



PROGRAMME BRIEF



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LEBANON

Photo: UN Women/ Jean Safi

Background

From the local to the national level, women are underrepresented in public office in Lebanon, as voters, as leaders, in elected office, the civil service, the private sector and in academia. This is the case despite women's proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally to men in democratic governance processes. For effective, responsive and accountable societies, gender equality is a right, a requirement and a means for increasing the credibility and legitimacy of elected institutions.

Although Lebanese women gained the right to vote in 1952, and despite a vibrant feminist movement, women remain grossly under-represented in public and political life. Out of 88 Lebanese governments formed since 1943, only 9 governments have included women, and today women represent only 4% of the cabinet, with one female minister out of 24. Lebanon is still ranked 149 out of 153 countries in political representation in the 2020 World Economic Forum Gender Gap report and ranked 183rd out of 187 countries in terms of women's participation in parliament. Women currently represent only 4.6% of the 128 elected officials in Parliament, 5.4% of the country's municipal councilors, and 1.9% of mukhtars.¹ While this reflects a slight increase from the 2010 elections, progress remains very slow. In comparison to neighboring Arab countries, Lebanon ranked 15th of 17 Arab countries in female parliamentarians, despite being trend setters in leading in allowing women the right to run and vote. In addition to a challenging electoral framework, women report significant barriers to political representation

including patriarchal political parties, the high cost of election campaigning, media bias and social norms that tend not to see women as political actors or leaders.²

Not only is unequal representation a violation of women's rights, but their marginalization from public office also creates less representative and more unstable societies³, and reinforces the notion that women do not belong in public decision-making. It also results in their exclusion from public policymaking, and therefore policymaking that skews heavily in favor of men. Despite support for temporary special measures for women's representation in public life, Lebanon's political system—which although is structured around and makes provision for religious quotas—still lacks gender quotas.

The 2022 parliamentary elections will happen in unique circumstances following a massive popular uprising, two governmental resignations since the previous elections, establishment of emerging parties, and profound economic and political crises. This call for change has resonated widely across Lebanon and has contributed to the emergence of a number of new political parties, many of whom are led by women or have women who are willing to run for elections.

To achieve higher representation in politics and leadership in Lebanon, UN Women works within a comprehensive and long-term strategy required to support women's increased engagement. UN Women works to support women's increased political representation by addressing their lack of engagement in electoral processes and policy-making, providing technical assistance and capacity building, and building cross-sectional coalitions.

1. UNDP, 2016, Women in Municipal Elections in 2016, Lebanon
2. UN Women, 2019, Pursuing Equality in Rights and Representation – Women's experiences Running for Parliament in Lebanon's 2018 Elections
3. <https://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/the-case-for-gender-equality/>

Our Strategy for Change

Women's leadership and political participation is one of UN Women's core areas of work, recognizing the integral role of women in promoting strong and stable political processes and inclusive, just societies. Taking action to address the challenges of women's under-representation in political spaces and leadership requires a multi-layered approach that combines policy work, institution building and community-level engagement. UN Women's strategy, which builds from its work to date and its engagement in support of women's participation in the 2018 Lebanese election, is as follows:

- 1. Support the development and implementation of robust legal frameworks and electoral policies that promote inclusive politics.** This includes advocating for and providing technical assistance for the application of concrete policy actions, such as temporary special measures (TSMs), including gender quotas.
- 2. Build cross-sector feminist and human rights coalitions calling for more diverse governance spaces, and support emerging independent groups calling for change.** This includes supporting thematically specific, shorter and longer-term strategic alliances around key issues related to inclusive governance, which bring together civil society actors, political actors, academia and others to lobby for change.
- 3. The provision of mentoring & strategy advice to women aspirants, and elected female parliamentarians, and support to building gender-responsive political institutions that can attract and retain female leaders.** This includes supporting women in electoral processes through technical capacity building on electoral laws, campaign strategies, campaign financing and partnering with media outlets to ensure more equitable coverage is provided, and support media spots. This also includes provision of support to elected female parliamentarians in pushing their feminist agenda forward.
- 4. Highlight and work on Violence Against Women in Elections and Politics (VAWP) through monitoring, reporting, and disseminating results.** This includes monitoring the parliamentary and municipal elections for any VAWP violations through training election observers and setting up a hotline to report any cases. This also includes monitoring traditional and social media outlets for such violence, as well as partnering with media outlets and platforms to ensure more accountability.

- 5. Support to national planning and budgeting to promote accountability for gender needs and priorities.** Through the provision of analysis, technical assistance, and capacity building. Implemented in partnership with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), this includes supporting ministries and governmental bodies to apply Gender Responsive Budgeting principles when drafting national budgets.

Theory of Change

If (1) electoral frameworks and arrangements promote inclusive governance structures and gender balance in elections;

(2) if a cadre of interested, diverse and capable female political leaders is formed parallel to the formation of cross sectoral alliances for representative politics;

(3) if women are perceived as legitimate political leaders; then;

(4) women are more likely to be able to enter, remain and flourish in political spaces.

Partnerships for Change

United Nations: UNDP, UNSCOL

Governmental: NCLW, Line Ministries

Local Organizations: LADE, FiftyFifty, Daraj Media, Maharat, KAFA and Madaniyat