

I'MPOSSIBLE

WE NEED AN EMERGENCY FUND FOR EVERY PROJECT

Based on an interview with Jana Makhoul, co-founder of I'MPOSSIBLE, a civil society organisation founded in 2017 to help build sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive communities in the Akkar region, north of Lebanon, through education support, youth empowerment, economic development and livelihoods.

"In Akkar, young men's options are largely limited to farming or enlisting in the military, while young women and girls often see marriage as their primary path," Jana says. Akkar, a remote area in northern Lebanon, is historically impoverished and disenfranchised due to discriminatory governmental policies that favour urban centres at the expense of rural areas. Education is one of the most impacted sectors, resulting in low-quality education and high dropout rates. In turn, this leads to a weak labour market, scarce employment choices, and opportunities for Akkari youth.

In response to this reality, Jana, along with a group of women invested in advancing the interests of their community, founded I'm Possible in 2017. "We realised that women teachers are marginalised, exhausted and struggling with violence both at work and at home," says Jana, stating her belief that a prosperous society is rooted in quality education. I'm Possible's vision is to empower teachers and build their personal and professional capacity.

I'm Possible worked with the displaced community who took refuge in Akkar during the September 2024 Israeli war on Lebanon. "As displaced families poured into Akkar, needs surged beyond what organisations were ready for. We sprang into action—opening shelters and collaborating with local municipalities to deliver assistance," Jana says.

Throughout Lebanon, numerous public schools were repurposed as shelters for displaced families, yet their staff and administrators lacked the training and resources to meet urgent needs, prompting I'm Possible to fill the gap. "Our team was under immense pressure and fatigue; we had to balance our ongoing projects with immediate emergency response," she adds.

Budget restrictions were a challenge that most local organisations struggled with. "We couldn't act freely to meet our staffing and resources needs," Jana says. "We should establish an emergency reserve for every project moving forward, along with a streamlined protocol that lets us respond immediately, without unmanageable paperwork or delays."

War forces women, girls and other marginalised communities into difficult situations, making them more vulnerable to discrimination and abuse. "Several women recounted that the school principal would enter rooms without knocking first." The lack of privacy causes discomfort and fear for women and girls. "They weren't sure where to turn or how to report what happened, and didn't feel safe discussing it. Even when we reached out, school principals and staff would linger nearby, listening in," Jana says.

In response, I'm Possible created safe rooms in shelters and municipality buildings for women and girls to seek support, and referred some cases to partner organisations with more expertise in managing sexual harassment cases. "We delivered psychosocial support and case management in numerous cases, but were unable to maintain proper follow-up once women went back home after the ceasefire, and contact was lost," Jana explains. This further highlights the critical need for emergency protocols and programs that are gender-sensitive and include consistent aftercare.

I'm Possible is a member of a local feminist network that includes other civil society organisations that lack the capacity to meet regularly. Jana admits that strengthening the network should have been our top priority. In her region, the lack of coordinated action among civil society organisations led to aid being distributed in a scattered, unplanned way across shelters. "For me, solidarity includes efficient coordination of efforts to serve people effectively. We need to meet, coordinate and ensure that our resources are well-distributed. We must have plans and organised ways of working. We must draw lessons from this war to better support one another in the future." In practice, that means shared resources, joint strategies, and a unified vision that both honours our diversity and streamlines our collective efforts.

Jana explains that solidarity is about compassion paired with effective action. It has many dimensions—sharing resources, forging alliances, and creating a shared vision that brings us together while honouring our diversities.

