

Setting the Agenda towards Gender Equity

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The 2018 parliamentary elections in Lebanon witnessed the largest participation of women in the country's history with 86 out of 113 female candidates making it on the final electoral lists (Batruni and Halinan 2018, 1-3). Yet, out of the 128 elected candidates, only 6 were women (The Daily Star 2018). More recently, since the October 2019 protests, women have been at the forefront of mobilisations, organising sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, and chanting feminist slogans. The "women's movement" has been pushing for a plethora of demands such as toppling both the sectarian system and patriarchal system, pushing for comprehensive socio-economic equality, abolishing the kafala system, amending the nationality law, reforming domestic violence laws, unifying the personal status law, among others. Based on extensive participatory research and consultations with actors, as well as a review of the main demands from the current social movement, Lebanon Support has developed the following briefing article on the policy priorities related to gender equity and rights.

1. Reform family laws

There are currently 15 different personal status codes in Lebanon, adopted by the 18 officially recognised religious sects (Koury 2016). These laws create inequality between men and women from the same sect (Human Rights Watch 2015a), as well as between women from different sects in matters of inheritance, marriage, divorce, and custody. Feminist activists, collectives, and organisations have been vocally demanding a unified personal status law (Ibid.), notably on:

A. Inheritance

In 1959, men and women belonging to non-Muslim confessions were granted the right to equal inheritance, through the adoption of the Civil Law of Inheritance (UNICEF 2011, 2). Nonetheless, to date, women from Muslim confessions are still subjected to unequal inheritance laws. Indeed, they are allotted half the share of men, on the condition that both are of the same degree of familial descent (i.e. siblings).

B. Minimum age of marriage

Article 483 of the Lebanese Penal Code requires religious authorities officiating marriages to provide a guardian's written consent when marrying minors.¹ This provision, however, contradicts international conventions and treaties to which Lebanon is party, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Lebanon Support 2017). Notably, Article 16 (2) of CEDAW stipulates that: "the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage."

¹ *Lebanese Penal Code*, Beirut, 1943.

Based on the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), in addition to national surveys, a UNICEF report estimated that by 2018, 6% of women in Lebanon had been married or entered into union before the age of 18 (UNICEF 2019, 233). Furthermore, child marriage increases the risks of physical violence, psychological, and sexual abuse, and can lead to higher mortality rates (Ibid, 16).

In response, lawyer and former MP Ghassan Moukheiber, in partnership with the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), submitted a bill to regulate underage marriage in 2014 (UNDP 2018, 16). Although the bill – yet to be signed into law – does not directly challenge pre-existing personal status codes in Lebanon, it stipulates that judicial permission must be acquired in order to officiate a marriage to a minor (Al Modon 2017a). This bill also proposed to penalise the clergy who contracted such marriages, along with the parents who facilitated them (UNICEF 2017, 13). However, it has been rejected by women’s rights organisations, such as KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation, as it condones child marriage (Dabbous 2017, 14). Indeed this bill would have been more effective if all concerned organisations had jointly labored together on creating a unified draft law (UNICEF 2017, 13).

In 2017, former MP Elie Keyrouz proposed a bill, originally drafted by the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL), to set the minimum age of marriage to 18, without exceptions (RDFL 2017). The bill stipulated that any party encouraging or officiating underage marriage, may be fined and sentenced to prison for up to 3 years. However, the bill awaits referral to a specialised parliamentary committee for discussion, and comparison with similar proposed bills (Mortada 2017).

Subsequently, and following political opposition to this law, the Lebanese Minister for Human Rights submitted a new draft law setting the minimum age to 18, in addition to allowing the marriages of those aged 16 to 17 contingent on a civil judge’s approval (Majzoub 2018). Further, it echoed the proposition of the previous bill which stressed on penalising all religious judges breaching these terms (Ibid.). Although approved by Lebanon’s Administration and Justice sub-committee in May 2018, it is yet to be debated in Parliament (Ibid.).

C. Divorce

In the majority of religious confessions in Lebanon, divorce laws set women at a legal disadvantage.

In both Sunni and Shiite confessions, women have the right to request *khula*, an Islamic practice wherein wives can solicit a divorce by renouncing financial provisions, and returning

the dowry.² However, it is ultimately the husband's prerogative to approve, or refuse, the wife's initiative through the grant of an *isma*.³ Consequently, the process of divorce is often complicated, and even impossible, to obtain, when initiated by a woman.

Druze couples can terminate their marriage before a Druze court if the spouses mutually consent to a divorce.⁴ However, only men have the right to a unilateral divorce or marriage termination, which presents a disadvantage for women. Yet, if the Druze husband is perceived to lack a legitimate reason to seek divorce, he may be required by the court to grant his wife compensation.⁵

In both the Shiite and Druze confessions, women cannot initiate divorce, it must be initiated mutually or unilaterally by the husband (KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation 2019, 29).

Certain restrictions apply to *Idda*, the waiting period following divorce during which the women cannot be remarried, and it concerns women from Sunni, Shia and Druze confessions (KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation n.d.).⁶ Sunni and Shiite women must wait 3 menstrual cycles if they are not pregnant, or 3 months if they have reached menopause, or until child delivery if they are pregnant (Ibid.).⁷ Moreover, during the *Idda* period, husbands have the right to revoke the divorce and remain married without their wife's consent or knowledge. Such revocation must not necessarily be registered before Court. For Sunnis only, women may resort to Court and file for divorce. A Druze woman must wait 4 lunar months after the divorce or the death of the husband, and a pregnant woman's *Idda* ends at child delivery or miscarriage (Ibid.).

Under Christian personal status laws, divorce is even harder to acquire, and the process limits the capability of both men and women. Catholics, for example, prohibited from divorcing, may instead seek a desertion, which is a form of separation, with the marital union persisting until re-marriage.⁸ A Christian man may convert to Islam in order to remarry, retaining both wives as is valid under the aforementioned confession. The wife, however, can be found "recalcitrant" under all personal status laws if she refuses to cohabit with her husband, for reasons perceived as illegitimate by religious courts (Human Rights Watch 2015a, III). A "recalcitrant" wife is not entitled to spousal maintenance, and recalcitrance affects custody decisions (Ibid.). A Christian man may initiate divorce under the suspicion that his wife was not chaste at the time of marriage; however this is not a reciprocal right, as women lack the option to do so (Ibid.)

²*Personal Status Laws of Islamic sects in Lebanon*, Beirut,

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷During *Idda*, men from the latter confessions may revive the marital bond without the wife's consent.

⁸*Personal Status Laws of Christian sects in Lebanon*, Beirut.

Although there are no pre-set fees for those seeking a Christian divorce or annulment, the costs associated with hiring a lawyer and resorting to religious courts are costly and lengthy (Thomas 2013, 59), and consequently, women from low and middle income backgrounds are at a particular disadvantage.

Alarmingly, and under all personal status laws, and across confessions, domestic violence is not a sufficient reason for divorce, except in cases of attempted murder (Human Rights Watch 2015a, 87). This confines women within dangerous and abusive marriages. One circuitous route that women can take is by linking the husband's violence to a pre-existing mental incapacity, thus suggesting that he is unable to fulfill basic marital duties (Freedom House 2010). This exception, however, must be legitimised by a medical professional.

D. Custody

In almost all cases, except in the Armenian-Orthodox personal status law, the laws governing maternal custody set women at a disadvantage.⁹ In the Sunni, Shia, and Druze confessions, post-marital custody is determined by the age and gender of the child, and not by his or her best interest (Human Rights Watch 2015a, 7; Mikdashi 2018). Similarly, Christian personal status laws also make use of a child's age as a custody determinant for Roman orthodox Lebanese (Human Rights Watch 2015a, 7). It is worth noting that Maronites do not have custody provisions in their personal status law.

There is a cross-confessional preference for the mother to maintain custodial rights while children are young, following divorce, with the father regaining custody at a certain age, often times determined by religious courts.

Most religious confessions in Lebanon sought to reform the laws regulating maternal custody. As such, the Evangelical confession raised it from 7 to 12 years for boys and girls in 2005; the Greek Orthodox confession raised it from 7 to 14 years for boys, and from 9 to 15 years for girls in 2006; Sunni confessions raised it from 7 years for boys, and 9 years for girls to 12 years for both in 2011; most recently the Druze confession raised it from 7 to 12 years for boys, and from 9 to 14 years for girls (Hivos 2019).

Even during maternal custody, paternal guardianship remains in effect in all legal codes. In regards to the child's residence, religious courts grant custody for the father after the child has passed a predetermined age, which varies across religions. In contrast to rights associated with the father's guardianship, those concerning maternal custody are temporally constrained, irregular, and subject to various conditions (Human Rights 2015, 69). In some confessions, for example, following the death of the father, custody is given to paternal male family members (Ibid., 70).

⁹Indeed, these disadvantages tend to dissuade women from divorcing.

Some of the criteria used by judges in religious courts to assess a woman's ability to hold custody are based on discriminatory and generalised stereotypes of motherhood, and of women in general, in that their decisions can be based on an ethical behavioral evaluation (Freedom House 2010). They may decide to withhold custody based on factors relating to her social life and post-marital relationships. Alternatively, courts rarely evaluate the father's behaviour in assessing his aptitude as a parent. These arbitrary grounds for decision-making prevent women from gaining custody after divorce, and even dissuade them from divorcing altogether.

In 2017, an unprecedented Shiite religious court ruling granted Zeina Ibrahim custody of her 7 year old son (Al Modon 2017b). However, subsequent reforms did not follow, with such rulings regarded as exceptional. To date, raising the issue of maternal custody in the Shiite confessions remains taboo (Al Modon 2017c).

2. Legalise civil marriage

Although civil marriages performed abroad are legally recognised in the country, Lebanese citizens remain unable to take initiate civil unions on Lebanese soil (Barjas 2016).

Demands for the right to civil marriage can be traced back to 1951, when the Lebanese Bar Association held a strike for almost 6 months calling for an optional civil marriage law (Human Rights Watch 2015a, 26). Former MPs such as Raymond Edde, Leader of the Lebanese National Bloc, endorsed the civil cause, and subsequently proposed bills to allow civil marriage in Lebanon, yet none were passed by the Lebanese parliament.

The first campaign for civil marriage was launched in 1998, entitled "Rassemblement pour le mariage civil" (*Liqā' al-zawaj al-madani*), and it saw the engagement of civil society organisations, students, as well as political parties (Karam 2006, 183). In the period spanning April 1998 till April 1999, they managed to create a database on the issue of civil marriage, collect 55,000 signatures for their petition, and create a support committee for approximately 75 associations and participating political parties (Ibid., 184-185).

In a landmark case in 2013, the first civil marriage took place in Lebanon (Nasr 2013; Lebanon Support 2017). A number of marriages followed suit, until the former Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Nouhad el-Machnouk reversed this development and declared he would not allow such marriages (Barjas 2016; The Daily Star 2015). In 2015, it had been reported that 560 Lebanese civil marriages were registered in Cyprus in 2014 alone (NNA 2015), which indicates the willingness of Lebanese nationals to escape the restrictions imposed by their respective discriminating domestic legal codes.

Against this background, the Ministry of Justice drafted a bill for officiating civil marriages in Lebanon without the need to alter or change the current legislative or administrative

structure of the Lebanese polity (Ministry of Justice 2013). The bill specifies that civil marriages would be recorded at the registry office, and that couples would have to choose the civil code of a foreign country to govern their marriage (Ibid.). Though many laws have been proposed by parliament to legalise civil marriage as an option for Lebanese, no law has yet to passed.

3. Reform the current nationality law

The inability of Lebanese women to pass on their nationality to their children and husbands is one of the most patent forms of gender discrimination. According to Article 1 of the 1925 Nationality Law, the Lebanese nationality is to be passed through a) the patrilineal/paternal line (having a Lebanese father); b) the right of the soil (being born on Lebanese land) without holding another nationality at birth; or c) being born on Lebanese land to unknown parents or to parents with an unknown nationality.¹⁰ When the law was first reformed in 1960, it was amended to allow foreign women to become Lebanese citizens if they are married to Lebanese men (Article 5 of decree no. 15), and pass on this newly acquired Lebanese nationality to their children from previous marriage (irrespective of the nationality of the former partners).

Strikingly, Lebanese women have to go through additional procedures in order to grant their foreign husbands and children a residency permit known as *ikamet mojamala* (courtesy residence), which is subject to renewal every 3 years (Mansour and Abou Aad 2012, 11). Similarly, for the foreign husbands and children of Lebanese women to access educational services, they would have to go through an additional layer of red tape. The only exception among Lebanese women pertains to the case of unmarried mothers (Mikdashi 2010); they are able to pass on their Lebanese citizenship to their children as long as the newborns remained stateless a year following birth (Lebanon Support 2017).

An unprecedented legal turning point was achieved in 2009, when a court ruling enabled Samira Soueidan, to pass on her Lebanese nationality to her children from her late Egyptian husband (The Legal Agenda 2015). This victory, however, was short-lived and the ruling was repealed by the Court of Cassation in 2010 (Mahdawi 2010, 49).

Over the past two decades, since 1999, civil society actors and feminists have been advocating for nationality law reforms. Indeed, the transnational campaign entitled “My nationality is a Right for Me and my Family Campaign” have been vocal in promoting the right to nationality across six Arab countries (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan) took the lead in this regard (CRTD-A 1999).

Nevertheless, nationality law reforms continue to be dismissed by government officials who politicise the issue and link it with the naturalisation of Palestinian refugees (husbands, and

¹⁰Decree no. 15 on Lebanese Nationality, Beirut, 1925.

children), also known as “tawteen”, forbidden by the Lebanese constitution (Shafi 2006, 14). That being said, the findings of a 2016 census on Palestinians in Lebanon stated that only in 3,707 cases was a Palestinian man married to a spouse of a different nationality (Human Rights Watch 2015b).

On 21 March 2018, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Gebran Bassil, proposed a bill which would grant women full citizenship rights but only so long as they are married to foreigners who are not from neighbouring countries (namely Palestine and Syria) (Diab 2018). The bill prohibited the granting of citizenship to the children of a Lebanese man married to a Syrian or Palestinian woman as well, justifying this clause by saying it aims to prevent their naturalisation (Ibid.).

On 21 May 2019, the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) presented a legislation proposal on the right of Lebanese women to pass on citizenship (The Daily Star 2019a). Advocates of this cause have denounced major aspects of the draft law, such as its populist rationale and the fact that it is not founded on human rights standards. Notably, the non-retroactive nature of this law will result in thousands left without citizenship, in addition to prioritising political considerations by for example sidestepping the predicament of Syrian and Palestinians in the country (Zaiter 2019).

Indeed, the aforementioned law not only discriminates between women and men, but also makes leeway for a new type of discrimination between the children born to Lebanese mothers, as it only concerns children younger than 18 years old (Lebanon Support 2019). Individuals older than 18 would be entitled to a “green card”, thus constraining their political rights, the right to retain public office, and the right to own property (Ibid.). Further, the law only applies to blood descendents of the woman, thus excluding husbands (Ibid.)

4. Reform laws related to gender-based violence (GBV)

A. Sexual harassment in Lebanon

Lebanese legal codes do not provide a clear definition for sexual harassment. Yet, the Lebanese Penal Code includes provisions which penalise individuals’ actions, under which sexual harassment may be included. For instance, Articles 385 and 507 punish “indecent actions in public” with subsequent imprisonment of up to 6 years.¹¹ Similarly, there are no provisions regarding sexual harassment in the Lebanese Labour Law. This legal flaw provides a main rationale as to why harassment goes unpunished in Lebanon.

In 2014, former MP Ghassan Moukheiber submitted a draft law proposing the criminalisation of sexual harassment and racial abuse in Lebanon (El Hassan 2014). The draft law suggests a penalty of 3 months to 1 year in prison, in addition to a fine mounting up to LBP 675,000 for

¹¹*Lebanese Penal Code*, 1943.

either offenses (Ibid.). However, prolonged political deadlock hampered its presentation to the parliament until January 2017 (Khneisser 2018, 2). Initial approval from the legislature was later recanted due to suspicions raised by MPs over the law's potential exploitative measures against employers (Namour, 2017).

In 2017, the Council of Ministers approved a bill proposed by the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs, a newly established Ministry highly criticised by women's rights organisations for its purely symbolic role (NNA 2017). This bill is the reworked version of the one proposed by MP Ghassan Mukheiber in 2014. It defined sexual harassment, added provisions to the Lebanese Penal Code, and Labour Law, ensured the protection against sexual harassment, and stipulated several degrees of penalties, some of which target individuals in positions of power, inter alia, employers. However, although the law was referred to the Parliament, it has yet to be passed.

In 2019, the parliament's Women and Children's Committee approved a draft law criminalising sexual harassment (Daily Star 2019b). Harsher punishments will be implemented for cases involving children and people with disabilities, and the victims can either be men or women (Ibid). Harassment incidents at the workplace are punishable, and can be reported to the authorities without compromising one's identity (Ibid.). This draft law has been passed to the Parliament, and awaiting deliberations.

B. Domestic Violence

In 2014, Law no. 293 on the Protection of Women and Children from Family Members from Domestic Violence was issued to criminalise domestic violence in response to the growing number of sexual and violent assaults against women.¹² According to a report by the Internal Security Forces, 49% of perpetrators of sexual violence are family members or relatives.

The aforementioned law is an amended version of the 2010 draft advanced by KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation. It initially called for setting up temporary shelters for survivors of abuse; designating a public prosecutor in each governorate to address domestic violence complaints; and establishing specialised family violence units in the Internal Security Forces to process complaints (Human Rights Watch 2014). However, and due to backlash from religious authorities, the clause relating to criminalising marital rape was removed, a main drawback for the provision of adequate protection (Ibid.).

Law no. 293 did advance some progressive steps in regards to addressing complaints concerning domestic violence,¹³ however it still did not make reference to marital rape, one of the most common and underreported forms of violence inside the marriage institution (UNFPA, UNDP, and UN Women 2018, 24). Further, it has adopted a narrow definition of

¹²Law 293 against Domestic Violence, Beirut, 2014.

¹³Some of the progressive steps include, among others: "breaking silence on domestic violence issues in Lebanon and developing the public opinion approach; acknowledging the role of State in providing protection for women by adopting the law and all attached procedures aiming to its effectiveness; succeeding at the institutional level in strengthening the role of security forces and judicial authorities to combat domestic violence."

domestic violence limited to family violence, with an overwhelming focus on the physical one, which is not in line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Lebanon is a signatory. In response, KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation, and the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs jointly drafted a bill to amend a number of the law's provisions (An-Nahar 2017). Indeed, the provisions of the proposed bill include, expanding the realm of sexual violence to include individuals from outside the family, widening the definition of domestic violence beyond the use of physical force and including psychological and economic violence, assigning specialised judges, prosecutors, and a police force tasked with addressing domestic violence cases, among others (UNFPA, UNDP, and UN Women 2018, 47). It also decriminalises the act of adultery by repealing articles 487, 488, and 489 of the Lebanese Penal Code (UNFPA, UNDP, and UN Women 2018, 27).¹⁴

Today, this law proposal is being studied in a subcommittee of 10 MPs, where so far one amendment was made to include marital rape as a form of domestic violence (Nasser 2019). The law has yet to be voted on in the parliament.

5. Reform social protection laws and regulations

The social protection coverage systems in Lebanon are not based on citizenship, or lack thereof, rather on the employment status of the individual, and its formality (AbiYaghi 2014). The Lebanese Labour and Social Security Laws do not protect the most vulnerable groups of women in Lebanon. Indeed, some Lebanese Labour Law provisions exclude workers outside the trade or industry sectors from benefiting from any protection¹⁵, on the grounds that there should be separate legislation to regulate these types of labour. Yet, so far, these regulations do not exist. These groups include agricultural workers, as well as migrant domestic workers – who are mostly women. Specifically, migrant domestic workers, who particularly lack protection, are subjected to the framework provided by the *kafala system*, which links their legal residency to the contractual relationship with the employer (Amnesty International 2019, 5). As a result, migrant domestic workers are not guaranteed overtime or fair dismissal compensation, minimum wage, or social security, among others (Ibid., 12). The main governing legal document is the 2009 unified standard contract introduced by the Ministry of Labor, setting out basic rights and obligations (Ibid.). However it is flawed and leaves room for exploitative practices by the employer, such as restricting the worker's freedom of movement, only made possible with the consent of the former (Ibid.). After many stalled and failed attempts to reform the laws governing the *kafala system*, in 2011, 2012 and 2014, the former Minister of Labor announced it would be his priority to do so in 2019 (Ibid., 2015). However, change has yet to be imposed.

¹⁴Lebanese Penal Code, Beirut, 1943.

¹⁵Lebanese Labour Law, Beirut, 1946.

Workers in the informal employment sector are often vulnerable and earn fluctuating salaries. Seasonal agricultural and domestic work are not considered part of the formal labour market, rather as “family duties” (ILO 2014, 4). The workers of concern would need to resort to a private insurance plan, often steeply priced, and henceforth one they cannot afford unaffordable given their economic situation.

Additionally, women and men are treated unequally, on the one hand in the rest-time provisions at work, as employers must provide a 1 hour break for work exceeding 5 working hours for women, and 6 working hours for men (Article 34), and on another hand when receiving end-of-service indemnities.¹⁶

Furthermore, Chapter II of the Labour Law groups women and children under the same category, and prohibits them from working in certain occupations deemed arduous or hazardous, namely: mining, welding, metal work, glass work, production of alcohol, or abattoir work (UNDP 2018, 22).

The Social Security Law (SSL) discriminates between men and women concerning their access to family indemnities provided by the social security fund. While insured men have access to health benefits and family indemnities, and were able to extend them to their wives and families unconditionally, women were able to obtain the same benefits, but on the condition that their husbands are unable to provide due to a physical or mental disability. (Articles 14,16, 46 and 47) (Lebanon Support 2017). The logic behind this disparity is the outdated perception that men are the sole providers, and therefore only they can provide social security coverage for their unemployed wives (ALEF 2019, 32).

In an attempt to make the SSL more equitable to women, in March 2017, the Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs referred a draft bill to amend Articles 14, 16, 46 and 47 of the Social Security Law to the Council of Ministers.¹⁷ It is still to be reviewed under the Council.

The Lebanese government had also implemented in 2014 an extension of the maternity leave to 10 weeks (previously 7 weeks), in addition to comprehensive salary benefits to be paid by the employer, also presenting the option to start the leave prior to the birth, with the continuation of any additional benefits guaranteed as part of the woman’s employment.¹⁸ Law no. 263 also protects women from being fired while on maternity leave. Moreover, in 2018, the Lebanese government approved a draft law submitted by former State Minister of

¹⁶*Lebanese Labour Law*, Beirut, 1946.

¹⁷The Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs. “مشروع قانون يرمي إلى تعديل بعض أحكام قانون الضمان الاجتماعي لتأمين المساواة بين الجنسين.” *The Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs*. March 2017. Accessed January 28 2020. <https://eeway.gov.lb/sites/default/files/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%20%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A.pdf>

¹⁸Law no. 267 Amending Articles 28 and 29 of the Labor Law issued on September 23, 1946, and its amendments, Beirut, 2014.

Women's Affairs, Jean Ogassapian, in which paternity leave would be extended from 1 to 3 full-paid days. However, it has yet to be passed by parliament (AlSharif, 2019).

6. Improve reproductive healthcare services to women

Due to the lack of age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health in schools, as well as the strict criminalisation of abortion, which remains illegal under the Lebanese Penal Code (Art. 539-540), there is a worrying number of high-risk abortions being performed in Lebanon (CRC 2017).

Notably, women and girls living in rural and remote areas have limited access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as free preventive check-ups, screening on reproductive system diseases and cancer (MoPH n.d.). This is in part due to various reasons such as the variation in insurance coverage, the inability to pay relevant fees, and inequitable accessibility to public hospitals in remote areas. The latter, in tandem with the control exerted by the regulations of private health-care providers, also subjected to minimal monitoring, exacerbate the conditions of healthcare for women by exposing them to precarious health issues (CRC 2017).

Healthcare service providers and clinics should expand their outreach to not only address their absence from certain areas, but also the needs of women from vulnerable backgrounds, specifically those of reproductive age. Also, solutions to lessen cost barriers impeding proper provision of healthcare services at the levels of both the facility and beneficiary, should be formulated.

Further, women from the LGBTQIA community face additional barriers to healthcare obtention, notably, the socio-cultural and legal climate in Lebanon (Kassem and Abdessamad 2019, 59-60). Also, the absence of a governing medical body able to formulate official guidelines for healthcare providers in regards to patients from the LGBTQIA community, hinders effective healthcare provision (Ibid.). Exacerbating this predicament is practitioners' attitudes towards the LGBTQIA community in general, with most of them unwilling to tend to the needs' of those concerned, often due to the lack of training and knowledge in this regard (Ibid.).

7. Improve women's political participation

Women encounter macro-structural difficulties in breaking through the political glass ceiling hindering their formal descriptive representation in the public sphere (El Masri, Zaiter and Lebanon Support 2018, 5). Women represent about 3.4%-4.6% of parliamentarians in Lebanon, 4 women out of 128 in the 2009 parliament, 6 in the 2018 parliament respectively, and 4% of ministerial positions (Ibid.).

In 2006, a bill proposing a 30% quota for women in the Parliament was proposed by the National Commission on Electoral Law, combining both the majoritarian and proportional

systems (Lebanon Support 2018). Lebanese political parties continue to be divided on whether to incorporate a quota for women inside their structures, with the majority of them rejecting the proposal. Despite the demands for a 30% quota for women, no quotas were included in the 2017 electoral law.

Most recently, on January 21 2020, and despite the absence of the aforementioned quota, the newly formed government appointed 6 women ministers, ultimately fulfilling the non-institutionalised quota (El-Hage 2018). However it remains to be seen if this contributes to advance and empower women to subsequently participate in political life.

Main priorities for action:

- Adopt a unified, civil personal status laws.
- Amend Law No. 293 on the protection of women and other family members from domestic violence by adding the criminalisation of marital rape.
- Legalise civil marriage in Lebanon.
- Adopt a legal code that criminalises and penalises underage marriage with no exceptions and repealing Article 483 of the Lebanese Penal Code.
- Reform the labour law, and expand the social protection rights for women, notably those working in the informal sector.
- Repeal article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code and which is used to criminalise members of the LGBTIQ communities.
- Legalise abortion, especially in cases of danger to the mother's health, rape, incest, or fetal developmental issues.

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