REPORT

LEBANON - HUMANITARIAN GENDER ANALYSIS

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BOX- Glossary

Child Marriage/Early and Forced Marriage: Child marriage is a formal or informal union before age 18. It is a violation of children's human rights that robs children of childhood. Child marriage also disrupts their education and drives vulnerability to violence, discrimination, and abuse. 'Child marriage' is often used interchangeably with other terms. These include 'early and forced marriage' and 'child and forced marriage'. These terms are often used to emphasise the fact that children are not considered able, due to their age, to give their free, full and informed consent to marriage, and are often subject to marriage under coercion, duress, and even violence. The minimum age of 18 is considered under international human rights law as appropriate to ensure that children can give their free and full consent to marry, and have the necessary maturity – physical, emotional, and psychological – to enter into marriage. Marriage is a formalised, binding partnership between consenting adults. Child marriage, on the other hand, is any form of marriage, whether under civil, religious, or customary law, with or without formal registration, where either one or both spouses are under 18 years old.[1]

Child Protection: Refers to the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children.

Empowerment: Power is the ability to shape one's life and one's environment. The lack of power is one of the main barriers that prevent girls and women from realising their rights and escaping cycles of poverty. This can be overcome by a strategy of empowerment. Gender-based empowerment involves building girls' assets (social, economic, political, and personal), strengthening girls' ability to make choices about their future, and developing girls' sense of self-worth and their belief in their own ability to control their lives.

Gender: The concept of gender refers to the norms, expectations, and beliefs about the roles, relations, and values attributed to girls and boys, women and men. These norms are socially constructed; they are neither invariable nor are they biologically determined. They change over time. They are learned from families and friends, in schools and communities, and from the media, government, and religious organisations.

Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination describes the situation in which people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than based on their skills or capabilities. For example, social exclusion, inability to participate in decision-making processes, and restricted access to and control of services and resources are common results of discrimination. When this discrimination is part of the social order it is called systemic gender discrimination. For instance, in some communities, families routinely choose to provide education for their sons but keep their daughters at home to help with domestic

1. [1] See for example: https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-marriage-a-violation-of-child-rights ; Plan International. 'A girl's right to say no to marriage: Working to end child marriage and keep girls in school.' Plan International, 2013.

work. Systemic discrimination has social and political roots and needs to be addressed at many different levels of programming.

Gender Equality: Gender equality means that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices. Gender equality does not mean that women and men, or girls and boys are the same. Women and men, girls and boys have different but related needs and priorities, face different constraints, and enjoy different opportunities. Their relative positions in society are based on standards that, while not fixed, tend to advantage men and boys and disadvantage women and girls. Consequently, they are affected in different ways by policies and programmes. A gender equality approach is about understanding these relative differences, appreciating that they are not rigid but can be changed, and then designing policies, programmes and services with these differences in mind. Ultimately, promoting gender equality means transforming the power relations between women and men, girls and boys in order to create a more just society for all.

Gender Equity: Gender equity means being fair to women and men, girls and boys. To ensure fairness, measures are put into place to address social or historical discrimination and disadvantages faced by girls relative to boys. A gender equity approach ensures equitable access to, and control of, the resources and benefits of development
through targeted measures. Scholarships for girls are one example of an equity approach that contributes to all children, boys and girls, accessing school and equally benefiting from education opportunities. Increased gender equity is only one part of a strategy that contributes to gender equality.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Gender- based violence refers to physical, sexual, psychological and sometimes economic violence inflicted on a person because of being male or female. Girls and women are most frequently the targets of gender- based violence, but it also affects boys and men, especially those who do not fit dominant male stereotypes of behaviour or appearance. Gender-based violence may refer to criminal acts of aggression committed by individuals, or to socially sanctioned violence that may even be committed by State authorities. Among these are human rights infringements such as domestic violence, trafficking of girls or boys, female genital cutting or violence against men who have sex with men.

Abstract/Summary

This gender analysis examines the differentiated impacts of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Lebanon on women, men, girls, and boys, with a specific emphasis on education, child protection, and access barriers across key sectors including WASH, education, nutrition, shelter, and livelihoods. The study is grounded in qualitative methodology, drawing on primary data from 59 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 28 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), supplemented by 8 validation sessions. These were conducted across diverse geographic areas—Akkar, Tripoli, Bekaa, Zahle, Tyre, and Sidon—with participants from Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities. The findings are further supported by a review of relevant secondary data.

Across all locations, prevailing social norms reinforcing male dominance in household and community decision-making emerged as a consistent theme. FGDs with Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian participants revealed that traditional gender roles at the household, community, and societal levels significantly influence access to services across sectors.

According to FGD respondents, access to education for girls is shaped by multiple intersecting factors, including early marriage, child labor, harassment in school and public transport, and poor menstrual hygiene management, in addition to social and cultural norms that restrict their mobility and assign them with domestic and caregiving duties.

Participants, particularly Syrian and Palestinian respondents, described experiencing barriers in accessing protection services, including fear of stigma, mistrust in service providers, and lack of awareness of available support. While women and girls acknowledged the presence of some GBV referral pathways, they also raised concerns about their confidentiality and cultural acceptability.

Male participants, including adolescent boys, shared a different set of vulnerabilities, including social pressure to drop out of school for informal labour, fear of recruitment in the armed forces, and limited access to safe recreational spaces.

Across all sectors, individuals with disabilities were significantly underrepresented in service feedback loops, reflecting a gap both in program outreach and in data collection efforts. The analysis was unable to provide a detailed picture of how gender intersects with disability due to the limited participation of persons with disabilities in the FGDs and KIIs.

Based on the findings, several opportunities for promoting gender equality were identified, including Transformative programmatic approaches, women's empowerment programs, community awareness raising efforts, and youth-led peer initiatives. However, these entry

points require further investment and formalization to serve as levers for shifting harmful norms and increasing meaningful participation.

Furthermore, based on these findings, the report outlines a set of sector-specific recommendations aimed at addressing gender-based barriers, enhancing inclusive service delivery, and strengthening accountability to affected populations.

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian crises often amplify existing gender inequalities and introduce new challenges, with women and girls disproportionately affected due to entrenched gender norms. These emergencies restrict their access to decision-making, education, and employment, while heightening their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Disrupting social and economic structures, such crises further increase the risks faced by women and girls. Save the Children in Lebanon, dedicated to advancing child rights, requires comprehensive data on gender equality and the diverse impacts of crises across the affected populations in Beqaa, Baalbek-Hermel, Beirut, North, South, and Akkar Governorates. To meet the organization's standards for gender-sensitive programming, as outlined in its Gender Equality Policy and humanitarian Gender and GBV minimum actions, a gender analysis is required in all humanitarian responses. This analysis, which involves both children and adults, identifies the distinct needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities of women, men, girls, and boys, examining their roles, access to services, resources, risks, and decision-making power. Beyond meeting these standards, the analysis will guide the development of relevant, effective programs, aligned with the Core Humanitarian Standard.

In line with this, Save the Children Lebanon has commissioned a comprehensive, multi-sectoral gender equality humanitarian analysis, covering areas such as Nutrition, Child Protection, WASH, Food Security, Child Rights Governance, and Education. The findings will inform future actions and priorities within the targeted governorates. The analysis will include a context and problem analysis, a stakeholder and power analysis, gendered impacts of the emergency, gender-based protection risks, decision-making dynamics, access barriers, and an overview of entry points, enablers, challenges, and risks. It will conclude with high-level recommendations for program development and mitigation plans for ongoing programming. A key focus will be on the gender-based barriers faced by girls and boys in accessing education and child protection services in humanitarian settings, using an intersectional approach that considers age, displacement, disabilities, ethnicity, nationality, and other factors. The qualitative nature of this study is critical for evaluating the nuances of complex social phenomena and processes and amplifies the voices of women and girls.

The analysis will be shared internally with Save the Children Lebanon's technical leads, management, program staff, and field teams, and externally to inform humanitarian actors, relevant authorities, and decision-makers at both local and national levels.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Lebanon's socio-economic and political landscape presents a complex interplay of progress and persistent challenges concerning gender equality. While strides have been made in specific sectors, significant disparities remain, particularly in education, labour force participation, political representation, and humanitarian aid distribution. In the educational sphere, Lebanon boasts a high adult literacy rate of 97.9%, indicative of substantial progress in educational attainment (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023)[2]. However, this statistic masks underlying gender disparities. The percentage of the female population aged 25 and above with at least some secondary education stands at 39%, significantly lower than the national average of 75% (UNDP, 2023)[1]. This gap suggests systemic barriers that hinder women's educational advancement, limiting their opportunities in higher education and the workforce.

Labor force participation further underscores these disparities. Despite women constituting 52.6% of the working-age population, their active participation in the labor market is less than 30%, highlighting a significant underutilization of women's potential (UNDP, 2023)[1]. Moreover, employed women earn, on average, 6.5% less than their male counterparts, reflecting persistent wage inequalities (UNDP, 2023)[1]. Cultural norms, limited access to affordable childcare, and occupational segregation contribute to these inequities, reinforcing traditional gender roles and impeding women's economic empowerment.

Political representation remains another critical area of concern. Women gained the right to vote in 1953, yet their presence in political offices has remained minimal. The Lebanese Women's Council's successful campaign for women's suffrage in 1953 led to the election of three women to the Beirut city council, with Emily Fares Ibrahim becoming the first female parliamentary candidate (Lebanese Women's Council, n.d.)[3]. Decades later, women held only 4.7% of parliamentary seats, underscoring the enduring male dominance in political spheres (UNDP, 2023)[1]. Structural barriers, patriarchal societal norms, and a lack of supportive policies continue to hinder women's full participation in governance and decision-making processes.

The humanitarian sector situation, particularly in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, has exacerbated existing gender inequalities. Lebanon, although it has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and is classified as "not a country of asylum," hosts one of the highest per capita populations of displaced persons in the world. Nearly 4 million individuals in the country need humanitarian assistance (Associated Press, 2023)[4]. However, less than half of these individuals receive aid due to funding constraints and significant reductions in humanitarian aid. Refugees in Lebanon without legal documentation face heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV), primarily due to their precarious legal status. This leaves many, especially women and girls, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the scarcity of resources has

2 United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Lebanon Gender Analysis.

3 Lebanese Women's Council. (n.d.). *History*.

4 Associated Press. (2023, October 5). Nearly 4 million people in Lebanon need humanitarian help but less than half receive aid, UN says. *Associated Press*.

led to increased tensions and negative rhetoric towards refugees, further marginalizing already vulnerable populations (Associated Press, 2023)[2].

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pressing issue, with women and girls facing heightened risks in refugee settings. Overcrowded shelters, inadequate lighting, and lack of privacy in sanitation facilities contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls to various forms of violence (UN Women, 2024)[5]. The intersection of displacement, economic hardship, and cultural stigmas creates a complex environment where women are disproportionately affected by conflict-related vulnerabilities. Addressing the humanitarian needs of women and girls necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes increased funding, culturally sensitive support services, and robust legal protections against GBV. Ensuring that aid reaches those most in need, particularly marginalized women and girls, is crucial for fostering social cohesion and upholding human rights (Associated Press, 2023)[2].

In conclusion, while Lebanon has made notable progress in certain areas, significant gender disparities persist across various sectors. A concerted effort from all societal sectors is essential to address these challenges, promote gender equality, and harness the full potential of all citizens. Such efforts are vital for Lebanon's sustainable development and social harmony.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Scope of Analysis

STOOS Consulting has been commissioned by Save the Children to carry out a comprehensive humanitarian gender analysis. The purpose of this study is to enhance the program's understanding of gender inequalities in accessing services provided by Save the Children (SC), assess the gendered impact of the ongoing emergency, and inform the development of a gender action plan for the current crisis. The study will also lay the groundwork for the design of future gender-sensitive and transformative programs and interventions across emergency, early recovery, and nexus phases. Ultimately, the study aims to deliver positive outcomes for individuals of all gender identities, ages, nationalities, ethnicities, and abilities by fostering inclusive and equitable programming.

This analysis will focus on identifying strategies to ensure equitable access to services and rights, particularly education for girls, while addressing both immediate needs and long-term barriers to participation. It will examine how existing programs can be adapted to reduce the risks of early marriage, exploitation, child labor, and school dropout among both girls and boys.

5 UN Women. (2024). Rapid Gender Analysis: Gender, Conflict, and Internal Displacement in and from South Lebanon

Objectives of the study

The study has five objectives, as follows:

a) Identify gender and social power dynamics: Conduct a detailed analysis to identify specific gender roles, power dynamics, and social inclusion challenges within targeted communities residing in the proposed counties, highlighting power differentials, socio-cultural barriers, and opportunities for promoting inclusivity.

b) Assess GBV risks and service accessibility: Evaluate the availability and accessibility of GBV support services and community attitudes towards survivors utilizing a DO NO HARM approach. This means, for example, not asking questions that would lead to identification of survivors but rather understanding the efficiency of the available referral pathways and GBV service providers and investigating the link between access to services, including education, and protection risks, such as GBV.

c) Analyze needs and emergency-related coping mechanisms: Explore the unique needs, interests, and coping mechanisms of women, men, girls, boys, and groups that are most impacted by inequality and discrimination, identifying gaps in services and interventions tailored to their specific gender and intersectional statuses.

d) Analyze gender barriers hindering the participation of children and adults from different groups, especially the most impacted by inequality and discrimination: Explore and conduct a comprehensive analysis of socio-cultural barriers, norms, beliefs, power dynamics, and practices and their effect on effective participation and decision-making power. This includes analyzing the specific factors that limit girls and/or boys from accessing education and protection services and understanding the current negative/positive coping strategies to the educational disruptions.

e) Develop gender equality integration action plan: Create a comprehensive program/sector-specific action plan for mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion considerations into sector programs, outlining specific strategies and measures for each sector and the integration needed to address identified gaps and promote inclusivity.

Furthermore, the analysis will include, but will not be limited to, the following research questions:

- How has the current emergency in Lebanon impacted women, girls, boys, and men, with or without disabilities, and from different nationalities and groups?

- Is humanitarian aid affecting (positively or negatively) different groups?

- Are there any protection risks for women, men, girls, and boys in accessing the services provided by SC?

- What measures should humanitarian agencies consider to mitigate these risks?

• Using the ecological model: what is the gender-based decision-making power ?

• What are the different gender-based needs?

• What are the gender-based barriers to all services provided by SC, including education, such as safety concerns, menstrual hygiene management, cultural restrictions, and the negative/positive coping mechanisms to address these issues?

• What are the intersectional gendered access barriers to services and rights?

• How can SC equally reach the different groups impacted by inequality and discrimination?

• What are the harmful gender and social norms that manifest in different communities (per location)? How can SC and partners support in accelerating the action to positively change these norms and enable equitable environments within current and future interventions?

• What are the different power dimensions that impact different groups' access to services and rights? What are the different power differentials that impact access to resources and diverse opportunities?

3.STAKEHOLDERS / AUDIENCE

This study involves several key stakeholders. Program management staff at Save the Children (SC) will use the findings to enhance gender-sensitive and community-responsive programs. Local partners, including non-governmental and community-based organizations, are essential for identifying and addressing service delivery barriers and integrating gender-sensitive approaches. SC donors, such as government agencies, international development organizations, and private foundations, will rely on the study results to evaluate current interventions and inform future funding decisions. The beneficiaries—refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities—will have their specific needs addressed through inclusive and responsive program designs. Local governments and authorities at both district and national levels can utilize the study to inform policies on gender equality, child protection, and service access. Finally, other humanitarian actors, including international and local organizations, will gain insights to enhance coordination and the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Engaging these stakeholders ensures that the study's findings translate into actionable strategies for addressing gender inequalities and promoting social inclusion in humanitarian programming.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative research methods, specifically Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), to gather in-depth insights into gender-related issues within the targeted communities. FGDs involved guided group conversations with 8–12 participants sharing common characteristics, facilitating the exploration of collective perceptions and experiences through group dynamics. This method is particularly effective in identifying shared challenges, community norms, and collective attitudes. KIIs, on the other hand, were conducted with individuals possessing specialized knowledge or authority, such as community leaders or service providers, to obtain expert perspectives on gender disparities and programmatic barriers. By combining FGDs and KIIs, the study ensures a comprehensive understanding of both community-level experiences and institutional insights, enhancing the development of targeted, culturally appropriate interventions.

Table 1. Summary of DQ methods used

Activity	Planned	#Achieved
KIIs	27	28
FGDs	70	59
Validation FGDS	8	8

Tools

The data collection tools were developed by Save the Children and subsequently shared with the STOOS team, who led field implementation. Save the Children also provided guidance on the data collection process and established the sector-specific lines of inquiry, ensuring that the assessment addressed general gender dynamics across the areas of intervention. Evidence collection and analysis were structured to follow the lines of inquiry outlined in the tools. While the qualitative nature of the research allowed for the emergence of additional themes and sub-themes beyond the predefined inquiry areas, these insights remain anecdotal and cannot be broadly substantiated or validated across all data collection locations.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling approach followed a convenience sampling method, consistent with qualitative research methodology. It was developed by Save the Children, which selected local partners based on availability and operational feasibility. SCI held several meetings with Area Managers to discuss the weight and distribution of activity types to identify where SCI interventions were most concentrated. The sampling strategy was developed based on a series of consultations with Technical Advisors and field teams to ensure the most

appropriate sample was selected. Furthermore, Save the Children also determined data collection venues, session numbers, and the sectoral focus areas for each location. The sampling aimed to ensure diversity across Lebanese host communities and displaced Palestinian and Syrian populations; however, the number of sessions varied by group, with Syrian refugees comprising the majority of participants, as detailed in the tables below. As this is not a representative sample, but rather one based on convenience, the variation and inconsistency in group distribution limit the comparability of emerging themes across nationalities or subgroups and constrain the extent to which findings can be generalized beyond the specific contexts studied.

Table 2. Sample distribution by nationality and status

The chart illustrates the distribution of FGD participants by nationality. The data shows that the overwhelming majority were Syrian refugees (57%), followed by Palestinian refugees (13%), members of the Lebanese host community (18%), and, lastly, displaced Lebanese individuals (10%).

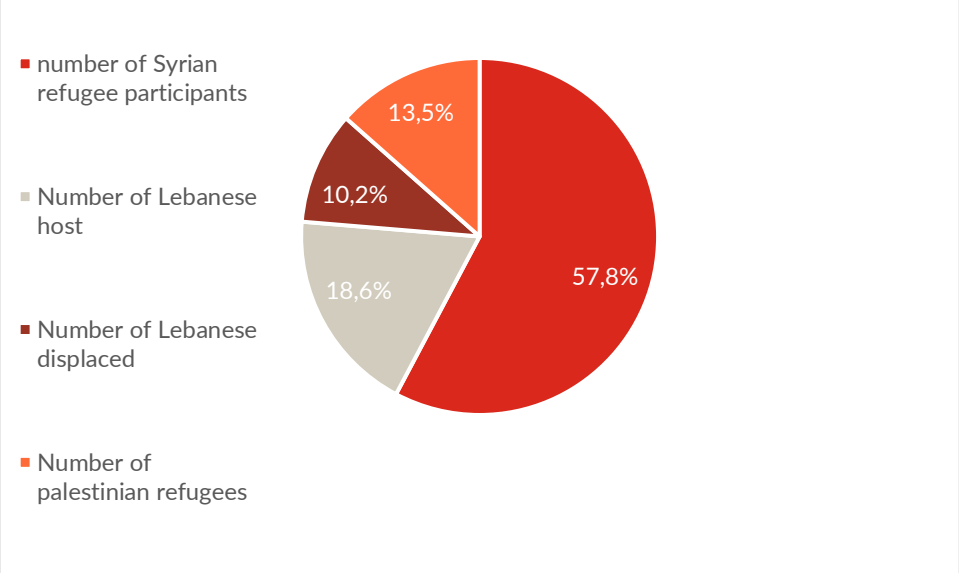

Table 3. Distribution of sessions over nationality and sector

This table provides key insights into the distribution of FGDs across sectors by nationality. It underscores the variability in the types and number of sessions conducted for each nationality, highlighting that not all nationalities participated in every sector or theme. This distinction is essential for understanding why the data is not always comparable by sector or theme across nationalities.

Sector/Nationality	Number of sessions
Lebanese Host	**6**
education	4
general	1
livelihood & nutrition	1
Lebanese Host- displaced	**1**
education & wash - shelter	1

Lebanese displaced	**7**
protection & nutrition	2
general - nutrition	2
general & wash	2
Protection & wash - shelter	1
Palestinian refugees	**6**
protection & nutrition	2
food & nonfood - liv	2
general - protection	1
general - nutrition	1
Syrian refugees	**39**
protection	5
education	12
education & protection	9
FSL	5
General- liv & cash	1
wash	7
Grand Total	**59**

Table 4.Distribution of sectors per location

District/ Sector	Number of sessions
Akkar	**13**
protection	2
education	6
education & protection	4
FSL	1
Baalbak	**2**
FSL	2
Sidon	**18**
protection & nutrition	4
food & nonfood - liv	2
general - protection	1
general - nutrition	3
general & wash	2
wash	6
Tripoli	**13**
protection	1
education	4
education & protection	5
General, livelihood & cash	1
general	1
liv & nutrition	1
Tyre	**6**
education	4
education & wash - shelter	1
Protection & wash - shelter	1
Zahle	**7**

protection	2
education	2
FSL	2
wash	1
Grand Total	**59**

Ethical Considerations and Safeguarding

In line with Save the Children's guidance, this study prioritizes ethical considerations, particularly when engaging with children and vulnerable populations. The methodology—comprising FGDs and KIIs—was designed to align with ethical standards, including the nine Basic Requirements for meaningful and ethical child participation. The tools used for data collection were developed by Save the Children and reviewed by SC's Ethics Committee before implementation to ensure adherence to these standards. These principles ensure informed consent, voluntary participation, non-discrimination, and the safeguarding of privacy and dignity.

Additionally, the STOOS Field team helped create a safe, inclusive environment using age-appropriate, culturally sensitive approaches and underwent safeguarding training conducted by SC to identify distress or provide referrals where needed. While group settings like FGDs encourage peer dialogue, the STOOS field team addresses potential discomfort and ensures all voices are heard. Ethics committee's approval was obtained from Save the Children before fieldwork began, and the consent process was rigorously followed.

Participants received a clear explanation of the purpose of the study and its implications for themselves. Additionally, verbal informed assent from children and consent from adult participants and caregivers were obtained before the start of the sessions. Confidentiality and data protection were upheld. This approach ensured participants' rights and well-being remained central while enabling valuable, respectful engagement.

Data Collection & Field Monitoring

STOOS has developed a comprehensive, gender-responsive protocol for data collection with children in Lebanon, integrating child protection principles with gender-sensitive methodologies. The training program equips researchers with essential skills through two complementary modules: generic training that covers gender-mainstreamed research ethics, child-sensitive approaches, and safety protocols, as well as technical training that focuses on gender-disaggregated data tools and inclusive methodologies for marginalized groups. The data collection process employs gender-sensitive practices, including female researchers for girls' groups where culturally appropriate, simplified assent procedures for children, and verbal consent options for non-literate caregivers. Data collection utilized gender-segregated focus groups and child-

friendly visual tools to ensure equal participation from boys and girls. Rigorous quality controls include gender-balanced research teams, bias monitoring in data interpretation, and feedback mechanisms with participants. This protocol adheres to Lebanese child protection laws, UNCRC standards, and global safeguarding policies, ensuring ethical collection of reliable, gender-representative data while prioritizing child wellbeing throughout the research process. Post-pilot debriefing sessions further refine methodologies based on observed gender dynamics and participant feedback.

Additionally, to ensure the highest quality of qualitative data collected from children, we implemented a rigorous real-time monitoring system. Each day, the research team conducted systematic reviews of the gathered narratives, field notes, and interview transcripts, checking for completeness, consistency, and adherence to ethical protocols. Identified gaps or unclear responses were immediately flagged as written feedback to field researchers, who then addressed these comments. This iterative process allowed for continuous data refinement while maintaining methodological integrity. This dynamic approach not only improved data accuracy but also strengthened researchers' skills in qualitative data collection throughout the study duration.

Action Plans and Round Table discussions

Based on the findings from the study, comprehensive, evidence-based action plans will be developed for each sector—WASH, shelter, education, protection, and livelihoods—to address the specific challenges and opportunities identified including those for people with disability, ensuring that all interventions are accessible, equitable, and tailored to diverse needs. These sector-specific plans will draw directly from the study's recommendations and be designed to promote practical and sustainable impact. Following their development, a multi-stakeholder roundtable will be convened, bringing together key actors—including government agencies, humanitarian and development partners, civil society organizations, and representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities. This platform will serve to review, validate, and refine the proposed strategies, gather cross-sectoral feedback, and ensure that implementation is contextually relevant and aligned with policy and community priorities. This collaborative and participatory approach will strengthen inclusive decision-making and enhance the accountability, effectiveness, and equity of interventions across all sectors.

Focus Group Discussions

Fifty-Nine (59) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across seven districts in Lebanon, engaging diverse groups including children, youth, women, and men. Followed by 8 validation sessions to confirm the different findings from the study. Participants were stratified by age, gender, and displacement status (host, refugee, IDP); however, equal representation across these categories was not ensured, as the sampling strategy employed was convenience sampling, as outlined in the Sampling Strategy section. To facilitate meaningful participation, tailored measures were implemented. Venues were chosen for physical

accessibility, and communication support included written materials and assistive technologies as needed. Facilitators used clear, simple language and worked with caregivers when needed to support understanding. Caregivers and support persons were allowed to accompany participants, and flexibility in participation modes (verbal, written) was ensured.

For children, age-appropriate activities were employed, and informed consent was obtained from caregivers , making participation voluntary and comfortable. This approach created a safe, inclusive, and accessible environment, enabling all participants to share their experiences and contribute to the gender analysis process.

Table 5. Distribution of FGDs by district

District	Gender		
District/Type	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Akkar	**6**	**5**	**11**
Adults	3	2	5
Children	3	3	6
Baalbak	**1**	**1**	**2**
Adults	1	1	2
Sidon	**9**	**9**	**18**
Adults	3	3	6
Children	6	6	12
Sour	**3**	**3**	**6**
Adults	1	1	2
Children	2	2	4
Tripoli	**10**	**5**	**15**
Adults	4	2	6
Children	6	3	9
Zahle	**4**	**3**	**7**
Adults	2	1	3
Children	2	2	4
Grand Total	**33**	**26**	**59**

Table 6.Composition of participants by nationality and status

Status /Nationality	Number of sessions
Lebanese Host	6
Lebanese Host- displaced (both)	1
Lebanese displaced	7
Palestinian refugees	6
Syrian refugees	39
Grand Total	**59**

Table 7.Distribution of validation sessions by district and nationality

District	female	male	Grand Total
Akkar	**3**	**2**	**5**
10 to 14	1		1
10 to 14	1	2	3
above 18	1		1
Bekaa	**2**	**1**	**3**
above 18	2	1	3
Grand Total	**5**	**3**	**8**

Nationality	Count of District
Lebanese Host	3
Syrian Refugees	3
Syrian Refugees-Leb host (combined)	2
Grand Total	**8**

Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) serve as a vital qualitative data collection method, offering in-depth insights that are often inaccessible through other approaches. By engaging individuals with direct knowledge and expertise, KIIs uncover underlying factors, motivations, and experiences pertinent to the research questions. They assist in identifying gaps in program implementation, validating existing findings, and contextualizing information within broader frameworks.

In this study, 28 KIIs were conducted with stakeholders from various implementation sectors, as outlined in the sample frame. Selection criteria prioritized both experience and diversity. Informants were chosen based on their specific knowledge or experience relevant to each project's sector. A range of perspectives was sought by including informants from different sectors and backgrounds, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issues. This approach aligns with best practices, emphasizing the importance of selecting informants who can provide diverse and relevant perspectives. By integrating these varied viewpoints, the study aims to capture a holistic understanding of the subject matter, enhancing the depth and applicability of its findings.

Table 8. Distribution of KII by sector and stakeholder groups

Sctor/Respondent position	female	male	Grand Total
Education	**5**	**1**	**6**
Education Specialist	1		1
NGO- volunteer	1		1
school Coordinator	1		1

School Principle		1	1
social worker	2		2
FSL	**2**	**3**	**5**
Health care provider	1		1
Local authority- Social Affairs		1	1
Local NGO		1	1
social worker	1	1	2
Nutrition	**2**	**2**	**4**
Health Advisor- International NGO		1	1
Health care provider		1	1
ngo- volunteer	1		1
Nutrition Specialist	1		1
protection	**3**	**2**	**5**
Lawyer- CP		1	1
ngo- volunteer	1		1
social worker	1	1	2
Women and Child CP specialist- Local NGO	1		1
shelter	**3**	**1**	**4**
Local NGO	2		2
Program Coordinator-Relief Agency		1	1
social worker	1		1
wash	**2**	**2**	**4**
Local NGO	2		2
WASH Community Representative - Local Community		2	2
Grand Total	**17**	**11**	**28**

Limitations

- This study employed a qualitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. While it provides valuable national insights, this approach has limitations, particularly in generalizability and the inability to establish correlations between variables. The findings do not aim to capture regional differences with statistical precision or explore correlations, particularly those related to household types, such as female-headed, male-headed, or youth-headed households, educational level, financial status, or household composition. These aspects would be interesting to explore in a quantitative study in the future, as convenient.

- Data collection during Ramadan posed challenges due to altered schedules and participants' religious and cultural obligations. Additionally, as noted by STOOS and the SC Ethical Review committee, the tools were too lengthy, leading to dissatisfaction and exhaustion among participants and the team. Long introductory questions, particularly with large groups, consumed significant time and energy, making it difficult to engage with core discussion points in some cases.

- Limited Number of People with Disabilities: While the study aimed to include diverse participant groups, the number of individuals with disabilities participating in the FGDs was limited to two people. Therefore, the findings might not fully reflect their experiences or challenges. This limitation was mitigated in the study through desk research and Key informant interviews.

- A significant limitation of this research is that no questions in the data collection tools addressed the needs of individuals with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (**SOGIESC**). Moreover, due to the sensitivity of the topic, questions related to the sexual orientation of respondents were not asked in FGD settings. This absence of inclusive data impedes the development of tailored interventions and policies that could effectively address the specific challenges encountered by these communities, thereby limiting the comprehensiveness and applicability of the study's findings to these specific identity categories.

5. FINDINGS

Glossary BOX

Theoretical Framing:

Socio-Ecological Model: In socio-ecological approaches, individuals are seen as key agents in ecological systems. This approach also recognises the interconnectedness between ecosystems and socio-economic systems with typically five levels of influence: 1) Individual, 2) Interpersonal, 3) Institutional, 4) Community, and 5) Policy. This is a useful framework by which to examine the lived experiences of individuals and to appreciate the similarities and differences experiences people may have through each of the systems. It is also a particularly useful tool for examining gender inequalities as it can highlight the disparities in each system and how these may affect men, women, girls, and boys differently and how these experiences may shift over time, for example, due to external events or age transitions.

Capabilities Approach: Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach and further work on how the freedom of individuals can provide the basic building blocks of development further develop the socio-ecological approach with the overall view that greater freedom and choice enhance the ability of people to help themselves and influence the world around them.[6] This theory is focused on what people are able to be and what they are able to do; the choices they are able to exercise. To Sen, human capabilities or 'substantial freedoms', are the ones that allow "people to live the lives they have reason to value and enhance the real choices they have".[7] In addition, societies should support access to opportunities and dignity, which people may then choose to exercise in action, or not. The centre of Sen's vision is the richness of human life and, within that, people's capability to function in society, rather than the usual concentration on rising GDP, technical progress, or industrialisation.[8]He outlines five distinct freedom domains: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. Freedom, he says, is a principal determinant of individual initiative and social effectiveness; it is good primarily because it enhances the ability of individuals to help themselves, a property that Sen describes as the 'agency aspect' of the individual.[9]

Empowerment Theory: The main elements of Kabeer's women's empowerment theory – access to resources, the role of agency, and a sense of achievement – are also critical to our analysis.[10] Examining who has *access to power*, who is able to *utilise their power*, and who an individual has *power (or influence) over* enables us to consider women and girls' perceptions of *power within* (through their independence or self-esteem), and *power to* (through their relationships with others and their own agency to act), as well as

[6] Further reading available: Sen, Amartya . *Inequality Reexamined* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; Sen, Amartya . *Development as Freedom* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 .
[7] Sen, Amartya . *Development as Freedom* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; O'Hearn, Denis, 'Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom: Ten Years Later', Policy and Practice, A Development Education Review, (8), Spring 2009.
[8] Ibid

[10] Kabeer, Naila, 'Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', Development and Change 30, No 3 (1999): 435-464.

to act as a useful tool for gathering insight of gender inequalities and gendered social norms and how these may exacerbate harmful gender practices.[11]

Traditional Roles: Traditional roles in Lebanon refer to socially defined expectations based on gender. Men are typically viewed as authority figures and financial providers. Women are often assigned caregiving and domestic responsibilities. These roles are reinforced by cultural, religious, and legal systems. Recognizing them is key to understanding gender dynamics in Lebanon.

Gender Norms: Socially constructed beliefs regarding men's and women's behaviour which are 'assigned' by their biological sex. These norms govern our actions and choices and may lead to gender stereotyping.

Patriarchy: Refers to historical power imbalances and cultural practices and systems that confer power and offer men and boys more social and material benefits than women and girls.

Freedom: Refers to the ability of individuals to make choices regardless of gender. It includes equal access to education, work, and political participation. Cultural and legal constraints often limit women's freedoms more than men's. True freedom involves removing barriers caused by traditional roles and discrimination. It is essential for achieving gender equality and social justice.

Gender and Power Dynamics

An intersectional examination of gendered power dynamics across the KIIs and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Akkar, Tripoli, Zahle, Tyre, and Sidon reveals the persistence of deeply rooted patriarchal structures that significantly limit women's and girls' autonomy and participation within the household and community. "*There are social and cultural barriers that prevent women from working, such as norms that confine a woman's role to the home*." (KII respondent). Furthermore, participants from various backgrounds, including Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian communities, both old and young, male and female, consistently described a traditional family structure in which gender serves as a key determinant of individual roles and authority.

Women and girls in FGDs across the different population groups and nationalities reported being excluded from core household decisions, particularly those involving the management of food, cash, and other resources. Their responsibilities were largely confined to caregiving and household tasks. As one Syrian woman in Akkar explained, "*Most of the time, I stay home and do not have enough time to work or visit, except for a short while*" (Syrian refugee woman, Akkar FGD). This account reflects how gendered social norms at

[11] ODI (2009) Understanding and operationalising empowerment, Working paper 308. Cecilia Luttrell & Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton & Kate Bird

the household level prevent women and girls' engagement beyond the domestic sphere and and restrict their power to access or engage meaningfully in public and economic life.

Furthermore, men and boys across various locations and nationality groups confirmed these dynamics. In Zahle, adult male respondents emphasized that decisions related to food and financial resources were typically made by men, on the basis that they were expected to provide for the family. One man asserted, "*Decisions related to the use of food and money, in particular, are made by men, as they are considered responsible for meeting the family's needs*," (Adult male respondents, Zahle FGD). This reinforces the notion that men are positioned as primary decision-makers at both the inter-personal, household and community and wider public spheres, while women's contributions, though essential, are rendered invisible or secondary.

Among younger respondents, similar patterns were observed in the way boys and girls perceived their roles. Palestinian refugee boys in Sidon identified a clear gendered divide in what they considered appropriate activities. They described their activities as including playing football, working as a mechanic, riding motorcycles, and camping—activities that involve freedom of movement and public presence. In contrast, they viewed girls' activities as confined to spaces like "my sister's room, women's gatherings (my mother and her friends), beauty salons, and women-only swimming pools," citing safety concerns and the perception that girls cannot defend themselves (Palestinian Boys FGD, Sidon). These internalized gender roles, shaped from a young age, influence children's early sense of agency and the way decision-making power is perceived and practiced.

> ***"I would shoot her (his sister); she is meant to stay at home only, the man is responsible for providing financially"***.
>
> (Palestinian refugee Boys, FGD Sidon)

The quote above presents evidence of the broader systemic and cultural dynamics that necessitate targeted, gender-transformative interventions. It is a stark and deeply concerning expression of violent patriarchal control. It reflects entrenched gender norms that not only confine women to the domestic sphere but also justify the use of violence to enforce these roles. This statement highlights the urgent need for violence prevention strategies that address harmful masculinities and challenge the normalization of violence as a tool for maintaining gender hierarchies. It also underscores the importance of gender norms transformation efforts that promote shared responsibilities, gender equality, and nonviolent expressions of identity and authority.

""All jobs are available to both girls and boys, and differences arise only from one family to another"

(Syrian refugee women FGD, Tripoli)

Despite the prevalence of these norms, there is evidence of change and contestation. Lebanese women in Akkar spoke of increasing female participation in social and economic life. They noted "Women today work and prefer social life and community engagement more than before" (Lebanese women FGD, Akkar), attributing this shift to changes in livelihoods and evolving mindsets. Similarly, Syrian refugee women in Tripoli expressed a more egalitarian view, stating, "All jobs are available to both girls and boys, and that differences arise only from one family to another". Aside from that, the participants expressed their firm belief that work is "*Neither shameful nor limited to specific roles*," (Syrian refugee women FGD, Tripoli).

These emerging perspectives can serve as critical entry points for gender-transformative programming. As outlined in SC's GAP Guidance (2022), identifying shifts in attitudes, especially among women and youth, presents an opportunity to reinforce positive deviance and scale normative change. Humanitarian actors should intentionally build on such narratives to design interventions that challenge restrictive norms, promote women's agency, and engage men and boys as allies in advancing gender equality whilst noting that normative change programmes take time and multi-sectoral commitment and support.

Together, these insights reveal a complex landscape of gendered power relations. While patriarchal norms remain deeply entrenched, affecting how decisions are made and who has access to opportunities, there is also growing recognition, particularly among some women and youth, that these roles can change depending on the circumstances. As economic pressures and generational shifts unfold, attitudes are beginning to shift toward greater inclusivity and equity, although such changes are uneven and deeply context-dependent.

Gender Based Socio-Ecological Model

The ecological model, when applied to gender-based decision-making power, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how gender roles and norms at multiple levels—individual, relational, community, and societal—interact to influence who holds decision-making authority. This model highlights that individual behaviours and choices are deeply embedded within a broader social context, emphasizing the need for interventions that address factors across all levels to achieve lasting change. By examining these interconnected layers, we can identify and address the structural and cultural barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities in decision-making processes. This analysis draws from 59 FGDs and 28 KIIs, highlighting how norms shape behaviours and decisions differently based on age, gender, legal status, and displacement.

Individual Level: At the individual level of the socio-ecological model, gender roles are shaped by internalized beliefs, perceived self-worth, and socialized understandings of appropriate roles for males and females. The findings from the KIIs and focus group discussions (FGDs) illustrate how these internalized gender norms begin to form early in childhood, shaping children's sense of agency and self-concept in deeply gendered ways.

Across different target locations, Tripoli, Sidon, Zahle, and Tyre, children consistently reported divergent expectations based on gender. Girls frequently described feeling obligated to support the family through domestic labor, while boys were given more freedom to participate in external activities. One girl in Zahle emphasized this disparity, stating, *"Money and forcing girls to do housework prevent them from going to school, whereas boys are not obligated in this regard, so they go to school."* (Syrian Girl FGD, Zahle). Her experience reflects how gendered norms around household responsibility can directly affect access to education and future opportunities.

These norms are not only internalized by girls but are also reflected in boys' perceptions. Boys described their daily activities as including *"A girl should stay at home out of concern for her, to protect her from potential loss or deviation, especially in the current time"* (Syrian refugee boy, Tripoli). Such gendered delineations reinforce the belief that boys are meant to be active in public spaces, whereas girls should remain within private or female-only domains due to perceived vulnerabilities: *"girls are seen as unable to defend themselves, and safety is a concern"* (Lebanese Boy FGD, Sour).

These patterns of early socialization influence how children perceive their roles and worth. Girls tend to associate their value with domestic contributions, while boys internalize messages of mobility, freedom, and

public participation. This individual-level internalization of gender roles ultimately affects children's confidence, aspirations, and decision-making power later in life.

However, the data also reflect a growing counter-narrative that supports more egalitarian gender norms. In Sidon, one boy described how his sister works in a sweets factory to contribute to household income, prompting him to take on more domestic duties: *"My sister works in a sweets factory to help with the household expenses, and so I help my mother at home because she gets very tired."* (Palestinian Boys FGD, Sidon). Similarly, in Tripoli, male Syrian refugees remarked: *"I think both boys and girls have equal education opportunities... Both girls and boys should be registered in schools. Our time is different from the past — it is the era of knowledge."* (Adult Male Syrian refugees, Tripoli).

> ***""My sister works in a sweets factory to help with the household expenses, and so I help my mother at home because she gets very tired."***
>
> (Palestinian Boys FGD, Sidon)

These statements signal emerging shifts in individual perceptions that challenge traditional gender roles, suggesting that while prevailing norms continue to limit girls' autonomy, they are not static. Education and exposure to alternative narratives of equality appear to foster more inclusive attitudes at the individual level, laying the foundation for long-term normative change.

> ***"I think both boys and girls have equal education opportunities... Both girls and boys should be registered in schools. Our time is different from the past — it is the era of knowledge."***
>
> (Adult Male Syrian refugees, Tripoli)

Interpersonal level: Gender norms are produced and reinforced through close relationships, primarily within the family and extending to interactions with peers and friends. These relational contexts serve as immediate social environments where individuals negotiate their roles, responsibilities, and sense of identity. KII respondents and Focus group discussions (FGDs) across various communities—Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese—consistently reveal how interpersonal dynamics reflect and perpetuate gendered expectations, often beginning in childhood and persisting throughout life.

Within families, gendered divisions of labor and authority remain central to interpersonal socialization. Many women across regions such as Nabatieh, Zahle, Akkar, and Tripoli reported being responsible for all domestic duties, including caregiving, cleaning, and food preparation, while men were often disengaged or took on the role of financial authority. One displaced woman in Deir El Zahrani described, "The man is always angry. He doesn't do anything and needs to rest. We do the cleaning, and the biggest concern is the laundry

because it's done by hand" (Female FGD, Deir El Zahrani). Another echoed, "Women take care of the family, and the man is always angry about the situation. You have to tolerate it, even though he doesn't do any work at all." These reflections point to unequal relational dynamics in the home, where emotional and physical burdens fall on women, while men often retain symbolic or nominal control. As further noted in Zahle, "Decisions related to the use of food and money, in particular, are made by men, as they are responsible for securing the family's needs" (Male FGD, Zahle). Here, male authority is both assumed and normalized, even in cases where women are effectively managing all daily survival tasks.

In sum, the interpersonal level reveals how gender norms are reinforced through daily relationships between parents and children, siblings, and peers. These dynamics, formed early and replicated through routine interaction, are critical in shaping how individuals understand their gendered roles. While dominant patterns reflect a patriarchal division of labor and authority, the data also reveal cracks in this structure: acts of role-sharing, redefined expectations, and a growing awareness, particularly among youth, of more equitable alternatives. These interpersonal relationships, therefore, are both sources of constraint and potential vehicles for change.

Community Level (Schools, Religious Institutions): Based on the findings from FGDs and KIIs, the community-level ecological model of gender norms in Lebanon emphasizes the interconnected roles of families, schools, peer groups, religious institutions, and religious leaders in reinforcing and sustaining patriarchal gender expectations. Within the family setting, gender roles are often internalized from an early age, as consistently reported by child participants in FGDs conducted across Sidon, Akkar, and Tripoli, as discussed in previous sections. These findings align with broader research on Lebanon, which confirms the persistence of traditional divisions of labour and authority within households. Women are still largely expected to manage caregiving and domestic responsibilities, while men are seen as providers and primary decision-makers. (UN Women, 2023)[12]. Schools further institutionalize these norms, both through gendered curricula and classroom dynamics. LNCW (2020)[13] further elaborated on this aspect. They reported that the Lebanese public education curriculum, last updated in 1997, has faced widespread criticism for being outdated and embedding gender-biased stereotypes. These biases limit equitable academic and professional opportunities for women and girls. The curriculum lacks integration of modern technology and entirely omits discussions of gender equality, reflecting the regressive societal attitudes that shaped its development (LNCW 2020)[6]. Furthermore, according to Shuayb (2015)[14], the curriculum exhibits gender bias, particularly by depicting women primarily in domestic roles. Girls are often encouraged into stereotypically "feminine" careers, and boys are expected to lead academically or socially (UN Women, 2023)[5]. These systemic issues highlight the urgent need for curriculum reform, inclusive of gender perspectives and expert input. As one KII expert put it, "Girls and boys do not have equal opportunities in education due to economic factors, household responsibilities, child marriage, security concerns, and the absence of female teachers in some areas. The main challenges include poverty, high education costs, child marriage, the need to work to support the family, bullying, and a lack of awareness about the importance of education for girls," (KII

[12] UN Women. (2023). *Gender statistical profile: Lebanon 2023*. https://lebanon.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/07/gender-statistical-profile-lebanon-2023
[13] Lebanese National Commission for Women (LNCW). (2020). *Gender stereotypes in the education sector: Need for reform of the curriculum and barriers hindering women's progress* (Policy Brief Series: Brief 3). Lebanese National Commission for Women. Retrieved from https://lngo.nclw.gov.lb/publications/gender-stereotypes-in-the-education-sector/
[14] Shuayb, M. (2015). *Human rights and education: The case of curriculum reform in Lebanon*. Centre for Lebanese Studies.

respondent). Moreover, Lebanon's religious institutions, rooted in its sectarian political system, play a central role in codifying and legitimizing gender inequality. With 15 different personal status laws governed by religious courts, women face systemic discrimination in matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance (Human Rights Watch, 2015)[15]. These overlapping social systems not only shape individual beliefs but also institutionalize gendered expectations, creating a societal structure in which gender inequality is normalized and sustained across generations.

Societal Level (Social Systems - Economic, Political, Legal, Cultural): Gender norms in Lebanon are deeply embedded within the political, legal, and cultural fabric of society, significantly influencing women's roles and rights. Politically, Lebanon's sectarian governance structure, which allocates power among various religious communities, has historically marginalized women from meaningful political participation. As UN Women (2020)[16] notes, Lebanon ranks among the lowest in the Middle East in terms of female parliamentary representation, a reflection of systemic barriers to political inclusion. Legally, women face substantial inequalities due to Lebanon's pluralistic personal status laws, which are governed by 15 different religious courts, each applying their interpretations of marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. These laws overwhelmingly favor men, as Usta et al (2016)[17] explain, contributing to women's legal disenfranchisement and reinforcing patriarchal control over family and property matters. The inequalities become even more pronounced in the cases of displaced or undocumented women, who face double legal marginalization. As they are constrained both by religious and state systems.

"The outdated and non-renewable laws and the long-standing customs that have been prevalent for ages act as a major barrier for women's equal participation in the job market."

Culturally, traditional gender roles are perpetuated through societal expectations and media portrayals that valorize male dominance and female submissiveness. This pattern has been confirmed through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted across Lebanon. As one respondent noted, "*The outdated and non-renewable laws and the long-standing customs that have been prevalent for ages act as a major barrier for women's equal participation in the job market*" (KII respondent, FSL). Additionally, El-Turk and Khoury (2017)[18] highlight how media narratives often depict women in domestic or passive roles, reinforcing a national discourse that discourages female assertiveness and leadership. These cultural constructs of gender identity intersect with political and legal systems, fostering a deeply entrenched patriarchal society where women are expected to adhere to traditional roles, leaving them with limited opportunities for self-determination. Therefore, transformative change in Lebanon requires not only legal reform and political inclusion but also a cultural shift toward more equitable gender norms. This entails

[15] Human Rights Watch. (2015). *Unequal and unprotected: Women's rights under Lebanon's religious personal status laws*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanons-religious-personal-status-laws
[16] UN Women. (2020). *Lebanon*. https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/countries/lebanon
[17] Usta, J., Farver, J. M., & Hamieh, C. S. (2016). Effects of socialization on gender discrimination and violence against women in Lebanon. *Violence Against Women, 22*(4), 415–431. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215603509
[18] El-Turk, N., & Khoury, D. (2017, December 6). *Challenging negative gender stereotypes of women in Lebanon*. Hivos. https://hivos.org/challenging-negative-gender-stereotypes-of-women-in-lebanon/

challenging ingrained stereotypes and empowering women to participate fully in all dimensions of public and private life.

Gendered Impact of Conflict (War or Violence):

Economic and Social Pressures from conflict: In FGDs with displaced Lebanese families, particularly those living in the Montana Hotel and Sidon, women described how displacement and economic collapse have intensified pre-existing gender inequalities. Women reported having to take additional responsibilities such as providing care, managing households, while also experiencing increased exposure to emotional stress and domestic tensions. *"The men are angry, but we have to tolerate it,"* (Female Lebanese IDP FGD, Sidon). One participant in Sidon described a sense of "constant pressure to provide without support," highlighting the compounding stressors facing women during emergencies. *"In the morning at the hotel, I take care of my children and clean the room, and in the afternoon, I teach some children so I can cover the expenses needed for the kids because my husband is currently without work,"* (Female Lebanese IDP FGD, Sidon). By contrast, several men participants described feelings of helplessness and powerlessness due to loss of employment and social status, particularly in roles traditionally associated with providing for the family. "*The life we are living now is no life at all. We have lost our homes, livelihoods, and our way of life. Everything changed after the war—men became like women, we stayed at home all the time, and all we do is try to provide whatever the family might need,*" (Male Lebanese IDP FGD, Sidon).

> ***"The life we are living now is no life at all. We have lost our homes, livelihoods, and our way of life. Everything changed after the war—men became like women, we stayed at home all the time, and all we do is try to provide whatever the family might need."***
>
> (Male Lebanese IDP FGD, Sidon)

These economic and social pressures are closely tied to widespread unemployment among both Palestinian refugees and Lebanese displaced populations. Across focus group discussions, particularly among residents of the Montana Hotel, the majority of men and women reported being out of formal employment, highlighting the broader economic collapse that has left families without stable sources of income or security. . Instead, they rely on external aid, ad hoc daily jobs, and community-based support systems to meet their basic needs, indicating a predominantly informal, community-driven economic structure. This sentiment was echoed in a separate FGD with Palestinian refugee boys, who noted that the war had a broadly negative impact on their community: *"Many children's fathers lost their jobs either inside or outside the camp, as they used to work in the south."* (*Palestinian* boys FGD, Sidon).

Unemployment as a consequence of the conflict was further emphasized by Key Informant Interview (KII) respondents. One participant noted, "The crisis has had a significant impact. Many people lost their jobs due to displacement or the collapse of local markets. Women were particularly affected, as their responsibilities at home increased, reducing their ability to look for work. Additionally, security restrictions and instability have affected agriculture and trade, limiting men's ability to provide income." (KII respondent).

All these dynamics compound intra-household tensions and also force women into expanded caregiving and income-generating duties while men grapple with a loss of identity tied to their provider roles. Yet, rather than prompting a shift toward more equitable dynamics, these changes have largely reinforced existing gender norms, leaving women overburdened and men disempowered within rigid societal expectations. Wider research from other situations of humanitarian crises (conflict, displacement and war) have highlighted that gender based violence and other harmful gender practices can become heightened as a result of role changes within the household.[19]

Challenges to well-being and mental health:

The war profoundly impacted the mental health and well-being of many of the women, men, girls and boys respondents, both Lebanese IDPs and Palestinian refugees. As with other experiences, the intersecting identities that make up individuals will have varying impacts on the ways in which their mental health has been affected as a result of the war. Several men and women across FDGs, especially in Sidon, reported resource scarcity, including limited access to baby formula and other essentials, which intensified their emotional and physical stress. *"My wife and I skip meals; what matters is that the children get their food"* (Male Palestinian refugees FGD, Ain EL Helwe). These unmet needs, coupled with overcrowded living conditions, insecurity, and economic hardships, contributed to elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety reported among displaced women. "*I don't feel alive, I stay in my room all day*," (Female Lebanese IDP, Sidon). Several women from FGDs in Sidon expressed a deep sense of loss and longing for the stability that displacement has taken from them. "*I want to drink my coffee with my neighbours, go back to our roastery where we used to earn our livelihood, and have joy return to our lives*," (Female Lebanese IDP, Sidon). This sentiment underscores the profound emotional and psychological impact of prolonged displacement on respondents' well-being and sense of normalcy.

Additionally, many children have experienced trauma and fear from witnessing bombings or near-miss attacks. "*I lost my sense of safety when I lost my home*," stated a Lebanese displaced girl. "*Our village was comfortable, and we loved everything about it. I lost that feeling of safety, but having my family by my side remains the most important thing*," a Palestinian girl echoed. Furthermore, both Lebanese and Palestinian children shared accounts of trauma, especially linked to airstrikes and displacement. Many reported avoiding outdoor play or socialization due to fear, which in turn affected their psychosocial development. A Palestinian boy in Sidon explained, "*What changed during the war compared to before is that we no longer went outside the*

[19] See for example: Humanitarian Action (2021). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021*

house to play, because our parents were afraid, in case the camp was bombed. Even after the war, it took about a month and a half before we were allowed to play outside under the house," (Palestinian Boys FGD, Sidon).

The findings, therefore, demonstrate how the war has severely impacted the mental health and well-being of displaced Lebanese and Palestinian communities, with women bearing the brunt of caregiving under resource scarcity and emotional strain. Furthermore, overcrowding, economic hardship, and unmet basic needs have compounded the emotional toll, especially for women and girls. These intersecting pressures underscore the critical need for multisectoral interventions—combining mental health support, GBV prevention, protection services, and economic assistance—while also addressing the underlying gender norms that reinforce these vulnerabilities in crisis contexts.

Primary Needs of Vulnerable Populations During Emergencies

In focus group discussions (FGDs) with male respondents in Ain el-Helweh, participants highlighted a range of unmet needs critical to household survival during emergencies. In addition to food assistance, respondents emphasized the importance of receiving *"hygiene kits tailored for both domestic use and personal care. These included cleaning supplies, disinfection materials, and specifically, women's hygiene kits,"* (Male FGD, Ain El Helwe). The need for child-focused items was also repeatedly stressed by both male and female respondents, including clothing, essentials, diapers, medications, and infant formula. These identified needs by respondents were further echoed by key informants. As one noted, "*The war has led to a decline in dietary diversity across all groups, as families were forced to rely solely on available foods, which may be low in nutritional value. Economic hardships have further limited access to healthy food, especially for women and children in refugee and displaced communities*."(Key informant). These responses underscore the multifaceted nature of emergency needs, which extend beyond food and shelter to include essential health, hygiene, and dignity-related items.

Displaced female respondents in Sidon further agreed on their need for underwear and loose-fitting clothing, as they face a shortage of clothes. They are forced to wash clothes by hand, hang them to dry, and then wear them again. *"The situation was even more difficult in winter, as clothes did not dry quickly and we had to wear multiple layers."* They also mentioned the need for quality sanitary pads, as the ones they received in aid packages were of "low quality" (Female FGD, Sidon).

Mental Health Needs: The effects of war and conflict on children are profound. In Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the majority of Lebanese internally displaced persons (IDP) and Palestinian refugee children affected by the conflict express heightened fear and anxiety. These emotions are frequently triggered by the sounds of airstrikes and the pervasive uncertainty of their environments. *"We are afraid of the return of war, or the outbreak of clashes between factions inside the camp"* (Boy FGD, Ain El Helwe). They also reported disruption of daily/school routines and being confined to the hotel all day. *"We don't leave the hotel, we study online"* (Girl FGD, Ain El Helwe). Furthermore, Lebanese IDP mothers in Tyre, expressed concerns about the psychological well-being of their children due to the stress of living in a conflict zone. *"Some mothers took*

their children to a psychologist," (Female IDP FGD, Tyre), showing that the mental health needs of children (especially those who have faced trauma or displacement) are being recognized.

Food and Shelter Needs: Lebanese IDP families and Palestinian refugees, grappling with the aftermath of attacks, face compounded hardships due to the lack of security and resources. Food, shelter, and safety remain core priorities. "*There is no support from the local community, and no one assists. Women and children cannot secure anything related to shelter because only the man works*," (Female FGD, Tyre). Furthermore, negative coping mechanisms were reported in Ain El Helwe. In focus group discussions with male respondents in Ain el-Helweh camp, participants described a range of urgent needs experienced during periods of conflict, particularly related to food access and financial insecurity. Food shortages were primarily reported during active conflict when shops inside the camp were closed due to security concerns: *"During the war did we struggled to access food, because the shops were closed,"* (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh). Even outside crisis periods, financial hardship remained a key barrier to securing essential goods: *"Currently, we don't suffer from anything except lack of money—if we have money, we could secure everything"* (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh). To cope with these challenges, households adopted a range of negative strategies, particularly in food consumption. Many reported reducing the quantity and variety of meals, often limiting daily cooking to a single shared dish: *"We cook only one dish—nothing more—and everyone eats from it,"* explained one respondent, a sentiment echoed by others citing unaffordable expenses or large household sizes (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh). In periods of acute shortage, adults—especially parents—resorted to skipping meals to prioritize children's nutrition: *"The most important thing is that the children eat—we eat bread and olives, my wife and I,"* one man shared (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh). Others affirmed, *"Children are the priority in everything, especially food,"* and *"We must provide food for the children before ourselves because they need nutrition to grow"* (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh).

Social Support Networks During Emergencies:

Many displaced families, both IDPs and Palestinian refugees, reported relying heavily on family and community support networks during emergencies. Families serve as the most immediate source of assistance, offering essential resources such as food, emotional support, and protection. In times of crisis, these familial bonds become crucial lifelines, helping individuals navigate the challenges they face. "*There is no shortage of food in the camp, but our financial situation does not allow us to buy what we need, so we purchase items one by one,"* (Female FGD, Ain el-Helweh). Despite these challenges, women emphasized the importance of community solidarity: *"There is strong social support in the camp—everyone helps each other,"* (Female FGD, Ain el-Helweh).

Persistent Aid scarcity: Despite the efforts of community support networks, aid scarcity remains a significant challenge in Lebanon, particularly in locations impacted by war. In Sidon, Palestinian refugees and displaced Lebanese have reported that the lack of sufficient aid has intensified the hardships faced by displaced families, underscoring the urgent need for increased international support and resources to address the growing crisis. Furthermore, focus group discussions (FGDs) with Palestinian refugees and

Lebanese internally displaced persons (IDPs) revealed that available resources are limited, and aid is insufficient to meet their needs. “There are no community committees in the area,” explained a displaced woman in Tyre. (Female FGD, Tyre). Another responded added, “There is no support whatsoever from the local community, and no one is providing shelter assistance”.(Female FGD, Tyre). Additionally, many families noted how they are forced to make difficult choices, such as reducing the number of meals per day or forgoing essential healthcare. A very difficult case was shared by a divorced mother with two children, who stated, “I feed my children tomato paste on bread because I have no money to buy food," (Female FGD respondent, Ain El Helwe). This situation highlights the critical importance of sustained and equitable aid distribution to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations in Lebanon.

On a related note, respondents in Ain El Helwe expressed concerns about the fairness of aid distribution, pointing out that humanitarian aid is often distributed based on social connections rather than actual vulnerability. This practice, known as "wasta," prioritizes individuals with influential ties, leaving those without such connections, often the most in need, without essential support. A Palestinian refugee female respondent noted that “aid is typically given to those who are well-connected, not necessarily to those who are most vulnerable” (Female FGD, Ain El Helwe). Additionally, it was noted that aid is frequently distributed in the name of the male heads of the households, which excludes female-headed households from decision-making and undermines women’s roles as caregivers and protectors. “I am a widow, they refused to give me aid”, explained another respondent in Ain EL Helwe. Furthermore, “Assistance is provided in the name of the male head of the household”, another one added. (Female FGD, Ain El Helwe). A similar perspective was shared in an FGD in Akkar with host community members. The respondents explained, “If they ever wanted to register for aid, the man must go to the designated registration locations." (Host Female FGD, Akkar) Such gender-blind aid distribution not only perpetuates existing power imbalances but also fails to address the nuanced needs of displaced populations, highlighting the necessity for more inclusive and equitable humanitarian assistance strategies.

Table 9. Emergency-related needs identified by the community

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Economic & Social Pressures from Conflict	Displacement and poverty have intensified gender inequalities and emotional burdens on women	Economic support for households; recognition of women’s dual roles during crises	“I take care of my children... and teach... to cover expenses” (Female IDP, Sidon); “Men became like women... we stayed at home” (Male IDP, Sidon)
Mental Health & Well-being	High stress levels, isolation, trauma, and depression among women and children	Mental health support; psychosocial services; restoration of routine and stability	“I don’t feel alive, I stay in my room all day” (Female IDP, Sidon); “We are afraid of war returning” (Boy, Ain El Helwe)
Unemployment and Economic Insecurity	Widespread loss of livelihoods; reliance on informal work or aid; limited male employment	Livelihood programs; job creation; income-generating opportunities for displaced populations	“My husband is currently without work” (Female IDP, Sidon); “Many fathers lost their jobs” (Palestinian Boys FGD)

Primary Emergency Needs	Scarcity of basic items (hygiene, baby formula, sanitary pads, clothing, cleaning supplies)	Distribution of dignity kits, infant care, and household hygiene supplies	"We need quality sanitary pads"; "The clothes don't dry in winter and we have to wear them again" (Female FGDs, Sidon)
Mental Health Needs of Children	Children express fear, trauma, anxiety, and social withdrawal; disruption of routines	Child-focused mental health services; safe spaces; support in schools	"We don't leave the hotel, we study online" (Girl, Ain El Helwe); "Some mothers took their children to a psychologist" (Female IDP, Tyre)
Food and Shelter Needs	Severe food insecurity; lack of adequate shelter; reliance on harmful coping strategies	Food aid, shelter support, equitable aid targeting	The most important thing is that the children eat—we eat bread and olives, my wife and I," (Male FGD, Ain el-Helweh)

Gender Based Violence Risks and accessibility of support services

Assessing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) risks and the accessibility of support services across various sectors involves evaluating the availability and effectiveness of GBV services and understanding community attitudes toward survivors. Findings across all locations indicate that GBV remains a pervasive and underreported risk, particularly for women, adolescent girls, female-headed households, and undocumented refugees. The analysis draws on 59 FGDs and 28 KIIs, which reveal that patriarchal gender norms, stigma, legal status, and weak institutional responses continue to shape vulnerability and limit survivors' access to protection and justice.

This section assesses correlations between GBV and access barriers across sectors (education, wash, shelter, nutrition, and protection) and examines how community attitudes, service availability, and power structures affect GBV risk and response.

Correlation between GBV and power dynamics

At the individual level: In the immediate environment encompassing family and intimate relationships, gender-based violence (GBV) is deeply entrenched within patriarchal structures that dictate power dynamics and decision-making. Within conservative households, women often face systemic constraints on their autonomy, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive choices, due to male authority figures such as husbands or fathers. This power imbalance is perpetuated by cultural norms that prioritize family honor and discourage women from reporting abuse, fearing social stigma and potential retaliation. As highlighted by most female Syrian refugee respondents in Tripoli and Akkar, "Women are expected to adhere to tradition. It is shameful to report". (Female FGD, Akkaar). "No, she shouldn't report it, because in our society, when a 17- or 18-year-old girl is harassed, people say she agreed to it because she's old enough," explained another female respondent in Tripoli (Female FGD, Tripoli).

This opinion, however, was not prevalent among all respondents. Some respondents demonstrated autonomy and expressed a different point of view: “Yes, she should report it to the relevant authorities and seek support, because if she stays silent, she will be harassed again or whatever problem she faced will happen again,” (Female FGD, Tripoli).

Such societal pressures not only silence victims but also reinforce a cycle of violence, as families and communities may either blame the victim or pressure them to remain silent to protect family honour. These dynamics underscore the critical need for interventions that challenge and transform harmful gender norms, promote accountability, and empower women to make autonomous decisions free from the threat of violence and societal retribution.

At the family level, GBV is closely tied to entrenched patriarchal structures and gendered expectations. Female respondents, particularly Syrian refugees in Tripoli and Akkar, consistently reported that male relatives hold authority over movement, sexual and reproductive decisions, and financial resources. As one woman shared in Tripoli, “Women are expected to adhere to traditions. Reporting abuse could expose them to public shame.” Reporting abuse is often discouraged due to fear of social stigma, family retaliation, or damage to the family’s “honour,” resulting in underreporting and internalized silence.

Community level interactions: Community pressure reinforces the household-level power dynamics. In multiple FGDs, particularly with women in areas of Tripoli and Akkar, respondents shared that attempting to seek help or report violence would lead to social exclusion, blame, or disbelief. As one participant described, “Women who speak out are accused of ruining the family reputation,” (Female FGD, Tripoli).

> ***“We are completely comfortable with our traditions. We do not want the principle of equality in the first place.”***
>
> (Female host community FGD, Akkar)

According to another respondent, "There’s significant social pressure that prevents women from seeking help, especially in conservative communities where women are expected to adhere to traditions," (Syrian FGD respondent, Akkar). These norms were particularly acute in traditional communities, where male dominance and female obedience were cited as collective values, deterring survivors from challenging the status quo. To further demonstrate this, host community respondents in Akkar unanimously agreed that mindset, traditions, and customs prevent this issue from being addressed, and that: “*We are completely comfortable with our traditions. We do not want the principle of equality in the first place*," (Female host community FGD, Akkar).

Indirect Social Systems): Structural institutions such as workplaces, legal systems, and healthcare providers significantly influence women's ability to make autonomous decisions. Evidence indicates that in Lebanon, these systems often fail to adequately uphold women’s rights, particularly in cases involving gender-based violence. One KII respondent stated his concern about these systemic barriers. *“Our society is not equipped*

at all. We address incidents by reporting them to the Internal Security Forces or associations concerned with this issue, but there is no clear mechanism for many community groups to report." Legal frameworks lack effective protective mechanisms, making it difficult for women to leave abusive environments or pursue justice (International Commission of Jurists [ICJ], 2020)[20]. Furthermore, as noted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2018)[21], women continue to face systemic obstacles in accessing justice and health services, especially in marginalized communities. These barriers further limit their capacity to make informed decisions about their health and safety. As Syrian girls in Tripoli noted, *"We don't know any rules or laws to protect us."* These institutional gaps leave women vulnerable and unsupported when seeking protection or assistance.

Groups identified as Most at Risk of GBV

Across all locations and population groups, respondents identified women and girls, particularly adolescent girls, single women, and those without legal documentation, as the groups at greater risk of gender-based violence. This risk is compounded by overlapping factors such as age, disability, displacement, and legal status. These groups are frequently marginalized, with limited access to protective services and support systems, making them more susceptible to various forms of GBV. Addressing the needs of these at-risk populations requires targeted interventions.

Women and Girls:

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue in Lebanon, disproportionately affecting women and girls, particularly among Syrian refugees, Palestinian communities, and Lebanese nationals. According to the 2024 mid-year report from the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS) in Lebanon, displaced Syrians continue to represent the majority of recorded GBV incidents, accounting for 70% of all cases. However, this proportion has decreased compared to 2023, with Lebanese nationals now comprising 24% of the reported incidents, marking an 11% increase from the previous year. Additionally, Palestinian refugees account for 4%, individuals of other nationalities 2%, and Iraqis 0.1% of the recorded GBV cases. This shift indicates a growing recognition of GBV among Lebanese nationals and highlights the need for inclusive interventions that address the needs of all affected populations (GBVIMS,2024)[22]. A study by Usta et al. (2019) found that Palestinian women in refugee camps experience high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual harassment, and limited access to support services, exacerbated by legal restrictions and social stigma. This is further supported by Palestinian FGD respondents in Ain El Helwe, some of whom mentioned how difficult it was to access resources because they only "register men for aid". Similarly, research by Awkal and Nooreddine (2024)[23] revealed that 86% of displaced Syrians in Lebanon have experienced GBV, with women and girls comprising 98% of reported cases. They further highlighted that GBV incidents remain significantly underreported due to fear, self-blame, and distrust in authorities as

[20] International Commission of Jurists. (2020). *Lebanon: Ensure the effective investigation, prosecution and adjudication of sexual and gender-based violence – New ICJ report*. https://www.icj.org/resource/lebanon-ensure-the-effective-investigation-prosecution-and-adjudication-of-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-new-icj-report/
[21] United Nations Population Fund. (2018). Gender justice & the law: Lebanon. https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/gender-justice-law-lebanon
[22] GBV IMS Steering Committee & GBV IMS Task Force Lebanon. (2024, November 21). *Lebanon: Gender-Based Violence Information Management System Mid-Year Narrative Report – 2024*. UNHCR. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/112644
[23] Awkal, A. J., & Nooreddine, D. (2024). *Gendered realities: Evaluating GBV services for Syrian refugees in Lebanon amid forced displacement and migration*. Lebanese American University. Retrieved from https://soas.lau.edu.lb/news/2024/11/gendered-realities-evaluating-gbv-services-for-syrian-refugees-i.php

echoed by FGD respondents in Akkar and Tripoli. "Currently, everyone is at risk of harm, abduction, exploitation, harassment, and more. Beneficiaries unanimously agreed that the risks at this time are significant," (Syrian FGD respondents, Akkar). On a relevant note, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2024)[24] reported that over 178,800 individuals remain displaced in Lebanon, with women and girls particularly vulnerable to GBV amidst ongoing instability and infrastructural damage.

Legal frameworks, such as Law No. 293/2014 on Domestic Violence and Law No. 164/2011 on Human Trafficking, fail to address the GBV faced by unmarried women and refugees, while weak enforcement and resource constraints undermine their effectiveness (Awkal and Nooreddine, 2024)[14]. Social stigma and cultural norms further discourage survivors from seeking support, particularly in mental health reporting. These challenges necessitate a multifaceted approach to GBV prevention and response, encompassing legal reform, community engagement, and the provision of accessible support services.

Early marriage, economic dependency, and restricted mobility were the most commonly risk factors for GBV against women and girls according to GBVIMS (2024)[14], which findings from this study support. Adolescent girls were frequently described as targets of harassment and exploitation, especially when unaccompanied in public spaces. In Tyre, one Lebanese participant noted, ""Of course, girls are at greater risk because they are less able to defend themselves compared to boys. Additionally, any young man in the area could manipulate their minds, and we fear for them," (Lebanese FGD respondent, Tyre). "We do not allow girls to go out on their own, but with a companion," explained another Lebanese displaced respondent from Tyre.

Furthermore, economic discrimination and lack of access to basic services disproportionately affect women, leading to a further power imbalance. Women reported they do not have the same rights or opportunities as men in areas like employment, education, making them financially dependent on others, often male relatives. One FGD respondent in Akkar explained, "I cannot give my opinion, nor work except in agriculture or in houses, and I do not receive my full wages." This economic dependence makes it harder for women to leave abusive situations or access support services, as explained under the ecological model above.

Men and Boys: In Lebanon, gender-based violence (GBV) risks for men and boys are frequently neglected, though they are deeply rooted in the country's social and economic structures. As noted by Marsi (2016)[25], traditional patriarchal norms that equate masculinity with dominance, emotional control, and the role of provider often prevent men from acknowledging or reporting abuse. These cultural expectations discourage male survivors of domestic or sexual violence from seeking help, out of fear that doing so would challenge their perceived masculinity and subject them to further stigma. On that related note, no respondent in the study confirmed being exposed to domestic or sexual violence. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance programs, as Marsi highlights, tend to prioritize women and children, often overlooking the specific

[24] United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2024). *Lebanon Situation Report #5 - December 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.unfpa.org/resources/lebanon-situation-report-5-december-2024
[25] Marsi, F. (2016, November 16). *Male refugees in Lebanon face abuse and neglect alone*. The New Humanitarian. https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/articles/2016/11/16/male-refugees-in-lebanon-face-abuse-and-neglect-alone

vulnerabilities of men, particularly single male refugees who face widespread exploitation in the labor market.

Syrian men in Lebanon face significant vulnerabilities to gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in the context of economic exploitation and legal marginalization. Many are employed in informal sectors, where they are subjected to exploitative labor practices, including withheld wages, unsafe working conditions, and verbal or physical abuse (Marsi, 2016). These risks are exacerbated for unregistered refugees, who live under constant threat of detention and deportation, further isolating them from legal protections and humanitarian assistance. Economic instability, a chronic feature of the protracted displacement crisis, also contributes to increased tension within households. As one refugee respondent in Tripoli described, "One form of gender-based violence that I observe is discrimination in the workplace, where some individuals are forced to work longer hours or take on more demanding jobs for lower pay, simply because they are not from the country," (FGD respondent, Tripoli). These gendered patterns of labor exploitation reflect broader societal power imbalances, where masculinity is linked to economic provision, and failure to fulfill this role may result in increased stress and interpersonal violence within the home.

In parallel, the recruitment and use of boys and young men in armed conflict represents a distinct but interconnected form of GBV. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted in Tripoli revealed widespread concern over forced recruitment, particularly in areas with weak security

> ***"Males, especially adolescents, may be coerced into joining armed groups under social or security pressures."***
>
> (FGD respondent, Tripoli)

governance and economic precarity. According to one KII respondent, "Girls are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, while boys are more exposed to economic exploitation and forced recruitment." FGD participants further emphasized that," *Males, especially adolescents, may be coerced into joining armed groups under social or security pressures*". (FGD respondent, Tripoli). Once recruited, they face risks including material deprivation, psychological manipulation, and coercion into committing violence, all of which constitute serious violations of their rights and safety. One respondent noted, "They may be used for inhumane purposes or pushed to participate in acts of violence that could expose them to serious harm" (FGD respondents, Tripoli). These concerns are supported by United Nations (n.d.)[26] documentation of child involvement in armed clashes in Tripoli, underscoring the real threat of political and militarized recruitment. Furthermore, the recruitment and use of boys in armed conflict in Lebanon constitute a serious form of GBV, especially when shaped by societal expectations around male strength and duty. As reported by UNICEF Lebanon (2020)[27], boys are often coerced into joining armed groups, where they are exposed to

[26] United Nations. (n.d.). *Children and armed conflict – Secretary-General report (excerpts)*. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-186770/
[27] UNICEF. (2020). *Understanding the Root Causes of Violence Against Children and Women in Lebanon*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports/understanding-root-causes-violence-against-children-and-women-lebanon

significant physical and psychological harm. This type of recruitment reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and deprives children of their rights and identity.

On a related note, refugee male respondents in Tripoli confirmed, "*Yes, males may be at risk of becoming involved with armed forces or armed groups, especially in situations where the security or social context pressures individuals to join such groups. The risks they face within these forces or groups include looting, whether material looting or psychological and emotional exploitation. They may be used for inhumane purposes or pushed to participate in acts of violence that could expose them to serious harm*" (FGD respondents, Tripoli). The United Nations (n.d.) documented a case in Tripoli—an incident that underscores how boys can become entangled in political and armed violence. These forms of GBV, though distinct from those faced by women, are interconnected through their roots in rigid gender expectations. Addressing them requires an inclusive response that integrates the specific experiences of men and boys into broader GBV prevention and protection strategies.

People with disabilities: People with disabilities in Lebanon face layered and often overlooked vulnerabilities that heighten their risk during crises and in everyday life. Structural barriers—including inaccessible infrastructure, limited legal protections, and service gaps—undermine their ability to respond to threats such as violence, displacement, or economic hardship. As one Key Informant Interview (KII) respondent explained, *"Persons with disabilities often face additional difficulties when dealing with risks such as natural disasters, violence, or lack of resources. They may have specific needs that make them more vulnerable, such as requiring extra assistance with mobility or access to information"* (KII respondent, personal communication, 2025). Another emphasized the lack of safe access and support: *"They face additional challenges such as a lack of accessible services, inability to move around safely, and weak legal protection against discrimination"* (KII respondent, personal communication, 2025). These lived experiences are echoed in findings from the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (2003), which documented how inadequate access to education, work, and services entrenches poverty and isolation among people with disabilities (LPHU, 2003)[28]. Similarly, a UNDP (2017)[29] the report found that exclusion from political and civic life remains a major barrier to empowerment, further reinforcing marginalization (UNDP, 2017). These insights point to a clear need for inclusive policy reform and targeted support systems that center the voices and rights of people with disabilities.

Single, Unpartnered women: According to FGD respondents, divorced women, widowed or never married women were consistently described as socially stigmatised and economically marginalized, often perceived as lacking protection or legitimacy within their communities. In FGDs in Bekaa and Ain El Helwe, these women were reported to face higher levels of harassment, economic exploitation, and social exclusion, especially in informal settlements or shelters, due to their legal and social status. A female refugee in Ain El Helwe reported, they only register men for aid. "When I asked to be registered, they told me, '*You are on your own. What do you need it for?' I am a widow*" (Female FGD respondent Ain El Helwe). A similar sentiment

[28] Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union. (2003). *Disability and livelihoods in Lebanon*. Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union. https://daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory/lebanese-physically-handicapped-union/resources/disability-and-livelihoods-lebanon
[29] United Nations Development Programme. (2017). *Political participation of persons with disabilities in Lebanon*. UNDP. https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/political-participation-pwd-lebanon

was echoed by a respondent from Bekaa, “Because I am divorced, my father forbids me from working and tells me, *'We don't have girls who work in this family,'* and he doesn’t give me any allowance.” (Female FGD respondent, Bekaa)

Illegal Refugees: Refugees without valid residency permits, particularly Syrians, were identified as among the most vulnerable to GBV, due to their fear of arrest and deportation. Several women reported choosing not to report abuse to police due to their nationality. One Syrian respondent shared, “We fear facing greater harm when filing a complaint or reporting to someone” (Female FGD respondent Tripoli). This lack of legal protection and access to services leaves undocumented refugees highly exposed to exploitation, coercion, and violence, particularly in aid distribution sites and informal labour markets. According to Syrian male respondents in Tripoli, "One of the greatest risks men may face is arrest, especially if they are moving around or working in areas that require legal permits or official documents, which we do not have. This can significantly impact their lives and stability, potentially leading to separation from their families or loss of their livelihood," (Male FGD respondents, Tripoli).

Displaced populations: Displaced populations are highly vulnerable due to their displacement. Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese IDPs often face significant barriers in accessing basic services, protection, and humanitarian aid. Lacking secure housing and access to resources, IDPs are at heightened risk of exploitation, sexual violence, and economic abuse. “I am afraid of the place where I live, it is exposed and unsafe, I don’t feel safe or at ease in my own home,” (Syrian girl FGD, Zahe). Their ability to rebuild their lives is severely limited, leaving them exposed to ongoing threats to their safety and well-being. Furthermore, as Lebanese IDPs mentioned, "Everyone is afraid of the war, regardless of their gender. Parents fear for their children’s physical and psychological well-being and health, due to what they are experiencing during this difficult time,” (Female Lebanese IDP, Tyre). Respondents further explained that some mothers have taken their children to a psychologist, a result of fear. “Even children at home are afraid to stay alone," (Female IDP, Tyre). Children in the Tyre area explained a case of a girl who was forced to leave school after her father passed away, as she had to help her mother raise her siblings. Her mother is the sole provider for the family, and the girl had dreamed of becoming a doctor. Her classmates miss her and feel sad for her because she was one of the top students (Girls FGD, Tyre).

Furthermore, in displaced refugee contexts, where public space is often contested and chaotic, women face an even greater threat. The stress and frustration generated by long waits and scarce resources can also spill over into the home, increasing the likelihood of violence. While refugees in Tripoli were not directly impacted by the war, “the war increased unemployment and impacted financial conditions” (FGD respondents, Tripoli). One respondent explained how she was living in Beirut and owed two months’ rent to her landlord. Due to the conflict, she was unable to pay and was temporarily relocated to Tripoli. During her absence, the landlord “seized my belongings and reclaimed the apartment without informing me”.(Adult Female FGD, Tripoli)

Social and Economic Strain: The socio-economic repercussions of conflict and displacement often intensify the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly within the most vulnerable households. Among Lebanese internally displaced persons (IDPs), post-war conditions contributed to heightened family tensions as discussed above. In such settings, the lack of economic independence among women and children exacerbates their exposure to violence, coercion, and exploitation. Male Syrian refugee respondents in Bedawi further explained," This economic collapse created immense psychological pressure, which led to increased tension in family relationships and, at times, domestic violence" (Syrian refugee respondent, Tripoli). Furthermore, several households reported adopting harmful coping mechanisms under economic strain, including reducing meals, child labor, and early marriage, each of which increases GBV risks. One Key Informant Interview (KII) respondent observed that some parents enroll their children in school solely to access aid, even when the child's academic performance is significantly compromised: "They don't care about their child's education, even if they repeat their grade four times." (KII respondent). This reflects a broader pattern in which economic vulnerability drives decisions that can expose children to further neglect or exploitation. Another KII respondent elaborated on these dynamics, highlighting how poverty, child marriage, and the need for children to work intersect to undermine protection and increase susceptibility to abuse. Moreover, the economic vulnerability of boys was also noted as a GBV concern, with one KII respondent stating, *"Boys are more vulnerable to economic exploitation and forced recruitment into armed forces, while girls are forced into child marriage"* (KII respondent).

Harmful Practices

Early Marriage: Child marriage remains a significant issue in Lebanon, with varying prevalence across different communities and national groups. According to a 2024 media investigation based on a survey of 1,300 individuals, 36% of Lebanese, 45% of Syrians, and 20% of Palestinians reported being married before the age of 18. Among these early marriages, 86% involved girls. Financial hardship was identified as a key driver, with 40% of respondents attributing child marriage to economic motives (Dargham, 2024)[30].

> ***"Boys are more vulnerable to economic exploitation and forced recruitment into armed forces, while girls are forced into child marriage."***
>
> (KII Respondent)

As one key informant interview (KII) respondent noted, "*Risks differ between men and women. Women face greater risks related to gender-based violence, such as harassment, domestic violence, and child marriage. Men, on the other hand, may face risks related to physical violence, labour exploitation, or forced recruitment in certain areas.*" (KII respondent). Child marriage in Lebanon is both a symptom and a driver of gender inequality, reinforcing patriarchal norms, limiting girls' autonomy, and increasing their vulnerability to violence and

[30] Dargham, Y. (2024, March 29). *Financial motives drive 40% of child marriages: Lebanon faces 'serious' crisis threatening Lebanese youth* [News bulletin report]. LBCI News. https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/news-bulletin-reports/762982/financial-motives-drive-40-of-child-marriages-lebanon-faces-serious-crisis-threatening-lebanese-youth/en

exploitation. As Anera (2024)[31] reports, these marriages often result in early school dropout, economic dependence, and long-term health and psychological consequences for girls. Despite the serious implications, legal protections against child marriage were not mentioned in community discussions.

Furthermore, in Lebanon, there is no unified civil personal status law that currently sets a standard minimum age of marriage. Instead, religious courts—18 in total—regulate marriage, and many permit unions under the age of 18, with some allowing girls to marry younger than 15 (Human Rights Watch, 2017)[32]. Although Lebanon has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and introduced Law No. 422/2002 for child protection, the law does not explicitly prohibit child marriage. Implementation is further hampered by weak coordination among institutions and deference to religious courts, as emphasized by El-Hoss (2023)[33]. This legal ambiguity and lack of enforcement were echoed in FGDs, where communities rarely referenced formal protections, underscoring the gap between legislation and lived experience.

Child labor: Child labor in Lebanon affects boys and girls across Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities, though boys are disproportionately represented. According to UNICEF (2021)[34], in the Bekaa Valley, Syrian refugee boys make up the majority of child laborers in agriculture, while girls often perform unpaid domestic or caregiving work, which remains largely invisible. The International Rescue Committee (IRC, 2016)[35] reports that more than 70% of working children on the streets are boys aged 6–14, who often endure long hours and abuse, while girls involved in labour are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Lebanese children, particularly boys from impoverished families, are also increasingly entering informal work sectors due to the ongoing economic crisis (Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC], 2021)[36]. Palestinian refugee children, both boys and girls, face similar barriers to education and are pushed into early labour, often in informal or street work (NRC, 2021)[22]. Child labour was further confirmed by KII respondents. One Key informant explained, “With increasing economic pressures, some individuals resort to risky activities such as child labor,” (KII respondent). These gendered patterns reflect deep social and economic inequalities that expose children, especially boys in physical labour and girls in hidden, exploitative roles, to serious protection risks.

Other Community risks for children: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants—both boys and girls from Tripoli and Akkar—reported a variety of risks that children face when outside the home. These include harassment, abduction, and trafficking, which were cited as concerns by both male and female respondents.. One respondent offered a more gendered perspective on this, explaining that “The greatest concern is usually for girls, especially in displaced or refugee communities, where the risks of early marriage, harassment, and sexual exploitation increase. As for boys, they may face dangers such as forced recruitment or working in hazardous conditions. These dangers are heightened, as one Key Informant Interview (KII) participant noted, by the “absence of safe, child-friendly spaces for children to play and learn” (KII

[31] Anera. (2024, March 28). *Rising rates of child marriage in Lebanon*. Anera. https://www.anera.org/blog/rising-rates-of-child-marriage-in-lebanon/
[32] Human Rights Watch. (2017, April 12). *Lebanon: Pass bill to end child marriage*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/12/lebanon-pass-bill-end-child-marriage
[33] El-Hoss, T. (2023). Reforming Lebanon's child protection system: Lessons for international child welfare efforts. *Children and Youth Services Review, 148*, 106858. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106858
[34] UNICEF. (2021). *Survey on child labour in agriculture in the Bekaa Valley*. https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports/survey-child-labour-agriculture
[35] International Rescue Committee. (2022). *New survey reveals extent of hardship and abuse experienced by Syrian children working in Lebanon*. https://www.rescue.org/press-release/new-survey-reveals-extent-hardship-and-abuse-experienced-syrian-children-working

respondent.This sentiment was echoed by Female FGD respondents in Tyre, who highlighted similar daily threats to children's safety and development. "*We feel afraid because they are not in their environment and don't know the places or the people. That's why we don't let the girls go out alone, only with someone accompanying them. There's no specific threat, just a general fear of harmful people or thieves*," (Female FGD respondent, Tyre).

> ***"We feel afraid because they are not in their environment and don't know the places or the people. That's why we don't let the girls go out alone, only with someone accompanying them. There's no specific threat, just a general fear of harmful people or thieves."***
>
> (FGD respondent, Tyre)

These vulnerabilities are particularly acute when children are left unsupervised or live in environments lacking basic safety infrastructure and oversight. One KII respondent explained, "There are safety concerns when children leave the house, because they may be more vulnerable, especially in unsafe environments, during periods of conflict, or in areas with high crime rates. These risks can include abduction, violence, or exposure to various accidents," (KII respondent).

Table 10. Needs based on the identified Risk group

At-Risk Group	Key Risks & Vulnerabilities	Identified Needs
Women & Girls	GBV (harassment, IPV, sexual violence); early marriage; economic dependence; restricted mobility; underreporting due to fear/stigma, child labor	- Safe reporting mechanisms- Economic empowerment- GBV services- Legal protection- Awareness and psychosocial support-Life skills
Single, Divorced, Widowed Women	Social stigma, aid exclusion, economic exploitation, lack of community protection	- Aid inclusion- Protection in shelters- Livelihood support- Awareness to reduce stigma
Refugees (esp. Syrians)	Legal insecurity, deportation fears, service exclusion, and underreporting GBV	- Legal aid- Culturally appropriate GBV services- Safe shelter- Anti-exploitation measures
Palestinian Refugees	IPV and harassment, poor aid access, patriarchal systems	- Equitable aid- IPV programs- Context-specific services- Norm-shifting engagement
Men & Boys	Neglected GBV risks, exploitation, reporting stigma, forced recruitment	- Safe reporting- Legal protections- Mental health care- Awareness programs- Anti-recruitment efforts
Adolescent Boys	Forced recruitment into armed forces, school dropout, child labor and economic stress	- Youth programs- Education access- Safe spaces- Legal protections
People with Disabilities	Inaccessibility, isolation, lack of services, crisis vulnerability	- Accessible GBV and basic services- Inclusive infrastructure- Anti-discrimination laws- Outreach and mobility support
IDPs	Unsafe housing, trauma, poor service access, GBV in displacement, economic distress	- Secure housing- Psychosocial aid- Legal and health support- Social reintegration

Children (Boys& girls)	Harassment, abduction, child labor, unsafe environments, lost education	- Child protection- Safe spaces- School support- Anti-trafficking measures
General Community Members	Conflict-related stress; domestic violence; harmful coping (child marriage, labor)	- Livelihood aid- Community GBV prevention- Mental health services- Education on positive coping strategies

Barriers and challenges by Sector

Protection and GBV

Legal barriers: The Lebanese legal framework for investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) offenses is characterized by significant legislative and procedural gaps, which result in the systematic denial of effective legal protection, access to justice, and remedies for women and girls who are survivors of SGBV (International Commission of Jurists [ICJ], 2020[37]). This is further illustrated by the experiences shared in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Tyre, where a female IDP participant stated, "*No one has reported any incidents of violence or similar occurrences, and we do not find that the general atmosphere in the country supports such actions. However, we are very cautious to avoid getting into any serious problems, especially with our girls*" (Lebanese IDP FGD, Tyre).

This statement reveals underlying cultural and gendered dynamics that shape perceptions and responses to gender-based violence (GBV) in displacement settings. While the speaker asserts that no incidents have been reported, this likely reflects societal norms that discourage reporting rather than an actual absence of violence. In conservative contexts, women and girls often face stigma, blame, or social repercussions if they disclose experiences of GBV, leading to widespread underreporting. Furthermore, the statement highlights how the burden of prevention is placed on potential victims, implying that it is their responsibility to avoid situations that could lead to harm. This mindset not only reinforces gendered expectations and the culture of silence around GBV, but also shifts attention away from structural protection gaps and community accountability. Ultimately, the quote illustrates how deeply rooted norms around honor and shame continue to shape behavior and risk management, even in emergency contexts, often at the expense of survivor agency and systemic prevention efforts.

Furthermore, FGD findings indicate that refugees in Lebanon, particularly those without legal documentation, face substantial barriers in accessing support for gender-based violence (GBV). Fear of deportation and legal repercussions was frequently cited by male respondents in Akkar and Tripoli as a key deterrent to reporting incidents or seeking assistance. As one male respondent from Tripoli observed, "Some feel that justice is not accessible to everyone, which leads to the spread of crime without fear of consequences. In some areas, even men can feel unsafe." Lebanon's legal and institutional frameworks do not adequately safeguard refugee populations, who are frequently excluded from formal systems or treated

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with suspicion by authorities. For Syrian refugees, the combination of insecure residency status, social stigma, and fear of retaliation intensifies underreporting of GBV cases (Masri, 2021[38]). Moreover, survivors—especially women—are frequently blamed, disbelieved, or dismissed when seeking help, perpetuating a culture of silence and impunity (Potts et al, 2020)[39]. As one Syrian female respondent from Tripoli shared, "*I fear facing greater harm when filing a complaint or informing someone.*" The lack of knowledge and perceived support of legal or institutional frameworks surrounding gender based violence was evident throughout the research, however this may be exacerbated even further for women and girls without legal status who may feel even further ostracised from seeking recourse to justice for gender based violence.

Cultural and Social Stigma: According to FGD and KII respondents, cultural and gender norms play a central role in increasing the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) among Lebanese host communities, as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations in Lebanon. This dynamic is further illustrated through the ecological model discussed above. Traditional patriarchal views, which often position men as decision-makers and women as caretakers, are prevalent across the Middle East and North Africa, including Lebanon. A study by the Lebanese National Gender Observatory (2023)[40] highlighted that these entrenched gender inequalities manifest in limited access to resources, services, and opportunities for women, as well as increased vulnerability to violence, abuse, and exploitation. To demonstrate this, one FGD respondent in Akkar mentioned, "Parents are unable to report incidents due to cultural traditions, Elders often say it brings shame to the girl. It is an ignorant mindset. "(Female FGD respondent, Akkar). This sentiment was further echoed by a KII respondent who explained, "*Some people believe that women or girls should not report such incidents because of traditions, but awareness is growing about the importance of reporting to protect victims*." (KII respondent)

These norms not only perpetuate violence but also discourage survivors from seeking help due to fear of stigma and social repercussions. In refugee communities, this is compounded by the threat of deportation for those without legal documentation, making women and girls particularly vulnerable, as discussed above. Addressing these deeply entrenched cultural and gender norms is crucial in mitigating GBV risks and ensuring the safety and well-being of refugee women and girls

Lack of reporting Mechanisms: Findings from both Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) reveal those formal mechanisms for reporting gender-based violence (GBV) in Lebanon remain limited and inconsistently accessed across different communities. Law enforcement, particularly the Internal Security Forces (ISF), continues to be identified as the primary channel for reporting, though some participants also mentioned resorting to local authorities such as the *mukhtar* (community leader). "We file a complaint with the Internal Security Forces," noted one respondent in Tripoli (FGD respondent, Tripoli, 2025). Another participant described a case where she had "previously reported the matter to the local

[38] **El Masri, Y.** (2021, May 15). *Women, displacement, and refugees in Lebanon*. Capire. https://capiremov.org/en/analysis/women-displacement-and-refugees-in-lebanon/
[39] Potts, A., Barada, R., & Bourassa, A. (2020). GBV and mental health among refugee and host community women in Lebanon. *Forced Migration Review*, 66, 40–42. https://www.fmreview.org/issue66/potts-barada-bourassa/
[40] Lebanese National Gender Observatory. (2023). *Gender In/Equality and Violence Against Women and Girls in Lebanon Including the Perspectives of Women from Vulnerable Host Communities and Syrian Refugee Women*. https://lngo.nclw.gov.lb/publications/gender-in-equality-and-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-lebanon-including-the-perspectives-of-women-from-vulnerable-host-communities-and-syrian-refugee-women-brief/

mukhtar to stop the person who was hitting my daughter, and he signed a pledge not to harm her again" (FGD respondent, Tripoli)

> ***"I don't talk about problems because I believe that nothing will change even if I speak up, or I'm afraid that someone might blame me for it."***
>
> (Boys FGD, Tripoli)

However, others reported not taking any action at all. "Some people do not report such incidents, especially if the person is a foreigner, due to the absence of clear or designated places to receive complaints from non-citizens," explained a male participant from Tripoli, adding that this sense of helplessness often pushes survivors toward silence rather than seeking help (FGD respondent, Tripoli). Similar sentiments were expressed by female Syrian refugee respondents in Akkar and Tripoli, many of whom simply stated, "We don't know where to report," (FGD respondents, Akkar). An adult female Syrian refugee in Tripoli recalled, "We used to contact UNHCR in the past, but now the number is disconnected and they no longer receive complaints," (FGD respondent, Tripoli).

Among adolescent girls across Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities, none reported knowledge of formal reporting mechanisms. Instead, many girls described relying on family members for support: "I tell my mother everything, secrets and more. I feel safe when talking to her," and "My father and my brother help me always," (FGD respondents, Akkar). Still, this type of informal support is not universal. A few girls in Ain el-Hilweh and Zahle starkly put it, "I don't tell anyone," (FGD respondent, Ain el-Hilweh), highlighting the isolation and fear that can accompany GBV disclosure in some contexts. A boy in Tripoli echoed the same sentiments, "*I don't talk about problems because I believe that nothing will change even if I speak up, or I'm afraid that someone might blame me for it*," (Boys FGD, Tripoli).

Key informants in Tripoli and Bekaa agreed that local communities are generally unequipped to respond to GBV. "Our society is not equipped at all to deal with these cases. When incidents happen, we usually report them to the Internal Security Forces or to organizations that specialize in such issues. However, for many segments of society, there is no clear or accessible reporting mechanism," one key informant stated. Another added that, "There is growing awareness thanks to awareness campaigns, but traditions still play a role in downplaying the importance of reporting these issues. There is a lack of support centers, a lack of awareness of rights, and fear of social discrimination," (KII respondent).

These findings underscore a critical gap in formal reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence (GBV) in Lebanon, particularly among both adult and adolescent survivors across Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities. While the Internal Security Forces (ISF) remain the primary formal avenue for reporting, access to and trust in these mechanisms are uneven and often inadequate. Many victims, especially girls non-citizens and youth, are unaware of where or how to report incidents, leading them to rely on informal

channels such as family members or local figures like the mukhtar—or to remain silent altogether. This reliance on non-formal mechanisms reflects not only a lack of institutional infrastructure but also pervasive fears of stigma, discrimination, and inaction. In the absence of clear, accessible, and trusted reporting pathways, survivors—particularly adolescent girls—are left isolated and vulnerable, highlighting an urgent need to expand, strengthen, and publicize survivor-centered GBV response systems across all communities.

Protection Structures and gender gaps: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in Tripoli, Akkar, and Tyre reveal significant gaps in the establishment and effectiveness of community protection committees, particularly concerning the representation of women. In Tyre, a participant noted, "There are no community protection committees or similar bodies, but for assistance, we turn to the local security forces, the union of municipalities, or the person responsible for the displaced in the area," (FGD respondent, Tyre). This sentiment is echoed by female respondents in Tripoli and Akkar, who stated, "We have never heard of protection committees," (Female FGD respondents, Akkar & Tripoli). Male respondents in Tripoli acknowledged the presence of community protection committees but highlighted a critical issue: "Women are rarely represented in these committees. Most of the time, these committees are primarily composed of men, which may affect the level of attention given to issues specifically concerning women and girls, and limits women's opportunities to access the support they need," (Male FGD respondent, Tripoli). Additionally, female respondents in Tyre noted that there are usually no female specialized officers to handle GBV cases within the ISF. This lack of female representation can hinder the effectiveness of these committees in addressing gender-specific concerns and providing adequate support to women and girls in the community.

The findings imply that while some protection committees may exist in certain communities, they are widely unknown or inaccessible to those most at risk, especially women and adolescent girls. Across all nationalities and locations, respondents demonstrated low or no awareness of GBV protection committees' . Where committees are known, they are often dominated by men and lack female representation, further eroding trust and limiting their effectiveness in addressing gender-specific risks. This highlights a critical protection gap: structures intended to safeguard communities are not reaching or resonating with the primary survivors of GBV. Ensuring women's participation in protection committees, increasing visibility of reporting channels, and expanding female-led support services are urgent priorities for a more inclusive and effective GBV response.

Gaps in access to services: Key informants reported that there are NGOs that provide GBV support services to local communities. "In the aftermath of conflict, rapid response centres have been established, providing psychological and social support to survivors of violence, alongside enhanced coordination among relevant stakeholders," (Key informant). Additionally, the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs launched the "Step" project in January 2024, offering mobile clinics staffed with mental health professionals to deliver psychosocial support in southern Lebanon[41]. However, access to these services remains inconsistent due to logistical challenges, limited outreach, and fears of stigma or reprisal. Most participants across all locations and population groups reported that they were either unaware of these services or unsure how to access

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them. In one FGD, a male participant from Tripoli explained, “Many people are unaware that entities are offering legal, psychological, and medical assistance to victims” (Male respondent, Tripoli). This highlights the need to raise awareness about these services and to make them more accessible.

None of the female FGD respondents interviewed were aware of services specifically targeting women and girls experiencing trauma related to displacement or GBV. This gap is particularly concerning given the layered vulnerabilities many displaced women face, including the psychological impact of violence, economic insecurity, and social isolation. To illustrate this, a Syrian refugee girl in an FGD in Zahle mentioned, “We need awareness sessions to be conducted by the school for students, especially for girls, to learn how to stay safe and access protection within the community” (Girl FGD, Zahle). A key informant echoed a similar need for “Economic empowerment of women, raising children’s awareness of their rights, and involving men in protection campaigns to strengthen their support for women’s issues” (KII respondent). Female Syrian refugee respondents in Tripoli and Female Lebanese IDPs in Tyre emphasized the need to highlight the importance of psychosocial support services and a psychologist available in addition to alternative housing. Male youths in Tripoli expressed the need for safe spaces and play areas. “I wish adults could organize activities for children and youth so that we don't have to stay out on the streets,” (Boys FGD, Tripoli).

The findings reveal significant gaps in Lebanon’s gender-based violence (GBV) protection landscape, characterized by weak or absent formal reporting mechanisms and community protection structures, and a critical lack of female representation within them. Many women and girls, particularly from displaced and non-citizen populations, are unaware of or distrust existing systems, often viewing them as male-dominated and inaccessible. While NGOs and government initiatives offer some services, such as mobile clinics and psychosocial support, access remains inconsistent due to logistical barriers, limited outreach, and cultural stigma. Consequently, many survivors, both male and female, especially adolescent girls, rely on informal networks or remain silent, increasing their vulnerability. The lack of confidential, culturally appropriate services—including clinical management of rape (CMR), legal aid, and safe shelters—and the absence of clear referral pathways further compound these risks. These findings underscore the urgent need for inclusive, female-led community structures and survivor-centered services that are accessible, trusted, and responsive to diverse needs.

Community needs and Programmatic implications

Table 11. Identified GBV and protection-related needs

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Legal Barriers	Legislative gaps; fear of deportation; lack of protection and remedies for survivors	Reform legal framework; legal aid; safe access to justice for all	“Justice is not accessible to everyone.” (Tripoli) / “I fear facing greater harm when filing a complaint.” (Syrian female, Tripoli)

Cultural & Social Stigma	Patriarchal norms; victim-blaming; social shame inhibits reporting	Community sensitization; gender norm transformation; engage men and elders	"It brings shame to the girl." (Akkar) / "Awareness is growing, but traditions still dominate." (KII respondent)
Lack of Reporting Mechanisms	Inconsistent, unclear, or inaccessible reporting systems; lack of designated services	Clear, confidential, multilingual complaint mechanisms; improved access for non-citizens	"We don't know where to report." (Akkar) / "UNHCR number is disconnected." (Tripoli)
Lack of Formal Support Structures	No community-based support; weak referral systems	Establish community protection structures; service mapping	"There are no community protection committees." (Tripoli) / "We have no idea [where to go]." (Tyre)
Limited Protection Committees & Representation	Male-dominated structures; lack of female officers; survivor distrust	Female representation in committees and law enforcement; gender-sensitive training	"Women are rarely represented in committees." (Tripoli) / "There are no female specialized officers." (Tyre)
Access to Services by survivors	Existing services are poorly known or hard to reach; fear of stigma	Mobile clinics; outreach campaigns; targeted psychosocial and legal aid	"Many people are unaware of legal, psychological, and medical help." (Tripoli) / "We need awareness sessions in schools." (Zahle)
Youth & Child Safety Needs	Silence around child protection; lack of child-safe spaces	Child protection awareness; safe play areas; peer support structures	"I don't talk about problems… I believe nothing will change." (Boy, Tripoli) / "We need youth activities." (Tripoli)
Psychosocial and Mental Health Support	Trauma, economic insecurity, social isolation; lack of mental health support	Expand mental health services; trauma-informed care; support for displaced women	"We need psychologists and alternative housing." (Syrian refugee, Tripoli) / "Psychosocial support is needed." (IDP, Tyre)

Programmatic Implications: The protection environment in Lebanon is marked by structural, legal, and social challenges that leave vulnerable groups, particularly women, girls, refugees, and persons with disabilities, at high risk of gender-based violence. Findings from focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and secondary data underscore systemic gaps in access to justice, support services, and reporting mechanisms. The following points highlight key programmatic implications that should inform GBV prevention and response strategies across humanitarian and development settings:

- Survivors, especially refugees and undocumented individuals, face legislative and procedural gaps that hinder reporting and accessing justice. Fear of deportation, stigma, and lack of legal support perpetuate underreporting and impunity.
- Patriarchal traditions discourage disclosure and reporting of GBV incidents. Survivors often face blame or shame, particularly women and girls, due to societal expectations and family pressures.
- Formal GBV reporting channels (e.g., ISF, mukhtars) are inconsistent and largely unknown among communities, particularly adolescents. Many rely on informal family support or stay silent, citing distrust and a lack of safe pathways.

- There are few functioning protection committees, especially in refugee settings, and those that exist often exclude women. This absence limits community responsiveness and survivor-centered protection measures.
- While NGOs and government initiatives (e.g., STEP mobile clinics) provide some GBV-related services, awareness remains extremely low. Many, especially women and adolescents, are unaware of where or how to seek help.
- Female participation in protection structures is minimal, and few female officers or staff are available to handle sensitive cases, deterring women from coming forward.
- Women heads of households, persons with disabilities, adolescent boys and girls, and Syrian and Palestinian refugees face compounded barriers due to legal insecurity, stigma, and lack of tailored services.
- Adolescent boys and girls report lack of safe spaces, protection from exploitation or recruitment, and psychosocial support. Many children rely solely on family, with limited institutional protection or outreach

Wash

Gender barriers in access and use

Access to Water: FGD responses varied across population groups, whether Lebanese, Palestinian or Syrian. No uniform responses were provided. Women are often tasked with managing household water usage. However, in many cases, the responsibility of collecting water does not fall on them sometimes because of the distance or the heaviness of water containers, or due to prevailing gender norms, where the woman's role is confined to her household duties and she has "no business leaving her home," (Syrian Refugee boy, Sidon). For instance, according to the majority of respondents from across the different population groups, men typically bring drinking water due to the heaviness of containers, or it is delivered, thereby reducing the burden on women. This suggests a gendered division of labor where physical tasks, such as water collection, may be more heavily assumed by men, especially in areas where water is not directly accessible or delivery services are unavailable. Others suggested that it is brought by whoever has the time to bring it (Female Lebanese IDPs, Sidon). This viewpoint was supported by female Syrian refugees in Zahle who reported that in the absence of men, the duty of bringing water falls on women and their daughters. This was explained well by a Syrian refugee girl in Sidon, "*Me, my mother, or my siblings, everyone helps with fetching water, and if the men are at home and not working, they are the ones who bring the water*," (Syrian refugee girl, Sidon).

d if the men are at home and not working, they are the ones who bring the water."

(Syrian refugee girl, Sidon)

"The heat bothers me, and the weight of the water gallon is exhausting. There are often problems at the water point. The young men argue and fight over whose turn it is, and we frequently quarrel about who will fetch the water first. It gets very crowded, and because we are girls and young, they make us go last. Sometimes, when conflicts arise, the man in charge turns off the water, and many people end up going home without any."

(Syrian refugee girl, Sidon)

Increased Vulnerability to Harassment and injury: Syrian refugee boys in one FGD explained that there have been physical injuries and health problems in the community caused by carrying water. "A boy suffered scratches and cuts that required stitches in his hand after falling to the ground while pulling a heavy water container. Another individual experienced pain in his lower back, legs, and hands due to the weight of the containers. Additionally, a woman slipped while carrying water, resulting in a permanent back injury," (Syrian boys FGD, Sidon). Female and children FGD respondents from Sidon, Tyre, and Zahle mentioned that they don't usually like collecting water in gallons due to their heavy weight. "I feel tired from the heavy weight ", (Syrian boy FGD, Sidon)

Verbal abuse and harassment during water collection are common challenges that women and girls face. Fights among boys are not uncommon either, according to respondents. This harassment is not just an occasional inconvenience but a direct result of the community's gender norms that view women as inherently responsible for tasks like water collection. Syrian Refugee Girls in Sidon explained, "*The heat bothers me, and the weight of the water gallon is exhausting. There are often problems at the water point. The young men argue and fight over whose turn it is, and we frequently quarrel about who will fetch the water first. It gets very crowded, and because we are girls and young, they make us go last. Sometimes, when conflicts arise, the man in charge turns off the water, and many people end up going home without any,"* (Syrian refugee girl, Sidon). Refugee females in Zahle also mentioned harassment at water collection points, "Girls are subjected to harassment on the streets, including catcalling, obscene remarks, and even mockery from passers-by," (Female refugees, Zahle). These incidents demonstrate the unsafe environment in which women and girls must operate, undermining their agency. The harassment described in the text shows how entrenched gender norms create an environment where women are vulnerable and unable to access resources freely, thereby limiting their opportunities for full participation in public and economic spheres.

Time and Travel: There was no clear consensus among Focus Group Discussion (FGD) respondents regarding the time required to access water collection points. In some locations, such as Sarafand and Baysarieh, participants indicated that water sources were relatively nearby. However, in areas like Zahle, the journey could extend to several hours. Refugee women in Zahle shared that "it takes women about an hour to reach the water on foot, and the journey can take even longer due to the heat or winter conditions, as the girls need to rest from carrying the water containers, which hold 10 litres of water," (Female FGD, Zahle). This highlights the burden of water collection. Not only does this task expose them to physical strain, but it also limits their time for education, income-generating activities, and rest, further entrenching gender-based inequalities in access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, female respondents in Zahle commented on the bad quality of water reaching their tents. "One of the necessary improvements is the need to treat and disinfect the water, as the water available in the tents is unclean and causes infections and skin rashes, affecting the health of both women and their children," (FGD respondent, Zahle).

Access to latrines: Regarding access to latrines, responses varied among FGD participants. Lebanese female IDPs displaced to hotels and schools in Sidon and Tripoli indicated that all families have their indoor toilets, which is beneficial in terms of safety. However, they expressed discomfort with sharing toilets, especially since single toilets were used by multiple family members, both adults and young, which may affect their comfort and privacy. It is also significant that women feel more secure using toilets inside their rooms.

Access to indoor toilets enhances privacy and safety, which is crucial for women, particularly in some cultural contexts where public toilets may not be safe or private enough for female use.

Syrian refugees in Zahle and Sidon refugee camps discussed the poor conditions of communal toilets. "*There are no external bathrooms; all the bathrooms are located inside the tents. However, each tent consists of a single room that includes a bathroom and a small kitchen area. There are no doors, so although accessing the bathroom is considered safe since it is inside the tent, there is no issue with reaching or using it at any time. Nevertheless, the absence of a door is very embarrassing, as you have to inform everyone before entering. There is also discomfort caused by the sounds and odours that arise during use,*" (Girls FGD, Sidon). Refugee women in Zahle described similar challenges, such as a lack of privacy and the absence of locks on doors. "*Women do not feel comfortable using the bathroom due to the lack of locks and broken doors. They also fear allowing their daughters to use the bathroom alone because of the overcrowding in the tent and the risk of younger children falling into the toilets, all of which are squat (Arab-style) toilets,*" (Female refugees, Zahle). They also elaborated that people with disabilities face difficulties using the toilets, as they are not suitable or designed to accommodate their needs. "*The toilets are squat-style (Arabic-style), which makes them unusable for many individuals with disabilities. Older adults also struggle to use them, especially those suffering from joint or leg pain*," (Female refugees, Zahle). These issues, stemming from both cultural norms and economic constraints, exacerbate women's vulnerabilities. Furthermore, inadequate sanitation facilities expose women to physical risks like assault or harassment, while also denying them the basic human dignity necessary for full participation in community life.

> ***"There are only two toilets available for around 35 people in each camp, which contributes to feelings of insecurity, especially in the early morning and evening hours, when individuals must wait in long lines to use the bathroom before going to or returning from work."***
>
> (Boys FGD, Baissariye)

Male experience in Syrian refugee camps was not very different. In one FGD, refugee boys in Sidon explained that several factors can affect the sense of safety when using the toilet, as the facilities are shared. "*There are only two toilets available for around 35 people in each camp, which contributes to feelings of insecurity, especially in the early morning and evening hours, when individuals must wait in long lines to use the bathroom before going to or returning from work*". (Boys FGD, Baissariye).

Menstrual Health Management: FGD findings reveal that the economic situation limits women's ability to purchase sanitary products, and many women rely on aid or poor-quality products, highlighting the intersection between gender and economic hardship. This can affect their dignity, health, and comfort. Many participants in refugee camps in Zahle, Sidon, and Tyre report that they receive poor-quality sanitary pads from aid, which cause health problems like irritation or inflammation. This suggests that not only are they struggling with product availability, but there is also a lack of access to high-quality menstrual hygiene

products, which is a significant gender-related barrier. "*We use low-cost sanitary pads and only use each pad once. At times, when pads are unavailable—either due to distance or lack of affordability—we are forced to use rags of cloth instead. These clothes are also used only once and then discarded*," (Refugee girl, Sidon).

Additionally, some female Lebanese IDPs mentioned that when they fled from their homes, they did not bring any personal clothing items. They indicated the need for underwear and loose-fitting clothes, in addition to hygiene kits, especially during menstruation. The absence of these resources in the community are another barrier for personal dignity and menstrual management in displacement situations, compounded by the economic challenges women face.

Safety and Accessibility for Vulnerable Groups: While FGD respondents did not report persons with disabilities or elderly family members in their households, a few mentioned the need for latrines to be more accessible, particularly if they are traditional squat latrines. Suggested improved features could include ramps, handrails, or space for assistance in toilets.. KII respondents further elaborated on accessibility, "In rural areas and camps, indoor toilets are rare, and the facilities are often shared or located outside. Women, children, and persons with disabilities face additional challenges due to the lack of lighting or the distance to the facilities," (KII respondent). Experts also suggested the need to improve sanitation access and the safety of latrines. They recommended constructing toilets specifically designed for children and persons with disabilities, ensuring they are equipped with appropriate facilities. Enhancing lighting around toilet areas and promoting awareness of personal safety are also essential measures. Additionally, involving local communities in the management and maintenance of these facilities can help ensure sustainability and responsiveness to users' needs. (KII respondent).

Water Committees and female presentation: None of the FGD respondents indicated any knowledge about water-related committees in their areas. "In the camps, there are no committees or programs for water distribution," (Female FGDs Zahle). Lebanese displaced women in Tyre further elaborated, "There are no committees. The person in charge of the center is the only one who addresses our concerns, but only when necessary. Some have expressed that there is no one dedicated to managing these matters, and they hope that someone will take responsibility for them in the future," (Female Lebanese IDPs, Zahle).

Key informants explained that there were a few water committees, but their impact and women's participation in them varied by location. "*There are some water committees, but the effectiveness of these efforts varies by region. Beneficiaries include host communities, refugees, and internally displaced persons. In some cases, women do participate, but their roles are often limited to advisory positions rather than executive ones. In certain communities, women face social barriers that prevent their full and active participation*," (KII respondent).

Table 12. Identified WASH needs

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings

Access to Water	Gender roles limit women's mobility; heavy containers restrict who can fetch water.	Support with water delivery or nearby access points; reduce physical burden.	"Me, my mother, or my siblings, everyone helps with fetching water." – *Syrian refugee girl, Sidon*
Harassment & Injury Risks	Women and children face harassment and injuries at crowded and unsafe water points.	Safer, better-managed water points; gender-sensitive water access arrangements.	"Girls are subjected to harassment… including catcalling and obscene remarks." – *Zahle*
Time and Travel Burden	Long distances and harsh conditions limit time for education, work, and rest.	Closer water access and reduced waiting times; improved infrastructure.	"It takes women about an hour to reach the water on foot… girls need to rest." – *Zahle*
Latrine Access & Safety	Poor sanitation conditions; lack of privacy, locks, and access for vulnerable groups.	Private, safe, and accessible latrines with secure doors and lighting.	"There are no doors… the absence of a door is very embarrassing." – *Sidon*
Menstrual Health Management	Limited access to quality hygiene products; poor sanitation; lack of basic clothing.	Distribution of hygiene kits, quality sanitary pads, and proper waste disposal.	"We use low-cost sanitary pads… sometimes rags of cloth instead." – *Sidon*
Vulnerable Group Accessibility	Elderly and people with disabilities cannot use squat toilets; unsafe outdoor access.	Inclusive toilet design (e.g. ramps, handrails); improved lighting and safety.	"Older adults struggle… squat toilets are unusable for many with disabilities." – *Zahle*
Water Governance & Inclusion	No visible water committees in camps; low female representation in decision-making.	Establish functional, inclusive water committees with women's participation.	"There are no committees or programs for water distribution." – *Zahle*

Programmatic Implications: The findings underscore the urgent need for gender-sensitive, context-specific WASH interventions that address both structural barriers and deeply entrenched gender norms. Women and girls face significant physical and psychosocial burdens related to water collection, including exposure to harassment, injury, and social stigma. Programs, therefore, should prioritize:

- The establishment of safe, accessible, and nearby water points, alongside improved household water storage to reduce reliance on unsafe public collection.
- Sanitation facilities must be upgraded to ensure privacy, safety, and accessibility for women, girls, older adults, and persons with disabilities—features such as locks, lighting, ramps, and gender-segregated spaces are critical.
- Menstrual health support should be expanded through the provision of quality hygiene products and awareness-raising initiatives to reduce stigma and promote dignity.
- Programs must work to challenge harmful gender norms by involving men and boys in awareness efforts and by promoting the redistribution of domestic responsibilities.
- Encouraging and supporting the establishment of inclusive and gender-balanced water committees is essential to ensure that women's voices are meaningfully included in decision-making.
- Leadership training and community accountability mechanisms.

- Linking WASH with education and livelihoods initiatives can help reduce the opportunity costs faced by women and girls, particularly in displacement settings, thereby enhancing their autonomy and long-term resilience.

Shelter

The recent conflict in Lebanon has left many displaced individuals, particularly women, unable to rebuild their homes due to financial constraints and security restrictions. This inability to restore stable living conditions contributes to a heightened sense of vulnerability and powerlessness, especially for women who are unmarried and solely responsible for caring for children and other dependents under increasingly difficult circumstances.

Limited Agency and Decision-Making for Women and Girls: FGD respondents in Tyre and Ain el Helwe reveal a gender power imbalance where women and girls have restricted participation in decisions regarding shelter and access to resources. In most assessed households, as the men are the primary breadwinners, they hold the power in decisions related to housing and shelter, leaving women and children without any input. The burden of securing shelter typically falls on men, which could lead to situations where women are not consulted on matters affecting their well-being and security, increasing the risk of exploitation and GBV in the absence of their voice in decision-making. “Women and children cannot secure anything related to shelter because only the men work," (IDP Male FGD respondent Sour). This is further elaborated on by one key informant who explained that “*persons with disabilities and female-headed households face greater challenges in accessing quality building materials. The lack of stable income and limited support forces them to rely on aid, which may not cover all their needs. Additionally, some suppliers prefer to deal with men, making women more vulnerable to exploitation*,” (KII respondent). This evidence suggests that female headed households face extreme discrimination in any form of consultation or decision-making concerning shelter which is even further exacerbated for child headed households, particularly girl headed households given the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms- leaving them open to extreme and compounding vulnerabilities as a result.

"Persons with disabilities and female-headed households face greater challenges in accessing quality building materials. The lack of stable income and limited support forces them to rely on aid, which may not cover all their needs. Additionally, some suppliers prefer to deal with men, making women more vulnerable to exploitation."

(KII respondent)

Economic Dependence and Increased Vulnerability: FGD findings reveal that the financial burden placed on men to secure housing for the family can exacerbate stress and lead to harmful behaviours, including domestic violence. Female respondents in Tyre confirmed this economic dependence on men by stating, "Women and children are unable to provide anything related to shelter, as only the man is working," (Female FGD, Tyre). Additionally, a displaced Lebanese respondent in Tyre area illustrated this by explaining that none of the displaced individuals has been able to build their shelter, as "Construction requires money, something we cannot secure under these difficult circumstances, which has added to the psychological stress experienced by the community," (Lebanese IDPs FGD, Tyre). This is in alignment with studies in the field, which confirm that when men face high levels of stress from economic pressures, they may direct this frustration towards women and children (Nasr et al, 2024)[42]. Additionally, women and children, being economically dependent on men, are more vulnerable to abuse in these situations, as they cannot independently secure their shelter or livelihood, as further discussed under the ecological model.

Increased Exposure to GBV in Displacement Centres: FGD findings and KII respondents reveal that displaced people who seek shelter in temporary centres may be at a heightened risk of GBV. One key informant explained this aspect: "Many *families, especially in camps, lack even the minimum level of privacy. Shelters are often overcrowded, and the walls are either very thin or non-existent. The situation could be improved by distributing materials for internal partitions, increasing the number of shelters, and providing adequate lighting in shared areas to enhance the sense of safety*," (Key informant). The absence of privacy, lack of security, and crowded conditions make women and children particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, harassment, and exploitation. "*Each tent consists of a single room that includes a bathroom and a small kitchen area used by the whole family. There are no doors"*. (Girl FGD, Sidon). These environments often lack adequate protection, further exacerbating the risks of GBV for women and girls. The combination of physical insecurity and limited institutional protection leaves women and girls especially exposed to harm. Many respondents across different locations, including Zahle, Tripoli, and Tyre, indicated that their houses or places of

[42] Nasr, R., Nasr, N., Haddad, C. *et al.* Financial insecurity and mental well-being: experiences of parents amid the lebanese economic crisis. *BMC Public Health* **24**, 3017 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20544-3

residence are not safe. Women in Tripoli further explained that all security incidents, such as theft or assault, occur to them, their children, or their husbands in their current places of residence. (Syrian refugee, Tripoli).

Table 13. Identified shelter-related needs

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Inability to Rebuild Shelter	Both genders face challenges accessing shelter related material	Financial support and equitable access to shelter materials; inclusive aid targeting women.	"Construction requires money, something we cannot secure." – *Lebanese IDPs FGD, Tyre*
Limited Agency for Women & Girls	Men dominate decisions related to shelter and resources; women are excluded from key decisions.	Increased female participation in household and community decisions; empowerment programming.	"Women and children cannot secure anything related to shelter because only the men work." – *IDP Male, Sour*
Economic Dependence & Vulnerability	Women's economic reliance on men contributes to stress, disempowerment, and risk of domestic violence.	Livelihood support for women; mental health and GBV prevention programming for stressed households.	"Women and children are unable to provide anything related to shelter, as only the man is working." – *Tyre*
Exposure to GBV in Shelter Settings	Overcrowded shelters, lack of privacy and lighting increase risk of harassment and violence.	Safe shelter designs with partitions, lighting, and GBV-responsive infrastructure.	"Each tent consists of a single room… there are no doors." – *Girl FGD, Sidon*
Lack of Safety in Displacement Areas	Displacement settings lack security measures; women and children face safety threats at home.	Improved physical security and protective services in temporary shelters and urban areas.	"All security incidents occur to them, their children, or their husbands.in their current places of residence" – *Syrian refugee, Tripoli*

Programmatic implications: The recent conflict in Lebanon has underscored the urgent need for gender-responsive shelter programming that addresses the intersecting vulnerabilities of displacement, economic hardship, and protection risks. Evidence from FGDs and KIIs reveals that women, especially those heading households or caring for dependents alone, face systemic exclusion from shelter-related decisions due to entrenched gender norms and financial dependency on male relatives. This lack of agency, coupled with economic barriers and limited access to building materials, places women and persons with disabilities at heightened risk of exploitation and gender-based violence (GBV). Overcrowded, insecure displacement shelters lacking privacy, lighting, and basic protection infrastructure further increase women's exposure to harassment and abuse. Programmatically, this necessitates:

- Shelter interventions that prioritize the needs of female-headed households and vulnerable groups, integrate privacy and safety measures, and promote women's participation in planning and decision-making.
- Livelihood and cash support should be linked to shelter assistance to reduce dependency and increase resilience.

- Coordination between shelter, protection, and WASH actors is essential for an effective, multisectoral response.
- Community-based efforts must challenge harmful gender norms and engage men and boys in promoting equitable roles, stress management, and non-violent behaviors to reduce GBV risks and enhance household stability.

Education

Gender barriers to education access and retention:

Gendered Discrimination in Schools: Even though most participants across FDGs indicate that girls and boys receive equal treatment in school, girl FGD respondents in Tripoli mentioned how teachers are more attentive to boys and that boys "are the priority" (Syrian girl FGD, Tripoli). Boy respondents in Tripoli, however, did not share the same opinion. Their responses varied between "they treat both genders equally" to "they treat girls better, they are stricter with us," (Boys FGD, Tripoli). This gender-based disparity, when it occurs, creates an unequal learning environment for girls or boys, which can discourage their participation.

Furthermore, gendered power dynamics in school settings can escalate into violence, particularly in a context of unequal treatment or the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes. A national study conducted by UNESCO and the Lebanese Ministry of Education found that school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is influenced by entrenched gender norms and unequal power relations, which can lead to various forms of violence including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, disproportionately affecting girls and undermining their right to safe education (UNESCO, 2012)[43]. These dynamics are further compounded by institutional tolerance of sexist behaviour and a lack of gender-sensitive educational practices. Complementing this, Usta, Masterson, and Farver (2016)[44] explored the socialization of Lebanese men's attitudes toward gender roles and found that educational experiences, parental expectations, and school discipline reinforce traditional masculinity, fostering attitudes that normalize male dominance and control over women.

Child Marriage and Early School Dropout: Child marriage remains a significant barrier to girls' education in Lebanon, particularly among refugee populations. According to UNICEF (2023)[45], adolescent girls in Lebanon face numerous challenges accessing education, including economic limitations, safety concerns, and societal norms that prioritize early marriage over schooling, which findings from this study confirm. Girls in FGDs describe facing increased pressure to drop out of school due to family obligations, such as household chores or marriage. According to a respondent in the boys' FGD in Zahle," Some parents force their daughters into early marriage". Another boy explained, "Girls face more judgment than boys, and if a girl fails her class, her parents immediately marry her off". Child marriage was further confirmed across all

[43] UNESCO. (2012). *School-related gender-based violence in Lebanon*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://www.ungei.org/publication/school-related-gender-based-violence-lebanon
[44] Usta, J., Masterson, A. R., & Farver, J. M. (2016). Violence against displaced Syrian women in Lebanon. *Violence Against Women, 22*(3), 324–343. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215603509
[45] UNICEF. (2023). *Adolescent girls in Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to accessing education and relevant services*. United Nations Children's Fund. https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports/adolescent-girls-lebanon-barriers-and-facilitators-accessing-education-and-relevant

locations, Tyre, Zahle, and Tripoli. It was also cited by experts as a reason for girls dropping out early from schools and not having equal opportunity to study. “Girls and boys do not have equal opportunities in education due to economic factors, household responsibilities, child marriage, security concerns, and the absence of female teachers in some areas,” (KII expert).

In addition to the social and educational factors highlighted above, Child marriage in Lebanon is fueled by legal and economic barriers, as discussed under GBV. The absence of a unified minimum legal age for marriage and the authority of religious courts to approve unions under 18 create legal loopholes that enable the practice. Economic hardship leads many families to view marriage as a survival strategy or a means of easing financial burdens. Deep-rooted gender norms that prioritize a girl’s "honor" often frame early marriage as a form of protection, especially in conservative or crisis-affected settings. Al-Hroub (2021)[46] found that societal expectations, particularly around early marriage, is a key driver of school dropout among Palestinian girls, rooted in economic strain and traditional beliefs. Human Rights Watch (2016)[47] reported similar challenges for Syrian girls, including safety risks, harassment, and forced marriage. In addition, UNICEF (2023)[48] confirms that societal expectations and early marriage remain among the most significant barriers to girls’ education in Lebanon. Moreover, poor access to safe and inclusive education environments causes families to see schools as risky or ineffective alternatives. These conditions reinforce a cycle that denies girls their rights and autonomy. Furthermore, Child marriage is a serious human rights and protection issue that undermines girls’ education, mental health, safety, and future economic independence, as further discussed under GBV. It exposes them to early pregnancy, sexual violence, psychological distress, and lifelong dependency. The practice reflects harmful gender norms that limit girls' autonomy and violate their rights.

While child marriage is evidenced by findings from this study, the findings also reveal a shift in attitudes in Syrian refugee communities across Akkar, Zahle, and Tripoli. As many parents described the importance of education for their girls. Syrian male respondents in Bekaa agreed that education is more important than marriage for girls. One FGD respondent further explained, “I don’t want her to marry for a year, then return home divorced. Education is more important”. Male respondents in Tyre agreed to this: “Not educating girls is a thing of the past and no longer exists these days” (Male Lebanese Host- IDP FGD, Tyre).

These findings point to a critical programmatic opportunity: while child marriage persists, shifting community attitudes, particularly increased support for girls’ education, signal potential for transformative change. Programs should build on this momentum by integrating education-focused interventions with community engagement efforts that challenge harmful norms. Engaging parents and male community members as allies can reinforce positive change and create a supportive environment for girls. This emerging

[46] Al-Hroub, A. M. (2021). *UNRWA school dropouts in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon: A qualitative study*. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/91056598/UNRWA_School_Dropouts_in_Palestinian_Refugee_Camps_in_Lebanon_A_Qualitative_Study
[47] Human Rights Watch. (2016). *“Growing Up Without an Education”: Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/19/growing-without-education/barriers-education-syrian-refugee-children-lebanon
[48] UNICEF. (2023). *Adolescent girls in Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to accessing education and relevant services*. https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports/adolescent-girls-lebanon-barriers-and-facilitators-accessing-education-and-relevant

shift presents a valuable entry point for designing gender-transformative programming that not only addresses child marriage but also promotes long-term empowerment and equality for girls.

Gendered social norms and the burden of unpaid domestic and care work on girls: Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) reveal that deeply entrenched societal norms systematically restricting girls mobility and assigning domestic and caregiving responsibilities to them, has an impact on girls' educational participation and opportunities reinforcing gender inequality. In FGDs held in Tripoli and Zahle, Syrian girls consistently reported being expected to assist with household chores and childcare, limiting their ability to attend or focus on school. One participant stated, *"Financial hardship prevents parents from sending their daughters to school; they only send the boys because they believe the boys will work and earn money in the future"* (Girls FGD, Tripoli). Another girl added that she always needs an escort on the way to protect her from society, and when no escort is available, she cannot go to school (Girls FGD, Tripoli). A refugee boy in Zahle confirmed, "There is discrimination between boys and girls, and parents often force the girl to stay at home" (Boys FGD, Zahle).

These expectations are not incidental—they are rooted in patriarchal social structures that view girls as domestic contributors rather than rights-holders with equal educational potential. These social norms are internalized from a young age, as further discussed under the ecological model, and rarely questioned within the community context. t. Furthermore, this gendered division of labor is a form of unpaid care work that is normalized as families adapt to economic stress. However, it disproportionately restricts girls' access to education and future livelihood opportunities, further entrenching cycles of dependency and inequality. In many cases, domestic responsibilities are so extensive that girls either fall behind academically or are withdrawn from school altogether.

These findings collectively highlight the urgent need for culturally sensitive and gender-responsive interventions that address the root causes of educational exclusion for girls.

Menstrual hygiene management: Menstruation remains a significant yet frequently overlooked barrier to girls' education in Lebanon, particularly among displaced populations, as it contributes to school absenteeism. In focus group discussions conducted in Tripoli and Akkar, participants indicated that schools provide some guidance on menstruation. However, this support is often insufficient to overcome the social stigma. A Lebanese host mother explained that although her daughter receives advice from school, "she prefers not to go to school on the first day of her period because she is embarrassed." Similar sentiments

> ***"Financial hardship prevents parents from sending their daughters to school; they only send the boys because they believe the boys will work and earn money in the future."***
>
> (Girls FGD, Tripoli)

were echoed by girls in both regions, who cited embarrassment and fatigue as reasons for staying home during menstruation. Key informants added that in some areas, girls "lack adequate education about hygiene, which undermines their confidence and willingness to attend school" (KII respondent), and broader challenges, such as poverty, stigma, and inadequate facilities, further compound the issue. Furthermore, according to Fe-Male and Plan International (2021)[49],76% of women and girls in Lebanon struggle to access menstrual products and often resort to unhygienic alternatives.

Access to latrines: According to a key informant, *"Not all schools have safe or separate facilities for girls and boys, which affects girls' attendance during their menstrual period."* (Key informant). This concern was echoed by several refugee girls in Akkar, who confirmed that school latrines were neither safe nor gender-separated. One participant noted, *"No, they are not separated. The boys enter the girls' bathrooms and threaten us if we speak up,"* while another simply stated, *"No, they are not separated."* (Girls FGD, Akkar)

Additionally, several beneficiaries in Tripoli and Akkar reported feeling uncomfortable attending school during menstruation due to a lack of support and inadequate facilities. One girl shared, "*I don't feel comfortable going to school during menstruation, because there is no water in the toilets."* (Girls FGD, Tripoli). Similar concerns were raised in Akkar: *"I don't feel comfortable and I get tired, and they don't teach us anything about this topic."* (Girls FGD, Akkar). However, these experiences were not universal. Other Syrian refugee respondents in both Akkar and Tripoli reported having safe access to clean, gender-separated latrines in their schools.

In conclusion, menstrual hygiene management remains a critical yet often overlooked barrier to girls' education in Lebanon, especially among displaced populations, due to stigma, lack of hygiene education, limited access to menstrual products, and inadequate, unsafe school facilities. Girls frequently miss school during their periods out of embarrassment or discomfort, with many reporting that latrines are not gender-separated, lack water, or are unsafe—conditions that not only affect attendance but also expose girls to heightened risks of gender-based violence (GBV). In some cases, girls reported boys entering girls' bathrooms and threatening them, underscoring how poor infrastructure exacerbates both educational and protection risks. To address this, schools must ensure safe, private, and gender-separated sanitation facilities, integrate comprehensive menstrual health education, provide affordable or free menstrual products, and engage communities to challenge harmful gender norms—essential steps toward promoting girls' dignity, safety, and uninterrupted access to education.

Economic constraints: Financial hardship remains one of the most frequently cited barriers to education for both boys and girls, particularly among displaced and low-income households. In focus group discussions held in Tripoli, Akkar, Tyre, and Zahle, numerous caregivers and children emphasized that the costs associated with education, such as transportation and school supplies, have become increasingly difficult to afford. One boy in Zahle noted, "*There is a significant financial burden we face, and if we decide to attend the*

[49]Plan International. (2021). *Period poverty in Lebanon: Economic crisis making menstrual products unaffordable*. https://plan-uk.org/press/economic-crisis-in-lebanon-making-period-products-unaffordable-for-majority-of-women

> ***"There is a significant financial burden we face, and if we decide to attend the morning shift, we have to pay some fees. The tuition is outrageous in private schools, so I also have to help my family with expenses."***
>
> (Boys FGD, Zahle)

morning shift, we have to pay some fees. The tuition is outrageous in private schools, so I also have to help my family with expenses," (Boys FGD, Zahle). Refugee girls in Akkar expressed similar concerns: "It is difficult to attend school in two cases: first, when we cannot afford transportation, and second, when school fees are high and unaffordable" (Girls FGD, Akkar). According to key informants, the primary barriers to education include "poverty, the high cost of education, child marriage, the need to work to support the family, bullying, and a lack of awareness about the importance of education for girls," (KII respondent).

These findings highlight that household decision-making and gender roles significantly influence which children stay in school when finances are tight, often to the detriment of girls. In many low-income and displaced families in Lebanon, economic constraints compel caregivers to make difficult choices about educational priorities. While boys are sometimes favored due to perceptions of them being future earners, they are also frequently withdrawn from school to contribute financially, as reflected by a boy in Zahle who noted the burden of school fees and the need to help support his family. For girls, financial strain intersects with restrictive gender norms and safety concerns, leading to school withdrawal not only due to costs but also because of risks tied to transportation, harassment, or reputational harm. In some cases, early marriage is viewed as a more viable or socially acceptable path than continued education. These decisions reflect broader social attitudes that undervalue girls' education, particularly among refugee communities where instability exacerbates existing inequalities.

To address these challenges, education and protection programs must adopt a gender-sensitive approach that responds to both economic and social drivers of school dropout. This includes targeted financial assistance, such as transportation stipends or school supply support, specifically aimed at keeping girls in school. Programs should also actively engage caregivers, especially male decision-makers, to shift perceptions around the value of girls' education and delay early marriage. Integrating education support with child protection and household livelihood interventions can help reduce economic pressure and prevent negative coping strategies. Without tackling the underlying gender norms that shape household decision-making, financial aid alone will be insufficient to ensure equitable and sustained access to education for all children.

Child labour: Child labor was frequently identified by Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants as a key factor in the decision to stop sending children to school. While many adult caregivers primarily associated child labor with boys, girls in Zahle and Tripoli reported working to support their families. Additionally, boys in Tripoli and Tyre mentioned that either they or their sisters worked to contribute to the household income. As one girl from Tripoli stated, "*Forcing girls to work to support their family prevents them from going to school*" (Girl FGD, Tripoli).

> ***"Forcing girls to work to support their family prevents them from going to school"***
>
> (Girl FGD, Tripoli)

This pattern is reflected in broader research by World Vision, which found an alarming increase in both child labor and school dropout rates across Lebanon, affecting both Lebanese and Syrian refugee children. The study revealed that 12.3% of Lebanese households and 71.6% of Syrian refugee households have at least one child aged 3 to 18 who is not enrolled in any form of education. Furthermore, 45.9% of caregivers attributed the rise in child labor to the economic crisis, while 37% linked it to cultural beliefs (World Vision International, 2023).

Safe space and educational assistance: While this barrier is not particularly gendered, it is an important obstacle for both boys and girls. Many respondents from different locations, Tripoli, Zahle, and Akkar, indicated they don't have a suitable space to study, and no one to help them study. "My brother makes a lot of noise and does not help me study," (Girl FGD, Tripoli). Syrian boys in Akkar echoed similar sentiments they explained that they lived next to a camp and it was always noisy (Boys FGD, Akkar). A Key informant further elaborated, "Many children lack a quiet environment to study, especially in poor or large households," (Key informant).

Other barriers related to Syrian refugees specifically: Syrian boys in Zahle commented on discrimination as a barrier to education. "*I love school, but there's a problem with some of the teachers. They make me hate school because they treat students unequally. There's discrimination between students, and even based on nationality*," (Boys FGD, Zahle). A Syrian girl in Zahle FGDs also shared a similar experience, "*I was in school, but I stopped last year because I don't have residency papers or a Lebanese sponsor, and the cost of residency is financially burdensome, and we can't secure this money. However, I love school very much*," (Girl FGD, Zahle). Furthermore, several male students in Zahle expressed concerns about the impact of school scheduling on their academic engagement and performance, particularly following the transition of Syrian students to afternoon shifts. One participant explained, *"I used to love school because I attended in the morning. But when Syrian students were moved to the afternoon shift, I stopped liking school and couldn't keep up with the learning again. The quality*

of education in the afternoon is not good, and there are educational gaps between the morning and afternoon shifts," (Boys FGD, Zahle). Another added, *"I love school, but during exam time, there's a lot of pressure to study, and there isn't enough time because school is in the afternoon. Especially since I'm in a school that follows the Syrian curriculum, which is very difficult,"* (Boys FGD, Zahle). These reflections underscore how structural barriers—such as time shifts, limited study hours, and challenging curricula—can diminish students' motivation, hinder their academic performance, and restrict equitable access to quality education.

In addition to scheduling challenges, issues related to legal documentation and curriculum access were also

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>
> (Boys FGD, Zahle)

reported. Syrian boys in Zahle highlighted their difficulties in following the Lebanese curriculum due to a lack of legal residency papers and bureaucratic barriers (Syrian boys, FGD, Zahle). These challenges further compound educational exclusion and contribute to a fragmented learning experience for refugee students, undermining their long-term educational outcomes and sense of belonging within the formal education system.

2. Violence in and around schools:

Harassment and safety risks around and during transit to school: Perceptions of safety vary widely depending on gender, location and proximity to school. While many focus group discussion (FGD) respondents reported feeling safe sending their children to school, this sentiment was not universally shared. For example, some boys in Tripoli mentioned that their schools were located very close to their homes, which contributed to their sense of safety (Boys, FGD, Tripoli). However, others expressed fears of harassment or kidnapping during their commute. As one respondent explained, *"They face harassment and bullying and fear being kidnapped on their way to school,"* (FGD respondent, Tripoli). Fear of harassment was also communicated by girls in Tripoli. One girl in Tripoli shared, *"I feel afraid on the way to school. I always need to be accompanied by my older brothers or family members,"* (Girl, FGD, Tripoli). Another added, *"Girls are exposed to risks of harassment on the way to school, that is why my father pulled me out of school,"* (Girl, FGD, Tripoli). These testimonies highlight how the perceived and actual risks of harassment, violence, and abduction contribute to school avoidance or withdrawal, especially among girls and boys.

Key informants echoed these concerns, citing broader issues of community insecurity. One explained, *"Traveling to schools is not always safe. The lack of security, having weapons in the hands of many, is considered a form of entertainment nowadays. And drugs are being sold at very low prices, like 1,000 Lebanese lira for a single pill,"* (Key Informant). This environment of insecurity intensifies parental fear

"Traveling to schools is not always safe. The lack of security, having weapons in the hands of many, is considered a form of entertainment nowadays. And drugs are being sold at very low prices, like 1,000 Lebanese lira for a single pill."

(Key Informant)

s and often results in increased dependence on male relatives for mobility or, in more restrictive cases, the complete removal of girls and boys from the education system.

Perceptions of safety around school attendance in Lebanon vary by gender, location, and proximity, with girls disproportionately affected by insecurity. While some boys feel safe due to nearby schools, both boys and girls report fears of harassment, kidnapping, and violence during their commute. For girls, these risks are compounded by restrictive gender norms, leading to greater reliance on male relatives for accompaniment or, in some cases, complete withdrawal from school. Insecurity—exacerbated by the presence of weapons, drugs, and weak community protection—intensifies parental fears and limits girls' mobility and access to education. Addressing these challenges requires gender-sensitive interventions that ensure safe, accessible schooling and challenge harmful norms that restrict girls' right to learn.

Harassment by teachers or school staff: Reports from focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) and mistreatment within educational settings, particularly involving authority figures. One mother described a case of teacher-perpetrated harassment, stating, *"My daughter and her classmates were being harassed by the teacher,"* (Female FGD, Tripoli). This is a direct GBV risk, where girls may experience harassment or abuse from individuals in power. Such behavior, if left unaddressed, can perpetuate further violence and discourage school attendance, particularly among girls. A Syrian girl from Akkar also noted that some teachers use physical violence, especially during afternoon shifts (Syrian girl, FGD, Akkar).

Compounding this issue, a Syrian boy in Tripoli explained, *"The presence of teachers who treat students poorly makes them hate education and prefer to stay at home"* (Syrian boy, FGD, Tripoli). These statements highlight how teacher misconduct not only disrupts the learning environment but also pushes students, regardless of gender, away from formal education. Violence or mistreatment by authority figures constitutes a serious GBV risk in educational settings and may be exacerbated by the absence of strict regulations, insufficient monitoring, or a failure to address bullying and staff misconduct in a timely manner.

Students' fear and mistrust in school staff: This issue was reported across several focus group discussions (FGDs). For example, a Syrian girl in Akkar stated, *"From time to time, someone comes and asks us if anything is bothering us, but the teacher threatens to beat us if we say anything"* (Syrian girl, FGD, Akkar). Similarly, when Syrian boys in Tripoli were asked about the challenges some children face in accessing education, they mentioned teachers who abuse their students and discriminate against them. However, these negative experiences were not universal. In contrast, some Syrian girls in Akkar expressed satisfaction with their educational environment, with one noting, *"I'm happy because the center is nice, and I love the teachers because they care about us and look after us,"* (Syrian girl, FGD, Akkar).

Reports from Syrian children in Lebanon reveal significant gaps in safeguarding and protection within the school system, particularly for displaced students. While some children describe supportive environments, others report abuse, discrimination, and threats from teachers, with no safe avenues to report mistreatment. These experiences reflect broader protection failures and a lack of accountability within schools, where safeguarding obligations are not consistently upheld. Such failures not only violate children's rights but also erode trust in the education system and deter school attendance. Ensuring safe, inclusive learning environments requires urgent investment in teacher training on child protection, enforcement of safeguarding policies, and the creation of confidential, child-friendly reporting mechanisms, especially for vulnerable and displaced populations.

Peer-to-Peer violence and bullying: Bullying among students has emerged as a recurring concern in focus group discussions (FGDs). A girl respondent in Tripoli observed, *"Children form groups and try to annoy the weaker children,"* (Girl, FGD, Tripoli), highlighting a dynamic of peer-led exclusion and aggression. Although such behavior was not always explicitly gendered, it was often noted that girls may be disproportionately affected, particularly in settings where social power dynamics and lack of adult intervention play a role. This observation is supported by empirical studies demonstrating the widespread nature of bullying in Lebanon. According to Malaeb et al. (2020)[50], nearly half (49.9%) of Lebanese adolescents reported experiencing bullying, with psychological and verbal forms being most prevalent. Their study also established strong associations between bullying victimization and prior experiences of child abuse, internet addiction, and mental health challenges. These findings point to the compounded vulnerability many children face in and outside school settings.

> ***"The presence of teachers who treat students poorly makes them hate education and prefer to stay at home."***
>
> (Syrian boy, FGD, Tripoli)

Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon face similarly acute challenges. In a 2020 report by Medical Aid for Palestinians, youth in refugee camps identified bullying as a normalized behavior, often linked to broader community-level exposure to violence. Peer education programs were developed to confront these patterns and promote a culture of respect among students (Medical Aid for Palestinians, 2020)[51]. This need for

[50] Malaeb, D., Akel, M., Awad, E., Haddad, C., & Obeid, S. (2020). Bullying victimization among Lebanese adolescents: The role of child abuse, internet addiction, social phobia and depression and validation of the Illinois Bully Scale. *BMC Pediatrics, 20*(1), 413.
[51] Medical Aid for Palestinians. (2020, November 20). *Palestinian youth working together to tackle bullying in Lebanon's refugee camps*.

inclusive, safe school environments was echoed by Syrian girls in Tripoli FGDs, who expressed concern about the potential for bullying and harassment among students. They emphasized the importance of disaggregating girls and boys to avoid harassment (Girls, FGD, Tripoli). The psychological mechanisms linking bullying to later aggression were further explored by Fekih-Romdhane et al. (2022)[52], who found that repetitive negative thinking mediated the relationship between victimization and outward aggression in Lebanese adolescents. This suggests that the cognitive and emotional toll of bullying can manifest in behaviors that perpetuate cycles of violence within school communities, making early intervention critical.

Although negative experiences were prominent, not all children shared the same perceptions. Some Syrian girls in Akkar reported positive school experiences, as discussed above. These accounts underscore the importance of supportive adult figures in shaping students' sense of safety and belonging in educational settings.

Bullying is a significant and recurring protection concern in Lebanese schools, particularly affecting marginalized groups such as girls and refugee children. Focus group discussions reveal that peer-led aggression often thrives in environments with weak adult oversight, reinforcing cycles of violence and compounding existing vulnerabilities. Girls are especially at risk, with some advocating for gender-segregated spaces to avoid harassment. The psychological toll of bullying, including links to trauma, mental health issues, and future aggression, highlights the need for early intervention. To fulfill their safeguarding responsibilities, schools must implement clear anti-bullying policies, train staff in child protection, establish safe reporting mechanisms, and promote inclusive peer education programs that foster a culture of respect and safety for all students.

[52] Fekih-Romdhane, F., Malaeb, D., Sarray El Dine, A., Obeid, S., & Hallit, S. (2022). Association between bullying victimization and aggression in Lebanese adolescents: The indirect effect of repetitive negative thinking—a path analysis approach and scales validation. *BMC Pediatrics, 22*(1), 735.

Inadequate school-based protection systems: Findings from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted in various regions of Lebanon reveal critical gaps in the protection systems available within schools, particularly for refugee and host community children. Across all reported incidents—whether involving school staff or peers—participants consistently described a lack of effective and confidential reporting mechanisms. As one KII respondent noted, "Bullying and harassment do occur in schools, but they may go unreported due to fear or the lack of effective protection mechanisms." Among Syrian refugee boys in Zahle, participants reported that their first line of response when facing problems with teachers was to approach the school administration. Some also indicated that they would inform their parents, recognizing that parents may be better positioned to advocate for them with school authorities. Similar opinions were echoed by girl respondents as well who also identified school administration ,parents or trusted teachers as go to in case they faced any issues. Noting that younger children from both genders were more likely to go to their parents first in case they encountered issues at school

When asked about formal mechanisms for reporting abuse or exploitation in schools, a KII respondent mentioned, "The Ministry of Education's hotline, which anyone can use to file a complaint." In Tripoli, some girls mentioned the presence of a "complaint box at schools" as a means of submitting grievances.However, awareness and use of such mechanisms varied widely. Female host community participants in Tripoli stated they were unaware of any formal reporting systems or designated child protection focal points within their schools, and like their peers, relied solely on the school administration when issues arose. As one KII respondent explained, "These cases often go unreported due to a lack of trust in existing protection mechanisms, compounded by the absence of effective and confidential reporting systems, which discourages children from safely disclosing violations." These findings underscore the urgent need for strengthening school-based child protection systems, ensuring that reporting channels are both accessible and trusted by students and families alike.

Identified Systemic gaps

The prevalence of harassment, abuse, and violence in and around schools in Lebanon reflects deep-rooted systemic failures, including weak teacher accountability, inadequate safeguarding policies, and ineffective reporting mechanisms. Recurring incidents of teacher misconduct and peer bullying point to a broader lack of oversight, enforcement of professional standards, and training on child protection. Although some reporting channels exist—such as complaint boxes or hotlines—their limited visibility, poor implementation, and the fear of retaliation discourage students, especially girls and refugee children, from coming forward. This reinforces a cycle of silence, mistrust, and impunity. To align with child rights and safeguarding principles, schools must go beyond their academic function to serve as inclusive, gender-sensitive protection hubs. This entails training staff to recognize and respond to signs of abuse, establishing clear and confidential referral pathways, and creating environments where girls feel safe, heard, and supported. Given that restrictive gender norms often suppress girls' ability to report abuse or assert their rights, schools should promote empowerment through life skills education and participatory protection activities. In collaboration with families, communities, and child protection actors, schools can help dismantle these barriers and foster safe, equitable, and rights-based environments for all children.

Table 14. Identified Needs in Education

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Gendered Discrimination in Schools	Unequal teacher treatment; boys perceived as prioritized; institutional tolerance for sexist behavior	Teacher training in gender sensitivity, promote equal treatment	"Teachers are more attentive to boys and that boys are the priority." – Syrian Girl, FGD Tripoli
Child Marriage and Early School Dropout	Social norms prioritize marriage over education; girls drop out early	Community awareness; stronger legal protection; economic support for girls' education	"If a girl fails her class, her parents immediately marry her off." – Boy, FGD Zahle
Cultural Norms and Unequal Household Roles	Girls are expected to do chores and stay home; safety concerns limit school attendance, restricted mobility	Family outreach; flexible schooling; gender-sensitive transportation solutions	"She always needs an escort on the way to protect her… when no escort is available, the girl cannot go." – Girl, Tripoli
Menstrual Hygiene Management	Embarrassment, lack of access to products, insufficient education	Improve access to menstrual products and hygiene education in schools	"She prefers not to go to school on the first day of her period because she is embarrassed." – Lebanese Host Mother
Economic Constraints	Inability to afford tuition, transport, supplies	Financial aid programs; subsidized schooling; transport assistance	"It is difficult to attend school… when school fees are high and unaffordable." – Girl, FGD Akkar
Child Labor	Children (especially boys) work instead of attending school; economic necessity	Livelihood support for families; enforcement of labor laws; flexible education programs	"Forcing girls to work to support their family prevents them from going to school." – Girl, FGD Tripoli
Unsafe Study Environments	Noisy or overcrowded homes; lack of educational support	Safe learning spaces; homework clubs or tutoring centers	"My brother makes a lot of noise and does not help me study." – Girl, FGD Tripoli
Legal Barriers for Syrian Refugees	Lack of legal papers; curriculum differences; shift to lower-quality afternoon sessions	Policy reform; curriculum bridging; legal aid	"I stopped last year because I don't have residency papers or a Lebanese sponsor." – Girl, FGD Zahle
Violence During School Commute	Risk of harassment and kidnapping; dependence on male escorts	Safer school routes, community escort programs, and public awareness	"Girls are exposed to risks of harassment on the way to school." – Girl, FGD Tripoli
Harassment by School Staff	Teacher misconduct, threats, and physical violence	Strong accountability, protection focal points in schools, teacher training	"My daughter and her classmates were being harassed by the teacher." – Mother, FGD Tripoli
Peer-to-Peer Bullying	Students bullying weaker peers; girls face harassment	Anti-bullying campaigns, counseling, and student clubs for inclusion	"Children form groups and try to annoy the weaker children." – Girl, FGD Tripoli

Weak School Protection Systems	Limited awareness or trust in complaint systems; underuse of formal reporting mechanisms	Strengthened reporting systems; trained child protection staff in schools	"These cases often go unreported due to a lack of trust in existing protection mechanisms." – KII Respondent

Programmatic implications: Based on findings and needs highlighted above, programmatic efforts must address a range of interlinked needs to ensure gender-responsive access to education in Lebanon. These recommendations require coordination across education, child protection, WASH, and social protection sectors, and must be aligned with national education strategies and safeguarding frameworks. A rights-based, inclusive approach will ensure that all children regardless of gender, status, or location can access, attend, and thrive in school safely.

These include:

- Training teachers and school staff on gender sensitivity, eliminating discriminatory practices, and promoting inclusive curricula to foster a supportive learning environment.
- School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) must be prevented through confidential reporting mechanisms, increased female staff presence, and strengthened referral pathways.
- Tackling child marriage requires community awareness, financial incentives for school attendance, and flexible learning programs for married adolescents.
- Menstrual hygiene management should be enhanced by providing free products, private sanitation facilities, and destigmatizing education.
- Economic barriers include transportation and supply costs, demand for cash or in-kind assistance, and subsidized services.
- To combat child labor and dropout, program initiatives, with non-formal education options and household livelihood support, should be put in place.
- Safe study environments, both in and out of school, are crucial and should be complemented by after-school and tutoring programs.
- Peer bullying and violence must be addressed through school policies, peer mediation, and access to counselling.
- Refugee-specific barriers, such as legal documentation, poor quality of second-shift education, and curriculum gaps, require targeted advocacy and tailored support.
- Lastly, ensuring children's safety during transit to school calls for community-based protection strategies, improved transport options, and enhanced school surroundings through collaboration with local authorities.

Nutrition

Gender based access to food and intra household Allocations: FGD and KII responses to the questions about food distribution suggest some gender-based dynamics. A key informant explained, "*Cultural traditions place the responsibility of family care on women, leading them to prioritize feeding children and men before eating themselves. This behaviour is often rooted in social norms that make women more likely to sacrifice their own health for the family's well-being*. T In Baalbek, one male respondent stated that "If meals are not available, priority is given to children." Male FGD respondents in Tyre also confirmed this.

This potential lack of equitable food distribution might have health implications for women. One key informant explained this aspect, *"Conflicts lead to food shortages, causing families to rely on unbalanced or nutritionally poor meals. Additionally, displacement may prevent some mothers from providing adequate breastfeeding due to stress and malnutrition"*. When asked if boys and men need more food than women and girls, opinions were divided. Some participants from FGDs across all locations agree that men and boys eat more, while others mention it depends on size, age, and some even mentioned that women eat more. This diversity in opinions is further demonstrated by the responses of Lebanese displaced girls in Sidon. "I believe that men eat more", a girl mentioned. Another responded, "Women eat more; it depends on the body type" (IDP girls FGD, Sidon) According to Key informants, this potential gender bias is more associated with traditional communities. "*Young girls may be more likely to skip meals compared to boys in some communities due to social traditions*," (KII respondent).

> ***"Young girls may be more likely to skip meals compared to boys in some communities due to social traditions"***
>
> (KII respondent)

These gendered patterns in accessing food, shaped by social norms, household roles, and power dynamics, further confirm the findings referenced under the ecological model discussed above. At the individual level, women internalize caregiving responsibilities, often sacrificing their own nutritional needs. Interpersonally, household hierarchies prioritize men and children in food distribution. At the community level, traditional norms reinforce these roles, especially in conservative or displaced settings. Structurally, displacement and conflict exacerbate these vulnerabilities, limiting access to adequate nutrition and support. Addressing these disparities requires a multi-level approach that challenges gendered norms while ensuring equitable access to resources across all ecological levels.

People with disabilities: Key respondents indicated there might be some discrimination in food distribution against people with disabilities due to their inability to express their needs (KII respondent). This view is further supported by studies in the field. According to the World Food Program, Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in communities affected by crises, facing heightened risks of food insecurity and exclusion from essential humanitarian assistance (World Food Programme, 2023).

Role of Women in Food Management: Many FGD responses indicate a gendered dynamic in household food and resource management, where men tend to hold primary control over resources as the family breadwinners. FGD respondents in Zahle, both Lebanese hosts and refugees, unanimously agreed that "*men primarily make decisions related to food and money, as they are responsible for providing for the family's needs*," (Male FGD, Zahle). This opinion was echoed by many respondents across Zahle, Baalbak, and Tyre. Female respondents in Baalbek echoed similar views. The female beneficiaries stated that "men are responsible for securing the money, while women manage the household expenses and the family's needs," (Female FGD, Baalbek). Women often have limited authority over these essential provisions and may rely on men for access to food, leaving them vulnerable to economic and emotional abuse. This gendered division of roles reflects entrenched patriarchal power structures that limit women's decision-making power, even in survival contexts. It also creates conditions for economic dependency and potential emotional or financial abuse.

Food distribution and food committees at the community level: The overwhelming majority of respondents at the community level stated that there were no food distribution committees. According to male respondents in Zahle, Syrian refugee beneficiaries receive food-specific assistance from certain grocery stores, but they consider it unfair because they are restricted to specific locations for their purchases. "Store owners often raise prices, and the available food items are limited and do not meet our needs," (Male FGD, Zahle) Additionally, they also explained that there are no designated supplies for children, such as milk or diapers. As for the Lebanese beneficiaries in the session, they reported receiving "no food items or assistance at all," (Male FGD, Zahle). Key informants reported similar views. "Some organizations provide nutrition support programs, but they may not reach all those in need," (Key informant). In some cases, female respondents in Tyre pointed out that there are discriminatory practices in the way food is distributed. For example, women IDPs in Tyre mentioned that aid usually comes in the name of the men, particularly those with connections. Women in general, particularly those without a partner, divorced or widowed, are not allowed to participate in community decision-making processes or are not considered equal participants in food distribution; they may be marginalized in terms of access to essential resources (Female FGD respondents, Tyre). This exclusion underscores the importance of reforming aid governance structures to ensure that women, especially those heading households, can access aid autonomously and safely.

> ***"Men primarily make decisions related to food and money, as they are responsible for providing for the family's needs."***
>
> (Male FGD, Zahle)

Furthermore, none of the female FGD respondents across any of the locations mentioned the existence of any food-related committees or participation in any structures. Key informants further elaborated on this aspect by explaining, "*There might be some groups, but they suffer from a lack of resources and insufficient support, which limits their effectiveness. While women do participate, their roles are often limited to attendance and learning, with few opportunities to make decisions or lead activities.* (KII, respondent). This indicates a clear

> ***"There might be some groups, but they suffer from a lack of resources and insufficient support, which limits their effectiveness. While women do participate, their roles are often limited to attendance and learning, with few opportunities to make decisions or lead activities."***
>
> (KII, respondent)

gap in women's meaningful participation in community-level food governance and decision-making. Gender quotas, leadership development, and safe feedback mechanisms should be integrated into food programming.

Breastfeeding practices and male involvement in child care: According to female host respondents in Akkar, involving men in infant and young child feeding (IYCF) is important to support women and help them avoid falling short in their responsibilities. "There is a need to raise awareness among men so they can understand how to assist their wives and share household responsibilities," (Female host FGD, Akkar). Palestinian women in Ain El Helwe disagreed with that idea, though. They mentioned that the men don't need to get involved; they had better work (Female FGD, Ain El Helwe). These contrasting perspectives underscore the need for culturally sensitive male engagement strategies that challenge harmful norms without reinforcing women's sole responsibility for care.

Regarding exclusive breastfeeding, most host female participants in Akkar and Palestinian refugee women in Ain El Helwe agreed that children should receive natural breastfeeding for up to one and a half years. They noted no significant difference between boys and girls in breastfeeding during infancy unless there are health issues, although some mentioned differences in quantity at older age, and confirmed that the mother is the one who makes the decision related to breastfeeding. Most mothers reported stopping breastfeeding between one and a half and two years, depending on their physical health and milk supply. Respondents in Akkar reported no problems breastfeeding and highlighted the need for healthy food and vitamins (Female FGD, Akkar).

However, a female refugee respondent in Bekaa explained, "Breastfeeding is painful, but I cannot stop because infant formula is not available," (Female FGD, Bekaa). Respondents in Bekaa also noted that support from local clinics is very limited, and they often have to purchase medications on their own. They also explained that there are cases where families are unable to provide healthy food or necessary medication

for their children due to difficult financial conditions. Furthermore, they expressed a strong need for entertainment activities for women in the areas (Female FGD, Bekaa). These responses point to structural gaps in maternal health and nutrition support systems, highlighting the need for integrated service delivery models that include breastfeeding counseling, food supplements, and mental health support.

In conclusion , based on the above discussion, gender-based barriers to nutrition access in Lebanon are shaped by intersecting social norms, economic inequalities, and structural exclusions, disproportionately disadvantaging women, girls, and people with disabilities. At the individual level, women often internalize caregiving roles that prioritize feeding men and children before themselves, leading to inadequate nutrition and negative health outcomes, including for lactating mothers whose physical and mental health are further compromised by stress, malnutrition, and lack of psychosocial support. Women typically have limited decision-making power over household resources, as men control food purchases, reinforcing economic dependency and reducing women's agency. Social norms and traditional roles often marginalize girls in food allocation and exclude women—especially widowed, divorced, or single mothers—from community-level food governance and aid distribution, which is frequently managed through male-headed household structures. People with disabilities face additional exclusion due to communication barriers and societal marginalization, heightening their risk of food insecurity. Breastfeeding mothers confront compounded challenges with insufficient access to nutritious food, infant formula, and maternal health services, further exacerbated by displacement and poverty. Addressing these layered barriers requires multi-level, gender-sensitive interventions that promote equitable resource distribution, meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in food governance, integrated maternal health and psychosocial support, and inclusive programming that recognizes and accommodates disability-related needs.

Table 15. Identified needs related to nutrition

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Gender-Based Food Allocation	Women prioritize feeding men and children first; the nutritional needs of women are often overlooked, especially in traditional communities	Nutrition education, gender-sensitive food distribution that ensures equity	"Cultural traditions place the responsibility of family care on women, leading them to prioritize feeding children and men before eating themselves." – KII
Role of Women in Household Food Management	Men control household finances; women manage food but lack decision-making power; risk of emotional/economic abuse	Empower women in household decision-making; integrate gender roles in nutrition and cash assistance, life skills, and female income generation activities.	"Men primarily make decisions related to food and money." – Male FGD, Zahle
Exclusion of Women from	No female participation in food committees or	Establish inclusive community food	"Women... are not considered equal

Food Committees	distribution decisions; aid often goes to men, especially those with community connections	committees; prioritize widowed, divorced, and single women in food aid	participants in food distribution." – Female FGD, Tyre
Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities	Persons with disabilities may miss food aid due to communication barriers or lack of prioritization	Inclusive targeting in food distribution; disability-sensitive communication	"Discrimination in food distribution... due to their inability to express their needs." – KII
Breastfeeding and Male Involvement in IYCF	Women carry full burden of IYCF; limited male involvement; formula shortages; inadequate health and nutrition support	Raise awareness among men; improve clinic support; provide breastfeeding-friendly food and vitamins	"Breastfeeding is painful, but I cannot stop because infant formula is not available". (Female FGD, Bekaa)

Programmatic implications: The analysis highlights critical programmatic implications for addressing gender- and disability-related barriers in food security and nutrition. Addressing these challenges requires targeted, inclusive, and intersectional programmatic actions that go beyond distribution to address underlying power dynamics, social norms, and structural exclusions.

- Programs should prioritize gender-sensitive food assistance that acknowledges intra-household disparities, where women often sacrifice their nutritional needs for children and men, increasing their vulnerability to malnutrition.
- Nutrition support must target women and adolescent girls, particularly pregnant and lactating mothers, through tailored interventions and direct assistance models.
- To address exclusion, food distribution mechanisms should move away from male-only registration practices and ensure fair access for divorced, widowed, and unpartnered women, as well as persons with disabilities who may face communication barriers.
- Women's participation in food-related community structures remains minimal, requiring the creation of inclusive decision-making spaces that elevate their voices and agency.
- Male engagement in infant and young child feeding (IYCF) should also be promoted to share caregiving responsibilities and support breastfeeding mothers, especially amid displacement-related stress and limited healthcare access.
- Reports of discriminatory aid practices, inflated prices at designated stores, and limited availability of essential food items highlight the need for strengthened monitoring, accountability, and transparent grievance mechanisms.
- Existing food and nutrition programs often lack sustainable support, requiring stronger clinic partnerships, community outreach, and donor investment in long-term, inclusive programming.
- Findings underscore the need to integrate food security with livelihood strategies, ensuring that families, especially women, have reliable income sources to secure adequate and nutritious food, thus reducing dependence on inconsistent aid mechanisms.

Livelihood

Economic Disparities and Financial Control: Lebanese host and refugee respondents in Zahle mentioned that men make significantly more than women for doing the same amount of work. They provided an example of wage disparity in their communities, where men earn about $10 per day while women earn about $4 to $5 per day, creating a serious economic imbalance. This has implications for gender-based violence risks, as financial independence is a key factor in enabling women to escape abusive situations. Research findings about women's economic participation further support this. According to ESCWA, Lebanese women face significantly higher unemployment rates compared to men and are more likely to work in poor conditions while earning less income and profit. As a result, women's participation in the labor force is less than half that of men, whose participation stands at around 70% (United Nations ESCWA, 2022).[53] The issue of unequal pay is even more pronounced for Syrian refugee women who already face multiple layers of marginalization and, most importantly, lack legal documents. *"I believe that both women and men are facing a major crisis due to our undocumented status in the country,"* (Male Syrian FGD respondent, Tripoli). They are excluded from receiving equal wages or the same resources as Lebanese women or men, compounding their economic vulnerability.

> ***"I believe that both women and men are facing a major crisis due to our undocumented status in the country."***
>
> (Syrian FGD respondent, Tripoli)

The gendered economic disparities, where men earn higher wages than women despite working the same number of hours, highlight potential economic abuse. Men are largely responsible for managing family finances, which can lead to unequal power dynamics and control over resources, as further discussed under the ecological model above. This unequal control over finances and resources can lead to psychological or emotional abuse, where women may feel powerless or dependent on male family members. Women might not have access to enough money for personal needs, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation or abuse. "*I would say that girls or young people are more easily drawn into dangerous activities to earn money, such as prostitution or drugs, but these things don't happen in my immediate neighbourhood. I only hear about them.*"(Syrian Refugees FGD, Akkar). This point of view was echoed by a KII respondent who clarified that,"due to economics, some individuals resort to risky activities such as child labour, begging, or even the exploitation of women in unsafe work. Men may engage in hard or illegal labour due to the urgent need to earn money."

[53]United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2022). *Women's economic participation in Lebanon: A mapping analysis of laws and regulations*. .

Gendered Employment Discrimination: FGD and KII respondents indicate that men usually have better access to jobs and are often paid more for the same work. Additionally, women are more likely to face barriers in securing well-paid employment. Women's work is often undervalued, leading to lower wages. One FGD respondent in Akkar explained that, "*Some people believe that women cannot work like men, for example, during the olive harvest season or in farming or land leasing—women never receive the same pay as men*," (Female FGD, Akkar). This was further supported by a KII respondent, who explained, "*Opportunities depend on the location and social status of each group. Men find more opportunities in physically demanding work such as construction, agriculture, and fishing. Women participate in home-based activities such as food production, sewing, and small-scale trade. Displaced persons and refugees face additional difficulties due to the lack of work permits in some areas*," (KII, respondent). These harmful gender norms limit women's

economic independence and, by extension, their ability to access necessary resources. A study by Yehia and

> ***"Opportunities depend on the location and social status of each group. Men find more opportunities in physically demanding work such as construction, agriculture, and fishing. Women participate in home-based activities such as food production, sewing, and small-scale trade. Displaced persons and refugees face additional difficulties due to the lack of work permits in some areas."***
>
> (KII, respondent)

Kettaneh (2015)[54] explored perceptions of gender inequality in the Lebanese workplace. The study found that women often face discrimination during job interviews, with questions about marital status and plans for children. Employers tend to view male employees as more stable and reliable, leading to a preference for hiring and promoting men over women. Cultural biases and stereotypes about women's commitment to work further hinder their career advancement.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that if women participate in the workforce, it is usually in what is considered to be female-safe jobs with limited to no interaction with men. For example, FGD participants in Tripoli and Akkar mentioned nursing, teaching, office work, or online jobs as socially acceptable. The idea of a "safe" job for women is often shaped by cultural norms and typically refers to work that is physically secure, socially acceptable, and situated in controlled or female-dominated environments. However, the classification of a job as "safe" is not always aligned with actual working conditions. For instance, even office jobs can involve risks such as harassment or exploitation, while home-based work often lacks legal protection, stable income, or career growth.

Tackling these challenges requires more than creating acceptable job types—it demands a shift in public attitudes, stronger labor protections, and inclusive economic policies. Empowering women economically

[54] Yehia, A., & Kettaneh, T. (2015). *Perceptions of gender inequality in the Lebanese workplace*. Academia.edu. Retrieved from

means ensuring they can choose their professions freely and safely, without facing stigma, control, or exclusion based on their marital status or gender.

Cultural Expectations of Men: Responses from both FGDs and KIIs reflect the cultural perception that men are not limited by societal expectations regarding employment. Men are seen as the primary breadwinners in the family, and there are "no restrictions on what types of work they can pursue", according to female FGD respondents in Tripoli. This belief stems from the traditional role of men as the head of the household, where they are expected to take on all financial responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a deep-rooted idea that nothing is shameful for men when it comes to employment, which allows them to engage in various work opportunities without fear of societal judgment or limitations. This stands in contrast to limitations in women's employment options, as one KII respondent explained, *"there are social and cultural barriers that prevent women from working, such as norms that confine a woman's role to the home*."(KII respondent). This view of men as workers and breadwinners contributes to men being economically independent, as they are encouraged to take on any job to support their families. In contrast, according to female FGD respondents in Tripoli, women are restricted in their employment opportunities due to gendered expectations about their roles within the family. "A woman is governed by customs and traditions, which are beyond her control and limit her ability to work and enter the labor market." (FGD respondents, Tripoli).

> ***"There are social and cultural barriers that prevent women from working, such as norms that confine a woman's role to the home."***
>
> (KII, respondent)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) in Tripoli revealed a range of perspectives. While some participants expressed traditional views, others stated that they had no issue with women working, provided the job was considered safe. Several respondents emphasized that, although they supported women's employment, societal norms and community perceptions often act as significant barriers. One male participant affirmed that women should have the freedom to work, while another directly challenged restrictive attitudes, asking, "Why shouldn't a woman work?" (Male FGD respondents, Tripoli).

Additionally, while some respondents communicated a general openness to the idea of women working, many focus group discussion (FGD) participants highlighted the significant role that social norms and stigma play in limiting women's opportunities. In particular, widowed and divorced women often face heightened scrutiny and restrictions. One participant in Tripoli shared, *"I am a widow, but I can't work due to social stigma."* Another woman explained that her family forbids her from working because she is divorced, yet they also do not provide her with financial support. These examples reflect a troubling double burden: social stigma prevents women from earning an income, while family and community expectations deny them the financial independence they need.

Table 16. Identified needs - Livelihood

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Wage Disparity Between Men and Women	Men earn significantly more than women for the same work; women earn $4-5 per day, while men earn $10 per day, creating economic imbalance	Address wage disparities; ensure equal pay for equal work	"Men make significantly more than women for doing the same amount of work." Male FGD, Zahle
Economic Vulnerability of Syrian Refugees, particularly Women	Syrian refugee women face compounded vulnerabilities due to lack of legal status, resulting in lower wages and fewer economic opportunities	Provide legal support and equal work rights for Syrian women; facilitate access to fair wages and resources	"I believe both women and men are facing a major crisis due to our undocumented status." Male, Syrian FGD, Tripoli
Gendered Economic Abuse	Unequal financial control within households leads to psychological and emotional abuse for women	Empower women financially; ensure equal access to financial resources and decision-making	"Women feel powerless or dependent on male family members for financial needs." – KII
Exploitation Due to Economic Pressures	Financial desperation leads individuals into dangerous work, such as child labor or exploitation in unsafe jobs, particularly for women	Strengthen legal protections against exploitation; provide alternatives to unsafe work	"Some individuals resort to risky activities such as child labour, begging, or the exploitation of women." – KII
Gendered Employment Discrimination	Women face barriers to higher-paying jobs; they are often confined to low-wage, home-based work; discrimination during hiring processes	Promote women's access to diverse, well-paying jobs; address hiring discrimination; create policies for equal job opportunities	"Opportunities depend on the location and social status of each group. Men find more opportunities in physically demanding work." – KII
Cultural Bias Against Women's Employment	Social stigma and cultural norms limit women's work options, especially for divorced or widowed women who face additional scrutiny and barriers	Shift cultural attitudes towards women's work; ensure safe, inclusive work environments	"I am a widow, but I can't work due to social stigma." – FGD respondent, Tripoli
Limited Employment Opportunities for Women	Women's work is undervalued and they are typically confined to 'female-safe' jobs with limited opportunities for advancement or growth	Ensure more opportunities in diverse sectors for women; protect women in the workforce from exploitation and provide growth pathways	"Women participate in home-based activities such as food production, sewing, and small-scale trade." – KII
Lack of Social Support for Working Women	Family and community pressure restrict women's ability to earn an income; widowed or divorced women face additional barriers to financial independence	Provide support for women in need of financial independence; address social stigma against working women	"My family forbids me from working because I am divorced, yet they do not provide me with financial support." – FGD, Tripoli

Programmatic implications: The findings highlight urgent programmatic implications related to gendered economic disparities and labor discrimination in Lebanon. There is a critical need to:

- Promote equal pay and fair employment practices, particularly in informal sectors where women are overrepresented and often underpaid.
- Legal and economic protections for women and undocumented refugee populations must be expanded, including access to work permits and legal aid.
- Programs should challenge restrictive gender norms by broadening women's access to non-traditional and higher-paying jobs through vocational training and inclusive livelihood initiatives.
- Strengthening women's economic agency is essential to reducing the risk of gender-based violence, as financial dependence increases vulnerability to abuse.
- Addressing social stigma, especially for widowed and divorced women who are often denied both work and family support, requires targeted community awareness campaigns.
- Efforts must also focus on youth, preventing economic exploitation by providing safe, alternative livelihood options and psychosocial support.
- Gender should be mainstreamed into labor assessments and all livelihood programming.
- Partnerships with policy-makers and private sector actors are necessary to advocate for labor reforms that ensure non-discrimination, safe work environments, and equal opportunities for women.

Barriers for People with Disabilities

Limited access to opportunities for People with Disabilities: Persons with disabilities in Lebanon face intersecting physical, social, and institutional barriers that severely limit their access to essential services, including education, food, and protection—barriers that have been further compounded by conflict and displacement. These individuals are often excluded from humanitarian assistance due to societal stigma, inadequate infrastructure, and limited mobility. As one key informant interview (KII) respondent noted, "It is more difficult for women and persons with disabilities due to physical weakness, societal discrimination, and the prioritization of men." Rigid gender norms and male-dominated spaces also restrict their ability to access markets and food, with another key informant explaining that "the dominance of men in this area limits their (women and persons with disabilities') freedom of movement and freedom to express their needs." (KII respondent).These compounded layers of exclusion significantly undermine autonomy and agency, particularly for women with disabilities.

> ***"It is more difficult for women and persons with disabilities due to physical weakness, societal discrimination, and the prioritization of men."***
>
> (KII, respondent)

In addition to economic and mobility constraints, persons with disabilities are at heightened risk of physical violence and neglect, in both public spaces and at home, where they often face barriers to reporting abuse. One KII respondent emphasized that "persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to physical violence and neglect, especially in public spaces and at home, where they face challenges in reporting abuse." These safety risks are further aggravated by a lack of accessible and inclusive protection systems. Conflict conditions have also worsened the situation, as the humanitarian response has struggled to reach marginalized groups. A key informant highlighted that access for persons with disabilities has been weakened "due to a lack of coordination between NGOs and the local community" and the "large numbers of displaced people arriving massively on a daily basis." This lack of structured, inclusive aid response continues to marginalize persons with disabilities, underscoring the urgent need for community-based, disability-inclusive approaches that ensure equitable access to resources, services, and protection in crisis settings.

Barriers to education and employment: Another significant barrier for people with disabilities is the lack of financial resources within families to place their disabled members in specialized rehabilitation or educational centres. This lack of access to specialized programs means that people with disabilities are often excluded from meaningful social and economic participation, reinforcing their marginalization in society. Furthermore, people with disabilities in Lebanon face widespread and systemic barriers to education and employment, despite existing legal protections. *"Children with disabilities face greater challenges, such as the lack of appropriate facilities, discrimination, and the absence of trained teachers to support their needs"*, explained one KII respondent.

> ***"Children with disabilities face greater challenges, such as the lack of appropriate facilities, discrimination, and the absence of trained teachers to support their needs."***
>
> (KII, respondent)

Lebanon's Law 220/2000 guarantees the right to education for individuals with disabilities; however, Human Rights Watch (2018)[55] found that discriminatory admission practices, lack of physical accessibility, and insufficient teacher training continue to exclude many children with disabilities from public schools. For instance, only a small percentage of schools provide accommodations such as Braille, sign language interpretation, or modified learning tools, limiting access to inclusive education (Human Rights Watch, 2018)[16]. In response, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education introduced the National Policy on Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in June 2023, in collaboration with UNICEF and the European Union. This policy aims to institutionalize inclusive practices based on global best practices and lessons learned in Lebanon (UNICEF, 2023)[56].

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[56] UNICEF. (2023, June). *National policy on inclusive education for children with special needs in Lebanon*. United Nations Children's Fund.

On the employment front, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2021)[57] reported persistently high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities in Lebanon, exacerbated by limited access to workplace accommodations, social stigma, and employer bias. These challenges are even more acute for women and individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, reflecting the intersectional nature of discrimination in employment settings (UNESCWA, 2021)[18]. This was further echoed by KII respondents. *"As for persons with disabilities, their opportunities of finding employment are extremely limited due to a lack of accommodations and the unavailability of appropriate training,"* (KII respondent). Female host community members in Akkar expressed a similar opinion. They unanimously agreed that in their areas, "there are certainly people with other needs, but none of them are employed—they all remain at home," (Female FGD, Akkar). To realize meaningful inclusion, targeted reforms in education and labor policy must be coupled with public awareness campaigns and resource investments to reduce stigma and promote equity.

Intersection of Gender and Disability: Research demonstrates that women with disabilities in Lebanon face compounded vulnerabilities due to the intersection of gender-based discrimination and disability-related exclusion. According to a 2022 UNFPA situation analysis, these women are at heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV), economic marginalization, and social isolation, particularly due to societal norms that limit their mobility, autonomy, and access to services (UNFPA, 2022)[58]. Furthermore, a 2022 policy brief by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) provides insights into the labor market perceptions and barriers faced by individuals with disabilities throughout Lebanon. The study highlights that unemployment rates remain high among persons with disabilities, particularly for women and those with cognitive disabilities. Employers often cite attitudinal and environmental barriers, including misconceptions and the perceived high cost of implementing reasonable accommodations, as significant obstacles to employment inclusion. (ESCWA,2022)[59]. A male participant in a Tripoli FGD captured this reality, explaining that "*persons with disabilities may face a different kind of risk, as the lack of attention from relatives or the community can make them more vulnerable, whether due to neglect or the failure to provide them with necessary care. In some cases, individuals with disabilities may find themselves unable to defend themselves or access help when needed*" (Male FGD, Tripoli). These barriers are reflected in findings from a study supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which revealed that women represent only 33.4% of users of physical rehabilitation services in Lebanon, often hindered by safety concerns, lack

"Persons with disabilities may face a different kind of risk, as the lack of attention from relatives or the community can make them more vulnerable, whether due to neglect or the failure to provide them with necessary care. In some cases, individuals with disabilities may find themselves unable to defend themselves or access help when needed."

(Male FGD, Tripoli)

[57] UNESCWA. (2021, April 13). *Barriers to employment for persons with disabilities in Lebanon*. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. https://www.unescwa.org/news/barriers-employment-persons-disabilities-lebanon
[58] UNFPA. (2022). *Situation analysis of gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities in Lebanon*. United Nations Population Fund.
[59] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2022, December). *Persons with disabilities: Labour market perceptions survey Lebanon* (E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/POLICY BRIEF.8).

of accessible transportation, and gendered expectations around caregiving (Abou-Abbas et al.,2024)[60]. Structural inequalities are further compounded by a lack of inclusive policy frameworks, as reported by the Global South Disability Rights Consortium, which notes that Lebanon lacks adequate legal protections and inclusive services for persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls (Combaz, 2018)[61].

Table 17. Identified needs- PWD

Identified Issue	Observed Gaps/Challenges	Expressed Needs/Requirements	Supporting Quotes/Findings
Exclusion from Essential Services	Physical, social, and institutional barriers limit access to education, food, and protection, compounded by conflict and displacement	Design inclusive, community-based services that address physical and social barriers	"It is more difficult for women and persons with disabilities due to physical weakness, societal discrimination…" – KII
Limited Mobility and Male-Dominated Spaces	Gender norms and male dominance restrict the freedom of movement and self-expression for women, particularly persons with disabilities	Create safe and accessible environments; promote inclusive community engagement	"The dominance of men in this area limits their freedom of movement and freedom to express their needs." – KII
Increased Risk of Abuse and Violence	High vulnerability to physical violence and neglect in public and domestic spaces; barriers to reporting abuse	Strengthen protection systems with accessible reporting and response mechanisms	"Persons with disabilities are more vulnerable… especially in public spaces and at home." – KII
Inadequate Humanitarian Response	Poor coordination among NGOs and an overwhelming number of displaced people limit access to aid for persons with disabilities	Implement disability-inclusive humanitarian planning and improve NGO coordination	"Access has been weakened due to a lack of coordination between NGOs and the local community." – KII
Barriers to Inclusive Education	Lack of financial support, discrimination, untrained staff, and insufficient infrastructure keep children with disabilities out of schools	Fund and implement the 2023 National Inclusive Education Policy; train teachers; improve facilities	"Children with disabilities face greater challenges… and the absence of trained teachers to support their needs." – KII
Employment Discrimination and Economic Exclusion	High unemployment due to stigma, employer bias, and lack of accommodations, especially acute for women and persons with cognitive disabilities	Develop inclusive employment programs and enforce labor protections	"Their opportunities of finding employment are extremely limited due to a lack of accommodations." – KII
Gendered Disparities Among Persons with Disabilities	Women with disabilities face greater marginalization, GBV risks, limited mobility, and exclusion from services	Promote gender-responsive disability inclusion policies and support services	"Women represent only 33.4% of users of rehabilitation services… hindered by safety, transport, and caregiving norms." – ICRC
Lack of Inclusive Legal Frameworks	Despite legal protections (e.g., Law 220/2000), implementation remains	Strengthen legal enforcement and inclusive policy development	"Lebanon lacks adequate legal protections and inclusive services for

[60] Abou-Abbas, L., Sabbagh, D., Rossi, R., Vijayasingham, L., Lteif, M. R., Rawi, H., Mitri, R., Al Sultan, H., Benyaich, A., Al-Mosa, A., & Truppa, C. (2024). Challenges in accessing health care services for women and girls with disabilities using a humanitarian physical rehabilitation program in Lebanon: A mixed method study. *International Journal for Equity in Health, 23*(1), 267.
[61] Combaz, É. (2018). Situation of Persons with Disabilities in Lebanon. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

	weak; existing laws lack coverage for women and cognitive disabilities		persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls." – ESCWA
Social Isolation and Family-Level Neglect	Persons with disabilities often left at home without engagement or support, especially in low-income or rural communities	Invest in community outreach and awareness to reduce stigma and promote inclusive practices	"There are certainly people with other needs, but none of them are employed—they all remain at home." – Female FGD, Akkar
Intersectionality and Stigma	Gender and disability-related stigma intersect to deepen marginalization, limit access, and increase vulnerability	Address intersectional discrimination through public awareness campaigns and targeted reforms	"Persons with disabilities may face a different kind of risk… due to neglect or failure to provide care." – Male FGD, Tripoli

Programmatic implications: People with disabilities in Lebanon face a wide range of systemic, social, and institutional barriers that hinder their access to basic rights and services. These challenges are especially severe for women and those affected by conflict and displacement, often resulting in exclusion from education, employment, protection, and humanitarian assistance. Addressing these issues requires inclusive, multi-sectoral strategies rooted in equity and accessibility.

- Persons with disabilities face barriers to accessing food, healthcare, education, and aid due to stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, and restricted mobility—challenges intensified by displacement and gender norms.
- They are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect, especially at home and in public spaces, with few safe or accessible channels to report violence or receive protection.
- Untrained staff and a lack of accommodations continue to exclude children with disabilities from public education, despite laws mandating inclusion.
- Unemployment is high among persons with disabilities due to workplace inaccessibility, social stigma, and lack of tailored job training—barriers are even more pronounced for women and those with cognitive disabilities.
- Women with disabilities face layered discrimination that limits access to services, increases gender-based violence risks, and restricts mobility and rehabilitation due to cultural and safety barriers.
- Despite policy efforts, lack of coordination, underfunding, and limited enforcement continue to prevent the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in public life.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from 59 FGDs and 28 KIIs reveal deeply rooted power imbalances and systemic barriers that significantly impact the well-being and agency of women and girls, as discussed under the ecological model. Across individual, family, community, and societal levels, patriarchal norms continue to limit women's participation in decision-making, access to resources, and opportunities for advancement. The application of the ecological model underscores how gendered expectations are reinforced through multiple layers of influence, leading to disparities in freedom, responsibilities, and coping mechanisms. Conflict has exacerbated these inequalities, placing additional burdens on women, who often assume caregiving and survival roles amid displacement, poverty, and emotional trauma. As highlighted in the report, when situations of conflict, war or other humanitarian crises are combined with low levels of education, physical and or mental isolation, low levels of rights-based awareness, and deeply embedded patriarchal social norms place women, girls are at extreme risk of gender-based violence. As this research has found, gender-based violence is a cross-cutting theme that is prevalent in all the sectors explored in the research, and the chance of support to seek justice is very low or even non-existent.

Despite the vital contributions of women, their roles remain undervalued, and aid distribution practices often marginalize female-headed households due to gender-blind systems and social favouritism. Coping strategies are further constrained by resource scarcity, weak infrastructure, and cultural norms that limit women's mobility and autonomy. To achieve meaningful and lasting change, humanitarian responses must prioritize gender-sensitive approaches that promote inclusive decision-making, equitable aid distribution, and comprehensive support systems tailored to the distinct needs of women, girls, and other marginalized groups.

WASH

Evidence from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) across multiple locations in Lebanon—particularly Zahle, Sidon, Tyre, and Tripoli—reveals significant gender-based disparities in access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Women, girls, and persons with disabilities face disproportionate burdens and risks, including physical injury, harassment, and time poverty, primarily due to inadequate infrastructure, harmful gender norms, and limited institutional support. WASH-related responsibilities, particularly water collection, are deeply gendered and can prevent women, girls, and boys from pursuing education or income-generating opportunities. Community engagement, female participation in WASH governance, and links to protection, education, and livelihoods remain minimal, with most decision-making spaces dominated by male actors or ad hoc mechanisms. Furthermore, the lack of safe and private sanitation facilities, especially in informal settlements and collective shelters, undermines personal dignity and contributes to broader protection risks, including gender-based violence (GBV). Moreover, limited access to quality menstrual hygiene products and poor water quality further compromise the health and well-being of displaced and marginalized populations.

These findings underscore the urgent need for integrated, gender-sensitive WASH interventions that address both infrastructure deficits and the underlying social barriers that limit safe access. Prioritizing the inclusion of women and vulnerable groups in planning, implementing, and monitoring WASH services will not only improve effectiveness and sustainability but also contribute to broader gender equity and resilience outcomes in Lebanon's ongoing crisis context.

GBV and Protection

Based on evidence from FGDs and KIIs, as detailed in the findings section, gender-based violence (GBV) in Lebanon is deeply rooted in structural inequalities, patriarchal norms, and systemic gaps in service accessibility. GBV risks are significantly amplified in the context of conflict, displacement, and socio-economic instability, where weakened institutional protections leave women, girls, people with disabilities, and undocumented refugees particularly vulnerable. These groups are disproportionately affected by harmful practices such as early marriage, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and neglect.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the deeply gendered dynamics of safety, mobility, and access to services within the community, particularly for women and girls. Pervasive fears of harassment, assault, and abduction significantly restrict girls' movement, often confining them to their homes unless accompanied by a male relative. These fears are exacerbated by the absence of formal protection mechanisms, such as community-based reporting systems or specialized services for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). The lack of female representation in decision-making spaces further silences women's voices and leaves their safety, health, and psychosocial needs largely unmet.

Addressing these challenges requires a dual approach: institutional investment in gender-sensitive services and a cultural shift that elevates women's agency, visibility, and leadership within protection systems. Interventions must also tackle the root causes of early marriage and its associated risks by promoting education, economic empowerment, and legal reforms—critical steps toward safeguarding young girls from cycles of violence and ensuring their rights and well-being.

Education

The findings reveal that education is deeply shaped by gendered barriers, exposing both girls and boys to multiple forms of gender-based violence (GBV) that hinder their right to learn in safe and supportive environments. Child marriage and child labor remain significant concerns, with early dropout from school linked to financial pressures and entrenched societal norms that prioritize marriage over education for girls and child labor for boys. In-school and community harassment, including bullying, sexual abuse by teachers, and threats during the commute, add further layers of risk. Cultural expectations reinforce domestic responsibilities for girls, limiting their time, mobility, and freedom to pursue education. Inadequate menstrual hygiene support and unsafe access to latrines in some cases, combined with gender bias in

classroom interactions, further alienate girls. Additionally, the lack of protective systems, such as clear school regulations or community reporting mechanisms, compounds their vulnerability. There is therefore a case to be made for quality education which is deemed worthwhile, as this research has shown in some cases families did not feel the schooling their daughters were receiving was working and turned to child marriage instead, whether for protection or economic reasons it is unclear. In addition this example reinforces the gender and empowerment approach which looks beyond access and participation in education programming (access and agency) at if and how girls' are benefitting from education programming by looking at outcomes.[62]

Undocumented and illegally residing refugees face additional barriers to education, including discrimination, assignment to evening shifts, challenging curricula, and, in some cases, exposure to abuse. These intersecting risks not only affect both girls and boys, but particularly girls' access to education but also reinforce cycles of violence and inequality, underscoring the urgent need for gender-sensitive interventions within educational and community structures.

Nutrition

The findings reveal deeply entrenched gender dynamics influencing food access, allocation, and decision-making within households and communities. While perceptions of food needs vary—some participants noting that men and boys eat more, others suggesting it depends on age or size—these beliefs can reinforce gender-biased practices, particularly in times of scarcity. Women, especially those who are widowed, divorced, or without male support, often face both social stigma and exclusion from decision-making processes, leaving them dependent on others for necessities. In many households, men control food distribution, and women, despite being central to food preparation, are frequently the last to eat or may skip meals entirely. This not only increases risk of malnutrition and related health complications but also reinforces women's economic and emotional vulnerability, heightening the risk of gender-based violence (GBV).

Moreover, marginalized groups such as people with disabilities and unpartnered (single, divorced, widowed) women face added layers of exclusion. The absence of their voices in food security discussions, combined with unequal access to aid and community-level distribution, reflects systemic discrimination. The risk of sexual exploitation, while not explicitly stated by participants, remains a critical concern in contexts of extreme scarcity and unequal power dynamics. Furthermore, women's emotional well-being is often compromised by the psychosocial strain of having to prioritize others' nutritional needs over their own, which may lead to long-term mental health challenges. The lack of gender-sensitive nutritional education

35. Nussbaum, Martha C., 'Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 2.

further exacerbates these inequalities, as women may be unaware of their own dietary needs or feel compelled to sacrifice for their families. Addressing food insecurity through a gender lens is essential—not only to ensure equitable access but also to safeguard the health, dignity, and safety of women and girls in vulnerable communities.

Shelter

The aftermath of conflict and displacement in Lebanon has significantly heightened the vulnerabilities of women and girls, particularly regarding shelter and security. Financial constraints and restrictive gender roles have left many women without the agency or resources to secure safe housing, increasing their exposure to exploitation and gender-based violence (GBV). As men retain primary decision-making power due to their role as breadwinners, women are often excluded from conversations about shelter, despite being the ones most affected by unsafe or unstable living conditions. This economic dependence reinforces power imbalances and can contribute to domestic violence, especially under the psychological strain of displacement. Overcrowded and insecure displacement centers further exacerbate GBV risks due to the lack of privacy, protection, and gender-sensitive support services. Without targeted interventions that empower women and girls, promote shared decision-making, and ensure safe, secure shelter options, displacement will continue to perpetuate cycles of gendered vulnerability and violence.

Livelihoods

Based on FGD and KII findings, women in both Lebanese host and refugee communities face significant gendered economic disparities, with instances of men earning double the wages for the same work—an imbalance that undermines women's financial independence and increases their vulnerability to economic and gender-based violence. Syrian refugee women are especially affected, as their undocumented status and social marginalization limit access to fair employment, legal protection, and equal wages. Cultural norms and traditional gender roles further restrict women’s economic participation, confining them to “safe” or socially acceptable jobs such as teaching, nursing, or home-based work, often with little protection or stability. In contrast, men are perceived as the primary breadwinners and can pursue any work without social stigma. These barriers are compounded for widowed and divorced women, who frequently face social stigma and are denied both family support and the freedom to work. As a result, many women and girls are economically dependent on male relatives, reinforcing power imbalances that can lead to psychological or emotional abuse. In the absence of economic opportunities, both women and youth may be pushed toward harmful coping mechanisms such as child labour, begging, or risky informal work. Focus group and key informant responses consistently emphasized that addressing these challenges requires not only expanding access to training and employment opportunities, but also transforming the cultural norms and legal systems that perpetuate gender inequality in the labour market

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a set of clear, actionable, and prioritized recommendations based on the findings of the humanitarian gender analysis conducted across seven districts in Lebanon. The recommendations are organized by sector and address the intersecting vulnerabilities experienced by children and adults of different genders, ages, nationalities (Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese), and disability statuses wherever relevant or possible based on the data.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection

To ensure gender-responsive access to quality education in Lebanon, programmatic strategies must address not only service delivery gaps but also the underlying social norms, gender-based risks, legal barriers, and structural inequalities affecting children, particularly girls and refugee populations. Recommendations should be multisectoral, coordinated, and grounded in protection principles, with accountability systems to monitor progress.

1. Gender-responsive teaching and school environments

- Train teachers and school staff on gender-transformative practices, not just gender sensitivity. This includes identifying and challenging discriminatory attitudes, engaging male staff in shifting gender norms, and using inclusive, non-stereotyped curricula.
- Increase the presence and leadership of female staff in schools, especially in afternoon shifts, to improve access to safe learning for girls.
- Institutionalize regular child safeguarding and anti-violence protocols, including orientation and monitoring of all school personnel.

2. Prevention and response to school-related gender-based violence (SGBV)

- Establish and publicize confidential, child-friendly reporting mechanisms for SRGBV, including in refugee schools and second shifts.
- Strengthen referral pathways that connect schools with community-based child protection actors, social workers, and psychosocial support services.
- Embed girls' participation in school decision-making or feedback mechanisms to ensure their voices shape school safety interventions.

3. Tackling child marriage and care burdens

- Promote girls' retention through community-level dialogue with caregivers and religious leaders about the harms of early marriage and the importance of education.
- Provide flexible learning opportunities (e.g. afternoon literacy classes, accelerated education) for married girls or those with caregiving responsibilities.
- Link education programs with cash or in-kind incentives (e.g. school meals, school kits) to ease economic pressures on families.

4. Menstrual hygiene and school participation

- Ensure the provision of free menstrual hygiene products, clean and private school latrines, and MHM education as part of life skills curricula.
- Tackle stigma through gender-segregated awareness sessions and school-wide engagement with staff, students, and parents.

5. Addressing economic barriers and child labor

- Expand transportation stipends or services for vulnerable children, particularly girls who face protection concerns on the way to school.
- Provide school supplies, uniforms, and access to subsidized services for displaced and low-income families.
- Introduce household livelihood support and cash-for-education schemes to reduce pressure for children to engage in labor.

6. Creating safe and inclusive learning environments

- Implement school-wide anti-bullying policies, including peer mediation and restorative discipline approaches.
- Provide accessible mental health and psychosocial support, including counselling for students who face violence or emotional distress.
- Introduce safe spaces and after-school programs, especially for girls who may face restricted mobility during regular school hours.

7. Supporting refugee students with tailored approaches

- Address legal documentation barriers through legal aid, community awareness, and coordination with protection actors.
- Improve the quality and oversight of second-shift education, ensuring parity in staffing, curriculum delivery, and student support.
- Introduce bridging or orientation programs to help students navigate curriculum transitions between Lebanese and Syrian systems.

8. Ensuring safe transit to and from school

- Collaborate with municipalities and communities to improve school-area infrastructure and transport safety, especially in informal settlements.
- Pilot or expand community-based accompaniment models where trusted adults or youth mentors support girls' safe mobility.
- Advocate for safe route mapping and monitoring around schools, with input from students, especially girls.

WASH

Girls, women, and people with disabilities face many barriers that hinder their access to WASH services, such as unsafe and inadequate sanitation options, particularly in informal settlements. MHM is a key gap. Shared latrines are rarely designed for dignity or safety.

1. **Improve Water Access and Delivery**
   Establish water delivery systems or install additional water access points closer to households to reduce the physical burden on women and girls, minimizing the need to carry heavy containers over long distances. This will help save time and energy, allowing more opportunity for education, work, and rest.

2. **Enhance Safety and Security at Water Points**
   Design and manage water collection sites with safety in mind, including adequate lighting, gender-segregated access where appropriate, and measures to reduce harassment and injury risks, ensuring women and girls feel safe and protected while collecting water.

3. **Upgrade Sanitation Facilities**
   Construct private, safe, and accessible latrines equipped with secure doors and locks, proper lighting, and inclusive design features such as ramps and handrails to accommodate elderly individuals and people with disabilities. This will ensure dignity and safety, especially for vulnerable groups.

4. **Support Menstrual Health Management (MHM)**
   Distribute quality hygiene kits, including sanitary pads and other menstrual products, alongside proper waste disposal systems and hygiene education to address menstrual health needs, reduce stigma, and improve the well-being of women and girls.

5. **Promote Inclusive and Participatory Water Governance**
   Establish and strengthen water committees that are functional, transparent, and inclusive, with

meaningful representation and leadership opportunities for women and marginalized groups. This will improve community ownership, responsiveness, and equity in water management.

6. **Address Mobility and Accessibility Barriers**
   Implement infrastructure improvements such as paved pathways and safe access routes to water and sanitation facilities, particularly for persons with disabilities and elderly community members, to reduce barriers caused by physical mobility limitations.

Shelter

Overcrowded and poorly designed shelters heighten GBV risks, especially for girls and women. FHHs report economic vulnerability and unsafe conditions. Shelters do not adequately consider privacy needs or accessibility for persons with disabilities.

1. **Ensure Equitable Access to Shelter Materials**
   Provide financial assistance and transparent distribution mechanisms that guarantee both women and men can access shelter construction materials, prioritizing inclusive aid that directly supports women, especially female-headed households.

2. **Promote Women's Agency and Participation**
   Implement empowerment programs that increase women's involvement in household and community decision-making related to shelter and resource management, challenging traditional gender roles that exclude women and girls.

3. **Support Women's Economic Empowerment**
   Offer livelihood opportunities and economic support targeted at women to reduce their financial dependence on men, while integrating mental health services and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention programming to address stress and vulnerabilities within displaced families.

4. **Improve Shelter Safety and Privacy**
   Design and upgrade shelter infrastructure to include secure partitions, doors, locks, and adequate lighting, creating safe and private spaces that reduce the risks of harassment and GBV for women and children living in overcrowded conditions.

5. **Enhance Security in Displacement Settings**
   Partner with local actors and affected communities to map unsafe zones, particularly areas with poor lighting, overcrowding, or reports of GBV. Use findings to inform the design of safer shelter layouts and prioritize locations for intervention.

Livelihood

Based on the needs identified in the table, it is clear that women, particularly Syrian refugee women, face multiple and intersecting barriers to economic empowerment. These challenges include wage disparities, limited employment opportunities, cultural stigma, and financial dependency, which collectively restrict women's ability to achieve financial independence and contribute equally in the workforce. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions to promote gender equality, legal protections, and social support systems that enable women to overcome economic vulnerabilities and exploitation.

1. **Advocate Equal Pay for Equal Work**

   Advocate for the Implementation of policies and monitoring mechanisms to eliminate wage disparities between men and women performing the same jobs, guaranteeing fair and transparent compensation structures.

2. **Promote Legal Rights and Work Protections for Syrian Refugee Women**

   Promote and provide legal assistance to address documentation barriers and advocate for the enforcement of equal work rights and protections, enabling Syrian women to access fair wages and safe employment.

3. **Promote Women's Financial Empowerment and Decision-Making**
   Develop programs that enhance women's control over financial resources and include them in household economic decisions to reduce gendered economic abuse and dependency.

4. **Expand Access to Safe, Diverse Employment Opportunities**

   - Support women in accessing a broader range of well-paying jobs beyond traditional home-based roles through offering vocational training and life skill programs.
   - Advocate for the implementation of anti-discrimination hiring policies to open pathways for career growth.

5. **Address Cultural and Social Barriers**

   Engage communities through dialogue and awareness campaigns to shift negative cultural attitudes towards women's employment, particularly targeting the stigma faced by widowed and divorced women.

6. **Strengthen Social Support and Protection for Working Women**

   Establish support networks, including childcare and legal aid, to help women navigate family and community pressures and reduce vulnerabilities to exploitation.

Education

1. **Improving Safety and Security**

- Safe Transportation: Provide secure transportation options for girls, such as school buses with chaperones or community-organized rides, to prevent harassment or violence on the way to school. Schools should work with local communities to ensure that roads and paths leading to schools are safe.
- Anti-Harassment Policies in Schools: Schools should develop and enforce strict anti-harassment policies. Teachers and students should receive training on recognizing, reporting, and preventing sexual and physical harassment.
- Community Awareness Campaigns**:** Raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and the risks associated with harassment or kidnapping. Involve parents and community leaders in creating safer environments for girls.

2. **Gender Equality in Education**

- Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy: Encourage teachers to adopt inclusive, gender-sensitive teaching methods. Ensure that both girls and boys have equal opportunities to speak and participate in class.
- Promote Equal Participation: Implement strategies to ensure equal attention to both boys and girls in the classroom, such as balanced group activities, gender-neutral language, and breaking down stereotypical gender roles in subjects and careers.

3. **Addressing Economic Barriers**

- Financial Support: Provide scholarships or subsidized school fees for girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This will help reduce the financial barrier preventing girls from accessing education.
- Support for Families**:** Offer resources or workshops to educate parents on the value of educating girls, emphasizing the long-term benefits for their families and communities. This can also help combat societal expectations that limit girls' participation in education.

4. **Menstrual Health and Hygiene Education:**

- Implement Menstrual Health Education**:** Schools should incorporate menstrual health education into their curriculum and provide adequate sanitary products and facilities for girls. This will help girls feel more comfortable and supported during menstruation, reducing absenteeism.
- Create Private, Clean Facilities**:** Ensure that there are separate, clean, and private sanitation facilities for girls, where they can manage their menstrual health with dignity.

5. **Promote Gender-Sensitive Policy Changes:**

- Early Marriage Prevention: Collaborate with local communities and policymakers to promote laws and initiatives that prevent child marriage, ensuring that girls can complete their education and make choices about their futures. This could include legal frameworks or community-driven programs focused on changing cultural norms.

- Supportive Family Environments**:** Create awareness programs for families, focusing on the importance of supporting girls' education and empowering them to pursue their dreams. Encourage the active involvement of fathers and male guardians in girls' education.

6. **Psychosocial Support and Empowerment:**

- Counselling Services**:** Provide counselling and psychosocial support for girls who have experienced harassment, violence, or other challenges. This could be implemented through school programs or community-based services.
- Peer Support Networks**:** Establish peer support groups where girls can share their experiences, support each other, and discuss ways to overcome barriers in education.

Nutrition and Food Security

1. **Center women and girls in food Assistance and nutritional support**

- Design and deliver nutrition support packages that prioritize adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and female-headed households, groups disproportionately affected by malnutrition and food insecurity.
- Shift from household-registered assistance to individual-based or women-focused modalities (e.g. e-vouchers or direct in-kind distributions) to reduce gatekeeping by male heads of household.
- Ensure breastfeeding support is integrated into nutrition interventions, with referrals to maternal health and psychosocial services where needed.

2. **Address intra-household inequities and social norms**

- Implement social behavior change communication (SBCC) campaigns to challenge harmful norms around women sacrificing food for others.
- Promote intra-household dialogue around equitable food allocation, especially in high-stress, food-scarce settings.
- Include messaging on the nutritional needs of adolescent girls and the importance of balanced diets for all family members.

3. **Expand inclusive access and targeting mechanisms**

- Reform food registration processes to allow for the independent registration of women, particularly widowed, divorced, or unpartnered women, and ensure they can access aid without male intermediaries.
- Strengthen inclusion of persons with disabilities by ensuring accessible complaint mechanisms, adapted communication tools, and individualized support at distribution sites

4. **Promote women's representation in food governance**

- Establish or reform community food committees to ensure women's participation is meaningful, not just presentational, and linked to decision-making, planning, and monitoring of food distribution.
- Train committee members on gender equality, inclusion, and accountability, and link these structures with local leadership and service providers.

5. **Engage men in nutrition and care roles**

- Develop community outreach targeting male caregivers to normalize shared responsibilities in child nutrition, IYCF practices, and food-related household decisions.
- Frame male engagement not as “supporting women” but as a step toward transforming rigid gender roles and promoting family well-being.

6. **Improve quality, fairness, and accountability in food assistance**

- Ensure aid distribution is not tied to exclusive vendor agreements or restricted to high-cost outlets. Increase transparency and introduce price monitoring systems to prevent inflation at designated stores.
- Develop and publicize safe, accessible grievance and feedback mechanisms for women, girls, and marginalized groups.
- Collaborate with local actors to monitor equity and consistency of food aid targeting, using both qualitative feedback and quantitative data

7. **Integrate food security with livelihoods and social protection**

- Link food assistance with cash-for-livelihoods, vocational training, or women’s income-generation initiatives, particularly for displaced and female-headed households.
- Support clinic–community linkages that reinforce both nutrition and economic resilience, ensuring nutrition messaging is reinforced through trusted outreach workers and local health providers.

People with Disabilities

Children and adults with disabilities face widespread exclusion across all sectors — from education to WASH to livelihoods. Girls and boys with disabilities are rarely reached by programs and are often invisible to community structures.

1. **Advocate for Legal Protections and Enforcement:**

- Promote the implementation of laws that protect people with disabilities from discrimination in all sectors, including employment, education, healthcare, and access to services. Advocate for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to guarantee equal rights and opportunities.
- Promote anti-discrimination policies for people with disabilities in both public and private sectors, ensuring that violations are met with appropriate legal consequences.

- Support legal literacy**:** Ensure that people with disabilities and their families are informed of their rights through accessible legal literacy programs and services. This will empower them to seek justice when their rights are violated.

2. **Improve Accessibility and Physical Infrastructure**

- Advocate for the design and renovation of public spaces, transportation, and government buildings to be fully accessible to people with disabilities. This includes wheelchair ramps, accessible bathrooms, and elevators.

3. **Strengthen Access to Education and Vocational Training**

- Promote education policies that support inclusive learning for children with disabilities. This includes providing accessible learning materials, reasonable accommodations, and trained teachers who can support the diverse needs of students with disabilities.
- Create specialized vocational training opportunities: Develop tailored vocational programs for people with disabilities that can help them gain marketable skills and enter the workforce. These programs should be designed to match the individual abilities and needs of participants.
- Promote disability-inclusive curricula**:** Advocate for educational curricula at all levels that are inclusive of disability awareness, highlighting the contributions of people with disabilities and promoting positive perceptions.

4. **Economic Empowerment and Employment Opportunities**

- Support entrepreneurship for people with disabilities: Provide financial support and training for people with disabilities who wish to start their businesses. This could include low-interest loans, grants, and mentorship programs tailored to their needs.
- Provide additional resources to families who have members with disabilities, including specialized care services, respite care for families, and training for caregivers.

5. **Support and protection Services**

- Promote the inclusion of people with disability in social protection programs such as disability pensions, healthcare, and assistance with housing or transportation costs. These benefits should ensure that people with disabilities can live with dignity and participate fully in society.

6. **Promote Social Inclusion and Awareness**

- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns**:** Launch national and local campaigns aimed at educating the public about the rights and capabilities of people with disabilities. These campaigns should challenge stereotypes and promote positive images of people with disabilities.
- Encourage the creation of peer support groups and community-based organizations that empower people with disabilities and their families to provide mutual aid, share experiences, and advocate for their rights.

7. Promote Safe Spaces and Prevent Violence

- Develop targeted interventions to prevent and respond to violence and abuse against people with disabilities. This includes training law enforcement and social service providers on how to support survivors with disabilities and providing accessible shelters and hotlines.
- Develop accessible complaint mechanisms where people with disabilities can report barriers to access, discrimination, or unmet needs. These mechanisms should be easy to use, responsive, and anonymous where necessary.
- Women and children with disabilities often face additional risks of gender-based violence and exploitation. Ensure that programs and services are designed specifically to meet the needs of disabled women and children, promoting their protection and empowerment.
- Conduct awareness campaigns about the heightened risk of violence and abuse faced by people with disabilities, particularly women and children, and encourage community members to report suspicious behaviour.
- Advocate for accessible (GBV) services for people with disability, such as shelters, counselling, and legal aid.

8. Foster Collaboration Across Stakeholders

- Addressing the issues of people with disabilities requires collaboration across sectors. Government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector must work together to develop comprehensive policies and programs that prioritize disability inclusion.
- Ensure that people with disabilities are involved at every stage of program design and implementation, from needs assessments to evaluation, to ensure that interventions are relevant and effective.