



# VOICES OF YOUTH

AMIDST LEBANON'S ECONOMIC CRISIS

2022 NEEDS ASSESSMENT & GENDER ANALYSIS



# LIST OF ACRONYMS

BLN	Basic Literacy and Numeracy
CP	Child Protection
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ERC	Emergency Response Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LCRP	Lebanese Crisis Response Plan
LOST	Lebanese Organization for Studies
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PHC	Primary Health Care Centre
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PWD	People with Disabilities
SBCC	Social and Behavioural Change Communication
SDC	Social Development Center
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Background .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Methodology .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Protection .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Education .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5. Youth Economic Empowerment &amp; Livelihood .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>6. Sexual and Reproductive Health .....</b>	<b>53</b>



# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

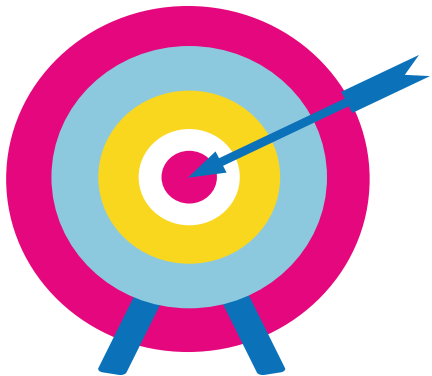
Plan International has been present in Lebanon since 2017 and has an operational and registered office since 2019. Following this progressively increasing presence in the country, a national strategy was drafted for the years 2020 to 2024, which mainly addresses children and youth with a focus on girls. It includes four programmes of intervention, namely protection, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, as well as economic empowerment. The implementation of the strategy is based on an aid localization approach whereby Plan International relies on local implementing partners in each area of intervention.

As the situation in the country is particularly volatile and characterised by fast-paced evolutions, UNOCHA launched an Emergency Response Plan in early August 2021 with the aim to alleviate the suffering of targeted vulnerable populations, both host and refugee, and to avoid the degradation of inter and intra-community tensions. The needs reflected in the response plan were identified through several existing nationwide assessments that provide insights on key socio-economic trends. In order to specify the needs of adolescents and youth, particularly girls and young women under this framework (and in line with the four key pillars of Plan International country strategy), Plan International Lebanon carried out a detailed needs' assessment and gender analysis to complement existing research with a focus on six specific geographic areas (Akkar, Tripoli, Aarsal, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and Saida).



## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this assessment is to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues that adolescent girls and boys and young women and men face across the nation. The research includes a detailed gender analysis and aims at guiding the design and implementation of Plan International's programmes. Therefore, the findings of this research study will be programme-oriented and provide insights and suggestions in terms of programming in addition to interviewees' knowledge, attitudes, and practices. It will serve as a complementary assessment to existing ones, such as those carried out by UN agencies and other NGOs from the relevant sectors over the past months, quantifying the impact of the crisis and determining the main needs, conditions, and capacities of the different target groups.



### THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS ASSESSMENT ARE TO:

- Gather information from adolescent girls and boys and young women and men on the issues they are facing, with a particular focus on education needs and protection risks;
- Obtain recommendations from participants through a participatory approach by extracting the views and suggestions of participants in contributing to solutions at the local levels and engaging in community initiatives;
- Complete a gender analysis and present comprehensive data on social norms and access to services;
- Set the areas of priority response, along with a list of recommendations to guide future tailored, targeted, integrated and inclusive programming.





## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 APPROACH AND SAMPLE

The study focused on collecting qualitative data including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with participants across six locations in Lebanon, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with focal points from implementing partners across the country. Primary data was also triangulated with a desk review including recent assessments and studies conducted by other INGOs, UN agencies, and inter-agency working groups.

#### 2.1.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research team followed international ethical standards for research with youth and children. Informed consent was sought and in the case of children below 18, caregivers' consent was also provided in addition to children's assent. All facilitators were trained on safeguarding and referrals and were able to address any case that was identified. Further details on ethical considerations and procedures are detailed in the Inception Report in the Annex of the report.

#### 2.1.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FGDs were organised with the support of Plan International's partners in the different locations. Partners specifically supported the selection and invitation of participants, as well as the logistical arrangement of FGDs. Data collection began on November 23, 2021, and ended on January 7, 2022, with a total of 52 FGDs conducted with 524 participants. Participants' profiles varied according to nationality (Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian), age group (14-17 years old and 18-24 years old), location (Akkar, Aarsal, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, South, and Tripoli), and gender. The FGDs were distributed according to the following table:

Location	Lebanese				Palestinian				Syrian				Total
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		
	14-17	18-24	14-17	18-24	14-17	18-24	14-17	18-24	14-17	18-24	14-17	18-24	
Arsal	1	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	8
Akkar	1	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	8
Beirut	1	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	8
Mount Lebanon	1	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	8
South	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Tripoli	1	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	8
Total	6	6	6	6	1	1	1	1	6	6	6	6	52

For each research objective, the report considered these several layers of disaggregation. When a difference between groups was visible and relevant, it is systematically indicated in the text. If a breakdown is not mentioned in the analysis, it means that no variation was actually visible on this particular point.

The detailed FGDs guidelines are available in the Annex with the Inception report. Guidelines include an icebreaker section followed by four different themes: protection, education, livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health. Each section was built around a specific exercise requiring the participants to split into small groups

and engage in a discussion together to ensure their participation. This was an opportunity to discuss their own situation, and the obstacles they face in their daily life.

Each FGD took around two hours to complete and included between eight and fifteen participants. One should note that FGDs include additional layers of diversity. Though not always visible in the analysis as it was not part of the sample breakdown, the FGDs are representative of both in-school and out-of-school profiles, that were equally represented in the FGDs. Finally, some adolescents and young adults with disabilities were invited to give their feedback on the different themes.

### NATIONALITY

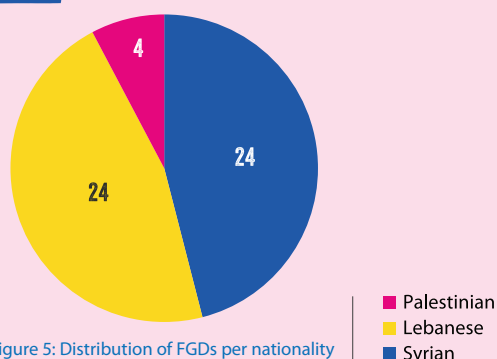


Figure 5: Distribution of FGDs per nationality

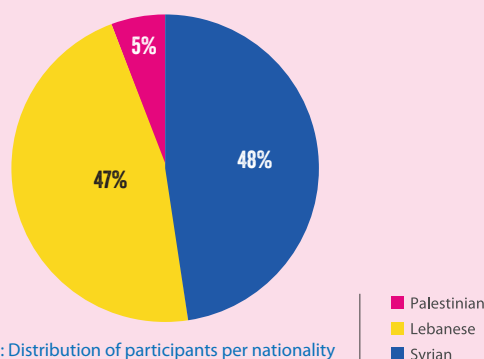


Figure 6: Distribution of participants per nationality

### AGE GROUP

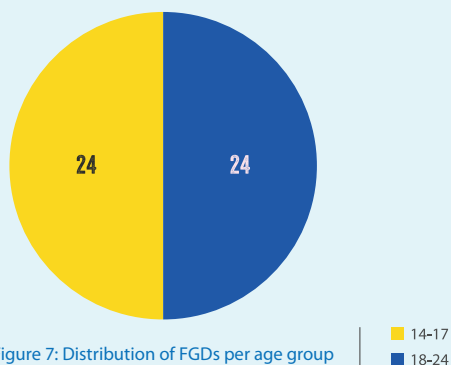


Figure 7: Distribution of FGDs per age group

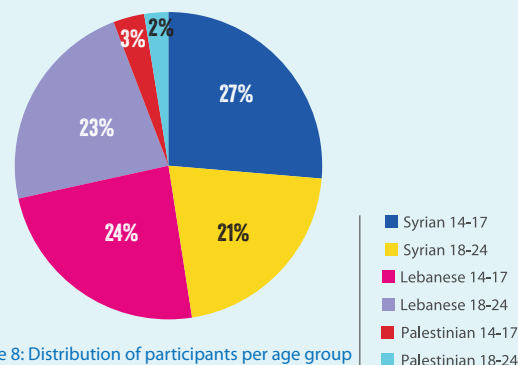


Figure 8: Distribution of participants per age group

### LOCATION

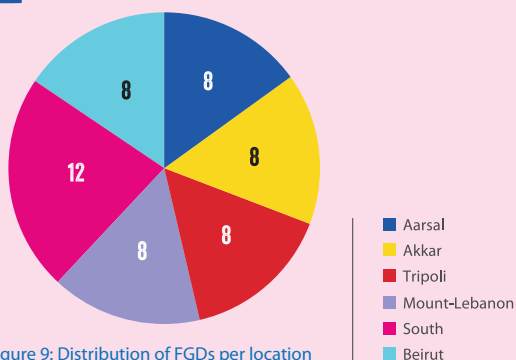


Figure 9: Distribution of FGDs per location

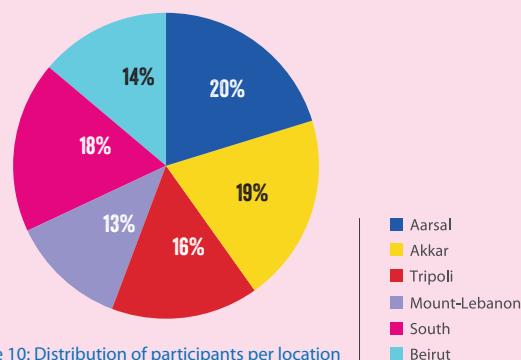


Figure 10: Distribution of participants per location

## GENDER

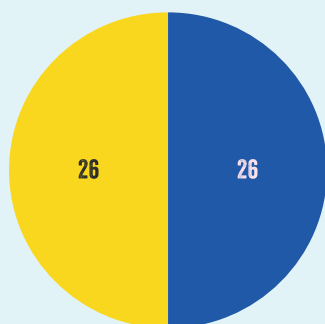


Figure 11: Distribution of FGDs per gender

■ Female  
■ Male

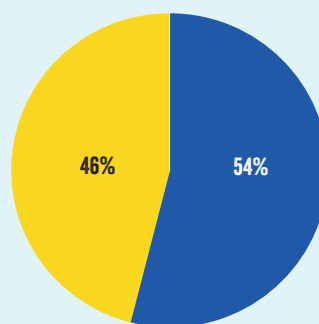


Figure 12: Distribution of participants per gender

■ Female  
■ Male

Note on the graphic representations of FGDs: Unless specified otherwise, bar charts in the below sections are representing the number of FGDs in which a topic was mentioned.

## 2.1.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

15 key informant interviews were conducted with the objective to provide complementary insights on local needs and existing service delivery and opportunities for the youth. KIIs were conducted with focal points from different regions and sectors as follows:

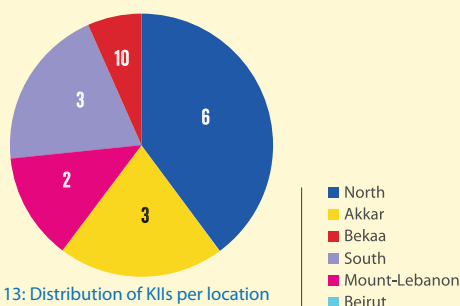


Figure 13: Distribution of KIIs per location

■ North  
■ Akkar  
■ Bekaa  
■ South  
■ Mount-Lebanon  
■ Beirut

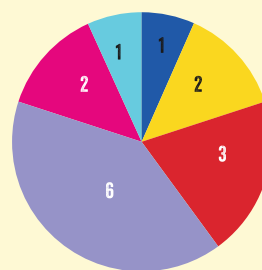


Figure 14: Distribution of KIIs per sector

■ Protection  
■ Social Activities  
■ Social Work  
■ Education  
■ Education & Protection  
■ Child Protection & Social Activities

## 2.1.4 LIMITATIONS

Overall, data collection took place without any major issues. However, some points of attention were reported.

## CHALLENGES FACED DURING FGDs:

- Participant profiles influenced participation: participants from different educational backgrounds were present in the same FGD with the objective to reach a balance between in-school and out-of-school profiles. In some instances, out-of-school participants seemed intimidated by other participants with higher educational achievements and were less prone to participate. Specifically, some participants who were completely out of the school system and were unable to read or write were reluctant to participate in the mobilisation exercises. In order to mitigate this issue, the main consultant and the second facilitator were each animating a subgroup of participants to ensure everyone's participation.
- Disturbance of FGDs: in a few FGDs, female respondents had to bring their children with them because there was no other alternative for them, which sometimes disrupted their focus.
- Logistical issues: in some locations, electricity cuts prevented consultants from projecting the ice-breaker video. However, consultants adapted and came up with backup options for ice-breaking activities that had been planned during the initial training.
- Limited participation of specific profiles especially People with Disabilities (PWD): Even at times where PWD were present, they would participate less in the discussion than other profiles. It is recommended to organize separate FGDs with PWD in the future.
- Timeline of data collection: the initial timeline for data collection was stretched at times, because partners were unable to mobilise participants according to plan.

# 3. PROTECTION

This section of the focus group discussions aimed at highlighting the main protection issues that adolescents and young adults in Lebanon are facing, as well as the perceived reasons of why they are occurring. It also assessed participants' awareness of existing community-based services and their knowledge about them, and explored which services participants felt were unavailable but required.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- While Syrian respondents reported persisting protection issues related to discriminations, Lebanese report a higher exposure to risks that vary essentially based on gender and on geographical locations.
- Exposure to protection risks was already visible to respondents due to conservative social norms but reportedly increased with the economic crisis. It focuses mostly on SGBV for adolescent girls and young women while adolescent boys and young men are more concerned with decent work, armed violence and drugs.
- In specific disadvantaged areas such as Aarsal, specific discrimination cases were reported among Lebanese.
- Overall, issues reported by adolescents and youth induce stress and imply harsh living conditions and deteriorating mental health, coupled with the recommendation to continue provision of PSS sessions. Therefore, the need for PSS is still relevant and needed.
- Awareness and utilization of current protection actors is relatively low, particularly among Lebanese who are not accustomed to rely on such services.
- Clubs, entertainment activities and sport venues are relatively absent from the environment of respondents and could be an entry door for better outreach and service delivery.



## 3.1 PROTECTION RISKS AND ISSUES

### 3.1.1 OVERVIEW ON PROTECTION ISSUES ACROSS LEBANON.

There was a general consensus among participants, regardless of their demographic characteristics, about not feeling safe nor protected in their communities. For the select few who did report feeling safe, they either attributed it to the fact that they had not experienced any protection issues first-hand, or to the fact that they avoid leaving the house, or simply to the reality that they have become accustomed to the issues that are present in their community.

As for the rest, they shared numerous concerns that they, or their surroundings, were exposed to on a daily basis, with the most common answers being theft and mugging, bullying, sexual harassment (including online) and assault, and shootings and homicides. Participants noted that while certain problems have existed for a long time, the phenomena of theft and robbery are becoming increasingly apparent and problematic in these last few months due to the degrading economic situation. These results are aligned with International Rescue Committee Protection Monitoring Report<sup>1</sup> published on November 2021, which also reports on incidents of kidnapping, harassments, robbery, and specific risks within the household. The IRC's Protection Monitoring data provides initial indications of an alarming increase in the rates of child marriage over the last year. In the last quarter of 2020, when respondents were asked, 'what are the main safety concerns affecting girls from the household', 1% of respondents mentioned child marriage. However, in comparison to the last quarter of 2021 when asked the same question, 5% of respondents described 'child marriage' as a main safety concern impacting girls. In summary, concerns around child marriage, expressed by the community, have quadrupled within the course of one year. This risk is highly specific to girls, and was only mentioned in relation to boys in relatively few instances. These findings align with the observations of the IRC's Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) program that have recorded in the Gender Based Violence Information Management System stark increases in the rate of child marriage, driven by caregivers' inability to afford their children's living costs.

Also, according to Protection Monitoring Findings, Lebanon – 4th quarter 2021, issued by UNHCR, with the deteriorating economic situation, children remain at risk of being sent to work by their parents, with 3.7% of all interviewed households with children reported having at least one child working. All instances of child labour cited financial necessity for the household as the reason. Furthermore, reports of working girls rose for the second quarter in a row. Now 28% of all working children are girls, whereas prior to the second half of 2021 this rate was 18%. Agriculture continues to be the leading form of child labour (38% of all instances), followed by working in shops (19%) and the high-risk activity of street selling (17%). To make the situation even worse, 2 in 3 children involved in child labour were not attending school. Moreover, the mental health issues continued to be reported by approximately a quarter of households, with 26% of adults reporting mental health issues. Almost all (97%) of respondents who reported suffering from mental health issues said that the pressure of the economic crisis was a main cause. It is worth mentioning that eviction threats have significantly increased in the governorates of Akkar and Beirut Mount Lebanon. Of the 43 households at risk of eviction, at least nine respondents reported having faced verbal abuse or threats of violence from the landlord. Female-headed households are substantially more likely to be at risk of eviction.

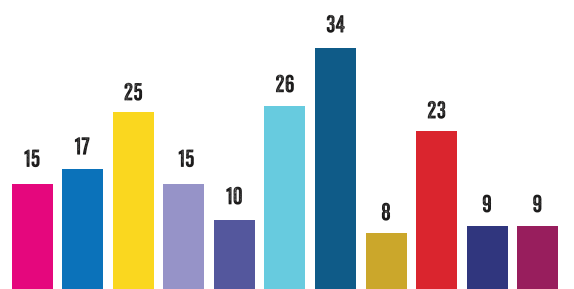
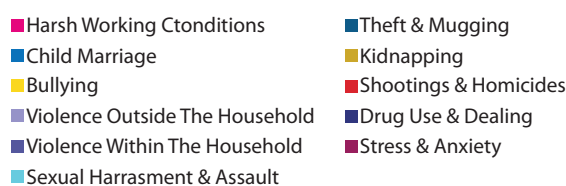


Figure 15: Protection issues faced by participants (as per number of FGDs)



<sup>1</sup> International Rescue Committee, Protection Monitoring Report – October 2021.



Bullying is another problem that was commonly brought up by participants who referred to bullying that occurs within schools and outside of it. Concerning the former, participants not only reported getting bullied by their classmates, but many also talked about bullying and abuse (both verbal and physical) that was perpetrated by teachers.

**“TEACHERS THREATENED STUDENTS TO HIT THEM AND BREAK THEIR LEGS IF THEY EVER MOVED IN CLASS (AFTER A STUDENT MOVED TO PICK UP HIS PEN OFF THE GROUND WHEN IT FELL); SHE ALSO HIT THE STUDENT WITH THE BOARD ERASER. IT WAS MONITORED VIA CAMERA BY THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, AND HE TOOK IMMEDIATE ACTION AGAINST THE TEACHER.”**

**TRIPOLI, SYRIAN BOY, 14-17 YEARS OLD.**

Regarding the latter, participants complained of bullying that occurred in various settings: on the streets, at work, in public spaces, in the building they live in, and many more. This was largely reflected in the accounts of Syrian participants who talked about the extent of bullying they are exposed to just because of their nationalities. For example, they mention how neighbours constantly attempt to interfere with their lives and their children's (e.g. they demand that the kids do not make any noise or do not leave the apartment) and they also exploit the children (e.g. asking them to carry heavy objects). They explain that if they or their children do not comply with everything the neighbours demand, they are instantly threatened with being kicked out of the building. Indeed, beyond the instances of bullying and exploitation, the threat of eviction is an additional problem that was more prevalent among Syrian participants.

This finding lends further support to the priority that was identified in the 2021 Midyear Protection Sector Dashboard<sup>2</sup>, for a stronger collaboration between the Protection sector and the Shelter sector.

On the one hand, Syrian participants were much more likely to report incidences of violence outside the household (11 FGDs) than were Lebanese participants (3 FGDS) or Palestinian ones (1 FGD). This finding aligns with the frequent reports by Syrian participants regarding the magnitude of the discrimination they face from Lebanese individuals primarily, but Palestinian individuals as well – discrimination that translates into different forms of abuse and harassment. In the KIs, stakeholders confirmed the existence and even the rise of tension against Syrians when receiving monthly aid from the UN or other organizations.

This tension has been ongoing for the past ten years and has been focusing on competition for low skilled jobs since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. It is increasing today due to the economic crisis and the impoverishment of Lebanese<sup>3</sup>.

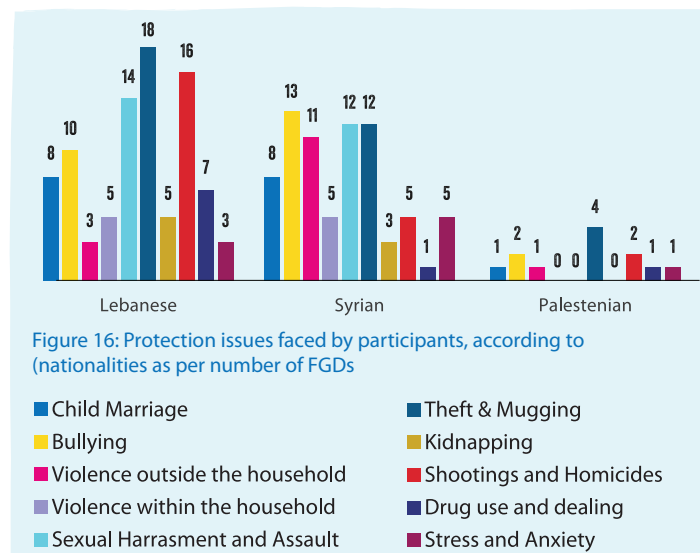
On the other hand, Lebanese and Palestinian participants tended to report the problem of homicides and shootings (18/29 FGDS) more than Syrian participants (5 FGDs). They talk about how easy it is for people to own guns and how common it is for shootings to occur randomly on the streets for reasons that are seemingly insignificant.

This problem can be considered another form of “violence outside the household” and it may be that Lebanese participants were more likely to report being affected by it because it is a problem that is not driven by discrimination against a specific nationality, thus it does not only affect Syrians.

<sup>2</sup> 2021 MID-YEAR SECTOR DASHBOARD. Protection including Child Protection and GBV

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, Tension Monitoring System Dashboard.





#### NOTE

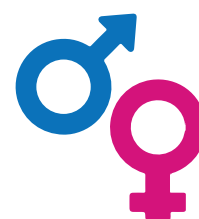
Note for interpretation of the bar chart: while the team conducted the same number of FGDs with Syrians and Lebanese (24 FGDs for each nationality), only four sessions were organised with Palestinians. Results must be interpreted with this sampling discrepancy in mind. Here, thefts and mugging were mentioned during all FGDs with Palestinians. Bullying, shootings and homicides were mentioned in half of them.

A problem that appears to be unique to the region of Arsal was highlighted in one of the discussions that were conducted there. Participants explained that Arsal is an area that is “covered by terrorist organizations”, which exposes them to a lot of discrimination.

For instance, they say that they endure a lot of humiliation and inspections whenever they stop at military checkpoints, only because they would be coming from Arsal.

Participants also reported being perceived as terrorists by their classmates who reportedly bully them because of their dialect or their area of residence.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES:



**WHILE SOME OF THE PROTECTION ISSUES MENTIONED WERE COMMON TO PARTICIPANTS OF EITHER GENDER, THERE WERE OTHERS THAT WERE UNIQUE TO A CERTAIN GENDER. AS A SIMPLE OBSERVATION, THE TOP CONCERN THAT WAS CITED BY GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WAS THAT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT, WHEREAS THE ONE THAT RANKED THE HIGHEST AMONG BOYS AND YOUNG MEN WAS THAT OF THEFT AND MUGGING.**



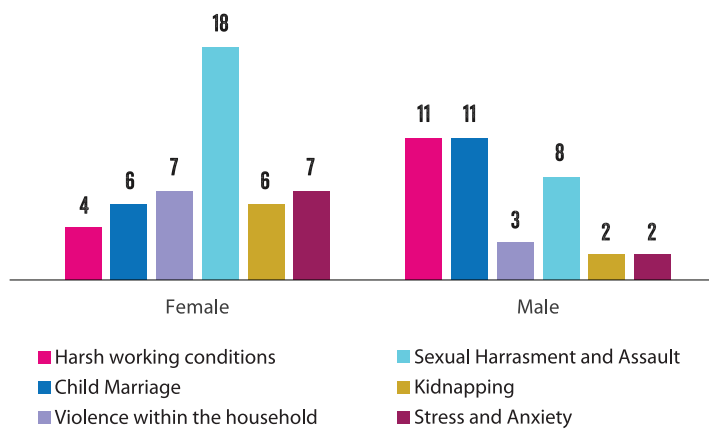


Figure 17: Protection issues faced, according to gender (as per number of FGDs)

Regardless of nationality, incidents of sexual harassment and violence were brought up in discussions with young women/girls (18 FGDs) and young men/boys (8 FGDs), and in both cases, participants tended to agree that such incidents occurred mostly to women. Moreover, participants who are between the ages of 14 and 18 were somewhat more likely to identify the problem of sexual harassment and assault than young adults (16 FGDs vs. 10 FGDs, respectively). Adolescent girls and young women report being exposed to catcalling, stalking, inappropriate touching, and rape when on the streets or in public spaces in general. Hence, they either voluntarily avoid walking on the streets, especially if alone or at night, or are forbidden to do so in the first place (by their parents and brothers). Some men participants tended to confirm this by explaining how a girl is not allowed to go out of the house at night because of “customs and traditions, and because of her exposure”. One of the adolescent boys even goes on to affirm that should a girl be seen alone on the streets at night, harassing her would be the “natural thing” to do as she would be asking for it because she decided to go out at night. As such, FGDs confirmed the deeply rooted social norms legitimising SGBV targeting women in the public space. Female respondents confirmed that this issue was limited to deeply rooted social norms among men. Only a few female respondents adopted the same stance during FGDs while most were opposed to it. Girls and young women were also more likely to mention the issue of violence within the household which was either perpetrated by family members (parents and brothers) or by the spouse. This problem appears to disproportionately affect participants from Aarsal.



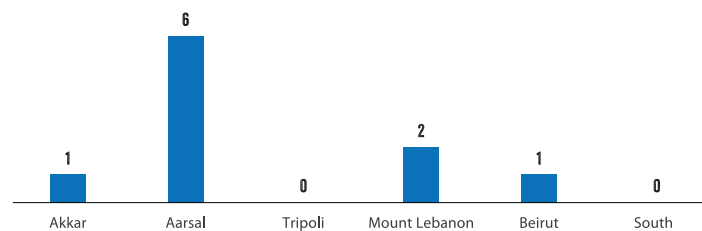


Figure 18: Violence within households according to locations (as per number of FGDs)

It was even suggested that some girls may resort to child marriage in an attempt to escape domestic abuse. Male participants also confirmed in their answers the prevalence of GBV, with one participant (adolescent Lebanese boy) stating that if his sister ever makes a mistake, then he would be ready to discipline her, as it is his right to do so. In contradiction with most testimonies from adolescent girls and young women interviewed during FGDs, key informants from local organisation staff usually did not acknowledge such reality in their areas. A large majority considered that these issues were limited to very specific areas, and such issues remained taboo among them. They focused on other issues such as child marriage.

**“ THERE WAS A GIRL NAMED ISRAA. SHE WAS SEEN AT A CAFÉ WITH HER FIANCÉE, SISTER AND COUSIN. HER DAD FOUND OUT AND WHEN SHE GOT HOME, HE BEAT HER SO VIOLENTLY HER SPINE BROKE. SHE DIED AT THE HOSPITAL WITHIN 15 DAYS. ALL BECAUSE SHE WENT OUT WITH HER FIANCÉE TO A CAFÉ ”**

**SOUTH, LEBANESE FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

Indeed, another problem that was also regarded as being primarily pertinent to girls is that of child, early and forced marriage. It was reported by participants in general, with some stating that this issue was common in their family and surroundings, while others claimed that it happened rarely around them, but that they are aware that it happens a lot in other specific regions.

These differences among participants were generally explained by differences in revenues between households. Indeed, the most common reason attributed to child marriage is that the father is no longer able to support his family financially, which was all the more relevant in the present situation and the impact of the crisis on households' financial capacities.

Other reasons however remained visible and were related to gender social norms, such as the belief that a girl should get married before the age of 18 because after that, she would no longer be eligible for marriage.

Another visible discrepancy was between regions. Almost none of the respondents in Akkar and the North mentioned early marriage as a protection issue. This does not mean that child marriage was not reported, but it was usually less of a protection concern than harassment, thefts, and bullying that reportedly increased with the recent crises. Child marriage itself was mentioned in these two regions but more as a barrier to formal education, as detailed in the second section of the report. (See section 2. Education).

Overall, participants across all FGDs generally appeared to be very conscious of the protection risks to which boys/young men and girls/young women are exposed in their community. This observation mitigates the findings from the earlier needs' assessments conducted by Plan International (2020, 2021)<sup>4</sup>, which noted low levels of awareness among participants about protection hazards.

### 3.1.2 PERCEIVED REASONS BEHIND THE RISE OF PROTECTION RISKS.

Participants provided several factors that could explain the protection issues they were facing and those generally fell under the categories of economic (the economic crisis), sociological (social norms, lack of awareness, family upbringing), political (sectarian political system), and individual/psychological factors (traits, psychological stress).

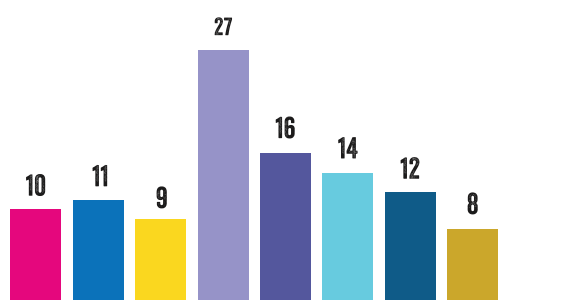


Figure 19: Perceived reasons for protection issues (as per number of FGDs)

- National Origin Discrimination
- Family upbringing
- Political system/situation
- Economic situation
- Lack of law enforcement
- Social norms and traditions
- Lack of awareness/ignorance
- Individual/Psychological factors

The main reasons behind a variety of protection issues were that of the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon, followed by the complete lack of law enforcement, in addition to the social norms and traditions prevailing in the Lebanese society. The economic crisis/situation ranked the highest in the number of FGDs where it was mentioned; this aligns with the earlier finding about theft and mugging being the most identified protection issue by participants. Participants explain that due to the economic situation, people are no longer able to cover the most basic expenses like food and rent. They are also having difficulties to find jobs. Consequently, some people no longer have any option but to resort to stealing and even killing in order to survive. The issue of unemployment was also linked to the problem of sexual harassment by some participants who claim that because boys/men are unemployed and have nothing to do, they end up spending their time on the street, harassing girls and women.

<sup>4</sup> Plan International Lebanon 2020. COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment

<sup>4</sup> Plan International Lebanon 2021. Adolescent Girls and Boys Needs in West Bekaa and Mount Lebanon



Another important reason that was given to explain the occurrence of crimes was the absence of law enforcement. Participants tended to agree on the virtual absence of the Lebanese government and of security forces leading to security not being maintained and justice remaining unserved. Lack of law enforcement was also mentioned as the reason why weapons are so easily accessible to individuals residing in Lebanon and why incidents of shootings are not uncommon. Syrian participants living in a refugee camp equally commented on the absence of the Lebanese government in the camp, leaving it utterly unsupervised and unsecured. Among the different nationalities, Lebanese and Palestinian participants were most likely to consider the economic crisis and the lack of law

enforcement as being the main causes for the protection issues. However, national origin discrimination is one factor that was only suggested by Syrian participants. They consider it as the key factor contributing to the various forms of abuse, exploitation, and harassment that they are exposed to. Participants believe that what fuels such discrimination are certain commonly held beliefs among the Lebanese, such as: 1) Syrians are stealing our jobs; 2) They are getting paid in fresh dollars by the UN; and 3) They are responsible for the crisis that Lebanon is going through. Participants also noted that family upbringing plays a role in discrimination, as they have observed Lebanese parents encouraging their children to hit Syrian kids.



Another important reason that was given to explain the occurrence of crimes was the absence of law enforcement. Participants tended to agree on the virtual absence of the Lebanese government and of security forces leading to security not being maintained and justice remaining unserved. Lack of law enforcement was also mentioned as the reason why weapons are so easily accessible to individuals residing in Lebanon and why incidents of shootings are not uncommon. Syrian participants living in a refugee camp equally commented on the absence of the Lebanese government in the camp, leaving it utterly unsupervised and unsecured.

Among the different nationalities, Lebanese and Palestinian participants were most likely to consider

the economic crisis and the lack of law enforcement as being the main causes for the protection issues. However, national origin discrimination is one factor that was only suggested by Syrian participants. They consider it as the key factor contributing to the various forms of abuse, exploitation, and harassment that they are exposed to. Participants believe that what fuels such discrimination are certain commonly held beliefs among the Lebanese, such as: 1) Syrians are stealing our jobs; 2) They are getting paid in fresh dollars by the UN; and 3) They are responsible for the crisis that Lebanon is going through. Participants also noted that family upbringing plays a role in discrimination, as they have observed Lebanese parents encouraging their children to hit Syrian kids.

**“ WE ARE BEING GIVEN DISGUSTING PLACES TO LIVE IN; PLACES WHERE NO LEBANESE WOULD LIVE FOR A HIGH RENTAL PRICE. THERE ARE INSECTS EVERYWHERE AND HUMIDITY THAT IS MAKING US DEVELOP ALLERGIES. THE LANDLORDS ARE MAKING US FEEL LIKE THEY'VE GIVEN US CASTLES TO LIVE IN. ”**

**SOUTH, SYRIAN YOUNG WOMAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD**

Moving on to the sociological factors, social norms and traditions, lack of awareness, and family upbringing were largely proposed as explanations for the problems of child marriage, and sexual harassment and assault. Concerning child marriage, participants ascribed this practice to the society's customs and traditions. For some, but not all, this practice is evidence of a “backward society” and of a lack of proper awareness. Regarding sexual harassment and assault, girls and young women were prone to blame the social norms of a society, as well as family upbringing, for raising men who do not respect women and who feel entitled to harass and abuse them. Adding to the idea of social norms, participants say that girls and women who experience harassment or violence tend to be blamed by society for the way they dress and behave.

While most female participants rejected such accusations, there were some exceptions among them who believed that assigning a certain level of responsibility to women was warranted. Explanations given by these respondents were limited to general opinions and beliefs common in their communities.

It is worth noting that adolescent participants were much more likely to assign social norms and traditions as being the causes of various protection issues than young adults. This is in line with the previous observation that participants who are 14-17 years old were also more likely to identify sexual harassment and child marriage as being the protection issues that they are mostly concerned with.

### 3.1.3 DEGREE OF EXPOSURE TO PROTECTION RISKS IS PERCEIVED DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON GENDER AND NATIONALITY.

When directly asked whether they believed girls and boys face the same protection issues, or to the same degree, the answers were mostly split between those indicating that girls and women face more problems and others indicating that girls and boys are equally at risk, either because they face the same problems, or different ones but to the same extent. Participants in fewer FGDs alternatively suggested that boys and young men are more exposed to protection issues.

It is worth mentioning that the most common answer among male participants was that girls and women are subject to greater protection issues. In fact, they were more likely to provide this answer than their female counterpart. This may be a positive indication that boys and young men are indeed conscious of the protection issues that are specific to people from the other gender.

Alternatively, this finding may simply reflect the popularly held belief among the participants that women are physically weak and “fragile” and therefore more vulnerable to attacks.

As for female participants, their most common answer was that boys/men and girls/women face protection issues equally. This finding can also indicate that although participants did acknowledge they face specific issues that are not relevant to boys and men (mainly sexual harassment), they still recognized that boys were exposed to a different set of unique problems. This is also relevant to communications from the field and Plan International’s observation when it comes to child marriage and child labour; the first is more evident among girls and young women, and the latter is evident among boys and young men. Concerning child labour, certain protection issues appeared to predominantly affect boys and young men, including exposure to harsh working conditions and exposure to drug use and drug dealing. Participants of either gender recognize that boys and young men are particularly exposed to harsh and dangerous conditions at work. This was also reported when asking about working conditions and livelihoods, further validating the

findings. There were numerous reports by men about having had to begin work at a young age and in jobs that are not suitable for children, such as construction. Many of the adolescent participants also mention being currently employed and having to work because of the economic crisis, confirming the findings from the desk review, about the increase in child labour that has ensued from the deteriorating economic situation<sup>5</sup>. The issue of harsh working conditions was almost equally mentioned by Syrian participants (7 FGDs) and Lebanese participants (6 FGDs). Nonetheless, according to accounts provided by several Syrian participants, they are reportedly facing discrimination at work, where they are being mistreated and given a much heavier workload than their Lebanese colleagues.

A few exceptions aside, there was an overwhelming agreement among participants about girls and women being disproportionately affected by the problem of sexual harassment and assault. The main reason that was given for this vulnerability to harassment is the fact that girls and women are physically weak and therefore incapable of defending themselves like a boy/man would do. While this was the most popular reason, a select few disagreed and provided alternative explanations. To them, the issue of harassment is caused by the mentality of boys and men in their communities. They also blame society and governmental authorities for perpetuating certain gender norms which they find to be untrue and harmful, such as: 1) Girls/Women are weaker than men; 2) It is shameful to discuss the topic of harassment or rape; 3) Girls/Women are to be blamed if they get harassed or assaulted. The social norms and cultural beliefs continue to act as a root cause to social protection, especially when it comes to gendered norms and roles. It is interesting to highlight how the intersectionality of identities – in this case, gender intersecting with nationality – can sometimes contribute to an existing problem. One participant commented on how Syrian girls are especially vulnerable to Lebanese men due to the power imbalance that exists between them.

**“LEBANESE MEN FEEL SUPERIOR TO SYRIAN GIRLS, SO THEY USE THIS TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.”**  
BEIRUT, SYRIAN BOY, 17-14 YEARS OLD

<sup>5</sup> Protection Monitoring Findings - Lebanon - 2nd Quarter 2021

Other problems stood out as being especially relevant to boys and young men. Participants of either gender comment on how boys and men are more likely to find themselves in situations that may be deemed risky, such as: having to drop out of school to work, working in harsh and dangerous conditions, walking on the streets at night, engaging in conflicts between political groups, participating in protests and strikes, and fighting in wars. In other words, while boys are perceived as being strong enough to defend themselves, they remain exposed to greater protection risks due to the fact that their movement is less restricted than girls, and so is their participation in various activities.

3.2 AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

3.2.1 AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES.

When asked about the most important community-based services they know, participants in 17 FGDs mentioned that they do not know any, while references to local services or international organizations were made in 43 FGDs. Among those references to local and international organizations, many of them lacked any indication of the names of the organizations or the type of services that they provide. This points to a gap in knowledge, among participants, about the availability of community-based services.

The most cited need among participants, especially among boys and young men, was the presence of active security forces that would implement the necessary measures to maintain security and protect citizens. Such testimonies potentially suggest the need to consider introducing both protection and social stability components in the programme, to tackle both the social roots of protection risks and their impact at the individual level. This is particularly valid in some places where participants also highlighted the need for resuming efficient municipal services, such as in Aarsal.

Participants were still able to list several international and local organizations that provide a variety of services. Concerning international agencies, Syrian participants (12/24 FGDs) and Palestinian participants (3/4 FGDs) were more likely

Generally, even participants who claimed that girls and boys are equally exposed to danger tended to differentiate between the types of hazards that concerned each gender. However, this was not applicable to the Syrian participants who gave this answer; to many of them, there is no difference between boys and girls in their exposure to protection problems because the key factor behind said problems is not gender but the fact that they are Syrian refugees. Such observation and contribution from the refugee community adds a layer of vulnerability to the overarching multi-dimensional lens, and calls for more inclusion and mainstreaming among the different communities.

to reference them than Lebanese participants (5/24 FGDs), and the below table includes a list of the ones that were mentioned, along with the services that they reportedly provide.

Name of I-NGO	Service Provided
DRC	Financial Support
UNICEF	Food, medicine, money, books & stationery, child protection
WFP	Food assistance
War Child	Education Activities
NRC	Courses and workshops
AVSI	Remedial courses
UN, UNHCR, UNFPA	Not mentioned
IMC	Supports women exposed to violence

Feedback about the above services was not readily available but there was indication of uncertainty, among some of the participants, about certain aspects of the organizations and their service provision. For instance, one participant who mentioned the DRC stated that he had received financial support from them a while ago, but they no longer operate in his region and he does not know why. Another participant (Akkar, Syrian boy, 14-17 years old) recounted that he too used to get support from the DRC but that he stopped going there after he got beaten by Lebanese citizens. Another example that was cited by several participants is UNICEF: for some of the participants, it was unclear whether UNICEF provides services for Lebanese individuals or only for Syrians, and for others – concerned with child protection services – they were not sure whether it was active in their



region and how to contact it in case they encounter a problem.

These few examples reveal a low level of awareness, among participants, about existing mechanisms, places, and focal points where they may receive assistance if they face any protection issue. This finding corresponds to the results of the previous needs' analysis conducted by Plan International in 2020 and 2021, which demonstrated a similar information gap<sup>6</sup>, further pointing to the need to improve the way information is disseminated, among adolescents and young adults, about existing services and focal points, and the way to access them.

Moving on to the local services, they included youth movements such as Scouts (only mentioned by Lebanese participants) and local NGOs that were mentioned by participants across all nationalities. Regarding the former, participants reported that the Scouts offered awareness sessions to the "younger generation" about life skills. As for Local NGOs, many names came up, which include, amongst others: KAFA, Himaya, Amel, Nabad, Sama, ABAAD, Caritas, Akkar for Development, and LOST organization. Participants listed a variety of services provided by these organizations; services which must commonly fall under two main umbrellas: 1) courses and awareness sessions, and 2) protection for girls/women and case management services. It should be noted however, that participants were usually unable to detail the exact services provided by these organizations and only had vague ideas about the work of these organizations, saying "They help women who are getting abused". This might explain the position of some of the participants that is illustrated in the statement made by a Lebanese young woman, "We have heard of all these NGOs, but we do not think they are effective, no one uses the services they provide, we do not know why" (Tripoli, Lebanese female, 18-24 years old).

However, others disagreed with this position, affirming instead that some NGOs do important work for the protection of girls and women. One participant even recounted how her own aunt was getting beaten by her husband and the organization KAFA has been standing by her side and fighting "until the end" for her rights.

On this note, participants and especially adolescent girls and young women proposed a variety of services that could be provided by NGOs to better answer their needs:

- Campaigning and awareness raising sessions: The topics of interest included child, early and forced marriage, women's rights, anti-bullying, and substance abuse and dependence.
- Delivery of PSS sessions and life skills courses.
- Rehabilitation from substance abuse and dependence.
- Protection for children and women: Providing support for women and children who are exposed to protection hazards (e.g., harassment). Concerning child protection, participants commented on the particular need to target schools.

However, results from the FGDs indicated that behaviours were also deeply rooted into collective social norms. Increased knowledge at the individual level would have limited impact on observed practices. A comprehensive behavioural change approach would be a way to increase the impact, in line with SBCC currently developed under the national UNICEF Qudwa strategy. Such programming could consider the described impact of the economic crisis on behaviours and consider program design that would integrate and mainstream SBCC into Livelihoods and Education programs for Lebanese.

The general issues of awareness around services were also mentioned in many KIs of service providers themselves. Difficulties revolved around outreach and the possibility to deliver protection services outside of the existing centres. As a result, refugees who do not live in the near vicinity cannot access services. As for Lebanese, they usually are more reluctant to access these places that are perceived to be dedicated to refugees. Due to the aforementioned, proposing integrated services becomes an. School directors indicated that they had limited interactions with protection services that were not offered in their institutions. In that regard, they acknowledge the need to propose more integrated services in the future. These challenges have become even more acute with the crisis, with many local NGOs acknowledging they had less budget to answer a higher demand for services since 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Plan International Lebanon 2020. COVID19- Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment

<sup>6</sup> Plan International Lebanon 2021. Adolescent Girls and Boys Needs in West Bekaa and Mount Lebanon

Finally, given the limited degree of awareness of the youth, integrating protection services in education services should be particularly considered into program design. However, implementers also insisted in KILs on the particular challenge of reaching out-of-school adolescents who are more and more numerous across the country. This could include mobile services for better outreach but also the development of gyms and venues to provide entertainment to young boys and girls.

### 3.2.2 DIFFERENCES BASED ON LOCATION.

Findings suggest that knowledge about existing international organizations was lowest in Aarsal, Mount Lebanon, and Beirut, and about local organizations in Akkar and Beirut. It is not clear whether there is an actual shortage in community-based services in these locations or simply a lack of awareness among the participants about their existence. Regarding Beirut, and specifically Hay Al Sellom (Dahye), where some of the focus group discussions were held, participants confirmed that such organizations are not present in this area.

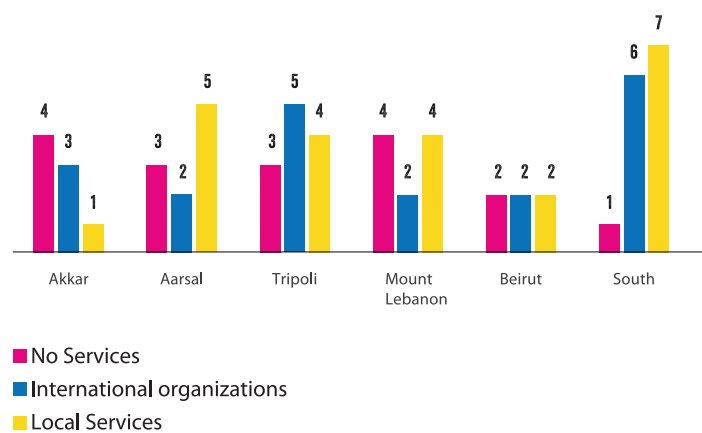


Figure 21: Knowledge about existing services according to locations (as per number of FGDs)

**“ REGARDING SCHOOL, THERE IS NO MONITORING AT ALL OF TEACHERS AND THE WAY THEY TREAT STUDENTS. THERE ARE NGOS FOR PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR ANYWHERE EXCEPT AT SCHOOL. SO, THERE SHOULD BE AN NGO THAT FOCUSES ITS PROTECTION EFFORTS PARTICULARLY ON SCHOOL SETTINGS.”**

**SOUTH, SYRIAN GIRL, 14-17 YEARS OLD**



## 3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

Among girls and young women, the most common reported protection issues are:

Early and forced child marriage and Gender-based violence (GBV).

Among boys and young men, the most reported protection issues are related to harsh working conditions, substance use along with risks of engaging in political conflict.

Social norms tend to legitimize SGBV targeting girls and young women.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Raise awareness among children, adolescents, and adults/caregivers on the risks and implications of early and forced marriage and GBV.
- Build capacities of local CSOs, community committees on service mapping, awareness raising, outreach, safe identification and referral, and case management, in order to respond to these rising issues at community level.
- Intensify advocacy efforts with policymakers, committee of justice, and parliamentary committees for justice, women and children to ensure policy change, including raising the minimum age of marriage to 18.
- Advocate with religious leaders to ensure their buy-in for this policy change and their support.

- Conduct awareness raising and strengthen community committees to raise awareness on decent working conditions and children's rights.
- Raise awareness among employers and micro, small and medium enterprises on decent working conditions for working children and adolescents.
- Advocate for further law enforcement with the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour.
- Provide awareness raising on the issue of substance use and its consequences and ensure referrals and access to specialized service providers.
- Conduct a conflict analysis and mainstream conflict sensitivity approaches throughout programmes accordingly.

- Raise awareness on gender equality, CP and SGBV risks and harmful social norms to all community members including girls, boys, caregivers and the wider community and key stakeholders through advocacy, awareness raising campaigns, and community-based mechanisms.
- Design and implement gender transformative projects aiming to address harmful social norms and targeting the rightsholders, parents/caregivers and the community at large.
- Organize inter-generational dialogues between adolescent girls, boys, youth and their parents/caregivers, which focus on gender equality and social norms.
- Organize high-level community dialogues tackling the issues of gender inequality and harmful social norms.

#### KEY FINDINGS

There are low levels of awareness and access to protection community-based services, INGOs and local NGOs, especially among Lebanese in comparison to refugees.

There are low levels of awareness and access to protection community-based services, INGOs and local NGOs, especially among Lebanese in comparison to refugees. Discrimination as a major protection issue was raised among both communities, especially refugee communities across the country and Lebanese in Aarsal, translating into different forms of abuse and harassment.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure the dissemination of information on existing local actors and their services during awareness raising sessions or other activities, especially among Lebanese beneficiaries, to enhance the knowledge of the community with their needed services' providers, while sharing a list of existing hotlines within the area.
- Support community-based protection mechanisms in the targeted communities by enhancing outreach and communication strategies among community-based groups and committees to raise awareness on the different protection services.
- Build the capacities of local organizations for establishing and implementing community-based protection mechanisms/committees in terms of approaches, modalities, needed resources and community mobilization.
- Strengthen existing coordination mechanisms between agencies and with municipal and governmental bodies to ensure the continuous support to local communities in terms of disseminating the updated service mapping and referrals between entities beyond projects implementation.

- Further mainstream diversity and inclusion into programming through creating community dialogues around diversity, inclusion and social cohesion.
- Ensure equal participation and representation of the different communities in programming through inclusive activities addressing the issues that are being faced.
- Mainstream conflict-sensitive and social peacebuilding approaches and do-no-harm in programming.
- Include peacebuilding activities through community-based interventions that target refugee and host communities and engage with them on joint context analysis and initiatives that aim at mitigating tensions.

## 4. EDUCATION

The focus group discussions aimed to examine participants' educational attainments, the challenges they faced, and their proposed solutions and recommendations. The majority of participants (289 participants in the FGDs, 62% of the sample) were pursuing some type of education, primarily formal education, followed by those who were attending vocational trainings and apprenticeship, or literacy courses. Around 175 respondents do not attend any form of education (38% of the sample). Finally, only a minority were following Basic Literacy and Number classes (BLN). The diverse education situations that participants were in, led to strong variations depending on nationality, gender, and age that are considered in the answers provided throughout the focus group discussions across different regions in Lebanon. It is important to note that the findings were driven by respondents who were participating more often than others, and who were part of the school system as they could relate more to their daily life throughout this sector. It is important to acknowledge that answers are driven by the curriculum that participants followed and is not to be generalised across the communities.



### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Syrian participants were less integrated in the school system even after completing non-formal education, mainly due to displacement from their home country, their inability to secure the necessary papers for enrolment, and the suspension of the afternoon classes over the last months.
- The main barrier to education for the majority of participants was the financial situation of households resulting from the crises. Other barriers such as child marriage, lack of security and parents' gender discriminative social norms were more specific to female participants.
- In terms of education, participants' main needs and recommendations revolved around the provision of educational materials and coverage of transportation fees. Moreover, adolescent girls and young women believed in awareness and communication with caregivers as a tool to mitigate gender specific obstacles they faced in their households.
- Adolescents reported that the main decision-makers in the household are the parents, while young men claimed to make the decisions regarding education themselves, sometimes with the advice of their parents.



## 4.1 EDUCATIONAL STATUS

Since the beginning of 2020, at least 1.2 million children, from all nationalities, all over Lebanon, have had their education disrupted<sup>7</sup>, and this seems to be an on-going phenomenon, which is represented by the data collected during focus group discussions.

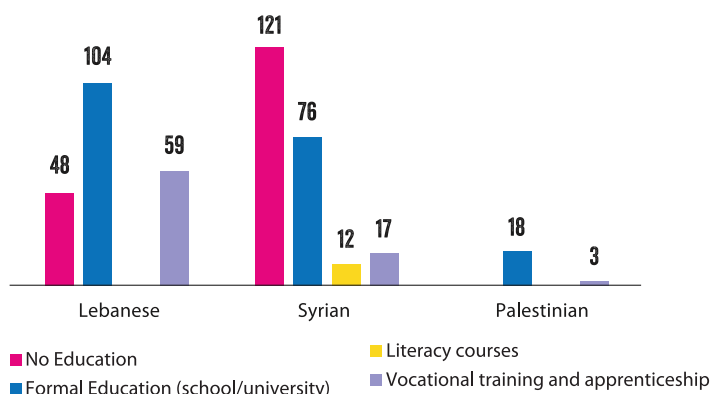


Figure 23: Educational attainment according to nationalities (as per number of participants)

It was apparent that Syrians were less integrated in the educational system. While Lebanese participants were more likely to be enrolled in schools and universities, Syrian participants were following literacy courses and vocational trainings alongside formal education; but for the majority of participants, they were completely out of the school system. Findings did indeed back up the statement that “more than half of school-age refugee children are out of school”<sup>8</sup>. The primary reason behind them not attending school or any other educational program was displacement. The majority of Syrian respondents regardless of their age complained about not being able to continue their studies in Lebanon after having fled their home country due to war. A lot of participants migrated to Lebanon at a relatively old age and enrolling in school made them feel uncomfortable because they would be older than most of their classmates. They also reported that the Lebanese school curriculums were difficult and that they did not have the required papers and documents that verified the school level they were in, which does not allow them to pursue their education as they would have back home. Respondents highlighted several recent obstacles related to their refugee status. Adolescent and young adults during FGDs

mentioned that the cancellation of afternoon classes constitutes a major obstacle, which for most Syrian respondents is related to their situation as displaced persons. As for key informants, they mentioned that Basic Literacy and Numbering programs are not contributing to the reintegration of illiterate children into the formal school system. Indeed, children completing the BLN programme have not been able to enrol in public schools since 2020 due to the absence of an Accelerated Learning Program to integrate schools.

**“ MY SCHOOL IN SYRIA WAS DESTROYED, AND THE PAPERS PROVING THAT I WAS LEARNING VANISHED UNDER THE RUBBLE, SO I COULD NOT SECURE THE NECESSARY PAPERS TO ENROL IN A SCHOOL HERE IN LEBANON. ”**

**MOUNT LEBANON, SYRIAN ADOLESCENT MALE, 17-14 YEARS OLD**

<sup>7</sup> Save the Children. (2021, March). Lebanon Education in Crisis: Raising the Alarm.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 13). World Report 2021: Lebanon

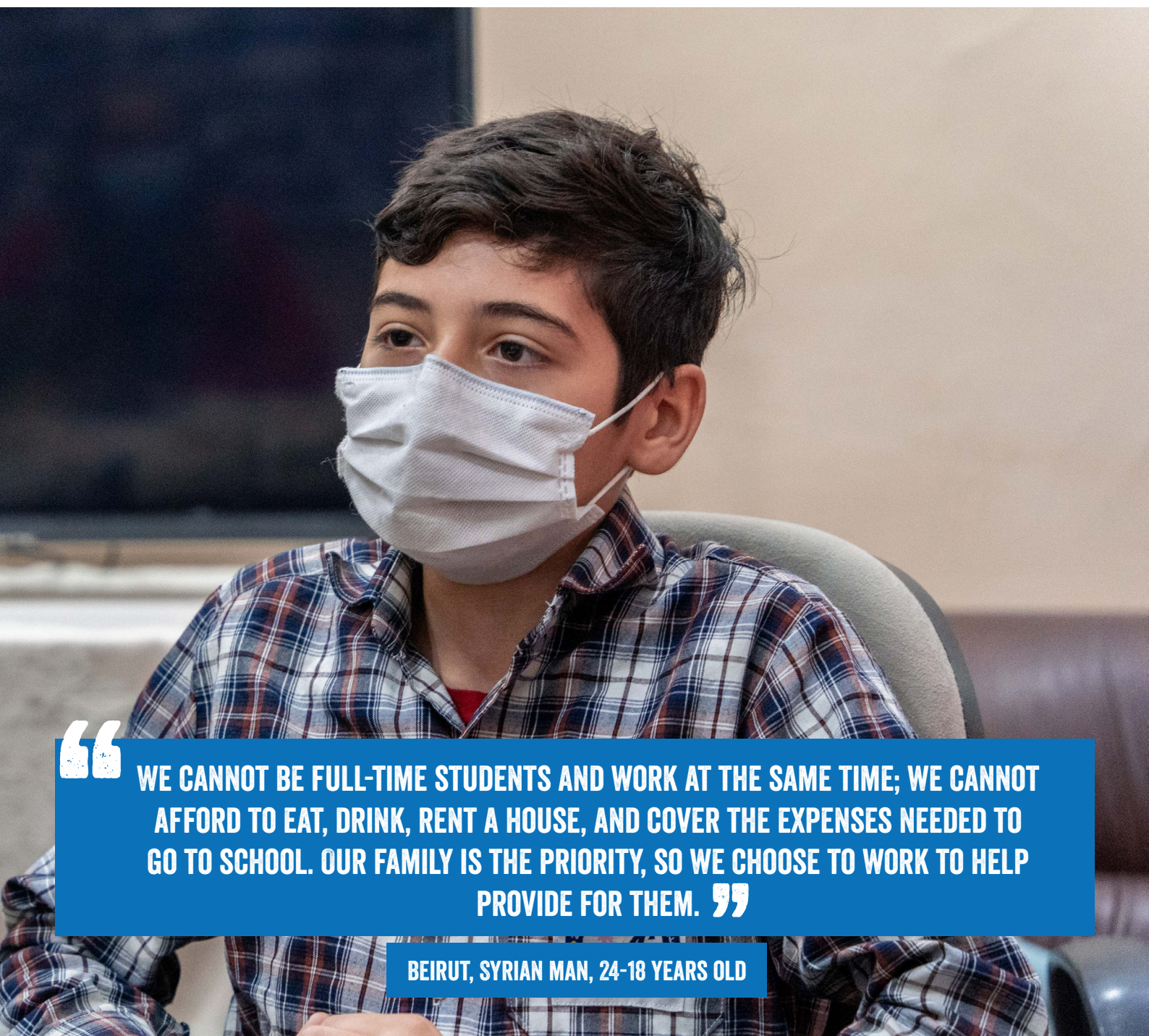


### 4.1.1 ATTENDANCE TO FORMAL EDUCATION.

Adolescent girls and boys were more likely enrolled in formal education, literacy courses, and vocational trainings and apprenticeship while young adults were most often out of the school system.

This major variation could have been observed as a general trend among the population with young adults joining the labour market in their early twenties. However, respondents reported that it was commonly due to the degrading economic situation and the financial crisis rather than a decision they would have made in the absence of the crisis.

The majority of participants who were out of the educational system had to drop out often before the age of 18 because they were neither able to pay their tuition fees, nor were they able to cover transportation costs alongside education material such as stationery, books or school uniforms. Being at the appropriate age for work, 18-to-24-year-olds tend to drop out of school and search for jobs in order to help with household expenses.



“

**WE CANNOT BE FULL-TIME STUDENTS AND WORK AT THE SAME TIME; WE CANNOT AFFORD TO EAT, DRINK, RENT A HOUSE, AND COVER THE EXPENSES NEEDED TO GO TO SCHOOL. OUR FAMILY IS THE PRIORITY, SO WE CHOOSE TO WORK TO HELP PROVIDE FOR THEM. ”**

**BEIRUT, SYRIAN MAN, 24-18 YEARS OLD**



## 4.2 BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

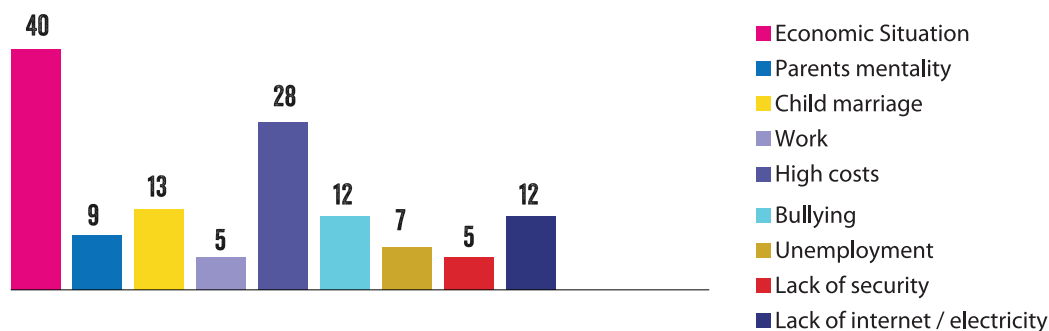


Figure 25: Barriers to education mentioned by participants (as per number of FGDs)

### 4.2.1 KEY BARRIERS ARE RELATED TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND DEGRADING ECONOMIC SITUATION.

Respondents were asked what they believed were the most prevalent challenges standing between the youth and accessing education in Lebanon. The degradation of the economic situation, resulting in very high costs, was a barrier that was mentioned in almost all sessions, regardless of location, age, gender, or nationality<sup>9</sup>. Respondents were complaining about not being able to commute because transportation was very expensive and most of the times, the educational establishment was far from where they lived. This was the primary reason for them dropping out of school and not continuing their education. In fact, a school adapted to their level and age was not often available in a close vicinity of their house. They also claimed that the school would not provide any materials such as books or stationery which they could not afford to buy themselves either. Without receiving external financial support, neither for transportation nor for basic education materials, it was nearly impossible for them to continue studying in Lebanon. Indeed, caregivers interviewed in previous studies reported that the primary reason for withdrawing their children from school was their inability to pay tuition fees, regardless of their belief that education is essential for their children's future.<sup>10</sup> Results were confirmed during all KIs with implementing partners working in the education sector who reported particularly low enrolment rates since September 2021 compared to previous years. They all indicated similar factors related to the cost of transportation and furniture, followed by tuition fees in the case of private schools.

**“ DURING WINTER, I CANNOT WALK SO I HAVE TO TAKE A TAXI, BUT I CANNOT TAKE ANY BECAUSE THE CHEAPEST TAXI IS ASKING FOR 1,000,000 LL., I LIVE ONE HOUR AWAY. ”**

**SOUTH, LEBANESE YOUNG WOMAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD**

**“ TRANSPORTATION FEES ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS. ALL NATIONALITIES ARE NOW FACING THIS PROBLEM. MOST OF THESE BOYS-STUDENTS GO TO WORK. AS FOR GIRLS, THEY STAY AT HOME UNTIL THEY GET MARRIED. THIS IS THE CASE OF BOTH LEBANESE AND SYRIAN STUDENTS, AS THEY COME FROM CONSERVATIVE AREAS; AKKAR, MINIEH. DENNIYE OR TRIPOLI ”**

**DIRECTOR OF THE NARDER INSTITUTE FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING, NORTH.**

<sup>9</sup> Note on figure 27 : high costs are also mentioned during 50% of Palestinian interviews. The low number of occurrences (2) is only due to the small number of FGDs with Palestinians.

<sup>10</sup> World Vision. (2021). Caregiver Perceptions and their Influence on Child Education and Labour across Different Areas in Lebanon.



Also associated with the worsening economic situation, participants reported that the youth are dropping out of school in order to work to increase household income and help pay for its expenses. A lot of parents are left unemployed as a result of the financial crisis, so the youth considered it their responsibility to help provide for their family. A substantial number of caregivers also previously reported the need to engage their children in income-earning activities<sup>9</sup>. Even though participants are leaving education in order to work,

a big part of participants who are still studying work at the same time in order to keep up with household and education expenses. Predominantly, men were the ones managing their time between work and education simultaneously, which had taken a toll on their ability to properly study and on their overall academic performance. This was confirmed by Key Informants in some areas such as the North of the country where implementers observed high levels of dropouts among adolescent boys.

**“ MY BROTHER HAD TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL IN ORDER TO WORK IN A STONE QUARRY BECAUSE WE NEEDED THE MONEY, AND IF WE NEED MORE, I WILL LEAVE SCHOOL AND HELP MY FAMILY WITH THE EXPENSES. ”**

ARSAL, LEBANESE WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD

**“ WE NOTICED A LOT OF DROPOUTS FROM BOYS TO HELP IN THE ECONOMIC SITUATION. IN OUR AREA, GIRLS CANNOT WORK SO THEY STAY AT SCHOOL. ”**

SOCIAL WORKER, RMF, TRIPOLI

Apart from the economic situation, bullying was cited as another issue which the youth suffer from, and a good enough reason for students to drop out of school (This was mentioned in 12 FGDs out of 52, or 23%). Some participants mentioned that students get bullied by their teachers who abuse them physically and verbally. Some call them names and some physically assault them. Others claimed that

they would get bullied by their friends. Overall, students did not feel comfortable going to a place where they were bullied and not respected, so they would rather drop out of education. This was mentioned as a recurring issue that came back in the group conversation when protection concerns were assessed. It was also confirmed during KIIs

**“ AT SCHOOL, THERE ARE TEACHERS WHO BULLY US AND TREAT US VERY BADLY WHICH PROMPTED MANY STUDENTS FROM OUR CLASS TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL ”**

PALESTINIAN YOUNG WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD

<sup>9</sup> World Vision. (2021). Caregiver Perceptions and their Influence on Child Education and Labour across Different Areas in Lebanon.

**“ MY COUSIN USED TO GET BULLIED BY HIS CLASSMATES BECAUSE HE STUTTERS. HE DID NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE ATTENDING SCHOOL ANYMORE, SO HE DROPPED OUT. ”**

AKKAR, LEBANESE MAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**“ THE WAY THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IS DEALING WITH THE STUDENTS CONTRIBUTES TO DROPOUTS. THEY LEAVE SCHOOL BECAUSE OF THIS DISRESPECTFUL AND INSENSITIVE TREATMENT. ”**

SOCIAL WORKER, RMF, TRIPOLI

These main barriers identified during FGDs suggest key opportunities for programming to consider the impact of the crisis on respondents' education:

- They include properly tackling the financial needs related to education including school supplies and transportation which seems to be a rising problem for Lebanese profiles that were not necessarily tackled by the response (especially under the LCRP) so far. This could encompass specific direct services including transportation, or mobile education units for the most remote areas in order to ensure the integration of students into the school system. Programs including income-generating activities while working for a

degree such as apprenticeship would also provide strong incentives to continue studying.

- Respondents also highlight persisting and widespread problems related to bullying in their school environment, which suggests the importance of developing or strengthening integrated programming, tackling not only education and financial means but also protection and PSS support. As of now, fully integrating different sectors in a single project remain a challenge for implementing partners, especially when it comes to referrals to protection and PSS services that are delivered by different organisations than the one in charge of education programs. Existing programs of Plan International are all considering this specific dimension.
- Students themselves could play a role in addressing bullying. The importance of tutoring was mentioned during several FGDs. These could be provided by older students with considerations not only for technical knowledge but protection and PSS support. Timing for support should include morning timeslots for Syrians.
- KIs with staff from local NGOs also allowed to identify specific gaps in service delivery. One staff in the North mentioned that there were no schools available to train children with mental disabilities in the region. This was confirmed by several interviewees, all claiming that they did not have the internal capacities to provide tailored education. Other participants also mentioned the complete lack of classes contributing to children's wellbeing such as sports, music, and arts.

Other barriers mentioned by participants during the focus group discussions were more specific to stronger gender- and nationality-based discrepancies.

### 4.2.2 BARRIERS STRONGLY VARY DEPENDING ON PROFILES.

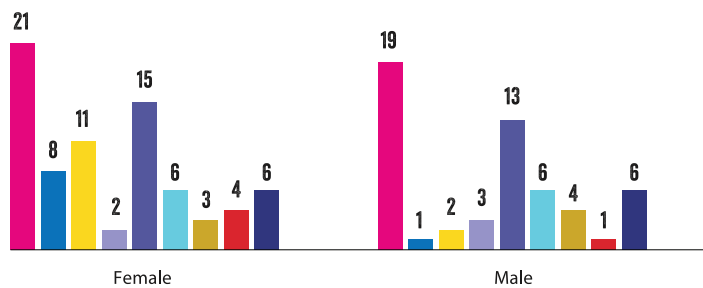


Figure 26: Barriers to education mentioned by participants, according to gender (as per number of FGDs)

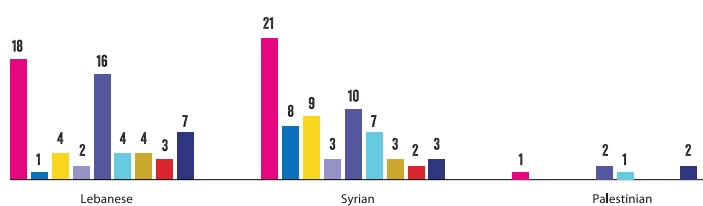


Figure 27: Barriers to education mentioned by participants, according to nationality (as per number of FGDs)



### 4.2.3 PARENTS' MENTALITY AND CHILD MARRIAGE AS OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN FEMALE RESPONDENTS.

The barriers that were mentioned by most Syrian women were parents' mentality and child marriage. Female respondents, especially Syrian, reported that parents – particularly the fathers who were the decision-makers in the household – believed that a girl will eventually end up at her husband's house, so it would be enough for her to know how to read and write. At this point, it would be appropriate for the girl to leave school and start preparing for her marital journey. During discussions, it seemed obvious that the norm in most communities was for a woman to get married at a young age and move into her husband's house to take care of the household and the children, while he provides the financial means. Although there have been some improvements in changing the conventional norm, many participants claimed that child marriage is still an occurrence they see, hear about, and sometimes

even experience, because this is what the parents want, regardless of the girl's opinion. In this regard, family pressure from the men household members, whether they are fathers, brothers, or uncles, were highlighted as the key factor pushing Syrian girls and women out of the school system. Sometimes, it was also the participants' perception that the economic crisis played a role in increasing child marriage instances. They stated that handling expenses would be less of a burden if girls got married and moved out of their parents' house, to their husband's. This was particularly valid in Arsal, Akkar, and Tripoli where child marriage was mentioned in most FGDs. In parallel, there were fewer issues mentioned in Mount Lebanon and Beirut. In the absence of marriage, key informants also insisted on the fact that adolescent girls would still leave school and stay home when they reach puberty. Interviewees indicated that many households would resort to such options in an attempt to maintain control on adolescent girls' sexuality.

**“ IT IS OUR PARENTS' MENTALITY THAT A GIRL DOES NOT NEED TO KNOW MORE THAN READING AND WRITING IN ORDER TO BE A GOOD HOUSEWIFE. MY FATHER WAS CONVINCED THAT I SHOULD DROP OUT OF SCHOOL BECAUSE SOON, I WOULD END UP IN THE KITCHEN AT MY HUSBAND'S HOUSE. ”**

TRIPOLI, SYRIAN WOMAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

## 4.2.4 PARENTS MENTALITY AND LACK OF SECURITY AS GENDER-SPECIFIC AND NATIONALITY-SPECIFIC BARRIERS.

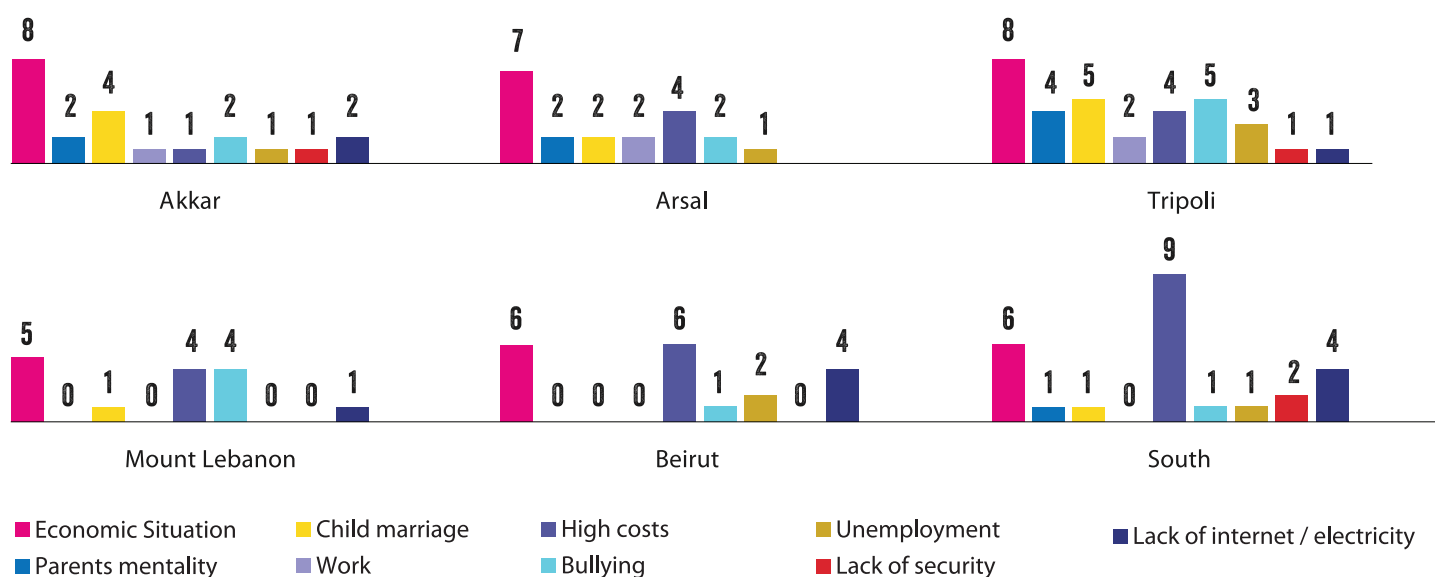


Figure 28: Barriers to education mentioned by participants, according to location (as per number of FGDs)

Lack of security was an issue that all participants, regardless of their profiles, were facing. However, only Syrian female respondents, specifically across peripheral areas such as Akkar, Tripoli, Aarsal, and the South reportedly halted their education due to security and safety threats in their communities. According to female respondents, their male counterparts can continue education normally because they are able to defend themselves, whereas they are said to suffer from sexual harassment and kidnapping (in and outside camps), something they are unable to defend themselves from. This was a recurring trend that is further developed in the protection section. Despite not being satisfied with their parents' decisions, most of the times, participants acknowledged that their parents are only afraid for their safety and they do not want anything to happen to them. However, they still believe it is unfair that they are being denied education due to the lack of security and due to their parents' mentality, as if they were the ones being punished for the aggressions happening in their society.

## 4.2.5 LACK OF INTERNET AND ELECTRICITY AS A BARRIER TO EDUCATION.

Participants were following different learning modalities which varied between fully remote classes, face-to-face classes, or a mixed approach of both remote and face-to-face. Regardless of the method that was used, participants, especially Lebanese, complained about the lack of electricity and internet. When attending classes physically, participants reported that there was no electricity to activate heating sources, leading to extremely cold and unbearable conditions, especially during winter. In addition, participants said that during winter it would get dark early. When involved in afternoon classes (in various contexts), they would have to put on their phone flashlights in order to continue studying at school, because there would not be any light due to the electricity cuts. This seemed to be a common finding overall, but support to Syrian respondents was more often mentioned, eventually suggesting that service delivery under the LCRP to ease remote modalities for Syrian had some impact on refugee respondents.

**“ IT IS OUR PARENTS' MENTALITY THAT A GIRL DOES NOT NEED TO KNOW MORE THAN READING AND WRITING IN ORDER TO BE A GOOD HOUSEWIFE. MY FATHER WAS CONVINCED THAT I SHOULD DROP OUT OF SCHOOL BECAUSE SOON, I WOULD END UP IN THE KITCHEN AT MY HUSBAND'S HOUSE. ”**

**SOUTH, SYRIAN WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD**



**“ONE TIME AT SCHOOL, AT AROUND 4PM, THE ELECTRICITY WAS CUT OFF AND IT WAS ALREADY DARK. WE STILL HAD AROUND ONE HOUR OF CLASS LEFT, SO THE TEACHER INSISTED THAT WE PUT ON THE FLASHLIGHTS FROM OUR PHONES IN ORDER TO CONTINUE STUDYING.”**

TRIPOLI, LEBANESE WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD

Apart from being an obstacle for face-to-face classes, power cuts were indeed an obstacle during remote learning. Along with lack of electricity, poor internet connection was the primary reason almost all participants preferred face-to-face classes, regardless of their profiles. This is aligned with the current direction of public schools to give face-to-face classes.

#### 4.2.6 PREFERRED LEARNING METHODS.

Participants mentioned that being physically present made understanding the lessons much easier regardless of the type of education they are following (formal and non-formal). Asking teachers questions, knowing that they would get their answers on the spot without having to go back and forth over the phone, made them at ease. They also enjoyed their friends' company and the interaction between them. Another reason they preferred face-to-face learning was because, most of the times, they had only one device at their disposal while they were more than one person following classes at home. Even though most participants would rather attend classes in person, they reported that transportation was too expensive to attend daily. This becomes an arbitration between cost and quality of education where students would either have to forgo a better-quality education for lower costs or would have to receive a relatively

better-quality education for higher costs. In this respect, a mixed approach of both remote and face-to-face learning seems to be the best solution to mitigate all concerns, as many institutions are already doing, provided that the electricity and internet issues are somewhat resolved.



### 4.3 NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS ACCORDING TO ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

After exploring the barriers to education, respondents were asked about their needs in terms of education and what they see as potential solutions to the aforementioned obstacles. Indeed, answers differed depending on the reality of their experiences. Direct coverage of fees and costs related to education remained the priority according to respondents. This includes helping pay tuition fees, providing education materials such as stationery, books and internet bundles (for those studying remotely), and most importantly, coverage of transportation costs. Generally, their needs were to improve their overall living conditions in order to afford education.

Key informants also indicated that the nature of classes needed had changed. Indeed, with Covid-19, the dropout rate of formal education was unprecedented. As a result, needs for BLN and A-BLN classes have drastically increased over the last months.

**“WE NEED HELP WITH COVERING TRANSPORTATION COSTS, ALONG WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP COVER TUITION FEES.”**

SOUTH, PALESTINIAN WOMAN, 24-18 YEARS OLD

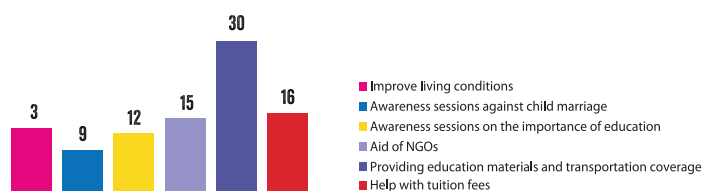


Figure 30: Needs and recommendations to overcome obstacles as stated by (participants (as per number of FGDs)

Other needs and recommendations were more specific to gender and nationalities. They differed based on the reality of participants' experiences.

### 4.3.1 AWARENESS RAISING SESSIONS AS KEY SOLUTION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

**Syrian adolescent girls and young women, predominantly residing in Akkar and Tripoli, believe that conducting awareness sessions against child marriage is a potential solution to the obstacles they face.**

Throughout the focus group discussions, it became obvious that in the respective communities, child marriage was still occurring for the prevailing reasons of gender norms, conservative parent mentalities, and the enduring economic crisis. According to Syrian women and mostly in the North, the most influential way to put an end to child marriage, or at least lessen its extent, is through awareness sessions. The point of the awareness sessions would be to highlight the potential risks and disadvantages that arise when a girl gets married at a young age, essentially before 18. These awareness sessions would be given to parents who have negative attitudes towards girls' education. Participants also declared that they, themselves are able to raise awareness on the harm of child marriage as they play an important role in pressuring their parents. In their perspective, if parents hear stories of their friends who got married early while they were still not ready, then maybe they would change their minds about child marriage. Respondents also mentioned the importance of policy-level interventions, saying that setting laws preventing child marriage and effectively enforcing them at the community level would be beneficial in helping the cause.

**“ MY PARENTS FORCED ME TO GET MARRIED AT 13. NOW, THEY ARE COMPLETELY AGAINST DOING THAT TO MY SISTER AFTER THEY SAW HOW MUCH I SUFFERED PERSONALLY AND IN SOCIETY. OF COURSE, ALL PARENTS SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF THE DISADVANTAGES OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE ADVANTAGES OF EDUCATION. ”**

**AKKAR, SYRIAN WOMAN, 17-14 YEARS OLD**

**Females, regardless of their age and nationality, believed that raising awareness on the importance of education to both parents and the youth would decrease dropouts from the education system.**

Female respondents showed tendency towards using the power of conversation and raising awareness, while men are more likely to find hands-on solutions. Female respondents in general seem confident that raising awareness on the importance of education to their communities, especially parents who prevent their children from attending school, would potentially decrease dropout rates.

Both men and women hear stories about people who are not able to make use of their education regardless of their attainments. Consequently, these experiences discourage a lot of youth, mostly men, from pursuing their education knowing that it might not improve their career path. Men more often than women, are discouraged by stories they hear and see around them. They refer to negative examples of young adults, mostly men, who have earned one or several degrees but who ended up finding jobs that do not require education to that extent. In parallel, female respondents tend to refer to more positive examples in their community showing the advantages of education to ensure successful careers.

### 4.3.2 FAITH IN LEBANESE EDUCATION ACCORDING TO GENDER.

As a result, even if both genders believe that education is important, more often than men, women are motivated to continue their education, whereas men are more likely to perceive education as useless and seek refuge in leaving the country

or other ways that do not include school system learning. Key informants confirmed this tendency, adding that it was more and more difficult to convince students, given their own parents did not believe in the value of education either.

**"WHEN I FINISHED 9TH GRADE AND WAS GOING TO START 10TH GRADE, I FELT LIKE THERE WAS NO FUTURE IN THIS COUNTRY. I BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS I CAN MAKE A LIVING FOR MYSELF THROUGH TECHNOLOGY."**

**SOUTH, PALESTINIAN MALE, 18-24 YEARS OLD**

**"MY UNCLE HAS A DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE AND MATHEMATICS, HE WORKS IN AUTO REPAIR. MY OTHER UNCLE HAS A DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMICS; HE WORKS IN A VEGETABLE STORE. "**

**SOUTH, LEBANESE MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**" I AM ON A PATH TO A VERY BRIGHT FUTURE; I PLAN TO START UNIVERSITY IN TWO YEARS. EDUCATION IS THE FUTURE FOR EVERYONE AND THE ONLY GATEWAY TO A CAREER INSTEAD OF JUST A JOB."**

**AKKAR, SYRIAN FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**"DO THEY BELIEVE IN EDUCATION OR NOT? SOME COMMUNITIES DO NOT THINK EDUCATION IS ACTUALLY IMPORTANT."**

**SOUTH, FEMALE KEY INFORMANT, LOCAL NGO STAFF.**

It was mostly female participants who claimed that education is the only way to be successful and have a bright future, as it opens up so many opportunities including pursuing a career. They also stated that after a person completes his or her education and works in a field related to their major in school, then they will never have to worry about being financially dependent on anyone, leading to complete freedom and independence. A subtle but re-occurring theme between female participants is independence, which seems to act as a motivator, especially because they depend on men since their childhood; first their father, then their husband. These results are in line with the findings that education is favoured by women more than men and that boys drop out of school more often than girls. Women also seek higher education qualifications in order to improve the likelihood of finding jobs in the future.





### 4.3.3 REFUGEES' RELIANCE ON ORGANIZATIONS TO SECURE EDUCATION AND OBTAIN A DEGREE.

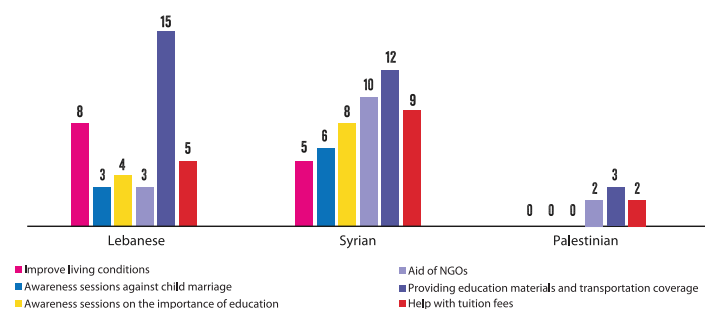


Figure 33: Needs and recommendations to overcome obstacles according to nationality (as per number of FGDs)

When asked about the participants' needs, Syrians and Palestinians mostly requested aid from NGOs in improving their living situations and helping with their educational path in general. They believe that completing their education and obtaining a certificate remains one of the greatest challenges which they are yet to overcome. In order to do so, they requested that NGOs provide free classes for those who are unable to attend school. Providing financial assistance to help those who are on the verge of dropping out because they cannot afford the costs of education seems to be the primary need amongst Syrian and Palestinians respondents. Certification and legal issues remain a problem for refugees and should not be disregarded in order to ensure results among the Syrian and Palestinian population.

## 4.4 DECISION-MAKING IN HOUSEHOLDS

As for decision-making regarding education, the majority reported that either the parents or male figures were the main decisionmakers, specifically fathers (thus explaining the previous importance given to parents' awareness raising sessions by female participants). Respondents mentioned at times that mothers can have an influence on the decision that is primarily taken by the father. It was commonly agreed upon in most focus group discussions that the final decision is mostly taken by the father, or any other male figure in case the father is not present.

It is clear that while adolescents' decisions regarding education are taken by their parents or fathers, young adults -especially men- claim to be the final decision makers themselves. They reported that the decision to continue or cease education is totally up to them.

This freedom of choice arises mainly from the fact that most 18-24-year-old men are either working or are able to work; so, they are able to secure the necessary funds for continuing their education if they wanted to do so.

However, this does not apply to girls and young women whose educational paths rely on the breadwinner's ability to pay for their education. Hence if the father is financially capable of sending his children to school, then he will, but if he is not, then the decision of allowing his kids to drop out is his to take. Young men do not have this problem because they are able to depend on themselves and make their own decisions if they are willing

### 4.4.2 PRIORITY GIVEN TO ADOLESCENT BOYS AND YOUNG MEN.

A relatively large number of participants claimed that men are prioritised when a decision regarding education has to be made. As previously discussed, social norms expect females to get married at an early age where girls are still supposed to be continuing their education. With the idea that the woman is going to end up as a housewife in mind, education immediately becomes useless and irrelevant. In this respect, it becomes more important for men to pursue their education in order to secure a job in the future and provide for their families.

These results indicate that caregivers play a substantial role in decision-making related to education, specifically when it comes to adolescent girls and young women. Specific Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) programming could be considered beyond awareness raising sessions in order to support change in household arbitrations.

This could be integrated into the existing strategy defined under the LCRP such as Qudwa, updated with new challenges observed by the crisis<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Sado L. & Daher M. (2021). The Life of Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF (June 2020), The Ministry of Social Affairs launched in partnership with UNICEF its 2027-2020 Strategic Plan for the Protection of Women and Children



## 4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

The main barrier to education according to the majority of participants remains the financial situation of households, resulting from the crises.

Protection risks, especially bullying, were shown as barriers to continuing education.

Logistical barriers to education, especially to online learning, such as limited internet services and electricity cuts.

Specific barriers for girls to pursue an education are mainly around gender roles; exclusion from decision making and the possibility of child marriage.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide education support to both Lebanese and Syrian children through (1) cash for education covering transportation, school supplies/education kits and food costs and (2) covering fees for semi-private and private schools.
- Join advocacy efforts with other education actors to highlight the dire situation of the education sector in Lebanon, its implications and the need to solicit funding from the international community.

- Design and implement integrated education and protection programming aiming at addressing the different needs and risks by providing PSS support sessions, awareness and case management.
- Establishing and/or reinforcing the existing feedback and complaint mechanisms in formal and non-formal education to enhance reporting and accountability.
- Provide teachers and education personnel with trainings on protection, inclusion and safe identification and referrals to ensure an inclusive protective learning environment.
- Provide awareness at community level, including community leaders, and parents to address exclusion and bullying, and provide ways to protect and empower children.
- Lead national-level child-friendly campaigns on bullying and its negative effects on children.

- Deliver data bundles and smart devices in the case of remote learning, to ensure a proper outreach for students.
- Enhance parents' awareness and skills on Information, and Communication, Technology (ICT) to support their children in remote learning.
- Establish digital child-friendly spaces to provide online education services and other set of recreational and protection activities to increase access.

- Mainstream gender equality and inclusion across all programs: provide an awareness session on Gender Equality and Inclusion to adolescents, youth, parents/caregivers, and community service providers including educators and religious leaders.
- Apply specific Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC) approaches to influence change at household level in terms of attitudes and practices towards girls' education and gender equality.

# 5. YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT & LIVELIHOOD

The present crisis and the deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon over the past three years have led to the depletion of livelihoods for the population in general and the most vulnerable segments of the population in particular. This includes Syrian and Palestinian refugees, but also a large segment of the Lebanese population that was ordinarily not considered as part of the LCRP response (or to a limited extent).

The following section of the report focuses on the impact of the recent events on the financial independence of the participants and their working conditions. It also explores skills they have acquired as well as other tools and barriers they consider important to them in order to access the labour market.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- There is a fundamental gender gap when it comes to employment status, mainly explained by conservative social norms and GBV risks in the public and workspaces.
- Employment, that is most common among male respondents, is not a guarantee for financial independence.
- Participants highlighted concerns regarding decent work, with specific concerns for Syrians, adolescent girls and young women, and child labour.
- While most respondents have acquired skills on the job and on their personal time, they indicated further specific needs related to languages, certified trainings, and IT skills.
- Barriers to accessing the job market revolved around nepotism for Lebanese and discriminations for foreigners.
- Beyond skills, accompanying beneficiaries towards jobs and during employment seemed particularly important to most participants to address external factors facilitating or hindering long-term and decent employment. Recommendations are therefore focusing on integrated livelihood programming tackling multiple dimensions.

## 5.1 WORKING STATUS AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

In most FGDs regardless of gender, age, nationality and areas, participants usually start the discussion about livelihoods by stressing on their willingness to work in order to first, financially support their households and second, be financially independent. This was considered particularly important to support their households in the present crisis. However, existing barriers specific to girls and

young women remain prevalent. These include sociological drivers such as conservative social norms from parents, other family members and community members, pushing girls and young women out of the public sphere, and the job market. This explains a particularly visible gap in terms of employment status between male and female participants. That gap was particularly visible among Syrian respondents, highlighting specific intersectional vulnerabilities when it comes to their integration on the labour market.

### 5.1.1 EMPLOYMENT STATUS.

Even though unemployment is a general concern among participants, different gaps related to age and gender were observed when it comes to employment rates. It was visible that participants above 18 years old are more likely to be employed than respondents under 18, confirming the ability of young adults to find some sort of activities on the labour market.

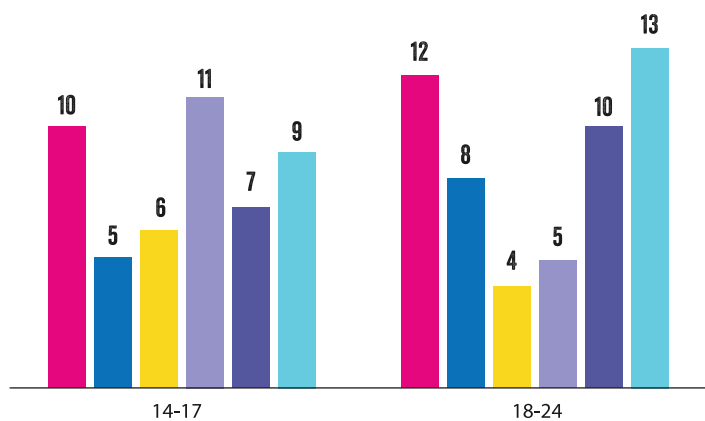


Figure 37: Employment status by age (as per number of FGDs)

■ Full time job  
■ Part-time  
■ Seasonal  
■ Dont work  
■ Decent conditions  
■ Tough conditions

The primary gap observed was gender related, where the overwhelming majority of employed participants were men. Female participants do not work with exceptions of very few working part-time jobs among Lebanese respondents. This is particularly valid for young Syrian and Palestinian women aged 18 to 24 years old. In five out of the six regions (Akkar, Aarsal, Tripoli, Mount Lebanon, Beirut), none of the female participants aged 18 to 24 were employed; they all relied on either family members, husbands or organizations for support.

### 5.1.2 GAP BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS' EMPLOYMENT STATUS, CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL NORMS AND PERCEIVED GBV RISKS.

Contributing factors affected both employed and unemployed women and were related to conservative social norms and perceived GBV risks.

Sociological factors preventing them from working were the most important according to all female respondents aged 18 to 24. They mentioned issues related to stereotypes and gender roles imposed on them by (a) society and (b) their direct relatives.

(a) Lebanese women acknowledged that some opportunities were still inaccessible to them due to gender stereotypes in society (e.g. night jobs, or positions requiring a lot of public exposure such as vendors in shops). In fact, potential employers are reportedly not accepting their applications due to their gender.

(b) Respondents also detailed pressures from the men of the household to not access the job market altogether. Direct pressures from the relatives were a key factor explaining unemployment. Stereotypes at the household level also indirectly prevent them from work. Chores and other commitments are imposed on them and impact their ability to save time for a work-related activity.

All participants agreed that they are ready to break traditions and community perceptions to access more opportunities in the job market, provided they receive social approval from their parents. Indeed, parents' mentality remains one of the most important barriers according to adolescent girls and young women, while it is barely mentioned during males' FGDs.

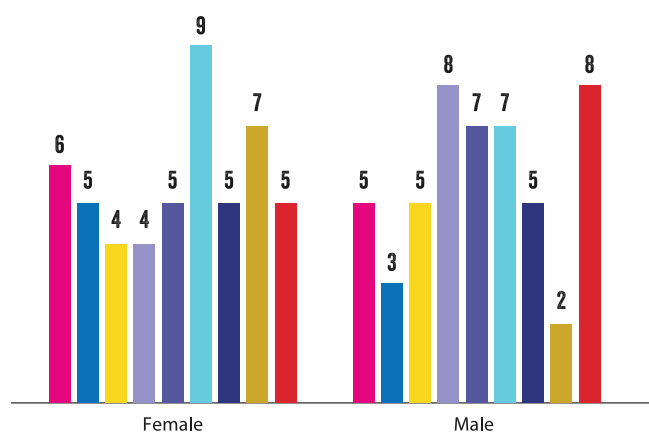


Figure 39: Barriers to employment depending on gender (as per number of FGDs)

■ Lack of job opportunities  
■ Discrimination between genders  
■ Discrimination between nationalities  
■ Discrimination between religions  
■ Transportation  
■ Nepotism  
■ Lack of education  
■ Parent's mentality  
■ Low salaries

**“YOUNG MEN CAN WORK IN ANYTHING, BUT A GIRL'S PLACE IS IN THE KITCHEN, IN HER HUSBAND'S HOUSE. OF COURSE, THIS IS THE OPINION OF THE COMMUNITY; WE ARE PREVENTED FROM GOING OUT AT NIGHT. IF WE DO GO OUT AT NIGHT, THEY SAY THAT WE ARE NOTORIOUS GIRLS, BUT THIS MATTER IS NOT IMPORTANT. IF OUR PARENTS DO NOT MIND US GOING OUT, WE ARE READY TO BREAK ALL TRADITIONS.”**

**SOUTH, PALESTINIAN FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**“IF IT WERE UP TO US, WE WOULD WORK, BUT OUR FAMILY AND SOCIETY REFUSE IT. WE ARE ATTACKED BY YOUNG MEN IN THE PUBLIC SPACE. THERE IS NO SAFETY AT WORK, SO WE DO NOT WANT TO WORK.”**

**MOUNT LEBANON, SYRIAN FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**“MY MOM'S COUSIN WANTED TO WORK AT A MEN'S SALON. SHE WENT TO THE OWNER WHO REFUSED AND TOLD HER DIRECTLY TO HER FACE, 'YOU WOMEN HAVE NO SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY; I WANT A MAN EMPLOYEE. PLEASE LEAVE MY STORE'”**

**SOUTH LEBANESE FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**“WE WORKED AT A SALON FOR ONE DAY ONLY AND IMMEDIATELY STOPPED GOING THERE. WE WERE WORKING UPSTAIRS TOGETHER AND THEN THE OWNER CALLED ONE OF US DOWNSTAIRS. AFTER A WHILE, I WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND SAW HIM TRYING TO GRAB HER INAPPROPRIATELY. WHEN HE SAW ME, HE AUTOMATICALLY REMOVED HIS HAND. SHE TOLD ME THAT WE SHOULD LEAVE IMMEDIATELY, AND WE DID. WE WERE BOTH SCARED.”**

**SOUTH LEBANESE FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

A visible difference on this question was that adolescent girls and young women were less likely to be personally opposed to women's work. The most important factor pushing girls and women to individually opting out of the job market was the risk of GBV. Indeed, fears related to bullying, gossip and sexual harassment were routinely mentioned in all geographic areas across all nationalities and age groups as a primary barrier to their integration in the job market.

Male participants, regardless of their nationality, shared conservative testimonies relating to working women with two main types of negative narratives matching the barriers previously shared by female participants. First, that women should not be part of the job market but rather take care of the household. Second, that women have more advantages on the job market because of the alleged potential for sexual favours with recruiters and managers.



**“A GIRL SHOULD NOT WORK IN ORDER NOT TO BE EXPOSED TO ACCIDENTS AT WORK (SEXUAL ACCIDENTS). ALSO, IF A GIRL WORKS, SHE WILL STRIP THE MAN OF HIS POWER, AND THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. WOMEN SHOULD NOT HAVE POWER.”**

ARSAL, LEBANESE MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

The below graph illustrates this gender gap in responses. Female respondents consider males at an advantage when it comes to the job market in almost all FGDs or at best on equal grounds. In parallel, in more than half of the FGDs with males, respondents consider that women are favoured on the job market displaying a strong lack of awareness on women's barriers. Adolescent boys and young men in central urban and coastal areas showed higher degrees of awareness of the difficulties faced by women in comparison to men in peripheral areas. Social and behavioural change is an important remaining point to be tackled, especially among the households of supported individuals to empower women to seek independent livelihoods. This could be considered in an SBC campaign at the household level with a wider and more ambitious scope that also tackles key barriers related to education and protection as detailed in the other sections of the assessment.

As opposed to previous sectors, participants were usually unable to identify actions where they could engage as actors of change either individually or as a group. Most support suggestions were related to, (1) institutional and financial support, as well as (2) social and behavioural change among their communities. Such testimonies suggest potential room to mobilise youth on SBC programming at the community level.

### 5.1.3 EMPLOYMENT STATUS IS NEITHER A GUARANTEE OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR RESPONDENTS NOR OF DECENT WORK CONDITIONS.

The combination of social, political and economic instabilities resulted in the free-fall of the currency exchange rates in both formal and informal markets, which led to sharp increase in inflation rates<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, salaries remained stagnant resulting in a steep decrease in households' purchasing power. The impact of the devaluation was reflected during the FGDs, with the majority of the employed participants reporting being financially dependent on their parents and aid from local and international organizations, despite having a paying job. In many cases, respondents reported that their wage was barely enough to cover transportation costs, which further limited their ability to find job opportunities beyond a limited geographical scope or pushed them to quit their positions. The financial dependency on parents is the most dominant trend across FGDs (mentioned by most respondents in 43 of the 52 FGDs), regardless of profiles.

**“WHILE WORKING FOR AN OIL COMPANY, I WAS MAKING CLOSE TO 700,000 LBP WHICH WAS BARELY ENOUGH TO COVER MY TRANSPORTATION COSTS”**

AKKAR, LEBANESE MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

**“We know someone in the village that committed suicide because he could not secure a decent life for his children”**

Arsal, Lebanese male, 14-17 years old

<sup>14</sup> World Bank (2021, October 17)

### 5.1.4 DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS: REGION AND PROFILE SPECIFIC ISSUES.

- In Akkar and Aarsal, most of the contracts that respondents were able to secure were part-time or seasonal. That was a general challenge in these regions in particular, however it was less mentioned in other areas. In Akkar, agriculture is the primary source of income for adolescent boys, while older profiles were working in the services and tourism industry where the majority of their employment was seasonal. Lebanese men in Aarsal were employed in stone sawmills and in construction, while their Syrian counterparts were employed in barbershops, and in agriculture. Again, most contracts were not granting full-time consistent revenues, adding up to difficulties related to the devaluation of the Lebanese pound.
  - Concerns for decent work were also widely shared regardless of the respondents' profiles, and the majority of them revolved around employers taking advantage of the situation. In this context, respondents reported that the bargaining power of the employer has largely increased, while the initial situation before the crisis was already unbalanced in their favour due to an absence of control and regulations by public authorities. Men in general shared several work conditions concerns that ranged from lack of compensation, excessive work schedules, lack of basic human rights, lack of safety measures, and verbal and emotional abuse. However, the primary employment condition issue for the Lebanese participants was the limited value of their salaries. The second concern for the Lebanese participants was safe work conditions. Effectively, (a) Syrians, (b) underage children, and (c) females were all reporting specific vulnerabilities and exposure to dangerous behaviours and practices. Specific testimonies were illustrative of general national trends detailed in national studies like the VASyR.
- A. Syrian respondents reported in all areas that, since they did not have their documents in order, they could not report any abuse or infractions. Additionally, they are suffering from discrimination as employers assume that they will work more for less remunerations.

As a result, they are often given the most dangerous occupations while lacking both basic safety measures and the possibility to object or legally pursue the employer.

- B. Even though laws and codes of conduct exist to protect against child labour, they are often not respected by families who rely on their children for income. Adolescents in general, especially males, felt compelled to enter the workforce to financially support their families. Most were working in physically demanding, seasonal jobs for a wage smaller than that received by an adult.
- C. Finally, female respondents reported risks and difficulties related to SGBV, as detailed in the above-mentioned barriers they faced to enter the workforce.

**"I WORK IN THE STONE SAWMILL, AND THIS IS A VERY DANGEROUS AND VERY TIRING WORK. BEFORE THE CRISIS WE WORKED FOR SEVEN DOLLARS PER DAY, BUT NOW WE WORK FOR LESS THAN ONE DOLLAR PER DAY"**

ARSAL, LEBANESE MALE, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**"I WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED AT WORK, BUT THE EMPLOYER DID NOT HELP ME WITH TREATMENT, SO I HAD TO BORROW MONEY TO SECURE TREATMENT"**

ARSAL, SYRIAN MALE, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**"LANDOWNERS ARE TREATING US LIKE SLAVES, WE WORK LONGER HOURS. WHEN PROMISED 50,000 LBP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DAY, WE ONLY RECEIVE 35,000 LBP AT NIGHT"**

AKKAR, SYRIAN FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

The following graph highlights how widespread dangerous working conditions are among respondents of all nationalities. This is even more valid for Syrians, where many respondents were unemployed and decent work was a concern in almost all FGDs with working respondents.

## 5.2 SKILLS ACQUIRED AND NEEDED TO ACCESS THE JOB MARKET

### 5.2.1 DIFFERENCES IN SKILL ACQUIRED ACCORDING TO GENDER.

Most respondents indicated they had developed technical skills early in their life. However, they develop these skills in varying environments depending on their gender. Males reported specific sectoral proficiencies related to construction and associated technical works such as electricity, plumbing and painting. Beauty and health sectors were also mentioned to a lesser extent. For most of them these were acquired on the job at an early age. On the contrary, female skills were less work-related. They are usually focused around the beauty sector and other activities typically associated with females such as knitting. These skills are also usually acquired from home and other close social circles, including direct relatives and friends. A recent trend was that female participants had grown wider skills through online platforms during the Covid-19 lockdowns. While facing social restriction to enter the job market at a young age, they relied on social media platforms to develop their skills and become more tech-savvy. Platforms mentioned included YouTube, Duolingo, TikTok and performing standard online Google searches. The skills developed ranged from hairdressing, drawing, knitting, handcrafts, social media, and language learning, as well as more tech-oriented skills such as properly using computer tools like the Office Suite and sometimes more complex programs.

**“I TAUGHT MYSELF HOW TO USE MICROSOFT WORD”**

AKKAR, SYRIAN FEMALE, 14-17



### 5.2.2 PERCEIVED NEEDED SKILLS AND NEEDS.

Perceived needs are mirroring the lack in respondents' self-assessments. The English language appeared to be the most widespread need regardless of age, gender, nationality, and geography. Besides the language barrier, more formal technical needs were mentioned equally among participants. Discrepancies were visible when it comes to:

- Life skills and soft skills to feel empowered in the workplace. It is a specific need mentioned by women in general.
- Computer skills were largely mentioned in urban areas like Tripoli, where respondents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods did not get the opportunity to nurture these skills, as opposed to respondents in Mount Lebanon and Beirut.

**“I LEARNED ALL MY HAIRDRESSING SKILLS FROM YOUTUBE AND ANOTHER ONLINE PLATFORM AS WELL AS FROM OUR FRIENDS IN SYRIA”**

ARSAL, SYRIAN FEMALE, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**“WE WOULD LIKE TO STRENGTHEN OUR CHARACTER AND SPEAK FOR OURSELVES, BEING INDEPENDENT IN SOCIETY”**

ARSAL, SYRIAN FEMALE, 14-17

**“IF YOU WANT A NEAT JOB, YOU NEED COMPUTER LITERACY. WE WORKED ON THAT ONLINE AND AT SCHOOL”**

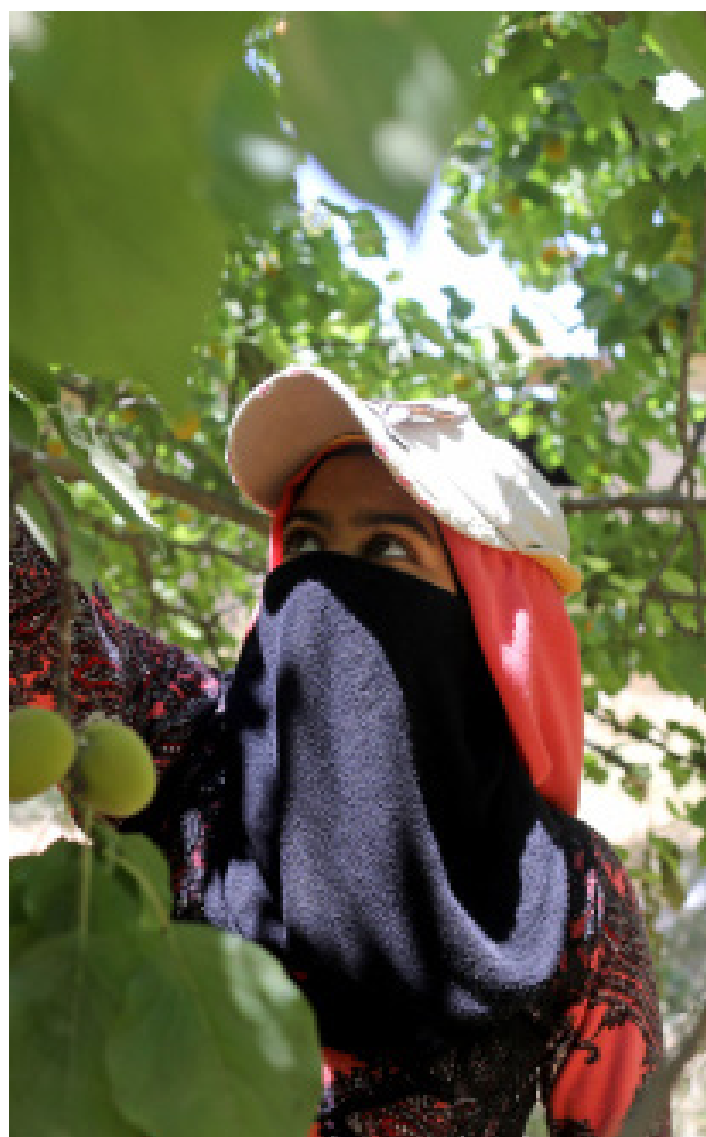
AKKAR, SYRIAN FEMALE, 18-24

**“IF WE AS GIRLS HAVE CERTIFICATES IN SELF-DEFENCE TRAINING, WE WILL BE ABLE TO CONVINCE OUR PARENTS THAT WE ARE ABLE TO PROTECT OURSELVES, HENCE HAVE A BIT MORE FREEDOM WHEN GOING TO SCHOOL OR WORK”**

TRIPOLI, SYRIAN FEMALE, 18-24



Previous findings from reports published before the crises indicated that cash for work activities have a higher appeal and more short-term usefulness to mitigate the impact of the crises on households' livelihoods in Lebanon. Results from the FGDs are not totally in line with such findings, where most of the respondents' shared needs related to technical training combined with activities to accompany them into employment. Integrated livelihoods programs that include a combination of on-the-job training combined with multidimensional support to tackle enabling factors (facilitating or hindering the long-term integration of vulnerable profiles on the job market with decent work), seem particularly adapted to tackle the present challenges described during data collection. Key informants shared several good practices following that trend. Students who come to the centres for livelihood training may be sent to other departments for additional services such as awareness, psycho-social assistance, and others. In this case, livelihood serves as a gateway for referrals to other services with a one-stop-shop mechanism.



## 5.3 CHANNELS AND BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE JOB MARKET

### 5.3.1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDER AND NATIONALITY REGARDING INFORMATION CHANNELS.

One of the outlined differences between male and female respondents was the propensity to rely on the internet and specific online platforms to find jobs. While male respondents barely mentioned such options, this was one of the most used tools among female participants regardless of nationality and locations. They tend to use this tool especially after the age of 18. This appeared to be related to their social media use over the last years, which was a previously observed trend when it came to learning skills and getting informed.

Another gender gap was specifically observed among Syrian girls and young women. A deeply entrenched belief among them was that obtaining more qualified degrees would be the only way for them to achieve financial independence and to justify their integration into the job market. Key informants confirmed the limited observed results of training programs that were not providing clearly recognized degrees. They also highlighted the need for more professionalisation of the sector to provide qualifying certificates and diplomas. Beyond gender discrepancies, another line of differentiation was related to nepotism or "Wasta". This was valid for most long-term residents of Lebanon including Lebanese themselves and also Palestinians. Wasta is considered both an opportunity and a barrier in most locations, except in Beirut and Mount Lebanon where this topic was not mentioned when the team probed barriers to accessing the job market.

**"I AM A MEMBER OF A WHATSAPP GROUP WHICH CONSTANTLY SHARES JOB OPPORTUNITIES. EVEN THOUGH I AM NOT CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR A JOB, I LIKE TO STAY UP TO DATE WITH JOB AVAILABILITIES."**

**BEIRUT, LEBANESE WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD**



**“IN ADDITION TO THE CERTIFICATE, WE DO NOT NEED THE NECESSARY EXPERIENCE; THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT IT NEEDS A ‘WASTA’”**

ARSAL, LEBANESE WOMAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**“I WANT TO ENTER THE MILITARY COLLEGE BUT I AM IN A COUNTRY WHERE INSTEAD OF NEEDING SKILLS YOU NEED A ‘WASTA’”**

SOUTH, LEBANESE MAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD

### 5.3.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDER AND NATIONALITY REGARDING BARRIERS TO THE JOB MARKET.

It is important to note that the primary barrier to accessing employment remains the Wasta for Lebanese participants. With the exception of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, this factor is more mentioned as a barrier than a door to employment. In parallel, Syrians commonly shared discrimination issues previously evoked in the discussion when talking about decent work conditions, as indicated in the graph below. This represents a more or less evident finding given that Syrians' access to the job market is legally limited to a few sectors. However, these discriminations were also observed by Lebanese participants when they came from specific regions and specific sects. Such testimonies were particularly mentioned in peripheral areas such as Arsal.

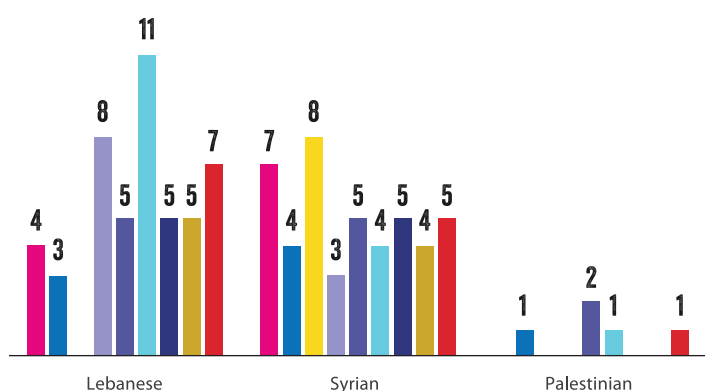


Figure 44: Barriers to job access, according to nationalities (as per number of FGDs)

- Lack of job opportunities
- Discrimination between genders
- Discrimination between nationalities
- Discrimination between religions
- Transportation
- Nepotism
- Lack of education
- Parent's mentality
- Low salaries

In an attempt to ease the access to the job market, partnering with specific actors could be a potential solution. That includes specialised education institutions and organisms providing official degrees relevant to the job markets. That could also be by partnering directly with identified companies to ensure employment from the start of the support. To that end, there would be a need to map Lebanese companies that may experience a relative growth with the slow reorganisation of the Lebanese economy, and that are interested to develop gender-friendly environments with protection processes. Such companies could see an interest in such partnerships if livelihood programs are ensuring them an access with young individuals with skills that are not necessarily available on the market. That could also represent an opportunity to address nepotism at the root by proposing transparent processes in the design of the project. Complementary to this, an important point to tackle will be the one of transportation to address both cost, access, and safety concerns of the youth throughout the country.

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

Participants rely on skills acquired on the job and not correlated to their studies or initial training.

Socio-cultural norms and GBV risks are barriers to accessing labour market for girls and young women.

Boys and young men reported concerns on harsh working conditions, including lack of safety measures and basic Human rights, alongside verbal and emotional abuse.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct job market analysis before offering/implementing skills-based trainings.
- Ensure integration of apprenticeships, job placements and coaching in livelihoods programming in addition to the standard vocational learning component.
- Focus on new trends in terms of trainings such as digital skills trainings as an emerging need, as reported by adolescents and youth.
- Advocate with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and Ministry of Labour (MoL) to embed relevant career orientation throughout secondary education.

- Integrate gender-transformative approaches in programming by tackling social and gender norms; through gender dialogues, raising awareness on gender related topics and harmful practices.
- Work with girls and young women on interpersonal skills such as communication and negotiation, decision-making, leadership and financial literacy, which may increase their sense of control over their lives and their access to resources.
- Raise awareness among girls and young women on available protection services and refer them to specialized service providers including GBV services, when needed.
- Build peer support networks for women and girls to voice out their challenges and share experiences
- Work with community stakeholders/leaders and parents to be more sensitized on gender equality and young women participation in the labour market.

- Raise awareness among boys, young men, and the general public on the Labour Law, children and Human rights in the workplace, available services and reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure coordination between job placement units and selected employers to apply the Labour Law and the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) measures and ensure a protective environment.
- Advocate with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Interior and chambers of commerce to reinforce the Labour Law and emphasize its application with employers.

## 6. SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Knowledge and exposure to SRH information is relatively limited with a strong gender gap, females usually having access to more information.
- Awareness-raising sessions for Syrians, and classes in school for Lebanese are the most common information channels on SRH for females. Information about the reproductive system in classes remain very generic, but also include more specific information about the female body where in some cases teachers specifically ask adolescent boys to leave the class. Males rely on more informal sources such as older relatives and friends as well as internet, which played a relatively positive role on questioning existing gender stereotypes and representations.
- Informed consent remains a major concern for female respondents who are not equipped with the relevant information when they reach puberty, especially around the notion of informed consent. Both Syrian and Lebanese shared multiple testimonies on this matter.
- Awareness and access to services remains limited. Lebanese in particular tend to not rely on NGO services while they could provide a valuable alternative in cases where individuals cannot afford the services of medical specialists within the current crisis context.

### 6.1 KNOWLEDGE AND EXPOSURE TO INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

#### 6.1.1 LIMITED EXPOSURE TO SRH INFORMATION.

One of the key observations from FGDs was the strong gender gap in terms of awareness of accurate SRH information. Throughout the country, adolescent girls and young women were reportedly more exposed to relevant information. This is something valid in both peripheral areas such as Aarsal but also in central places like Beirut. Testimonies confirmed that in these different places, due to persisting stereotypes, boys and girls are usually separated to receive gender-specific information while remaining uninformed about the other sex. When matters relating specifically to adolescent girls and young women such as the female reproductive system were being discussed, males were asked to leave the room. While awareness was more significant among female participants, information channels still vary depending on nationalities and age:

- Namely, it was more common for Syrian females to attend awareness-raising sessions with local associations and NGOs, while Lebanese and Palestinian females usually learned such topics in school during biology classes. In most cases,

organizations themselves report issues with caregivers when addressing such topics, thus highlighting the need for specific communication targeting all members of the household. The issues reported with caregivers, be them direct parents, family members, or sometimes parents-in-law, were either about their unacceptance to discussing such topics as they consider it a taboo or about the information they have, in case they were accepting, that sort of contradict with scientifically proven information, for instance when it comes to how long should the young women wait until bathing after giving pregnancy; or not needing to visit a gynecologist if the young women is not sexually active.

- Age appears to play a role as well, as younger profiles are more exposed to awareness-raising sessions about these topics. This might also reflect the fact that respondents felt less equipped at a younger age and therefore are more in demand for such activities.

**“WHEN THEY GAVE US THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE LESSON, THEY TOOK THE BOYS OUT OF THE CLASS TO EXPLAIN TO THE GIRLS EXCLUSIVELY. WHEN SENSITIVE TOPICS ARE BEING DISCUSSED, THEY SEPARATE MALES FROM FEMALES.”**

ARSAL, LEBANESE FEMALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

### 6.1.2 TYPE AND DEGREE OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE.

The topics that were most prominently tackled during awareness sessions were the menstrual cycle and feminine hygiene more generally, followed by sexual harassment and child marriage. Female respondents partially mentioned sexual rights such as contraception. However, topics such as abortion were always avoided by participants, which is the result of abortion being illegal, and can be penalized in Lebanon, thus it is not even a choice to discuss. Male respondents, especially those interviewed in the South, but also in other peripheral areas, did not attend any educational activities regarding female SRH topics or sexual rights due to conservative social norms. They report that these topics are unacceptable to talk about since it is considered a taboo in their community. In some cases, they also claimed that it was religiously forbidden. Environmental factors (such as religion), and sociological factors (such as society and family pressure) were the most mentioned reasons for this gender discrepancy.

**“WE DID NOT ATTEND ANY EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND SPEAKING ABOUT THESE TOPICS IS NOT ALLOWED IN SOCIETY BECAUSE OF CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS.”**

SOUTH, PALESTINIAN MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

When asked if the participants are equipped with sufficient and correct information regarding SRH, the majority reported that they only know the basics and they believe that they should learn more about these topics and also about the other sex's body. They stated that in order to have a successful relationship and eventually marriage with their partner, they have to understand what the other

gender experiences, both physically and psychologically. This is a valid point coming from the youth themselves, and this could actually be a step forward when planning for any SRHR intervention to ensure that youth are on-board during the preparation phase. As of now, this is also one of the key points of attention of Plan International programming.

**“WE HAVE BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT WE SHOULD CONTINUE LEARNING BECAUSE THERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT THINGS THAT WE MIGHT NOT KNOW. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT GUYS LEARN ABOUT THE OPPOSITE GENDER'S BODY BECAUSE WHEN YOU HAVE A PARTNER IN LIFE AND YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE OTHER GENDER, YOUR MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIP WILL FAIL.”**

AKKAR, SYRIAN MAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

More specifically, the lack of awareness on the notion of consent in an intimate context seemed to be an issue that was mentioned by the majority of female participants. This point was communicated differently between Syrians and Lebanese respondents depending on their own personal experiences. A recurrent trend in Lebanese adolescent girls and young women's answers was that there was a lack of awareness amongst both female and male partners around the notion of informed consent when having their first adolescent relationships and that this impacted their personal lives. Lebanese girls and young women openly shared their experiences around this topic, which indicated a gap in their knowledge (both female and male) resulting in specific vulnerabilities in their interactions with their male peers. This notion could definitely be addressed through the awareness-raising sessions. It calls for standardizing the information shared with the beneficiaries about the different SRHR actors, be them the health care professionals at the local or national level or the outreach workers.



**“SOME GIRLS END UP SENDING PICTURES OVER THE INTERNET TO GUYS, UNWILLINGLY. THE MAN MAKES HER FEEL LIKE SHE IS THE ONE FOR HIM AND HE ENDS UP TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HER.”**

**SOUTH, PALESTINIAN MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**“A LOT OF US HAVE BEEN IN SUCH SITUATIONS. THOSE SITUATIONS IN WHICH YOU ASK YOURSELF: “WHAT HAPPENED?”, “WHAT SHOULD I HAVE DONE?”. AND THESE USUALLY HAPPEN IN THE BEGINNING, WHEN A PERSON FIRST STARTS EXPERIENCING CHANGES IN THEIR BODY SUCH AS PUBERTY AND FIRST PERIODS...”**

**BEIRUT, LEBANESE WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

This same issue was visible during FGDs with Syrian females. However, their experiences slightly differed. The theme of consent and lack of knowledge was addressed through the discussion of child marriage, and at times, forced marriage. In such cases, respondents reported issues as child brides because they did not know what to expect after marriage. Other Syrian females who are not married also indicated a similar lack of awareness. Nevertheless, during group conversations, adolescent girls and young women tended to focus on more socially conservative situations, in this case, marriage rather than unofficial relationships. Their questions were usually reformulated into “What is going to happen when we get married?” indicating their inexperience and obliviousness regarding first sexual encounters and consent around the matter. That is due to the fact that child marriage is higher in refugee communities, due to a set of multi-dimensional factors, be them social norms, lack of knowledge among parents and caregivers, the deteriorating economic situation, the protection constraints, and security issues, etc. According to the VASyR, 20% of the interviewed Syrian refugee girls and women aged between 15 and 19 were married in 2021.

**“MY FRIEND, WHO WAS FORCED TO GET MARRIED WHEN SHE WAS 18, DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING PRIOR TO HER MARRIAGE. PEOPLE ARE CLAIMING THAT SHE IS NOW SUFFERING FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESSES BECAUSE OF HER MARITAL RELATIONSHIP THAT SHE WAS FORCED INTO. IF SHE HAD MORE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS ABOUT THESE TOPICS, SHE WOULD NOT HAVE FACED ANY ISSUES.”**

**BEIRUT, SYRIAN WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

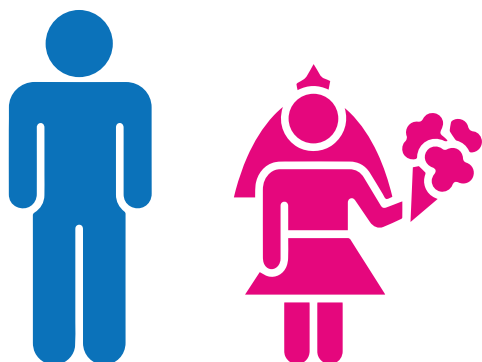
Overall, there was a shared understanding among respondents that they did not have sufficient information available, even among participants who stated that they were opposed to discussing such matters. When probed about their perceptions, respondents who were opposed to the discussion indicated specific sociological factors, namely relatives’ pressure and conservative social norms, to explain their points of view. They reported that their parents convinced them since their early childhood that talking about such topics was wrong and forbidden. However, with time, they knew that this is not necessarily true and that sexual and reproductive health is something all people should be informed about. Internet and social media play an important role in this shift of perceptions.

**“FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, WE WERE TOLD THAT THESE TOPICS ARE CONSIDERED SHAMEFUL. SO, WE LEARNED NOT TO DISCUSS THESE TOPICS, OR ANYTHING RELATED TO THEM. WHEN WE GREW UP, WE FOUND OUT THAT IT IS NOT SHAMEFUL, BUT WE WERE RAISED IN A WAY TO BELIEVE THAT IT WAS.”**

**BEIRUT, LEBANESE MAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

**“WE FEEL ASHAMED TO ASK SOMEONE TO TELL US ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GET MARRIED, BUT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO KNOW SO WE DO NOT GET SCARED.”**

BEIRUT, SYRIAN WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD



## 6.2 MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Overall, participants relied on parents, influential figures, friends, and specialists in order to obtain information regarding SRH. However, these channels varied greatly based on gender and age. A common trend was the use of the internet in order to obtain more information than the perceptions and views shared within their close circles.

Female participants in general relied on their mothers and awareness-raising sessions given by specialists in order to obtain information related to SRH. Adolescent girls, rather than young women, primarily relied on their mothers when they had any inquiries, though these were mostly limited to discussions of menstrual cycles and general health questions. Young women behaved more independently in obtaining information about SRH and addressing their concerns, relying more on gynecologists or specialists proposing less expensive services with local NGOs and associations.

**“I WOULD FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE TALKING TO MY MOM ABOUT THESE TOPICS BECAUSE SHE IS THE ONE WHO RAISED ME”**

BEIRUT, LEBANESE WOMAN, 14-17 YEARS OLD

Male respondents strongly differed from females and tended to rely on older male relatives or friends to obtain answers to their questions. Males usually complement these primary sources by surfing the internet and asking religious figures for advice. However, when asking religious figures, they made sure that the topics they would talk about would be limited to marriage and the religious appropriateness of actions. Relying on the internet to acquire knowledge on sexual and reproductive health challenges pre-existing social norms and socially conservative representations of SRH. Participants mentioned that surfing the internet is used as a way to obtain information that they are unable to source otherwise. Respondents directly linked their change of practices to the access they had to alternative sources on the internet.

**“HONESTLY I CANNOT TALK TO MY PARENTS BECAUSE IF I BRING UP THIS TOPIC THEN THEY WILL BE VERY ANGRY. HOWEVER, IT IS NORMAL BECAUSE EVERYBODY IS ABLE TO GET THE INFORMATION THEY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THROUGH THE INTERNET AND ALL OUR QUESTIONS CAN BE ANSWERED.”**

AKKAR, SYRIAN MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD

**“YOU CAN TALK ABOUT THESE TOPICS LIKE NEVER BEFORE. 10 TO 15 YEARS AGO, THE SITUATION WAS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT. YOU SEE A FEMALE EXPERT TALKING FREELY ABOUT THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGAN. IT’S NORMAL NOW. WE NEED TO MAKE A POINT ABOUT THE FACT THAT INTERNET IS COMPLEMENTARY TO OTHER EXISTING SOURCES THAT CAN PROMOTE MORE TRADITIONAL AND CONSERVATIVE NARRATIVE GOING AGAINST WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND EQUALITY”**

TRIPOLI, SYRIAN MALE, 18-24 YEARS OLD

**“NOW WE DON’T NEED ANYONE TO TALK ABOUT THESE TOPICS BECAUSE WE HAVE OUR PHONES, AND WE CAN FIND ALL THE INFORMATION WE NEED OR WANT TO KNOW ABOUT ON THE INTERNET.”**

**TRIPOLI, SYRIAN MALE, 14-17 YEARS OLD**

Nevertheless, traditional channels such as religious figures and conservative youth associations have maintained a certain degree of influence over respondents. These usually convey contradictory information or misrepresentations that were commonly shared by some respondents. Some male participants gave testimonies in which they described relationships between men and women with negative and violent representations, in addition to stating misinformation about the male’s sexuality and biological fundamentals. In such instances, the use of the internet appeared to be a catalyser of existing representations (positive or negative) rather than a factor of change by essence. This is also visible in the continuous discussions among the humanitarian actors, who believe that it is very important to be coordinating with key influencers and in this case religious leaders to be able to provide both the host and the refugee communities with the scientific notions of SRH and related rights.

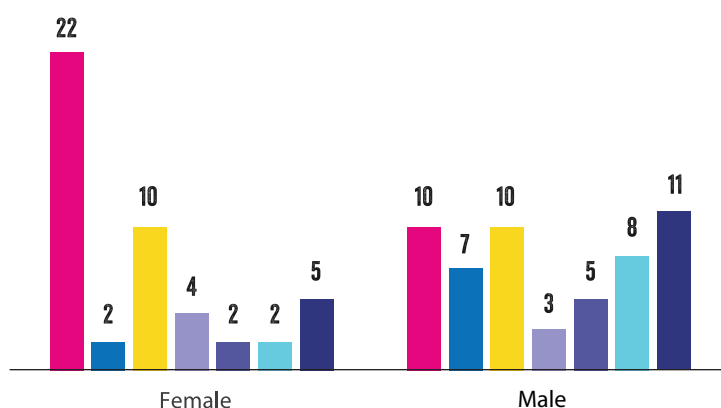


Figure 48: Sources of information on SRH according to gender (as per the number of FGDs)

■ Awareness sessions with specialists ■ Ask Experienced people  
 ■ Ask Friends ■ Ask religious figures  
 ■ Ask Mothers ■ Refer to the internet  
 ■ Ask Parents

## 6.3 KNOWLEDGE OF EXISTING SRH SERVICES

When participants were asked about existing SRH services in their communities, the majority reported that they were only familiar with medical services to which they would go to for consultations regarding their physical health, such as treatments, medicines, and vaccines. Overall, respondents were aware of the health sector but not any specificities dealing with sexual and reproductive health. Other participants did not know about any of the services while a few knew about drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation centres. A particularity of interviewed Palestinian respondents is that they were well aware of actors proposing services inside the camps, which were easier for them to map than other respondents.

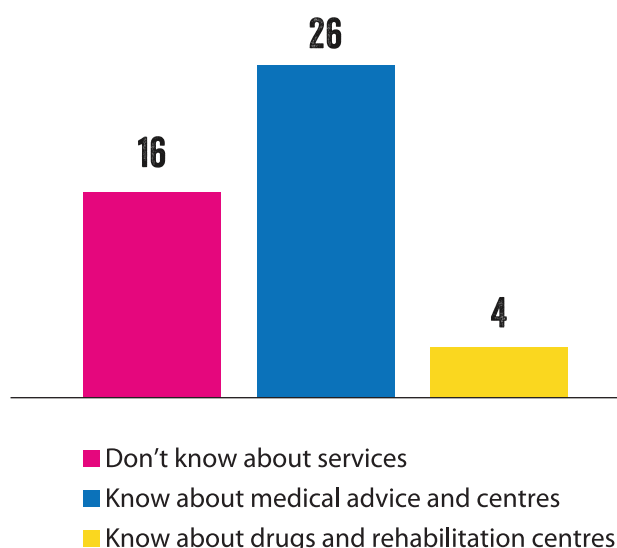


Figure 49: Knowledge of existing SRH services among participants (as per the number of FGDs)

When probing what participants meant by medical centres and the services they offered, NGOs, both local and international, as well as UN agencies were seen to play a primary role in the delivery of services regarding medical treatments and consultations. Most services mentioned revolved around vaccines, contraception services, and generic gynecological consultations (i.e. while not being detailed systematically, respondents mentioned ante-natal and post-natal care, mammography, and STI screenings occasionally but remained very broad in their definitions and descriptions of medical acts).



Below is a table detailing the types and names of organizations that participants know in their vicinity:

Type of Organization	Name of Organization	Region(s) of operation
International	Médecins Sans Frontières	Arsal, Beirut, Mount Lebanon
	Knights of Malta	Arsal
	Caritas	South
	International Medical Corps	South
Local	Mouwassat	South
	Religious Figures	Tripoli, South
	Political Parties	South
	Abed L Saad	South
	Amel	Beirut
	SIDC	Beirut
	SAMA	South
	Hayaa' L Sohiyye	Beirut
	UNRWA	South
UN Agencies	UNICEF	Beirut

Testimonies from the FGDs indicate a particularly widespread lack of information among the targeted population, despite notable progress over the last years. In terms of access to information, SBCC and specifically targeted information will have to take into account the different gender-specific channels that are used by females and males. Ensuring the dissemination of the relevant narratives and information online to targeted clusters of individuals and online platforms will be key to efficiently support change.

## 6.4 ACCESS TO EXISTING SERVICES

The majority of participants agreed that services were out of reach in their respective communities. However, this differed slightly according to gender and nationality.

Syrian girls and young women claimed that services were generally accessible and that they have sometimes used the services offered to them. Their answers confirmed the partial coverage of the LCRP response in terms of awareness raising among Syrians. However, a remaining issue for females is the lack of access to menstruation products, either due to the rising costs, or simply because of the shortage, girls and young women are unable to purchase sanitary pads and other products. This in turn led to side effects impacting their mental health, appearing in the form of anxiety and stress.<sup>16</sup> These claims were also visible in the study conducted by Plan International Lebanon on Period Poverty in 2021, which clearly states the difficulties girls and young women are facing in accessing the proper menstrual hygiene kits. Based on nationality, the majority of Lebanese participants stated that services were inaccessible for them. The two major reasons that participants claimed services were inaccessible were due to:

1. Lack of knowledge of given services: Sometimes respondents did not know that said services or centres exist, and other times they had heard of the name of the centre/NGO but they were clueless regarding the services they offered. This is often related to the deeply entrenched perception within Lebanese communities that NGO services are meant for refugees and have negative associations.
2. High cost of services and transportation: participants reported at times that they were unable to afford medical services, which prevented them from receiving the medical care they needed. This is also observed when discussing pregnant young women's access to ante-natal care during the economic crisis, where they tend to prioritize other needs over their SRH needs. In times of COVID-19, the maternal mortality ratio has increased in 2021. Other times participants claimed that the centres or NGOs were quite far from their place of residence, which made it difficult to arrive due to high transportation costs. These cost issues were reported by local organisations as well. Key informants confirmed that adolescent girls and young women were increasingly coming to them for menstrual pads that they cannot afford.

**"I USED TO TAKE DRUGS AND I BECAME ADDICTED, THERE WAS NO ONE THERE TO HELP ME STOP, I HAD TO DO IT ON MY OWN. IF THERE WERE SOME OF THE SERVICES YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT HERE IN AKKAR AND I KNEW ABOUT THEM, THEN I WOULD NOT HAVE SUFFERED ON MY OWN, STRUGGLING TO STOP. I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ADVICE AND UNDERSTOOD WHY I SHOULD STOP AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME."**

**AKKAR, LEBANESE MAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD**

In general, the question of outreach and access to vulnerable communities will be particularly important, especially for Lebanese who are less used to rely on NGO services for such information and cannot necessarily afford to access the services they used to rely on, such as private gynecologists.

<sup>16</sup> Plan International & Fe-Male. (August 2021). Period Poverty In Lebanon.



## 6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

**Limitations in terms of SRHR awareness among girls, boys, and young women and men.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- At the inter-agency level, revise all the SRHR related curricula through the SRH sub-working group to standardize the information provided to the beneficiaries, their caregivers and the service providers.
  - Ensure that SRH and child marriage topics are mainstreamed in the developed age-appropriate curricula targeting beneficiaries and their caregivers from one end, and service providers from another end.
  - Integrate SRHR as part of any relevant community-based activity or campaign conducted by community members to achieve positive social norms around SRH
  - At the educational level, advocate with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) to include Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the official curricula.
- Produce awareness materials on SRH topics targeting different profiles to be shared and disseminated at a national level.
- At the national level, advocate with the Ministry of Public Health on the adoption of adolescent-/youth-friendly SRH services in the Primary Health Care Centers (PHCs); that would entail provision of trainings for service providers, longer working hours, opening on Saturdays and having internet access within the centers...

**Limitations in terms of awareness of available services and access to them among girls, boys and young women and men.**

- Strengthen the referral mechanism and awareness raising on available services at the PHCs and the SDCs while emphasizing that these services target all residents in Lebanon with a focus on Lebanese communities.
- Support local CSOs and service providers through technical support and trainings on age- and gender-appropriate SRHR services.
- Coordinate through the SRH Sub-working group, the health sector, and the Ministry of Public Health, to advocate for and ensure the inclusion of SRHR specific services among the primary healthcare package.

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No photographs were taken during the course of this assessment.

Girls and boys featured in images in the report are not the same as those that participated in the research.

## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognize the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And its girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organization, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 83 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries. Since 2017, Plan International has been working in partnership with local, national and international organisations to strengthen capacities and address the needs of Lebanese and refugee children in Lebanon. With a focus on adolescent girls and young women, Plan International Lebanon implements projects in the sectors of Child Protection, Gender- Based Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Education, Youth Economic Empowerment and Participation.



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