



Gender stereotypes and educational inequality

in Lebanon's public and private schools



This study was produced by

Madanyat for Equality

With the support of

the IGNITE programme – Inspiring Girls and Grassroots Networks for Inclusive and Transformative Education, implemented by the René Moawad Foundation in partnership with the International Rescue Committee and funded by Agence Française de Développement

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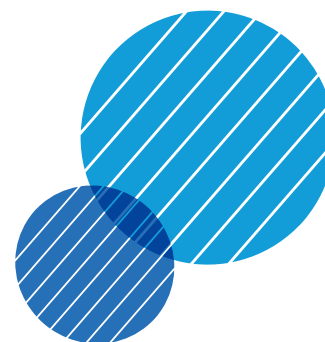
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This publication is supported by Agence Française de Développement. The ideas and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors (Madanyat for Equality) alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Agence Française de Développement.

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Summary

This study investigates how gender stereotypes and socio-economic conditions shape educational inequality in Lebanon's public and private schools, focusing on girls aged 15–18 in Metn, Akkar, and Bekaa. While Lebanon maintains comparatively high literacy and enrollment rates, structural disparities and entrenched gender norms continue to undermine girls' academic opportunities, especially in underserved regions.

Existing evidence highlights persistent barriers such as the reinforcement of stereotypes within classrooms, limited access to STEM opportunities, high dropout rates driven by poverty and early marriage, and significant regional disparities in school infrastructure and parental attitudes. Despite policy efforts by the Ministry of Education, the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), and international partners, existing interventions remain fragmented, underfunded, and insufficiently adapted to local realities.

To generate evidence, the study employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative tools. Nine focus group discussions (FGDs) with students, parents, and teachers are conducted across the three target regions, alongside six key informant interviews (KIIs) with education officials and experts. These explore cultural influences, institutional constraints, and lived experiences shaping girls' access to education. A structured survey targeting 228 female students provides quantitative insights into the availability of learning resources, gender norms in schools, and academic aspirations. By combining statistical data analyses with personal narratives, the study offers a comprehensive picture of systemic barriers to girls' education in Lebanon.

Designed as a pilot initiative, the study seeks to provide a replicable model for assessing gender-based educational inequalities in other regions of Lebanon, contributing to generate evidence on strategies that promote equitable access, retention, and empowerment of girls in education.

The findings are disseminated through advocacy efforts targeting policymakers, educational institutions, and civil society actors, with the aim of informing gender-sensitive education reforms.

Preamble

Madanyat for Equality is a Lebanese non governmental organisation , operating since 2019, committed to advancing gender equality, civic engagement, and inclusive governance. Drawing on extensive work with women, youth, academic institutions, syndicates, and political actors, Madanyat views education as a vital entry point for shaping equal opportunities in society.

This study emerges from that engagement. It responds to the need for grounded, context-specific evidence on how gender norms continue to influence educational trajectories in Lebanon, particularly in regions facing gender compounded socio-economic challenges. While national indicators suggest relatively high levels of access to education, they often mask deeper inequalities linked to geography, resources, and social expectations.

Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis and severe resource constraints hinder efforts to ensure equitable access to education and to adequately prepare schools, teachers, and students for the rollout of the anticipated new national curricula, and an opportunity to address structural gaps, including those related to gender.

Within this context, Madanyat positions this study as part of a broader effort to inform more responsive and inclusive educational approaches. By combining rigorous research with lived experience, this study contributes not only to documenting existing challenges but also to identifying actionable strategies that not only improve access, but also address the underlying norms and conditions that shape girls' educational opportunities.

I. General overview of the context

a. Crisis and educational disruption

Since October 2019, Lebanon has been facing a convergence of profound economic, political, security, and institutional crises. These challenges were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic Beirut Port Blast of August 4, 2020. The cumulative effect of these shocks has severely undermined social cohesion, public service delivery, and household resilience, placing the safety, livelihoods, and dignity of large segments of the population at risk and threatening national stability.¹ The situation has deteriorated further following the Israeli attacks on Lebanon in October–November 2024, which, despite a ceasefire agreement, have continued into 2025. The ongoing hostilities have resulted in civilian casualties, widespread destruction, and the displacement of more than one million people, particularly from southern regions, many of whom have sought refuge in central areas of the country. This new wave of internal displacement has compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities and placed additional pressure on already strained public services.²

Lebanon also continues to host the highest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometer globally. With a Lebanese population of approximately 5.26 million, the country hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees, alongside 489,292 Palestine Refugees registered with UNRWA, in addition to around 31,400 Palestine Refugees from Syria³. Although these figures are not the most recent, they reflect the enduring scale of Lebanon's refugee burden, which has not diminished in recent years. According to the World Bank, Lebanon's crisis ranks among the most severe globally since the mid-nineteenth century and is the result of decades of unsustainable fiscal and monetary policies. The economic collapse has been characterized by extreme currency depreciation, with the Lebanese lira losing approximately 98% of its value, rapid dollarization, and persistently high inflation. The average annual inflation rate reached 222.42% in 2023, while food price inflation peaked at 350% year-on-year in April 2023, disproportionately affecting low-income households.⁴⁻⁵

As a result, around 80% of the population is estimated to be living below the relative poverty line, with approximately 36% falling below the extreme poverty line as of March 2023. The erosion of purchasing power and real wages has severely strained access to basic services. Public institutions, including schools and healthcare facilities, are struggling to function due to budget constraints, staff shortages, and deteriorating infrastructure, further deepening inequalities and long-term human capital losses.⁶

Within this broader context, the education sector has been particularly affected. Since 2019, repeated school closures, strikes, political unrest, and pandemic-related disruptions have drastically reduced instructional time, with public-school students receiving less than half of the expected in-person school days over a four-year period. These disruptions are expected to result in long-term learning losses and reduced future earning potential.⁷

1. World Bank. (2021). Lebanon economic monitor: The deliberate depression.

Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/lebanon-economic-monitor>

2. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2025). Lebanon humanitarian situation reports.

Retrieved from <https://www.unocha.org/lebanon>

3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). Lebanon operational data portal.

Retrieved from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/lbn>

4. World Bank. (2021). Lebanon economic monitor: The deliberate depression. World Bank Group.

Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/lebanon-economic-monitor>

5. World Food Programme (WFP). (2023). Lebanon food security and inflation monitoring.

Retrieved from <https://www.wfp.org/countries/lebanon>

6. World Bank. (2023). Lebanon poverty and equity brief. World Bank Group.

Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/poverty-and-equity-brief-lebanon>

7. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2022). Impact of school disruptions in Lebanon.

Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports>

Lebanon's geographic and demographic configuration further compounds these challenges. While major urban centers, particularly Beirut and Tripoli, concentrate much of the country's economic activity, higher education institutions, and public services, the majority of the country consists of rural areas and villages with limited infrastructure and service coverage. This urban-rural divide directly affects access to education, especially for children and youth living outside major cities.⁸

b. Education sector context and structural barriers

The number of schools and universities, particularly public institutions, remains insufficient to meet population needs, with disparities most evident in rural and peripheral areas. Many communities lack nearby public schools or universities, requiring students to travel long distances to access education. However, public transportation systems are largely inadequate or unavailable, and rising transportation costs place education beyond reach for many low-income families. These barriers disproportionately affect girls, who often face additional mobility constraints linked to safety concerns and restrictive social norms.⁹

The national curriculum has not kept pace with social, economic, and technological developments. Delays in curriculum reform have limited the relevance and quality of education, particularly in preparing students for evolving labor market demands. At the tertiary level, public universities, most notably the Lebanese University, offer a limited range of majors compared to private institutions, restricting students' academic choices, especially in technical and specialized fields. This reinforces inequalities between students who can afford private education and those who depend on under-resourced public options.¹⁰ Political instability further undermines the education system. Frequent changes in government, prolonged political deadlocks, and institutional paralysis have resulted in high turnover among Ministers of Education, many of whom have held office for short periods. This lack of continuity has disrupted reform efforts, as each leadership change often requires restarting policy discussions and strategic planning from the beginning. Moreover, education has rarely been treated as a sustained national priority by policymakers and decision-makers, limiting long-term investment and structural reform.¹¹

II. Introduction

Despite Lebanon's historically high youth literacy rates for both girls and boys, the crisis has exposed and intensified pre-existing inequalities, particularly along geographic, socioeconomic, and gender lines. Poverty and displacement have constrained access to education, especially in rural and marginalized areas, where transportation costs, deteriorating infrastructure, and limited household resources directly affect school attendance and retention.¹² Gendered norms within the education system continue to shape students' experiences and trajectories. Persistent stereotypes in curricula and classroom practices reinforce traditional gender roles, influencing subject choice, participation, and aspirations. While girls have generally maintained higher rates of school completion and academic performance, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels, this advantage coexists with structural barriers, including limited access to STEM fields, heightened dropout risks linked to poverty and early marriage, and uneven availability of gender-responsive teaching and psychosocial support across regions.¹³

8. Central Administration of Statistics (CAS). (2022). Population and geographic distribution in Lebanon. Government of Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://www.cas.gov.lb>

9. Educational Center for Research and Development (CERD). (2022). Education statistics and official reports. Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.crdp.org>

10. Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). (2021). Education sector overview and reform priorities. Government of Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://www.mehe.gov.lb>

11. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS). (2021). Governance challenges and public sector reform in Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org>

12. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2021). *Education in emergencies: Lebanon country profile*. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/lebanon>

13. UN Women. (2022). *Gender norms and education in Lebanon*. Retrieved from <https://arabstates.unwomen.org>

Teachers play a critical role in addressing or perpetuating these inequalities. Evidence indicates that sustained, gender-responsive pedagogy and continuous professional development are more effective than one-off training in promoting fairness, participation, and inclusive classroom environments. However, ongoing crises have disrupted training systems and child-protection initiatives, slowing reform efforts and highlighting the fragility of progress not embedded in routine school practice.¹⁴

Pathways beyond secondary education further reflect gender patterns. Female students consistently demonstrate higher participation and attainment in national examinations and higher education overall, particularly in public institutions. Nonetheless, gender segregation persists by field of study, with women underrepresented in engineering and certain technical disciplines, underscoring the interaction between academic achievement, social norms, labor market expectations, and structural constraints.¹⁵

Early marriage remains a barrier to girls' education, particularly among refugee populations. While approximately 6% of Lebanese women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18, rates among Syrian refugees are substantially higher, with more than one in three girls married before adulthood. Recent assessments indicate a continued rise in child marriage among Syrian refugees, reinforcing cycles of educational exclusion, economic dependency, and long-term vulnerability.¹⁶

Globally, education is recognized as a critical driver of gender equality and women's empowerment. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore this link, with SDG 4 calling for inclusive and equitable quality education and Target 4.5 specifically demanding the elimination of gender disparities in education. Likewise, the Ministerial Declaration of the 4th Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society identifies violence against women and girls as a root cause of persistent inequality and highlights education as an essential component for achieving safety, security, and equal opportunities.

In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2023–2027, with the support of international partners including UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank. The plan represents a comprehensive reform agenda aimed at modernizing curricula, strengthening governance, improving the quality of education, integrating digital technologies into teaching and learning, and better aligning education with labor market needs.

Draft versions of the new curricula were developed based on a competency-based and life-skills approach intended to respond to digital transformation and evolving labor market demands. However, three years into the reform process, no ministerial decree has been issued to formally adopt these curricula. Instead, the Ministry has relied on interim circulars to adapt the outdated curricula to ongoing crises and emergency conditions. As a result, the reform remains theoretically complete but practically suspended¹⁷.

Nevertheless, evidence from Lebanon shows that the education system as a whole continues to reproduce gendered expectations¹⁸ that influences how girls and boys perceive their roles in society. Beyond the classroom, these early patterns extend into public and professional life, shaping attitudes toward leadership, career choices, and women's participation in decision-making. Such stereotypes often portray men as naturally more resilient, rational, or suited to hard work, while women are viewed as less capable in science, mathematics, or leadership roles. Although some stereotypes may appear "positive," they reinforce structural discrimination by limiting opportunities and shaping aspirations. These socially embedded beliefs are first

14. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2022). *Gender-responsive pedagogy in crisis contexts*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>

15. Educational Center for Research and Development (CERD). (2022). *Official examination and higher education statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.crdp.org>

16. Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). (2023). *Annual report*. UNHCR. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/vasyr>

17. Nashaba, H. (2025, October 20). *The deferred educational reform: When the plan turns into a political façade* [Arabic]. Lebanon24. Retrieved from <https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/1431556/>

18. Council of Europe, Gender Equality Commission. (2015). *Gender equality glossary*. Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/16805a1c74>

transmitted within families, where parents consciously or unconsciously steer children toward gender-appropriate life choices. Teachers then reinforce these norms in the classroom through feedback, task assignments, or even grading practices thereby normalizing inequality in everyday educational settings, where curricula still contain gendered language.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine how gender stereotypes and socio-economic factors influence girls' educational experiences in both public and private schools across Metn, Akkar, and the Bekaa. Using a mixed-methods design, it investigates the mechanisms through which cultural norms, parental expectations, and classroom practices shape girls' access to education, academic trajectories, and career aspirations.

III. Objective of the study

This study aims to generate context-specific and action-oriented evidence on how gender stereotypes and socio-economic conditions shape girls' secondary education trajectories in Metn, Akkar, and the Bekaa. The overarching goal is to inform practical reforms and targeted programming by education authorities, schools, and civil society actors.

Specifically, the study examines how gender stereotyping manifests within classroom interactions, educational materials, assessments, leadership opportunities, and participation in laboratories and sports, and how these factors influence girls' sense of safety, participation, subject choice, and aspirations. It also explores the impact of household and community constraints including transport costs, income instability, care responsibilities, digital access, and risks such as early marriage on access, attendance, and retention, comparing variations across public and private schools and among the three regions.

In addition, the research assesses institutional strengths and gaps in curriculum content, teacher training, guidance and counseling, and child protection mechanisms. By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from focus groups, key informant interviews, and desk reviews, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and comparative understanding of the systemic barriers affecting girls' education. Ultimately, it aims to establish a baseline for future monitoring and deliver a set of feasible, cost-conscious recommendations to guide gender-responsive educational planning and implementation.

IV. Methodology

The study adopted a gender-inclusive, intersectional, and participatory methodology, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research tools. This mixed-methods approach combined a comprehensive desk review of existing literature and secondary data with primary qualitative and quantitative data collection, allowing for both breadth and depth analysis. The methodology was designed to capture not only statistical trends but also the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of girls, parents, teachers, and education stakeholders, while ensuring ethical rigor and safeguarding throughout the research process.

a. Sampling and study participants

The study intentionally applied a gender-inclusive and intersectional participatory approach, recognizing that gender inequality in education does not affect all girls in the same way. Factors such as socio-economic status, geographic location, sectarian background, and access to public services intersect to shape distinct educational barriers. To reflect this diversity, the sampling strategy ensured balanced representation across three regions: Metn, Akkar, and Bekaa. These regions were selected because together they represent Lebanon's major socio-economic,

geographic, and socio-religious contexts, including urban, peri-urban, and rural settings, as well as areas with differing levels of access to public education infrastructure.

Both public and private schools were included in the sample to capture variations in access, quality, resources, and gender dynamics across the education system. Schools were selected purposely, in coordination with local stakeholders, to ensure diversity in school type, location, and student population.

Participants for the focus group discussions were identified and recruited through local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively working in the field of education in the selected regions. These organizations supported outreach and participant mobilization by facilitating contact with parents whose children were currently enrolled in schools, as well as with teachers from both public and private institutions. Female students aged 15–18 were recruited through these same networks and were selected from among the daughters of participating parents, ensuring coherence between household- and school-level perspectives. The use of established NGO partners enabled the study to reach diverse participants across socio-economic backgrounds while relying on trusted community-based actors to support ethical engagement, informed consent procedures, and safe participation.

In addition, six (6) key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with education officials and experts from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, including current and former members of the gender focal point committee, directors of primary and secondary education, and experts from the Educational Center for Research and Development. These interviews provided institutional perspectives on policy frameworks, implementation challenges, and structural constraints within the education system.

The quantitative component complemented the qualitative findings through a structured survey administered to 228 female students aged 15–18 across the same three regions. To ensure balanced geographic representation, approximately 76 respondents were selected from each region. This distribution enabled comparative analysis across different socio-economic and geographic contexts while maintaining analytical coherence.

b. Ethics, safeguarding, and informed consent

Ethical considerations and safeguarding principles were embedded throughout all stages of the research process, in line with Madanyat for Equality's institutional Safeguarding Policy and Anti-Harassment Policy. These frameworks guided all field activities and ensured the protection of participants, particularly children and adolescents, from harm, exploitation, or misconduct.

Separate informed consent procedures were implemented for adults and minors. Clear, age-appropriate consent forms were prepared for participants under the age of 18, with caregivers or parents fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Caregivers provided written informed consent on behalf of participating minors. In addition, all children and students were asked to provide informed assent prior to participation. The study procedures and consent forms were explained verbally in age-appropriate language to ensure full understanding before any data collection took place.

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. No audio or video recordings were conducted without explicit consent, and participants who did not agree to photography or documentation were fully respected. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout data collection and analysis.

Data collection was carried out by a trained researcher from Madanyat for Equality, using participatory and child-sensitive methods. A designated Field Officer and Safeguarding Focal Point were present during all activities to monitor safeguarding compliance, explain participants' rights, and ensure a safe and respectful environment. Safeguarding awareness sessions were delivered to participants and caregivers, including explanations of acceptable behavior, types of misconduct, and reporting mechanisms.

Clear reporting and complaint mechanisms were established, with participants and caregivers provided with direct contact details to report any concerns confidentially. All reports were to be handled in accordance with organizational safeguarding procedures.

c. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic and integrated mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative descriptive analysis. Qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were transcribed and analyzed using a deductive approach based on a thematic coding framework informed by the study's research questions and an intersectional gender lens. Recurring themes related to gender norms, access to education, institutional practices, and socio-cultural barriers were identified and compared across regions and participant groups and then contextualized within Lebanon's broader political and economic environment.

The quantitative survey was developed based on a review of relevant literature on gender equality and education, drawing on established gender and school-climate frameworks to inform question design and ensure conceptual rigor. The final questionnaire consisted of 22 structured questions and required approximately 10 minutes to complete. Data was entered, cleaned, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, applying descriptive statistical techniques to generate frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. This analysis enabled comparisons across regions, age groups, and school types (public and private), highlighting patterns and disparities in girls' educational experiences, perceptions, and challenges across different socio-economic and geographic contexts.

Triangulation constituted a core analytical strategy; whereby qualitative insights were systematically cross-referenced with quantitative findings and evidence from the desk review to enhance the validity and reliability of the results. This mixed-methods approach allowed the study to move beyond isolated observations and capture the interaction between structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors shaping girls' educational outcomes.

To further strengthen analytical rigor, statistical cross-analyses were conducted to examine how key educational outcomes vary across demographic and contextual characteristics. These analyses explored variations by region (Metn, Bekaa, and Akkar), age group, and school type, enabling the identification of emerging trends related to girls' safety, academic aspirations, exposure to gender bias, risk of dropout, and access to learning opportunities. By linking quantitative patterns with qualitative narratives, the analysis ensured coherence between the study's methodological design and its findings, and supported the formulation of evidence-based recommendations for both immediate advocacy and longer-term policy reform.

The analytical framework was structured around nine interrelated domains derived from the design of the survey tool and the thematic structure of the qualitative instruments. These domains guided the analysis across both data components and included: socio-economic and geographic factors influencing school continuity; school environment and classroom interactions; curriculum content and learning materials; teacher capacity and school leadership; household norms and economic pressures; infrastructure, mobility, and safety; exposure to STEM subjects and career guidance; policy and institutional context; and regional and institutional variation between public and private schools. This structured approach ensured coherence between the study's methodological design and the analysis, and supported the development of evidence-based recommendations.

d. Limitation and generalization

While this study provides valuable insights into how gender stereotypes and socio-economic factors shape girls' educational experiences in Lebanon, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize its scope and interpretation.

The research intentionally focused on marginalized groups in the three target regions, Metn, Akkar, and the Bekaa, which together represent diverse socio-economic, cultural, and sectarian contexts. Participants included female students currently enrolled in schools, parents with children still studying, and teachers actively working in these areas. This selection was designed to capture grounded, lived experiences within vulnerable communities rather than to produce nationally representative data. As such, the findings reflect regional realities and should be interpreted within these boundaries.

For the quantitative component, the study surveyed 228 female students, with 76 respondents from each region to ensure balanced geographic comparison. While this sample size offers meaningful insights into local dynamics, the sampling approach was not intended to draw a representative sample for these regions therefore results should not be generalized to the full population of girls attending school in these regions nor to Lebanon's entire school population or for conducting advanced inferential statistical analysis.

Data collection relied primarily on self-reported information gathered through surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews. Consequently, responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias or hesitancy to disclose sensitive experiences, particularly regarding early marriage, financial hardship, or gender-based discrimination. Despite the creation of safe, confidential, and participatory spaces, some topics remain difficult to discuss openly.

In addition, the study faced limitations in disaggregating findings by urban versus rural location. Lebanon's demographic and geographic characteristics complicate such distinctions, as the selected regions do not contain large metropolitan centers in the conventional sense. Akkar and much of the Bekaa are predominantly rural, characterized by dispersed villages and agricultural communities, while Metn, although extending to the coastal area, is largely mountainous and composed of medium-sized towns and villages rather than major urban cities. As a result, participants often live-in hybrid peri-urban or semi-rural settings, making strict geographic categorization challenging and limiting the precision of urban-rural comparisons.

Moreover, the research was conducted during a period marked by economic collapse, political instability, and intermittent conflict, conditions that may have shaped participants' perceptions, priorities, and responses. These external pressures also affected data accessibility and logistical coordination, particularly in remote or underserved areas where school operations were irregular or disrupted.

Finally, institutional data from public sources were at times incomplete or not consistently disaggregated by gender, region, or school type, constraining the depth of quantitative cross-analysis between public and private education systems.

Given these constraints, the study should be viewed as exploratory in nature, serving as a foundational or pilot effort that establishes an evidence base for broader and more comprehensive research. It underscores the need for expanded studies covering additional regions, educational levels, and population groups, as well as for strengthened national data systems capable of supporting gender- and region-disaggregated analysis.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design combining surveys, focus group discussions, and expert interviews enabled robust triangulation and generated rich insights into gendered educational experiences within marginalized contexts. The study's value lies in its ability to illuminate patterns, perceptions, and inequalities that are often underrepresented in national statistics, thereby providing a credible foundation for future research, advocacy, and targeted policy action aimed at advancing inclusive and gender-responsive education in Lebanon.

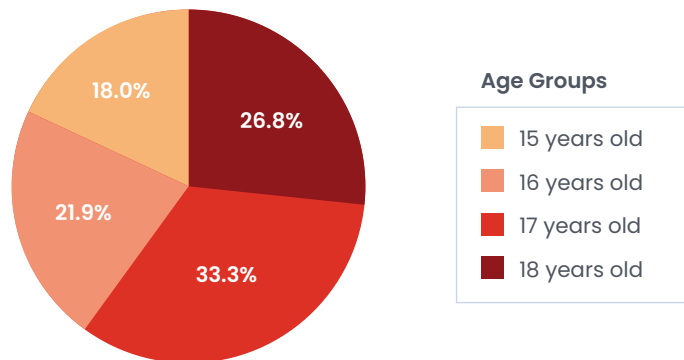


V. Main Findings

a. Overview of study participants characteristics

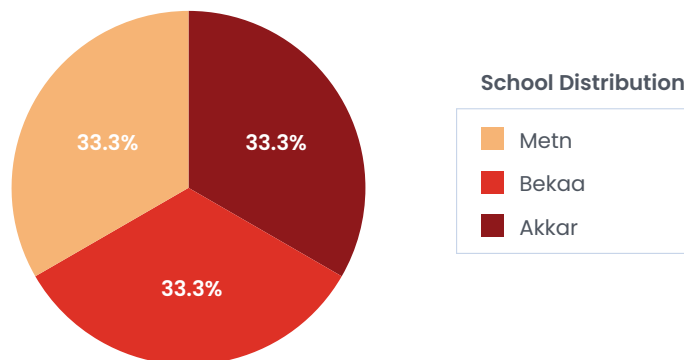
The quantitative component complemented the qualitative findings through the administration of a structured survey targeting 228 female students enrolled in public and private schools across the three regions.

Survey Background Information (Demographics)
Participants age range



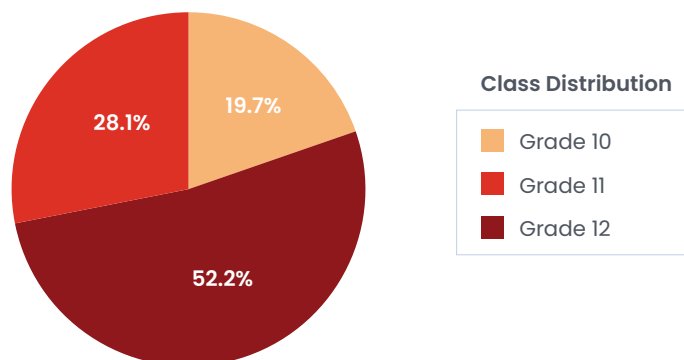
Among the participants, **18%** were **15 years old**, **21.9%** were **16 years old**, **33.3%** were **17 years old**, and **26.8%** were **18 years old**. The largest proportion was observed at 17 years old, while the smallest was at 15 years old.

School distribution



Participants were evenly distributed across the three regions, with **33.3% from Metn**, **33.3% from Bekaa**, and **33.3% from Akkar**, ensuring equal representation from each area.

Class distribution



19.7% of participants were enrolled in Grade 10, **28.1% in Grade 11**, and **half (52.2%) in Grade 12**. This indicates a gradual increase in representation across grades, with the highest participation coming from students in their final year of secondary school.

b. Main findings structure

To present a clear and comprehensive understanding of the study's results, the main findings are organized into five interrelated sections, each addressing a distinct dimension of girls' educational experiences in Lebanon. This structure allows for a systematic analysis that connects classroom realities with broader social and institutional contexts.

Section (a) examines the **school environment and classroom experience**, exploring issues of safety, teacher behavior, gender bias, and participation within everyday learning spaces.

Section (b) focuses on **access, opportunities, and challenges in education**, assessing girls' ability to remain in school, pursue higher education, and navigate barriers such as financial hardship, transportation, and limited local institutions.

Section (c) addresses **gender roles, bias, and societal expectations**, highlighting how social norms and cultural attitudes continue to shape girls' choices, confidence, and aspirations across regions.

Section (d) explores **support systems and encouragement**, emphasizing the role of families, teachers, and schools in motivating and guiding girls, as well as the importance of institutional and psychosocial support in sustaining their engagement.

Finally, **Section (e)** presents **participants' recommendations, awareness, and improvement**, summarizing the collective proposals of students, parents, teachers, and experts for advancing gender equality within Lebanon's education system.

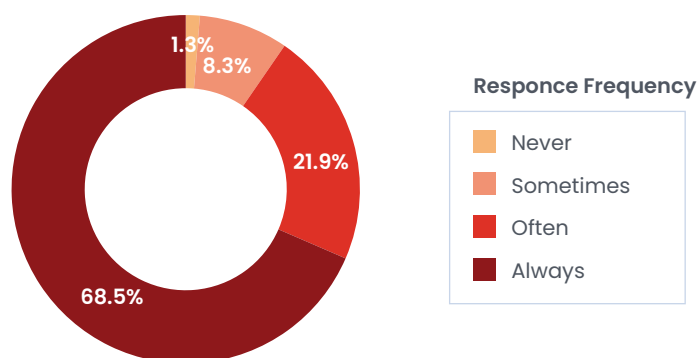
Together, these five sections provide an integrated perspective on the factors influencing girls' educational experiences and outcomes. They move from the immediate realities of school life to the structural and societal forces that shape them, and finally to the solutions identified by the very actors most affected. This layered approach ensures that the analysis remains both evidence-based and action-oriented, bridging data with practical recommendations for policy and educational reform.

c. School Environment and Classroom Experience

The findings of the school environment and classroom experiences reveal a complex picture of both progress and persistent challenges within Lebanon's education system.

c.1- Survey results indicate that most students generally feel safe at school, with **68.5%** reporting that they always feel secure, and an additional **21.9%** indicating that they often feel safe.

Figure 1: School safety



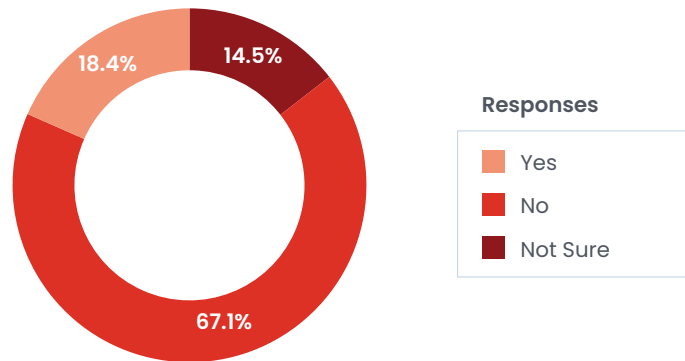
However, 8.3% indicated that sometimes they feel safe and continue to experience occasional or persistent concerns about safety in addition to 1.3% reported that they never feel safe. This total of 9.6% of respondents who reported not feeling safe at schools reflecting the need for ongoing attention to child protection measures.

Students defined safety as not only physical protection but also emotional and psychological security, expressing the importance of being able to speak, learn, and participate without fear of humiliation, ridicule, or exclusion.

Qualitative data revealed that emotional and relational factors such as teacher tone, peer behavior, and classroom dynamics are central to students' sense of security.

c.2- Regarding perceptions of teacher behavior, **67.1%** of girls' students reported no observed difference in how boys and girls are treated, while **18.4%** perceived disparities towards both boys and girls, and **14.5%** were uncertain.

Figure 2: Teacher behavior

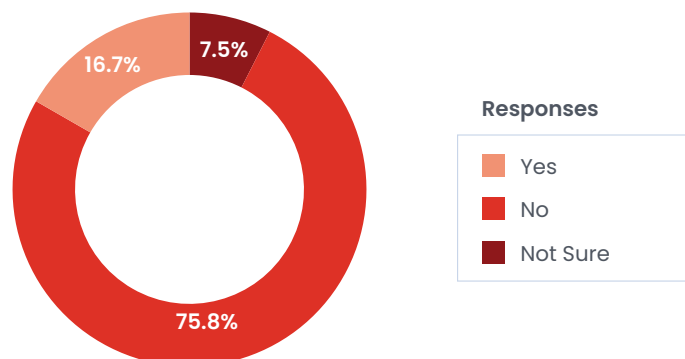


Focus group discussions with girls across all regions revealed that several participants observed clear differences in how teachers discipline male and female students. Many girls reported that they are often punished less severely or treated with greater consideration and forgiveness compared to boys. Participants linked this differential treatment to prevailing societal traditions and norms in Lebanon, where girls are commonly perceived as more mature, responsible, and academically focused than boys. According to the girls, such assumptions appear to influence teachers' expectations and responses to behavior in the classroom. Despite seemingly benefiting from more lenient treatment, many participants described this practice as unfair and expressed a clear preference to be held to the same expectations and disciplinary standards as their male peers, emphasizing that genuine equality requires consistent rules and equal accountability for all students.

Teachers themselves acknowledged this difference, noting that they often adopt a more lenient and protective approach toward girls, avoiding harsh tones, disciplinary measures, or sending them out of class.

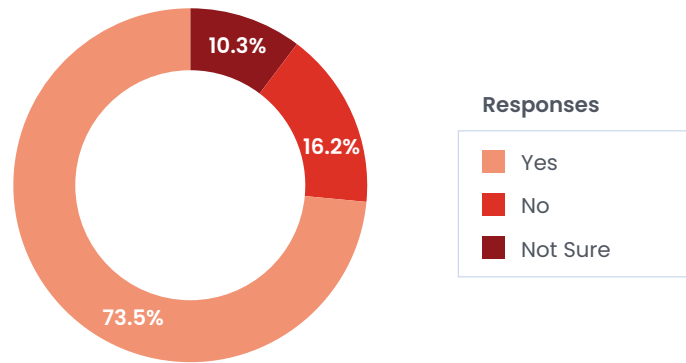
c.3- When exploring students' perceptions of subject and activity appropriateness, the survey found that **75.8%** of participants did not feel that certain subjects or activities were designated for boys such as sports, yet **16.7%** indicated that they did perceive such distinctions, as indicated in the figure 3.

Figure 3: Activity appropriateness



Additionally, survey results, with **73.5%** of participants reporting that both boys and girls receive equal encouragement to pursue all subjects. However, **16.2%** of respondents reported that encouragement was not equal, while **10.3%** indicated uncertainty regarding whether encouragement differed by gender, as shown in figure #4.

Figure 4: Subject appropriateness

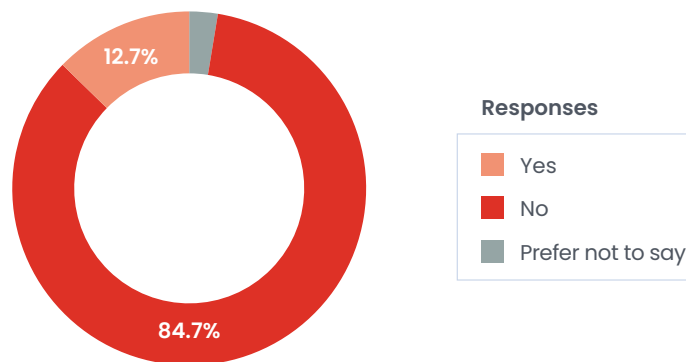


Similarly, girls in the focus group discussions supported this perception and reported that teachers encourage both boys and girls to pursue all subjects, including mathematics, science, and technology, and none indicated that encouragement was explicitly unequal.

Other FGDs perceptions?

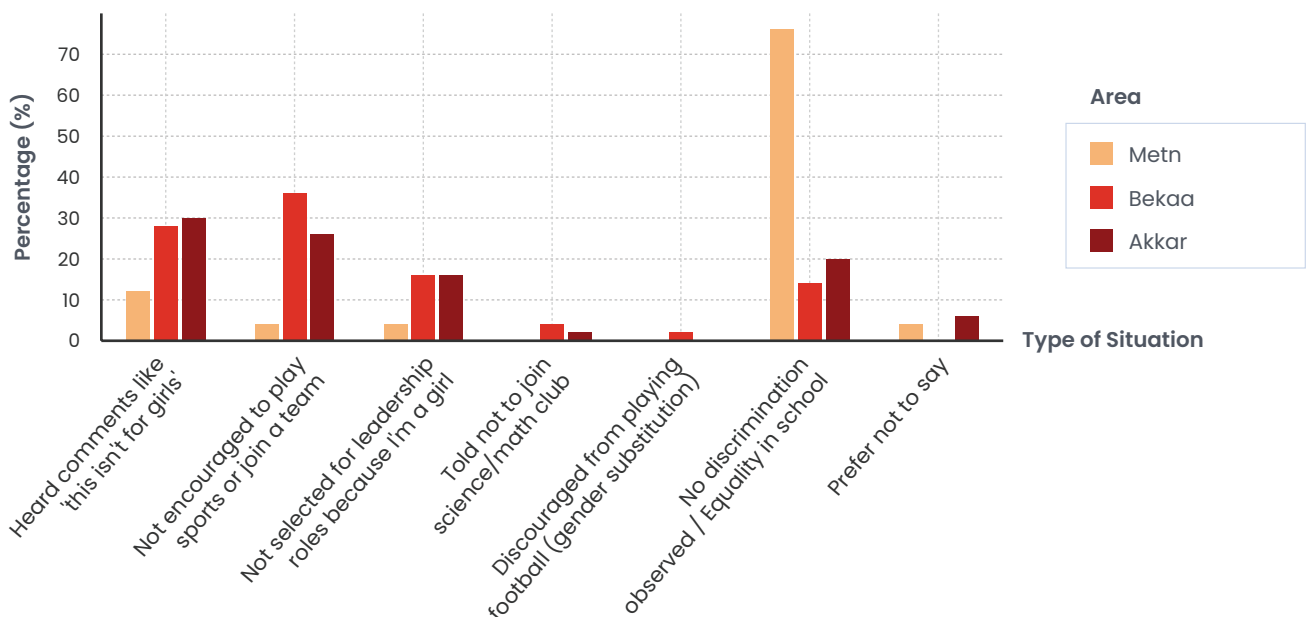
c.4- Similarly, while 84.6% of students reported no restrictions based on gender, 12.7% indicated that they had at some point been prevented from engaging in certain activities.

Figure 5: Activity engagement



Focus group discussions with girl students provide further context, revealing that comments such as **“this isn’t for girls”** or subtle discouragement from sports, leadership, or science clubs remain common in some schools.

Types of Gender-Based Exclusion or Comments Experienced – Comparison by Area



Teachers in the FGDs acknowledged these constraints but emphasized their commitment to mentorship, striving to support all students, including encouraging girls to engage in subjects or activities traditionally dominated by boys. They described deliberate efforts to create inclusive classrooms and ensure that no student is excluded from participation, whether in leadership opportunities, debates, or STEM-focused activities.

Across all regions, students in the focus groups pointed to persistent bullying and mockery that create hesitation to speak in class. This issue was most evident when teachers opened discussions beyond the standard curriculum particularly on topics such as politics, or social issues.

Many girls described feeling exposed or ridiculed when expressing opinions, especially in mixed classrooms where boys were more vocal and confident. As one participant explained, ***“When we talk about politics or society, the boys immediately start arguing and laughing at what we say. It’s easier to stay quiet than be made fun of.”***

These classroom patterns were reinforced by what students described in extra-curricular and open-classroom conversations. ***Girls often felt less at ease discussing social or political topics, noting that boys are more exposed to such issues through daily life outside school, including paid work or wider community engagement.*** Many girls described a routine of going directly from school to home with limited opportunities for interaction beyond family.

Regional data further highlights the disparities between Metn, Bekaa, and Akkar. In Metn, responses were overwhelmingly positive, with **76%** of students reporting no discrimination or full gender equality. Only a small number of **10%** of respondents reported hearing gendered remarks or being discouraged from certain activities. However, the Bekaa stood out with notably higher levels of gender-based discouragement particularly in sports, where **36%** said they were not encouraged to play or join teams. Akkar showed similar trends, though to a lesser extent: **30%** of respondents reported hearing gendered comments, and **26%** said they were discouraged from participating in sports.

Focus group discussions across all three regions reflected similar dynamics, showing that some boys resisted engaging in mixed activities, perceiving girls as less capable or unfit to compete on equal terms. Such attitudes not only restrict girls’ participation but also perpetuate stereotypes that hinder progress toward gender equality in schools. Comments like ***“this isn’t for girls”*** remain the most frequent form of discrimination reported across regions, followed by limitations on girls’ access to sports and leadership opportunities.

Gendered perceptions are most visible in areas such as sports and leadership activities, where stereotypes about girls’ abilities persist. As one student explained, ***“When we try to join sports, some boys laugh and say we’re not strong enough. It makes many girls stop trying.”*** Teachers confirmed these patterns, noting ongoing efforts to mentor girls and challenge discriminatory attitudes.

The experts’ interviewees highlighted the critical role of teachers in either perpetuating or challenging these norms. Continuous professional development, especially for contract and less experienced teachers, was emphasized as essential to shifting mindsets and promoting inclusive practices. They stressed that one-off training is insufficient; rather, a long-term, consistent approach is required to foster reflective teaching practices and reduce unconscious bias.

Experts interviewed for the study reported that child protection policies and psychosocial support initiatives have been introduced in some schools, often in collaboration with psychologists and NGOs. However, they emphasized that such programs are limited in scope and unevenly distributed, particularly outside major urban centers. A teacher explained, “We had a few workshops on bullying and violence prevention, but not all schools received them; it depends on the partner organization.”

Participants also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many ongoing programs, halting training for teachers and delaying the implementation of planned reforms. Experts highlighted that while schools are encouraged to integrate social and emotional learning, these efforts remain inconsistent. As one official put it, ***“We have guidance from the Ministry, but there is no structured plan; it depends on each school’s motivation.”***

Several students mentioned that extra-curricular discussions on equality and social issues happen only when teachers voluntarily introduce them. They expressed appreciation for such initiatives, describing them as moments when they felt “**heard**” and “**treated as equals**”.

Focus group discussions with students, parents, and teachers further elaborated on these systemic challenges. Students valued the friendships, knowledge, and extracurricular opportunities offered by their schools, yet the overall learning environment was widely described by participants as **overly rigid and heavily theoretical**. Many girls emphasized that while they appreciated their teachers and enjoyed learning, the system left little room for creativity or interaction. As one student explained, “**We memorize everything, but we rarely discuss or understand how it connects to real life**”. Another added, “**Classes are long and full of information, so we don’t have time to think or ask questions**”.

Structural barriers such as long school hours, heavy curricula, excessive homework, and a strong emphasis on rote learning were frequently mentioned as factors that reduce engagement and enthusiasm, even among highly motivated learners. A teacher from Bekaa explained, “**Students are exhausted. They study for hours, and by the time they get home, they still have more assignments. It’s too much for their age**”.

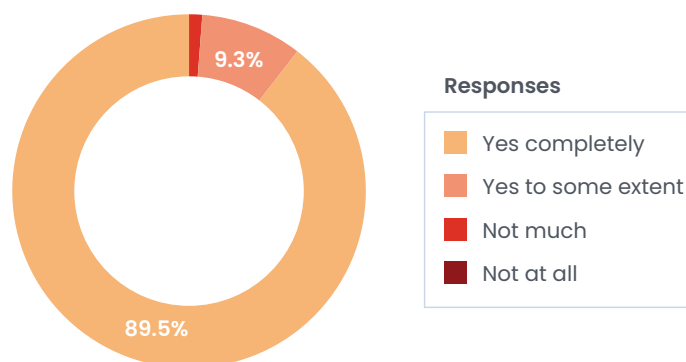
Parents echoed concerns regarding the system’s limited responsiveness to technological and societal changes, noting that children face both physical and mental strain due to the combination of long school days and additional academic demands at home.

Experts highlighted that inconsistent enforcement of compulsory education and limited affordable tertiary options compound these inequities, reinforcing the urban-rural divide.

Across expert interviews and focus group discussions, participants consistently emphasized the need for comprehensive reforms to modernize the educational system. These include updating curricula to reflect contemporary societal norms and technological advancements, integrating interactive and participatory teaching methods, reducing teaching hours, and implementing shorter yet more effective school days. Emphasis was placed on fostering classroom practices that encourage engagement, equitable participation, and empowerment, particularly for girls, as a crucial step toward dismantling persistent gender stereotypes.

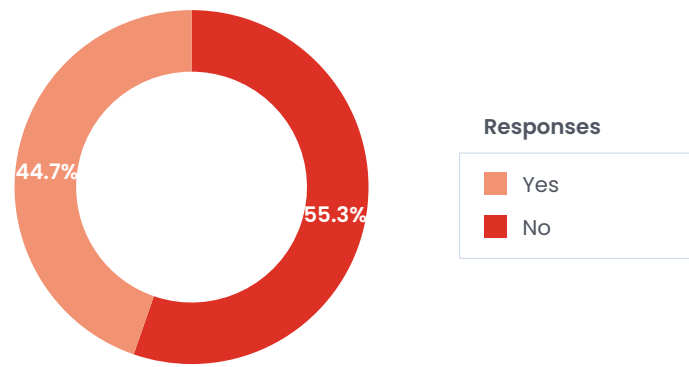
d. Support systems and encouragement

88.2% of participants receive full support from parents or family, while 10.7% reported partial support, and only 1.1% indicated minimal support.

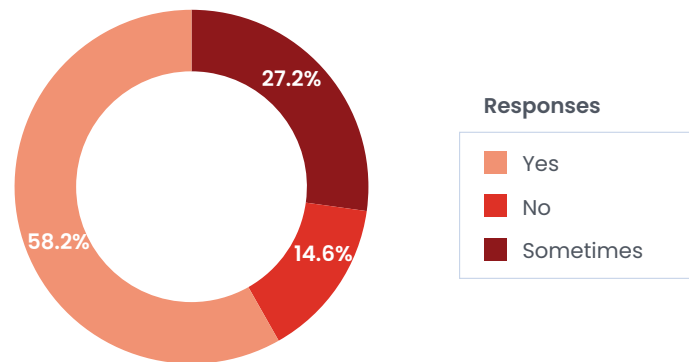


No participants reported receiving no support. These findings indicate that family encouragement remains a central factor in sustaining students’ educational engagement and motivation.

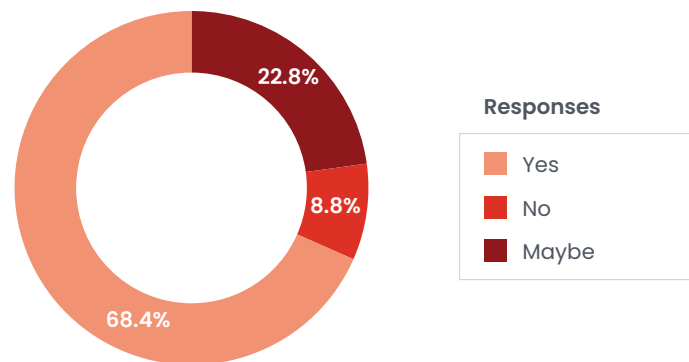
Exposure to initiatives addressing gender equality in schools appeared somewhat limited. Less than half of participants (44.7%) reported having taken part in activities or sessions focused on gender equality, while a slight majority (55.3%) said they had not.



Among those who participated, **58.2%** felt comfortable discussing gender-related issues, **27.2%** felt comfortable only sometimes, and **14.6%** reported feeling uncomfortable.



Interest in expanding such initiatives is evident, with **68.4%** of participants expressing a desire for more school-led activities on gender equality and girls' rights, **22.8%** responding "Maybe," and **8.8%** indicating no interest.



Experts highlighted that schools maintain regular communication with parents' committees to address educational gaps and promote awareness. Approximately **3,000** students have participated in workshops on violence prevention, and parents are routinely invited to engage in discussions about challenges and solutions. Collaboration between schools, civil society organizations, donors, the World Bank, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Social Affairs supports these initiatives. One education expert noted, ***"When parents are involved, change happens faster. They hold schools accountable and make equality a shared responsibility".*** Another added, ***"Partnerships between schools and NGOs have made gender discussions possible even in remote areas where they were once taboo"***.

Focus group discussions reinforced the importance of both familial and institutional support. Students consistently reported feeling encouraged by teachers and school staff to pursue interests across diverse fields, including science, literature, arts, and sports. As one student from Metn shared, ***"Our teachers push us to try everything, they never say this subject is only for boys"***.

Parents confirmed their active engagement in their children’s education, attending meetings, monitoring homework, and participating in school events, but acknowledged that schools could communicate more directly about girls’ education. A mother from Bekaa explained, **“We go to school meetings, but they rarely talk about girls’ issues. We’d like to be more involved in that”**.

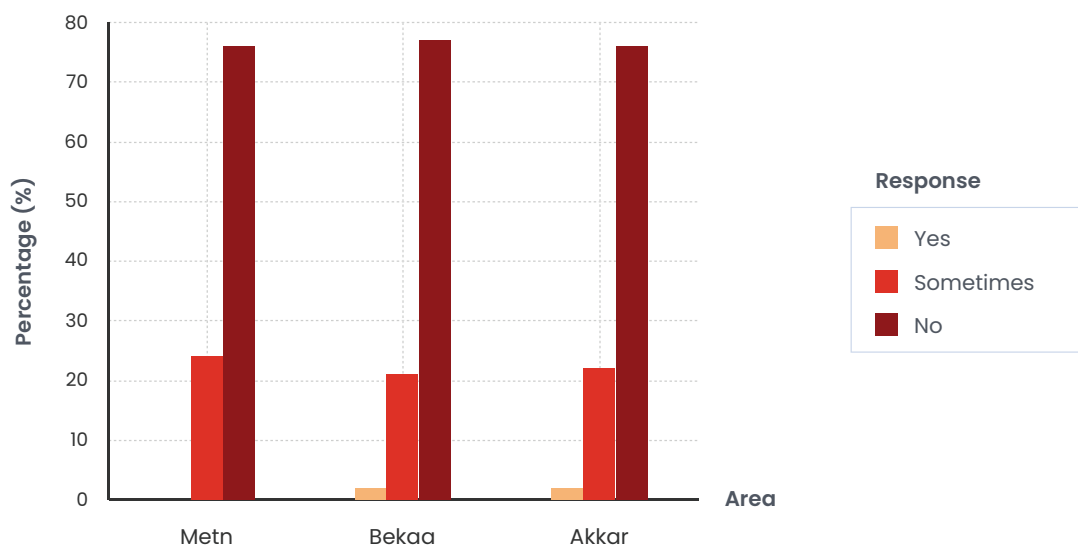
Teachers reported feeling supported by their school administrations and the Ministry of Education in promoting gender equality in classrooms yet emphasized the need for more consistent training and resources. One teacher stated, **“We want to teach equality, but we need materials that reflect it, textbooks and examples that show girls as leaders”**. Another highlighted the importance of ongoing professional growth, saying, **“A single training isn’t enough. We need continuous support to change mindsets and classroom habits”**.

These findings indicate that students benefit from a combination of supportive families, responsive teachers, and school initiatives. The integration of appropriate teaching resources, professional development, and parental engagement contributes to an environment where students, particularly girls, can thrive academically and personally. As a student from Akkar put it, **“When our families, teachers, and schools work together, we feel unstoppable”**.

e. Access, opportunities, and challenges in education

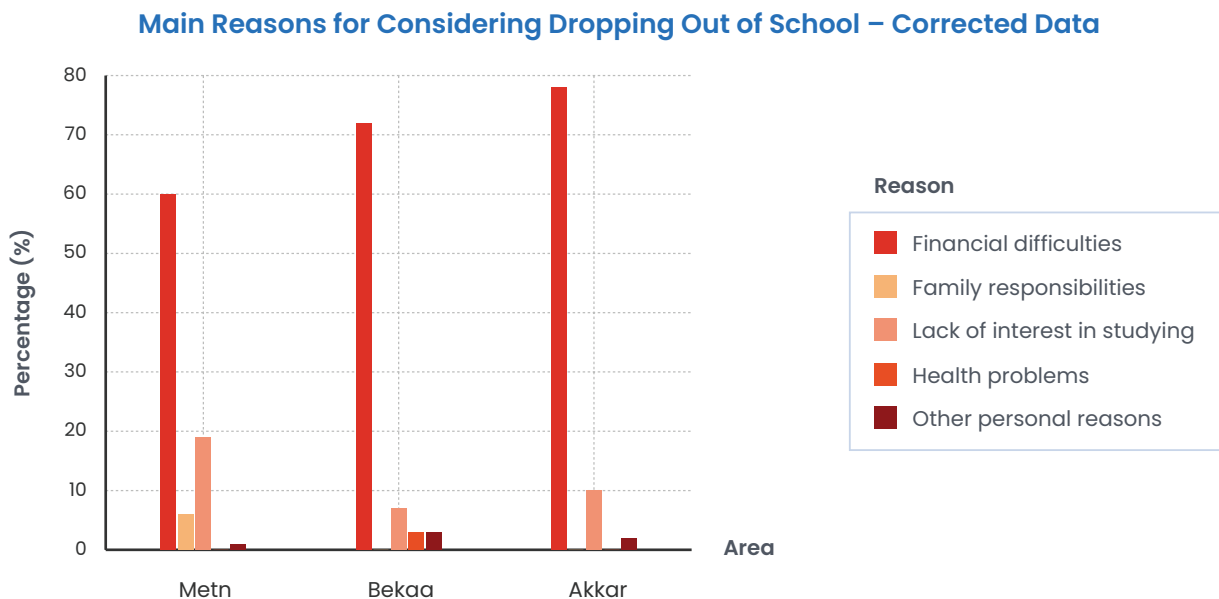
e.1- Overall, access to schooling for girls in the sample is robust. Most students reported uninterrupted participation, with **78.7%** never having considered dropping out and less than **5%** in each of Bekaa and Akkar having seriously contemplated it.

Have You Ever Considered Dropping Out of School? – Corrected Data



e.2- Challenges in Education:

While asking those 5% in Akkar and 5% in Bekaa areas, who thought or are intending to drop out of school to give us the main reason behind it the chart shows the following:



The overwhelming majority of respondents who considered leaving school cited financial difficulties as the primary reason, especially in Akkar (78%) and Bekaa (72%), where economic challenges are more pronounced. In Metn (60%), financial strain also emerged as the dominant factor, though slightly less severe compared to the other regions. Only a small minority mentioned “other personal reasons” or “lack of interest in studying”, confirming that girls’ motivation to learn remains strong when economic conditions allow it.

Focus group discussions reinforced these findings. Students frequently spoke about their families’ struggles to meet school expenses, describing how tuition fees, transport costs, and material need weigh heavily on household budgets. One student from Akkar explained, *“My parents sometimes think about taking me out of school because the transport and books are too expensive. They tell me it’s not about wanting me to stop, it’s that they can’t afford it”*. Another added, *“Even when we have exams, I worry if we’ll be able to pay the bus next month. It makes it hard to focus”*.

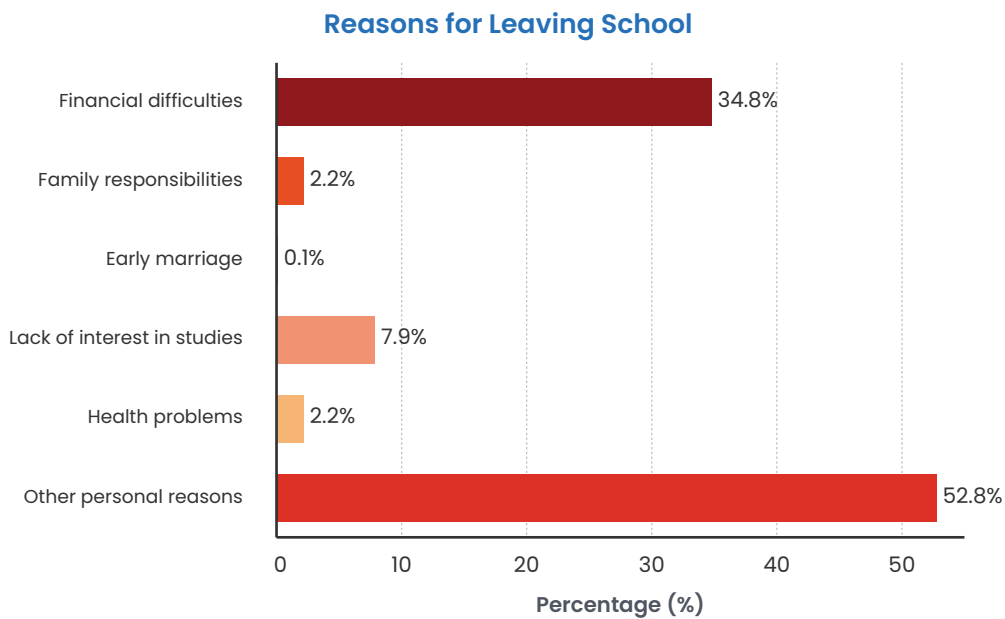
Parents echoed these concerns, emphasizing that economic hardship, transport costs and distance to universities, not social attitudes, emerged as decisive factors restricting opportunities for students outside major cities. A parent from Akkar said, *“Even if our daughters want to continue to university, how can they go? Transport costs more than tuition”*. Another added, *“We trust our girls, but sending them far without safe transport is impossible”*.

Family responsibilities and health concerns were mentioned far less frequently, suggesting that the risk of dropout is primarily financial rather than social or cultural.

Teachers, too, confirmed that financial strain has become the principal factor behind absenteeism and dropout. As one teacher explained, *“Girls want to stay in school. The problem isn’t motivation, it’s survival. Families are exhausted”*.

Most parents and teachers agreed that families increasingly value girls’ education, especially when daughters perform well academically. As one father put it, *“When she gets good grades, we all want her to continue. We are proud we don’t want her to stop her education for marriage.”*

Persistent obstacles remain at personal, household, and systemic levels. Among students who had considered dropping out, 52.8% cited personal challenges such as bullying, peer pressure, and mental health concerns, while 34.8% identified financial constraints.



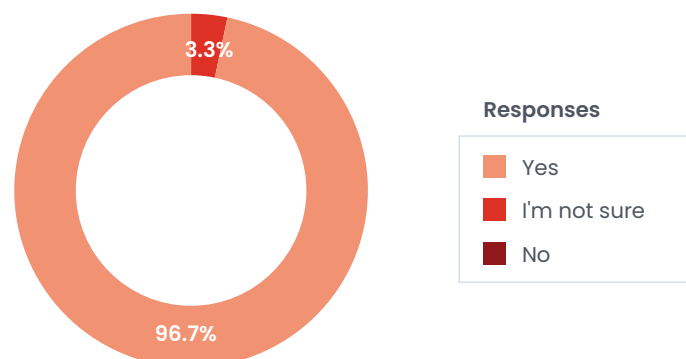
Early marriage was not directly mentioned by girls as a cause of leaving school, though it appeared indirectly in discussions. A teacher from Akkar observed, ***“In the past, girls left school for marriage more often, but now parents try to keep them studying. Only in rare cases does marriage become an excuse to leave when a girl has already lost interest in studying”***. In focus groups particularly in the Bekaa girls were very reluctant to discuss early marriage, with one participant even expressing her wish to leave if the topic was pursued further. Some participants noted that marriage is sometimes considered by girls who are not performing well academically, as an alternative to continuing their studies.

Although early marriage appeared negligible in the survey results (0.1%), experts cautioned that it still occurs in pockets of vulnerability. Teachers and parents also cited early marriage and household care responsibilities as occasional drivers of dropout among girls, while boys are more often withdrawn from school to support family income¹⁹.

e.3- Opportunities and career choice:

Ambitions for continued study are exceptionally high, with 96.7% of surveyed students intending to pursue university or professional education. This optimism was strongly reflected in the focus groups. A student from Bekaa said, ***“Even if it’s hard, I will go to university. I want to work and help my family.”*** Another from Metn added, ***“We all want to succeed. Our parents didn’t have this chance. We want to change that”***.

Figure 6: intention to pursue university



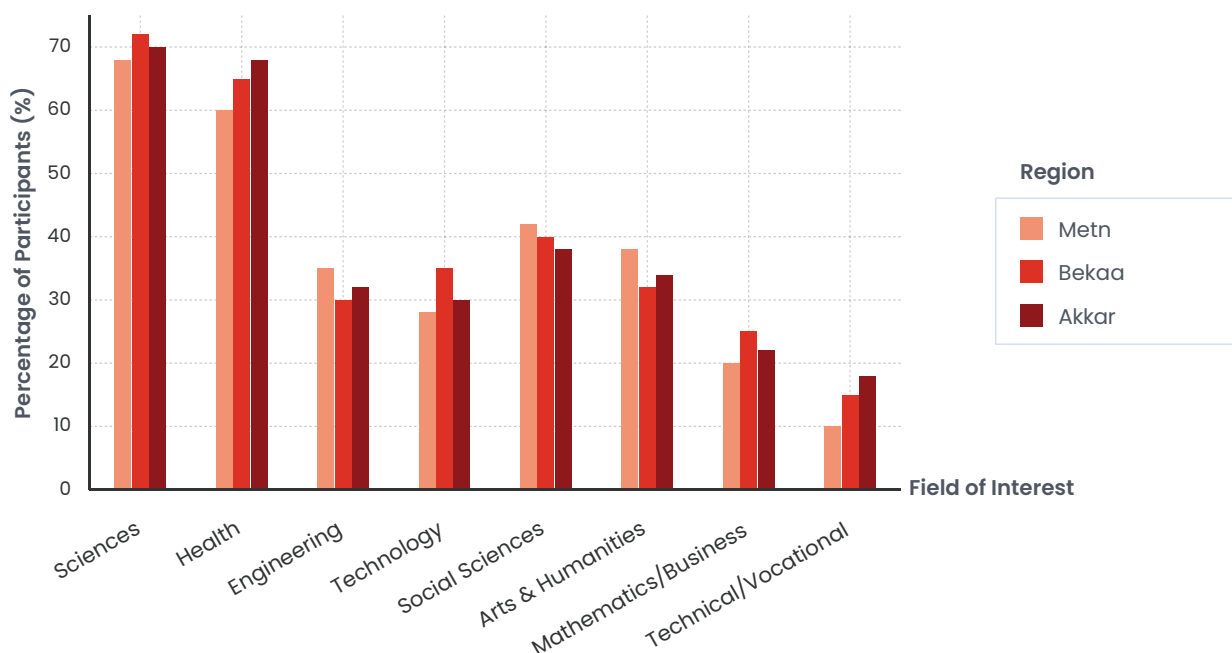
19. Collier, A., House, E., Helal, S., Michael, S., Davison, C. M., & Bartels, S. A. (2023). ‘Now, she’s a child and she has a child’—Experiences of Syrian child brides in Lebanon after early marriage. *Adolescents*, 3(2), 212–227. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/adolescents3020016>

Experts noted that girls increasingly complete basic and secondary education in public schools and that female participation in official examinations has been strong in recent years. Taken together, these indicators suggest that the right and ability to attend school remain largely intact, even amid wider national pressures.

Students described broad encouragement to pursue all subjects, including mathematics, science, and technology, and expressed diverse career aspirations across multiple disciplines. STEM fields dominate interest across all regions, particularly in sciences (68–72%) and Health (60–68%), reflecting strong ambition for academic and scientific careers. Engineering and Technology are also gaining traction, especially in Bekaa, where 35% of students expressed interest in technology-related paths.

While Social Sciences and Humanities continue to attract more than one-third of respondents demonstrating the persistence of varied intellectual interests, technical and vocational fields show more modest engagement overall, though higher in Akkar (18%), possibly reflecting local job realities.

Preferred Professional Fields Among Girls – Comparison by Area



Expert testimony aligns with these patterns, observing that girls perform well in official and international assessments and that female enrollment is consistently higher in the Lebanese University and other public higher education institutions. Experts described a system in which girls progress strongly through basic and secondary education and perform well in official examinations (see annex 1).

At the same time, experts emphasized the structural and contextual pressures that shape continuation and career choice.

Students in FGDs consistently reported broad encouragement to pursue all subjects including mathematics, science, and technology yet gendered perceptions persist in everyday interactions. A student from Bekaa explained, ***“We’re told we can study anything, but some people still act surprised when a girl says she wants to be an engineer”***. Parents across regions agreed that barriers are more systemic than cultural, with a father in Metn summarizing, ***“The problem isn’t that we don’t want girls to learn. It’s that the system makes it hard for everyone”***.

Taken together, expert testimony, survey results, and focus group narratives reveal that high aspirations and strong academic performance among girls coexist with persistent structural and social inequities. Despite nearly all students expressing a desire to continue to university or professional education, many face obstacles that go beyond motivation or ability. Transportation challenges, the scarcity of universities outside Beirut, and the high cost of living and tuition were repeatedly cited as barriers.

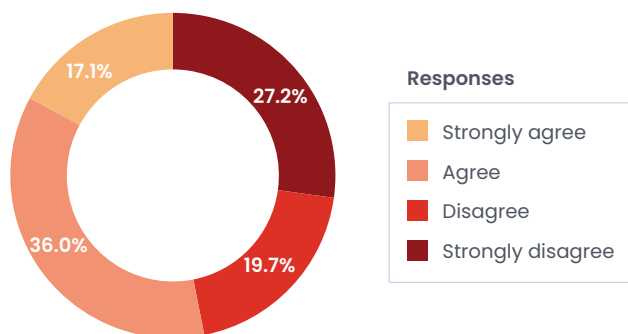
Yet, amidst these challenges, a strong sense of hope emerged from the voices of participants. Nearly all surveyed students expressed a clear desire to continue their studies beyond secondary school, with many aspiring to careers in medicine, science, and technology. As one student from Bekaa said, ***“Even if it takes longer or costs more, I want to reach university. It’s the only way to build a future”***. Another from Akkar added, ***“My dream is to become a doctor and help my community. I want to prove that girls can achieve anything”***.

Girls participating in the study reported high educational aspirations despite facing financial, geographic, and infrastructural challenges. Many expressed a strong determination to continue their studies, and highlighted the support they receive from families, teachers, and schools as important factors influencing their motivation and persistence in education.

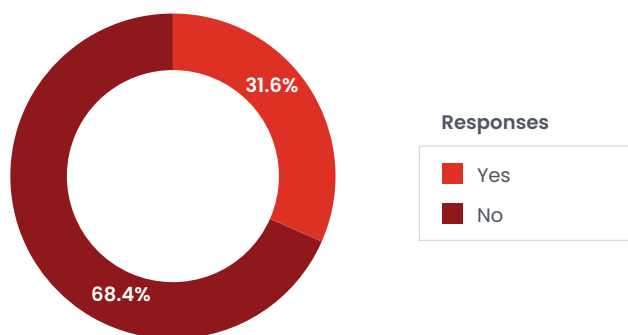
f. Gender Roles, Bias, and Societal Expectations

Survey of girl students consistently perceive that societal expectations impose distinct standards for girls compared to boys, particularly regarding education and career goals.

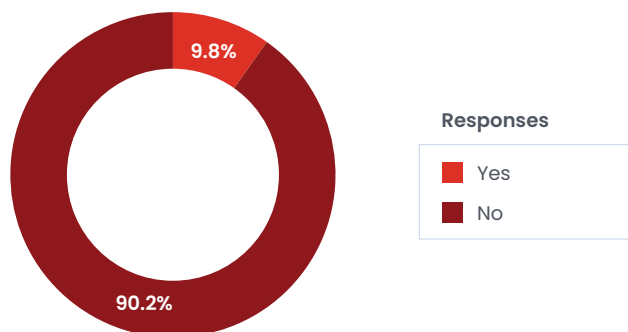
In the survey, **36%** of participants agreed and **27.2%** strongly agreed that society expects girls to behave differently from boys in these domains, versus **19.7%** disagreed and **27.2%** strongly disagreed on this. In total, more than half of respondents (**53.1%**) recognized these differentiated societal expectations versus **46.9%** of girls’ students disagreed or strongly disagreed.



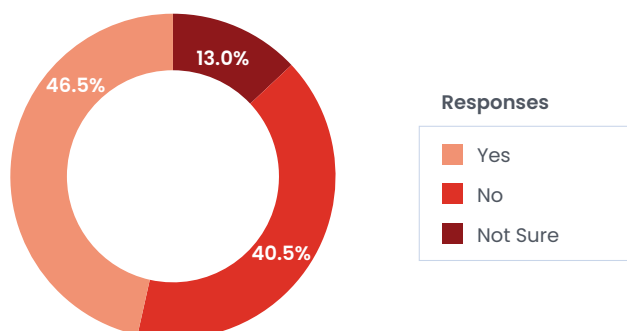
Despite this, more than half of participants (**68.4%**) reported that no one, whether family, teachers, or society, had attempted to influence their academic or career choices, while **31.6%** indicated that they had experienced such interference, revealing a substantial minority still subjected to external pressures when pursuing education or career paths.



Furthermore, when asked if someone they know a girl had ever been discouraged or prevented by family, teachers, or society from pursuing a particular field of study or career path, **90.2% responded “no,”** while **9.8% said “yes,”** reflecting that although direct interference is less commonly reported, perceptions of it within their surroundings still persist.



Pressure related to family responsibilities was particularly pronounced for girls. The survey showed that **46.5%** of students perceive girls as being expected to prioritize household duties over education, compared to **40.5%** who disagreed, with **13%** unsure. These results suggest that **opinions remain divided**, reflecting ongoing social debates about gender roles rather than a clear consensus.



f.1- Structural Barriers to Girls’ Educational Continuity:

Structural constraints continue to shape girls’ educational pathways, particularly in marginalized and rural areas. A student from Akkar explained, **“I want to study engineering, but there’s no university here that offers it. My parents can’t afford to send me away”**. Teachers and experts confirmed that such constraints disproportionately affect girls, especially those living outside major urban centers. As a teacher from Bekaa observed, **“Even when girls have the grades, they sometimes stop because transport or rent is too expensive. Families are afraid to send them far from home”**. These challenges underscore the need for sustained investment in accessible and safe transportation, the expansion of tertiary education options beyond Beirut, and targeted financial support for low-income families.

The lack of universities and specialized majors in regions outside the capital, combined with the absence of safe and affordable public transportation, high poverty levels, and the ongoing economic collapse, continues to limit girls’ educational and professional choices. Teachers noted that these same constraints had shaped their own trajectories. A teacher from Akkar reflected, **“When I finished school, there were no universities nearby, and my parents couldn’t send me to Beirut. Teaching was the only option”**. Another explained, **“Most of us didn’t plan to become teachers, we wanted to study other fields, but we stayed close to home because that’s what families could afford”**. Several teachers also reported graduating in other fields but being unable to find employment locally, forcing them into teaching as the only viable option.

Despite strong ambitions among girls today, many still face significant obstacles in turning their dreams into reality. As one student from Metn summarized, **“We dream big, but sometimes Lebanon feels too small for our dreams”**. Participants stressed that without government investment in public universities offering a wider range of majors in underserved regions, these structural patterns are likely to be reproduced among future generations.

f.2- Social Norms, Gender Bias, and Girls’ Aspirations

Beyond infrastructure and economic barriers, societal expectations and subtle gender biases continue to influence how girls’ educational and career choices are perceived and negotiated. While parents and teachers increasingly encourage girls’ education, long-standing norms still shape assumptions about what fields are considered “appropriate.” As one student from Metn reflected, **“Everyone tells us to study, but when it comes to choosing a major, they still say, ‘choose something easier for a girl’”**. Experts emphasized that discrimination is no longer formalized but remains embedded in social traditions, particularly at the university level, where families have historically invested more in boys’ education in scientific fields while steering girls toward literary tracks.

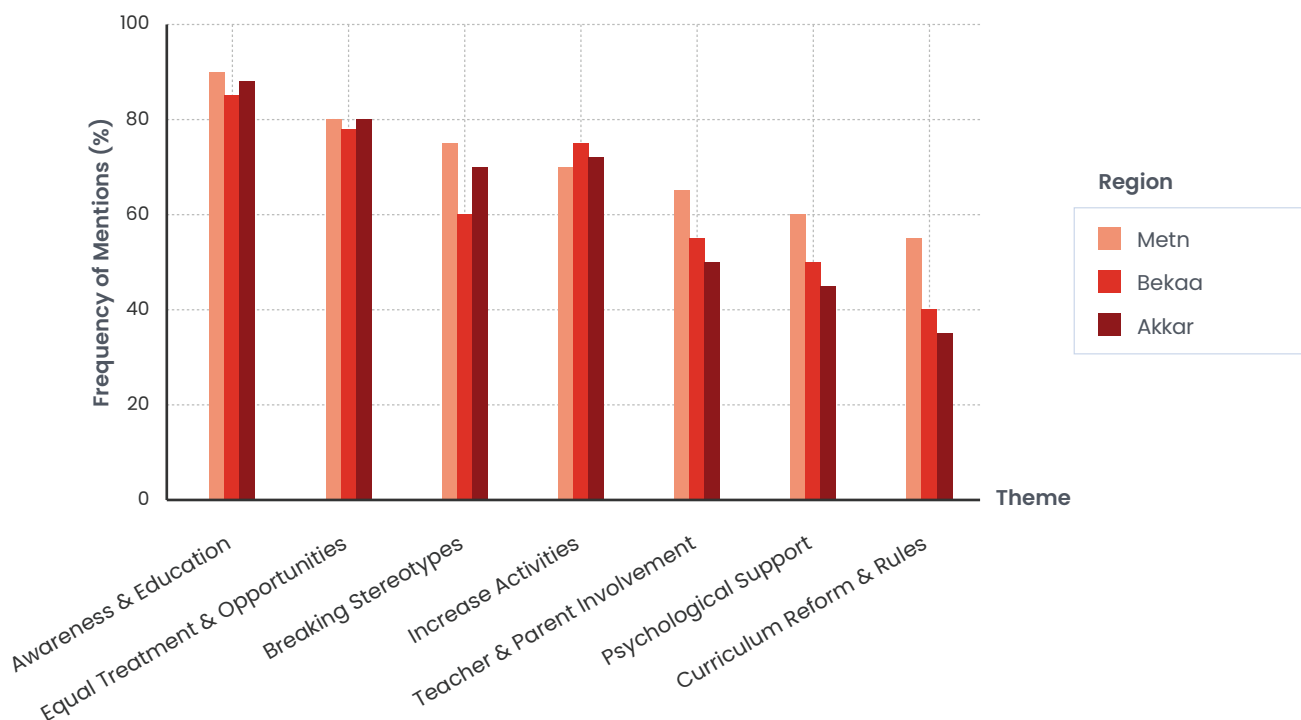
Focus group discussions revealed that classroom experiences are generally supportive. Students reported that teachers treat boys and girls equally and encourage participation across subjects such as mathematics, science, and technology. However, girls continue to experience pressure to excel and to constantly prove their capabilities. Some also reported taking on household or caregiving responsibilities, particularly in cases of parental absence or illness, which can affect their concentration and academic performance. Teachers acknowledged that while overt gender bias in classrooms is limited, subtle biases persist among students and educational materials, including textbooks that reinforce traditional gender roles. Teachers who had received gender-sensitive training highlighted its positive impact and emphasized the importance of expanding such training.

Despite these pressures, girls' aspirations remain remarkably high. In focus group discussions, nearly 70% of girls expressed a desire to become scientists, pilots, or doctors, with only a few indicating an interest in teaching, mainly in literature or languages. As one student from Bekaa stated, *"We want to study something new, something that people don't expect from girls"*. Another added, *"I want to be a doctor so that girls in my village can see that we can do it too"*. Across all regions, students emphasized that the opportunity to study and work in their field of choice remains their strongest motivation to stay in school. As one participant from Metn noted, *"When we think about our future jobs, we feel proud and hopeful, even if things are difficult now"*.

g. Participants Recommendations, Awareness, and Improvement

Students emphasized the central role of awareness and education in promoting gender equality within schools. Many highlighted the need for continuous campaigns, workshops, and lectures on gender equality and girls' rights, with several stressing that boys must also participate in these initiatives to understand and respect equality. Students expressed that gender equality should not be treated as an occasional topic but should be integrated consistently into daily learning and classroom discussions. Beyond curriculum integration, students underscored the importance of fostering equal treatment in all aspects of school life. They called for the elimination of discrimination, harassment, bullying, and sexist remarks, noting that phrases such as "this is not for girls" reflect deep-rooted stereotypes that undermine girls' confidence and participation. Respect, empathy, and inclusivity were repeatedly highlighted as values that must guide teachers, administrators, and students alike, creating a culture of fairness and dignity.

What Schools Can Do to Support Girls and Promote Gender Equality – Thematic Comparison



Across all three regions, girls identified schools as key spaces for change. The majority (85–90%) emphasized the need for awareness sessions and educational campaigns, while around 80% called for equal treatment and opportunities in participation, sports, and leadership. Between 60% and 75% highlighted the importance of breaking gender stereotypes, and 70–75% urged schools to increase extracurricular activities that promote equality in practice. Additionally, 50–65% recommended engaging teachers and parents in awareness efforts, and about 45–60% mentioned the need for psychological support to boost girls' confidence. Finally, 35–55%, mainly from Metn, suggested curriculum reform and stronger anti-discrimination rules.

These findings confirm that girls across Lebanon are not passive recipients but active advocates for inclusive, gender-responsive education that empowers both girls and boys. As one student from Bekaa expressed, ***"We want equality to be more than just a word in books, it should be something we live every day at school"***. Another from Akkar added, ***"Sometimes boys think leadership is only for them. We want to show that girls can lead too"***.

Empowerment emerged as a recurring concern in students' reflections. They stressed the need for more opportunities that actively build girls' confidence and leadership skills. Suggested initiatives included campaigns and programs that showcase female role models, particularly in male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). A student from Metn said, ***"It helps when we see women engineers or scientists visit our school, it makes us believe it's possible"***. Another remarked, ***"Empowerment is not just about confidence; it's about giving us real chances to prove ourselves"***.

Sports and extracurricular activities were repeatedly identified as areas requiring targeted attention. ***"We love sports, but sometimes we're told it's not for girls"***, explained a participant from Akkar. ***"If we had more teams or tournaments, we'd join without hesitation"***. Students proposed that schools expand opportunities for girls to engage in sports, cultural programs, and collaborative projects, emphasizing that participation in these activities promotes equality in practice and cultivates teamwork, confidence, and leadership.

Support and guidance were also seen as critical for promoting equality. Students called for psychological and social support tailored to girls' needs, including counseling, mentorship, and career orientation programs that expose both girls and boys to a wide range of professional fields. As one participant put it, ***"Sometimes we just need someone to talk to a teacher or counselor who listens and helps us find our way"***.

Families were highlighted as essential partners in fostering equality, with students emphasizing that schools should involve parents in awareness programs. ***"If parents hear about gender equality from schools, they might start applying it at home too"*** one girl said.

Participants noted that the school environment itself plays a critical role, with teachers and administrators expected to model fairness, enforce anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies, and invite civil society organizations to support equality initiatives. Teachers echoed this sentiment, recognizing their role as change agents. A teacher from Bekaa stated, ***"When we treat boys and girls equally in class, we teach more than the lesson we teach respect"***.

Experts reinforced these observations, identifying a set of concrete interventions to strengthen schools as supportive spaces for girls. They highlighted the need for psychosocial support, stronger monitoring mechanisms, and increased technical and financial support from the Ministry of Education, alongside active engagement from civil society to ensure that policies translate into practice. Clear interventions to prevent child marriage and awareness campaigns aimed at dismantling long-standing stereotypes were also emphasized.

Students' participants in FGDs underscored the importance of mentorship programs and experiential activities that allow girls to explore male-dominated fields safely and confidently. Parents in FGDs prioritized practical reforms in the curriculum, including hands-on learning, equal inclusion in sports and extracurricular programs, and initiatives that raise awareness of girls' rights while cultivating allyship among boys. A parent from Metn said, ***"We want our sons to learn about equality too, not just our daughters"***.

Teachers FGD's respondents recommended the formal integration of gender equality principles into school policies and curricula, the removal of gender stereotypes from textbooks and learning materials, and the expansion of professional training in gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching. ***"We need more than awareness, we need the right tools and materials to teach equality every day"***, a teacher from Akkar explained.

Across all perspectives, participants emphasized actionable strategies to foster an equitable learning environment. These include structured workshops, curriculum reforms that emphasize practical knowledge and inclusivity, expanded participation in sports and extracurricular activities, mentorship and career guidance, and the creation of educational resources that reflect gender equality. As one student concluded, ***"If schools give us the space to lead, we will"***.

Implementing these measures would enable schools not only to ensure fair treatment for all students but also to actively empower girls, challenge stereotypes, and cultivate an environment that nurtures ambition, self-confidence, and equitable opportunities in both academic and personal development.

Key recommendations included updating outdated curricula to include gender equality concepts, integrating anti-harassment legislation into educational materials, and ensuring schools are equipped to meet the needs of girls such as providing sanitary products, safe and adequate restrooms, and improved transportation. An education expert noted, *“Gender equality starts with dignity when a girl has what she needs to learn comfortably, she can focus on her future”*.

VI. Discussion and analysis

The evidence across surveys, interviews, and focus groups shows that adolescent girls in Lebanon sustain high aspirations and strong academic performance in a system strained by economic shock and uneven service delivery. Rather than restating prevalence figures, this section explains how household resources and norms, school climate and pedagogy, and the wider policy and financing context interact to shape access, participation, subject choice, and transitions to post-secondary education. The analysis underscores that equality in policy or enrollment does not automatically translate into equality in everyday classroom experience.

The synthesis also points to a practical agenda. Stakeholders consistently converged on iterative teacher development in gender-responsive pedagogy; curriculum and assessment reform that remove stereotyping and normalize mixed-gender participation; reliable school-based protection and referral; guidance and counseling that broaden academic and vocational pathways, including STEM and TVET; and low-cost enablers that matter disproportionately to girls, such as transport support, menstrual-hygiene-friendly facilities, and targeted assistance for vulnerable households. When coupled with predictable financing, coordinated partnerships, and diversified affordable tertiary options outside Beirut, these measures can convert current gains in participation and attainment into durable, system-wide improvements.

a. Inclusive Learning Environment and Classroom Equity

The findings indicate that while many students perceive their schools as generally safe and supportive environments, a significant minority continue to experience inequities in classroom interactions. This highlights that safety in schools extends beyond physical protection to include emotional and psychological dimensions.

While the majority of students report equitable treatment, a notable proportion either experience or suspect unequal treatment based on gender. These perceptions point to persistent gendered expectations that influence participation, access to leadership opportunities, and encouragement in specific subject areas, particularly STEM. Although such patterns may not always be the result of explicit discrimination, they reflect subtle biases embedded in everyday practices. Interviews with educators and school administrators further reveal that, despite the presence of formal equality policies, implicit gender norms remain present in curricula, classroom discussions, and teacher-student interactions. In some cases, practices motivated by care or respect, such as greater leniency or protection toward girls, can inadvertently reinforce assumptions about fragility and dependence, thereby perpetuating unequal standards of accountability and behavior.

Focus group discussions with students illustrate how these dynamics are reinforced through peer interactions and extracurricular participation. While many classrooms are perceived as broadly equitable, gender differentiation remains visible in specific contexts, including sports, leadership roles, and participation in open discussions. These findings should be interpreted with caution, as they reflect students’ perceptions rather than direct measures of discrimination; nevertheless, they point to a meaningful minority who continue to observe or experience gendered differences

in encouragement and participation. Differences in lived experiences outside school further contribute to these patterns. Boys' greater exposure to public spaces, work, and community engagement from a young age often strengthens their confidence and willingness to speak, while girls' more restricted mobility can limit opportunities to develop similar skills, affecting classroom dynamics.

Regional contrasts further underscore these patterns. Schools in Metn are generally described as offering more inclusive environments, while those in Bekaa and Akkar exhibit more entrenched gender biases, particularly in relation to sports and leadership opportunities. These disparities suggest that local social norms, economic conditions, and institutional capacities intersect to shape girls' educational experiences differently across regions. While some teachers actively challenge these norms through mentorship and inclusive practices, reliance on individual initiative highlights a broader gap in institutionalized approaches that systematically promote gender equity, dialogue, and protection across all schools.

Overall, the evidence suggests that fostering inclusive learning environments requires more than formal policies or individual goodwill. It calls for sustained professional development in gender-responsive pedagogy, consistent monitoring of classroom dynamics, and stronger institutional frameworks that support equitable participation. Without such systemic efforts, progress toward classroom equity risks remain uneven and dependent on individual actors rather than embedded within the education system as a whole.

b. Access to Education and Pathways for Academic Advancement

The study indicates that adolescent girls in Lebanon demonstrate strong commitment and motivation toward continuing their education, with nearly all survey participants expressing aspirations to pursue university-level studies. Career goals are diverse and ambitious, ranging across sciences, health, social sciences, arts, technology, and engineering, highlighting both high capability and a willingness to challenge traditional gendered expectations in professional fields.

Despite this strong motivation, access to education is shaped by persistent structural and contextual barriers, which disproportionately affect students in rural or underserved areas such as Akkar and the Bekaa. Transportation challenges, inadequate school infrastructure, and limited availability of affordable higher education outside urban centers create practical obstacles that can hinder students' ability to pursue their goals. Even when families value education, these systemic limitations reduce the feasibility of sustained academic engagement and may contribute to localized disparities in educational attainment.

While survey data suggest that early marriage and household responsibilities are not widespread obstacles for the majority of participants, expert interviewers emphasize that these factors remain influential in conservative or economically marginalized communities. In such contexts, social expectations may still limit girls' educational trajectories, and financial constraints can push families to prioritize immediate economic survival over continued schooling. This intersection of economic hardship, geographic isolation, and cultural norms illustrates the complexity of barriers that girls face beyond their personal ambition or family support.

Focus group discussions reinforce the nuanced nature of these challenges. Students acknowledge encouragement from teachers and family members but note that logistical difficulties, including long commutes and limited access to extracurricular programs or STEM-focused activities, can restrict engagement and opportunities for skill development. Teachers highlight that while girls often excel academically, systemic gaps, such as insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of practical learning experiences, can limit the translation of motivation into tangible achievements.

Together, these findings reveal that while girls' aspirations for higher education and professional careers are strong and increasingly diverse, structural inequalities continue to shape the practical realization of these ambitions. Ensuring equitable access requires targeted interventions including investment in infrastructure, improved transportation options, localized academic support, and initiatives designed to mitigate socio-economic constraints, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

c. Societal Norms and Gendered Expectations

The study indicates that societal norms continue to influence girls' roles and opportunities, particularly regarding household responsibilities and career decisions. Survey results show that more than half of the participants feel pressured by expectations from family, peers, or the broader community. This highlights that even as schools strive to provide equitable learning environments, broader social influences remain a significant factor in shaping girls' choices and self-perceptions.

Focus group discussions with students, teachers, and parents reveal a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics. Teachers and parents largely support equal participation in academic and extracurricular activities, actively encouraging girls to engage in subjects and fields historically dominated by boys, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Nevertheless, subtle gendered patterns persist. Boys often dominate sports and leadership roles, while educational materials, including textbooks, continue to reflect traditional stereotypes. These subtle cues can limit girls' confidence, reinforce internalized notions of "appropriate" behavior, and affect participation in classroom discussions or decision-making opportunities.

Experts emphasize that these societal norms are slowly evolving, with urban and semi-urban areas showing more openness to gender equality. However, in rural and economically marginalized communities, conservative expectations remain stronger, reinforcing traditional gender roles and occasionally influencing decisions about continuing education, subject choice, or engagement in extracurricular activities. This underscores the importance of designing interventions that extend beyond the classroom. School-based strategies, such as inclusive teaching practices, mentorship programs, and gender-awareness campaigns, must be complemented by community-level initiatives that engage parents, local leaders, and civil society to actively challenge entrenched stereotypes and promote equitable expectations.

Ultimately, these findings illustrate that addressing gendered social norms requires coordinated efforts across multiple levels. Schools can provide safe, supportive spaces for learning and participation, but meaningful changes in girls' experiences and aspirations also depend on transforming the broader cultural and social environment that shapes their opportunities.

d. Networks of Support and Enabling Environments

Family encouragement stands out as a primary enabling factor, with 86% of students reporting strong parental support. This support not only influences academic engagement but also fosters confidence and resilience in pursuing both traditional and non-traditional fields of study.

Institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality exist in some schools; however, their coverage and effectiveness are uneven. Participation in workshops, discussions, and other structured programs has been linked to increased confidence in the classroom, higher engagement, and greater willingness to take on leadership roles. Despite these benefits, nearly half of the surveyed students have not yet accessed such interventions, suggesting gaps in outreach and consistency.

Feedback from experts and focus group participants underscores that isolated activities are insufficient to create lasting change. Sustainable impact requires integrated and contextually adapted approaches that combine curriculum reform, targeted mentorship, psychosocial support, and extracurricular engagement. Programs that address both academic and socio-emotional dimensions of learning are more likely to enhance girls' confidence, participation, and long-term educational outcomes.

Collaboration emerges as a key factor in strengthening these support systems. Partnerships among schools, civil society organizations, and government agencies can amplify the reach and impact of gender-sensitive initiatives, creating a coordinated network that reinforces equitable opportunities for girls across multiple contexts. By fostering such interconnected support, educational environments can move beyond mere access, ensuring that girls are empowered to fully exercise their rights, talents, and aspirations.

e. Opportunities for Reform and Intervention

Participants consistently emphasize that promoting gender equality must extend beyond isolated initiatives and be embedded into the daily operations and culture of schools. Students, teachers, and experts alike highlight the need for practical measures that address both visible and subtle forms of bias. Key recommendations include revising curricula to remove stereotypical representations, adopting interactive and participatory teaching methods, and broadening opportunities for girls in STEM subjects, sports, and leadership activities. Structured mentorship programs and career guidance are also cited as essential tools to support informed decision-making and foster confidence in academic and professional pursuits.

Experts further stress that meaningful change requires systemic and sustained reforms. One-off interventions are insufficient; long-term investment in teacher training, infrastructure improvements, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are critical to ensure policies are effectively implemented and translated into tangible outcomes. The alignment observed between students' ambitions, parental encouragement, and teacher commitment provides a strong foundation for these efforts, suggesting that well-targeted interventions can leverage existing support networks to create inclusive and empowering learning environments. Embedding gender equality into everyday school practices, therefore, emerges as both a strategic priority and a practical pathway to reducing disparities and nurturing the full potential of all students.

f. Structural and Normative Barriers to Girls' Education

Findings point to a layered set of constraints that narrow girls' choices and reduce the probability of completing upper secondary education. Economic stress is the most immediate pressure on access and retention. Households that face income volatility or debt report greater difficulty covering transport, learning materials, and exam-related costs. In these settings, negative coping strategies appear more frequently, including early marriage and short-term withdrawal for informal work or family care, with re-entry becoming less likely as girls age. These pressures are most visible in the Bekaa and Akkar, where distance to secondary schools and transport interruptions magnify the cost of attendance, although elements of the same dynamic also appear in semi-urban Metn.

Gender stereotypes operate at both household and school levels, and they have cumulative effects. Parents often articulate high aspirations for daughters, yet they also describe science and technical fields as better suited to boys, which leads to cautious subject selection at the point where specialization begins. In classrooms, teachers who lack training in gender-responsive pedagogy sometimes offer praise or criticism in ways that signal different expectations for girls and boys. Textbooks and assignments continue to contain gendered representations that position men as actors in public and technical spheres and women as carers or support staff. Over time, these cues shape self-belief and narrow the set of options girls consider attainable.

School conditions can either mitigate or intensify these dynamics. Where guidance and counseling are limited, students receive little structured support to explore non-traditional pathways, including TVET or STEM tracks. Laboratories and equipment are unevenly available, and when resources are scarce, priority for access is sometimes informally allocated to higher-performing students, which compounds earlier advantages. Safety concerns on the journey to school are occasionally cited, especially in more remote areas, and inadequate sanitation deters attendance during menstruation for a subset of students. At system level, interventions remain fragmented and funding intermittent, which leads to pilots that do not reach scale and to staff who receive partial training without reinforcement. The digital divide also persists. Parents with lower digital literacy engage less in school communications and are less likely to access online materials and information about scholarships or support programs.



g. Enabling Conditions and Scalable Pathways for Girls' Educational Progress

At the same time, several conditions consistently support access, participation, and reform. Local focal points embedded in communities provided trusted entry to schools and households during the study, and similar community-anchored mechanisms can facilitate programming that is responsive to local constraints. Within schools, individual champions make a measurable difference. Principals who set explicit expectations on equity, and teachers who adopt practical gender-responsive techniques, report improvements in girls' participation and confidence, particularly in science and mathematics classes. Even modest adjustments, such as rotating leadership roles in group work, auditing examples and images in lesson materials, or scheduling targeted study circles before exams, can shift classroom dynamics in ways that accumulate over time.

The broader policy environment offers openings for scale. National frameworks already reference gender equality in education, and partnerships between public institutions and civil society are well established. Where resources are predictable and coordination is deliberate, these platforms allow for teacher training that is iterative rather than one-off, for referral pathways that are understood and used, and for guidance and counseling services that move beyond a narrow focus on exam preparation. High baseline rates of literacy and enrollment provide a strong foundation on which to build. In this context, low-cost measures that improve the reliability and affordability of transport, expand access to accurate information about scholarships and career options, and strengthen school-community communication can deliver early gains while more intensive investments in infrastructure and staffing are planned.

In summary, the analysis shows that economic stress, persistent stereotypes, and uneven school conditions interact to limit girls' progress, but it also identifies feasible points of leverage. Community-level access, school-based champions, and existing policy platforms can be combined with targeted improvements in guidance, pedagogy, and mobility to reduce barriers. The comparative lens across governorates and school types helps specify which combinations are most likely to succeed in different settings, which in turn supports the design of interventions that are both realistic and scalable.

VII. General Recommendations

Advancing gender equality in Lebanon's education system requires a coordinated, multi-level strategy that addresses the pedagogical, structural, and socio-economic barriers documented in the study. The following recommendations are organized thematically according to the primary actors and systemic areas that influence girls' education. They are grounded in the quantitative and qualitative evidence collected across Metn, Akkar, and the Bekaa, and they reflect the realities of a country facing economic hardship, infrastructural deterioration, and deeply rooted gender norms.

a. Pedagogical Reform and Teacher Capacity Development

Teachers remain the primary influence on students' daily learning experiences, and their practices significantly shape how gender norms are reinforced or challenged. For this reason, pedagogical reform must move beyond short, isolated workshops toward a long-term model of professional development that accompanies teachers throughout their careers. Continuous coaching, classroom observation, and reflective practice groups should become a defining feature of instructional improvement, enabling teachers to identify unconscious biases, adopt gender-responsive strategies, and cultivate equitable participation in all subjects. Pre-service preparation programs must incorporate gender equality as a core competency, ensuring future educators enter classrooms equipped with the tools to challenge stereotypes, encourage girls' leadership,

and support participation in STEM subjects. In-service teachers should receive regular mentoring through strengthened regional resource centers capable of providing localized guidance, peer learning, and targeted support. These changes would help institutionalize gender-responsive pedagogy across both public and private schools, gradually transforming classroom culture into one that consistently promotes fairness, agency, and confidence for all students.

b. Curriculum and Assessment Reform

Curriculum content and assessment practices continue to transmit gendered expectations through their structure, language, and representation of roles. To address these embedded biases, Lebanon's curriculum reform process must include a systematic and rigorous review of textbooks and teaching materials to eliminate stereotypical portrayals and introduce diverse, empowering examples of women in leadership, scientific innovation, public life, and technical fields. Curriculum revision, however, must be accompanied by a parallel shift in how learning is evaluated. Traditional assessment models that reward memorization and passive learning often limit girls' opportunities to develop the analytical, communicative, and collaborative skills essential for higher education and employment. The examination system should therefore incorporate modes of evaluation that recognize reasoning, teamwork, oral expression, and the application of knowledge to real-world contexts. Integrating structured oral participation, interdisciplinary projects, and mixed-gender group assignments would not only foster inclusive classroom habits but also build the confidence and leadership capacity of girls, especially those in under-resourced settings. Such reforms would align daily teaching practices with the broader national objective of promoting equity and supporting diverse career pathways.

c. School Environment, Safety, and Protection Mechanisms

The sense of safety and belonging experienced by students is fundamental to their learning, participation, and psychological well-being. In regions such as Akkar and parts of the Bekaa, girls continue to report heightened concerns related to bullying, emotional insecurity, and mobility constraints, underscoring the need for institutionalized protection mechanisms within schools. Every school should designate trained focal persons responsible for addressing harassment, managing risk, and coordinating with external protection services. Strengthening counseling units is equally essential. Counselors should provide academic guidance, information on university admissions, vocational alternatives, and scholarship opportunities, while also offering psychosocial support to students affected by economic hardship or social pressures. When these services are consistently available, students are more likely to remain engaged, make informed decisions, and seek help when facing obstacles. Ensuring that schools cultivate a climate of respect, dignity, and emotional safety is therefore central to reducing dropout risks and empowering girls to pursue their aspirations.

d. Infrastructure, Transportation, and Learning Conditions

Across all three regions, but particularly in Akkar and the Bekaa, deteriorating infrastructure and unreliable transportation remain among the most significant barriers to girls' educational continuity. Reliable and affordable transportation is especially critical in rural and geographically dispersed areas. Subsidized transportation schemes developed through partnerships between municipalities, schools, and local actors would significantly reduce absenteeism and dropout particularly for girls whose mobility is often more restricted. Improving school facilities is not merely a matter of comfort but a prerequisite for fairness. Investments are urgently needed to ensure that all schools have safe sanitation facilities, access to clean water, adequate lighting, appropriate heating and cooling, and inclusive designs accommodating students with disabilities. Establishing shared laboratories, libraries, and technology hubs across clusters of schools would help bridge resource gaps and allow students in marginalized regions to access the practical, hands-on learning experiences necessary for scientific and technological literacy. Adjusting school schedules to minimize commuting burdens and protect time for remedial learning or extracurricular involvement would further support consistent participation.

e. Family and Community Engagement

Family expectations and community attitudes remain among the most influential determinants of girls' educational pathways. Although many families express strong support for their daughters' learning, economic stress and traditional gender norms still affect decisions about participation, specialization, and post-secondary opportunities. Schools should therefore develop structured mechanisms for engaging parents through regular community dialogues where data on attendance, learning outcomes, and gender disparities are presented in clear and accessible formats. These meetings should inform families about available academic and vocational pathways, scholarship mechanisms, and university requirements, reducing reliance on assumptions or outdated perceptions. At the community level, civil society organizations can contribute to raising awareness, promoting girls' aspirations, and facilitating mentorship programs that connect students with female role models from various sectors. Engaging fathers and male community leaders is particularly important in regions where restrictive norms persist, as their endorsement can significantly influence attitudes and open opportunities for girls.

f. Economic Support and Alleviation of Financial Barriers

Economic vulnerability has become the most decisive factor influencing dropout considerations, absenteeism, and reduced engagement in learning. To counter the effects of Lebanon's prolonged economic crisis, financial assistance must be integrated into national and regional education strategies, rather than delivered in ad hoc or temporary ways. Targeted support may take the form of transportation subsidies, school supply vouchers, financial assistance for examination fees, and emergency relief for families experiencing sudden shocks. Such measures should prioritize the most vulnerable households, including those affected by displacement or living in remote areas where educational costs are higher. In addition to direct financial support, investments in school infrastructure, reliable electricity, connectivity, and learning materials are essential to ensure that resource-dependent learning opportunities do not become a privilege of better-off regions. Predictable and transparent economic support would significantly reduce the risk of dropout and give girls in disadvantaged communities a fairer chance to pursue secondary and post-secondary education.

g. Governance, Coordination, and National Planning

Effective progress toward gender equality requires reforms at the systemic level, with strong governance structures and well-coordinated implementation strategies. National stakeholders should work to align the multiple donor-supported initiatives currently operating in Lebanon within a unified framework that establishes measurable targets related to teacher development, textbook revision, counseling coverage, infrastructure investment, and schools safety protocols. Strengthening data systems is also essential. Reliable, sex-disaggregated and region-disaggregated data on attendance, performance, retention, and discipline would allow ministries, districts, and schools to monitor disparities, identify early warning signs, and design interventions based on evidence rather than assumptions. Coordination among the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, CERD, local municipalities, regional resource centers, and civil society organizations must be clarified through formal mechanisms that define responsibilities, communication channels, and accountability standards. Without such governance improvements, promising interventions will remain fragmented, short-lived, and unable to influence the system on scale.

h. Regional Tailoring of Interventions

The study illustrates that gender inequality does not manifest uniformly across Lebanon. While Metn benefits from stronger infrastructure and more diverse extracurricular opportunities, Akkar and the Bekaa face compounded challenges tied to mobility, economic hardship, and limited post-secondary access. Interventions must therefore be adapted to regional conditions rather than applied uniformly. In Metn, efforts should focus on improving teaching quality, enhancing leadership pathways for girls, and expanding enrichment programs that foster innovation and counter subtle gender bias. In Akkar and the Bekaa, the priority shifts toward strengthening transportation systems, improving public school infrastructure, and establishing shared laboratories and technology hubs that compensate for resource shortages. Where early marriage or heavy domestic responsibilities remain significant, after-school programs and mentorship initiatives should be scheduled at times that reflect girls' mobility constraints and family obligations, ensuring that participation is both safe and culturally feasible. Tailoring interventions to the realities of each region will increase their relevance, sustainability, and impact.

VIII. Conclusion

This study shows that adolescent girls in Lebanon learn and aspire in environments marked by resilience and constraint. On the one hand, girls report strong motivation to continue education, perform well in examinations, and express ambitions across a wide range of fields. Families and teachers frequently act as allies, and many schools provide a sense of safety that allows learning and friendship to flourish. On the other hand, structural inequities and social expectations continue to shape everyday experience and long-term choices. Subtle classroom dynamics still steer participation, leadership, and subject confidence. Transport costs, distance to universities, and uneven infrastructure create practical limits, especially outside major urban centers. Economic stress tightens these limits for households that have little margin for additional fees, materials, or commuting. The result is a system that produces genuine success stories while leaving too much to individual effort and luck.

The path forward is therefore not a single intervention but a coordinated set of changes that make equity ordinary. Equality cannot remain an aspiration in policy documents or a statistic in national reports. It must become visible in the texture of daily lessons, in the images and exercises students encounter, in the way teachers assign roles and ask questions, and in the support that keeps students engaged when life outside school becomes difficult. When girls see themselves reflected in materials and roles, when they are invited to lead discussions and pursue practical projects in laboratories and clubs, and when families receive clear information and low-friction assistance, aspirations turn into attainable plans.

Sustained progress depends on institutions that learn. Teacher development should be iterative and evidence informed, with classrooms treated as the unit of change and coaching used to sustain new practices. Curriculum and assessment should be revised together so that what teachers teach and what students are rewarded for align with inclusive aims. Protection and counseling must be reliable, not symbolic, because a student who does not feel emotionally and physically safe cannot learn fully. Guidance should open doors to the full range of academic and vocational options, including regional public universities and quality TVET, so that place of residence does not predetermine opportunity. Community engagement should move beyond awareness sessions toward shared problem solving on transport, extracurricular access, and the social permissions that govern girls' time.

Regional disparities require that policy be flexible in design and firm in purpose. Where infrastructure is relatively strong, the priority is to uproot persistent bias in pedagogy and leadership. Where distance, cost, and scarcity of programs are the binding constraints, the focus must be on mobility, scholarships, and locally available pathways that do not force families to choose between safety and schooling. In every context, data that are disaggregated by sex and region should guide decisions and allow early identification of gaps. Monitoring is not a compliance exercise but a way to learn what works and to protect gains during fiscal stress.

The alignment observed in this study between student ambition, parental support, and teacher commitment is a strategic asset. If policy and programming harness this alignment with predictable financing and coherent delivery, Lebanon can turn its many pilots into a system that routinely expands choice. The stakes are high. When girls complete upper secondary with confidence, move into diverse post-secondary options, and enter public life as scientists, teachers by choice rather than default, engineers, artists, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders, the returns flow to families, communities, and the economy. The way to reach that horizon is clear. Make classrooms inclusive by design, keep schools safe and supportive, widen the pathways beyond secondary school, and remove the practical obstacles that weigh most heavily on girls. With patience, coordination, and attention to local realities, these steps can transform promising islands of progress into a landscape where every girl's effort has a fair chance to become an achievement.

Annex

Contextual Analysis of Gendered Education in Lebanon

a. Overview and Purpose of the Annex

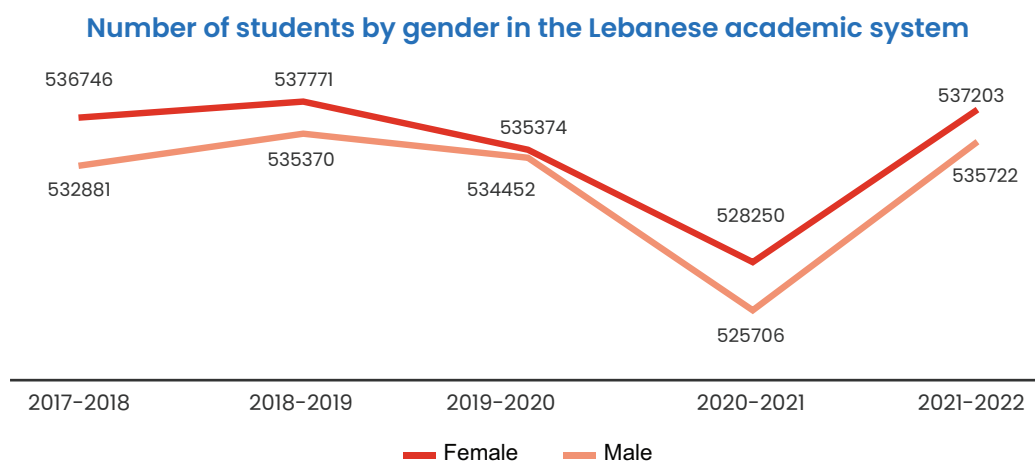
This annex provides a detailed analysis of gendered education trends in Lebanon, expanding on the summary presented in the General Overview. It presents quantitative and qualitative evidence on enrolment patterns, learning disruptions, examination outcomes, and higher education pathways, with a particular focus on gender disparities. The annex is intended to support evidence-based programming and policy dialogue by illustrating how systemic shocks and social norms intersect to shape educational outcomes for girls and boys.

b. Learning Disruptions and System-Wide Enrolment Trends

Lebanon has long reported comparatively high literacy among youth, with youth literacy consistently above 95% for both girls and boys in recent years. Yet, these national figures mask enduring disparities that disadvantage students in rural and economically marginalized areas. The World Bank has noted that poverty tripled to 44% by 2022–24, with the heaviest burden outside Beirut, where conditions directly affect school access, transport, and post-secondary opportunities.

Learning disruptions since 2019 have further weakened the education system.

System-wide enrolment trends reflect this shock, with a marked dip in 2020–2021 (see Figure 1).



source: Educational center for research and development

Enrolment for both girls and boys fell sharply in 2020–2021 amid closures and strikes, then partially recovered in 2021–2022. The parallel movement of the two lines indicates that crisis effects were system-wide, even as girls remained slightly more numerous overall.

Public-school students received roughly 270 in-person school days over four years when about 600 would have been expected, due to protests, the pandemic, closures, and strikes.²² These compounded crises are projected to translate into long-term learning and earnings losses.²³

c. Gender Norms in Curriculum and Classroom Practices

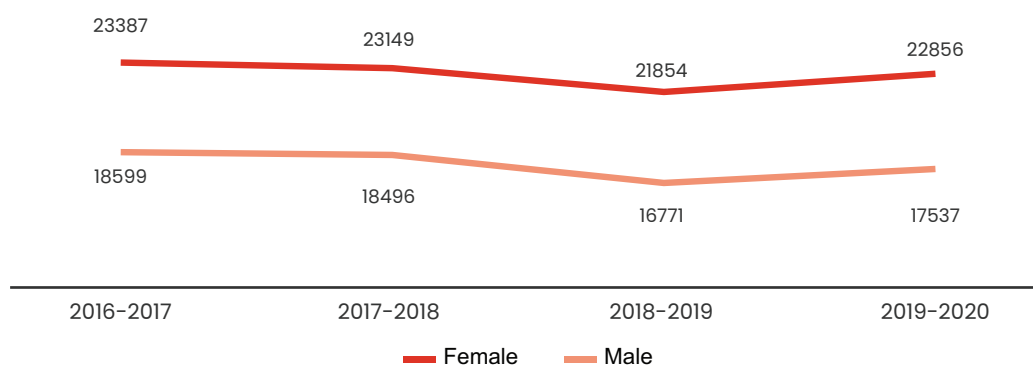
Gendered norms in curricula and classrooms remain well documented. Multiple textbook reviews describe stereotyped portrayals of men and women in national curricula, with slow reform processes reinforcing traditional roles unless actively countered by teachers^{24 25 26}. The present study confirmed these dynamics: while most students perceive teachers as generally fair, a significant minority reported unequal treatment.

Teacher capacity is a decisive factor in shifting these norms. Literature stresses the value of gender-responsive pedagogy and continuous professional development. The study confirmed that one-off training does not create lasting change. Teachers who had received gender-sensitive training reported clearer benefits for fairness and participation. Yet, child-protection initiatives and psychosocial support remain uneven across regions. The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted training cycles, slowing reforms and exposing the fragility of progress not embedded in routine school practice.

d. Participation in National Examinations and Educational Attainment

Pathways beyond secondary school strongly shape choices during school years. CERD’s official statistics confirm 222,064 students enrolled in higher education in 2019–20, though sex-disaggregated data remain patchy in public releases^{27 28}. Because official examinations are the gateway to post-secondary study, it is important to track who sits for them (see Figure 2).

Number of students enrolled in the official examinations by gender



source: Educational center for research and development

22. World Bank. Another Lost Year: The Education Crisis in Lebanon’s Public Schools, 2022–23. 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/another-lost-year-the-education-crisis-in-lebanons-public-schools-2022-23>

23. World Bank. Foundations for Building Forward Better: An Education Reform Path for Lebanon. 2021. Retrieved from <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/365241615563716623/foundations-for-building-forward-better-an-education-reform-path-for-lebanon>

24. UNESCO Beirut. Textbook content review on gender stereotyping in Lebanon. 2021. UNESCO. School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Lebanon. 2012 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215189>

25. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS). Gender equality in education in Lebanon. Policy brief, 2020. LCPS. Higher Education in Lebanon: A Primer. 2022: <https://lcps-lebanon.org/publications/168>. Retrieved from api.lcps-lebanon.org

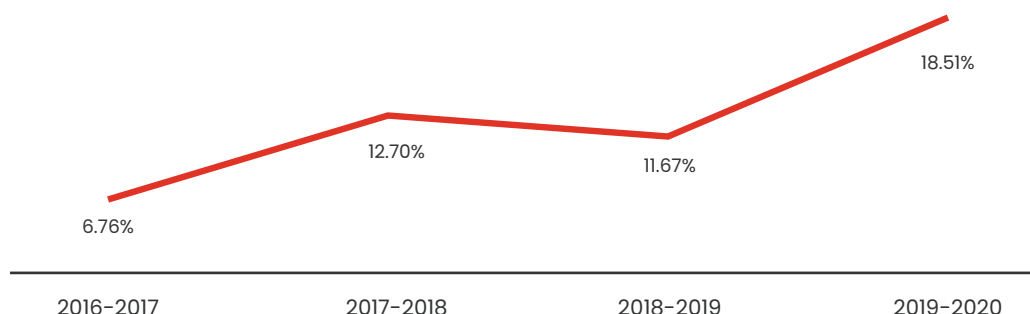
26. USAID. Gender analysis of the education sector in Lebanon. 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/lebanon>

27. CERD (Center for Educational Research and Development). Statistical Bulletin on Education, 2019–2020. Retrieved from <https://www.crdp.org/statistics-bulletin>

28. LCPS. Trends in higher education enrollment in Lebanon. 2020. Higher Education in Lebanon: A Primer. 2022. Retrieved from <https://lcps-lebanon.org/publications/168LCPS>.

Female candidates consistently outnumbered male candidates over the period, which aligns with qualitative reports of higher female continuation to the end of secondary school and helps explain women’s strong presence in public higher education. Beyond participation, female attainment also strengthened over time (see Figure 3).

The proportion of female students achieving a ‘Very Good’ grade in the official secondary school examinations



source: Educational center for research and development

The proportion of girls achieving top marks rose from 6.76% to 18.51% despite system disruptions, indicating not only sustained participation but improved performance among female candidates.

e. Gender Patterns in Higher Education

To illustrate sectoral and gender patterns in higher education, Table 1 summarizes enrolment by gender at the Lebanese University and at private universities from 2017 to 2018 to 2020–2021.

Student Distribution by Gender and Institution

Year	Institution	Female	Male	Female %	Male %
2017–2018	Lebanese University	55758	23602	70.2%	29.8%
2017–2018	Private Universities (total)	63880	67480	48.6%	51.4%
2018–2019	Lebanese University	57267	23757	70.7%	29.3%
2018–2019	Private Universities (total)	64541	73683	46.7%	53.3%
2019–2020	Lebanese University	56059	23266	70.7%	29.3%
2019–2020	Private Universities (total)	66122	76617	46.3%	53.7%
2020–2021	Lebanese University	60548	26204	69.8%	30.2%
2020–2021	Private Universities (total)	70124	80770	46.5%	53.5%

source: Educational center for research and development

The figures indicate that women consistently constituted about 70% of enrolment at the Lebanese University across the period, whereas private universities remained balanced to slightly male-dominant (female share approximately 46–49%). Overall higher-education enrolment rose from 210,720 students in 2017–2018 to 237,646 in 2020–2021, while the combined female share held near 55–57% (including 222,064 in 2019–2020, as cited above).

Independent analyses suggest women comprise around 54% of science students but only about 25% of engineering students, underscoring persistent gendered channelling in STEM^{29 30}.

f. Early Marriage and Its Impact on Girls' Education


Early marriage disrupts girls' education and restricts their future prospects, reinforcing existing financial and structural inequalities. In Lebanon, national data indicate that approximately 6% of Lebanese women aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18. However, the rate is significantly higher among Syrian refugees, where more than one in three girls are married before reaching adulthood. The 2022 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) further reveals a troubling increase in child marriage among Syrian girls from 20% to 22% within a single year with the highest prevalence reported in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.³¹

29. British Council. Women in STEM in Lebanon. 2019. "Urgent action required to address gender inequality in higher education," 2022: Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/urgent-action-required-address-gender-inequality-higher-education>

30. Arab Barometer / LAU. Women's Access to STEM Fields in Lebanon. Retrieved from 2021.<https://alraidajournal.com/index.php/ALRJ/issue/view/36>

31. Girls Not Brides – Lebanon Country Profile. Retrieved from <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/lebanon/>

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