



The Lebanese Organisation  
of Studies and Training  
الجمعية اللبنانية  
للدراستات والتدريب



# Adolescents in the abyss of Lebanon's worst economic crisis

A focus on Lebanese and Palestinian  
adolescents' education, and voice and agency

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July 2022



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# Abstract

Vulnerable Lebanese and Palestinian refugee adolescents in crisis-stricken Lebanon, amid a global pandemic, face the most enormous challenges to their education. With increasing socioeconomic vulnerabilities and shrinking opportunities, and the ever more fragile education sector, adolescents' education is increasingly at risk. In 2021, an estimated 260,000 Lebanese children and 440,000 refugee children dropped out of school.

Major insecurity and hyperinflation, within a turbulent political and socioeconomic environment, is negatively impacting adolescents' movement and their overall psychosocial well-being. Adolescents (especially girls) – who already experienced restrictions on their movement and limited access to public spaces and peer support even before the crisis – are now even more isolated. They also increasingly report feeling powerless and less hopeful of taking part in any meaningful processes to change their

lives. The crisis has increased many risks for adolescents, including gendered risks (child labour for girls and boys alike; child marriage for girls; use of violence and weapons among boys; and involvement in risky and exploitative work).

This report focuses on Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents' access to education and learning, and their opportunities to exercise voice and agency, highlighting the impact of the Lebanese crisis on their lives. It draws on findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal study, involving adolescents from Syrian and Palestinian refugee communities and vulnerable Lebanese host communities. Using interactive participatory tools, including participatory photography, GAGE aims to gain a better understanding of 'what works' to empower different groups of adolescents (especially girls) in conflict-affected contexts.

# Introduction

The current crisis in Lebanon – exacerbated by numerous factors, including the influx of Syrian refugees since 2011 and, since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic – has had a huge impact on the lives of children and adolescents across all communities. They are missing out on education and learning, with many forced to drop out of school to work to support their struggling families. In 2021, an estimated 260,000 Lebanese children and 440,000 refugee children dropped out of school (UNICEF, 2021: 6). There are also rising levels of mental distress and mental health challenges. Child labour is an increasing concern, driven in part by the growing belief that work provides more opportunities than education – a commonly held view among Palestinian refugee households and many vulnerable Lebanese boys even prior to the crisis. A survey conducted by UNICEF between April and October 2021 found that 30.6% of Palestinian households were reducing spending on their children's education in October 2021 (compared to 26.3% in April), and 12% were sending their children to work (compared to 9% in April) as a way to cope with the loss of income and rising costs. Among Lebanese

households, 7% more families were sending their children to work by October 2021, and this figure was expected to rise as the situation continues to worsen (UNICEF, 2021; UNRWA, 2022).

The economic crisis, along with socio-political unrest, has led to an increasingly inequitable and inefficient education sector, as educational institutions are providing a minimal level of learning, and skills taught are not closely matched to the job market. Government spending on education is expected to continue to decline due to the combined impact of the national crisis, the pandemic and the Beirut port explosion in 2020. School enrolment rates have been declining over recent years reaching a year-on-year dramatic drop in 2021–22, from 60% to 43% for adolescents and young people aged 15–24 (UNICEF, 2022). The following section discusses in more detail the changes in the education sector in Lebanon. Education quality faces other challenges, including hikes in tuition fees, increase in teachers' salaries to account for inflation, and decreasing job security for administrative and teaching staff. As the economic situation worsens,

many students are leaving private schools to join public schools (enrolment increased by 11% in 2020-21), putting even more pressure on the already struggling state system (World Bank, 2021: 14). As poverty continues to worsen, students from the most vulnerable Palestinian and Lebanese households are expected to drop out of school in even larger numbers than they are already (World Bank, 2021). For example, in 2020-21, 55% of Palestinian students dropped out of school, mainly due to mental distress (UNRWA, 2022).

Online learning (introduced in Lebanon in response to the pandemic) has proved challenging, due to the country's underdeveloped communications infrastructure (especially inside Palestinian refugee camps), with unstable internet connection, power cuts and internet outages, and lack of access to electronic devices. As schools began to return to classroom learning, transport costs (which had increased substantially due to rising fuel prices and shortages) have proved prohibitive for many students, further disrupting their education. This has also affected teachers, who face salary losses and challenges in affording transport to school, prompting teachers' strikes in a further disruption of education.

Several other factors have affected adolescents' and young people's access to education, including the Beirut port explosion, which destroyed or damaged many schools. Water shortages and lack of funds for running costs have caused many schools to close. The noticeable increase in violence within school settings, and an increase in gender-based violence, have also affected school attendance. All of these factors combined have led to the dramatic levels of school drop outs noted above, with a disproportionate impact on refugee children's dropping out (an estimated 260,000 Lebanese children versus 440,000 refugee children). Many may not be able to go back to school, and the compound crisis continues to jeopardise children's education, and especially adolescents' education (UNICEF, 2021; UNRWA, 2022).

### Limitations on adolescents' voice and agency

The wider Lebanese context and the increasing challenges caused by the combined crises – not least the rise in insecurity – have had varied impacts on adolescents, especially girls. They faced many cultural restrictions on their freedoms, choices and agency even before the crisis, but these restrictions have intensified. Lebanese society

is strongly patriarchal and based on age hierarchy, which significantly limits adolescents' and young people's ability to make decisions about matters that affect them at every level, from the family to their community and the state. Key life choices – such as education and marriage – are a family matter, especially where young girls are concerned. Parental control is pervasive in Lebanese culture, which continues as adolescents' transition into adulthood. Adults typically use authoritative communication styles with adolescents and young people, giving orders and instructions and using shaming and threats if these are not complied with. Palestinian youth in Lebanon in particular lack autonomy, including financial autonomy and decision-making opportunities, as life decisions are generally made by older male 'breadwinners' in the family.

In Lebanese society, the family takes precedence over the community, sect, political party or nation. Nepotism and favoritism are based around family networks with political parties and 'zu'amā' (political leaders), so the family is key to accessing services and job prospects. While national identity is generally more important to young people than religious affiliation, they do have a strong predisposition towards their own sect, with a modest acceptance of members from other sects (Youssef, 2020).

Adolescents in Lebanon are not allowed to be members of civic and political associations; the minimum age for membership is 20 years, and the voting age is 21. Lebanese adolescents are also excluded from decision-making at party or civic levels. Palestinian youth, on the other hand, have no access to civic and political participation and do not have the right to form associations. They are also excluded from participation and leadership opportunities in Palestinian institutions. Only private schools and universities offer school-based clubs, civic and sports activities (Youssef, 2020). The elevated social and political unrest that accompanied the economic crisis over the past few years has made adolescents and youth feel increasingly excluded from all levels of society.

This report sheds light on the impact of these compound crises on Palestinian refugee adolescents and vulnerable Lebanese adolescents. Drawing on the GAGE conceptual framework which takes a gendered capabilities lens, we explore gendered differences in education and learning, and voice and agency, by focusing on adolescents' lived experiences amid the turbulent and deteriorating socioeconomic and political environment.

# Background

## Political and economic instability

Lebanon has the highest number of refugees per capita, hosting around 1.5 million Syrian refugees as well as refugees from other countries, and more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees including around 180,000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and more than 29,000 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS)<sup>1</sup>. Yet Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees. Under Lebanese law, refugees are considered 'foreigners'; they have no special legal status and no civil, political or economic rights (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, 2022; UNRWA, 2022). Around half of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in the 12 official Palestine refugee camps, which are spatially and socially isolated, and characterised by overcrowdedness, poor housing conditions, and poor sanitation and infrastructure. They are also subject to violence between armed factions and groups. The remaining Palestinian refugees live in gatherings around the camps or are scattered among the Lebanese community (UNRWA, 2020a). UN agencies are the main service providers for refugees in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). For further information on Lebanon's complex socio-political history, (see Box 1).

## Lebanon's economic crisis

Lebanon's acute economic crisis is a direct result of the corruption of its power-sharing political elite and their lack of interest in reforms for development. Between 2019 and 2021, Lebanon's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by more than 58%, and is expected to decline even further as the crisis continues. Its currency has depreciated by 219% on a year-on-year basis, losing 90% of its value since the beginning of the crisis. Soaring inflation had reached 200% by November 2021, making it the third highest rate globally. Food inflation peaked at 441%, making it very difficult for struggling families to afford to eat. Even well before the crisis, Lebanon was one of the world's most unequal countries. The crisis has weighed heavily on vulnerable groups and the middle-class, pushing them deeper into poverty (World Bank, 2022).

Poverty levels are increasing dramatically among both Palestinian and Lebanese populations (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, 2022). Poverty affects 74% of the population, with a soaring rate of multidimensional poverty<sup>2</sup> that reached 82% in 2021 – doubling from 42% in 2019 (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2021). In comparison, 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees are living in extreme poverty (UNHCR, 2022). The poverty

### Box 1: Lebanon's complex socio-political history

Lebanon's recent history is marked by instability, sectarian and ethnic cleavages and conflicts. The 15-year civil war (1975–1990) was driven by the state's inability to address mounting class, sectarian and regional inequalities. Muslim communities suffered most from poverty and supported the Palestinian militias in Lebanon. Christian communities were guarded and wary of the surge of militarisation among Palestinians and perceived it as a threat to the Lebanese state. The civil war ended with a peace settlement (the Ta'if Accord), which established power-sharing between the Muslim and Christian communities (Traboulsi, 2012).

Since the end of the civil war, Lebanon has been struggling with internal socio-political conflicts, wars with Israel, and a continually deteriorating economy. The Syrian conflict, which prompted a massive influx of refugees, has exacerbated the country's socioeconomic instabilities. The worsening situation led to anti-government protests in October 2019, which marked a rapid acceleration of the economic crisis, fuelled by Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020. The year 2019 also saw a government crackdown on refugees, especially those from Syria. In July 2019, the Ministry of Labour announced that all foreigners working in the country would need to apply for a work permit. There was then a crackdown on illegal foreign workers (including refugees) and the businesses employing them.

<sup>1</sup> Even though both the Palestinian refugees from Syria (have been in Lebanon since the Syrian war in 2011) and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (have been in Lebanon since 1948) fall under the protection of UNRWA, the Lebanese state gives different status for each of the two Palestinian refugee groups. PRS, like Syrian refugees, are considered temporary wartime displaced persons in Lebanon unlike the PRL who are now in their third or fourth generation of displacement.

<sup>2</sup> The multidimensional poverty measure is an index that seeks to capture the deprivations in monetary and non-monetary factors that contribute towards well-being. The Multidimensional Poverty Index is derived from the following indicators: employment; income; consumption; housing; assets; education; healthcare; and basic infrastructure services such as drinking water, sanitation and electricity. Households are defined as multidimensionally poor if they are deprived in one or more dimensions under the Index (ESCWA, 2021).

rate among Palestine refugees from Lebanon was 65% in 2016, whereas by 2020, 87% of Palestine refugees from Syria were estimated to live in poverty, and 11% in extreme poverty (UNRWA, 2020a, 2020b). The ever-deteriorating economic situation is significantly impacting Palestinian refugees, who were already vulnerable and experiencing intergenerational poverty prior to the crisis. Restrictions on refugees working make the situation even more dire (see Box 2).

### Education pre- and post-crisis

The Lebanese education system is highly privatised, and more than half of students in the country (Lebanese and non-Lebanese) attend private schools. In the school year 2018–19, 47.8% of students aged 3–24 were in private schools, 5.6% in semi-free private schools subsidised by government (mostly politically and religiously affiliated schools), and 46.5% in public schools. The rates are higher among Lebanese students, with around 70% in private and semi-free private education institutions at primary level, falling to 46.6% at secondary level (CAS et al., 2020). However, only a few private schools are ranked as high-performing, and those charge very high fees. Students in public schools are, on average, two years behind students in private schools. Yet despite parents' substantial investments in private schools, the quality of education varies greatly, with a lack of standardisation and government oversight affecting public and private schools alike (World Bank, 2021). For Palestinian students, UNRWA schools are the primary providers of education,

which is free. Although they operate a parallel education system, they teach the Lebanese curriculum, which allows Palestinian students to sit official exams, the brevet, at the end of grade 9, and the baccalauréat at the end of grade 12. UNRWA also has a vocational training institute in Saida city, which delivers vocational training to Palestinian students. In 2018, 67% of all Palestinian students in Lebanon were enrolled in the country's 68 UNRWA schools (Abdul-Hamid and Yassine, 2020).

Government spending on education is very low, at less than 2% of GDP, which is among the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (World Bank, 2021). As a result, equity and quality of education has been declining. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for Lebanese students in 2019 show that around two-thirds do not achieve basic literacy, scoring very low compared to the international standard. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) scores for grade 8 students have also consistently declined over the past decade. In 2019, Lebanon ranked 32 out of 39 participating countries for grade 8 maths, and 38 out of 39 for science.

In the school year 2018–19, 71.7% of all individuals aged 3–24 years<sup>3</sup> were enrolled in educational institutions, with a rate of 74.4% for females and 69.1% for males. The enrolment rate for young people aged 15–19 years was 71.4%, while girls' enrolment was higher than boys' (77.1% compared to 65.9%). Enrolment rates for the 5–9 and 10–14 age groups dropped from 98.6% to 92.7% (from 2004 to 2019) and from 95.2% to 92.4% respectively, which was

#### Box 2: Work opportunities and unemployment in Lebanon

Since the beginning of the crisis, Lebanon has had a failing public services sector and seen a steep increase in migration, especially of highly skilled people, which inevitably further limits provision of basic services (World Bank, 2022). The unemployment rate has increased from 11.4% in 2019 to more than 40% in 2021, and 60% youth unemployment (FAO, 2022). This rate could be even higher among young women, considering that Lebanon has one of the largest employment gender gaps in the Arab region, at 30% (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2022). Palestinian refugees are forbidden from working in 39 syndicated professions in Lebanon and usually work instead in low-skilled and low-paying informal jobs. Among Palestine refugees in Lebanon, the unemployment rate was estimated at 23% in 2015 (and is expected to have increased during the crisis), and among Palestine refugees from Syria, it was estimated at 49% in early 2020. Adolescents and young people under 30 years typically have higher unemployment rates and there is likely to be a pronounced gender disparity due to limited paid work for women (UNRWA, 2020a).

<sup>3</sup> Education in Lebanon comprises preschool, primary, middle and secondary stages. Preschool begins at the age of 3 or 4. Primary (elementary level) is compulsory and provided free by the government, covering children aged 6–12 years (grades 1–6). The middle stage (intermediate level) covers 3 years (grades 7–9) for children aged 12–14. At the end of intermediate level, students sit official exams for the brevet Libanais certificate (Lebanese intermediate certificate). The general (secondary stage) continues for 3 years (grades 10–12) for adolescents aged 15–18 years, at the end of which they sit official exams and are awarded the baccalauréat Libanais certificate (Lebanese general secondary education certificate), which facilitates access to tertiary education. Tertiary education is divided into 3 stages: 3–5 years of study, at which stage students are awarded the Licence, Bachelor's Degree or Diploma, depending on the institution attended. Second stage is comprised of 1–4 years of study, leading to a Master's Degree. The final stage is a Doctorate degree, a further 2–5 years of study.

likely related to a drop in refugee students' enrolment. Among Lebanese students, the overall enrolment rate was 79.2%, broken down to 99.2% for 5–9-year-olds and 97.7% for 10–14-year-olds. This drops even further to 82% for adolescents aged 15–19, with girls having a slightly higher enrolment rate than boys (Central Administration of Statistics, ILO and European Union, 2020). The most recent study on Palestinian students conducted in 2015 estimates that the enrolment rate among Palestine refugees in Lebanon was 97.2% at primary level, with no significant gender disparity. However, enrolment rates drop at intermediate level to 84.2%, with a higher rate for girls (89.4%) than boys (78.6%); and they drop further at secondary level, to 61.2%, again with a higher rate for girls (65.2%) than boys (58.1%). Among Palestine refugees from Syria, the enrolment rate in 2015 was 88.3% at primary level (89.6% for girls compared to 87% for boys). It drops to 69.6% at intermediate level, again with higher rates for girls than boys (75.2% versus 64.3%). At secondary level, overall enrolment is 35.8%, with noticeably lower rates among boys (28.4%) than girls (42.9%) (Chaaban et al., 2016).

In comparison, for the school year 2020–21, enrolment for adolescents and young people aged 15–24 (Lebanese and non-Lebanese) was 60% (52% for males versus 69% for females), breaking down to 77% for students aged 15–18 and 58% for those aged 19–24. There was a dramatic drop in enrolment in 2021–22, from 60% to 43%. Lebanese students' attendance rate in 2020–21 was 79%, which is higher than that of Palestinians, at 63% (UNICEF, 2022). Boys have a higher dropout rate than girls as they tend to join the labour market at a younger age, so girls remain in education for longer. Many boys drop out before doing their brevet (grade 9) but the dropout rate is highest for boys aged 15–17, at 45.2% (compared to 24.6% for girls the same age) (UNRWA, 2020b). In 2020–21, the dropout rate was 30% across all students in Lebanon aged 15–24, with males having a higher rate (37%) than females (24%). Among Lebanese students the dropout rate was 15%, compared

to 26% among Palestinians (UNICEF, 2022). Table 1 shows results of a 2021 study by UNICEF on the overall well-being of adolescents and young people (aged 15–24) in Lebanon.

## Impacts of the deteriorating situation on adolescents

Insecurity and instability are deepening in Lebanon as a result of the failing economy and state institutions, thus further jeopardising public safety. Following the crisis, the state with its armed forces have been incapable of policing the streets, especially in the marginalised peripheral areas. As a result, the country witnessed a sharp increase in crime rates, emergence of local militias, tensions between communities, armed clashes, and weaponisation among citizens seeking to protect their families and properties. For example, instances of murder in December 2020 showed a year-on-year increase of 91% (Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), 2022; International Crisis Group, 2022). In April 2021, auto thefts and robberies increased by 263% and 268% respectively compared to the previous year (The Monthly Magazine, 2021). The deteriorating state of security has complicated and aggravated the challenges facing adolescents and youth, further restricting their mobility (particularly for girls).

Sexual exploitation and abuse has also increased, especially against girls and women. For example, sexual exploitation cases doubled in the first half of 2021 compared to 2020, alongside a stark deterioration in mental health and psychosocial well-being. Vulnerable groups, including girls and women, increasingly report feeling unsafe in their own home. In 2020, there was a 35% year-on-year increase in the percentage of Lebanese survivors seeking services from organisations. Palestinian refugees, on the other hand, accounted for 2% of reported cases, indicating low levels of reporting among Palestinian survivors (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, 2022).

The combined impacts of the crisis, reduced capacities of public institutions, growing violence and barriers to

**Table 1: Adolescents' and young people's participation in education in Lebanon, 2021**

|   | Total | Male | Female | Lebanese | Palestinian | Aged 15–18 | Aged 19–24 |
|---|-------|------|--------|----------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Not in education, employment or training (NEET) | 31%   | 27%  | 36%    | 22%      | 32%         | 22%        | 33%        |
| Attended school in 2020–21                      | 60%   | 52%  | 69%    | 79%      | 63%         | 77%        | 58%        |
| Stopped education                               | 30%   | 37%  | 24%    | 15%      | 26%         | 28%        | 31%        |
| Reduced spending on education                   | 43%   | 46%  | 39%    | 34%      | 32%         | 40%        | 43%        |

Source: UNICEF, 2022.

accessing services has overstretched community support networks. It has also led to reduced participation and involvement of people of all ages – including Lebanese host communities and refugees – in decisions that directly affect their lives (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, 2022). Adolescents who already had limited involvement in decision-making and limited opportunities to express their voice and agency now have even fewer opportunities to do so. A further challenge is that following anti-government protests in 2019, the state has been increasingly using violence against protestors, including forced disappearances and torture of detainees, some of them children. State violence has stretched to any

critics of the ruling elite and established political parties, especially those active on social media platforms (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This situation has left adolescents and young people feeling unable to influence events that directly affect their lives, and unable to call for change through peaceful pathways.

The next section describes how the GAGE conceptual framework helps us to explore the different dimensions of support that adolescent girls need in order to develop their full capabilities, and – for the purposes of this report – specifically in terms of their education and learning, and voice and agency within their families and communities.

## GAGE conceptual framework

GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach based on the interconnectedness of 'the 3Os' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see Figure 1 and 2). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts; however, we tailor that approach to the specific challenges of understanding what works in improving adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1984, 2004), and nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003), the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework that explores the assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) needed to expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in girls and boys with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and 'hardest to reach'.

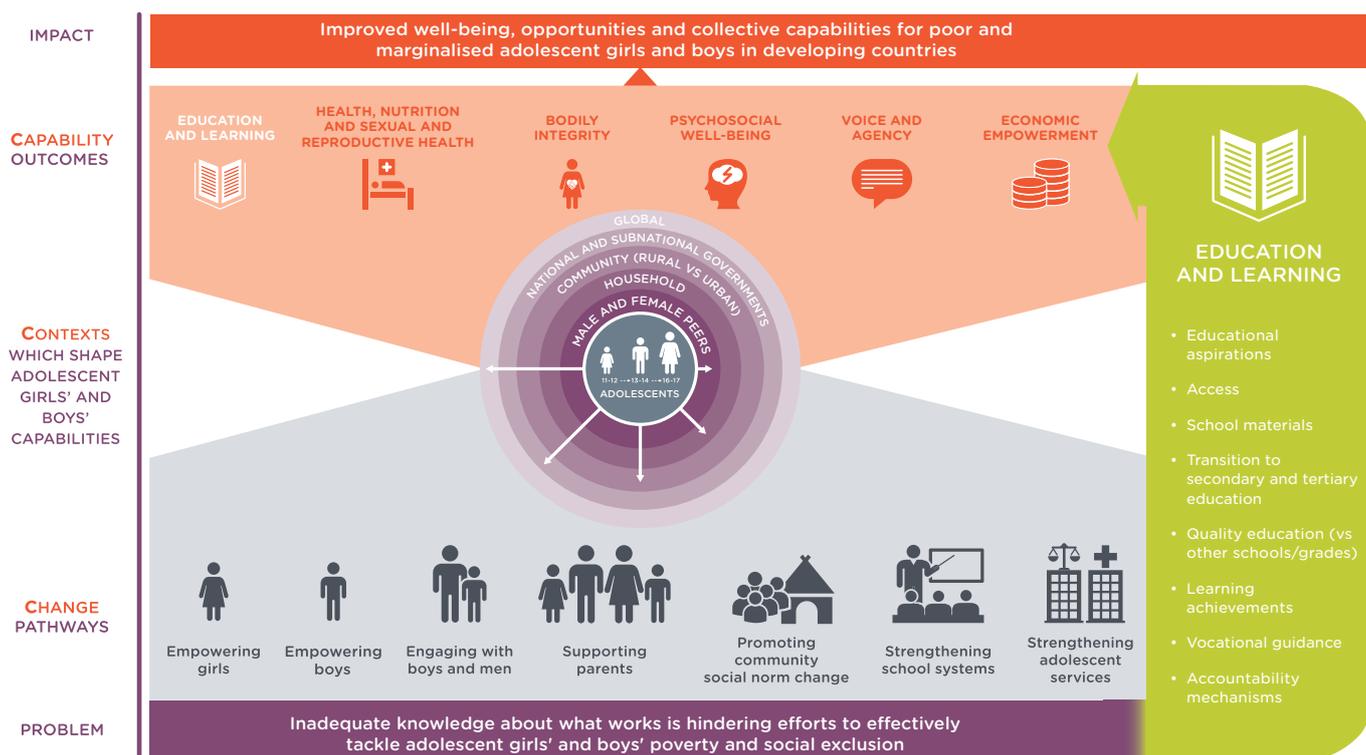
The second building block is context, recognising that adolescent girls' and boys' capability outcomes are highly

dependent on their family, household, community, state and global contexts.

The third and final building block acknowledges that girls' and boys' contextual realities can be mediated by a range of change strategies, including: empowering individual adolescents, supporting parents, engaging with men and boys, sensitising community leaders, enhancing adolescent-responsive services, and addressing system-level deficits.

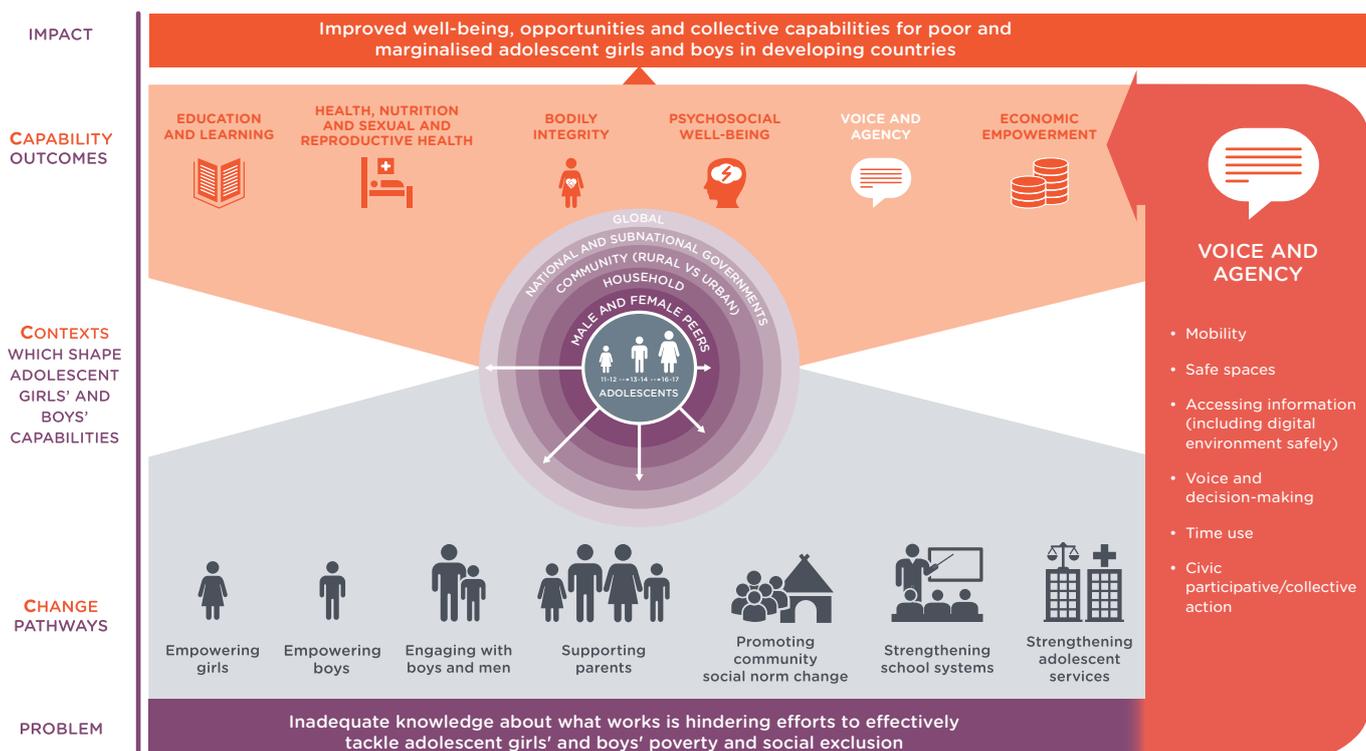
GAGE explores six key capability domains: education and learning; health, nutrition and sexual and reproductive health; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. In this paper, we focus on two: education and learning, and voice and agency. Under the education and learning capability domain, we explore adolescents' educational access, educational aspirations, education quality, and successful education transitions. The voice and agency domain looks at adolescents' mobility and access to safe spaces, access to age-appropriate information and digital technology, voice and decision-making within the family and community, and civic engagement (for a detailed overview of GAGE's conceptual framework, see GAGE consortium, 2019.)

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework - education and learning



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

Figure 2: GAGE conceptual framework - voice and agency



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

# Research methodology

This paper draws on longitudinal participatory research by GAGE with older adolescents and young people (aged 15–21 years). The sample includes more than 100 adolescent boys and girls from vulnerable Lebanese communities and Syrian and Palestinian refugees. It includes the most vulnerable groups, such as out-of-school adolescents or those at risk of dropping out of school, working adolescents, married adolescents (or those at risk of early marriage), and adolescents involved with or at risk of joining the armed forces. The sample includes: Palestinian refugee adolescents living in Ein el-Hilweh camp in Saida city, south of Lebanon, and in Wavel camp, in Baalbek city in the Beqaa valley; Syrian refugee adolescents living in informal tented settlements (ITSs) and collective shelters; and vulnerable Lebanese adolescents from Baalbek city. Research tools used include 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) and three rounds of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) that started in July 2019, including 2 FGDs and 1

IDI round conducted at the beginning of the pandemic (between March and June 2020) and following the crisis (up to April 2022). There were also interactive activities such as participatory photography, intergenerational trios (interviews with adolescents' parents and grandparents) and peer-to-peer research (see Annex 1 for a timeline of research activities and for more on the research tools, see Jones et al., 2017; 2018; 2019a; 2019b; Małachowska et al., 2020).

This paper focuses on the experiences of 24 vulnerable Lebanese adolescent boys and girls living in Baalbek city, 6 Palestinian boys living in Wavel camp, and 24 Palestinian adolescent boys and girls living in Ein el-Hilweh camp. The Baalbek region is heavily weaponised, and there are frequent armed clashes between Lebanese clans. Ein el-Hilweh camp is the largest walled-off Palestinian camp in Lebanon and is infamous for its frequent clashes between the Palestinian factions that control the camp.

## Findings

We now discuss our findings on the impact of Lebanon's economic and political crisis on adolescents' education and learning, and their ability to exercise voice and agency within their family and community.

### Adolescents' education and learning

To maximise their education and learning potential, adolescents need access to schools. They also need support to attend classes regularly and to have educational aspirations, and for these demand-side dimensions to be matched by the provision of quality education. In this section, we discuss the challenges that host community and refugee adolescents alike face in the context of the country's crisis.

#### Education access Financial pressures

Financial pressure is one of the biggest determinants of access to education in a highly unequal country such as Lebanon. The formal social support schemes available

for the poorest households are limited in Lebanon. People (Lebanese and refugees) rely heavily on informal support arrangements provided by non-state actors such as the non-governmental organizations, the family (including remittances from migrant family members), and the political parties and its affiliate organizations. However, access to informal support schemes is conditioned by favouritism, which is facilitated by access to familial, community and political networks. The rising poverty (fueled by the economic crisis and the pandemic) means many families (Lebanese and refugee) cannot afford their basic needs let alone school fees, transport, uniform or basic materials, leading to more children dropping out from school.

Except for some Palestinian adolescents' households receiving financial support from UNRWA, and the support with stationery mentioned by a few Lebanese adolescents, none of the adolescents reported receiving any social support following the crisis specifically for Lebanese adolescents. Only a few reported receiving occasional food baskets from local organisations or fuel at lower

prices from Lebanese political parties. Adolescents from Lebanese and refugee communities alike reported that nepotism and favouritism were at play in providing the scarce support that is available. As a 19-year-old Lebanese boy from Baalbek city explained:

*We were left alone during the crisis. No one is helping us... Everyone left us to die slowly. We do not have a state, and the [political] parties and the organisations only give those they know or follow them... I understood with the crisis that poor people do not have anyone in this country.*

In line with the literature, our participatory research shows that Lebanese adolescents attain higher educational levels than their Palestinian counterparts. Lebanese girls have the greatest access to education, whereas Palestinians have the lowest access. Financial stress is the main driver for boys dropping out of school, although dropout rates are higher for Palestinian boys. Within both Lebanese and Palestinian communities, males are perceived as the breadwinners, which pushes boys out of school to start earning to support their struggling families. Boys themselves start feeling that they need to earn and cover their own expenses at a young age. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I was the only male child alongside two girls. I had no one to play with, and my father used to take me to help him at his work since I was 7 years old... When I was in grade 8, my family faced a hard situation and I had to drop out... I then started working with my father selling fresh juice in front of our snack restaurant... My sisters continued their education and my older sister is about to graduate from university.*

Inability to afford basics like clothing, food and school materials is another driver of school dropout among adolescents. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp, who dropped out of school, explained:

*I did not like to go to school because I felt different from my friends. I did not wear clothes like them and my parents could not give me money to buy food like my friends... I could not buy pens and notebooks like them... I hated school because of that.*

Palestinian adolescents, and especially boys, tends to prefer vocational education over the academic route. However, most Palestinian school dropouts who continue their education seek free informal vocational courses available

at local organisations, whereas Lebanese adolescents tend to choose vocational education mostly at public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) schools. Palestinian adolescents (mostly boys) opt for a range of courses to diversify their skills and increase their chances of finding a job. A dearth of funding and scholarships, especially for Lebanese young people, prevents many adolescents from seeking tertiary education; moreover, the Lebanese public university does not have branches or offer diversity of majors in all areas/governorates in Lebanon. There is also a widely shared sentiment among adolescents (especially Palestinians) that scholarships are awarded based on favouritism. The high costs of private institutions and perceptions of low-quality education at public institutions or the UNRWA-run Sibli TVET school has also made it hard for adolescents to continue their education along the TVET track. Even when scholarships are available, transportation costs alone can be prohibitive. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:



**Photo 1: Photo story by Abou Hamza Tleis, a 19-year-old out-of-school Lebanese boy living in Baalbek city**

*'Many children drop out of school because their parents cannot afford the tuition fees or the transportation costs like myself. My brother and I dropped out from school because we have to work to help with house expenses. Having a whole generation without proper education will surely lead us to work in illegal work. I feel like I am lifting the whole economic calamity on my back, working two jobs back-to-back.'*

*I want to go to university, it is my dream but I cannot if I could not get a scholarship. My sister got a scholarship at a private university and I would like to study there, like her... It would be hard for me to afford transportation but if I get a scholarship, I can work on managing that... There is a lot of favouritism in awarding the scholarships in the camp and there are only a few. I have to work now with a political faction and volunteer with them so that I can have a chance to get one.'*

## Social norms and gender differences in accessing education

Social norms play a major role in shaping adolescents' (particularly girls') educational opportunities and aspirations. Lebanese girls were least at risk of dropping out of school compared to Lebanese boys and Palestinian adolescents. This is mainly due to the higher value placed on girls' education culturally, which is perceived to be more important than boys' education – a sentiment shared by boys and girls alike. This could explain why Palestinian and Lebanese girls have higher education ambitions than boys, reflecting also the cultural link between formal education and decent work for girls. Girls' ability to find decent work is linked to acquiring education, whereas boys are perceived to be able to do any type of work regardless of their education level. There is also a gendered belief that education helps girls raise their children better, and can help in the event of marital problems or death of a partner. A 20-year-old young Lebanese woman from Baalbek city explained:

*Girls' education is more important than that of boys... Boys can do any work but a girl cannot. Girls cannot find good work if they do not have education and a certificate... If the girl's husband has a good financial situation, it is not important for the girl to work... Education is a girl's weapon because even if she does not work it will protect her in case she faced something later in her life. If she divorced or her husband dies, she will not then need anyone if she is educated... Education is also important for girls to raise their children well and be able to teach them.'*

Although this sentiment is prevalent among both Lebanese and Palestinian girls, Palestinian girls are less likely to continue their education due to other factors linked to cultural restrictions on girls' work and social interactions.

While both Lebanese and Palestinian communities view girls' main role as a wife and mother, unlike Lebanese communities, Palestinian communities have a negative attitude towards girls working or pursuing higher education,

for various reasons, including fear of gossip (if girls spend a long time outside the house and the camp); fear of girls mixing with boys; fear of girls seeking more freedoms if they mix with their Lebanese peers; or fears of experiencing harassment on the streets, in educational institutions or workplaces. This can prevent girls from continuing their education and impacts their education aspirations. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I decided to leave school when I was in grade 7. My friends started to marry and leave school and I realised that my destiny will be the same... I did not want to tire myself studying while I know that my family will not allow me to work, and if I get married my husband will not allow me to study or work... It was useless for me to study because girls' place is eventually the house.*

Lebanese communities, on the other hand, have fewer restrictions on girls' movement and are less concerned about girls mixing with boys, which supports their access to education and their education ambitions. Whereas in the camps, schools are segregated by gender, higher education is not, which presents a further problem, as a 19-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*My father does not approve of me going to university... Parents do not like to send their daughters to university because there will be boys and Lebanese there, and they fear that they [their daughters] will change and stay outside late and start asking to go out and visit friends.*

Conservative social norms among Palestinian communities can also threaten girls' education at secondary level, as UNRWA's secondary school is divided into single-sex classes but there are no separate schools. This could prevent girls from pursuing TVET education or seeking informal vocational education at local organisations. Some families seek to isolate their daughters at home as soon as a girl reaches puberty. A 16-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp described how:

*My father did not want me to go to the secondary school. He says that there are boys in the school. But we do not mix in the school. We have separate buildings and there is a door that separates the playgrounds. He needed a lot of convincing.'*

An 18-year-old Palestinian girl explained: 'There are many families in the camp that do not allow their girls outside their home at all. They make them leave school and do not allow them to do anything, not even come to organisations.'



**Photo 2: Photo story by Jouri Ismail, a 20-year-old out-of-school young Palestinian woman living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

'Girls are deprived of education in Ein el-Hilweh camp because they are prevented from going to school either by their parents, brothers, fiancés or husbands. They are prevented from going to school because of fears that the girl would fall in love and talk boys, or even get influenced by other girls and start demanding greater freedoms. Some girls choose to drop out of school because they lack any hope of working in the future and making use of their education because work is forbidden for them.'

Many girls had tried to negotiate with their parents – especially fathers and older brothers – to continue their education or enrol in skills-building programmes. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl explained that:

*My brother heard a false rumour that I was talking to a boy on the street. He forbade me from going to the vocational school or to any place and locked me up at home. My mother and I had to convince him slowly to start allowing me to go out and eventually return to my school. My sister also helped me with this, accompanying me at first to places I went to.'*

Girls' cultural role as family caregiver can also hinder their education as they are required to do housework and look after younger siblings and family members who are ill if the mother is unable to assume that role. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl commented: 'My parents got sick and I had to leave school to take care of them and the house.'

## Early marriage

Early marriage or engagement affects refugee girls in Lebanon far more than Lebanese girls. Palestinian girls marry at an earlier age than Lebanese girls, which is another main reason for school dropout. It is common for fiancés and husbands to ask girls to stay at home, as girls' main role

in life is still largely perceived as being at home. Palestinian girls noted that although some girls marry at a young age, many become engaged and only marry when they reach the age of 18. Many girls are pressured into accepting engagements and marriages as families either try to relieve their financial pressures, adhere to cultural traditions, avoid gossip and protect their honour, which is closely bound up with their daughters' chastity. When a girl gets engaged, authority over her transfers from her birth family to her fiancé, who determines the girl's mobility, education and other key life choices. This typically harms girls' education as it is common for a fiancé to request that the girl leaves school. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp recounted her experience:

*I was engaged to my brother's friend whom I did not want... He forbade me from going to school and I was out of school for two years... I did not want to leave school and my family did not say anything to him because it was up to him to decide anything related to me... After two years, I stood up for myself, broke up with him and returned to school. I had to fight against my family for it but I was stronger and I took back my life.*

Lebanese girls reported that prior to the current crisis, their family exercised negligible control over their education but generally encouraged girls to continue studying, and although marriage requires the family's approval of the spouse, girls reported that there were few forced and early marriages in their community. However, since the crisis has taken hold, Lebanese girls reported that child marriage is increasing, and some girls reported that their mother was pressuring them to get married to reduce the financial pressures on the household. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city reported that:

*I am very miserable due to the situation... We have a lot of problems at home... My father has changed, he was gentle and supportive, now he is angry and shouting all the time and saying hurtful words... My mother is also angry all the time because we cannot get food easily... She is always pressing me to get married, she told me that would ease the money pressures at home.*

Palestinian girls, on the other hand, reported that although the crisis can delay age at marriage due to financial hardships and men being unable to afford marriage costs, they stated that marriage to migrant Palestinian men living in Europe is increasing in their community, as both families and the girls themselves seek this type of arranged



**Photo 3: Photo story by Ola Hamadi, a 17-year-old in-school Palestinian girl living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

'Many small girls are getting engaged at a very young age. They are leaving school and looking for a groom because they want their fiancé or husband to spend on them to decrease the financial pressure on their families. Girls are doing this and they are not aware of the consequences of leaving school and getting married. It is becoming a norm among the girls and they are losing the opportunity to learn, work and be independent to spend on themselves.'

marriage believing it to be a better option to escape the poverty and insecurity of Lebanon. This is especially the case for Palestinian girls from Syria. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*My neighbour has arranged my marriage to a Palestinian man in Germany... We did not know the man or his family, but I accepted because it is better for me to marry and leave this country... Many girls and families are thinking in this way because the girl's life will be better abroad as there is no future in Lebanon.*

However, parents can sometimes put undue pressure on girls to agree to such a marriage, even when the girl is fearful of what might happen when she joins him in that other country. The same girl stated:

*I do not like my fiancé or trust him because he keeps demanding sexual things from me over the phone and I deny him that because although we are married on paper, he is not my husband yet... He said that he cannot wait until I follow him to Germany, he is always angry and pressuring me to finish my papers fast and it is not in my hands... I told my mother and brother about it after a long time of suffering with him but they do not want to listen to me and refuse that I leave him... I am frightened. If he is that bad before meeting him, what would he do with me when I join him?*

## Legal and social discrimination against Palestinians

As already noted, refugees in Lebanon lack civil and economic rights. Although Palestinians have been residing in Lebanon since 1948, they still do not have full residency rights. Lebanese laws prevent Palestinians from working in syndicated professions and they face discrimination in the labour market against based on their nationality. This also has an impact on Palestinians' education due to restricted working opportunities. Although this lack of rights has been mentioned by Palestinian girls as a main reason for their low education attainment and economic participation, this is by far the greatest reason for Palestinian boys' lower educational attainment and ambitions. A 19-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I did not want to continue studying in school. Why should I study if I would not gain anything from it?... We are not allowed to work in anything. We see all the university graduates on the streets not working or driving taxis... My brother graduated from university and he encouraged me not to study because I would not find any work with a university degree and end up like him jobless.'*

As well being discriminated against through laws and in the labour market, Palestinians also face discrimination from Lebanese public education institutions, as Lebanese students are prioritised. Moreover, although Palestinian students pay the same minimal fees as Lebanese students at public university, they are not allowed to enrol in all majors (particularly scientific majors), which poses a further barrier to higher education. With limited opportunities, adolescents' ambitions and the value of education also shrink. A 16-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp explained:

*I do not want to study, I am only in school because my parents want it, but I do not see any worth in it. What would I achieve if I study in Lebanon?!*

Vocational education and training and learning skills has become a preferred substitute to academic education for Palestinian adolescents. Learning a vocational skill (or skills) is perceived as essential for Palestinian boys as it increases their chances of finding a job. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I left school but I did not stop learning. I wanted to learn a skill and start working... I took different vocational courses and whenever there is a course I take it because if I cannot find a job in one major I can search in another...*



**Photo 4: Photo story by Sam Atweh, a 16-year-old in-school Palestinian boy from Syria living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

‘There are a variety of reasons for boys to drop out of school. The most common reason is that the boys and their parents prefer to stop studying because it is not useful for the children in their future. In Lebanon, Palestinians are banned from working in most of the professions even if they are university graduates. Hence, they are forced to enter the labor market at a young age to learn a skill, or they get enlisted with one of the factions.’

*You need to learn many skills in Lebanon in order to be able to survive.*

TVET education, especially at Sibliin (the UNRWA-run free TVET school), and non-formal vocational courses run by local organisations are seen as a better option for Palestinian boys, as they can learn skills quickly and start working at an earlier age. Although girls who have dropped out of school are less likely to seek formal TVET education, the non-formal vocational courses run by local organisations are seen as a good way to substitute for their loss of education. They are also opportunities to socialise and possibly to learn a skill that might allow them to work (however, this would most likely be limited to working within the camp). A 20-year-old young Palestinian woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp noted: *‘The courses at the organisations are a way for us to go outside of the house and meet people.’*

## Labour market opportunities and limitations

Whereas restrictions on Palestinians’ working constrains their education ambitions and attainment, dropout among Lebanese boys is mainly due to high unemployment

rates. The labour market is not structured to offer sufficient opportunities to educated youth, and this acts as a disincentive. As an 18-year-old Lebanese boy from Baalbek city asked:

*Why should I study?! Look at all the university graduates, they hang their certificates on the wall and none can find work... There are no jobs here, why should I do like them?! It is better for me to start working and making money.*

Several adolescents reported positive outcomes from non-formal vocational courses run by local organisations, including skills-building. As noted earlier, Palestinian boys often attend these courses to learn new skills in hope of finding work opportunities and even starting their own small business. Programmes that provide materials and small grants have also helped some adolescents start their own business. A 20-year-old young Palestinian man from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I did not want to study, I wanted to learn something that is beneficial to start my own work... I took a haircutting course and I opened my own barber shop. They gave me kits and my mother helped me financially, which helped me open my own store.*



**Photo 5: Photo story by Ahmad Fawwaz, a 21-year-old out-of-school young Lebanese man living in Baalbek city**

‘Boys usually leave school at an early age in Baalbek because educational certificates do not guarantee young people access to employment opportunities. Young people in Baalbek suffer from a serious unemployment problem and most boys spend their time on the streets. If the state work on policies to increase job opportunities, this may encourage boys to complete their studies.’

Marginalised areas such as Baalbek have even fewer opportunities for work. Although it is an agricultural area, the agricultural sector has been neglected by the government, and perceptions that agricultural work is low-income and demeaning, and linked to low-skilled migrant workers, specifically Syrians, make it unattractive to many young people. The services and tourism sectors, in the touristic city of Baalbek, have been the main source of work opportunities and income for most youth. However, these have also been shrinking over recent years due to the security and economic situation and the impact of the Syrian war on the Lebanese economy. The Covid-19 pandemic and related lockdowns further exacerbated employment challenges, as many businesses closed and young people lost their jobs. A 20-year-old young Lebanese man from Baalbek city commented:

*I used to work in an amusement park and my mother as a cleaning person in a school, we both lost our jobs during the lockdown... We are now left without an income and unable to pay the rent.*

## Parental support

Lebanese parents are typically more supportive of their adolescents' education compared to Palestinian parents, whose legal status in Lebanon largely determines the low value they place on their children's education. They tend to encourage boys to learn a skill and start work at an early age, owing to the lack of opportunities available to them through education. Palestinian girls typically receive less support for their education due to gendered norms (as discussed previously). On the other hand, Lebanese parents put more weight on girls' education. Nonetheless, many Lebanese boys receive parental support as their parents believe education is a way to escape poverty and secure a better future. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained his situation:

*I see how my father is suffering to provide money for me and my brother's education... He tells us that he does not want us to be uneducated like him and to study to have a better life... My father and mother deprive themselves from everything for us to learn and succeed... I still remember how my mother used to be stressed more than us during the official exams and stay awake with us and get up in the morning before us to wake us up, what she did touches me and means a lot to me... I study hard and want to succeed in life for them.*



**Photo 6: Photo story by Tifo Ghanj, a 17-year-old in-school Palestinian boy living in Wavel camp in Baalbek city**

'My school is closed, and we are studying online. I find online education to be difficult with the electricity and internet cuts. I am not understanding and can only study in the daytime during sunlight. If it is up to me, I would leave school but my parents insisted that I study and hired me a private tutor to explain the lessons to me. They push me to finish school so that realize my dream of becoming an engineer and migrate.'

Parental support for adolescents' education plays a considerable role in the level of education adolescents achieve, especially at the secondary stage. Even when adolescents do not perceive the same value of education as their parents, parents can push their children to stay in education. Nonetheless, because of the current crisis, both Lebanese and Palestinian parents (but particularly the latter) now place less value on education, as they see even fewer avenues for their children to build a better future using this route. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp explained that:

*When I was younger I wanted to migrate and stay with my aunt abroad but my father refused the idea although my aunt tried to convince him a lot... He wanted me to continue my education and then choose what I want... He tells me that now he regrets his decision because of what is happening and that he should have allowed me to leave, I could have had a better future in Europe.*

## School attendance

School absences are generally low among both Lebanese and Palestinian girls, and girls rarely report skipping school. Their lower absence rate reflects the greater restrictions on girls' mobility and stronger family supervision of girls and any activities they do outside the house. Palestinian boys

are most likely to report school absences and skip school to spend time with their friends. Boys reported that school management rarely follow up on absences, and there is also low parental follow-up. A 16-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*Many times we do not go to school. We gather at a café with my friends... The teachers and the school do not really care if we do not go to class, and sometimes they do not even know that.*

Lebanese adolescents, however, reported that skipping school from private education institutions is problematic because the school management follows up on attendance and informs parents.

## Impact of the pandemic

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, students in Lebanon had faced many challenges, including interrupted education during anti-government protests in October 2019. The pandemic and associated lockdowns meant that schools switched to online learning, and eventually slowly returned to in-class teaching, continuing with a combination of online and in-class tutoring. During lockdowns, many families lost their income, which heightened the vulnerability of households with children and adolescents. This meant that some adolescents lost their education during lockdown due to their family's inability to pay school fees. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp reported that:

*I pay \$200 per year for my vocational school. I used to give private lessons to students and save money from the allowance I get sometimes from my brother to pay the fees... During lockdown, no one at home was working and the school kept asking for the money, which I could not pay... I could not register for my second year at the vocational school and I am still unable to pay the remaining fees from my first year.*

Limited access to mobiles and laptops for online learning was another major challenge. This has worsened with the crisis and hyperinflation, as such devices are unaffordable for many adolescents. A 19-year-old Lebanese boy from Baalbek city explained:

*I cannot follow my studies properly because my phone is very old and barely working... I cannot get a new one because the phones became very expensive... I need a laptop to do my projects and I cannot buy one either, I always borrow my married sister's laptop when I have homework.*



**Photo 7: Photo story by Shaghaf Rifai, a 19-year-old out-of-school Palestinian girl from Syria living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

*'Studying has become a nightmare. Online education is very hard. Many students do not have phones or laptops to study. Sometimes, siblings have to wait for each other to study because they all share one phone. On top of that, there is no electricity and internet most of the day. At night, you need to study on the candle light. My younger sister is always stressed and feels suffocated from studying in these conditions. She started hating studying.'*

## Declining educational access following the crisis

The pandemic coincided with a severe economic crisis in Lebanon that has made it hard for vulnerable households to afford even the low tuition fees at public education institutions, let alone transportation. This has led to decreased access to education, particularly for adolescents, who are now dropping out in higher numbers than before the crisis period. Some adolescents reported that they or their siblings had been pushed out of school due to their family's worsening financial situation and their inability to afford even food. This has been especially noticeable among Lebanese adolescents. While UNRWA schools provide free education for Palestinian students, Lebanese students have to pay. And although public school fees are minimal, the deterioration of households' economic situation has made it impossible for many families to afford. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained that:

*My two younger brothers who are in primary school stopped studying because my family cannot pay the fees or the transportation costs... My family's situation*

*is very bad now, our life has changed a lot. We are not able to eat as before nor do the things we used to do.*

With the crisis and hyperinflation, the increase in fuel prices has led to a drastic increase in transportation costs, which has kept many adolescents from returning to school when in-class learning was reinstated. As a 20-year-old young Lebanese woman from Baalbek city explained:

*I stopped going to university because of the cost of transportation... [it] is very expensive now. When it started to increase, I started going less [often] to my classes. But now it would cost more than 100,000 [Lebanese pounds] a day to go by bus there, when it only cost 10,000 before. So I stopped going.*

A 19-year-old Lebanese boy from Baalbek city similarly explained:

*My vocational school is in Khiyara [an hour and a half ride from Baalbek] and transportation costs much more than the school fees. It even costs more than double my father's salary. For sure, I would not go there... I am planning to continue my studies when the situation gets better.*

Books and stationery costs were also reported to be a challenge for many adolescents and their siblings, although some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were reported to be providing free books and stationery. A 20-year-old young Lebanese woman from Baalbek city commented that:

*UNICEF has provided everything for my younger sisters, from books and stationery, and the schools are not requiring students to wear the uniform because they know people's situation... Otherwise, we could not really get my sisters anything for their school. This helped us a lot.*

A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city also noted that:

*The stationery is very expensive and I cannot afford it... I save money for that but it is not enough. A notebook that I used to buy for 4,000 [LBP] is now 60,000 and more. My relatives helped me to get free stationery from an organisation in Beirut.*

However, the threat of losing out on education is now greater for in-school Lebanese adolescents as the country's education sector is failing. Many Lebanese adolescents reported not starting their school in the current year or having their studies interrupted either due to teachers'



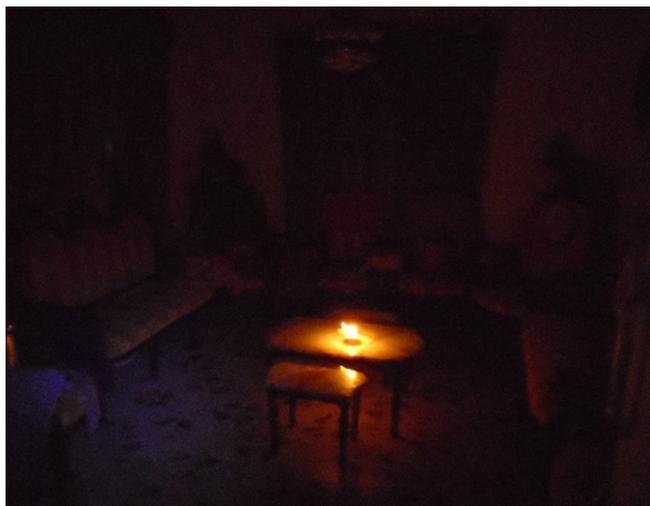
**Photo 8: Photo story by Samar Atallah, a 20-year-old out-of-school young Lebanese woman living in Baalbek city**

*'The stationary has become very expensive now and many families are not buying any for their children. The UNICEF distributed stationary for the students as a form of aid, which without it many students would have not been able to buy it like my younger sister for example.'*

strikes, teachers' inability to afford transportation to schools, or schools' inability to open as they cannot afford running costs such as electricity and fuel. This has resulted in interrupted attendance and, in some cases, prolonged absences. Many students have not received any online or in-class education, whether at public institutions or some UNRWA schools (this was reported in Baalbek but not in Ein el-Hilweh). A 16-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained:

*I am barely going to school because it is not opening. They are saying the teachers are not coming to school... I do not know if I will continue studying so I started working in a photography store. Years ago I took a photography course and I know a little about it, so I decided to gain some experience and to learn more about it so that I can have a skill in case I cannot continue my education.*

As the financial pressures on households are pushing more adolescents into the job market, it is putting boys – and especially Lebanese boys – at greater risk of engaging in illicit activities, which we discuss in the next section. However, despite restrictions on working outside the home, some Palestinian girls reported that their families are now open to the idea of girls finding work to support the household. As a 19-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:



**Photo 9: Photo story by Ali Abou Zed, a 19-year-old in-school Lebanese boy living in Baalbek city**

'My university did not open this year. It is having a problem with lack of teachers who stopped working due to low salaries and some classes are halted. We are studying now online, but only some of the subjects. At home, we are getting a maximum of two hours of electricity in the day and we had times when we had none at all for several days, and we cannot afford the private generator subscription fees. I am missing many of my classes and I am not able to study. My psychology is destroyed.'

*My parents never allowed me to work even though I tried to convince them several times... I never imagined they would approve of that, but now my father is the one who is asking me to find work.*

It was also notable that some Lebanese girls – even those in school – were actively looking for or taking on work.

Paid vocational programmes and cash-for-work programmes<sup>4</sup> run by international and local non-governmental organisations (see below) are being perceived by both Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents as the most valuable sources of support following the crisis, as they provide their households with some income while learning a skill that help them either cover some of the education costs including tuition fees, books, stationery, and some basic needs.<sup>5</sup> A 21-year-old young Lebanese woman from Baalbek city explained that:

*I took a sewing course and I used the money I earned from it to pay all my vocational school fees. Last year, I*

*almost missed the official exams because I did not have the money to pay for the exam fees and I did not want to ask my father because I know he is in a bad situation.'*

GAGE programme stipends are also helpful for many adolescents, as a 17-year-old Lebanese girl commented: 'The money I get from the sessions helps me a lot. I use it to buy my sanitary pads, I also used it to buy some of the books I needed at school!' Cash-for-work programmes are being also increasingly seen as a substitute to formal work, although they provide only short-term work opportunities and are not sustainable. A 20-year-old Lebanese young man explained:

*I started working at an organisation [cash-for-work programme]. It is a good working opportunity and the money is good. It is better than what other jobs pay. But you do not learn a lot and the job is temporary. The courses should be longer to be able to learn a profession or to have a stable income.*

## Quality of education

Quality of education and teacher support play a central role in adolescents' education. This was most evident during the online education adolescents received during Covid-19. That modality was not effective for several reasons, including the fact that schools and teachers were not sufficiently equipped or trained to teach and follow up with students using online methods. Most in-school adolescents, both Lebanese and Palestinian, cited low-quality education and support from their teachers and schools. The challenges adolescents faced in accessing online education, in addition to the household financial stresses, resulted in deterioration of their mental health. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained:

*I feel very depressed... There is a lot of stress at home due to the situation and the online [learning] is causing me a lot of stress... The teachers keep sending us lessons on WhatsApp all the time, even at night, and they do not explain anything... I study much more to understand my lessons... I have a headache all the time.*

As a result of these online education challenges, many adolescents have dropped out of school or have not

<sup>4</sup> Cash-for-work (CfW) programmes aim at providing skills training and paid short-term employment opportunities for youth (usually 40 days of paid work).

<sup>5</sup> Cash-for-work programmes target out-of-school and unemployed adolescents and youth (18+) but many in-school young people have actually joined these programmes, potentially because criteria have become more flexible during the crisis in order to support families in poverty.



**Photo 10: Photo taken by Ola Hamadi, a 17-year-old in-school Palestinian girl living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

'Since the covid-19 pandemic started, we started with the online education. We returned to school but then again returned to online studying. We are lost and cannot understand the lessons explanations nor can we follow up with the teachers and lessons. We feel embarrassed to ask the teachers questions and they take very long time to respond to us. I prefer to ask my friends instead of the teachers, but it is still hard for me to understand most lessons.'

been studying for the past two years at all. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I did not register in school when they opened again... I did not study anything when they were doing online lessons because I could not understand anything. I did not understand lessons in class, how was I supposed to understand them on the phone?!... I felt that I would not catch up in class, so I left school.*

Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents both cited that very few teachers were supportive during online learning, or responsive to their questions about lessons. However, peer support was common, especially among girls. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp commented:

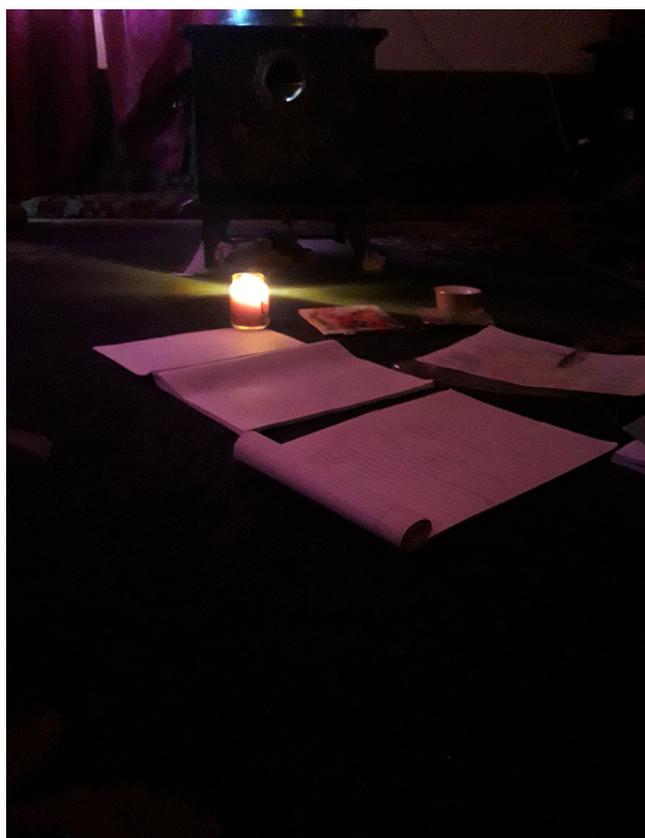
*We have a group on WhatsApp with my friends and we explain what we understand from the lessons to each other... When I have questions, I ask them and they help me.*

In general, both Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents felt that few teachers put in enough effort in class for students to understand lessons, although this view was more common among Palestinian adolescents. Adolescents believe that quality of education is dependent on the teachers' ability and willingness to explain lessons properly

and keep order in class. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp explained that:

*Most of the teachers do not care... They do not force order in class and do not care if we understand the lessons or not... How are we supposed to care if they do not?*

Lebanese adolescents added that differences in the quality of school management – especially in public schools – have a substantial impact on their education.



**Photo 11: Photo story by Isabella Hayek, an 18-year-old in-school Lebanese girl living in Baalbek city**

'In the winter, we are all forced to sit together in the same room because we can afford only to use one heater. In this room we do everything, eat, study and the whole family would be sitting together. On top of that, we do not have electricity nor internet and at night we have to sit on the candlelight. I started hating studying. My psychology is destroyed. It is worse for younger children like my siblings. Children in public schools are not learning anything, they are still studying online because the schools are not opening and teachers are always on strikes or not teaching. Children do not know how to read and write because online education is very bad, and they cannot focus at home. The children are left with little support and they are moving to upper levels without actually learning anything.'

The stricter the management is, the better the quality of education they receive. A 17-year-old Lebanese boy from Baalbek explained:

*I changed my school because there was no order in it, the students do not even come to class and the teachers do not care... Not all public schools are bad, it depends on the school management... The school I am in is very good, there are no fights in the school, and no one can leave class when they want.*

The current crisis has brought new challenges in terms of the support adolescents receive from teachers and schools (this was mostly mentioned by Lebanese adolescents in our research). Teachers' salaries are continually depreciating (to the point that some can't afford transport costs to get to their place of work), resulting in some teachers being laid off by schools, and public education institutions have had to deal with teachers' strikes demanding wage increases following the hyperinflation and the depreciation of the Lebanese currency. Inevitably, education quality has been deteriorating as a result. A 16-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained that:

*Both students and teachers do not care anymore. They are both depressed... Teachers stopped caring if the students understand the lessons or not, they come to school indifferent... They are also tired of this situation and their salaries became nothing... Can you believe that some teachers cannot come to school because they do not have money for transportation?!*

## Violence as a barrier to quality education

Adolescents reported that one of the key barriers to receiving a quality education is violence experienced in the home, community, online and even in schools. Violence is widespread in Lebanon, at all levels, and boys tend to be the main victims. Violence not only threatens adolescents' psychosocial well-being, it also has impact on every aspect of their daily lives and future prospects. A 20-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained: *'I was beaten a lot at school because I was a disorderly student... There was one time that I was beaten so hard that I still remember it now.'* Violence in schools has also been a major driver of school dropout among Palestinian adolescents. Palestinian boys are more likely than girls to mention teacher violence at schools, whether verbal or physical, as a reason for dropout. Violence is also a driver of girls' dropout, though it is mostly verbal in form rather than

physical. An 18-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp recalled that *'I left school when I was in grade 4... The teachers were not good with me and this made me hate going to school.'*

Both Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents reported that violence – and especially physical violence – decreases to a great extent at secondary level. Peer-on-peer violence in and around schools is also widespread, and the use of sharp tools and 'white weapons' (such as knives, blades, iron chains, iron hand clasps, etc.) has been reported by Palestinian boys. Violence can also extend beyond school to the camp streets. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp recounted that:

*We once had a fight with my friend at school. We thought that the problem ended there, but when we returned home we knew that he was preparing to attack us in front of the school the next day with his relatives and friends... The next day we went prepared... and took with us chains and metal sticks.*

Lebanese adolescents, especially girls, believe that violence in schools has been decreasing over recent years as there is now more awareness (among both teachers and parents) and better support from parents, noting that younger siblings do not face the same level of verbal and physical violence they faced at school when they were younger. A 20-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained that:

*When we were younger, our parents used to tell the school "the flesh is yours and the bones are ours", and they used to give the teachers and school the authority to do whatever they want with their children... Now the situation has changed, teachers do not speak badly or beat children because they are afraid of the parents. The parents are now more aware and would not accept that the school mistreat their children and teachers have more awareness because teachers in these days have training on this... The children in this time are also different from how we used to be, they are more aware and brave and know a lot of things. Parents and teachers do not dare to say anything to them.*

Lebanese adolescents also noted that the pandemic and the shift to online education has helped decrease school violence.

Peer-on-peer violence in schools was also mentioned by Lebanese adolescents, especially in some TVET schools that suffered from violence and drugs within and



**Photo 12: Photo story by Isabella Hayek, an 18-year-old in-school Lebanese girl living in Baalbek city**

'Violence is widely spread at schools. Teachers would pull the students ears, hit them by the ruler, hit them on their hands, or slap them. Physical violence is forbidden at public schools but it still happens. With the online education, physical violence decreased but verbal violence is still common. Teachers' salaries are worthless now due the crisis and depreciation of the local currency and this is making the teachers short tempered and angry all the time. Violence at school has many negative impacts on students as they would grow up with fear, hate school, and drop out from school.'

around the premises. This has pushed some adolescents and their parents to look for educational institutions outside Baalbek. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained that:

*The vocational schools are very bad in Baalbek... There are always fights and there are many incidents of firing guns in them, and there is a lot of drugs in these schools... My father did not want me to study here in such an atmosphere. That is why I registered in a vocational school in West Beqaa [an hour and a half ride from Baalbek].*

Some Lebanese adolescents mentioned tensions and intimidation from peers and discrimination by teachers and schools based on sectarian divisions and political affiliations. Some even mentioned that friendships in educational institutions are sometimes formed along sectarian/political lines. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained that:

*I do not understand them [students], I am not like them and I do not care about religion and sect but they do. In school, Shia students and Sunni students would not become friends with each other... It is the same in my university, students are divided into groups according to their sect, Druze sit together, Shia together and Sunni together.*

Lebanese girls stated that harassment by boys around school was also prevalent. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city stated:

*At the end of the school hours, boys congregate in front of the school in their cars and on their motorcycles. They wait for the girls in front of the school to watch them and catcalling... This is very annoying, I have to rush to my bus when I leave school to avoid them.*

Violence perpetrated by students against teachers was mentioned by Lebanese and Palestinian boys but not by girls. Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents both mentioned that some parents also use violence at school with teachers and management, although in the case of Palestinians it is mostly verbal violence. However, Lebanese adolescents in Baalbek cited that some parents who belong to armed tribes sometimes threaten the teachers and school staff with weapons if their children



**Photo 13: Photo story by Diana Akaman, a 16-year-old in-school Lebanese girl living in Baalbek city**

'Girls are subject to harassment and irritation by young boys who gather in front of our schools. This is very annoying for girls and it makes them uncomfortable to walk while boys surround them. No one is doing anything to solve this, the school does not interfere with what is happening outside the school campus and there is no police or cameras on streets.'

encounter problems in school. Community violence is common in both locations (Ein el-Hilweh camp, which is infamous for its armed clashes among factions, and Baalbek city, which is a hub for armed tribes and drugs/weapons traffickers). Lebanese adolescents mentioned that schools have been attacked and fired at by armed clans or groups, albeit such incidents are infrequent. Unlike Palestinian adolescents, Lebanese adolescents did not mention that community violence has had a great impact on their education. For Palestinian girls, frequent armed clashes and violence on the streets were cited as a threat or a driver of school dropout, as some families fear sending their daughters to school due to fear of armed clashes nearby. A 16-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that:

*My father fears the clashes a lot because he was shot in one of the clashes. He is always anxious... When I reached secondary level, he forbade me from going to school because the street where the secondary school is located is a street that has the most clashes in it... At first, my mother helped me go to school secretly, and we had to convince him slowly to allow me to go to school.*

## Educational aspirations

Lebanese adolescents have higher education aspirations compared to their Palestinian peers. This is most likely related to the available opportunities open to each community in Lebanon. With limited access to the job market and substantial restrictions on girls working, Palestinian adolescents do not see much value in education, which explains their lower aspirations. For reasons mentioned earlier, both Lebanese and Palestinian families put greater value on girls' education, so girls from both communities tend to aim higher than their male peers. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp asked:

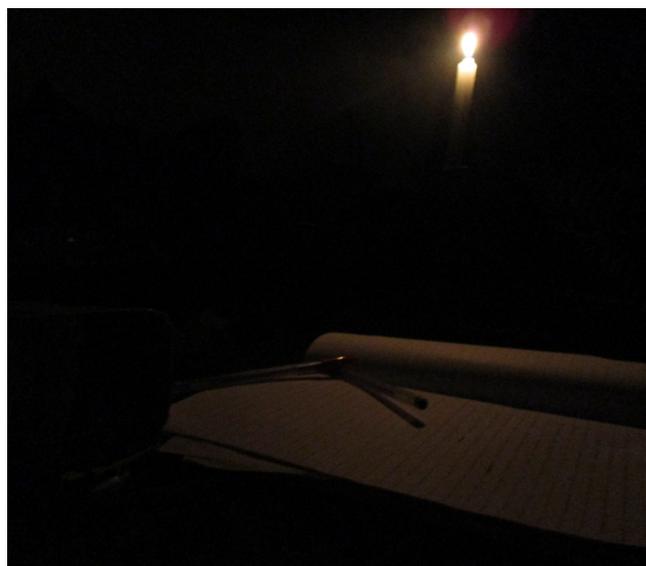
*Why should I study, what is the purpose of that?!... Studying does not benefit us Palestinians, it is useless... Eventually we will hang the certificates on the wall and do any work we find. Look at the educated people in the camp, they do the same jobs as those who are uneducated.*

## Shifting aspirations as a result of the crisis

The economic crisis in Lebanon has had a huge impact on adolescents' and young people's education and work ambitions and opportunities. Adolescents' psychosocial well-being is deteriorating due to household financial

pressures and associated increasing tensions at home, as well as decreasing opportunities and wages, amidst currency depreciation and hyperinflation – all these factors combine to result in low educational ambitions, even among those who had high ambitions prior to the crisis. This is pushing more adolescents to leave school and look for work of any kind so that they can earn an income and help their families. Although Lebanese girls did not commonly share this view, the crisis is such that even they are now beginning to have this perception. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city noted that:

*Previously it was impossible for me to think that I would not go to university. When I finished school, I realised that it is better for me to work at anything and make money to help my family rather than studying... It is useless to study anyway because there are no jobs... I work now as a private teacher and I earn more than university graduates. So why should I study, pay money and wait for years to graduate and I know I won't gain anything from it?!*



**Photo 14: Photo story by Talal Fahed, an 18-year-old in-school Palestinian boy living in Wavel camp in Baalbek city**

'Electricity is rarely available, and this is affecting my education. I am studying on candle light and not comprehending all subjects. Now they decided to close all schools and convert to online learning, which also does not work for me since I am not able to have access to internet or to charge my phone due to electricity cuts. The current situation is discouraging me from going later to a university. It seems to be a waste of time to study for five years then find no work, which I know I will never be able to find if the crisis persists in Lebanon.'



Photo 15: Photo story by Marie Khoury, a 21-year-old in-school young Lebanese woman living in Baalbek city

'The crisis in Lebanon is suffocating us. Our life and conversations revolve now around the US Dollar. The crisis changed me a lot, I get stressed and depressed by any conversations about the crisis. I am fed up! I started thinking about surviving my day and I do not want to think about the future and if I will need money or not. Thinking about the future became useless and living day to day is the only thing we can do. I was not like that before, I always thought about my education and getting a high degree, working and being independent. But now everything changed! I stopped dreaming of becoming a nurse and I stopped thinking about anything. I am still studying but I am aware that it will not benefit me in any way.'

The economic crisis has also impacted adolescents' education choices, preventing many from pursuing their preferred career. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained:

*My dream was to study medicine and my family were dreaming of me becoming a doctor, they had high hopes on me as I am the only one who continued my studies in my family... My dream has gone and I cannot achieve now. There is only medicine major in the branch in Beirut and we cannot afford the expenses of me going or living in Beirut anymore... I chose a scientific major that was close to medicine to feel I am close to my dreams, but I am still not happy.*

The crisis has also increased school dropout rates, even pushing more adolescent girls into work, which was far less

common prior to the crisis. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that despite this, she still hopes to achieve her goal one day:

*I had to stop my education to start working because everyone at home has to work now to be able to pay the rent and buy food. My biggest dream is still to continue my studies and become a nurse, but I cannot achieve it now. However, I will not give up on my dream, I want to achieve it one day.*

Even adolescents who are still in school fear they will not be able to continue for long, as a 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp noted:

*I fear for my future a lot... I do not know if I can go to university because our situation is very bad now... I fear I cannot study like my sisters did.*

### Emerging aspirations of migration

As a result of the crisis, adolescents and youth are increasingly seeing their future outside of Lebanon, especially adolescent boys, who report increasing ambitions to migrate overseas to find decent work. They increasingly see the only value of education as helping them migrate for work. This trend has been emerging especially among in-school Lebanese adolescents and young men. A 20-year-old from Baalbek city explained:

*I am only studying in the hope of leaving this country and working abroad. I am not thinking about working in Lebanon at all, my only hope is to be able to build a career and a future somewhere else...*

Another 20-year-old Lebanese young man explained how:

*I never thought about migrating. I feel like a fish out of water when I go outside Baalbek, I feel unrest and like a stranger. I cannot even live in Beirut... But, I have no option and I have to migrate. I am searching for opportunities anywhere but here.*

Palestinian boys also reported hoping to migrate to find work. However, due to the dire living conditions as a result of the crisis, many Palestinian girls are now hoping to migrate, even though cultural restrictions would not make this an option for them except through marriage. A 21-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp, who is engaged, explained:

*This is not a living... There is nothing anymore here... Look at us, how we are living inside this camp, and now the whole country does not have a thing, no electricity,*



**Photo 16: Photo story by Afnindar Azad, a 20-year-old out-of-school young Lebanese man living in Baalbek city**

‘There are no jobs available anymore in Lebanon. The passport is our only ticket to escape from the miserable situation that we are stuck inside it. In Lebanon, one cannot secure his future and live a comfortable life. I started trading hash because I was not able to find work and I had to do this work to survive the crisis and I am now wanted by the government who put me in this situation in the first place. I am currently contacting smugglers to migrate through Syria and escape this hell and the situation I found myself inside it even though I never thought that I would put myself in such a situation prior to the crisis.’

*no water, no jobs, no hope and no future... Things will even be worse in Lebanon, I only see dark days awaiting us... I wish I could go anywhere but here... I am trying to convince my fiancé to sell his house and to migrate anywhere when we get married.*

## Adolescents’ voice and agency within their family and community

We now discuss the effects of the country’s economic and political crisis on adolescents’ ability to exercise voice and agency within their family and community. We focus on findings related to decision-making within the family, mobility and access to safe spaces, social connectedness, online access and safety, and opportunities for civic engagement.

### Decision-making within the family and community

#### Family control over girls

Lebanese adolescents (boys and girls) feel they have more voice, understanding and support in their family than Palestinian adolescents do. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained:

*My family are very good with me. They do not interfere in anything. My father tells me it is up to me to decide anything in my life because they trust me and know how they raised me.*

On the other hand, Palestinian girls and, to a lesser extent, boys described being controlled by their family, and many reported the use of violence if adolescents oppose customs, rules or demands. This is especially the case for girls due to the cultural importance of women’s honour and chastity (as discussed earlier).

In general, Palestinian girls are most likely to feel that they are not listened to by their family and community. Palestinian and Lebanese girls reported feeling that girls’ voices are often unheard, but most boys and girls alike reported having only limited conversations with their families. Lebanese girls are more likely than Palestinian girls to report receiving support from their family in making decisions. Boys in general, whether Lebanese or Palestinian, have more ownership over their choices and decisions. Some adolescents reported that siblings can be supportive and understanding. In general, Palestinian boys seek support from their sisters, but this is not reciprocated: Palestinian girls report receiving little support from their brothers or, sometimes, sisters. A 16-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that:

*My sister and I are friends... I take her opinion on everything I want to do and she gives me advice... I tell her a lot of things but there are certain things that I do not share with her because they are boys’ issues, like what happens between my friends or the fights, because she would not be interested in these things.*



**Photo 17: Photo story by Ivona Mohammad, a 17-year-old engaged out-of-school Palestinian girl living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

'Girls in the camp have no control over anything in their lives. The family dominate everything in a girl's life. This all because of the culture and traditions in the camp. Girls are forbidden from talking to boys either on phone or in-person. Girls are not allowed to go out like boys. They are not allowed to study or work. Girls are born prisoners in their homes inside the bigger prison they live in, the walled-off camp. The family does not trust the girl and parents do not speak with their children. Girls always feel they are suffocating in their own home. Girls live in fear, anxiety and worry; they live a life of loneliness because no one understands them and listens to them.'

Lebanese boys do not exert much power over any sisters, and girls confiding in their brothers is more common among Lebanese girls than Palestinian girls. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city stated that:

*My brother is my best friend... He takes me with him everywhere... When my parents do not allow me to go out, he takes me out with him... We tell each other everything. I even tell him about my boyfriend and he helps me to meet him.*

Palestinian girls are strongly controlled by their parents, especially the father, and by brothers, who often make decisions about girls' education, work and marriage. Some girls are even forced to become engaged and marry at a young age. Fiancés and husbands usually take control of girls' lives in a similar fashion to how fathers and brothers did, and it is common for the family to leave any decision about their daughter's life and choices to the fiancé once she is engaged. Girls reported that fiancés and husbands prevent them from going to school, put restrictions on their movement, prevent them from taking part in any social

activities, and restrict them from working outside the home. Parents (especially Palestinian parents) also exercise strong control over how girls dress, often demanding they dress more modestly. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp reported that:

*My mother does not like the way I dress, she asks me to wear longer shirts or dresses... I have a different style and my clothes are modest and long, but she wants them to cover under the knees.*

In the public sphere, both Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents have little or no spaces (social, civic or political) in which they can exercise voice. However, Palestinian adolescents feel their marginalisation and exclusion is twofold, as they are already marginalised within their community by virtue of their status as refugees and this is then compounded because of marginalization on the basis of gender and age. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp lamented that: 'No one listens to us, not our family, nor the factions or the Lebanese state... No one cares about us.'

### Access to friends

Palestinian girls' access to their friends is restricted by their family as it is seen as not decent for girls to go out frequently from their homes. Restrictions on making friendships with girls the family perceive as being a bad influence on their daughters is also common, especially girls who face gossip due to mixing with boys. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*My family forbade me from talking with my best friend because people were gossiping about her that she has a relationship with a boy... I did not listen to them and I still went to visit her. I had a fight with my family and they beat me... when my brother knew, he got furious and locked me up at home.*

Palestinian girls are mostly forbidden from having male friends or interacting with boys. A 20-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp commented that: 'My mother does not allow me to go a lot to my friends. She only allows me once or twice a week. She says that if I go out a lot, people will start talking about me.' Palestinian girls and, to a lesser extent, Lebanese girls have limits on how much time they can spend visiting friends. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained: 'I like to spend more time with my best friend but mother does not allow me. She gives me an hour or two with my friend



**Photo 18: Photo story by Ivona Mohammad, a 17-year-old engaged out-of-school Palestinian girl living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

'Birds always make me think about freedom. Birds can fly wherever they want and eat whatever they find in nature. Male and female birds stay together all the time and are friends with each other. I wish I can be like a free bird and have freedom and ease of mind, but I rather feel like a bird in a cage where everything is forbidden for me. I cannot have male friends without having problems because of these friendships in my community as girls and boys are forbidden from forming friendships. I like my male friends more than girls but we are not free as the birds.'

and then calls me or comes to take me.' Furthermore, Palestinian girls are often required to be accompanied by another family member (often a brother) when going somewhere inside or outside the camp. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp stated that: 'I take my sister to places she wants to go to. If she wants to go to our neighbours or her friends, I accompany her. She does not go out alone.' Lebanese girls face fewer family restrictions on socialising and visiting their friends. Friendships with boys and access to mixed-sex spaces are not restricted for Lebanese girls, whereas they are strictly forbidden for most Palestinian girls.

## Opportunities offered by local organisations

The courses and programmes offered by local organisations were reported to have positive impacts on adolescents. Lebanese adolescents find that they add value to their educational and professional life and help them find better opportunities. Lebanese girls found that some vocational courses were very helpful in gaining more experience in their major, whereas Lebanese boys – similar

to their Palestinian counterparts – see vocational courses as offering the chance to diversify their skills, which is much needed given the state of the Lebanese labour market. Educational courses were also reported to help adolescents, especially at grades 9 and 12, when students have official exams.

Lebanese and Palestinian girls reported that the different programmes offered by local organisations have an especially positive impact on their personality and self-confidence, and thus improve their psychosocial well-being. A 20-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city explained:

*I was feeling really down until I joined a psychosocial social support programme... There, we share a lot of things and I learned to talk and let things out... I did not know how to share my thoughts and feelings before, but now... I am more talkative and able to express myself... I feel more confident.*

Furthermore, Palestinian girls reported that the programmes offered by local organisations were a way to substitute for loss of education, enabling them to do activities outside the house – for which there are few opportunities for girls in Ein el-Hilweh. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from the camp described how:

*Without the organisations we would have nothing... Going to organisations has changed me a lot... It allows me to go outside the house... My personality and way of thinking changed... I became more aware about different things... It makes you a different person and helps you grow.*

## Mobility and access to safe places

Adolescent boys, Palestinian and Lebanese, have more freedom of movement and access to public spaces than girls. However, Lebanese girls generally have more freedom of movement and access to public spaces than their Palestinian counterparts, although Lebanese girls still have less freedoms than Lebanese boys. Whereas Lebanese and Palestinian boys are generally free to spend time on the streets or in the local neighbourhood doing activities such as playing football, going to cafes (sometimes to play video games), or even going on trips to far-away places with their friends, girls have comparatively few activities available to them (though Lebanese girls mentioned being able to go to a gym, Palestinian girls tended to say that gyms are mostly for boys). Lebanese girls also have more access to streets where they can walk to take exercise, whereas this is not available for Palestinian girls due to the

congested nature of the camps where they live. Palestinian girls face many restrictions on their movement and their visibility on the streets and in public places. The streets are easily accessible for boys, but girls face scrutiny and gossip from the community for being seen on the streets and in public spaces, and might even face violence from their family if they walk on the streets and especially if they are seen interacting with boys. Boys of both nationalities have more accessible spaces for leisure time compared to girls, and especially Palestinian girls, who almost exclusively meet others at home. An 18-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained how:

*We are not allowed to go to the street while the boys stay on the streets all the time. If we go out, people will start gossiping about us... Boys go to cafes and network [internet] cafes with their friends while we do not have any place to go.*

A 16-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp also commented that: *'I spend most of my time on the street with my friends... Sometimes we go to a cafe and stay there but mostly we stay on the street.'*

As already noted, Lebanese girls face fewer restrictions than Palestinian girls, and are allowed to access public spaces although often only during the day, before sunset. In some spaces, girls can only go during the morning before boys congregate there. Some spaces are also considered off limits to girls altogether, as these are usually spaces where boys congregate. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city noted that:

*I like to go walking on Ras el-Ein [a public space] with my friend, but we can only go in the morning before the boys start coming there... We do not go in the afternoon because people will think we went there for the boys and start gossiping.*

Both Lebanese and Palestinian girls face restrictions on their movement after sundown, which boys do not face. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp noted: *'The sundown marks our prison time... The time after which we cannot be out of the house.'* Lebanese girls have also cited scrutiny and gossip by the community if they are highly visible in public spaces, and this effectively limits girls' movement in these spaces. Parents and brothers (particularly of Palestinian girls) actively control girls' access to public spaces, to protect the family's honour and reputation. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp explained that: *'I do not allow my sister to go to the*



**Photo 19: Photo story Rawan Attiyah, a 19-year-old out-of-school Palestinian girl living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

*'The sunset has been and continues to be girls' imprisonment, from the time of my grandmother's adolescence to my mother's and until mine today. Sunset is the time for girls to return home. Despite the beauty of the sunset, girls cannot enjoy it.'*

*street. The streets are full of boys and this will bring her a bad reputation.'* Control over girls – whether Palestinian or Lebanese – is almost always linked to the presence of males and the girl's (and family's) reputation in the community – a sentiment rooted in culture. Unlike brothers' control over Palestinian adolescent girls, Lebanese adolescents remarked that brothers do not control their sisters. A 17-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city said: *'The brother has no say over his sister. Only the parents and the father have a say over their daughter.'*

### Street and community insecurity

Peer-to-peer violence is common on the streets, among both Palestinian and Lebanese boys. Lebanese girls report that peer violence is confined to male violence on the streets. However, Palestinian girls report that peer violence is increasing but remains at a low level. Nonetheless, boys' fights on the streets are more common and violent. Many Palestinian and Lebanese boys admitted to engaging in street violence and using white weapons on streets, although some reported that guns were also used. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city stated that: *'I was once stabbed in a fight I had with boys at Ras el-Ein [public space].'* Some boys admitted that they carry white weapons or guns with them when they go out to the streets. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp said: *'I always carry a blade with me under my tongue*

*just in case I got into a fight.* Palestinian boys noted that it has become more common among young boys in the Ein el-Hilweh camp to carry a weapon over recent years and they increasingly use those weapons to prove their masculinity among their peers. Easy access and low cost of weapons in the camp have made it easy for younger boys to access weapons. By contrast, some boys – Lebanese and Palestinian – cited violence on the streets as a reason for them avoiding some public spaces. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained:

*I do not like to go out to the streets or to Ras el-Ein as I do not like the boys there... I am not like them and I prefer to study, stay at home or visit my friend... We were raised differently in my family and I do not like to engage with others on the streets.*

Violence on the streets is not limited to peers, as there are substantial security risks in Baalbek and in Ein el-Hilweh camp. In Baalbek, there are many armed clans and drugs and arms traffickers, and some neighbourhoods are controlled by them. Weapon fire at night is common, and clashes between the clans are frequent. A 16-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained that: *'Firing guns at night is normal in Baalbek... It happens every day, it is part of our lives and it does not scare me... When clashes occur, I go out and watch them.'* Lebanese adolescents reported that they avoid some neighbourhoods in Baalbek that are controlled by clans due to the frequent clashes there. However, insecurity in Ein el-Hilweh camp, due to tensions and clashes between the different factions there, has had enormous impacts on Palestinian adolescents, particularly boys, and especially if they enter a neighbourhood of an opposing faction. A 19-year-old Palestinian young man from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that: *'There are certain neighbourhoods in the camp that I cannot enter. If I go there I might be killed because I am an active member of Fatah.'* Moreover, some adolescents mentioned that these tensions and threats can cause families to be displaced from their homes in the camp. A 16-year-old Palestinian boy described how:

*During the last war that happened in the camp, we had to leave our house and live outside the camp because we live in an Islamic neighbourhood and my family are in Fatah. They killed my uncle and were threatening to kill my father... We lived outside the camp for a year and it was the hardest time in our lives... Since then, my father lost his business in the camp and I had to leave school and start working to help him.'*



**Photo 20: Photo story by Mohammad Ali, a 20-year-old out-of-school young Palestinian man living in Ein el-Hilweh camp**

*'Ein el-Hilweh has a bad environment. It is not a good place to live in. It does not have open spaces or trees, you cannot see the sky or have a breathable fresh air. The worst thing that there are always armed fights between political factions and we find ourselves suddenly running on the streets. There are also a lot of fights between the males on the streets. Although I spend most of my time with my friends on streets or in cafes in the camp but I like going outside the camp, it makes me forget all this pressure or maybe it disappears, and I feel a great comfort.'*

Furthermore, violence on the streets, and especially the armed clashes in the camp, has been cited as the main reason why families restrict girls' movement, as they fear for their safety. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp noted that: *'My father does not allow me to go outside in the camp because he always fears that fights might start.'* Some girls also reported that fights and clashes, and the heavy presence of armed men on the streets, was causing increasing levels of distress and anxiety. A 20-year-old Palestinian young woman from the camp explained: *'I hate weapons and I fear the armed men on the streets, they scare me... When I see armed men, I try to avoid them and change my route.'*

### **Impact of harassment on girls' mobility and freedom**

Both Lebanese and Palestinian girls reported that they had experienced harassment on the streets, at markets and in public spaces. Palestinian girls noted that harassment is common inside the camp, which is why families restrict girls' mobility or require girls to be accompanied when they go outside the home. Palestinian boys confirmed that harassment and fear of gossip is the main reason why

they control their sisters' mobility and activities outside the house. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp explained that:

*Girls cannot go to the street, it is full of boys and they won't leave the girl alone... My sister does not go out of the house alone, I walk with her when she wants to visit our neighbour or her friends... She cannot walk on the street with her friends like boys...*

For Palestinians, the fear of harassment intensifies outside the camps, as they believe girls face more risks when they move among the Lebanese community. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Wavel camp said:

*I would never allow my sister to go outside the camp alone, this is impossible... She can go to her friends inside the camp as people know her and no one will do anything to her, but it is impossible for her to go outside the camp.*

As noted earlier, family fears of girls being harassed also impacts girls' education and their ability to work outside the home. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp noted that:

*I do not allow my sister to work outside the camp or anywhere with strangers... I do not want her to face any bad situations and for men to harass her... The only way for her to work is if I had a store and she works in it with me.*

Lebanese girls reported that harassment is widespread in their community and permeates all public spaces, including neighbourhoods, streets, markets, schools and workplaces. Although harassment affects Lebanese girls' access to streets and public spaces, or limits their access to the early hours when boys are less likely to be there, unlike Palestinian adolescent girls, Lebanese girls did not report serious impacts of harassment on their education or other life choices. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained that:

*We cannot go to Ras el-Ein in the afternoon because boys will start coming at this time... There are many places where girls cannot go, especially in the afternoon, because they are full of boys...*

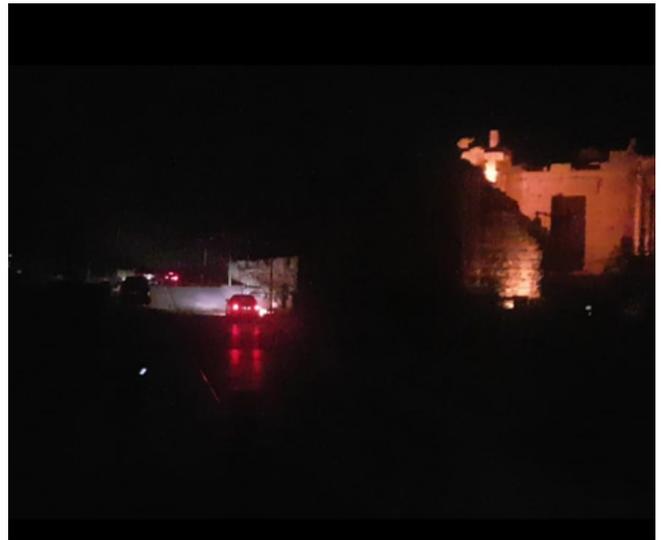
Lebanese girls referred to catcalling as being a normal part of a girl's life in Baalbek because it is so widespread. Although some girls do not believe it is as harmful as sexual harassment or unwanted touching, others find it very uncomfortable and it makes them feel unsafe. A 21-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city

explained: *'It is not normal nor acceptable to face this... I find it humiliating and it makes me feel bad about myself.'*

Lebanese girls also mentioned that it is common for them to be chased by boys who are either on foot, or on motorcycles or in cars, which causes them anxiety and means they look for a different route to avoid these men. A 19-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city recalled one experience:

*I noticed that there is this guy following me on the street when I leave my workplace to go to my home... When it occurred several times, I started changing the street I walked on to make him lose me.*

Lebanese girls did not perceive that their risk of harassment has increased due to the crisis and rising levels of poverty and insecurity. However, Palestinian girls did indicate that harassment has increased following the crisis, and they linked this to increased consumption of alcohol and drugs by boys, who are becoming increasingly desperate as



**Photo 21: Photo story by Rita Toufan, a 17-year-old in-school Lebanese girl living in Baalbek city**

*'Girls face verbal and physical harassment a lot and in all places and during their whole life. The electricity cuts lead to absence of security or safety and made the situation worse for us. Girls are not able to go out anymore especially at night. The streets became empty due to darkness and lack of security where there are a lot of robberies, kidnapping, rape and killings. This situation is making us live in fear and worried all the time. We barely go outside the house now because we are scared. All places became unsafe and at all times. Even the boys do not go out as they used to because they are afraid too. This situation is harming us psychologically, we are tired, afraid and depressed and have nothing in our lives anymore.'*

they have no jobs and are on the streets, with no aim in life. Palestinian girls noted that the increase in drug addiction, especially among males in the camp, has made streets unsafe for them, further restricting their already limited free movement. A few Palestinian boys also mentioned avoiding some streets in Ein el-Hilweh camp to avoid other boys who consume alcohol and use drugs. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from the same camp explained that: *'I cannot go out of the house anymore... The street is full of boys using drugs.'* Both Lebanese and Palestinian girls mentioned that fear of kidnapping has increased as a result of the crisis. Palestinian girls mentioned this fear, both inside and outside the camp, mostly involving taxi drivers, although their fears also reflect the increase in gender-based violence in Lebanon and incidents they hear on the news or social media. However, some Lebanese girls reported that as well as fears about the general increase in violence against women in the country, cases of kidnapping (which used to occur infrequently in Baalbek) had increased following the crisis, which in turn increased girls' fears about going outside the house. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city noted that: *'It is becoming scary to go out... Kidnapping has increased a lot. It is becoming worse in Baalbek and there is no security anymore.'*

## Social connectedness

Social connectedness for young people, especially those from refugee communities, is a significant challenge that has been exacerbated by the economic crisis and to a lesser extent the pandemic. The Palestinian camps in Lebanon are socially and spatially isolated from Lebanese society. Ein el-Hilweh camp is walled off and its entrances controlled by Lebanese army checkpoints. As already noted, Palestinian armed factions control the camps, which are considered off limits to the Lebanese state (Lebanese armed forces do not enter or interfere in the camps). Palestinian adolescents, especially girls, perceive the isolation of the camps and discrimination in the Lebanese community to be directly linked to violence inside the camps, and perceive that this separation reinforces the more conservative norms that govern restrictions on what girls can do. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that:

*We are like this and our community is backwards because we are stuffed like animals inside this camp, like prisoners inside the camps walls... Look how we are living, crowded above each other in this small camp... No wonder people will burst in some way or another.*

Palestinian boys reported experiencing problems at army checkpoints at the entrances of Ein el-Hilweh camp, which affects their mobility. As already noted, Palestinian girls' access to spaces outside the camp is very restricted, limited to a few outings (mainly for holidays) during the year. Some boys reported relatively infrequent movement outside the camp, partly to avoid harassment by Lebanese forces at the checkpoints (camp entrances) or outside the camp.

## Interactions with peers

The increase in fuel prices and transportation costs, as well as hyperinflation and financial vulnerability, has also limited Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents' movement. Palestinian girls reported that they are not able to go out with their friends to cafes and restaurants anymore, which were among the few outings they had prior to the crisis. An 18-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*I used to go out with my friends every month or two months or so, and on the Eid mainly, but the restaurants and cafes are now very expensive and the taxi fees are very expensive as well... Last Eid, we went to a restaurant and left after we saw the prices... Now we do not go out anymore, we gather sometimes at our houses and each one brings her own drinks and snacks because no one can afford hospitality anymore.*

Similarly, Palestinian boys in Ein el-Hilweh camp, as well as Lebanese boys, reported no longer being able to afford activities like going to cafes with friends, or cruising in cars outside the camp. An 18-year-old Palestinian boy noted that:

*I have not been out with my friends for more than two years. I work all the time and go home, stay on my phone watching YouTube... I yearn for an outing with my friends or a trip, but I cannot afford it as my salary is not enough for food at work anymore... This has become my wish, to go out with my friends.*

Likewise, some Palestinian boys and Lebanese boys in Baalbek reported that they no longer go places with friends. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city said:

*When I graduated from school, I used to go out with my friends in my father's car. We used to cruise to different places and then hell broke in Lebanon and the fuel prices skyrocketed... A boy my age should be living his life, going out with friends, having fun, not worrying about the simplest things in life. But now the car is parked at*



Photo 22: Photo story taken by Deeb Deeb, a 19-year-old out-of-school Lebanese boy living in Baalbek city

'Since the crisis, our local currency has fallen to the ground. We cannot afford anything anymore. Our income is not enough for transportation to work and we are not able to go out anymore. I cannot go to the café with my friends as I used to. Prior to the crisis, I used to frequently go on outings with my friends, we used to go to the cinema, go to Beirut, go the Assi river for a picnic. I only stay at home now.'

*home because we cannot afford gas and I stay at home because everything is expensive... I have already lost my youth years.'*

Due to the environment in the walled-off camp, Palestinian adolescents naturally have fewer public spaces and less outdoor activities compared to Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents in Baalbek.

Although that same camp environment means that Palestinian adolescents have easier physical access to friends, Lebanese adolescents in Baalbek city reported having less access to friends as they cannot afford fuel or transportation costs to visit them anymore. Furthermore, adolescents noted that visiting friends has become rare, especially during the winter, as all households are struggling financially, and some families can only afford to heat one room (if any), so hosting visitors has become costly. Lebanese boys and girls both reported that going out with friends has become rare and their meetings are limited to home visits, which are again fewer. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city explained that:

*I rarely see my friends. We used to go out all the time and visit each other but we do not anymore... Last time when I wanted to visit my friend, I had a fight with my father because he did not want to take me to her house as it would cost us a lot because the car gas is very expensive.*

A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city also commented:

*I stopped seeing my friends especially now in the winter... None of us can have a heater in more than one room and we cannot go out in the cold... We only talk on the phone.*

### Increased insecurity, limited movement and increased risks for adolescents

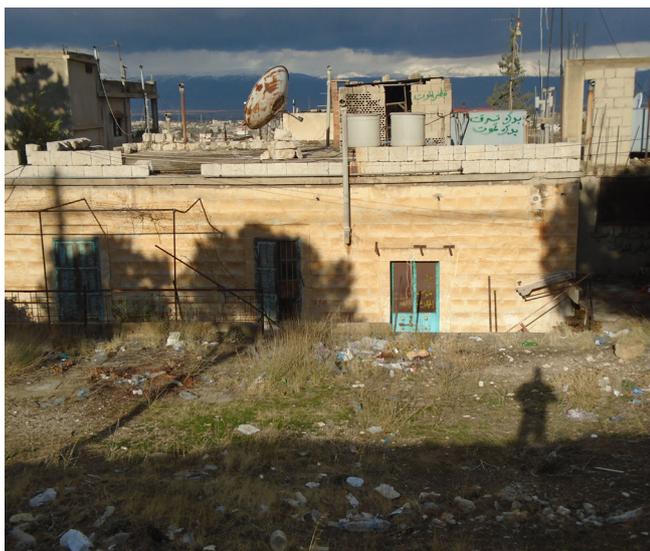
Both Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents reported increasing levels of insecurity and lack of safety following the crisis. Lebanese adolescents in Baalbek reported an increase in house robberies, armed robberies on the streets, kidnapping and use of weapons. This lack of safety and security has had many impacts on adolescents, including increased psychological distress and restricted mobility for both boys and girls (for Lebanese adolescents in general and for Palestinian adolescents outside of the camp). Lebanese boys reported that they are now very scared to go out, and alarmingly, many report that they carry weapons for self-protection. A 21-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city said:

*There is no security at all and the state does not exist in Baalbek, you have to defend yourself... I do not go out of the house without carrying my weapon in case armed robbers attack me.*

A 19-year-old Lebanese young man who works as a bus driver explained: *'I admit I am saving money to buy a gun... I have to because I am out on the streets all the time and it became a necessity to have a gun with you.'* Lebanese adolescents reported that violence is continuing to spread in Baalbek, and whereas it used to be limited mainly to certain neighbourhoods and clashes mostly erupted at night, following the crisis and amid the deteriorating security situation, clashes now occur in all places and at any time of the day. Lebanese boys and girls recounted that their movement has been restricted as a result of this situation. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl from Baalbek city described how:

*It is not safe anywhere anymore, even if you are in your own house... You cannot guarantee if you go anywhere that something would not happen. They even fire guns and rob in the market during the day now, and when there are many people out there, and they do not care.*

Alarmingly, given the increasingly limited job opportunities, low wages and financial vulnerability of households, adolescents are now at greater risk of joining armed



**Photo 23: Photo story by Abou Hamza Tleis, a 19-year-old out-of-school Lebanese boy living in Baalbek city**

'The sentence on the water tank reads: "If you steal, you will die". Every day we hear of a robbery or a murder around us that it became necessary to hold a weapon anywhere we go in Baalbek. After the sun goes down, you feel there is an absence of safety, even in the safe places like the café we usually sit in. I feel constant anxiety while going out with friends, and there is always a person from the group holding a weapon. This friend would be responsible for driving everyone home at the end of the evening.'

groups. Some Lebanese boys reported that they were now willing to get involved in drugs and arms trafficking as a way to cope with the impacts of the crisis, even though they realise the substantial risks involved. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained: *'If I had no option and if I cannot find work, I would work in trafficking drugs.'* A 20-year-old Lebanese young man commented that: *'I lost my job... and I could not find work for more than a year... I had no option but to work in drug trafficking or I would have died from hunger.'* Palestinian adolescent boys who used to refuse to follow family or friends and join armed factions have now shown greater interest as the crisis has worsened, leaving them with few other options, seeing it as a way to acquire hard currency that they can use to support their family. A 17-year-old Palestinian boy from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained that:

*I did not want to join Fatah, neither did my father, although all my family are in Fatah. But I applied [to join] and I am currently waiting for them to tell me about my starting date to start working with them as a soldier... I have no option but to do this and wait to find a chance to migrate.*

## Access to information and digital technology

### Online access

Lebanese and Palestinian boys reported that they have fair and open access to mobile phones, with no parental restrictions on their access and usage. Palestinian girls, however, do face restrictions in accessing a mobile phone, and if they own a phone, their activity is often closely monitored and controlled by their mother or brother. Lebanese girls, on the other hand, have a fair amount of access to a mobile phone and there is little parental/familial surveillance of how they use it. Nonetheless, some Lebanese adolescents said that they were scrutinised by family members for sharing their political and religious views online. A 21-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city explained that:

*I posted on Facebook criticising the political parties and religious figures... This caused a huge outburst in my family and they started asking me to remove the post because my uncle got upset by it because he is a sheikh [religious cleric].*

Adolescents from both communities, boys and girls alike, reported censoring or not sharing their views on social media either due to lack of interest, fear of getting involved in online conflicts with people of opposing views, or fears of conflicts with family or community members with opposing views.

Online access is a major source of information for adolescents on all matters in their lives, including education, health (especially during the pandemic), social and political events, and finding opportunities whether for education, work or opportunities to enrol in courses or programmes run by local organisations. As a result of the country's economic and political crisis, adolescents report using social media heavily in search of work opportunities or to start their own online business. A 20-year-old Lebanese young woman stated that:

*My phone is my whole world... I use it for everything I need... If I want to know more about my lessons, I use my phone... I search Google to find information on diseases if I have any health problems... I also sell clothes on WhatsApp and I am gaining more income like this.*

Some adolescents also reported using social media to spread awareness about specific issues among their peers. A 19-year-old Lebanese girl noted:

*I have a WhatsApp group for girls where I share the information I learn in my nursing classes on sexual and*

*reproductive health with my friends... I also search for more information by myself and do my own research and share it with them.*

### Online access during the pandemic

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, online communication has become the most accessible way for adolescents to communicate with friends, especially for girls. During lockdowns, girls' movement outside the home became even more restricted, especially Palestinian girls, who already faced more restrictions on their movement than Palestinian boys and Lebanese adolescents (girls and boys). However, using a phone to communicate with friends can undermine privacy, as girls' homes are crowded and they do not have private spaces. During lockdown, a 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp said:

*I only talk to my friends on the phone, I do not see them as we are at home all the time... I cannot share anything with them when I am feeling bad or something happens because we cannot talk in privacy at home. It is different from talking face-to-face.*

Online access also helped some adolescents to study during online classes, especially as they received little support from schools or teachers. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl said that:

*I am searching my lessons online to understand them... I look for articles and videos on YouTube and this is helping me understand my lessons better.*

### Limitations to online access following the crisis

As the Lebanese crisis worsened, electricity cuts and poor internet connectivity meant that online communication was often interrupted, limiting adolescents' access to peer support. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained that:

*Our lives have become meaningless. We do not have anything. Not even the basic things that a person should not worry about like water and electricity... We cannot go out and the phone, which is our only means of for entertainment and talking to people, has also become a luxury... There is no electricity most of the time, so we have to rush when the electricity comes to charge our phones, which are always off... I spend most of my time in bed... sleeping because there is nothing to do... When I talk to my friend who lives in Turkey, I feel embarrassed when he asks me about myself. What should I tell him?! That I am now charging my phone before the electricity cuts again to study and to talk to people, that I have nothing, no education, no life, and no future, while he lives a normal life there.'*

Some adolescents reported that with increasing prices if their phones break they struggle to afford to repair or replace them. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp said:

*My phone broke months ago and I could not get a new one. All the prices are in dollars and I cannot buy any phone now... I use my mother's phone but very little, because during the day she is at work and at night she is using it.*

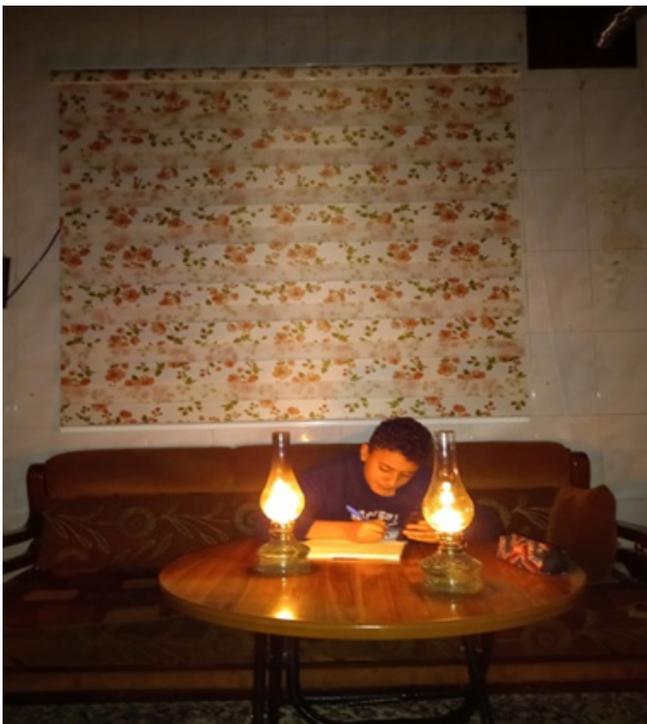


Photo 24: Photo story by Mohammad Ali, a 20-year-old out-of-school young Lebanese man living in Baalbek city

'The electricity cuts is making our life impossible. We are back living on the light of antique gasoline lamps like the ancient ages. I have nothing to do, so I sleep very early, I cannot charge my phone or watch TV. There is no internet connection or phone signal in the absence of electricity. I am unable to talk with friends or play an online game with them. If I decide to go out, I cannot because the gas prices are high and I cannot visit my friends. I became accustomed to loneliness, and been sleeping much more often.'

## Online violence

Both Lebanese and Palestinian girls reported that online harassment is common, but its real-life impacts affected Palestinian girls far more than Lebanese girls. Some Lebanese girls said they avoid sharing personal pictures on social media platforms to avoid harassment, or avoid their pictures being used inappropriately. Palestinian girls, however, face the strongest restrictions on their online access and usage, with many not allowed to have social media accounts or share photos on social media. This is due to the risk that some boys have been known to use girls' photos to harass or blackmail them, by altering them and sharing them widely. Many girls self-censor their online activities to avoid such problems. Palestinian girls recounted instances where online harassment or



Photo 25: Photo story by Shaghaf Rifai, a 19-year-old out-of-school Palestinian girl from Syria living in Ein el-Hilweh camp

'Online harassment and blackmailing is widely spread. Girls can be blackmailed for everything a chat, a voice message and their photos. This is because the boys know that girls fear their family's reaction if they knew that they are talking to boys. Boys even fake conversations and photos of girls and share them with their friends. Girls are blackmailed to give money or sexual favors in return of not disgracing them with their family and community. Many girls who were blackmailed sexually or whose nude photos were spread in the camp have committed suicide.'

violence meant that girls faced violence from their own families, blaming them for it, and had been shunned by their community as a result. There were even reports of girls being killed or committing suicide to avoid this fate. Some girls reported that contacting boys online caused family members (especially brothers) to beat them, confiscating their phone and locking them inside the home. A 19-year-old Palestinian young woman from Ein el-Hilweh camp said:

*My brother searched my phone and he saw a conversation I had with my [male] friend... The conversation was very normal but he got angry and broke my phone and started beating me so hard... He forbade me from leaving the house and from talking to anyone.*

Both Palestinian and Lebanese boys, on the other hand, reported that their phone use is not monitored or restricted, even at a younger age. There has been no noticeable increase in online violence following the Covid-19 pandemic and despite increased online presence of adolescents (both Lebanese and Palestinian).

## Civic engagement

### Low levels of inclusion and participation by adolescents

Adolescents (whether Lebanese or Palestinian) reported little or no participation in decision-making at any level, from the household to the state. Due to the political and religious affiliations of most Lebanese families, it is not deemed acceptable for adolescents to express any opposing views. For example, during the 2019 anti-government protests, some Lebanese families opposed their adolescent children's (and particularly girls') participation, due to the family's political affiliations. A 20-year-old Lebanese young woman explained: 'I had a lot of fights with my family when I went to the protests in Baalbek... They did not like it and did not want me to go, but I still went.' However, generally, Lebanese adolescents did not participate in large numbers. In a sectarian and politically charged society, Lebanese adolescents reported that they do not often share their views, either on social media or with friends or family and community members, in order to avoid conflicts with them. An 18-year-old Lebanese boy described how:

*In front of people I pretend to be with the party [Hezbollah]... Sometimes, people talk nonsense but I do not bother to talk to them because I do not want to get into useless arguments and lose my friends because they will not change their minds.*

Palestinian adolescents, on the other hand, do not engage in protests outside the camps. During the anti-government protests in October 2019, they could not participate, although some reported that they wanted to, as the situation in the country also affects them. This was because of fears of being scapegoated by Lebanese authorities or some of the Lebanese communities (given complex history of Palestinians in Lebanon). However, adolescent boys and young men are actively engaged in protests within the camps, relating to Palestinian refugees' rights in Lebanon or the Palestinian cause. Many reported having taken part in the uprising in the camps in July 2019 in response to the Minister of Labour's decision to require foreigners to apply for a permit to be able to work in Lebanon. Some Palestinian girls reported that they had wanted to participate, but this was forbidden as the protests were mixed-sex gatherings. A 16-year-old Palestinian girl from Ein el-Hilweh camp explained:

*We are not allowed to go the protests because there are a lot of men there... Even if we participate, people start gossiping about us... My mother allowed me to go to one of the protests with my brother and the people started talking about me, [saying] that I am out in the streets with a boy, they did not know he was my brother.*

### Socio-political unrest and adolescents' perceptions of their civic role

In the public and social spheres, both Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents feel marginalised and have no voice and no opportunities to express their views. With the recent socio-political unrest, these feelings have increased. The 2019 anti-government protests left some adolescents hopeful for positive change, although only a few (and only Lebanese) adolescents took part, for the reasons already noted. However, as the protests subsided and the crisis unfolded, adolescents began to feel more pessimistic and unable to play a role in bringing about change. A 19-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city explained:

*It is saddening that we are living in this way... Everyone is robbing us, the government and the politicians... We lost everything and we are not allowed to say a word or do anything about it... Even if we raise our voices, it is useless now and nothing will change. The crisis will not go.*

Alarmingly, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents, boys and girls alike (with only a few exceptions) reported their belief that violence (war or a violent uprising) would be the only way

for them to secure positive change in the country. A 19-year-old Lebanese young man from Baalbek city explained:

*That was not a revolution. It does not work in that way. They were not serious... Only when there is violence can we achieve something... Or a war can change the situation, nothing else.*

Few adolescents appeared to believe that peaceful methods like elections or awareness-raising can achieve change in the country and society. NGOs are playing an important role in supporting adolescents and young people to be active in the socio-political realm and have a voice, although these efforts are very limited given the existing constraints. A 21-year-old Lebanese young woman from Baalbek city described her situation:

*I and a group of youth have won a grant from a programme we participated in and we created a safe space for youth where we do many activities, including meetings to discuss sectarianism and politics... We have been focusing on voting rights and the role of youth in elections because we are close to the elections. We want the youth to know that they can change things with their vote and that they should think of their rights as citizens of the country rather than following the parties... Some youth do not like our conversations and leave, but we are not giving up, and hoping that we can convince more youth to change.*



Photo 26: Photo story by Marie Khoury, a 21-year-old in-school young Lebanese woman living in Baalbek city

*'I feel like we are all like the blind people, walking and unable to see anything in front of us. Our country is ruined and we do not have a future. It seems like the people gave up to this crisis and they are not trying to do anything. If there is a solution for this crisis and we are able to make change, I want to be part of it but no one knows what the solution to the crisis is. I started thinking that a dictatorship is better because when you have one head of the country, then you know whom should you face and punish. I realised that we are suffering worse than those who are living under a dictatorship.'*

# Discussion

## Education access in jeopardy

Our findings indicate that vulnerable adolescents' access to education in Lebanon is increasingly at risk, particularly adolescents in public education institutions. The economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on their access to education and work opportunities. The increasing financial pressures on households mean that many are unable to afford school fees, transport or stationery costs, which is forcing many students to leave education. The lack of support for students, from the state and other organisations, as well as limited scholarship opportunities, risk deepening the country's crisis. The financial pressures on households are increasingly pushing adolescents towards negative coping strategies such as child labour or early marriage, both of which translate into loss of education. The crumbling education sector, crippled by teacher strikes and lack of financial resources for educational institutions to cover their running costs, are resulting in interrupted education for students and decreasing quality of education.

## Negative gendered social norms as a barrier to education

Gendered social norms and traditions are by far the greatest barrier to girls' education, and especially in the case of Palestinian refugee girls. Although boys' education is constrained by their social role as family breadwinner, which often means they have to sacrifice their education to support their families, girls' education remains most impacted by gender-based restrictions. This is particularly the case for Palestinian girls, given especially conservative cultural norms in their family environment. Whether it is the expectation that girls will take on caregiver roles at home, the perception that a girl's role is as a wife and mother (hence expectations of marriage at a young age), or limitations on girls working or mixing with boys, Palestinian girls' access to education – especially higher education – remains severely constrained.

## Work restrictions and limited opportunities impact adolescents' educational aspirations

Palestinian communities' lack of civic and economic rights in Lebanon is also a major factor in Palestinian

girls' and boys' lower educational levels. Lack of future work opportunities and prospects in Lebanon further limits adolescents' education aspirations. However, the perception that education now has less value appears to be shared by both Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents as a result of the economic crisis. Many can see no future from staying in education, and are seeing it only as a means to migrate and look for better work opportunities abroad. The crisis has not only increased challenges to adolescents' education, it has altered their educational ambitions, choices and opportunities. The state's indifference toward adolescents' plight, especially those of young people in refugee communities, with ever-decreasing work opportunities and increasing unemployment, is contributing to a generalised feeling of hopelessness among vulnerable communities.

## Parental and school support are key to adolescents' education

Our findings underscore that parental and school support are central to adolescents' education ambitions (particularly for higher education) as well as higher attendance rates, and successful education transitions. When parents are supportive and willing to follow up on their children's studies, adolescents tend to have greater ambitions of completing higher education, whether through the academic or TVET route. Having strong school management and supportive teachers can positively impact adolescents' education, while lack thereof tends to lead adolescents to either skip classes, put less effort into studying, or leave school altogether. This has been particularly evident in the lack of support for the shift to online classes and especially following the deterioration of the education sector amid the economic crisis. Increasingly, adolescents are feeling dissatisfied with the quality of education and the lack of support, which reinforces their growing feelings about the low value of education and its lack of returns.

## Actions to support adolescents' education

Although some adolescents had taken advantage of online learning and free educational courses and programmes run by local organisations to support their education and

education transitions, the quality of these programmes has not always been perceived as adequate. Programmes to support parents and raise awareness about the importance of education in creating better opportunities for adolescents and for their overall well-being, especially for girls, are an important first step, especially as even supportive parents are increasingly devaluing education. Yet for awareness to translate into meaningful change, expanding social assistance to reach all struggling households is essential, and requires the government to implement monetary and economic policies to reduce the harm the crisis is inflicting on Lebanon's residents. Moreover, the Ministry of Education must make serious efforts to train teachers in modern pedagogy and learning methods, updating both the academic and TVET curricula to enable adolescents to gain the skills they need, which should be linked to labour market needs so that graduates can find decent work opportunities.

### **More attention is needed to tackle escalating violence**

Violence permeates all levels of life in Lebanon, from family, schools and streets to the community overall. It not only poses risks to adolescents' safety but also has many consequences for their education, and voice and agency. The growing violence in and around schools (especially Palestinian schools) has been a key factor depriving many adolescents of an education, particularly boys, while street violence (including harassment) plays a major role in girls' limited mobility, in Palestinian and Lebanese communities alike. The increase in crime and violence as a result of the economic crisis has affected girls' and boys' mobility, as the streets are generally perceived as less safe. More time spent at home and less time outside the house spent with peers has harmed adolescents' psychosocial well-being, which was already deteriorating due to the impacts of the financial stresses on their lives. The Palestinian camps' seclusion and control by opposing factions (who often clash), and the inability of the Lebanese state to secure the streets and public spaces, are severely curtailing adolescents' and young people's freedoms and their ability to lead a normal and safe life in their community. Adolescent boys in particular are at greater risk of being engaged in harmful activities like weapon-holding, joining armed groups, or taking part in illicit activities.

Violence in Lebanon is a vicious circle that negatively impacts adolescents' lives but can also lead them to become involved in or perpetrate violence themselves.

There is a need for efforts to combat violence at all levels of society in Lebanon. Household violence is increasingly being reported by adolescents, so there is a need for awareness campaigns on violence against children and women, including to strengthen means of reporting and protection. The increased stress in the households due to the pressures of the crisis is being a direct factor contributing to increased household violence. As such, there is a growing need for psychosocial support programs that include both parents and their children. Violence in schools (though reported by Lebanese adolescents to be decreasing) must also be directly addressed by the Ministry of Education, alongside greater efforts for safe reporting at schools and training of teachers in non-violent discipline methods. The state, working with local community leaders and international organisations, must work to make streets and public spaces safer to address the deteriorating security situation.

### **Digital connectedness and limited access to basic infrastructure services**

The crisis has not only impacted adolescents' and young people's safety and mobility, it has also impacted their access to digital technology and the internet, which have become an important way of staying connected with friends and family living elsewhere. Although most Lebanese and Palestinian adolescents own a mobile phone, electricity cuts that prevent them going online are isolating them from the virtual world, often for prolonged periods. This not only prevents adolescents from accessing peer support networks, information and entertainment, but is also negatively affecting their education, especially as many schools are still using online (or a combination of online and in-class) teaching methods. Limited opportunities for adolescents to have their voice heard in the real world are reflected in their inability to use social media platforms to openly share their views or do other activities.

### **Adolescents are marginalized in the private and public sphere**

Adolescents (particularly Palestinian adolescents) reported very few opportunities to be involved in civic life in Lebanon. Marginalisation of adolescents and young people, within their home, their community and by the state, is increasingly resulting in feelings of despair, as they have little say in decisions that affect their lives, either in the private or public realms. Programmes run by local organisations were reported to have positive impacts,

so extending these programmes to target vulnerable adolescents and young people – especially girls – would be a proven pathway for increasing their participation and engagement in their respective communities. Nonetheless, efforts with parents on positive methods of parenting are necessary for the healthy development of children and adolescents. There is a need for efforts to engage

adolescents and young people within their communities, either across municipalities, factions or parties or religious institutions. The use of violence by the state has had negative impacts on adolescents' and young people's participation in civic life and their perceptions of the effectiveness of peaceful ways to bring about change.

## Implications for policy and practice

Our findings suggest some priority actions for the Lebanese government, the international community, and NGOs (national and international) seeking to improve adolescents' and young people's access to education, and voice and agency.

- Improve the quality and affordability of education. The crisis in Lebanon, with households struggling to meet basic needs, alongside the deterioration of the education sector, means that many adolescents are losing out on education. The Lebanese government must increase spending on expanding public education institutions, which are now the only affordable option for most households. It should also improve the quality of education through training teachers in how to use modern and interactive teaching methods, as well as modernising the curriculum and linking it to labour market needs. International organisations should increase their funding to education and provide financial support to students and their households, to help cover essential costs such as books, stationery and transport. The government, education institutions and international organisations will need to provide more scholarships for TVET and tertiary education, as many households are unable to afford the costs of even public education.
- Expand social protection and strengthen economic empowerment efforts. Adolescents identified household financial stresses as the main reason for school dropout or fear of losing out on education. As more and more households are unable to afford basic needs, including food, it is essential to scale up social protection to reach all vulnerable households in Lebanon. Most Palestinian

adolescents mentioned receiving social assistance from UNRWA, which has been supporting households to meet their basic needs. However, as the crisis continues to deepen, aid must be scaled up to meet increasing needs. Lebanese adolescents reported not receiving any social assistance during the crisis, except for a few receiving occasional food baskets from local organisations, or receiving fuel at lower prices from political parties they have connections with. Given the increasing fragility of many Lebanese households, the government and international organisations must expand social protection provision.

- Provide employment opportunities for young people and skills-building programmes linked to labour market needs, to improve adolescents' and young people's well-being, now and in the future. Ultimately, the government should implement corrective economic policies to address the severity of the crisis, so that adolescents and young people have better opportunities for decent work and incomes in future. The international community should support the Lebanese government to structure and implement development policies that would create opportunities for decent work for adolescents and young people. This is essential for young people to get sufficient returns on their education and counter the devaluing of education that the crisis has led to.
- Strengthen psychosocial support for adolescents and young people. Adolescents' psychosocial well-being continues to deteriorate, due to the crisis and their lack of hope for the future. Many are unable to envisage a worthwhile future for themselves, which is contributing

to the devaluing of education and feeding a cycle of distress. Lack of psychosocial support was reported by Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents alike, and considering the increasing risks to adolescents' psychosocial well-being, it is more necessary than ever for donors and local organisations to invest in psychosocial programmes that target adolescents (and to include their parents, due to increasing levels of domestic violence). The government must work towards providing an affordable national psychosocial support system with tailored services designed to meet the specific needs of adolescents and young people.

- Invest urgently in efforts to prevent violence and ensure sufficient redress. Adolescents reported lack of safety and security as a driver of increased psychosocial distress. The increase in weapon-holding among boys (especially Lebanese boys) has further impacted freedom of movement for Lebanese and Palestinian boys and girls (especially girls, who already faced restrictions on their free movement outside the home compared to boys). Efforts must be made, by Palestinian factions inside the camps, the Lebanese government and UNRWA to increase security measures inside the camps, to discourage clashes and violence by males on the streets. The Lebanese government should introduce policies to address the increasing insecurity

and weaponisation among young people. Moreover, NGOs should address violence and weapon-holding, whether inside the Palestinian camps or in Lebanese communities, through targeted programmes. Domestic violence also needs to be addressed, engaging with and challenging cultural norms (among Palestinian and Lebanese communities) which posit that masculinity requires violence. The government must also address the spread of armed groups, either within Palestinian camps (political factions and Islamic groups) or in Baalbek city (political factions and drugs and arms traffickers), as their activities are having very harmful impacts on adolescents' and their families' lives. With the reported increase in gender-based violence following the pandemic and the economic crisis, there is a need to strengthen enforcement of laws, including safe reporting to protect girls from all types of gender-based violence. Long-term awareness programmes targeting adolescents, including boys, at the household and community levels, should be implemented to address gendered norms that result in harmful practices, including early marriage, and heightened restrictions on girls' freedom of movement, social connectedness, and opportunities to exercise voice and agency.

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# Annex 1

**Table 2: Participatory research tools used by GAGE in Lebanon**

| Tool name   | Type of tool   | Purpose of tool  | Date of activity |
|---|--|--|------------------|
| Physical community mapping                            | FGD  | To understand adolescents' access to spaces and services by gender, age and other social categories.   | Aug 19           |
| Peer-to-peer interviewing training                    | Group training   | To teach adolescents how to conduct IDIs and use digital recorders.  | Aug 19           |
| Intergenerational trios – 1                           | IDIs conducted by participants with their parents and grandparents                             | To understand how decision-making and challenges facing adolescents have changed over time and vary by gender.   | Aug-Sep 19       |
| Intergenerational trios – 2                           | FGD  | To understand how decision-making and challenges facing adolescents have changed over time and vary by gender.   | Sep 19           |
| Participatory photography training                    | Group training   | To teach adolescents how to use digital cameras and how they can use photography as a storytelling tool to reflect on their realities or to express themselves.  | Sep 19           |
| Participatory photography for intergenerational trios | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the most surprising thing participants learn about their parents/grandparents' adolescence.  | Sep 19           |
| Madame President                                      | FGD  | To understand how policy-makers can support adolescent empowerment, and especially girls' empowerment, using an adolescent lens to understand how adolescents perceive their collective capabilities.        | Dec 19           |
| Participatory photography for Madame President        | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the challenges adolescents face in their community, particularly in regards to their active engagement in society.   | Dec 19           |
| Virtual community mapping                             | FGD  | To explore the virtual spaces that adolescents use in their daily lives as well as their sources of information, ideas, and social contacts beyond people in their community, and how this varies by gender. | Dec 19           |
| Friendship circles                                    | Small FGDs – The tool was conducted with each participant and two of their close friends       | To gain a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics and depth of adolescents' peer networks.   | Jan-Feb 20       |
| Covid-19 in-depth interview (IDI)                     | IDI  | To understand in real time the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns on adolescents and their households.   | Mar-Jun 20       |
| Covid-19 FGD  | FGD  | To explore in real time the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns on adolescents and their households.  | Apr-May 20       |
| Participatory photography for Covid-19 FGD            | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the challenges adolescents are facing during Covid-19 lockdowns.   | Apr-May 20       |
| Covid-19 cross-country FGD                            | FGD - The tool was conducted with participants from participatory groups in Lebanon and Jordan | To explore in real time the different experiences of adolescents in Lebanon and Jordan during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns.   | Jun 20           |

| Tool name   | Type of tool   | Purpose of tool  | Date of activity |
|---|--|--|------------------|
| Participatory photography for friendship circles    | Participatory photography  | To take photos of what adolescents value in their peer networks and what challenges they face with their peers.  | Jul 20           |
| Training on videography and blog writing            | Group training   | To teach adolescents how to make promotional videos using cameras and how to write personal blogs.   | Jul 20           |
| My Favourite Things                                 | IDI  | To understand what objects or belongings are most important to adolescents and what meaning or significance they have in their lives. This tool is highly personalised.  | Sep 20 - Jan 21  |
| Participatory photography for My Favourite Thing    | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the objects or belongings that are most important to adolescents.  | Mar 21           |
| Climate change                                      | FGD  | To explore the environment that adolescents live in, and its impacts on their ability to lead a healthy and safe life. Discussions focus on quality of housing and essential services like water and sanitation, and other issues around quality of life (hygiene, basic services, and pollution). | Jul 21           |
| Participatory photography for climate change        | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the environmental challenges adolescents face in their communities.  | Aug 21           |
| Most Significant Change                             | FGD  | To explore what young people value about the programmes they are part of – without having predefined parameters – and to understand how such initiatives can be improved based on adolescents' own perspectives.   | Sep 21           |
| Crisis  | FGD  | To understand the multidimensional impact of the crisis on adolescents, their households, and community.   | Dec 21           |
| Participatory photography for crisis                | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the most significant challenges that adolescents are facing during the crisis.   | Dec 21-Jan 22    |
| Dependent interviewing – intra-family relationships | IDI  | To understand the relationship between adolescents and their family members as well as trusted adults in their lives.  | Jan-Feb 22       |
| Gender-based violence (GBV)                         | FGD  | To explore priorities and entry points for tackling GBV experienced by adolescents within their community.   | Feb 22           |
| Participatory photography for gender-based violence | Participatory photography  | To take photos of the most significant GBV challenges that each adolescent identifies in their community.  | Mar 22           |
| Inequality  | Small FGDs - The tool was conducted with each participant and one of their close friends | To explore, through reading vignettes, priorities and entry points for tackling inequality challenges that adolescents identify in their community.  | Apr 22           |





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ISBN: 978-1-913610-86-9



## **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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Front cover: An 18-year-old Palestinian refugee from Ein El Hilweh camp, Lebanon © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2022