



GENERATION EQUALITY IMPACT STORY



FORMER WOMEN INMATES STRIVE FOR REHABILITATION AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN LEBANON

Photo: UN Women/Dar Al Mussawir

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND RIGHTS is the focus of one of the six Generation Equality Action Coalitions, the innovative, multi-stakeholder initiative convened by UN Women that is mobilizing governments, civil society, international organizations and the private sector to deliver tangible impact on gender equality and women and girls' human rights by 2026. Ahead of the Generation Equality Forum in Paris (30 June - 2 July 2021), when the Action Coalitions' plans will be officially launched, this special edition of the [Impact Stories series](#) will include six briefs focused on each of the Action Coalitions' themes.

"My ex-husband was very abusive and a drug addict; sometimes he would lock me up at home for days, leaving me with whatever food there was at home," recounts Oula Abdo, a 24-year-old Lebanese mother and former prison inmate. "He was formerly a taxi driver and used to own a bakery, but he sold everything for drugs, even the furniture in our house."

Abdo was part of the UN Women programme Strengthening Economic Empowerment and Protection for Women and Girls, which was implemented in 2020 in partnership with the Philanthropic Lebanese Association for Reform and Rehabilitation, with funding from the Government of Japan. The programme supported former female inmates in Lebanon to enter the labor force and

Photo above: Oula Abdo receiving a new sewing machine to help her start her business.



The **Generation Equality Forum** is a milestone global event to advance action and investment for gender equality convened by UN Women and co-chaired by the governments of France and Mexico in partnership with civil society and youth.

The Forum kicked off in [Mexico City](#) from 29 to 31 March 2021, and will culminate in [Paris](#) from 30 June to 2 July 2021, when heads of State and Government, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and youth organizations will gather to launch the **Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality**. Structured around **six Action Coalitions**, the plan will include concrete commitments and intergenerational, multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance gender equality over the next five years.



Register for the Paris Forum at: <https://forumgenerationegalite.fr>

Learn more about the **Action Coalitions** and its [leaders](https://forum.generationequality.org/) at: <https://forum.generationequality.org/>

#ActForEqual! for **#GenerationEquality**

restart their lives, which can be particularly hard on female prisoners or former prisoners who face discrimination as a result of their incarceration.

“I endured the abuse for a long time and never said anything, but when he started hitting my daughter, I could not take it anymore. I left him, and I filed for divorce,” recalls Abdo.

In her community, it is frowned-upon for women to divorce, so when she separated from her husband, her family treated her like an outcast. She resorted to the support of friends who helped her get an apartment, which her ex-husband would occasionally frequent to visit their daughter.

“One time, my daughter was playing in the living room, and she found two bags of drugs under the couch; I immediately handed the bags to my ex-husband and asked him not to come to my house again as long as he was on drugs. He eventually turned himself in and accused me of selling drugs with him, and that is how I went to prison for a year and three months,” said Abdo.

In prison, Abdo’s mental health deteriorated so much so that when the Philanthropic Lebanese Association for Reform and Rehabilitation showed up to offer inmates training and psychological support as part of the initial phase of the UN Women programme, she was the second person to sign up. “Many of my fellow inmates did not talk to each other and fought a lot, but after we received the life skills lessons and group therapy, we became more open with our feelings and chose to be honest with our reality and ourselves,” she shared. “A lot of the girls apologized, cried a lot, and expressed how they felt. The way we perceived each other changed.”

After her release from prison in early 2021, Abdo enrolled in the second phase of the programme, which offered participants skills-based training in sewing and cooking, also led by the Philanthropic Lebanese Association for Reform and Rehabilitation. Abdo, who chose to learn sewing, noted, “None of us who attended the training skipped a single day because we wanted to be there; we wanted to be part of a community where we could learn, laugh and be there for each other. It helped me feel like

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

The **UN Women** programme **Strengthening Economic Empowerment and Protection for Women and Girls** was conducted in 2020 in partnership with the Tripoli-based **Philanthropic Lebanese Association for Reform and Rehabilitation** and was made possible with funding from the **Government of Japan**.

The programme, implemented in 2020-2021, supported the rehabilitation of prisoners and their transition back into society through psychosocial support sessions for inmates and skills-based training in sewing and cooking for former inmates.

I could overcome my depression and that I could stand on my own feet again. It made me realize that I must not remain broken.”

At the end of the full training, which includes psychosocial support for incarcerated women followed by skills-based training upon release, trainees were provided with assets to enable them to start their own businesses. Abdo received a sewing machine.

“The stigma associated with incarceration for women in Lebanon means that they struggle to rebuild their lives and often lose their families, their children, their jobs and their homes while in jail,” explained Rachel Dore-Weeks, UN Women Representative in Lebanon. “Helping these women regain a sense of self and their place in their communities is fundamental for their reintegration into society, and is critical to our collective aim of ‘Leaving No One Behind.’”

As **Action Coalitions** leaders, **Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Care International, African Women’s Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Huairou Commission, International Trade Union Confederation, Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development, Anyar, Manki Maroua and PayPal** will commit to ensure that economic justice and rights are guaranteed for all women and girls.