

Next Steps

Lebanon

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Disclaimer

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Acronyms

ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
CSO	Civil society organization
CBO	Community based organization
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
ICT	Information and communications technology
KII	Key informant interview
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NGL	Next Generation Lebanon
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
USA	United States of America

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Forewords

A year ago I wrote a foreword to the first piece of research for Next Generation Lebanon. The report was not published at the time due to a series of unforeseen events: a global pandemic that interrupted the finalisation of the report and the Beirut Port Explosion in August 2020 that tragically disrupted our lives here in Lebanon, and the planned launch of the research. As I write this foreword for the second piece of Next Generation Lebanon research, *Next Steps Lebanon*, we are back in our office and reconnecting with stakeholders face to face, ready to take the Next Steps in sharing our findings on youth aspirations and livelihoods. We are ready to challenge ourselves and others to respond to the hopes and change that young people are calling for to mitigate the risks and challenges that they face.

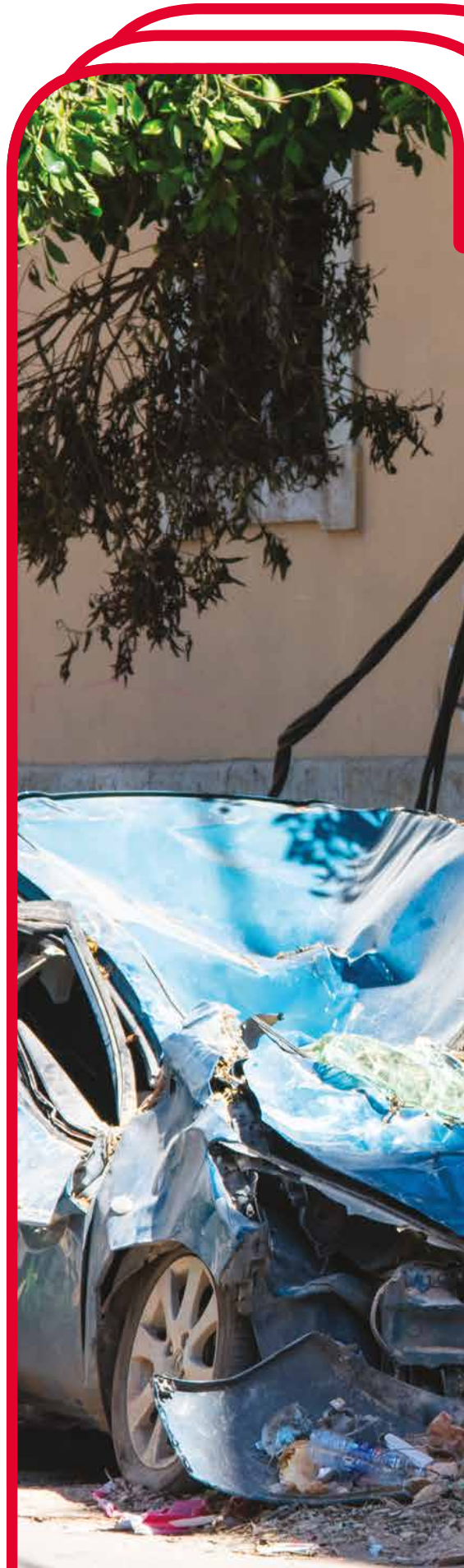
The Next Generation research series has been conducted in countries such as Colombia, Myanmar, Turkey and the UK and usually during significant periods of change. The initiation of the first piece of research in Lebanon was in early 2019 and to coincide with the 30 year anniversary of the signing of the Taif Accord. With the numerous challenges and changes taking place in Lebanon since 2019, we are publishing this second piece to explore what has changed since then. Next Steps Lebanon aims to update our understanding of how the aftermath of the 17 October Uprising, the Beirut Port Explosion, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing political and economic challenges have impacted the views and livelihoods of young Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians in Lebanon.

It is a very sobering finding that it is still the case that young people almost unanimously describe their lives as a “survival exercise”. It is not surprising to find that the multiple crises that young people continue to face are having an impact on their mental health.

In exploring the daily lives of young people, findings on education and employment remain consistent with our earlier study, with an emphasis on the further deterioration of opportunities and a challenge to the feasibility of recommendations for improvement. Young people’s aspirations for social and political participation were indeed awakened by the 17 October Uprising, but many are now less optimistic about their ability to influence change, and not many expressed interest in the potential of elections in 2022. In terms of their experiences of violence, it is clear that this remains a threat to young people and their sense of safety and well-being. Overall, it seems that there is a new division amongst young people which draws a line between those who are pro-uprising and those who are pro-government.

Despite these challenges and new divisions, the conclusions and recommendations stem from a collective understanding of the findings that show that there is far more that unites young people than divides them in Lebanon; setting a possible framing for a new social contract which the first report recommended. The recommendations are addressed to education institutions and to youth groups and associations. In addition, we make recommendations to the government and to international organisations. At the British Council, we will renew our efforts to build trust and understanding by making our small contribution through working with all stakeholders, particularly young people themselves, to meet these aspirations.

David Knox
Director, British Council Lebanon





Executive Summary

As part of the British Council's efforts to make youth in Lebanon's voices and perspectives heard, the Next Generation Lebanon: Next Steps study was commissioned. The current study follows-up on the initial Next Generation Lebanon (NGL) study which was held in 2019, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Taif agreement which put an end to the civil war. The initial study was concluded in December 2019, just as the October 17 uprising had begun and the economic crisis was just beginning to escalate. As such, the initial study did not include the contextual changes that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Blast and the deepening socio-economic crisis and political deadlock.

As such, the current study seeks to assess the relevance of the research given the recent contextual developments, identify new trends and findings and inform the British Council's work with youth and other stakeholders involved in youth policy and programming.

Qualisus utilized qualitative methods, including group and individual discussions with youth across Lebanon, and key informant interviews with experts and stakeholders with relevant insight to youth livelihoods. Similar to the initial report, the findings are organized along five key areas of focus:

Youth aspirations and global outlook

Participating *youth almost unanimously agree that their lives are a "survival exercise"*, with each group highlighting their common and diverging struggles. Moreover, the study was able to highlight two emerging findings under this area of focus. The first is the fact that the *compounding adverse effects of crises and the unsure future have a detrimental impact on youth's mental health*. As youth grow more uncertain of their future in Lebanon, willingness to migrate has dramatically increased, after seeing a dip directly after October 17 uprising. The second is that *disabled youth wish to immigrate mostly to avoid discrimination and exclusion*, but the decision to leave is not light for most.

The decision to immigrate is more difficult for refugees, owing to their residency status and limitations on their travel.

Also, youth gave *equal responsibility to the government and society, in ensuring they have a good future*, but stressed the fact that *societies must hold governments accountable*. When asked to describe how they feel towards foreign countries such as the USA, UK, Iran and Saudi Arabia (KSA) youth in Lebanon presented mixed views depending on two factors:

- 1) Prospect of immigrating to them;
- 2) Their perceived effect on Lebanon.

Youth identities in Lebanon

Majority of Lebanese youth identify as Lebanese as opposed to sectarian lines (subject to change based on contextual developments), but a *sense of unity was not tangible*. Incidentally, youth *blame the division in the identities of Lebanese on persistent "civil war mentalities"*, and their exploitation by political parties to promote group identities and segregation. From a social perspective, most youth in Lebanon have *no qualms in living, working and being friends with people from different religions*. However, *youth are significantly less open to inter-religious marriage*. While social cohesion has increased, fears remain of regression to group mentalities.

Daily lives of youth in Lebanon

Education

All youth who are currently enrolled are also looking to continue their education. On the other hand, uneducated youth and drop-outs find it increasingly difficult to get back to education. The main barriers for joining and staying in education are the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. Notably, additional barriers exist for certain groups, such as *refugees who cannot find place in schools and cannot afford university fees*. Also, youth from rural areas feel marginalized due to the *absence of many majors away from the main cities*, leaving them to incur additional costs.

Additionally, the majority of youth and key informants agreed that *the curriculum should be updated to meet the expectation, aspirations and needs of youth living in the 21st Century*. More specifically on 21st Century skills, these are split into three categories: language, numerical and information communication technology (ICT) literacy, competencies and character qualities which propel youth to be more competitive in the job market (refer to Figure 2 in Daily lives of youth – Employment section).

Notably, youth and key informants both decried the *deterioration of the quality of education in public institutes*, which may lead to an educational gap between socio-economic classes. As for the initial NGL recommendation to improve access to education, they were viewed positively by the majority of participants, who also doubted their feasibility given the current situation.

Employment

With the deterioration of the economic situation, an *overwhelming majority of youth¹ regardless of educational status are looking for work*. Educated youth have almost lost hope of finding any work, let alone in their major. An emerging finding which differs from that of the initial study is that *the public sector is no longer an optimal career choice for youth* with the devaluation of salaries and pensions.

Unemployed youth have little hope of finding work, or starting their own business, with the main challenges mentioned: clientelism (Wasta), the economic crisis, COVID and the lack of 21st century skills among youth. A further *barrier to equitable employment is discrimination* by gender, nationality (Syrian and Palestinian refugees have limited sectors they can work in), ability and place of residence presenting a barrier to the employment of many youth. Key informants also highlighted that the *lack of 21st century skills among youth could mean a missed opportunity for Lebanon to capitalize on emerging neighboring markets* to create employment opportunities.

Similarly, to education, NGL recommendations to boost youth participation in the labour market viewed positively by the majority of participants, who also doubted their feasibility given the current situation.

Youth civic and political engagement

In general, most *Lebanese youth want to take part in political life, but feel “oppressed”* and that they cannot influence the change they would like to see with the current system.

While the initial NGL study described the enthusiasm among youth with the launch of the October 17 uprising, the current study did not unveil the same excitement.

While the *uprising did trigger optimism among many youth in their ability to change*, many lost hope as the situation continued to worsen.

Incidentally, almost all youth agreed that *they do not feel empowered by their community, and the political system to influence change*. This was particularly evident in the fact that not many youth expressed an interest or hope for change through the upcoming 2022 election.

Also, many agreed that community, government and political parties often acts as barriers to youth’s political participation. Also, *almost no youth were aware of the National Youth Policy of 2012*, but the recommendations were well met. Many decried the fact that almost none were achieved, and few will be achieved if the situation continues to deteriorate in Lebanon.

Effects of violence and conflict on youth in Lebanon

Youth from all backgrounds have each faced at least one form of armed conflict or violence which have affected them physically, mentally and emotionally. The deepening crises are resulting in increased conflict that will continue to affect youth. Syrian refugee youth were particularly affected, as they were reminded of violence experienced in Syria during the civil war.

¹ > It should be mentioned that there are some isolated cases of youth who want to focus on solely their education (youth from higher socio-economic classes) or leave the country.

Most youth agreed that political and sectarian group interests, perpetuated by politicians and clergymen, are the main trigger for conflict. Other emerging sources of conflict include economic inequality, discrimination and social media.

Overall, youth noticed an **increase in tension after the October 17 uprising**, but with a change of the conflicting sides. Youth see that the current conflict it is more related to political affiliation (**pro-uprising vs pro-government**) than religious belief.

In addition, unemployment and poverty are seen as key drivers to joining armed groups, but youth also emphasized how indoctrination and societal influences also lead to youth joining armed groups.

Conclusion

Overall, many of the findings of the initial study remain valid, but an overall **negative trend of change** was observed, particularly in the daily lives of youth and in their global outlook and future aspirations. Another observed common trend is that **deepening crises are leading to a more grim outlook on life**.

However, it should be noted that the held **sessions offered the opportunity for youth in Lebanon to voice their thoughts, views and opinions safely and comfortably**. Despite the fact that identifying and engaging youth was challenging, all **participants did not want the sessions to end** and were grateful for involving them. The data collection team noticed that the **sessions gave youth room to “vent”**.

An overall review of the findings shows that **youth's views remain fluid in certain topics, as contextual changes have been proven to affect their perspectives**.

In addition, **while youth differ in socio-political and civic views, they are united across most aspects in lives**. Interestingly, **youth from different gender, disabilities and nationalities had less diverging opinions** when it came to their daily lives (i.e: education and employment), future aspirations, global outlook on the situation in Lebanon and the key sources/triggers of issues.

However, they presented **more differing views related to political and civic life**. This was observed first regarding the role of youth in political and civic engagement, where youth are divided primarily between those who remain enthusiastic to continue the change triggered by the October 17 uprising, and those who have lost hope.

Given the above compilation of major observed trends, it should be noted that **what unites youth far exceeds what divides them**. Therefore, these uniting factors can form the basis for a set of **collective morals and values** to guide the development of a **renewed social contract**. The contract should clearly state roles and responsibilities of the people (particularly youth) and government, where the people are responsible for giving power the government, and the government is responsible to provide the people with their rights and aspirations through democratic processes.

Recommendations

The conclusions that **what unites youth far exceed what divides them sets the basis for a renewed social contract**, where responsibilities and roles of both people and government are clearly set, and aligned with the needs and expectations

of youth, and by extension the majority of the population share. As such, any future programming, policy decisions or legislation can capitalize on the common aspects of youth in Lebanon's lives. This would require coordinated and targeted efforts by youth themselves, the government, as well as local and international non-profit actors. As such, the recommendations were tailored to the attention of stakeholders who can influence youth's lives and contribute to the establishment of a renewed social contract. Recommendations are addressed to educational institutes and youth groups/associations, the government as well as local and international non-profit actors.



Background Statement

Next Generation Lebanon (NGL) is part of the British Council's Next Generation global research series, held in countries going through periods of change. The NGL is designed to propagate youth's voices, making sure their opinions and interests are represented in decision making circles that influence youth's aspirations and plans. More specifically, the NGL seeks to gauge youth's perspectives on education, employment, lifestyle, civil and political engagement, as well as their hopes and fears for life in Lebanon.

The initial research was commissioned in 2019, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Taif agreement which put an end to the civil war. The initial study was concluded in December 2019, just as the October 17 uprising had begun and the economic crisis was just beginning to escalate. As such, the initial study did not include the contextual changes that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Blast and the deep socio-economic crisis and political deadlock.

In response, the British Council commissioned Next Steps Lebanon, which is discussed in detail in this report. The purpose of this assignment is to build upon the finding of the initial NGL and:

- Assess the relevance of the research given the recent contextual developments;
- Identify new trends and findings;
- Inform the British Council's work with youth and other stakeholders involved in policies and programmes.

In addition, the methodology presented below (expanded in the relevant annex) was designed to respond to the following research questions set in the assignment's Request for Proposals:

- > Do the findings from Next Generation Lebanon resonate with young people in Lebanon today? If so/not, how and why?
- > Has the role of young people in their communities and society changed since 17 October uprising/ COVID-19/Beirut explosion, and if so, how?
- > What will a new/renewed social contract provide for young people in Lebanon today?

Current context in Lebanon

Over the past three decades, Lebanon has been affected by recurrent domestic and regional conflicts that resulted in dire economic and social costs, in addition to a global pandemic and the recent Beirut Blast which have affected the lives of millions of Lebanon's inhabitants. All these factors accounted for, the situation in Lebanon can be describe as a **multi-faceted crisis**, a culmination of multiple crises contributing to decreased livelihood opportunities and an increased need for basic services and assistance for both refugee and host populations.

With the **ongoing conflict in Syria since 2011**, many Syrian refugees (880,000 currently registered with UNHCR², but when accounting for unregistered, the estimates are over one million refugees) have sought asylum in Lebanon.

In addition to the existing number of displaced Palestinians (470,000 currently registered with UNRWA³), the dramatic surge in population (of which there is no official census) has placed strain on the country's resources, public services, and infrastructure.

Economically, Lebanon is currently in hyperinflation, with the devaluation of the local currency exceeding 80%. Prior to the blast, it was reported that approximately 220,000 formal jobs have been lost, and 12% of all local businesses have ceased their activity⁴. In addition to an increasing national debt (current over USD 100 billion⁵), the Beirut Blast's damages are estimated to be between USD 5 billion to USD 10 billion⁶.

Further adding to the contextual complication, the **Beirut Port Blast on August 4th 2020**, has created immediate humanitarian needs, with 180 people killed, dozens missing, over 6,000 injured and 300,000+ displaced⁷. The explosion left most of the port facility destroyed, and surrounding neighbourhoods flattened, with damage reported up till six kilometres away from the blast epicentre.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected Lebanon along with rest of the world. While the situation was initially under control, cases increased exponentially, with Lebanon reaching over 6,000 cases per day in January 2020⁸. Moreover, the pandemic has had overreaching socio-economic implications. This includes the effects of recurrent lockdown on the local economy and the livelihoods of millions of Lebanese and foreign daily workers. In addition, the pandemic has

2 > UNHCR Lebanon Portal - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

3 > UNRWA - <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

4 > Economic Briefs from the Middle East – Week from 07 to 14 February 2020

5 > Abou Aoun; Yacoubian. (2020, August 7). After Beirut Blast, What's Next for Lebanon's Broken Political System? United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/after-beirut-blast-whats-next-lebanons-broken-political-system>

6 > Beirut Explosion: loss estimate. (2020, August 14). Atlas Magazine. <https://www.atlas-mag.net/en/article/beirut-explosion-loss-estimate>

7 > Lebanon: Beirut Explosion Situation Report No. 5 - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 17 August 2020

8 > WHO Lebanon Portal <https://www.who.int/countries/lbn/>

had a detrimental effect on the lives of children and youth, whose educational future has been put at risk. According to the Human Rights Watch, the government's distance learning strategy overlooks Syrian refugee students that attend the "second shift classes". This has resulted in the majority of Syrian children and youth being out of learning (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The effects of these overlapping crises have affected all areas in Lebanon, but particularly adverse effects have been observed in rural underdeveloped and underserved areas. This includes the rural communities in Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon and Bekaa, which have suffered neglect in the development of their infrastructure, basic services, and the preservation of the existing cultural heritage sites. Also, many natives of these rural communities have sought out urban areas looking for employment, especially Beirut. With the Beirut blast, many of those individuals have lost their jobs and have moved back to their villages.

Current situation of youth in Lebanon

Aside from the general background data on the multi-faceted crises in Lebanon, few resources are available on the updated analysis of the socio-economic conditions and daily lives of youth in Lebanon. This stresses on the importance of gathering data directly from youth and the need for the NGL study. What was available from secondary literature has been included mostly in the findings section, offering points of triangulation to support or challenge this study's findings.

What's new in the NGL approach?

The Next Steps Lebanon study focuses on acquiring a narrative description of the different aspect of youth's lives in Lebanon, through their own words. This was done using qualitative data collection, with a representative sample of youth from Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian nationalities living in Lebanon.

The adjusted approach allowed youth the space to openly express their opinions and views. Notably, a majority of youth ***expressed issues and concerns they are facing with regard to their mental health***. This has been identified across most aspects of youth's lives, and is explored further in the findings section.

Moreover, the study included a particular focus on ***capturing the views of disabled youth in Lebanon***. Disabled Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian from across Lebanon took part in dedicated focus groups discussion (FGDs) with a trained ***inclusion specialist***, to assure that their voices are captured.

Guidance on the Report

The report provides a brief overview of the utilized methodology, reached sample and the limitations/challenges faced throughout the assignment. This is followed by a presentation of the findings along the lines of the five key areas of focus of the NGL research (discussed in-depth later on). The finding sections includes and overall conclusion and discussion of youth's lives in Lebanon, paving the way

to the recommendations offered to key actors and decision makers influencing youth's lives.

While the initial NGL study grouped education and employment under Daily lives of youth in Lebanon, the following report presents split findings. This was done to accommodate the bulk of the data, and allowed for the presentation of sector specific findings.

Throughout the report, where reference is made to "***all youth***" or "***youth in Lebanon***", this means youth from all nationalities and socio-economic background residing in Lebanon.

Otherwise, findings specific to a certain demographic and socio-economic group are highlighted when needed.

Methodology

Research Methods

Relying on the results of the previous NGL, the research team utilized qualitative methods including: **focus group discussions** (FGDs) with young people in Lebanon and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with youth in addition to **key informant interviews** (KIIs) with representatives from youth political parties and groups, UN representative working on youth programmes, among others stakeholders. In order to ensure controlling bias, triangulation technique was applied using finding from the previous study, the findings from the current research and from the desk review. For more details about the methodology please refer to Annex A.

Accessing youth

Youth participating in this research were identified using several gateways covering all the areas in Lebanon. 179 were contacted and comprised of scout associations, religious youth groups, university clubs, local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), international NGOs, capacity building hubs, and sports clubs. Out of 179 contacted gateways, 36 were responsive and provided the data collection teams with lists of youth (Annex C: List of gateways). To avoid bias and a concentration of similar profiles, the team used a snow-ball approach and asked youth to refer three other youth who have a different background from their network.

For disabled youth, participants were recruited using the purposive sampling and the snowball sampling.

Participants were composed of youth from the same NGOs who are acquaintances. They have met before but do not have any close relationships and so, they can be comfortable while interacting in a permissive, non-threatening environment in order to avoid the fear to speak out in a crowd (Barrett and Kirk 2000).

An overall observation for youth participants is that there was a **general hesitation initially to join the FGDs**. However, at the end of each sessions, most if not all mentioned enjoying it and wanting to keep the conversation on-going. Several FGDs took up to two hours as participants wanted to discuss certain topics and provide further input. From a gender perspective, **youth female participants were more interested to join than their male counterparts**. Additionally, they were more vocal and engaging during the FGDs.

For disabled youth, participants had a range of disabilities including visual, physical, auditory, verbal, cognitive and learning impairments, as well individuals with Down's Syndrome. The sessions were facilitated by a **trained inclusion specialist**, who took numerous measures to assure the comfort of participants, and the smoothness of the session. More specifically, the facilitator ensured that the questions are conversational, clear, short and open-ended. If needed, the questions were made more concise. Also, if an activity required abstract thinking, the facilitator explained the exercise and clarified the activity by dividing it into a shorter task.

When the discussion got under way, the facilitator kept the discussion on track to avoid digressions, or awkward silences by refocusing the topic and, engaging participants with probing and follow-up questions. There were instances where disabled youth were unable to answer the questions which have been noted throughout the report.

Qualitative method

Desk Review

The first stage of the research included a thorough desk review of different documents in relation to the initial NGL study. This allowed the team to understand the methods used, the context in which the study was conducted in and the sampling. Moreover, the team conducted a literature review to cover most recent updates in the context, identify scientific and academic findings relative to youth's behaviors (education, livelihood, political and civic engagement).

More specifically, the desk review aimed to gather information regarding the context following October 17 uprising, COVID-19, the economic crisis (devaluation of the LBP) and Beirut Blast. As such, the newly developed tools were based on the outcome of the review to complement the ones from the initial NGL.

The desk review was carried out through the research timeframe, as it was needed to inform not only the inception phase but also support in analysis and triangulation of data.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Based on the existing five modules corresponding to the NGL research topics, a structured *focus group discussion* guide was developed centered on interactive and participatory exercises such as the infographics, the root cause tree, the body map exercise and the wheel of emotions (further details are found in Annex B – FGD and KII Guides).

Concretely, given the lock-down measures taken during the data collection, the team conducted synchronous focus groups⁹ with a range of participants from 4-6¹⁰. Sessions were divided by nationality and age groups and by gender based on the specificity of certain areas¹¹. The sessions were conducted using Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms depending on youth's preference and ability to join.

Overall, it is important to note that the literature review endorses the usage of such methods in general and more specifically with youth given its benefits and given the fact that youth are largely more familiar with instant messaging and online platforms (Williams S., 2012). Furthermore, the authors suggest that online research has the potential to comprise groups who normally would not participate in more traditional studies. (Williams S., 2012).

However, in the same study, two important limitations were highlighted: 1) agreeing on a common suitable time and; 2) The synchronicity making the session 'fast, furious, and chaotic' (Williams S., 2012) which makes it harder for participants with less computer literacy skills. Those were indeed challenges faced by the team during the data collection exercise, in addition to several other challenges. Those will be further unpacked in the limitations section.

In relation to the FGDs, although online research provides participants with less pressure to answer questions in comparison to face to face FGDs (Kenny, 2005), the team ensured to provide a safe environment for participants at all time. This was ensured by requesting consent prior to joining the session and guaranteeing that they are conformable to share their identities with other participants. Furthermore, an online etiquette guide and ground rules were set to safeguard the appropriateness of the tone, content of their views and enhance constructive dialogue.

In-depth interview (IDIs)

To close the break in the representativeness of certain groups from a socio-demographic perspective (ages, nationalities, educational background), the team has assessed the FGDs which were conducted and the profiles of its participants versus the original sample. Accordingly, it was agreed after consultation with the British Council to purposefully conduct IDIs with youth who were not represented in the conducted FGDs.

The IDIs were conducted using the same online platforms and in certain cases the interviews were conducted over the phone and through WhatsApp.

This method not only bridged a gap, but also provided the space for participants who did not want to join group sessions (FGDs), to voice out their views and thoughts in a more reserved manner.

Key-informant Interviews (KIIs)

KIIs were held predominantly with external stakeholders representing various background and institutions such as youth branches of political parties, youth guiding counselors from municipalities, community-based organizations (CBOs), donors and UN agencies involved in youth programming in Lebanon.

Presentation of the preliminary findings (interpretation workshop)

An interpretation workshop was held on the March 10, 2021, for the purpose of validating the preliminary findings and jointly discuss the interpretation of the findings in comparison to the initial NGL findings. Inputs and guiding notes from the interpretation workshop were further incorporated in the report.

9 > "Synchronous focus groups occur in real-time and require participants and researchers to contribute at the same pre-arranged time. These typically use chat tools such as messenger systems or chat room" (Williams S., 2012)

10 > The initial number of invited participants was 6-8, however the sessions ended by with 4-6 due to last minute drop out. Further details are found in the limitation section.

11 > Details on the interviewees are found in the data collection section.

Data Collection

The preparation and launching of the data collection was conducted between February and March 2021. As mentioned earlier, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all data collection methods were conducted by remote/online.

The data collection of FGDs and IDI was carried by team of data collectors who were supervised by a team leader. The team was selected with gender equity in mind to ensure that in each FGD a female and a male representative was present. All FGD facilitators and note take were gender balanced with the exception of one team.

Prior to the data collection initiation, recruited data collectors took part in a one-day training. They were briefed on the objectives of the research, the methodological approach and the ethical considerations. They were provided with a detailed review of the tools, trained on how to administer it and had time to practice through role play.

The data collection had two critical points which required careful planning and close follow up. The first one was the coordination with gateways given their essential role in providing access to youth. Schedules and daily follow ups were taking place to warranty that list of potential youth are shared.

The second critical piece was the follow-up with youth to confirm the date and time of the sessions and guarantee that they will attend.

FGD sessions were planned 1-2 days ahead to avoid gap period between the scheduled and actual FGD sessions.

For the data collection of disabled youth, the inclusion specialist ensured that no kind of distractions were present by focusing on the modules. In order to get the correct balance between the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups (and avoid any biases), each group was formed of participants with different types of disabilities. Focus groups did not exceed 5 to 6 participants. If the group is too large participants with cognitive and learning disabilities may find it difficult to take part (Fraser and Fraser 2000).

Finally, throughout the data collection period, the team took considerable measures to assure the **quality of data collection** and to ensure representativeness of youth from various identified categories highlighted in the below sample versus achieved section. As such, daily comparison was needed to ensure that the scheduled sessions account for the needed diversity within participants.

In terms of timing, the KIs were held towards the end of the data collection period, following the FGDs and KIs. This allowed the team to identify preliminary key findings to be unpacked with key informants for further interpretation and triangulation.

Sampling Reach & Coverage

As agreed during the inception phase, the team relied on a **grounded theory approach** guided by **saturation**.

Determining the number of FGDs was difficult, as such a tentative target was determined for planning purposes.

Furthermore, an **oversampling** was applied for all FGDs to account for potential drop-out rates during the process. This included an oversampling up to 20%.

In terms of sampling, a mix of random and purposive sampling were applied. Pertaining to the initial group of youth contacted, a **random sampling** was applied followed by a snow-ball sampling to identify the remaining youth.

Purposive sampling was also used for inclusion of under-represented profiles and for disabled youth, through implementing IDIs and tailored FGDs.

Table 1: Reached target through FGDs and IDIs

Nationality	Locations	size	size	size
Lebanese	8x FGD 1x IDI	14x FGD 6x IDI	5x FGD 3x IDI	5x FGDs
Syrian	1x IDI	2x FGD 5x IDI	2x FGD 1x IDI	2x FGDs
Palestinian	NA	2x FGD	2x FGD	1x FGDs

With regards to their demographic and socio-economic split, the majority of the participants 60%+ were university educated, 30% Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) educated and the remaining having dropped-out before grade 9, or never received an education. In terms of split across religious denominations, this was not captured for each participant. However, the sampling method that targets most areas in Lebanon also assures an equivalently representative split by religious denominations. No clerk statistics or information exists on how sects are split across areas, but the overall consensus and national narrative is that areas, localities and villages are either predominantly one sect, or a mix of few sects.

Overall, 179 gateways were contacted the 36 provided youth access. 600 youth were contacted and 185 participated through 42 FGDs and 17 IDs. Finally, 8 participated in the KIs.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on an orderly process of *coding responses in accordance with the thematic focus of the research (5 modules)* in addition to the identified emerging themes and patterns. Collected themes and patterns were clustered into categories to gain new insights into the impact of the work.

More specifically, findings of the Next Steps research were structured according to the research topics of the initial NGL. As such, input was aggregated in a unified *response coding sheet*, and input was analyzed transversally along the specific finding it corresponds to. This has been included in the FGD guide, as each question (along with its

probing questions) is linked to a specific finding(s) from the NGL.

Data was not only coded thematically, but also clustered considering the age categories and nationalities of the participants in the FGDs. As such, the analysis was conducted horizontally (thematic topics) and vertically (per nationality, age group and disability).

In order to assure that findings fit the purpose of the research, the analysis relied on *triangulation* of findings from each method, whether the desk review, literature review, or qualitative data. All findings were *objectively verifiable and tangible*.

Research Limitations

The limitations of this research covered numerous aspects in relation to the methodology and context.

To begin with, the limitation of this study consisted of a rather *small sample* (185 youth) that may not be representative to the general youth population. Despite the limitation, the participants represent all gender, age groups, nationalities and disabilities with the exception of Palestinians youth aged from 15-18 years old.

Moreover, the research study had a *limited timeframe* in order to conduct a representative qualitative assessment with youth in Lebanon. Despite this, a high level of coordination was maintained internally among Qualisus' team and with the partner agency the British Council. Weekly check-in meetings allowed Qualisus to communicate progress, successes and challenges to the colleagues at British council and to collaborate on troubleshooting efforts.

Online fatigue and lack of interest in participating remained a challenge throughout the data collection period. Youth were either not interested or did not want to join online sessions. Some requested to conduct face to face FGDs (specifically in the North), however this was not possible due to the lockdown measures in country. To accommodate for this, the sessions were made as interactive as possible basing it on exercises. Furthermore, for the ones *who were not interested to join*, the team asked participants who enjoyed the FGD sessions to refer at the end of the sessions, three friends/acquaintances and colleagues. More specifically regarding the profile of the youth who were not interested to join, the team noticed that most were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The latter were less likely to participate without a financial or in-kind incentive. As this was not possible to attend to, less educated and underprivileged youth remained slightly under-represented.

Logistically, *connectivity* was a major limitation and challenges in several ways. From one side, the most recurring issue during the sessions was keeping a stable connectivity. Hence, whenever a participant had connection difficulties, the team made sure to recapitulate what he or she lost, to keep track. For disabled youth, if the participant was unable to join again, a individual invitation was sent on WhatsApp in order to emphasize and let them know that the participant's insights are of value to the study. From the other side, connectivity was challenging for youth who did not have or couldn't afford internet bundle.

Bias of responses when expressing identities, possibly due to being in mixed sessions with people from differing views. This may have triggered youth to unanimously identify as Lebanese, regardless if they truly identify along religious or political lines, in an effort to maintain conformity.

Findings

The findings of the report have been disaggregated under each of the five key areas of focus of the initial NGL research:

- Youth aspirations and global outlook
- Youth identities in Lebanon
- Daily lives of youth in Lebanon
 - Education
 - Employment
- Youth civic and political engagement
- Effects of violence and conflict on youth in Lebanon

Each section contains a table providing a *comparison between the findings of the initial NGL and the current findings*. Also, emerging findings not observed in the initial study have been highlighted under each area of focus. The findings are followed by an overall conclusion and discussion of youth's lives in Lebanon, highlighting the main commonalities and divergences observed.

It should be noted that the presentation of the finding differs from that of the initial study, as the *“Youth aspirations and global outlook”* module was moved to the forefront of both the FGD guide and the discussion on the findings. This realignment was beneficial, as the FGDs started off with an overall discussion of youth's lives and then delved into specific details across the different aspects of their lives. This is also reflected in the findings presented below, and sets the scene of the overall report.





Youth aspirations and global outlook

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% of youth agree that “being a young adult in Lebanon is a survival exercise • 88% of youth worry about falling into poverty 	<p>The overwhelming majority of participants (youth and key informants) agreed that life for young adults in Lebanon is a survival exercise. This has escalated with the worsening situation since October 17 to date.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71% would like to migrate to another country for better job opportunities • Migration is a decision of conflict due to having to leave behind family and friends 	<p>Youth from all nationalities look towards emigration as the most viable option for a bright future. However, financial, legal and social constraints influence their ability to leave the country.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU countries, US and UK as countries with most positive influence on Lebanon • US also viewed as the country with the second most negative influence on Lebanon 	<p>There was no consensus among youth on how they viewed foreign countries. Their perspectives were based on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Quality of life 2- Perceived influence of the country on Lebanon;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% believe society is responsible for addressing the challenges and 37% believe it is the government 	<p>Majority of youth gave equal responsibilities on both society and government in addressing challenges faced by youth. However, many highlighted that society must rise to hold the government accountable.</p>

Participating youth almost unanimously agree that their lives are a “survival exercise”, with each group highlighting their common and diverging struggles

This statement has become more true to them with the recurrent crises that the country has went through since October 2019. A common description of youth’s lives was that they are “living day to day”, awaiting what may further develop in Lebanon. Some youth from all nationalities pointed out that different groups are affected differently in Lebanon. A commonly cited vulnerable group was women and girls, as they are subject to societal norms, limited rights and increased risk of harassment with little to no protection. This subjugation to social gender norms has been explored by both male and female participants, and is discussed in more details under the forthcoming sections.

Additionally, many refugee youth (Palestinians and Syrians) highlighted that they face further challenges owing to their refugee status. Particularly for Syrian youth, many expressed that they sought safety in Lebanon, but now no longer find it. Moreover, many made continual comparisons between the situation in Syria during the war, and the current situation in Lebanon.

Life in Lebanon is truly a state of terror for us specially that we are refugees and the conditions in Syria are very bad. We lived and faced war for many years and here we’re facing a war of respect too. Life in Lebanon is on survival mode ... I wish I had opportunities here as I do back in Syria. I think if I stay here, I’ll live in poverty for the rest of my life.

Syrian Female, 23, Baalbek

It should be noted that participating disabled youth agreed with their peers that life in Lebanon is a survival exercise. The majority of participants with a disability reported that *having a disorder makes their life harder*. They are easily discriminated against, and their quality of life is regressing, especially with COVID-19 and the economic crisis which further limit their access to the needed support services.

The main reasons contributing to more youth believing their lives in Lebanon are a survival exercises, are the overlapping economic, health and socio-political crises. These crises have had a detrimental effect on youth’s daily lives, aspirations for the future and mental health.

With the economic crisis, educated and uneducated youth both feel the stressors of the increased costs for living. This is further exacerbated with the limited livelihood opportunities, in the ever-shrinking employment market. *Youth from all background expressed that their chief worry is unemployment and falling into poverty.* Moreover, the economic uncertainty has reflected poorly on youth's outlook for the future, leaving them in doubt of the viability of their academic and/or professional pursuits.

Corona doesn't scare me, unemployment does, I'm scared that once I finish university, I won't find a job. Everyone invests their time to get a bachelor but end up joining the army or they leave the country.

Lebanese Male, 18, Nabatieh

Emerging Finding: The compounding adverse effects of crises and the unsure future have a detrimental impact on youth's mental health

A finding which emerged in the recent study, is the **deteriorating mental health of youth in Lebanon**. Youth from all nationalities and age groups expressed feelings of distress, uncertainty and hopelessness with the current situation.

Our psyche has become zero. We used to think about the future, today we cannot think of the present. The reasons youth live this way are psychological problems and sectarian problems, lack of acceptance of others, closure, non-acceptance of freedoms and their suppression.

Lebanese Female, 19, Hermel

These adverse mental effects were observed among all youth, including those who are currently employed.

Of course, I feel that we are living in a struggle to survive because we wake up every morning and go to work without a soul. We feel that we are going to suffer. The pension does not suffice us for five days a month. We study without interest because we do not find work, and if we find work, we will need 20 years in order to return what we paid on university tuition fees, and today I work with 3 jobs and the pensions are not enough, so what if I had a family. We work to live every day; we work to only eat.

Lebanese Female, 27, Tripoli

The deterioration in mental health was also noted in a recent study conducted by Plan International in 2021, where caregivers and adolescents reported very high stress levels, leading to negative coping mechanisms. There was a clear correlation between increasing stress levels among youth resulting from the build-up of crises (Plan International, 2021).

As youth grow more uncertain of their future in Lebanon, willingness to migrate has dramatically increased, after seeing a dip directly after October 17 uprising

The majority of youth participants from all nationalities expressed their wish to emigrate, seeing that **a new life abroad is their only hope with the current situation**. This has been confirmed by key informants, who see travelling abroad as one of the few options that youth have for a better life. An ECOSOC study showed that Lebanon had the highest level of brain drain in the Arab region in 2019, with 40% of college educated youth emigrating (ECOSOC, 2019). More recently, key informants noted that migration rates initially decreased after the October 17 uprising.

However, the rate dramatically escalated after the Beirut Blast, increasing by 47.19% since 2019 (The961, 2020).

Youth currently have minimal options either to put food on the table through any mean or to leave.

Key informant, UN agency

While many said that their initial instinct is to build careers and families in Lebanon, their decision to emigrate was based on the lack of support and opportunities. The future is unclear to them, many want to migrate, and those who want to stay can find no way to convince others of the same.

I will go for the first opportunity outside Lebanon. I am burying my dreams in Lebanon.

Lebanese Male, 29, Zgharta

Participants from all nationalities shared similar **specific reasons for emigrating**. These include: seeking financial security for themselves and their families, seeking safety, desired major or field of work not present in Lebanon and the encouragement of friends and family to "succeed aboard" and come back. However, a minor proportion of participating youth **cited societal and family pressure to remain** in Lebanon. On the other hand, more youth reported that their **families have become more encouraging of their decision to leave** as the situation worsens.

Specifically for refugees, Palestinian and Syrian youth want to emigrate due to their inability to find equitable work with good pay. Refugees are particularly affected with discriminatory labor laws and employment practices, which limit the viable jobs to three sectors (Agriculture, environment and construction), in addition to earning lower wages when compared to Lebanese.

They want to leave Lebanon in search for other countries which they believe are more organized, with less security risks and less discrimination against them.

While the majority of the youth want to leave Lebanon, there were numerous challenges reported. The principal barrier to emigration for youth from all nationalities is incapability to cover the costs of moving to another country. The second most common reason to stay is youth's desire to stay close to their families.

If I travel, how can I guarantee that my family will be able to cover my education fees?

Lebanese Male, 21, Hermel

Specifically for refugees, emigration involves a long and arduous process, which must include the United Nations' assistance, due to their refugee status.

Emerging Finding: Disabled youth wish to immigrate mostly to avoid discrimination and exclusion, but the decision to leave is not light for most

In addition, most disabled youth expressed their wish to emigrate, since Lebanon does not offer sufficient accessibility for disabled youth and a perceived perception that people abroad do not discriminate against them. Disabled youth gave examples of the issues they face in Lebanon, such as having to circumvent a car parked on the sidewalk and the absence of elevators/ramps in most buildings and public spaces.

Disabled participants face different challenges and **emigration for them is not a simple matter**, as the severity of their disability plays a decisive role. Participants who are more dependent on their guardians in their daily lives expressed a wish to stay in Lebanon. Meanwhile, more independent individuals look forward to emigrating to countries where their independence is supported, and where they can find equitable employment fitting their skills.

Youth gave equal responsibility to the government and society, in ensuring they have a good future, but stressed the fact that societies must hold governments accountable.

Most Lebanese youth agreed that society and the government are equally responsible for securing a better future for youth. Many mentioned that each must play their role, as the government should govern a country's resources and economy well, and the society has the responsibility to hold a failing government accountable. However, some mentioned that society is at often times enabling government's abuse of responsibilities by continuing to support the current "ruling class", as youth commonly referred to the leading political parties with parliamentary representation.

Everyone is responsible, the people, the government, parents and children. The government is incapable and therefore the people should act.

Lebanese Female, 16, Chouf

For Syrians and Palestinians, they placed main responsibility on the government, mentioning discriminatory practices they face (i.e. limited job opportunities, social exclusion). Syrian youth in particular compared the current Lebanese government to oppressive governments around the region which "do not care for their people".

Disabled youth also gave great responsibility for the government, to provide them with equitable livelihood opportunities. Moreover, they stressed the need for the government to invest in the educational and healthcare systems, to further meet the needs of disabled youth in terms of inclusion and ease of access to services.

Youth in Lebanon presented mixed views towards foreign countries, depending on two factors:

- 1) Prospect of immigrating to them;
- 2) Their perceived effect on Lebanon.

The wheel of emotions exercise used in the FGDs (described in detail in the methodology annex) allowed youth to select nuanced emotions to describe how they feel towards certain countries. They were then encouraged to elaborate upon them.

The most common views among youth from all nationalities were interest, curiosity and high-energy positive emotions towards more "Western Countries", but notable wariness to USA when compared with EU countries, which are perceived as having less negative effect on Lebanon. Negative emotions were noted, especially in countries perceived as affecting Lebanon (USA, Iran, Syria etc.) and admiration of Arab countries who have progressed technologically such as United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) were shared. Sadness, empathy and some anger towards Syria and Palestine were the general sentiments also expressed.

It should be noted that the majority of youth expressed an aversion to foreign influence in Lebanon, mentioning that this has led to internal instability. Coinciding with this view, Iran and USA were the most controversial countries, owing to the general view that each country supports key rival parties competing in the Lebanese political sphere. European countries were viewed neutrally, but more optimistically than other countries. This was particularly true for France. As for the UK, it was viewed with an overall neutral to positive trend. Youth who mentioned negative emotions towards UK cited that foreign policy decisions are frequently aligned with the USA in terms of policy decisions and influence on Lebanon.

I've never seen USA having a positive impact on Lebanon, and I think that the UK follows the USA in all of their decisions, therefore it has a negative impact too.

Lebanese Male, 21, Nabatieh

More specifically, *Lebanese youth's opinion of foreign countries varied across geographic areas*. For example, youth from Baalbek-Hermel, South and refugee populations presented negative emotion when asked about USA, UK and European countries. In the same areas, Lebanese youth expressed positive feeling towards Iran, Syria and Palestine, and negative emotions to UAE and KSA. Meanwhile youth from Mount Lebanon, Beirut and some areas of the Bekaa (Zahle) presented directly contradictory emotions (i.e. positive towards the US and EU and negative towards regional countries), to their peers in the aforementioned regions. This distribution of views is similar to the general distribution of political affiliation among the regions in Lebanon. This became evident during the entire discussion, as youth from Baalbek-Hermel and South governorates (with a significant portion

of youth from the North) expressed that Western countries have a negative impact on Lebanon. On the other hand, youth from Mount Lebanon, Beirut and some areas of the Bekaa (Zahle) viewed the influence of Western countries as positive.

Syrian youth's views of foreign countries were split similarly to Lebanese, and were motivated by how they influence nations in the region. Youth particularly noted that foreign influence led to tragedies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

More specifically for Syrian youth, those who expressed positive emotions (optimism - comfort) often related them to the improved living standards that are found in Western Countries (US, UK, EU). However, the same participants did express negative emotions (fear - anger) when talking about these countries' influence on Syria, Lebanon and the region as a whole.

As for Palestinian youth, the majority expressed negative emotions towards USA (annoyance, aggression), positive and safe emotions for Palestine. Interestingly, the UK was viewed positively, while EU countries were perceived negatively. Feelings towards EU countries were attributed to the perceived racism that immigrants from Arab countries face there.

It should be noted that the views of disabled youths were similarly split to the aforementioned attribution by nationality and geographic area.



Youth identities in Lebanon

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68% of Lebanese youth identify as Lebanese Language, Culture and History as key sources of being Lebanese 35% Lebanese youth also identify along religious lines (most common amongst Christians in northern districts) Family narratives and oral history remain key source on history and cultural heritage 62% Lebanese youth believe no unified identity in Lebanon 52% believe no unified identity due to political system, religious partitions and 30% due to memories of war 	<p>The overwhelming majority of Lebanese youth identified as Lebanese.</p> <p>However, a review of secondary literature has shown that this is subject to fluctuation over time, depending on the change in the socio-economic and political domains.</p> <p>Youth are particularly influenced with family and local traditions in identifying their identity.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46% Lebanese youth not comfortable in areas of different religion/political party from their own 67% youth strongly agreed or agreed that “People who belong to different religions are probably just as moral as those who belong to yours” 	<p>Majority of youth from all nationalities and backgrounds were open and comfortable to live and interact with people from different religions and political parties.</p> <p>However, this comfort did not extend to marriage, as most expressed aversion to inter-religious marriage.</p>

Majority of Lebanese youth identify as Lebanese as opposed to sectarian lines (subject to change based on contextual developments), but a sense of unity was not tangible.

The Next Steps study found that a majority of youth identify as Lebanese, but participants from most areas did not express a sense of unified identity. This *deviation from the initial NGL findings* is aligned with studies that show that youth's sense of belonging to religious sects dropped by 50% between March and July 2020, which coincides with a time where sects became less important in the political discussion within Lebanon (UNICEF, 2020)

While the finding shows an increase in *those identifying as Lebanese*, when compared with the initial NGL study, other sources show that this has *fluctuated greatly according to the contextual changes* that the country is going through. More specifically, youth became increasingly disenchanted with the sense of belonging to Lebanon, reporting a 36.4% decrease in expressions of belonging when comparing polls collected in March 2020 with those

from September 2020 (UNICEF, 2020). This coincides with the deepening economic crisis, worsening COVID-19 situation and increase in socio-political tensions (UNICEF, 2020).

Incidentally, key informants gave a less optimistic view of the unified identity in Lebanon. Most agreed that there is no clearly defined Lebanese identity to adhere.

I know I am Lebanese and I know that there is no unified identity.

Key informant, Youth Branch of a Political Party

At the same time, all informants observed that youth are increasingly identifying as Lebanese, as opposed to sectarian identification, since the October 17 uprising. However, the same informants described that with the ever-worsening economic situation, there are fears that more youth may revert to identifying along sectarian and religious lines.

Syrian refugees in general noted that identities in Lebanon are divided along sectarian and political lines. They did not comment on the prevalence of these identities, but did note the detrimental

effects they have on society (discussed later). Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees generally expressed a strong desire to belong to Lebanon. This was well-pronounced among Palestinian refugees with Lebanese mothers, whose mothers are prohibited by law from passing the nationality to their children.

Youth blame the division in the identities of Lebanese on persistent “civil war mentalities”, and their exploitation by political parties to promote group identities and segregation

The Lebanese civil war (1975 – 1990), similarly to the initial NGL findings, was the most frequently cited cause for continued division in the identities of Lebanese. This has been shared by youth from all nationalities as well as key informants.

Notably, many participants conveyed a similar narrative regarding *why the civil war remains so influential* after more than 30 years of being concluded. Youth primarily identified that the same political parties which fought the civil war are still in power, and in *the absence of a “clear winner”*, led to continuous disputes over power and wealth.

Figure 1 A: consolidated problem tree, completed with participants in one of the FGDs with youth in Aley



Youth also emphasized the *role of the older generation*, including their parents, in promulgating sectarian and divisive mentalities based on their experiences during the war. One key informant expressed her own childhood experience, when the school invited them to a field trip to the South of Lebanon. The informants recounted her father's reason for refusing to allow her to go, as "the south is not ours". The informant (of Christian descent) was alluding to the common concept in Lebanon, where areas are divided as belonging to certain sects or political parties.

2011 the school decided to take us to the south my dad refused to let me go by telling me "the south is not ours".

Key informant, Youth Branch of a Political Party

Most youth, particularly Lebanese in the older age group of 25 to 29, discussed how the current political parties *use sectarian and divisive narratives to further segment society*. Youth gave examples of how some politicians still rely on disputes in ancestry (i.e. are Lebanese Arabs or Phoenician?) to justify current political disputes, turning them to cultural and religious battles.

The root causes are ignorance, religion, the civil war, parents' way of raising their children, the sanctification of the politicians, and old habits and traditions. These roots cause hatred, uncontrolled weapons, and mental stress. The consequences are security and social problems, increase of immigration rate, sectarianism, increase of crime rate, mental stress, and country's division into smaller states.

Lebanese Female, 16, Chouf

In addition, youth have also mentioned that divisions in society have been depend by the *unequal access to economic opportunities*. In their view, this results from two factors, both attributed to the "ruling class" and affiliated business tycoons. The first is clientelism (commonly referred to as "Wasta"), as youth feel resentment in the knowledge that their employment future depends on who they know (or which political party they are affiliated with), and not what their skills and potential are. The second factor is related to the unequal distribution of resources a development funding which has led to inequity in development among underdeveloped areas. Youth from under-developed areas (specifically Hermel, Akkar and Tripoli) expressed their frustration, as they see *the politicians are using under-development as a leverage to create followers*. The general sentiment shared by youth in those areas is that when the government fails to develop certain areas, the political parties step in as saviors. This in turn, sections Lebanon, leading to separate areas each "taking care of their own".

The government's failure for empowering citizenship led to a Lebanon that is sectioned and every section cares only about itself.

Lebanese Male, 24, Tripoli

This is supported by secondary literature, which views that political parties seek to make citizens feel insecure by building on the fears generated by crises like COVID (European Forum, 2020). The source continues to say that political parties' goal is to "push citizens away from national solidarity" and have them focus on their individual or social group's safety.

Moreover, multiple sources, including donor agencies, have cited their concern when it comes to the delivery of aid to those affected by the pandemic, because "political parties step in and seek to fill the state's governance voids" (Azhari T., 2020)

Syrian and Palestinian refugees also conveyed the same root causes as those mentioned by the Lebanese youth. One divergence is the mention of the Taif agreement. Some Syrian youth mentioned that the Taif agreement (signed to end the Civil War) gave more power to sectarian groups, and led to dividing Lebanon to "smaller states".

The Taif Agreement leads to dividing Lebanon into smaller states depending on religions and sects. And the consequences would be outbreak of civil war, clashes, and division of quotas.

Syrian Male, 20, Mount Lebanon

It should be noted that the root causes question was difficult to grasp for most participants with a learning disability¹². For the ones who were able to answer, they mentioned that the root causes were political parties, different nationalities and religions and war.

Most key informants expressed concerns that religious and political affiliation will be on the rise as the socio-economic deterioration continues. This is alarming, since some informants also discussed how COVID-19 has triggered physical division and segmentation, due to the lockdowns, curfews and restriction of movement. This may be an additional divisive factor for the Lebanese unified identity, as areas are becoming more secluded with less inter-area communication.



Despite the disputes over the history but yet we have something in common.

Key informant, Local Youth CSO

The economic crisis may also contribute to **increased tensions between social groups**. This was noted among youth participants from the North of Lebanon, who expressed their dissatisfaction with refugees, as they perceived them to be “taking the jobs meant for Lebanese”. This sentiment was mirrored by Syrian and Palestinian refugees, who reported greater discrimination as the situation worsens in Lebanon.

Lebanese youth also took this question as an opportunity to talk about the discrimination and reactions they face when they tell someone they are from a certain area. For example, youth from Tripoli explained that people often “look down” at them as being from Tripoli (owing to the economic fragility of its inhabitants, and the increased rate of violence). However, many youth have reclaimed this identity proudly.

Most youth in Lebanon have no qualms in living, working and being friends with people from different religions, but are significantly less open to inter-religious marriage. While social cohesion has increased, fears remain of regression to group mentalities.

The majority of youth from all nationalities and background expressed comfort in living around, interacting and being friends with people from different religions. This could be that more than 46% of youth (as reported in the initial NGL) are comfortable with living with people from different backgrounds.

Many recounted how they have friends from different nationalities and sects, but mentioned that overall, society in Lebanon is not very tolerant of diversity.

Also, only a minor portion of youth from all nationalities expressed that it is easier to live with people from the same religion, because of “the [shared] way of living”.

In addition, multiple youth mentioned factors which have led them to have increased tolerance of people from different backgrounds. Major examples given include: scouts groups that emphasize the non-sectarian nature of volunteering and secular education institutes (schools, and more importantly university).

What’s good about our higher education sector is that it helps youth get out from their bubbles and interact with youth from other religions and areas. Youth were raised to fear other.

Key informant, UN agency

Notably, during this discussion many of the youth who expressed greater tolerance for diversity, **compared their views with those of their parents**. As discussed in the earlier finding, the parents of youth who lived through the civil war have more strict intolerant views, which they instill in their youth. In addition, key informants mentioned that the different backgrounds in Lebanon and miscommunication between groups are still a barrier towards cohesion and unity.

Key informants agreed that **social cohesion between different sects has improved since the October 17 uprising**. Similarly, to youth’s views on unified identity, this may be subject to fluctuation as the context evolves. As basic needs and means for survival become more scarce, families will become more focused on crises arising at home. This is a model environment for political parties to promote split across group identities, using assistance (Azhari T., 2020).

However, the overall tolerant sentiment did not extend to the discussion whether youth are open to **marrying someone from different sect or religions**. Most Syrian and Palestinian refugees and Lebanese expressed a strong aversion to marrying someone from a different religion. The reasons for this as reported by youth include:

- Fear of family and societal repercussions;
- Different religions have different ways of living;
- Fear of conflict when deciding religious upbringing of children etc.

It should be noted that the same participants had no issues in inter-sect marriage (e.g. Sunnis marrying Shia but not Christians, citing cultural gaps between religions).

Notably, the few youth who were open-minded in their views regarding to inter-religious marriage were from the North of Lebanon (Zgharta and Tripoli). At the same time, these participants stressed the need for a **civil marriage contract**, to circumvent any inter-religious disputes.

Interestingly, Syrian and Palestinian youth almost unanimously described having spouses from different religions as an insurmountable barrier. Only a few were open to the prospect of an inter-religious marriage, if governed under a civil contract.

Daily lives of youth in Lebanon - Education

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 42% of all youth aged 25-29 obtained HE or technical degree. 45% women and 39% men 47% Lebanese, 29% Palestinian, 6% Syrian aged 25-29 hold HE or technical degrees 	<p>Most educated youth at all levels (school, undergrad, and graduate) wish to continue their education, preferably abroad.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20% of all youth aged 25-29 dropped out of high school, due to high costs, need to work or marriage. 49% of all youth who dropped out still interested in completing education 3% of all youth never received education due to economic barriers or no enrolment 47% of those who never received education interested in enrolling in adult education programmes 	<p>Youth in Lebanon face common barriers to accessing and staying in education, including financial limitations, inequitable distribution of available majors across areas, and COVID-19.</p> <p>More and more youth are being forced to drop-out due to their inability to meet educational costs.</p> <p>Many participating uneducated youth and drop-outs want to return to education, but find it increasingly harder to do so.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58-59% of all youth believe school curriculum and system is very good 65% of all youth believe Lebanese education system needs serious reform 17% Lebanese youth received HE scholarships, compared to 38% Syrians and 40% Palestinians 	<p>Almost all youth agreed that the education curriculum is in need of revision, to meet the demands of youth starting a life in the 21st century. Youth perceived a chasm in quality of education between public and private institutes.</p> <p>Almost all Palestinian and Syrian youth at the university level rely on scholarship.</p>

All youth currently enrolled in education are motivated to continue their education, while uneducated youth expressed willingness to return to learning, but both cited barriers.

More specifically, the desire to continue education differed by nationality and age group. For Lebanese youth aged 15 to 18, almost all are willing, or are continuing their education, beyond grade 12 to university. For Lebanese aged 19 to 24, all educated youth want to continue their education, except for one person who was able to find a job. More youth in the age group of 25 to 29 are looking for jobs instead of continuing education. As for disabled youth, most of the participants are either studying or seeking to continue their studies. Some are working and studying at the same time, while some are looking for jobs.

A common trend among all participants from various backgrounds, is that most who want to continue their education, want to do so abroad. The main reason for this as provided by youth are comparable with those mentioned when discussing their future aspiration, such as the fear of graduating and not finding a job in Lebanon. Another reason mentioned is the unavailability of certain majors in Lebanon. Similarly, to what was discussed earlier, key informants and youth both agreed that more youth decided to leave because of the deteriorating situation.

Many of those who have dropped out or do not have an education have expressed a willingness and desire to return to education, but are finding it increasingly difficult to do so given the current situation.

They cite financial constraints and some mentioned that they cannot stop working and go back to learning. This comes at a time where *not many re-integration programmes exist*. For example, the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) allows children aged 9 to 16 who have been out of school for more than two years to catch up with the Lebanese educational system. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ALP programme was put on hold, leaving many prospective returnees (the majority of whom are Syrian) unaware of their future.

Youth in Lebanon face common and group specific barriers to accessing and staying in education, which are becoming more profound as the crises escalate

While many youth are looking to continue their education, the reality of the situation in Lebanon may prove difficult to materialize these wishes into reality. The *changing context in Lebanon has affected youth's access to education*. Plan International's recent study (Plan International 2021), showed that one quarter of adolescents are not attending any form of education, with half of them having dropped out in the previous year due to financial and COVID-19 related reasons.

COVID-19 in particular presented a *strong barrier facing the education of less-privileged youth* who were less able to adapt to online learning solutions. This is due to the recurrent electricity outages, limited internet connectivity, inability to afford the required devices and the lack of a stable learning environment at home (Plan International, 2021). The Ministry of Education and

Higher Education launched multiple alternative learning platforms to support youth in their studies, including broadcasted classes for students on the national news channel (Tele Liban) and a plan for hybrid learning and return to schools.

During the FGDs, many youth (among whom were multiple teachers) decried the fact that most educational institutes were ill-equipped to shift to online. They mentioned issues arising due to the decreased technical proficiency of their instructors, and the absence of the needed infrastructure and software for online learning. As for disabled youths, several mentioned that COVID and the economic crisis have limited their ability to either go to school or to continue their education. This has left many unsure about their future career decisions, and if they wish to leave the country.

In addition, youth from remote areas (Baalbek-Hermel, Akkar and South) face a specific barrier in the fact that many of the *desired majors are centralized in cities*, particularly Beirut. This limits their ability to access many majors, and increases the costs of education for them as they would have to meet transportation or accommodation fees.

Increased education fees cannot be considered for most youth given the worsening economic situation. In the North and south, a few participants mentioned that they stopped their university education after first year, as they are unable to shoulder the costs.

I was studying civil engineering in Russia, but had to come back to Lebanon because of financial problems.

Lebanese Male, 21, Nabatieh



Particularly for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, they face additional barriers as they rely mostly on scholarships to study in university in Lebanon. Refugee youth find extreme difficulties in enrolling in universities without these scholarships, unless they are financially capable of covering the fees. Refugees also face issues in accessing the Lebanese University (the only public higher education institute), because registration fees are higher for refugees. Given these barriers, most prefer to leave, but they face financial barriers, and the added challenge of their refugee status.

Key informants noted that Palestinians face less challenges since they have no hope to getting back to their country. For many Syrians who hope to return, they lack the infrastructure to continue schooling due to a lack of internet access, laptops and good schools for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Aside from this, for both Syrian and Palestinians who might achieve higher education they will not be able to access all job types due to legislative restrictions.

Disabled Syrian and Palestinian youth mentioned that they did not go to school due to financial problems. More specifically, they cannot afford to pay extra in order to get an education (i.e. covering transportation costs). When asked about the support needed, all disabled participants talked about developing more accessible public schools for youth with disability and evolving the educational system to be more accessible.

An observation was made by many female participants (and few male participants) from all backgrounds, in that they face additional challenges in accessing and staying in education.

Participants gave examples in how their decision to continue education is influenced by societal norms and gender roles. Females, particularly those in more conservative communities across Lebanon, are expected to adhere to gender specific expectations such as domestic duties and marriage.

As such, their desire to continue education is often discouraged. Moreover, if they wish to continue education, they are boxed in by society to a few majors, mainly teaching and nursing, as these are seen as “appropriate for women”.

This experience was less pronounced among more educated and privileged youth. Among that group (from all nationalities and backgrounds), female participants were more oriented by their community to continue learning when compared with males. Males on the other hand prioritized finding jobs after graduation, and females expressed more willingness to pursue graduate studies (such as master and doctoral programmes).

Majority of youth and key informants are aware that the curriculum should be updated to meet the expectation, aspirations and needs of youth living in the 21st Century. Participants stressed on the importance of soft skills such as critical thinking and 21st century skills related to technology were explicitly mentioned.

The most common criticism of the current educational curriculum shared by almost all participants, is that it is **outdated**. The curriculum was last updated in the year 2000, which is in violation of the recommended three years for the revision of national curriculums in developing countries (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2011).

The curriculum is not only outdated, but a **strong male-biased influence** in Lebanese textbooks which have many **stereotypical images of women in various social and vocational roles** (Altman, 2019).

In addition, there are multiple inaccuracies and inconsistencies in key books that contribute to youth’s sense of identity, specifically history and civics books. One of the youth participants in FGDs, who is also a teacher, pointed out that the Lebanese civics books from grades 9 to 12 are almost the same, and

they contain ideal scenarios that do not reflect the actuality of civic life in Lebanon. Also, a notable Lebanese Historian Charles Hayek pointed out multiple inaccuracies in the Lebanese history book. For example, the history books of grades 9 and 12 include references stating that the Soviet Union took part in World War One, when in fact, there was no Soviet Union, as the Bolshevik revolution was still ongoing during the closure of the war (Sarde After Dinner, 2021).

Other criticisms mentioned by youth, is **the curriculum’s focus on information retention rather than critical thinking**. This is particularly evident for youth who have taken the required official examinations of grade 9 and 12, where students are directed to study previous exams and memorize the types of question that will arise, and apply the same method of solving.

The education system in Lebanon is indoctrination and does not support the student’s abilities (theories, lessons and exams only).

Lebanese Male, 25

Two certificates, the one of the 9th grade (brevet), and the senior year, have no use. They’re mentally draining for nothing and I did not benefit from them. The way they teach us is bad, because they care more about grades than actual learning...

Lebanese Female, 17, Saïda

Participants also called for **more diversity and tailoring of the curriculum to their individual needs**. They specifically mentioned the need for more focus on personal development, sports and arts.

They just make you memorize things without letting you reflect on the information, there should be oral exams and add arts and sports classes. The student isn’t a robot and they should focus more about the student’s personality.

Lebanese Female, 19, Jezzine

Youth mentioned the need to update the curriculum, move away from traditional studies and follow the advancement of education around the world. One young adult teacher said “[the curriculum] **must change and introduce life skills into it and teach students things that benefit them in their lives. courses that prepare them for life must be included in order to become useful members of society**”.

Specifically for disabled youth, participants in most groups mentioned that the education system is good¹³. This generally positive reaction may relate to the fact that disabled **youth use a functional academic program** that focuses on life and social skills development; thus, more tailored to the specific needs of the students. Students are taught with a modified curriculum that is aligned with their needs and difficulty.

Additional weaknesses in the curriculum were highlighted by the key informants. Of them, is the noticeable **gap between the market need and the educational system/curriculum**, which is ever-growing without proper orientation and career guidance at high-school and university levels. In addition, informants decried the fact that the **curriculum does not teach students basic 21st century skills**, especially computer literacy which are needed in today’s technology reliant workplaces (ECOSOC, 2019). In general, the **shift to online offered an opportunity for the education system to develop and reform**, however there are still various challenges at the level of the infrastructure, connectivity (internet and electricity), skills, costs at the level of students and teachers.

They fill it up with stuff that you will never ever use.

Member of the Youth Branch of a Political Party

The deterioration of the quality of education in public institutes may lead to an educational gap between socio-economic classes

A recent study (CLS & LAU, 2020) indicated that three quarters of individuals from low socio-economic classes have dropped out of education. This is compared with only a 10% drop out rate among higher socio-economic classes. As such, this supports a shared sentiment by many youth and key informants, that **education is soon to become a privilege**.

The problem is that education in Lebanon isn’t a right, it’s a privilege.

Key Informant, Youth Branch of a Political Party

Many of the participating Lebanese youth (especially those who are among higher socio-economic classes) view the public school system as belonging to underprivileged Lebanese and Syrian/Palestinian refugees. Only 5% of low-income families send their children to private schools (ECOSOC, 2019). However, with the devaluation of the local currency and the increase in costs of education, more and more youth are shifting from private to public. This will create strain on an already fragile system, and trigger competition over limited spaces. Incidentally, some Lebanese youth mentioned in the FGDs that this will create conflict, as public schools are already overloaded with refugee students.

In addition, both youth and key informants pointed out disparities between public education institutes (which are viewed as underfunded and ill-equipped) and private education institutes which are more expensive and not accessible to all. Therefore, as more youth rely on public education, it may lead to broadening the knowledge gap between rich and poor students in Lebanon, which is currently at 45% (ECOSOC, 2019), and is already among the largest gaps in the region.

In order to avoid this, key informants stressed the **need for reform and rehabilitation in public educational institutes**. This will enable them to meet the increased demand, and provide high-quality education to youth regardless of their socio-economic standing.

NGL recommendations, especially those supporting enhancing the role of TVET institutes, are viewed positively by the majority of participants, who also doubted their feasibility given the current situation.

While the offered recommendations were well-met by youth, the majority felt that much more can be done to enhance education in Lebanon. On the other hand, many also doubted the feasibility of any recommendations given the worsening state of the country.

The chief demand of youth from all backgrounds was to **enhance career counseling at high school and university entry levels**. This would support the second NGL recommendation (linking majors offered with market demand), which many youth stressed on its importance.

The second recommendation is very important. Some fields are saturated, each graduate stays unemployed at least for 3 years.

Lebanese Female, 20, Nabatieh

A specific demand was made by youth from rural areas, who demanded to have more majors available to them closer to home. They view that they are disenfranchised from accessing quality education, as they have to incur transportation of accommodation costs if they wish to pursue a major not available close to home.

An emerging recommendation from many youth, is to **enhance the reputation of TVET institutes**, which are commonly viewed by society as a last resort “for those who fail”. Youth and key informants both saw the importance of this, in order to encourage more youth to pursue vocational education, as the market is becoming saturated with countless numbers of youth holding higher education degrees, but no jobs.

13 > It should be noted that many of the disabled participants attend tailored programmes with local and international NGOs that meet their individual educational needs.

Daily lives of youth in Lebanon - Employment

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17% of youth surveyed unemployed (other studies show 35% for those with HE degrees) • 74 % believe good jobs are usually centred in Beirut • Low wages and long hours noted across all youth as key challenges in employment • 64% of youth enthusiastic to look for job opportunities • 2/3 of youth interested in setting up own business • 49% note lack of experience/skills and 46% state see access to finances as barriers to self-employment • 71% of youth believe personal connections or Wasta more important than qualifications to succeed 	<p>Unemployment levels have assuredly gone up with the deterioration of the local economy. Latest numbers indicate that 42% of youth between the age of 24 and 29, and over half of those between 20 and 23 are unemployed (CLS & LAU, 2020).</p> <p>Vast majority of youth (in education and uneducated) are looking for part-time or full-time employment, to make extra income after the devaluation of the local currency.</p> <p>Most Lebanese youth are no longer attracted by the prospect of working in the public sector due to the devaluation of compensation packages.</p> <p>Common and group specific challenges for employment have increased. Financial constrains in starting own business, and “Wasta” in getting employment are prime examples.</p>

With the deterioration of the economic situation, an overwhelming majority of youth¹⁴ regardless of educational status are looking for work. Educated youth have almost lost hope of finding any work, let alone in their major.

Educated youth who are looking for jobs all set a priority to find employment related to their majors. Others are looking for jobs to boost their experience or to develop their CVs. However, they are unanimously pessimistic of finding any sort of employment, given the limited market opportunities.

If I find a job in my specialization or major, even if with a low salary, of course, I will accept it to gain experience and increase the pension over time. But in these situations, it is difficult for me to find work within my specialist. In the education system, especially in the university, what we study, we do not use it in our working life. For that reason, we have to search for work related to our skills.
Lebanese Female, 21, Hermel

Given that pessimism, educated youth (particularly those of lower socio-economic classes) would often end the discussion of employment by saying that they will work anything as long as the wage is sufficient, and/or in “fresh” USD¹⁵.

While there is *limited accurate data on unemployment in Lebanon*, available secondary literature and triangulation of different sources justifies youth’s pessimism. A study conducted in November 2020, by the Center for Lebanese Studies and the Lebanese American university, shows that 42% of youth between the age of 24 and 29, and over half of those between 20 and 23 are unemployed (CLS & LAU, 2020).

A 2019 study commissioned by ECOSOC to provide recommendation for the Lebanese government, shows that the *economic growth and job creation in Lebanon were hindered given the cyclical and structural unemployment*, affected by the political and social issues in the country. Moreover, a growing gap between the labor supply and labor demand in the market was observed making the situation more dire in terms of youth employment, inclusion and new skills in demand (ECOSOC, 2019).

Moreover, as seen in the earlier section, key informants, youth and secondary literature indicate that the *education system is currently inadequate and ineffective in helping to tackle unemployment* in the country.

Emerging Finding: A once attractive employment prospect, the public sector no longer pulls youth as an optimal career choice with the devaluation of salaries and pensions.

An emerging finding in the Next Steps Lebanon, is the *decreased willingness and desire of Lebanese youth to be employed in the public sector*. Employment in the public sector was an attractive prospect to many youth, given the stability and pension received after retirement. This was particularly true for security forces, who have a lower retirement age, based on years of service (minimum 18). With the devaluation of the local currency, public sector wages and pensions have lost their value.

Opportunities are almost non-existent after the revolution. Before the economic crisis, if we had a job in the public sector, there was pension and compensation today that had no value [referring to the devaluation of the Lebanese Pounds].
Lebanese Male, 25, Zahle

Most participants mentioned that creating new job opportunities in the public sector is not recommended at this stage for various reasons: 1) No trust in the public sector; 2) Current economic crisis and the need to reduce governmental costs.

14 > It should be mentioned that there are some isolated cases of youth who want to focus on solely their education (youth from higher socio-economic classes) or leave the country.

15 > “Fresh” USD is the term given to all USD transfer made from abroad to Lebanon after the October 2019, when banks restricted all withdrawals in form of USD. This is the only form of USD payment that can be drawn in cash from banks, and thus is a form of payment that withstands the ongoing devaluation of local currency.

Self-employment is an attractive prospect for many youth, but capital and legal limitations are the main barriers.

When youth were asked of the prospect of starting their own business, many expressed their enthusiasms and some gave examples of business ideas and niches they'd like to explore, mostly related to their majors, or general business ventures in tourism and food and beverage industries. However, with the devaluation of the local currency, limited job opportunities **and absence of start-up loans and incubators**, youth have little hope of realizing their aspirations. Some key informants also noted that the incubation of youth led small and medium enterprises is an opportunity for the economic growth of the country, and a critical response to the deteriorating livelihoods of youth.

Unemployed youth have little hope of finding work, or starting their own business, with the main challenges mentioned: clientelism (Wasta), the economic crisis, COVID and the lack of 21st century skills among youth.

Prior to discussing these challenges in detail, all except the lack of 21st century skills, are aligned with the same barriers to livelihood in a recent UNICEF study (UNICEF, 2020).

More specifically, the prime issue in finding equitable employment as described by youth, are **clientelism ("Wasta") and nepotism**. Hiring in public and private sphere are often related to a person's knowledge of influential politicians or businessmen. Clientelism is a recurrent theme that youth in Lebanon face, as is evident by its mention under almost all modules of the study. "Wasta" was not only described as a barrier to employment, but as a detrimental issue to society.

The existence of close connections and Wasta destroy everything we have. It overlooks candidates' knowledge, education and competence. Wasta will destroy everything in Lebanon.

Lebanese Female, 23

As for the **economic crisis**, it has led to rampant unemployment (as discussed earlier) and led to a more competitive job market. This, when coupled with the devaluation of the local currency that led to decreased wages, has further hindered youth's access to the labor market. A significant but not major proportion of youth expressed their hopes in starting their own business. However, those who had a significant capital stored in the bank in USD are now no longer able to withdraw it, and others without capital will have a near impossible job of finding investors. Even employed youth talked about the hardship they are currently facing, due to lower wages and higher demands from employers.

It's because of the Lira, we are almost working for free.

Lebanese Female with disability, 26

Discrimination by gender, nationality, ability and place of residence present a barrier to the employment of many youth.

Discriminatory employment practices and laws affect women, persons with disability and refugees residing in Lebanon. As mentioned earlier, female youth face stereotypical gender roles that seek to either limit their role solely to domestic duties, or direct them to be employed in the "what are viewed as traditionally female sectors, like teaching and nursing.

Discrimination is also faced by Palestinians and Syrians, at the level of labour laws and employment practices. The **labour law which** is particularly impactful for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, as youth recurrently mentioned how it limits their allowed areas of employment. More specifically, participating Palestinian youth hold many undergraduate and graduate degrees that can be employed in Lebanon (engineering, social workers etc.). However, current laws inhibit them from working in these sectors. **Discriminatory practices by employers** lead to refugees being overlooked in favor of Lebanese candidates, while others

exploit the refugee status to offer lower wages when compared with Lebanese employees.

When asked, Lebanese youth had an evenly split view of the experiences faced by refugees in Lebanon. Whilst some said that Syrians and Palestinians faced greater issues in finding jobs due to restrictive laws, others said that it is easier as they accept lower wages, and opportunities are provided by NGOs.

Disabled youth also mentioned that they face discrimination, as some recounted instances where employers **did not hire them because of their disability**.

Youth from rural and remote areas also decried the fact the jobs are centralized in cities, similarly to desired majors. Key informants agreed that this decentralization is necessary, and would ease tensions and poverty.



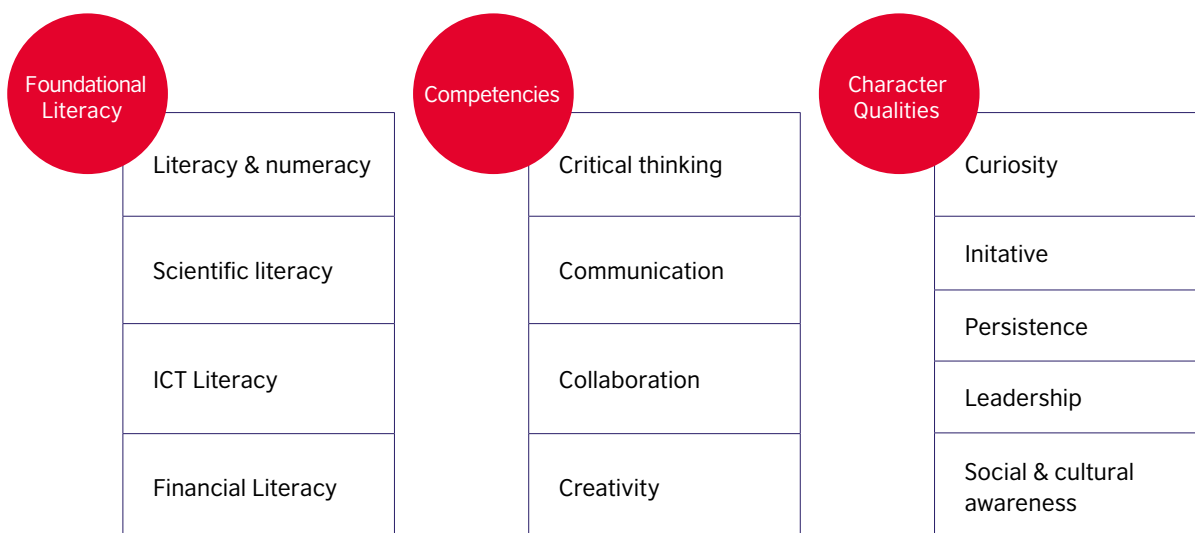
The development of 21st century skills among youth presents an opportunity for Lebanon to capitalize on emerging neighboring markets to create employment opportunities.

As mentioned in the education section, the current educational system does not foster the development of 21st century skills among youth. With the current economic crisis and the COVID-19

lockdown, key informants viewed that Lebanese youth’s most probable opportunities for quality employment (as mentioned by key informants) is remote work that can be done for firms and companies that are based abroad. More specifically, key informants suggested to *position Lebanon as a remote hub for Information and Communication Technologies* to support the rapid economic occurring in the Arab Gulf

countries (i.e. UAE and KSA). To do so, Lebanese youth must be technologically literate to make it in the high-demanding global market. However, technological literacy among youth is limited, as most have little to no exposure during their time at school and in university. More specifically, the graph below presents a breakdown of the needed 21st century skills, split by literacy, competencies and character traits:

Figure 2: 21st Century skills essential for youth to access employment markets



NGL recommendations to boost youth participation in the labour market viewed positively by the majority of participants, who also doubted their feasibility given the current situation.

Additional recommendations were made by youth, fitting the specific challenges they face. Lebanese youth expressed the need to have jobs that fit the schedules of university students. Refugees requested for clear *guidelines to be put in place to*

decrease discrimination in recruitment processes. Disabled youth added that the government should include their needs in economic planning. They also suggested to create a *platform to advertise job opportunities in the public sector.*

Youth civic and political engagement

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substantial increase in political engagement since 17 October 2019 uprising. Youth confident in themselves as agents of change, with desire to engage in political discussions and processes. 	<p>Political engagement has increased significantly since October 2019 uprising, but dipped dramatically after the Beirut Blast.</p> <p>Youth mostly feel oppressed by government and society, and are not confident in their ability as agents of change.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low trust in current political system, government continues in addition to perception that communities are not supportive of youth. Citizenship laws restrict rights of numerous groups. 	<p>Youth still do not feel empowered by government or society to take part in political life, as they often hinder their participation.</p> <p>Refugees youth expressed their willingness to contribute to civic life, but are hindered by laws and racism.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Youth Policy (NYP) of 2012 has had little affect and substantial proportions of youth believe religion and state should be separate. 	<p>The NYP 2012 is almost completely unknown among youth from all background (except for one participant).</p> <p>The majority of youth identify that the link between religion and state is detrimental to the progress of the country.</p>

Most Lebanese youth want to take part in political life, but feel “oppressed” and that they cannot influence the change they would like to see with the current system, even in the upcoming 2022 election.

This varied across different age groups of Lebanese youth. Most participants aged 15 to 18 agreed that they have limited ability to influence political life, as they cannot vote until 21. Also, some were discouraged to take part in other forms, because they believe that their influence is minimal with the current “ruling class”.

On the other hand, most older Lebanese youth were enthusiastic about taking part in the next elections, viewing their roles as integral to influence change. However, there was a strong sentiment of *hopelessness for change through other methods of political activism* (i.e. protests, advocacy etc.), and especially through the 2022 elections. Most youth did not take the topic of upcoming elections to heart, and youth below the legal voting age of 21, but over the age of 18 decried the fact that their voices will be excluded from the election process.

I have little motivation since my voice will not be heard. My role and that of other young people is to provide awareness to everyone, in order to show the wrongdoings in the political system.
Lebanese Female, 19, Chouf

In addition, Syrian youth share strikingly similar opinions to Lebanese youth, regarding the political climate in Lebanon. They show a great willingness to participate, and would enjoy being actors of change in Lebanese society. However, systemic and community discrimination remains as the main barrier.

Similarly, Palestinian youth have a great desire to take part in political life in Lebanon, and most expressed a strong desire to contribute to the growth of the country.

If we had the capacity to vote, we’d gladly participate in the political life. If youth participated in a healthy political life, this will motivate them to stay in Lebanon and to support their parents.
Palestinian Female, 20, Tyre

However, political participation is a sensitive topic among Palestinian youth who are aware of how their participation

may be used for political gain. With the government overlooking (and at times inhibiting) their possible contributions to society, some participating Palestinian youth described how they contribute to Lebanese society. This is mainly done through civil society and non-governmental channels, where Palestinians either work or take part in discussions with.

I would never support the government. I always support the people in a more subtle way. As a social worker I train the youth on not using drugs, I help the prisoners who don’t have lawyer by defending their case and hiring them the lawyer, especially those who are under 18.

Palestinian Female, 19, Tyre

As for disabled youth, there was an overall split in half between youth who are motivated to take part in the public life and who are not motivated. The same goes for their belief in the role of youth in making/influencing change.



Emerging Finding: The October 17 uprising triggered optimism among many youth in their ability to change, and many were early supporters. However, many lost hope as the situation continued to worsen.

The October 17 uprising gave motivation to youth in their ability to influence change. Lebanese youth from all age groups described how they took part in the early protests across Lebanon, with some taking part in dialogues and discussions to enhance political awareness. However, this enthusiasm *wore off over time and with the deepening crises*. As such, current sentiments are split across two extremes, with some still motivated while others see that *“the revolution has failed”*. Youth who expressed their continued motivation were extremely passionate in their wording, mentioning that *“they will never give up”*. Notably, youth from the North (Tripoli, Zgharta) showed a higher propensity and willingness to take part in political life, when compared with other areas.

According to key informants, since 17 October, the role youth play in the political sphere has increased, with great communication between youth who were able to organize themselves well in the protests. However, most informants fear that youth’s enthusiasm and energy has died down after the Beirut Blast and the severe devaluation of the local currency. As noted earlier, the views of youth in Lebanon are influenced by the context around them, and if the crises were to deepen further, then their motivation and confidence is projected to decrease.

Almost all youth agreed that they do not feel empowered by their community, and the political system to influence change. Many agreed that community, government and political parties often acts as barriers to youth’s political participation. However, this has not stopped some youth from taking active roles in responding to crises.

This was particularly pronounced among Lebanese youth who live in areas with strong political affiliation to any of the political parties currently part of the government. Also, many youth described how their *parents discourage their political participation*, in fear for their safety.

However, *this did not hinder youth from taking on active roles in responding to the many crises that Lebanon is facing*. For example, the majority of the Beirut Blast clean-up efforts were done by youth led efforts (institutional and individual). Moreover, many youth across Lebanon took part in relief efforts, providing aid to the most vulnerable families who have fallen deeper into poverty due to the pandemic.

Syrian and Palestinian youth similarly do not feel empowered, and are discouraged and demotivated to take part in political life. Most mentioned that despite the

fact that they cannot participate, they are still influenced by the decisions of those who vote. Therefore, their exclusion from participation leaves them helpless and unable to demand for their rights.

Almost no youth (except one participant) were aware of the National Youth Policy of 2012, but the recommendations were well met. Many decried the fact that almost none were achieved, and few will be achieved if the situation continues to deteriorate in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, all key informants were aware of the NYP 2021, yet most of them mentioned that the policy was not implemented and stopped at the level of planning. Others who took part in its development thought that it helped build a generation of politically engaged youth and are now playing a significant role in the uprising. This is in allusion to the youth shadow government that was formed, and the diverse political discussions between politicians and youth that were facilitated by the British Council.

NGL Recommendations were found to be feasible, and youth stressed their importance.

Further recommendations offered by participating youth to enhance their political participation include increasing engagement with the government at local levels through municipalities. Among refugees, the recommendations prompted a discussion on nationality law (i.e. allowing Lebanese mothers to pass on the nationality to their children). Refugee youth with Lebanese mothers are aware that giving nationalities to Syrians and Palestinians was a hotly debated topic that is heavily politicized due to perceived implications on sectarian quotas. As such, views on this matter were divided, with some believing that Lebanese need to take their rights first, while others viewed that these are human rights that must be met immediately.

Effects of violence and conflict on youth in Lebanon

NGL Initial Findings	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of youth surveyed agree that generation that lived through the civil war have different views of society to their own • 33% agree that young people in Lebanon are still affected by the civil war 	<p>Throughout the Next Steps Lebanon study, youth themselves highlighted how their views differ from the older generation.</p> <p>Youth's behaviors, attitudes and inter-action amongst each other are still influenced by civil war mentalities passed on by their parents and political parties remaining from the war.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58% believe tensions worsened over the past 10 years • 52% believe tensions between different sects are getting worse 	<p>Sectarian tension was not significantly noted among youth, nor by key informants.</p> <p>However, new tensions have arisen owing to the increased crime rate, and on the political scale, where the main tension are now between those who support the "revolution", and those who support the "ruling parties".</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment and poverty seen as key drivers that cause young people to become involved in armed violence and conflict 	<p>Unemployment and poverty are seen as key drivers, but youth also emphasized how indoctrination and societal influences also lead to youth joining armed groups.</p>

Youth in Lebanon from all backgrounds have each faced at least one form of armed conflict or violence which have affected them physically, mentally and emotionally. The deepening crises are resulting in increased conflict that will continue to affect youth.

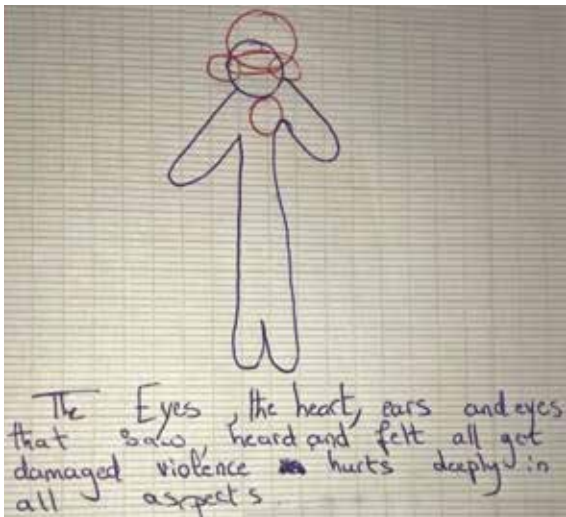
To assess how youth are impacted by conflict and violence in Lebanon, the body map exercise was used. Youth recollected how they were affected by conflict that they have heard of and/or witnessed first-hand, including but not limited to: the civil war, the recurrent engagements with Israel (1996, 2006), bombing and assassinations (starting in 2004), internal socio-political clashes (May 2011, Bab Al Tabanneh and Jabal Mohsen Conflict), conflict with terrorists groups (Arsal, Saida, Nahr Al Bared etc.), violence in protests.

From a physical standpoint, youth reported that they are affected through physical damage themselves and by observing the disability and pain that conflict causes on others. From a mental standpoint, youth discussed traumatic memories, mental health issues and being vigilant and afraid all the time. In addition, the youth's eyes, ears, and mouth are also affected, as they saw many shocking and violent scenes, heard loud and scary noises or shouts, which resulted in making people in general and youth in specific to say insults, unethical expressions, and incorrect declarations.





Figure 3: Response to the body map exercise mapping how violence affects youth, submitted by Lebanese Female aged 19



Particularly for Lebanese youth, most recalled that **traumatic memories and experience have been passed on to them by their parents**. For example, many viewed that their parents are overprotective, afraid of other sects (and the areas affiliated with them) and harbor deep resentment for people from other sects due to the civil war.

For Syrian youth, almost all highlighted that violence they witness or hear about in Lebanon triggers mental health problems, by reminding them of traumatic events they faced in Syria. Meanwhile, Palestinian youth expressed more mental effects of conflict.

It could be possible that because of all the conflicts, our minds got confused. Everything that happened made the society unmotivated, therefore everyone became lazy. Just as if everyone had broken hands, they were unable to do anything.
Palestinian Female, 21, Tyre

While not all disabled youth were able to respond to this line of inquiry, the ones who were able to answer agreed that incidents of violence affect youth. Some mentioned that it disturbs the body: headaches, epilepsy, mental and psychological disorders (PTSD) being physically hit. They also added that violence makes them vigilant and afraid all the time.

Also, the numerous **political and security shocks** which have occurred since October 2019 have further destabilized youth's lives. According to a recent study conducted by Plan International to assess the lives of adolescents in the Bekaa, **exposure rates to exploitation, harassment, abuse and child labor have increased significantly**. Also, there has been an alarming increase of early marriage when compared with previous years (Plan International, 2021). This distress was conveyed by youth participants in Baalbek-Hermel and the north of Lebanon, who reported increased stress from being exposed to armed conflict involving militias and tribes, or as youth described them: "loose weapons".

Youth agree that political and sectarian group interests, perpetuated by politicians and clergymen, are the main trigger for conflict.

Youth from all backgrounds expressed **deep frustration with the current ruling class, identifying how they build upon sectarian sentiments to drive the Lebanese people apart**. Behavioral research supports the fact that in contentious political arenas, **the stronger allegiance to group identities gets the intensity of inter-group conflict also increases** (Albert, C. D., 2009).

Many youth from different religious background spoke of a perceived agreement between clergymen and politicians, who they view as having a common goal to keep sectarianism splits in the Lebanese society.

The main triggers of tension are the religious men who use religion as an excuse to exploit the system and form a crowd.

Lebanese Male, 18, Aley

More specifically, youth from areas who have witnessed intense political fighting, such as Tripoli, noted that conflicts are funded by politicians. They added that being in an area going through such a conflict leaves them with little room to live a dignified life:

If you oppose [armed groups], then you are an agent. If you support them, you'll be uncomfortable deep inside. If you say the truth, you'll be murdered. If you shut up, you'll face remorse.

Lebanese Male, 26, Tripoli

Similarly, to the perceived economic manipulation by political parties mentioned earlier, youth from underprivileged areas (i.e. Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel and Tripoli) reported that politicians exploit the poverty of the population, to entice them into conflict for the promise of pay.

Wherever there is poverty, tension resides. Being poor makes people blind and triggers them to do harmful acts.

Key Informant, Local CSO

Meanwhile, in the south of the country, participants noted instances of family conflict triggered by political disputes. One participant recounted a story in their village, where a father attempted to murder his son who was expressing opposing political views to that of his father. This brings insight to another trigger of conflict, which is the **persistence of sectarian mentalities from the civil war**, which are being passed down from the older generation to the youth of today.

As mentioned earlier, some youth and key informants noted that the only reason that **politicians use these tactics, is to create pockets of influence** where they are seen as the saviors (also noted earlier in Employment section). Moreover, many youth decried that the political parties in charge are influenced by foreign countries, and are implementing agendas that are not Lebanese.

We are still the victims of agendas that control the Lebanese decision and parties are still mobilizing based on religion.

Key Informant, Youth Branch of a Political Party

Emerging Finding: Economic inequality, discrimination and social media also contribute to conflict

The economic crisis may also contribute to **increased tension and conflict between social groups**. This was noted among youth participants from the North of Lebanon, who expressed their dissatisfaction with refugees, as they perceived them to be “taking the jobs meant for Lebanese”. This sentiment was mirrored by Syrian and Palestinian refugees, who reported greater discrimination as the situation worsens in Lebanon.

Notably, Syrian refugees made a clear comparison between the situation in Lebanon and that in Syria before the civil war.

Basically, I know about this due to war in Syria. [Politicians] all want money and power to control us in a bad way. I guess most tension here is in the North of Lebanon due to the poverty there...

Female Syrian, 23, Baalbek

Key informants provided an additional trigger to violence, that was not mentioned by youth participants. Informants noted that **social media may have reflected negatively on youth**, as violence became more visible and news spread faster. This is supported by secondary literature, which shows that the online environment means that participants are more likely to be exposed to negative views, and even more likely to communicate with less discretion, tolerance and politeness (Oringderff, 2004). Moreover, with increasingly uncertain circumstances, the population in Lebanon has become influenced by “fake news” often disseminated via social media channels without clear citations from verifiable sources. The aforementioned need for 21st century skills include the need for critical thinking and social and cultural awareness, which would **empower youth to better understand news and identify inaccuracies**.

Emerging Finding: While youth have noted an increase in tension after the October 17 uprising, it is more related to political affiliation than religious belief.

It should be noted that both the majority of youth and key informants reported **increased tensions after the October 17 uprising**. However, these tensions were not along the normal political and sectarian lines, but were **between “revolutionaries” and supporters of the “ruling political parties”**.

Unemployment and poverty are seen as key drivers to joining armed groups, but youth also emphasized how indoctrination and societal influences also lead to youth joining armed groups.

Youth and key informants mostly agreed that **poverty and unemployment area pushing youth towards armed groups** who will offer money and power. These are not available to youth due to the economic crisis, that fact that their

parents cannot support them, and that they are unable to access jobs. As such, multiple key informants expect youth to adopt negative coping mechanism, to please/rewards themselves through relying on violence and armed conflict.

As mentioned earlier, **youth do not feel that political parties are averse to using poverty to push people into conflict**. Many examples were provided from underprivileged areas, such as Tripoli, where politicians are speculated to be the main source of funding behind conflicting armed groups, in two of the poorest neighborhoods.

In addition, youth are aware of **how society can influence the decisions and action of youth**, particularly the older generation which passes down war time ideologies and divisive mentalities (discussed earlier in detail). Some youth even compared this to brainwashing, that ultimately leads to youth joining armed groups. Participants mentioned that some youth (especially in underprivileged areas) fall into indoctrination by political parties, often supported by their parents.

Another mentioned reason for joining armed conflict is peer pressure.

Participants from both genders agreed that this accounts mainly for male youth, who are influenced by the masculine culture which values strength. Therefore, many youth fall into armed groups seeking a feeling of strength and belonging.

Fear is the main cause, the strong kills the weak this is why they seek to get protected from such groups. The law in Lebanon doesn't work so the people have to take their right by weapon forces sometimes. Another reason is immaturity and toxic friends who brainwash the person to enter such groups.

Palestinian Female, 26, Tyre

Syrian youth drew comparisons between youth who joined armed groups in Lebanon and Syria. Many gave examples from their peers back in Syria, who joined armed groups in search for financial stability. They saw these incidents increasing as the economic situation deteriorated, culminating in the Syrian war.

Conclusion & Discussion

This research assessed the relevance of the previously conducted NGL research, in addition to identifying new emerging findings to inform British Council's work with youth and other stakeholders.

Overall, many of the findings of the initial study remain valid, however a **negative trend of change** was observed, particularly in the daily lives of youth and in their global outlook and future aspirations. This is most probably attributed to the complexity of the crisis, the worsening economic crisis, and the ongoing socio-political crisis, which leaves the country in a state of freefall. This in-turn has left youth fearing for their futures, and uncertain of what next steps they can take in life.

Another observed common trend is that **deepening crises are leading to a more grim outlook on life**. More recently, the economic crisis, combined with the negative effect of COVID is revealing a battle over opportunities and resources between youth from different nationalities and between youth from same areas. This battle is far from being purely economic, as showcased earlier, dire economic situations often lead to increased socio-political tensions and can contribute to resorting to violent extremism.

However, it should be noted that during these difficult times for the country, the research effort itself and the FGDs held

with youth were well met by participants. Many explained that the **sessions offered the opportunity for a youth in Lebanon to voice their thoughts, views and opinions safely and comfortably**. Despite the fact that identifying and engaging youth was challenging, all **participants did not want the sessions to end** and were grateful for involving them. The data collection team noticed that the **sessions gave youth room to "vent"** about issues they are facing across all aspects of their lives and their concerns.

Despite deteriorating conditions in the education, livelihood and political engagement of youth, there was a **strong sense of optimism triggered in youth by the October 17 uprising**. However, this like other findings presented earlier, is subject to change, as youth's perspectives are fluid depending on the context.

Overall, it was noticeable that **youth's views remain fluid in certain topics** such as their identity, their belonging, their civic engagement and political views. A comparison of this study's findings with literature covering the period between the initial study and this study, as well as inputs provided by key informants, show that the **contextual changes around youth highly affect**

their perspectives. This is particularly true for matters related to national identity, optimism for the future and political and civic engagement. More specifically and going back to the optimism generated after the October 17 uprising, it was evident through the findings that it was replaced with disappointment among most youth.

In addition, an overview of the findings shows that **while youth differ in socio-political and civic views, they are united across most aspects in lives**. Interestingly, **youth from different gender, disabilities and nationalities had less diverging opinions** when it came to their daily lives (i.e: education and employment), future aspirations, global outlook on the situation in Lebanon and the key sources/ triggers of issues.

More specifically, youth presented the following common views:

- The majority of youth from all nationalities, socio-economic status and religions see no future in Lebanon and wish or are planning to immigrate;
- Religion and politics are almost unanimously cited as key factors for division and triggers of conflict;

- Clientelism and nepotism (Wasta) was observed across all aspects related to youth's lives, particularly in accessing employment opportunities, services and resources;
- The current educational curriculum is in need of reform;
- Almost all youth would benefit from the *development of marketable skills, particularly 21st century skills* (discussed above in detail) allowing them to better compete in the local and international job market;
- Parents' effect and influence on youth's lives particularly in relation to the fear from the "other" which is associated with war memories.

However, they presented *more differing views related to political and civic life*. This was observed first regarding the role of youth in political and civic engagement, where youth are divided primarily between those who remain enthusiastic to continue the change triggered by the October 17 uprising, and those who have lost hope.

Recommendations

The recommendations that arose from the initial NGL study were presented to youth and key informants to reflect upon and offer adjustments, alternatives or additional recommendations.

The overall sentiment noted among the majority is that the provided recommendations were found to be relevant and able to address the issues faced, but not feasible in the current political climate.

The table below lays out the initial recommendations, and compares it with what was gathered from participants:

NGL Initial Recommendation	Next Steps Lebanon Findings
<p>Recommendations for Improving access to and quality of education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued development of and investment in public education to increase trust in public education. HE and TVET sectors relate offered programs to demand of the local economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth expressed the need for career counseling in high school and at the entry of universities. Investments should be made to strengthen public education systems, and make it more accessible to vulnerable and marginalized groups. The current curriculum does not offer youth concrete 21st century technological skills and proficiency. The need to strengthen the reputation (i.e. change the misconception that it is for “failures”) and role of TVET institutes, and linking them with the demands of the local market has been re-emphasized by participants.
<p>Recommendations for supporting youth participation in the labour market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upcoming economic policies and international support efforts should explicitly consider and include youth voices and ideas. Public sector jobs should be further advertised with youth to encourage and provide space for youth to be involved in local and national level public bodies and government; International stakeholders should continue and expand their work to develop young people’s entrepreneurial skills and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informants recommended to enhance youth’s 21st century skills, positioning them for employment with businesses from abroad; Public sector jobs are no longer an attractive opportunity for youth, and their proliferation and expansion is discouraged given the current climate and fears of further waste in government resources; International stakeholders have an opportunity to shift their programming to empower youth in Lebanon to contribute to the recovery of their country.
<p>Recommendations for pursuing effective pathways for community and political engagement with youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of horizontal and transparent communication channels between youth, communities and national government; Increased opportunities for political engagement at municipal and national level; Civic laws and rights better communicated and understood, such as revising civic and history curriculums to develop shared understanding of rights and history; Basic rights and civil status laws must be revisited ad revised enabling youth to have equal access to services and rights, regardless of gender or nationality (citizenship laws for women, employment laws for Palestinians and Syrians). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth currently feel an overall discontent from political and civic engagement; Clear lack of distrust and unwillingness to communicate with government has been observed among most youth; Current history and civic curriculum filled with inaccuracies and present a false idealistic narrative; Youth continue to feel marginalized by numerous laws, including: voting age at 21, the fact that mothers cannot given nationalities to their children (particularly an issue among refugees) and employment laws for refugees.

Given the above compilation of major observed trends, it should be noted that *what unites youth far exceeds what divides them*. As such, any future programming, policy decisions or legislation can capitalize on the common aspects of youth in Lebanon's lives. This sets the basis for a **renewed social contract**, where responsibilities and roles of both people and government are clearly set, and aligned with the needs and expectations of youth, and by extension the majority of the population share. This would require coordinated and targeted efforts by youth themselves, the government, as well as local and international non-profit actors.

As such, the following recommendations have been tailored to the attention of the three main stakeholders who can influence youth's lives and contribute to the establishment of a renewed social contract:

Recommendations for educational institutes and youth groups/ associations:

- Focus on developing marketable skills that youth can apply in the local, regional and global market (i.e. technological literacy, foreign language proficiency etc.);

- Promote a secular, civic, and humanistic view of society, by discussing social issues with youth outside of a group identity lens;
- Promote diverse and open inter-youth dialogue, to overcome societal beliefs (often passed by parents) that influence: youth's perception of people from other socio-demographic background, their decision-making processes and their general outlook on society;
- Support mental health awareness of youth, and promote the development of positive coping mechanisms.

Recommendations for the government:

- Facilitating and encouraging local development initiatives in under-privileged areas through local authorities, partnerships with NGOs (local and international) and private sector initiatives (i.e: incubators);
- Implement inclusion of disabled youth practices in all public spaces, institutes and facilities, particularly education;
- Secure and facilitate agreements with neighboring countries witnessing an economic rise (i.e. UAE, KSA etc.) to attract foreign investments, and position Lebanon as a regional hub for outsourcing services (i.e. customer service, IT support etc.).

Recommendations for local and international non-profit actors:

- Mainstreaming mental health awareness and activities for the development of positive coping mechanisms in all relevant programming targeting youth;
- Design social cohesion programme that builds upon the common beliefs, traditions and values that are shared by all youth in Lebanon regardless of nationality race, religion, ethnicity, etc. This includes social tradition, food, common interest in activities among others;
- Supporting the public education sector given the shift from private to public schools as more and more families cannot afford tuition fees and with the observed increase in drop outs (specifically for Lebanese youth- new trend);
- Provide more inclusive opportunities for disabled youth in education, employment and social cohesion activities;
- Design programmes focusing on youth's marketable skills, particularly 21st century technological literacy allowing them to compete with the local and regional market, and possible access jobs by remote as a response to the economic crisis and lack of job opportunities in Lebanon.



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Annexes

Annex A – Research Methodology & Sampling

Annex B – Data collection tools (FGD & KII guide)

Annex C – List of Gateways

Annex D – Infographics

Annex E – Data Sets & Means of Verification

For access to Annex B,C,D,E please contact the British Council at researchglobal@britishcouncil.org



Annex A

Methodology

The research methodology utilizes qualitative methods, **both focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs)**, to capture subjective narrative input from research participants. The methods are design to disseminate the initial findings of the research, and encourage participants to share their perspective on the life of youth in Lebanon.

Accessing youth

Youth participating in this research were identified using several gateways covering all the areas in Lebanon. 179 were contacted and comprised of scout associations, religious youth groups, university clubs, local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), international NGOs, capacity building hubs, and sports clubs. Out of 179 contacted gateways, 36 were responsive and provided the data collection teams with lists of youth (Annex C: List of gateways). To avoid bias and a concentration of similar profiles, the team used a snow-ball approach and asked youth to refer three other youth who have a different background from their network.

For youth with disabilities, participants were recruited using the purposive sampling and the snowball sampling. Participants were composed of youth from the same NGOs who are acquaintances. They have met before but do not have any close relationships and so, they can be comfortable while interacting in a permissive, non- threatening environment in order to avoid the fear to speak out in a crowd (Barrett and Kirk 2000).

An overall observation for youth participants is that there was a **general hesitation initially to join the FGDs**. However, at the end of each sessions, most if not all mentioned enjoying it and wanting to keep the conversation on-going. Several FGDs took up to two hours as participants wanted to discuss certain topics and provide further input. From a gender perspective, **youth female participants were more interested to join than their male counterparts**. Additionally, they were very vocal and engaging during the FGDs.

For youth PwDs, participants had a range of disabilities including visual, physical, auditory, verbal and intellectual impairments, as well individuals with Downe Syndrome. As will be noted later, some participants were unable to provide input on certain questions that were beyond their capacities. Also, the sessions were facilitated by a **trained inclusion specialist**, who took numerous measures to assure the comfort of participants, and the smoothness of the session. More specifically, the facilitator ensured that the questions are conversational, clear, short and open-ended. If needed, the questions were made more concise. e.g. Also, if an activity needed mental representation (abstract thinking) the facilitator explained the exercise and clarified the activity by dividing it into a shorter task. When the discussion got under way, the facilitator kept the discussion on track to avoid digressions, or awkward silences by refocusing the topic and, engaging participants with probing and follow-up questions.

Desk Review

Prior to tool development, a **desk review** of the Next Generation Lebanon research documents was conducted, including the final report, quantitative tools, qualitative methodology, presentation of key findings etc. The desk review guided the development of the tools and sampling approach, to be aligned with the initial research. As such, the methods discussed in the follow section will present and re-assess the NGL initial findings with a sample of youth comparable with those targeted in the initial research.

The first stage of the research included a thorough desk review of different documents in relation to the initial NGL study. This allowed the team to understand the methods used, the context in which the study was conducted in and the sampling. Moreover, the team conducted a literature review to cover most recent updates in the context, identify scientific and academic findings relative to youth's behaviors (education, livelihood, political and civic engagement). More specifically, the desk review aimed to gather information regarding the context following October 17 revolution, COVID-19, the economic crisis (devaluation of the LBP) and Beirut Blast. As such, the newly developed tools were based on the outcome of the review to complement the ones from the initial NGL.

The desk review was carried out through the research timeframe, as it was needed to inform not only the inception phase but also support in analysis and triangulation of data.

Focus Group Discussions

Based on the existing five modules corresponding to the NGL research topics, a structured *focus group discussion* guide was developed centered on interactive and participatory exercises such as the infographics, the root cause tree, the body map exercise and the wheel of emotions (further details are found in Annex B – FGD and KII Guides). More specifically, the discussion guide was composed of five modules corresponding to the NGL research topics:

- Youth aspirations and global outlook;
- Youth identities in Lebanon;
- Daily lives of youth in Lebanon (Education and Employment);
- Youth civic and political engagement;
- Effects of violence and conflict on youth in Lebanon.

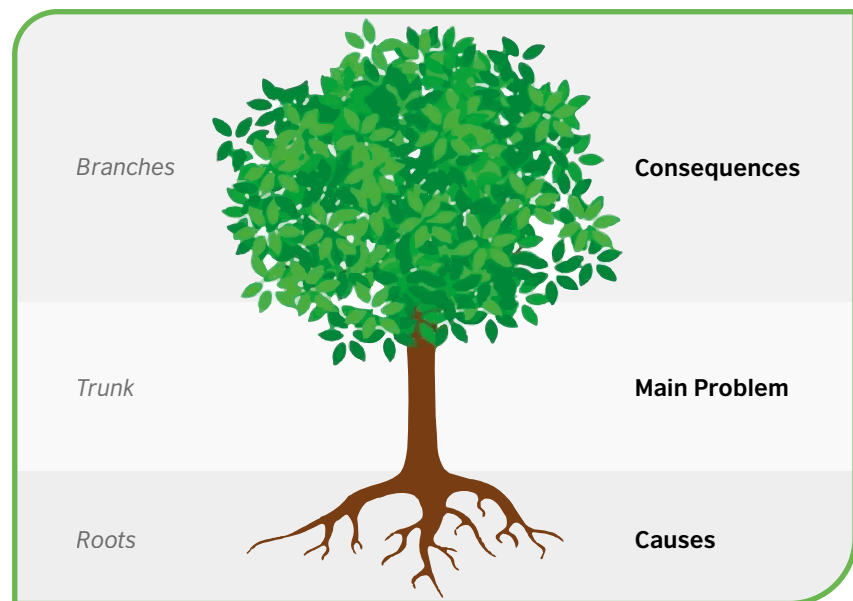
At the beginning of each module, an *infographic showcasing the main findings and recommendations* under each topic is presented. Facilitators will address any questions that the participants may have prior to starting the questions.

Once the findings are presented, a series of questions will engage the group to comment on what they have seen. The line of questioning is directed to identify converging and diverging findings. In addition, all questions will include probing guidance for facilitators, prompting *input on how youth's lives have changed after the successive crises* (October 2019 protests, COVID 19, Beirut Blast) that the country has faced.

In addition, the FGD session includes three interactive engagement activities, designed to encourage the participation of youth and young adults in research. The following activities were selected based on their ability to graphically interpret and map out participants' input, and provoke further reflection on the posed questions¹⁶:

1. Root Cause Tree Analysis Exercise:
Similarly, to a problem tree (see figure 1), participants are asked on a pen and paper (or whiteboard feature of video conferencing) to draw the causes for divisions in identities across Lebanon, starting from the *root cause*;

Figure 1: Root cause tree



2. **Body Map Exercise:** participants will be asked to draw a basic outline of a body, and are given ten minutes to plot how *incidents of violence affect youth*. This includes past and more recent incidents, such as the civil war, the recurrent engagements with Israel (1996, 2006), bombing and assassinations (starting in 2004), internal socio-political clashes (May 2011, Bab Al Tabanneh and Jabal Mohsen Conflict), conflict with terrorists groups (Arsal, Saïda, Nahr Al Bared etc.) and violence during the protests starting in 2015, which intensified after October 17, 2019.
 - Answers are to be mapped according to how conflict affect youth, corresponding to the function of each body part.
 - Head (their thoughts)
 - Eyes (things they see)
 - Ears (things they hear)
 - Mouth (things they say)
 - Body (their health, the things they can do, or where they can go)
 - Heart (things they feel);

N.B: in both of the aforementioned activities, participants will be encouraged to present their graphs to the group (with the option to share anonymously) for discussion. All produce drawings and graphs will be collected, analyzed and annexed to the transcripts of the sessions.

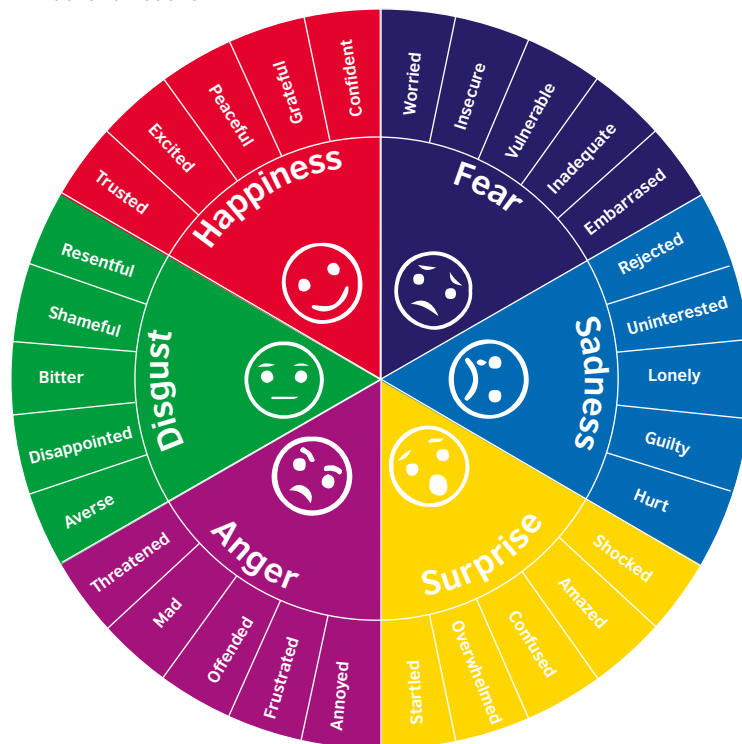
3. **Wheel of emotions:** Facilitator is to read a list of countries (USA, UK, France, KSA, Iran, Syria, UAE, Palestine), and the participants are asked to indicate their feeling towards said country according to a shared wheel of emotions (see figure 2). This method supports participants to *verbalize, describe the intensity of and understand the relationship between their emotions*.
 - Participants are then prompted to classify these countries as having either a positive, neutral or negative influence on Lebanon. Facilitators will encourage participants to elaborate on their emotions and probe for the reasoning behind these feelings.

Concretely, given the lock-down measures taken during the data collection, the team conducted synchronous focus groups¹⁷ with a range of participants from 4-6¹⁸. Sessions were divided by nationality and age groups and by gender based on the specificity of certain areas¹⁹. The sessions were conducted using Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms depending on youth's preference and ability to join.

Overall, it is important to note that the literature review endorses the usage of such methods in general and more specifically with youth given its benefits and given the fact that youth are largely more familiar with instant messaging and online platforms (Williams S., 2012). Furthermore, the authors suggest that online research has the potential to comprise groups who normally would not participate in more traditional studies. (Williams S., 2012).

However, in the same study, two important limitations were highlighted: 1) agreeing on a common suitable time and;

Figure 2: Wheel of emotions



2) The synchronicity making the session 'fast, furious, and chaotic' (Williams S., 2012) which makes it harder for participants with less computer literacy skills. Those were indeed challenges faced by the team during the data collection exercise, in addition to several other challenges. Those will be further unpacked in the limitations section.

In relation to the FGDs, although online research provides participants with less pressure to answer questions in comparison to face to face FGDs (Kenny, 2005), the team ensured to provide a safe environment for participants at all time. This was ensured by requesting consent prior to joining the session and guaranteeing that they are conformable to share their identities with other participants. Furthermore, an online etiquette guide and ground rules were set to safeguard the appropriateness of the tone, content of their views and enhance constructive dialogue.

Key Informant Interviews

KIIs were held with internal and external stakeholders that can offer insight to the situation of youth in Lebanon. *Internally*, the research team interviewed select British Council Staff who were involved in the Next Generation Lebanon, in addition to staff involved in youth programming across Lebanon.

Externally, interviewees were from various background and institutions such as youth branches of political parties, youth guiding counselors from municipalities, community-based organizations (CBOs), donors and UN agencies involved in youth programming in Lebanon.

The infographics on the main findings of the NGL research were supplied to participants beforehand. The line of questioning followed a similar logic to the FGD, in prompting discussions on

the findings, and highlighting the change in youth's lives given the contextual developments.

Presentation of the preliminary findings (interpretation workshop)

An interpretation workshop was held on the March 10, 2021, for the purpose of validating the preliminary findings and jointly discuss the interpretation of the findings in comparison to the initial NGL findings. Inputs and guiding notes from the interpretation workshop were further incorporated in the report.

Data Collection

Following the approval of the inception report and data collection tools, the team proceeded with the preparation and launching of the data collection which was conducted between February and March 2021. As mentioned earlier, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all data collection methods were conducting by remote/online.

The data collection of FGDs and IDI was carried by team of data collectors who were supervised by a team leader. The team was selected with gender equity in mind to ensure that in each FGD a female and a male representative was present. All FGD facilitators and note take were gender balanced with the exception of one team.

Prior to the data collection initiation, recruited data collectors took part in a one-day training. They were briefed on the objectives of the research, the methodological approach and the ethical considerations. They were provided with a detailed review of the tools, trained on how to administer it and had time to practice through role play.

Logistically, the data collection was carried out in following the steps:

1. Recruitment of data collector teams (data collectors, team leader and an inclusion specialist);
2. Training of data collectors on the above-mentioned topics;
3. Tool testing with all youth groups including with People with Disabilities (PwD);
4. Data collection preparation which included:
 - a) Contacting key gateways;
 - i. Contacting specialized NGOs targeting youth with disabilities.
 - b) Identifying potential interested participants and scheduling the sessions and confirmation with participants of their availability;
5. Receiving participants' consent;
6. Conducting the sessions at participants most convenient times (afternoons/early evenings/during the weekends) using the platforms mentioned earlier Zoom/Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp;
 - a) For youth with disabilities, the platform Zoom was used instead of Teams given their familiarity with it. FGDs were set at dates and time that are convenient for them where they regularly attended and used the platform Zoom (e.g. 9:30 in the morning for the Fista Groups or 1:30 for step together) especially to offer regularity for individuals with intellectual disabilities. If needed, some participants were contacted via telephone before the focus group session as asked by their parents.
7. Transcription of the data;
8. Daily de-briefs and quality assurance through verification and validation of uploaded data and needed means of verification

17 > Synchronous focus groups occur in real-time and require participants and researchers to contribute at the same pre-arranged time. These typically use chat tools such as messenger systems or chat room's (Williams S., 2012)

18 > The initial number of invited participants was 6-8, however the sessions ended by with 4-6 due to last minute drop out. Further details are found in the limitation section.

19 > Details on the interviewees are found in the data collection section.

The data collection had two critical points which required careful planning and close follow up. The first one was the coordination with gateways given their essential role in providing access to youth. Schedules and daily follow ups were taking place to warranty that list of potential youth are shared.

The second critical piece was the follow-up with youth to confirm the date and time of the sessions and guarantee that they attend. FGD sessions were planned 1-2 days ahead to avoid gap period between the scheduled and actual FGD sessions.

For the data collection of youth with disabilities, the inclusion specialist ensure that no kind of distractions was present by focusing their attention span on the modules. In order to get the correct balance between the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups (and avoid any biases), each group was formed of participants with different types of disabilities. Focus groups did not exceed 5 to 6 participants. If the group is too large participants with intellectual disabilities may find it difficult to take part (cognitive impairments and distractibility) (Fraser and Fraser 2000).

As for the types of disabilities, the inclusion officer used words that youth can easily understand. When needed, repetition was made in order to avoid distractibility and help them focus on the topic. In order to make sure that youth with intellectual disabilities were participating without difficulties, simple, easy-to-understand questions were used, supported by illustrations and visual aids.

Moreover, the inclusion officer ensured that the questions are conversational, clear, short and open-ended. If needed, the questions were made more concise. e.g. If an activity needed mental representation (abstract thinking) the inclusion officer explained the exercise and clarified the activity by dividing it into a shorter task. When the discussion gets under way, the focus was to keep the discussion on track and avoided rambling, or awkward silences by refocusing the topic and, engaging participants with questions.

Finally, throughout the data collection period, the team took considerable measures to assure the **quality of data collection** and to ensure representativeness of youth from various identified categories highlighted in the below sample versus achieved section. As such, daily comparison was needed to ensure that the scheduled sessions account for the needed diversity within participants.

In terms of timing, the KIs were held towards the end of the data collection period, following the FGDs and KIs. This allowed the team to identify preliminary key findings to be unpacked with key informants for further interpretation and triangulation.

Sampling

Planned Sampling

For qualitative methods, the key idea that **guides the number of FGDs, KIs** or other methods used is **saturation**. Saturation refers to collecting data until further data collection adds little to the 'picture' that has already been established. It is obviously difficult to know in advance how quickly this will happen. However, particularly when several different methods of collecting information are being used, twenty interviews or exercises (whether involving individuals or groups) with any particular methods will usually be sufficient to produce saturation.

As for the split of these sessions across different age groups and nationalities, a review of the NGL sampling shows that the overall population was split to have 80% Lebanese, 12% Syrian and 8% Palestinians. As such, a total of 82 FGDs will be held and split accordingly:

Table 2: FGD split by nationality and age group

Age Group	Lebanese	Syrian	Palestinian
15 - 18 years	22	6	6
19 - 24 years	20	4	2
25 - 29 years	16	4	2

It should be noted that the number of FGDs is subject to change, based on the systematically gathered and analyzed data. The research team will assess the achieved level of data saturation to inform the decision of adding or removing FGDs.

that participants will be *split equally across gender*, across all age groups and nationality. Gender mixed sessions may be held in more diverse and open communities, while ethical considerations will call for gender segregated sessions among more conservative communities.

As for the *geographic spread*, FGDs with Lebanese youth are split per governorate, and per cadaster/locality within each governorate. The number of FGDs was allocated as per population in each area. Without official reliable data, the research team relied on estimates provided from different sources, as well as their demographic knowledge of areas in Lebanon.

While it is possible to split FGDs further on smaller localities and villages, the limited number of FGDs would not be sufficient to cover them entirely, as was achieved through the quantitative survey.

However, as is indicated through the shared list of gateways, data collection will target numerous locations within each cadaster to assure that most of the residents' views are captured. The table on planned FGDs with Lebanese youth can be found below:

Table 3: Split of FGDs with Lebanese youth across areas

Area	# of FGDs	Area	# of FGDs
Total in South Governorate	6	Total in Beqaa Governorate	6
Sidon	2	Rashaya	2
Jezzine	2	Western Beqaa	2
Tyre	2	Zahle	2
Total in South Governorate	6	Total in Beqaa Governorate	6
Batroun	2	Aley	2
Bsharri	2	Baabda	4
Miniyeh-Danniyeh District	2	Byblos	4
Tripoli	2	Chouf	2
Zgharta	2	Keserwan	4
Total in Akkar Governorate	4	Matn	2
Akkar	2	Total in Nabatieh Governorate	6
Wadi Khaled	2	Hasbaya	2
Total in Akkar Governorate	4	Marjeyoun	2
Baalbek	2	Nabatieh	2
Hermel	2	Total in Beirut Governorate	4

As for Syrian refugees, FGDs were split across the different governorates, according to the proportion of distribution as per UNHCR's Lebanon Portal²⁰. 39% of refugees are in Beqaa and Baalbek Hermel, 27% in North Lebanon and Akkar, 23% in Beirut and 11% in South Lebanon. In addition, the selection of Syrian refugees will also reflect input from those living *in urban and camp settings*.

As such the sessions with Syrian refugee youth are split as follow:

Table 4: Split of FGDs with Syrian refugee youth across areas

Area	# of FGDs
Total in Akkar Governorate	2
Total in Baalbek-Hermel Governorate	2
Total in Beirut Governorate	2
Total in Beqaa Governorate	4
Total in North Governorate	2
Total in South Governorate	2

Similarly, to Syrian refugees, FGDs with Palestinian refugees were split according to their distribution across governorates. More specifically, targeting will be based on the main gatherings and camps as identified by UNRWA²¹. The detailed split can be found below:

Table 5: Split of FGDs with Palestinian refugee youth across areas

Area	# of FGDs
Total in Mount Lebanon Governorate	2
Total in North Governorate	2
Total in South Governorate	6

As for the targeting of Persons with Disabilities, participants will be purposefully sampled, according to the proportion of PwDs in each population. A recent Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)²² report shows that 2% of the total population live with a disability, but data is limited in their disaggregation by age and gender. More details are available for refugees, as the same report shows that 5% of Palestinian youth and around 4% of Syrian youth live with a disability.

In light of the above findings, the research team will commit to ensuring that at least 3% of all participating youth live with a disability. As such, PwDs will take part in the sessions with their peers, and the consultants will account for the additional considerations needed (i.e. having a sign language interpreter present when needed, audio adaptation to persons with hearing difficulties etc.).

PwD's participation, along with the participation of other groups (age, nationality, gender etc.) will be reflected in a detailed demographic breakdown of FGD participants. This demographic assessment will be maintained continuously throughout the assignment, to assure adherence to the sampling methods.

20 > <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

21 > <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

22 > Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE). (2020, June). Adolescent boys and youth in Lebanon. GAGE. <https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Adolescent-boys-and-youth-in-Lebanon.-A-review-of-the-evidence-.pdf>

Sampling Reach & Coverage

As agreed during the inception phase, the team relied on a *grounded theory approach* guided by saturation. Determining the number of FGDs was difficult, as such a tentative target was determined for planning purposes.

Furthermore, an *oversampling* was applied for all FGDs to account for potential drop-out rates during the process.

This included an oversampling up to 20%. In terms of sampling, a mix of random and purposive sampling were applied. Pertaining to the initial group of youth

contacted, a *random sampling* was applied followed by a snow-ball sampling to identify the remaining youth.

Purposive sampling was also used for inclusion of under-represented profiles and for PwD, through implementing IDIs and tailored FGDs.

Table 6: Reached target through FGDs and IDIs

Nationality	15 - 18 years	19 - 24 years	25 - 29 years	PwDs
Lebanese	8x FGD 1x IDI	14x FGD 6x IDI	5x FGD 3x IDI	5x FGDs
Syrian	1x IDI	2x FGD 5x IDI	2x FGD 1x IDI	2x FGDs
Palestinian	NA	2x FGD	2x FGD	1x FGDs

With regards to their demographic and socio-economic split, the majority of the participants 60%+ were university educated, 30% TVET educated and the remaining having dropped-out before grade 9, or never gotten an education. In terms of split across religious denominations, this was not captured for each participant.

However, the sampling method that targets most areas in Lebanon also assures an equivalently representative split by religious denominations. No clerk statistics or information exists on how sects are split across areas, but the overall consensus and national narrative is that areas, localities and villages are either predominantly one sect, or a mix of few sects.

Overall, 179 gateways were contacted the 36 provided youth access. 600 youth were contacted and 185 participated through 42 FGDs and 17 IDIs. Finally, 8 participated in the KIIs.

Analysis of Data

The data analysis was based on an orderly process of *coding responses in accordance with the thematic focus of the research (5 modules)* in addition to the identified emerging themes and patterns. Collected themes and patterns were clustered into categories to gain new insights into the impact of the work.

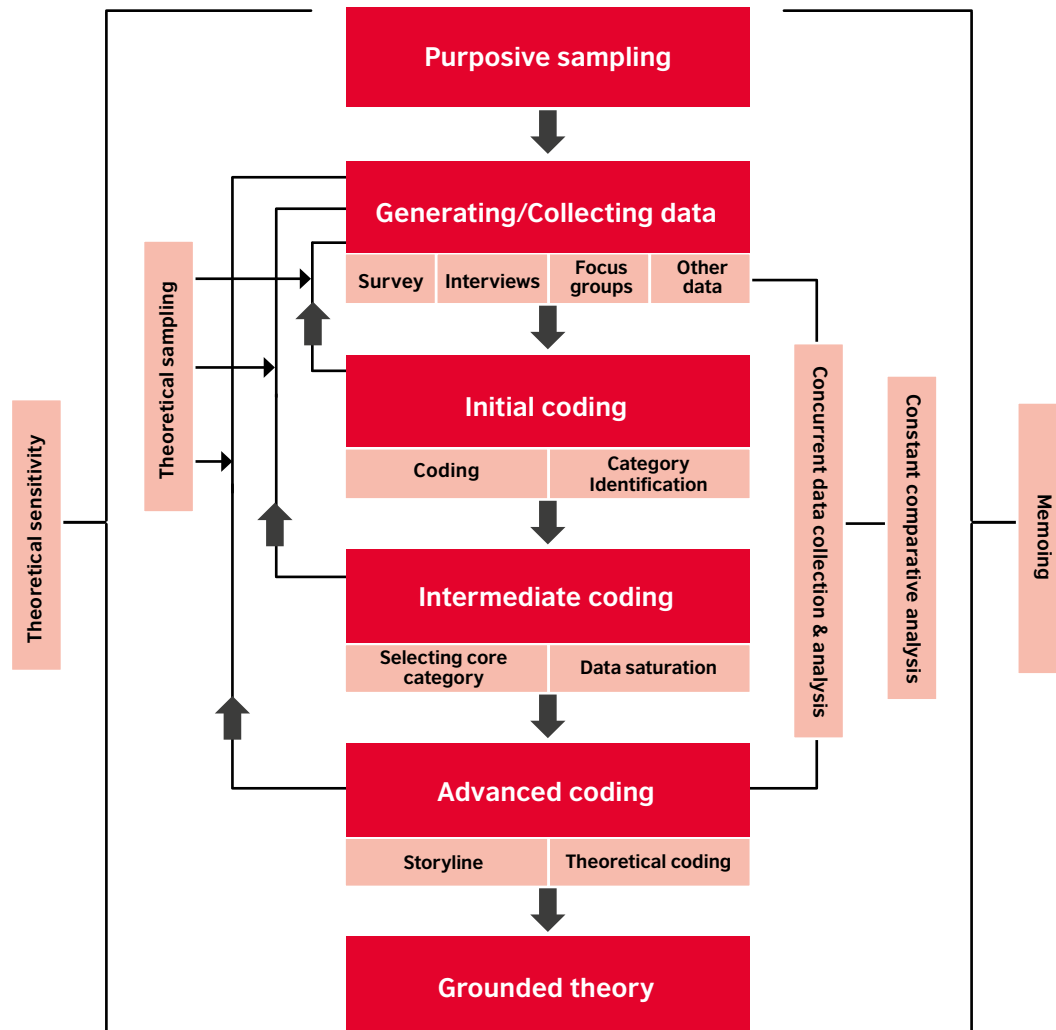
More specifically, findings of the Next Steps research were structured according to the research topics of the initial NGL. As such, input was

aggregated in a unified *response coding* sheet, and input was analyzed transversally along the specific finding it corresponds to. This has been included in the FGD guide, as each question (along with its probing questions) is linked to a specific finding(s) from the NGL.

Data was not only coded thematically, but also clustered considering the age categories and nationalities of the participants in the FGDs. As such, the analysis was conducted horizontally (thematic topics) and vertically (per nationality, age group and disability).

The research team used the *grounded theory approach*, which entails an ongoing development of theories as data collection proceeds. As such, the research did not include a pre-determined hypothesis. More specifically, the graph below illustrates how the approach was used throughout the assignment:

Figure 3: Grounded theory approach, as will be used for the analysis of qualitative findings (source: US National Library of Medicine)



For the *analysis of social issues*, the research team took into consideration multiple factors that influence youth's lives in Lebanon, such as the legal framework, economic situation, educational background etc. Also, the team *disaggregated findings by age, gender, nationality, education, location, wealth, religion, ethnicity, and disability*. This allowed for an *intersectional analysis of the situation of youth and the issues they face*.

In order to assure that findings fit the purpose of the research, the analysis relied on *triangulation* of findings from each method, whether the desk review, literature review, or qualitative data. All findings were *objectively verifiable and tangible*.

Research Limitations

The limitations of this research covered numerous aspects in relation to the methodology and context.

To begin with, the limitation of this study consisted of a rather *small sample* (185 youth) that may not be representative to the general youth population. Despite the limitation, the participants represent all gender, age groups, nationalities and disabilities with the exception of Palestinians youth aged from 15-18 years old.

Online fatigue and lack of interest in participating remained a challenge throughout the data collection period. Youth were either not interested or did not want to join online sessions. Some requested to conduct face to face FGDs (specifically in the North), however this was not possible due to the lockdown measures in country.

To accommodate for this, the sessions were made as interactive as possible basing it on exercises. Furthermore, for the ones *who were not interested to join*, the team asked participants who enjoyed the FGD sessions to refer at the end of the sessions, three friends/ acquaintances and colleagues. More specifically regarding the profile of the youth who were not interested to join, the team noticed that most were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The latter were less likely to participate without a financial or in-kind incentive. As this was not possible to attend to, less educated and underprivileged youth remained slightly under-represented.

Logistically, *connectivity* was a major limitation and challenges in several ways. From one side, the most recurring issue during the sessions was keeping a stable connectivity. Hence, whenever a participant had connection difficulties, the team made sure to recapitulate what he or she lost, to keep track. For PwD, if the participant was unable to join again, a individual invitation was sent on WhatsApp in order to emphasize and let them know that the participant's insights are of value to the study. From the other side, connectivity was challenging for youth who did not have or couldn't afford internet bundle.

Bias of responses when expressing identities, possibly due to being in mixed sessions with people from differing views. This may have triggered youth to unanimously identify as Lebanese, regardless if they truly identify along religious or political lines, in an effort to maintain conformity.

Quality Control & Safety Considerations

Quality control mechanisms and practices were maintained throughout the different phases of the assignment. *For quality control during data collection*, this was achieved by setting up mechanisms and tools for quality control, throughout the process.

Throughout data collection, the data collectors were closely monitored and supervised by at least one of Qualisus team members to assure quality, *abidance with ethical standards and policies and to asses any safety or security updates* (in case of shifting from remote to field work). Data collectors abided by the "*buddy system*", meaning they worked in gender mixed pairs so as to assure gender sensitivity on the field. The consultants held daily *detailed debriefings* with all data collectors to capture field observation and to share successes, challenges and suggestions. All needed *safety and security considerations* were put in place given the *conflict sensitive nature*, and the team coordinated with relevant staff for all field activities.

As for quality control during analysis and interpretation, the diversity of the team was utilized to allow for thorough revision, cross interpretation and collated input from all involved parties, so that all deliverable requirements are met.



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