



Funded by
the European Union



OXFAM
أوكسفام



SEEDS
For Legal Initiatives

Applying a Gender Lens to Conflict Resolution Efforts in Lebanon

**WE'AM - A Feminist Exploration of Conflict and
Peacebuilding Practices in Lebanon**

February 2025

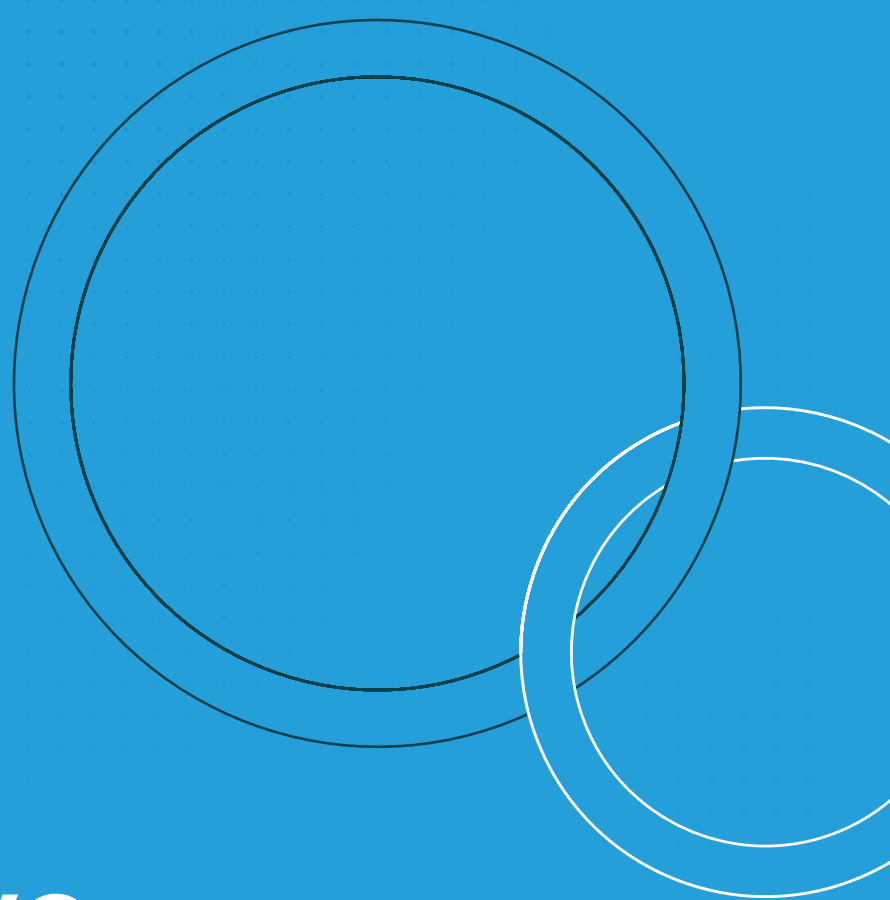
Table of Contents

Acronyms	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction	8
Literature Review: Conflicts in Lebanon	10
Conflict Definition.....	10
Types of Conflicts and Their Gendered Dimension.....	10
Stakeholders.....	16
Conflict Settings By Regions.....	17
Rationale	19
Objectives	19
Methodology	20
Data Collection	21
A.Key Informant Interviews (KII).....	21
B.Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).....	27
The Ecosystem Approach	29
Limitations and Mitigation Measures	30
I. Interview Insights	33
1. General Questions	34
1.1 Definitions of Conflict	34
1.2 Scope of Conflict-Related Work.....	35
2. Level One: Individual Level.....	36
2.1 Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls.....	36
3. Level Two: Interpersonal Level.....	37
3.1 Perception of Women as Agents of Change	37
3.2 Empowerment Efforts	38
3.3 Barriers to Empowerment.....	40
3.4 Cultural and Societal Norms.....	41
3.5 Navigating Family and Community Dynamics.....	43
3.6 Engaging Men and Youth	44
4.Level Three: Organizational Level.....	45
4.1 Involvement in Project Planning and Conceptualization.....	45
4.2 Measures to Ensure Participation and Safety.....	47
4.3 Internal Gender Sensitivity Policies.....	48
4.4 Training and Sensitization	49
4.5 Gender-Sensitive Budgeting.....	50
4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation.....	51

5. Level Four: Community Level.....	52
5.1 Trust Building with Communities.....	52
5.2 Building Networks and Partnerships.....	53
6. Level Five: Institutional Level.....	54
6.1 Role of Local Authorities	54
6.2 Navigating Institutional Challenges.....	55
6.3 Challenges Faced by Organizations.....	56
6.4 Engaging in Advocacy	57
6.5 Challenges in Policy Influence.....	58
II. Conclusion.....	60
III. Recommendations.....	62
Annex 1 - Data Collection Tools	66

Acronyms

AND	Akkar Network for Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EPA	Education Planet Association
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GSB	Gender-Sensitive Budgeting
IO	International Organization
KII	Key Informant Interviews
Lecrovaw	The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NCLW	National Commission for Lebanese Women
RDFL	The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRW	Syrian Refugee Women
UPW	Union of Progressive Women
WRO	Women's Rights Organization



Executive Summary

Lebanon's history of conflict has reinforced gender inequalities, restricting women's participation in peace and security. Structural barriers, patriarchal norms, and discriminatory laws continue to exclude women from decision-making, while crises such as the economic collapse, the Beirut port explosion and more recently the Israeli war on Lebanon have further marginalized their role in governance and security. Despite these challenges, civil society remains a critical force in advocating for women's inclusion in peacebuilding.

This report, part of the EU-funded WE'AM project, examines how organizations working on social cohesion in Lebanon engage with women and integrate gender considerations into their approaches. It explores the effects of conflict on women, the interventions supporting them, and the mechanisms in place to enhance their participation. By shedding light on both challenges and opportunities, the report aims to highlight the need for gender-responsive strategies that strengthen social cohesion and promote sustainable peace.

A qualitative and context-driven research approach was used to capture diverse perspectives on gender and conflict resolution in Lebanon. Data was gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) with organizations working on social cohesion and municipalities and focus group discussions (FGDs) with women involved in peacebuilding initiatives and WE'AM partners. This ecosystem-based approach to structuring questioning enabled an analysis of structural barriers, local norms, and institutional efforts to integrate gender-sensitive conflict resolution strategies.

Key Findings

- The findings reveal **varying levels of theoretical understanding of conflict and gender dynamics** among stakeholders. While some organizations recognize the structural exclusion of women and the economic and psychological toll of conflict, others focus more on immediate concerns, overlooking systemic issues. Many organizations, particularly municipalities, continue to frame women's contributions to peacebuilding within traditional gender roles, limiting their decision-making power.
- **Cultural norms and patriarchal structures remain significant barriers.** Resistance from men in the community, religious leaders, and even other women often hinders women's participation in conflict resolution. Some organizations successfully engage with communities to challenge these norms, but others lack deeper engagement, limiting their impact.
- Empowerment efforts often **focus on skills development, advocacy training, and legal awareness**, yet logistical barriers such as transportation and childcare frequently go unaddressed, making participation difficult for many women. Psychological support is recognized as critical but is not often systematically integrated into projects. Furthermore, while some organizations prioritize women's safety through secure venues and transportation, others do not provide formal protection measures, leaving gaps in ensuring women's security.
- Internally, many organizations express **awareness of gender-sensitive policies but struggle with consistent implementation.** Some integrate gender mainstreaming only when required by donors, rather than embedding it into their core strategies. Gender-sensitive budgeting remains underdeveloped, often misunderstood as simply funding women's projects rather than systematically integrating gender considerations into financial planning to address structural inequalities. Additionally, monitoring and evaluation practices frequently rely on quantitative participation metrics, failing to capture the depth of women's empowerment.
- **Engagement with men and youth remains limited.** While some organizations recognize the importance of men allies in shifting community attitudes, cultural resistance or limited interest often prevents their meaningful involvement. Youth engagement is similarly sporadic, missing an opportunity to foster long-term change.
- **Structural issues** - such as the underrepresentation of women in municipal councils, political resistance to gender initiatives, and Lebanon's weak implementation of UNSCR 1325 - **further restrict women's empowerment and participation in peacebuilding.**
- Given the recent hostilities Lebanon faced, inclusive and sustainable peace efforts are more urgent than ever. Women must be central to these efforts, requiring the development and implementation of a gender-transformative toolkit that equips organizations with practical strategies to integrate women's perspectives meaningfully into conflict resolution. For peace efforts in Lebanon to be truly inclusive and sustainable, women must move beyond symbolic participation to decision-making roles. Organizations and municipalities must adopt gender-transformative approaches that address structural barriers, engage communities, and ensure that women's voices shape conflict resolution strategies. With organizations, municipalities, and women community members all acknowledging a positive shift regarding women's increased involvement and recognition of their leadership skills, there is strong momentum to advance gender-sensitive peacebuilding efforts. With Lebanon facing some of its harshest hostilities since the civil war, now is the time to act. Inclusive governance and gender-responsive peacebuilding are not optional - they are essential for lasting stability.

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen Awareness of Gendered Conflict Dynamics:** Organizations should integrate a deeper understanding of how gender and conflict intersect to anticipate women's specific needs. Internal capacity-building or partnerships with specialized organizations can improve interventions while gender-sensitive conflict analysis should be embedded into project design to ensure sustainable support for women.
- 2. Prioritize Safety:** Organizations should establish and enforce internal policies on harassment, abuse, and representation while ensuring clear reporting mechanisms and staff training. Secure venues, safe transportation, and protection policies for participants must be clearly communicated.
- 3. Ensure Effective Communication:** Organizations should carefully frame gender-related discussions to avoid community backlash. Reframing language around shared values like social stability or economic empowerment can enhance acceptance. Clear messaging on project eligibility is also crucial to prevent misunderstandings that limit participation.
- 4. Design Impactful Projects:** Women's participation should be supported through childcare, transportation stipends, flexible scheduling, and safe meeting spaces. Awareness-raising should be paired with practical opportunities for leadership to ensure long-term impact. Embedding projects within local structures and fostering community ownership will enhance sustainability.
- 5. Expand Inclusion Efforts:** Engaging men in gender-sensitive projects fosters broader support and allyship, strengthening impact. Mixed-gender discussions have empowered women and encouraged social change. Conflict reconciliation projects should facilitate inter-group dialogue to bridge societal divides.
- 6. Improve Gender-Sensitive Budgeting:** Organizations and municipalities should allocate resources based on gendered needs, including support for childcare, transportation, and capacity-building. Sustainable funding strategies must be prioritized to prevent abrupt project discontinuation.
- 7. Enhance Budget Flexibility:** Organizations should adopt more flexible budgeting approaches that account for changing circumstances and potential backlash. Allocating funds for contingency planning, responsive programming, and risk mitigation can help projects remain effective in dynamic environments.
- 8. Mitigate Political Bias and Instability:** Organizations should develop strategies to main-

tain project continuity despite political shifts. Strengthening municipal partnerships, documenting successes, and fostering community ownership can reduce risks associated with leadership changes and political instability.

- 9. Enhance Women's Representation in Decision-Making:** To promote women's participation in municipal leadership, organizations should prioritize partnerships with municipalities that actively support women in decision-making or create incentives for inclusive governance. Institutional backing is necessary to translate individual support into action.
- 10. Develop Standardized Tools for Gender-Sensitive Programming:** A standardized toolkit with practical guidance, training programs, and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to ensure effective gender-sensitive programming in conflict-affected areas. Organizations should invest in internal capacity-building to apply these tools effectively.



Introduction

Lebanon's history of conflict and instability has deepened gender inequalities, restricting women's participation in politics, the economy, and peacebuilding. From the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) to ongoing crises and recent Israeli war, women have borne a disproportionate burden. Despite high educational attainment, they face rising unemployment, structural barriers, and restrictive personal status laws limiting their rights. Gender inequality in Lebanon is deeply rooted in cultural, social, and legal structures. Patriarchal norms have historically dictated the roles and responsibilities of men and women, leading to widespread gender discrimination. In the legal sphere, Lebanese women face numerous obstacles, including personal status laws that vary by religious affiliation and often disadvantage women in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. These challenges, compounded by the 2019 financial collapse and the 2020 Beirut port explosion, further exclude women from security and governance structures. Women remain largely absent from national and local peace and security processes, including the 1991 Ta'if Accords and subsequent national dialogues.¹ Their underrepresentation in security institutions is stark, with women comprising only 6.25% of parliamentarians and remaining largely absent from police forces, despite public support for greater women presence in security roles.² This exclusion weakens the prospects for sustainable peace, as global evidence shows that women's participation in conflict resolution leads to more enduring and inclusive outcomes.³ However, Lebanon has a strong and active civil society, with international and national organizations and local institutions stepping up to push for positive change in the absence of sufficient state intervention.

Against this backdrop of entrenched gender inequality and structural barriers, Lebanon has also witnessed the rise of an anti-gender movement

that seeks to undermine efforts toward gender justice and reinforce traditional patriarchal norms. The anti-gender wave is a global reactionary movement opposing gender equality reforms, seeking to maintain traditional gender roles while resisting the recognition of diverse gender identities.⁴ In Lebanon, this movement manifests in resistance to women's rights advancements, often driven by political and religious conservatism.⁵ Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) advocating for gender equality face significant opposition from conservative factions and institutions that uphold the status quo.⁶

The anti-gender wave's emphasis on traditional roles further marginalizes women from conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, despite their proven contributions to sustainable peace and reconciliation efforts, making the report at hand even more relevant today.⁷

Despite these challenges, Lebanese women have played a crucial role in social and political movements, particularly during the 2019 October Revolution.⁸ Women were at the forefront of protests against corruption and inequality, demanding reforms in governance, economic justice, and gender equality.⁹ Their activism has shown that women are not passive victims of discrimination but active agents of change in Lebanon's political and social landscape.¹⁰

¹ UN Women Lebanon, "In Brief - Women, Peace and Security," 1.

² UN Women Lebanon, "In Brief - Women, Peace and Security," 1.

³ "We need more women leaders to sustain peace and development," United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed February 14, 2025, <https://www.un.org/fr/desa/we-need-more-women-leaders-sustain-peace-and-development>.

⁴ Kate Walton, "Opposition to gender equality around the world is connected, well funded and spreading. Here's what you need to know about the anti-gender movement" - CNN <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/asequals/anti-gender-equality-threat-explained-as-equals-intl-cmd/>

⁵ Nay El Rahi and Fatima Antar, "Deconstructing Anti-Feminist Backlash: The Lebanese Context" - IDS Bulletin <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/3251/3350>

⁶ Nay El Rahi and Fatima Antar, "Deconstructing Anti-Feminist Backlash: The Lebanese Context" - IDS Bulletin <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/3251/3350>

⁷ Parliamentary Assembly - "Conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women" <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=17233>

⁸ Wissam Abdo El-Haybi, "Impact of Nongovernmental Organizations Promoting and Developing Women's Human Rights in Lebanon", Walden University 2018 <https://media-ghi.ghi.aub.edu.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Impact-of-Nongovernmental-Organizations-Promoting-and-Developing-Womens-Human-Rights-in-Lebanon.pdf>

⁹ Wissam Abdo El-Haybi, "Impact of Nongovernmental Organizations Promoting and Developing Women's Human Rights in Lebanon", Walden University 2018 <https://media-ghi.ghi.aub.edu.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Impact-of-Nongovernmental-Organizations-Promoting-and-Developing-Womens-Human-Rights-in-Lebanon.pdf>

¹⁰ Azzi-Mofrad, Natalie. "Breaking the Silence: An intersectional approach to sexual violence and harm narratives of women living in Lebanon" - University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Canada) <https://www.proquest.com/openview/bbae0a0c97e538742cb44d6ac72ecc73/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Literature Review: Conflicts in Lebanon

At the beginning of the project, we set the scene by establishing a definition for conflict and examining the conflicts faced by communities in 12 different regions across Lebanon.

Conflict Definition

The term conflict lacks a single definition. The Cambridge Dictionary describes it as “an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles.”¹¹ Academic literature adds depth, defining conflict as the incompatibility of interests, goals, values, or ideologies, with ideological conflicts often turning malicious.¹² Socio-economic conflict is a struggle over values and resources, where opponents aim to neutralize or eliminate each other. Conflict can also be seen as the interaction of differing value systems, which may be destructive or creative. Even within individuals, conflicts can arise from incompatible goals.¹³ In Lebanon, conflict reflects sectarian, political, and socio-economic tensions, often resulting in armed clashes, political violence, and social unrest. These tensions stem from historical grievances, corruption, and diverse competing interests, exacerbated by regional instability and refugee influxes. The focus here is on conflicts externalized at a scale large enough to represent a general struggle within a community or region, excluding isolated disputes unless they affect the wider community. Addressing Lebanon’s conflicts requires more than managing surface-level disputes; it demands gender-transformative change targeting the root causes of gender inequality.¹⁴ This approach involves inclusive, holistic strategies tailored to Lebanon’s unique context, fostering equitable communities and reducing tensions across society.¹⁵

For the purposes of this report, conflict is defined as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing armed violence, political unrest, and socio-economic struggles, as well as inter-communal and interpersonal tensions within cities, communities, and institutions, as long as they are externalized to a detectable extent. It arises from competing interests, identities, and resource distribution, often exacerbated by historical grievances, corruption, and structural inequalities. Given the gendered nature of conflict and the objective of the project, this report also considers how entrenched power imbalances and discriminatory social norms shape conflict dynamics, disproportionately affecting women and other marginalized groups. A gen-

der-transformative approach is essential, not only to address the symptoms of conflict but to challenge and reshape the underlying structures that sustain inequality and exclusion.

Types of Conflicts and Their Gendered Dimension

This analysis builds on the extensive conflict mapping conducted by Oxfam across 12 regions in Lebanon, consolidating recent research, reports, and official records to identify key conflict dynamics at national, sub-national, and local levels.¹⁶ Through the mapping of the 12 focus areas of the WE’AM project, we identified the most commonly referenced tensions and looked deeper into assessed their gendered dimensions.

We discovered that the most common tensions were disputes regarding land ownership and access to resources, tensions between host communities and refugees, general security concerns, as well as economic, religious, political, and social tensions. Less common, but still identified within the communities were generational, historical, and regional tensions and spill-overs from conflicts in the region, as well as conflict resulting from illicit activities. While these issues are listed separately, they are usually deeply interrelated, exacerbating or creating each other. Still, for the sake of clarity, they are explored separately below.

Nationwide Context

Lebanon has recently faced nationwide challenges, the consequences of which persist until today. These include COVID-19, the Beirut port explosion, political paralysis, the Syrian refugee crisis, and sectarian divisions. These factors intensify existing social tensions and their differing perceptions of national issues across sectarian lines.¹⁷ Additionally, tensions with Israel have escalated, leading to bombings across the country, severe civilian harm, and mass displacement. These attacks harm security, mental health, and the economy, contributing to anxiety, depression, reduced tourism, and family separation.

While the regional and societal impacts of these challenges are significant, the literature does not yet cover how these recent developments may affect Lebanon in general and women in particular. Where possible, it is mentioned under the specialized chapters below.

¹¹ “Conflict,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict>.

¹² J.M.G. van der Dennen, “Introduction: On Conflict,” in the *Sociobiology of Conflict* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1990), 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Gender Transformative Change,” ESCWA, July 16, 2024, <https://de.slideshare.net/slideshow/4-gender-transformative-change-escwa-pdf/270272296>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Oxfam, Literature Review Report - WE’AM Conflict Mapping Study, October 2023, 5.

¹⁷ Oxfam, “Literature Review Report - WE’AM Conflict Mapping Study,” October 2023, 6.

Disputes Regarding Land Ownership and Resource Access

Women in Lebanon face significant challenges regarding land ownership and access to natural resources due to discriminatory laws and societal norms. While the Lebanese Constitution protects the right to ownership against arbitrary expropriation and stipulates equality for all Lebanese before the law, it lacks any clear reference to sex or gender equality and does not contain a prohibition of discrimination on the basis of the two.^{18,19} Inheritance laws reflect this inequality: non-Muslims are governed by the 1959 Civil Law of Inheritance, which ensures full equality between men and women regarding inheritance rights and the distribution of shares, but women often relinquish their inheritance to men relatives due to social expectations.²⁰ Muslim inheritance follows sect-specific sharia provisions, typically granting men twice the share of women but with dramatic intrasectarian conditional and sectarian variations in application. Additionally, land is often registered under a men relative's name, even when it contradicts religious inheritance laws, to preserve family wealth.²¹ Further, Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men face challenges passing property to their children because, while land transfer is generally allowed, it depends on the principle of reciprocity - whether the husband's country grants similar rights to Lebanese citizens.²² Men are not affected by this, since their non-Lebanese partner could be granted Lebanese nationality after one year of marriage.²³ Additionally, the inability of women to pass their nationality to their children creates legal and bureaucratic hurdles, complicating property transfer processes and potentially limiting the children's ability to fully own or inherit property under Lebanese law.²⁴ In the case of divorce, women are usually deprived of their share of the property, as personal status law does not recognize domestic labor whereby women are seen as having contributed less to the property.²⁵ This means that while the constitution technically upholds equality, the lack of a clear ban on gender or sex-based discrimination allows social norms, discriminatory nationality laws, and sect-specific inheritance laws to dis-

advantage women in inheriting and transferring land.

This lack of access to land directly affects women's economic independence, limiting opportunities for farming, securing loans, or accessing resources like clean water. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies restricts their ability to intervening in land property disputes or influence policies or resolve disputes favoring their rights.²⁶

When women transfer inherited land to men relatives, it reflects the influence of societal pressures and traditional norms that shape land ownership dynamics, potentially reinforcing inequality. Women in Lebanon are deeply engaged in managing natural resources and land, yet they are often excluded from landownership due to discriminatory inheritance laws and societal norms. Women play a significant role in addressing tensions related to environmental damage by managing natural resources and leading grassroots initiatives. Through founding organizations, engaging in environmental preservation, producing food, and mobilizing local resources, they work to reduce environmental pressures, thereby contributing to social stability.²⁷ Their extensive interaction with land highlights the contradiction in denying them formal ownership and control. International efforts, like those by the Food and Agriculture Organization, focus on empowering women in agriculture, particularly in rural areas, demonstrating opportunities for targeted interventions to promote gender equity.²⁸ Strengthening women's property rights would not only correct a long-standing inequality but also reinforce their ability to contribute to social cohesion, economic resilience, and sustainable peace.

Economic Tensions

The basis for economic tensions in Lebanon may vary based on the region. In Mina, Tripoli, for example, the textile industry is an important employer, wherefore damages to this industry impact the local population more.²⁹ In other regions, economic

¹⁸ Lebanese Parliament, The Lebanese Constitution, promulgated on May 23, 1926, Article 15.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme, "Lebanon - Gender Justice and the Law," December 2019, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/Lebanon.Summary.19.Eng.pdf>.

²⁰ Arab Land Initiative, Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework - Lebanon, Report April, 2024, 38.

²¹ Ibid.

²² National Commission for Lebanese Women, "Nationality not Naturalization, The Rights of Lebanese Women to Full Citizenship and to Confer their Nationality to their Children", UN Women, 2021, https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2021_Nationality-not-Naturalization_Policy-Brief_Eng.pdf, 6.

²³ Article 5 of the Lebanese Nationality Law.

²⁴ Arab Land Initiative, Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework - Lebanon, Report April, 2024, 38-39.

²⁵ Ibid, 39.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Slaiby, C. S. (2020). The role of women in the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, Lebanon. Cultural landscapes and biodiversity in the Mediterranean Basin, Washington, DC: IUCN, 20.

²⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Gender Spotlight - Lebanon, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5965en>, 5.

²⁹ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 31.

stability may be tied to agriculture, commerce, or illicit activities, such as the cannabis plantations in Baalbeck.

Women in Lebanon have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis. Between 2017 and 2020, women's unemployment rose by 63%,³⁰ primarily due to their concentration in insecure or informal jobs and lack of qualifications, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and exploitative conditions.³¹ Like men, women in agriculture face additional challenges as the labor laws do not protect agricultural workers, and their work is seasonal with low wages, leading to high rural unemployment, for example in Baalbeck.^{32,33} The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, with women being let go without compensation and often taking three to five years to reenter the workforce. It is estimated that more women were leaving the workforce than joining and many of the women newly joining took up informal positions.³⁴ Migrant women workers faced even greater vulnerabilities, including homelessness and lack of basic necessities.³⁵

While the crisis disrupted traditional gender roles in areas like Fnaidek and Saida by pushing women into the workforce, many were left to juggle financial responsibilities with household duties, work burdens, and still more women were leaving the workforce than joining.^{36,37} As women are less likely to be formally employed outside the home, they are more likely to have inadequate or nonexistent pensions.³⁸

In addition to losing their own jobs, women often faced the added challenge of their husbands also losing employment, which compounded financial

stress on the household.³⁹ There were also instances of men abandoning their families, leaving women solely responsible for providing for their children.⁴⁰ Overall, women-headed households were at a higher risk of falling below the poverty line.⁴¹

Unemployment during economic crises is likely to increase women's dependence on men for financial support and shelter, while tightened household budgets and reduced government spending on health and education often deprioritize women's needs, leading to a decline in their status and access to resources.⁴² Economic hardships also increased maternal mortality rates and strained mental health, especially among Syrian refugees with limited access to healthcare, although economic crises have been reported to affect men's mental health more.⁴³ In Hay el Garbeh and Ghobeiri, it was noted that economic burdens strain women's family relations and overall fueled gender-based violence, particularly during pandemic-related confinements.⁴⁴

Women's contribution to conflict resolution is significant in some areas. In Jabal Mohsen and Tebbeneh, women's organizations advocate for economic support, while in Barja and Mina, women engage in skill-building and entrepreneurial initiatives that alleviate economic pressures and support community stability.⁴⁵ These efforts highlight women's crucial role in fostering economic resilience and social cohesion.

Political Tensions

Women in Lebanon face significant challenges in politics, marked by severe underrepresentation that perpetuates the marginalization of women's

³⁰ Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 7.

³¹ "The Impact of the Economic and Monetary Crisis on Human Rights in Lebanon," Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, September 12, 2023, <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5807/The-Impact-of-the-Economic-and-Monetary-Crisis-on-Human-Rights-in-Lebanon>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 33.

³⁴ Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 7, 9.

³⁵ "The Impact of the Economic and Monetary Crisis on Human Rights in Lebanon," Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, September 12, 2023, <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5807/The-Impact-of-the-Economic-and-Monetary-Crisis-on-Human-Rights-in-Lebanon>.

³⁶ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 97.

³⁷ Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 7, 9.

³⁸ Ibid, 10.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "The Impact of the Economic and Monetary Crisis on Human Rights in Lebanon," Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, September 12, 2023, <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5807/The-Impact-of-the-Economic-and-Monetary-Crisis-on-Human-Rights-in-Lebanon>.

⁴¹ Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 10.

⁴² Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 11.

⁴³ Nisreen Salti and Nadine Mezher, "Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon," UN Women, September 2020, 11.

⁴⁴ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 114.

⁴⁵ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 63, 108.

issues and hinders societal progress. Currently, women constitute only 6.25% of the national parliament.⁴⁶ Corruption, sectarianism, and entrenched political dysfunction exacerbate unrest, with clientelism and discriminatory personal status laws reinforcing gender inequalities.⁴⁷ Political forces have blocked essential reforms, while protests are often met with harsh crackdowns, limiting avenues for change.⁴⁸

Political instability affects economic stability, security, the provision of government services, education, political participation, and basic human rights. In urban areas, informal security providers, including political parties, were described as a major source of fear for women.⁴⁹ Sectarian divides and patriarchal policies, such as nationality laws that deny women equal rights, persist due to stagnant political discourse and demographic pressures. The absence of national elections perpetuates this status quo, hindering progress on women's rights.⁵⁰ While women are often accused of inaction and lack of interest in political participation, the fact is that systemic barriers, including harassment and violence sometimes targeting their entire families, severely restrict their access to leadership roles. Despite these challenges, Lebanon's feminist movement is among the most active in the Middle East. Women have formed and joined CSOs and participated in political movements, such as during the October 2019 revolution, demonstrating their critical role in advocating for change.⁵¹

Religious Tensions

Religious extremism and sectarianism have been significant sources of insecurity and division in Lebanon, disproportionately affecting women. Lebanon's sectarian system includes 18 sects and 15 different personal status laws, which subordi-

nate women in areas like marriage, custody, and economic rights.⁵² Every single personal status law disadvantages women, increasing their vulnerability to violence and dependency.⁵³ Additionally, this means that women may receive different treatment based on their religious affiliation. Religious customs are sometimes used to justify practices such as child marriage, marital rape, and "honor crimes" and to prevent reforms regarding freedom of belief or sexual orientation, further exacerbating gender inequality.⁵⁴

Religious tensions are reinforced by national laws that impose restrictions on inter-religious relationships, including inheritance and custody rights, infringing on women's freedoms to choose their partners or religion and hindering societal cohesion.⁵⁵ Those without religious affiliation face even greater discrimination, as sectarian authorities monopolize family law and civil rights, thereby denying civil rights to those not belonging to any sect.⁵⁶ The absence of civil personal status laws may pose a challenge to individuals who want to leave their sect, maintaining systemic discrimination and impeding reforms aligned with international conventions like CEDAW.

Women's rights movements have achieved significant progress, such as securing protections against violence and allowing individuals to remove sectarian affiliations from their ID, should they want to. Efforts like the Family Rights movement have also successfully improved custody laws, showcasing women's crucial role in advancing equality and conflict resolution.⁵⁷

Refugee Dynamics

The WEAM conflict mapping report does not assess the gendered dimensions of Lebanon's ref-

⁴⁶ Abir Chebaro, "Missing: Vital Voices of Lebanese Women in Politics," Lebanese American University & the Arab Institute for Women, 2023, 19.

⁴⁷ UN Women Lebanon, "In Brief - Women, Peace and Security," 1.

⁴⁸ Rebecca O'Keeffe, "Revolution and the Role of Women: Lessons from Lebanon," Friends of Europe, April 14, 2023, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/revolution-and-the-role-of-women-lessons-from-lebanon/>.

⁴⁹ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 4.

⁵⁰ Nizar Saghie and Lama Karame, "Discrimination and Violence Against Women in Lebanon Takes Place on Multiple Fronts," the Legal Agenda, September 15, 2020, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/discrimination-and-violence-against-women-in-lebanon-takes-place-on-multiple-fronts/>.

⁵¹ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WEAM Conflict Mapping Study," 125-126.

⁵² Rebecca O'Keeffe, "Revolution and the Role of Women: Lessons from Lebanon," Friends of Europe, April 14, 2023, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/revolution-and-the-role-of-women-lessons-from-lebanon/>.

⁵³ The National Working Group on FoRB, "National Report on Freedom of Religion and Belief - Lebanon," July 2023, <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/National-Report-on-Freedom-of-Religion-and-Belief-Lebanon.pdf>, 119.

⁵⁴ Alef, "In the Name of Religion: Women's Unequal Rights in Lebanon," accessed August 7, 2024, <https://alefliiban.org/publications/in-the-name-of-religion-womens-unequal-rights-in-lebanon/>, 8.

⁵⁵ The National Working Group on FoRB, "National Report on Freedom of Religion and Belief - Lebanon," July 2023, <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/National-Report-on-Freedom-of-Religion-and-Belief-Lebanon.pdf>, 119.

⁵⁶ Nizar Saghie and Lama Karame, "Discrimination and Violence Against Women in Lebanon Takes Place on Multiple Fronts," the Legal Agenda, September 15, 2020, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/discrimination-and-violence-against-women-in-lebanon-takes-place-on-multiple-fronts/>.

⁵⁷ Nizar Saghie and Lama Karame, "Discrimination and Violence Against Women in Lebanon Takes Place on Multiple Fronts," the Legal Agenda, September 15, 2020, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/discrimination-and-violence-against-women-in-lebanon-takes-place-on-multiple-fronts/>.

ugee crisis in depth but acknowledges the significant burdens on women from host and refugee communities, stemming from economic strain, insecurity, and social tensions following the influx of refugees. These challenges are interconnected with other forms of tension highlighted in this research.

While many place the blame on Syrian refugees for insecurity and economic crisis⁵⁸, dissatisfaction with public services more often stems from broader systemic disparities in government provision across regions rather than solely from the presence of refugees.⁵⁹

Lebanese women in this context face challenges such as limited access to support services, which are often more clearly directed towards refugees wherefore Lebanese women are less likely to make use of such services despite being eligible.⁶⁰ Syrian women experience intersectional vulnerabilities, with one in five Syrian refugees having a disability, women being at greater risk of violence and 60% of women not having regular access to a mobile phone, leading to further isolation.⁶¹ Syrian refugee women experience higher levels of severe psychological distress than Lebanese women due to financial and family stress, uncertainty, family separation, and stigma surrounding their refugee status.⁶² Women are generally less likely than men to be granted legal residency or Lebanese sponsorship, partially due to discriminatory or socio-economic structures, but also due to a lack of knowledge about these procedures.⁶³ This compounds their inability to work and increases fears of arrest or deportation, which prevents them from approaching local authorities when they are in need of assistance.⁶⁴ This fear of approaching authorities is especially concerning when considering that Syrian refugee women are at a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence due to displacement and 94% of known sex trafficking survivors in Lebanon are Syrian.⁶⁵ Additionally, the resulting financial stress leads to higher levels of

child marriages.⁶⁶

It is still unclear how the fall of the Assad-regime in Syria will influence the situation of refugees in Lebanon and their impact on local communities. Syrian refugee women actively contribute to conflict resolution through volunteer work addressing violence and supporting survivors.⁶⁷ Employing refugees as aid workers presents a promising approach to alleviate tensions while offering meaningful employment opportunities.

Security Concerns and Gender-Based Violence

Lebanon, like much of the MENA region, remains impacted by insecurity due to armed conflicts, political corruption, dysfunctional institutions, economic hardship, and the Syrian refugee crisis. Political violence persists decades after the end of the Lebanese Civil War, exacerbated by inter-communal grievances, inadequate governance, and broader regional conflicts. Women remain largely excluded from peace and security processes, including the 1991 Ta'if Accords, subsequent national dialogues, and security institutions, where they constitute only 6.25% of parliamentarians and are notably absent from police units.⁶⁸ They are also absent from more local security institutions, such as police stations, despite both men and women stating that they would feel more secure if a women's unit were present.⁶⁹ This is a critical omission, as their perspectives and representation have been shown to contribute to more sustainable peace.

Women and men experience and perceive security differently. A 2019 survey showed that 50% of women in Lebanon have "serious problems" due to the "safety and security where they live."⁷⁰ In West Beqaa, near the Syrian border, both women and men perceived the threat of sexual assault and rape to be significantly higher than in other parts of the country. In some areas, men felt less safe, for example when traveling alone at night, especially in areas bordering Syria, due to the increased mili-

⁵⁸ Patricia Karam, "The Plight and Politics of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", Arab Center Washington DC 2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-plight-and-politics-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon/>.

⁵⁹ Ark Group DMCC, "Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon - Wave VI," August 2019, iii.

⁶⁰ "GBV and Mental Health Among Refugee and Host Community Women in Lebanon," Forced Migration Review, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.fmreview.org/potts-barada-bourassa/>.

⁶¹ UN Women Lebanon, "Research Brief- Addressing Gender Amongst Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," September 2019, 1.

⁶² "GBV and Mental Health Among Refugee and Host Community Women in Lebanon," Forced Migration Review, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.fmreview.org/potts-barada-bourassa/>.

⁶³ UN Women Lebanon, "Research Brief- Addressing Gender Amongst Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," September 2019, 1.

⁶⁴ UN Women Lebanon, "Research Brief- Addressing Gender Amongst Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," September 2019, 1-2.

⁶⁵ UN Women Lebanon, "Research Brief- Addressing Gender Amongst Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," September 2019, 2.

⁶⁶ UN Women Lebanon, "Research Brief- Addressing Gender Amongst Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," September 2019, 1.

⁶⁷ "Refugee Women Prevent Violence in Lebanon," Plan International, accessed July 13, 2024, <https://plan-international.org/lebanon/case-studies/refugee-women-prevent-violence-in-lebanon/>.

⁶⁸ UN Women Lebanon, "In Brief - Women, Peace and Security," 1.

⁶⁹ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 6.

⁷⁰ "GBV and Mental Health Among Refugee and Host Community Women in Lebanon," Forced Migration Review, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.fmreview.org/potts-barada-bourassa/>.

tarisation of the area.⁷¹ In Baalbeck, marginalization and violence were present, and gender-specific issues continue to be ignored in peace-making efforts here.⁷²

Rural women face higher risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SCBV), while urban women are more threatened by informal security actors, such as political parties.⁷³ This is partially due to rural areas being more homogenous and therefore experiencing less political tensions. Syrian refugees also face unique challenges, with 59% perceiving host communities as a primary threat to their safety.⁷⁴

Restrictive gender norms often limit women's mobility, as parents are worried their daughters might fall victim to harassment and violence in public spaces.⁷⁵ It has been reported, for example in Hay el Garbeh and Ghobeiri, that women have become increasingly targeted by theft and harassment.⁷⁶ However, homes are not necessarily safer, as domestic violence has surged, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent economic crises, with Mina specifically recounting an increase in domestic violence.^{77,78} CSOs in Lebanon struggle to address domestic violence, as survivors rarely seek help due to cultural stigma framing it as a private family issue.⁷⁹ Both women and men reported a common belief that having connections is essential for receiving respectful treatment at police stations and for ensuring that cases are properly processed.⁸⁰ Limited divorce rights under personal status laws and the risk of further abuse deter many women from reporting cases, which are rarely pursued effectively.

Despite improved laws on domestic violence (restraining orders and shelters), enforcement remains weak, hindered by corruption, societal stigma, and survivors' fear of retaliation. Marital rape remains legal due to religious pressures.⁸¹

The effects of the changing security situation on women due to the escalations of hostilities between local armed groups and Israel are not yet addressed in reports and publications. While women are generally at a larger risk of falling victim to bombings, women in Lebanon have, in the past, been rarely hit by explosive attacks.⁸² Whether this statistic is still relevant is unclear at this point (January 2025). Additionally, many women were displaced due to the war, internally and into Syria, putting them at a heightened risk of exploitation and harassment, as well as complicating their access to adequate shelter, nutrition, and medical care.

The structural inequality and legal restrictions often force women into untenable choices, such as staying in abusive marriages to retain custody of their children. Limited awareness of available services further complicates their ability to seek help. Women contribute meaningfully to improving security despite systemic exclusion. In Deir el Ahmar, women educators promote peace and stability, while in Saida, mothers address youth involvement in armed groups. In Ein el Remmeneh and Chiyah, women work to mitigate tensions within families and communities, showcasing their capacity as agents of change in fostering societal cohesion.⁸³

Social Tensions

Social tensions in Lebanon intertwine with other challenges, shaped by religion, nationality, gender, and economic status. Traditional values and customs shape social norms and hierarchies, often influenced by religion, ethnicity, and nationality. In some communities, Lebanese women hold a higher social status than Syrian refugee women, even when they share the same religion, hinting at nationality or refugee status having a bigger effect on social standing than religious affiliation.⁸⁴ However, despite these distinctions, public spaces remain largely men-dominated, limiting women's

⁷¹ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 3.

⁷² Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 90 & 93.

⁷³ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 4.

⁷⁴ UN Women, "Follow-Up Assessment on Gendered Realities in Displacement: Lebanon," <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/lebanon-onu-1610-002.pdf>, 54.

⁷⁵ "Humanitarian Impact Assessment of Lebanon's Ongoing Social Unrest and Possible Economic Crisis on Women and Girls," the UN Refugee Agency, November 21, 2019, 2.

⁷⁶ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 114.

⁷⁷ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 72.

⁷⁸ Rebecca O'Keeffe, "Revolution and the Role of Women: Lessons from Lebanon," Friends of Europe, April 14, 2023, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/revolution-and-the-role-of-women-lessons-from-lebanon/>.

⁷⁹ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 4.

⁸⁰ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 6.

⁸¹ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 4-5.

⁸² Professor Ismene Gizelis et al., "Gendered Patterns in Explosive Violence: a Policy Brief on Understanding the Impact of Explosive Weapons on Women," ReliefWeb, published April 19, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gendered-patterns-explosive-violence-policy-brief-understanding-impact-explosive-weapons-women>.

⁸³ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 80, 102, 122.

⁸⁴ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 26.

visibility and participation regardless of nationality.⁸⁵ A survey found that interpersonal violence was more often considered acceptable as a last resort for enforcing certain social norms, but different forms of socialization lead to different attitudes toward violence.⁸⁶ In Barja, women daring to break cultural norms, like forming political parties, face resistance, reflecting entrenched societal attitudes.⁸⁷ Rural areas see fewer interpersonal tensions due to their homogeneity.⁸⁸

Rising poverty exacerbates social unrest, tied directly to Lebanon's economic crisis.⁸⁹ Socio-economic barriers, particularly in Beddawi and Mina, hinder women's empowerment and conflict resolution efforts.⁹⁰ The absence of a cohesive national social protection strategy leads to fragmented, inefficient programs and high exclusion rates for vulnerable groups.⁹¹

Women actively contribute to conflict resolution through peace-building and reconciliation efforts, especially in teaching roles, despite restrictive social norms.

Stakeholders

Lebanese conflicts are shaped by diverse stakeholders operating at multiple levels. At the governing level, political parties and government officials are key actors, often prioritizing sectarian or factional interests, which exacerbates divisions. The Lebanese Army serves as a stabilizing force but is constrained by political influences and limited resources. Women soldiers play a key role in fostering dialogue, de-escalating tensions, and building trust with communities while also reducing the risk of sexual harassment.⁹² Their presence in the Lebanese Army has grown from 1% in 2017 to 5.5% in 2021, reflecting gradual progress in gender inclusion.⁹³ Local governmental institutions, including municipalities and local authorities, play

crucial roles in managing tensions but often lack adequate support or are accused of biases. As our research shows below, municipalities also often lack a thorough understanding of the gendered dimensions of conflict and generally deprioritize projects and supportive mechanisms that specifically support women in their communities and within municipal structures.

Figures operating in the illegal realm, such as smugglers, criminal networks, armed groups, weapons dealers, traffickers, and at times politicians exploit disorder for profit. There is limited information on how these figures specifically affect women, but given their overall negative impact on law and order in Lebanon, a negative effect can be assumed. Additionally, Lebanon has been a known destination for victims of human trafficking from abroad, many of whom are forced into domestic servitude or sex work.⁹⁴ Certain armed groups, which control a significant portion of illicit activities, can simultaneously escalate and mediate conflicts, wielding dual roles as disruptors and stabilizers.

Organizations, including local and international NGOs, strive to address the humanitarian and social consequences of conflict. Their efforts often bridge gaps left by weakened state institutions; with Lebanon's political deadlock and a caretaker government in place since 2022, many state institutions remain paralyzed, leaving NGOs to fill critical gaps in service provision.⁹⁵ This role has expanded beyond traditional development work to humanitarian relief, particularly in response to economic decline, food insecurity, and the destruction caused by Israeli bombardments.⁹⁶ NGOs now provide essential support to farmers, small businesses, and vulnerable groups, including women and youth.⁹⁷ However, their increasing dependence on foreign funding raises concerns about long-term sustainability, as economic instability weakens efforts to

⁸⁵ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 46.

⁸⁶ Ark Group DMCC, "Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon - Wave VI," August 2019, v & 24.

⁸⁷ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 111.

⁸⁸ Lana Khattab and Henri Myrtilinen, "Gender, Security and SSR in Lebanon," International Alert, November 2014, 4.

⁸⁹ "Humanitarian Impact Assessment of Lebanon's Ongoing Social Unrest and Possible Economic Crisis on Women and Girls," the UN Refugee Agency, November 21, 2019, 2.

⁹⁰ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 58 & 72.

⁹¹ Beyond Group, "Social Protection in Lebanon, From a Gender Perspective Baseline Assessment Report," 2021, 6.

⁹² Alia Brahimi, "Fighting Females," Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2022/05/fighting-females?lang=en>, published on May 5, 2022.

⁹³ Alia Brahimi, "Fighting Females," Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2022/05/fighting-females?lang=en>, published on May 5, 2022.

⁹⁴ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "Global Organized Crime Index - Lebanon," 2023, 3.

⁹⁵ Jennifer Holleis and Sara Hteit, "Lebanon Ceasefire: Civil Society Ramps Up Reconstruction," DW, 29th of November 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/ceasefire-in-lebanon-civil-society-ramps-up-reconstruction-plans/a-70919839>.

⁹⁶ Imad Salamey, "Lebanon's Non-Governmental Organizations' Needs Assessment In Livelihood and Food Security," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, November 2022, 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 9.

generate local income and diversify resources.⁹⁸

At the religious level, faith-based organizations and religious leaders shape narratives and influence communities, both positively and divisively, depending on their affiliations and actions.

Community-level actors encompass local youth and women's groups, which often promote peace through education and grassroots initiatives. Influential families and business owners wield economic and political power, sometimes leading to favoritism and tensions. Older generations and diaspora members shape cultural and political ideologies, while local sports and community groups foster cohesion. Refugees, particularly Syrian communities, face vulnerabilities while also being perceived as contributors to social tensions.

Conflict Settings By Regions

This chapter contains a regional breakdown of conflict dynamics and their interaction with gender. It is focused on the regions referenced in this report, as it includes input from municipalities from Saida, Fnaidek, Majdal Anjar, and Chiyah (Beirut), as well as from women community members from Baalbeck, Barja, Beirut, Saida and Tripoli. The information in this chapter is mainly based on the insights from the research conducted by Oxfam previously in the WE'AM project, specifically the Literature Review and the Community Conflict Mapping. These insights are completed with additional research to reflect the most recent developments in these areas, as well as to add the regions that are featured in this report (Majdal Anjar, the whole of Beirut, and the whole of Tripoli) but not, or not fully, in the WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study.

Baalbeck contends with economic disparities, illicit trade, and resource shortages, exacerbated by the Syrian refugee influx.⁹⁹ Armed groups dominate the local economy, creating security and

environmental concerns. Social tensions arise as those involved in the illicit trade gain higher social status, while families and clan structures who perceive themselves to be disadvantaged contribute to intensifying tensions and divisions.¹⁰⁰ Baalbeck was targeted extensively by the most recent Israeli bombardments and received unrealistic evacuation notices, as residents of the entire city and surrounding areas were ordered to leave.¹⁰¹ Women are underrepresented in decision-making and suffer from marginalization and violence, but contribute to social cohesion through education and mediation efforts.¹⁰² NGOs and local reconciliation committees work to stabilize the area, though challenges remain.

Barja faces political instability, and social divisions, further strained by the presence of Syrian refugees. Political tensions are exacerbated by divided loyalties among residents and the absence of leadership following the municipality head's departure after the 2019 economic crisis.¹⁰³ Historical grievances related to the civil war, particularly around land ownership and political power dynamics, continue to shape the region. Barja was hit by recent Israeli airstrikes, targeting residential buildings.¹⁰⁴ Women's roles are expanding in political and economic spheres, though cultural barriers persist.¹⁰⁵ Community organizations and youth initiatives contribute to conflict mitigation, but leadership gaps hinder long-term stability.¹⁰⁶

Beirut, Lebanon's capital, struggles with deep socioeconomic inequality, worsened by the 2020 port explosion, the ongoing economic crisis, and the recent Israeli airstrikes that caused extensive damage and civilian harm.¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸ Fragmentation along social, ethnic, and religious lines has increased, particularly in neighborhoods like Hay el Gharbeh, Ghobeiri, Ein el Remmeneh, and Chiyah, where historical sectarian divides, political affiliations, and economic struggles drive tensions.¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰ Women play a key role in mitigating tensions, but they also

⁹⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁹⁹ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 33-34.

¹⁰⁰ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 33-34.

¹⁰¹ David O'Sullivan and Emma de Ruiter, "Israeli Airstrikes Hit Lebanese City of Baalbek, Home to UNESCO World Heritage Site," EuroNews, October 30th, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/10/30/israeli-airstrikes-hit-lebanese-city-of-baalbek-home-to-unesco-world-heritage-site>.

¹⁰² Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 87-88.

¹⁰³ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 38.

¹⁰⁴ "Twenty Killed in Israeli Strike on Lebanese Town of Barja," Middle East Eye, November 5th, 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/twenty-killed-israeli-strike-lebanese-town-barja>

¹⁰⁵ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 111.

¹⁰⁶ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 37.

¹⁰⁷ UN-Habitat Lebanon, "Beirut City Profile 2021," 2021, XVII.

¹⁰⁸ Laila Bassam and Riham Alkousaa, "Powerful Israeli Airstrike in Central Beirut Kills 20, Lebanese Health Ministry Says," Reuter, November 23rd, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/least-four-missiles-fired-strike-that-rocked-beirut-security-sources-say-2024-11-23/>.

¹⁰⁹ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 40.

¹¹⁰ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 39.

face increased insecurity and economic stress.¹¹¹ Civil society efforts remain highly active and crucial in bridging divides and providing essential services.¹¹²

Fnaidek in Akkar faces economic deprivation and pressures from hosting a significant Syrian refugee population. Generational divides, large income disparities, and delayed government aid further strain local cohesion.¹¹³ Political tensions, influenced by sectarian affiliations, foster mistrust in the government and disparities in security levels among residents.¹¹⁴ Women's economic participation is rising due to financial necessity, with organizations like Zahret Al Ajyel supporting their involvement in agriculture and social initiatives.¹¹⁵ Youth and NGOs like UNDP, UNICEF, and the Red Cross contribute to resilience.

Majdal Anjar in the Beqaa Valley is one of Lebanon's poorest areas and faces economic hardship and infrastructure strain, partially due to the high presence of Syrian refugees, who make up nearly half its population (2019).¹¹⁶ While the town has not seen major intercommunal tensions, resource pressure - especially waste management - remains an issue, although local authorities, international organizations, and both Lebanese and Syrian locals collaborate to address such issues.¹¹⁷ Women have limited economic opportunities but benefit from services like MSF's reproductive health center.¹¹⁸ The town's vulnerability to regional conflicts was underscored by the 2024 Israeli airstrikes that targeted Palestinian Hamas members.¹¹⁹

Saida in the South of Lebanon experiences over-

lapping economic, historical, political, and sectarian tensions, exacerbated by the presence of Palestinian refugees in Ain al-Helweh camp, where frequent clashes impact the city.¹²⁰ Economic disparities between neighborhoods, reliance on vulnerable industries have deepened poverty and created economic instability. Additionally, Saida has experienced relatively heavy Israeli bombardments, lasting well into the official ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel.¹²¹ Women face economic pressures that push them into the workforce while also increasing their caregiving burdens.¹²² They play a crucial role in preventing youth recruitment into armed groups, with civil society actors supporting peacebuilding efforts.¹²³

Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, suffers from extreme marginalization, high unemployment, and security crackdowns, which fuel cycles of violence.¹²⁴ Tripoli's directly surrounding areas were targeted by recent Israeli airstrikes and internally displaced persons have moved to Tripoli seeking safety.¹²⁵ Deep class and geographic divides, high unemployment - reaching up to 80% in some neighborhoods - and underinvestment in infrastructure contribute to systemic disenfranchisement, but economic stress and conflict-related trauma have increased gender-based violence generally, with deteriorating mental health affecting family dynamics.¹²⁶ Women and girl refugees face heightened risks of exploitation and gender-based violence.¹²⁷ Women's organizations play a vital role in reconciliation, but systemic instability persists.

¹¹¹ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 122.

¹¹² UN-Habitat Lebanon, "Beirut City Profile 2021," 2021, XX.

¹¹³ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 24.

¹¹⁴ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 25.

¹¹⁵ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 39 & 43.

¹¹⁶ UNHCR, "Inauguration of Non-Organic Waste Sorting Facility in Majdal Anjar," July 27th, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/news/inauguration-non-organic-waste-sorting-facility-majdal-anjar>.

¹¹⁷ UNHCR, "Inauguration of Non-Organic Waste Sorting Facility in Majdal Anjar," July 27th, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/news/inauguration-non-organic-waste-sorting-facility-majdal-anjar>.

¹¹⁸ Jinane Saad, "I still Remember the First Child Born at our Centre - Her Name Was Ghazal," Médecins Sans Frontières, December 2nd, 2016, <https://www.msf.org/lebanon-%E2%80%99Ci-still-remember-first-child-born-our-centre-her-name-was-ghazal%E2%80%99D>.

¹¹⁹ Laila Bassam et al, "Israeli Strikes Kill at Least Five in Lebanon, Including Two Children," Reuters, May 17th, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-strikes-kill-least-5-lebanon-including-civilians-2024-05-17/>.

¹²⁰ Oxfam, "Literature Review Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," October 2023, 35-36.

¹²¹ Muntasser Abdallah, "Saida Strike: Israeli Army Claims to Have Killed Hamas Commander," L'Orient Today, February 17th, 2025, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1448130/one-killed-three-injured-in-israeli-strike-targeting-car-in-saida.html>

¹²² Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 97.

¹²³ Oxfam, "Community Conflict Analysis Report - WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study," 102.

¹²⁴ Ruth Simpson and Layal Assaad, "Prospects and Challenges for Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention and Reconciliation in Lebanon," UN Women and International Alert, March 2022, 11.

¹²⁵ "Israeli Air Strike on Northern Lebanon Kills Hamas Commander and His Family," Al Jazeera, October 5th, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/5/israeli-air-strike-on-northern-lebanon-kills-hamas-commander-and-his-family>.

¹²⁶ Ruth Simpson and Layal Assaad, "Prospects and Challenges for Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention and Reconciliation in Lebanon," UN Women and International Alert, March 2022, 12-13.

¹²⁷ Ruth Simpson and Layal Assaad, "Prospects and Challenges for Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention and Reconciliation in Lebanon," UN Women and International Alert, March 2022, 13.

Rationale

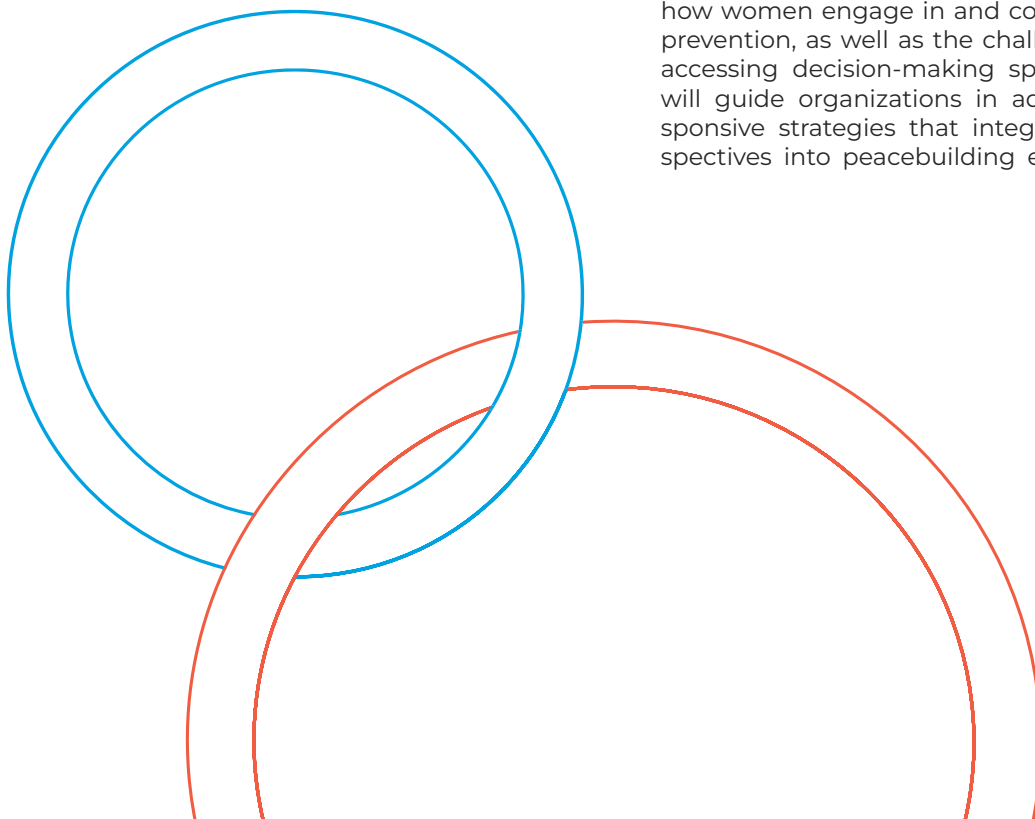
This report is part of the WE'AM project (Working for Engagement, Acceptance, and Mediation: A Community-Based Approach to Social Cohesion in Lebanon), a European Union-funded initiative implemented by Oxfam in partnership with Right to Play, SHiFT, and ALEF. WE'AM aims to foster social cohesion by addressing drivers of tensions at the community level, promoting gender-responsive conflict resolution tools, and integrating social cohesion approaches into local and international programming. A central focus of the project is understanding how women engage in and contribute to conflict prevention and resolution, highlighting their role in mitigating community tensions. This report specifically examines how various actors working on social cohesion in Lebanon engage with women and integrate gender considerations into their approaches. It analyzes how women are included in conflict resolution efforts, the perceptions of their roles, the support mechanisms available to them, and the extent to which organizations and institutions understand and apply gender-responsive strategies in their work. Organizations working on social cohesion and women's rights - including civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations (IOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), and municipalities - have the potential to drive meaningful change. By actively integrating women into conflict resolution efforts, advocating for gender-sensitive policies, and strengthening local support mechanisms, these actors can challenge entrenched inequalities and enhance women's role in peacebuilding. If coordinated effectively, their interventions can help reshape Lebanon's conflict landscape, ensuring that women's perspectives and leadership are recognized as essential to lasting social cohesion and stability.

Objectives

This report serves as a key output of WE'AM, offering insights into local conflict dynamics and the gendered dimensions of social cohesion efforts in Lebanon. It draws from a conflict analysis based on the WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study and extensive key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a diverse set of stakeholders, including international organizations, Lebanese civil society organizations (CSOs), WE'AM partner organizations, women's rights organizations (WROs), women community members engaged in conflict-related projects, and municipalities. Using an ecosystem approach, these interviews assess social cohesion efforts at five interconnected levels - individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and institutional - providing a holistic perspective on gender and conflict.

This report aims to contribute to fostering social cohesion by addressing community tensions and promoting gender-inclusive conflict resolution tools to enhance gender awareness and sensitivity within Lebanese organizations and institutions. It highlights the intersection of conflict and gender inequalities, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, particularly women. The report seeks to identify entrenched patriarchal norms, legal barriers, and resource limitations that hinder women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution by assessing conflict resolution efforts across multiple levels. This report equips local and international actors with practical strategies and crucial insights to enhance women's roles in peacebuilding and ensure more inclusive and sustainable conflict resolution in Lebanon.

A key objective is to inform the development of a gender-transformative toolkit that supports targeted interventions in conflict resolution. Through conflict analysis and stakeholder engagement, the project will provide a nuanced understanding of how women engage in and contribute to conflict prevention, as well as the challenges they face in accessing decision-making spaces. The findings will guide organizations in adopting gender-responsive strategies that integrate women's perspectives into peacebuilding efforts.



The background is a solid blue color with a subtle pattern of small, lighter blue dots. In the upper right quadrant, there are two overlapping circles. The larger circle on the left has a thin black outline, while the smaller circle on the right has a thin white outline. The word "Methodology" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, positioned in the lower left area of the page.

Methodology

This report employs a qualitative and inclusive research methodology to capture diverse perspectives on conflict resolution and its intersection with gender dynamics in Lebanon. A key aspect of this approach is its extractive nature, meaning that insights are drawn directly from those engaged in conflict-related work. It is also context-driven, as respondents contributed to defining conflict based on their lived experiences, informing the design of a forthcoming tool.

This is achieved through qualitative data collection, specifically key informant interviews (KIIs) with organizations and focus group discussions (FGDs) with women involved in peacebuilding initiatives. These discussions provide first-hand accounts of challenges, opportunities, and best practices in integrating gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution. In total, 58 individuals from different geographical areas participated in this research. More details on the methodology are provided below.

The research process began with a comprehensive literature review. These insights are primarily based on WE'AM's conflict mapping study, a cornerstone for understanding Lebanon's diverse conflict landscapes. Specifically, this report draws on Oxfam's Literature Review Report and Community Conflict Analysis Report, both part of the WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study."

Oxfam's conflict mapping studies provide a comprehensive analysis of tensions across 12 regions in Lebanon, offering a geographically representative overview. These reports examine the root causes and drivers of conflict, the role of women in fostering social cohesion, and the historical, social, and cultural dynamics shaping each community. They also identify key actors influencing conflict escalation or de-escalation and present detailed community profiles that highlight local power structures, sources of tension, and potential opportunities for conflict resolution. This foundational research informs the broader analysis of gender and social cohesion within this report.

To ensure comprehensive insights, additional information is incorporated from reputable sources, including international organizations and research institutions active in Lebanon. Given the rapidly evolving security situation, recent developments have also been included based on news reports from credible agencies.

The desk review was instrumental in:

- Contextualizing the gender dimensions of conflict in Lebanon.
- Identifying gaps in current strategies for conflict resolution.
- Key resources include Oxfam's conflict mapping study, which offers critical insights into the geographic and socio-political distribution of conflicts in Lebanon. By analyzing this, the

study pinpoints regions with heightened conflict intensity and the specific challenges faced by local communities, enabling targeted and context-specific interventions.

Data Collection

The data for this report was collected between September 6th, 2024, and November 12th, 2024, a period marked by heavy Israeli bombardments across Lebanon. The ongoing conflict may have influenced participants' perceptions, shaping their responses based on heightened insecurity, shifting priorities, and the evolving political landscape. This context is important when interpreting the findings, as the war may have reinforced or altered views on social cohesion, gender roles, and conflict resolution.

The data was collected through 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 5 focus group discussions (FGDs), as detailed in the following chapter. These interviews and discussions took place online to ensure attendance and safety in light of the security situation, with the exception of 1 FGD in Tripoli, as it took place before the escalation of hostilities.

A.Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Conducting KIIs with WROs, CSOs, municipalities, and one IO across the twelve regions is a cornerstone of the WE'AM project's research methodology. These interviews are important for deepening our understanding of the diverse methodologies and approaches employed by these organisations. By engaging directly with WROs, we aimed to uncover the nuanced strategies they used to navigate the complex landscape of gender dynamics and conflict resolution in Lebanon.

The KIIs delved into several critical areas; firstly, they explored the strategies employed to create safe spaces for women. This involves understanding how programs are designed and implemented to ensure women feel secure and supported when participating in community activities or seeking services. These safe spaces are essential for empowering women, as they provide an environment where they can express themselves freely, seek help, and engage in community decision-making processes without fear of discrimination or violence.

Another focus of the KIIs was mapping formal and informal influential stakeholders and actors' interaction with local communities. Organizations often work within a network of various stakeholders, including community leaders, local authorities, and other influential individuals or groups. By addressing these interactions, we can identify key allies and potential obstacles in their advocacy efforts. This mapping exercise helped in understanding the power dynamics within communities and devising strategies to engage stakeholders effectively in promoting gender equality and women's rights.

The KIIs also examined how gender is integrated into project design, implementation, and evaluation phases. Integrating a gender perspective involves considering the different needs, roles, and impacts on men and women at every stage of a project, especially projects that focus on social cohesion and peace building. This ensures that interventions are inclusive and address the specific challenges faced by women and girls. Through these interviews, we gathered insights into the practical tools and frameworks used to mainstream gender including gender-sensitive indicators, methodologies for gender analysis, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating gender impacts.

The insights gathered from these interviews are a keystone for understanding the practical challenges and successful strategies employed by intervening actors. By understanding these challenges, we can develop targeted support mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of their work. Similarly, the interviews highlight successful strategies and best practices that can be replicated or adapted in other contexts. These might include innovative approaches to community engagement, effective advocacy techniques, or successful models of collaboration with other stakeholders. The information collected through the KIIs will directly inform the development of practical tools and guidelines within the Gender Transformative Toolkit. These tools and guidelines will be designed to address the specific needs and challenges identified.

The questions used to guide the KIIs can be found in Annex 1.

KII Participants

This section outlines the categories of participants of the KIIs, the specific organizations involved, and the rationale for their selection. By engaging a diverse range of actors - including civil society organizations, women's rights organizations, international organizations, and municipalities - the research captures a comprehensive understanding of how different stakeholders integrate gender-sensitive approaches into their work. The following subsections introduce the participating organizations and explain their relevance to the study.

Women's Rights Organizations (WROs):

Women's Rights Organisations are at the heart of our KIIs. These organizations are instrumental in championing gender justice and women's empowerment across Lebanon. With deep roots in their respective communities, WROs possess a nuanced understanding of the local gender dynamics and the unique and multifaceted challenges women face. The WROs serve as both primarily involved individuals and implementers of the Gender Transformative Toolkit that will be developed in the next phase of the project. Their involvement is crucial not only for enhancing their own capacities but also for disseminating the toolkit's principles and

practices within their communities. As experienced advocates for women's rights, these organisations have a proven track record of addressing gender inequalities through a variety of projects and initiatives. Their strong community engagement and diverse expertise in areas such as advocacy, legal support, education, economic empowerment, and psychosocial services make them invaluable partners.

The selection of WROs from 6 different regions and backgrounds helps capture diverse contexts and challenges faced by women across Lebanon. This geographical diversity allows for the inclusion of various contexts, perspectives and experiences, enhancing the relevance of the research and the applicability of the Gender Transformative Toolkit. By engaging organisations from different areas, the project ensures that regional challenges are reflected and strategies are tailored to address them, making the interventions more effective and impactful.

→ Selection of areas: The targeted areas in where the 6 KIIs were conducted are selected from 12 different regions that were covered in WE'AM Conflict Mapping Study.

Initially, these 12 regions were chosen based on geography to ensure a nationally representative study.

- **Area 1** - Mashta Hammoud/Mashta Hassan - Fnaidek - Tikrit (Akkar)
- **Area 2** - Beddawi – Jabal Mohsen/Tebbeneh - Mina (Tripoli)
- **Area 3** - Deir el Ahmar – Baalback – Bekaa
- **Area 4** - Saida – South Lebanon
- **Area 5** - Mount Lebanon
- **Area 6** - Ein el Remmeneh/Shiyah - Hay el Charbeh/Ghobeiri - Beirut

The KIIs took place between September 6, 2024 and November 4, 2024.

These are the WROs selected:

- 1. Akkar Network for Development (AND) - North Lebanon:** was selected for its role as a women-led organization actively working to unify and empower communities in Akkar. Its focus on collaborative development policies and engagement with civil society and local authorities provides valuable insights into gender-sensitive approaches to social cohesion and conflict resolution in the region.
- 2. Damma HUG - West Bekaa:** was selected for its commitment to empowering vulnerable communities, particularly women and children, through gender equality, economic empowerment, and peacebuilding initiatives. Its focus on reducing gender-based violence, foster-

ing psychosocial resilience, and advocating for women's participation aligns directly with the project's goal of understanding and enhancing gender-responsive conflict resolution efforts in Lebanon.

3. Education Planet Association (EPA) - South Lebanon:

was selected for its role as a leading NGO in education and capacity building, providing children and youth with essential resources, training, and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. As a community-led organization, its work directly contributes to strengthening social cohesion and fostering resilience, making it highly relevant.

4. The Lebanese Council To Resist Violence Against Women (Lecorvaw) - Operates across different regions in Lebanon:

was selected for its women-led approach to addressing GBV through response, prevention, and advocacy. Its services, including legal support, mental health therapy, and vocational training, wherefore it can offer insightful information for holistic interventions.

5. The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) - Operates across different regions in Lebanon:

was selected for its long-standing feminist advocacy and commitment to eliminating gender-based violence. Through research, awareness campaigns, and support services, it plays a key role in advancing women's rights and fostering gender equality in Lebanon.

6. Union of Progressive Women (UPW) - Operates across different regions in Lebanon:

was selected for its broad advocacy on gender equality and women's rights, particularly its efforts to empower rural women, combat violence, and push for political representation. Its work can give unique insights into working in less urban communities.

Municipalities

Engaging municipality members through KIIs is a strategic decision for several reasons as local authorities possess an in-depth understanding of the socio-political dynamics and specific needs of their communities. Their insights are invaluable in tailoring conflict resolution strategies to fit local contexts, ensuring that interventions are both relevant and effective. Municipality members play a pivotal role in facilitating the work of WROs and CSOs. Their support, or lack thereof, can significantly impact the success of these organisations' initiatives. By understanding the level of support provided by local authorities, we can identify potential barriers and enablers for project implementation, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of our efforts.

The municipalities were selected from 5 different regions across the country to provide representative insights that reflect regional differences. The data was collected between September 12, 2024,

and November 12, 2024.

1. Fnaidek municipality (Akkar)
2. Majdal Anjar municipality (Beqaa)
3. Saïda municipality (South)
4. Chiyah Municipality (Beirut)
5. Tripoli municipality (North)

International Organization (IO)

The inclusion of international agencies is essential for understanding how global strategies and frameworks shape gender mainstreaming in social cohesion and conflict resolution. Such organizations bring global expertise, substantial resources, and policy guidance to their partnerships with national governments, CSOs, and WROs. These actors operate within broader geopolitical and institutional contexts, influencing regional dynamics and local interventions. By engaging them, we aim to examine how their global approaches interact with Lebanon's specific conflict landscape, assess the relevance and adaptability of their gender-sensitive methodologies, and explore existing tools that could inform the WE'AM Gender Transformative Toolkit. This analysis will also provide insight into how international strategies align with or diverge from regional and local efforts in advancing gender-inclusive peacebuilding.

We conducted a KII with 1 International Organization on September 16, 2024:

1. **International Alert** was selected for its extensive experience in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Its approach, which combines direct community engagement, policy advocacy, and long-term conflict prevention strategies, aligns closely with the objectives of this project. Given its broad reach across Lebanon and its focus on marginalized groups and civil society, International Alert provides valuable insights into how international actors interact with local dynamics. Its expertise in developing sustainable solutions and strengthening community resilience offers important perspectives on integrating gender-sensitive approaches into peacebuilding efforts.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs dedicated to conflict resolution and social cohesion play a pivotal role in our KIIs. These entities specialise in mediating disputes, fostering dialogue, and implementing peace-building initiatives within conflict-affected regions. Their deep knowledge and expertise in conflict resolution methodologies are essential for integrating gender-sensitive approaches into peace-building processes. While these organisations are committed to inclusivity, gender is not necessarily their main focus, wherefore they provide crucial insights into the approaches of actors not specialized in gender-sensitive interventions. With an established presence in various regions, they have built significant trust and credibility within communities. Their collaborative approach, often involving partnerships with local authorities, international agencies,

and community groups, enhances the effectiveness and reach of their initiatives. Their participation in the project provides valuable insights into existing conflict resolution mechanisms and practices, enabling the development of more inclusive and effective strategies.

The CSOs were selected for their extensive experience and established presence in conflict-affected regions. Their involvement guarantees that the project benefits from practical insights and proven strategies in conflict resolution. By including these organisations, the report ensures that gender-sensitive approaches are effectively integrated into existing conflict resolution frameworks, making the interventions more inclusive and effective.

We conducted 3 KIIs with relevant CSOs between September 10, 2024 and November 4, 2024:

1. Act for the Disappeared was selected for its unique role in addressing Lebanon's history of conflict through truth-seeking and reconciliation efforts. By working with families of the miss-

ing and advocating for accountability, it contributes to restoring social cohesion - an essential aspect of sustainable peace.

2. Fighters for Peace was selected for its unique role in addressing the legacies of conflict and its commitment to preventing future violence. Given that conflict and militarization have deeply gendered impacts, Fighters for Peace provides critical insights into the workings of an organization with predominantly men beneficiaries.

3. Mousawat was selected for its work in promoting inclusion and accessibility for marginalized communities. Its experience in addressing structural barriers provides valuable insights into how intersectional challenges shape women's experiences in post-conflict reconciliation.

Table 1 Stakeholders Mapping and Characteristics (KII Participants)

Category	Name	Characteristics
Women's Rights Organizations (WROs)	Akkar Network for Development (AND)	• Women-Led • Engages civil society, local authorities, & the community to assess needs and shape development policies for Akkar. • Implements collaborative projects to enhance social, economic, and environmental conditions while driving community-led change. • AND works with: local communities in Akkar - civil society organizations and local government entities. • Location: Akkar
	Damma HUG	• Women-Led • Supports women & children in rural & underprivileged areas, including displaced & refugee communities in Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, Akkar, and southern Lebanon • Support those affected by conflict, poverty, and displacement. • Location: Bekaa
	Education Planet Association (EPA)	• Community & Women-Led • Provides children & youth with resources, training, & opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. • Focuses on capacity building & peacebuilding initiatives. • Supports Lebanese, Syrians, & Palestinians in Saida. • Location: Saida

Women's Rights Organizations (WROs)	Lecorvaw (The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women)	• Women-Led • Women and girls, especially survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). • Works with Lebanese and Syrian communities. • Location: Tripoli
	Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)	• Women-Led • Focuses on eliminating gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination while achieving full citizenship for women through active membership and collaboration with civil society. • Support Women & girls in Lebanon, especially survivors of GBV and discrimination from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. • Location: Beirut & Tripoli
	Union of Progressive Women (UPW)	• Women-Led • Empowers rural women through income-generating projects. • Advocates for a 30% women's quota in local and national elections. • Supports marginalized women, GBV survivors & engages youth, women activists, and refugee communities (Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian). • Location: across Lebanon
Municipalities	Fnaidek	• Selected from 5 different regions to capture local governance perspectives and their role in supporting gender-sensitive conflict resolution. • Regions: Akkar, Bekaa, South, Beirut, and North.
	Majdal Anjar	
	Saida	
	Chayah	
	Tripoli	

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	Act for the Disappeared	• Community-Led • Supports families of the missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon by seeking answers, promoting reconciliation, and fostering collective healing. - Communities impacted by the civil war and other conflicts, as well as those affected by unresolved disappearances. • Stakeholders involved in the peacebuilding process, including civil society actors, human rights organizations, and local communities. • Regions: Across Lebanon
	Fighters for Peace	• Community-Led • Works to prevent the resurgence of violence in Lebanon by engaging youth, civil society activists, & former fighters in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. • Former fighters seeking alternatives to violence and pathways to peace. • Regions: Across Lebanon
	Mousawat	• Community-Led • Works to remove barriers, promote inclusion, and provide essential services to improve quality of life. • Supports persons with disabilities & marginalized communities, including Palestinian refugees. • Region: Beddawi Palestinian Camp
International Organizations (IOs)	International Alert	• Expertise in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and gender-sensitive approaches at local & international levels. • Works with local communities, marginalized groups, civil society organizations, and policymakers to promote peace and inclusive policies. • Regions: Across Lebanon

B. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs complemented the KIIs by facilitating separate collective dialogue - 4 involving women community members in 4 different geographical areas, and 1 gathering 3 WE'AM partners. These discussions provide a platform for participants to share experiences, validate findings from the KIIs, and offer additional perspectives on the interplay between gender and conflict resolution. Through these dialogues, we aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the obstacles hindering gender-sensitive conflict resolution initiatives and explore avenues for enhanced networking and alliance-building among organizations and beneficiaries.

Women community members from different regions are engaged to understand the needs and gaps identified by the very individuals these projects aim to support. By hearing directly from women active in their communities, we gathered first-hand accounts of their experiences, challenges, and the impact of the interventions provided. This feedback is invaluable for identifying areas of improvement and ensuring that the projects are truly responsive to the needs of the community.

The FGDs are designed to be highly engaging ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly those of marginalized groups. This inclusive approach is vital for capturing the diverse perspectives and experiences of organizations and women community members in different contexts within Lebanon.

The questions used to guide the FGDs can be found in Annex 1.

FGD Participants

This section outlines the categories of participants of the FGDs, specifically the regions from which women community members were selected, as well as the specific organizations involved, and the rationale for their selection. The following subsections introduce the participating organizations and explain their relevance to the study.

Women Community Members

These women from diverse regions, are the direct recipients of the projects and initiatives implemented by WROs and other organizations. Engaging this group in our FGDs is critical to assessing the alignment between their needs and the design and implementation of the projects they are involved in. These women come from various socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds, representing a wide range of experiences and needs. To ensure diverse representation, each group was selected from different regions across

Lebanon, covering the north, south, east, and west. Their participation provides first-hand accounts of their experiences with the different community initiatives and projects they took part in, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement. As the ultimate beneficiaries and agents for change, their well-being and empowerment are the primary goals of the project. Their input ensures that the strategies and interventions are grounded in the realities of those they are designed to help, making their feedback essential for the project's relevance and effectiveness.

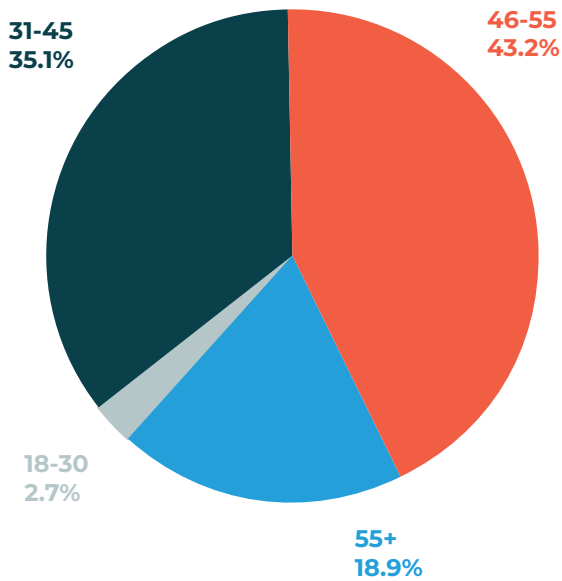
We engaged with a diverse range of active women from various regions, all of whom have participated in different conflict-resolution projects with multiple organizations. This approach assesses the alignment between women's needs and the design and implementation of the projects they are involved in. These FGDs were conducted in collaboration with WE'AM consortium partners – who facilitated access to women in the communities where WE'AM is intervening. The FGDs were initially intended to be conducted to provide a safe space for women to express their opinions, recognizing that they may have difficulty accessing online meetings or having a safe space at home to talk. However, due to the escalation of hostilities at the time of the data collection phase, all but the one FGD with women community members from Tripoli and Akkar area, had to be moved online to ensure the safety of staff and participants and to accommodate for the limited mobility in light of security threats.

We conducted FGDs with women from 4 regions between September 23, 2024 and October 25, 2024:

1. Baalbeck
2. Beirut & Barja
3. Saida
4. North

10 women participated in the Baalbeck FGD, with 6 coming from Baalbeck directly and 4 from Deir El Ahmar. The FGD from Beirut and Barja consisted of 5 women, one each from Furn El Chebbak, Ain El Remmaneh, Chyah, Chouf, and Barja. 10 women participated in the Saida FGDs, all coming from Saida. The North FGD included 12 women, with 1 from Machta Hassan (Akkar), 1 from Machta Hammoud (Akkar), 2 from Tekrit (Akkar), 1 from Tabbaneh (Tripoli), 2 from Fnaidek (Akkar), 2 from El-Mina (Tripoli), 1 from Jabal Mehsen (Tripoli), and 2 from Beddawi (Tripoli).

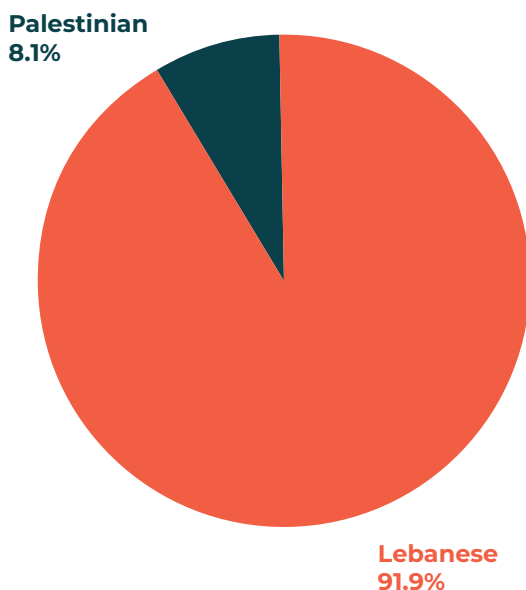
Age Range of Women from the four FGDs



The majority of participants, comprising **78.3%**, were between **31 - 55** years old. A smaller yet significant portion, **18.9%**, consisted of older women and **2.7%** of the participants of younger women, aged **18 to 30**.

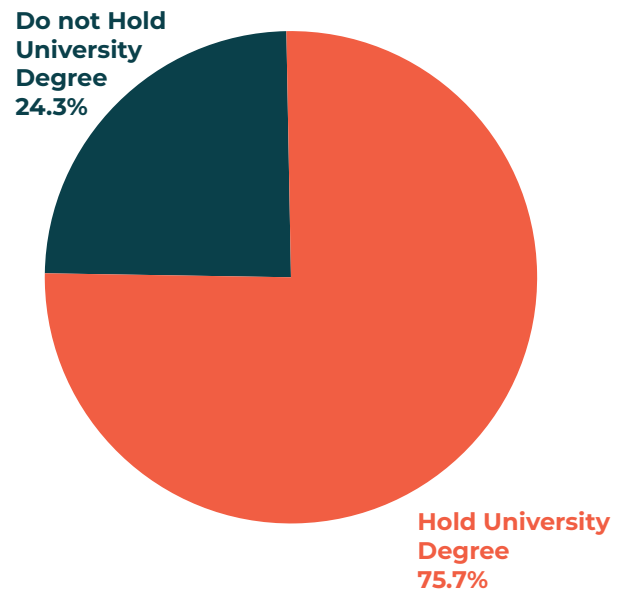
This generational diversity presents an opportunity to foster a more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution and social cohesion. Middle-aged women, often leaders within their communities, are well-positioned to translate discussions into action, while older women provide a historical perspective that grounds these conversations in lived

Nationality of Women Interviewed



experiences. Younger women, are crucial to the future of Lebanon's peace-building efforts, as they hold the potential to drive change and innovation.

Educational Background of the Women Interviewed



Addressing this generational gap requires fostering **intergenerational dialogue**—a crucial mechanism that combines historical wisdom with contemporary agency and future vision.

WE'AM Partners

By engaging the WE'AM partners in a FGD, our goal was to achieve several key outcomes. First, we aimed to gain in-depth insights into the challenges and successes they have experienced while promoting gender-sensitive conflict resolution. These insights will help us understand what has worked well and what barriers still exist in addressing gender inequality in conflict settings. By discussing and sharing their experiences, we can ensure alignment on strategies, goals, and approaches. This FGD allowed us to gather detailed feedback on the Gender Transformative conflict prevention actions approach more. Their input will help us tailor the toolkit to be more effective and user-friendly. Additionally, the discussion will help us identify any gaps or areas to be tackled in the toolkit, ensuring that it addresses the root causes of gender inequality in conflict-affected areas.

The WE'AM Consortium represents a strategic alliance of 4 partner organizations with corresponding expertise and resources. The consortium's representativeness lies in its ability to integrate diverse perspectives and methodologies, fostering a comprehensive and impactful implementation of the project. By working together with the consortium, we can leverage the strengths of each partner to achieve a more significant and lasting impact. We conducted FGDs with 3 WE'AM partners on September 17, 2024:

1. Alef
2. Right to Play
3. Shift

The Ecosystem Approach

Our research employs an ecosystem approach during the KIIs and FDGs, structured across five levels to provide a comprehensive analysis of conflict's impact on women and the strategies organizations use to address these challenges. The ecosystem approach is a comprehensive framework used in research to understand the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviors. This model posits that individual behavior is shaped by multiple levels of influence, ranging from personal to societal factors. By examining these interconnected levels, researchers can develop holistic strategies to address complex issues such as public health, social behavior, and community development.¹²⁸

The approach contains 5 levels; first, the **individual level**, which focuses on personal characteristics such as knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Interventions at this level aim to influence individual behaviors, such as awareness-raising sessions or skill-building programs that empower women to engage in peacebuilding. Second comes the **interpersonal level**, which examines relationships within families, peer groups, and social networks. Third is the **organizational level**, which encompasses the policies and practices within institutions such as municipalities, workplaces, and civil society organizations. This level focuses on shaping internal policies to support gender-sensitive approaches, such as ensuring equitable hiring practices or training staff on gender and conflict sensitivity. Afterwards comes the **community level**, which looks at broader societal norms and collective behaviors that influence individuals and groups. Finally, the **policy level** encompasses legal frameworks and policies that shape gender dynamics and social behaviors on a larger scale. Advocacy efforts at this level push for legal protections, gender-inclusive policies, and institutional reforms that create long-term structural change.¹²⁹

The ecosystem approach is particularly suited to this project as it provides a holistic framework to examine the interconnected factors shaping gender dynamics and conflict resolution. By addressing five levels, it captures the complexity of challenges and opportunities across diverse contexts. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of women's experiences and stakeholders' approaches within their broader social, organizational, and institutional environments, fostering inclusivity by incorporating perspectives from all levels of engagement. It also enables tailored interventions, from empowering individuals and enhancing organizational practices to fostering community cohesion and influencing systemic policy changes. By addressing barriers at every level, the ecosystem approach ensures culturally

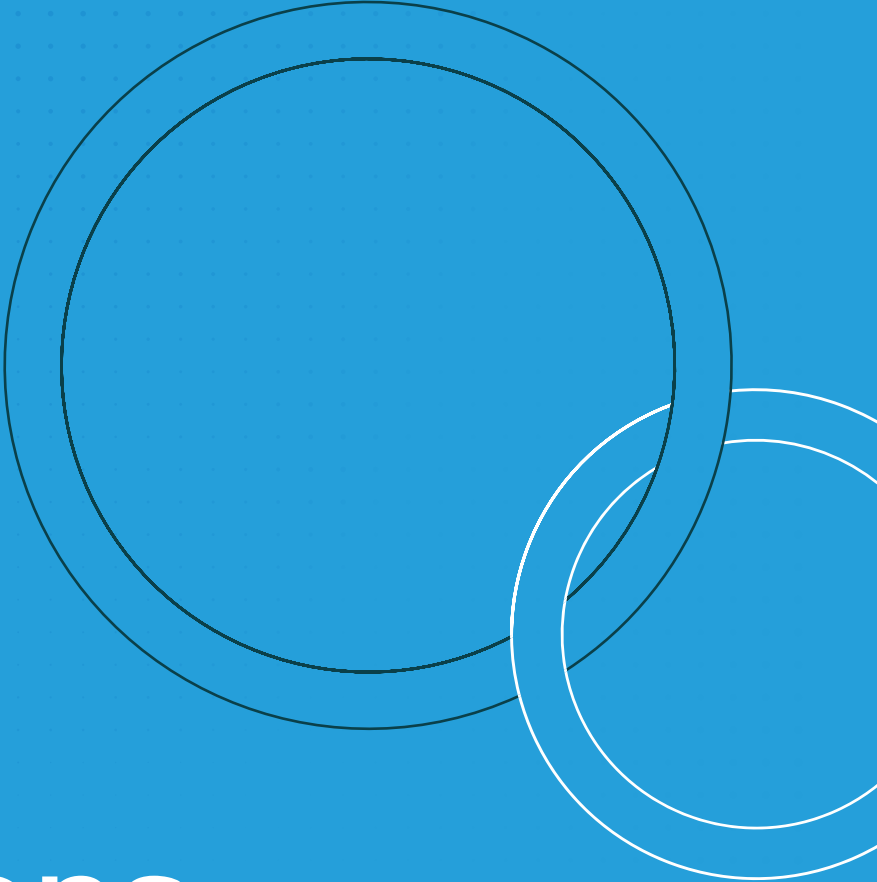
sensitive, impactful, and sustainable outcomes. Each level contributes a crucial dimension to the research:

- 1. General Understanding of Conflict:** Initial questions explored stakeholders' perceptions of conflict and the scope of their work, establishing a baseline for understanding their priorities and challenges.
- 2. Level One: Individual** - This level examines the direct impacts of conflict on women and girls, which is critical for tailoring interventions to specific needs and vulnerabilities.
- 3. Level Two: Interpersonal** - At this level, we investigated how women's social environments - family and cultural norms - shape their experiences of conflict and opportunities for participation. This analysis highlights the socio-cultural barriers and supports that influence women's roles.
- 4. Level Three: Organizational** - Here, we assessed the strategies organizations use to conceptualize projects, their inclusion of women, internal safety measures, and policies. This level is vital for understanding how organizational practices can empower women and foster gender-sensitive approaches.
- 5. Level Four: Community** - This level focused on how stakeholders interact with local communities and the partnerships they cultivate. Community-level insights reveal the dynamics of collaboration and the creation of sustainable support networks.
- 6. Level Five: Institutional** - The final level examined advocacy efforts, policy influence, and the role of local authorities and frameworks. Understanding institutional interactions is essential for identifying systemic challenges and opportunities to enhance gender inclusivity through policy reforms.

The multi-faceted methodology ensures that the research captures the complex and layered dynamics of gender and conflict in Lebanon. By combining a thorough literature review with qualitative, context-driven research methods, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how organizations and communities navigate and address these critical issues. For a deeper exploration of community dynamics and cultural and societal norms, refer to the respective chapters.

¹²⁸ Jessica Ochs, Sherry L. Roper and Susan M. Schwartz, "10.3 Core Principles of the Socio-Ecological Model" in Population Health for Nurses, (OpenStax: May 2024), <https://openstax.org/books/population-health/pages/10-3-core-principles-of-the-socio-ecological-model>.

¹²⁹ Jessica Ochs, Sherry L. Roper and Susan M. Schwartz, "10.3 Core Principles of the Socio-Ecological Model" in Population Health for Nurses, (OpenStax: May 2024), <https://openstax.org/books/population-health/pages/10-3-core-principles-of-the-socio-ecological-model>.



Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Focus on Conflict-Affected Areas

Our literature review and data collection focused on conflict-affected areas with significant refugee populations. While urban centers like Beirut, Saida, and Tripoli were included, the neighborhoods covered - such as Ain El Remmeneh and Chiyah in Beirut - have historically experienced conflict and may reflect different dynamics than other parts of the city, such as Hamra or Achrafieh, where civil society engagement and openness to gender-related issues may differ. This limitation exists because the areas chosen align with Oxfam's ongoing project implementation, which targeted regions known to experience diverse forms of conflict.

The research focused on capturing diverse forms of conflict within the selected areas and supplemented findings with independent research on additional conflict dynamics. The study aimed to be nationally representative, with selected areas spanning different regions of Lebanon. However, resource limitations required prioritizing specific locations aligned with the WE'AM project, building on an extensive conflict mapping that had already been conducted. Future studies should expand the geographic scope to include urban or less conflict-affected areas for a more comprehensive understanding of Lebanon's socio-political landscape.

Representativeness of Findings

The findings represent a snapshot of certain areas and groups, which, while insightful, may not capture the broader spectrum of practices and understandings across Lebanon. Similar groups in other areas may have differing perspectives and experiences, which could add further value to the research. However, the selected areas offer important and interesting insights, as they span various parts of the country and encompass diverse forms of conflict, providing a solid foundation for understanding Lebanon's conflict dynamics.

Recognizing this limitation, the study aimed to gather diverse perspectives from multiple participants across categories. However, future research should explore additional regions and contexts to gain a more representative view of conflict dynamics and gendered experiences.

Long Response Times

Some interview participants were slow to respond, while others provided limited detail in their answers, particularly during long interviews. As the discussions progressed, participants occasionally began providing briefer responses or skipped over certain questions.

Initially, we reached out to a second international organization for input. However, due to difficulties in assigning the appropriate respondent and the escalation of hostilities shifting their focus to emergency relief, their responses were significantly delayed.

In an attempt to mitigate these limitations, when participants did not provide specific answers to a question, insights were drawn from related answers they provided during the interview without relying on the authors' interpretations and inferences beyond the collected data. Additionally, interviewing multiple actors within each category helped compensate for instances where some interviews yielded less detailed information. This approach ensured that key insights were still captured and analyzed effectively.

Regarding the second international organization, by the time their input was received, the analysis and reporting process had already progressed to a stage where incorporating it was no longer feasible within the given timeframe.

Escalating Hostilities

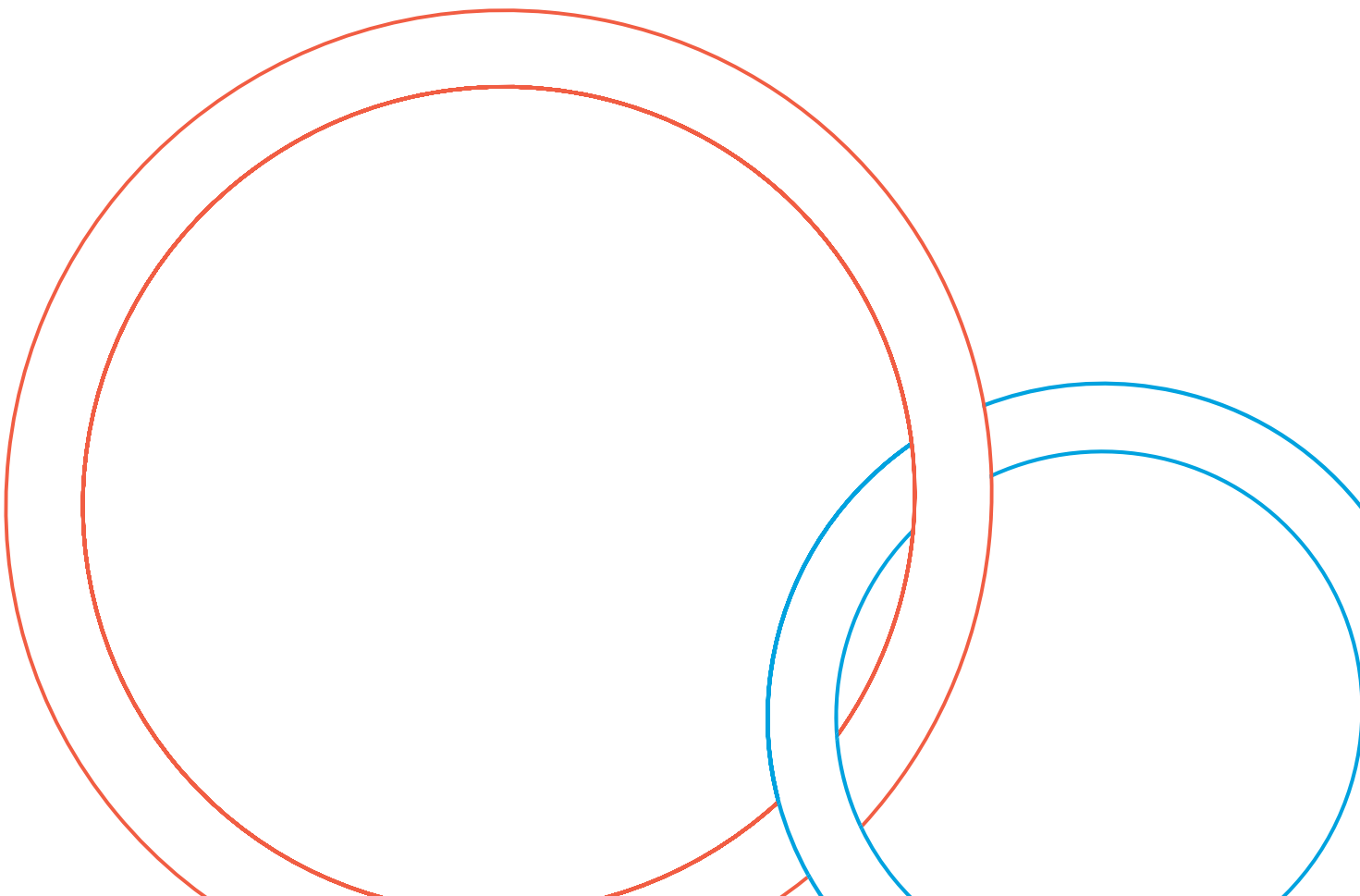
The Israeli bombardment of Lebanon significantly influenced the data collection process, particularly in areas like Baalback, which was heavily bombed. This created challenges in bringing women community members together for FGDs, as the state of fear, instability, and threat affected their ability to participate. The conflict likely influenced their perceptions of the broader conflict dynamics, as their immediate experiences of violence and insecurity shaped their responses. Additionally, the timing of the data collection during the war complicated the process, as many organizations shifted their priorities to emergency relief efforts, delaying their ability to fully engage in the interviews.

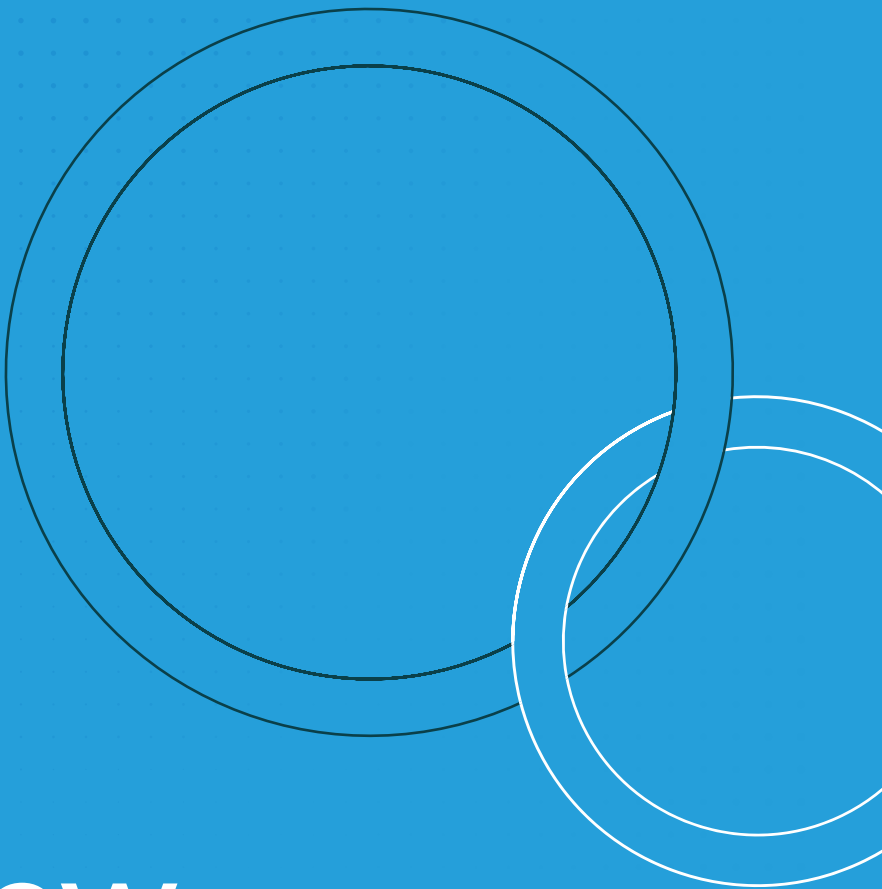
In response to this, we had to move most FGDs online, aside from one conducted with women community members in Tripoli, which took place right before the escalations. Interestingly, while this was initially challenging, it also proved to be an important outlet for the women we worked

with, as many were in need of a space to share the experience they were making during the conflict and appreciated having found such a place, even if online. We provided space for women community members to express their immediate concerns and experiences, and then guided the discussion back to the topic of conflict dynamics. To address delays in organizational responses, Oxfam granted an extension to the timeline, allowing us to accommodate the delayed input from interview partners and ensure more comprehensive data collection despite the difficult circumstances.

Engaging Municipalities

Several municipalities became unreachable as the violence escalated, severely impacting our ability to conduct KIs with local authorities. In some cases, the municipalities themselves were directly affected by the **Israeli war**, leading to delays in communication and scheduling such as Nabatieh, Barja and Baalbeck. As a result, other municipalities were selected with the support of WE'AM partners. Additionally, some municipalities were unfamiliar with the scope of the project and lacked an understanding of gender-related issues. To address the limited knowledge, emphasis was placed on clearly explaining the project's objectives and the relevance of gender-sensitive approaches, ensuring more informed participation.





I. Interview Insights

To explore the dynamics of conflict interventions in Lebanon, we applied an ecosystem approach in our interviews, recognizing that conflict and peacebuilding efforts are influenced by interconnected levels of interaction. This layered approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon, identifying common themes, grievances, and best practices.

1. General Questions

1.1 Definitions of Conflict

This chapter explores the diverse ways in which interview partners define and understand conflict, highlighting both strengths and gaps in their perspectives. While many participants demonstrate a solid grasp of conflict dynamics, their focus and depth vary. The analysis examines how stakeholders perceive conflict triggers, systemic drivers, and the interplay between economic, political, and social factors. Particular attention is given to the nuanced understanding of women community members and the varying approaches to gender-sensitive perspectives across organizations and institutions.

The interview partners' understanding of conflict varies, but the IO, WE'AM partners, some municipalities, women community members, and WROs have demonstrated a **good understanding** of relevant concepts and dynamics. Some interview partners exhibit a detailed understanding of local political and sectarian tensions and local conflict drivers. One organization's broad framing of conflict suggests a holistic approach, although it may lack localized specificity. Overall, most WROs recognize that conflict can arise from a variety of situations - often citing diverging opinions or resource disputes as the main triggers. Women community members from Beirut and Barja municipality stand out for their deep understanding of conflict dynamics, reflecting on both the complexity of conflicts and their interconnected causes. The participants link economic, political, and social conflicts and acknowledge how the absence of conflict resolution mechanisms, especially in education and public policies, is a major challenge. Women community members generally demonstrate a nuanced understanding of conflict, seeing it as both a challenge and an opportunity. They link conflicts to resource scarcity, economic collapse, and political instability, highlighting how these factors strain communities and families. Some view conflict as neutral, emphasizing its potential for advocacy and mutual understanding if managed effectively. A shared concern is the lack of conflict resolution mechanisms in education and public policies, underscoring the systemic barriers to addressing conflicts constructively.

Some CSOs, the IO, WROs, and municipalities exhibit at times **superficial understanding of conflict**, focusing on immediate causes while neglecting systemic drivers. Some CSOs prioritize

addressing surface-level issues, with less emphasis on deeper structural causes. One interview partner defines conflict broadly but could further align its approach with Lebanon's specific conflict dynamics to enhance its impact on supporting women in these settings. Among municipalities, Fnaidek concentrates on tangible issues like property disputes, while Majdal Anjar highlights economic hardship and poverty but frames disputes in simpler, binary terms. WROs largely focus on present-day challenges, with fewer references to historical or systemic conflict dimensions, reflecting differing levels of emphasis on broader underlying causes. This variety in focus suggests opportunities for deeper analysis and a more comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics across stakeholders.

WE'AM partners generally demonstrate a **strong understanding of gender and conflict dynamics**, with Alef emphasizing transformative frameworks that position women as agents of change. Right to Play incorporates gender into broader empowerment initiatives, reflecting sensitivity to regional differences. Shift highlights how local customs influence women's participation.

Despite notable strengths, CSOs, the IO, municipalities, WROs, and some WE'AM partners show incidental **gaps in gender-sensitive perspectives**. Some CSOs overlook critical gender dynamics, which can limit their interventions' relevance to gender-focused work. Other interview partners discuss broader conflict-related concepts but could benefit from a stronger integration of gender-specific challenges, patriarchal norms, and women's unique roles in conflict. Municipalities like Fnaidek and Majdal Anjar often adhere to traditional perspectives, framing women as mediators within cultural norms, while others do not fully account for the diverse ways women experience and influence conflict. WE'AM partners often provide valuable insights into gender and conflict but could benefit from a deeper focus on addressing gender-specific dynamics, for example by more explicitly linking them to specific conflict types, combining their strengths for a more integrated, transformative impact. WROs frequently rely heavily on practical experience, which, while impactful, may limit the incorporation of theoretical frameworks to better understand gendered conflict dynamics.

The definitions and understandings of conflict among interview partners reveal a mix of holistic perspectives and areas for further development. While many stakeholders effectively link conflict to broader systemic and societal factors, others emphasize immediate causes or surface-level issues, highlighting the need for deeper analysis. Women community members stand out for their nuanced understanding, viewing conflict as both a challenge and an opportunity, while gaps in integrating gender-specific perspectives remain evident across several organizations and municipalities. Still, their advanced understanding hints at successful conflict-intervention projects. Strengthening these perspectives and fostering a compre-

hensive understanding of conflict can enhance the effectiveness of interventions, particularly in addressing gendered dimensions and systemic barriers.

1.2 Scope of Conflict-Related Work

This chapter explores the diverse scope of work undertaken by the interview partners in addressing conflict dynamics and promoting gender-sensitive approaches in Lebanon. From historically grounded initiatives linking civil war legacies to present tensions, to child-focused community programs and gender-transformative strategies, the approaches vary in depth and focus. The chapter examines how IOs, CSOs, WROs, WE'AM partners, municipalities, and women community members integrate gender considerations, foster inclusivity, and address systemic barriers, offering insights into their contributions to peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Interview partners **address diverse forms of conflict**, such as Act for the Disappeared (CSO), which uniquely ties current social tensions to Lebanon's unresolved civil war legacies, reflecting a historically grounded approach. Municipalities display a spectrum of readiness: while some adopt an integrated and proactive stance, other's efforts, though limited, focus innovatively on addressing divides through child-focused programs. Chiyah municipality noted that the responsibility to address larger scale conflicts lies with the parties to the conflict, not municipalities. Among **WROs**, Lecorvaw's empowerment of women in conflict-affected areas and RDFL's focus on the intersection of conflict and gender inequality stand out as systemic approaches.

Several actors **excel in specific areas**. Right to Play and Shift's (WE'AM partners) ability to adapt to the diverse needs of Lebanon's regions highlights the importance of contextual adaptability in conflict settings. In a football-for-development project, Right to Play faced local resistance to women's participation, including field owners refusing to rent to them. Rather than directly challenging these barriers, they addressed them indirectly within their sessions, recognizing that long-term change requires community buy-in. Similarly, women community members emphasize how participatory leadership has fostered inclusivity, reduced divisions, and strengthened collaboration, even involving non-Lebanese nationals as partners rather than factions. Lecorvaw's empowerment of women and RDFL's (WROs) integration of gender analysis into conflict work offer unique and transformative approaches, setting benchmarks for addressing systemic barriers to cohesion.

A clear commitment to addressing **gender dynamics** is evident across most actors, though the depth and focus vary. Many actors integrate gender considerations by engaging both men and women to tackle societal norms and imbalances. Mousawat's (CSO) model of involving men

to address power imbalances exemplifies a gender-transformative approach. Similarly, Fnaidek municipality demonstrates an inclusive method by involving women-led organizations and fostering youth participation in family conflict resolution, promoting cohesion across genders. WROs like Lecorvaw and RDFL place gender at the center of their work, linking women's political participation and leadership to broader systemic changes in peacebuilding. Across all these efforts, there is a shared emphasis on creating space for women to lead, participate, and challenge restrictive norms.

The **extent and specificity of gender integration** differ significantly. Fnaidek and Saida municipalities show promising practices, such as using structured committees and engaging women-led organizations. WE'AM partners demonstrate varying levels of gender focus, with Shift paying strong attention to gender-specific issues, Alef adopting a gender-transformative lens, and Right to Play embedding gender considerations more broadly. Women community members working in municipalities add another layer, reflecting on how such projects have helped them overcome gender-based barriers to engage actively in public life and advocate for women's participation in decision-making.

Women community members consistently highlighted the **positive impact of the projects** on fostering social cohesion and enhancing conflict resolution skills. Across regions, participants emphasized how the initiatives deepened their understanding of conflict dynamics and the importance of communication in bridging divides. These projects were universally valued for strengthening community ties and providing participants with a sense of purpose and contribution. While some reflections were not specific to conflict-related contexts, the overarching emphasis on community participation and thorough follow-up highlights the importance of aligning project design and implementation with local needs for lasting impact.

Some **general challenges** emerge among municipalities and WROs in their understanding and approach to conflict dynamics. Municipalities sometimes demonstrate a passive approach to dispute settlement, for example by referring them to judiciaries and awaiting lengthy settlements or relying on mukhtars. While these strategies can be a good approach to leveraging external expertise or legal advice, they underline the importance of striking a balance between self-initiative and outsourcing to avoid an overreliance on external partners that lead to deadlocks. Some adopt systematic but reactive strategies, while financial and trust-related constraints in some municipalities hinder sustained engagement. Women community members noted that **personal interests sometimes interfere** with collaborative processes, complicating group-focused objectives. Similarly, WROs face challenges in implementing comprehensive strategies, with some lacking clar-

ity in defining activities or expanding their reach to address diverse conflict settings effectively.

Gender-sensitive approaches remain an area for growth across CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, municipalities, and WROs. CSOs and the IO often acknowledge the importance of women's participation but may fall short of integrating transformative strategies to address structural inequalities. Municipalities tend to constrain women's roles within traditional frameworks, with limited mechanisms to incorporate women's perspectives into conflict-specific initiatives.

The scope of work reflects significant efforts across actors to address conflict and promote gender equality, with notable strengths in contextual adaptability, fostering collaboration, and empowering women to participate in decision-making. Beneficiaries consistently highlighted the positive impact of these initiatives on social cohesion and conflict resolution skills. However, challenges remain, including limited inclusivity in some municipal approaches, gaps in gender-sensitive frameworks, and a need for more comprehensive strategies. Aligning project designs with local needs and emphasizing transformative approaches to gender dynamics are crucial for enhancing the long-term impact of these efforts.

2. Level One: Individual Level

This section explores organizations' efforts to empower women on a personal level and examines the barriers they identify that hinder individual empowerment in conflict settings. It focuses on personal skills, capacities, and challenges faced by women in navigating these environments.

2.1 Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls

This chapter examines the varying levels of understanding among actors regarding the impact of conflict on women, focusing on systemic, social, cultural, and health-related issues. While some demonstrate a mix of theoretical and experience-driven perspectives, their approaches range from progressive and nuanced to constrained by traditional stereotypes. The analysis explores how these actors address systemic barriers, cultural burdens, and health concerns, as well as their recognition of women's vulnerabilities and leadership potential in conflict settings.

CSOs and WROs demonstrate a notable **theoretical understanding**. Some CSOs demonstrate an evolving, experience-driven perspective, although their gender sensitivity is a later development, not rooted in theoretical frameworks. WROs display mixed approaches. One example is RDFL bridging theoretical frameworks with grounded realities, as seen in their critique of the gap between international norms and on-the-ground protections.

"In times of conflict, we have to know that women are not prioritised, and all their needs and issues are no longer prioritised, so the conflict and the conflicting parties are prioritised, and 'who wins over who'. Girls are not allowed to talk about any particular topic or try to prioritise themselves. At the end of the conflict, or in the case of negotiations, women are also not invited to the negotiating table, they are not involved, their opinion is not even taken into account, when the two conflicting parties sit down, women are excluded, they are not seen as partners in anything."
- From a KII with WRO representative

When **understanding systemic issues**, CSOs, the IO, and WROs exhibit varying levels of awareness. Mousawat (CSO) offers a broad and practical understanding of women's vulnerabilities during conflict, including systemic critiques of humanitarian responses, showing their understanding of structural shortcomings. International Alert (IO) utilizes its understanding of practical barriers women face by providing childcare support during training to ensure their participation. Among WROs, Lecorvaw and Damma HUG showcase a nuanced understanding of structural challenges, including exposure to violence and economic exploitation. Damma HUG highlights that while conflict can lead to new economic opportunities for women, they often enter the labor market unprepared, which increases their vulnerability to economic exploitation and harassment.

"Women are the most affected by conflict, whether armed or not, through our experience we observe that women are exposed to social, economic and gender-based violence, and these are among the most common effects on women and girls in periods of war, and the tools through which women are marginalised during wars are the denial of opportunities for education and empowerment."-From a KII with CSO representative

Regarding **social and cultural matters**, some CSOs and WROs demonstrate progressive perspectives, while others are constrained by traditional stereotypes. Some CSOs frame women's roles in peacebuilding within traditional gender norms, which may be a limiting factor for a transformative approach. While acknowledging cultural burdens like "honor," their view overlooks women's leadership potential in peacebuilding and the systemic issues affecting their empowerment.

“Women usually carry the burden of protecting the ‘honour’ of the family, clan or community, which is a great responsibility for women because ‘honour’ is sacred in our societies, it can be a ‘catalyst’ for radicalisation or escalation of conflict.” - From a KII with CSO representative

Many WROs recognize how conflict exacerbates systemic exclusion and societal pressures on women, particularly stigmatization and blame in cases of harassment. However, critical issues like domestic violence and women’s safety often remain unaddressed.

The understanding of **mental and physical health** issues among actors varies. Act for the Disappeared (CSO) addresses trauma related to forced disappearances, while International Alert (IO) supports mental health through safe spaces and local mediators. Some WROs recognize the psychological burdens on women, with Lecorvaw’s provision of dignity kits demonstrating a focus on immediate needs. However, broader aspects of mental and physical health, including safety concerns, are not consistently prioritized.

Other critical points include the **instrumentalization of women in conflict**, highlighted by Damma HUG and RDFL (WROs), who point to how women are manipulated as tools of war, further entrenching their marginalization.

The understanding of conflict’s impact on women reflects both strengths and areas for improvement. Many actors highlight systemic exclusion, economic exploitation, and cultural burdens such as “honor,” yet critical issues like domestic violence and safety are often underrepresented. While some actors adopt innovative and practical solutions, such as childcare support and dignity kits, others miss opportunities for transformative approaches. Addressing these gaps through a deeper focus on systemic barriers, leadership potential, and comprehensive health and safety measures will strengthen efforts to empower women in conflict settings.

3. Level Two: Interpersonal Level

The interpersonal level of the ecosystem approach explores how relationships within families and communities influence women’s empowerment in conflict settings. This section examines two critical aspects: how organizations navigate family and community dynamics to address barriers and foster support, and the role of engaging men and youth in creating inclusive environments that challenge traditional gender norms. Together, these themes shed light on the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping empowerment efforts.

3.1 Perception of Women as Agents of Change

Recognizing women as agents of change is crucial in conflict settings where their involvement can lead to more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding. Women’s unique perspectives, shaped by their roles in families and communities, position them as vital actors in resolving conflicts and addressing societal challenges. However, societal norms and stereotypes often limit their potential, emphasizing the need for targeted support and acknowledgment of their contributions.

Women community members have expressed their confidence and ability in their involvement with peacebuilding projects, when given the opportunity. CSOs, the IO, and WROs all generally express a **positive perception of women as agents of change**, recognizing that their involvement in peacebuilding is both necessary and beneficial, though the extent of this varies.

“We want projects that highlight women in leadership roles.” - From an FGD with women community members

Municipalities also formally acknowledged women’s potential for contribution but often limited them to specific roles, describing them as calm and thoughtful. The municipalities notably lacked women representation within their councils, with no women being on the councils of several municipalities. This underrepresentation can significantly limit the influence women have in peacebuilding, especially considering one participant’s observation that women usually have to work harder than men to be heard and recognized. While they stress that women in small numbers are also influential, these limitations make their ability to consistently achieve actual impact within municipal structures questionable.

Interestingly, the IO, WROs, and municipalities all **perceive a positive shift** in Lebanon regarding women in peacebuilding and leadership positions.

“In my opinion, women are a fundamental and clear partner in society. There is no complete peacebuilding process if women are not actively involved. We believe that women should have the platform, capabilities, and skills to be heard and play an effective role in peacebuilding.” - From a KII with WRO representative

International Alert highlights the creation of a women peacebuilders network and gender units within ministries, while AND refers to women’s growing confidence and readiness to take on responsibilities, which is in line with the feedback from the women community members.

The extent to which organizations **recognize the barriers women face** in fulfilling their potential varies. Among the CSOs, Lebanon's general struggle with implementing UNSCR 1325 was mentioned as a critical challenge and some demonstrated a strong understanding of the specific barriers women face.

"Women should have a role in the peace-building work, not only when it comes to participation, but also protection and recovery. I believe in Lebanon we have made progress. First we have a network of peace builders, second there are gender focal points in all official ministries. Third, there is a gender unit in the Lebanese Army regarding women participation (In the last round of recruitment for the ISF, the majority of applicants were women - the results were not announced yet). Women have a role - should have a role - we cannot build peace when excluding a category of society. As a result of excluding women, the decisions are being made based on men's needs." - From a KII with IO representative

However, CSOs, the IO, and municipalities often define barriers in vague terms or not at all, hinting at a lack of understanding, and few show efforts to compensate for such barriers in their internal policies and organizational structures further limiting their ability to support women's full participation in peacebuilding and governance. Often, the focus is on equality rather than equity with a general lack of proactive measures, with some municipalities lacking any gender-specific interventions altogether, such as quotas for women participation.

"Unfortunately, these traditions and customs 'keep women on the sidelines', and their role is considered stereotypical, that they should only take care of the family and have no role in public affairs, which is why we do not find women within conservative societies at the negotiating table, nor do they assume roles, whether in the local community or at the national level. Because we know very well the stereotypical role given to women in those societies, especially religious societies, they consider that there is no role for women in politics, and that this role is reserved for men only."-From a KII with WRO representative

A notable shortcoming is the **vague depiction of women's contributions, often confined to traditional gender roles** by some organizations and municipalities.

"Authoritarian patriarchal roles have a major impact, meaning that women are subordinate and roles are limited in terms of participation in politics and society." - From a KII with WRO representative

While most emphasize the importance of women's involvement, some organizations provide little detail regarding their contributions to peacebuilding, suggesting limited awareness.

"There is always a stereotype of gender roles for women and there is a clear gender gap in this process, what I observe most is the confusion between the caring role and the productive role of women, the caring role is imposed on women within the cultural or patriarchal heritage in our societies, in addition to the productive role, which when performed by women, they do not have economic freedom, and this is an issue that women suffer from in the Bekaa, lack of economic freedom means lack of security, economic empowerment is the most important tool that enables women to eliminate economic fragility and this helps them to achieve independence and decision-making."- From an FGD with women community members

Among municipalities, women are frequently assigned informal, family-centered roles and characterized as harmonious, patient, and non-confrontational - generalizations that portray them as passive rather than active and strong-willed. Although Saida municipality acknowledges women's mediation skills, they are largely excluded from leadership roles, and their broader experiences in conflict settings are overlooked.

These findings suggest that while there is a general consensus that women do contribute to change and peacebuilding, the actual understanding of their contributions appears rather limited. While a positive shift in women's involvement and the acknowledgment of their skills is commonly described, intervening parties would benefit from a greater understanding of the barriers women face in this regard to help women exhaust their full potential.

3.2 Empowerment Efforts

Organizations operating in Lebanon employ varied strategies for strengthening revealing both commonalities and unique approaches. Thematically, their efforts focus on education, logistical support (such as the provision of venues or safe transportation) reform, economic development, and psychological support. The organizations considered cultural specificities to varied degrees, some presented innovative approaches, but some gaps also

became apparent, as discussed below. The women community members reported, across regions, that their participation had a positive impact on their empowerment, though they suggested some points for improvement.

Education, skill development, and awareness-raising were among the most commonly used strategies for empowerment, used by WROs, CSOs, and WE'AM partners. Education and vocational training were central to the approaches of multiple WROs, with some including leadership and advocacy training as well as a special focus on legal awareness. Some WE'AM partners and CSOs trained women to lead in conflict resolution efforts, fostering local ownership and gender justice initiatives. Through these new skills, women were transformed into agents of change equipped with an advanced ability to challenge societal divisions and take collective action, creating a more direct and sustainable impact on individuals' lives. However, the organizations' approaches at times appeared broad, potentially limiting the impact they could have on individual participants or specific communities. Positively, women community members reported how even small-scale successes through awareness-raising and skill-building enhanced their confidence and inspired them to contribute to their communities more actively. Across regions, they gained critical interpersonal, practical, and technical skills, including empathy, conflict communication, and project management, which fostered both personal growth and community resilience. Adaptability emerged as a key theme, equipping participants to navigate diverse contexts creatively and inclusively.

Legal and structural reforms were also commonly employed by WROs, the IO, and WE'AM partners. Among the WROs, Lecrovaw's focus on gender rights training and legal reforms demonstrated an especially comprehensive approach, while RDFL's legal awareness initiatives complement their holistic support model, covering various dimensions of empowerment, such as legal protection, access to justice, social participation, and advocacy for women's rights. International Alert's (IO) collaboration with CSOs and their focus on building support networks, for example through communication channels, enhances trust and sustainability by creating strong, reliable support structures. Alef (WE'AM partner) focuses on advocacy and promoting gender sensitivity, aiming to shift broader societal attitudes and institutions rather than targeting individual changes. Some CSOs seem to lack a comprehensive approach to reform. When examining the answers of the municipalities, it becomes apparent that women's empowerment is treated as secondary at best. While some do acknowledge the positive impact of including women, active efforts to facilitate this are mostly seen as redundant.

Economic empowerment emerged as a foundational need among women community members, providing financial independence that mitigates vulnerabilities and enables women to participate

more freely in projects and broader communal activities.

"Money influences in its most corrupt form, partisanship is back again, parties are more than families, whoever has money works and shows up. The possibilities are many and the arena is for those who have it. ... Money is the only enemy that makes it difficult for us to work."- From an FGD with women community members

Such efforts became especially apparent among WROs and CSOs with some WROs prioritizing economic hardship, especially in rural and conservative areas. However, while some organizations manage to integrate economic empowerment in a well-balanced manner and combine it with the consideration of, for example, psychological needs and family dynamics, others demonstrate a more limited focus, which risks sidelining other crucial aspects that must be addressed to ensure empowerment. Additionally, some of the economic empowerment programs described rely heavily on stereotypical roles, often focusing on crafts and caregiving. While this can be a good strategy to guide women into economic activity, it also risks reinforcing societal norms rather than challenging them.

Psychological support makes up an important aspect of women's empowerment, especially considering the, at times, traumatic impact of conflict. WROs and CSOs integrated such support, addressing trauma and ensuring safe spaces alongside skill development and other empowerment efforts. However, many interview partners, while impactful in their areas of focus, offer fewer insights into addressing women's emotional and psychological needs in conflict settings.

Logistical support and safe and inclusive spaces are another important factor in ensuring women's empowerment, although they not commonly mentioned under this point.

To ensure the greatest impact of empowerment efforts, it is important to tailor them to the target communities by integrating **cultural considerations**. CSOs, the IO, and WE'AM partners demonstrated such considerations, for example by integrating family dynamics, working with local women mediators, and implementing community-led initiatives.

Some organizations, especially WROs, stood out for their **innovative approaches**. Damma HUG, for example, focused on women as agents of environmental protection, linking feminist environmentalism to empowerment. This innovative approach broadens the scope of women's involvement in societal transformation.

While the participants often demonstrate holistic and creative approaches to women's empowerment, some **gaps and challenges** emerge. Many responses reveal gaps in addressing systemic challenges and structural inequalities and efforts to engage women in leadership, political participation, and advocacy often appear underdeveloped or lack detail. Tailoring strategies to conservative settings and navigating cultural resistance remain challenges across the board. Women community members noted the absence of follow-ups in some areas which hints at an omission that can hinder the long-term success of such efforts.

The projects significantly enhanced participants' empowerment and confidence through personal growth, societal engagement, and economic independence. Across regions, women reported transformations in self-perception, increased assertiveness, and dismantled fears, particularly when stepping into challenging environments. Interpersonal confidence was a key outcome, with many women feeling more empowered to express themselves at home and in social contexts, challenging traditional power structures. Participants also noted a heightened sense of responsibility for community issues, such as forming committees to address violations or drug abuse. Collectively, these insights demonstrate the organizations' ability to address empowerment holistically, tailoring approaches to local contexts for maximum impact.

3.3 Barriers to Empowerment

The next section delves into the interview partners' perspectives on barriers to women's empowerment, exploring their understanding of these challenges and the strategies they adopt to address them. The barriers identified were cultural norms and gender roles, religious and social resistance, a lack of men engagement and community buy-in, structural and economic barriers, and limited freedom of expression. Lastly, this part also addresses the methods adopted by organizations and municipalities to mitigate these challenges.

Limiting cultural norms and gender roles were most commonly mentioned across the board by the IO, WE'AM partners, WROs, and women community members. International Alert (IO) addressed deeply rooted societal dynamics and the WE'AM partners and WROs commonly noted the influence of entrenched patriarchal norms and family restrictions. As noted by AND (WRO), traditional gender roles restrict women's vocational choices and their participation in projects. Other WROs highlight how conservative attitudes are more limiting in conservative regions, making their participants subject to bullying or stigmatization.

"Personally, there are many things I don't address, firstly because I am a woman living in a conservative society, and secondly because I am a Palestinian refugee in a society that does not widely favour the presence of Palestinian refugees or displaced Syrians and does not integrate with them in a big way."-From a KII with WRO representative

Hostility and skepticism were also recounted by the women community members, interestingly often stemming from other women in the communities. This highlights internalized cultural attitudes that often limit women's roles in public life and create a discouraging environment for their participation. While participants recounted some positive developments in this regard, they mentioned to still often be excluded from conflict-related roles. The demonstrated successes of the beneficiaries in non-conflict-related initiatives further highlight that women's exclusion in conflict-specific contexts is not due to a lack of capability but rather institutional and societal barriers. Unfortunately, these negative observations are reflected in the municipalities' own answers with most demonstrating a reluctance to challenge patriarchal norms, favoring culturally acceptable progress over transformative change. Some municipalities openly reject projects promoting women's autonomy, prioritizing traditional values and framing autonomy as a threat to family structures. Additionally, statements like "women should be under the wing of men," reflect entrenched patriarchal attitudes. Others emphasize non-gender-specific projects, shifting responsibility to women to overcome barriers without addressing systemic inequalities. The representative of one municipality understands how cultural norms can pose significant barriers to women's participation, rooted in societal perceptions of leadership as inherently masculine. These norms create a challenging environment for women, where their personal lives and reputations are often weaponized against them - obstacles men rarely face. Certain participants similarly promote education as a tool for empowerment but overlook cultural factors perpetuating inequality, placing the burden on women to adapt to societal expectations.

Barriers stemming from **religious and social resistance** were mentioned primarily by WROs, one municipality, and women community members.

“The challenges are inherited ideas: ‘A woman can’t get out of her own way’. There is no confidence in women’s work, society’s perception of women’s priorities and their role in the home, and on a personal level, there may not be support for women from their surroundings or partners. Another obstacle is the financial obstacle, as there is no funding to carry out activities to resolve conflicts and others.” - From an FGD with women community members

Several WROs reported backlash from local religious leaders for being labeled as promoting “Western” or anti-religious agendas. Lecorvaw, in particular, faces strong resistance to its feminist initiatives, with Islamic associations and local authorities sometimes withdrawing support. AND and UPW also noted how they often have to navigate political or religious cover to safeguard their initiatives. The women community members identified clerics as a key barrier to their participation. One municipal representative acknowledged that societal expectations require women to demonstrate strength in ways that align with traditional notions of masculinity while navigating a landscape fraught with gender-specific criticisms.

Securing **men engagement and community buy-in** is another barrier identified by WROs and women community members. Men-dominated political spheres were another key barrier identified by women community members and WROs noted how the limited engagement of men in empowerment efforts exacerbates traditional dynamics and limits broader community acceptance, but their involvement as men allies remains difficult due to cultural norms and societal resistance.

Structural barriers were noted across multiple interview partners, particularly WE’AM partners, women community members, and municipalities. Alef (WE’AM partner) mentions the deprioritization of women’s rights in legislative discussions, highlighting systemic barriers that hinder progress. One woman community member highlighted how corruption, political partisanship, and gender-discriminatory laws hinder women’s involvement while political parties use women symbolically rather than genuinely empowering them. The absence of structural measures like gender quotas adds to this struggle, leaving women without sufficient representation or confidence in their potential success. Other categories of interview partners acknowledged structural barriers less or did not address them.

One municipality stands out for addressing **economic barriers** through, for example, craft training, to empower women economically. However, their approach places the burden of overcoming barriers on women, neglecting the role of men and broader societal structures.

Women community members there also uniquely mentioned restrictions of their freedom of expression, with participants referencing restrictions on their ability to openly share opinions, particularly in social contexts.

In light of these challenges, WE’AM partners and WROs have adopted **strategies to address barriers**. WE’AM partners focus on adaptability and alignment with local values by employing a conflict-sensitive approach, gradually fostering community understanding and raising awareness with the consideration of cultural respect. Some WROs take practical steps like relocating seminars to more open areas to reduce resistance. However, most organizations lack comprehensive strategies to shift societal attitudes or promote long-term acceptance of women’s expanded roles. Municipalities show minimal efforts, largely confined to logistical support like venue provision. Family support emerges as critical for women community members, helping counter societal resistance. However, in rural areas, traditional roles persist despite some progress in societal attitudes and technological advancements. Women community members further highlighted gaps in project planning and execution, particularly in conflict-related initiatives. Some participants noted a lack of clarity on how acquired skills translated into meaningful daily changes, while others emphasized the need for realistic timelines, consistent follow-ups, and deeper community involvement. These insights suggest that projects require thoughtful design and sustained engagement to deliver lasting benefits and effectively address the unique needs of women in conflict settings.

Responses demonstrate the variety of potential barriers to women’s empowerment. Some barriers were named notably little, like freedom of expression, or economic barriers, despite them being referenced multiple times before. This might stem from a limited consideration or the interview partners believe that these topics were sufficiently covered in previous interview answers. Across municipalities, entrenched attitudes, such as viewing women’s participation as secondary or dismissing systemic challenges, were frequent and limited meaningful gender inclusivity and the potential for lasting change. Positively, women community members noticed a positive development of such barriers and organizations do demonstrate some degree of adaptability to address them.

3.4 Cultural and Societal Norms

This chapter examines how cultural and societal norms shape the design, implementation, and impact of gender-focused initiatives in conflict-affected settings. By tailoring their approaches to regional dynamics, organizations demonstrate varying degrees of sensitivity to entrenched patriarchal attitudes, resource disparities, and systemic exclusion. While some organizations effectively integrate gender-sensitive tools and community insights into their work, others show gaps in

addressing deeper cultural barriers or sustaining long-term change. Women community members consistently highlight the importance of tailored, culturally sensitive interventions that balance respect for local norms with the need to challenge inequities, emphasizing that lasting progress depends on both empowering individuals and addressing structural barriers.

“There is no respect for women’s specificities. Topics are approached in general terms - generic tools that do not take into account time, place, and background - and sometimes information is omitted. Even the person who conducts the training must be from the region, so that it is more accepted in the region and becomes more localised. If someone comes from abroad and gives ideas, even if they are correct, they will be rejected. Within the same neighbourhood, each person needs to be dealt with in a certain way to resolve the conflict.” - From an FGD with women community members

Among the interview partners, CSOs, the IO, WE’AM partners, and WROs demonstrated a strong ability to design **nuanced interventions that are tailored to cultural contexts**. WROs, CSOs, WE’AM partners, and the IO recognize the importance of tailoring projects to regional and cultural dynamics and at times demonstrate an impressive level of flexibility in adapting gender-sensitive tools to fit local cultural contexts, particularly through thorough context analysis and community feedback integration. One participant’s shift to focus on mental health and peacebuilding illustrates responsiveness to community needs, but it could be helpful to continuously gather insights from communities throughout project implementation, not just during the initial analysis phase. The importance of tailored approaches becomes especially apparent through the responses of the women community members, where the importance of culturally sensitive project design was emphasized across all regions. Participants in one region stressed the ineffectiveness of generic, externally imposed frameworks in addressing community needs. Positively, some participants noted a positive trend in organizations adopting a more tailored, bottom-up approach, but also highlighted the need for long-term, sustainable interventions, to sustain the benefits after the end of the project. They also stressed that no single project can address the breadth of challenges within the community. Responses from other regions stood out for their ambiguity in identifying challenges, with participants suggesting that issues arise only when the community perceives something as contrary to its interests. This reflects a broader difficulty in defining community benefits and assessing needs openly.

CSOs and WROs employ **strategic sensitivity** to local cultural and societal norms, particularly in

relation to adopting appropriate language. Several CSOs use locally acceptable language and collaboration with community leaders to balance cultural sensitivities while advancing gender justice. This may lead to the avoidance of terms like “gender” or “feminism,” as mentioned by Mousawat, to ensure that projects do not provoke backlash that makes their implementation unsafe or impossible. However, it is important to ensure that these adaptations do not dilute critical messaging on long-term goals for equality. Some WROs highlight the need to navigate sensitive topics delicately, avoiding direct confrontation with local norms while fostering incremental change. AND showed a nuanced understanding of socio-cultural differences and their cautious approach to navigating patriarchal structures. However, avoiding sensitive topics due to local opposition can also limit organizations’ ability to address critical gender issues comprehensively, if not navigated carefully. If done well, strategic sensitivity can help women community members overcome restrictions on their freedom of expression and the pressure to conform to societal norms. However, gaps in fully addressing deeper cultural and societal dynamics were noted, particularly regarding perceptions of favoritism and unequal benefit-sharing, which risk reinforcing existing divisions.

The responses revealed **varying degrees of gender focus** across CSOs, the IO, and WROs in their assessments of cultural and societal norms. Some CSOs show limited integration of systematic gender considerations, which may restrict their ability to address deeply rooted societal challenges. Other CSOs and the IO exhibit a strong understanding of gender dynamics in project design which tailors gender-sensitive tools to local cultural contexts. Among WROs, Damma HUG incorporates gender analysis to inform its interventions, while Lecorvaw emphasizes empowering women in leadership roles, demonstrating transformative approaches to challenging entrenched norms. Conversely, some WROs’ limited elaboration on their engagement with cultural norms leaves some uncertainty regarding the depth of their gender-specific integration. Overall, though, the responses from women community members highlight that many projects effectively address critical challenges faced by women, reflecting positive impacts within their communities.

Understanding societal and cultural norms is essential to addressing barriers women face, including patriarchal attitudes, limited resources, and exclusion from decision-making. Women community members across regions emphasized that while projects raise awareness and empower individuals, systemic inequities - such as corruption, political interference, and entrenched norms - persist. Many municipalities focus on women’s individual agency but often overlook the structural changes needed for gender inclusivity. One specifically mentioned how deeply ingrained familial and societal norms prioritize men leadership, often sidelining qualified women in favor of men rela-

tives. WROs generally show strong awareness of these challenges, with organizations like Lecorvav and Damma HUG adopting targeted strategies to empower women leaders and promote collective action. However, meaningful progress requires broader cultural shifts and institutional reforms to complement localized efforts.

Overall, the findings emphasize the value of cultural sensitivity in project design, that enables organizations to respond to backlash through appropriate planning and budgeting. Organizations that embed these considerations can navigate resistance more effectively and maximize the benefit for participants to foster sustainable and transformative change. Conversely, neglecting these aspects risks perpetuating inequalities and limiting the impact of conflict-related interventions. Most organizations demonstrate a recognizable effort to include such considerations, but some do so inefficiently or incorporate restrictive biases.

3.5 Navigating Family and Community Dynamics

Most organizations recognize the critical role of women in fostering community stability and conflict resolution, yet their approaches reveal varying degrees of community and family considerations and engagements. Common themes were the different approaches to tailoring interventions to local contexts, understanding the impact of restrictive dynamics and family dynamics, as well as to inclusive approaches. Notably, women community members indicated overwhelmingly positive feedback from families and communities regarding their participation in these projects, highlighting the transformative potential of such initiatives, if implemented properly.

CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs mentioned that they **tailor their interventions to local contexts** to varying degrees. Several organizations demonstrate sensitivity to cultural norms in their project design, which enhances their effectiveness. Some CSOs apply a nuanced intersectional and feminist strategy and emphasize shared humanitarian concerns to ease women into public roles, while WROs leverage communal spaces and target men community leaders, particularly those in influential roles like religious courts, to work around the power structures that potentially put pressure on women and girls. Some CSOs and WE'AM partners do, however, run the risk of limiting the impact of their projects by avoiding confrontation or resistance to women's participation or having limited interactions with local communities. Women community members offered limited perspectives on the cultural relevance of the projects they participated in, pointing to gaps in communication and project scope. Feedback from women community members indicates that while awareness sessions generate movement within communities, they fail to significantly impact women's roles in conflict resolution or challenge societal norms. Development-oriented initiatives, when executed

effectively, are perceived as more transformative.

The **impact of restrictive patriarchal dynamics** was recognized or perpetuated by various interview partners. The IO and WE'AM partners demonstrated the importance of doing so by acknowledging the ongoing challenges of addressing deeply rooted social dynamics and seeking to address the patriarchal constraints and the centrality of family dynamics that impact women's participation. Restrictive patriarchal norms remain a significant barrier across municipalities, with varying degrees of acknowledgment and challenge. One Municipality explicitly excludes women from critical disputes, reflecting entrenched biases, while another acknowledges women's assertiveness but places the burden of adaptation on them without questioning societal equity. In other municipalities, women's involvement is largely limited to advisory roles, with minimal influence on formal decision-making or conflict resolution. Among women community members, visible engagement has fostered gradual shifts in attitudes, with some families and communities becoming more accepting of women's public roles. Tangible successes in traditionally men-dominated spaces have begun to challenge biases, highlighting the transformative potential of women's active participation. However, systemic barriers persist, necessitating deeper cultural shifts and policy-level interventions to address underlying dynamics and ensure sustainable progress.

Correctly considering **family dynamics** is crucial in Lebanon's context as they often shape women's access to opportunities, their participation in public life, and their ability to challenge restrictive societal norms. Positively, some CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs showed consideration for this in their responses. Their approaches included involving family members and providing family training, offering reference letters to legitimize women's participation, allowing family members to accompany women to encourage their engagement, offering flexible scheduling, and providing childcare to facilitate women's ability and willingness to participate. However, a lack of consideration for women's domestic responsibility could also be observed among some organizations, which lacked such accommodations or specialized focus on family dynamics. Some women community members reported how older men family members often override women's input. Similarly, some answers indicate that family dynamics, shaped by generational expectations and customs, continue to restrict women's participation. Still, women community members also mentioned that they observe improvements in their families' respect and recognition for them.. Across regions, their visible engagement fostered trust, respect, and admiration within families, elevating their roles as role models and decision-makers whose opinions are increasingly valued. In one municipality, growing parental acceptance of daughters' independence underscores the potential for gradual cultural shifts, though protective attitudes remain a chal-

lenge. However, the absence of decision-making power of women within municipalities, despite familial support, highlights persistent structural limitations and internalized biases that projects must address to ensure lasting empowerment.

Given the multifaceted nature of community and family members, **inclusive approaches** are advisable to engage a broad range of stakeholders. CSOs, WROs, Chiyah municipality, and WE'AM partners demonstrated such approaches; Chiyah municipality conducts a program to promote harmonious living among community members, regardless of sectarian affiliation. CSOs like Mousawat demonstrated a youth-centered engagement through creative mediums, while WE'AM partners emphasized capacity-building and cross-community collaboration. WROs focused on educational interventions that frame women's rights as legitimate within cultural and religious contexts, mitigating potential backlash and enabling women to navigate conservative environments more assertively. Initiatives that emphasize both men's and women's rights illustrate a dual strategy to shift familial and societal perceptions, fostering collaborative advocacy for gender equality. Still, the projects' inclusivity had limitations as demonstrated by one woman community member, who pointed out that while projects were culturally relevant, they excluded suburban areas in her region. This suggests that while projects align with cultural norms, their restricted reach limits still inclusivity.

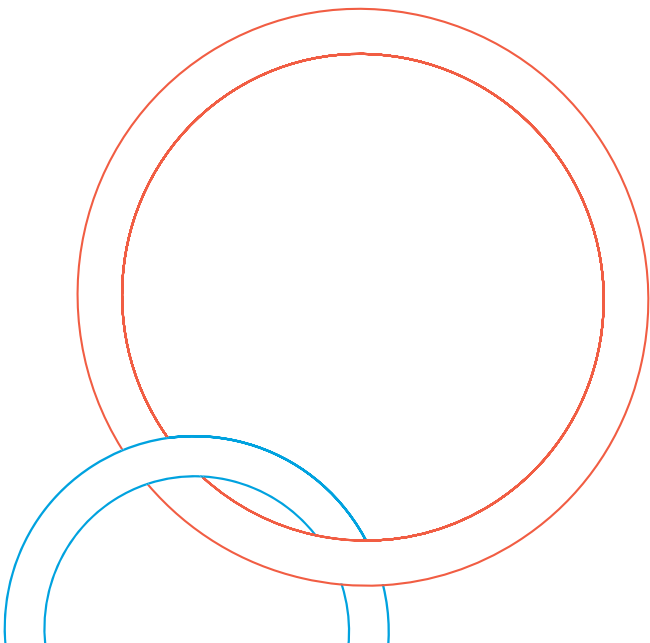
Collectively, these approaches illustrate the role of family and community dynamics in shaping women's opportunities and challenges. While progress is evident, the findings suggest that sustained and well-tailored strategies are essential for addressing family and community dynamics. Positively, the responses of women community members already underscore the positive impact these projects have on the women and their surroundings. Acceptance and trust remain closely tied to the visibility of women's successes, emphasizing the need for ongoing support to ensure these changes endure and expand.

"As women, nearly 80% of us cannot freely express our opinions without fear or hesitation due to societal customs, traditions, and family influence. Our perspectives differ from those of our parents—we advocate for women's active roles in society, but they believe a woman's primary duty is to marry, have children, and raise them. When a woman aspires to a decision-making position, she often faces resistance from her family and community. The biggest obstacle is the family itself; without parental support, it becomes nearly impossible for a woman to succeed. While we may believe in women's rights and their ability to achieve them, convincing the older generation remains a challenge. In some cases, even when women recognize their rights, societal pressures make it difficult for them to act on them."- From an FGD with women community members

3.6 Engaging Men and Youth

The involvement of men and youth is essential in promoting women's empowerment and fostering inclusive societal change, particularly in conflict-affected settings. Engaging these groups helps address deeply rooted patriarchal norms, create allies for gender equality, and challenge generational cycles of inequality, which is especially crucial considering Lebanon's generational divides. This section explores how organizations incorporate men and youth into their initiatives, examining their strategies for fostering awareness, shifting attitudes, and building supportive networks that contribute to sustainable empowerment and social cohesion.

Across the board, most interview partners acknowledged the importance and benefits of **engaging men**. CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs demonstrated at least some strategies for involving men. Depending on the focus point of the organizations, their engagement of men varies and includes occasional and organic integration through families, an emphasis on equal involvement of men and women, or explicitly engaging men, for example through men leaders in culturally sensitive discussions about family matters and religious court issues. International Alert (IO) and some WE'AM partners involve men in discussions and dialogue sessions, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity while gathering critical insight into their perspectives that can shape the projects. Still, multiple organizations reported difficulties in actively involving men due to their lack of commitment or other reasons. Here, it is interesting to remember how Tripoli municipality describes projects specifically referencing gender as harmful, believing that they promote "foreign agendas," and instead favors mutually beneficial projects, such as wider sidewalks for people with disabilities that also benefit mothers with strollers, viewing them as



“non-controversial.” Additionally, some initiatives seemed to lack specific strategies to engage men due to an overgeneralization of the participants, which risks overlooking their unique roles in conflict mediation.

Youth involvement emerged less frequently among interview partners but revealed notable efforts by CSOs, the IO, WROs, and two municipalities. Some WROs, CSOs and the IO involved youth in age-appropriate ways through school-based initiatives and creative mediums like theater, music, or digital skills and entrepreneurship training. Their belief in youth as catalysts for change is reflected in their detailed strategies, highlighting the potential of younger generations to drive societal shifts. Right to Play, for example, specifically mentioned that it seeks to create safe and inclusive spaces that include youth, while Shift implements marches and celebrations for Youth Day. Among municipalities, Fnaidek and Chiyah explicitly include youth in some initiatives. Generally, however, many organizations lacked specificity in their strategies for youth involvement, hinting at a missed opportunity to foster generational support.

Organizations recognize the importance of the inclusion of men and youth, but their approaches to engaging men and youth vary in depth. Many emphasize men's roles in influencing societal norms through targeted activities like awareness sessions on domestic violence laws and discussions on redistributing gender roles, positioning them as allies in promoting equality. However, achieving balanced representation of men and consistent youth engagement remains challenging. For example, Damma HUG noted that men more often prioritize commitments outside of their participation in projects and strategies for youth engagement appeared more limited among most organizations. Programs employing gender-sensitive communication and aligning roles with participants' interests show promise, but others are still developing frameworks to integrate men and youth effectively. Initiatives addressing youth often lack the structure needed for sustained impact.

“In all our projects, we strive to involve men, but building trust with them largely depends on the nature of the initiative. I won't deny that we face significant challenges when engaging men in activities related to early marriage, harassment, or the rights of women and girls. In such cases, men often exhibit strong resistance and rejection.”- From a KII with WRO representative

4. Level Three: Organizational Level

This part of the ecosystem approach focuses on the organizational characteristics of the interview partners. Answers from the interviews provide insight into their internal gender-sensitive policies and training, their gender-sensitive budgeting, as well as their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies.

4.1 Involvement in Project Planning and Conceptualization

All interview partners acknowledge the importance of including women in project planning to some degree, but their approaches vary significantly in depth and consistency. While some prioritize women's involvement based on situational needs, others integrate it systematically. The analysis highlights both progress and persistent gaps in women's involvement, especially at the municipal level. While some progress has been made, meaningful inclusion often remains superficial or limited to specific roles.

CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and municipalities show **varying degrees of systematic inclusion and consistent gender mainstreaming**. WE'AM partners, CSOs and the IO demonstrate a comprehensive and systematic approach, consistently considering gender in their program design to ensure that women's needs and comfort are prioritized. Municipalities show a more limited approach to inclusion. While some municipalities mention positive trends regarding the involvement of women, others illustrate a lack of structured initiatives to formalize women's involvement.

Organizations' approaches differ, with some emphasizing equal representation through strategies like a 50-50 selection quota and capacity-building initiatives. While this approach is inclusive, it is also general, focusing on equality rather than equity and feminist principles. The absence of clear strategies among municipalities to expand women's roles underscores a broader institutional gap that hinders sustainable gender inclusivity. Municipalities generally fail to take active steps to overcome barriers to women's participation. One municipality's claim of “open and free” participation reflects a passive stance that overlooks systemic obstacles such as entrenched patriarchal norms and logistical constraints. This lack of proactive facilitation results in women's involvement remaining below 50% in key initiatives, underscoring a failure to achieve meaningful inclusivity. This passive approach is reflected in the statement by women community members, who mentioned that they often need to work harder and be more persistent to have their voices heard. Their answers also indicate that they do feel that their input is valued, but the broader narrative about needing to rely on personal strength to “impose” one's presence highlights systemic challenges. This is a significant omission, as the interview answers underscore women's potential when included

in meaningful ways. In Saida, while not directly related to conflict settings, participants emphasized the positive role of projects that prioritize women's participation and representation. In Tripoli, examples from non-conflict-related settings demonstrate women's ability to apply learned skills effectively, such as organizing municipal meetings and engaging youth, which highlights their capacity to lead and drive change when given the opportunity. A common thread across regions in the answers of women community members was the need for supportive environments that enable women to express themselves freely. In more inclusive settings, women's opinions are not only heard but acted upon, as seen in examples from Baalbeck, where participants successfully advocate for community-relevant initiatives. However, this progress is often inconsistent, reflecting the broader influence of patriarchal norms, which might be overlooked by insufficient consultation of target communities.

To ensure women's meaningful involvement in project planning, **closer collaboration with target communities** is essential for identifying needs and aligning initiatives with local dynamics. Mousawat (CSO) exemplifies this by integrating community consultations and involving men and women as volunteers, fostering inclusive and gender-transformative solutions. Among WROs, Damma HUG stands out for conducting needs assessments to align projects with local contexts and avoid unintended harm. While UPW does not directly collaborate with communities, its decentralized approach incorporates regional perspectives into planning. Municipalities, being closely aligned with their communities, show promising trends in women's participation. In Fnaidek and Saida, for example, women are increasingly involved in municipal activities, with Saida highlighting significant roles such as the highest administrative post. While these developments reflect a positive shift in societal attitudes, leadership opportunities for women remain unevenly distributed. For further discussion on community dynamics and cultural and societal norms, see the respective chapters.

Another strategy to work more closely with beneficiaries among the IO and WROs was the **establishment of networks and the involvement of diverse departments**. International Alert (IO) creates networks through WhatsApp groups to strengthen participant support and some WROs emphasize cross-departmental collaboration to ensure diverse expertise is incorporated into project design. Lecorvaw (WRO) even includes social workers and psychotherapists in their teams.

An unfortunately common omission to be derived from the interviews was the **selective integration of women and gender issues** among CSOs, WE'AM partners, and municipalities. They demonstrated instances of integrating women and gender-sensitive practices well, but only when the project specifically demanded this. This signifies a selective application of gender considerations, suggesting

the need for greater consistency to ensure systemic gender mainstreaming across all initiatives. The issue is more apparent among municipalities: Women are often confined to supportive or advisory roles, emphasizing their simple presence over actual authority. One municipality involves women primarily in gender-specific initiatives, leaving broader gender equity goals to external partners like NGOs. Another offers a notable example of a woman leading the conflict resolution office, but this remains an isolated case without a broader institutional commitment to gender equity as the municipality prioritizes universally beneficial projects while dismissing gender-specific initiatives. This dismissal reflects resistance to addressing structural inequalities and overlooks how gender-focused projects can foster inclusivity and benefit entire communities by tackling root causes of social inequities. Women community members consistently noted their inclusion in community-level projects but exclusion from mediation and decision-making processes in conflict settings. In 2 municipalities, they reported being sidelined from key peace negotiations, including tribal mediations and land disputes.

This selective involvement of women is often related to the influence of **limiting gender roles** among municipalities, where traditional perceptions of women's roles persist, with municipal leaders acknowledging women's value but often through narrow, conservative lenses. In one setting, societal norms appear to constrain women's involvement in topics challenging conservative values. While most municipalities acknowledge women's contributions, their framing often reinforces traditional gender roles. Emphasis on women as moral boosters and the focus on their involvement in gender-specific issues demonstrate a limited view of women's broader potential in leadership and decision-making roles. Women community members emphasize the recurring pattern of women being restricted to nurturing and service-oriented roles during crises, only to be sidelined from decision-making once stability is restored. This highlights a crucial blind spot in many conflict-related initiatives: they often fail to anticipate and mitigate the marginalization of women in post-conflict phases. The exclusion reported by women community members reflects deeply entrenched societal norms and cultural resistance to women in leadership roles, limiting their ability to contribute to high-stakes negotiations. A recurring challenge lies in less supportive environments, where societal pressures and traditional hierarchies limit women's ability to assert their voices. Despite these challenges, some respondents noted positive changes, such as increasing community support for women pursuing work and leadership roles, signaling a gradual shift in attitudes.

An unfortunate theme across most answers was the general **lack of detail regarding how and to which extent women's voices are integrated into the planning and conceptualization of projects**. While some answers entail positive steps,

they lack overall insight into how deeply structural gender inequalities are addressed within the program design, which is essential for achieving more transformative outcomes. Among the WROs, while many highlight inclusivity, the extent of direct involvement of women in the planning phase often remains unclear. Some mention creating inclusive environments and emphasizing gender equity, but they lack explicit examples of how women's input shapes projects. Others fail to prioritize women's involvement in the initial planning stages. The incidental absence of gender-specific considerations and the acknowledgment of being restricted by donor parameters suggest a need for more structured and participatory approaches.

The findings reveal promising efforts to include women in project planning, with strategies like needs assessments, inclusive networks, and community consultations fostering gender-sensitive approaches. However, significant gaps persist, particularly among municipalities and some organizations, where women's roles are often confined to traditional or supportive functions. Limited systemic integration of gender considerations and inconsistent inclusion in decision-making highlight the need for more structured, participatory approaches. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts to empower women as active contributors in the planning and conceptualization of initiatives, ensuring their voices shape projects that are inclusive, equitable, and impactful.

4.2 Measures to Ensure Participation and Safety

Safety mechanisms are essential for ensuring women's active participation in projects, particularly in conflict-affected areas where societal norms and instability pose significant risks. These mechanisms create an environment where women can engage without fear of physical harm, backlash, or social exclusion, fostering trust and allowing them to focus on their personal and collective growth.

CSOs and WROs demonstrate a strong **understanding of women's needs** across different communities, enabling them to tailor culturally sensitive and inclusive measures. For instance, women community members from Saida noted that rural environments are less supportive of women's opinions compared to more progressive urban settings, underscoring the importance of understanding local contexts. Awareness-raising and education were noted as key factors in fostering confidence in these settings. CSOs show a strong understanding of conflict dynamics, focusing on inclusivity and collaboration. Emphasis on dialogue, mediation, and multi-stakeholder engagement highlights their commitment to fostering cohesion and addressing diverse community needs. WROs and CSOs provide thoughtful approaches to aligning logistical aspects with participants' needs by seeking to understand the communities they work with and emphasizing culturally sensitive, inclusive approaches. UPW has an interesting, grounded

approach as they engage with influential figures from the communities, such as religious figures, to legitimize projects, thereby protecting participants. RDFL's focus on psychological support and mental health aspects is also noteworthy.

CSOs, the IO, WROs, and municipalities demonstrate different approaches to the provision of **logistical support**. Some CSOs show awareness of barriers to women's participation, like cultural norms, but lack clear strategies to address them effectively. International Alert (IO) addresses some barriers by providing childcare during training sessions. For the WROs, EPA's close consideration of participant needs leads to the provision of the appropriate logistical support needed. Municipalities demonstrated a limited understanding and inconsistent approaches to logistical support. Across contexts, logistical support is often restricted to basic provisions, such as offering meeting spaces. Some municipalities show a willingness to cooperate with external partners by providing facilities for activities or projects, but their support is limited to operational aspects and lacks strategic planning to address women's unique needs. Some women community members mentioned logistical support only in relation to non-conflict related projects, such as transportation and childcare, hinting at a gap in support provision.

CSOs, WROs, and municipalities demonstrated varying degrees of consideration of **safety mechanisms**. Multiple CSOs and WROs demonstrated a comprehensive approach by providing safe venues and transportation and establishing protection policies. Damma HUG relies on external expertise for the protection of their beneficiaries in cases of severe safety concerns. UPW's engagement with influential religious figures to legitimize projects and protect participants stands out as a context-specific strategy. Several organizations lack detail regarding the specific measures they implement and some could move beyond basic or reactive efforts to fully support women in these contexts. Municipalities rarely implement proactive safety measures or address women's gender-specific safety challenges. While some municipalities support freedom of expression, they offer no details on ensuring participant safety during dialogues. Others express confidence in their measures but provide no concrete evidence, potentially reflecting resource or awareness limitations. Women community members across regions did not report formal safety mechanisms such as secure venues, transportation, or harassment reporting systems in their experiences, suggesting either their absence or poor communication about their availability. Notably, mechanisms to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse, and anti-sexual harassment policies were rarely mentioned, aside from Mousawat's brief reference. This is not necessarily because the organizations do not have any in place, as other interview insights demonstrate, but it appears that they are not seen as fundamental for a safe environment and therefore not mentioned here.

A key theme is **competent project management and the creation of safe spaces**. In Baalbeck and Saida, women community members reported a baseline sense of safety during projects, emphasizing the importance of trust, neutrality, and skilled facilitation. Baalbeck participants highlighted trust-building as vital for open communication in conflict resolution, while Saida participants noted dialogue on sensitive topics like religion as a culturally relevant approach to ensuring safety. These findings underscore the importance of training facilitators in emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity to enhance participants' sense of safety. Mousawat (CSO) includes trained professionals, and International Alert (IO) engages local women as mediators to create safe spaces for communication. WROs prioritize fostering supportive environments with psychological and social support. Right to Play (WE'AM partner) highlights the need for safe spaces in conservative settings. Municipalities generally lack structured efforts to create safe spaces for women, often reducing safety to physical spaces without addressing privacy, security, or cultural appropriateness.

“The challenges women face in municipal work vary from one municipality to another across Lebanon. In some areas, it is more difficult for women to take on active roles than in others. However, I don’t believe the situation necessitates security or protection measures. Instead, I plan to organize awareness-raising sessions and seminars to educate communities on the role of women in municipal work, starting with the fundamentals.”—From a KII with Municipality representative

Commitments to inclusivity are vague, with limited consideration of women's specific needs, particularly in conservative or conflict-affected areas. Some municipalities focus on non-controversial topics and rely heavily on external partners for establishing safe spaces. While their collaboration with external organizations is beneficial, it reflects a reactive approach and insufficient internal capacity to tackle gender-specific challenges proactively. Women community members appear confident in their roles and expressing their views but acknowledge the effort required to be heard, reflecting systemic barriers. Interestingly, women community members from Tripoli found mixed-gender interactions empowering. These interactions built confidence and highlighted the value of thoughtfully integrating men into projects. Similarly, engaging beyond usual social circles was transformative, encouraging women to step beyond traditional boundaries and express themselves more openly.

Overall, the responses suggest room for growth in prioritizing safety as a cornerstone of women's empowerment. While practical measures like safe transportation and accessible locations are important, fostering culturally sensitive environments

that encourage open expression and engagement is equally vital. WROs generally demonstrated a stronger alignment with community needs, whereas logistical support and safety considerations appeared less developed among municipalities and some WE'AM partners. The concept of safe spaces and the measures required to establish them could benefit from further clarity and emphasis across all actors. Municipalities, in particular, could enhance their approaches by adopting more comprehensive and tailored safety mechanisms to support women's effective and secure participation in conflict resolution and related initiatives.

4.3 Internal Gender Sensitivity Policies

Gender-sensitive policies play a critical role in shaping effective and inclusive interventions for women affected by conflict. Such policies ensure that the unique challenges faced by women are addressed in a manner that promotes equity, empowerment, and long-term resilience. Gender-sensitive policies can take various forms, including targeted support for women-headed households, mechanisms for involving women in decision-making processes, and the integration of anti-sexual harassment policies or policies against exploitation and abuse. This chapter explores the interview partners' awareness of their importance, the existence of formal policies, as well as the different strategies implemented.

An **awareness of the importance** of internal gender-sensitive policies can be observed, to varying degrees, across the IO, CSOs, WROs, and WE'AM partners, though this awareness does not necessarily translate into the existence of a robust policy framework, as elaborated below. International Alert confirmed its commitment to gender-sensitive policies within its organizational structures. Municipalities demonstrated a more limited understanding of the importance of such frameworks, and women community members demonstrated, at times, a lack of awareness of such policies or their importance within the projects they participated in, hinting at a structural gap on the side of the implementers or flaws in the communication of such policies, if they exist.

The actual **existence of formal policies** could be detected across CSOs, WE'AM partners and WROs, although some demonstrated gaps in their frameworks. Some organizations, like Mousawat (CSO), stand out for their comprehensive approaches, embedding gender mainstreaming and protective policies across their activities and establishing proper mechanisms for reporting. Others, however, have underdeveloped formalized policies and lack proactive gender considerations, with some demonstrating the struggle to evenly implement policies across their branches and employees. Municipalities generally did not appear to have significant gender sensitive policies in place, which is reflected in the observation of women community members who reported that municipal support and equal treatment fluctuates as it heavily depends on the supportiveness of the current municipal leaders.

“Policies and laws that require revision fall under the responsibility of the state.”- From a KII with municipality representative

Interview partners have established a wide range of **strategies and types of policies**, often tailored to their field of focus. Act for the Disappeared (CSO) incorporates gender assessments into their projects, while Alef stands out among interviewed WE'AM partners for their robust anti-sexual harassment policies and protocols for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, fostering a safe and inclusive organizational culture. Shift focuses on protection policies and ensures the inclusion of gender-sensitivity already at the proposal stage, while Right to Play integrates quotas into their staffing practices. Some WROs have implemented robust anti-harassment measures, child protection guidelines, and gender-sensitive recruitment practices, drawing from feminist-oriented principles and prioritizing the safety and inclusion of women. However, across interview partners many organizations demonstrated a more narrow focus regarding such policies, sometimes focusing solely on quotas, leaving out significant protective policies, or having limited enforcement and reporting structures. Women community members stressed the importance of having well-planned and inclusive projects to uphold gender sensitivity, emphasizing the need for skilled and responsive staff. This shows how gender sensitivity already begins in the project design where policies are a useful tool for ensuring that such needs are met.

While most organizations recognize the importance of internal gender sensitive policies, their approaches differ in depth and rigor. Moreover, some organizations face unique challenges, such as ensuring consistent application of policies across widespread local branches, which can dilute the uniformity of their gender-sensitive approach.

4.4 Training and Sensitization

This section examines the training and sensitization efforts undertaken by organizations. Comprehensive and continuous training strategies are essential for fostering a culture of inclusivity and gender sensitivity within these organizations. By equipping staff and members with the tools to address diverse and complex challenges, such efforts enhance the effectiveness of interventions while promoting gender-equitable practices. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of consistent and adaptive approaches to sensitization, ensuring that organizational cultures evolve to meet the needs of both beneficiaries and the broader communities they serve. This section examines how widespread such training is, as well as whether they follow a formal or informal approach. Lastly it looks into potential follow-ups of such sessions.

Most interview partners did, when asked, mention

at least some form of training and sensitization efforts within their structures. However, among some CSOs, such training seems to take a rather **informal** form, by relying on informal guidelines and discussions to promote gender sensitivity, but lacking formal training and capacity-building. Some organizations also provided very little insight into such training, wherefore it remains unclear how far-reaching their impact is and how consistently they are conducted.

Most interview partners, however, did mention **formal training and sensitization**, including CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs. Among CSOs, Mousawat takes a structured approach, offering protection and safeguarding training to all personnel, which reflects a strong commitment to ethical practices, although gender-specific topics could be more explicitly included. The structured onboarding sessions offered by some WROs focus on foundational topics such as gender-based violence, child protection, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring that staff are well-equipped with essential knowledge. Outsourcing training to specialized organizations has also proven effective in accessing expert knowledge, though it necessitates active oversight to ensure alignment with organizational goals and responsiveness to emerging challenges. Additionally, ongoing training programs aimed at raising awareness about unconscious biases and promoting conflict resolution through women's leadership have been resumed in some organizations after temporary interruptions. Shift (WE'AM partners) provides training sessions for beneficiaries on gender-related concepts. Meanwhile, Majdal Anjar municipality has implemented various training programs focused on conflict resolution, community awareness, and leadership development over the past eight years. While women were free to participate, it remains unclear whether the training specifically incorporated gender-sensitive approaches or addressed women's roles and needs in conflict resolution.

To ensure that all employees remain up-to-date and knowledgeable of existing structures, it is crucial to conduct **follow ups** of training sessions and review policies regularly. The latter practice was mentioned by Mousawat (CSO), while multiple WROs, though not all, adopted proactive measures like integrating training into annual policy reviews and conducting interactive workshops, aligning these efforts with broader feminist agendas. Budgetary constraints, however, remain a recurring challenge in sustaining such initiatives.

Training and sensitization efforts are recognized by many organizations in Lebanon as vital for fostering gender-sensitive practices and addressing the needs of women affected by conflict. While several CSOs, WROs, and WE'AM partners demonstrate structured approaches, including formal onboarding sessions and specialized training programs, others rely on informal methods that may lack consistency and measurable impact. The

integration of gender-specific content, proactive follow-ups, and regular policy reviews are critical steps for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives. However, budgetary limitations continue to pose significant challenges, underscoring the need for strategic planning and resource allocation to maintain and enhance these essential efforts.

4.5 Gender-Sensitive Budgeting

The next chapter explores gender-sensitive budgeting (GSB), an approach that ensures public resources are allocated in a way that addresses the different needs and priorities of women and men. Rather than creating separate budgets for women, GSB integrates a gender perspective into all stages of the budget cycle - planning, allocation, execution, and evaluation - to assess whether financial decisions promote gender equality.¹³⁰ This process helps identify gaps, reallocate funds where necessary, and ensure that budget commitments align with policies aimed at advancing women's rights and addressing structural inequalities.¹³¹ By ensuring that financial resources are allocated in ways that address the distinct needs of women and men, GSB enhances the inclusivity and effectiveness of programmes. This approach not only promotes transparency and accountability but also enables organizations to design and implement initiatives that directly tackle gender disparities. In conflict-affected settings, where resources are often scarce and women face heightened vulnerabilities, gender-sensitive budgeting becomes particularly important for fostering sustainable and equitable outcomes. This chapter is divided into the organizations that employ GSB and those that do not.

The IO, WROs, and WE'AM partners **use, to varying degrees, gender sensitive budgeting**. International Alert (IO) stands out for the strongest consideration by, for example, effectively mitigating donor-related challenges by negotiating with hotels and covering transportation costs to ensure gender-sensitive budgeting. Their commitment to allocating funds for caregivers, accommodations, and other gender-specific needs shows a strong dedication to supporting women's participation, even when donor approval isn't fully granted. This proactive approach ensures that women can engage in their programs without financial or logistical barriers. WE'AM partners and WROs are less consistent, though some integrate gender considerations into their general budget, at times without creating dedicated allocations, or apply GSB selectively, when the projects require it. Such projects often focus on addressing GBV, education, and capacity building.

While women community members called for dedicated budgets to help empower women in

conflict resolution initiatives, many CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs **lack robust GSB frameworks**, limiting their ability to address the distinct needs of women in conflict settings.

"We seek projects that showcase women in leadership roles, demonstrating their ability to secure funding and support their local communities. There is a prevailing belief that men are the primary financial providers and decision-makers, and we want to challenge this perception. Women can take on projects related to municipal work and create opportunities that generate jobs and income, empowering them to contribute economically to their households."-From an FGD with women community members

Financial constraints are a recurring challenge, but gaps in understanding and implementation also play a significant role. Some organizations narrowly interpret GSB as funding women-focused initiatives, overlooking the need for equitable resource distribution across all programmes. This limited approach often results in missed opportunities to comprehensively address systemic gender disparities. A lack of structured planning and monitoring further weakens GSB efforts. While some organizations claim gender sensitivity in their projects, they provide little evidence of concrete financial strategies or mechanisms to track expenditures against gender equity objectives. Inconsistent application of GSB principles, as seen in situational or project-specific approaches, further undermines their potential impact.

While GSB is recognised as an important tool for fostering inclusivity and addressing systemic gender disparities, its implementation across organizations remains uneven. International Alert exemplifies a proactive approach by allocating resources to address logistical and financial barriers faced by women, demonstrating the transformative potential of robust GSB practices. However, many CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs fall short, either applying GSB inconsistently or failing to integrate it comprehensively into their financial planning. Financial constraints and limited understanding further hinder progress, leading to missed opportunities for advancing gender equity. Strengthening structured planning, monitoring mechanisms, and a broader commitment to GSB is essential to ensure that financial resources are allocated in ways that effectively address the needs of women in conflict settings.

¹³⁰ "Gender Equality Glossary," UN Women Training Centre eLearning Campus, UN Women, accessed February 24, 2025, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=G&sortkey=&sortorder=&fullsearch=0&page=-1>.

¹³¹ International Organization for Migration, "Understanding Gender Sensitive Budgeting," 6.

4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

The next chapter examines the M&E strategies employed by the organizations. Effective M&E is crucial for assessing the impact of initiatives, ensuring accountability, and refining practices to address the specific needs of beneficiaries. By incorporating gender-sensitive methodologies, organizations can capture the unique experiences of women, evaluate their empowerment, and adapt programs to better serve marginalized communities. This chapter explores the extent to which organizations integrate gender considerations into their M&E frameworks, their consideration of inclusivity of other groups, the tools they use and the adaptability they demonstrate through integrating their M&E insights.

CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs mentioned the use of **specific gender indicators** in their M&E. Some CSOs, WE'AM partners, and the IO demonstrate a strong proactive commitment to integrating gender indicators as an organizational priority and tailor evaluations to reflect the group they are working with. These indicators often specifically measure gender justice or transformations and women are actively included in the evaluation process, which enhances accountability and participation. Some CSOs, WROs, and WE'AM partners, however, appear to include them more at a surface level, often driven by external factors like donor requirements that tend to rely on more general metrics like women participation rates, which lack the qualitative depth to measure meaningful empowerment. Efforts to ensure gender balance, such as achieving a 50% women presence, are evident but lack targeted indicators to measure progress toward gender equality and empowerment systematically. Some WE'AM partners also mentioned challenges related to measuring long-term impacts of their work, which seems likely given the previously mentioned time constraints many projects face. Overall, though, multiple organizations have made strides by developing gender-sensitive toolkits, providing clearer guidance for M&E, and addressing specific challenges like maintaining gender balance in key initiatives.

Evaluation methods do at times differ among the organizations but their practices provide valuable insight into different strategies to measuring gender-related progress. International Alert (IO), for example, uses both qualitative and quantitative data through pre-tests, focus groups, and impact assessments. Right to Play (WE'AM partner) uses gender-specific indicators alongside play-based methods and academic collaboration, offering a dynamic approach. Among WROs, evaluative methods range from participant surveys and feedback interviews to observations, demonstrating an effort to include diverse voices, such as marginalized women from rural areas. However, systematic dissemination of lessons learned and the establishment of standardized evaluation frameworks remain at times limited, which could hinder the long-term integration of gender justice principles.

CSOs, the IO, and WROs demonstrate an ability to **adapt their program based on their M&E insights**, but the extent and nature of adaptability vary. For example, Act for the Disappeared integrates lessons learned to improve project design; when one of their projects saw low participation rates from women, they adjusted their approach by partnering with feminist organizations and refining their outreach strategies. These adaptations also informed the design of future projects, ensuring more effective participation. While this reflects a more reactive approach, other organizations, such as Mousawat, integrate M&E throughout their projects, making adjustments in real-time based on ongoing insights. This allows them to refine programs both during and after implementation, ensuring continuous improvement. Among WROs, community advisory structures have also been used to align interventions with local needs, signaling a commitment to responsive programming.

While the organizations were not specifically asked how they ensure **inclusivity aside from gender considerations**, CSOs and WROs still provided insight worth mentioning. Mousawat, for example, uses one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and informal feedback to ensure diverse voices inform their evaluations. Among WROs, a positive trend can be observed where organizations include marginalized groups in evaluations as natural participants due to their involvement in activities.

While some organizations prioritize tailored approaches with specific gender indicators to measure transformative impacts, others rely on surface-level metrics, often influenced by donor requirements, such as participation rates. These general metrics, while indicative of progress, lack the qualitative depth necessary to evaluate meaningful empowerment or systemic change. Adaptability is a notable strength across many organizations, with adjustments informed by M&E findings, though the extent and depth of such adaptability differ. Tools and methods, including focus groups, pre-tests, and community advisory structures, showcase efforts to include diverse voices, yet challenges remain in achieving long-term impact measurement, consistent inclusivity, and standardized evaluation frameworks. Overall, while strides have been made in incorporating gender justice principles, the varying depth of application highlights the need for more consistent and systematic approaches.

5. Level Four: Community Level

The next section delves into the community-level strategies employed by organizations, focusing on two key aspects: trust-building with communities and fostering networks and partnerships. These approaches are critical for establishing sustainable relationships, enhancing local ownership, and amplifying the impact of initiatives.

5.1 Trust Building with Communities

Building trust with communities is a vital yet complex process that requires strategies tailored to local dynamics, sensitivities, and potential resistance. A gradual, human-centered approach prioritizing relationship-building over directly addressing contentious issues has proven effective in fostering trust. This apolitical stance is particularly important in Lebanon, where political tensions often intersect with community relations, making trust-building an essential foundation for sustainable engagement and impactful interventions. This chapter explores the interview partners' answers in four steps, first focusing on their level of local sensitivity, followed by their communication methods, fostering local ownerships, and lastly, their inclusion of gender dynamics.

WROs, CSOs, WE'AM partners, and the IO demonstrate heightened levels of **local sensitivities**, with all involving locals in their work which allows them to identify regional sensitivities and consider them in their project design. WROs and the IO align organizational efforts with community priorities, encompassing initiatives beyond core mandates, such as education, food security, and legal advocacy. These efforts increase credibility and allow for the flexibility needed to respond to regional differences among communities. This is especially critical when considering how some municipalities exhibit mistrust toward external organizations due to misaligned priorities and a lack of community relevance. WROs and CSOs pay attention to culturally resonant language and terminology. In contexts resistant to addressing sensitive topics like domestic violence, organizations' adaptability in framing these issues within broader community well-being is particularly effective. Linking women's rights to family stability, education, and conflict resolution helps navigate resistance without compromising core missions. WROs also provide local necessities, such as safe, accessible spaces and accommodating family-related constraints, which highlight an awareness of local challenges, especially for women from marginalized or conservative backgrounds. Such efforts were appreciated among women community members in Baalbeck, where the provision of essential needs such as water, energy, and safe spaces created immediate benefits for participants while encouraging sustainable, community-driven efforts.

CSOs, Chiyah municipality, and the IO use **communication** as a tool to engage and get to know the communities they work with. CSOs and

the IO emphasize consistent communication and a phased implementation of initiatives, starting small and scaling up as trust deepens, with International Alert establishing communication channels to strengthen trust and sustainability. Attention to culturally resonant language and terminology also emerges as a critical tactic, ensuring respect for local customs and traditions while subtly introducing new ideas. Chiyah municipality puts forward an interesting approach; uses a sector-based approach to involve the local community and build trust. They announce conflict resolution projects on social media and invite residents to participate. The community is divided into smaller groups based on sectors, and each group is invited separately to learn about the initiative. This allows the municipality to engage directly with residents, explain the project in detail, and identify those interested in participating. Women community members noted how some projects helped them establish networks in which they could consult each other, which not only reduced intra-community conflict but also promoted solidarity among women.

Fostering a sense of ownership through community inclusion strengthens local trust and participation. CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs noted strategies for **involving local stakeholders** in their projects. CSOs mentioned involving diverse stakeholders, including decision-makers, as a core strategy to foster trust and enhance transparency, accountability, and active participation while mitigating resistance. The IO and WROs involve locals by training them to productively participate in their projects. A strong example for this is International Alert, who trained 130 local women as mediators in conflict resolution, thereby not only helping them gain crucial professional and life skills, but also furthering gender representation.. WROs also implemented strategies to engage men as allies, such as outreach and advocacy targeting men and youth, which contribute to shifting perceptions and building broader community acceptance for gender-related initiatives. However, gaps remain in extending these efforts to encompass all community segments, with some WROs providing little insight into how they engage, for example, families or local leaders, potentially requiring more structured, inclusive outreach strategies. Women community members view local involvement as empowering and transformative. In Saida, increased participation and interregional exchanges foster coexistence, while collaborative projects in Tripoli challenge norms and promote shared leadership. In Baalbeck, women gain skills to resolve conflicts and lead community initiatives. Across all cities, empowerment efforts drive societal change and strengthen community dynamics.

The IO, and WROs specifically mentioned the inclusion of **gender dynamics** as part of their community strategies. International Alert (IO) demonstrates flexibility in adapting gender-sensitive tools to fit local cultural contexts, particularly through context analysis and community feedback integra-

tion. WROs focus on gradual engagement, starting with awareness-raising on pertinent laws and transitioning to comprehensive protection services, which demonstrates a commitment to sustained involvement. Across all regions, women community members reported a shift toward greater acceptance of women's participation and empowerment. In Baalbeck, societal norms have evolved over the past decade, with traditional beliefs giving way to increased inclusion of women, laying the foundation for their expanded roles in peacebuilding and community development.

Building trust with communities is a multifaceted process that requires local sensitivity, inclusive communication, and strategies fostering ownership while considering gender dynamics. By aligning efforts with community priorities, addressing cultural sensitivities, and involving diverse stakeholders, organizations can build credibility and create sustainable impact. Despite challenges such as resistance and regional differences, the integration of local voices and gradual, relationship-focused approaches has proven transformative, empowering women and fostering solidarity. While notable progress has been made, continued efforts to enhance inclusivity and address gaps in community engagement remain critical for fostering long-term trust and cohesion.

5.2 Building Networks and Partnerships

This chapter explores the critical role of networks and partnerships in advancing gender-focused initiatives in conflict-affected settings. Effective collaboration amplifies impact, fosters resource sharing, and enhances sustainability. The analysis is divided into three parts: working with formal stakeholders, engaging informal stakeholders, and examining strategies employed to strengthen collaboration. These dimensions highlight how organizations navigate complex dynamics to create inclusive and resilient support systems.

CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, municipalities, and WROs engage with **formal stakeholders** in their work, meaning governmental bodies or official organizations. Multiple CSOs, WROs, and WE'AM partners work with municipalities as key gatekeepers, using these relationships to navigate resistance and scale up their initiatives. Some adopt a selective approach here, only collaborating when necessary to preserve their independence while making use of their expertise and support when necessary. Most municipalities demonstrated openness to such collaborations, while one voiced skepticism which sometimes hindered such joined efforts. International Alert (IO) collaborates with CSOs and WROs to facilitate working more closely with local communities rather than imposing international solutions. Municipalities also collaborate with CSOs and WROs but take a more reactive approach, meaning that they do not seek out these collaborations but rather the other way around. Some WROs noted that they engage with international entities, like embassies and global organizations to

enhance the visibility of their projects and provide access to resources. They also have collaborative efforts with women leaders in local governance.

Leveraging partnerships with **informal stakeholders** is another way to establish networks and partnerships closely to target communities. CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs make use of this CSOs foster trust and expand their reach and impact by occasionally engaging with actors such as school principals, teachers, and religious figures. Shift (WE'AM) focuses on sustaining women's groups post-training. Some WROs leverage local insights and adapt their programs according to village dynamics and engage with beneficiaries. Notably, though, broad partnerships sometimes pose challenges in aligning diverse motivations and limited formalized networks, particularly with municipal authorities, present challenges for scalability and local acceptance. Therefore, a mixed approach, involving both formal and informal stakeholders, is advisable.

All organizations employ different, unique **strategies** to foster partnerships. Some CSOs take a selective approach through stakeholder mapping, ensuring partnerships align with project goals. WE'AM partners and CSOs also leverage expertise strategically, as exemplified by Mousawat's collaboration with the Bar Association and Public Transport Syndicate to address sexual harassment. International Alert (IO) trains other organizations on integrating conflict and gender sensitivity, along with capacity-building training, uniquely spreading their insights while fostering partnerships. All WE'AM partners use subgranting schemes to empower local communities and advance localization. Alef, a WE'AM partner, focuses on advocacy to maintain independence from governmental partnerships, which supports their rights-based work but may limit their ability to effect systemic policy changes through collaboration.

By strategically engaging formal and informal stakeholders, organizations navigate local dynamics to foster trust, amplify impact, and enhance sustainability. Partnerships with municipalities and international entities provide resources and visibility, while collaborations with community influencers and beneficiaries ensure relevance and adaptability. Despite challenges in aligning diverse motivations and maintaining independence, the diverse strategies employed - from stakeholder mapping to capacity building - highlight the value of a mixed approach. Effective partnerships emerge as essential to creating inclusive, resilient support systems that address complex, gendered needs in conflict-affected contexts.

6. Level Five: Institutional Level

The institutional level examines the broader frameworks shaping women's empowerment efforts, focusing on the role of local authorities and the challenges organizations face within institutional settings. This section explores how municipalities and other governing bodies contribute to or hinder gender-focused initiatives, as well as the strategies organizations employ to navigate systemic obstacles and ensure impactful engagement.

6.1 Role of Local Authorities

The role of local authorities in supporting or hindering peacebuilding and gender-focused initiatives varies significantly based on individual attitudes and institutional dynamics. Municipalities emerge as pivotal actors, with their support - or lack thereof - profoundly shaping the success and sustainability of these projects. This chapter explores the nuanced interplay between local authorities and peacebuilding efforts, analyzing key themes such as dependency on leadership and regional differences, openness to collaborations, proactive versus reactive approaches and communication, gender and representation, partnership strategies, and resistance to gender issues. Together, these aspects highlight the opportunities and challenges in leveraging municipal involvement to foster meaningful change.

CSOs, WROs, and women community members identified that municipal support depends heavily on **individual leadership and regional differences**. CSOs and women community members pointed out how positive engagement often depends on the personal beliefs of municipal leaders, such as their alignment with feminist and gender justice principles. Women community members observed periods of equality and collaborative work when leadership was supportive and progressive, as well as challenges when leadership shifted and political dynamics became more divisive. CSOs and WROs mentioned that while supportive municipalities contribute resources like free venues, protection, and actively facilitate initiatives, more traditional or conservative authorities may resist these efforts due to misalignment with local values or preferences for particular individuals during recruitment processes. Some women community members noted only engaging successfully with municipalities if their projects align with community needs. These challenges can undermine fairness and transparency and complicate project execution. Women community members further mentioned how unqualified municipal staff might hinder initiatives.

All municipalities exhibit **openness to collaborate** with external organizations on conflict resolution though the extent differs. Some demonstrate more flexibility and willingness to engage, leveraging external expertise to address community issues. One municipality described its communication channels between the municipal-

ity and organizations as accessible and straightforward, with municipal representatives available for contact at any time. Another municipality, while supportive of collaborations, remains passive, primarily responding to external initiatives without prioritizing deeper engagement. In contrast, another municipality shifts focus away from meaningful collaboration on women-specific issues, framing partnerships in terms of political or foreign agendas. Generally, the capacity of local authorities to engage meaningfully has diminished in recent years due to weakened municipal systems and limited resources. This decline has led to increased reliance on NGOs to address issues beyond their mandates, such as waste management, which adds complexity to project implementation. In areas where long-standing relationships and community trust exist, local authorities are more likely to support initiatives actively. This demonstrates the value of establishing legitimacy and local influence to ensure sustained cooperation. Women community members further mentioned that municipal support is often complicated by corruption and self-interest.

Among organizations, approaches differ between **proactive and reactive approaches and communication**. CSOs emphasize the importance of proactive communication and relationship-building with local authorities to establish trust and legitimacy. It was mentioned how engaging municipal leaders early in project planning help prevent potential obstacles and foster smoother implementation, but some organizations mention the need for persistence in addressing resistance. Among WROs, effective communication and alignment with local authorities remain challenging in many cases, with some organizations relying on intermediaries to navigate these barriers. Municipalities themselves act mostly reactive, typically responding to external initiatives rather than proactively seeking collaboration or advancing gender-inclusive strategies.

Gender and representation within local authorities is another key aspect to consider, as demonstrated by CSOs, which pointed out that women's roles within municipalities are a potential advantage, claiming that women decision-makers are often seen as more empathetic and open to sensitive issues. Women community members from Baalbeck observed a positive shift towards greater inclusion in municipalities, attributing this to NGOs that have actively reinforced women's roles and created opportunities for their participation. They noted that funders' conditions requiring equitable representation between women and men have also contributed to this progress. Yet, the underrepresentation of women in municipal leadership remains a barrier. Many municipalities include women based on externally driven factors, lack experience with integrating women meaningfully, downplay their participation, or demonstrate limited enthusiasm regarding the discussion of gender-issues. Sustained systemic support is necessary to ensure these advancements are not

undermined by fluctuating leadership dynamics. Women community members stressed the importance of strengthening relationships between women and municipalities, recognizing that such connections can help women gain credibility and influence in traditionally conservative spaces.

Partnership strategies among interview partners reveal varying approaches to collaboration, reflecting their unique objectives and operational contexts. International Alert (IO) focuses on horizontal social cohesion instead of directly collaborating with local authorities. This strategy aligns with their donor's parallel efforts through other organizations, allowing a concentrated focus on community-level impact. Some WE'AM partners avoid direct governmental partnerships to focus on independent advocacy. Other WE'AM partners adopt a selective approach to collaborations, involving municipalities only when necessary. This is in line with the vital complementary role of NGOs and local institutions stressed by women community members, particularly in the absence of strong state structures. A proactive and strategic stance is taken by some WE'AM partners to initiate contact with local authorities early and make use of their insights and build alliances to navigate challenges. Notably, while municipalities are a primary focus, limited engagement with other local authorities, such as police or political parties, may leave critical gaps in addressing broader societal and institutional obstacles. Expanding partnerships with diverse local actors could strengthen initiatives and enhance sustainability.

WROs pointed out significant **resistance to gender issues** by municipalities, which was partially confirmed during the interviews with the municipalities themselves.

“Municipalities play a crucial role in the success of our projects. If they oppose a project, we are unable to proceed with its implementation. On the other hand, some municipalities support our efforts by providing protection and necessary licenses, making our work easier.”-From a KII with WRO representative

Despite logistical cooperation in some regions, resistance to certain topics, particularly women's empowerment and feminist issues, persists. This resistance is often subtle, manifesting as indifference from predominantly men leadership, rather than overt opposition. While some dismiss gender-focused projects as foreign impositions, others adopt a more constructive, albeit individual-focused, approach to empowering women. This highlights differing levels of openness to gender equity.

The role of local authorities in peacebuilding and gender-focused initiatives is marked by complex dynamics, shaped by individual leadership, institu-

tional capacity, and societal norms. While municipalities can act as pivotal allies, their engagement varies widely, influenced by regional differences, resource constraints, and attitudes toward gender inclusion. Proactive collaboration and trust-building with local authorities have proven crucial for project success, though challenges such as resistance to gender issues, corruption, and fluctuating leadership persist. Strengthening partnerships, fostering gender representation, and addressing systemic barriers are essential steps toward maximizing the impact and sustainability of these initiatives.

6.2 Navigating Institutional Challenges

Navigating institutional challenges is a critical aspect of implementing peacebuilding and gender-focused initiatives. Interviews revealed a range of obstacles stemming from entrenched societal norms, resource limitations, and institutional biases. Resistance to progressive issues like gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, compounded by corruption, weakened institutional capacities, and distrust in local authorities, creates a challenging environment for organizations and beneficiaries alike. This section explores the barriers organizations face and the strategies they employ to address these challenges, highlighting the importance of resilience, adaptability, and principled approaches.

First, interviews demonstrated a wide range of **challenges** that exist within the collaborations with local institutions.

Organizations often face significant **resistance and backlash when addressing certain issues** that challenge entrenched societal and patriarchal norms, as mentioned by WROs, CSOs and WE'AM partners. Such issues include LGBTQ+ topics or gender rights, which at times led to public demands for denouncements, and WROs further identified external pressures as hindering their work. One municipality specifically noted that it rejects any projects that do not exclusively benefit Lebanese citizens as a way to limit aid to Syrian refugees. While this approach aligns with local sentiments about aid distribution, it excludes opportunities for initiatives that could promote coexistence between Lebanese and foreign populations.

WE'AM partners noted the **deprioritization of gender issues** by those in power as a significant obstacle, as it complicates advocacy and policy influencing efforts.

Weakened institutions were identified as a challenge by WROs and women community members, as they lead to limited resources that often necessitates compromises in project implementation. The lack of state funding and inactive governmental plans force women community members to rely on NGOs.

Corruption and biases within institutions were also mentioned by WROs, pointing out the unfair

recruitment practices of local officials and the resistance to interventions stemming from political and religious figures. Additionally, multiple representatives from municipalities noted that women in leadership positions face significant barriers and backlash, leading to unequal treatment and a general resistance to supportive measures such as quotas. Women community members in two municipalities have expressed their distrust in and dissatisfaction with local authorities and pointed out how projects are often ignored if they do not directly benefit municipal leadership. Women community members stressed how personal relationships with municipal members can influence support for initiatives, rather than objective, systematic approaches.

Second, different **mitigation strategies** emerged during the interviews.

Resilience and patience was mentioned as a key requirement by WE'AM partners, CSOs and the IO highlighted the need for **adaptability and collaboration** to respond to emerging challenges. This can take the form of changing venues and seeking strategic collaborations to secure resources. Right to Play and International Alert leverage local insights to adapt their programs when necessary, demonstrating the ability to adjust their activities based on cultural and societal contexts. Appropriate planning and budgeting further facilitate a flexible approach during project implementation.

Women community members themselves also stressed the invaluable insight local women bring to identifying community needs and therefore the importance of **incorporating women's insights in planning** and implementation, emphasizing their role in shaping responsive and practical interventions.

Having a **principled approach** emerged as a strategy among CSOs, to ensure that sensitive issues remain adequately addressed despite backlash.

CSOs and WROs further pointed out the benefit of **emphasizing the humanitarian and universally beneficial dimensions** of their work to ease tensions and gain acceptance. This underscores the importance of tailored outreach efforts and strategic advocacy to overcome institutional and cultural barriers.

Securing institutional support was another strategy identified by CSOs and WROs, which might require them to balance their strategic goals with immediate demands from local authorities, such as addressing urgent public hygiene issues before implementing long-term interventions. Many organizations adopt proactive and collaborative approaches to mitigate these challenges, including leveraging external partnerships and engaging with local stakeholders which requires delicate strategies that maintain fairness and transparency while fostering trust.

Institutional challenges pose significant barriers

to effective collaboration, but organizations have developed strategies to mitigate these obstacles. By prioritizing adaptability, strategic partnerships, and local insights, they navigate complex cultural and societal contexts. Emphasizing humanitarian values, engaging stakeholders, and maintaining transparency are key to fostering trust and gaining institutional support. Despite resistance and resource constraints, these efforts demonstrate the importance of persistence and innovative approaches in advancing gender-focused and peacebuilding initiatives in difficult institutional landscapes.

6.3 Challenges Faced by Organizations

Here, the different interview partners were asked to identify challenges they face in their work to advance gender issues. Not all provided answers to this, wherefore some insights were derived from previous answers they gave. Some organizations appeared to struggle with identifying their challenges, but for the most part appeared reflected and grounded. The answers show challenges in seven categories; limiting societal and cultural attitudes; financial constraints; engaging men; the complex needs of women (in conflict settings); institutional challenges; a lack of clarity on gender-sensitive policies; and the inconsistent integration of gender issues.

Struggles with **limiting societal and cultural attitudes** were mentioned the most across CSOs, the IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs. CSOs mentioned the difficulties that come with working in a patriarchal societal framework, which leads to resistance against certain, especially feminist, projects. This resistance intensifies in conservative areas and is recounted to be mostly directed against WROs and women in leadership positions. WE'AM partners and WROs reported having to refrain from using certain terms such as “gender” or “sexual harassment” as they are associated with foreign agendas and trigger resistance. Some WROs reported that these patriarchal structures also hinder women from participating in these projects, either due to unwillingness on their part or limitations imposed by those around them, including religious and political figures. Women community members criticize how approaches are at times too general, but positively, many organizations appear to have developed strategies to mitigate this resistance, mainly through gradual, locally tailored approaches.

Financial constraints were noted by CSOs, the IO, municipalities, and women community members with several CSOs noting the lack of adequate budgets for implementing gender-sensitive practices, as the monetary constraints limit their ability to provide crucial services such as childcare or safe transportation for women participants. International Alert further mentioned the crucial point of how it can be difficult to align global and donor-driven guidelines with the specific needs of the community they work with. This demonstrates

the need for external funding to allow for a certain degree of flexibility, especially considering how important tailored approaches are for avoiding community backlash, as demonstrated above. This lack of funding is also noted by the women community members, who mentioned across regions how they face significant economic barriers that the projects do not sufficiently address. Participants from Saida specifically called for a dedicated budget for women's empowerment in conflict resolution.

CSOs, the IO, and WROs noted difficulties in **involving men** in their projects. Involving men is crucial to challenge patriarchal norms, foster allyship, and create inclusive solutions for gender equality. Damma Hug (WRO) highlighted a critical gap in the participation of men and pointed to the problematic framing of women as quotas rather than equal contributors. Several CSOs struggled to involve men in gender-sensitive and peacebuilding efforts effectively and some demonstrated limited strategies for targeting this group. Some organizations illustrated a need to involve men more actively and address structural issues more explicitly.

Another common challenge is to appropriately address the **complex needs of women**, especially in conflict settings. CSOs noted shortcomings in navigating trauma, caregiving responsibilities, and safety concerns. WROs additionally mentioned transportation and participant retention, particularly for women constrained by restrictive norms. Among women community members, differences emerge in the specific feedback from each region. Some participants emphasized the lack of psychological support and practical skills training, suggesting a gap in addressing the emotional and systemic challenges women face in conflict settings. Women community members pointed out some projects' lack of sustainability. The emphasis on short-term initiatives fails to create enduring change or tackle systemic issues like the personal status law, which significantly impacts women's rights and autonomy.

International Alert (IO) mentioned **institutional challenges** related to the complex dynamics of working within the Lebanese political landscape.

Two more challenges were identified from the interviewees' responses. First, many **lack clarity on gender-sensitive policies**, with some CSOs admitting to still being in the process of formalizing them, and a complete lack thereof within municipalities. This lack of clear frameworks or enforcement mechanisms complicates their ability to ensure gender-sensitive practices consistently. One woman community member from a municipality refers to the need for better representation and inclusion of women in decision-making positions, emphasizing that such inclusions often remain symbolic rather than substantive - an observation similar to Damma Hug highlighting how women are often treated as quotas rather than equal contributors.

The second of these challenges is the **inconsistent integration of gender issues**, which is noticeable, especially among CSOs and municipalities. CSOs noted gaps in their ability to consistently integrate gender sensitivity across all projects. Some admitted to treating gender issues situationally or focusing more on broader family or community needs rather than directly addressing women's roles in peacebuilding. Municipalities further mentioned the need to align gender-focused projects with broader community needs to justify them to themselves and others.

Despite these challenges, most organizations demonstrate resilience and creativity, emphasizing dialogue, strategic community engagement, and localized approaches to navigate these barriers, though further support is essential to address systemic resistance and promote sustainable change. Particularly the formalization of gender-consideration within the structures of organizations and municipalities could help them to navigate such challenges with greater ease and expertise.

6.4 Engaging in Advocacy

Advocacy plays a critical role in advancing gender justice and peacebuilding. Through legal reforms, strategic stakeholder engagement, and grassroots initiatives, these actors drive meaningful change at both community and policy levels. Their approaches underscore the importance of combining legislative advancements with community-driven advocacy to address societal divisions and foster reconciliation.

CSOs, WROs, and women community members participate in **legal advocacy**. Efforts to repeal harmful laws, introduce new legislation, and engage with policymakers and religious authorities can lead to long-term structural change. Organizations have demonstrated significant progress in this domain by contributing to legislative advancements, such as the passage of key laws and the establishment of national committees. However, they emphasize that legal measures alone are insufficient; these must be reinforced by grassroots efforts to address societal divisions and foster reconciliation.

Strategic stakeholder engagement emerged as a core strategy for advocacy among CSOs, the IO, and WE'AM partners. Such stakeholders may take diverse forms; some CSOs involve youth in their initiatives to bridge generational gaps and increase community-level engagement. Others strategically partner with authorities or knowledgeable associations, as demonstrated by projects such as "Harassment in Taxis," which included police training and research components as mentioned above, to combine awareness campaigns with practical action-oriented measures. International Alert's involvement with the NCLW is a significant step towards policy advocacy for gender justice. By acting as a bridge between community needs and higher authorities, they are ensuring that grassroots insights inform national priorities.

CSOs and WROs **build networks** to amplify advocacy efforts. Mousawat's ability to mobilize 50 to 60 partners per project and establish strong regional networks before expanding into new areas illustrates a strategic and inclusive approach. Their involvement in networks focused on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation further underscores their commitment to collaborative action. WROs international collaborations and socio-scientific research provide additional platforms to amplify advocacy efforts, ensuring that local realities are connected to global frameworks.

The IO, WE'AM partners, and WROs emphasize **community engagement** to enhance advocacy efforts. International Alert meets with local women mediators to allow those directly impacted to voice their concerns and priorities, thereby amplifying women's voices. Right to Play emphasizes community level advocacy to foster grassroots connections. Local engagement allows WROs to address community-specific issues such as gender-based violence, unpaid care work, and women's political participation. These approaches emphasize dialogue, fostering cultural shifts, and creating incremental progress where systemic resistance is strong. Women community members also emphasize the power of community advocacy in driving gender equality and social change. In Baalbeck, women lead impactful initiatives like municipal election support and a conflict-reducing lighting project, showcasing their role in peacebuilding. In Saida, advocacy empowers women through skill-building and collaboration, enabling participation in campaigns and movements like the 2019 revolution.

Despite these strengths, some advocacy efforts **lack a dedicated focus on gender-sensitive issues**, presenting an opportunity to incorporate a stronger emphasis on women's rights and gender equity in future initiatives.

While advocacy efforts have achieved notable successes, such as legislative progress and strengthened networks, challenges remain in fully integrating gender-sensitive issues. Strengthening the focus on women's rights and fostering inclusive, community-level engagement will be essential to sustaining progress and ensuring advocacy efforts contribute to long-term societal transformation.

6.5 Challenges in Policy Influence

This chapter explores the challenges identified by organizations and women community members regarding the influencing of national policies. In their responses, women community members stressed the essential role of policies in supporting women's participation in conflict resolution and empowerment efforts. This chapter begins by illustrating the different challenges identified by the interview partners, followed by their mitigation strategies, and the potential gaps in their approaches.

Challenges arising from issues within **politics and existing policies** were identified by WE'AM partners, WROs, and women community members. Alef noted the lack of existing gender-sensitive national policies as complicating their advocacy work and WROs pointed out the complex Lebanese political landscape. Another issue was the lack of prioritization of gender issues by those in power, which likely translates into institutional challenges that complicate advocacy and policy influence. The lack of answers by women community members pointed, in some cases, to a potential gap in participants' awareness of current policies and necessary reforms, underscoring the need for projects to incorporate education and awareness sessions. This allows participants to critically assess and advocate for meaningful changes. Still, beneficiaries did, at times, highlight the need for structural policy changes, including equal pay, quotas for leadership roles, and greater representation in governance. Similarly, in Tripoli, though in a non-conflict-related context, there was a call for legal equality, such as granting Lebanese women the right to pass on their nationality to their children.

Social and cultural attitudes were identified as challenges by CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs. Organizations reported facing resistance due to patriarchal norms and cultural barriers, deep societal divisions, and conservative social contexts. Most organizations did, however, appear to be well aware of these attitudes and demonstrated at least some ability to navigate them. Addressing these challenges requires policy considerations that promote gender-sensitive frameworks, support legal reforms, and encourage institutional commitments to women's inclusion in conflict prevention and social cohesion efforts.

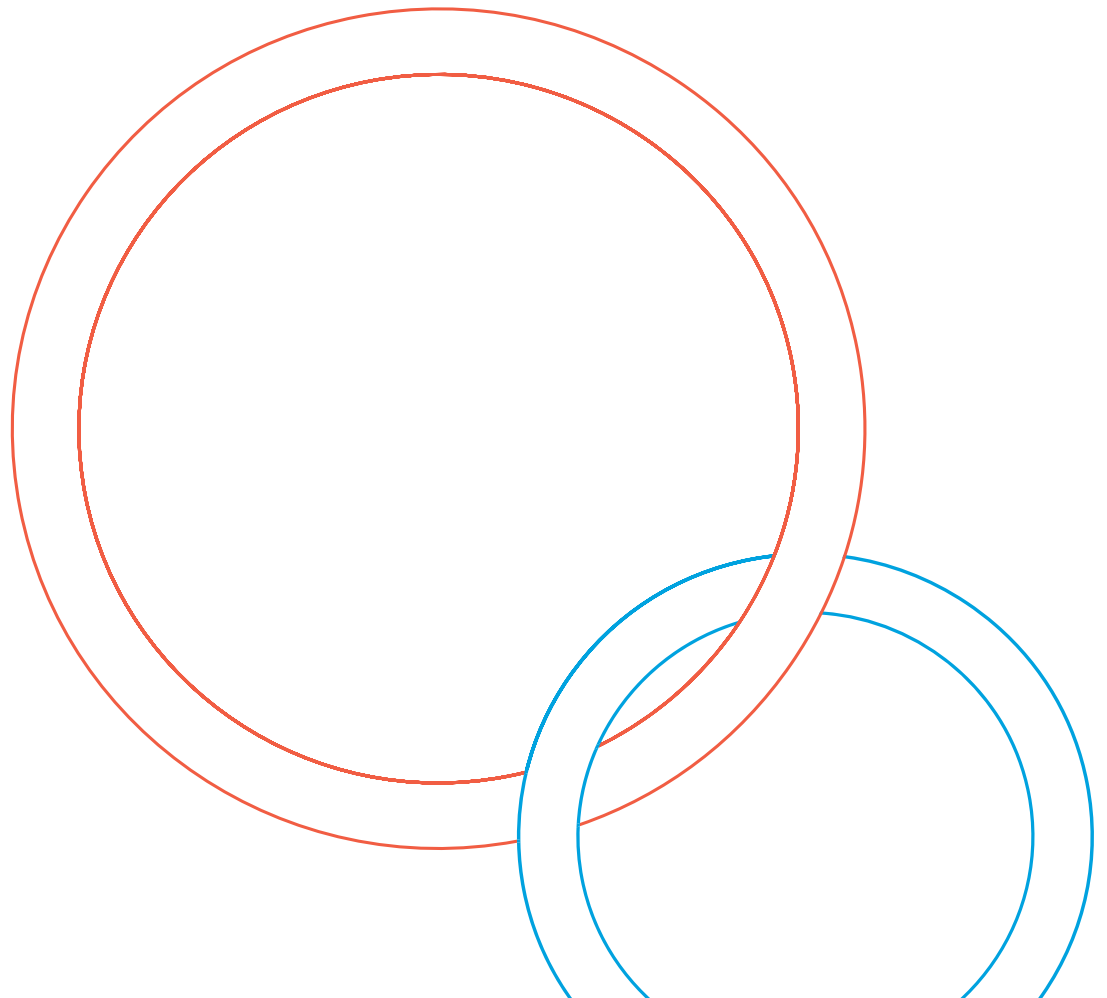
In line with this, **topical challenges** arose for CSOs, WE'AM partners, and WROs, with organizations facing harsher backlash when addressing specific topics. Such topics included war legacies, women's rights and gender concepts, and LGBTQ+ issues. On one occasion, a CSO was faced with demands for public denouncements of LGBTQ+ rights, even though this was unrelated to the organizations' work, highlighting the broader challenges of advocating for inclusivity in such contexts. Addressing specific policies was also met with greater societal resistance, such as underage marriage, personal status laws, and gender-based violence. Other obstacles mentioned were limited grassroots foundations, resource constraints, and issues with local authorities.

Mitigation strategies highlight the resilience and adaptability of policy influence efforts across CSOs, WE'AM partners, WROs, and women community members. CSOs focus on strategic mobilization through extensive networks, media engagement, and flexible planning, including security measures, to counter resistance and amplify outreach. WE'AM partners emphasize gradual, community-led methods, such as sports initiatives, to empower women while remaining sensitive to local dynam-

ics. WROs prioritize building trust through religious leaders and workshops, addressing systemic barriers through legislative reform and social empowerment programs that shift societal attitudes. Women community members stress integrating policy advocacy into conflict-related projects, equipping women to influence decision-making and drive sustainable change.

Areas for improvement center on enhancing grassroots engagement and prioritizing gender-sensitive policies. CSOs face challenges in fostering youth involvement and building stronger grassroots foundations, which limits their ability to generate widespread support for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Additionally, while their advocacy is broad, integrating gender perspectives and prioritizing women's rights remains an area for growth. The IO effectively connects local women mediators' experiences to national discussions, but continued efforts to deepen community perspectives in policy frameworks could further enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in promoting women's roles in conflict resolution.

This chapter highlights the multifaceted challenges organizations and women community members face in influencing national policies and advancing gender-sensitive reforms. The identified barriers - ranging from political complexities and societal resistance to resource constraints - underscore the necessity of strategic, resilient approaches. Mitigation efforts demonstrate adaptability, leveraging networks, media, and grassroots engagement to amplify advocacy and address systemic obstacles. Women community members emphasize the critical role of legislation as a tool for meaningful action, while cautioning that policies alone are insufficient without practical implementation and societal transformation. This dual focus on structural change and community-level action underscores the need for holistic advocacy efforts that integrate policy frameworks with grassroots initiatives to achieve sustainable progress.





II. Conclusion

This report underscores the multi-layered challenges and opportunities in addressing the gendered dimensions of conflict in Lebanon.

The **literature review** identifies several key conflict dimensions, including land ownership disputes, economic hardships, political instability, religious tensions, refugee dynamics, security concerns, and social divisions. These conflicts disproportionately impact women through restricted access to resources, limited political representation, economic vulnerability, and heightened exposure to violence and discrimination.

The findings of the study emphasize the significance of integrating gender-sensitive strategies into every level of intervention while considering the nuanced socio-political and cultural context of Lebanon. The interview findings demonstrate how different stakeholders navigate these complex dynamics. **CSOs** often excel in building community trust and implementing targeted interventions, though some struggle to consistently integrate gender-sensitive approaches across their programming. **WROs** demonstrate a strong understanding of gender-specific challenges and often lead innovative approaches to women's empowerment, particularly in addressing sensitive issues like gender-based violence and political participation. The IO contributes valuable expertise and resources, especially in areas of policy advocacy and institutional capacity building, while maintaining flexibility to adapt global frameworks to local contexts. **WE'AM Partner organizations** show particular strength in implementing tailored, community-based initiatives, though their impact varies based on their ability to navigate local power structures and cultural sensitivities. Their experiences underscore the importance of combining technical expertise with a deep understanding of local contexts.

Municipalities emerge as crucial yet complex stakeholders, with their effectiveness heavily dependent on individual leadership and regional dynamics. While some demonstrate proactive engagement with gender issues, many maintain traditional approaches that limit women's meaningful participation. The research reveals that municipal support often remains reactive rather than strategic, highlighting the need for more systematic approaches to gender inclusion.

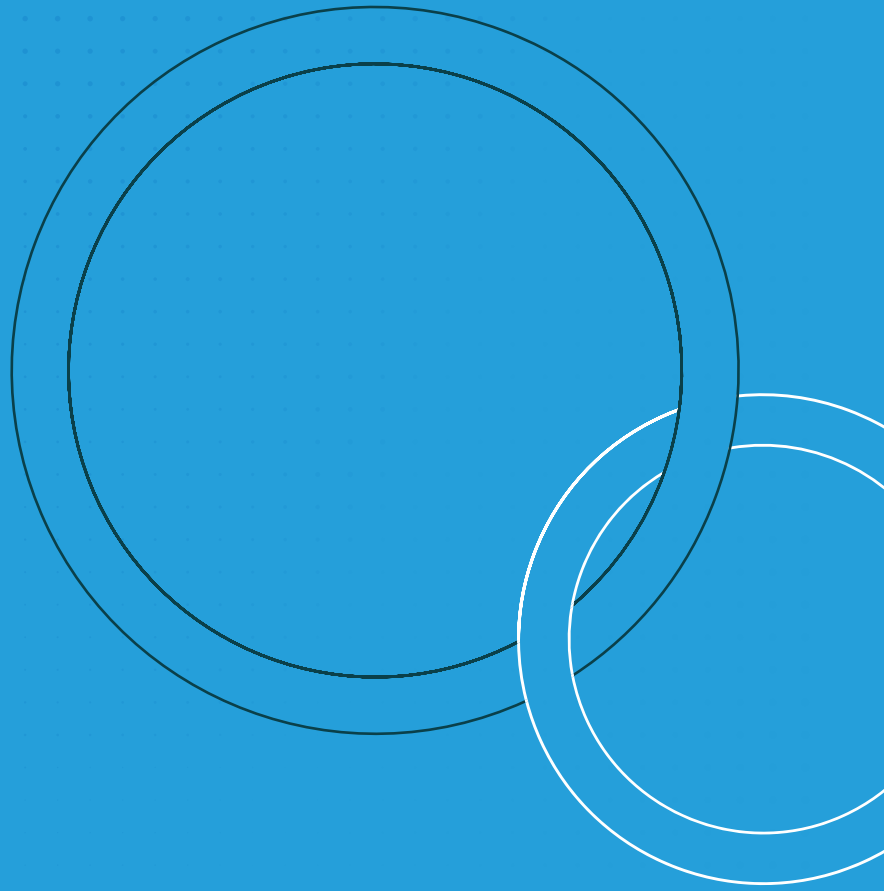
Notably, **women community members'** perspectives provide crucial insights into both the effectiveness of interventions and persistent gaps. Their feedback emphasizes the need for sustainable, long-term support that addresses both immediate practical needs and structural barriers. They particularly value initiatives that enhance their economic independence, provide safe spaces for participation, and strengthen their capacity to influence decision-making processes. The women who participated in the interviews further demonstrated commendable levels of motivation, expertise, and confidence, demonstrating that a signif-

icant amount of potential lies in involving them strategically and consistently in peace-building initiatives.

Cross-cutting **challenges** emerge across stakeholder interventions, including limited resources, resistance to gender-focused initiatives, and difficulties in sustaining impact beyond project timeframes. However, successful approaches share common elements: strong community engagement that involves locals in project design and implementation, sensitivity to local dynamics, and the ability to build strategic partnerships across different levels of intervention.

The analysis reveals that effective support for women in conflict settings requires complementary efforts across stakeholder groups. While each type of organization brings distinct strengths, the most impactful initiatives tend to combine local knowledge with technical expertise, practical support with advocacy for systemic change, and individual empowerment with community-level transformation.

Moving forward, this research suggests the need for stronger coordination among stakeholders to leverage their respective strengths while addressing gaps in current approaches. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening municipal capacity for gender-sensitive programming, enhancing sustainable funding mechanisms, and ensuring that interventions respond directly to women's articulated needs and aspirations in conflict-affected communities.



III.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of stakeholder interventions in Lebanon's conflict settings, several key recommendations emerge for organizations working to support women in these contexts. The recommendations are divided into 8 categories below.

→ Strengthening Awareness of Gendered Conflict Dynamics

Organizations involved in conflict-related projects could benefit from a **deeper understanding of how conflict dynamics interact with gender**. This awareness is essential for anticipating gender-specific needs during crises and addressing the barriers women face when accessing conflict-related initiatives. Conflict often exacerbates existing inequalities, with women experiencing heightened risks of gender-based violence, harassment, and limited access to resources and decision-making spaces. While expecting all actors to become experts in this field is unrealistic, integrating some level of awareness - whether through internal capacity-building or strategic partnerships with specialized organizations - could enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Beyond logistical support, a more informed approach could help organizations recognize and respond to the mental and physical impacts of conflict on women. By incorporating gender-sensitive conflict analysis into project design and implementation, initiatives can be better equipped to provide meaningful and sustainable support, ensuring that women's needs are not only acknowledged but actively addressed.

→ Prioritize Safety

Organizations could establish and maintain **strong internal policies addressing harassment, abuse, and representation** to ensure a safe and inclusive work environment. These policies should be clearly formulated, regularly reviewed, and adapted as needed to remain effective. Beyond policy creation, organizations could implement clear reporting mechanisms and conduct follow-up sessions to reinforce accountability. Ensuring that all staff members are aware of these policies is crucial - this includes comprehensive training and regular communication to foster a culture of transparency and trust.

Further, organizations could take a more comprehensive approach to participant safety by ensuring **secure venues, reliable transportation, and clear protection policies**. Some organizations effectively address safety concerns by relying on external expertise for beneficiary protection in severe cases or collaborate with influential religious figures to ensure a context-specific strategy for legitimizing projects and safeguarding participants. These approaches demonstrate proactive engagement, but more organizations could adopt similar measures to go beyond basic or reactive efforts.

Women community members across different regions did not report formal safety mechanisms such as secure venues, transportation, or harassment reporting systems in their experiences, suggesting either their absence or poor communication regarding their availability. This highlights the need for **clear communication regarding safety mechanisms**.

→ Effective and Mindful Communication

Organizations are recommended to be **mindful of language** when addressing gender-related topics, as certain terms - such as "gender" or "feminism" - have triggered backlash from communities and local authorities. Several organizations reported being accused of promoting foreign agendas or facing outright rejection due to associations locals have with these terms. Some municipalities also expressed skepticism, perceiving them as linked to external influences. Rather than avoiding these terms altogether, organizations could adopt a strategic approach, considering the timing, context, and audience. In some cases, reframing discussions around universally accepted values - such as family well-being, social stability, or women's empowerment in economic and community roles - could help reduce resistance. Engaging trusted local actors and tailoring language to align with community concerns can also facilitate more productive dialogue. Striking this balance is crucial to ensuring that essential gender-related issues are addressed without jeopardizing the organization's ability to operate effectively.

Ensuring that the full benefits of a project are well understood, alongside clear eligibility criteria, can enhance participation and community acceptance. Some Lebanese women have reportedly refrained from participating in initiatives they were eligible for, as the projects were more explicitly advertised toward refugee women, leading them to believe they were not the intended beneficiaries.¹³² At the same time, certain municipalities have halted refugee-targeted projects or those specific to gender matters due to community pushback, instead prioritizing initiatives they believe to offer more universal benefits. Several organizations have successfully framed their work by emphasizing humanitarian or universal benefits, which has helped secure broader acceptance. This approach is particularly relevant for feminist initiatives, as gender equality has far-reaching positive effects beyond women themselves, considering, for example, how women's involvement in peacebuilding has been shown to lead to more sustainable and inclusive resolutions. By highlighting these broader social and stability-related benefits, organizations can navigate sensitivities while ensuring that gender-focused interventions remain impactful and accessible to all who stand to benefit.

¹³² "GBV and Mental Health Among Refugee and Host Community Women in Lebanon," Forced Migration Review, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.fmreview.org/potts-barada-bourassa/>.

→ Designing Impactful Projects

Ensuring women's effective participation in projects requires **tailored logistical and practical support**. Many women face barriers such as the lack of childcare, limited transportation options, or financial constraints that hinder their ability to engage. In some cases, privacy concerns, flexible scheduling to accommodate household responsibilities, or the need for family approval also play a role. Anticipating these challenges and integrating solutions - such as providing stipends for transportation, offering on-site childcare, ensuring safe and discreet meeting locations, scheduling activities at convenient times, and handing out certificates of participation - can significantly enhance participation. Clearly communicating these support mechanisms is equally important to ensure women are aware of and able to access them, ultimately leading to more inclusive and impactful project outcomes.

Awareness-raising efforts can play a valuable role in fostering confidence and encouraging women's engagement within their communities. Women community members reported that even small-scale successes in awareness and skill-building helped them feel more empowered and motivated to participate in local initiatives. However, feedback from women community members suggests that while awareness sessions can generate momentum, they often fall short of significantly shifting women's roles in conflict resolution or challenging entrenched societal norms. To create lasting impact, organizations could complement **awareness-raising with development-oriented initiatives** that provide tangible opportunities for women to apply their skills and take on leadership roles. When executed effectively, such initiatives are perceived as more transformative, equipping women with not only knowledge but also practical tools and platforms to engage in decision-making and conflict resolution processes. Ensuring that awareness efforts are paired with concrete opportunities for participation could enhance their effectiveness and contribute to more sustainable change.

To ensure that gender-sensitive and conflict-resolution initiatives create lasting change, organizations could **focus on long-term impact rather than short-term project cycles**. Some municipalities expressed concerns that projects often seem transactional, implemented primarily for funding rather than achieving meaningful outcomes. Additionally, the effects of certain initiatives fade once external support ends, limiting their sustainability. Organizations could address this by embedding projects within existing local structures, fostering ownership among community members and municipalities, and integrating follow-up mechanisms. Capacity-building efforts should not only equip participants with skills but also create pathways for them to apply those skills in meaningful, long-term ways. Strengthening partnerships with municipalities, supporting local actors in continu-

ing initiatives independently, and ensuring a clear handover strategy could help reinforce sustainable impact. Strengthening partnerships and ensuring a clear handover strategy would also help maintain the continuity of impact beyond project lifespans.

Ensuring effective and consistent M&E requires moving beyond surface-level assessments driven primarily by donor requirements. Many organizations rely on general metrics such as women's participation rates, which, while useful, do not provide sufficient qualitative insights into empowerment or long-term change. Challenges in measuring long-term impact were also noted, particularly given the time constraints of many projects. However, some organizations have made notable progress by developing gender-sensitive toolkits that offer clearer M&E guidance. Expanding these efforts by incorporating qualitative indicators, ensuring follow-up assessments beyond project completion, and integrating participatory evaluation methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of impact.

→ Expanding Circles

Putting an active effort into **incorporating men** into gender-sensitive projects can strengthen their impact, as men remain key figures in family dynamics and institutional structures. Their involvement not only fosters allyship but also helps create a more supportive environment for women's participation by ideally generating broader community involvement and acceptance. Women community members interviewed expressed no objection to including men in these initiatives and, in one case, actually found it empowering. Engaging in discussions with men allowed them to challenge traditional norms and express themselves more openly. By skillfully moderating mixed-gender discussions and collaboration, projects can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable social change.

Conflict reconciliation projects, in particular, offer an important platform for fostering understanding between groups by **facilitating exchanges of groups that usually remain separate**. Women community members highlighted positive experiences where such initiatives not only strengthened mutual understanding but also contributed to their personal empowerment and growth. By structuring projects to encourage dialogue and shared experiences, organizations can leverage these opportunities to break down societal divisions while reinforcing the broader goals of gender inclusion and peacebuilding. Exposure to diverse perspectives proved transformative for women, encouraging them to step beyond traditional boundaries.

→ Improve Internal Financing Structures

Many organizations and municipalities did not incorporate **gender-sensitive budgeting**, limiting their ability to allocate resources effectively for gender-inclusive initiatives. Ensuring that budg-

ets account for the specific needs of women and marginalized groups can enhance the impact of projects, making them more accessible and sustainable. This includes funding for childcare, transportation, and targeted capacity-building, as well as integrating gender considerations into broader development and peacebuilding efforts. Allocating resources in a way that reflects gendered realities can strengthen the effectiveness of interventions and contribute to more equitable outcomes.

A key factor in addressing challenges is the **development of sustainable funding strategies** that enable ongoing engagement with communities. Donor limitations must be recognized and skillfully negotiated - ideally before a project begins - to ensure that initiatives are not abruptly discontinued due to funding gaps.

→ Mitigating Political Bias and Shift

Given the significant influence of municipal leadership on gender-focused initiatives, organizations could develop strategies to **navigate political transitions and mitigate risks related to bias, self-interest, and corruption**. Municipal elections or leadership changes can disrupt ongoing projects, especially if new officials deprioritize gender-related work or view initiatives through a political lens. To ensure continuity, organizations can build relationships with diverse stakeholders within municipal structures, document successful collaborations to create institutional memory, and establish clear handover protocols. Strengthening transparency measures and fostering community ownership of projects can also reduce the risk of initiatives being shaped by individual interests rather than genuine needs.

Similarly, Lebanon has experienced decades of broader political instability, which influences the effectiveness and sustainability of gender-focused and peacebuilding initiatives. Ideally, actors would prioritize **flexibility in planning**, including adaptive project timelines and contingency strategies, while building strong local partnerships to navigate shifting political dynamics. Engaging diverse stakeholders and ensuring continuous dialogue can help mitigate the impact of instability and sustain progress even during periods of uncertainty.

Furthermore, organizations could **recognize that municipalities typically adopt reactive rather than proactive approaches** to gender initiatives. Therefore, successful collaboration requires early engagement of municipal partners in project planning, clear communication of expectations and responsibilities, and structured mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and feedback. By positioning municipalities as genuine partners from the outset and providing them with clear frameworks for engagement, organizations can foster more sustainable and effective collaborations. Furthermore, these findings showcase the importance of engaging decision-makers as well as implementing partners in adopting a gender-transformative

approach. It emphasizes the vitality of continuing and expanding the work we do with policymakers and donors, in parallel with targeting non-profits, civil society actors, and women community members.

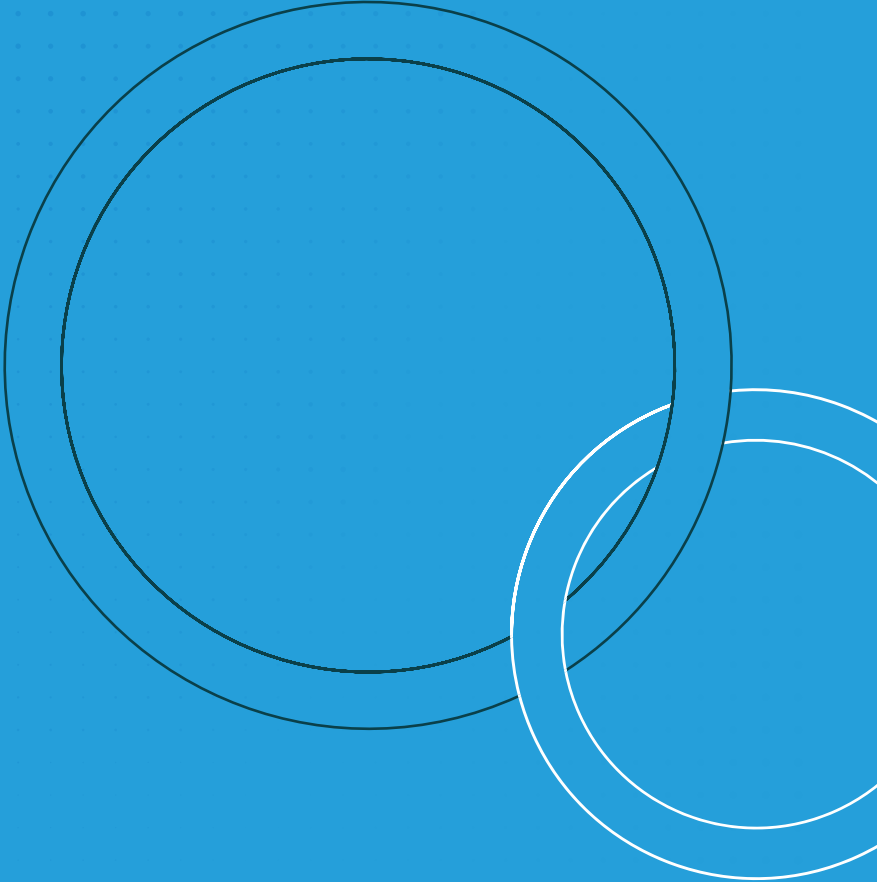
To **promote greater representation of women in municipal decision-making**, organizations could prioritize collaboration with municipalities that actively support women's participation in councils and leadership roles or set incentives for this within the context of their collaboration. Without such efforts, women will continue to be engaged at various levels except in decision-making positions, limiting the transformative impact of gender inclusion and preventing their needs from being properly reflected in policies and initiatives. While individual municipal actors may express support for women's leadership, this does not always translate into action due to a lack of broader institutional backing. Therefore, having clear policies in place to promote women's participation is essential. Rather than imposing requirements, organizations can create incentives that highlight the benefits of inclusive governance, fostering long-term progress toward more balanced representation.

→ Looking Ahead

First, there is a critical need to **develop and implement a standardized toolkit** that provides practical guidance for gender-sensitive programming in conflict-affected areas. This toolkit should be accompanied by comprehensive training programs to ensure effective implementation, regular evaluation mechanisms to assess its impact, and periodic updates to incorporate emerging best practices and lessons learned. Organizations could invest in building internal capacity to utilize these tools effectively and adapt them to local contexts.

Building on the insights from this study, a **large-scale research initiative with an expanded geographic scope** is recommended to deepen the understanding of conflict and gender dynamics in Lebanon and the broader region. A more comprehensive study could capture regional variations, explore evolving trends, and provide a stronger foundation for designing conflict-sensitive, gender-responsive interventions.

Additionally, many women community members, municipalities, and organizations have noted a positive shift in recognizing women's strengths and their natural right to participate in peacebuilding. This growing acknowledgment presents a critical opportunity to **capitalize on existing momentum**, reinforce gender-inclusive approaches, and further institutionalize women's roles in conflict resolution efforts.



Annex 1

Data Collection

Tools

A. Key Informant Interview (KII) Questions

First Section: WROs

General Questions

What is your definition of conflict?

What types of conflicts does the organisation focus on (e.g. social conflicts, political conflicts, etc.)?

In your opinion, how does the conflict you work on affect women and girls?

During the process of planning and writing projects - specifically conflict resolution projects - which individuals or departments are involved in project conceptualisation and planning? How was a holistic approach taken?

Are gender roles, cultural legacies and social specificities related to the region you are studying in before you start implementing the project? (How are projects adapted to the needs of women and girls?)

How do cultural and societal norms affect women's participation and role in peacebuilding efforts?

What measures do you take to ensure the effective and safe participation of women and girls in your projects? What obstacles do you face?

How do women themselves perceive their role in conflict resolution? Do they see themselves as agents of change and if not, why not?

What is the perception of men within the community or local authorities in which you are active towards women's participation in conflict resolution projects?

Detailed Questions Using Ecosystem Approach

Individual Level: Empowerment and Capacity Building

How do your projects work to empower women within the community?

Interpersonal Level: Community and Family Dynamics:

How do you deal with the dynamics within families and communities that can significantly impact women's participation in conflict resolution activities (i.e., power relations, role distribution...)?

What strategies do you use to engage men and youth in supporting women's empowerment and participation?

Organisational Level: Internal Processes and Policies:

What internal policies does your organisation have in place to ensure gender sensitivity and inclusivity during project planning and implementation?

How are staff within the organisation trained and sensitised on these policies?

Does the organisation develop a gender-sensitive budget in general - especially for conflict resolution projects? How?

Monitoring and evaluation: Are there specific indicators that your association uses to measure the impact of gender justice in your programmes?

How do you involve women and other marginalised groups in the evaluation process?

In what ways do you involve women and other marginalised groups in the evaluation process?

How does your organisation use the findings in future programmes?

Community Level: Community Engagement and Trust Building:

How do you build trust with local communities to ensure their support and participation in your projects? What challenges do you face in gaining community acceptance and how do you overcome them? For example: What networks do you build or are part of? How does this affect your work?

Who are the potential/current partners/allies (formal and informal) with whom you collaborate to overcome specific challenges in the community in which you are active?

Institutional Level: Collaboration with Local Authorities and Institutions:

What role do these authorities play in facilitating or hindering your efforts?

Policy Level: Advocacy and Policy Influence:

How do you engage in advocacy to influence policies related to gender and conflict resolution?

Second Section: Municipalities' Members

Can you describe your role within the municipality and your responsibilities related to conflict resolution and community development?

Can you describe the role of women within your municipality and to which extent they have decision-making roles? How is their role reflected at the level of representation?

To which extent women voices are heard within your community? and how is it heard?

How does the municipality collaborate with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) on conflict resolution projects?

To which extent do you believe these organizations are effective in addressing local conflicts and promoting peace? Why or why not?

Can you describe any ongoing or past conflict resolution projects that the municipality has been involved in? What role did you play in these projects?

Can you provide examples of successful collaborations between the municipality and these organizations?

How does the municipality ensure community engagement and participation specifically the participation of women and girls in conflict resolution initiatives?

What are specific cultural or societal barriers that need to be addressed to ensure the meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution? and how do you help addressing these barriers?

Are there any logistical support or safety measures mechanisms available to ensure safe spaces for CSOs and WROs to implement their initiatives?

Are there any policies or laws that need to be revised or implemented to better support these organizations?

What recommendations do you have for enhancing the collaboration between the municipality and CSOs/WROs?

Third Section: CSOs Working on Conflict Resolution & Social Cohesion

General Questions:

What is your definition of conflict?

What types of conflicts does the organisation focus on (e.g. social conflicts, political conflicts, etc.)?

In your opinion, how does the conflict you are working on affect women and girls?

During the process of planning and writing projects - specifically conflict resolution projects - which individuals or departments are involved in project conceptualisation and planning? How was a holistic approach taken?

Are gender roles, cultural legacies and social specificities related to the region in which you are active studied before you start implementing the project? (How are projects adapted to the needs of women and girls?)

How do cultural and societal norms affect women's participation and role in peacebuilding efforts?

What measures do you take to ensure the effective and safe participation of women and girls in your projects? What obstacles do you face?

What do you think is the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

Detailed Questions Using Ecosystem Approach

Individual Level: Women's Empowerment:

How do your programmes address the challenges faced by women in conflict settings?

Interpersonal Level: Family and Community Dynamics:

How do you engage family members and partners in supporting women's participation in conflict resolution?

What methods do you use to address resistance or opposition within the community?

Organizational Level: Internal Capacity and Policies:

What internal policies does your organisation have in place to ensure gender sensitivity and inclusivity during project planning and implementation?

How are staff within the organisation trained and sensitised on these policies?

Does the organisation set a gender-sensitive budget in general - especially for conflict resolution projects? How?

Monitoring and evaluation: Are there specific indicators that your association uses to measure the

impact of gender justice in your programmes?

How do you involve women and other marginalised groups in the evaluation process?

In what ways do you involve women and other marginalised groups in the evaluation process? How does your organisation use the findings in future programmes?

Community Level: Community Involvement and Trust:

How do you involve community members in the planning and implementation of your projects?

How do you build trust with local communities to ensure their support and participation in your projects? What challenges do you face in gaining community acceptance and how do you overcome them? e.g.: What networks do you build or are part of? How does this affect your work?

Who are the potential/current partners (formal and informal) with whom you collaborate to overcome specific challenges in the community in which you are active?

Institutional Level: Collaboration with Local Authorities:

What role do these institutions play in facilitating or hindering your efforts?

Policy Level: Policy Advocacy:

What advocacy strategies do you use to influence local and national policies related to gender and conflict resolution?

Fourth Section: International Organizations

General Questions:

How do you define “Conflict”?

How do you define “Gender Transformative conflict prevention actions” ? are there any specific programs or strategies that work specifically on this concept?

What do you think is the role of women in achieving the goals of the peace and security agenda at the local and international levels, especially in countries most vulnerable to conflicts and disputes, such as Lebanon?

Questions Using Ecosystem Approach

Individual Level:

How do your social cohesion programs address the specific needs and challenges faced by women, particularly in conflict-affected areas?

Can you share examples of projects where gender-specific interventions have led to successful outcomes in community cohesion?

In your projects, how do you empower individual women to take on leadership roles in peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts?

Interpersonal Level:

How does your organization address the role of family and community dynamics when promoting women's participation in social cohesion initiatives?

What strategies do you use to engage men and boys in supporting gender equality in conflict resolution projects?

How do your projects build networks of support among women participants to ensure sustainable impact in social cohesion?

Organizational Level:

How does your organization integrate gender considerations into the design and implementation of your social cohesion programs?

What specific tools or toolkits does your organization use to ensure gender justice is reflected in your programming?

How does your organization collaborate with local CSOs and WROs to ensure gender-sensitive approaches in social cohesion projects?

What challenges have you faced in ensuring gender is prioritized by local partners, and how have you addressed these challenges?

Community Level:

How do you ensure that community-driven approaches to social cohesion incorporate gender justice?

What measures are taken to ensure women's voices are heard and respected in community decision-making related to peacebuilding?

How do you adapt your gender-sensitive tools and strategies to fit the cultural and social contexts of the communities where you work?

Institutional Level:

How do you work with local authorities and institutions to integrate gender justice into broader social cohesion policies?

Are there any institutional barriers that have hindered your efforts to promote gender equality in your social cohesion programs?

How does your organization allocate resources specifically to promote gender equality in social cohesion projects?

Are there any challenges related to funding gender-sensitive programs, and how do you overcome them?

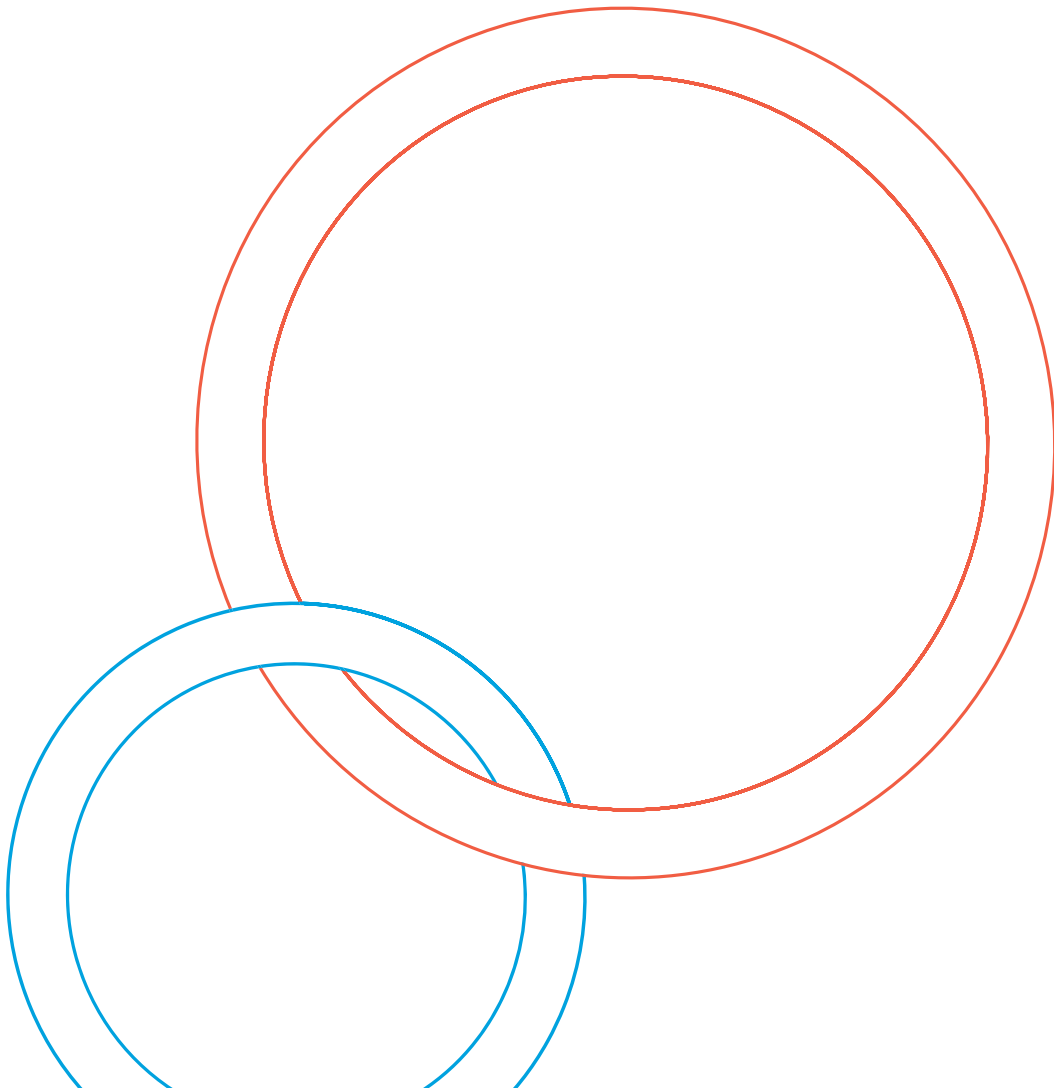
Policy Level:

Does your organization engage in policy advocacy to promote gender justice within social cohesion frameworks? If so, can you share any successful examples?

How do you influence local or national policies to prioritize the inclusion of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding agendas?

How does your organization assess the impact of its gender integration efforts in social cohesion projects? What indicators do you use to measure success?

How do you ensure that women's feedback is incorporated into the M&E processes of your social cohesion projects?



B. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Questions

First Section: FGD with Beneficiaries (Women)

General Questions:

How have the social cohesion and conflict resolution projects you participated in impacted your daily life?

What are the main challenges you face in your community that these projects address?

Are there any needs or issues that affect women and are not currently being addressed by these projects?

How do you feel about your level of participation and representation in the projects?

Do you feel that your voice and opinions are heard and valued? How?

Do you feel safe expressing your opinions, ideas, and feelings around other participants? Why or Why not?

How do the projects take into account the cultural norms and societal specificities of your community?

Do you feel that these projects are culturally relevant and appropriate?

How do the projects ensure your safety in all activities?

Have you faced any barriers or challenges to participating in the projects?

Detailed Questions Using Ecosystem Approach:

Individual Level: Personal Empowerment:

How have these projects helped you feel more empowered and confident?

What skills or knowledge have you gained through your participation?

Interpersonal Level: Family and Community Support:

How do your family members and community view your participation in these projects?

Have you noticed any changes in their attitudes or behaviors as a result of your involvement? Provide examples.

Organizational Level: Support from Project Implementers:

How supportive are the project staff and implementers in addressing your needs and concerns?

Do you feel that the projects are well-organized and effectively managed?

Community Level: Community Benefits and Changes:

How has your community benefited from the projects?

Have you seen any positive changes in your community as a result of these projects?

Institutional Level: Interaction with Local Authorities:

How do local authorities support or interact with the projects you are involved in?

Do you feel that local institutions are responsive to the needs and challenges of women in your community?

Policy Level: Policy Impact and Advocacy:

Have you been involved in any advocacy efforts or policy changes as a result of your participation in these projects?

What policy changes do you think are necessary to better support women in conflict resolution and empowerment efforts?

Second Section: WE'AM Partners

1. What is your definition of conflict?
2. What is the concept of gender transformative conflict prevention action and how is it translated in your projects?
3. If we want to read the dynamics of conflict and its impact on gender, how do your organisations see the impact of gender on conflict dynamics in the regions where you are active?
4. Do you notice how this differs from one region to another, for example between Tripoli and Akkar, and how gender affects and translates in your activities?
5. What are the challenges related to gender mainstreaming in conflict resolution and social inclusion programmes, especially in conflict-affected areas? What approaches have you adopted to address the challenges?
6. In projects related to social cohesion in which you work with women, how would you categorise the role of women in this area and have you noticed changes in women's participation in social cohesion projects over time during your experiences?
7. How do you mainstream gender in your projects during conflict resolution and peacebuilding? What tools are used to ensure gender inclusion in projects?
8. Are there any specific tools or instruments that you use to ensure gender in projects?
9. Are there any cultural, political or organisational barriers that have hindered your efforts to include women in projects?
10. What opportunities do you see that currently exist that could help improve mainstreaming of gender especially in conflict resolution and social cohesion projects?
11. As partners in Weam, how do you see opportunities to strengthen collaboration and support mainstreaming gender or support a gender-sensitive perspective in conflict resolution and social cohesion projects?
12. If we want to talk more about the gaps that can be seen when implementing projects - what gaps did you identify when you tried to mainstream gender into the cohesin sector?
13. How do you think you can address these gaps in future projects?
14. In terms of empowering women, how do your projects help to support, empower and contribute to women taking on leadership roles in conflict resolution?
15. On a personal level, what role do family dynamics play in supporting women's participation in conflict resolution projects?
16. How does your organisation make sure that gender sensitivity is embedded within your projects, processes and policies?
17. How does your organisation make sure that gender sensitivity is embedded within your projects, processes and policies?
18. What challenges do you face within your organisation to fully incorporate or integrate gender justice into projects and how are they addressed?
19. Is there in your organisation specific indicators that measure the effectiveness of gender justice resulted in each project?
20. Do you have a gender sensitive budgeting?
21. How do you co-operate with local authorities such as municipalities, do you have formal or informal partners, and to what extent do municipalities hinder or facilitate your work?
22. Are there specific activities where local authorities play a role in facilitating or hindering or training?
23. Have there been partners other than local authorities?
24. What role do national policies play in facilitating or hindering your efforts?



Funded by
the European Union

Facebook: EUinLebanon
Instagram: euinlebanon



OXFAM
أوكسفام

Facebook: OxfamInLebanon
Instagram: oxfam-lebanon
Twitter: oxfaminlebanon



RIGHT TO PLAY
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

Facebook: RightToPlayLEB
Instagram: righttoplaylebanon



Facebook: ALEF-Act For Human Rights
Twitter: alefliban



linktr.ee/SHiFT.SIH