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ASFARI INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY  
& CITIZENSHIP

معهد الأصفري للمجتمع المدني والمواطنة

# INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN LEBANON

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# BACKGROUND

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After years of constant internal strife, wars, and socio-economic inequalities, and amid global economic uncertainties, Lebanon faces a severe economic crisis characterized by soaring inflation rates that continue to burden its citizens.

Recent data indicate that the country's inflation rate for 2023 averaged an alarming 222%<sup>1</sup>. Since 2019, Lebanon's once-stable economy has spiraled into a persistent state of decline, with the national currency losing much of its value<sup>2</sup>. Food prices, a crucial component of daily life, skyrocketed by 208% compared to the previous year<sup>3</sup>, further worsening the struggles of Lebanese citizens and refugees as their purchasing power rapidly diminishes.

Lebanon hosts a diverse population, including Lebanese citizens, Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and migrant workers, many of whom are women from South and Southeast Asian and African countries. The economic downturn has pushed many families into extreme poverty, with women migrant domestic workers and queer communities being particularly disempowered. This economic strain, coupled with prolonged periods of isolation during COVID-19 lockdowns, has intensified violence on marginalized communities and other factors across the country<sup>4</sup>.

It is also important to highlight the situation of each marginalized community, which has faced multiple forms of marginalization and has been affected by every crisis. These include migrant domestic workers under the Kafala System<sup>5</sup>, LGBTIQ+ individuals facing crackdowns from both authorities and self-security groups like the Soldiers of God<sup>6</sup>, as well as sex workers<sup>7</sup>, refugee women and girls, undocumented persons, and persons with disabilities. Moreover, mothers and women are negatively impacted by Lebanon's personal status laws and discriminatory nationality laws, including women who are married to a non-Lebanese man or their children (such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) ratification of Lebanon in 2022)<sup>8</sup>.

As of October 2024, Lebanon is facing yet another emergency crisis due to violent attacks by Israel, which has led to the displacement of over 1.2 million people<sup>9</sup>. This mass displacement has significantly exacerbated the risk of migrant domestic workers among displaced populations and vulnerable communities<sup>10</sup>, alongside queer communities and groups<sup>11</sup>. The ongoing war has devastated infrastructure, disrupted essential services, and created a humanitarian crisis that disproportionately affects women, children, and marginalized groups without discrimination<sup>12</sup>.

1 Bechara, S. (2024). "Lebanon's inflation remains in the triple digits in 2023". *L'Orient Today*.

2 The World Bank. (2023). "Lebanon: Normalization of crisis is no road to stabilization".

3 The World Bank. (2024). "Food security update".

4 Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship. (2024). "Feminist Activism During the COVID Pandemic: Zooming in on the MENA Region".

5 Issa, L. (2024). "The Kafala System in Lebanon: Between slavery and domestic labor trafficking". *Arab NGO Network for Development*.

6 Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Lebanon: Attack on freedoms targets LGBTI people*.

7 Houmøller, K. D. (2024). *When I was a sex worker: "I always believed that sex workers were happy and could do exactly what they wanted"*. Beirut Today.

8 National Commission for Lebanese Women (2021). "Nationality, not naturalization: The rights of Lebanese women to full citizenship and to confer their nationality to their children - Policy brief".

9 Giovetti, O. (2024). "The crisis in Lebanon, explained: 5 things you need to know." *Concern Worldwide*.

10 Edwards, M., & Sousa, J. (2024). "Lebanon's migrant workers left stranded and homeless by Israeli attacks." *The New Humanitarian*.

11 Diab, J. L. (2024). "The moral imperative to protect Lebanon's LGBTIQ+ displaced". *The New Humanitarian*.

12 OCHA. (2024). "Humanitarian Action: Flash Appeal".

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In this context, the present study examines the intersection of political and economic crises with marginalized communities in Lebanon, focusing on migrant domestic workers and queer communities. Conducted over two months in wartime conditions in 2024, the research employs qualitative methodologies, including 15 key informant interviews, five focus group discussions, and autoethnographic documentation. The study's geographical focus is primarily urban, centered in Beirut, with limited data collection in the Beqaa and other rural areas.

This research explores crisis and intersectional justice in Lebanon. The research questions explored are as follows:

1. How have political and economic crises been experienced by marginalized women and sexual and gender minorities?
2. How have these groups mobilized against inadequate social protection provisions and how have they negotiated relations with wider protest movements?
3. How have legacies of conflict shaped the position and responses of these groups?

While the research explores how these marginalized groups experience and respond to multiple crises, it particularly examines their mobilization strategies, informal support networks, and negotiations with broader protest movements. The investigation is contextualized within Lebanon's complex socio-political landscape, including the impacts of recent Israeli attacks, economic downturn, and COVID-19 aftermath. However, the study acknowledges limitations in reaching non-urban populations and inactive migrant domestic workers, as well as constraints related to class, racial, and religious divides inherent in Lebanese society.

# METHODOLOGY

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This study employed qualitative methods, including key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and autoethnographic documentation, to explore the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Lebanon, focusing on migrant domestic workers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and intersecting marginalized groups. Using thematic and discourse analysis, the research examined how language, power, and crisis dynamics shape these experiences while also acknowledging methodological challenges such as ethical concerns, urban-rural disparities, and researcher positionality to ensure a participatory and inclusive approach.

## Research Methodology and Analytical Approach

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Lebanon during periods of multiple crises. The approach was selected for its ability to capture nuanced narratives and complex social dynamics, allowing for emergent themes and unexpected findings. The research design was particularly responsive to the challenging context of conducting research during periods of conflict in Lebanon. The data collected in the study underwent a systematic thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring patterns and themes emerging from participants' narratives. This process enabled the researchers to understand the core issues and experiences that participants highlighted.

Building upon the thematic framework, discourse analysis was also employed to explore how language, power, and meaning intersect within participants' accounts. This analytical approach provided insight into how individual narratives

are shaped by and situated within broader sociocultural and political contexts. By utilizing discourse analysis, researchers were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what was explicitly communicated and what remained implicit, shedding light on the complexities of participants' experiences and perspectives.

## Target Groups

The study targets migrant domestic workers, LGBTQ+ communities, as well as intersecting marginalized groups in Lebanon, examining how overlapping forms of discrimination—shaped by factors such as economic status, legal recognition, geographic location, and identity visibility—affect their experiences within the country's socio-political and economic landscape.

### Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs)

The study focuses on migrant domestic workers, predominantly women from South and Southeast Asian and African countries, with particular attention to workers from Sri Lanka. These individuals operate within Lebanon's Kafala system, a sponsorship structure that significantly impacts their legal status and working conditions. MDWs face multiple layers of disempowerment, intensified by the country's economic crisis and recent conflicts.

### LGBTQ+ Communities

The study examines diverse LGBTQ+ populations in Lebanon, with particular attention to trans individuals and queer activists. This group faces intersecting challenges related to legal recognition, social acceptance, and access to basic services. The research specifically explores how their experiences vary based on visibility, class position, and geographic location within Lebanon.

## Intersecting Marginalized Groups

The research focuses on individuals and communities that experience multiple and overlapping forms of marginalization. This includes urban poor LGBTQ+ individuals who face economic precarity and identity-based discrimination, highlighting the compounded challenges they encounter. Trans sex workers are another key group, as they deal with the intersection of gender identity, legal status, and economic vulnerability, making their experiences particularly complex. The study also pays close attention to undocumented individuals within these communities, who face additional barriers to accessing services and support, further exacerbating their marginalization. Finally, disabled individuals are included to provide a deeper understanding of other marginalized communities within the Lebanese landscape, ensuring that the research captures a broad range of experiences and the interconnected nature of various forms of discrimination.

The research acknowledges the diversity within these groups, recognizing that their experiences are not homogeneous. Factors such as economic status, geographic location (whether urban or rural), and documentation status contribute to significant variations in how individuals experience crisis and marginalization. Additionally, language abilities, connections to support networks, visibility, and “outness” in terms of identity further shape these experiences. Religious and sectarian affiliations also play a crucial role in influencing how individuals navigate their circumstances, highlighting the complexity of their lived realities and how different identities intersect within these communities.

## Data Collection Methods

The study employed various qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive approach to data collection.

### Key Informant Interviews

First, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a total of fifteen participants. These semi-structured interviews included

individuals such as LGBTQ+ activists, mental health professionals, community leaders, NGO representatives, and migrant domestic worker organizers. The interviews aimed to understand both individual and collective experiences of crisis and marginalization, organizational responses, and challenges. Additionally, they explored support systems, coping mechanisms, and the barriers that hinder mobilization and organizing efforts within these communities.

### Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, with five separate groups engaging in discussions. These FGDs provided a space for collective meaning-making, allowing participants to share and validate their experiences while also offering group-level insights into how communities respond to crises. The discussions helped to further refine emerging themes from the individual interviews and fostered a shared understanding of key issues faced by the participants.

### Autoethnographic Documentation

To complement these data collection methods, the study also utilized autoethnographic documentation, which involved the researcher’s detailed field notes during the two-month research period. This documentation allowed the researcher to reflect on and record personal observations and insights throughout the study.

The study’s sampling strategy was a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. For purposive sampling, participants were selected based on specific criteria, including their direct experience with crisis impacts, involvement in community organizing, and their representation of the target marginalized groups. Meanwhile, snowball sampling was used to access hard-to-reach populations, build trust through existing networks, and identify additional key informants who could offer valuable insights into the study’s themes.

## Methodological Challenges and Limitations

Conducting research in times of war presents numerous methodological challenges. The war context significantly impacted the findings and the ethical considerations of the study. One of the key challenges was the power dynamics between the researcher and the researcher, particularly in conducting focus group discussions with marginalized and disempowered groups. Research on marginalized communities often results in data extraction that can lead to their exhaustion, subjectification, and commodification. To address this, the researcher took steps to counteract these dynamics by thoroughly explaining the purpose of the research, attending to the participant's interests and needs, and re-engaging with them at the end of the study to allow for feedback, edits, and suggestions.

Another limitation was the urban concentration of data collection, as the researcher was based in Beirut, which created a divide between urban and rural voices. While one focus group discussion was conducted in the Beqaa area, it was insufficient to include rural perspectives fully. In addition, the class, racial, and religious divides in Lebanese society posed challenges in gathering the contextual insights of each group, given the deep political and social divides.

The researcher's positionality also surfaced as an issue in key informant interviews and focus group discussions with migrant domestic workers. These participants expressed concerns about the researcher's ability to fully capture their lived realities, raising ethical questions about representation and self-representation. Moreover, the sensitivity and privacy of marginalized individuals presented another challenge, as the data collection process sometimes reopened painful memories and stories that participants were reluctant to share, despite efforts to maintain anonymity and discretion.

The researcher's identity as a cis-heterosexual (queer) individual also created barriers, particularly with migrant domestic workers, who might not have felt comfortable or safe sharing their experiences. This dynamic added another layer of complexity that needed to be considered in both the analysis and methodology. Finally, access to migrant domestic women who were not active on the ground proved to be a significant limitation, as it was challenging to reach these individuals and include their voices in the research. These various methodological and ethical limitations highlighted the complexities of conducting research in such a sensitive and contextually rich environment.

The researcher attempted his best to address these with the participants themselves. The tools used were trust, transparency, privacy, and security, as well as building ethical relationships with the participants after the interviews were over. The researcher also tackled these challenges and limitations with the team to develop more accurate findings that speak to their daily lived realities and struggles. The research is also participatory, meaning that it allows the participants of this study to have their voices woven into the findings, analysis, and synthesis of the report.

# KEY FINDINGS AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

After conducting thematic and discourse analysis, the researcher determined it was most effective to organize the findings into two main categories: major and minor findings. The major findings refer to the primary insights that emerged from the data, while the minor findings are secondary insights that have been previously identified and discussed in other research studies.

## Major Findings

### On crisis

Crisis is a concept. It is not just a word. A concept limits, it assumes value, it defines, structures, and destroys<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, according to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who defines something gives him/her power to use, constrain, restrict, undermine, or propagate the concept. Accordingly, concepts are not apolitical. They are neither innocent. According to Foucault, they form languages, stories, narratives, and discourses which, ultimately, (re)shapes the way we think and do in this world<sup>14</sup>. Accordingly, the concept of crisis (and marginalization, see below) itself was a topic of investigation and exploration in collecting the data.

After probing and thinking with the study's participants, it became clear that the term **"crisis"** itself was attached to many other factors, plugged into a discourse shaping the lives of those living it. As one of the participants, a trans queer activist, defined crisis,

**“The factor of the feeling that you are very unstable and there is urgency and there is the unknown.**

She continued,

**“I’m operating in this place that has a lot of sense of urgency that doesn’t make me think of anything else.**

Another participant, a queer activist and psychologist working on issues of mental health with migrant domestic workers, noted,

**“Crisis is depoliticized, decontextualized. Sometimes they don’t even use crisis. They use “relief” and “emergency response.” Why?**

Another participant also explained how the crisis is a depoliticized and decontextualized term appropriated by CSOs and organizations in Lebanon. He specifically asked

**“When are crises defined as crises? and where do we draw the line between a crisis and an emergency response? and what is their relationship?**

He notes how organizations actively avoid using the term **"crisis,"** preferring terms like **"emergency response."** This linguistic choice reveals how institutions frame and potentially depoliticize systemic issues.

A key theme in another interview reveals how **"crisis"** becomes normalized and shapes organizing capacity. One participant notes how being in **"constant emergency response"** for **"5-6"** years has led organizations to focus on **"covering gaps"** rather than political organizing.

<sup>13</sup> Sayyid, S. (2022). "Recalling the caliphate: Decolonization and world order". Hurst Publishers.

<sup>14</sup> Phillips, M.J. (2023). "Towards a social constructionist, criticalist, Foucauldian-informed qualitative research approach: Opportunities and challenges". *SN Soc Sci* 3, 175.

This suggests that crisis creates what she calls being on “*autopilot*” where immediate needs overshadow longer-term movement building.

Accordingly, crisis is not merely a political term or issue. Findings suggest that it is also a phenomenological, experiential, emotional, as well as socio-economic term that could be exploited for various interests. Indeed, it emerges as a malleable concept capable of being used in multiple contexts and, specifically in Lebanon, used to restrict funding and resources and frame the lived realities of those disempowered. Data also suggests that crisis is not just material deprivation for those (in)directly affected by the said crisis, but entails social and political erasure, silencing of their rights, and the absencing of their agency. Hence, a crisis emerges at the intersection of power, the political, and the social.

## On Marginalization

After using the term ‘*vulnerable*,’ one of the interviewees was quick to interrupt me and say,

**“Vulnerable? You mean disempowered.”**

Another interview showed a similar pattern,

**“I really don’t like the word vulnerable. I feel it is passive.”**

Another noted that,

**“We are not vulnerable out of nowhere.”**

Further, linking marginalization with disempowerment, two of the KIs noted how migrant domestic workers are perceived as receptive, defensive, and passive agents,

**“Migrant domestic workers are the most powerful and active people I know. We need to stop considering them as passive and invisible.”**

Moreover, most of the KIs and FGDs showed that marginalization is linked to the systemic structures in place, and how power is what represses it and keeps it marginalized.

Specifically, the mental health professionals explained how depoliticized mental health frameworks are, suggesting that this is a deep and widespread belief that assumes that the problem lies at the hands of the victim, and not any kind of overarching structure.

Data suggests that marginalization is understood not just as exclusion from resources or rights, but as a dynamic process that shapes both how communities can organize and how they’re forced to navigate institutional support systems. Data also suggests that marginalization is a continuing process of repression and oppression with multiple structural factors feeding into compounding marginalization further and further. It suggests that it should not be understood – and that it is understood – as an individual problem.

Hence, marginalization is understood not just as exclusion from resources or rights, but as a dynamic process that shapes both how communities can organize and how they’re forced to navigate institutional support systems. That the site of marginalization is a position from which new forms of solidarity and resistance emerge (such as informal support networks, Queer Mutual Aid, Student mobilizing, and Teresa’s unregistered NGO as examples), even as institutional structures and repeated crises work to fragment collective organizing capacity.

## On Isnad

As will be explained below, there emerged within marginalized tactics and strategies specific ways of organizing and mobilizing, usually referred to as informal support networks. In this study, informal support networks emerged, such as the politics of care with the Queer Mutual Aid (crowdfunding from Patreon as an example and giving their money to close friends who have already built their trust with them as an example) organization, decolonial listening which is perceived as a non-legitimate way of organizing, and, most importantly, *Isnad* (relational support networks) as healing.

To understand *Isnad*, compare it to *steadfastness* in (Palestinian) academic scholarship<sup>15</sup>. How can we think of these emerging conceptualizations as specific, local, and non-Western tactics? This is not addressed in the literature, especially the concept of *Isnad*, yet figured significantly in the study's findings and in the general discourse on organizing. Accordingly, what does it mean to heal from colonial wounds? And how is it a legitimate case of mobilization? Why is it not perceived as such? Moreover, *Isnad* (anthropologically) takes the shape of primordial ties, anti-capitalistic (as in nuclear family unit), anti-imperialist (as in forcing these values, and anti-consumerist. Yet, these need much more probing before attempting to make these analytical claims.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework that has been utilized in the Lebanese landscape *by most organizations*. Many organizations are using it to frame their work as it provides a ladder approach to prioritize marginalized communities and a way to conceptualize the different struggles facing these groups. In our study, data identifies a “neoliberal form” of intersectionality where organizations claim intersectional approaches while remaining siloed:

**“You take this fund but go fight in the corner.”**

This creates polarized activism where groups work separately despite interconnected issues. This can be connected to the separation between different marginalized groups. Another KII mentioned how movements work in “silos.”

## Solidarity

Based on the findings, there is a clear lack of solidarity between marginalized groups and communities in Lebanon, a result of organizations working in silos. Findings from many focus group discussions (FGDs) claimed the dissonance between them and reaching organizations, and many key informant interviews (KIIs) claimed the

need to have trans-organizational support. In addition, marginalized groups are further divided by existing racial, class, sectarian, religious, and national lines where they are being sustained by humanitarian-based organizations.

## Depoliticization and decontextualization

**“Resilience is a word that I hate a lot,**

claimed one of the mental health professionals.

This reflects broader criticism of how resilience narratives can shift responsibility onto marginalized communities while ignoring structural violence. This is also mentioned in two other KIIs with mental health professionals. They raise the concern of how psychologists treat queer individuals or other marginalized identities without referencing and referring to the structural inequalities that shape their suffering and torture.

Another KII addressed how there exists a shift away from political organizing toward service provision. They describe how movements became

**“invested in mundane day-to-day tasks” rather than political pressure or lobbying, comparing it to how “feminism shifted to corporate feminism.”**

## Articulation of struggles

A (autoethnographic) finding that emerged was the urgent need for individual groups and communities to express and articulate their struggles, experiences, and lived realities in a way that reflected their complex and nuanced identities.

During the war in Lebanon, the Public Works Studio, an organization working on the housing sector, wanted a name for reflecting the forcibly displaced individuals “occupying” vacant apartments/buildings. In the end, they settled for the label *“wade3 al yad”*, which literally translates to *“putting your hand on.”* There are

15 Busse J. (2022). “Everyday life in the face of conflict: Sumud as a spatial quotidian practice in Palestine”. *Journal of international relations and development*, 25(3), 583–607.

also multiple ethnographic encounters during the war and after of how certain individuals do not have the language to capture their mixed and diverse lives. This was also reflected in the Klls with mental health professionals on how therapy and other basic service provisions are not tailored to the complex and messy identities of queer folks (which even becomes clearer when we speak about women migrant domestic workers).

## Passive vs active agents

One of the insights emerges around the migrant domestic worker (MDW) agency and how they strategically navigate support systems. Rather than being “*passive victims*,” Mostafa describes how MDW “*exploit the NGO system*” (exploitation as agency) for their benefit, using initiatives as opportunities to raise money and help each other.

He also mentions how they are perceived as passive and powerless victims, but he challenges that to say that they are active and more aware of most leaders doing and representing their work. It seems to be a common pattern where marginalized individuals are pushed to generate informal support networks as well as working in silence (as is clear with queer and MDW folks). Forced silence, however, (could) be an agentive and autonomous move.

## Western vs local culture

The data highlights the complexities of the encounter between Western and local groups, demonstrating how local queer organizations, rather than simply acting as passive victims of imperialist practices, were, at times, able to successfully navigate tensions by engaging strategically with Western organizations to advance their own goals. Many vocalized how LGBTQ+ organizations mimic protest tactics such as queer marches (the one done in Beirut in 2019, as one of the Klls mentioned), they also made clear how they use funding and other resources to advance their own goals.

One mentioned how a Western-funded project was advanced by a local queer activist to produce a glossary about the localized and historical Arabo-Islamic terminologies of

queerness. Moreover, a note should be added here that when we claim they are Western, we are neglecting their agency. Moreover, there are no serious grabbling and generative conversations around colonial histories in Lebanon.

Mostafa critiques how Western NGOs impose restrictive frameworks that limit real action:

**“They would just get in the way... because this organization has certain milestones or requirements.”**

He particularly highlights how decolonial approaches were stripped from feminist frameworks because

**“it was impossible to do with the German government funding.”**

## Minor Findings

### Community

One of the participants mentioned how the perception of the queer community has changed. From “gays” to “LGBT,” highlighting progress in terminology, language, and nuance. They also mentioned,

**“What is a community?”**

### Strategic non-engagement or de-linking

Strategic non-engagement both epistemically and materially from institutions. Like the scholarship on de-linking, but in a much more serious, tactical, and generative sense. Data reveals that there is a constant battle between not being dependent on organizations and funding while at the same time using their funding and resources to advance their rights. One participant, Khodor, mentioned how there needs to be a strategic break with NGO funding. This appears only with Khodor and is invisible throughout the rest of the data.

## Generational limitations

A significant theme is the gap between movement generations. One participant describes challenges around knowledge transfer, noting *“there is no documentation”* and everything is *“oral history.”* This creates situations where newer activists feel they’re *“starting from scratch”* despite existing movement history.

## Gatekeeping

One interview reveals how resources and knowledge are controlled within movements:

**“People who have social capital... rarely share resources.”**

This gatekeeping affects movement sustainability and growth.

## The queerer you are

It depends on how queer one is and how openly visible one’s identity and expressions are when organizing. This creates a hardship in mobilizing, pushing them to work behind the scenes. Many expressed this, the queerer they are (in terms of visibility, such as dress, etc.) the harder it becomes to be public.

## Imaginariness, repositories, re/sources

Cementing already existing sectarian and identitarian politics in Lebanon. Makes it harder to organize. Many also expressed the lack of a vision for Lebanon. This goes back to the *“imagined communities”* debate by Benedict Anderson. Every community has its own imagination. Every group, or community, and depending on its location and socio-political history and dynamics, may have its own imagination. This also ties back to solidarity.

## Terrorism

Fear, security, and terrorism are common tactics of the state and self-security groups (see the Soldiers of God in Lebanon, a Christian right-wing group that terrorizes and attacks queer gatherings). An NGO did a zine comic, and the

director was printing it in one of the printing houses when they realized it had explicit graphic content, they told him to go away or they would call the authorities.

## Absent/silenced themes

One of the major analytical frameworks used for discourse analysis was looking at the absences and silences within the uttered speech of the interviews and discussions. This, as Gayatri Spivak notes, allows us to probe the hidden factors affecting what has become apparent<sup>16</sup>.

Collective memory is a concept that was absent or silent in all the data collected. Collective memory, which serves as an important tool for resilience and resistance, especially in Lebanon, did not surface in any of the discussions. This is important to think alongside the various imaginaries Lebanon holds.

Another glaring absence or silence in the data was archiving. Archives serve as important repositories and resources for documenting history, oral traditions, and memorable events. In Lebanon, it seems that the archive does not play any role in movements and organizations, even though there are (but extremely limited) groups that work on archiving. Only one of the interviews mentioned the need for documenting past experiences and oral traditions.

## General Findings

**“How have the groups we have looked at in Lebanon fared in the face of these long-running multiple crises? Have they been able to exploit opportunities to advance their agendas or been forced to focus on narrower concerns (e.g., providing for basic/humanitarian needs)?”**

Data suggests that the queer community has largely struggled to maintain momentum and advance rights-based agendas in the face of multiple crises, instead being forced to focus on immediate survival needs and mutual aid

<sup>16</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? *Die Philosophin* 14 (27):4258-.

(QMA). Student groups for example focus on the intuition fees, and other basic needs, even though most of those organizing are from the queer community. Most KIs claimed the need for services, one even claiming

**“ Advocacy is needed, but we need services.**

The data suggests that this defensive posture was driven by several key factors. First, severely constrained resources due to the economic crisis led to brain drain and reduced organizing capacity. Second, there was a fragmentation of community solidarity and support networks, as evidenced by internal gatekeeping and judgment.

Third, weakened institutional support systems further exacerbated the situation, with multiple participants describing unreliable organizational responses. Finally, increased intersectional vulnerabilities compounded existing marginalizations related to gender, sexuality, nationality, and class, making it even more difficult for affected communities to navigate these challenges.

**“ If some groups have been able to advance their agendas amid wider protest movements/crisis conditions – why is that? Why have some groups been able to carve out agency, while others haven’t?**

Data suggests that marginalized groups should be taken through an intersectional lens for us to be able to understand the intersecting forms of oppression. Findings suggest that some groups have taken advantage of the crisis and propagated their rights as opposed to other groups. The main reason for this is twofold. First, funding and resources remain a significant challenge. Groups like migrant domestic workers in Lebanon face systemic barriers to accessing financial support, as they cannot legally register as NGOs, making them ineligible for institutional funding. Moreover, even for organizations that do exist, funding for trans and other queer communities in the region is extremely limited, often deprioritized, or restricted due to legal and

social constraints. This lack of financial resources affects their ability to organize, advocate, and provide necessary services for their communities. Teresa, a migrant domestic worker, shared her experience of struggling to establish collective agency and form structured groups. She explained that despite these limitations, they continue to persevere, relying on informal networks and personal efforts to support one another. However, without institutional backing or sustained funding, their capacity to create lasting change remains severely restricted.

Second, privilege and awareness play a crucial role in shaping the struggles of marginalized communities. Data from the focus group discussion (FGD) with trans sex workers highlighted a concerning gap in knowledge about their rights and how to effectively defend them. Many participants lacked access to legal literacy, advocacy tools, or support systems that could help them navigate the systemic oppression they face. A particularly alarming issue that surfaced was the concept of rape fantasy within their experiences, raising critical ethical and legal concerns. This discussion underscores the urgent need for organizations to reassess their role in addressing these gaps. Should their focus be on direct intervention, legal empowerment, or broader structural change? How can they ensure that these communities have the tools and resources necessary to advocate for themselves? These questions highlight the pressing need for a more targeted and inclusive approach in organizational strategies aimed at supporting trans and queer individuals in the region.

Migrant domestic workers struggle to find agency for themselves before anything else. Pontillas notes

**“Nobody will protect me...I have to save myself first.**

Moreover, Teresa describes how state surveillance limits organizing possibilities, as seen in the story of the theater production that was stopped due to immigration authorities demanding documentation of undocumented workers involved. Other organizations can clearly navigate the system more visibly. Thus, factors

such as nationality and race also play a crucial role in determining how and who gets to do activism.

At the structural level, the key informant interview with a student activist demonstrates how established networks enabled crisis response,

**“We have allies...alternative media....covering this daily.**

This suggests what is called “institutional embeddedness” – where movements’ connections to broader social institutions provide resilience during crises.

However, the FGD data reveals how marginalized groups often lack this institutional access:

**“Most of these organizations... care about a certain type of people... they care about you if you meet certain criteria.**

At the meso-level of organizational dynamics, we see established patterns of organizing that groups can draw upon during a crisis. However, the data shows how these repertoires are unevenly distributed. While student movements could activate existing protest networks, marginalized groups like trans sex workers lacked these organizational templates. At the micro-level of individual and community relationships, the FGDs reveal how some communities lack what can be called *“movement habitus”* – the internalized understanding of how to organize and advocate effectively.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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The findings of this research highlight several areas where further investigation is needed to deepen our understanding of the experiences of marginalized communities in Lebanon and to inform more effective interventions. Building on the insights gained from this study, it would be a good idea to research the question:

**“How have these groups mobilized against inadequate social protection provisions, and how have they negotiated relations with wider protest movements?”**

In addition, future research should expand on the following key areas to address existing gaps and build a more comprehensive understanding of marginalized communities' experiences and responses to crises.

## Longitudinal Studies

The dynamic nature of crises and their impact on marginalized communities necessitates longitudinal studies that track changes over time. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to observe how the experiences, coping mechanisms, and mobilization strategies of marginalized groups evolve in response to ongoing political, economic, and social challenges. For example, the informal support networks and mutual aid systems that emerged during the 2024-2025 crises could be studied over several years to assess their sustainability and effectiveness and examine the informal support networks that emerged during other crises and their differences and similarities (such as in the 2019 uprisings).

## In-Depth Exploration of Specific Marginalized Groups

The research highlights the diversity within marginalized communities, suggesting that different groups face particular challenges. Future studies should focus on specific subgroups, such as transgender individuals, undocumented migrants, or disabled women, to capture their nuanced experiences, while also taking into consideration the polarized dynamics between these groups. For example, the experiences of trans sex workers, who face intersecting challenges related to gender identity, legal status, and economic vulnerability, call for deeper exploration which this study could not include. Ethnographic methods could be particularly useful in this regard, as they allow for a detailed understanding of the lived realities of these groups.

## Archival and Oral History Research

The absence of collective memory and archives in the data suggests a gap in documenting the history and experiences of marginalized communities. Future research should prioritize archival and oral history methods to preserve the stories, struggles, and resilience of these groups and the intricate and undocumented ways they do these kinds of resistances. For instance, collecting and preserving personal narratives, photographs, and other materials from LGBTQ+ activists, migrant domestic workers, and other marginalized individuals could create a valuable repository for future generations, something many activists in the research study also pointed to (the lack of intergenerational communication). The Paphos workshop highlighted the importance of such documentation, particularly in the context of ongoing crises that risk erasing these histories.

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## **Intersectionality**

While intersectionality is widely discussed, there is limited research on how it is implemented in practice by organizations and movements. Future studies should investigate how NGOs, community organizations, and social movements in Lebanon operationalize/mobilize intersectionality in their work. The workshop emphasized the need to explore how intersectionality can move beyond a theoretical concept to become a practical tool for addressing the overlapping forms of marginalization faced by communities in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, yet also highlighting how it can reproduce the same forms of oppression it aims to dismantle. This research could also examine the tensions between neoliberal funding structures and the radical potential of intersectional approaches.

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