

# Building social cohesion in conflict affected communities

A retrospective research study  
with refugee and host community  
adolescents in Lebanon

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# Acronyms

COSV	Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario
DPNA	Development for People and Nature Association
ENPI	European Union – European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
ILO	International Labour Organization
LOST	Lebanese Organization of Studies and Training
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSC	Most Significant Change
NOVACT	International Institute for Nonviolent Action
ODI	Overseas Development Institute

# Executive summary

This briefing presents the findings of a qualitative research study on the current and retrospective effects of two peacebuilding projects implemented by Search for Common Ground (Search) with adolescents from refugee and host communities in Lebanon. It explores the positive and negative gendered effects of peacebuilding project initiatives implemented by Search on Lebanese adolescents' development trajectories in the short and medium term. The research team used a capability-based approach, which was originally championed by Amartya Sen and further nuanced by Marta Nussbaum and Naila Kabeer to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels.

The research explored two key domains of adolescents' experiences: (1) psychosocial well-being and (2) voice and agency. The psychosocial capability domain is concerned with adolescents' sense of self and ability to set their own goals and demonstrate resilience in the face of setbacks. It recognises the importance of both internal emotional capacity and external social support. The voice and agency capability domain focuses on the ability of adolescents to meaningfully participate in household, school and community life – which is key to them developing the skills required for civic participation

in adulthood. Adolescents' responses indicated important spillover effects of the project activities, particularly for education and future employment activities.

## Methodology

The briefing draws on two case studies in Lebanon: the FURSA project (which began in 2017 and is still ongoing) and the Better Together project (which ended in 2015). Both projects aimed to build social cohesion among refugee and host populations and focused on activities around skill-building, conflict prevention and psychosocial support. To understand the short- and medium-term effects of these projects, the research team applied an adapted most significant change (MSC) approach using three different research tools:

- key informant interviews with project implementers
  - participatory timelines with project participants and parents
  - a feedback meeting with the project management team.
- Research was conducted in five sites: Akkar, Joub Jenine, Beirut, Saida and Baalbek, with a sample of 18 project implementers, 27 adolescents (boys and girls from Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Lebanese-Palestinian communities) and 19 caregivers (male and female).

### Key findings

- Adolescent girls and boys reported that the peacebuilding projects implemented by Search had positive short- and medium-term effects on their psychosocial well-being, voice and agency, and (to some extent) on their education and employability.
- Positive reported effects on adolescents' psychosocial well-being, voice and agency were strongly noticeable during project implementation, in terms of greater self-confidence, improved skills, new friendships, increased decision-making power, a network of positive role models, and an overall positive outlook for the future.
- Some effects were consistently sustained one or two years after project completion, including: having a network of peers and trusted adults, skills that could be useful in gaining future work, and a continued tolerant attitude towards 'others' – be it those of a different gender, age or nationality.
- Challenges faced by the projects included social norms around gender equality for girls and adolescents' limited decision-making power, reflecting their limited financial independence due to high unemployment rates locally. These two contextual factors continue to constrain the psychosocial well-being, voice and agency of adolescents from Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese communities in Lebanon.
- To strengthen and sustain the positive effects of these peacebuilding projects, caregivers and adult members of the wider community should be involved in peacebuilding activities. Doing so will better enable project implementers to support the development of vertical support structures for adolescents – support mechanisms that could prove critical in helping young people to set more aspirational goals, and achieve greater mobility and independence in life.

## Key findings

### Adolescent psychosocial wellbeing

- Syrian adolescent girls most often mentioned the effects of the interventions on their psychosocial wellbeing, especially due to the restrictions on their mobility in their household, school and wider community. The project encouraged girls to explore their own interests, identities and friendships, which in turn increased their self-confidence and resilience. During the project, adolescent girls reported being able to discuss their experiences – often traumatic – in a safe and conducive environment.
- Being part of a peer to peer project with social cohesion as a core objective and participating in structured activities helped war-affected Syrian boys in our sample to cope with their new realities and gave them a sense of purpose, built their self-esteem and resilience, and provided them with a peer network. Syrian boys also reported being able to interact with members of the host community without discrimination, which helped to increase their feelings of acceptance and self-esteem. This in turn helped them develop a more positive outlook for the future.
- The situation of Lebanese adolescents was significantly different as they had not experienced conflict first-hand. Instead, they reported worries about their future career and employment. Lebanese adolescent girls and boys appreciated the opportunities for recreational and skill-building activities available to them in their communities. They also indicated that their individual perceptions about peers from other nationalities had permanently changed and that they did their best to speak up when others spoke in a discriminatory manner.
- Palestinian refugee adolescent boys indicated that they had had limited opportunities to interact with Syrian and Lebanese peers prior to the project. Because of their involvement in the Better Together project, they also reported having gained a better understanding of their Lebanese and Syrian peers' realities.

### Adolescent voice and agency

- Adolescents of different nationalities, genders and age groups reported that the project activities had helped them access diverse means of obtaining information they wanted in their daily lives which they often did not have access to otherwise (e.g. on economic

empowerment, inter-personal relationships, sexual and reproductive health (SRH)).

- Adolescents indicated that the projects helped them connect with role models who demonstrated different ways of behaving, distinct from conventional restrictive and discriminatory gender roles. Project facilitators gained participants' trust and respect, so were able to have a positive impact on the adolescents who took part.
- Adolescents also reported that the project activities had helped them resolve conflicts with peers in a peaceful manner and to counter prejudice. They also reported greater empathy for others.
- Adolescents mentioned that they had made lasting relationships with peers with whom they are still in touch (as at late 2017) almost two years after the project they were involved in had ended. They reported having developed strong and supportive relationships with peers from all different nationalities and ages. As a result, they reported gaining stronger emotional intelligence and communications skills. When the projects ended, the adolescents used social media (WhatsApp and Facebook groups) to stay in touch.
- Adolescents indicated that both projects had a positive impact on how they were perceived and supported within their families and in other personal relationships. Parents noticed the positive changes in their children's conduct and were impressed with the skills they had developed. As a result, some parents became more emotionally supportive towards their children.
- Syrian and Lebanese adolescent girls appreciated being consulted in the decision-making process during both projects and reported that as a result, they felt confident in making their own decisions. The effects of the FURSA project were magnified among girls from conservative families, who often had limited decision-making power to begin with.
- Adolescent boys involved in both projects also reported having more positive attitudes towards their female peers. Male beneficiaries respected girls' rights to explore their own interests and identities and to build resilience within the safe space of the project. The projects gave boys a chance to test out 'different' behaviours that was not always accepted by other (more conservative) community members, and encouraged adolescent boys to use their voice in the community to support girls and help defend their rights.

- Conducting project activities with mixed-gender groups caused significant challenges in some cases, particularly for adolescents from conservative families and backgrounds (e.g. as in rural areas in Syria), who encountered resistance from family members as a result.
- Local partners, often respected in the communities they work in, provided valued support and were pivotal in ensuring community acceptance.
- After completing project activities, many adolescents reported that their voice and agency in their wider family and community was constrained due to other structural realities – especially the lack of employment opportunities for young people and their ongoing (financial) dependence on their parents. To ensure sustained effects from the project, adolescents believed that it is vital to engage local communities, private sector and government to explore formal or informal income-generating opportunities for young adults.

Participants of both projects described important spillover effects, particularly on their education and future employment opportunities:

- Syrian boys and girls benefited from training in conflict-sensitivity when dealing with discriminatory comments at school at the changeover between the first and second shifts of the day. Lebanese adolescents reported being more sensitive to the feelings of other students because of what they had learned in the projects. In this sense, the projects supported the creation and maintenance of an enabling and peaceful schooling environment.
- Adolescents also reported that the projects had helped them perform better in school tasks, and that the positive learning environment created by the projects gave them a stronger desire to do well in school. Additionally, some reported using the soft skills they gained from being involved in the projects (for example, conflict prevention skills, coping skills and more practical skills such as drawing and photography) in school projects.
- All male participants highlighted that the FURSA project had provided them with a network that could potentially help them find employment. They also indicated that the skills they had learned (e.g. conflict resolution, theatre, photography, etc.) could be useful in finding work at a later stage. Girls, by contrast, put

less emphasis on the economic benefits of project participation, mindful of the very limited employment opportunities open to girls and women in the country.

- Boys (and particularly Syrian boys) who had graduated from the Better Together project noted that they had not been able to apply the skills they had learned during the workshops and had not been able to find jobs thus far due to restrictive labour policies that prevent Syrian refugees undertaking formal work in Lebanon. This was perceived as an important limitation to the projects' effects, as Syrian male adolescents in particular had hoped that participating in such a project would help them find work, even if this was not an explicit aim of either of the projects.

## Conclusions

Adolescent girls and boys alike reported that both projects had positive short-term and medium-term effects on their psychosocial well-being, voice and agency, and (to some extent) on their education and employability.

- Reported effects on well-being ranged from increased happiness, self-confidence, access to a peer network and knowledge on key life transitions and coping mechanisms, to increased communication skills and more positive and tolerant attitudes towards adolescents of different backgrounds.
- Adolescent boys noted greater access to positive role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with girls and thus became more sensitive to the needs, abilities and aspirations of their female peers, after as well as during the project. Girls reported having access to role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with boys and who helped girls dream of a better future, in which they could find paid work and have other opportunities. As a result, girls reported increased confidence, agency and decision-making power.
- While adolescents welcomed the mixed-gender, mixed-nationality groups in the projects, this approach sometimes caused problems for them within their family. This was particularly the case with girls and boys from conservative families from rural Syria, with some parents reportedly pulling their daughters out of the project. Some Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents faced a verbal backlash in their community because of their more tolerant behaviour towards Syrian families.

- Parents and local leaders were only sporadically involved in the projects. As a result, the attitudes of these key adult 'powerholders' had not necessarily changed even if the adolescent participants changed their perceptions and behaviour(s).
- Most project effects were still strongly noticeable after the project had ended, with some friendship groups surviving distance and time, largely thanks to social media.
- However, some project effects became weaker over time due to structural challenges around employability and the restrictions imposed on girls and boys by discriminatory social norms. Adolescent girls from Syrian and Palestine-Lebanese communities (for example) mentioned not being able to do paid work and having to marry instead. Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescent boys noted challenges in finding work in a context where formal youth employment opportunities are scarce.
- Other effects (network of peers and trusted adults, new skills, and more tolerant attitudes) were sustained for some time after the project had ended – effects that could contribute to the development of future leadership skills needed to bring about more equal and peaceful social change.

## Recommendations

Our findings suggest that organisations aiming to replicate the model of these peacebuilding projects should consider the following:

- Provide access to peers and a social support network, to give adolescents vital support structures to help them cope with changes they experience during adolescence and in their daily family and community life.
- Adopt a participatory approach to project design and activities to enable adolescents' voices to be heard. Activities should match adolescents' interests with fun and engaging methodologies that help build skills.
- Use young, professional and respected facilitators of different nationalities and genders who are genuinely interested in the lives of the adolescents, as this is a key factor in a project's success.
- Collaborate closely with local partners who have a strong grounding in the community, to enhance project success and sustainability.
- Equip adolescents with skills so that they can share lessons learned during project activities with other adolescents, in school, in the community and in other 'spaces'.

Our findings also point to a number of programming implications, many of which resonate with the recommendations of the young people involved in the evaluation:

- Strategies to address youth unemployment should be integrated as a complementary programmatic activity, with adolescents involved in the two projects citing unemployment and lack of financial independence as an important barrier to social cohesion and psychosocial well-being.
- Social networks require ongoing support when bridging across diverse social groups. To sustain the friendships and social networks created by adolescents from different backgrounds, projects should plan reunion activities at set intervals, ideally supported by local partner organisations.
- Involving parents and other key adults to foster social cohesion between adults, to broker gender-equal opportunities and to ensure wider community support for the changes that adolescents reported.
- Investing in a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system with adequate data disaggregation is also key. Organisations should invest in the design and rollout of an M&E system that distinguishes between participants from different backgrounds so that they can more accurately track which adolescents drop out, when, and why.

# 1 Introduction

Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world, hosting 1 million registered Syrian refugees,<sup>1</sup> along with 31,502 Palestinian refugees from Syria, 35,000 Lebanese returnees, and a pre-existing population of more than 277,985 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Government of Lebanon, 2017). The influx of refugees – with Syrians being the most recent group – has put a strain on many aspects of life in Lebanon, including ‘increasing demographics, a regressing economy, exhausting social services, complicating politics and decreasing security’ (Government of Lebanon, 2017) (see also Box 1).

A recent report by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme highlights that there is comparatively little high-quality evidence about adolescent girls in Lebanon – and very little on adolescent Palestinian and Syrian refugee girls (Presler-Marshall et al., 2018). Specifically, there is little research on girls’ physical and sexual health, nutrition, access to voice and agency, and economic empowerment. Outside of the fact that

Syrian refugee girls are highly vulnerable to child marriage and sexual harassment, we also know very little about Lebanese and Palestine-Lebanese girls’ bodily integrity and exposure to violence. This is the same when exploring evidence on the psychosocial well-being of adolescent girls in Lebanon: even if research highlights that adolescent girls are more socially isolated than boys, we know far more about refugee girls’ psychosocial well-being than the well-being of other adolescents in Lebanon (ibid.).

It is against this backdrop that this report presents the findings of a qualitative research study conducted by GAGE on the effects of two peacebuilding projects with adolescents from refugee and host communities in Lebanon. The projects were implemented by Search for Common Ground (hereafter Search), an international non-profit organisation working to end violence by ‘changing everyday interactions between groups of people in conflict, so they can work together to build up their community, choosing joint problem solving over violence’ (Search

## Box 1: Lebanon’s changing social fabric and conflict

Longstanding inequalities in Lebanon are becoming deeper and there are growing tensions at local level, mostly over perceived competition for jobs and access to resources. Unemployment and high levels of informal labour are reported to have intensified since the start of the Syria crisis, with the World Bank indicating that the Lebanese economy would need to create six times more jobs just to absorb regular market entrants (Government of Lebanon, 2017). Unemployment is particularly high in some of the country’s poorest localities; in some areas, it is nearly double the national average, placing considerable strain on host communities (ibid.). The economic downturn has had a disproportionate effect on young people, with youth unemployment rates three to four times higher than the overall unemployment rate (ibid.). An International Labour Organization (ILO) report indicates that nearly half (46.5%) of unemployed youth in the country had been unemployed for longer than one year and just over a quarter (25.3%) for longer than two years. Young women are much more likely to be unemployed than young men (Dimova et al., 2016).

Among a Lebanese population of just 4 million, one in every five people is Syrian, and yet host and refugee communities rarely mix – a situation that has allowed mutual resentment and suspicion to take hold (Shackle, 2017). In 2014, for example, the Lebanese government, with the support of UNICEF, introduced a ‘second shift’ of classes at public schools for refugee children so that they could attend without having to provide proof of legal residency or pay enrolment fees. The vast majority of school-going children attend classes – just for refugees – at the end of the day. The second shift means that Lebanese and Syrian children hardly ever interact – with Lebanese students taught most subjects in English and French, and Syrian students taught in Arabic (ibid.).

Despite the second shift system, a 2014 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that many children were still not in school: 64.29% of Syrian refugee children aged 6–14 were out of school, rising to 92.26% of children aged 15–18 (Watkins and Zyck, 2014). Research by International Alert has found that the lack of children’s integration at school could have a huge impact on relations between refugees and local communities (Khattab, 2017).

<sup>1</sup> The actual figure is likely to be even higher as many refugees are not registered

website). Search has been working in Lebanon since 1996 and engages with stakeholders to 'strengthen local capacities in order to create sustainable change and increased social cohesion' (ibid.).

This report is informed by a review of the evidence on the effectiveness of project interventions to enhance adolescent psychosocial well-being and social cohesion in conflict-affected contexts. It explores the following

research question: what are the short- and medium-term gendered effects (positive and negative) of peacebuilding project initiatives<sup>2</sup> implemented by Search on Lebanese adolescents' development trajectories? The report draws on two case studies (FURSA and Better Together projects) and concludes with a summary of lessons learned and broader programming implications.

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<sup>2</sup> For Search for Common Ground, FURSA and Better Together are considered as projects, falling under a broader social cohesion project, which might include (in the case of Fursa) community initiatives developed and implemented by participants as part of the project's activities.

## 2 Framing our research

Relationship-building between actors is an important part of peacebuilding in any conflict-affected or post-conflict setting (Lederach, 1997). Drawing on social capital theory, we recognise the importance of social relations as a prerequisite for access to resources and opportunities, particularly in resource-poor and conflict-affected settings such as Lebanon. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) stressed that relationships between people and groups can be formed in both a horizontal and vertical manner – between peers of equal status (horizontal) and between groups and organisations with unequal status (vertical). This is also termed ‘bonding’ (social networks between homogeneous groups) and ‘bridging’ (social networks between heterogeneous groups and between communities and authorities). Both forms of social capital may provide access to network resources outside of an individual’s normal circles and, as such, can provide significant individual (and collective) benefits. Bridging social capital may not involve many shared norms, but is likely to be associated with reciprocity and ‘thin trust’ (Schuller et al., 2000).

McGill et al. (2015) used social capital theory when evaluating various initiatives working with young peacebuilders, and concluded that enhanced social cohesion among adolescents from diverse backgrounds was an important impact. Examples from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region include projects focusing on host community and refugee youth, where intercultural dialogue, face-to-face encounters, workshops, and structured sport-based interactions have been found to play a role in reconciliation (Kraft and Prytherch, 2016; Maoz, 2011). Moaz (2011) also concluded that: ‘Intergroup contact can, under certain conditions, be effective in reducing hostility and prejudice and in creating more positive attitudes between the groups’. Art-based approaches have been identified as particularly successful for working with young, conflict-affected populations facing issues around psychosocial well-being (Lenette and Sunderland, 2016). Music projects involving refugee groups, for example, can produce a range of outcomes along a

‘continuum of health determinants ranging from individual factors through to broad social and environmental outcomes’ (ibid.). Another example from the MENA region is Capoeira4Refugees, which aims to increase the psychosocial well-being of young refugee adolescents and foster positive coping strategies (Boateng, 2017).

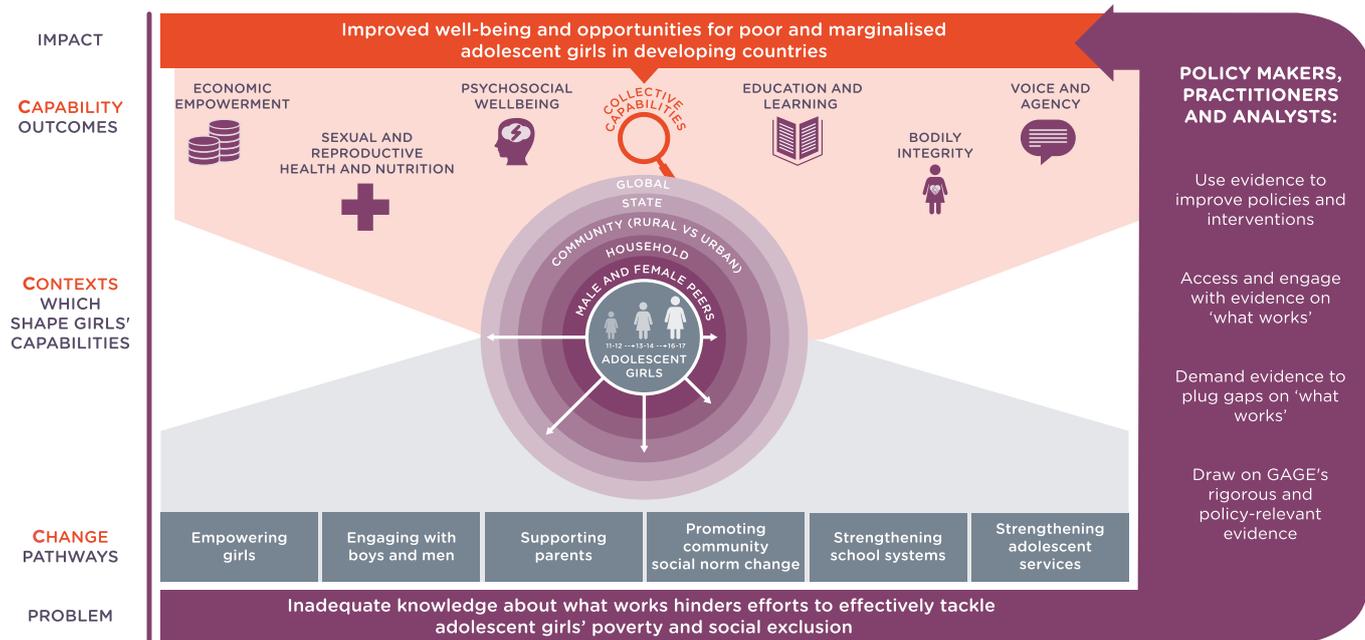
Yet social capital approaches are often conceptualised as both ‘gender blind’ and ‘age blind’, paying limited attention to gendered intra-household issues of power and hierarchy (Kilby, 2002; Norton, 2001; Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003, cited in Pruitt, 2015). As a result, we know relatively little about the patterning of social capital viewed through a gender and age lens, and particularly in the context of peacebuilding initiatives. Accounting for gender, in particular, in a context-specific way, is likely to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of projects that aim to support and encourage equal youth participation in peacebuilding (Pruitt, 2015). Schuller et al. (2000) also noted, however, that because social capital is often associated with strong norms, mores and trust, an unintended effect might be social exclusion inside of the group.<sup>3</sup>

To assess the effects of peacebuilding projects that aim to increase adolescents’ social capital, our conceptual framework uses a capability-based approach originally championed by Amartya Sen (1984, 2004, cited in GAGE Consortium, 2017). The approach was subsequently nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels by Marta Nussbaum (2011, in GAGE Consortium, 2017) and Naila Kabeer (2003, in GAGE Consortium, 2017) (see Figure 1).

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<sup>3</sup> Social capital scholars, for example, noted potential downsides, including fostering and imitating harmful intra-group behaviour, which can worsen access to resources, exclude members in the group or community from upward mobility or social inclusion, and facilitate negative behaviour (e.g. crime, educational underachievement, and health-damaging behaviour such as smoking and drinking) (Aldridge et al., 2002).

Figure 1: GAGE's 3Cs conceptual framework: capability, context, change pathways



Source: GAGE Conceptual Framework, GAGE Consortium 2017

# 3 Methodology

The research team engaged with young people who had taken part in two Search projects designed to build social cohesion among refugee and host populations (see Table 1). The team worked with young women and men who were either still taking part in or had 'graduated' from these projects to measure the effects of the interventions (e.g. skill-building, social cohesion, conflict prevention and peace, psychosocial support and gender equality). Our research methodology takes into account Search's guiding principles on young people's participation in peacebuilding: participation, diversity, gender, leadership, safety and involvement (Search for Common Ground, 2017).

To understand the short- and medium-term effects of the projects, the team applied an adapted 'most significant change' (MSC) technique. MSC is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that was developed to collect and systematically analyse significant changes as experienced by project participants (Davies, 1996, in Davies and Dart, 2005).<sup>4</sup> It is a dialogical, story-based technique, which facilitates project improvement by focusing activities towards explicitly valued directions and away from less valued directions (ibid.). The stories collected from participants are discussed with stakeholders and together, the most significant change is determined. The team used three research tools to apply the adapted MSC methodology: key informant interviews with project implementers; participatory timelines with project participants and parents (see Figure 2); and a feedback meeting with the project management team (see final sample in Table 2).<sup>5</sup>

The research focused on Search's Better Together project, which ran from 2014 to 2016, and the FURSA project, which started in January 2017 and was still ongoing at the time of the research (for more details, see Table 1). Both projects aimed to increase social cohesion between Syrian and Palestinian refugee communities and the Lebanese host community. Design of the FURSA: Resilient Communities (FURSA) project was informed by learning from the earlier Better Together project (whose full title was Better Together: A Youth-Led Approach to Peaceful Coexistence). In the mid-term evaluation of Better Together (2015), it became clear that participants wanted a focus on economic opportunities, so Search incorporated socioeconomic empowerment activities in the FURSA project.

Research was conducted with FURSA project participants in Berqayel (Akkar) and Joub Jenine (Bekaa), and with participants who had completed the Better Together project in Beirut, Saida (South), and Baalbek (Bekaa). Although the sites were purposefully chosen (as they were the areas where project activities had been implemented), it is useful to note that in the Government of Lebanon's Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2016–2020, Bekaa and Akkar were cited as among the most vulnerable, poor, and under-served communities hosting the largest number of refugees (373,124), followed by Beirut (314,731).

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4 To date, the technique has been used for the evaluation of international development programmes (see, for example, Kraft and Prytherch's evaluation on Capoeira4Refugees in the Middle East in 2016), after having been initially developed for the evaluation of a social development programme in Bangladesh (Davies and Dart, 2005).

5 The timeline tool (Jones et al., 2017) provided opportunities for adolescents and their parents in refugee and host community settings to articulate their perspectives and experiences in a fun and interactive manner; the key informant interviews ensured that the research findings were situated, by including adults and other key stakeholders.

**Table 1: Comparing the Better Together and FURSA projects**

Indicator	Project	
	Better Together: A youth-led approach to peaceful coexistence	FURSA: Resilient communities
Number of participants	320	600
Number of girls	Year 1: Bekaa: 55 girls. South: 32 girls. Year 2: Bekaa: 50 girls. South: 36 girls.	Akkar, 66% Lebanese (23% male and 77% female) and 34% Syrians (57% male and 43% female) and for Bekaa, 52% Lebanese (39% male and 61% female) and 48% Syrians (79% male and 21% female).
Number of boys	Year 1: Bekaa: 70 boys. South: 54 boys. Year 2: Bekaa: 70 boys. South: 51 boys.	
Age groups	15–25 years old	14–27 years old
Nationalities	Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese	Lebanese and Syrian
Geographical reach	North Bekaa (Ein, Hermel, Baalbek, Bednaye) and the South (Saida, Nabatieh, Sour, Jezzine)	Akkar (Berqayel), Bekaa (Joub Janine)
Number of facilities	8 professional artists – one Syrian and one Lebanese per course	6 professional artists and 6 trainers, half Lebanese, half Syrians
Type of speciality	Skilled media and art professionals	Skilled artists, radio, and professional social leadership trainers
Age facilitators	Around 25–40 years old	Around 25–45 years old
Activities	Summer camps, workshops, final events, closing ceremony	Workshops, summer camp, reunion days, final events, community initiatives
Donor	European Union – European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)	European Union – Madad /Regional EU Trust Fund
Partners	Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA) /Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST) (local partners)	Coordinamento delle Prganizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario (COSV), Un Ponte Per (UPP), International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) (regional consortium partners); Al Hadatha, Sada Al Bekaa (local partners)
Overall aim	Social cohesion, youth leadership, conflict transformation	Social cohesion, increased psychosocial well-being, socioeconomic empowerment
Timeline	Year 1: One summer camp in each region (summer 2014); follow-up workshops in 8 communities; final events in 8 communities. Year 2: One camp in each region (summer 2015); follow-up workshops in 8 communities; final events in 8 communities; end ceremony in Beirut (mid-April 2016)	Year 1 and 2: Training of artists and trainers (January 2017); open days in partners centres; 10 workshops and related activities; summer camps (one in each region, July–August 2017); reunion days; community initiatives; final events
Frequency	Artistic workshops were held approximately once a month, and the partners were organising life skills workshops in between	Workshops are held every two weeks. Each summer camp lasts 1 week
Parental involvement	Parents attended the final events in each community	Parents attended the ‘talent show’ on the last night of the summer camps and the final regional events
Community involvement	Wider community attended the final events in each community	Community consultations conducted by the social leadership participants; radio broadcasting; community initiatives, wider community attended the final regional events
M&E data available	Baseline; mid-term; end evaluation, pre-/post- tests, evaluations, partners/artists/trainers reports, activity reports and project’s monthly journal, retention, and participants’ observation database	Baseline, mid-term reflection, end evaluation, pre-/post- tests, evaluations, partners/artists/trainers reports, activity reports and project’s monthly journal, retention, and participants’ observation database
Curriculum used?	Artists’ curriculum, partners’ curriculum, Search’s peacebuilding and arts for peacebuilding curriculum	Search for Common Ground Approach, trainers’ and artists’ curriculum

Figure 2: Timeline made by an adolescent girl involved in the FURSA project

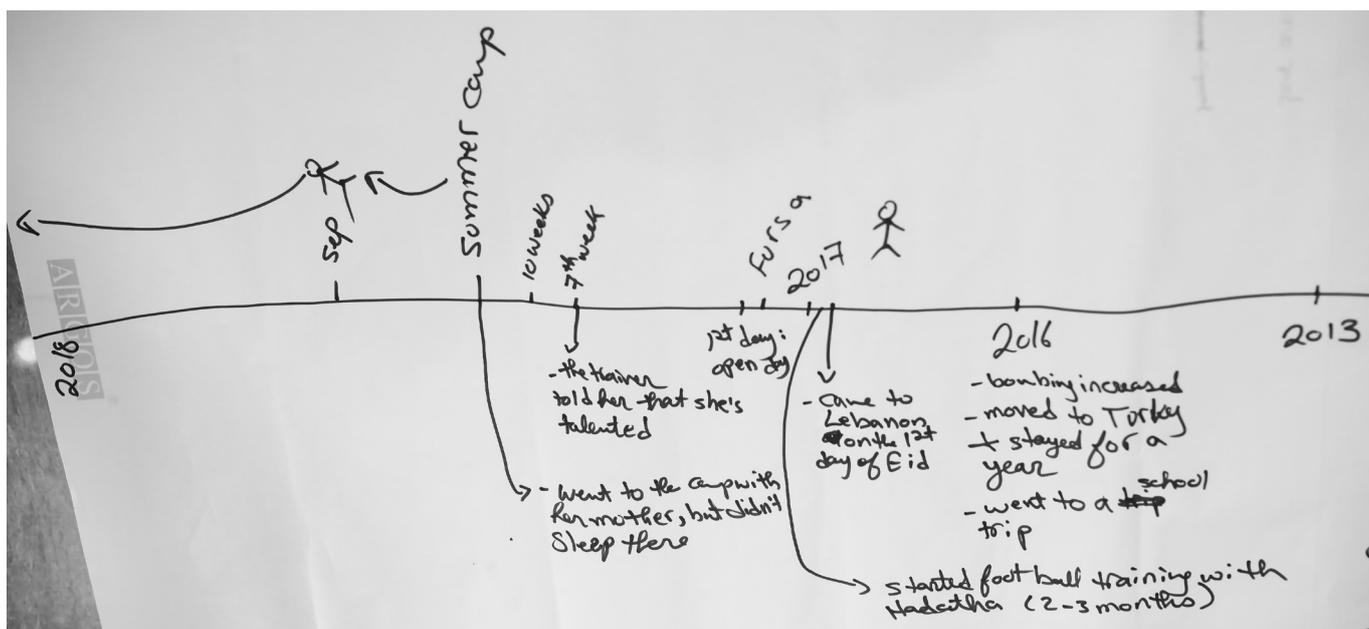


Table 2: Final sample

Project	Site	Key informant interview (KII) with project implementers	In-depth interview (IDI) with adolescent		IDI with parent	Feedback meeting (with 8 participants)	Total
			F	M			
Better Together	Bekaa	4	3	3	3	0	11
	Saida	1	3	4	1	0	9
	Beirut	6	0	0	0	1	14
FURSA	Akkar	2	6	4	9	0	21
	Bekaa	5	2	2	6	0	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>70</b>

# 4 Adolescent experiences and most significant changes

This section discusses our key findings on the short-term and medium-term legacy effects of Search's peacebuilding activities from the perspective of adolescents, adults and project implementers involved in the projects. The outcomes are structured around the two key capability areas – psychosocial well-being, and voice and agency – with spillover effects (see boxes 3 and 4) into the other capability domains (employment and education) as set out in the GAGE conceptual framework (Figure 1).

## 4.1 Psychosocial well-being

The psychosocial capability domain is concerned with adolescents' sense of self and ability to set their own goals and demonstrate resilience in the face of setbacks. It recognises the importance of both internal emotional capacity and external social support (GAGE Consortium, 2017). Given that the baseline situations of the different groups of adolescents involved in the FURSA and Better Together projects were significantly different, we compared the experiences of adolescents of different nationalities and genders (see Table 3 for a summary of project effects).

### Syrian refugee adolescent boys: from trauma to relief

In terms of their backgrounds prior to project participation, Syrian refugee boys in both projects reported trauma due to exposure to physical violence, including bombing and torture. Others reported witnessing the death of family members and friends: *'He was walking on the street and was shot by a bullet'* (Syrian boy, 17, Bekaa, FURSA project). Some spoke about losing their possessions and of hazardous journeys to Lebanon: *'Our house was burned in the last battle... we left Aleppo running away from war and looking for peace'* (Syrian boy, 18, Bekaa, FURSA project). Many families were already impoverished and suffering from food insecurity before arriving in Lebanon: *'Everyone was scared of the war and stopped working'* (Syrian boy, 18, Baalbek, Better Together project).

Upon arrival in Lebanon, the situation was often challenging: *'We came here and there was nothing'* (Syrian boy, 16, Akkar, FURSA project). Boys also mentioned difficulties in enrolling in school, as the system only allows a person to register if they have their previous exam certificates: *'You need papers; you need papers'* (Syrian

**Table 3: Short- and medium-term legacy effects – psychosocial well-being**

Type of participant	Short-term effects (adolescents' views)	Medium-term effects (adolescents' views)
Timepoint	FURSA reflections during implementation, retrospective perceptions on Better Together	Better Together reflections post-endline
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to rare, structured recreational and educational activities, which built skills that adolescents perceived as useful, increased their self-confidence and related feelings of happiness</li> <li>• Increased access to recreational activities that facilitated access to peers and adult role models</li> <li>• Changed negative behaviour towards adolescents from different backgrounds, leading to adolescents feeling more accepted by society</li> <li>• Feeling more valued by members of the household because of new skills and changed behaviour also helped increase confidence and psychosocial well-being</li> <li>• Not all adults had changed their behaviour and spillover effects to other 'spaces' that adolescent frequented were limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued access to a supportive peer network of adolescents from very different backgrounds (often via social media and telephone because of limited money for transport (boys and girls) and restrictive social norms (girls))</li> <li>• A continued positive and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, actively combating discrimination</li> <li>• Because there were few opportunities to meet up after the project, some friendships did not survive distance and time</li> <li>• Some adolescents were disappointed that they were not able to practise the skills they had learned during the project due to limited equipment available (e.g. lack of camera equipment in some communities)</li> </ul>

Type of participant	Short-term effects (adolescents' views)	Medium-term effects (adolescents' views)
Timepoint	FURSA reflections during implementation, retrospective perceptions on Better Together	Better Together reflections post-endline
Additional, specific effects		
Lebanese girls and boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased happiness due to access to extra-curricular recreational activities outside of the household that are often not available through school or in the community</li> <li>Not all adults and peers respected participants' new interactions with adolescents from different nationalities (as dissatisfaction with the struggle around resources is still fresh in the minds of many adults in host communities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built hard and soft skills, which increased their confidence and profile in searching for jobs after high school or university</li> <li>Some adolescents expressed disappointment when they were not always able to practise the skills (photography, drama, etc.) they had learned during the project to gain formal jobs</li> </ul>
Palestine-Lebanese and Palestine-Syrian refugee adolescent boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relief from a very challenging home situation, often living in camps and facing an uncertain future; project activities had very positive effects on adolescent self-assessed psychosocial well-being</li> <li>Relief from discrimination from the host community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned coping strategies to handle challenging situations around restricted mobility, depression and other setbacks in life (in particular Palestine-Syrian girls)</li> <li>Project participation did not often lead to the much hoped for increased income-generating opportunities – which decreased the support from some parents (for example: a few fathers reporting that sons had been 'wasting their time with play things', which in turn led to shame on the part of boys for being 'childish and selfish')</li> </ul>
Palestine-Lebanese and Palestine-Syrian refugee adolescent girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relief from a very challenging home situation, often living in camps, and facing an uncertain future; project activities had very positive effects on adolescent self-assessed psychosocial well-being</li> <li>Relief from discrimination from the host community</li> <li>Increased happiness due to access to extra-curricular recreational activities outside of the household, whereas their mobility was otherwise restricted by social norms</li> <li>Not all adult and adolescent members of the wider community supported adolescents' changed views around interacting with adolescents from the opposite sex, which in some cases led to participants dropping out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned coping strategies to handle challenging situations around restricted mobility, depression and other setbacks in life</li> <li>Support from adults in the family for adolescent girls' dreams and support for increased mobility, interaction with peers and access to informal education slowly decreased over time, which had a negative impact on girls' psychosocial well-being and represented a challenge for the project</li> </ul>
Syrian boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relief from a very challenging home situation, with adolescent and family often having experienced war-related violence</li> <li>Relief from discrimination by members of the host community resulted in increased happiness and improved psychosocial status</li> <li>Access to skill-building and education that is often not available in the regular school system</li> <li>Not all adult and adolescent members of the wider community supported adolescents' changed views around interacting with adolescents from the opposite sex</li> <li>Confusion of some boys about experiences interacting with adolescent girls in the project due to strong social norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned coping strategies to handle challenging situations around restricted mobility, depression and other setbacks in life</li> <li>Even if the project did not aim to increase employment, some participants reported disappointment (from self and adults) when project participation did not lead to increased income</li> </ul>

Type of participant	Short-term effects (adolescents' views)	Medium-term effects (adolescents' views)
Timepoint	FURSA reflections during implementation, retrospective perceptions on Better Together	Better Together reflections post-endline
Syrian girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relief from a very challenging home situation following experience of war-related violence</li> <li>• Access to structured activities that built skills which girls perceived as useful increased their self-confidence and related feelings of happiness and satisfaction</li> <li>• Increased peer network whereas they previously had very limited mobility due to restrictive social norms</li> <li>• Feeling more valued by members of the household because of skills built and changed behaviours</li> <li>• Changed negative behaviours towards adolescents from different backgrounds made adolescents feel more accepted by society</li> <li>• Non-supportive reactions from some adults and peers (not part of the project) in the wider community around interacting with adolescent boys, which led to some girls being prevented from attending project activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learned coping strategies to handle challenging situations around restricted mobility, depression and other setbacks in life</li> <li>• Support from adults in the family for adolescent girls' dreams and support for increased mobility, interaction with peers and access to informal education would often decrease over time, which had a negative impact on girls' overall psychosocial well-being</li> </ul>

boy, 20, Akkar, FURSA project). Many Syrian refugees reported having lost these documents when fleeing the violence. Others mentioned abuse by Lebanese employers when working illegally: *'He didn't pay us [after three months of work]. He said, "if you come back and ask for money I will tell the police". And our residency permit was expired'* (Syrian boy, 19, Baalbek, Better Together project).<sup>6</sup> Others reported experiencing discrimination from host communities: *'Whenever they see a Syrian they used to tease him'* (Syrian boy, 18, Akkar, FURSA project). Others reported facing discrimination from fellow students in the double-shift school system: *'They accused me of terrorism. They verbally abused me and it affected my health'* (Syrian boy, 21, Saida, Better Together project). Many hoped they would be able to return to Syria: *'... keep hoping that this month we will go back'* (Syrian boy, 16, Bekaa, FURSA project), and started to become even more depressed once they realised that this was not an option.

Given these challenging and often traumatic circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that many adolescent boys in both projects reported suffering from depression: *'I hate my life'; 'I was lost'* (Syrian adolescent boys, Bekaa, FURSA project). This was particularly the case among FURSA participants, as many had only recently arrived in Lebanon. This was also confirmed by

project facilitators, who suspected that some boys were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet many adolescent boys underscored the dearth of support systems available to them because of their displacement: *'We were new in this country. We had to start to build relationships with the people'* (Syrian boy, 20, Baalbek, Better Together project). Parents of Syrian adolescents were also troubled, which decreased their ability to care for their children adequately. As one mother explained: *'I left my house [crying]. My children didn't go out before, it was very hard on them. They were new here and they didn't know anyone. All we remember now are the hardships'* (Syrian mother, Akkar, FURSA project).

Being part of a social cohesion project such as Better Together or FURSA and participating in structured activities helped boys in our sample to cope with their new reality, giving them a sense of purpose, building their self-esteem and resilience, and providing them with a peer network. Boys also reported being able to interact with members of the host community without discrimination: *'They immediately accepted me'* (Syrian boy, 18, Saida, Better Together project), which helped increase their feelings of acceptance and self-esteem. In the project, they felt part of a wider support group, which helped them to develop a strong sense of acceptance and motivation

<sup>6</sup> Syrian refugees reported that they had to pay a \$200 annual renewal fee for their resident permit in Lebanon. This cost was often not affordable. Without residency papers, they are illegal citizens and, as such, vulnerable to abuse by employers – i.e. not being able to complain to the police (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2016). The renewal fee was subsequently (February 2017) waived by the Lebanese government (HRW, 2017).

for change: *'It was the first time I did not experience discrimination'* (Syrian boy, 18, Baalbek, Better Together project). This in turn helped them develop a more positive outlook for the future.

Parents also reported being extremely happy with project activities as it provided their children with: *'... the simplest things they need [in a time like this], like education and fun'* (Syrian mother, 33, Akkar, FURSA project). The same mother reported seeing changes in her children: *'Their personality changed for the better'*.

### Syrian refugee adolescent girls: increased mobility and self-esteem

Syrian adolescent girls most often mentioned the effects of the interventions on their psychosocial well-being, especially due to the restrictions they otherwise faced in terms of their mobility at home, at school and in the wider community: *'I was just at home taking care of my sisters. I was very lonely and sad the whole time'* (Syrian girl, 16, Akkar, FURSA project). Many Syrian girls mentioned rarely leaving their house prior to taking part in the project: *'My parents did not let me out that much. It is not our country ... There are guys who get attached to girls and there's no safety'* (Syrian girl, 17, Akkar, FURSA project). Adolescent girls compared themselves to their more liberal Lebanese peers: *'It is the norm in Syria for the girls to learn cooking and stay at home'* (Syrian girl, 17, Akkar, FURSA project).

Many Syrian girls reported not having access to friends outside of formal structures (such as school) and reported not attending other formal services. Those who were only in informal education projects highlighted their short duration: *'It was for a month, I missed my friends a lot'* (Syrian girl, 17, Akkar, FURSA project). Most girls reported not having friends or peers to confide in – only female family members.

Not having access to peers and recreational activities further increased girls' tensions and trauma linked to experiences of wartime violence, which ranged from witnessing violent acts to being injured themselves. Adolescents reported also being concerned over the safety of their family members: *'My brother is a military man and he was serving up north in the empty lands. The war got close to us'* (Syrian girl, 18, Baalbek, Better Together project). As a result, most parents reported witnessing a change in their child immediately after coming to Lebanon: *'She was the opposite, she didn't leave her room, she*

*isolated herself from the world. Her physiological status affected her a lot'* (Syrian mother, Akkar, FURSA project).

Perceptions of refugees among host communities were also difficult for traumatised adolescent girls, with bullying in the double-shift school system reported to be common: *'I hated school. I didn't have friends'* (Syrian girl, 16, Akkar, FURSA project). Being part of the project helped girls *'believe in myself and the future again'* (ibid.). The project encouraged girls to explore their own interests and identities, which in turn increased their self-confidence and resilience. They marvelled at their newly acquired skills and the effect on their well-being: *'Before, I was really depressed, now I am proud'* (Syrian girl, 19, Akkar, FURSA project). The projects enabled adolescent girls to confront their trauma in a safe and conducive environment. One girl explained that the Better Together project helped create an environment in which adolescents felt free to be and to express themselves: *'It changed me. It took me out of a depression and out of a hostile environment. We really thought the Lebanese and the Syrians hated each other but it is the opposite'* (Syrian girl, 21, Saida, Better Together project). The same was true for FURSA participants: *'In the [summer] camp we became all together'* (Syrian girl, 18, Bekaa, FURSA project).

### Lebanese adolescents: coping with a 'hateful' environment, becoming courageous

The situation of Lebanese adolescents was significantly different. While they had not typically witnessed war-related crimes, they reported worries about their future career and employment: *'She was so upset, she thought she couldn't find work'* (father of Lebanese adolescent girl, Better Together project). Other adolescents mentioned feeling *'stressed'* because of their father's unemployment: *'The Syrians stole all the jobs'* (Lebanese girl, 20, Baalbek). In some research sites, adolescents also mentioned feeling unsafe in the community because of the refugee influx and previous wars/conflicts: *'The Syrians hurt us, so I always feel there is something'* (Lebanese girl, 19, Baalbek, Better Together project); *'...because when the Syrian army entered Lebanon they kidnapped my grandfather. So, I don't really like to socialise with them'*. One Lebanese adolescent (an outlier) reported having witnessed the death of a family member in Lebanon due to violence that erupted as opponents and supporters of the Syrian rebels travelled to Lebanon and fought each other on Lebanese soil.

Lebanese adolescent girls and boys alike indicated that they enrolled in the project because there were so few opportunities for recreational and skill-building activities available to them. The effects of both projects were strongly highlighted by adolescents and particularly by adolescent girls, who reported becoming more ‘*courageous*’. Parents also commented that adolescents valued the social network provided by the project. Having more friends also reportedly increased adolescents’ well-being as they gained access to peer support: *‘My friends help me when I am sad. They are from Syria and Lebanon. It does not matter’* (Lebanese boy, 19, Bekaa, FURSA project); *‘[we] were united ... got along ... [the project] gave us the chance to get to know each other’* (Lebanese girl, 15, Akkar, FURSA project).

Adolescent boys also added that their individual perceptions about peers from other nationalities had permanently changed and that they did their best to speak up when others expressed discriminatory views: *‘I really became convinced that stereotypes against Syrians are wrong’* (Lebanese boy, 19, Bekaa, FURSA project).

### **Palestine-Lebanese and Palestine-Syrian refugee adolescents: living in camps – a stressful experience**

Palestinian refugee adolescent boys who had been living in Lebanon for a long time compared themselves more with Lebanese boys than Syrian boys (*‘we are the same’*, Palestinian young man, 20, Saida, Better Together project) but mentioned facing unique challenges because of living in camps. Palestinian boys from Syria found themselves with a split identity, often reporting feeling more ‘Syrian’ than ‘Palestinian’. Palestinian refugees from Lebanon also indicated that they had had limited opportunities to interact with peers prior to the project. One girl indicated they would only meet each other during protests: *‘when the camp was under siege and there was hunger, and that was how we got to know each other’* (Palestinian young woman, 20, Saida, Better Together project). Being involved in the project gave them a better understanding of their Lebanese and Syrian peers: *‘... got to know that we are all the same and we suffer from the same’* (Palestinian young woman, 21, Saida, Better Together project).

## **4.2 Voice and agency**

The voice and agency capability domain focuses on the ability of adolescent girls to meaningfully participate in household, school and community life – which is key to

them developing the skills required for civic participation in adulthood (GAGE Consortium, 2017). Again, given that the baseline situations of the different groups of adolescents involved in the research were so different, we compared the experiences of adolescents of different nationalities and genders (see Table 4 for a summary of effects).

### **Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese girls: the ability to decide, and having a social network**

Syrian adolescent girls reported not having much decision-making power in their household and in the wider community. While participating in the FURSA project, however, dynamics shifted, as one 18-year-old Syrian girl (Bekaa) indicated: *‘When we first got here we were given the opportunity to choose which course we want. I was so happy that someone cared about me’*. Lebanese girls also appreciated being consulted, and reported that as a result, they felt confident in making their own decisions: *‘I feel the confidence in myself when I take my own decisions without taking my parents’ opinion into consideration and my decision turns to be right, and it also shows in the way I talk to people now’* (Lebanese girl, 15, Akkar, FURSA project).

Adolescent girls and their caregivers also reported that the projects had spillover effects on other areas of their lives (see boxes 2 and 3). One Syrian mother said her 19-year-old daughter had previously been too scared to go to the hospital alone: *‘She refused to go alone, I had to always go with her to the doctor’*. After being involved in the FURSA project: *‘Now, she goes, her courage is different. It benefited her so now she goes alone’*. Adolescent girls also reported having greater decision-making power about their education. As one girl said: *‘I thought I should speak up and express that I refuse this. I told them that I am comfortable in this school and I don’t want to move to another school’* (Syrian girl, 14, Akkar, FURSA project). The effects of the FURSA project were magnified among girls from conservative families, who often had very limited decision-making power to begin with.

Adolescent girls involved in the Better Together project mentioned that they had formed long-term relationships with peers with whom they were still in touch: *‘We always chat via WhatsApp or voice record and see each other once a month’* (Lebanese girl, 20, Baalbek, Better Together project). Having a social support network of adolescents of the same age was the most significant project impact, according to the girls. They reported having developed

**Table 4: Short- and medium-term legacy effects – voice and agency**

Type	Short-term effects (adolescents' views)	Medium-term effects (adolescents' views)
Measuring point	Better Together project – retrospective reflections FURSA project – current reflections during implementation	Better Together project – current reflections post-endline project
All Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased access to a supportive network of boys and girls and trusted adult role models who demonstrate alternative gender roles</li> <li>• Increased understanding of the experiences and perspectives of members of the opposite sex on key issues around adolescence and life</li> <li>• Increased communication skills</li> <li>• Increased information and knowledge on life skills around relationships and love due to spending time with peers</li> <li>• Changes in behaviour towards members of the opposite sex, members of different layers of society and different nationalities</li> <li>• Increased acceptance and confidence has led to increased agency, negotiation skills and hence decision-making power about day-to-day decisions.</li> <li>• Whereas adolescents were able to demonstrate increased agency in the project and, in some cases, in the household, they were not always able to adopt alternative attitudes around gender and anti-discrimination with all adults in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued access to information and increased knowledge on life skills around relationships and love because of ongoing friendships (mainly through social media and via telephone)</li> <li>• Continued (albeit limited) access to adult guidance and positive role models through social media, engagement with project facilitators and Search staff</li> <li>• Continued changed perceptions (and, at times, behaviours) towards members of the opposite sex, members of different layers of society and different nationalities</li> <li>• Most adults' perceptions around age and ability had not changed during the project and these perceptions, attitudes and behaviours continued to restrict adolescents' agency</li> <li>• As such, not all adolescents were able to continue to adopt alternative attitudes around nationality and gender-based discrimination, given their limited decision-making power in society (largely due to their life stage being accorded less importance)</li> </ul>
Palestine-Lebanese, Syrian refugee and Lebanese boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys were exposed to positive gender roles that helped them speak out to support the girls in the project</li> <li>• Increased understanding of the experiences and perspectives of members of the opposite sex on key issues around adolescence and life</li> <li>• Boys were not always able to speak out against all adults in their society because of age-based discrimination against adolescents (all) and strict social norms around gender (in particular for Syrian and Palestine-Syrian boys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained positive and tolerant behaviour towards members of the opposite sex, and peers from different social classes and nationalities</li> <li>• Limited work and income-generating opportunities after the project ended have restricted the (financial) independence and therefore agency of adolescent boys</li> <li>• Being dependent on key adults because of the challenging economic situation and high unemployment rates meant that adolescents could not always continue to demonstrate alternative attitudes</li> </ul>
Palestine-Lebanese, Syrian refugee and Lebanese girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the project, girls were able to decide on issues (e.g. which activity to do, when, with whom, where and how) whereas normally they would not be able to make such decisions without consulting their male relatives (particularly the case for girls from conservative families; less so for Lebanese girls)</li> <li>• They also had increased access to a male peer support network; boys would sometimes stand up for girls' rights and defend their ability to act in some circumstances</li> <li>• Girls were not always able to speak out to all adults in their household, community or the wider society because of age and gender-based discrimination (and, for some, nationality-based discrimination)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased understanding of the experiences and perspectives of members of the opposite sex on key issues around adolescence and life</li> <li>• More self-esteem and confidence, which gave girls stronger negotiation skills to advocate for issues important to them – e.g. education</li> <li>• Social norms and adults' perceptions had not changed as a result of the project and continued to restrict adolescent girls' agency</li> <li>• Being dependent on key adults (because of the challenging economic situation), alongside restrictive gender norms, meant that adolescent girls could not always continue to demonstrate alternative attitudes they had adopted as a result of participating in the project</li> </ul>

### Box 2: Spillover effects - employment

Employment or economic empowerment was not an explicit aim of Search's Better Together project. However, adolescents that had been involved in the project stressed the importance of receiving support to gain financial independence from their parents. It was because of this learning that livelihoods were integrated as an explicit objective in the subsequent FURSA project. The livelihood components were spearheaded and managed by a partner organisation, Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario (COSV). By the time of this research, these activities had not yet commenced.

However, participants of both projects (FURSA and Better Together) described positive spillover effects, particularly on their employment prospects. All male participants highlighted that the project had provided them with a network that could potentially help them find employment. They also indicated that the skills they had learned (e.g. conflict resolution, theatre, photography, etc.) could be useful in finding work at a later stage.

However, boys who graduated from the project noted that they were not able to apply the skills they had learned and had not been able to find jobs thus far. This is an important limitation, as Syrian male adolescents in particular had hoped that participating in the project would help them find work, even if this was not an explicit project aim. Many participants were thus somewhat disappointed with the value of the skills gained. Not being able to practise the skills they had learned also caused participants' parents to reconsider the usefulness of the project. As one young man indicated: *'My father now says [about his photography] that I am wasting my time'* (Syrian male, 23, Baalbek).

Girls, by contrast, put less emphasis on the economic benefits of project participation because they were aware of the very limited employment opportunities open to them, linked to the restrictions placed on them by social norms: *'Your husband might not allow you that [to work outside the home]'* (Syrian mother of a 15-year-old girl, Akkar).

### Box 3: Spillover effects - education

Adolescents also reported various spillover effects of the projects on their formal education. Syrian boys and girls benefited from the conflict-sensitive training when dealing with discriminatory comments at school at the changeover between the first and second shifts. Lebanese adolescents reported being more sensitive to the feelings of other students because of what they had learned during the projects. In this sense, the projects supported the creation and maintenance of an enabling and peaceful schooling environment.

Adolescent boys also reported that the project made them *'less annoying'* (Lebanese boy, Baalbek, Better Together) and more collaborative with the teachers, as well as performing better in school tasks. As one adolescent boy from Lebanon indicated: *'I used to hate it when my teachers asked me to give a presentation in class. I used to look at them and say "no please"'* (Lebanese boy, 16, Bekaa, FURSA project). Now, he explained that he enjoyed presenting his ideas to a group. He attributed this personal development completely to the FURSA project.

Girls also reported being: *'too shy when the teachers ask me to talk or do something'; 'my voice was so low. It was!'* The projects helped them to be more confident, which had improved their school performance (Lebanese girl, 15, Bekaa, FURSA project).

stronger emotional intelligence and communications skills, which meant they were able to connect and foster positive relationships with peers. Girls also reported having developed strong and supportive relationships with peers from all different nationalities and ages, as well as with boys: *'We even took on each other's accents'* (Lebanese girl, 15, Akkar, FURSA project). They commented that the project activities had helped them resolve conflicts with peers in a peaceful manner, countering prejudices, and reported greater empathy for others.

Finally, girls reported that they were able to access more information, and different types of information, than before the project, which included gaining information from peers about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and romantic relationships.

### Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese boys: exercising their voice and agency

Given that adolescent boys often already had more opportunity than girls to make decisions in their household, school and community life, they did not discuss frustration with lack of decision-making power as often as girls did. Boys did, however, note that they do not always enjoy decision-making power within their family: *'My father does not listen to me... he says I don't know about things because of my age'* (Lebanese boy, 17, Bekaa, FURSA project). Yet boys in both projects indicated that the activities had had a positive impact on how they were perceived and supported, within their families and in other personal relationships. Parents noticed the positive changes in

their children's conduct and were impressed with the skills they had developed. As a result, some parents became more emotionally supportive towards their children: *'He became a different person ... I am so proud'* (mother of an adolescent Syrian boy, Akkar, FURSA project).

Adolescent boys involved in the FURSA project also reported having a stronger belief in the abilities of their female peers: *'I got to know girls and learned that they were also able to do things just as good as boys and sometimes even better'* (Syrian boy, 18, Bekaa, FURSA project). This statement also represented the views of participants in the Better Together project. According to girls and boys, this was a significant success of the projects, as it encouraged adolescent boys to use their voice in the community to stick up for girls' capabilities. Male beneficiaries respected girls' rights to explore their own interests and identities and to build resilience within the safe space of the project.

Running project activities with mixed-gender groups was, however, confusing for some of the boys involved – particularly those from very conservative backgrounds: *'But it is "haram" [forbidden] ... if it was not for religion I would want to interact with them more'* (Syrian boy, 18, Bekaa, FURSA project). The projects also gave boys a chance to test out 'different' behaviours that were not always accepted by other (more conservative) members of the wider community. For example, a facilitator in Akkar told the story of a participant who had initially refused to let his fiancée go to university as he didn't want her to *'be around males'*. After the project had begun, he decided to let her go.

### Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents: access to information is useful for the future

Adolescents from across the different nationality and age/gender groups reported that both projects had helped them access diverse means of obtaining information that they wanted in their daily lives. They mentioned speaking with their friends in the workshop about issues that mattered to them (also around romantic relationships, love, and SRH issues).

When the Better Together project ended, participants kept in touch via social media (WhatsApp and Facebook groups). Two years on, they still had contact with their peers: *'When I am in trouble ... I call my friends from the project. The other day my car broke down. They came to my rescue'* (Syrian boy, 21, Baalbek, Better Together project). Adolescents indicated that they also keep in

touch with the project facilitators and often use the social network they gained during the project when looking for jobs or opportunities: *'I gained a network ... the facilitators, they now let me know about jobs'* (Palestinian boy, 21, Saida, Better Together project).

### Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents: role models that demonstrate positive gender roles

Adolescents also indicated that the projects helped them connect with role models who demonstrated different ways of behaving that are distinct from conventional restrictive and discriminatory gender roles. Facilitators of the art sessions, for instance, played a key role in supporting adolescents to begin to negotiate change as adolescents reported looking up to the facilitators on account of their skills: *'Each one of the teachers who were training us knew how to play an instrument'* (Lebanese girl, 21, Baalbek, Better Together project). Adolescents also appreciated the interest facilitators took in participants' individual and group concerns. Because of the level of trust and respect the facilitators had gained, they were able to have a positive impact on the adolescents involved in the project.

Adolescents also reported that facilitators often played a useful role in negotiating participation with their parents (see also case study); *'I made teacher [name] talk with her, and that's how she was convinced'* (Syrian girl, 15, Bekaa). This was particularly important for some Syrian girls who had been on the brink of dropping out of the project due to restrictive social norms, as the following quotes illustrate:

*'My father didn't allow it because the groups are mixed.'*  
(Syrian girl, 15, Bekaa, FURSA project)

*'She dropped out because she had personal problems with her parents. They didn't like for her to be outside for too long or to be in the same class with boys.'*  
(FURSA coordinator)

*'I wasn't ready to put my daughters in a mixed group.'*  
(Mother of a Syrian girl, 15, Bekaa, FURSA project)

### Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese families: civic engagement, vertical relationships

As the case study shows, securing wider community acceptance of the changed perceptions of adolescents involved in the project was a significant challenge. When adolescents from particularly conservative backgrounds (especially those from rural areas in Syria) showed up with friends of the opposite sex, they encountered resistance.

As one participant indicated: *'The [Palestinian] camp is not so accepting of my values'* (Palestinian refugee from Syria, 20, Saida, Better Together project). A FURSA project field officer highlights why there is still a long way to go: *'There were two girls ... their parents refused to let their girls talk to boys or even to say hello to them'*. It was difficult for adolescent girls to challenge social norms in the wider

community, particularly given that they do not have a strong voice in their family or community. Moreover, their limited opportunities to voice their views were further constrained over time due to structural realities – especially the lack of employment opportunities for young people and their ongoing financial dependence on their parents.

### Case study: Negotiating girls' participation in summer camps

Overall, inviting girls and boys to participate together in project activities proved somewhat challenging. A Search field officer in Bekaa highlighted how the 'mixing of gender' was perceived by the community in her catchment area:

*Problems started after the mobilisation. We started losing girls when the workshops started. We had lots of dropouts and the biggest problem was when it was time for the summer camp ... The parents were ... you know how our society here is, with girls and young females, especially in Bekaa – they refuse to let their daughters have male friends. They don't accept this. For example, they would say "Who is that boy? Why are you saying hi to him? Why are you talking to him?" ... Do you understand what I am telling you?*

The biggest hurdle was the summer camp: 'Before we went to the summer camp, we faced a big problem with the parents. It was a seven-day camp. The parents did not want their daughter to sleep out'. Before the summer camp, Search field officers (in the FURSA project), as well as the artists and some participants who had completed the Better Together project, would spend hours in the community going house-to-house to negotiate girls' participation with parents. This approach proved effective:

*We were able to keep some girls – I'll tell you how. We knew we could convince the girls' parents to let their daughters stay in the project if she had a male sibling with her in the project. The girls' siblings were mostly younger than the girls and they attended a different workshop. We actually were in need of more participants and so the girls' younger siblings took part in the arts workshop and the girls were in different workshops.*

After the initial hurdle was overcome, parents became more cooperative:

*After the camp, this didn't happen anymore. They started to accept their daughters' male friends from the project. I know that because I used to pick them up from their houses. You feel that they are comfortable with us. They are not worried anymore ... They trusted the project after conducting several check-up visits. It created a more solid trust between the parents and their girls. This impact is very important for me.*

# 5 Conclusions and recommendations

In summary, adolescent girls and boys reported that both projects had short-term and medium-term effects on their psychosocial well-being, voice and agency, and (to some extent) on their education and employability (see Table 5).

During project implementation, adolescents cited various effects on their well-being, ranging from increased happiness, self-confidence, and increased access to a peer network to knowledge on key life transitions and coping mechanisms, increased skills (including communication skills), as well as a change towards more positive and tolerant attitudes towards adolescents from different backgrounds (be it a different gender, age or nationality). Adolescent boys also mentioned increased access to positive role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with girls and thus greater sensitivity to the needs, abilities and aspirations of their female peers. Girls, on the other hand, also mentioned having access to role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with boys. These role models (usually the project facilitators) also helped girls dream about a positive future, including one where they were able to find paid work. As a result, girls reported increased confidence, agency and decision-making power.

Although the mixed-gender, mixed-nationality groups in the projects were well received by the adolescent participants, this did present challenges for some of them at home. This was particularly the case with conservative families from rural areas of Syria. As parents were not regularly involved in the programme, these influential adult stakeholders had not necessarily changed their own perceptions and behaviour(s) about gender relations or gender equality, even if their daughter(s) and/or son(s) had. For example, it was reported that some parents pulled their daughters out of the project because of sensitivities around mixed-gender activities. Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents at times also faced a verbal backlash in their community because they began to express more tolerant behaviour towards Syrian families. Local partners played a pivotal role in obtaining parental permission for girls to attend sessions and helped to mitigate (where possible) other challenges within the community and the household.

Most project effects were still strongly noticeable even after the project had ended – in terms of participants'

greater self-confidence, increased coping mechanisms, communication skills and continued positive and tolerant attitudes. Some adolescents also mentioned that some of their friendship groups had survived distance and time. Adolescent boys demonstrated continued sensitivity to the needs, abilities and aspirations of their female peers. However, some of the project effects became weaker over time due to structural challenges around employment and the restrictions imposed on girls and boys by prevailing social norms. Adolescent girls from Syrian and Palestine-Lebanese communities, for example, mentioned not being able to do paid work due to restrictive social norms and having to marry instead. Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescent boys mentioned the challenges around finding work in a context where formal youth employment opportunities are scarce. Perhaps more importantly, some effects were consistently sustained even one or two years after project activities had ended, including having a network of peers and trusted adults, skills that could be useful in gaining future work, and a more tolerant attitude to 'others' – be they of a different gender, age or nationality. These effects could build strong leaders, ready to change societies to become more equal and peaceful.

## Recommendations

Studying the immediate and legacy effects of the Better Together and FURSA projects has provided GAGE with some interesting insights into effective programming. Organisations aiming to replicate the model employed by these peacebuilding projects should consider the following factors:

- Providing access to peers and a social support network is critical for adolescents as it provides them with the support structures needed to cope not only with changes in their lives during adolescence but also with changing contexts (in this case, due to the Syrian refugee crisis).
- Adolescents appreciated the participatory project approach, as it enabled their voices to be heard. This significantly increased their self-confidence and resilience.
- It was also important that activities matched adolescents' interests with fun and engaging

methodologies. Adolescents reported wanting to build their skills in the courses on offer and were therefore motivated to participate in project activities.

- Using young, professional and respected facilitators of different nationalities and genders who were interested in the lives of the children they were engaging with was a key factor in both projects' success. Even after the projects had ended, the facilitators still had a substantial positive impact on participants' lives, linking them with employment opportunities in their fields of interest.
- Close collaboration with local partners who had a strong grounding in the community was another factor contributing to success and sustainability. Partner organisations' ongoing efforts with communities afforded adolescents a safe space where they could meet, within and outside of the projects' activities and after the activities ended. Some of the local partners (such as DPNA) also provided job opportunities to adolescents involved in their project activities, which was seen as a huge motivator for other adolescents taking part.
- Equipping adolescents with skills so that they could share lessons learned during the projects with other adolescents, in school, in the community and in other 'spaces', was another key factor. Participants reported negotiating for inclusion for Syrian refugees, and condemned discrimination against women and girls.

Our findings point to a number of programming implications, many of which resonate with the recommendations of the young people involved in the evaluation:

- It would be worthwhile to engage with parents and local leaders to increase social cohesion between adults and to broker more gender-equal opportunities. Adolescents recommended organising activities that fit the interests of mothers and fathers, and recommended single-sex groups for activities with their parents: 'food workshops and cultural workshops for women and backgammon for men' or 'summer camp for parents'. In these groups, adolescents advised parents to be exposed to the same type of information that they were exposed to during the project.
- Adolescents also indicated that they would like to keep the programmatic groups as mixed sex but that they believe it would be useful for project implementers to have further, in-depth dialogue with parents on interaction with members of the opposite sex due to strict social norms among some groups

in the community. It is vital to discuss and monitor this process together with parents and the wider community and to ensure safeguarding practices to counter any backlash against participants, particularly among conservative communities.

- Strategies to address youth unemployment need to be integrated as a complementary programmatic activity. Although this was a lesson that emerged from the endline evaluation of the Better Together project, and was to be mitigated by collaboration with COVS, these activities had not yet been initiated at the time of our research, and only targeted a small number of beneficiaries of the overall sample. Adolescents involved in the two projects indicated that to sustain the positive effects, projects must address the main barrier to social cohesion and psychosocial well-being – unemployment or lack of other income-gaining opportunities for young people. Adolescents and youth requested support (e.g. career counselling) to help them find jobs.
- Social networks require ongoing support when bridging across diverse social groups. To sustain the friendships and social networks created by adolescents from different backgrounds, projects should plan reunion activities at set intervals, ideally with support of local partner organisations. The sessions could be centred around job creation and collaborative problem-solving, for example.
  - › Adolescents involved in the FURSA project also said that if the project were to be implemented again, it would be useful to plan the summer camps first (as was the case in Better Together but had to be postponed in FURSA), so that participants have the chance to bond strongly, and then to hold the workshop activities after.
- Investing in a robust M&E system with adequate data disaggregation is key. Organisations that are considering replicating this peacebuilding model should invest in the design and rollout of an M&E system that distinguishes between the different backgrounds of participants in an integral manner (for example, in school or out-of-school, refugee status, home situation, conservatism of family, poverty levels, etc.) to more accurately track which adolescents drop out, when, and why.
  - › It would also be important to conduct further research on the implications of running activities with mixed-sex groups for adolescents, their families and wider society.

**Table 5: Short- and medium-term legacy effects on adolescents involved in the projects**

Type	Short-term effects		Medium-term effects	
	Point of measurement: FURSA during implementation, retrospective reflections on Better Together		Point of measurement: Better Together current reflections post-endline	
	Effects on adolescents	Community support	Effects on adolescents	Community support
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to a peer network</li> <li>• Increased happiness and self-confidence</li> <li>• Knowledge on key life transitions and coping mechanisms</li> <li>• Increased skills and knowledge on their chosen subject focus and increased communication skills</li> <li>• Positive and tolerant attitudes towards adolescents of different backgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spillover effects on the wider community and adult decision-makers in the household, family and wider community included changed perceptions among some parents and peers, but not all. To ensure sustainability it is key to further broker stronger parental support for the changed perceptions of adolescents on gender equality and anti-discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued access to a peer network</li> <li>• Increased knowledge on key life transitions</li> <li>• Increased coping mechanisms</li> <li>• Increased skills and knowledge on their chosen subject focus</li> <li>• Increased communication skills</li> <li>• Continued positive and tolerant attitudes</li> <li>• Some friendships groups survived distance and time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spillover effects on the wider community and adult decision-makers in the household, family and wider community included changed perceptions among some parents and peers, but not all. To ensure sustainability it is key to further broker stronger parental support for the changed perceptions of adolescents on gender equality and anti-discrimination.</li> <li>• Unemployment was a continued challenge, with detrimental effects on the voice and agency and psychosocial well-being of adolescents</li> </ul>
Specific effects				
Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to positive role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with girls</li> <li>• Increased sensitivity to the needs, abilities and aspirations of adolescent girls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from some adults and peers for adolescents' changed attitudes and behaviours</li> <li>• Positive spillover effects on safe school environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued sensitivity to the needs, abilities and aspirations of their female peers</li> <li>• Confidence had continued to stay high</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At times, community acceptance around changed attitudes was a challenge for the projects</li> </ul>
Girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to positive role models that promoted more gender-equal relationships with boys</li> <li>• These role models also helped girls dream about a positive future, including one where girls could take up paid work</li> <li>• Girls reported increased confidence, agency and decision-making power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from some adults and peers for adolescents' changed attitudes and behaviours</li> <li>• Limited support from some adults due to mixed-sex groups, which led some to pull their daughters out of the project</li> <li>• Positive spillover effects on safe school environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued increased confidence</li> <li>• Continued sensitivity to the needs, abilities and wishes of peers from different backgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from some adults and peers for girls' changed attitudes and behaviours.</li> <li>• Challenges included medium and long-term support for greater mobility of girls (among Syrian and Palestinian communities), and unemployment (Lebanese girls)</li> </ul>

Type	Short-term effects		Medium-term effects	
	Point of measurement: FURSA during implementation, retrospective reflections on Better Together		Point of measurement: Better Together current reflections post-endline	
	Effects on adolescents	Community support	Effects on adolescents	Community support
Syrian adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased psychosocial well-being</li> <li>Increased skills and confidence</li> <li>Increased agency and decision-making power</li> <li>Some parents reported increased acceptance by host community, which helped foster a safe community and a happy home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For some girls the mixed-sex groups evoked challenges at home, which led to some adolescents dropping out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued effects of having developed coping skills, having access to a peer network within different groups of society, and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Among conservative communities, acceptance of changed attitudes towards mobility and social norms for girls was a particular challenge</li> </ul>
Palestinian adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased psychosocial well-being</li> <li>Built skills and confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For some girls the mixed-sex groups evoked challenges at home, which led to some adolescents dropping out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued effects of having developed coping skills, having access to a peer network within different groups of society, and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key challenges included medium and long-term support for greater mobility (girls) and unemployment (Palestinian boys)</li> </ul>
Lebanese adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased psychosocial well-being</li> <li>Built skills and confidence</li> <li>Because the project was perceived as an extracurricular activity, adolescent boys often reported dropping out once they had found a job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spillover effects included changed perceptions among some parents and peers. To ensure sustainability it is key to further broker the support of parents for adolescents with changed attitudes to gender equality and anti-discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional skills and network were important in the search for employment</li> <li>Access to a peer and adult network</li> <li>Continued psychosocial well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unemployment was a continued challenge, with detrimental effects on the voice and agency and psychosocial well-being of Lebanese adolescents</li> </ul>

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## **About GAGE**

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit [www.gage.odi.org.uk](http://www.gage.odi.org.uk) for more information.

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