

The Path Coalition:
Power in Inclusion and Diversity

Policy Platform

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Leading Organisation Overviews



The Lebanese Union for People with physical Disabilities (LUPD) was founded in 1981 and is a non-profit, non-governmental, non-sectarian organisation working for and with people with physical disabilities.

A voluntary-based grassroots organisation with 8 branches across Lebanon, LUPD currently comprises 1,200 members and involves people from different religious groups and with various forms of physical disability.

Through its beginnings on Beirut's sidewalks, the organisation has been active in promoting the participation of disabled people in governmental decision-making processes, successfully witnessing changes in national approaches to disability. The dialogue has transformed from charity to rights, and from exclusion to inclusion.

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ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality is a UN ECOSOC-accredited organisation that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable peace, democracy, and social and economic development in the MENA region.

ABAAD believes that eliminating gender-based barriers, discrimination, and violence while simultaneously building women's and girls' agency and critical consciousness can allow them to participate effectively in all life spheres, lead change on their own, realise their rights, and freely determine their life outcomes.


Since 2012, ABAAD has been the co-chair of the National Technical Task Force to End GBV against Women and Girls (alongside the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs).

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As a global leader in democracy promotion, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) engages with critical issues in democracy, governance and elections around the world. A key focus of IFES' work is inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, youth, indigenous groups and ethnic and religious minorities. IFES uses an intersectional approach to its inclusion work, ensuring that individuals who are part of multiple marginalised identities are not pushed to the sidelines. IFES works to strengthen political participation and inclusion by conducting civic and voter education activities via diverse media, including face-to-face, radio, social media and street theatre; providing technical assistance to government officials on how to implement international standards, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; empowering civil society organisations to advocate for equal rights; and assisting citizen-led efforts to define best practices through the development of global tools such as the Violence Against Women in Elections framework, the manual Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes and the online resource ElectionAccess.org.

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Policy Platform Background

This policy platform document has been developed by the Lebanese Union of People with Disabilities (LUPD) and ABAAD - Resource Centre for Gender Equality, with the support of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

The policy platform priorities were identified after conducting 18 key informant interviews (with NGOs, embassies, local political parties, Lebanese ministries, and the Supervisory Commission for Elections), 4 focus group discussions with a total of 42 women and men (including people with disabilities), and 2 workshops with 47 experts representing 25 different organisations whose work focuses on women, people with disabilities, LGBTQI, refugees, and people living with HIV (PLHIV).

The main findings from the consultations are the following:

- In Lebanon, women, LGBTQI people, people with disabilities, older people, and people living with HIV have a weak legal status and are often excluded from decision-making processes in the public sphere. In 2019, women hold only %4.69 of parliamentary seats, and there are no MPs who openly identify as LGBTQI or who have disabilities.
- Lebanon recognises 18 religious sects, and, accordingly, has 15 different personal status laws. These are overseen by religious courts without being subject to governmental supervision. Due to the significant differences stipulated in these laws, joint intersectional advocacy is extremely challenging; sometimes impossible.
- There have been public initiatives and efforts to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 (including by youth organisations), but thus far, this has faced the rejection of some political parties who assume that “certain religions may gain an advantage with these additional citizens on the voters’ list.”
- While civil society organisations are actively working to reduce marginalisation and discrimination in Lebanon, there is a lack of coordination between stakeholders working on similar topics.
- Disabled persons’ organisations (DPOs), women’s rights, and LGBTQI organisations are not currently working together, but there is an interest and an acknowledgement of the benefits of intersectional coalition-building for united advocacy efforts.
- Physical inaccessibility to the polling station is a barrier to voting for many people with disabilities, older people, and pregnant women.

Over the past decade or so, civil society efforts and campaigns have resulted in a number of notable human rights victories that have begun paving the path to positive social transformation. However, much work is yet to be done, especially taking into consideration the above axes.

With the ideology that democratic institutions flourish when all groups of society are represented, and the vision of a more just and inclusive society in which the human rights of all its members are equally recognised, respected, protected, and fulfilled, representatives of the 25 organisations have agreed to

a list of priority axes falling under the following broad headlines as a road map of items to be reformed in the coming five years: Inclusive Governance, Legal Frameworks, Inclusive Education, Employment, and Political Rights.

This policy platform addresses some of the most critical social justice issues and barriers faced by different marginalised populations which prevent them from meaningfully participating within their communities and society in Lebanon. Its wider aim is to strengthen socio-political rights, participation, and inclusion, by applying an intersectional approach to policy and advocacy work, thus ensuring that individuals who are part of multiple marginalised identities are not left behind.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Females and males approximately **%50 each** (CIA factbook, no official census in Lebanon since 1932)

Literacy rate **%93.9** of total population

of which **%96 men** **%91.8 women** (2015 est.) (CIA factbook)

LGBT
No official numbers
%10
of the population
as per global statistics estimates

%50.2 youth under 30 years old of the population (PopulationPyramid.net)

recognised religions **18 / 15** different personal status laws

≈ 944,613
Syrian refugees

registered with UNHCR (March 2019 est)

≈ 450,000
Palestinian refugees

registered with UNRWA (2014 est)

≈ 97,735
individuals with disability

registered with Ministry of Social Affairs

*Not all people with disabilities in Lebanon are registered to receive the disability card.

≈ 2,366
PLHIV
(2018 est, MoPH NAP)

(2016 est) of which **%62 men** **%38 women**

of the total number **%55** are people with physical disabilities
%3 are people with learning disabilities
%11.6 are people of working age (between 21 and 63 years old)
According to WHO estimates **%15** of the total population has a disability

of which **%94.4 men** **%5.6 women**

As shown above, the sheer number of individuals impacted by inequality in socio-political rights is significant enough to affect the health and resilience of Lebanese democracy.

The diverse organisations who have participated in developing this platform, as well as the signatories, believe it is crucial to work together, hand-in-hand, to establish a unified front working towards the same goals for all communities in Lebanon.

The signatory organisations hope to foster a sense of community and equality for all in Lebanon, with no exceptions.

Priorities

The participating civil society organisations have identified five key issue areas for action by the Lebanese government:

1. Inclusive Governance

2. Legal Frameworks

3. Inclusive Education

4. Employment

5. Political Rights



When local governments make adequate efforts to involve and acquire input from citizens, as well as to provide services to all their constituents equally, this promotes stability, growth, and credibility. Once citizens begin to view their local authorities as trustworthy, there will be enhanced collective action, citizen ownership, and increased political and financial backing for priorities that impact Lebanon's most marginalised citizens. Participation in policy development plays an important role in facilitating inclusive service delivery and legitimising other components of governance.

- Create a new technocratic, full-time budgeted position of "Inclusion Focal Points" at the different ministries. These individuals should be high level experts capable of developing solid, well-informed, and actionable plans.
- Include reasonable accommodations into information dissemination to the public (for example, picture or audio formats, Braille or colour-blindness considerations, etc). Dissemination methods that are likely to reach different populations such as women, youth, people from rural areas, and others are crucial. Methods can be identified through conducting a baseline assessment.
- Ensure that laws and policies are developed through a participatory approach, which can include i) increased cooperation with local governance structures and civil society organisations to provide diverse population groups with more agency, and ii) a referendum system open to general public votes.
- Develop indicators to track Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) compliance at each ministry, with a focus on holistic inclusion relevant to each ministry's mandate.
- Launch public sensitisation campaigns spearheaded by governmental agencies.
- Apply administrative decentralisation.



Legal Frameworks and Reform

The presence of adequate, person-centred laws and consequences are paramount to ascertain equal opportunities, accountability, and every individual's independence, empowerment, and accessibility to different sectors, services, as well as private and public spheres. From that stems the importance of amending legislation, particularly:

- Harmonise laws with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and global rights conventions. Any laws containing discriminative articles should be amended, including the: Labour, Penal Code, Personal Status, and Nationality laws in general, as well as articles related to drug users, trafficking, social security, Article 534 of the Penal Code, and Law 220.
- Amend the electoral law to ensure that different groups have full access to electoral processes, including enforcing reasonable accommodations and activating monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- Develop a civil code regulating personal status matters, which would include unifying the 15 different confessional personal status laws into one secular law that applies to all citizens of Lebanon. This includes amending articles on divorce, inheritance, age of marriage, and others.
- Fully ratify global human rights conventions: while Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, this was done with several reservations which should be lifted. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has thus far not been ratified. Ratifying these conventions will ensure that Lebanon takes steps to carry out its legal obligations to promote, protect, and ensure the rights of all women and people with disabilities, safeguarding equal rights in all areas of life.
- Explain and clarify laws to avoid ambiguity, including setting out clear and agreed-upon definitions of sexual harassment, violence, and discrimination.
- Update the media law and restructure internal policies within media institutions in accordance with human rights standards, rights-based terminology, and discourse.



Inclusive Education

Between the ages of 8 and 12, children begin formulating their ideals of the world around them, including their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards gender, people with disabilities, and other social constructs and norms. Given that they will carry what they learn during their formative years for the rest of their lives, awareness and early inclusive education are key towards social transformation and building a more equitable generation and society.

- Modify school curricula (particularly but not limited to Civic Education classes) to promote inclusivity, equality, and respect for personal freedoms, working towards combating stigma and discrimination from an early age, and highlighting diversity and different capacities. When it comes to higher education, curricula should be revised on two levels: i) integrating a course on sensitisation, intersectionality, and equality, and ii) ensuring awareness-raising among students studying crucial majors that have to do with dealing with people (law, medicine, psychology, psychiatry social work, etc), or forming public opinion (journalism, political science, etc.) Upon development of new curricula and policies, disseminate those to public and private schools, including those working with refugees on formal and non-formal education (UNRWA and other local and international NGOs).
- Conduct a baseline study to assess the current situation on the ground, allowing for accurate recommendations based on the local reality.
- Make education in public schools beyond the secondary level free of charge and thus accessible to all population groups interested in pursuing education.
- Incorporate gender, gender identity and neutrality, and sexual and reproductive health and associated rights into school curricula for all ages (appropriately catered to each grade level).
- Adequately equip school infrastructure and learning tools to ensure they promote accessibility and take reasonable accommodations into account.
- Train and sensitise school staff (teachers and administration) on integration, inclusivity, gender sensitivity, communication, and the use of any newly introduced learning tools.
- Effect serious sanctions against the non-reception or expulsion of students due to a particular status (for example persons with disabilities, refugees or migrants, people living with HIV, LGBTQI...)
- Establish and mainstream a confidential and secure Monitoring and Complaints Mechanism that allows equal opportunity to education.
- Activate the role of Parental Committees at schools, and provide them with reasonable authority, awareness with respect to the rights of their children and to what can be requested of the schools, and empowerment to ensure their full engagement in working towards improvement at schools.
- Integrate career development axes into education, and provide the option of non-formal education.



Employment

Labour laws should provide social justice to workers by protecting their rights, setting forth employers' obligations and duties towards employees, and ensuring a suitable distribution of profits and benefits among both parties. Labour laws should also ensure equal opportunity and pay, mental and physical wellbeing of employees, and workplace diversity.

- Create technical team committees especially dealing with the inclusion of marginalised groups (setting penalties/incentives for compliance/non-compliance with laws).
- Develop a code of practice aiming to eliminate discrimination in employment (should include clear definitions and set measures for accurate implementation).
- Enforce meritocracy and equal opportunities (as opposed to religious quotas or political affiliations) in hiring employees for the public, private, and NGO sectors.
- Require non-discrimination and inclusivity audit mechanisms in the public and private sectors to ensure equal opportunity employment regardless of gender, disability status, sexual orientation, and HIV status.
- Make amendments to the labour law as follows:
 - i. Include merit-based equal pay.
 - ii. Include a clause related to reasonable accommodations and maternity/paternity leaves.
 - iii. Eliminate mandatory HIV testing prior to employment in different sectors.
 - iv. Apply special considerations or reduced measures for former drug users who are attempting to reintegrate into their communities through seeking employment to avoid their automatic rejection based on drug-related judicial records.
 - v. Introduce trafficking laws that penalise solicitors rather than sex workers.
 - vi. Ensure that all categories of workers are under the same labour law, while keeping in mind reasonable accommodations for the different groups. This also includes eliminating the guarantor system.
 - vii. Modify arbitrary termination conditions to include different types of issues such as retaliation for complaining about harassment, or requesting equal pay/reasonable accommodations, among others.
 - viii. Revise the employment benefits of part-time employees and agricultural workers.
 - ix. Clarify the labour law, providing both, clear steps on how to implement it, and employee education and awareness on its clauses and their rights. Furthermore, it should be mandatory for employers to induct all employees on their rights according to the labour law.



Political Rights

Political rights aim to protect individual freedoms by ensuring citizens' rights to freely and independently participate in political and public life and decision-making spheres in a manner free of discrimination and repression. Clarification of roles, promotion of transparency and accountability, and ensuring that electoral processes are just, inclusive, and rights-based are key to preserving democracy and healthy political life.

- Amend the laws pertaining to parliamentary and municipal elections to become more democratic, just, and free of sectarian restrictions.
- Provide all appropriate alternative means and reasonable accommodations for populations with different needs (including but not limited to older people and people with disabilities) to ensure that the right to vote is exercised by all independently and with dignity.
- Promote the participation of marginalised populations through establishing different quotas for elected officials (for example, for women and people with disability).
- Enforce a higher level of accountability on members of parliament: lift bank secrecy, set up electoral spending controls/equal opportunities in media and electoral advertising, eliminate expatriate deputies, hold candidates accountable to their suggested programmes and reforms during campaigns, and impose compulsory education on human rights.
- Ensure that voter education is in accessible formats and features all members of society. This includes adopting diversity and human rights standards to ensure addressing all groups' diverse needs (persons with disabilities, youth, older people, people living with HIV/AIDS, women, LGBTQI, unregistered children...)
- Ascertain that adequate measures are taken to ensure voter confidentiality, including stipulating contracts that hold registrars responsible for maintaining election secrecy.
- Adopt rights-based language and terminology in all types of communication, including media reporting, campaigning, public speaking, and informative brochures.
- Ensure elections are independent, constitutional, and occur regularly.
- Train observers and heads of polling stations with an adequate timeframe ahead of elections.
- Urge parties to work on their own internal systems to become more democratic and inclusive, taking diversity criteria into consideration.
- Reduce the age of candidacy, and the voting age from 21 to 18 years old.

Signatories

ABAAD

Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities

IFES

1. AMEL Association
2. Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE MENA)
3. Arab Network for Democratic Elections (ANDE)
4. Darb Al Wafaa
5. Fe-Male
6. Helem
7. Justice Without Frontiers (JWF)
8. Learning Centre for the Deaf (LCD)
9. Lebanese Association for Self-Advocacy (L.A.S.A)
10. Lebanese Federation for the Deaf (LFD)
11. Lebanese Syndicate of Social Workers
12. Maharat Foundation
13. MENA Rosa
14. Mosaic
15. Najdeh Association
16. Palestinian Women's Human Rights Organisation
17. Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering
18. Riders' Rights
19. Safadi Foundation
20. SIDC
21. Taabeer
22. Youth Association of the Blind

