



Lebanon National
Gender **Observatory**
المركز الوطني اللبناني
للمساواة بين الجنسين

Gender Stereotypes in the Education Sector

Need for reform of the curriculum and
barriers hindering and women's progress in
the sector

Policy Brief Series: Brief 3

December 2020



Funded by the European Union
بتمويل من الاتحاد الأوروبي



EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed



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SUMMARY FINDINGS

- Current curriculum is outdated and does not take gender issues into considerations;
- Incomplete and inconsistent efforts from the government to reform the curriculum, with political considerations remaining a key constraint to curriculum reform;
- Social norms remain a major factor for girls and women in accessing education and defining their careers;
- Lack of awareness of gender issues amongst education professionals further entrenches stereotypes and gender-based discrimination.



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Scope & Purpose: The Lebanese National Gender Observatory has issued this brief focusing on the situation of girls and women in the Lebanese educational system. The brief introduces the factors contributing to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in the Lebanese curriculum, the barriers and discrimination faced by women in education, and lists some of the ongoing or past efforts toward gender sensitive practices in education. The documents also offer recommendations addressed to all stakeholders involved in education, laying out the key steps needed to achieve greater gender equality in education.

Approach & Method: this brief has been compiled based on a review of relevant secondary literature related to education in Lebanon, and focusing on the situation of women; and five key informant interviews with educational experts and stakeholders. Special thanks to those who participated in the interviews:

- Joumana El Halabi - Gender Focal Point at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE);
- Ghada Azar - School principal at Ras Beirut public school
- Carmen Shbib - Representative from the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD);
- Faten El Hajj - Educational editor at Al Akhbar newspaper;
- Dr. Makram Ouass - Dean of Students and Associate Professor at the Political Sciences Department at the Lebanese American University (Jbeil).

Topics Covered:

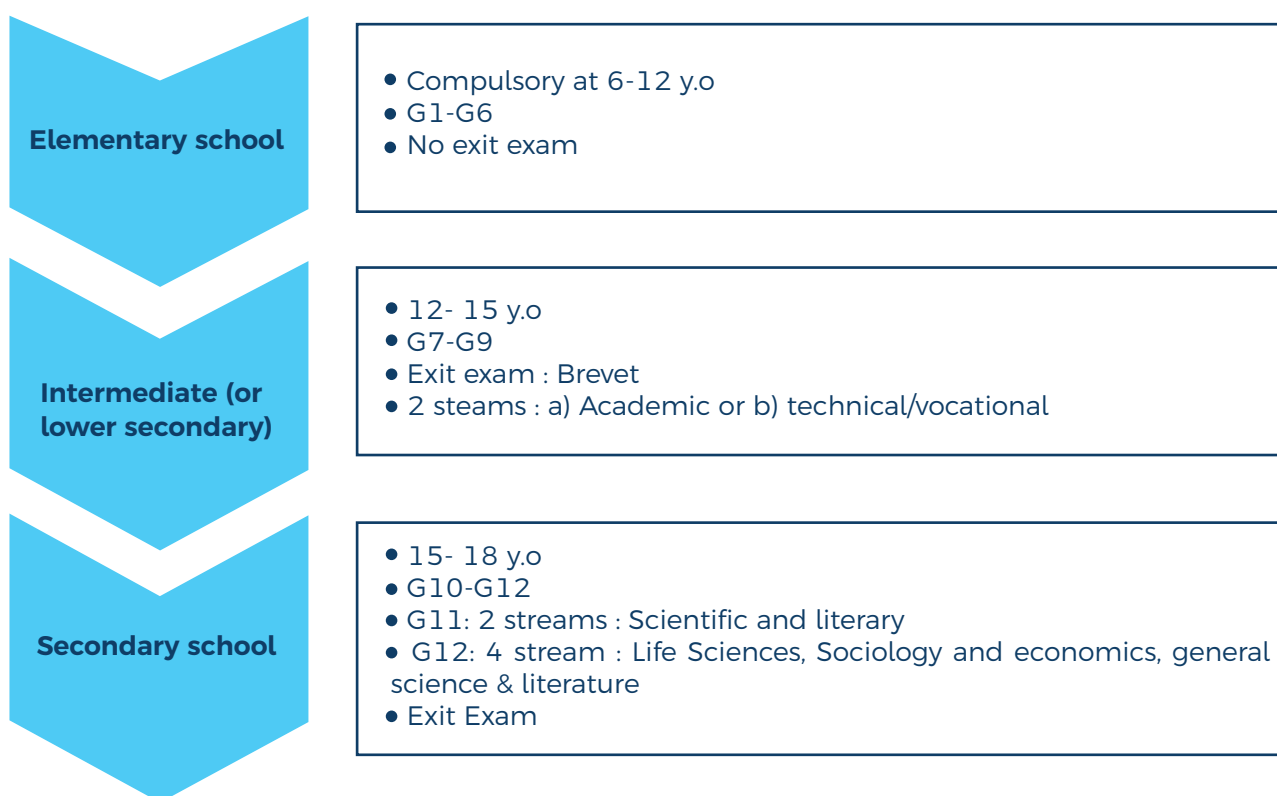
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01 Introduction

The Lebanese basic education system (Grades 1 to 12) is comprised of four main types of school: public schools run by the government; private schools, either run by private secular education institutes, or linked with religious bodies; free private schools (private schools receiving subsidies from the state); and those run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which are mainly for Palestinian refugee students¹.

The basic education system is further split into two main streams at the end of the Intermediate level (**Grade 9**). Students have the option to continue in either the basic education system (continuing to grade 12), or to follow a path in the formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), also ending at grade 12.

Figure 1 below, provides an overview of the Lebanese educational system, with key statistics on the enrolment of girls and women in each stage.



¹ USAID. (2018). Gender analysis of basic public education in Lebanon. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/-pa00mz43.pdf

In terms of educational level of the populace, Lebanon is among the most literate countries in the area, with 99% literacy among both women and men². However, enrolment and retention rates across the different levels are not as elevated, and show disparities between genders more specifically in secondary and higher education. As shown in the below table the enrolment rate is almost equal between both gender in KG, Cycle 1 and 2, while in Cycle 3 and 4 there is a gender gap with more girls attending schools than boys. This is particularly true for non-Lebanese. While these numbers show progress and a high level of enrolment for girls, the social culture (patriarchal and stereotypical) still inhibits some girls from participating in the education system³. More specifically, girls from poor and less fortunate families are still considered a burden and are married off at an early age⁴. This is further enhanced in the LCRP Education chapter, which highlights the fact that vulnerable and marginalized families resort to negative coping mechanisms when faced with financial hardships that includes supporting boys' education over girls.

Girls usually finish their secondary education and their percentage is higher than boys in public schools. And they usually go to literary specialisation. In remote areas there is some that leave schools early

Joumana EL Halabi, MEHE Gender Focal Point

Table 1: Formal Education (FE) Enrolment disaggregated by gender and cycle⁵

	Non- Lebanese					Lebanese				
	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
Girls	48%	47%	52%	60%	63%	49%	48%	49%	55%	53%
Boys	52%	53%	48%	40%	37%	51%	52%	51%	45%	47%

² Ibid

³ Borgen, C. (2019, October 20). Girls' Education in Lebanon Strives to Reach Those Most in Need. The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/girls-education-in-lebanon-strives-to-reach-those-most-in-need/>

⁴ Borgen, C. (2019, October 20). Girls' Education in Lebanon Strives to Reach Those Most in Need. The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/girls-education-in-lebanon-strives-to-reach-those-most-in-need/>

⁵ MEHE Project Management Unit. (2019, September). RACE II Factsheet. MEHE. <http://racepmulebanon.com/images/RACE-PMU-Fact-Sheet-September-2019.pdf>

Thus, despite the elevated percentage of enrolment of girls in Cycle 3 and 4, many are still unable to access school and are at risk of early marriage and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).⁶ In addition, gender-bias in education has been shown to hinder students' aspirations and achievements.⁷ In the current labor market, women are overrepresented in teaching, nursing and public sector jobs, and underrepresented in engineering, security personnel (police and army) and in elected public office⁸.

“The region where the school is located has a huge factor on the how children are taught and even women. For example, in remote areas we still have this old ideology about women, they should be in the kitchen taking care of the house but in Beirut we don't see this often anymore.”

Carmen Shbib, Representative from CERD

Although many efforts have been made throughout the years to reform and improve the curriculum to become more gender sensitive, several contextual, social and political barriers hindered it. As such, the brief will start with an overview of gender issues in the curriculum, followed by the presentation of barriers and discriminatory actions that hinder girls' education and ending with an overview on several reform efforts implemented by the private and public institutions.

⁶ Government of Lebanon & UNHCR. (2020, April 26). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2020 update) - Lebanon. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020-2020-update>

⁷ Ghada M. Mougharbel & Rima Bahous (2010) Gender Bias in Lebanese Language Classes, The Educational Forum, 74:3, 198-212, DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2010.483901

⁸ Ahmad, A. (2019, May 3). Shedding Light on Female Talent in Lebanon's Energy Sector. World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31608>

02

Reinforcement of gender stereotypes in the Lebanese curriculum

Outdated curriculum with examples of gender-biased stereotypes and discriminatory portrayal of women

As with most sectors in the country, education has been affected by the multiple overlapping crises facing the country. The sector was put under strain with the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011.⁹ There has been arguably little to no increase to the quality of public education since the last revision of the curriculum (in 1997, discussed later on in-depth) , as stated by many of the interviewees and highlighted in several studies.¹⁰

The most recent comprehensive review of the Lebanese curriculum occurred in 1997, where a new curriculum with accompanying textbooks was released. Interviewed key informants, all agreed that the **curriculum is outdated**. This is a particularly long gap in revision, as most developing countries up-date their curriculums every five to 10 years, while developed countries review their curriculums every three years.¹¹

There is no reference or guidance on the use of technology while teaching, books contain obsolete information and the entire curriculum **lacks any reference to gender equality**.¹² The main cause for this according to key informants is the **absence of gender experts in the curriculum development process**. Informants continued to say that the curriculum was reviewed at a time where the majority of the Lebanese society had regressive views on gender equality, and stereotypical gender roles were common, for example, limiting women's role to house-wives and caregivers for children.

As such, this curriculum has presented many discriminatory aspects that **marginalize and limit women's ability to progress academically and professionally**. Shuayb (2015) argues that there are **seven forms of gender bias present in the Lebanese curriculum**,¹³ which include stereotyping through recurrent mention or portrayal of women in **stereotyped** gender roles (i.e: women as housewives and teachers), **intolerance and insensitivity** as they are rare cases of interpretation and analysis of social issues from a gender perspective (only one noted in the civics books) and finally **linguistic** applied in the Arabic language which has gender-split nouns, verbs and adjectives. Most characters in the textbooks are male and the language used was masculine. Also, when addressing students, the textbooks predominantly use the pronoun "he".

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ National Curriculum and Textbook Board - Bangladesh. (2011, March). Guidelines for Curriculum Review and Development. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533200.pdf>

¹² Shuayb, M. (2015b, February 17). Human rights and peace education in the Lebanese civics textbooks. SAGE Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent>

¹³ Ibid

Other sources **identified strong male-biased influence** in Lebanese textbooks (produced after the 1997 curriculum review), which have many **stereotypical images of women in various social and vocational roles**.¹⁴

From a **social perspective**, Lebanese textbooks portrayed women as having a more prominent role in their families than men, particularly in the role of “educators of social values”.¹⁵ Key informants also highlighted many cases in the textbooks where women were portrayed in the stereotypical roles of housewives, and familial interactions were heavily patriarchal in nature.

“There is a lot of traditional pictures in the book that show the man working or reading a newspaper and the woman cooking.”

Joumana El Halabi, MEHE Gender Focal Point

Stereotypical portrayal of women in the curriculum and textbooks has longer term consequences. It in the minds of students, contributes to the **persistence of patriarchal mentalities** among future generations. This was noted by the interviewed dean of students at one of Lebanon’s private universities, who reported that many freshmen and sophomores from the Lebanese educational system (including girls) have developed a tendency to use masculine pronouns when communicating even among themselves. As such he argues that the Lebanese curriculum has influenced the way youth communicate making it more gender-biased.

Moreover, the UNESCO study highlighted how the Lebanese textbooks present a clear **male bias when portraying people working in different sectors**. Out of the 9,102 instances where people were portrayed or described as working a certain profession, 82% were men and only 18% were women. More specifically, only 87 out of 699 professionals portrayed in the books in a scientific field were women. Also, women’s representation was completely absent in medicine, commerce, engineering, management, technology etc.¹⁶

Other studies and key informants¹⁷ focused on analysing **gender representations in the Lebanese civics book**, which provides students with a study of their rights, duties and roles as citizens of Lebanon. The portrayal of political leaders, decision makers and diplomats was heavily male biased, with women only being described as being able to vote in the elections.¹⁸

¹⁴ Altmann, J. (2019, July 11). Lebanon to Integrate ‘Gender Perspective’ into Education Curriculum. The Media Line. <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/lebanon-to-integrate-gender-perspective-into-education-curriculum/>

¹⁵ Shuayb, M. (2015b, February 17). Human rights and peace education in the Lebanese civics textbooks. SAGE Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent>

¹⁶ UNESCO. (2016). Global Education Monitoring Report: Textbooks pave the way to sustainable development. UNESDOC Digital Library. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246777>

¹⁷ KII with public school principal

¹⁸ Shuayb, M. (2015b, February 17). Human rights and peace education in the Lebanese civics textbooks. SAGE Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent>

In addition to bias, the Lebanese curriculum also **misses critical topics particularly relevant for the specific needs of girls and women**. As noted in a study by the World Bank, study participants observed that girls and women are not instructed or given information on how to manage their stress and care for their mental health at any point in their academic lives (whether at school or at university). This was noted by participants as a gap, given the specific stresses faced by working mothers (i.e. handling two roles as breadwinner and caregiver, insufficient maternal leave time, discriminatory behaviour in society etc.).¹⁹

Religious and socio-political barriers to an educational reform

Gaps in **government policies and implementation**, as well as the **influence of political and religious actors** on education policy reform, have stalled progress in quality and efficiency in the education sector, as Craddock (2018) notes,²⁰

The weakness of the government is reflected by problems in the public education sector. At the primary and secondary levels, Lebanon has struggled to increase the quality of public education since the end of the civil war.

Educational quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms for universities remain in a state of inaction as of 2017. Multiple Lebanese universities and the European Union collaborated to develop a quality assurance framework for higher education in 2011, under the Toward the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (TLQAA) project²¹. The project resulted in a draft law to establish a governmental quality assurance agency that would cover both private and public institutes. The law however was never passed, due to shared **political interests from political figures and the owners of private universities**.²²

One key informant noted that in 2001, with the release of new history books, one politician who is also influential in the education field, chose to dispose of all the newly printed books as they contained facts misaligned with their political views. This example highlights the trend in interrupting the advancement in the education level (curriculum/training) at the final stages when approval is needed. This is one example of several, whereby politicians interfere in the reform of a curriculum and hinder its progress, thus maintaining the status quo of men engaging actively in decision making positions.

Additionally reform efforts often excludes educational experts and professionals, whom most policy makers view condescendingly²³. Craddock continued to note a clear disjunction between policy makers and knowledge producers, as policy makers often overlook locally produced knowledge when conducting reform.²⁴

¹⁹ Ahmad, A. (2019, May 3). Shedding Light on Female Talent in Lebanon's Energy Sector. World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31608>

²⁰ Craddock, A. (2018, December 17). Education in Lebanon. WENR. <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/05/education-in-lebanon>;

²¹ Craddock, A. (2018, December 17). Education in Lebanon. WENR. <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/05/education-in-lebanon>.

²² Ibid

²³ Shuayb, M. (2015). Who Shapes Education Reform Policies in Lebanon? The Role of Research Centres. Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1-33. <https://www.lebanesestudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Research->

²⁴ Ibid

Political influence in education is not only limited to reform and policy production, but extends across the entire structure. One interviewee stated that political parties continue to hold strong influence across public and private educational institutes, as they dominated most students body councils in universities, in addition to teacher syndicates. The core issue, in her view, is the **absence of women in leadership and decision making positions**. Without the influence of women on educational reform and key decisions, gender sensitivity and equality cannot be effectively achieved.

In addition to the political influence on education, one informant²⁵ noted that **religious institutes involved in education maintain a strong opposition to gender equality**. One example for this opposition (as described by a key informant)²⁶ was when MEHE released a decision to cease the practice of gender segregation in schools, and to have only mixed gender schools. This decision was openly opposed by religious institutes, and not carried out in religious run schools in conservative environments.

²⁵ KII with Carmen Shbib

²⁶ KII with a journalist and education specialist

03

Barriers and discrimination against women and girls in education

Patriarchal social norms continue to hinder girls and women's access to education and their career direction

Despite evidence showcasing the numerous forms of discrimination faced by women in education and other sectors, many still refuse to recognize a gap in gender equality.²⁷ All of the issues with the educational system and the curriculum mentioned earlier affect the entire student population and girls and women face additional challenges given the prevalent patriarchal mentality and conservative social norms.²⁸ At points these challenges intersect – girls from the community of Palestinian Refugees from Syria are three time more likely to have never been to school, when compared with their male counterparts.²⁹ In addition, as per the LCRP, education chapter,

“Demand-side barriers and family priorities (supporting boys' education over girls') have driven many displaced Syrian adolescent girls into early marriage, and prevented them from continuing their education.”³⁰

Faten el Hajj Journalist- Al Akhbar

Women in rural areas face specific restrictions in accessing tertiary education, owing to the centralization of higher education facilities and majors in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. This is challenging to most women from remote areas such as Beqaa, the North and South of Lebanon, with the absence of safe and reliable public transportation systems, and the persistence of patriarchal mentalities that limit **women's freedom of transportation**.³¹ Key informants also agreed that the areas where girls come from influences their choice of university and major.³² Rural students are more likely to be confined to “women's majors” and are less likely to travel abroad.³³

²⁷ Altmann, J. (2019, July 11). Lebanon to Integrate 'Gender Perspective' into Education Curriculum. The Media Line. <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/lebanon-to-integrate-gender-perspective-into-education-curriculum/>

²⁸ Avis, W. R. (2017, August 16). Gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/175-Gender-Equality-and-Womens-Empowerment-in-Lebanon.pdf>

²⁹ Government of Lebanon & UNHCR. (2020, April 26). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2020 update) - Lebanon. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020-2020->

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ahmad, A. (2019, May 3). Shedding Light on Female Talent in Lebanon's Energy Sector. World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31608>

³² KII with a journalist and education specialist

³³ Ibid

Familial and societal expectations also influence the choice of university major that young women make, as they are often expected to play the role of housewife in their future families. As such, their families normally drive them towards majors that will lead them to be employed in sectors with shorter working hours (public sector, teaching etc.) so they can balance their professional and at-home responsibilities. Social norms also hinder whether a girl goes to university at all. One interviewee described how families prefer not to spend too much money on girls' education as they will "later get married and not need to work". As such, they would prioritize what money they have to send the boys to university.

 *They think that this is a girl, why spend so much money on educating her she will get married later and not need to work* 

Ghada Azar – School Director

The principal explained how she is encouraging girls enrolled in her school, motivating them to overcome the male-dominant mentalities and empowering them to achieve financial independence by choosing the major they love and want to pursue, despite what society says. At the university level, Dr. Makram Ouass, stated that gender is mainstreamed in the pre-enrolment phase at the university, during the orientation period. All students are informed of the rules of regulations of the university, their rights and duties, and gender is embedded in this rights to access equal opportunities, and the duties to respect women and men. The dean of students explained that they have been witnessing more girls running for the elections at the students' committee, and a girl became the president last, year. Such success stories should be more visible at the national level.

Lack of awareness on gender sensitive practices among teaching staff leads to discrimination against girls and women

In addition to the negative influence of patriarchal social norms on the education of girls and women, discrimination and male-bias was noted in the practices of teachers and educational staff.

Despite the fact that the majority teaching staff in Lebanon are women (75.2%)³⁴, there has been a reported widespread **usage of discriminatory pedagogical practices and gender-biased terminology**. In a study on gender bias in language classes, classroom observations have shown that men and women teachers have a tendency to address boys more than girls, giving them priority when answering posed questions and in providing in-put in in-class discussions. Also, many of the observed teachers practices favouritism to the needs, perception and beliefs of boy students over those of their girl peers, even in some cases citing girl's limited role in society later on as only housewives and not in productive and decision making positions in the society.³⁵

³⁴ Avis, W. R. (2017, August 16). Gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/175-Gender-Equality-and-Womens-Empowerment-in-Lebanon.pdf>

³⁵ Ghada M. Mougharbel & Rima Bahous (2010) Gender Bias in Lebanese Language Classes, The Educational Forum, 74:3, 198-212, DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2010.483901

Key informants also gave examples on how some teachers use gendered language when addressing their students. Girls are often addressed using adjective related to their physical beauty or those related to their socially accepted roles. Girls are addressed or given compliments by being called “helwati” (meaning my beauty) or “ya amira” (princess), while boys are addressed as “batal” (meaning hero) or “abaday” (meaning tough guy). Without mandatory **formal training on gender equality and sensitivity in pedagogical practices**, most teachers further reinforce the male-bias existing in the curriculum, which have not been addressed through reforms.³⁶

Gender biased practices are not only limited to the classroom, as key informants noted that teachers and administrative educational staff influence girls’ choice of major and vocation. According to multiple key informants, educational practitioners tend to direct girls and women towards jobs such as teaching and employment by citing that in the future girls will need to make time for taking care of their husband, children and homes, in addition to their work.

The lack of a **gender sensitive career guidance framework** has contributed to a misbalanced representation of women across multiple professions in the Lebanese labour market. Major universities offer orientation and guidance activities focusing on increasing enrolment, without considering the needs of the labour market for more equal gender representation in certain sectors.³⁷

³⁶ Avis, W. R. (2017, August 16). Gender equality and women’s empowerment in Lebanon. ReliefWeb.<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/175-Gender-Equality-and-Womens-Empowerment-in-Lebanon.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid

04 Efforts towards best practices for gender sensitive education

Individual efforts by public and private institutions contributing towards gender sensitivity

Whilst the curriculum requires revision, there have been multiple efforts to improve gender mainstreaming in public education. In 2011, a **gender perspective committee** was formed in MEHE under the direction of the Minister, and led by the director general of education. The committee is formed of a gender focal person and representatives from all directorates within MEHE.

The main purpose of the committee is to provide statistics on gender to all directorates and to provide awareness sessions in school.³⁸ However, these roles were not achieved as the committee was not given leeway to act with the necessary actors such as regional educational directors, schools, research centres and CERD.³⁹

Other efforts include those made by CERD in most recent years to **capacitate teachers on gender issues** and assuring equality through **gender sensitive pedagogical practices**. However, the representative of CERD mentioned that these trainings were optional for teachers, and not many chose to attend, as only fixed contract employees get compensated for a training day. Meanwhile, contractual teachers do not get paid for any training day they attend, and as such have no motivation to attend and furthermore some refused to attend the trainings owing to their conservative background, adherence to patriarchal mentalities and lack of understanding of gender and its importance.⁴⁰ In addition, the trainings were not completed due to the multiple-crises facing Lebanon, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, many efforts initiated at the government level, remain incomplete for the various reasons mentioned in earlier sections. Trainings are either not provided to all teachers, or certain topics from the trainings are not completed. Whenever trainings have been completed, no monitoring or follow up is implemented, consequently limiting the possibility to measure progress.

³⁸ KII

³⁹ Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, 2010, Gender-Relevant Legal Change in Lebanon, Vol 22, 3, Women in the Middle East, pp.210-228.

⁴⁰ KII with Carmen Shbib

Leadership assuring gender equality in certain public schools

Ghada Azar, the principal of a public school in Ras Beirut described her own experience in assuring gender equality at the school she has been managing for seven years. The core aim of her work is to “work with women on making them leaders”.

Despite the challenges faced by public school across Lebanon, such as decreased government funding and the absence of clear gender mainstreaming guidelines, Ghada works to assure that she and her staff abide by equitable practices. This starts by assuring all students wear the same uniform with no distinctions between girls and boys, and by offering girls and boys equal access to opportunities across both literary and scientific fields.

In addition, Ghada and the teachers at her school work understand the importance of involving student's caregivers and the community to assure gender equality is achieved. One of the cases she mentioned was when a girl's parents refused to have her play sports with boys. The school directly intervened and contacted the parents, making sure to convey the necessity for their daughter to be involved in all classes to assure her health and development.

Some ***secular private educational institutes have made efforts towards enhance gender sensitivity*** and protecting their female students from harassment and SGBV. During an interview with Dr. Makram Ouass, the dean of students at the Lebanese American University (Jbeil), he described how a specialized office (called the Title 9 Office) was created to make sure that all genders have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination. The office is mandated to be present in all American universities under US government law. It deals with discrimination and harassment complaints confidentially, and assesses enrolment processes and opportunities for possible gaps in gender equality.

In addition to public and private educational stakeholders, ***local and international non-profit agencies and NGOs have also contributed to enhancing gender equality in education***. Efforts by international non-profit actors include the work done by UNICEF, which has provided a wide array of programmes and services to enhance girls' access to education and reducing the risk of drop-outs and discrimination. This includes covering enrolment fees, stationery costs and transportation of vulnerable students. Other efforts by UNICEF include the “My Safety, My Wellbeing” programme which equips adolescent girls with the needed knowledge and skills to avoid and report SGBV and early marriage, in addition to healthy coping mechanisms to manage health, stress and reproductive health.⁴¹

⁴¹ Borgen, C. (2019, October 20). Girls' Education in Lebanon Strives to Reach Those Most in Need. The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/girls-education-in-lebanon-strives-to-reach-those-most-in-need/>

Other efforts include partnerships between international and local NGOs, such as the joint effort by the Malala Fund and the Kayani Foundation. The two agencies have collaborated to establish the Malala Yousafzai All-Girls School in Beqaa, which provides formal education to around 200 Syrian refugee girls residing in informal tented settlements. These girls are more often than not prohibited by their parents from attending co-ed schools due to strict social norms.⁴²

Other efforts include **collaborations between governmental institutes and local NGOs** to enhance gender equality in education. For example, ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality is a local Lebanese NGO has signed a partnership with CERD to plan and advocate for the integrations of gender sensitive considerations in the public-school curriculum. One notable addition will be the introduction of sexual education into the curriculum, a topic which is nearly absent across all grades, except for purely scientific approach in secondary classes.

A holistic approach for gender equality reform in the Lebanese curriculum

During one of the interviews, Dr. Makram Ouais, the dean of students at the Lebanese American University in Byblos presented his version of a holistic approach for gender equality reform in the curriculum. In his view, any sustained and effective reform should **start at the school level**.

The approach described should be **participatory**, by including the perceptions and experiences of all stakeholders involved in education, including experts, administrative staff, teachers, caregivers and students.

Once a revised curriculum has been drafted, it would then be piloted in up to three schools, with an effective **results and satisfaction monitoring framework in-place** targeting the same stakeholders in the design phase. As such, the curriculum can then be assessed and further revised as needed, based on the findings of the monitoring framework processes.

⁴² Ibid

05 Recommendations

To achieve comprehensive change in the educational system toward more gender equality, all stakeholders involved in education should be engaged and involved in any reform effort. This includes the government, private education institutes, local and international NGOs, teachers, caregivers and students. Drawing from the desk review and interviews with key stakeholders, the following recommendations are offered:

Recommendations at the level of the governing bodies of public and private education institutes:

- **Comprehensive review of the curriculum** conducted by educational experts and research bodies (such as CERD). This will allow for an up-to-date gender-sensitive curriculum free from gender stereotypes and discriminatory representation of girls and women. Critically, this review must be carried out independently of political figures, by education experts.
- **Creation of regional gender response units** composed of trained and experienced staff within MEHE, to assure the effective roll-out and implementation of gender mainstreaming practices in schools all over Lebanon. These units can also conduct assessments and monitoring at the school level (with teachers and administrators), offering tailored recommendations for gender mainstreaming fitting the local context of each school. The unit will also integrate gender awareness activities into schools' parent teacher's associations. The unit should release periodic reports on the status of gender in education, and the needed action plans at a regional level;
- **Establishing a government mandated national education quality assurance agency** that will monitor the quality of education and the application of gender considerations across private and public education institutes in Lebanon;
- **Establishing a centralized educational data system**, that can offer up to date and gender and age disaggregated statistics on education. The data set should include (non-exhaustive list) data on enrollment and drop-out rates across all levels of the education system, information on gender parity among teaching staff.

Recommendations for teachers and other educational staff:

- **Mandatory and compensated gender sensitization training** for all staff focusing on gender equitable pedagogical practices. This will mitigate the use of biased terminology in-class and avoiding the transfer of patriarchal and male-dominated mentalities to students. This training should be linked to independent monitoring of teacher's use of training and adherence with this training should be included as part of teachers' responsibilities in their job description.

Recommendations for efforts targeting students' caregivers and local communities:

- **Involving caregivers in the education of their children** to assure that gender sensitivity and equality is mainstreamed both at school and at home. Through large-scale awareness activities, collaborating with parent teachers' committees on joint activities and targeted consultations with caregivers as needed;
- **Targeted awareness activities at the community level** on women's rights and value of girls' education, to help mitigate patriarchal and conservative norms that disenfranchise women and constrain girls' access to education.

Recommendations for efforts targeting students:

- **Targeted interventions for girls and women** to increase their awareness on their rights, enhance their self-confidence and improve their ability to identify and report cases of discrimination and/or abuse;
- **Assuring equitable gender representations in elected student body committees** to assure that concerns and issues conveyed by these councils to administrators are gender sensitive and meet the particular needs of girls and women;
- **Supporting female students' access to support services**, such as counselors, and gender equitable career guidance. In addition to facilitating their access to diverse extra-curricular activities (particularly for vulnerable and marginalized girls/women).

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About the Lebanon National Gender Observatory

The Lebanon National Gender Observatory is at the forefront of engendering policies and practice by undertaking gender transformative research, providing gender analyses and gendered and evidence-based recommendations to national policy makers, and bringing together scholars, researchers, state actors and gender experts. Funded by the European Union, through the EU's Region Fund, and supported by EuroMed Feminist Initiative, the Observatory works on the engendering of Lebanon crisis response, ensuring the protection of Syrian refugee women and Lebanese women in the local communities. On a national level, it works on promoting international women's rights mechanisms in Lebanon.