



Unequal Burdens: Corruption's Impacts on People with Intersectional Identities in Lebanon

February 2024





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Disclaimer: Views expressed in this publication are not necessarily endorsed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) or the authors. Quotes across the report generally represent an individual's perspective, which other informants may or may not share.



About IFES

An informed and empowered citizenry is a crucial component of a healthy and resilient democracy. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) works to strengthen the participation, influence, and representation of citizens in political processes and governance structures.

A key focus of IFES's work is the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women; persons with disabilities; young people; Indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQI+) people; and ethnic and religious minorities. IFES uses an intersectional approach to its inclusion work to tailor its approaches and programming to individuals who identify with multiple social identities and ensure they have voices in the way they are governed.

IFES works to strengthen political inclusion by:

- Providing technical assistance to election management bodies on how to implement international standards such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Empowering civil society organizations (CSOs) and traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, young people, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ people, and ethnic and religious minorities to advocate for equal rights.
- Assisting citizen-led efforts to define best practices through the development of such global tools as the Violence Against Women in Elections framework and tools, the manual *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes*, and the online resource [ElectionAccess.org](https://www.electionaccess.org).

Since 2004, IFES has provided Lebanese stakeholders with technical advice and support on a wide range of electoral and governance issues. IFES built civil society capacity in Lebanon to advocate for women's inclusion in the political process and disability rights and worked with election authorities on electoral reform issues. IFES also developed a Lebanon-specific election violence risk assessment and database to track and analyze violence indicators.

Since 2018, IFES has worked with diverse CSOs across Lebanon that represent marginalized groups to build their knowledge of intersectionality and to equip them to conduct collective rights-based advocacy.

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Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crime, terrorism, and other threats to human security to flourish.

This evil phenomenon is found in all countries – big and small, rich and poor – but it is in the developing world that its effects are most destructive. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government’s ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign aid and investment.

Corruption is a key element in economic underperformance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development.

”

Kofi Annan
Former UN Secretary-General¹

Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IIR	Identify, Inform, Respond (<i>IFES Project in Lebanon, Phase I</i>)
KI	Key Informant
LBP	Lebanese Pound
LePAIR	Lebanon: Political Advocacy for Inclusive Reform (<i>IFES Project in Lebanon, Phase II</i>)
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and Other
NACC	National Anti-Corruption Commission
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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Glossary of Key Terms

Administrative corruption, petty corruption, or bureaucratic corruption:

The abuse of authority or discretion by public officials in the administration of public services such as procurement, licensing, and taxation. Administrative corruption can include demanding bribes, granting favors in exchange for services or commissions, or using public resources for personal gain. These behaviors can lead to inefficient and unequal delivery of public services and can also increase the cost of doing business for private companies.

Intersectionality:

Gender or sexual identity, disability, age, race, ethnicity, and other identity markers all impact an individual's experiences of participating in political and public life. Depending on the context, these identities can provide access and agency or can contribute to barriers and exclusion. Traditionally excluded populations – including women, persons with disabilities, young people, ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQI+ persons – often experience personal and systemic discrimination at the individual, community, and institutional levels, as well as inequitable access to and control over resources. Inequities caused by the intersection of different social identities may lead to barriers that prevent meaningful participation in elections and political processes and, in some cases, may result in individuals being subjected to physical or psychological violence. The compounding nature of these barriers is often referred to as intersectionality – the idea that individuals face unique experiences of discrimination resulting from the interconnected nature of multiple social identities.

Kafala system:

In the 1950s, the *Kafala* (sponsorship) system was introduced in the Middle East to regulate relationships between employers and migrant workers as demand for the latter increased. Under *kafala*, a migrant worker's immigration status, visa, and living arrangements are legally bound to an employer or sponsor throughout the duration of the contract period. This means that migrant workers may not change employers or enter or leave the country without the employer or sponsor's permission. The *kafala* system has long been criticized for its potential to lead to exploitation and abuse of migrant workers.

Political corruption or grand corruption:

The abuse of public power, office, or resources by government officials or elites for personal gain. This can include bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, and cronyism or nepotism. The term also refers to the manipulation of policies, institutions, and rules. Political corruption can undermine public trust in government, erode democratic institutions, and hinder economic development.

Wasta:

This Arabic word loosely translates as nepotism, clout, or “who you know.” It is the practice of using connections or influence to get things done, including quickly completing government transactions (such as renewing a passport, obtaining a driver's license without a test, or avoiding fines), or getting hired for jobs without the appropriate qualifications.

Executive Summary

This research was conducted under IFES's *Lebanon: Political Advocacy for Inclusive Reform* (LePAIR) project, which focuses on strengthening intersectional networks to organize for political rights and to counter corruption, especially outside the capital, where marginalized groups do not have the same access to information and resources that can help them champion change. Civil society coalitions magnify prospects for change when women; people with disabilities; young people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQI+) persons and others take collective action and address the unique experiences of people with multiple marginalized identities.

LePAIR builds on the successes of IFES's first intersectionality project in Lebanon, *Identify, Interpret and Respond* (IIR), which ran from mid-2018 to early 2022 and included the first intersectionality assessment conducted in Lebanon, [Identity and Politics in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities for Coalition-Building and Inclusion](#). That project witnessed the October 17, 2019, revolution, when protestors took to the streets in response to a new tax, closely followed by an unprecedented economic collapse that resulted in more than 80 percent of Lebanese now living in poverty. The economic collapse partially contributed to a political crisis that came to a head in August 2020, when more than 250 people were killed in an explosion in Beirut's port that immediately exposed official negligence and resulted in the government stepping down. Throughout these events, the Lebanese public, united under common cause despite diverse backgrounds, called clearly for change and an end to corruption.

The LePAIR project recognized those calls and was designed to support collective advocacy from an intersectional perspective, building knowledge around how corruption affects marginalized groups and using it to formulate new strategies. LePAIR also integrates perspectives from outside Beirut, including Tripoli, Akkar, Baalbek, Bekaa, and surrounding areas.

In February 2023, with logistical support from local and convening partners, IFES conducted eight focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys with 127 individuals from the Tripoli/Akkar and Baalbek areas, including women, young people, people with disabilities, and participants representing intersectional identities. The FGDs were followed by 16 key informant interviews with stakeholders representing organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), young people, anti-corruption groups, migrant and refugee rights groups, LGBTQI+ rights groups, the independent media, development groups, academia, and others. Using the same methodology as with the previous intersectionality assessment, research questions focused on corruption and its effects to measure how perceptions and experiences differ among marginalized groups and to identify any unique effects that people with intersectional identities encounter.

This research identified the following key findings:



Political corruption and lack of government accountability rank as the most common forms of corruption in Lebanon according to respondents. Coupled with legal loopholes, the elite are the most likely to benefit from political corruption. People with intersectional identities are less likely to be part of the elite and therefore are disproportionately impacted by corruption.



Administrative corruption, especially corruption in public service provision, disproportionately affects marginalized groups.

Discriminatory legislation in Lebanon, although not corruption in itself, is often linked to creating the permissive environment for the inequality and injustice that enable corruption to flourish.



Respondents link corruption in the media sector in Lebanon to enabling lack of transparency, misinformation, polarization, and limited government accountability.

Respondents named persons with disabilities as the population most impacted by systemic corruption, followed by refugees, migrants, LGBTQI+ people, older persons, and women.



Respondents note that political corruption can both facilitate and hinder public participation, depending upon whether an individual has access to influential people or is able to pay bribes.



Respondents perceive corruption as hindering more than facilitating public participation across several factors including political corruption and misconduct, discrimination and inequality, socio-economic issues, security and safety issues, and lack of justice and human rights.

In addition to the findings identified by this study, the key recommendations, disaggregated by stakeholder group, are as follows:

Civil Society Organizations and Advocacy Groups



- Form alliances across sectors to share expertise, resources, and amplify their voices in fighting corruption.
- Safely document and expose corruption through research and public reporting.
- Advocate for media funding/ownership transparency and promote media literacy to combat biased reporting, while also raising awareness about target populations and corruption's impact.
- Advocate for transparent government processes (procurement, budgeting, decision-making) and support citizen engagement/oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability.
- Advocate for laws engaging diverse groups, protecting their rights, tackling corruption, and strengthening oversight and information access.
- Empower marginalized communities by educating them on rights, fostering community awareness, and promoting leadership roles through rights-holder-led campaigns, while targeting caregivers of persons with disabilities, especially girls, at the household level.
- Utilize digital tools and social media for accessible information dissemination, support mobilization, and amplified anti-corruption efforts across diverse audiences.
- Collaborate with international organizations for knowledge sharing, best practice exchange, and resource acquisition in the fight against corruption.
- Prioritize understanding and addressing challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities. Integrate their needs across all program design and implementation to ensure inclusivity, expand reach, and achieve rights-based, beneficiary-centered solutions.
- Prioritize long-term, systemic change strategies over short-term campaigns. Promote inclusivity through projects addressing needs of diverse populations and encourage collaboration among different identity-based CSOs.

Media and Journalists



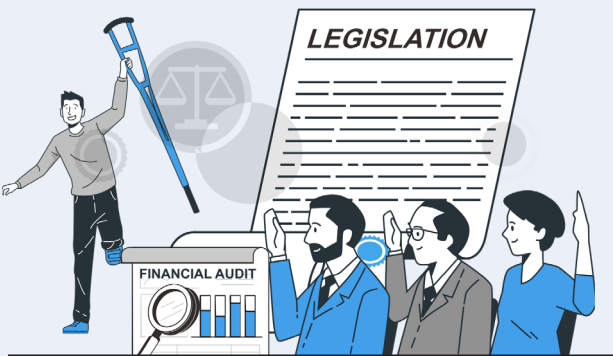
- Implement international standards-based editorial guidelines addressing bias, responsible reporting, and fact-checking. Journalists should prioritize in-depth investigations into corruption, especially with regard to vulnerable groups, using credible evidence and balanced, objective presentation.
- Adopt an intersectional lens, and diversify staff for better representation. Partner with NGOs for capacity building, and actively engage marginalized communities to understand and accurately report their perspectives.
- Prioritize inclusive language, realistic imagery, and accessibility for all. Avoid stereotypes, discrimination, and sensationalism to foster an equitable representation of Lebanon's diversity. Ensure TV and online content is accessible through captioning, sign language interpretation, and website accessibility features.
- To build trust and serve as national watchdogs, disclose funding and ownership structures, and hold government actors accountable. This includes exposing conflicts of interest, scrutinizing public procurement, and demanding transparency from the ruling class, Central Bank, and commercial banks.
- Bolster accountability by creating confidential whistleblower channels (internal and external) to safeguard information and encourage safe reporting on corruption.
- For mutual benefit, the media can amplify CSO anti-corruption campaigns, while CSOs can offer training and community access. Together, they can promote rights, pressure officials, and develop joint anti-corruption strategies.

Donors



- Prioritize intersectionality, funding projects that understand and address how corruption uniquely affects diverse groups.
- Prioritize funding grantees who implement sustainable, cross-cutting interventions that empower individuals with intersectional identities, moving beyond one-off trainings to build long-term capacity and address the unique challenges they face.
- To ensure responsible use of funds, strengthen oversight mechanisms, implement clear allocation and monitoring guidelines, and conduct regular audits and evaluations, prioritizing accountability to beneficiaries.

Government Actors



- Fulfill Lebanon's UNCAC commitment through stronger legislation, enforcement, public engagement, transparency, and international cooperation.
 - Empower the NACC with sufficient funding, access to training, authority, and independence to effectively investigate and prosecute corruption.
 - Implement transparent public contract bidding, adhere strictly to procurement laws, and enforce responsiveness to information requests with penalties for non-compliance.
 - Tighten financial controls, bolster audits, and ensure transparent, accessible spending data to prevent embezzlement and empower citizen participation in financial matters.
- Enhance essential service functionality, operations, resources, and infrastructure while ensuring equal access for all citizens regardless of background or identity.
 - Implement penalties for discriminatory hiring, promote affirmative action, and enforce disability quotas, as per Law 220/2000, for fair workforce opportunities for all.
 - To ensure diverse perspectives, involve experts from across Lebanon's geographic regions and marginalized groups when developing relevant policy, legislation, and plans.
 - Reduce restrictions and facilitate funding for CSOs advocating for marginalized groups' social justice.
 - Simplify media establishment processes, engage civil society in revising the media draft law, and prioritize diverse perspectives to reinforce independent, alternative media and increase freedom of expression.

Methodology

Introduction

IFES's assessment methodology aims to identify opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs) that represent specific groups to build coalitions, as well as vulnerabilities that might impact their civic and political participation. Assessments usually include a desk review, key informant interviews with government, media, and civil society leaders, FGDs with community members, and feedback loops with key stakeholders. The methodology is tailored to the country context and allows a focus on either a discrete identity, such as women refugees, or multiple groups, for instance women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people, within a standardized framework.

Intersectionality assessment reports offer programming options that make it possible for government, civil society, and international NGO implementers to put technical findings to direct use.

The research team contextualized this assessment, *Unequal Burdens: Corruption's Impacts on People with Intersectional Identities in Lebanon*, for Lebanon and conducted it in collaboration with IFES's local convening partners as well as CSO members of the Path Coalition, a network of over 40 local CSOs that was launched in 2019 during IFES's previous phase of Identify, Inform, Respond (IIR) programming in Lebanon. The assessment sought to identify vulnerabilities that might impact specific marginalized groups' civic and political participation and experiences of corruption. Based on the findings, it offers recommendations to combat forms of corruption that have outsized impacts on marginalized communities for international donors, national policymakers, civic organizations, and the media.

Data Sources

Desk Review

To inform the assessment methodology and mobilized instruments, the research team conducted a desk review of relevant assessments, publications, and articles from local or international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the media; United Nations (UN) Treaty Committee reports; and other relevant global, regional, and national reports. The team also used the desk review to triangulate or contextualize responses across the report. Key resources are featured in footnoted references.

Pre-meeting Surveys and Interactive Focus Group Discussions

IFES's participatory FGD methodology centers on participants' voices and deliberations to ensure their meaningful participation. Facilitators gave space to participants to share, interpret, and examine their experiences through group and individual exercises. While IFES uses a standardized approach to each FGD, participants drive the conversation.

This assessment generated broader qualitative data through collaborative FGDs and participant-led analysis with the assessment's target populations on corruption, access, voice, and leadership.

In February 2023, IFES held a series of eight interactive FGDs and surveys with 127 individuals from different urban and rural communities of the North of Lebanon and the Bekaa. Four FGDs in each location included men and women with and without disabilities. Participants were drawn from different age, wealth, educational, and religious strata. Before conducting the FGDs, IFES disseminated surveys to invited participants to collect their basic demographic information and insights on their opinions of political life in Lebanon.

Each FGD lasted three hours, during which participants worked in groups to identify and present key information on their political participation that they then analyzed, categorized, and prioritized in different ways. Participants also took open votes on opinions and priorities that were immediately tabulated by the FGD facilitators and visualized to guide discussions on the results. This methodology emboldened even the quietest participants to think for themselves and voice their opinions, as opposed to more traditional group interviews where a handful of participants may monopolize the conversation. The findings of the assessment are a rich mix of qualitative and quantitative findings around issues that Lebanese people of various identities face. The research team cross-tabulated the pre-FGD surveys with responses and votes taken during the FGDs to determine how individuals within certain demographic categories feel about their degree of civic and/or political participation in Lebanon. The findings are not meant as statistical representations of the opinions of each identity group at large, given the relatively small sample size. However, they provide insights to understand how different identity groups, and those with multiple identities, perceive and experience corruption in their day-to-day lives.

Key Informant Interviews

The assessment sourced data from 16 purposively selected key informants (KIs). The key informant interviews focused on identifying predominant types of corruption affecting different population groups in Lebanon; the effects of corruption at the national, community, and individual levels; and opportunities to enhance the civic and political participation of individuals with intersectional identities. The key informant interviews were conducted following FGD data cleaning and analysis, so the research team capitalized on them to triangulate or validate some information collected directly from community members.

Stakeholders included representatives from organizations for people with disabilities (OPDs), anti-corruption groups, migrant or refugee rights groups, LGBTQI+ rights groups, independent media, development groups, and academia. Politically active youth and independent activists were also engaged and consulted.

Limitations

The research team anticipated and addressed several potential limitations:

- **Informant anonymity:** To ensure the highest level of confidentiality and to safeguard respondents, particularly in light of the sensitive nature of the thematic areas of this research, no quotations from KIs across the report are attributed. Furthermore, to ensure the comfort of community members, respondents were not asked to share their names at any phase of the primary data collection sessions.
- **Participation of assistants to persons with disabilities:** Some participants with disabilities were accompanied by personal assistants. Facilitators provided guidance at the beginning of each session, noting that it was designed to focus on the perspectives of persons with disabilities, and asking assistants to refrain from interjecting. This guidance was effective, with one exception. In an FGD for women with disabilities, one participant's father sought to dominate the conversation and direct her responses. The facilitators reminded him to refrain from participation, emphasizing that the objective of the session was to capture the perspectives of the participants, not their assistants or caregivers. None of his interjections are reflected in the findings.

In subsequent sessions, IFES took additional measures to enhance the effectiveness of participant-centered discussions, and suggested that, ideally, assistants should be of the same gender as the participant.

FGDs included visual content and instructions in plain language to help ease understanding for participants with intellectual disabilities. Still, some participants with intellectual disabilities sometimes appeared unsure about instructions but preferred not to seek assistance. Additionally, in certain instances, it was challenging to discern whether responses truly represented participants’ own opinions or were influenced by their assistants.

- **Unclear references to political actors:** Many quotations in this report include unclear references to political parties or actors (using “they” without specific identification). These references reflect the fact that 1) participants were either making blanket statements that applied to all political actors or did not want to create tensions within the larger group, or 2) IFES removed certain references to avoid polarizing the assessment findings and/or to protect respondents.
- **Analysis focus on discrimination:** The report places significant emphasis on the negative impacts of discrimination on marginalized groups. While the authors recognize that discrimination is not always linked directly to corruption, they adopted this focus in response to recurring concerns that community members raised during the research process, where they consistently identified discrimination as a critical factor that shapes their experiences of corruption and their overall wellbeing.

This decision reflects the authors’ commitment to capturing the broader context in which corruption occurs and to highlighting the intersectional nature of its impacts. The report acknowledges that discrimination often serves as a foundation for corruption, exacerbating existing inequities and vulnerabilities. By acknowledging and addressing discrimination, the report aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of challenges associated with corruption and to promote more effective anti-corruption strategies that consider the unique experiences of marginalized groups.

Community Member Sampling and Demographics

Sampling

Over a four-day period in February 2023, IFES conducted eight FGDs with 127 participants (52 percent females and 48 percent males) in the North of Lebanon (representation from rural and urban communities of Tripoli and Akkar) and the Bekaa (representation from rural and urban communities of Baalbek, West Bekaa, Chtaura, and surrounding regions). Participants were reached through several partner NGOs or independent activists working in those locations. They were selected randomly to represent varied age groups and educational backgrounds in order to collect a wider range of experiences and responses. In most cases, they were not affiliated with NGOs.

Figure 1 is a breakdown of FGD participants.

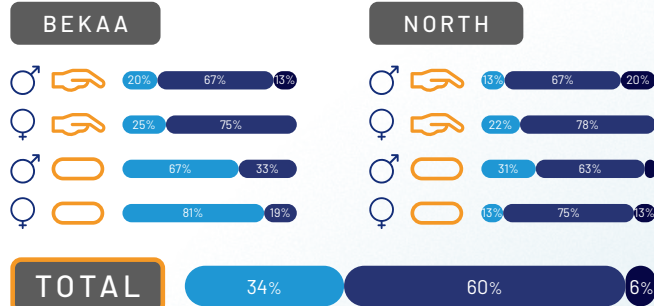
Figure 1 - FGD Participant Breakdown

Location	Cohort	Date	# Participants
Tripoli – Akkar	Women, no disabilities	February 21	16
	Men, no disabilities	February 21	16
	Women, disabilities	February 23	18
	Men, disabilities	February 23	15
Bekaa – Bekaa	Women, disabilities	February 27	16
	Women, no disabilities	February 27	16
	Men, disabilities	February 28	15
	Men, no disabilities	February 28	15
Total			127

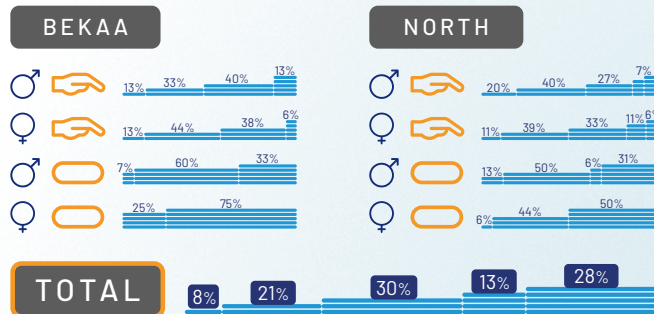
Figure 2 – Overview of Sampling and Demographic Targets

8 FGDs | 127 Participants | ♀ 52% ♂ 48%

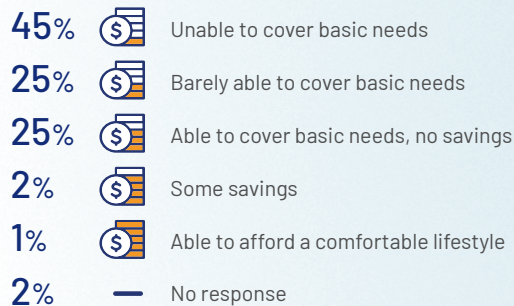
AGE



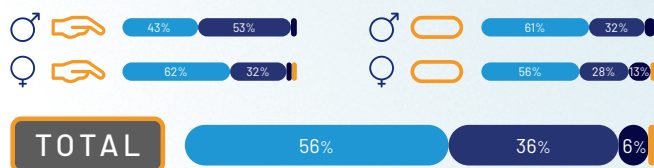
EDUCATION



ECONOMIC STATUS



MARITAL STATUS



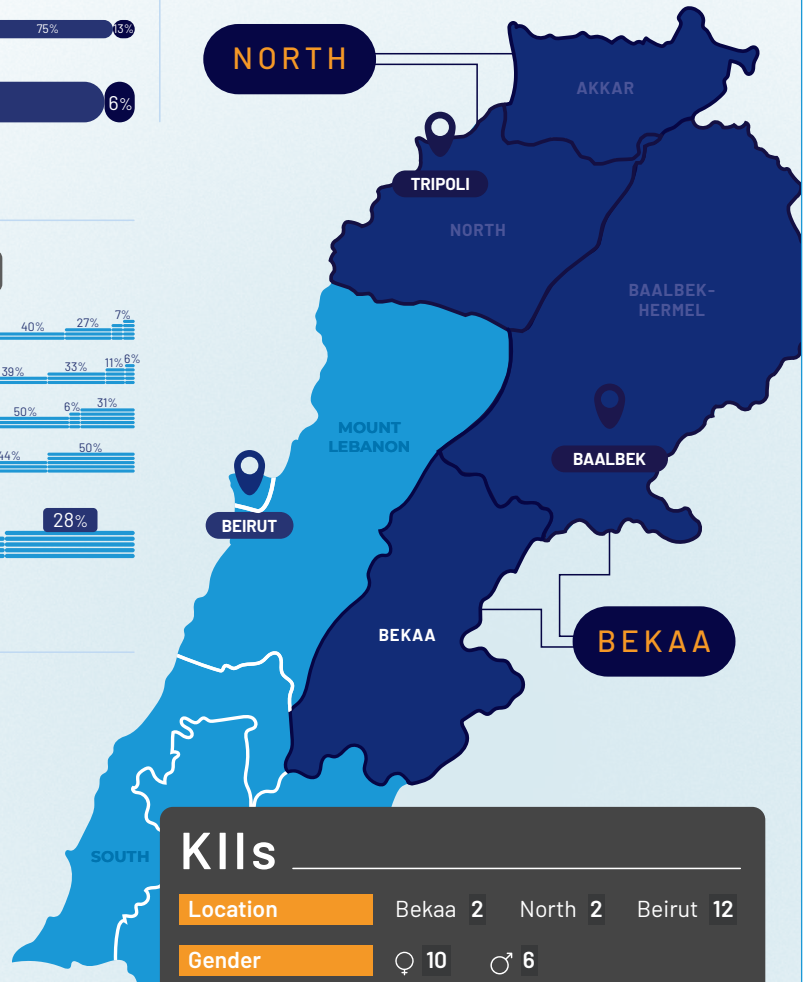
AGE

- 18-24 years
- 25-54 years
- 55+ years

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

- No formal education
- Elementary School
- Middle/High School
- Some university, no degree
- University graduate or post-graduate

DISABILITIES



KIIs

Location	Bekaa 2	North 2	Beirut 12
Gender	♀ 10	♂ 6	
Youth	♀ 1	♂ 2	
PWD	♀ 2	♂ 1	

LEGEND

- ♀ Female
- ♂ Male
- Person with Disabilities icon
- Person without Disabilities icon

MARITAL STATUS

- Never married
- Married
- Separated or Divorced
- Widowed

Demographics

Age

While participants from all age groups joined the discussion sessions, most were young people. One-third (34 percent) were 18 to 24 years old, 29 percent were 25 to 34 years old, 19 percent were 35 to 44 years old, 12 percent were 45 to 54 years old, and 6 percent were 55 years old or above. The majority of the Bekaa participants without disabilities were young people, while ages varied across the remaining cohorts, as shown in *Figure 2*.

Religion

The predominant religion among FGD participants in the Bekaa was Shiite (60 percent), followed by Sunni (30 percent), and 3 percent identified as Muslim without mentioning a sect. Another 5 percent did not identify as religious, and 2 percent declined to respond.

In the North, the majority were Sunni (86 percent), with minimal proportions of Alawite (6 percent), Greek Orthodox (5 percent), and Maronite (1.5 percent). Another 1.5 percent declined to respond.

Disability

Participants with disabilities mostly reported having physical (53 percent) and auditory (29 percent) disabilities, followed by intellectual (8 percent) and visual (6 percent) disabilities. Two respondents had both visual and auditory disabilities, and one had physical, visual, and intellectual disabilities.

Education

The highest levels of education were recorded among FGD participants without disabilities, while the lower levels, including no formal education, were recorded among both women and men with disabilities in the Bekaa and the North. This finding can be considered indicative of the failure of Lebanon's education system when it comes to accommodating students with disabilities. According to a Human Rights Watch report,² *"while Law 220/2000 grants persons with disabilities the right to education [...], in reality, the educational path of children with disabilities in Lebanon is strewn with logistical, social, and economic pitfalls that mean they often face a compromised school experience—if they can enroll at all."*

Economic Status

Nearly half of the sample of respondents (45 percent) reported not having enough money to cover their most basic needs. While this was the case for most cohorts, the finding was more common among groups with disabilities. The households of 25 percent of respondents had barely enough money to cover basic necessities, and another 25 percent had enough for basics but could not afford to save. Finally, 2 percent had savings, one respondent said her family could afford a comfortable lifestyle, and two respondents declined to respond.³

Marital Status

The highest proportion of respondents who had never been married were among the groups with no disabilities in the Bekaa. This was because most were young people between the ages of 18 and 24, and most were still pursuing higher education. Among groups with disabilities, while female and male respondents in the North and Bekaa were of similar ages and disability types, more women than men reported never having married. Married female respondents mostly had either a physical or an auditory disability. The research team integrated questions

² Human Rights Watch, 2018. "I Would Like to Go to School: Barriers to Education for Children with Disabilities in Lebanon." <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/03/22/i-would-go-school/barriers-education-children-disabilities-lebanon>

³ One man and one woman (or 6 percent of each cohort) in the North with no disabilities declined to respond.

around this finding into key informant interviews with disability rights activists and representatives of OPDs. The section below describes the reasoning and perceptions gleaned from interviews.

Marriage and Disability

“At weddings, it is a very common cultural practice for people to tell single women, “Here’s to yours!” A woman with a disability will never hear that statement, simply because she is not seen as worthy of marriage. In fact, she is not even viewed as a woman to begin with.” (KI)

KIs confirmed that the identified discrepancy in marriage rates among women versus men with disabilities was an accurate reflection of the reality: it is *“much easier”* for men with disabilities to find spouses than women. The reasons provided, all rooted in patriarchic thought and hegemonic masculinities and femininities, included the following:

- Many men – who often want to be *“envied for their wives”* – would not want to marry a woman with a disability *“out of embarrassment,”* particularly due to society’s discriminatory outlook toward people with disabilities.
- Women are expected to have children and deal with all household affairs, and society generally does not believe that women with disabilities *“can satisfy those requirements.”* One KI commented that this attitude is *“ridiculous, because many are already doing housework in their parents’ homes.”*
- Women will more readily accept a man with a disability, particularly when they feel they are growing older and have not yet found a husband. *“Sometimes, girls will just accept the first suitor for fear of ‘missing the train’.”*
- Some parents may refuse to allow daughters with disabilities to marry. This may be because they are *“hiding her to avoid stigmatizing the family and ruining other daughters’ chances to find husbands,”* or they do not want people to think that they are getting rid of a burden or that they are poor and need the dowry. One KI remarked that the parents of a woman with an auditory disability were shocked when she told them she wanted to get engaged; they did not think that she could lead a normal life or that anyone would want to marry her.

In general, all three KIs quoted above flagged the importance of raising awareness around this topic, both at the community level and, equally importantly, at the household level with the parents of individuals with disabilities.

Contextual Overview

Lebanon, once celebrated for its cultural vibrancy and economic prosperity, now grapples with embedded corruption and dire prospects for reform. As the country struggled to rebuild in the aftermath of the 1975–1990 Civil War, political power brokers illicitly amassed wealth and influence. Corruption became institutionalized, permeating every facet of Lebanese society from the highest echelons of government to the daily dealings of ordinary citizens. Over the years, politicians have enriched themselves through embezzlement, nepotism, and cronyism, and many businesses have thrived on contracts and deals with no transparency. The judiciary has become increasingly susceptible to political pressures, further entrenching a culture of impunity.

The consequences of this corruption have been devastating. The Lebanese economy, once a regional powerhouse dubbed “the Switzerland of the Middle East,” collapsed under the weight of unsustainable debt and mismanagement. Inflation has soared, plunging millions of Lebanese into poverty. Essential services, such as healthcare and education, have deteriorated, leaving citizens vulnerable and desperate.

In October 2019, people took to the streets in Lebanon, protesting a proposed tax on WhatsApp calls announced by the government. Over the next weeks, demonstrations grew exponentially into a nationwide movement to challenge the government’s failing economic policies and demand an end to corruption. The COVID-19 pandemic largely curtailed the demonstrations, arriving in Lebanon at a time when the economic crisis was deepening and making management of the health situation especially challenging. Then, the catastrophic Beirut Port Blast of August 2020 served as a stark reminder of the systemic failures that have plagued Lebanon.

Negligence and corruption were immediately linked to the disaster, which killed over 200 people, injured thousands, and caused widespread destruction. Despite immediate calls by the president and the interior minister for a transparent investigation of the blast, the investigation remains ongoing over three years later and has attracted significant criticism for lack of transparency and accountability.

In early 2020, in an attempt to rehabilitate its image with the public and to acquire much-needed international funding, the Lebanese government introduced a new anti-corruption law and began work on a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy. Law 175/2020, Combating Corruption in the Public Sector and the Establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), was adopted on May 14, 2020, after its publication in the Official Gazette. In September 2020, Parliament adopted Law 189/2020, the Financial Disclosure and the Punishment of Illicit Enrichment Law. In spite of the new laws, Transparency International’s 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index for Lebanon in 2022 was only 24 of 100 possible points (with a score of zero indicating extreme corruption and a score of 100 representing very clean governance). This score placed Lebanon 150th of 180 countries, a decline from its rank of 128th in 2012. Lebanon also scored well below the global average of 43 and the Middle East and North Africa regional average of 38.⁴

“

Despite being created by a 2020 law, the six seats on the NACC were only filled by a cabinet decision in late January 2022. Mohammed Chamseddine, a researcher at Information International, previously told L’Orient-Le Jour that this delay showed a *‘lack of seriousness of the state in its will to fight corruption’*. ”

Richard Salame
L’Orient Today⁵

4 Transparency International, January 2023. “Corruption Perceptions Index 2022.” https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/Report_CPI2022_English.pdf

5 L’Orient Today, July 2023. “The National Anti-Corruption Commission finally exists, but work remains.” <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1344016/finally-the-national-anti-corruption-commission-exists-but-the-asset-declaration-system-it-oversees-needs-work.html>

Indeed, with the economic crisis in its fourth year, the lack of progress on the Beirut Port Blast investigations, and the regional instability that continues to stress a dysfunctional infrastructure, Lebanon is experiencing the culmination of decades of corruption and mismanagement and teetering close to collapse. Ordinary citizens are left to bear the brunt of the failings and inequities inherent in this system.

Lebanon's multiple layers of social, confessional, ideological, economic, and cultural identities are governed by varied laws or rules. This creates space for corruption to combine with discriminatory practices. As discussed in IFES's first intersectional assessment in Lebanon and its subsequent publication, [*The Status of Women with Disabilities in Lebanon: A Snapshot of Socio-Political and Economic Impacts from an Intersectional Lens*](#), the experiences of women, youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, refugees, migrants, and those with multiple identities are significantly impacted by the complexity and inherent inequality of Lebanon's political and social systems. Lebanon has 18 officially recognized religious sects that are governed by 15 personal status laws enforced by religious courts. Social identity, and the role of religion in politics, both contribute to conflict and lack of consensus. These are compounded by socio-economic factors including imbalance in access to services – especially outside the capital, low exposure to economic and educational opportunities, limited inclusion in public service, and youth unemployment. Legal obstacles created by personal status laws and the discriminatory application of other laws seriously hinder the ability of marginalized groups to act as full and equal citizens.

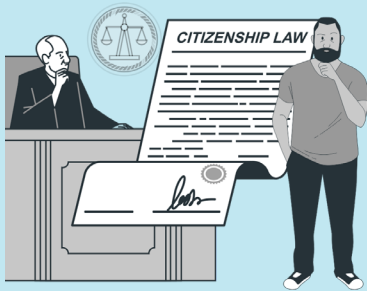
The snapshot below of the findings from the first intersectionality assessment sheds light on the experiences of different identity groups in Lebanon and clarify the impact of further inequities that are exacerbated by corruption at all levels.



People with disabilities in Lebanon include:

- **Older women**, who are more likely to suffer worse health, have lower socio-economic status, be less educated, and live alone.
- **Children and youth with disabilities.**
- **Palestinian and Syrian refugees**, who may live in poor conditions, suffer from food insufficiency and insecurity, and lack access to health services. Older refugees; women and children; and poorer, uneducated refugees are at particular risk of exploitation and neglect.

Summarized from, Combaz E. (2018, July 15). [*Situation of persons with disabilities in Lebanon*](#) K4D Helpdesk Report, UK Department for International Development.



Lebanon's legal framework systematizes gender inequality. For example:

- **Fifteen personal status laws** replicate sectarian and gendered discrimination for Lebanese women. Varying by sect, the laws are more disadvantageous for some Lebanese women than others, for example, regarding divorce (although divorce laws discriminate against women of all sects in different ways), custody, or inheritance.
- **The Citizenship Law** engenders discrimination by not permitting a woman to pass her citizenship to her foreign husband or children, although men can pass their citizenship to their foreign wives. There is also a fear that providing citizenship to the growing number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in the country would tip the balance toward some religious groups. As a result, thousands of men and children in Lebanon are stateless, restricting their access to government services, education, employment, and inheritance.



Refugee Women in Lebanon: Lebanon hosts over 1 million Syrian refugees and over 450,000 Palestine refugees. Many recent refugees from Syria are women and girls who may live without the protection of male relatives who were victims of the conflict. Women refugees face some of the most difficult conditions, including:

- High rates of social and sexual harassment or exploitation, domestic violence, and violence in camps and on the street.
- Child marriage, especially among Syrian refugee girls.
- Joblessness or access only to menial jobs that do not provide a living wage, making many refugee women vulnerable to sex work and increasing child labor and school dropout rates.
- Limited access to healthcare, including reproductive and mental healthcare.
- Limited availability of educational opportunities.

Key Findings

Corruption on the Community Level

“Corruption is not something dysfunctional in the system, it is the system.” (KI)

Key informant interviews aimed to elicit perceptions of the types of corruption that most critically affect all residents of Lebanon. The commentary of a few respondents focused on its “macro” nature: Corruption is so entrenched in Lebanese society that it has become “*such an intertwined web which is impossible to separate into discrete components.*” Others focused on specific types of corruption, and while responses varied, all forms ultimately traced back to corruption at the political and administrative levels.

The discussions below provide an overview of forms of corruption across different sectors in Lebanon. All interviewed KIs were asked to rate the degree of corruption in each sector on a scale from 0 (not affected by corruption) to 3 (completely affected). Each section is accompanied by a gauge chart which presents the average value of all provided ratings.



Political Corruption and Lack of Accountability

“They provide the needed tools and orchestrate the proper environment to protect and nurture corruption so that they benefit from it. They have grabbed all state facilities, divided the sectors; each leader is running his share in his own personal fiefdom. They have obliterated the entire state and country.” (KI)

Perhaps the source of the majority of Lebanon’s calamities – chronic mismanagement of state affairs, years of misappropriation of public resources, embezzlement, and squandering of tens of billions of Lebanese pounds’ (LBP) worth of public funds (including for “*useless projects*”) – and the lack of oversight and budget transparency have led to the economic crisis plaguing Lebanon and its residents. Since 2019, attempts to finance the government’s deficit have included a series of “*illegal decisions or actions*” such as privatizing public facilities and spaces (for example, the casino and beaches); the Central Bank printing money without gold reserves to back it – leading to hyperinflation, and diverting funds from state-owned enterprises to the government, which led to their collapse and the loss of jobs. Banks went even further to impose illegal capital controls and confiscate money deposited by natural persons. Currency devaluation, “*lollarization*,”⁶ and confiscation of funds also contributed to the loss of pensions, especially for public sector employees and members of independent workers’ unions.⁷ One KI added,

“They have robbed people of their rights and dignity. People can no longer eat, their children are dying at hospital doors, and they are stealing or committing suicide. Those who have been working for decades have lost their lives and retirement.”

“We have always known that our politicians are very corrupt – they have consistently extended their political mandates illegally, and everything they have done in between is corrupt. But when they took people’s money from them, when their money got devalued and stuck in banks, this is when everyone truly felt the impacts of this corruption.” (KI)

⁶ A “lollar” is a U.S. dollar that is stuck in the Lebanese banking system. In reality, it is simply a computer entry with no corresponding currency. Harvard economic fellow Dan Azzi coined the term after the onset of the severe economic crisis in Lebanon.

⁷ Independent workers like doctors, lawyers, and engineers do not receive pensions from the state. Instead, each syndicate requires that they pay yearly union fees which feeds into their pension funds. The economic crisis and loss of these funds means they will not be entitled to any pensions.

All KIs affirmed that political corruption was rampant – including the government’s absence in various sectors where services rely on its involvement and the ruling class’s “*excessive meddling*” through misuse of power, clientelism, bribery, vote buying, and ballot fraud in elections. One KI noted that, in the 2016 municipal elections, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) and other watchdogs documented numerous transgressions and instances of forgery “*where we saw ballot boxes thrown into rivers.*” Although monitors made their observation reports publicly accessible and submitted them to the State Council (Shura) which is responsible for overseeing municipal elections, no actions were taken in response. Community members from the North and the Bekaa echoed these observations, expressing distrust in the voting process for issues such as discarding and replacing ballot boxes, purchasing people’s identification cards ahead of elections “*for laughable amounts*” and voting in their stead, removing voters’ names from lists, and party representatives accompanying voters into polling booths to dictate the selection of candidates. A man from the Bekaa scoffed, “*Some deputies know for a fact that dead people will vote for them in the next election.*”

“During elections, we are made to vote for people we do not want. If you vote for someone new, not only is your physical safety at risk, but so is your emotional wellbeing, as they will accuse you of being a traitor or a spy in your own community. We do not have the freedom of choice.” (FGD participant. Similar comments were made across all eight FGDs.)

The perception of political corruption, coupled with the widespread suppression of dissent, has created a climate of intimidation and doubt that “*anything could change.*” Both KIs and community members believed that party leaders’ external affiliations meant that they do not act in the best interests of the country and its residents but in the interests of foreign powers.

“If you are not politically affiliated, you will not have a ‘back’ in Lebanon – all you will have is missed opportunities. I am part of a political party because I need to look out for my own interests and feed my child. When it comes to parties, I do not believe there is good and bad – there is bad and worse. So, you go with the bad.” (KI)

Furthermore, politicians’ hijacking of public projects and contracting incompetent developers has resulted in “*scandalous*” outcomes, such as the Bisri Dam⁸, the electricity sector, or the natural gas reserves project, where, according to one KI, “*over 50 companies – some of which have a registered capital of \$2.00 – have been established by the political elite to undertake the distribution of profits.*”

Another KI noted that, despite rampant corruption, the elites “*never break the law – they merely circumvent it, because there are always loopholes.*” This common practice is exacerbated by unwillingness among most of the population to hold their leaders accountable, which one KI emphasized “*means we are all to blame.*”

“The people we are trusting to work for us are the root of all corruption in Lebanon. We were taught to respect and fear them, to treat them like they are better than us. We do not realize that they are our employees. If you hire someone incompetent and they mismanage your company and run it into the ground, would you not fire them? But we continue to give them jobs and legitimacy. We continue thinking they are invincible. We never learned our rights or how to hold them accountable.” (KI)

⁸ Arab News, September 2020. “Bisri: Lebanon’s dam of contention.” <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1729886/middle-east>



Administrative Corruption

Pervasive administrative corruption has impeded Lebanon's progress and stability. It has also undermined the rule of law, diverted resources from essential services, hindered people's ability to access their rights, and intensified social inequality. Political patronage; the absence of qualified personnel in favor of those who are hired on the basis of *wasta* (connections), political affiliation, or sectarianism; ineffective oversight mechanisms; and a culture of impunity have created a permissive environment in which bribery, nepotism, and favoritism flourish.

Transparency and accountability are conspicuously absent in the public sector, leaving corrupt practices unchecked. Citizens often encounter demands for bribes to access healthcare, education, justice, and even completion of the most basic governmental transactions. Several KIs commented that public procurement processes are marred by fraudulent activities, with contracts awarded based on personal connections rather than merit, thus *"cancelling out the possibility of fair and transparent tendering processes that allow qualified private sector companies to secure deals and carry out the work correctly."* In fact, a KI noted that *"according to Gherbal Initiative, access to information is never respected, and while public institutions are legally required to publish data and grant access to documentation when requested, an overwhelming 75 percent do not comply."* Disability activists also commented on the absence of reasonable accommodations within the public sector and departments, explaining that contractors do not know how to create proper infrastructure so, for example, even when they do attempt to install a ramp to facilitate access to a public building, it would have the incorrect dimensions or be too steep.

With regard to public sector jobs, according to one KI, *"employees are a minority, and the bigger bulk are contractors with no fixed job descriptions or responsibilities, and we know nothing about their merits and qualifications. There is no transparency, so we are not able to hold them to account."* A 2021 occupational survey⁹ identified a lack of transparency and numerous instances of illegal contracting. Even when public sector recruitment occurs, hiring tends to rely not on merit and competence but on sectarianism and political loyalty. One KI mentioned that hiring decisions are often contingent on the ability to recruit a certain quota of individuals from a specific sect.

*"The government encourages the gap in service provision as this allows the private sector to benefit. The fact that there is no state-provided electricity enriches private diesel generator owners – and not just everyone can decide to become a provider, unless they have a *wasta*. None of them have a financial number, and they are not required to get a license from the Ministry of Environment to operate."¹⁰ (KI)*

Corruption in public service provision disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Respondents reported that public service provision was at an *"all-time low."* For example, although the government has *"invested"*¹¹ over \$40 billion on the electricity sector, no new power plants have been built in decades, and the existing ones are outdated, inefficient, and unable to respond to power demands. Thus, the country is plagued by continuing power outages and severe electricity rationing. In fact, several respondents scheduled their interviews around the availability of electricity, and some community members in the North and the Bekaa said they had not had electricity *"for days."* While the lack of electricity affects all residents in different ways, it has disproportionate effects on certain groups such as individuals who are older or who have chronic illnesses or disabilities.

⁹ Gherbal Initiative, 2022. "The occupational survey: 92,000 personnel in public sector and 72% vacancies and 27,000 occupations conceal illegal contracting." <https://elgherbal.org/grains/ake7GCq81azdQ1FolzOE>

¹⁰ Air pollution from diesel generators contains more than 40 toxic air contaminants, many of them carcinogenic. Researchers at the American University of Beirut found that toxic emissions may have quadrupled as a result of the economic crisis, which has further increased reliance on generators.

¹¹ Overbilling, inflated contracts, and a lack of transparency are all common.

“Most of the money I earn, I spend on facilitating my own accessibility (for example, to have 24/7 electricity and an elevator in order to be able to get into and out of my apartment). People with physical disabilities who live on higher floors and cannot afford to pay for electricity are often prisoners jailed in their own homes.” (KI)

Other issues that respondents mentioned included the disability cards issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which were intended to help facilitate access to services but were never administered properly and have “become essentially useless” since the economic crisis began. Community members expressed exasperation with the time needed to renew the card (a man from the North said, “it used to take under an hour to renew the card, now it has been dragging for over two months, where we need to sit and wait for entire days, only to be met with excuses – no electricity, no diesel – and told to come back”). The delays are especially frustrating given the almost nonexistent benefits that cardholders receive. One KI said, “People often mention the customs waiver law that allows persons with physical disabilities to import cars as a positive thing. In my experience, it was a nightmare: I had to secure 48 signatures and pay a number of fees in addition to a suggested bribe of \$2,000 for someone to secure the waiver and get the car out of customs. Furthermore, the law initially did not include persons whose disability was in the left foot.”¹² The KI went on to say that the waiver is known to be abused by the political elite and people in their circles who purchase cars in the name of a person with a disability and then sell them.

“In order to get my driver’s license, I had to go to the second floor of the building. They asked me why I came alone without someone to help me. They had a moving walkway which was purchased through EU funding, but they did not even know how to turn it on. While the disability card is supposed to provide holders with certain benefits, I actually had to pay much more than a person without disabilities would to get my license.” (KI)

Another concern was hospitals’ refusal to treat cardholders. In fact, a KI said it was better not to show the card, as the reaction was either to turn them away, or ask them to “pay now, and follow up with the ministry yourself,” because social security coverage is no longer available.

Finally, the absence of consumer protection or monitoring of market prices has opened the door to monopolization and hoarding of commodities and medications to sell at higher prices. For example, community members noted that the same medication could cost 90,000 LBP in one pharmacy and 300,000 LBP in another, while some medicines were not being sold at all, under the premise of a shortage. In reality, those products were taken off the market pending higher exchange rates to maximize profit, as evidenced by the fact that people with personal connections to pharmacists could often obtain what they needed.

“Everyone is complicit in this corruption because we have been taught that this is the norm. People claim they are not corrupt and that they hate corruption, but what they do not realize is that using their connections to get out of trouble or to secure a job and paying bribes to speed up administrative processes makes them a part of corruption, makes them perpetuate it.” (KI)



Justice and Security

“After the civil war, all ‘warlords’ received a general pardon. There was no accountability. Nobody went to prison. Since then, ministers have been changing legislation and issuing memos to protect themselves and to take advantage of their positions for illicit enrichment and immunity.” (KI)

¹² The exclusion of persons whose right foot was not affected by a disability is due to the assumption that they would be able to drive a car with an automatic transmission without the need for any reasonable accommodations.

All respondents agreed that Lebanon's judiciary, whose appointments depend largely on political patronage and backing, is highly prone to political, partisan, religious, or external influence: *"Every elite owns a judge."* The lack of judicial independence discredits and damages good governance and becomes *"a core from which other corruptions originate."* People with intersectional identities are less likely to be part of the elite and therefore are disproportionately impacted by corruption in the judiciary.

"A man in Akkar wanted to rehabilitate a road in front of his house to facilitate access for his brother, who is in a wheelchair. Because the family were at odds with the mayor, the judiciary has dodged his case and never intervened." (KI)

Some respondents pointed out that a few judges are independent and conscientious but that they often face numerous challenges, including being told they are acting beyond their authority¹³ or being removed from their positions. After the Beirut Port Blast, Judge Tarek Bitar, the lead investigator, was pressured and threatened, and politicians flagrantly ignored his subpoenas. Then he was replaced. When Judge Bitar tried to resume his work in January 2023, the Public Prosecutor served him with a lawsuit, imposed a travel ban, and ordered the release of all detained individuals suspected of involvement in the explosion (at least one of whom fled the country). The Beirut Bar Association and the Lebanese Judges Association deemed the Prosecutor's actions illegal, but no further steps were taken, and the domestic investigation continues to be *"hampered by systemic obstruction, interference, intimidation, and a political impasse."*¹⁴

Similarly, one KI brought up the topic of the Central Bank forensic audit,¹⁵ explaining, *"the Central Bank was indeed engaged in money laundering and embezzlement, illegal capital controls and stealing 90 percent of the people's money – but who has decided these things? Who is responsible for the bankruptcy of the banking sector? [The Central Bank] did not act alone. But there were no follow-up accountability measures, and the judiciary has remained silent."*

Other KIs commented on discriminatory legislation, such as the law stipulating that women cannot pass their Lebanese nationality to their children. Examples of judicial misconduct included the lack of serious judicial action against rising cases of femicide, with perpetrators either not serving prison terms or being released within two years, and arbitrary detention of people (some of whom may be innocent) for years without court hearings or rulings.

"I know a young man with a disability who is well-educated and has a university degree. When his parents died, his siblings did not want to share the inheritance with him, so they bought a false report from a doctor claiming that he was 'mentally disabled, incompetent, and unable to take care of himself.' When he went to file a complaint at the police station, they asked him who he was there with and who took care of him – they would not even accept to discuss the case directly with him. The way that people without disabilities perceive people with disabilities is at the very root of our experiences of inequality and injustice." (KI)

The vast majority of KIs and community members severely criticized the security apparatuses for *"multiple examples, proven, that they are not at all willing or even able to fulfill their role of providing people's constitutional rights to protection and personal security, and their right to gather and peacefully protest."* One KI said his organization had documented *"multiple cases where security actors had sided with aggressors against people they deem an enemy or a scapegoat."* He added, *"They do not follow modus operandi. They do not adhere to local laws or even their own policies."*

¹³ One such example is the removal of Mount Lebanon's prosecutor from office after bringing corruption charges against the Central Bank governor and commercial banks. See: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-legal-council-dismisses-judge-investigating-corruption-2023-05-04/>

¹⁴ Amnesty International, August 2023. "Lebanon: Unacceptable lack of justice, truth and reparation three years after Beirut blast." <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/lebanon-unacceptable-lack-of-justice-truth-and-reparation-three-years-after-beirut-blast/>

¹⁵ An international firm conducted the investigation. The Central Bank refused to cooperate, deemed the audit "a witch hunt," destroyed documents, and intimidated witnesses. Nonetheless, the findings painted a damning picture of embezzlement of public funds, manipulation of financial data, issuance of preferential loans to politically connected individuals, and other transgressions and mismanagement.

“The security apparatuses in Lebanon are the armed extension of the political establishment.” (KI)

One KI recalled that, at the end of September 2023, a group of activists and NGOs organized a peaceful march to demand a full guarantee of political and civil liberties and socio-economic rights for Lebanese citizens. A group of “thugs” on motorcycles fired into the air, chased and attacked protesters with stones, and shouted homophobic insults at them, although the protest had not espoused any LGBTQI+ causes. Lebanese security forces used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protesters but did not intervene to stop the attackers. Several individuals were injured in the clashes, and dozens were arrested¹⁶.

In recent years, Lebanon has witnessed regular arrests of activists, performers, and journalists (often for social media posts) who are questioned, tried by military tribunals, and sometimes imprisoned. Witnesses are generally subjected to character assassination or fabricated accusations in an attempt to discredit them and their accounts.¹⁷ This pattern has created a dramatically shrinking space for civil liberties and freedom of speech – enforced by the security apparatus.

“They have bungled almost every single file related to the protection of marginalized groups. They have neither been unable to create any form of security, nor any lasting, tangible change in the legislative and judicial sphere.” (KI)

One KI believed the Lebanese army could be considered less corrupt than other security forces. However, another respondent pointed out that many army contracts are covered by confidentiality clauses, limiting the availability of information about what is being purchased, including weapons. He clarified that public purchases over a certain value are subject to tendering processes; according to findings by Gherbal Initiative, contracts are often divided so they stay under the threshold and avoid the tendering requirement.



Media

“A small number of traditional media outlets are sometimes more objective than others and do an acceptable job in terms of highlighting corruption and questioning people in power. However, they tend to go silent on certain matters that do not suit their overall political agenda.” (KI)

Respondents generally agreed that there is little or no independent media in Lebanon (some called it “*media for hire*”) and that reported news is often biased, contributing to 1) lack of transparency, misinformation, and inaccurate or subjective information; 2) polarization of Lebanese society, and 3) limits on the public’s ability to hold the government accountable. Participants mentioned several reasons for the absence of a free media:

- **Political influence:** Traditional media outlets are subject to the influence of the political elites that own or support them. A KI elaborated, “*Especially during election periods, slots are reserved for the existing elites. Any independent candidates who want airtime need to pay between \$25,000 to \$125,000 per episode. They market the criminals and normalize their existence, so they keep winning.*” Several noted that the media has a foundational role in the current system, serving as a tool for governing stakeholders to promote their own discourse and scapegoat individuals or groups to suit their purposes. Alternative news sites and independent blogs are nascent, and some KIs believed those outlets could not always implement their goals impactfully because they have not gained community trust. One politically active youth believed the

¹⁶ Amnesty International, October 2023. “Lebanon: Investigate assault on Freedom March protesters.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/lebanon-investigate-assault-on-freedom-march-protesters/>

¹⁷ A recent example is the case of a journalist who accused a Sharia Court judge of a lack of impartiality and was met with counteraccusations of slander and defamation, an illegal search of her home, and drug charges. See: <https://english.legal-agenda.com/joint-statement-denouncing-the-use-of-drug-charges-to-repress-freedoms-and-liberties/>

alternative press “generally covered news that gives them a political advantage, and even if a traditional political party does something good once in a blue moon, they do not cover it.”

- **Licensing control and requirements:** The Ministry of Information controls media licensing and has the power to determine who obtains licenses. The licensing process itself is rigorous and expensive.
- **Funding and sponsorship:** The advertising market is limited in comparison to the existing demand, which leads the media to identify other sources of revenue, such as political parties or corrupt business. When funded by these sources, reporting is biased in favor of their interests. One example provided by a KI was that despite the economic crisis, commercial banks never stopped running advertisements “and unsurprisingly, the media has not attacked them despite their illegal confiscation of depositors’ money.”

A study by The Policy Initiative¹⁸ pointed out that the media sector’s funding sources are opaque and that outlets have been reluctant to share information on their revenue structure and funders, including investments by the banking sector, large profits realized during parliamentary elections, and advantageous loans from the Central Bank in 2016. Additionally, the advertising field has historically not been liberal or competitive. In the post-civil war era, a single group controlled an estimated 92 percent of national advertising, in violation of the Audio-Visual Media Law (1994). That law limits each advertising agency to servicing no more than one television and one radio station at a time. As one group had a monopoly over the advertising sector, it was able to exclusively set prices, effectively lowering media outlet advertising revenues.

- **Shrinking space for freedom of expression:** Recent years have seen a surge in cases of Lebanese authorities weaponizing defamation and insult laws to target journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, and other critics. Many have been unjustly arrested or sued for articles or Tweets they published, accused of “posting fake news,” “inciting sectarian strife,” or slander and defamation. Most were released after public outcry and protests, cementing the lack of grounds for detention.¹⁹ Although more prominent media figures have refused to comply with security apparatus demands to remove their published content, the increased media capture and pressure have silenced many voices. In November 2023, Parliament proposed a draft media law, “which was being privately discussed and hidden from public scrutiny while the spotlight was fixed on the ongoing Israeli attacks in South Lebanon since October 7,” according to the Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon. Amnesty International²⁰ criticized the law’s “many alarming provisions that will stifle freedom of expression and press freedoms, upholding criminal penalties and in some cases increasing prison sentences and fines for insults and defamation.” They added, “if approved in its current form, this law would be a dangerous setback for freedom of expression in Lebanon in an environment where defamation laws are already being used to harass and intimidate journalists and other individuals who criticize the authorities.” They also observed that the lack of engagement of Lebanese civil society in discussions around the law – even UNESCO’s recommended amendments were dismissed – means “there is a real danger that the legislation could grant the authorities free rein to harass, intimidate, and silence critics, and perpetuate an environment of censorship.”

Several respondents distinguished between traditional media outlets and journalists in their corruption ratings. While they assigned media outlets a high corruption score, they believed that many journalists demonstrated exemplary ethics and professionalism, although they were often “at the mercy of their employers: since employment options in independent media were limited, they were forced to work wherever they could find a job.”

¹⁸ The Policy Initiative, July 2023. “Follow the Money: The Informal Channels of Lebanese Media Funding.” https://api.thepolicyinitiative.org/content/uploads/files/Media-Funding-Report_20230731.pdf

¹⁹ The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, March 2020. “Controlling the Narrative: Lebanon Compromises Free Speech in Crisis.” <https://timep.org/2020/03/17/controlling-the-narrative-lebanon-compromises-free-speech-in-crisis/>

²⁰ Amnesty International, November 2023. “Lebanon: Proposed media law poses grave threat to freedom of expression.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/lebanon-proposed-media-law-poses-grave-threat-to-freedom-of-expression/>

When it came to marginalized groups, stakeholders said that in addition to supporting the state's scapegoating, the media in Lebanon often conveys misinformation, including unintentionally, or reports in a sensational style that *"paints a negative picture."* One respondent elaborated that talk shows or series never feature a person with disabilities who is a businessperson or who holds a position of power; rather, persons with disabilities are always presented as disturbed, criminal, or helpless and pitiful. Another mentioned that a talk show has hosted homosexual and transgender guests who generally displayed exaggerated or "scandalous" behavior that reflected negatively on the LGBTQI+ community and incited hate speech on social media.

Finally, one KI noted that one of the most critical issues related to the media is the complete lack of effort to make information accessible. For example, no television channels use sign language interpretation or captioning. She noted, *"Even when an effort was once made to use a sign language interpreter, this did not necessarily mean that it was useful to all people with auditory disabilities, because ... Lebanon does not have a unified sign language!"*

Other Sectors

Note: IFES's current project in Lebanon does not address the medical, education, or private sectors. Therefore, the discussions below present only a brief overview of the most prominent forms of corruption reported by respondents.



Medical Sector

- Mismanagement, embezzled funds, and the sale of expired or counterfeit medications are common within the sector. Hospitals are no exception. As an example, community members spoke about a recent case where a public hospital employee sold placebos to cancer patients at exorbitant prices but was never held accountable due to political patronage.
- The periodic hoarding of medications by pharmacies and agents, especially to profit from exchange rate fluctuations, led to inflated prices and shortages. This had devastating impacts on people with chronic illnesses who were unable to access lifesaving medicine.
- People without financial means or a *wasta* in the medical system have been denied treatment.
- The Ministry of Public Health and the National Social Security Fund have failed to provide adequate oversight and accountability, allowing corruption to flourish in the medical sector.
- People with disabilities are unable to secure prohibitively expensive assistive devices without a *wasta*.
- Discrimination against and mistreatment of LGBTQI+ individuals has been observed.

"When it comes to people with disabilities, corruption starts with their basic needs and rights to live independently. As a person with a physical disability, my wheelchair is a part of my body; it is the replacement for my lack of mobility, and the only way I can move autonomously. Wheelchairs need to be changed every few years, but this is expensive. Many of my peers need to ask (or beg, rather) for favors through someone who can secure their medical devices. Without connections, one will not be able to afford their most basic need." (KI)



Education

- Nepotism and political favoritism in admissions and hiring provide advantages to people with connections to political parties or influential figures, whether enrolling as students or securing jobs in education. Many qualified candidates are unfairly excluded, perpetuating inequality. One KI mentioned that she had an opportunity to work at the Lebanese University but was told that she would need to obey all the instructions of the controlling political party, including when it comes to (unfairly) passing and failing students.
- Mismanagement of funds allocated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has limited resources for schools, teachers, and students. Some KIs reported dire conditions at public schools and universities, where *“the ceiling leaks and walls crumble onto students’ heads.”* In fact, in 2022, a student was killed and another injured after a ceiling collapsed in a public school in Tripoli.²¹
- Students pay bribes to enroll, receive higher grades, or pass without meeting requirements.
- Discrimination on the basis of religion, social class, background, and/or sexual orientation can surface in admissions processes, grading, and other treatment.
- Discrimination against persons with disabilities, who face many barriers to quality education, includes inaccessible infrastructure, a lack of qualified teachers with the skills and capacities to work with students with disabilities, and a general lack of awareness of disabilities throughout the education system.



Private Sector

- Comparatively, the private sector was rated as the least corrupt. Several KIs believed that, since business owners prioritize profit and growth, they may be less prone to corrupt hiring, for example. However, the general opinion was that the private companies committed to ethical business practices were exceptions, and corruption was widespread to varying extents across different industries.
- Nepotism and favoritism are common in hiring and promotion decisions.
- Some companies engage in corrupt practices to secure public contracts. Many of those companies belong to political elites.
- The telecom, insurance, and construction industries are reportedly particularly prone to corruption. A KI noted that insurance companies may not insure persons with disabilities but, when they do, they dictate *“numerous unfair exclusions – for example, if I sustain an injury because of a fall, they will attribute that to my disability and exclude it.”*
- Commercial banks engage in corrupt practices, often through their relationships with the political class.
- Discriminatory hiring practices are common in the private sector, particularly against marginalized groups. LGBTQI+ people, especially transgender individuals, often face rejection and can rarely secure jobs. Article 74 of Law 220/2000 sets hiring quotas for persons with disabilities for companies with a minimum of 30 employees. The law also requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations. However, noncompliance is widespread for reasons including employers’ lack of awareness of the law; the government’s lack of support or enforcement; and negative attitudes toward people with disabilities.²²

²¹ The National News, November 2022. “High school pupil dies in ceiling collapse at Tripoli school.” <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2022/11/02/high-school-pupil-dies-in-ceiling-collapse-at-tripoli-school/>

²² Legal Agenda, 2017. “Right of Disabled to Working in Lebanon: Complicity and Non-Compliance.” <https://english.legal-agenda.com/right-of-disabled-to-working-in-lebanon-complicity-and-non-compliance/>

Corruption on the Individual Level

Impact of Corruption and Discrimination on Marginalized Groups

The three groups that respondents considered at highest risk of the impacts of corruption²³ are persons with disabilities, refugees, and LGBTQI+ people.²⁴ Others at risk include older persons, women, and migrant workers. Respondents considered men to be least impacted.

While most KIs rated corruption affecting marginalized groups on a scale of 0 (not impacted by corruption) to 3 (heavily impacted), a few had reservations about providing ratings. Some noted that all residents of Lebanon, regardless of their identities, are affected by systemic corruption. One remarked that **each category was very diverse, and intersectional factors played a critical role in how they experienced corruption**. Another expressed a similar sentiment, noting that there can be no generalized rating for any population group because *“it really depends on where they stand in this farm.”* In other words, people who are influential, well-connected, or backed by a political party or a politician tend to be less affected. The respondent added that this is not necessarily a given because, for example, residents of a particular area of Lebanon who are known for extreme loyalty to a political leader still live in abject conditions.

Persons with Disabilities

“Persons with disabilities are the last of the government’s priorities because they cannot use them – they cannot get money off their backs to steal it.” (KI)

“At the airport, State Security does not even look at us – they address their questions to the porters assisting us. It is as though we were just another suitcase sitting there.” (KI)

Respondents named persons with disabilities as the population most impacted by systemic corruption, including the failure to implement Law 220/2000 across civil society and the private and public sectors. Thus, persons with disabilities are prevented from accessing their most basic rights, including to accessible infrastructure, public and private spaces and employment, as well as health and rehabilitation services, social and recreational opportunities, public transportation, security, and legal services.

There was a consensus that corruption is to blame for public services being either nonexistent or limited and of poor quality. Furthermore, it is difficult to access existing services due to a lack of qualified personnel with the knowledge and skills to provide appropriate support (this includes a lack of interpreters for persons with auditory disabilities). Another accessibility challenge is that service delivery points are often located on the higher floors of buildings. *“Even where the buildings have elevators,”* a KI noted, *“electricity rationing means they are merely a decorative item.”*

“As the economic scandal came to light, international support has dwindled away, and there is a lack of public social funds due to mismanagement and embezzlement. This has placed persons with disabilities in a very precarious state; they have nowhere to go.” (KI)

²³ Ratings on a scale of 3 were as follows: Persons with disabilities 2.96; refugees and migrants 2.83; LGBTQI+ people, 2.81; the elderly, 2.78; women, 2.75; and men, 1.86. Three respondents scored migrants lower than refugees, which reduced the rating to 2.63. However, most KIs believed the two groups were affected equally, noting that in some cases migrants experienced worse types of abuse due to the kafala system. For this reason, the report combines the two groups into a single category.

²⁴ One respondent opted not to provide feedback about LGBTQI+ people.

Considering the intersection of disability and sex, some KIs emphasized that, since women “*were already treated as second-class citizens,*” the vulnerability of women with disabilities was significantly multiplied in comparison to their male counterparts. One respondent noted that, regardless of a person’s gender, the more severe their disability, the more acute were the effects of corruption experienced.

At the household level, persons with disabilities – especially, but not limited to, girls – are often deprived of education: Families prioritize boys or children without disabilities, especially when their financial means are limited. Two KIs attributed such favoritism to a lack of awareness and “*corrupt thought among parents.*” Even when parents send their children with disabilities to school, they face a range of challenges:

- Public and private schools, as well as technical institutes, turn away disabled students due to the inaccessibility of the facility or the limited human resources available to support them. This practice is illegal: Law 220/2000 stipulates that schools cannot deny children an education on the basis of disability.
- Private schools with special education departments are often prohibitively expensive.
- When their children are accepted to a public school, families are expected to hire shadow teachers themselves, which they often cannot afford to do. The result is sub-standard education for children with disabilities, although the quality of public education is already perceived as low due to challenges related to the economic crisis such as teacher strikes, frequent closures, and limited funding for resources.
- Children with disabilities often face bullying. One KI noted that “*as children, we were always bullied by our peers because they were never taught that we are not different. Their parents see us as inferior and convey this ‘corrupt thought’ to their children. A lot of our social problems begin there, and we need to fight these issues at the root.*”
- Access to transportation is limited. Many private schools use buses that do not accommodate wheelchairs, and public transportation is difficult to access. Securing private transportation is generally costly.
- Transportation challenges and concerns over children’s safety are exacerbated at the level of higher education. Universities may be far from home and challenging to reach. Moving from a family home is not always feasible – especially taking into account cultural values that reject girls leaving their parents’ households before marriage.

“We are people with disabilities, not disabled people who are unable to do anything. But alas, this is how we are viewed in Bekaa-Hermel. Had we been in a different country, we would have had many more rights. We would have at least been allowed an education. I would have gone to university, which was always my dream. I have built myself on my own, I have taken many trainings and sessions which I have paid for myself. Every single thing I have done I have fought for tooth and nail.” (Women with disabilities FGD participant, Bekaa)

The inability of persons with disabilities to access formal education and/or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) perpetuates the inequality, discrimination, and challenges they face. A direct consequence of this limitation is unequal access to the labor market and employment opportunities. However, even individuals who access education often face challenges. A man with an auditory disability cited an example: Although he had a barbering certification, he lacked the capital to open a business, and no barbershop would hire him.

In the workplace, persons with disabilities tend to be exploited financially, paid lower wages than other workers, and deprived of equal rights because of an assumption that the challenge of securing employment in general means they will stay in the job. Candidates with disabilities reported sometimes being subjected to invasive and disrespectful questioning in job interviews or asked about activities that highlight their disabilities despite their irrelevance to work requirements. One KI with a physical disability who interviewed for a graphic design position commented that she was asked whether she could run. She pointedly asked, “*Why would I need to run? They are literally paying me to be sitting in front of a computer.*”

With regard to decision-making and national strategy development, people with disabilities “*fall through the cracks of every conversation.*” Even when a law pertains to disabilities, people with disabilities are consistently excluded from these processes. One KI said, “*people think that help is only through charity, but we are not all charity cases. If we are not included in the planning and decision-making processes, if we are not consulted on topics we know better than anyone, this makes the entire effort futile, regardless of how well-intentioned it may be.*”

Corroborating this point is an observation by an FGD participant during the session. He told a member of the research team that a ramp at the venue indicated the intention to improve accessibility. However, he was certain that no one with mobility challenges had been consulted, because the ramp’s dimensions were incorrect; it was too wide for a person in a wheelchair to use easily and independently.

Respondents also identified challenges in civil society. Unless an actor was specifically an organization for persons with disabilities (OPD), they tended to overlook disability considerations and reasonable accommodations in their programming and service areas. Even among OPDs, some were viewed negatively for not employing more persons with disabilities. Several KIs noted that projects may sometimes include an element that involves disabilities – more than likely due to a donor request; however, when the project ends, there is no sustainability or continuity. Participants with disabilities are left behind.

“They bring women with disabilities for trainings, then they never follow up with them beyond that. This is harmful, because [even as an OPD], we have reached a point where it is challenging to get participants with disabilities to engage. We invite them and they tell us we do not want to come, everyone just brings us, preaches at us for a few hours, takes pictures of us to exploit our presence, and that is the extent of it.” (KI)

Refugees

Refugees in Lebanon, often marginalized and deliberately omitted from legal frameworks, face a multitude of challenges. They are recognized as displaced persons rather than refugees, which many activists consider a strategic decision that enables the state to deprive them of the international rights and protections afforded to refugees. Obtaining documentation for legal residency is difficult, and many have stayed in the country illegally. Some respondents noted that refugees who have registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees are in a somewhat better condition, although commenting that many refugees often express disappointment with the meager benefits provided by the agency. Recent state deportation campaigns have left them particularly vulnerable,²⁵ often regardless of whether they have documentation.

“Even though Syrian refugees are victims of political scapegoating and deportation campaigns, the government does not want them all to leave. They need them to get aid from foreign countries, and to do jobs that the Lebanese will not do.” (KI)

The key challenges reported included 1) an inability to secure safe and dignified shelter (high rents for small plots in informal tented settlements, financial or sexual exploitation with the threat of arbitrary eviction by landlords or camp authorities, overcrowded or dilapidated living spaces, lack of privacy, and winterization concerns); 2) limited opportunities, low wages and long working hours, with illegal contracts that deprive them of potential protections afforded by the labor law; and 3) challenges accessing education, including bullying at schools due to racism.

KIs also stated that refugee response funding has been siphoned off between the government and NGOs, with only a small portion reaching intended beneficiaries. Still, many Lebanese think refugees are prioritized for assistance at the expense of local residents. This belief fuels anti-refugee sentiment at a time where the economic crisis has

²⁵ Al Jazeera, May 2023. “State of Terror Hangs over Syrians in Lebanon amid deportations.” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/3/state-of-terror-hangs-over-syrians-in-lebanon-amid-deportations>

left 80 percent of Lebanese in poverty and 90 percent of Syrian refugees unable to cover their basic needs.²⁶ In addition to the direct mismanagement of funding, a critical area of concern is the claim that subsidized commodities such as fuel and flour are being smuggled to Syria instead of being sold on the Lebanese market.

“Syrians as individuals are the weaker link. We are angry at them because of the pressure the country is under, but our anger is misplaced. We should be angry at the government for allowing such chaos to take over the country. Look at Jordan for example, the situation is much more organized. The lack of ability to coordinate the refugee response is yet another manifestation of corruption.” (KI)

A study by ABAAD²⁷ found that exploitation, including sexual, was widespread among some NGO distribution and service delivery staff. KIs and community members reported corrupt and fraudulent practices including registering people on beneficiary lists in return for sexual favors or relationships (generally women and girls), services (mostly men), portions of received assistance, commissions, or bribes. Refusal to engage could result in deregistration, even of eligible beneficiaries.

Shelter rehabilitation projects were reported as *“hotbeds for corruption”* where NGO staff sometimes colluded with landlords for financial gain, threatening refugees with eviction if they complained about the insufficient or substandard restorations.

Reporting mechanisms were deemed weak or absent. Some community members expressed mistrust in established systems, and a few KIs revealed that NGOs, especially smaller ones, tended to cover up reported incidents to avoid being blacklisted by donors and to continue receiving funding.

Since 2011, the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon and the resulting additional pressure on the country’s struggling infrastructure, increased competition, and economic issues have made them targets of racism, scapegoating, exploitation, and corruption. However, each population group faces its own challenges. For example, while men’s mobility is limited and they may experience deportation or assault, women are subjected to intimate partner violence, sexual harassment within collective sheltering settings, sexual exploitation, and mistreatment by service providers that increases their distrust.

Palestine refugees from Lebanon experience ongoing issues, such as the lack of legal status and recognition, employment restrictions, high poverty, and poor living conditions. Many Palestinian families have lived in Lebanon for five generations without being granted Lebanese citizenship,²⁸ depriving them of legal protection and social integration. Their classification as foreigners, refugees, and stateless people hinders their ability to access the most basic rights and services.

Employment is extremely restrictive for Palestine refugees from Lebanon. They are barred from professions organized by syndicates (such as law, medicine, engineering, and teaching), holding managerial positions, or working in the public sector. Often, their prospects in the labor market are limited to jobs in construction, administrative roles, and small crafts. One KI said that these restrictions open the door to rampant corruption and exploitation. *“I know of numerous cases of employers – including traders and some NGOs – who will hire a Palestinian candidate. They tell them ‘Your salary is \$300, and \$100 of it is mine,’ and make them sign that they are receiving the full amount. If they complain or report these instances, they are fired. People are forced to agree to these conditions*

²⁶ European Commission, March 2023. “Lebanon: €60 million in humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable.” https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/lebanon-eu60-million-humanitarian-aid-most-vulnerable-2023-03-30_en

²⁷ ABAAD, 2022. “Norms and Reform: Social, Economic, and Public Health Drivers of GBV among Syrian Refugees.” <https://www.abaadmena.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Norms-and-Reform-GBV-among-Syrian-Refugees.pdf?x17986>

²⁸ Palestinian women who marry Lebanese men can acquire Lebanese citizenship, but Palestinian men who marry Lebanese women (as well as their children) are not entitled to the Lebanese nationality.

because it is difficult to secure jobs and they need the money.” The KI said other practices include withholding “social security contributions” despite the fact that Palestine refugees do not benefit from social security or state pensions. According to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), denial of the right to work or own property leaves them unable to generate or accumulate wealth through ownership and inheritance. It also prevents them from being productive members of Lebanese society from whom the state could benefit.²⁹

The distribution of in-kind relief assistance is problematic, as it often involves the storage of goods prior to distribution. This creates opportunities for theft and misappropriation such as taking valuable items, altering quantities, and replacing high-quality food items with lower-quality ones. A KI identified cash cards as a much more effective and transparent modality because they minimize the risk of theft and corruption and give recipients the freedom to purchase items that best meet their needs.

Another significant concern is the lack of impartiality and heavy political influence on assistance allocation. Organizations and groups often prioritize their own members and supporters over others in need, disregarding eligibility criteria and denying assistance to households that are not affiliated with a particular faction (those households might receive assistance *“on the rare occasions when non-partisan NGOs hold a distribution”*). This practice exacerbates poverty as well as social and political divisions.

Living conditions in refugee camps are dire, particularly during the winter months when substandard housing structures are vulnerable to damage from rain and flooding. Densely packed and low-hanging electrical wires pose significant risks of electrocution, with numerous fatalities resulting from this combination of environmental factors and inadequate infrastructure.

“The women in one camp went out to protest at UNRWA to demand milk and diapers for children with disabilities. Not long afterwards, an individual started a small project to distribute milk, and asked us for a list of people who needed it. However, he treated people in a humiliating way, was extremely selective with who he helped, and made assistance contingent to the recipients praising him on Facebook. We later found out that a philanthropist had heard about the protest and had given a large sum for the milk to be distributed through this man. His treatment was inexcusable, and the money was not even from him.” (KI)

Within refugee camps, the operation of shops is controlled by people with strong connections or affiliations to influential figures (*“It is fully dependent on wasta, you cannot get a single square meter otherwise”*). This control enables shopkeepers to engage in exploitative practices including arbitrarily inflating prices and selling expired food and medication. Those who voice concerns about quality and safety or call for investigations are subjected to pervasive threats of violence or death.

While these issues affect all Palestine refugees, a KI noted that *“everything gets infinitely worse”* for persons with disabilities. They often lack access to specialized services and support, as concerned stakeholders and humanitarian actors have no dedicated departments or mandates to address their needs. Even when they receive assistance or certain benefits, their caregivers often monopolize those resources. They also cannot find work, as employers are skeptical of their abilities. All these factors perpetuate dependence and reinforce the power dynamics within families, limiting the agency of those with disabilities.

Similarly, older persons in camps are marginalized, especially if they live alone. The lack of social support systems and adequate care leaves them vulnerable to neglect, isolation, inability to afford their most basic needs, and consequently subject to exploitation.

²⁹ UNRWA, July 2023. “Where We Work – Lebanon.” <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

Migrants

Migrant workers³⁰ are recruited through employment agencies and can come to Lebanon only under *kafala*, “a system of slavery enabled by the law.” Subjugation of migrant workers begins on their arrival at the airport, where they often face mistreatment until they are released to their employers. Generally, sponsors take their passports immediately. Often, they are unable to contact their families and are expected to work around the clock with little or no rest in what one KI called “a glorified broom closet of a room.”

Torture, sexual harassment, and rape are not rare, especially against young female domestic workers. The Anti-Racism Movement reports that at least 60 migrant domestic workers die annually, an average of more than one death per week.³¹ These cases are rarely investigated officially, and if they are, reports are not made public. The few reports that activists have obtained identified a glaring “*lack of seriousness*” in how the investigations were conducted. For example, reports often list the wrong nationality and generally rule deaths as suicides, even if a victim was found with a bullet in her back. “*However, that is not to say that there are no suicides,*” a KI remarked, “*because the conditions they endure in many households would drive anyone insane.*” Still, due to the lack of attention and concern displayed in investigations, she continued, “*we will never know the ratio of suicide to non-suicide.*”

“*There is a thriving corruption network between the authorities and the offices responsible for recruiting migrant workers. And naturally, the families that accept to get into such contractual relationships are accomplices to the abuse and corruption.*” (KI)

Many workers escape from their employers’ households, often without their official documents, which they cannot access. Some have died in the attempt, and those who manage to escape may not make it to safety: A number are unable to leave the country or do not wish to. Instead, they work on the black market without legal status, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation or risks to their safety. Others are detained and “*have to pay their way out.*” Interestingly, some “*actually pay their way into detention [bribing officers to arrest and deport them] because that is the only way for them to get back home.*”

“*Everyone – from the most junior officers to agencies to employers/sponsors – now knows how the system stands against migrants, and how anyone can abuse them without repercussions. Anyone – including civilians – can stop them on the road and threaten them with the trauma of detention while demanding they hand over their money, and they do. There is no sparsity of evildoers in this place. Legal proceedings are so corrupt; all you need is to have one contact in the judicial system to erase any case that may have been filed against you by domestic migrants or a rights group supporting them.*” (KI)

Many migrant workers never receive their wages. This was an issue even prior to the economic crisis, and it has worsened now that many Lebanese are unable to secure their own basic needs. Even with support from migrant rights groups, workers can at best recover only a fraction of what they are owed.

One KI said, “*There is no justice unless they manage to reach an NGO who takes up their case. If they go to a police station to file a report, they will likely face racism or be questioned (‘Where is your passport?’ ‘Have you stolen anything?’) rather than assisted.*” However, another KI whose work centers around migrant rights pointed out that justice is usually unattainable. “*While migrant domestic workers may stand a chance of getting some of their rights with NGO backing, even then it is not a given.*”

³⁰ Migrant workers in Lebanon are both female and male, although most migrant domestic workers are female.

³¹ Anti-Racism Movement, September 2023. “Migrant Deaths in Lebanon: Concealed Causes.” <https://armlebanon.org/news-report-september-2023/>

“Migrant-led groups have such limited resources, and face extremely high risks merely by existing. There is extremely slow but steady progress; what we have been able to do is a drop in the ocean of what needs to be done. In an ideal world and situation, the kafala system would have been abolished by now.” (KI)

At its height, the effects of the economic crisis were compounded by COVID-19 and the Beirut Port Blast. Numerous migrant workers experienced financial hardship, homelessness, abuse, and other indignities. During lockdowns, even those who could have travelled to their home countries were stranded, with some having to live in makeshift tents or on the street.³²

With regard to COVID-19 vaccination, Human Rights Watch³³ noted that *“despite the government’s promises of an equitable program, the effort has been tainted by political interference and a lack of information,”* which *“risks leaving behind marginalized communities including refugees and migrant workers,”* who comprise one-third of Lebanon’s population.

LGBTQI+ People

Note: Feedback from a small number of respondents (independent activists and NGO representatives) reflected a deep-rooted misunderstanding of LGBTQI+ people. While their overall feedback did call for rights-based approaches, they also made comments that were unintentionally homophobic. Furthermore, one respondent pointedly declined to provide feedback.

As a marginalized community with overlapping vulnerabilities, LGBTQI+ people were reported to experience disproportional corruption and discrimination. In contrast to other groups, in which women tend to face more vulnerabilities, men from this community - especially those who are non-conforming in their gender expression - were reportedly much more likely to experience discrimination, violence, injustice, and corruption than women.

“Studies we conducted have found that gay men feel much more personally targeted than their female counterparts. This is absolutely the result of ideologies deeply rooted in patriarchy. Lesbian women, on the other hand, are fetishized – “they are just girls” – so they do not experience much homophobia because they slip through the cracks.” (KI)

One KI commented that some individuals do not have clear sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) expression, *“but those who do will face bullying, attacks on the road, and be placed in tough positions at public departments and in the health sector.”* She added that healthcare personnel often have the preconceived notion that these people have HIV and treat them according to that misconception.

KIs working on LGBTQI+ rights said that, even within this category, transgender individuals, *“who often do not even have the option of keeping their identities a secret,”* disproportionately experienced abuse and discrimination; they could not benefit from public education, and most could not secure employment. Many must turn to sex work to survive – a great safety risk. Other challenges they face include completing official paperwork. For example, while some can renew their passports with no issues, in some cases – especially if the applicant’s appearance differs from the sex listed on their documentation – they may face mistreatment or bullying, or may have to resort to bribery to complete the transaction.

The absence of social security benefits poses another challenge, since this community would benefit significantly from them. One KI stressed the importance of government support, recalling incidents at the height of anti-gay sentiment in the United States in the 1980s. He explained that, although LGBTQI+ people were considered *“sick”*

³² UN News, 2020. “Photo Story: Migrant Workers ‘destitute’ in Beirut.” <https://news.un.org/en/gallery/1128807>

³³ HRW, 2021. “Lebanon: Refugees, Migrants Left Behind in Vaccine Rollout.” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/06/lebanon-refugees-migrants-left-behind-vaccine-rollout>

and “afflicted with HIV because of the wrath of God,” most ACT UP³⁴ activists who could not secure employment received welfare or disability payments from the government. He added, “This government support allowed them to continue fighting for their rights and make substantive change through lobbying concerned stakeholders. In Lebanon, what activist can say that? They cannot hold good jobs because almost nobody will employ them, they cannot go to school because of discrimination.”

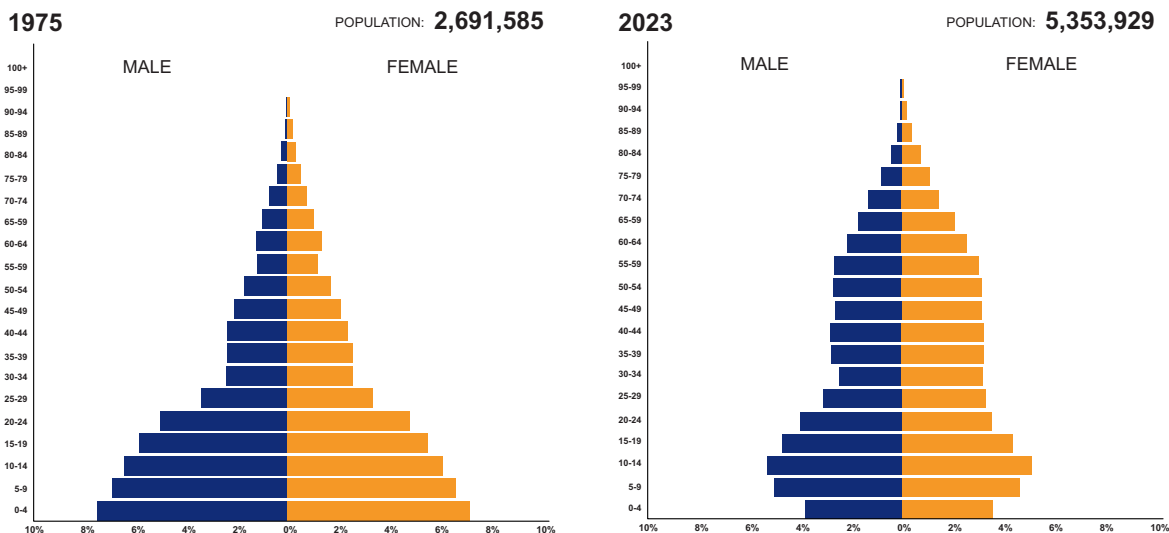
In addition to inadequate access to benefits and employment, as well as stigmatization, members of the LGBTQI+ community are subjected to hate speech and scapegoating from public and social leaders – sometimes in an effort to deflect public discourse from government failures.

“Recently, the government decided that one of the avenues to deepen and continue their corruption with impunity is to scapegoat the LGBTQI+ community by accusing them of spreading deviancy and moral corruption. This was a strategy used to create a “great enemy” which it is fighting against. Sadly, it worked quite well and diverted attention from other major socio-economic issues in the country. For a few months, LGBTQI+ debate dominated the discourse in the country, right up until the war in Gaza broke out and shifted attention to Palestine.” (KI)

Older Persons

An analysis of Lebanon’s population pyramid³⁵ from the start of the Civil War in 1975 until 2023 shows a significant transition from a youthful, expansive population to an aging, constrictive one (see *Figure 3*). This shift is attributable to factors including war, economic development and collapse, changing social norms, and decreased fertility. Ministry of Social Affairs figures³⁶ reveal that people over age 65 represent more than 11 percent of Lebanon’s current population – the highest percentage in the Arab region. The ministry also estimates that, by 2040, Lebanon will have more older people than children, especially due to “successive and increased migration waves of young adults seeking better work opportunities elsewhere, as well as counter-waves of return migration of workers post-retirement.”

Figure 3 - Lebanon Population Pyramid in 1975 and 2023



³⁴ In 1981, the New York Times published an article titled “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” about the disease that would later become known as AIDS. Six years later, amid one of the highest periods of anti-gay sentiment, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), an activist group that would lead the fight against AIDS by raising awareness and pressuring government, pharmaceutical companies, and the medical establishment, was formed. <https://actupny.com/actions/>

³⁵ Based on trends observed on <https://www.populationpyramid.net/>

³⁶ Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020. The National Strategy for Older Persons in Lebanon 2020–2030. https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/online_-_final_english_strategy_for_online_use_1.pdf

The aging of the Lebanese population will have a number of implications for the country. These include increased demand for healthcare and social security, both of which have buckled under the strains of the economic crisis and corruption, leaving people above the age of 65 without social security benefits or access to free healthcare. KIs mentioned that *“because of corruption, they must wait in line for hours, sometimes days, to obtain medication – if they can afford it. [...] Hospice care is available for older persons who can no longer afford to pay rent or whose children have emigrated, but most hospice care is sub-standard, and there have been reports of abuse against both women and men, as well as sexual assault, mostly against women.”*

After they retire, pensioners lack social security or the private insurance that their employers may have provided. Several KIs also observed that the collapse of the banking sector and the devaluation of Lebanese currency due to corruption means that people who have worked for decades are left *“without a single LBP to their name.”* One remarked, *“How many countless times have we all gotten into a taxi with a driver who was over 80? Should these people not be enjoying their retirement with decency at this age?”*

Few CSOs work with older populations, and a notable proportion of those who do tend to rely on individual donations as older population groups are rarely included on donors’ agendas.

In general, respondents took a dire view of the situation of older persons. Several KIs pointed out that, until the National Strategy for Older Persons’ social protection, pensions, and security goes into effect – after being on the table for years without being implemented – older people will continue to be at high risk.

Women

Women in Lebanon face challenges associated with pervasive corruption in their communities and the country at large. Depending on their locations (for example, rural versus urban) and the attitudes of their families, girls often do not have the same opportunities as their brothers for education and building social networks. Corruption in the education system may affect women’s opportunities for advancement, with their admission to schools or universities sometimes being denied based on their gender or family background.

The combination of social norms and discriminatory practices can limit employment opportunities for women. For example, female FGD participants from the North and the Bekaa noted that employers often prefer to hire young, unmarried women on the assumption that a married woman will prioritize her household responsibilities over her work. A few said potential employers had stated that job offers were contingent on their being unmarried, and the few married candidates were told they should not become pregnant. Women may also face demands for bribes or favors to secure employment or promotions, or experience sexual harassment or rape in the workplace. One KI commented that these experiences can discourage women from seeking employment or *“affect their husbands’ willingness to allow them to work.”*

“Women face corruption everywhere: in employment, public transactions, legal rights, and anything in between. Now they are changing, they are learning more, they have more presence, but this is still not enough. More awareness-raising on rights is needed, because many still are unaware of what rights are afforded to them and how they can benefit from them despite the persisting pressures and injustice.” (KI)

Existing legislation does not afford women necessary rights and protections, even in the face of violence, *“because those deciding on which laws to pass are men, and their decisions are rooted in religious and patriarchal thought.”*

“Men – especially those in power – will always defend each other and their interests as men. They might be in opposing political parties and agree on nothing, but when the time comes to vote on personal status laws, they will all act in solidarity to deny women’s rights.” (KI)

Custody laws deprive Lebanese women of their children, with some sectarian personal status laws stipulating that men should be granted legal custody of their children as young as two years old, depending on the husband’s sect (see Figure 4). One KI said, “*this is all the worse if the husband has money or a wasta.*” She added, “*My mother worked three jobs and my dad had no occupation besides beating her. He took everything from her and left nothing in her name. He always threatened that he would take away the kids. And indeed, many men would prefer to take their children and throw them in the street rather than allow their wives to keep them.*”

Figure 4 – Paternal Custody Age, per Lebanese Sectarian Personal Status Laws

Paternal custody age, by gender of the child ³⁷		
Confession ³⁸	Girls	Boys
Catholic ³⁹	2 years	2 years
Shiite	7 years	2 years
Armenian Orthodox	9 years	7 years
Assyrian Eastern Orthodox		
Syriac Orthodox	12 years	12 years
Evangelical		
Sunni	13 years	11 years
Coptic Orthodox	14 years	12 years
Druze	15 years	14 years
Greek Orthodox		
Roman Orthodox		

The current system forces women to endure violence and mistreatment to avoid losing their children – an indication of the importance of reforming custody laws. At the same time, efforts should include raising awareness among families and religious leaders, who tend to tell women to remain at home with their husbands regardless of the conditions in the household.

Women’s representation in political decision-making has always been low. In fact, when the Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs was established in 2016, the minister appointed to lead was a man. The ministry was abolished in 2019 and incorporated into the Ministry of Social Affairs due to budget cuts. As of 2022, women’s representation in Parliament stands at just 6.25 percent, well below the global average of 26.5 percent.⁴⁰ In 1985, women’s rights activist Laure Moghaizel⁴¹ pointed out that “*women who enter parliament do so wearing black,*” since they always run for or are appointed to a seat vacated by a deceased father or spouse. Several KIs noted in 2023 that this was still the case. Calls for a gender quota in the electoral system have been made for years, but the current electoral law, adopted in 2017, lacks any provisions that reserve or mandate a certain percentage of seats for women.

One KI remarked, “*We have always pushed for a gender quota because the mentality remains that women should be at home, and that there is no space for them in politics or the public sphere.*” Another KI expressed opposition to a gender quota “*because it is more important to have people in Parliament on the basis of their skills rather than their gender.*”

³⁷ Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, April 2019. “Ja’fari Courts Deprive Lebanese Divorced of Children.” <https://arij.net/motherhood-denied/>

³⁸ Judges may override the laws (including the ages listed in Figure 4) in favor of either parent if they consider doing so to be “in the child’s best interest.”

³⁹ The Maronite, Roman, Armenian, Syriac, Chaldean, and Latin confessions are subject to a single Catholic personal status law.

⁴⁰ UN Women, 2023. “Women in politics: 2023.” <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023>

⁴¹ Al-Raida, Lebanese American University, 2005. “The Implementation of a Women’s Quota System in Lebanese Legislation.” <https://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/iwsaw/raida111-112/EN/p048-089.pdf>

Men

In general, KIs did not believe men are as affected by corruption as other groups. Indeed, one KI remarked that men should not have been considered under this research “as they are not an underdog.” There was consensus that, as residents of Lebanon, men are impacted by corruption – but not *because* they are men. Some respondents noted that the country is largely controlled by men; as the main decision-makers, they are the instigators of most of the corruption in the country. One said that while men are not as affected by corruption as women, there have been numerous instances of men committing suicide because they have been unable to fulfill their roles as breadwinners for their families as a result of the economic crisis. One respondent also noted the role of identity: While “men” cannot be differentiated as an identity group on its own, factors such as SOGIESC, socio-economic status, religion, and others play an important role in how they experience corruption.

Impacts of Corruption on Civic Participation

“The crisis has inevitably strengthened the very same political actors who had caused it. In a nutshell, we are now even more reliant on the corrupt political class for our basic rights, survival, and court mediation. Before, people relied on political leaders to get them a job or resolve an issue. Now they rely on them for the most basic needs. For food. For access to healthcare. To shelter. And this is what makes it all so much scarier.” (KI)

The discussion below highlights community members’ perceptions of the positive and negative effects of corruption on participation in public life.

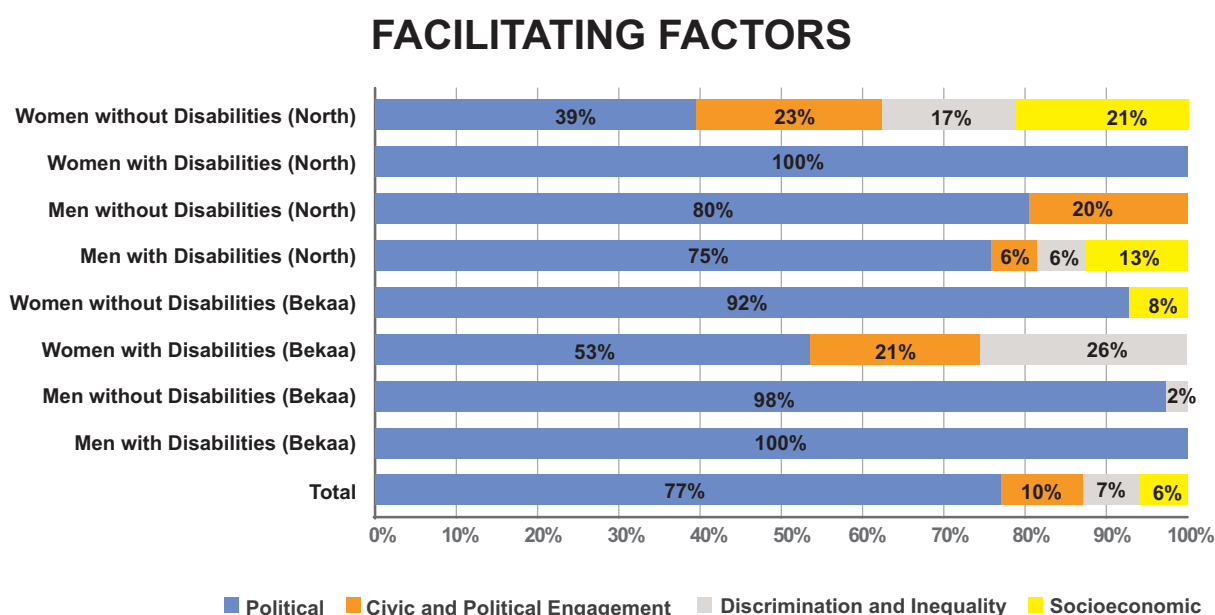
FGD participants in the Bekaa and the North took part in an interactive exercise in which they were randomly divided into groups. Each group brainstormed key facilitating and hindering factors – ways that corruption and its impacts may improve or pose obstacles to their participation in public life. Each group listed their ideas and appointed a group spokesperson to present them. Facilitators combined similar facilitating and hindering factors and asked participants to vote on the five factors they felt were the most critical in each category. Participants had the option to divide their votes among five factors or use two to five of their votes on the same factor, as they saw fit.

On the whole, although participants agreed that corruption facilitated certain aspects of public life, their responses largely leaned toward affirming the negative implications of corruption on residents’ ability to participate in civic life.

Corruption as a Facilitating Factor for Participation in Public Life

FGD participants selected political corruption and misconduct (77 percent) as the most common facilitating factors. Other factors they selected were corrupt civic and political engagement (10 percent), discrimination and inequality (7 percent), and socioeconomic issues (6 percent). *Figure 5* is a breakdown of opinions of facilitating factors per cohort.

Figure 5 – Types of Corruption Facilitating Public Participation



Political corruption and misconduct was primarily reported as facilitating access to jobs (including higher or well-paid positions, especially in the public sector) for people who could benefit from *wasta*, clientelism, and nepotism. This behavior includes barring qualified candidates from obtaining employment on merit by prioritizing party members, influential constituents, relatives of the ruling class, or individuals who could gain access through bribes. Forgery of credentials and documentation, facilitated by politicians, was a recurring topic in both locations; some respondents cited an example of a pharmacist with a forged degree who has been working in their community for over 20 years. Misuse of power and authority also enables individuals who are well-connected or able to pay bribes to complete governmental transactions rapidly or to secure protection and immunity when they might otherwise face persecution for illegal activities.

“Because we had a close relationship with the head of the municipality, after my husband died, he used his influence to make sure I did not have to pay any bills or fees for over 1.5 years. Even after that, he kept making sure that I got significant discounts when I had to pay.” (Women without disabilities FGD participant, North)

Corrupt civic and political engagement: Membership in a political party or connections to influential figures or religious leaders give individuals *“strength,”* influence, or benefits in society. Some participants believed being part of a CSO can facilitate certain benefits because members or staff may be able to misuse organizational resources or funds to their advantage and/or to access or undeservingly allocate assistance to friends and family at the expense of vulnerable individuals or households. Some NGO employees were reported to exploit their positions to barter assistance for kickbacks, including sexual favors or relationships with individuals from affected populations, usually women.

“The electricity in my home stopped working. Usually when this happens to households in my community, despite ample efforts, nobody responds or helps. I just called the electricity company and pretended I was an army general. They came and fixed it for me the next day.” (Men with disabilities FGD participant, Bekaa)

Discrimination and inequality: Respondents observed that discrimination, oppression, and sectarianism confer advantages for some people over others “when in the right setting which creates favorable conditions for corruption.” Key manifestations of discrimination – with positive or negative effects – according to community members and KIs with disabilities included:

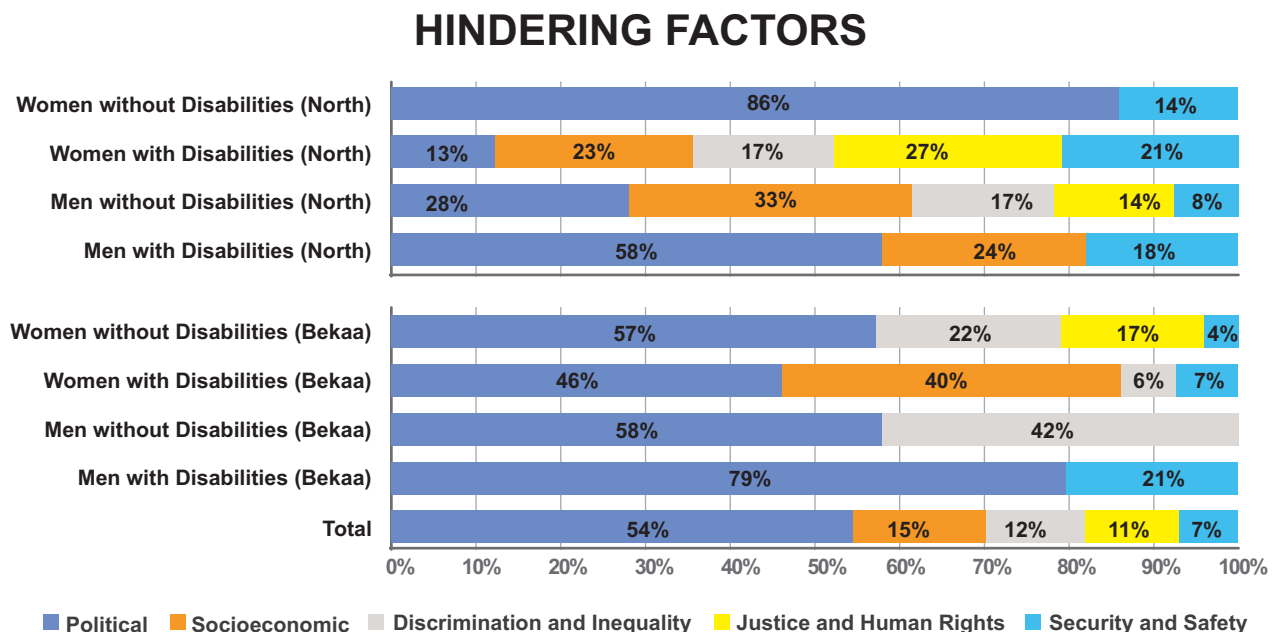
- *No equal opportunity employment.* Respondents cited discriminatory behavior including inappropriate or irrelevant interview questions and refusal to hire due to disability regardless of an applicant’s merit and qualifications. Some noted that, when persons with disabilities are hired, they are often “under the microscope.” In contrast, employees without disabilities might sometimes do only one-third of the work they did without issue. In this way, not having a disability would work in one’s favor.
- *Different treatment of people with visible disabilities.* While the law confers certain benefits to persons with disabilities, compliance is uncommon, and many respondents observed occasional preferential treatment “not because we have rights as persons with disabilities, but mostly out of pity.”

Socio-economic issues: Individuals experiencing economic hardship – especially due to the ongoing economic crisis – are more likely to engage in corrupt acts to secure a decent life and improve their situations and living conditions. This is especially so if the corrupt behavior incurs financial incentives. Indeed, politicians may prey on vulnerable groups to further their interests through illicit enrichment, taking over property at minimal prices, providing temporary assistance during election periods as a vote-buying strategy, and administrative corruption.

Corruption as a Hindering Factor for Participation in Public Life

As with facilitating factors, respondents considered political corruption relatively common (54 percent). Other responses were divided among socioeconomic issues (15 percent), discrimination and inequality (12 percent), injustice and human rights transgressions (11 percent), and lack of security and safety (7 percent) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 - Types of Corruption Hindering Public Participation



Political corruption and misconduct has the most severe impacts on the lives and participation of all residents, as it has been *“festering for decades, and has become unstoppable.”* Community members described the misuse of power to engage in illicit acts, including theft of public (and even private) funds; not providing required services and leaving the burden to NGOs; and engaging in recurring political inheritance, unfair elections, and political bias. These acts all limit citizens’ ability to enjoy a wide range of rights, including political participation. Furthermore, administrative corruption and *“the fact that bribery is a given”* restricts access to opportunities and services, especially for people who are unable to afford to pay bribes. But men from Tripoli pointed out that paying bribes is not the only problem: Public sector employees who willingly accept bribes may need to comply with requests that conflict with their beliefs. In other words, taking bribes can affect their lives and freedom of choice. However, many respondents from the different groups noted that low incomes in the public sector make accepting bribes a necessity.

“Corruption has become such a normalized part of life, that if you refuse to participate in corrupt acts like bribery, you become the strange one.” (Men with disabilities FGD participant, Bekaa)

Discrimination and inequality - on the basis of sex, ability, socio-economic status, religion, or background - across all public and private sectors of society, including employment, education, healthcare, and the judicial system, hinder the ability to participate fully in public life. Further, they create opportunities for corrupt practices to flourish. The lack of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities compounds this issue by preventing them from engaging fully in civic and political processes (for example, inability to access polling stations due to the lack of appropriately equipped public transportation and polling stations). A further obstacle to public participation is lack of access to information. Without adequate information about candidates and political issues, individuals cannot make informed decisions and engage meaningfully in democratic processes. The absence of sign language interpretation or captioning in media broadcasts further excludes people with disabilities from obtaining essential information, limiting their understanding of current events and ability to navigate society safely and effectively.

Socio-economic issues: The collapse of Lebanon’s social and economic systems, lack of a healthy labor market, brain drain, increasing illiteracy, poverty, and citizens’ inability to cover basic needs create widespread hardships and foster apathy regarding participation in public affairs. Resulting disillusionment is exacerbated by the monopolization or theft of assistance such as food or medications intended for vulnerable groups. Participants in different groups expressed frustration at learning that aid provided by international donors and Lebanese expatriates, especially after the Port Blast, had been *“left in warehouses to rot”* or appeared on supermarket shelves, clearly marked as assistance that was *“not for sale.”* Tax evasion, common among the rich and poor alike, contributes to the government’s bankruptcy and ineffectiveness. The result is a vicious circle: Community members do not believe they should pay taxes *“which are unjustified as the state provides nothing in return.”* Persons with disabilities emphasized this point of view, noting that they received even less consideration than those without disabilities (no tax exemptions, welfare or assistance, specialized medical services, reasonable accommodations in public transport, or enforcement of legal protections, especially through Law 220/2000).

Security and safety issues: Security may be lacking due to government mismanagement, limited or unavailable funding, favoritism, and acceptance of bribes to avoid prosecution –including in the face of terrorism, intimidation, oppression, abduction, wielding illegal weaponry, and other forms of violence. All these factors play strong roles in repressing participation in public life. The challenges are even greater among certain population groups, such as refugees, migrants, and some transgender people, as their basic right to freedom of mobility is restricted.

Lack of justice and human rights: Impunity for criminal activity, the inability to build a state that is protected by the judiciary and the Constitution, and lack of enforcement of separation of powers between the judiciary and the political class contribute to an environment of fear and discourage civic participation. Weak personal status laws, failure to implement or enforce legislation (especially law 220/2000), and not providing the necessary protections for marginalized populations who are victimized by Lebanese society significantly hinders their ability to participate in public life and live with dignity and freedom.

Recommendations by Stakeholder Group

Civil Society Organizations and Advocacy Groups

Build coalitions and cross-sectoral partnerships:

CSOs that work with different population groups should form intersectional alliances and collaborate on anti-corruption initiatives. The partners can pool resources, share expertise, and amplify their collective voices. IFES documented this proven good practice following the creation of the *Path Coalition* under the IIR project in Lebanon, where observations, member feedback, and evaluations demonstrated the importance of collaboration and experience-sharing between organizations working with different target populations: Coalition members reported that they had learned new information about different identities and population groups, and as a result of the coalition's network-building, some collaborated with new CSO partners to strengthen the implementation of projects beyond the scope of the IIR project.

Document and expose corruption:

To the extent that it is safe to do so, CSOs should engage in research, documentation, and public reporting of corruption cases that affect marginalized communities. This evidence-based approach can help raise awareness, build public pressure, and inform policy decisions.

Work with the media:

Advocate for transparency in media ownership and funding to identify potential conflicts of interest. At the national level, implement media literacy programs to provide the public with the skills and awareness to critically evaluate news sources and recognize biased reporting. At the implementation level, work with the media to increase societal awareness around target populations and the impacts of corruption.

Promote transparency and accountability:

Advocate for transparency in government processes including procurement, budgeting, and decision-making. While some CSOs and advocacy groups already work to make such processes more publicly accessible, they should also support mechanisms for citizen engagement and oversight to hold officials accountable.

Support legal and policy reforms:

Advocate with legislators and policymakers to develop and implement laws and policies that engage groups with intersectional identities, protect their rights, and address the root causes of corruption that hinder access to those rights. This may include enhancing oversight mechanisms and promoting equal access to justice and information.

Empower individuals and communities:

To address the discrimination and neglect that marginalized communities often face, CSOs should educate and train members of those communities on their rights, access to justice, and strategies for combating corruption. Further, they should raise awareness among communities and households on the rights of those groups. Community-level campaigns can be led by rights-holders; for example, OPDs could initiate a public campaign that places persons with disabilities at the forefront. This would normalize their roles as active members of society, foster integration, and demonstrate that they need not be treated differently. At the household level, target the caregivers of persons with disabilities, especially girls.

Capitalize on digital tools and social media:

Leverage digital technologies and media platforms to disseminate information, mobilize support, and amplify anti-corruption efforts among wider audiences. Ensure digital tools are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Engage with international organizations and networks:

CSOs and advocacy groups should collaborate with international organizations to share knowledge, learn from comparable experiences and best practices in other countries, and gain access to resources and support.

Recognize and include people with intersectional identities:

CSOs should understand and address the challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities, such as persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants, LGBTQI+ individuals, older and younger persons, women, and individuals from rural communities, who often face compounded forms of marginalization and discrimination. Ensure that programming accounts for the needs of people with intersectional identities across different aspects of activity design and implementation. Doing so will both expand reach and uptake and ensure a truly beneficiary-centered and rights-based approach to programming.

Emphasize long-term, sustainable strategies:

Rather than conducting short-term campaigns, CSOs should ensure that anti-corruption efforts reflect long-term, sustainable strategies that address the underlying causes of corruption and promote systemic change. As feasible at the program level, projects and activities should be inclusive of different population groups. Another best practice is to actively promote coordination and collaboration among grantees, especially those from different identity-based CSOs.

Media and Journalists

Foster thorough and unbiased reporting:

Media outlets should develop and enforce editorial guidelines in line with international standards that clearly address bias and misrepresentation, responsible reporting, and fact-checking. Journalists should conduct in-depth investigations into corruption cases, particularly those that disproportionately affect individuals with intersectional identities. They should base reporting on credible evidence and present it in a balanced and objective manner.

Meaningfully engage people with intersectional identities in reporting and as staff:

The media and journalists should recognize that corruption often overlaps with different forms of discrimination related, for example, to gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and residence status. An intersectional approach is crucial to understanding the unique experiences of marginalized communities. The media can engage specialized local or international NGOs that can provide capacity-building and guidance on concepts of intersectionality. This can be followed by actively engaging with different population groups to 1) understand their experiences with corruption and the specific challenges they face, and 2) accurately report on their perspectives. Media outlets should also proactively recruit more diverse staff, including those who identify with multiple marginalized groups.

Enhance inclusivity and accessibility in reporting:

The media should avoid stereotypes, discrimination, and sensationalism, and should maintain journalistic integrity by using inclusive language and realistic imagery that respects all communities. Doing so can contribute to a more equitable media landscape that represents Lebanon's diversity. Television and online media outlets should ensure that their content is accessible to persons with disabilities. Possible actions can include making sign language interpretation or subtitling available (at a minimum, during news segments) and ensuring websites have accessible features and easy-to-read content.

Promote transparency and accountability:

Media organizations should disclose their funding sources and ownership structures to build trust with audiences. At the national level, they should take a watchdog role, scrutinizing the actions of Lebanon's ruling class, Central Bank, and commercial banks, and holding officials accountable. This includes exposing conflicts of interest and questionable decisions, and demanding transparency in public procurement and contracting.

Support and protect whistleblowing:

Media organizations should establish confidential reporting channels and safeguards for whistleblowers (both within the organization and externally) to encourage individuals who have information about corruption to divulge it without fear of reprisal. This is especially important to foster a culture of accountability, particularly in light of Lebanon's current shrinking space.

Partner with CSOs:

The media should establish partnerships with CSOs and advocacy groups, to mutual benefit. For example, the media can support CSOs that counter corruption to improve the living conditions of marginalized groups by amplifying and disseminating their campaigns and awareness messaging. CSOs can support media personnel through training and sensitization and by providing access to community members with intersectional identities (applying Do No Harm principles) who consent to participate in interviews or town hall meetings to share their experiences. Those experiences can then be integrated into media narratives that aim to reduce stigma and discrimination. Media and civil society organizations can also collaborate to promote rights-based approaches, apply pressure on government officials, and develop joint strategies to fight corruption.

Government Actors

Implement the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC):

Lebanon's accession to the UNCAC in 2009 was a commitment to fighting corruption, but effective implementation of the convention remains a challenge. To fully realize its potential, Lebanon must strengthen anti-corruption legislation, establish robust enforcement mechanisms, promote public awareness and engagement, enhance transparency and accountability, and bolster its international cooperation to combat corruption effectively.

Enhance the independence and resources of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC):

The Government of Lebanon should provide the NACC with adequate funding, access to capacity building opportunities, authority, and independence to conduct thorough investigations and prosecute corrupt officials.

Improve transparency and accountability in government procurement and contracting:

The government should implement transparent bidding processes for public contracts and ensure strict adherence to current procurement laws and regulations. The government should enforce the responsiveness of the various public departments to official requests for information in accordance with the public procurement law and impose appropriate penalties.

Strengthen financial controls and auditing:

The government should implement stricter financial controls and audit procedures to monitor spending and prevent embezzlement. Data about budgets and public spending should be transparent and publicly accessible, and citizens should be encouraged to participate meaningfully in financial consultation processes.

Enhance access to education, healthcare, and social services:

The government should strengthen the functionality, operations, resources, and infrastructure of essential services. It should ensure equal access to those services for all citizens, regardless of their background or identity.

Promote equal opportunities in employment and business:

The government should penalize discriminatory practices in hiring and promote affirmative action policies to ensure marginalized groups have fair opportunities in the workforce. It should also apply the relevant components of Law 220/2000, which requires companies with a minimum of 30 employees to hire qualified candidates with disabilities and ensure the provision of reasonable accommodations.

Engage representatives of marginalized groups in the development of policy and legislation:

When developing new legislation, policies, and strategic plans, the government should involve experts from different population groups to provide varying perspectives for consideration. It is especially important to ensure that stakeholders represent the different regions of Lebanon, particularly in light of the diverse experiences and needs in major cities or rural areas outside of Beirut. Introducing transparency mechanisms will enable engaged representatives to follow up on how recommendations were used or why they were dismissed.

Strengthen CSOs and empower activists:

Support CSOs that advocate for the rights of marginalized groups and promote social justice by reducing restrictions on their operating capacity and facilitating their access to funding.

Support independent and alternative media; increase freedom of expression:

Revise legislation associated with the establishment of media outlets to make those processes less rigorous and encourage the development of alternative, independent media sources that can provide diverse perspectives. Engage civil society in revising the proposed media draft law, and consider their recommendations to encourage rather than quash free speech.

Donors

Prioritize projects that focus on intersectionality:

Donors should prioritize projects that explicitly address intersectional identities across their activities – particularly in work intended to counter the impacts of corruption. This means supporting organizations that strive to understand how corruption disproportionately affects these groups and develop strategies to address relevant issues and concerns in an inclusive manner.

Encourage sustainable cross-cutting interventions:

Understanding that CSOs regularly invite marginalized populations to participate in a training or an activity but neglect to follow up or build on those efforts, donors should encourage their grantees to take a long-term approach to service delivery, capacity building, and empowering individuals with intersectional identities.

Increase expenditure oversight and accountability:

Donors should increase oversight of the expenditure of allocated funds and strengthen the capacities of any oversight bodies. This includes implementing clear guidelines for the allocation and monitoring of funding and for regular audits and evaluations to ensure funds are used effectively, responsibly, and in a manner that prioritizes accountability to supported individuals and communities.



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