



# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LEBANON: PERSPECTIVES FROM MOUNT-LEBANON

LEBANON

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Women are invisible on the political scene in Lebanon. This diagnosis explores the reasons for this situation and proposes actions to strengthen the participation of women in political life at local and national level. Despite the efforts of civil society, further steps are needed to reverse this trend.



Lebanese civil society organizations are advocating policies which promote women's access to decision-making.  
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- Advancing in the common fight for equal rights of women and men to participate in political, economic, civil and social life;
- Eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls;
- Encouraging a change in attitude and behaviour for gender equality.

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#### Field diagnosis: Women's political participation in Lebanon: perspectives from Mount-Lebanon

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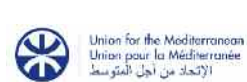
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## Local clusters of gender equality actors<sup>©</sup> mobilized since 2016



**A** Region of Marrakech - Safi (Morocco)

**B** Wilaya of Oran (Algeria)

**C** Governorates of Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia)

**D** South of Giza District (Egypt)

**E** Southern part of the West Bank (Palestine)

**F** Governorate of Irbid (Jordan)

**G** Mount Lebanon  
Governorate (Lebanon)

The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation sets up local clusters of gender equality actors coordinated by associations every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors<sup>©</sup> chooses a target territory that can be a region or a province or a metropolitan area of a large city. Subsequently, the local cluster's members define a topic of interest related to gender equality that they consider a priority in this target territory.

Each local cluster is made up of 5 actors working in favour of gender equality in the target territory: associations; research or education institutions; local or regional authorities or ministerial departments in charge of advocating for women's rights; media and enterprises and trade unions. Their mission is to mobilize the gender equality actors through data collection, consultations and exchange of experiences. Thus, they analyse the situation related to the target topic and they follow-up the effectiveness of public policies in this area with a collective and participatory approach.

This bottom-up approach leads to produce a diagnosis of the situation that highlights the main obstacles to achieve gender equality, and to design a collaborative and replicable field project to address those obstacles. A first call for proposals was launched and local clusters were set in Oran (Algeria), Giza (Egypt), Irbid (Jordan), Mount Lebanon (Lebanon), Marrakech - Safi (Morocco), West Bank (Palestine), Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia). These local clusters focus on two main issues: women's participation in political life and combating violence against women. This document presents the diagnosis with regard to Mount Lebanon.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is a small democratic parliamentary republic. Although Lebanon is sometimes considered as the only democratic country in the Arab region with a free political environment and electoral system, the situation of women has not been strengthened enough for them to have a role on an equal footing with men. Lebanese women form a majority of 53% and they are actively participating in all aspects of Lebanese society. They enjoy equal constitutional rights with men and have the right to vote, hold public office, elect and be elected in municipal councils. The Lebanese Constitution, amended on 21/9/1990, stressed the principle of equality among the Lebanese and the commitment to international instruments. However, in practice, there are many laws that discriminate against women. Women constitute 24% of the overall labour force and mainly work in the services sector, which is an extension of their traditional role.

Nevertheless, the situation in Lebanon indicates a subtle difference between full equality under the law and accessing these rights in reality. Lebanese women still suffer discrimination in terms of marital and family relations, as well as citizenship rights. Despite their freedom to work, they are still subject to persistent gender stereotypes and domestic violence. In such a context, the political presence of Lebanese women is yet to be adequately representative.

## B. DIAGNOSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LEBANON

There are many obstacles that hinder women's leadership and access to decision-making processes. They have not yet been able to reach positions of political decision-making power, except to replace family members, dead husbands in most cases.

In order to achieve adequate political representation, civil society organisations have to exert all possible efforts to bridge the gap between full equality under the law and the absence of any explicit practices of rights, or in other words the gap between theory and actual practice.

### **The Committee for the Follow-Up on Women's Issues (CFUWI)**

The diagnosis was realised by CFUWI, a non-governmental organization. Since its establishment, CFUWI has been implementing several projects on gender equality, mainly focused on mainstreaming gender in education, on women's citizenship rights as well as women's political participation. In addition, CFUWI has been engaged in monitoring progress towards full

implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through drafting CEDAW shadow reports.

CFUWI's goals are to:

- To develop the participation of women on all levels of social, economic and political aspects of life, and to eliminate all types of discrimination against women;
- To raise the awareness concerning gender related issues; to integrate gender mainstreaming within the national policies;
- To develop the participation of women in the decision making process;
- To encourage intercommunication among women on the local, regional and international levels.

### **1. Objectives of the Diagnosis**

The purpose of this diagnosis is to identify the needs of the local actors and the actions needed in order to enhance the participation of women in political life. Other objectives include:

- networking and strengthening the partnership with gender equality actors;
- exchanging experiences in a participatory approach;
- monitoring the public policies on gender equality, especially at the local level.

### **2. Methodological Framework of the Diagnosis**

The theme of the diagnosis was determined by CFUWI in partnership with the local cluster of gender equality actors©, which was established at the beginning of the pilot action.

The members of the local cluster are:

- Byblos Municipality
- Smart Center
- Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women-LECORVAW
- Women sector in Future Movement

The pilot action targeted Mount Lebanon region in order to determine the needs of the local actors and the needs of women to enhance their participation in politics given that women are still excluded from decision-making positions.

Two meetings with the local cluster allowed to develop an action plan for the implementation of the pilot action and to discuss the information and advocacy documents on women's political participation that were introduced and distributed in subsequent sessions.

Four sessions were held in Mount Lebanon with local actors (non-governmental organizations - NGOs, municipalities, political parties...) which involved:

- Baakline: 21 participants
- Katermaya: 30 participants
- Ain El Remmaneh: 12 participants
- Hammana: 21 participants

Moreover, a national meeting, with 25 participants from local and national gender equality actors, was held with the aim to present the results of the sessions and to define a concrete project.

Although the pilot action was developed in Mount Lebanon, the diagnosis covers Lebanon as a whole, as the parliamentary election is a national one, with a particular consideration of the statistical information of Mount Lebanon regarding the municipal election.

## **C. FINDINGS OF THE DIAGNOSIS**

### **1. The Lebanese Constitution**

Lebanon is a democratic parliamentary republic and its cultural and religious diversity allowed it to be open to many political movements. Such openness was emphasised in the Lebanese Constitution, which provided for the participation of all of its faiths (19), on the basis of balance in public service jobs and their fair distribution. Moreover, the Lebanese Constitution guaranteed confessional representation in the Legislative and Executive Powers. The Constitution tops the legislative pyramid in Lebanon. Therefore, the political system in Lebanon is a consensual democracy system between the confessional components of Lebanese society.

Lebanon's amended 1990 Constitution incorporates the International Bill for Human Rights and requires that the principles contained in its covenants be embodied "in all fields and areas without exception." Thus, the Constitution requires that the international human rights standards be reflected in the laws of the country, and enjoined in practice. In addition, Lebanon has ratified most of the major international conventions and, in the last 10 years, has passed more than 90 new laws related to human rights, gender equality and transparency.

Article 7 of Lebanon's Constitution asserts that "All Lebanese shall be equal before the law. They shall equally enjoy civil and political rights and shall equally be bound by public obligations and duties without any distinction."

## **2. Compliance with International Human Rights Mechanisms**

It is noteworthy that Lebanon has not yet responded to all its international obligations, especially the Beijing Declaration, which stressed several issues to enhance the situation of women in relation to poverty, education, health, violence, conflict, economy, power and decision-making, media, and the environment. Furthermore, Lebanon ratified and signed many international human rights conventions. However, it expressed several reservations on CEDAW, which weakened its influential capacity.

Back in 1996, the Lebanese state approved the CEDAW through Law No. 592, which came into effect on 1/8/1996. However, this conclusion included some reservations regarding basic matters to achieve equality. The reservations made deprive women of equality before the law and deny them full rights to citizenship. Reservations on paragraph 2 of Article 9 on citizenship are still ongoing. Moreover, the reservation regarding Clauses (c), (d), (f), and (g) of the following paragraph of Article 16 on Personal Status is still upheld. Supporters of such reservations have become more diehard and, hence, it was not laid out for discussion in parliament. In addition, the reservation regarding Article 29 on conflict resolution still holds.

Lebanon did not make any reservation to Articles 7 and 8 of the CEDAW regarding equality in civil and political rights of women and the obligation of the state to enhance the participation of women in political life. Yet the government still has no policies to develop the laws and legal texts.

## **3. Women's Political Participation in Lebanon**

The work of the Lebanese women's movement has for decades focused on the practical needs of women, mainly "education and employment when needed." The demands of the women's movement in Lebanon have evolved to strategically address the political participation of women in their agenda. Despite this development in the vision of the Lebanese women's movement and Lebanon's commitment to international conventions and enhancing women's participation in political life through ministerial statements, little has been achieved.

Lebanese women are still excluded from decision-making positions in both public and private sectors, despite the fact that they are enjoying greater access to education services compared



The lack of political power-sharing impedes the empowerment of Lebanese women and prevents them from being considered as full partners in the administration of the state and society. © *hxdbzxy / Shutterstock.com*

to the majority of women in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Additionally, women in Lebanon appear to enjoy a greater sense of freedom when it comes to what they wear and social mobility and are more visible in the public sphere. However, a pervasive public presence stops short of participation by these women in leadership and decision-making and they are still invisible in Lebanese politics.

According to a report published by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, entitled “Opinion Poll on the Electoral Issues in Lebanon”, women’s political participation was the least important issue according to the opinions of participants.

The reasons for women’s poor representation in Lebanese politics are complex and far-reaching. The laws and traditions that are encompassed in a system of government based on patriarchal religious views and controlled by male political elites present a formidable challenge to women entering the political sphere. This is of course in addition to the socioeconomic barriers to women’s political participation. It goes without saying that the social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies.

The obstacles that prevent women from participating in political life can be identified at three levels:



- Social factors such as cultural constructs, prevalent relationship patterns in Lebanon and the patriarchal society;
- Economic factors affecting women's political participation, particularly those related to electoral campaigns and "poverty among women" and their financial dependence;
- Political factors related to the prevailing political regime based on tribal, family and sectarian structures.

Other major factors that affect the participation of women are legal considerations, particularly laws that discriminate against them, such as the personal status laws, and the absence of the quota.

There is a notable absence of policies developed by the local or national authorities that could promote and enhance the political participation of women. In Lebanon, confessional identity has become political identity as the high level appointments follow a sectarian quota system and civil servants are mostly employed based on sectarian and political connections. The patriarchal religions support hierarchical family institutions. Statistics indicate that women's participation in political parties decreases as they get married, which further reinforces the pervasive understanding of women's reproductive role in the family and society as a whole.

In this situation, citizenship is mediated through a web of communal ties and primordial identities, constituting what Sua Joseph has framed as "communal citizenship" rather than the individual citizenship of women and men enjoying their full rights and entitlements. Women, their rights and entitlements, fall victim to the confessional system that is defined by the insecurities and radical ideological differences of sects. Various organizations for the defence of women's rights are actively trying to bring about positive change in their public and private lives. However, these efforts are few and far between and have had limited impact due to lack of solidarity. This is a result of division amongst women along confessional lines, the very limited ability of civil society to influence policy-makers in a confessional system, competition among civil society organizations for limited funding and the politicisation of many of them.

#### *a. Women in political parties*

Although women have had more active roles in political parties in the past, particularly during the civil war when certain groups sought women's participation as a mean to boost their support base, men still dominate the public sphere. There are numerous instances when women's unions/coalitions were pushed out to form NGOs. Although the presence of NGOs may be

considered a favourable factor to encourage women's engagement with the outside world, the very nature of the organizations and their evolution casts doubts on the very purpose and mandate of these NGOs. Some civil society actors feel that women in political parties have in effect been marginalised and "pushed aside" to form associations, which illustrates the lack of political will to integrate women into political systems and therefore address issues pertaining to their rights.

The current political climate in Lebanon is discouraging not only for women's engagement in political processes but also for indoctrinating the culture of national identity and purpose among youth. State and political parties failed to use elections as an opportunity to define their strategic development priorities and rally support around them through broad engagement. Elections in Lebanon are seen as wrangling between confessional groups.

Although more than 60% of Lebanese residents are female and around 52.4% of voters were women during the elections of 2009, there is only one woman minister and only four out of 128 parliamentarians are women (a rate of 3.2% of female representation). Moreover, in the municipalities, the rate of women is 4.7%, one of the lowest rates in the region. Almost all of these women were elected to these positions due to their family connections to higher ranks of political elite in the country. Lebanon is at the bottom of the table of parliamentary representation of women in the Middle East and the world, where it ranks 135 out of 142 in the Gender Gap Index 2014, although Lebanon is part of the high development countries as per the Human Development Index (HDI).

#### *b. Women's participation in parliament*

Women's political participation is a complicated process in light of the historical division of roles between men and women, confining the private sphere to women and the public sphere to men. Engaging women in the public sphere needs a supportive environment to allow the perception still controlling the historical division between women and men to be reconsidered.

Most studies and reports stress the "components of the Lebanese election" as one of the obstacles to women's participation in parliament and the reason for the low representation of women in parliamentary life.

Moreover, the political and ideological orientation of the political parties excludes women as candidates.

Table 1: Participation of Women in Parliamentary Elections

Electoral cycle	No. of candidates	No. of winners	Percentage
1953- 1962	1-4	0	0%
1963			
One woman was appointed	1	1	1%
1991			
One woman was appointed	--	--	1%
1992	6	3	2.34%
1996	11	3	2.34%
2000	18	3	2.34%
2005	14	6	4.68%
2009	14	4	3.13%

*c. Women's participation in governments*

Women did not participate in Lebanon's government before 2004, the first time when two women ministers were appointed. Since that date, the government has included only one or two women in each new government.

Table 2: Participation of Women as Ministers

Year	Number of women assigned as ministers	Total number of ministers	Percentage
2004	2	30	6.66%
2005	2	30	6.66%
2008	1	30	3.33%
2009	2	30	6.66%
2011	0	30	0%
2014	1	24	4.16%

*d. Women's participation in the municipalities*

Although the percentage of women voters in the municipal elections in Lebanon was equal to that of men in most polling stations, the proportion of women candidates for seats in the municipal elections was very low. Moreover, women representatives in the municipalities do not exceed 4.8%. All studies stressed the prevailing patriarchal culture as the main reason for the low representation of women in local authorities, which impose the guardianship and power of men over women, where this power is enriched in the personal status laws.

Table 3: Participation of Women in Municipal Elections  
(comparison between 2004 and 2010)

2004 Region	2004				2010			
	Total seats	No. of women candidates	No. of women elected	% of women in relation to the total elected	Total seats	No. of women candidates	No. of women elected	% of women in relation to the total elected
Mount Lebanon	3413	170	75	2.20	3528	466	188	5.33
Bekaa	1727	55	26	1.50	1938	129	48	2.48
Beirut	24	9	1	4.17	24	21	3	12.5
Nabatieh	1503	67	17	1.13	1548	103	25	1.61
South	1548	25	21	1.36	1662	149	66	3.97
North	2430	199	75	3.09	2724	478	306	1.56
Total	10646	552	215	2.02	11474	1346	526	1.70

#### 4. Challenges

The diagnosis shows that there is understanding among local actors about the needs of society and the actions that should be taken to enhance women's political participation. However, there is a lack of understanding about what gender equality means and no national or local policies address these needs, as shows the absence of the quota.

Women's participation in decision-making and political participation are still a problem that hampers their empowerment and promotion, as well as their consideration as a full partner in the administration of the state and society.

There are several levels of challenges to the development and enhancement of women in political life, which were addressed by the local and national actors during the national meeting which was organized by CFUWI as follows:

- Legal level: the laws discriminating against women are affecting the participation of women as well as the absence of the quota. There are no policies and strategies from the authorities to amend these laws or to adopt a women's quota as a positive procedure to enhance women's participation. Moreover, the Constitution states that all citizens are equal, and underlines the commitment to the international conventions. However, there is an overall absence of laws that conform to these conventions and adequate procedural safeguards to ensure their implementation;
- Social and economic level: the values and norms of the patriarchal system and conservative attitudes and stereotypes erode women's rights and destabilise societies, undermining the promotion of women's leadership at all levels of society. Finally, women's economic dependence and the high cost of the electoral campaigns affect their participation;
- Educational level: gender discrimination in the curriculum and textbooks plays a prominent role in reproducing the stereotypical and traditional images and the role of both women and men in society;
- Media level: the stereotyped image of women in the media and the commercialisation of women in advertising affect women's political participation;
- At the individual and institutional level: women lack knowledge of their rights and the laws that discriminate against them, along with skills to advocate their rights and organise an election campaign. This affects their participation in decision-making in both the public and private spheres.
- At the institutional level, there is a lack of skills, especially for gender equality actors, in managing financial resources and projects and digital and social media. There is also a lack of knowledge about the international conventions, discriminatory laws against women, gender issues and the role of NGOs, especially in the field of gender equality.

## 5. Opportunities for Change

There are two opportunities that could enhance women's political participation: the first is the municipal election in 2016 and the second is the parliamentary election in 2017.

The main recommendation of the diagnosis is that it is most important to work on the legal component and advocate the adoption of the quota system in the electoral law.

Another component of the challenges facing women concerns the media. It is very important during the elections to encourage the media to show a positive image of women and support their participation as a right in the democratic process and the rule of law.

Moreover, it is important to mention that there is an urgent need to support women candidates, NGOs and gender actors in order to advocate women's political participation.

## 6. Recommendations

During the implementation of the pilot action, consultations and debates were held with local actors. They mentioned several intervention levels:

### *a. At the legislative level:*

- Amend and adopt the quota in electoral law;
- Amend all the discriminatory laws and especially the personal status laws;
- Implement the international conventions, especially CEDAW;
- Develop policies to enhance women's participation in political life.

### *b. At the social level:*

- Change the values and norms of the patriarchal system to work on combating gender-based violence.

### *c. At the economic level:*

- Develop policies to promote and empower women at the economic level.
- Regulate electoral campaign expenditure.

### *d. At the educational level:*

- Modify the curricula and include the concepts of gender equality and human rights, and include the concepts of political rights, democracy and citizenship;

- Provide training on gender to the educational bodies and practitioners.

*e. At the media level:*

- Change the stereotyped image of women in the media.
- Raise the media's awareness of gender and allocate a quota for women in the media.

*f. At the individual and institutional level:*

- Provide training to NGOs on managing financial resources and projects, digital and social media, organising election campaigns and advocacy.
- Provide training and educational courses on international conventions, discriminatory laws against women, gender issues and the role of NGOs, especially in the field of gender equality.
- Establish networks between political parties and civil society groups, and support women's participation in political parties and political life.



The Committee for the Follow-up on Women's Issues (CFUWI) gathered views from NGOs, members of municipalities and political parties on women's access to decision-making.

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مؤسسة نساء الأورو-متوسط  
Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation  
Fondation des Femmes de l'Euro-Méditerranée

According to its mandate, the **Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (EMWF)** analyses women's local realities and public policies through consultations and dialogues at a grass-roots level. Concretely, the Foundation sets up **local clusters of gender equality actors**® every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors© is coordinated by an association as the Foundation recognises that civil society is the real motor of change in our societies to improve women's conditions.

The local clusters' approach is an innovative and participatory process, which supports networking and sharing of good practices in favour of gender equality at a decentralized level and promotes the emergence of projects rooted in the territory.

The Foundation systematizes the results obtained through the local clusters and transfers them to the policy-makers in the Region's countries and at the Euro-Mediterranean level. All the information related to the local clusters' results is available on the Foundation's website ([www.euromedwomen.foundation](http://www.euromedwomen.foundation)) and widely disseminated across the Region among key stakeholders, policy-makers and international organisations.

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