



NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

Women saving their futures

RDFL
التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering - RDFL



Progress Report 2017-2018



RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

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أقروا قانون حماية
الطفلات من
التزويج المبكر

كلنا
بالنسوية
سوا.

Trans women
are women

WE ARE THE
GRANDDAUGHTERS
OF THE VICTIMS YOU
WERENTABLE TO
BURN

WHAT SHOCKS
YOU
MORE?

RARCH

الثقافة الذكورية
الوحيد للاقتصاب
هو المقتصب

الثقافة الذكورية اسقطت الكوتا النسائية

مشروع " دورك "

مشروع " دورك "

دودة غضبنا



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01 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Welcome to the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) Progress Report for 2017-2018, which puts into words the decisive actions that our feminist organisation has taken over 12 months to promote the fundamental rights of women and girls in Lebanon.

Every time I am at a meeting of our volunteers, I am struck by the diversity of ages that we have among our feminist members. Many young faces, full of passion, sharing power and making decisions with those who have been here for years. If this tells me anything, it highlights the remarkable spirit with which RDFL has renewed itself.

As we continue this journey for a fifth decade, we remain hopeful that we will touch many young lives with positive change. Our dedication to the values we defend remain as high as ever, our beliefs as relentless, and our activism as fierce.

As you will read in these pages, the RDFL team have tirelessly worked, empowered and advocated. With their unshakeable belief in equality as a cornerstone for prosperity and progress, they are spurred on to promote our values of feminism, secularism, transparency, democracy and equality.

I am proud that RDFL is now at the forefront of the fight to end child marriage in Lebanon. Last year, our #NotBefore18 media campaign kicked off on a high note. I was overwhelmed by the fantastic reaction from our supporters who joined our call for justice.

#NotBefore18 put into motion what had been a slow-moving river. For months, our supporters had been waiting for a draft law banning child marriage to enter discussions at the Lebanese Parliament committee. Thanks to the efforts of our staff, volunteers, partners and officials who endorsed the draft bill, the proposal is now closer to realisation.

On the same front, we have also welcomed the coming together of 54 - organisations to establish the National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage. Together, we hope to end the nightmare which thousands of girls who get married before their 18th birthday endure.

These achievements were anything but smooth sailing. Our campaign was challenged. Arguments were deployed to make it look like a betrayal of respected traditions, but our message was clear:

“ There is nothing respectful about condemning young futures to a life of struggle. ”

I have always believed that change starts within the family when we raise our children, both boys and girls, equally. No matter how legislations evolve, if we do not switch mind-sets, we will not be able to achieve equality.

Just as we affected changes nationally, we introduced a wave of internal reforms. RDFL members agreed in 2017 to separate the leadership team from management affairs, a step towards more transparency and accountability, with which we have always conducted ourselves. We also rebranded ourselves with the heralding of a new logo that reflected our character as an entity fighting for equality.

But our achievements are incomplete until women and girls live free from the shackles of patriarchy and discrimination. The fight will not stop until they are inspired to believe in what she can do, to stand up against violence, and to realise her dreams, whatever they may be.

Thank you,
Layla Mroue, President of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)



About us

The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) is a feminist, secular, non-governmental organisation advocating for the rights of women in Lebanon. Founded in 1976, RDFL is one of the oldest feminist organisations based on volunteerism. Its vision and objectives draw from international laws and treaties that Lebanon is signatory to, as well as the constitution itself.

RDFL's vision is to achieve equality between women and men in all spheres and protection from gender-based violence. To achieve this vision, RDFL works on and advocates for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society. RDFL has over 20 full-time & 15 part-time employees across its six regional centres. The centres provide social, psychological and legal support to woman and girl survivors of violence, regardless of religion, political affiliation or nationality.

02 WHO WE ARE

Our mission, vision and values

RDFL's Mission is to work on and advocate for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society.

RDFL's Vision is to achieve equality between women & men in all walks of life and protection from gender-based violence.

RDFL's Values:
Feminism / Secularism / Democracy
/ Transparency / Rejection of all forms of
discrimination and racism / Equality

EQUALITY

DEMOCRACY

SECULARISM

FEMINISM

TRANSPARENCY

**REJECTION OF
ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION
AND RACISM**



1976

Four decades of standing up for women's rights: Our history

Our story began in 1976 with a group of brave women who led a revolution away from the direct crosshairs of bullets, shelling, and sandbags that dominated the Lebanese Civil War era.

Today, those same centres are leading a shift in conversation and a change into a feminist world.

Networking and power sharing have always been major factors contributing to our success story. RDFL members and partners defend their arguments with conviction and rely on local communities who share our cause. RDFL joined forces with various organisations and forged alliances with the civil society that shared our passion for activism in favour of women's rights and the issues that continued to crop up.

2009

Wadad Shakhtoura, who founded RDFL and headed it as president until her passing in 2009, set out with her colleagues to help the Lebanese people recognise a country that appreciated gender equality. Initially, work focused on establishing and expanding our branches across all regions to serve the widest possible network of women, particularly the most marginalised communities in towns and cities. We opened a centre in Beirut's Southern Suburbs and then expanded to Baalbek and Ksarnaba in Bekaa. With the turn of the century, we opened our training centres in Tripoli, Mount Lebanon, and Saida, thereby extending our reach across the country. These centres were meant to encourage women to acquire skills and rely on themselves to take control of their own lives.





03 THE INSIDE LOOK

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An entity of believers: Our assembly

RDFL's General Assembly, also called The Membership, the umbrella under which all its registered members act.

The Assembly's mandate

ELECTS THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS EVERY
THREE YEARS

ELECTS BRANCH COMMITTEES TO MANAGE
REGIONAL CENTRES

SUBMITS ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DRAFTS AND EXECUTES PROGRAMMES

UPDATES INTERNAL REGULATIONS

MONITORS THE BUDGET AND FINANCES

Our volunteers and members

Since it was founded more than four decades ago, RDFL has relied on its volunteers to pick up the baton and fight for a just cause. They have not done it for any personal benefit or reward. That kindred spirit never faded as years went by. Our heritage of promoting activism and volunteerism has transcended any work we do.

RDFL's Membership



280 Members
by the end of 2018



75 Members to be
attracted annually

How we help our volunteers to achieve

DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS AND CAPACITY ON
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY

ENGAGE THEM IN DECISION-MAKING

COMMUNICATE STRATEGIES AND PLANS

In her best interest: Our board of directors

Elected by the General Assembly every three years for a maximum of two terms, the Board of Directors represents the organisation's branches. It sets the strategy and evaluates the performance and progress of the annual plans and meets on a regular basis to review and advise on recent issues.

Zeinab Mroueh, President,
member since 1976

Caroline Succar, Vice President,
member since 1995

Ahida Taleb, Secretary,
member since 2003

Marie Therese El Mir, Treasurer,
member since 1995

Hiam Fakieh, Accountant,
member since 1994

Manal Majed, Lawyer,
member since 2003

Kamal Cherfane, Member,
member since 2016





Join the cause:

Do you want to engage
in efforts towards
achieving gender
equality and combating
gender based violence?

You can join our movement by filling an
online application on RDFL's Website.



www.RDFLwomen.org

Online Application
Together we are stronger!

We are unstoppable: Our alliances

We could not do it alone. Over the years,
we have struck rock-solid partnerships
with allies in Lebanon, the region and
beyond. Realising women's rights is not an
individual mission, and any success is not
exclusive.

RDFL is a member of

In Lebanon

The Lebanese Women's Network

The Non-Governmental National
Committee for Pursuing Women's Issues

The Lebanese Council of Women

Women in Politics Coalition

The National Network for the Change of
Women Image in the Media and
Advertising in Lebanon

Leading The National Coalition for
Protecting Children from Early Marriage

In the region

Arab Women's Forum (AISHA)

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

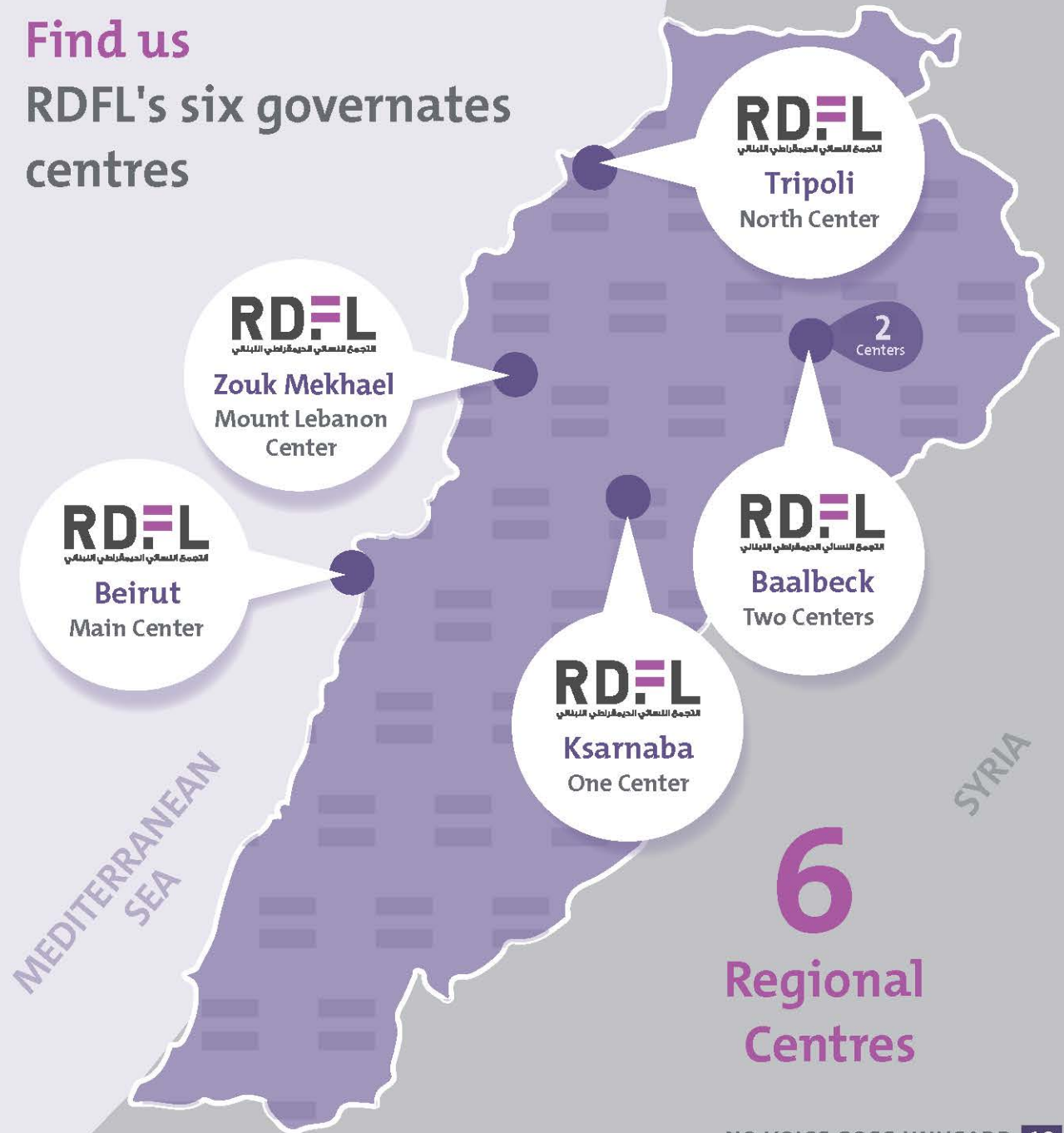
Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Find us

RDFL's six governates centres



04 FAITH IN THE CAUSE: OUR SUPPORTERS AND DONORS

We are grateful to those who make it their mission to help end the suffering of millions of women in Lebanon and around the world. In 2017, we joined hands with generous givers who helped us further the cause, assisting survivors to start a new journey and promoting equality among all groups.

act:onaid

unicef 

for every child

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

 **UN
WOMEN**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



Thank you to:



05 OUR ACHIVEMENTS IN 2017 AND 2018

At a glance

General services



4

Municipalities supported to integrate gender mainstreaming in their policies



more than

650

Sessions

Awareness and sensitization sessions were conducted all over Lebanon



5300

Participantes

Participated in public events conducted by RDFL



more than

200

People

Benefited from Drama therapy and psychosocial support sessions.



687

People

Benefited from summer camps done by RDFL



20

Lawyers

Female lawyers trained on protection mechanisms



more than

6574

People

Benefited from RDFL's work and services



234

Survivors

Women and girls survivors of different kinds of GBV and SGBV received psychosocial and legal support

Unlocking handcuffed futures: Ending child marriage

It is a piece of jewellery that is supposed to symbolise the eternal unity of wedlock.

However, for a girl who has not reached her 18th birthday, that shiny wedding ring is a padlock for her future- one without education, one burdened by compromised ambitions and long years of agony.

In spite of the rather sluggish decline in child marriage rates over recent years, there has been little progress to stamp the dangerous phenomenon out.

Every **2** Somewhere on
the planet, a girl
under 18 has her
destiny decided
for her
Seconds

Child marriage is a
social problem that goes
beyond the personal.

It shuts girls off from contributing to
their societies, curtailing their education.
It fuels poverty and maternal mortality.
It drives back growth, stability
and transformation.

Getting into the first circle

In Lebanon, things are not very different. One or both parents can agree to marrying their daughter off without her consent or even considering her opinion on the matter. It is often accepted that a girl is told she will be a bride for a groom she had barely met. Marriage, in many cases, is typically arranged as a deal to preserve family honour and stress a stereotypical image of women as housewives expected to stay at home all day to bring up children, dust window sills and bake a delicious pie.

In 2017

we travelled the length and breadth of Lebanon to tell girls that this should not be the case,

that decision and destiny were theirs to make.

Our awareness sessions, summer camps, plays and focus groups brought together thousands of girls, boys, women and men to highlight the issue. We encouraged girls of all backgrounds and nationalities to be leaders, ready to point a finger whenever a red line was crossed. They went back to their communities and shared advice with young adolescents like themselves.

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Standout moments 2007

12 July

Led by members of the community an event marking the International Population Day on 12 July brought the risks of child marriage to the forefront, with participants watching a film telling stories of young people who were coerced, against their own will, to get married.

12 August

Exactly a month after, on 12 August, RDFL celebrated the limitless energy of young people on the International Youth Day. Four outdoor games tested the congregation's skills and personalities. The aim behind the celebration was to raise awareness on the many roles that young people can play in their communities beyond those dictated by the norms.

21 September

A third moment, the International Peace Day on 21 September, brought together a group of adolescents to express their emotions and engaged in role-play activities, prepared by trained psychologists. The experience that those adolescents took from such gatherings will serve them well when a critical decision on their future has to be made.

Taking the initiative

When it comes to legislation, there is no civil law that sets an age under which a girl cannot get married. Marriage as a personal status is governed by religious communities, some of which allow exceptions for girls to get married when they are as young as nine.

To close that gap, RDFL proposed a draft law for the protection of children from child marriage to the Lebanese Parliament. Building on months of tireless advocacy work, the move represented a momentous leap on a rocky mountain.

The journey began in December 2015, when RDFL formed a legal committee to draft a law banning child marriage. The committee took into consideration the draft law prepared by the National Commission for Lebanese Women and aimed to fill the main gaps in the proposed law. The committee ensured that the proposed draft law is developed in line with international conventions and Lebanon's obligations, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, and the International Bill of Human Rights.

In August 2016, the committee reviewed and finalised the proposed draft law, which now consisted of five articles that define the minimum age for marriage in Lebanon and stipulated Article 1 stating that a child refers to any boy or girl under the age of 18, therefore the age of marriage in Lebanese territory [should be] 18.

RDFL's draft law, entitled Protecting Children from Child Marriage, was introduced to key political figures, legal advisors and members of the parliament to support the adoption of the draft law. The ceaseless efforts and discussions, finally bore fruit when the draft was adopted by MP Elie Keyrouz and presented to the Lebanese Cabinet on the 28th of March 2017.

Because child marriage is an issue largely instructed by religion as much as by anything else, RDFL took the new draft law for discussion with religious leaders representing the main sects in Lebanese communities. A panel titled, "The Role of Religious Leaders in Protecting Children from Early Marriage" was attended by representatives of all faiths in addition to 40 actors from the civil society and international organisations.

The panel was a crucial moment for RDFL to make it clear that child marriage is a serious phenomenon that threatens the

stability and security of the Lebanese society at large. Our demands did not shy away from calling for religious texts to be revisited to see how the evolution of societies deems those long-standing edicts inapplicable.

The participants agreed that no sacred text or scripture determines the age of marriage. A notable intervention from one Sheikh revealed how the overwhelming majority of child marriage cases ended with divorce, which goes to explain passionate calls for that practice to end.

The panel made 2 principal recommendations:

- 1 Spread awareness among communities about the dangerous impact of child marriage.
- 2 Protect children from early marriage, especially that there are no religious texts that contradict with this.

ACHIEVEMENT

Seven months on from its submission and after the launch of RDFL's national media advocacy campaign, #NotBefore18, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri referred the proposed law on the protection of children from child marriage to the Administration and Justice Committee for discussion. Though we still have unfinished business, the step means **we are closer than ever to rescuing futures.**



Law proposal of children protection from early marriage

Article One:

The word child refers to any boy or girl under the age of eighteen full years.

Article Two:

The age of marriage on Lebanese territories is determined as eighteen for men and women, contrary to any other text.

Article Three:

Article 483 of the Penal Code is amended as follows: Anyone who has contracted, permitted, urged, intervened for, contributed to, or participated in the marriage contract of a child in conflict with the provisions of this law shall be fined ten times the minimum wage rate and face jail time of six months to two years. In case of repeated offence, the penalty shall be compounded.

Article Four:

All legal or regulatory statutes that conflict with the provisions of this Law or are inconsistent with its contents are hereby voided.

Article Five:

This Law shall go into effect immediately upon its publication in the official gazette.





18 as the legal minimum marriage age, for both men and women.

A minute of warning

To hammer home the message, RDFL released a powerful minute-long video that recapped some of the most health-damaging consequences that an underage bride is faced with upon taking such a step. Those consequences are so sinister that they could cause chronic physical, psychological and social problems.



#NotBefore18

With a mission to change destinies and challenge wrong practices, RDFL took the fight to end child marriage to the nation. A clear message was that the start should be with the foundations and so a new #NotBefore18 national media campaign broke ground.

Launched on the International Day of the Girl Child in October 2017 with two principal objectives, #NotBefore18 called for more public and media awareness to be raised on the health risks and costs associated with child marriage. It sought to challenge Members of the Lebanese Parliament to assume their legislative responsibility and adopt a civil law that sets



They include, but are not limited to, vaginal ruptures, pregnancy poisoning, premature delivery, psychological disorders and traumas associated with the inability to cope with the new life.

The simple reason why all this might happen is that the girl's body is still underdeveloped.

Watch the chilling warning via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4ppdfKH8x8>

Overwhelming support



33 influencers

The campaign got off to an auspicious start, with a wave of support from 33 influencers from all walks of life who spoke to the nation and called for an end to child marriage. Media personnel, actors, singers, political leaders, directors, authors, social activists and religious leaders united to raise the voice of thousands of girls pushed into dangerous uncertainty.

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40 national and international media outlets

The campaign launch was covered by 40 national and international media outlets. Over the first month, we witnessed unprecedented engagement on our channels, with nearly two- and-a-half million people reached on our Facebook and other social media platforms.



#NotBefore18 in numbers

 **2,000,000**
people reached on Facebook

 **10,000**
video views on YouTube

 **100,000**
views on Instagram

 **216,000**
tweet impressions

 **150** billboards
in four provinces

 **15** unipoles
on key roads

 **15** digital screens
on coastal highways

Nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award

The great efforts of our members and volunteers were acknowledged with the nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award, which recognises the best online campaigns. Our campaign was voted as the second best, an achievement we dedicate to all those waiting for the biggest reward of abolishing child marriage.



1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals & 200 primary healthcare centres

The overwhelming public response coincided with support from official departments. The Ministry of Health joined the cause through raising awareness on the health risks of child marriage across 1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals and 200 primary healthcare centres. More than 80,000 posters and flyers were handed out, while the campaign's video was shared on the ministry's social channels and affiliated website



Together we are stronger

As the campaign gathered momentum, RDFL was stepping up its representation on the national and international stage. In Lebanon, the **National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage** came into existence after more than one year of consistent efforts by RDFL to bring together 57 child rights & women’s rights organisations, official institutions & INGOs. The primary task for this nucleus of enthusiastic human rights defenders was to stress the role of the State in protecting the rights of its female citizens to equality and introduce legislation banning child marriage on Lebanese territories.

Globally, RDFL joined the **Girls Not Brides** partnership, which consists of more than **900 civil society organisations** representing over **95 countries** to spare girls the terrifying consequences of child marriage and enable them to fulfil their potential, wherever they happened to be in the world. Such partnerships bring the best in the feminist organisations and unite passionate voices calling for a fairer reality.

Get to know more: Watch celebrities share a message of support for RDFL’s campaign to ban child marriage on our YouTube channel



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

Where did we go further?

We did not stop there. In 2018, we trained 40 youth and leaders from Lebanese political parties on child marriage where they set action plan to lobby for the endorsement of the law by meeting their representatives in the parliament.

On May 2018, a new parliamentary election was held, and the discussion of the proposed laws in the Administration and Justice Committee was paused. New MPs were elected, the new Administration and Justice Committee was formed. Accordingly, RDFL has to remind the new elected MPs of the #NotBefore18 campaign and its goal of passing the law for the protection of children from child marriage. As a result, RDFL was back with an innovative new online and outdoor campaign following the Lebanese parliamentary elections that took the country by storm - both aesthetically in the form of campaign posters and thoughtfully in the form of the country's collective conscience. The new campaign focused on the electoral slogan posters that were plastered all around the country during the parliamentary election period.

As part of the campaign, RDFL used the slogans of all of the politicians that took part in this Month's elections - altering the photographs by covering them with the slogan:

“ Time for Action: Pass the law to change the minimum age of marriage #NotBefore18 ”



The campaign highlights a desperate need to change the current laws that allow marrying off children in Lebanon, but it also highlights a much more serious one - for the politicians in power to stand up for the cause and make that change happen, because after all, they are the only ones who have the authority to do so.

As a result to this campaign, a number of MPs and political parties committed on social media platform (twitter) that they support this campaign and its cause.

Watch the new campaign's GIF:
<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1655932421109489/>

The campaign also included sending a letter to the new MPs where we are requesting to meet them. Luckily, a number of MPs has invited us over to meet them and they have showed their full support of the law.

Part of the advocacy plan is the mobile van visiting different remote areas & disseminating information to the public in all Lebanese areas on the issue of child marriage. The mobile van has targeted men and women from all areas suffering from child marriage. It opened the debate of child marriage where hundreds of people participated in these public events.

In addition to RDFL's work towards protecting girls & children from child marriage, RDFL published a study that aimed at shedding light on the attitudes of Lebanese society

towards the phenomenon of marriage of children and their causes and effects. The study also examined the opinion of the Lebanese people regarding the state's position on the issue and the role it should play in order to put an end to this phenomenon and in particular through the adoption of a law establishing the minimum legal age for marriage in Lebanon with 18 full years for male and female.

According to the study, the majority of the Lebanese people considered marriage of children to be a serious practice and a violation of the rights of the child. While 97% of the Lebanese believe that the best age for marriage is 18 years and above, 64% support the establishment of a law to determine the minimum age of marriage in Lebanon for 18 years, complete for males and females alike.

You can check the results of this study via this link:

<http://www.rdfwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RD-FL-POLL-BOOKLETS-HIGH.pdf>



Young 3arous

Recently and after the launch of the opinion poll mentioned above, RDFL launched its digital nationwide campaign, #NotBefore18, through a social media stunt titled “Young 3arous”, literally translated as Young Bride in English. The campaign calls upon Lebanese members of Parliament and leaders to end child marriage in Lebanon; permits girls to marry below the age of 18 years. The campaign also tackles awareness about the dangers of child marriage in the country.



RDFL kicked off its campaign on October 24, 2018 with a digital media stunt, creating a fake Instagram and Facebook accounts for “Young 3arous”, acting as a matchmaking agency, promoting underage brides for those in search of a young wife. The social media channels led to a website: www.young3arous.com which showcased an under construction template and contact number for individuals to call and ask for further information. Taking the stunt even further, an actor represented “Young 3arous”, answering the phone calls and taking orders for the young brides he is supposedly promoting.

In as little as two hours from its launch, “Young 3arous” took the nation’s social media by storm with Lebanese bloggers and influencers, media, activists, and citizens taking to social media and calling the Lebanese Internal Security forces to demand that the pages be shut down immediately.

The digital stunt caught the attention of Joe Maalouf, a primetime presenter and whose program *Hawa Al Horiyi* on LBCI is dedicated to tackling issues in Lebanon. RDFL revealed the aim of its campaign during this program and the public was

invited to check the website again and sign the online petition against child marriage. After revealing the campaign, we posted a video clearing out for the public our aim and approach behind this campaign via this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/2384414864905391/>

Also, as a call for action, we asked people to support our law by signing the petition via this link:

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/978/356/676/?cid=headerClick>



As part of our advocacy plan to advocate for women's rights in Lebanon, RDFL prepared on December 4, 2018 in the Lebanese Parliament's library hall for a national consultation conference on child marriage in partnership with Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the National Coalition for Protecting Children from Early Marriage and with the support of UNOHCHR and the European Union. The conference was a needed and essential process that gathered experts, national and international NGOs, survivors of child marriage who were at the heart of the problem and the survivors of violence, media, decision makers and stakeholders that will contribute

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to lobbying for a law that ends child marriage in Lebanon. This event aimed to inform the debate on the issue of child marriage among stakeholders in Lebanon. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the vice president of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in addition to a number of Lebanese MPs, ministers and decision makers had participated as speakers in the conference where deputies were told to express their political parties' position from the laws being discussed.

As a celebration of the International Women's Day and in support to RDFL's #NotBefore18 campaign, RDFL organized a dinner where parliament members, ministers,

journalists, celebrities, partners, and others were invited to celebrate the success of the campaign so far and ensure continuous coordination and support for the aim of passing the law to protect children from child marriage. To watch the video, go to <https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1618891574813574/>

We will lobby, push, defend, question and demand. A new march on child marriage on March 2nd, 2019 will try to gauge people's awareness about the issue and decide with partners in the media, the civil society and policymakers on the best steps to change wrong perceptions.



“ Our ultimate aim is to turn our end goal to a common goal: adopt a new law that bans child marriage ”

“

Her story

I was 14 when I attended an awareness session at RD/L. I sat next to my Mom to hear stories of girls who got married when they were my age. It all sounded like physical and psychological torture. The accounts I heard sent chills down my spine. When the session was over, I asked to talk to the social worker separately with my Mom. I told her I was engaged and getting ready for my wedding soon, but after watching the horrifying film and listening to some of the most frightening stories, I was starting to change my mind. The social worker encouraged me to reconsider my options. She told me what kind of dangerous route I was about to take. When I left [the session] that day, I had already made my mind. It took some convincing to get my Dad to support my decision. I was too scared, but I know that my future was at stake. I told him I did not want to go ahead with the wedding and that I wanted to go to school. Looking back, I cannot think of a better decision I have made in my life. I now offer the same advice to my friends.

Jamila (not her real name),
a would-be child bride

”

No honour in silence: Fighting sexual and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) happens behind closed walls and in the open. Though not restricted to one sex, more than one in three women have experienced some form of gender-based violence around the world, a shocking manifestation of a global injustice, of which women are often the victim.

The burning question is why, in the 21st century, are women still subjected to harassment, sexism, intimidation, honour crimes and exploitation. In Lebanon, those practices, whether at home or in the workplace, are not uncommon; on the contrary, they are widespread.

More Than
1/3 women have
experienced
some form
of gender-based violence
around the world,

“ This is not a threat aimed at girls only;
it is a sign that societies are
doomed to failure. ”



Taking notice and taking action

Working within and across communities, RDFL targeted 223 female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV and SGBV). We supported them to **stand up and be counted**. Not to let barriers silence them. We addressed not just the physical impact that such aggression can cause, but also the **lasting psychological wounds** that cause innocent women to live in embarrassment and self-deprecation. Some of the victims even wished death because it was a better end. Community members, including those from Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps, were supported to refer violence cases to RDFL for **legal, psychological, and case management assistance**.

In Lebanese villages and Syrian informal tented settlements in Bekaa and North Lebanon, opened **dedicated safe spaces for women** to open up about issues they had hardly discussed with themselves. In spite of the numerous challenges that they have faced in their lives, the brave girls came to debate a range of topics and raise the voice in our **community-based awareness-raising sessions**, later documenting their stories to be shared for awareness with other survivors. No lines were to be drawn and no taboos to be left unbroken. The candid discussions,



according to one lady “enabled me to reveal a lot of what had been going inside all these years. It gave me some comfort to vent my distress and frustration and build a rapport with women from the society around me.”

Up to 145 volunteers and 20 university students were meanwhile trained to join operations across communities, including refugees, in Lebanon to **monitor and safely refer GBV cases**. Our team of trained volunteers and expert psychologists provided the rigorous **psychosocial support** needed to **encourage women to speak up**.

In Mount Lebanon and Bekaa, 60 women from all backgrounds were trained to **step up their self-confidence** and talk openly about problems related to their bodies in “speak out” sessions. Participants were encouraged to address issues at hand without any feeling of guilt or self-blame. They understood the importance of respect and self-esteem in enjoying a healthy life and gained knowledge in laws governing protection from sexual exploitation.

Our project to **enhance the response to and prevention of gender-based violence** enabled minors as well as girls and women who survived violence of all forms to receive support to **gain justice and protect themselves**. To this end, 20 lawyers were trained on GBV protection mechanisms to distinguish between national and international laws that protect women from human trafficking and violence in all its forms. Acquiring the knowledge enabled the lawyers needed to help survivors seek the right legal measures. In addition to our consistent coordination with lawyers and legislators to provide legal services for survivors and victims of sexual violence, we enabled national and refugee communities to access **trusted counselling and professional advice**.

Breaking away from the traditional

We engaged women in a range of activities that developed their life skills, such as hairdressing, embroidery, handicraft and English lessons. The exercises helped boost women's confidence and gave them a space to express themselves freely, which was reflected in the increasing numbers of women who came to register at our centres and those seeking legal knowledge.

To stress our message, we chose to abandon traditional methods and go for the innovative. The issues that we dealt with were too serious to overlook, so we used entertainment as a tool to engage the broadest possible category of participants.

29 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD



From cinema to music and theatre, we sought to highlight the invisible struggle that hundreds of women had to live with, bringing to the communities' turf new mediums they could relate to and interact with. A joint Open Your Eyes to Your Rights event with Unicef brought together 250 children, parents and members of the Syrian refugee community in activities challenging violence against women. The activity was a celebration of our values.

“ The mantra has not changed for us; men and women are eligible for the same rights and roles. And that is the only way towards equality ”



Identifying legal gaps

On the legal front, RDFL left no stone unturned. A roundtable was held in May 2017 to discuss the **legal protection of victims of sexual violence**, in front of an assembly that included Minister of State for Women's Affairs Jean Oghassabian and representatives from other ministries. The meeting discussed the controversial Article 522 of the penal code, later to be abolished, that exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim.

RDFL also prepared a legal research to assess the protection mechanisms for female victims of violence. The study identified the available methods that protect women while recommending the best way to make use of them.

The results of the study, disseminated in 1,000 copies, were revealed by 20 lawyers who organised five panel discussions across Lebanon, attended by 300 people including MPs, mayors, heads of municipalities and journalists. Up to 75 meetings were also held by trained university students to spread the knowledge among their peers and with the public.

The impact of the study was manifested in the high turnout of people who took part to emphasise change in thinking and readiness to take action against GBV acts.

Testimonies in the dark

Another major study released by RDFL and partner organisations in May 2017 revealed the **scale of violence and abuse** committed against women within the closer and wider circles of the community.

Prepared by Dr Faysal El Kak and Dr Caroline Succar Slaiby, **Sexual Violence Against Women in Lebanon Testimonies in the Dark** interviewed 50 women who had experienced one or more type of sexual violence including harassment, incest, marital rape, sexual assault and rape. The chilling findings of the study revealed that 90 percent of the assaults were committed by a family member, including by a father or a brother.

The study also showed that a female of any age could be targeted. Some of the girls who were subjected to brutal grooming and harassment were as young as six. The horrific practices are often a result of cunning tactics through which the perpetrators create a bond of trust that makes it more difficult for the victim to speak out or cope with the aftermath.

Testimonies in the Dark analysed the short- and long-term health, physical and psychological consequences of sexual violence, highlighting important

recommendations that should be taken into consideration if women were to live in a safer world.

Besides in-depth interviews, the study identified the main services provided by anti-GBV organisations in Lebanon and obstacles facing the improvement of women's realities.

The release of the study came at a special event attended by representatives of ministries, diplomats, security officials and the media. It featured a live testimony by one survivor to expose grave violations and the implications on the Lebanese society.

“

Her story

There was hardly a day that went by without me getting beaten or humiliated by my husband. He would call me names, said I was a cheater for going out. He never spared a way to punish me. I decided to seek counselling at RDFL when things went out of control. I had abandoned my husband and children and my life descended into further misery. I was made to feel welcome at the [RDFL] centre. The counsellors helped me understand the problems and work on them. We put an action plan for me to find a job and become economically independent. I was ready to fix my relationship with my husband. I am glad that it worked out. We have come together again. I now have a job and feel as though my life was wretched back from the cliff edge. It was all thanks to that RDFL's constant support that I am with my family again. We are now an equal couple, exactly how it should be.

Fadwa (not her real name),
a domestic violence survivor

”



Words that are vows: Gender mainstreaming on a policy level

Integrating gender in municipal strategies

RDFL's core mission to achieve gender balance was introduced to four local municipalities in four different regions: Hammama, Niha, Hasroun and Kfar Nabrakh. Through closed-doors consultations, training and workshops, we encouraged the local authorities to adopt a **gender element** in their strategic plans that took into consideration the **importance of equality** between men & women in communal work.

The activities started with a gender assessment that sought to identify the gaps, needs and potential of the targeted municipalities to introduce gender-oriented work. A set of recommendations put together with the municipality officials laid the foundation for ambitious cooperation.

Capacity building activities were then introduced to foster a gender-sensitive environment and support the right attitudes among both genders. Up to 24 municipal members were supported to improve their knowledge and skills on the topic and encourage participatory approach and networking.

The third stage was heralded with two-day workshops in each area, where 60 members of the public, activists and the youth were involved in identifying the needs of their communities and shaping the best gender integration process.

The outcome of those intensive discussions was shared in a special event that called for those who hold power for change to take action. The municipalities took away the main recommendations to support women's participation in decision-making positions and promote ideal gender-sensitive environment.

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Launched in 2015, the Euromed Feminist Initiative (EFI) is a policy network that brings together 24 women's rights organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean to advocate for gender equality and promote women's rights. In Lebanon, the network's board is represented by RDFL, providing diverse feminist expertise to engage national decision and policymakers in vital issues such as protection from violence and political participation.

In 2017, EFI set out a list of **policy recommendations** to Lebanon and other countries as part of the Ministerial Process and the Ministerial Declaration. The recommendations are meant to improve the status of gender equality across the region. RDFL is proud to have contributed to what can transform Lebanon into a fairer, more open place for everyone on its territories. Our promise is to continue to work to see this roadmap realised.



EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأوروبية المتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

Starting from within: reforming our policies and bylaws

Transparency for us is not simply a value; it is a virtue. We realise that we can only affect the world around us when we are in the best shape. The challenges are getting more sinister, and the mission to serve more women has become almost an oath.

With that in mind, RDFL **overhauled a set of internal regulations** that will enable the organisation to realise its ambitious goals on the short and long term and achieve greater impact and visibility in and among communities. The reforms were agreed among the members and approved as a cornerstone for our future glories.

The multi-front reforms:

Revising bylaws to reach more transparency and accountability

Reducing executive committee membership to seven members, none of whom is a paid staff

Developing A five-year strategic plan, setting a clear path for the organisation

Introducing fundamental documents:

Gender Policy, Human Resources Policy, Code of Conduct, Advocacy Strategy, Visibility Strategy, Donor Policy, Anti-Fraud Policy, and Financial and Procurement Policies.

Their voice and word: our media work

Turning the volume up

It is the mirror that reflects the life we live. Thus, the reflection better be fair and true. When women's issues are inadequately reported, it can mislead the public and create an inaccurate and questionable interpretation in the minds of viewers, readers and listeners.

Media in all its forms is the only way that brings together people of different interests to debate, defend and promote issues close to their hearts.

The emergence of social media means that an avalanche of news, rumours and gossip can spread like wildfire within a matter of minutes, or even seconds.

Hashtags were launched, awards given out, and hours of broadcast dedicated for brave women who came forward to reveal the extent of the threat that they, and many women, had to endure. The encouraging signs were starting to catch up with audiences in Lebanon and the region.

In 2017, we stepped up our work with the media to discuss critical matters and advocate justice and equality.

Our **#NotBefore18** media campaign sparked a crucial debate on TV channels, in the papers and on social media platforms. Media personalities joined the campaign and shared messages that warned against child marriage. These efforts complemented our lobbying efforts and expanded our campaigns to create a favourable environment for change.

Stepping up our media work is one of our strategy elements. We want women to be heard. And heard they will be.

“ Around the world, women took to the media to share their stories and uncover horrifying stories that they had to live with for years. ”

Glory in the badge: The new logo

Dove and olive branch

Ever since it came into existence, RDFL has been championing its founding values; women's rights, feminism, democracy and secularism. As a brand, our organisation has famously been associated with a dove and olive branch, which represented an identity synonymous with peace activism. The logo was sketched by the late Wadad Shakhtoura as an artistic resistance of the Lebanese Civil War, which broke out in 1975, and as a kernel of a reasonable argument in troublesome times.

As Lebanon departed a dark phase of its history, RDFL refused to lament the past and looked with hope to the years ahead.

“We have reinvigorated our mission and breathed fresh life into the civil society.”

RDFL
التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

Since 1976

2017, New Logo Announcement:

The Lebanese women's Democratic Gathering (RDGL) switched to new logo and visual identity, a change prompted by a desire to bring RDFL's core mission forward, and the fact that we have since the founding of the NGO done more than 40 years of work.

2017, Previous Logo Background:

Back in 1975 RDGL was established as a non-profit, charitable entity to lead through the fighting and occupation periods, leading RDGL's identity was at the time, representing hope that through women's resistance the country could be free and democratic.



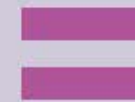
The New Logo:

RDGL and the Democratic Gathering are now logo-free with a new visual identity. The logo-free version of our identity is inspired by Lebanon's rich history, tradition and the values of RDGL's founding mission. It is a visual statement of our commitment to women's rights and democracy, and our dedication to work with gender equality.

@RDFLwomen



RDFLwomen.org



Purple and equal

In September 2017, RDFL introduced a new logo that reflects the change and ambition of the organisation.

The new bold, if simple-looking, design consists of the four initials, “RDFL” in white, with the letter “F” made to resemble a purple “equals” sign.

The full name of the gathering appears in Arabic underneath the four initials.

The new insignia is inspired by generations of feminists who want to see a just world in which gender equality is the name of the game. It sets a high bar for a society that has emerged into an era of peace and liberty that cannot be complete when its members do not enjoy the same rights.

It is the beginning
of a
new glorious period,
and we want all women
to define it.

However, at the same time, we never diverted from the core ambition of justice and equality between men and women.

06 A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

We understand that real and lasting progress does not happen overnight. It is a process that culminates in many baby steps. In the past, RDFL has faced challenges concerning administrative documentation, a shortage of resources, varying performance capabilities, unification of members, and fluctuating external funding. With that in mind, we aim high but detail our goals in the medium term. RDFL has identified and outlined the following focus points for our five-year strategic plan (2018-2022):

“ The worst thing that we can do as women is not stand up for each other, and this is something we can practice every day, no matter where we are and what we do, women sticking up for other women, choosing to protect and celebrate each other instead of competing or criticising one another. ”

- Amal Clooney,
International court lawyer & ambassador
for women's and human rights.

RDFL'S MAIN OBJECTIVES

1st OBJECTIVE

Combat all forms of violence & discrimination against women, both in the private and public spheres, working on three levels:

1. Raising awareness: This is a critical pillar of combatting gender-based violence. RDFL will continue to **raise awareness** about sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, rape, child marriage, and deprivation of economic rights.

2. Empowering women: RDFL will **support women** who reach out to our centres, as well as those in vulnerable communities such as immigrants, migrant workers and refugees. We will provide social and psychological support for survivors of violence.

3. Utilising Media: Given the importance of the media in raising awareness and creating an environment that is conducive to change, RDFL will **work with the media** to strengthen the culture of women's rights.

2nd OBJECTIVE

Build a strong membership that enlivens and advocates for women's rights

RDFL has always been based on grassroots activism and volunteerism. It has built a widespread membership that believes in transmitting the essence of RDFL's feminist, secular and democratic values to their communities. RDFL has set out to activate and **grow its membership** by increasing communication with members.

3rd OBJECTIVE

Revive the Women's Network to strengthen the feminist movement in Lebanon

A unifying force is an essential part of carrying the messages of civil society. Feminist organisations have previously advocated for various issues through different coalitions. For each issue, one organisation led the coalition and prepared the public mobilisation efforts. However, having an overarching Network would catapult the movement in the right direction. It would play an essential role in


setting priorities and developing coordination between NGOs. The Network would also help unify the voice of the feminist movement, reduce duplications of efforts, and make for better use of resources.

RDFL aims to **revise the Women's Network** in the next five years. It will begin by working through the existing National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage to call for coordination meetings between the feminist organisations in the country.

4th OBJECTIVE

Strengthen internal capabilities

If an organisation does not run smoothly from within, it cannot expect to do so on a grander scale. RDFL is resolute in its path towards fortifying its capabilities and achieving its goals efficiently. We plan to further **strengthen our governance** and overall management, as well as build up our human resources, enhance our specialist services to women, and monitor our project implementation.



Just as our late founder and icon Wadad Shakhtoura, who was born on the International Women's Day, envisioned a better society for women in Lebanon, so too do we carry on her legacy, her aspiration, her values and beliefs. Her message continues to resonate: we will never give up defending women's rights to equality.

We have introduced a platform for action, awoken a determination as bullet-proof as steel. The leaders of tomorrow have fed the flames of inequality for far too long. For decades, centuries really, we have allowed our fates and our very lives to be dictated by men who crave power. We will keep the conversation going strong.

Shakhtoura once said,

“ Women have to abandon the space that laws have confined them to and get out into the space that men have dominated. ”

07 THE FINAL WORD

“Our promise to our founder, and to every woman and girl, is to continue the fight for what is right.”

08 CONTACTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks go to all the women and girls who shared their stories with us and continue to do so as we strive for a better reality for every woman in Lebanon.

This report was prepared by the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering – RDFL.

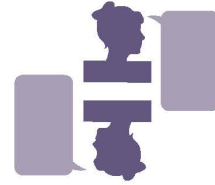
RDFL would like to express its deepest appreciation to all those who provided information and testimonies for the purpose of this report. It could not have possible without the contribution of every one of them.



لطلب الدعم



القانوني



الإجتماعي



النفسي

أو التبليغ عن أية حالة عنف



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خدمة 24/7
سرية ومجانية

RDFL

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www.RDFLwomen.org



NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

Women saving their futures

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The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering - RDFL



Progress Report 2017-2018



RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

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أقروا قانون حماية
الطفلات من
التزويج المبكر

كلنا
بالنسوية
سوا.

Trans women
are women

WE ARE THE
GRANDDAUGHTERS
OF THE VICTIMS YOU
WERENTABLE TO
BURN

WHAT SHOCKS
YOU
MORE?

الثقافة الذكورية
الوحيد للاغتصاب
هو الاغتصاب

الثقافة الذكورية اسقطت الكوتا النسائية

مشروع " دورك "

مشروع " دورك "

دودة غضبنا



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01 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

3 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

Welcome to the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) Progress Report for 2017-2018, which puts into words the decisive actions that our feminist organisation has taken over 12 months to promote the fundamental rights of women and girls in Lebanon.

Every time I am at a meeting of our volunteers, I am struck by the diversity of ages that we have among our feminist members. Many young faces, full of passion, sharing power and making decisions with those who have been here for years. If this tells me anything, it highlights the remarkable spirit with which RDFL has renewed itself.

As we continue this journey for a fifth decade, we remain hopeful that we will touch many young lives with positive change. Our dedication to the values we defend remain as high as ever, our beliefs as relentless, and our activism as fierce.

As you will read in these pages, the RDFL team have tirelessly worked, empowered and advocated. With their unshakeable belief in equality as a cornerstone for prosperity and progress, they are spurred on to promote our values of feminism, secularism, transparency, democracy and equality.

I am proud that RDFL is now at the forefront of the fight to end child marriage in Lebanon. Last year, our #NotBefore18 media campaign kicked off on a high note. I was overwhelmed by the fantastic reaction from our supporters who joined our call for justice.

#NotBefore18 put into motion what had been a slow-moving river. For months, our supporters had been waiting for a draft law banning child marriage to enter discussions at the Lebanese Parliament committee. Thanks to the efforts of our staff, volunteers, partners and officials who endorsed the draft bill, the proposal is now closer to realisation.

On the same front, we have also welcomed the coming together of 54 - organisations to establish the National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage. Together, we hope to end the nightmare which thousands of girls who get married before their 18th birthday endure.

These achievements were anything but smooth sailing. Our campaign was challenged. Arguments were deployed to make it look like a betrayal of respected traditions, but our message was clear:

“ There is nothing respectful about condemning young futures to a life of struggle. ”

I have always believed that change starts within the family when we raise our children, both boys and girls, equally. No matter how legislations evolve, if we do not switch mind-sets, we will not be able to achieve equality.

Just as we affected changes nationally, we introduced a wave of internal reforms. RDFL members agreed in 2017 to separate the leadership team from management affairs, a step towards more transparency and accountability, with which we have always conducted ourselves. We also rebranded ourselves with the heralding of a new logo that reflected our character as an entity fighting for equality.

But our achievements are incomplete until women and girls live free from the shackles of patriarchy and discrimination. The fight will not stop until they are inspired to believe in what she can do, to stand up against violence, and to realise her dreams, whatever they may be.

Thank you,
Layla Mroue, President of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)



About us

The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) is a feminist, secular, non-governmental organisation advocating for the rights of women in Lebanon. Founded in 1976, RDFL is one of the oldest feminist organisations based on volunteerism. Its vision and objectives draw from international laws and treaties that Lebanon is signatory to, as well as the constitution itself.

RDFL's vision is to achieve equality between women and men in all spheres and protection from gender-based violence. To achieve this vision, RDFL works on and advocates for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society. RDFL has over 20 full-time & 15 part-time employees across its six regional centres. The centres provide social, psychological and legal support to woman and girl survivors of violence, regardless of religion, political affiliation or nationality.

02
WHO
WE ARE

Our mission, vision and values

RDFL's Mission is to work on and advocate for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society.

RDFL's Vision is to achieve equality between women & men in all walks of life and protection from gender-based violence.

RDFL's Values:
Feminism / Secularism / Democracy
/ Transparency / Rejection of all forms of
discrimination and racism / Equality

EQUALITY

DEMOCRACY

SECULARISM

FEMINISM

TRANSPARENCY

**REJECTION OF
ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION
AND RACISM**



1976

Four decades of standing up for women's rights: Our history

Our story began in 1976 with a group of brave women who led a revolution away from the direct crosshairs of bullets, shelling, and sandbags that dominated the Lebanese Civil War era.

Today, those same centres are leading a shift in conversation and a change into a feminist world.

Networking and power sharing have always been major factors contributing to our success story. RDFL members and partners defend their arguments with conviction and rely on local communities who share our cause. RDFL joined forces with various organisations and forged alliances with the civil society that shared our passion for activism in favour of women's rights and the issues that continued to crop up.

2009

Wadad Shakhtoura, who founded RDFL and headed it as president until her passing in 2009, set out with her colleagues to help the Lebanese people recognise a country that appreciated gender equality. Initially, work focused on establishing and expanding our branches across all regions to serve the widest possible network of women, particularly the most marginalised communities in towns and cities. We opened a centre in Beirut's Southern Suburbs and then expanded to Baalbek and Ksarnaba in Bekaa. With the turn of the century, we opened our training centres in Tripoli, Mount Lebanon, and Saida, thereby extending our reach across the country. These centres were meant to encourage women to acquire skills and rely on themselves to take control of their own lives.





03 THE INSIDE LOOK

7 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

An entity of believers: Our assembly

RDFL's General Assembly, also called The Membership, the umbrella under which all its registered members act.

The Assembly's mandate

ELECTS THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS EVERY
THREE YEARS

ELECTS BRANCH COMMITTEES TO MANAGE
REGIONAL CENTRES

SUBMITS ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DRAFTS AND EXECUTES PROGRAMMES

UPDATES INTERNAL REGULATIONS

MONITORS THE BUDGET AND FINANCES

Our volunteers and members

Since it was founded more than four decades ago, RDFL has relied on its volunteers to pick up the baton and fight for a just cause. They have not done it for any personal benefit or reward. That kindred spirit never faded as years went by. Our heritage of promoting activism and volunteerism has transcended any work we do.

RDFL's Membership



280 Members
by the end of 2018



75 Members to be
attracted annually

How we help our volunteers to achieve

DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS AND CAPACITY ON
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY

ENGAGE THEM IN DECISION-MAKING

COMMUNICATE STRATEGIES AND PLANS

In her best interest: Our board of directors

Elected by the General Assembly every three years for a maximum of two terms, the Board of Directors represents the organisation's branches. It sets the strategy and evaluates the performance and progress of the annual plans and meets on a regular basis to review and advise on recent issues.

Zeinab Mroueh, President,
member since 1976

Caroline Succar, Vice President,
member since 1995

Ahida Taleb, Secretary,
member since 2003

Marie Therese El Mir, Treasurer,
member since 1995

Hiam Fakieh, Accountant,
member since 1994

Manal Majed, Lawyer,
member since 2003

Kamal Cherfane, Member,
member since 2016



Join the cause:

Do you want to engage
in efforts towards
achieving gender
equality and combating
gender based violence?

You can join our movement by filling an
online application on RDFL's Website.



www.RDFLwomen.org

Online Application
Together we are stronger!

We are unstoppable: Our alliances

We could not do it alone. Over the years,
we have struck rock-solid partnerships
with allies in Lebanon, the region and
beyond. Realising women's rights is not an
individual mission, and any success is not
exclusive.

RDFL is a member of

In Lebanon

The Lebanese Women's Network

The Non-Governmental National
Committee for Pursuing Women's Issues

The Lebanese Council of Women

Women in Politics Coalition

The National Network for the Change of
Women Image in the Media and
Advertising in Lebanon

Leading The National Coalition for
Protecting Children from Early Marriage

In the region

Arab Women's Forum (AISHA)

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

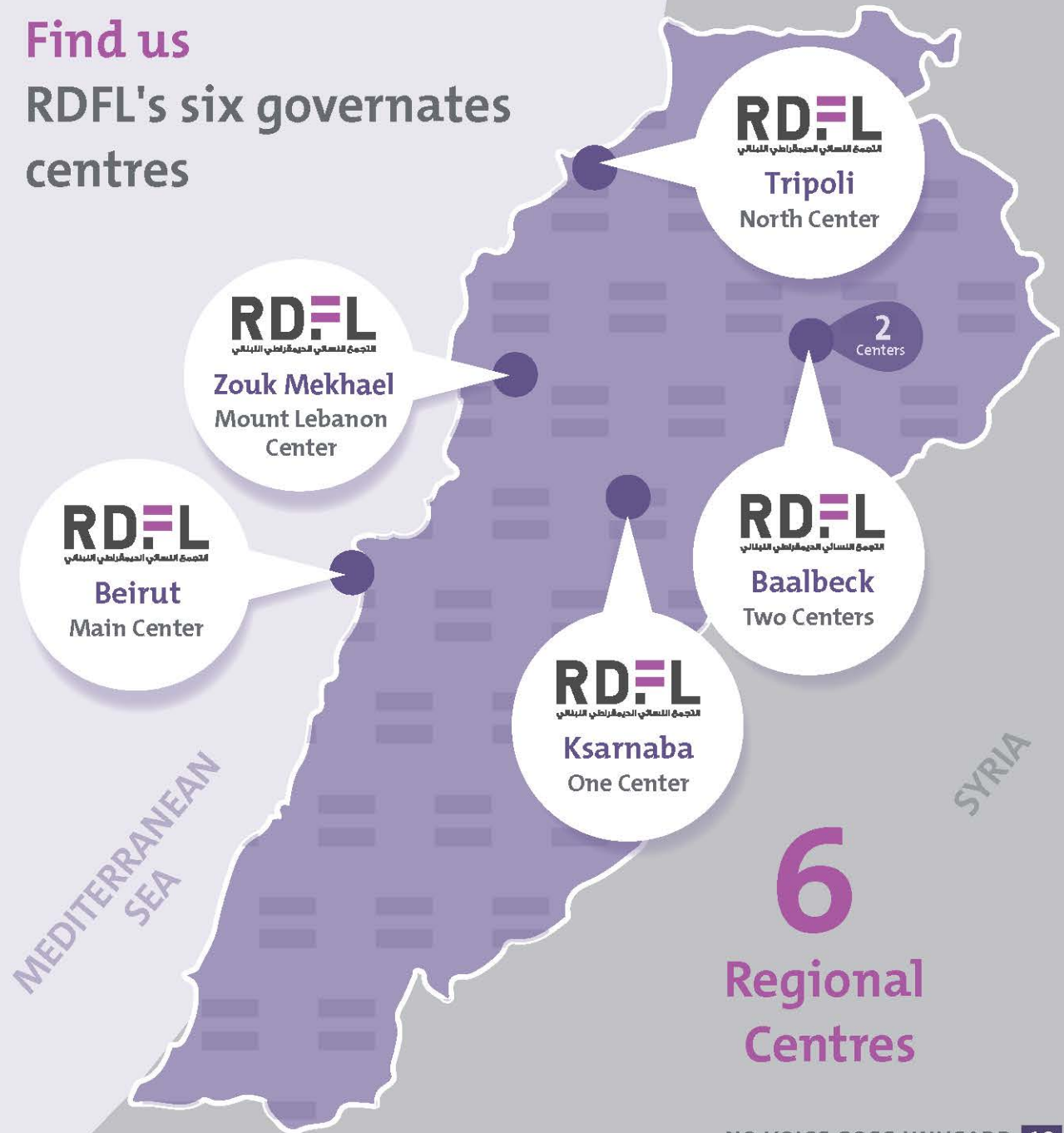
Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Find us

RDFL's six governates centres



04 FAITH IN THE CAUSE: OUR SUPPORTERS AND DONORS

We are grateful to those who make it their mission to help end the suffering of millions of women in Lebanon and around the world. In 2017, we joined hands with generous givers who helped us further the cause, assisting survivors to start a new journey and promoting equality among all groups.

act:onaid

unicef 

for every child

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

 **UN
WOMEN**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



Thank you to:



05 OUR ACHIVEMENTS IN 2017 AND 2018

At a glance

General services



4

Municipalities supported to integrate gender mainstreaming in their policies



more than

650

Sessions

Awareness and sensitization sessions were conducted all over Lebanon



5300

Participantes

Participated in public events conducted by RDFL



more than

200

People

Benefited from Drama therapy and psychosocial support sessions.



687

People

Benefited from summer camps done by RDFL



20

Lawyers

Female lawyers trained on protection mechanisms



more than

6574

People

Benefited from RDFL's work and services



234

Survivors

Women and girls survivors of different kinds of GBV and SGBV received psychosocial and legal support

Unlocking handcuffed futures: Ending child marriage

It is a piece of jewellery that is supposed to symbolise the eternal unity of wedlock.

However, for a girl who has not reached her 18th birthday, that shiny wedding ring is a padlock for her future- one without education, one burdened by compromised ambitions and long years of agony.

In spite of the rather sluggish decline in child marriage rates over recent years, there has been little progress to stamp the dangerous phenomenon out.

Every Somewhere on
2 the planet, a girl
under 18 has her
destiny decided
Seconds for her

**Child marriage is a
social problem that goes
beyond the personal.**

It shuts girls off from contributing to their societies, curtailing their education. It fuels poverty and maternal mortality. It drives back growth, stability and transformation.

Getting into the first circle

In Lebanon, things are not very different. One or both parents can agree to marrying their daughter off without her consent or even considering her opinion on the matter. It is often accepted that a girl is told she will be a bride for a groom she had barely met. Marriage, in many cases, is typically arranged as a deal to preserve family honour and stress a stereotypical image of women as housewives expected to stay at home all day to bring up children, dust window sills and bake a delicious pie.

In 2017

we travelled the length and breadth of Lebanon to tell girls that this should not be the case,

that decision and destiny were theirs to make.

Our awareness sessions, summer camps, plays and focus groups brought together thousands of girls, boys, women and men to highlight the issue. We encouraged girls of all backgrounds and nationalities to be leaders, ready to point a finger whenever a red line was crossed. They went back to their communities and shared advice with young adolescents like themselves.

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Standout moments 2007

12 July

Led by members of the community an event marking the International Population Day on 12 July brought the risks of child marriage to the forefront, with participants watching a film telling stories of young people who were coerced, against their own will, to get married.

12 August

Exactly a month after, on 12 August, RDFL celebrated the limitless energy of young people on the International Youth Day. Four outdoor games tested the congregation's skills and personalities. The aim behind the celebration was to raise awareness on the many roles that young people can play in their communities beyond those dictated by the norms.

21 September

A third moment, the International Peace Day on 21 September, brought together a group of adolescents to express their emotions and engaged in role-play activities, prepared by trained psychologists. The experience that those adolescents took from such gatherings will serve them well when a critical decision on their future has to be made.

Taking the initiative

When it comes to legislation, there is no civil law that sets an age under which a girl cannot get married. Marriage as a personal status is governed by religious communities, some of which allow exceptions for girls to get married when they are as young as nine.

To close that gap, RDFL proposed a draft law for the protection of children from child marriage to the Lebanese Parliament. Building on months of tireless advocacy work, the move represented a momentous leap on a rocky mountain.

The journey began in December 2015, when RDFL formed a legal committee to draft a law banning child marriage. The committee took into consideration the draft law prepared by the National Commission for Lebanese Women and aimed to fill the main gaps in the proposed law. The committee ensured that the proposed draft law is developed in line with international conventions and Lebanon's obligations, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, and the International Bill of Human Rights.

In August 2016, the committee reviewed and finalised the proposed draft law, which now consisted of five articles that define the minimum age for marriage in Lebanon and stipulated Article 1 stating that a child refers to any boy or girl under the age of 18, therefore the age of marriage in Lebanese territory [should be] 18.

RDFL's draft law, entitled Protecting Children from Child Marriage, was introduced to key political figures, legal advisors and members of the parliament to support the adoption of the draft law. The ceaseless efforts and discussions, finally bore fruit when the draft was adopted by MP Elie Keyrouz and presented to the Lebanese Cabinet on the 28th of March 2017.

Because child marriage is an issue largely instructed by religion as much as by anything else, RDFL took the new draft law for discussion with religious leaders representing the main sects in Lebanese communities. A panel titled, "The Role of Religious Leaders in Protecting Children from Early Marriage" was attended by representatives of all faiths in addition to 40 actors from the civil society and international organisations.

The panel was a crucial moment for RDFL to make it clear that child marriage is a serious phenomenon that threatens the

stability and security of the Lebanese society at large. Our demands did not shy away from calling for religious texts to be revisited to see how the evolution of societies deems those long-standing edicts inapplicable.

The participants agreed that no sacred text or scripture determines the age of marriage. A notable intervention from one Sheikh revealed how the overwhelming majority of child marriage cases ended with divorce, which goes to explain passionate calls for that practice to end.

The panel made 2 principal recommendations:

- 1 Spread awareness among communities about the dangerous impact of child marriage.
- 2 Protect children from early marriage, especially that there are no religious texts that contradict with this.

ACHIEVEMENT

Seven months on from its submission and after the launch of RDFL's national media advocacy campaign, #NotBefore18, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri referred the proposed law on the protection of children from child marriage to the Administration and Justice Committee for discussion. Though we still have unfinished business, the step means **we are closer than ever to rescuing futures.**



Law proposal of children protection from early marriage

Article One:

The word child refers to any boy or girl under the age of eighteen full years.

Article Two:

The age of marriage on Lebanese territories is determined as eighteen for men and women, contrary to any other text.

Article Three:

Article 483 of the Penal Code is amended as follows: Anyone who has contracted, permitted, urged, intervened for, contributed to, or participated in the marriage contract of a child in conflict with the provisions of this law shall be fined ten times the minimum wage rate and face jail time of six months to two years. In case of repeated offence, the penalty shall be compounded.

Article Four:

All legal or regulatory statutes that conflict with the provisions of this Law or are inconsistent with its contents are hereby voided.

Article Five:

This Law shall go into effect immediately upon its publication in the official gazette.





18 as the legal minimum marriage age, for both men and women.

A minute of warning

To hammer home the message, RDFL released a powerful minute-long video that recapped some of the most health-damaging consequences that an underage bride is faced with upon taking such a step. Those consequences are so sinister that they could cause chronic physical, psychological and social problems.



#NotBefore18

With a mission to change destinies and challenge wrong practices, RDFL took the fight to end child marriage to the nation. A clear message was that the start should be with the foundations and so a new #NotBefore18 national media campaign broke ground.

Launched on the International Day of the Girl Child in October 2017 with two principal objectives, #NotBefore18 called for more public and media awareness to be raised on the health risks and costs associated with child marriage. It sought to challenge Members of the Lebanese Parliament to assume their legislative responsibility and adopt a civil law that sets



They include, but are not limited to, vaginal ruptures, pregnancy poisoning, premature delivery, psychological disorders and traumas associated with the inability to cope with the new life.

The simple reason why all this might happen is that the girl's body is still underdeveloped.

Watch the chilling warning via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4ppdfKH8x8>

Overwhelming support



33 influencers

The campaign got off to an auspicious start, with a wave of support from 33 influencers from all walks of life who spoke to the nation and called for an end to child marriage. Media personnel, actors, singers, political leaders, directors, authors, social activists and religious leaders united to raise the voice of thousands of girls pushed into dangerous uncertainty.

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40 national and international media outlets

The campaign launch was covered by 40 national and international media outlets. Over the first month, we witnessed unprecedented engagement on our channels, with nearly two- and-a-half million people reached on our Facebook and other social media platforms.



#NotBefore18 in numbers

 **2,000,000**
people reached on Facebook

 **10,000**
video views on YouTube

 **100,000**
views on Instagram

 **216,000**
tweet impressions

 **150** billboards
in four provinces

 **15** unipoles
on key roads

 **15** digital screens
on coastal highways

Nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award

The great efforts of our members and volunteers were acknowledged with the nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award, which recognises the best online campaigns. Our campaign was voted as the second best, an achievement we dedicate to all those waiting for the biggest reward of abolishing child marriage.



1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals & 200 primary healthcare centres

The overwhelming public response coincided with support from official departments. The Ministry of Health joined the cause through raising awareness on the health risks of child marriage across 1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals and 200 primary healthcare centres. More than 80,000 posters and flyers were handed out, while the campaign's video was shared on the ministry's social channels and affiliated website



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

Together we are stronger

As the campaign gathered momentum, RDFL was stepping up its representation on the national and international stage. In Lebanon, the **National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage** came into existence after more than one year of consistent efforts by RDFL to bring together 57 child rights & women's rights organisations, official institutions & INGOs. The primary task for this nucleus of enthusiastic human rights defenders was to stress the role of the State in protecting the rights of its female citizens to equality and introduce legislation banning child marriage on Lebanese territories.

Globally, RDFL joined the **Girls Not Brides** partnership, which consists of more than **900 civil society organisations** representing over **95 countries** to spare girls the terrifying consequences of child marriage and enable them to fulfil their potential, wherever they happened to be in the world. Such partnerships bring the best in the feminist organisations and unite passionate voices calling for a fairer reality.

Get to know more: Watch celebrities share a message of support for RDFL's campaign to ban child marriage on our YouTube channel



Where did we go further?

We did not stop there. In 2018, we trained 40 youth and leaders from Lebanese political parties on child marriage where they set action plan to lobby for the endorsement of the law by meeting their representatives in the parliament.

On May 2018, a new parliamentary election was held, and the discussion of the proposed laws in the Administration and Justice Committee was paused. New MPs were elected, the new Administration and Justice Committee was formed. Accordingly, RDFL has to remind the new elected MPs of the #NotBefore18 campaign and its goal of passing the law for the protection of children from child marriage. As a result, RDFL was back with an innovative new online and outdoor campaign following the Lebanese parliamentary elections that took the country by storm - both aesthetically in the form of campaign posters and thoughtfully in the form of the country's collective conscience. The new campaign focused on the electoral slogan posters that were plastered all around the country during the parliamentary election period.

As part of the campaign, RDFL used the slogans of all of the politicians that took part in this Month's elections - altering the photographs by covering them with the slogan:

“ Time for Action: Pass the law to change the minimum age of marriage #NotBefore18 ”



The campaign highlights a desperate need to change the current laws that allow marrying off children in Lebanon, but it also highlights a much more serious one - for the politicians in power to stand up for the cause and make that change happen, because after all, they are the only ones who have the authority to do so.

As a result to this campaign, a number of MPs and political parties committed on social media platform (twitter) that they support this campaign and its cause.

Watch the new campaign's GIF:
<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1655932421109489/>

The campaign also included sending a letter to the new MPs where we are requesting to meet them. Luckily, a number of MPs has invited us over to meet them and they have showed their full support of the law.

Part of the advocacy plan is the mobile van visiting different remote areas & disseminating information to the public in all Lebanese areas on the issue of child marriage. The mobile van has targeted men and women from all areas suffering from child marriage. It opened the debate of child marriage where hundreds of people participated in these public events.

In addition to RDFL's work towards protecting girls & children from child marriage, RDFL published a study that aimed at shedding light on the attitudes of Lebanese society

towards the phenomenon of marriage of children and their causes and effects. The study also examined the opinion of the Lebanese people regarding the state's position on the issue and the role it should play in order to put an end to this phenomenon and in particular through the adoption of a law establishing the minimum legal age for marriage in Lebanon with 18 full years for male and female.

According to the study, the majority of the Lebanese people considered marriage of children to be a serious practice and a violation of the rights of the child. While 97% of the Lebanese believe that the best age for marriage is 18 years and above, 64% support the establishment of a law to determine the minimum age of marriage in Lebanon for 18 years, complete for males and females alike.

You can check the results of this study via this link:

<http://www.rdfwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RD-FL-POLL-BOOKLETS-HIGH.pdf>



Young 3arous

Recently and after the launch of the opinion poll mentioned above, RDFL launched its digital nationwide campaign, #NotBefore18, through a social media stunt titled “Young 3arous”, literally translated as Young Bride in English. The campaign calls upon Lebanese members of Parliament and leaders to end child marriage in Lebanon; permits girls to marry below the age of 18 years. The campaign also tackles awareness about the dangers of child marriage in the country.



RDFL kicked off its campaign on October 24, 2018 with a digital media stunt, creating a fake Instagram and Facebook accounts for “Young 3arous”, acting as a matchmaking agency, promoting underage brides for those in search of a young wife. The social media channels led to a website: www.young3arous.com which showcased an under construction template and contact number for individuals to call and ask for further information. Taking the stunt even further, an actor represented “Young 3arous”, answering the phone calls and taking orders for the young brides he is supposedly promoting.

In as little as two hours from its launch, “Young 3arous” took the nation’s social media by storm with Lebanese bloggers and influencers, media, activists, and citizens taking to social media and calling the Lebanese Internal Security forces to demand that the pages be shut down immediately.

The digital stunt caught the attention of Joe Maalouf, a primetime presenter and whose program *Hawa Al Horiyi* on LBCI is dedicated to tackling issues in Lebanon. RDFL revealed the aim of its campaign during this program and the public was

invited to check the website again and sign the online petition against child marriage. After revealing the campaign, we posted a video clearing out for the public our aim and approach behind this campaign via this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/2384414864905391/>

Also, as a call for action, we asked people to support our law by signing the petition via this link:

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/978/356/676/?cid=headerClick>



As part of our advocacy plan to advocate for women's rights in Lebanon, RDFL prepared on December 4, 2018 in the Lebanese Parliament's library hall for a national consultation conference on child marriage in partnership with Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the National Coalition for Protecting Children from Early Marriage and with the support of UNOHCHR and the European Union. The conference was a needed and essential process that gathered experts, national and international NGOs, survivors of child marriage who were at the heart of the problem and the survivors of violence, media, decision makers and stakeholders that will contribute

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to lobbying for a law that ends child marriage in Lebanon. This event aimed to inform the debate on the issue of child marriage among stakeholders in Lebanon. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the vice president of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in addition to a number of Lebanese MPs, ministers and decision makers had participated as speakers in the conference where deputies were told to express their political parties' position from the laws being discussed.

As a celebration of the International Women's Day and in support to RDFL's #NotBefore18 campaign, RDFL organized a dinner where parliament members, ministers,

journalists, celebrities, partners, and others were invited to celebrate the success of the campaign so far and ensure continuous coordination and support for the aim of passing the law to protect children from child marriage. To watch the video, go to <https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1618891574813574/>

We will lobby, push, defend, question and demand. A new march on child marriage on March 2nd, 2019 will try to gauge people's awareness about the issue and decide with partners in the media, the civil society and policymakers on the best steps to change wrong perceptions.



“ Our ultimate aim is to turn our end goal to a common goal: adopt a new law that bans child marriage ”

“

Her story

I was 14 when I attended an awareness session at RDFL. I sat next to my Mom to hear stories of girls who got married when they were my age. It all sounded like physical and psychological torture. The accounts I heard sent chills down my spine. When the session was over, I asked to talk to the social worker separately with my Mom. I told her I was engaged and getting ready for my wedding soon, but after watching the horrifying film and listening to some of the most frightening stories, I was starting to change my mind. The social worker encouraged me to reconsider my options. She told me what kind of dangerous route I was about to take. When I left [the session] that day, I had already made my mind. It took some convincing to get my Dad to support my decision. I was too scared, but I know that my future was at stake. I told him I did not want to go ahead with the wedding and that I wanted to go to school. Looking back, I cannot think of a better decision I have made in my life. I now offer the same advice to my friends.

Jamila (not her real name),
a would-be child bride

”

No honour in silence: Fighting sexual and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) happens behind closed walls and in the open. Though not restricted to one sex, more than one in three women have experienced some form of gender-based violence around the world, a shocking manifestation of a global injustice, of which women are often the victim.

The burning question is why, in the 21st century, are women still subjected to harassment, sexism, intimidation, honour crimes and exploitation. In Lebanon, those practices, whether at home or in the workplace, are not uncommon; on the contrary, they are widespread.

More Than
1/3 women have
experienced
some form
of gender-based violence
around the world,

“ This is not a threat aimed at girls only;
it is a sign that societies are
doomed to failure. ”



Taking notice and taking action

Working within and across communities, RDFL targeted 223 female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV and SGBV). We supported them to **stand up and be counted**. Not to let barriers silence them. We addressed not just the physical impact that such aggression can cause, but also the **lasting psychological wounds** that cause innocent women to live in embarrassment and self-deprecation. Some of the victims even wished death because it was a better end. Community members, including those from Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps, were supported to refer violence cases to RDFL for **legal, psychological, and case management assistance**.

In Lebanese villages and Syrian informal tented settlements in Bekaa and North Lebanon, opened **dedicated safe spaces for women** to open up about issues they had hardly discussed with themselves. In spite of the numerous challenges that they have faced in their lives, the brave girls came to debate a range of topics and raise the voice in our **community-based awareness-raising sessions**, later documenting their stories to be shared for awareness with other survivors. No lines were to be drawn and no taboos to be left unbroken. The candid discussions,



according to one lady “enabled me to reveal a lot of what had been going inside all these years. It gave me some comfort to vent my distress and frustration and build a rapport with women from the society around me.”

Up to 145 volunteers and 20 university students were meanwhile trained to join operations across communities, including refugees, in Lebanon to **monitor and safely refer GBV cases**. Our team of trained volunteers and expert psychologists provided the rigorous **psychosocial support** needed to **encourage women to speak up**.

In Mount Lebanon and Bekaa, 60 women from all backgrounds were trained to **step up their self-confidence** and talk openly about problems related to their bodies in “speak out” sessions. Participants were encouraged to address issues at hand without any feeling of guilt or self-blame. They understood the importance of respect and self-esteem in enjoying a healthy life and gained knowledge in laws governing protection from sexual exploitation.

Our project to **enhance the response to and prevention of gender-based violence** enabled minors as well as girls and women who survived violence of all forms to receive support to **gain justice and protect themselves**. To this end, 20 lawyers were trained on GBV protection mechanisms to distinguish between national and international laws that protect women from human trafficking and violence in all its forms. Acquiring the knowledge enabled the lawyers needed to help survivors seek the right legal measures. In addition to our consistent coordination with lawyers and legislators to provide legal services for survivors and victims of sexual violence, we enabled national and refugee communities to access **trusted counselling and professional advice**.

Breaking away from the traditional

We engaged women in a range of activities that developed their life skills, such as hairdressing, embroidery, handicraft and English lessons. The exercises helped boost women's confidence and gave them a space to express themselves freely, which was reflected in the increasing numbers of women who came to register at our centres and those seeking legal knowledge.

To stress our message, we chose to abandon traditional methods and go for the innovative. The issues that we dealt with were too serious to overlook, so we used entertainment as a tool to engage the broadest possible category of participants.

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From cinema to music and theatre, we sought to highlight the invisible struggle that hundreds of women had to live with, bringing to the communities' turf new mediums they could relate to and interact with. A joint Open Your Eyes to Your Rights event with Unicef brought together 250 children, parents and members of the Syrian refugee community in activities challenging violence against women. The activity was a celebration of our values.

“ The mantra has not changed for us; men and women are eligible for the same rights and roles. And that is the only way towards equality ”



Identifying legal gaps

On the legal front, RDFL left no stone unturned. A roundtable was held in May 2017 to discuss the **legal protection of victims of sexual violence**, in front of an assembly that included Minister of State for Women's Affairs Jean Oghassabian and representatives from other ministries. The meeting discussed the controversial Article 522 of the penal code, later to be abolished, that exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim.

RDFL also prepared a legal research to assess the protection mechanisms for female victims of violence. The study identified the available methods that protect women while recommending the best way to make use of them.

The results of the study, disseminated in 1,000 copies, were revealed by 20 lawyers who organised five panel discussions across Lebanon, attended by 300 people including MPs, mayors, heads of municipalities and journalists. Up to 75 meetings were also held by trained university students to spread the knowledge among their peers and with the public.

The impact of the study was manifested in the high turnout of people who took part to emphasise change in thinking and readiness to take action against GBV acts.

Testimonies in the dark

Another major study released by RDFL and partner organisations in May 2017 revealed the **scale of violence and abuse** committed against women within the closer and wider circles of the community.

Prepared by Dr Faysal El Kak and Dr Caroline Succar Slaiby, **Sexual Violence Against Women in Lebanon Testimonies in the Dark** interviewed 50 women who had experienced one or more type of sexual violence including harassment, incest, marital rape, sexual assault and rape. The chilling findings of the study revealed that 90 percent of the assaults were committed by a family member, including by a father or a brother.

The study also showed that a female of any age could be targeted. Some of the girls who were subjected to brutal grooming and harassment were as young as six. The horrific practices are often a result of cunning tactics through which the perpetrators create a bond of trust that makes it more difficult for the victim to speak out or cope with the aftermath.

Testimonies in the Dark analysed the short- and long-term health, physical and psychological consequences of sexual violence, highlighting important

recommendations that should be taken into consideration if women were to live in a safer world.

Besides in-depth interviews, the study identified the main services provided by anti-GBV organisations in Lebanon and obstacles facing the improvement of women's realities.

The release of the study came at a special event attended by representatives of ministries, diplomats, security officials and the media. It featured a live testimony by one survivor to expose grave violations and the implications on the Lebanese society.

“

Her story

There was hardly a day that went by without me getting beaten or humiliated by my husband. He would call me names, said I was a cheater for going out. He never spared a way to punish me. I decided to seek counselling at RDFL when things went out of control. I had abandoned my husband and children and my life descended into further misery. I was made to feel welcome at the [RDFL] centre. The counsellors helped me understand the problems and work on them. We put an action plan for me to find a job and become economically independent. I was ready to fix my relationship with my husband. I am glad that it worked out. We have come together again. I now have a job and feel as though my life was wretched back from the cliff edge. It was all thanks to that RDFL's constant support that I am with my family again. We are now an equal couple, exactly how it should be.

Fadwa (not her real name),
a domestic violence survivor

”



Words that are vows: Gender mainstreaming on a policy level

Integrating gender in municipal strategies

RDFL's core mission to achieve gender balance was introduced to four local municipalities in four different regions: Hammama, Niha, Hasroun and Kfar Nabrakh. Through closed-doors consultations, training and workshops, we encouraged the local authorities to adopt a **gender element** in their strategic plans that took into consideration the **importance of equality** between men & women in communal work.

The activities started with a gender assessment that sought to identify the gaps, needs and potential of the targeted municipalities to introduce gender-oriented work. A set of recommendations put together with the municipality officials laid the foundation for ambitious cooperation.

Capacity building activities were then introduced to foster a gender-sensitive environment and support the right attitudes among both genders. Up to 24 municipal members were supported to improve their knowledge and skills on the topic and encourage participatory approach and networking.

The third stage was heralded with two-day workshops in each area, where 60 members of the public, activists and the youth were involved in identifying the needs of their communities and shaping the best gender integration process.

The outcome of those intensive discussions was shared in a special event that called for those who hold power for change to take action. The municipalities took away the main recommendations to support women's participation in decision-making positions and promote ideal gender-sensitive environment.

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Launched in 2015, the Euromed Feminist Initiative (EFI) is a policy network that brings together 24 women's rights organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean to advocate for gender equality and promote women's rights. In Lebanon, the network's board is represented by RDFL, providing diverse feminist expertise to engage national decision and policymakers in vital issues such as protection from violence and political participation.

In 2017, EFI set out a list of **policy recommendations** to Lebanon and other countries as part of the Ministerial Process and the Ministerial Declaration. The recommendations are meant to improve the status of gender equality across the region. RDFL is proud to have contributed to what can transform Lebanon into a fairer, more open place for everyone on its territories. Our promise is to continue to work to see this roadmap realised.



EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأوروبية المتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

Starting from within: reforming our policies and bylaws

Transparency for us is not simply a value; it is a virtue. We realise that we can only affect the world around us when we are in the best shape. The challenges are getting more sinister, and the mission to serve more women has become almost an oath.

With that in mind, RDFL **overhauled a set of internal regulations** that will enable the organisation to realise its ambitious goals on the short and long term and achieve greater impact and visibility in and among communities. The reforms were agreed among the members and approved as a cornerstone for our future glories.

The multi-front reforms:

Revising bylaws to reach more transparency and accountability

Reducing executive committee membership to seven members, none of whom is a paid staff

Developing A five-year strategic plan, setting a clear path for the organisation

Introducing fundamental documents:

Gender Policy, Human Resources Policy, Code of Conduct, Advocacy Strategy, Visibility Strategy, Donor Policy, Anti-Fraud Policy, and Financial and Procurement Policies.

Their voice and word: our media work

Turning the volume up

It is the mirror that reflects the life we live. Thus, the reflection better be fair and true. When women's issues are inadequately reported, it can mislead the public and create an inaccurate and questionable interpretation in the minds of viewers, readers and listeners.

Media in all its forms is the only way that brings together people of different interests to debate, defend and promote issues close to their hearts.

The emergence of social media means that an avalanche of news, rumours and gossip can spread like wildfire within a matter of minutes, or even seconds.

Hashtags were launched, awards given out, and hours of broadcast dedicated for brave women who came forward to reveal the extent of the threat that they, and many women, had to endure. The encouraging signs were starting to catch up with audiences in Lebanon and the region.

In 2017, we stepped up our work with the media to discuss critical matters and advocate justice and equality.

Our **#NotBefore18** media campaign sparked a crucial debate on TV channels, in the papers and on social media platforms. Media personalities joined the campaign and shared messages that warned against child marriage. These efforts complemented our lobbying efforts and expanded our campaigns to create a favourable environment for change.

Stepping up our media work is one of our strategy elements. We want women to be heard. And heard they will be.

“ Around the world, women took to the media to share their stories and uncover horrifying stories that they had to live with for years. ”

Glory in the badge: The new logo

Dove and olive branch

Ever since it came into existence, RDFL has been championing its founding values; women's rights, feminism, democracy and secularism. As a brand, our organisation has famously been associated with a dove and olive branch, which represented an identity synonymous with peace activism. The logo was sketched by the late Wadad Shakhtoura as an artistic resistance of the Lebanese Civil War, which broke out in 1975, and as a kernel of a reasonable argument in troublesome times.

As Lebanon departed a dark phase of its history, RDFL refused to lament the past and looked with hope to the years ahead.

“We have reinvigorated our mission and breathed fresh life into the civil society.”

RDFL
التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

Since 1976

2017, New Logo Announcement:

The Lebanese women's Democratic Gathering (RDGL) switched to new logo and visual identity, a change prompted by a desire to bring RDFL's core mission forward, and the fact that we have since the founding of the NGO done more than 40 years of work.

2017, Previous Logo Background:

Back in 1975 RDGL was established as a non-profit, charitable entity to lead through the fighting and occupation periods, leading RDGL's identity was at the time, representing hope that through women's resistance, the country could be free and democratic again.



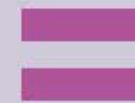
The New Logo:

RDGL and the Democratic Gathering are now logo-free with a new visual identity. The logo-free version of our identity is inspired by Lebanon's new 2017 constitution that marks the start of RDGL's 40th birthday. It's a logo that represents a desire for justice and equality. The logo is inspired by the constitution with gender equality.

@RDFLwomen



RDFLwomen.org



Purple and equal

In September 2017, RDFL introduced a new logo that reflects the change and ambition of the organisation.

The new bold, if simple-looking, design consists of the four initials, “RDFL” in white, with the letter “F” made to resemble a purple “equals” sign.

The full name of the gathering appears in Arabic underneath the four initials.

The new insignia is inspired by generations of feminists who want to see a just world in which gender equality is the name of the game. It sets a high bar for a society that has emerged into an era of peace and liberty that cannot be complete when its members do not enjoy the same rights.

It is the beginning
of a
new glorious period,
and we want all women
to define it.

However, at the same time, we never diverted from the core ambition of justice and equality between men and women.

06 A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

We understand that real and lasting progress does not happen overnight. It is a process that culminates in many baby steps. In the past, RDFL has faced challenges concerning administrative documentation, a shortage of resources, varying performance capabilities, unification of members, and fluctuating external funding. With that in mind, we aim high but detail our goals in the medium term. RDFL has identified and outlined the following focus points for our five-year strategic plan (2018-2022):

“ The worst thing that we can do as women is not stand up for each other, and this is something we can practice every day, no matter where we are and what we do, women sticking up for other women, choosing to protect and celebrate each other instead of competing or criticising one another. ”

- Amal Clooney,
International court lawyer & ambassador
for women's and human rights.

RDFL'S MAIN OBJECTIVES

1st OBJECTIVE

Combat all forms of violence & discrimination against women, both in the private and public spheres, working on three levels:

1. Raising awareness: This is a critical pillar of combatting gender-based violence. RDFL will continue to **raise awareness** about sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, rape, child marriage, and deprivation of economic rights.

2. Empowering women: RDFL will **support women** who reach out to our centres, as well as those in vulnerable communities such as immigrants, migrant workers and refugees. We will provide social and psychological support for survivors of violence.

3. Utilising Media: Given the importance of the media in raising awareness and creating an environment that is conducive to change, RDFL will **work with the media** to strengthen the culture of women's rights.

setting priorities and developing coordination between NGOs. The Network would also help unify the voice of the feminist movement, reduce duplications of efforts, and make for better use of resources.

RDFL aims to **revise the Women's Network** in the next five years. It will begin by working through the existing National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage to call for coordination meetings between the feminist organisations in the country.

2nd OBJECTIVE

Build a strong membership that enlivens and advocates for women's rights

RDFL has always been based on grassroots activism and volunteerism. It has built a widespread membership that believes in transmitting the essence of RDFL's feminist, secular and democratic values to their communities. RDFL has set out to activate and **grow its membership** by increasing communication with members.

3rd OBJECTIVE


Revive the Women's Network to strengthen the feminist movement in Lebanon

A unifying force is an essential part of carrying the messages of civil society. Feminist organisations have previously advocated for various issues through different coalitions. For each issue, one organisation led the coalition and prepared the public mobilisation efforts. However, having an overarching Network would catapult the movement in the right direction. It would play an essential role in

4th OBJECTIVE

Strengthen internal capabilities

If an organisation does not run smoothly from within, it cannot expect to do so on a grander scale. RDFL is resolute in its path towards fortifying its capabilities and achieving its goals efficiently. We plan to further **strengthen our governance** and overall management, as well as build up our human resources, enhance our specialist services to women, and monitor our project implementation.



Just as our late founder and icon Wadad Shakhtoura, who was born on the International Women's Day, envisioned a better society for women in Lebanon, so too do we carry on her legacy, her aspiration, her values and beliefs. Her message continues to resonate: we will never give up defending women's rights to equality.

We have introduced a platform for action, awoken a determination as bullet-proof as steel. The leaders of tomorrow have fed the flames of inequality for far too long. For decades, centuries really, we have allowed our fates and our very lives to be dictated by men who crave power. We will keep the conversation going strong.

Shakhtoura once said,

“ Women have to abandon the space that laws have confined them to and get out into the space that men have dominated. ”

07 THE FINAL WORD

“Our promise to our founder, and to every woman and girl, is to continue the fight for what is right.”

08 CONTACTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks go to all the women and girls who shared their stories with us and continue to do so as we strive for a better reality for every woman in Lebanon.

This report was prepared by the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering – RDFL.

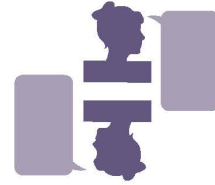
RDFL would like to express its deepest appreciation to all those who provided information and testimonies for the purpose of this report. It could not have possible without the contribution of every one of them.



لطلب الدعم



القانوني



الإجتماعي



النفسي

أو التبليغ عن أية حالة عنف



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خدمة 24/7
سرية ومجانية

RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

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NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

Women saving their futures

RDFL
التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering - RDFL



Progress Report 2017-2018



RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

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أقروا قانون حماية
الطفلات من
التزويج المبكر

كلنا
بالنسوية
سوا.

Trans women
are women

WE ARE THE
GRANDDAUGHTERS
OF THE VICTIMS YOU
WERENTABLE TO
BURN

WHAT SHOCKS
YOU
MORE?

الثقافة الذكورية
الوحيد للاقتصاب
هو المقتصب

الثقافة الذكورية اسقطت الكوتا النسائية

مشروع " دورك "

مشروع " دورك "

دودة غضبنا



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01 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

3 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

Welcome to the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) Progress Report for 2017-2018, which puts into words the decisive actions that our feminist organisation has taken over 12 months to promote the fundamental rights of women and girls in Lebanon.

Every time I am at a meeting of our volunteers, I am struck by the diversity of ages that we have among our feminist members. Many young faces, full of passion, sharing power and making decisions with those who have been here for years. If this tells me anything, it highlights the remarkable spirit with which RDFL has renewed itself.

As we continue this journey for a fifth decade, we remain hopeful that we will touch many young lives with positive change. Our dedication to the values we defend remain as high as ever, our beliefs as relentless, and our activism as fierce.

As you will read in these pages, the RDFL team have tirelessly worked, empowered and advocated. With their unshakeable belief in equality as a cornerstone for prosperity and progress, they are spurred on to promote our values of feminism, secularism, transparency, democracy and equality.

I am proud that RDFL is now at the forefront of the fight to end child marriage in Lebanon. Last year, our #NotBefore18 media campaign kicked off on a high note. I was overwhelmed by the fantastic reaction from our supporters who joined our call for justice.

#NotBefore18 put into motion what had been a slow-moving river. For months, our supporters had been waiting for a draft law banning child marriage to enter discussions at the Lebanese Parliament committee. Thanks to the efforts of our staff, volunteers, partners and officials who endorsed the draft bill, the proposal is now closer to realisation.

On the same front, we have also welcomed the coming together of 54 - organisations to establish the National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage. Together, we hope to end the nightmare which thousands of girls who get married before their 18th birthday endure.

These achievements were anything but smooth sailing. Our campaign was challenged. Arguments were deployed to make it look like a betrayal of respected traditions, but our message was clear:

“ There is nothing respectful about condemning young futures to a life of struggle. ”

I have always believed that change starts within the family when we raise our children, both boys and girls, equally. No matter how legislations evolve, if we do not switch mind-sets, we will not be able to achieve equality.

Just as we affected changes nationally, we introduced a wave of internal reforms. RDFL members agreed in 2017 to separate the leadership team from management affairs, a step towards more transparency and accountability, with which we have always conducted ourselves. We also rebranded ourselves with the heralding of a new logo that reflected our character as an entity fighting for equality.

But our achievements are incomplete until women and girls live free from the shackles of patriarchy and discrimination. The fight will not stop until they are inspired to believe in what she can do, to stand up against violence, and to realise her dreams, whatever they may be.

Thank you,
Layla Mroue, President of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)



About us

The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) is a feminist, secular, non-governmental organisation advocating for the rights of women in Lebanon. Founded in 1976, RDFL is one of the oldest feminist organisations based on volunteerism. Its vision and objectives draw from international laws and treaties that Lebanon is signatory to, as well as the constitution itself.

RDFL's vision is to achieve equality between women and men in all spheres and protection from gender-based violence. To achieve this vision, RDFL works on and advocates for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society. RDFL has over 20 full-time & 15 part-time employees across its six regional centres. The centres provide social, psychological and legal support to woman and girl survivors of violence, regardless of religion, political affiliation or nationality.

02 WHO WE ARE

Our mission, vision and values

RDFL's Mission is to work on and advocate for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination and to achieve full citizenship for women, through a widespread and empowered membership and in collaboration with the civil society.

RDFL's Vision is to achieve equality between women & men in all walks of life and protection from gender-based violence.

RDFL's Values:
Feminism / Secularism / Democracy
/ Transparency / Rejection of all forms of
discrimination and racism / Equality

EQUALITY

DEMOCRACY

SECULARISM

FEMINISM

TRANSPARENCY

**REJECTION OF
ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION
AND RACISM**



1976

Four decades of standing up for women's rights: Our history

Our story began in 1976 with a group of brave women who led a revolution away from the direct crosshairs of bullets, shelling, and sandbags that dominated the Lebanese Civil War era.

Today, those same centres are leading a shift in conversation and a change into a feminist world.

Networking and power sharing have always been major factors contributing to our success story. RDFL members and partners defend their arguments with conviction and rely on local communities who share our cause. RDFL joined forces with various organisations and forged alliances with the civil society that shared our passion for activism in favour of women's rights and the issues that continued to crop up.

2009

Wadad Shakhtoura, who founded RDFL and headed it as president until her passing in 2009, set out with her colleagues to help the Lebanese people recognise a country that appreciated gender equality. Initially, work focused on establishing and expanding our branches across all regions to serve the widest possible network of women, particularly the most marginalised communities in towns and cities. We opened a centre in Beirut's Southern Suburbs and then expanded to Baalbek and Ksarnaba in Bekaa. With the turn of the century, we opened our training centres in Tripoli, Mount Lebanon, and Saida, thereby extending our reach across the country. These centres were meant to encourage women to acquire skills and rely on themselves to take control of their own lives.





03 THE INSIDE LOOK

7 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

An entity of believers: Our assembly

RDFL's General Assembly, also called The Membership, the umbrella under which all its registered members act.

The Assembly's mandate

ELECTS THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS EVERY
THREE YEARS

ELECTS BRANCH COMMITTEES TO MANAGE
REGIONAL CENTRES

SUBMITS ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DRAFTS AND EXECUTES PROGRAMMES

UPDATES INTERNAL REGULATIONS

MONITORS THE BUDGET AND FINANCES

Our volunteers and members

Since it was founded more than four decades ago, RDFL has relied on its volunteers to pick up the baton and fight for a just cause. They have not done it for any personal benefit or reward. That kindred spirit never faded as years went by. Our heritage of promoting activism and volunteerism has transcended any work we do.

RDFL's Membership



280 Members
by the end of 2018



75 Members to be
attracted annually

How we help our volunteers to achieve

DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS AND CAPACITY ON
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY

ENGAGE THEM IN DECISION-MAKING

COMMUNICATE STRATEGIES AND PLANS

In her best interest: Our board of directors

Elected by the General Assembly every three years for a maximum of two terms, the Board of Directors represents the organisation's branches. It sets the strategy and evaluates the performance and progress of the annual plans and meets on a regular basis to review and advise on recent issues.

Zeinab Mroueh, President,
member since 1976

Caroline Succar, Vice President,
member since 1995

Ahida Taleb, Secretary,
member since 2003

Marie Therese El Mir, Treasurer,
member since 1995

Hiam Fakieh, Accountant,
member since 1994

Manal Majed, Lawyer,
member since 2003

Kamal Cherfane, Member,
member since 2016





Join the cause:

Do you want to engage
in efforts towards
achieving gender
equality and combating
gender based violence?

You can join our movement by filling an
online application on RDFL's Website.



www.RDFLwomen.org

Online Application
Together we are stronger!

We are unstoppable: Our alliances

We could not do it alone. Over the years,
we have struck rock-solid partnerships
with allies in Lebanon, the region and
beyond. Realising women's rights is not an
individual mission, and any success is not
exclusive.

RDFL is a member of

In Lebanon

The Lebanese Women's Network

The Non-Governmental National
Committee for Pursuing Women's Issues

The Lebanese Council of Women

Women in Politics Coalition

The National Network for the Change of
Women Image in the Media and
Advertising in Lebanon

Leading The National Coalition for
Protecting Children from Early Marriage

In the region

Arab Women's Forum (AISHA)

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Internationally

Women's International Democratic Federation

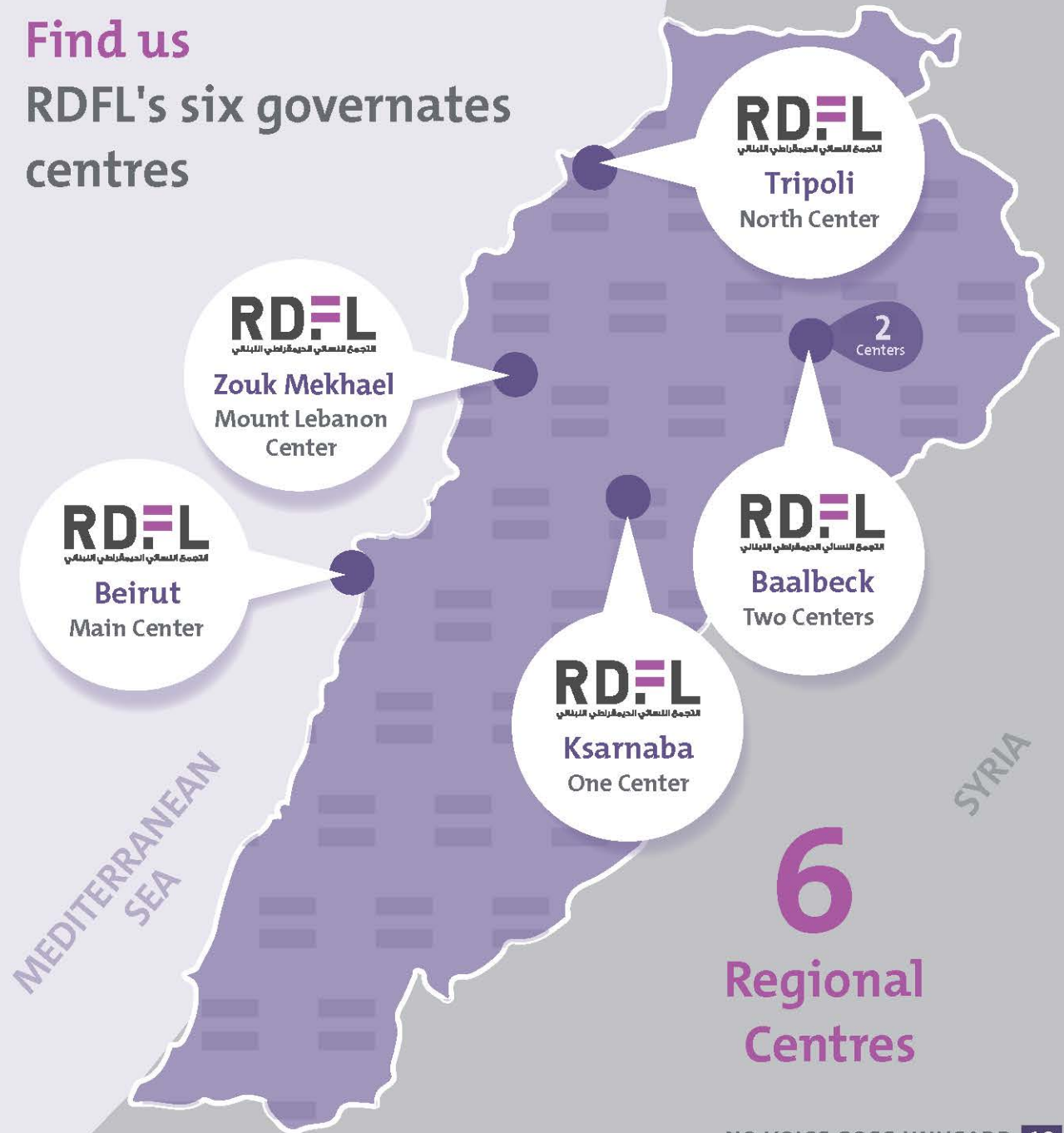
Euromed Civil Forum

Girls Not Brides

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Find us

RDFL's six governates centres



04 FAITH IN THE CAUSE: OUR SUPPORTERS AND DONORS

We are grateful to those who make it their mission to help end the suffering of millions of women in Lebanon and around the world. In 2017, we joined hands with generous givers who helped us further the cause, assisting survivors to start a new journey and promoting equality among all groups.

act:onaid

unicef 

for every child

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

 **UN
WOMEN**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



Thank you to:



05 OUR ACHIVEMENTS IN 2017 AND 2018

At a glance

General services



4

Municipalities
supported to integrate
gender mainstreaming
in their policies



more than

650

Sessions

Awareness and sensitization
sessions were conducted
all over Lebanon



5300

Participantes

Participated in public events
conducted by RDFL



more than

200

People

Benefited from Drama
therapy and psychosocial
support sessions.



687

People

Benefited from summer
camps done by RDFL



20

Lawyers

Female lawyers trained on
protection mechanisms



more than

6574

People

Benefited from RDFL's
work and services



234

Survivors

Women and girls survivors of
different kinds of GBV and SGBV
received psychosocial and legal
support

Unlocking handcuffed futures: Ending child marriage

It is a piece of jewellery that is supposed to symbolise the eternal unity of wedlock.

However, for a girl who has not reached her 18th birthday, that shiny wedding ring is a padlock for her future- one without education, one burdened by compromised ambitions and long years of agony.

In spite of the rather sluggish decline in child marriage rates over recent years, there has been little progress to stamp the dangerous phenomenon out.

Every Somewhere on
2 the planet, a girl
under 18 has her
destiny decided
for her

Seconds

Child marriage is a
social problem that goes
beyond the personal.

It shuts girls off from contributing to
their societies, curtailing their education.
It fuels poverty and maternal mortality.
It drives back growth, stability
and transformation.

Getting into the first circle

In Lebanon, things are not very different. One or both parents can agree to marrying their daughter off without her consent or even considering her opinion on the matter. It is often accepted that a girl is told she will be a bride for a groom she had barely met. Marriage, in many cases, is typically arranged as a deal to preserve family honour and stress a stereotypical image of women as housewives expected to stay at home all day to bring up children, dust window sills and bake a delicious pie.

In 2017

we travelled the length and breadth of Lebanon to tell girls that this should not be the case,

that decision and destiny were theirs to make.

Our awareness sessions, summer camps, plays and focus groups brought together thousands of girls, boys, women and men to highlight the issue. We encouraged girls of all backgrounds and nationalities to be leaders, ready to point a finger whenever a red line was crossed. They went back to their communities and shared advice with young adolescents like themselves.

15 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD



Standout moments 2007

12 July

Led by members of the community an event marking the International Population Day on 12 July brought the risks of child marriage to the forefront, with participants watching a film telling stories of young people who were coerced, against their own will, to get married.

12 August

Exactly a month after, on 12 August, RDFL celebrated the limitless energy of young people on the International Youth Day. Four outdoor games tested the congregation's skills and personalities. The aim behind the celebration was to raise awareness on the many roles that young people can play in their communities beyond those dictated by the norms.

21 September

A third moment, the International Peace Day on 21 September, brought together a group of adolescents to express their emotions and engaged in role-play activities, prepared by trained psychologists. The experience that those adolescents took from such gatherings will serve them well when a critical decision on their future has to be made.

Taking the initiative

When it comes to legislation, there is no civil law that sets an age under which a girl cannot get married. Marriage as a personal status is governed by religious communities, some of which allow exceptions for girls to get married when they are as young as nine.

To close that gap, RDFL proposed a draft law for the protection of children from child marriage to the Lebanese Parliament. Building on months of tireless advocacy work, the move represented a momentous leap on a rocky mountain.

The journey began in December 2015, when RDFL formed a legal committee to draft a law banning child marriage. The committee took into consideration the draft law prepared by the National Commission for Lebanese Women and aimed to fill the main gaps in the proposed law. The committee ensured that the proposed draft law is developed in line with international conventions and Lebanon's obligations, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, and the International Bill of Human Rights.

In August 2016, the committee reviewed and finalised the proposed draft law, which now consisted of five articles that define the minimum age for marriage in Lebanon and stipulated Article 1 stating that a child refers to any boy or girl under the age of 18, therefore the age of marriage in Lebanese territory [should be] 18.

RDFL's draft law, entitled Protecting Children from Child Marriage, was introduced to key political figures, legal advisors and members of the parliament to support the adoption of the draft law. The ceaseless efforts and discussions, finally bore fruit when the draft was adopted by MP Elie Keyrouz and presented to the Lebanese Cabinet on the 28th of March 2017.

Because child marriage is an issue largely instructed by religion as much as by anything else, RDFL took the new draft law for discussion with religious leaders representing the main sects in Lebanese communities. A panel titled, "The Role of Religious Leaders in Protecting Children from Early Marriage" was attended by representatives of all faiths in addition to 40 actors from the civil society and international organisations.

The panel was a crucial moment for RDFL to make it clear that child marriage is a serious phenomenon that threatens the

stability and security of the Lebanese society at large. Our demands did not shy away from calling for religious texts to be revisited to see how the evolution of societies deems those long-standing edicts inapplicable.

The participants agreed that no sacred text or scripture determines the age of marriage. A notable intervention from one Sheikh revealed how the overwhelming majority of child marriage cases ended with divorce, which goes to explain passionate calls for that practice to end.

The panel made 2 principal recommendations:

- 1 Spread awareness among communities about the dangerous impact of child marriage.
- 2 Protect children from early marriage, especially that there are no religious texts that contradict with this.

ACHIEVEMENT

Seven months on from its submission and after the launch of RDFL's national media advocacy campaign, #NotBefore18, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri referred the proposed law on the protection of children from child marriage to the Administration and Justice Committee for discussion. Though we still have unfinished business, the step means **we are closer than ever to rescuing futures.**



Law proposal of children protection from early marriage

Article One:

The word child refers to any boy or girl under the age of eighteen full years.

Article Two:

The age of marriage on Lebanese territories is determined as eighteen for men and women, contrary to any other text.

Article Three:

Article 483 of the Penal Code is amended as follows: Anyone who has contracted, permitted, urged, intervened for, contributed to, or participated in the marriage contract of a child in conflict with the provisions of this law shall be fined ten times the minimum wage rate and face jail time of six months to two years. In case of repeated offence, the penalty shall be compounded.

Article Four:

All legal or regulatory statutes that conflict with the provisions of this Law or are inconsistent with its contents are hereby voided.

Article Five:

This Law shall go into effect immediately upon its publication in the official gazette.





18 as the legal minimum marriage age, for both men and women.

A minute of warning

To hammer home the message, RDFL released a powerful minute-long video that recapped some of the most health-damaging consequences that an underage bride is faced with upon taking such a step. Those consequences are so sinister that they could cause chronic physical, psychological and social problems.



#NotBefore18

With a mission to change destinies and challenge wrong practices, RDFL took the fight to end child marriage to the nation. A clear message was that the start should be with the foundations and so a new #NotBefore18 national media campaign broke ground.

Launched on the International Day of the Girl Child in October 2017 with two principal objectives, #NotBefore18 called for more public and media awareness to be raised on the health risks and costs associated with child marriage. It sought to challenge Members of the Lebanese Parliament to assume their legislative responsibility and adopt a civil law that sets



They include, but are not limited to, vaginal ruptures, pregnancy poisoning, premature delivery, psychological disorders and traumas associated with the inability to cope with the new life.

The simple reason why all this might happen is that the girl's body is still underdeveloped.

Watch the chilling warning via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4ppdfKH8x8>

Overwhelming support



33 influencers

The campaign got off to an auspicious start, with a wave of support from 33 influencers from all walks of life who spoke to the nation and called for an end to child marriage. Media personnel, actors, singers, political leaders, directors, authors, social activists and religious leaders united to raise the voice of thousands of girls pushed into dangerous uncertainty.

19 NO VOICE GOES UNHEARD

40 national and international media outlets

The campaign launch was covered by 40 national and international media outlets. Over the first month, we witnessed unprecedented engagement on our channels, with nearly two- and-a-half million people reached on our Facebook and other social media platforms.



#NotBefore18 in numbers

 **2,000,000**
people reached on Facebook

 **10,000**
video views on YouTube

 **100,000**
views on Instagram

 **216,000**
tweet impressions

 **150** billboards
in four provinces

 **15** unipoles
on key roads

 **15** digital screens
on coastal highways

Nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award

The great efforts of our members and volunteers were acknowledged with the nomination for the Wajih Ajouz Award, which recognises the best online campaigns. Our campaign was voted as the second best, an achievement we dedicate to all those waiting for the biggest reward of abolishing child marriage.



1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals & 200 primary healthcare centres

The overwhelming public response coincided with support from official departments. The Ministry of Health joined the cause through raising awareness on the health risks of child marriage across 1,500 pharmacies, 250 hospitals and 200 primary healthcare centres. More than 80,000 posters and flyers were handed out, while the campaign's video was shared on the ministry's social channels and affiliated website



Together we are stronger

As the campaign gathered momentum, RDFL was stepping up its representation on the national and international stage. In Lebanon, the **National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage** came into existence after more than one year of consistent efforts by RDFL to bring together 57 child rights & women's rights organisations, official institutions & INGOs. The primary task for this nucleus of enthusiastic human rights defenders was to stress the role of the State in protecting the rights of its female citizens to equality and introduce legislation banning child marriage on Lebanese territories.

Globally, RDFL joined the **Girls Not Brides** partnership, which consists of more than **900 civil society organisations** representing over **95 countries** to spare girls the terrifying consequences of child marriage and enable them to fulfil their potential, wherever they happened to be in the world. Such partnerships bring the best in the feminist organisations and unite passionate voices calling for a fairer reality.

Get to know more: Watch celebrities share a message of support for RDFL's campaign to ban child marriage on our YouTube channel



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

Where did we go further?

We did not stop there. In 2018, we trained 40 youth and leaders from Lebanese political parties on child marriage where they set action plan to lobby for the endorsement of the law by meeting their representatives in the parliament.

On May 2018, a new parliamentary election was held, and the discussion of the proposed laws in the Administration and Justice Committee was paused. New MPs were elected, the new Administration and Justice Committee was formed. Accordingly, RDFL has to remind the new elected MPs of the #NotBefore18 campaign and its goal of passing the law for the protection of children from child marriage. As a result, RDFL was back with an innovative new online and outdoor campaign following the Lebanese parliamentary elections that took the country by storm - both aesthetically in the form of campaign posters and thoughtfully in the form of the country's collective conscience. The new campaign focused on the electoral slogan posters that were plastered all around the country during the parliamentary election period.

As part of the campaign, RDFL used the slogans of all of the politicians that took part in this Month's elections - altering the photographs by covering them with the slogan:

“ Time for Action: Pass the law to change the minimum age of marriage #NotBefore18 ”



The campaign highlights a desperate need to change the current laws that allow marrying off children in Lebanon, but it also highlights a much more serious one - for the politicians in power to stand up for the cause and make that change happen, because after all, they are the only ones who have the authority to do so.

As a result to this campaign, a number of MPs and political parties committed on social media platform (twitter) that they support this campaign and its cause.

Watch the new campaign's GIF:
<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1655932421109489/>

The campaign also included sending a letter to the new MPs where we are requesting to meet them. Luckily, a number of MPs has invited us over to meet them and they have showed their full support of the law.

Part of the advocacy plan is the mobile van visiting different remote areas & disseminating information to the public in all Lebanese areas on the issue of child marriage. The mobile van has targeted men and women from all areas suffering from child marriage. It opened the debate of child marriage where hundreds of people participated in these public events.

In addition to RDFL's work towards protecting girls & children from child marriage, RDFL published a study that aimed at shedding light on the attitudes of Lebanese society

towards the phenomenon of marriage of children and their causes and effects. The study also examined the opinion of the Lebanese people regarding the state's position on the issue and the role it should play in order to put an end to this phenomenon and in particular through the adoption of a law establishing the minimum legal age for marriage in Lebanon with 18 full years for male and female.

According to the study, the majority of the Lebanese people considered marriage of children to be a serious practice and a violation of the rights of the child. While 97% of the Lebanese believe that the best age for marriage is 18 years and above, 64% support the establishment of a law to determine the minimum age of marriage in Lebanon for 18 years, complete for males and females alike.

You can check the results of this study via this link:

<http://www.rdfwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RD-FL-POLL-BOOKLETS-HIGH.pdf>



Young 3arous

Recently and after the launch of the opinion poll mentioned above, RDFL launched its digital nationwide campaign, #NotBefore18, through a social media stunt titled “Young 3arous”, literally translated as Young Bride in English. The campaign calls upon Lebanese members of Parliament and leaders to end child marriage in Lebanon; permits girls to marry below the age of 18 years. The campaign also tackles awareness about the dangers of child marriage in the country.



RDFL kicked off its campaign on October 24, 2018 with a digital media stunt, creating a fake Instagram and Facebook accounts for “Young 3arous”, acting as a matchmaking agency, promoting underage brides for those in search of a young wife. The social media channels led to a website: www.young3arous.com which showcased an under construction template and contact number for individuals to call and ask for further information. Taking the stunt even further, an actor represented “Young 3arous”, answering the phone calls and taking orders for the young brides he is supposedly promoting.

In as little as two hours from its launch, “Young 3arous” took the nation’s social media by storm with Lebanese bloggers and influencers, media, activists, and citizens taking to social media and calling the Lebanese Internal Security forces to demand that the pages be shut down immediately.

The digital stunt caught the attention of Joe Maalouf, a primetime presenter and whose program *Hawa Al Horiyi* on LBCI is dedicated to tackling issues in Lebanon. RDFL revealed the aim of its campaign during this program and the public was

invited to check the website again and sign the online petition against child marriage. After revealing the campaign, we posted a video clearing out for the public our aim and approach behind this campaign via this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/2384414864905391/>

Also, as a call for action, we asked people to support our law by signing the petition via this link:

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/978/356/676/?cid=headerClick>



As part of our advocacy plan to advocate for women's rights in Lebanon, RDFL prepared on December 4, 2018 in the Lebanese Parliament's library hall for a national consultation conference on child marriage in partnership with Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the National Coalition for Protecting Children from Early Marriage and with the support of UNOHCHR and the European Union. The conference was a needed and essential process that gathered experts, national and international NGOs, survivors of child marriage who were at the heart of the problem and the survivors of violence, media, decision makers and stakeholders that will contribute

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to lobbying for a law that ends child marriage in Lebanon. This event aimed to inform the debate on the issue of child marriage among stakeholders in Lebanon. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the vice president of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in addition to a number of Lebanese MPs, ministers and decision makers had participated as speakers in the conference where deputies were told to express their political parties' position from the laws being discussed.

As a celebration of the International Women's Day and in support to RDFL's #NotBefore18 campaign, RDFL organized a dinner where parliament members, ministers,

journalists, celebrities, partners, and others were invited to celebrate the success of the campaign so far and ensure continuous coordination and support for the aim of passing the law to protect children from child marriage. To watch the video, go to <https://www.facebook.com/RDFLwomen/videos/1618891574813574/>

We will lobby, push, defend, question and demand. A new march on child marriage on March 2nd, 2019 will try to gauge people's awareness about the issue and decide with partners in the media, the civil society and policymakers on the best steps to change wrong perceptions.



“ Our ultimate aim is to turn our end goal to a common goal: adopt a new law that bans child marriage ”

“

Her story

I was 14 when I attended an awareness session at RD/L. I sat next to my Mom to hear stories of girls who got married when they were my age. It all sounded like physical and psychological torture. The accounts I heard sent chills down my spine. When the session was over, I asked to talk to the social worker separately with my Mom. I told her I was engaged and getting ready for my wedding soon, but after watching the horrifying film and listening to some of the most frightening stories, I was starting to change my mind. The social worker encouraged me to reconsider my options. She told me what kind of dangerous route I was about to take. When I left [the session] that day, I had already made my mind. It took some convincing to get my Dad to support my decision. I was too scared, but I know that my future was at stake. I told him I did not want to go ahead with the wedding and that I wanted to go to school. Looking back, I cannot think of a better decision I have made in my life. I now offer the same advice to my friends.

Jamila (not her real name),
a would-be child bride

”

No honour in silence: Fighting sexual and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) happens behind closed walls and in the open. Though not restricted to one sex, more than one in three women have experienced some form of gender-based violence around the world, a shocking manifestation of a global injustice, of which women are often the victim.

The burning question is why, in the 21st century, are women still subjected to harassment, sexism, intimidation, honour crimes and exploitation. In Lebanon, those practices, whether at home or in the workplace, are not uncommon; on the contrary, they are widespread.

More Than
1/3 women have
experienced
some form
of gender-based violence
around the world,

“ This is not a threat aimed at girls only;
it is a sign that societies are
doomed to failure. ”



Taking notice and taking action

Working within and across communities, RDFL targeted 223 female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV and SGBV). We supported them to **stand up and be counted**. Not to let barriers silence them. We addressed not just the physical impact that such aggression can cause, but also the **lasting psychological wounds** that cause innocent women to live in embarrassment and self-deprecation. Some of the victims even wished death because it was a better end. Community members, including those from Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps, were supported to refer violence cases to RDFL for **legal, psychological, and case management assistance**.

In Lebanese villages and Syrian informal tented settlements in Bekaa and North Lebanon, opened **dedicated safe spaces for women** to open up about issues they had hardly discussed with themselves. In spite of the numerous challenges that they have faced in their lives, the brave girls came to debate a range of topics and raise the voice in our **community-based awareness-raising sessions**, later documenting their stories to be shared for awareness with other survivors. No lines were to be drawn and no taboos to be left unbroken. The candid discussions,



according to one lady “enabled me to reveal a lot of what had been going inside all these years. It gave me some comfort to vent my distress and frustration and build a rapport with women from the society around me.”

Up to 145 volunteers and 20 university students were meanwhile trained to join operations across communities, including refugees, in Lebanon to **monitor and safely refer GBV cases**. Our team of trained volunteers and expert psychologists provided the rigorous **psychosocial support** needed to **encourage women to speak up**.

In Mount Lebanon and Bekaa, 60 women from all backgrounds were trained to **step up their self-confidence** and talk openly about problems related to their bodies in “speak out” sessions. Participants were encouraged to address issues at hand without any feeling of guilt or self-blame. They understood the importance of respect and self-esteem in enjoying a healthy life and gained knowledge in laws governing protection from sexual exploitation.

Our project to **enhance the response to and prevention of gender-based violence** enabled minors as well as girls and women who survived violence of all forms to receive support to **gain justice and protect themselves**. To this end, 20 lawyers were trained on GBV protection mechanisms to distinguish between national and international laws that protect women from human trafficking and violence in all its forms. Acquiring the knowledge enabled the lawyers needed to help survivors seek the right legal measures. In addition to our consistent coordination with lawyers and legislators to provide legal services for survivors and victims of sexual violence, we enabled national and refugee communities to access **trusted counselling and professional advice**.

Breaking away from the traditional

We engaged women in a range of activities that developed their life skills, such as hairdressing, embroidery, handicraft and English lessons. The exercises helped boost women's confidence and gave them a space to express themselves freely, which was reflected in the increasing numbers of women who came to register at our centres and those seeking legal knowledge.

To stress our message, we chose to abandon traditional methods and go for the innovative. The issues that we dealt with were too serious to overlook, so we used entertainment as a tool to engage the broadest possible category of participants.

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From cinema to music and theatre, we sought to highlight the invisible struggle that hundreds of women had to live with, bringing to the communities' turf new mediums they could relate to and interact with. A joint Open Your Eyes to Your Rights event with Unicef brought together 250 children, parents and members of the Syrian refugee community in activities challenging violence against women. The activity was a celebration of our values.

“ The mantra has not changed for us; men and women are eligible for the same rights and roles. And that is the only way towards equality ”



Identifying legal gaps

On the legal front, RDFL left no stone unturned. A roundtable was held in May 2017 to discuss the **legal protection of victims of sexual violence**, in front of an assembly that included Minister of State for Women's Affairs Jean Oghassabian and representatives from other ministries. The meeting discussed the controversial Article 522 of the penal code, later to be abolished, that exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim.

RDFL also prepared a legal research to assess the protection mechanisms for female victims of violence. The study identified the available methods that protect women while recommending the best way to make use of them.

The results of the study, disseminated in 1,000 copies, were revealed by 20 lawyers who organised five panel discussions across Lebanon, attended by 300 people including MPs, mayors, heads of municipalities and journalists. Up to 75 meetings were also held by trained university students to spread the knowledge among their peers and with the public.

The impact of the study was manifested in the high turnout of people who took part to emphasise change in thinking and readiness to take action against GBV acts.

Testimonies in the dark

Another major study released by RDFL and partner organisations in May 2017 revealed the **scale of violence and abuse** committed against women within the closer and wider circles of the community.

Prepared by Dr Faysal El Kak and Dr Caroline Succar Slaiby, **Sexual Violence Against Women in Lebanon Testimonies in the Dark** interviewed 50 women who had experienced one or more type of sexual violence including harassment, incest, marital rape, sexual assault and rape. The chilling findings of the study revealed that 90 percent of the assaults were committed by a family member, including by a father or a brother.

The study also showed that a female of any age could be targeted. Some of the girls who were subjected to brutal grooming and harassment were as young as six. The horrific practices are often a result of cunning tactics through which the perpetrators create a bond of trust that makes it more difficult for the victim to speak out or cope with the aftermath.

Testimonies in the Dark analysed the short- and long-term health, physical and psychological consequences of sexual violence, highlighting important

recommendations that should be taken into consideration if women were to live in a safer world.

Besides in-depth interviews, the study identified the main services provided by anti-GBV organisations in Lebanon and obstacles facing the improvement of women's realities.

The release of the study came at a special event attended by representatives of ministries, diplomats, security officials and the media. It featured a live testimony by one survivor to expose grave violations and the implications on the Lebanese society.

“

Her story

There was hardly a day that went by without me getting beaten or humiliated by my husband. He would call me names, said I was a cheater for going out. He never spared a way to punish me. I decided to seek counselling at RDFL when things went out of control. I had abandoned my husband and children and my life descended into further misery. I was made to feel welcome at the [RDFL] centre. The counsellors helped me understand the problems and work on them. We put an action plan for me to find a job and become economically independent. I was ready to fix my relationship with my husband. I am glad that it worked out. We have come together again. I now have a job and feel as though my life was wretched back from the cliff edge. It was all thanks to that RDFL's constant support that I am with my family again. We are now an equal couple, exactly how it should be.

Fadwa (not her real name),
a domestic violence survivor

”



Words that are vows: Gender mainstreaming on a policy level

Integrating gender in municipal strategies

RDFL's core mission to achieve gender balance was introduced to four local municipalities in four different regions: Hammama, Niha, Hasroun and Kfar Nabrakh. Through closed-doors consultations, training and workshops, we encouraged the local authorities to adopt a **gender element** in their strategic plans that took into consideration the **importance of equality** between men & women in communal work.

The activities started with a gender assessment that sought to identify the gaps, needs and potential of the targeted municipalities to introduce gender-oriented work. A set of recommendations put together with the municipality officials laid the foundation for ambitious cooperation.

Capacity building activities were then introduced to foster a gender-sensitive environment and support the right attitudes among both genders. Up to 24 municipal members were supported to improve their knowledge and skills on the topic and encourage participatory approach and networking.

The third stage was heralded with two-day workshops in each area, where 60 members of the public, activists and the youth were involved in identifying the needs of their communities and shaping the best gender integration process.

The outcome of those intensive discussions was shared in a special event that called for those who hold power for change to take action. The municipalities took away the main recommendations to support women's participation in decision-making positions and promote ideal gender-sensitive environment.

Euromed Feminist Initiative - EFI

Launched in 2015, the Euromed Feminist Initiative (EFI) is a policy network that brings together 24 women's rights organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean to advocate for gender equality and promote women's rights. In Lebanon, the network's board is represented by RDFL, providing diverse feminist expertise to engage national decision and policymakers in vital issues such as protection from violence and political participation.

In 2017, EFI set out a list of **policy recommendations** to Lebanon and other countries as part of the Ministerial Process and the Ministerial Declaration. The recommendations are meant to improve the status of gender equality across the region. RDFL is proud to have contributed to what can transform Lebanon into a fairer, more open place for everyone on its territories. Our promise is to continue to work to see this roadmap realised.



EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأوروبية المتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

Starting from within: reforming our policies and bylaws

Transparency for us is not simply a value; it is a virtue. We realise that we can only affect the world around us when we are in the best shape. The challenges are getting more sinister, and the mission to serve more women has become almost an oath.

With that in mind, RDFL **overhauled a set of internal regulations** that will enable the organisation to realise its ambitious goals on the short and long term and achieve greater impact and visibility in and among communities. The reforms were agreed among the members and approved as a cornerstone for our future glories.

The multi-front reforms:

Revising bylaws to reach more transparency and accountability

Reducing executive committee membership to seven members, none of whom is a paid staff

Developing A five-year strategic plan, setting a clear path for the organisation

Introducing fundamental documents:

Gender Policy, Human Resources Policy, Code of Conduct, Advocacy Strategy, Visibility Strategy, Donor Policy, Anti-Fraud Policy, and Financial and Procurement Policies.

Their voice and word: our media work

Turning the volume up

It is the mirror that reflects the life we live. Thus, the reflection better be fair and true. When women's issues are inadequately reported, it can mislead the public and create an inaccurate and questionable interpretation in the minds of viewers, readers and listeners.

Media in all its forms is the only way that brings together people of different interests to debate, defend and promote issues close to their hearts.

The emergence of social media means that an avalanche of news, rumours and gossip can spread like wildfire within a matter of minutes, or even seconds.

Hashtags were launched, awards given out, and hours of broadcast dedicated for brave women who came forward to reveal the extent of the threat that they, and many women, had to endure. The encouraging signs were starting to catch up with audiences in Lebanon and the region.

In 2017, we stepped up our work with the media to discuss critical matters and advocate justice and equality.

Our **#NotBefore18** media campaign sparked a crucial debate on TV channels, in the papers and on social media platforms. Media personalities joined the campaign and shared messages that warned against child marriage. These efforts complemented our lobbying efforts and expanded our campaigns to create a favourable environment for change.

Stepping up our media work is one of our strategy elements. We want women to be heard. And heard they will be.

“ Around the world, women took to the media to share their stories and uncover horrifying stories that they had to live with for years. ”

Glory in the badge: The new logo

Dove and olive branch

Ever since it came into existence, RDFL has been championing its founding values; women's rights, feminism, democracy and secularism. As a brand, our organisation has famously been associated with a dove and olive branch, which represented an identity synonymous with peace activism. The logo was sketched by the late Wadad Shakhtoura as an artistic resistance of the Lebanese Civil War, which broke out in 1975, and as a kernel of a reasonable argument in troublesome times.

As Lebanon departed a dark phase of its history, RDFL refused to lament the past and looked with hope to the years ahead.

“We have reinvigorated our mission and breathed fresh life into the civil society.”

RDFL
التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

RDFL

التجمع النسائي الديمقراطي اللبناني

Since 1976

2017, New Logo Announcement:

The Lebanese women's Democratic Gathering (RDGL) switched to new logo and visual identity, a change prompted by a desire to bring RDFL's core mission forward, and the fact that we have since the founding of the NGO done more than 40 years of work.

2017, Previous Logo Background:

Back in 1975 RDGL was established as a non-profit, charitable entity to lead through the fighting and occupation periods, leading RDGL's identity was at the time, representing women that fought, under the banner of the female liberation, from the civil war.



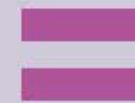
The New Logo:

RDGL and the Democratic Gathering (RDGL) logo have been designed to reflect the organization's commitment to women's rights, feminism, democracy and secularism. The logo is a simple, bold, and modern design that is easy to recognize and use across all platforms.

@RDFLwomen



RDFLwomen.org



Purple and equal

In September 2017, RDFL introduced a new logo that reflects the change and ambition of the organisation.

The new bold, if simple-looking, design consists of the four initials, “RDFL” in white, with the letter “F” made to resemble a purple “equals” sign.

The full name of the gathering appears in Arabic underneath the four initials.

The new insignia is inspired by generations of feminists who want to see a just world in which gender equality is the name of the game. It sets a high bar for a society that has emerged into an era of peace and liberty that cannot be complete when its members do not enjoy the same rights.

It is the beginning
of a
new glorious period,
and we want all women
to define it.

However, at the same time, we never diverted from the core ambition of justice and equality between men and women.

06 A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

We understand that real and lasting progress does not happen overnight. It is a process that culminates in many baby steps. In the past, RDFL has faced challenges concerning administrative documentation, a shortage of resources, varying performance capabilities, unification of members, and fluctuating external funding. With that in mind, we aim high but detail our goals in the medium term. RDFL has identified and outlined the following focus points for our five-year strategic plan (2018-2022):

“ The worst thing that we can do as women is not stand up for each other, and this is something we can practice every day, no matter where we are and what we do, women sticking up for other women, choosing to protect and celebrate each other instead of competing or criticising one another. ”

- Amal Clooney,
International court lawyer & ambassador
for women's and human rights.

RDFL'S MAIN OBJECTIVES

1st OBJECTIVE

Combat all forms of violence & discrimination against women, both in the private and public spheres, working on three levels:

1. Raising awareness: This is a critical pillar of combatting gender-based violence. RDFL will continue to **raise awareness** about sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, rape, child marriage, and deprivation of economic rights.

2. Empowering women: RDFL will **support women** who reach out to our centres, as well as those in vulnerable communities such as immigrants, migrant workers and refugees. We will provide social and psychological support for survivors of violence.

3. Utilising Media: Given the importance of the media in raising awareness and creating an environment that is conducive to change, RDFL will **work with the media** to strengthen the culture of women's rights.

setting priorities and developing coordination between NGOs. The Network would also help unify the voice of the feminist movement, reduce duplications of efforts, and make for better use of resources.

RDFL aims **to revise the Women's Network** in the next five years. It will begin by working through the existing National Coalition to Protect Children from Early Marriage to call for coordination meetings between the feminist organisations in the country.

2nd OBJECTIVE

Build a strong membership that enlivens and advocates for women's rights

RDFL has always been based on grassroots activism and volunteerism. It has built a widespread membership that believes in transmitting the essence of RDFL's feminist, secular and democratic values to their communities. RDFL has set out to activate and **grow its membership** by increasing communication with members.

3rd OBJECTIVE


Revive the Women's Network to strengthen the feminist movement in Lebanon

A unifying force is an essential part of carrying the messages of civil society. Feminist organisations have previously advocated for various issues through different coalitions. For each issue, one organisation led the coalition and prepared the public mobilisation efforts. However, having an overarching Network would catapult the movement in the right direction. It would play an essential role in

4th OBJECTIVE

Strengthen internal capabilities

If an organisation does not run smoothly from within, it cannot expect to do so on a grander scale. RDFL is resolute in its path towards fortifying its capabilities and achieving its goals efficiently. We plan to further **strengthen our governance** and overall management, as well as build up our human resources, enhance our specialist services to women, and monitor our project implementation.



Just as our late founder and icon Wadad Shakhtoura, who was born on the International Women's Day, envisioned a better society for women in Lebanon, so too do we carry on her legacy, her aspiration, her values and beliefs. Her message continues to resonate: we will never give up defending women's rights to equality.

We have introduced a platform for action, awoken a determination as bullet-proof as steel. The leaders of tomorrow have fed the flames of inequality for far too long. For decades, centuries really, we have allowed our fates and our very lives to be dictated by men who crave power. We will keep the conversation going strong.

Shakhtoura once said,

“ Women have to abandon the space that laws have confined them to and get out into the space that men have dominated. ”

07 THE FINAL WORD

“Our promise to our founder, and to every woman and girl, is to continue the fight for what is right.”

08 CONTACTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks go to all the women and girls who shared their stories with us and continue to do so as we strive for a better reality for every woman in Lebanon.

This report was prepared by the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering – RDFL.

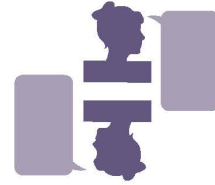
RDFL would like to express its deepest appreciation to all those who provided information and testimonies for the purpose of this report. It could not have possible without the contribution of every one of them.



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