

Gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon

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Question

Provide a desk-based review of the factors influencing gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon focusing on achievements, trends, enabling and constraining factors¹.

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¹ This report explores **Gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon** and is the second report of a two-part query. The full list of queries is provided below:

1. *Provide a desk-based review of the factors influencing gender equality and women's empowerment in Jordan focusing on achievements, trends, enabling and constraining factors.*
2. *Provide a desk-based review of the factors influencing gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon focusing on achievements, trends, enabling and constraining factors.*

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1. Overview

Lebanon has made limited progress in promoting gender equality, empowering women, and opening the space for women to play their part in achieving sustainable development. What progress has been evidenced is linked to legal and constitutional reforms. For example, in 1953, Lebanon became one of the first countries in the Arab region to accord women equal rights to participate fully in politics. Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 and in the late 1990s, Lebanon adopted gender mainstreaming in the collection and analysis of gender statistics (IWSAW, YEAR). Compared to other Arab countries, the Lebanese legal system is considered fairly progressive and there are no legal restrictions limiting women in engaging in income-generating activities.

This rapid help desk review provides an overview of the academic, policy and practitioner literature that examines **gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon**. It is broadly accepted that despite many advantages and acquired rights, Lebanese women continue to face discrimination at numerous levels, keeping gender equality in Lebanon an elusive objective (USAID, 2012; World Bank, 2015). The weakness of the State is felt in the areas of civil affairs and personal status (especially in their relevance to women's civic rights, family matters and gender relations). Such affairs have been formally relegated to the religious authorities as part of a confessional system rooted in an acknowledgement of the representational rights of registered sects and their respective power over their subjects (USAID, 2012). The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (2016) assert that by keeping family matters within the jurisdictions of religious courts, the Constitution detaches itself from its role as a guarantor of equal rights and creates a buffer between the citizen and the State. Salmeh (2013) asserts that, inspired by religious discourse, this legal structure necessarily places women as second-class citizens, treating them as minors in decisions related to governing their own lives.

Gender Inequality in Lebanon is considered to be particularly stark. According to the Gender Gap index, Lebanon ranks third to last in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (ranked at 135), only Syria and Yemen have a worse gender gap ranking, 142 and 144 respectively (WEF, 2016: 228). Since 2010, Lebanon has seen a consistent decline in its global index rank and relative gender gap score primarily as a result of scores consistently close to zero in political empowerment (WEF, 2016).

Key findings include:

- The confessional system of governance, which has been captured by elites, alongside national and regional conflict dynamics constitute overarching constraints that have engendered deep structural inequalities and deficiencies, inhibited economic growth and inclusive development, and are at the core of Lebanon's current fragility and vulnerability to destabilising national and regional shocks (World Bank, 2015). These have also impeded progress in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment
- Lebanon's internal stability and political, social and economic dynamics have been directly affected by regional conflict dynamics. The influx of refugees (Palestinian, Syrian, Iraqi etc.) alongside the continuing Syrian conflict have fed into and exacerbated existing sectarian divisions. In such a fragile political, social, and economic context progress in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment has been constrained.
- Structural constraints that carry the seeds of discrimination and women's vulnerability are rooted in laws and regulations, sectarian dynamics, socio-cultural values, decision-

making structures, public policies and development strategies, ongoing conflict and security problems, and a rise in social conservatism. (USAID, 2012: 44).

- An economic system based on minimal taxation and commitment to free market has privileged the private sector according it much dominance over vital public services, including education. Accordingly, a significant gap exists in Lebanon in terms of educational achievements between public and private education, which is reducing equality of opportunity among children.

Table 1: Key indicators of Gender equality and women’s empowerment in Lebanon and Jordan

	Gender Gap Index Rank (2016)	Gender Inequality Index (2015)	HDI rank (2015)	Female seats in Parliament (%)	Female labour force participation rate (%)
Lebanon	135/144	83/159	76/188	3.1	23.5
Jordan	134/144	111/159	86/188	12	15

Source: UNDP (2016: 3); WEF (2016)

2. The Lebanese Context

The Republic of Lebanon is a high middle-income country with a population in 2013 of 4.5 million people. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is estimated at US\$ 17,390 in Purchasing Power Parity terms (World Bank, 2015). Lebanon is bordered by Syria to the North and East and Palestine to the South. The country is divided into six governorates or *Mohaafazaat* (Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Nabatieh, South Lebanon, the Bekaa, and North Lebanon). Lebanon benefits from significant human capital, a strategically-positioned geographic location, and an open social and economic environment supported by a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional commitment to civil rights and freedom (USAID, 2012).

The lack of official and updated data makes an analysis of the Lebanese socio-economic situation difficult. No national census has been conducted since 1932 due to political sensitivity over the size of religious communities, which is the basis of the political system (ETF, 2013).

Since gaining independence from France in 1943, Lebanon has experienced two civil wars (1958 and 1975-1990) between the various religious groups competing for power, military occupation by Syria (1976-2005), and Israeli military aggressions (1982 and 2006). In 2005 the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri triggered the Cedar Revolution (a series of demonstrations), which demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

Whilst conflict has prompted a more equitable distribution of power among competing factions, it has also had a lasting legacy on Lebanon’s infrastructure, service delivery, institutions, environment and employment (IWSAW, 2016). Lebanon’s political development since independence has been influenced primarily by its evolving confessional system. The countries ethno-religious diversity has required the accommodation of political (and often conflicting) claims of 18 officially recognised sects (USAID, 2012). This system, originally established to balance the competing interests of local religious communities, is increasingly seen as an impediment to more effective governance, resulting in a paralysis in decision-making and a hollowing out of the state (World Bank, 2015). According to USAID (2012), a power sharing

formula drawn along sectarian lines and rooted in traditional loyalties has restricted the development of a unified sense of citizenship and contributed to repeated cycles of violence². The confessional system has also proven extremely vulnerable to external influence, which has bred and exacerbated local conflict and violence. Weak and deteriorating governance has resulted in a poor delivery of public services.

Freedom House (2016) note that whilst Lebanon's troubled political system ensures representation for its many sectarian communities, it suppresses competition within each community and impedes the rise of cross-sectarian or secularist parties. Parliamentary elections have been repeatedly postponed amid partisan gridlock and security threats linked to the war in Syria. Lebanese citizens enjoy some civil liberties and media pluralism, but the rule of law is undermined by political interference and partisan militias, and the country has struggled to cope with an influx of refugees (Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi) who make up circa 25% of its population (World Bank, 2015: 6). In spite of its political instability, the country is notable for its high level of human development and its open economy as well as a large, educated and diversified diaspora (World Bank, 2015).

The Lebanese economy has grown at a moderate pace in recent years, but growth has been uneven due to frequent, and predominantly "political", shocks. Services and trade are the most important economic sectors with tourism and financial services driving the national economy. GDP grew on average by an estimated 4.4% from 1992 to 2014 but this performance obfuscates the impact of shocks (domestic, international, political and/or confessional). The conflict in neighbouring Syria, which, given the linkages between the two countries, is generating large and negative spill over effects in Lebanon (World Bank, 2015).

Moderate growth has translated into an inability to reduce widespread poverty and to generate inclusive growth, as job creation has been weak and of low quality. Poverty incidence has been elevated and broadly unchanged for the past 25 years (USAID, 2012). Since the end of the civil war, extreme poverty has been recorded at between 7.5-10%, while 28% of the population is considered poor using the upper poverty line (World Bank, 2015: 2). The distribution of poverty has also been unequal with poverty levels being highest in the north and south of the country, and in small, dense pockets in the suburbs of large towns. Unemployment rates are highest among the poor, with an estimate one third among of women unemployed in the South and Mount Lebanon governorates (Laithy et al, 2008: 13). Lack of quality jobs continues to push a large share of Lebanese to migrate, especially the educated youth (World Bank, 2015).

Further to this, the economic system based on minimal taxation and commitment to the free market has privileged the private sector, according it dominance over public services (including education and health). In addition to monetary poverty, the World Bank (2015) comments that sections of the population suffer from nonmonetary dimensions of poverty (e.g. lack of adequate levels of education, health care and access to basic infrastructure). Though Lebanon is an upper middle-income country, weak and deteriorating public institutions mean that the state is unable to deliver satisfactory quality public services. While more affluent citizens are able to compensate

² There are counter arguments to this that the alternative is war and that the issue in Lebanon is the corporate nature of the agreement with fixed percentages of positions, rather than a system that takes into account changes to the demographics. Michael Kerr argues such in 'Imposing Power-Sharing: Conflict and Coexistence in Northern Ireland and Lebanon'

by purchasing private goods and services (e.g. private schools, bottled water, and electricity generators etc.), the poor and lower middle class are unable to compensate fully for limited access to basic services, which adversely affects their living conditions and quality of life (World Bank, 2015).

Gender in Lebanon

As is identified in report one of this two-part query, the term “gender” is an often confusing concept in the region. It is mostly used interchangeably with women and women’s affairs. The Arabic translation of the term gender *al naw’a al ejtima’i* (‘the social type of men and women’) does not precisely reflect the conceptual meaning (UNDP, 2012: 11).

In 1953, Lebanon became one of the first countries in the Arab region to accord women equal rights to participate fully in politics. Despite this progressive step, women continue to be excluded from the Parliament until 1991 (with the exception of the six month tenure of Mirna Bustani in 1965). In the late 1990s, Lebanon adopted gender mainstreaming in the collection and analysis of gender statistics. However, most ministries and public agencies continue to overlook the gender dimensions in their work (IWSAW, 2016).

Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996. However, reservations by the Lebanese government on Article 9, Paragraph 2, and Article 16, Paragraphs 1(c, d, f, g) and 3, refuted the purpose and objectives of CEDAW. The rejected articles related to personal status laws and nationality rights of women citizens. Through the reservations, the Lebanese state effectively denied women the same rights as men in instances of marriage, divorce, and family matters and upheld the ban on Lebanese women from passing their nationality to their husbands and children. According to Salameh (2013), the reservations are intended to maintain the current personal status law, which is under the mandate of religious courts, rather than civil courts.

Despite many advantages and acquired rights, Lebanese women continue to face discrimination at numerous levels, keeping gender equality in Lebanon an elusive objective. USAID’s (2012) gender assessment identified the structural constraints that carry the seeds of discrimination and women’s vulnerability, as rooted in laws and regulations, sectarian dynamics, socio-cultural values, decision-making structures, and public policies and development strategies ongoing conflict and security problems, and a rise in social conservatism. (USAID, 2012: 44).

Gender inequality in Lebanon is considered to be particularly stark. According to the Gender Gap Index, Lebanon ranks third to last in the MENA region (ranked at 135), only Syria and Yemen have a worse gender gap ranking, 142 and 144 respectively (WEF, 2016: 228). Since 2010, Lebanon has seen a consistent decline in its global index rank and relative gender gap score primarily as a result of scores consistently close to zero in political empowerment (WEF, 2016). The Global Gender Gap Index is designed to measure gender equality presents a worsening picture for women in Lebanon (see table 2).

Table 2: Gender Gap Lebanon: 2016 and 2010 Rankings

	2016		2010	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Global Gender Gap Index	135	0.598	116	0.608
Economic participation and opportunity	133	0.440	124	0.448
Educational attainment	108	0.959	91	0.977
Health and survival	102	0.970	1	0.980
Political empowerment	143	0.021	127	0.028
Rank out of	144		115	

Source: WEF (2016: 228)

It is important to place the discussion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon within a wider appraisal of socialisation. In a study on the effects of socialisation on gender discrimination and violence in Lebanon, findings indicate that the society and parents give boys entitlement over their sisters from early childhood. Boys are raised in a way that provides them with a feeling of authority over women and makes them expect women to accept their superiority. Respondents, when asked about perceptions of the ideal woman, would most frequently mention attributes, such as 'being a good housewife and mother', 'sacrificing', 'devoted to her family', 'obedient', one who 'maintains the reputation and dignity of her husband'. Attributes relating to a woman's personality or education were seldom cited (Hamieh & Usta, 2011: 14).

It is also important to note that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity (Hamieh & Usta, 2011).

Human development and gender inequality an uncertain picture

Lebanon's HDI value for 2015 is 0.763, which put the country in the high human development category, positioning it at 76 out of 188 countries and territories. Between 2005 and 2015, Lebanon's HDI value increased from 0.733 to 0.763, an increase of 4.1%. Between 1990 and 2015, Lebanon's life expectancy at birth increased by 9.3 years, mean years of schooling increased by 1 year and expected years of schooling increased by 1.6 years. Lebanon's GNI per capita increased by about 50.8% between 1990 and 2015 (UNDP, 2016: 2)

The UNDP Human Development Index puts Lebanon ahead of its neighbour countries (72nd in 2012 and 76 in 2015), but information on poverty in Lebanon is very limited due to the paucity of data collected. Based on the 2004-05 surveys (National Survey of Living Conditions and Household Budget Survey), a study in 2008 shows that 8% of the population is extremely poor with striking regional disparities. The same study also finds that inequality represented by the GINI coefficient is very high (0.37%). In addition, on the basis of a World Bank working definition, the headcount poverty rate is estimated at 28.5% (UNDP, 2016: 4).

Table 3: Lebanon's HDI trends based on consistent time series data (1990-2015)

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	HDI Value
1990	70.2	11.7		8,829	
1995	72.1	12.5		12,735	
2000	74.4	15.0		12,573	
2005	76.8	13.2	7.6	12,152	0.733
2010	78.4	13.2	7.9	16,066	0.758
2011	78.6	13.3	8.3	15,728	0.763
2012	78.8	13.3	8.6	14,961	0.766
2013	79.0	13.3	8.6	13,935	0.763
2014	79.3	13.3	8.6	13,582	0.763
2015	79.5	13.3	8.6	13,312	0.763

Source: UNDP (2016: 3)

Lebanon's 2015 HDI of 0.763 is above the average of 0.746 for countries in the high human development group and above the average of 0.687 for countries in Arab States. From Arab States, countries which are close to Lebanon in 2015 HDI rank and to some extent in population size are Jordan and Kuwait, which have HDIs ranked 86 and 51 respectively

Lebanon has a GII value of 0.381, ranking it 83 out of 159 countries in the 2015 index. In Lebanon, 3.1% of parliamentary seats are held by women, and 53.0 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 55.4 percent of their male counterparts. For every 100,000 live births, 15 women die from pregnancy related causes; and the adolescent birth rate is 12.4 births per 1,000 women of ages 15-19. Female participation in the labour market is 23.5 percent compared to 70.3 for men (UNDP, 2016: 6).

Table 4: Lebanon's GII for 2015 relative to selected countries and groups

	GII Value	GII Rank	Female Seats in Parliament (%)	Population with at least some secondary education (%)		Labour force participation rate (%)	
				Female	Male	Female	Male
Lebanon	0.381	83	3.1	53.0	55.4	23.5	70.3
Kuwait	0.335	70	1.5	56.8	58.1	48.4	84.5
Libya	0.167	38	16	65.7	44.2	27.8	78.7
Arab States	0.535	-	15.5	41.6	52.3	22.3	75.1
High HDI	0.291	-	21.6	66.9	74.0	56.5	77.1

Source: UNDP (2016: 6)

Legal, electoral and political framework

The Lebanese legal system is primarily based on the French Civil Code and Egyptian legal systems. Whilst there is no unified civil law in Lebanon, the Lebanese Constitution promulgated in 1926 articulates the principle of equality among all citizens and does not in carry any discrimination against women. Article 7 of the Constitution states that all Lebanese citizens are equal before the law, enjoy equal civil and political rights, and bear equal obligations and duties without any differences between them. According to Article 12 every Lebanese citizen has the right to hold public office, without any preferences except for merit and capacities. The Constitution also guarantees all Lebanese citizens a set of fundamental liberties; primary among them is political participation, personal freedoms, access to employment, and freedom of expression (USAID, 2012).

Compared to other Arab countries, the Lebanese legal system is considered fairly progressive and there are no legal restrictions limiting women in engaging in income-generating activities. However, the current patriarchal system places women at home rather than in the workforce and this affects the confidence of women when it comes to starting their own business (IWSAW, 2016).

The weakness of the State is felt in the areas of civil affairs and personal status (especially in their relevance to women's civic rights, family matters, and gender relations). Such affairs have been formally relegated to the religious authorities as part of a confessional system rooted in an acknowledgement of the representational rights of registered sects and their respective power over their subjects (USAID, 2012). Articles 9 and 10 of the Constitution guarantee Lebanese families the right to exercise spiritual independence and the ability to manage familial affairs based on own religious beliefs and requirements. According to Article 9 of the Constitution, religious communities have the right to apply their own laws especially in matters related to personal status.

The different religious communities in Lebanon have their own personal status laws (which govern legal procedures that pertain to matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance)

(USAID, 2012; IWSAW, 2016). For Muslims, *Sharia* courts hear personal status cases. The courts are separated into Sunni and Shiite hearings. For the different Christian denominations, the ecclesiastical courts have jurisdiction over personal status issues. In Lebanon there are 18 legally recognised religious groups. The largest groups are the Sunni Muslims, the Shiite Muslims and the Maronite Christians (UNICEF, 2011).

The IWSAW (2016) assert that by keeping family matters within the jurisdictions of religious courts, the Constitution detaches itself from its role as a guarantor of equal rights and creates a buffer between the citizen and the State. Salmeh (2013) asserts that, inspired by religious discourse, this legal structure places women as second-class citizens, treating them as minors in decisions related to governing their own lives.

In July 2006 a Cabinet vowed in its Ministerial Statement to put in action all the commitments that Lebanon has made on women's issues in connection with the recommendations of the Beijing Conference in 1995 (IWSAW, 2016). The subsequent Government of 2008 reiterated this commitment and emphasised that it will pursue in the same efforts to strengthen the participation of women in all financial, economic, social, and political areas. It also confirmed the plan to implement all signed international conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEADAW). In 2011, a law punishing the crime of trafficking in persons was adopted.

The main official instrument representing women's machinery in Lebanon is the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). Parallel to the establishment of NCLW, the Lebanese governmental mandates the appointment of Gender Focal Points (GFP) in all ministries and public institutions. The NCLW and the GFPs represent Lebanon's official mechanisms to address gender, and reflect attempts the Lebanese State has undertaken towards the institutionalisation of gender equality. According to USAID (2012), the abilities of GFPs are limited by the absence of overarching commitment to women's empowerment across sectors and the continuous deficiency of effective policies to prioritise gender equality. The capacities of NCLW are also limited by its consultative nature having therefore no authority to directly propose legislations or reforms.

Notwithstanding positive changes in recent years in favour of women's rights on issues related to Labour Code, the Social Security Code, and state employment regulations, gender relations in Lebanon continue to be marked by inequalities in other legal areas besides the personal status laws. For example, whilst Lebanon annulled Article 562 of the Criminal Code, which called for lesser punishment for crimes committed in the name of 'honour'. However, Article 252, states that if anyone commits a crime in a fit of rage provoked by an unlawful act committed by the victim they can benefit from a reduced sentence (Tabet, 2005). Another notable example is the Nationality Law Act No. 15, which restricts to men the right to pass on citizenship status to children and spouses when married to a foreign national (Tabet, 2005).

Domestic violence and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) are also contested issues, whereas recent attempts to advance strict protective regulations were undermined by systematic pressure from the religious leaderships and courts, leading the parliamentary sub-committee discussing the draft GBV law to change its title (and in the process its content) from "protecting women from family violence" to "protecting the entire family from violence" (USAID, 2012).

Regional issues

Lebanon's internal stability and political, social, and economic dynamics have been directly affected by regional developments. Immigration has had a significant impact on the country. In 2013, Out of 750,000 immigrants, more than 50% were Palestinian refugees (433,000 recorded by UNWRA in June 2011). There are also around 50,000 political refugees from Iraq.

According to a number of commentators (World Bank, 2015; UNDP, 2016; IWSAW, 2016) one of the key issues impacting upon Lebanon at present is the Syria Crisis. In 2011, the Syrian civil war spilled over into Lebanon, causing further incidents of sectarian violence and armed clashes between Sunnis and Alawites (IWSAW, 2016: 3). In 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees living in Lebanon was 1,846,150. This does not take into account the numbers of unregistered refugees- Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, etc. Accommodating the needs of both the Lebanese and the Syrian refugee population has placed a substantial burden on Lebanon's resources and infrastructure.

Further to this, the Syrian conflict is having a significant destabilising effect on the political/confessional, security, economic, and social conditions in Lebanon. The Syria crisis has led to an escalation of tension between coalitions as well as more broadly among Sunni and Shiite groups within Lebanon (World Bank, 2015). Tensions have been exacerbated by the increasing pressure on already stretched and weak public and social services and local communities with an estimated 1.8 million Syrian refugees having crossed the border and officially registered with the UNHCR (representing over 25% of the Lebanese population). In addition, several violent incidents have led to a deteriorating security environment and local communities perceiving refugees as a threat to social stability, with a number of municipalities having instituted curfews specifically targeting Syrians. A detailed estimate of the economic and social cost of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon can be found in World Bank (2013).

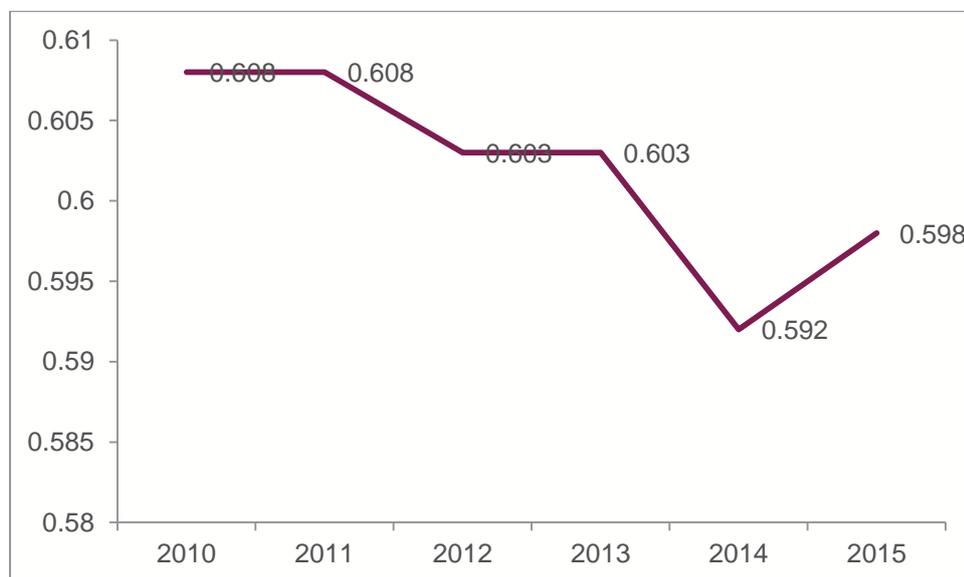
It is also important to note the gender specific challenges faced by female refugee's e.g. Syrian women and the youth, who face severe challenges in accessing labour markets in the host countries (Errighi & Griesse, 2016). A gender imbalance is present for Syrian refugees in working age groups. Overall, 52.5% of all Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are females (Verme et al 2016). In Lebanon, the male-to-female ratio is particularly low in the 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 age groups, where females consistently outnumber males. Employment and activity rates of Syrian women are particularly low. In Lebanon, unemployment of Syrian women is estimated at 68%, while in Jordan the figure is at 83.3%. Economic activity rates are 5.9% for Syrian women in Jordan and 19% for those in Lebanon (ILO 2014). Cultural factors combined with the high share of small children, and the concomitant need for some of the adult population to ensure childcare, can explain such numbers. Moreover, the gender pay gap is substantial for Syrian women workers in Lebanon, where women have been found to be earning 40% less than men (ILO 2014). The low amount of male heads (especially in Lebanon) for Syrian refugee households requires more women to engage in economic activities in order to sustain themselves and their families. The need to engage in childcare might require the development of part-time and home-based activities, in particular for women.

3. Gender equality and women's empowerment

A contextual analysis of Lebanon's salient features points to complex political and socio-economic dynamics that continue to undermine gender equality and female empowerment in the

country. While Lebanese women have made some recent gains, they continue to face discrimination at many levels (USAID, 2012). Lebanon has a GII value of 0.381, ranking it 83 out of 159 countries in the 2015 index. In terms of the gender gap index, Lebanon ranks 135 out of 144 countries (World Bank, 2015).

Figure 1: Gender Gap Index: Lebanon: (2010-2016)



Source: WEF (2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010)

The following sections present factors influencing gender equality and women’s empowerment in Lebanon focused on four areas. Table 5 presents an overview of Lebanon scoring across the four components of the Gender Gap index:

- Educational attainment
- Political empowerment, agency and access to justice
- Economic Participation and opportunity
- Health and Survival (including Violence Against Women)

Table 5: Gender Gap: Global Rankings 2016

Country	Global Index		Economic Participation and Opportunity		Educational attainment		Health and Survival		Political Empowerment	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Iceland	1	0.874	9	0.806	1	1.000	104	0.970	1	0.719
Jordan	134	0.603	138	0.381	64	0.993	131	0.966	123	0.073
Lebanon	135	0.598	133	0.440	108	0.959	102	0.970	143	0.021
Yemen	144	0.516	141	0.352	141	0.720	122	0.967	139	0.026

Source: WEF (2016: 10-11)

Educational attainment

Whilst some commentators consider the Lebanese education system to perform quite well compared to many neighbouring countries characterised by a significant and diversified private sector contribution and a high level of access (ETF, 2013). Other commentators highlight that equity remains one of its main challenges (World Bank, 2015, USAID, 2012). While total education spending (public and private together) exceeds 11% of GDP, public expenditure on education amounted to just 1.65% of GDP in 2011. The gross enrolment rate was 90.3% in lower secondary and 76% in upper secondary and 57.6% in tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6) in 2016 Lebanon ranks the highest in the region in terms of university enrolment rates (ETF, 2013).

The World Economic Forum (2016) rank Lebanon 108th out of 144 countries in terms of educational attainment. Education in Lebanon is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Despite the National Education Strategy Framework (2011–2015) being based on fundamental principles of freedom and equal educational opportunities for all Lebanese citizens, the quality and cost of private schooling in comparison to public alternatives is much higher, which has resulted in an immense gap regarding available standards of education (World Bank, 2015). An economic system based on minimal taxation and commitment to free market has privileged the private sector according it much dominance over vital public services, including education. Accordingly, a significant gap exists in Lebanon in terms of educational achievements between public and private education, which is reducing equality of opportunity among children. Children from wealthier and middle-class households are concentrated in high performing private schools while the highest share of disadvantaged children is observed in schools with low performance (World Bank, 2015).

In recent decades, various educational reforms have been undertaken, mostly with support from international donors, to attend to the challenges afflicting public education in Lebanon. According to USAID (2012) the results have been marginal: compulsory free education is yet to be enforced; students with special needs continue to be largely excluded from public schools; and the Lebanese University continues to struggle financially and qualitatively. While all these problems affect the whole student population in the country, they are more likely to have a greater impact on female students in the context of prevailing patriarchal cultural and traditional social values. The situation is especially problematic for female children with special needs who are generally treated with more bias than their male counterparts and are considered a bigger burden on their families (USAID, 2012).

Table 6: Gender Gap: Educational Attainment – Lebanon 2016

	Rank	Score	Avg.	Female	Male	F/M ratio
Educational attainment	108	0.959	0.955			0.96
Literacy rate	96	0.958	0.897	92	96	0.96
Enrolment in primary education	121	0.929	0.980	83	90	0.93
Enrolment in secondary education	1	1.000	0.970	65	65	1.00
Enrolment in tertiary education	1	1.000	0.930	46	40	1.16

Source: WEF (2016: 228)

Public education in Lebanon has been overshadowed by the large number of private institutions, which absorb as much as 70% of elementary students, 60% of intermediate students and 50% of secondary students (MEHE figures as quoted in Nahas, 2009: 19). The dominance of private sector education has particular implications for female students with public education being the first (and often only choice) for poor families, especially in rural areas, when it comes to their daughters (Nahas, 2009). At the university level, in 2009 there was only one public higher education institution, the Lebanese University (LU), competing with 37 better equipped private institutions graduating 55% of the student body (Ibid: 15).

Available studies, including a UNESCO evaluation of the content of 103 school books, indicate that reforms have failed to eliminate traditional gender stereotypes prevalent in school curricula, (UNESCO, 2015). Moreover, the domination of the teaching profession by women, constituting 75.2% of the total number of teachers, enhances perceptions of traditional gender roles in the country and supports existing stereotyping in books (UNESCO, 2015).

Further to this, a contributing factor behind labour market problems in Lebanon, especially for women, is the lack of effective gender sensitive career guidance framework within the education system, despite the existence of several specialised institutions, such as the Office of Guidance and Counselling at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), the Lebanese National Employment Office, the Career Guidance Center at the American University of Beirut, and The Career Guidance Center at the Hariri Foundation. The ongoing general discrepancy between post-secondary education and market demands indicates that the efforts of such institutions have not yielded far-reaching benefits for Lebanese students in the area of career guidance and counselling” (Ayyash-Abdo, et al., 2010: 14). Moreover, orientation and educational guidance activities carried out by major universities focus mainly on increasing enrolment with little attention paid to gender issues.

Table 7: Net enrolment ration by stage of education (2011)

Level of Education	Female	Male
Primary	89%	91%
Secondary	79%	71%
Tertiary	57%	48%

Source: UNICEF (2011: 4)

Political empowerment, agency and access to justice

The Lebanese constitution guarantees segmental autonomy to 18 recognised communities in the country and the distribution of the country's state offices along religious lines, with the president a Maronite Christian; the prime minister, a Sunni Muslim; and the speaker of parliament, a Shiite Muslim. Although this balance has helped to establish an acceptable level of stability in the country, it has nonetheless made political life and society very rigid. Implementing reforms is always a delicate exercise, which is often blocked to avoid potential conflicts (ETF, 2013: 4).

Lebanon has consistently ranked at the bottom of the table of parliamentary representation of women in the Middle East. Only Qatar ranks below Lebanon (WEF, 2016). Recently, attempts by

civil society activists and women's machinery to advance a draft electoral law with a suggested 30% quota for women have been resisted by politicians (El-Helou, 2015).

Table 8: Gender Gap: Political empowerment – Lebanon 2016

	Rank	Score	Avg.	Female	Male	F/M ratio
Political empowerment	143	0.233	0.233			0.02
Women in parliament	137	0.032	0.269	3	97	0.03
Women in ministerial positions	135	0.045	0.238	4	96	0.05
Years with female head of state (last 50)	68	0.000	0.204	0	50	0.00

Source: WEF (2016: 228)

The absence of women from decision-making positions has been attributed to the patriarchal character of Lebanese society, governed by customary rather than codified laws. This is enforced by “the traditional rules governing the functioning of the political system” (NCLW, 2012), which consider politics as a male preserve and dismiss women's views in political matters as irrelevant (USAID, 2012). The prevailing sectarian tribal system of compromise and power-sharing draws on the representational base of the various sects and religious communities, which are typically dominated by male members of leading families, and in the process undermine the possibility of women's participation (USAID, 2012).

Since 1991 only 3.1% of parliamentary seats have been occupied by women. Women have also been largely absent from the Council of Ministers until two female appointments in 2004. As of 2015 there is only one woman in the Council of Ministers and only four (out of 128) occupy seats in the Parliament (IWSAW, 2016). The participation of women in the Parliament is thus minimal, declining from six female members of parliament to four female MPs being elected in the 2009 elections (USAID, 2012).

To date there have been no female governors in Lebanon. In 2009, females counted for 32% in the Executive Council of the Free Patriotic Movement, 20% of the Political Council of the Amal Movement, 14% of the members of the Executive Council of the Lebanese Forces and the Democratic Tajadod Party respectively, 9% of the members of the Political Bureau of the Phalangists Party, and 5% of the members of the Executive Committee of the Future Movement (IWSAW, 2016: 5).

Economic Participation and opportunity

The Lebanese labour market is characterised by low activity and employment rates, a low contribution of women to economic life, a large informal sector, high influx of foreign workers and a large number of skilled Lebanese people seeking and obtaining employment abroad (World Bank, 2015). The Lebanese Labour Law, (decree issued in 1965) states that men and women undertaking the same job must receive the same remuneration, but according to IWSAW (2016) this is not implemented in practice. The absence of tangible laws and policies that support women in the labour force has further resulted in discrimination at the workplace, in the provision of social benefits, taxation, and medical services especially in the non-formal sector (IWSAW, 2016).

In 2009, according to the central administration for statistics, the total unemployment rate was 6%, with 5% for males and 10% for females. Unemployment is higher among the higher educated youth and certainly for women (7.7% among upper secondary graduates, 8.8% among university graduates) (ETF, 2013: 8).

The gender gap in Lebanon is thus pronounced in the fields of economic participation and opportunity. Lebanon continues to have a low economic participation rate with less than half of the working age population participating in the labour market. The male labour force participation rate (70%) continues to be comparatively less than other MENA countries, but largely comparable with non-MENA countries with similar levels of development. Female labour force participation, by contrast, is equivalent to MENA averages, but lags significantly behind non-MENA comparators with the exception of Turkey (World Bank, 2013). Despite high literacy rates among women, their economic participation remains low. Women still suffer from gender inequality in the Lebanese economy. Although current participation rates are low, particularly for women, they are on an upward trend. Not taking into account the recent influx of refugees, 23,000 individuals, on average, enter the labour market each year. To absorb them, the economy would need to create more than 6 times the number of jobs it creates (on average, only 3,400 net jobs per year between 2004 and 2007) (World Bank, 2013).

Table 9: Gender Gap: Economic participation and opportunity - Lebanon, 2016

	Rank	Score	Avg.	Female	Male	F/M ratio
Economic participation and opportunity	133	0.440	0.586			0.44
Labour force participation	136	0.343	0.665	26	75	0.34
Wage equality for similar work (survey)	88	0.611	0.622	-	-	0.61
Estimated earned income (US\$, PPP)	135	0.252	0.502	7,000	27,831	0.25
Legislators, senior officials, and managers	118	0.092	0.358	8	92	0.09
Professional and technical workers	76	0.933	0.862	48	52	0.93

Source: WEF (2016: 228)

Even though participation rates remain low, especially for women, the labour force has been growing in Lebanon both due to demographics and increasing participation. The labour force has been growing robustly, in part driven by an increase in the working age population, but also due to slowly increasing labour force participation, particularly among women (World Bank, 2015).

Table 10: Trends in Female Participation in the Labour Force in Lebanon and MENA region

Country or region	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Lebanon	12.5	18.1	21.4	26.2	32.3
MENA	21.9	22.8	24.7	26.4	32.2

Source: World Bank (2004: 59)

Whilst unemployment is high, especially among women and youth, and is often of a long duration, participation has been improving (World Bank, 2015). Prior to the Syrian crisis, around 11% of the labour force was unemployed. Such high rates reflected in part long average durations of the unemployment (close to 13 months for men and 10 months for women). The unemployment rate among women is twice as high as among men. The youth unemployment rate (34%) is high even by regional standards and especially compared to other countries outside the MENA region. Current unemployment rates are likely to increase significantly given slower economic growth and impact of the Syrian conflict (World Bank, 2015).

More broadly, gender-related obstacles inhibit access to funding for women entrepreneurs. The Lebanese banking industry has been particularly inaccessible to women, with only 3% of bank loans going to female entrepreneurs (IFC, 2012).

Finally, the influx of refugees from the ongoing Syrian conflict is having a profound impact on the socio-economic situation in Lebanon, exacerbating labour market conditions (World Bank, 2013). The (official) refugee influx accounts for one quarter of the population of Lebanon, increasing already high unemployment and poverty. As a result of that influx, the labour force is expected to be increased by as much as 35%, with major changes taking place among women and youth. Because of the low level of education of the Syrian refugees, most will join the supply of low skilled workers, and informality is likely to increase as a result (World Bank, 2015).

Palestinian refugees represent a group in need of employment, however due to their special status and the limited number of occupations they have access to; they seek and find jobs mainly in the informal labour market. The size of informality as a percentage of GDP is estimated to be 36.4% by the World Bank, while the share of self-employment as a percentage of total employment is 32.9%. However, the share of the labour force which does not contribute to any social security goes up to 66.9% among employees. Currently, the high immigration of refugees from Syria represents an additional challenge for the Lebanese labour market as well as an immediate humanitarian emergency (World Bank, 2015).

Health and Survival (including Violence Against Women)

Lebanon's pledge to provide satisfactory health care to its population was institutionalised with the ratification of the 1972 International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which enshrines health care as a fundamental human right. However, the health care system in Lebanon is pluralistic, highly fragmented and deregulated. It is financed by the social security system and private health insurance companies (World Bank, 2015). The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is the main body responsible for health service policies and programs. A significant gap exists between the private and the public health sector. The public health sector suffers from numerous deficiencies including; poor quality of services, obsolete equipment and low funding etc. (IWSAW, 2016: 7). Generally, those most affected by limited and poor services are women and girls; this is especially true for those from poor social backgrounds or rural areas. The spill over from the Syrian conflict has also placed additional pressure on the health care system in Lebanon.

Table 11: Gender Gap: Health and Survival – Lebanon 2016

	Rank	Score	Avg.	Female	Male	F/M ratio
Health and Survival	102	0.970	0.957			0.97
Sex ratio at birth	1	0.944	0.918	-	-	0.94
Healthy life expectancy	113	1.029	1.043	71	69	1.02

Source: WEF (2016: 212)

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Lebanon can take many forms and occurs within both private and public spheres. In comparison to other Arab countries, Lebanon has made some progress in addressing GBV. The recent passing of the Law on Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence in April 2014 is an example of this. However, IWSAW (2016) comment, the law has a number of shortcomings, including a failure to recognise marital rape as an offence. The Domestic Violence Law also states that in case of any conflict between this law and the personal status law, the later takes precedence. According to IWSAW (2016), the country's personal status law also contributes towards violence against women because of its discriminatory nature. Loopholes in the country's Penal Code give latitude to perpetrators in cases of 'honour' crimes or by getting the perpetrator of rape to marry the survivor. Still, Lebanon's repeal of the Criminal Code provision which handed out lenient sentences for so-called honour crimes can be seen as a positive step in addressing GBV. In Lebanon, according to a UNFPA-supported study conducted in 2002, out of 1,415 women interviewed, 35% had been victims of domestic violence (Usta et al., 2007: 208–19).

Lebanon has no legislation in place for sexual exploitation and harassment within the work place. The only advantage a victim has is that she is allowed to leave her workplace without having to give notice (IWSAW, 2016). Many civil society organisations are working towards GBV prevention and response, lobbying for policies and procedural changes to recognise the seriousness of violence against women. This is one of the primary objectives addressed by the National Strategy for Women 2011-2021. Unfortunately, the Lebanese legal system does not provide any tools for monitoring violations of gender equality.

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