

# ADOLESCENT GIRLS **IN CRISIS:** VOICES FROM BEIRUT

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# ACRONYMS

<b>EDS</b>	Economic Development Solutions
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GAGE</b>	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (Overseas Development Institute project)
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence
<b>GPS</b>	Gender, Peace and Security centre (Monash University)
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LCRP</b>	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PRL</b>	Palestinian Refugee (Lebanon)
<b>PRS</b>	Palestinian Refugee (Syria)
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
<b>VAW</b>	Violence against Women
<b>WRC</b>	Women's Refugee Commission

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. This includes an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees, close to one million of whom are registered with the UNHCR. In addition, there are an estimated 34,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) who join a pre-existing population of more than 277,985 Palestinian refugees whose families have resided in Lebanon (PRL) since 1949 under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Lebanon also hosts 35,000 Lebanese returnees, in addition to refugees from Iraq and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

In at least one of the data collection sites recent Syrian refugees live alongside other displaced populations and a high number of Lebanese and migrant workers from lower economic backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> While Lebanon has shown hospitality in accepting large refugee populations, there has been significant strain on the infrastructure and resources available to support these already vulnerable groups and inter-communal tensions can arise when different populations live together in over-crowded areas. The research for this report was carried out in Lebanon's capital, Beirut. In 2019 UNHCR estimated that there were 239,005<sup>3</sup> registered refugees in Beirut alone: 11 per cent of a total population estimated to be as high as 2,200,000.<sup>4</sup>

Within these urban refugee communities, adolescent girls are impacted by the surrounding crisis in ways that are not only different from adolescent boys and women, but also are often overlooked. This report explores the experiences of adolescent girls - within two age brackets of 10-14 and 15-19 years- navigating urban spaces in order to access services and opportunities. It seeks to amplify their voices and perceptions of their lives and communities, and presents their views on how the humanitarian sector might respond to the challenges they face.

The following findings are drawn from research conducted with adolescent girls and their communities in Beirut and its suburbs, specifically Shatila, Bourj Al Barajneh and Bourj Hammoud, during October and November 2018:

### Violence

At home and in public spaces girls report experiencing, witnessing and perpetrating violence and their expectation and perception of harassment and sexual violence against girls is particularly high.

### Freedom of movement

Adolescent girls report limited freedom of movement both in their communities and in Beirut more broadly. This is primarily due to the security concerns of the girls and their parents, with girls reporting high levels of street harassment and feeling unsafe on public transport.

### Access to education

Adolescent girls report difficulties in **accessing education** and this is heightened for more recently arrived refugees, and as girls get older. Girls not attending school attribute this to lack of parental permission, limited places, cost, administrative barriers to enrolment (including those associated with migration), and child marriage.

### Healthcare

Adolescent girls responded overwhelmingly that they receive routine medical attention when needed, but only half of those with significant or long-term health concerns report receiving adequate healthcare. This appears to be particularly high for Syrian girls. Girls also report receiving low levels of sexual and reproductive healthcare, which is worrying considering the high levels of early marriage and pregnancy, and the indications of sexual violence.

### Unhappiness and loneliness

Adolescent girls report high levels of unhappiness and loneliness. These levels increase as they become older. There are barriers to playing and socialising with their peers and in accessing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and protection services - as well as in joining activities, where they are provided, at community centres, schools, and health facilities.

### Discrimination

Adolescent girls report that their communities face discrimination, and this is even more pronounced among recent refugee populations: discrimination occurs in terms of access to services and resources, and in inter-community dynamics.

### Rights and Opportunities

Adolescent girls state that their rights and opportunities are more restricted as they get older. Their attitudes also become more negative. This is evident in access to education, safety and experiences of harassment, access to community services and freedom of movement.

## Optimism

Despite the challenges they face adolescent girls are optimistic. They are ambitious for their own futures and are engaged with the social, political and cultural issues that affect their lives. However, few report being engaged in community-based programmes or activities.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the ways in which refugee and vulnerable adolescent girls experience insecurity and demonstrate resilience in Beirut provides a foundation for the humanitarian sector to partner with them in both addressing their concerns and enhancing their capacities. Building upon existing assessments in this field (see Literature Review), the following report seeks to highlight both the sites of insecurity for adolescent girls, but also the ways in which they respond and continue to strive towards a safer community for themselves and those around them. In particular, the research seeks to examine how vulnerable and refugee adolescent girls navigate public spaces in the urban context of Beirut and its suburbs - Shatila, Bourj Al Barajneh, and Bourj Hammoud - in order to access services and opportunities. By identifying the risks and barriers that adolescent girls face in their daily lives, this research will inform recommendations that not only reduce these risks but also provide opportunities to increase girls' agency.

## 1.1. Research Questions and Goals

Designed to understand how the humanitarian sector can better listen to, learn from, and partner with vulnerable adolescent girls who face inter-connected insecurities in Beirut, this report seeks to answer four questions:

- How do adolescent girls (aged 10-14 and 15-19), from local and refugee communities, perceive and experience their city, particularly in terms of safety and violence?
- Based on their perceptions and experiences of public spaces, how do these adolescent refugee girls navigate the city? What coping mechanisms and capacities do they utilise?
- What opportunities or mechanisms exist to support refugee and vulnerable adolescent girls in Beirut? Are these girls aware of, accessing and participating in these opportunities?
- What are the recommendations, based on the research findings and views of adolescent girls themselves, for Plan International, humanitarian actors, policy-makers, donors, and the broader community to improve the opportunities, and the perceptions and experiences of safety, for adolescent girls in Beirut?

## 1.2. Research Hypotheses

This research tests several interconnected hypotheses, which have been developed based upon existing desk research and comparable case studies:<sup>5</sup>

- **adolescent girls from vulnerable and refugee communities experience life in urban centres in ways that are unique from others in their communities**
- **adolescent girls develop coping mechanisms, strategies and capacities that can positively shape their own security and contribute to their communities**
- **adolescent girls not only have a rational and demonstrated understanding of the social and political contexts in which they live, but are also well-placed to positively influence the understanding, priorities and approaches of the humanitarian sector.**

## 1.3. Research Methodology

In order to test these hypotheses, the project places the voices of adolescent girls at the centre of its methodology. To achieve this, the methodology adopted in this research has five features (see Figure 1).

- **It uses a grounded theory approach, which draws upon the voices and experiences of adolescent girls to establish the knowledge base for this project.**
- **It adopts a feminist methodology, which positions the advancement of the rights and empowerment of girls as central to the research process.**
- **It is adolescent-centred in its efforts to amplify and legitimise the knowledge of young people.**
- **Where the data permits, the research adopts an intersectional approach that recognises diversity in the adolescent experience of crisis. In so doing, it identifies where experiences are consistent across adolescent girls, and where and why some experiences may vary.**
- **This research adopts a rights-based approach with a focus upon the rights of the child. In particular, this research centres Article 12 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) that speaks of children's right to have their voices heard in decisions regarding them.**

Figure 1: Five influences on the research methodology





This approach allows adolescent girls both a blank slate and a safe space to speak about their lives. In doing so, it also makes them authoritative in discussions regarding their own welfare and in understanding their social, political and economic contexts. It therefore seeks to place adolescent girls as both the source of knowledge *and* primary analyst of their lives and experiences.

## 1.4. Data Collection

### 1.4.1. Research sites

This report draws from data collected in October and November 2018 by the local data collection firm EDS (Economic Development Solutions). Data was collected in three sites across the Beirut governorate (see Tables 1, 2 and 3): Shatila, Bourj Al Barajneh, and Bourj Hammoud. These sites were chosen as they afforded access to vulnerable and refugee communities of different nationalities. They further allowed assessment to take place in both camp and 'non-camp' settings.

The **Shatila** camp is located in southern Beirut and was established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1949. Its original purpose was to accommodate Palestinian refugees predominately from northern Palestine following their expulsion by Israel. The camp — which is approximately one square kilometre — was designed to house around 10,000 people. With the arrival of refugees from the 2011 conflict in Syria, the camp population is now estimated to be around 30,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The camp has a mixed population including Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and other refugee and migrant populations, including Iraqi refugees and migrant workers from Ethiopia, Bangladesh and elsewhere. It is extremely overcrowded with limited and unreliable access to electricity and clean drinking water. The camp does not come under the authority of the Lebanese government or police but instead is administered by "host authorities" with services provided under the mandate given to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Under its mandate, UNRWA provides health, education and other support services to Palestinian populations in both Shatila and the Bourj Al Barajneh refugee camps.<sup>7</sup>

The **Bourj Al Barajneh** camp was similarly established in the late 1940s to accommodate Palestinian refugees and is also located in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Like Shatila, it spans approximately one square kilometre of land and is overcrowded with poor living conditions, especially in light of recent refugee arrivals. In 2018, UNRWA had registered around 18,000 Palestinian refugees in the camp,<sup>8</sup> though others have estimated the population of the camp to be closer to 50,000,<sup>9</sup> including local Lebanese and migrant populations.

The final site of data collection was Nabaa, one of the neighbourhoods in **Bourj Hammoud**, located in the north-east of Beirut. This site is not a refugee camp but hosts an estimated 19,000 Syrian refugees along with other displaced populations and a high number of Lebanese and migrant workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that both Shatila and Bourj Al Barajneh, although designated as refugee camp areas, are also to a great extent integrated into the local urban environment and infrastructure. They therefore differ from other rural or isolated refugee camps.

### 1.4.2. Research context

The rapid influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon after 2011 has changed the political, social and cultural dynamics of these three sites, while also placing enormous strain on already weak infrastructure. As demonstrated throughout the report, this generates unique experiences for adolescent girls of different nationalities — and in different geographic sites. In addition to gender and age, the research finds that nationality and location can also have a significant impact on the experiences of vulnerable and refugee girls.

As noted above, **Shatila** and **Bourj Al Barajneh** were established as refugee camps for Palestinian populations — some of whom have lived there for generations. This allowed communities and businesses to become established and for intermingling — including intermarriage — between Palestinian and local Lebanese populations to occur. UNRWA supports these camps, providing schools and other services,<sup>11</sup> but it is only mandated to provide these to Palestinian refugees. This creates a disparity in access to services between Palestinian and other refugee populations. It also creates a visible knowledge and network gap between older and newer refugee communities. This is evident throughout the report as older Palestinian refugee communities report having greater access to, and knowledge of, local services, as well as more established community networks.

While Syrian and other non-Palestinian refugee populations in the camps and communities cannot access UNRWA support, the UNHCR works with the government of Lebanon and international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to coordinate and provide protection and assistance across the different nationality groups. Nonetheless, there can be a number of reasons why access to humanitarian support and services is uneven between populations. Syrian refugees in Beirut who are not registered with UNHCR may experience greater vulnerability that further limits their access to services, employment, and certain rights (such as freedom of movement). Furthermore, response actors and programmes operating in Beirut may choose to target specific communities, despite the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) promoting an inclusive approach to humanitarian programming. Services for migrants in particular are much more limited than those for refugee communities.

Services also tend to be more concentrated in certain geographical areas and may not always reach rural and mobile populations. Ultimately, this creates different opportunities and challenges for adolescent girls that may be contingent upon their location and their nationality.

As will be detailed further below, data was gathered from two types of Palestinian refugee groups. The first are Palestinians who fled (or whose families fled) from Palestine to Lebanon following their expulsion by Israel in 1948. They are referred to throughout the report as **PRL – Palestinian refugees from Lebanon**. The second group are **Palestinian refugees who have been recently displaced from Syria (PRS)**. These are Palestinians who fled (or whose families fled) to Syria in or after 1948 and resided there before being further displaced to Lebanon. PRS communities experience unique vulnerabilities as they have been twice displaced. Furthermore, as a refugee community in Syria, these Palestinian communities may have already experienced discrimination and vulnerability.

The research suggests that the distinction between Palestinian groups may shape lives and experiences in two contrasting ways. First, as both groups are Palestinian, they are all protected under UNRWA's mandate. As previously noted, this ensures their access to services. There may also be kinship and community relations that support their arrival and integration in Lebanon. However, the research also suggests that as more recently arrived refugees from Syria, PRS communities may have social and cultural experiences that are more akin to those of Syrians. This may manifest particularly in relation to attitudes towards gender roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, as recent arrivals, both Syrian and PRS communities will be less familiar with the context, services, and networks available in Lebanon and those without local connections may share similar experiences of integrating into and navigating a new city.

Related to this, community attitudes toward and between 'old' and 'new' refugee communities may shape individual experiences. Beirut, as previously noted, has a long history of hosting refugee communities and regional and national intercommunal rivalries have, over the decades, added to the tensions caused by poverty and overcrowding. This has been exacerbated by the recent refugee influx, causing already deprived communities to further struggle for resources. The research found that discrimination against refugee populations may at times be based less on nationality and more on how recently a refugee arrived in Beirut. This accords with perceptions that unbearable resource and infrastructure burdens have been created by more recent arrivals in ways that have degraded the living conditions and social cohesion of the whole community.

Like other nationality groups, local Lebanese populations from lower socio-economic backgrounds have unique vulnerabilities. While these communities do have the entitlements that accompany Lebanese citizenship, they nonetheless experience greater vulnerabilities and discrimination relative to the broader Lebanese population.

Finally, the changes in population dynamics has been shown to affect community cohesion within the sites. The recent influx of Syrian refugees rapidly increased the number of 'strangers' in the community, shifting previous social, cultural and religious dynamics and straining access to resources and services. For example, in certain sites, religious affiliation shaped the demographic make-up of the community. This has the potential to create considerable social tensions within communities that may manifest in nationalist and gendered ways. The increased number of 'strangers' can also have a negative impact on perceptions of safety. Indeed, the research has indicated that aside from the perceived threat posed by 'strangers', more recently arrived refugees are perceived to be at greater risk in Beirut because fewer people know and look out for them in the community.

While these social, political and geographic patterns remain dynamic, where the data permits, and where relevant, consideration is given in the analysis to the role that nationality and geography play in shaping the experiences of adolescent girls.

### 1.4.3. Research Participants

In line with the discussion above, this research is based predominately upon the experiences of adolescent girls from four nationality groupings:

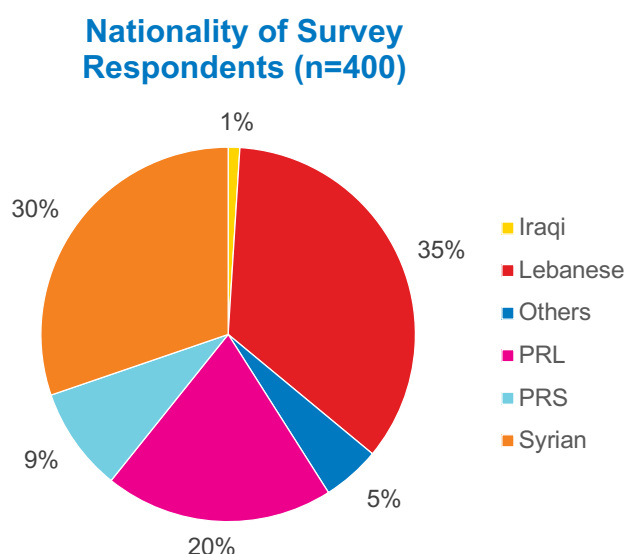
- Local **Lebanese girls** from lower socio-economic backgrounds who live among displaced populations
- Refugee **Syrian girls**, the majority of whom have arrived after the outbreak of the 2011 Syrian conflict
- Refugee **Palestinian girls** who fall into two groups: recently arrived refugees from Syria (referred to throughout the report as **PRS**); and more established Palestinian refugees whose families have been in Lebanon since their expulsion from Palestine in the late 1940s (referred to as **PRL**)
- **Iraqi** refugees and 'Other' displaced communities.

During data collection and analysis, study participants were divided into two age brackets: 10-14 and 15-19-years-old (see Graph 1). The purpose of this was to further analyse the intersection of age and gender in the experiences of adolescents. This is particularly important for issues such as freedom of movement, access to education, and child and early marriage, where the experiences of each age bracket may be significantly different and age/sex dependent. As outlined further below, adults from these nationality groups were also consulted, as were members of the humanitarian sector, civil society (including community and religious leaders as well as representatives of NGOs and UNRWA) and local authorities (representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs, municipal authorities and the police). Data collection took place during the afternoons and weekends to include those who may attend school or work during regular daytime hours.

#### 1.4.4. Quantitative Research

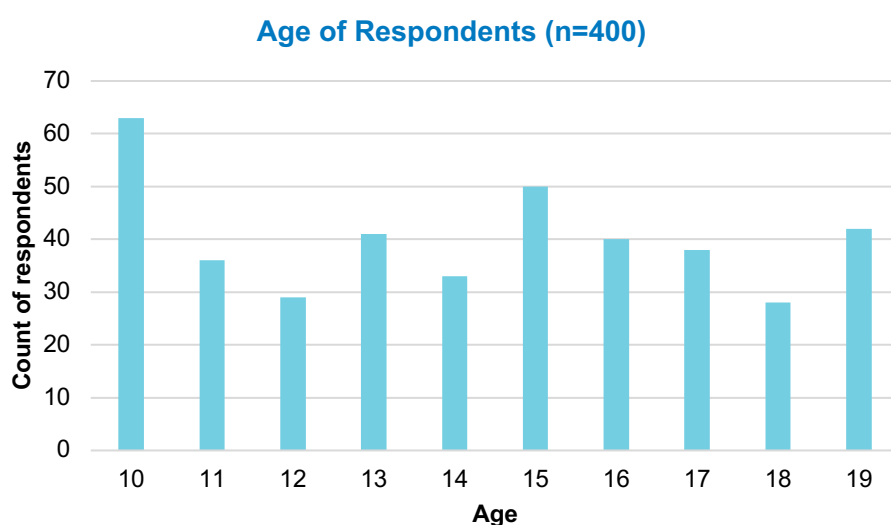
Data collection adopted a mixed method approach. **A survey was conducted with 400 adolescent girls** from the different nationalities (see Graph 1). Local NGOs and other actors in each of the three sites were contacted to identify initial respondents. From there, respondents were randomly selected and a snowballing technique employed. The findings of this survey are reflected in the quantitative data presented in this report.

Graph 1: Survey respondents, by nationality



Half of the surveys were conducted with girls in the 10-14 age bracket while the other half were with girls aged 15-19, providing an equal sample for comparison (see Graph 2).

Graph 2: Survey respondents, by age



Survey respondents were also equally split across the three sites in order to consider the impact that location has upon girls' experiences (see Table 1). Consequently, survey data can be disaggregated by nationality, location and age group. However, in some cases the sample size becomes too small to offer meaningful analysis.

Table 1: Survey respondents by location, nationality and age

	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Total
<b>Nabaa in Bourj Hammoud</b>			
Lebanese	32	34	66
Syrian	25	21	46
PRS	1	0	1
Iraqi	3	0	3
Other	7	13	20
			<b>136</b>
<b>Shatila</b>			
Lebanese	10	10	20
Syrian	9	12	21
PRL	34	32	66
PRS	13	13	26
Other	0	0	0
			<b>133</b>
<b>Bourj Al Barajneh</b>			
Lebanese	29	25	54
Syrian	27	27	54
PRL	6	7	13
PRS	5	4	9
Iraqi	1	0	1
Other	0	0	0
			<b>131</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>400</b>

#### 1.4.5. Qualitative Research

A total of 22 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 153 participants were conducted across the three main nationality groups from Shatila, Bourj Hammoud and Bourj Al Barajneh. This included ten single sex FGDs with adolescent girls and boys across both age groups plus a further five FGDs with adolescent girls conducted to enable more in-depth discussion and seven FGDs with parents or caregivers (see Table 2). The semi-structured FGDs allowed for open-ended questions and answers – including follow-up questions – and for free-flowing discussions between participants to take place. The FGDs also enabled consensus-building around responses to certain issues or, alternatively, highlighted differences of views and experiences.

While the research remained adolescent girl-centred, the inclusion of single-sex FGDs with adolescent boys had three purposes: to cross-reference responses with accounts of the experiences of adolescent girls; to determine similarities and differences in the experiences of girls and boys; and as part of an inclusive, community approach to data collection. It also furthered understanding of gender dynamics and relations between girls and boys across different dimensions: for example, roles and responsibilities, social norms and beliefs, access to and control of resources and participation. Additionally, it identified potential opportunities to engage adolescent boys in addressing gender discrimination and GBV, as well as drawing out specific risks faced by boys.<sup>12</sup>

Table 2: Number of Focus Group Discussions by Gender and Nationality (Number of participants in brackets)

	Lebanese	Syrian	Palestinian	TOTAL
<b>Adolescent Girls</b>				
10 – 14	1 (14)	1 (6)	1 (4)	3 (24)
15 – 19	2 (4, 8)	2 (8, 5)	2 (8, 9)	6 (42)
<b>Adolescent Boys</b>				
10 – 14	1 (9)	1 (6)	1 (5)	3 (20)
15 – 19	1 (5)	1 (5)	1 (8)	3 (18)
<b>Parents &amp; Guardians</b>				
Mothers	2 (14, 5)	2 (8, 9)	1 (5)	5 (41)
Fathers	1 (5)	1 (3)	0	2 (8)
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>22 (153)</b>

FGDs with Iraqi refugees and other refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants were not conducted due to capacity constraints.

A total of 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with government representatives (including the police), community and religious leaders, civil society representatives (including members of NGOs), and a representative of UNRWA (see Table 3). Interviewees were chosen on the basis of their knowledge and experience working with



either, or both, adolescent or gender-based issues, and a diverse group was selected to ensure a range of views and working contexts. Selection was made on the basis of gender, organisational type, and level at which the person was working -local, national, regional, international. The government representatives interviewed for the research were a female from the Ministry of Social Affairs, a female police officer from Bourj Hammoud and a male representative from a local municipality. The community leaders interviewed were social activists (two female and one male) and two male religious leaders. Civil society representatives included members of NGOs working directly with children and adolescents, as well as gender-based violence and gender equality. From the humanitarian sector, a representative of UNRWA was also interviewed. These interviews provided greater contextual depth to the research and enabled the research to draw from the experiences of those directly engaged in responding to the needs of adolescent girls.

Table 3: Number of interviews by stakeholder group and geographic area

	Bourj Hammoud	Shatila	Bourj Al Barajneh	National	TOTAL
Government	2		1	1	4
NGOs and UNRWA				4	4
Community and Religious Leaders	3	1	1		5
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>13</b>

#### 1.4.6. Sample Questions

The survey consisted of the following modules, which align with the research goals:

- **Access to Housing**
- **Access to Education**
- **Safe and Dignified Work**
- **Freedom of Movement**
- **Access to Health, in particular SRHR**
- **Access to Protection and MHPSS**
- **Access to Basic Assistance and Other Services**
- **Perceptions of Safety and Security**
- **Resilience, Agency and Participation**

The questions and topics of the KIIs and FGDs also followed this outline and were adapted to reflect the respondent group. Questions to adolescents sought to encourage responses regarding either their own experiences, the experiences of their peer group, or their perceptions on these topics. Girls were not asked about their own experiences of violence in order to mitigate distress to them or backlash from the community. Instead, questions focused upon their awareness or perception of violence in the community and their knowledge regarding available services. Questions regarding violence were either omitted or altered for the young age group (10-14). Efforts were made to ensure privacy during the surveys and a safe space was established in FGDs to encourage girls to speak openly and freely about their fears and hopes for the present, and what changes they wanted to see in their future.

Adult respondents were asked about their knowledge of the experiences of adolescent girls in relation to the above topics. They were asked to describe their own attitudes towards issues such as child and early marriage, girls' education, and girls' roles in the household and community. This provided important data on the context in which girls live and helped to corroborate or challenge the views of adolescent girls. It also identified potential areas and ways in which to engage parents/caregivers and other adults with these issues.

## 1.5. Data Analysis and Dissemination

Consistent with the methodology, the goal of the data analysis is to draw out and amplify the voices of adolescent girls in the research findings. The project does this by highlighting areas of commonality and difference across the respondents, which provides a rich understanding of how adolescent girls experience their everyday lives in Beirut.

The survey data provides an account of the broad experiences of adolescent girls. In each issue addressed in the report, the **quantitative survey data** is analysed according to age bracket, nationality and location, and further cross-referenced according to marital and maternal status, dis/ability and other relevant identity markers. Significant and meaningful findings are reported.

The **qualitative research** is juxtaposed to the survey findings to provide nuance and context. The qualitative data was similarly analysed according to respondent type, age (for adolescents), nationality and location. It is important to note the research as a whole does not intend to establish prevalence with regards to any issue facing adolescent girls, but rather to highlight their views.<sup>13</sup>

The data analysis and report writing was undertaken by a research team based at Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security research centre (Monash GPS). This team worked in partnership with a technical advisory

group consisting of local and international personnel. This group provided feedback at all stages of the research process and included staff from Plan International Incorporated, Plan International Australia, Plan International Lebanon and the Beirut-based Economic Development Solutions (EDS). Data collection was coordinated by Plan International Lebanon, who supported the translation of data collection tools into Arabic and contracted the local firm EDS to undertake the data collection and provide support for the analysis. To share the research findings with the research participants and their communities, a condensed version of the report will be translated into Arabic and shared by Plan International Lebanon with relevant stakeholders and, where possible, research participants.

## 1.6. Research Ethics

Particular attention was given to the ethical concerns of working with adolescents. Data collectors – who were young women from the local community - were attentive to issues that may trigger distress and had received in-situ training from the research team and Plan International Lebanon on gender sensitivity, child protection, and research ethics. Data collectors had previous experience conducting assessments with refugee and host communities, including in related topics, and with adolescents. All research staff engaging with the community also took part in Plan International's Child Safeguarding session and signed a Code of Conduct statement. As previously discussed, the data collection tools were designed to limit the likelihood of exposing girls to discomfort. Referral mechanisms aligned with national coordination standard operating procedures for child protection and GBV were in place for those who experienced distress or required individual follow-up support. Where these services were not available, data collectors removed trigger questions.

The relevant ethical protocols for both Plan International and Monash University were followed. The research scope and data analysis had the approval of Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were applied, with parents/caregivers being asked for consent for girls' and boys' participation and girls and boys subsequently asked for their assent. Participation was voluntary and participants could stop their participation at any point. To facilitate participation and minimise the burden on participants of different gender and age groups, transportation and refreshments were provided for FGDs.

## 1.7. Limitations of the Data

While strategies were employed to mitigate bias in the data collection, there remain limitations to the data that shape the analysis. This has been taken into consideration throughout the analysis but must also be considered by the reader.

First, due to security constraints, research could not be conducted in certain sites. In some cases, this may mean that the most vulnerable and at-risk populations could not be reached. Second, in order to avoid further causing distress to girls, individual interviews with girls were not conducted. Instead, a larger number of small focus group discussions were conducted alongside the survey with the 400 girls. Finally, data collection tools were designed in English, however tools were translated into Arabic and data collection conducted in Arabic. Findings were translated back into English before analysis, which creates opportunities for both questions and responses to lose some nuance or meaning.

In terms of the quantitative data collection, surveys conducted in the girls' homes created the possibility that parents or family members could overhear, which may have influenced girls' responses. While efforts were made to ensure that safe spaces were established, this was not always possible in confined living conditions. The data suggests that not all questions were asked or answered, creating inconsistent response rates. These are reflected throughout the report in the 'no response' rates and overall response rates.

There were similarly limitations in the qualitative data collection. Neither Plan International Lebanon nor EDS have prior programming in the research sites, therefore participant mobilisation was difficult and relied upon existing contacts with NGO and civil society partners. This may have created some selection bias in the qualitative data as it drew from those already known to the NGO sector and/or with access to services provided by NGOs. Furthermore, the transcripts show that some participants in the focus group discussions were related. It is possible this lack of anonymity had an effect on participant engagement and responses. Due to the difficulty in securing participants, a small number were outside the 10-19 age range for the research. These contributions were not considered in the analysis. Similarly, the ideal size of FGDs was not always achievable and overly large and small groups may shape dynamics and depth of conversation.

## 1.8. Literature Review

This report seeks to bridge knowledge gaps in our understanding of how protracted crises impact adolescent girls by linking together the crisis context, an urban setting, and the experiences of adolescent girls. In doing so, it draws upon a number of existing reports, research, and programmes. Primarily, these come from three broad areas: (1) the experiences of Syrian refugee communities throughout the region; (2) the experiences of vulnerable and refugee communities in Beirut specifically; (3) the experiences of adolescents and girls in crisis contexts.

This report seeks also to contribute to existing literature by examining in the urban context of Beirut, the particular impact on adolescent girls of the inter-communal dynamics of multiple refugee and vulnerable groups.

### 1.8.1. Adolescent Girls in Crisis

There is widespread recognition of the role that gender plays in determining the experiences of those impacted by crisis.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly there have been efforts across the breadth of international humanitarian action to disaggregate data and findings by sex, and – as importantly – to deploy that data as part of gender analysis to ensure gender-sensitive programming.<sup>15</sup> To this end, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) encourages both a “meaningful gender analysis, including the collection of sex and age disaggregated data” and “gender-responsive information products that capture the differential impacts [of crisis] on women and men of all ages and backgrounds.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, there is an emerging body of research and programming which examines the gendered experiences of crisis.<sup>17</sup> This reporting brings to the fore women’s particular experiences of vulnerability, violence and access to resources and services in times of crisis.

In addition to gender, there has been an emerging consideration of age. This is particularly prevalent in child protection literature, though, in practice, it has yet to consistently proliferate across most humanitarian assessments and programming. However, efforts to mainstream an age-based analysis bring into focus the unique experiences and heightened vulnerability of the very young and very old in crisis contexts.<sup>18</sup> For example, in the case of young people, it highlights their demographic over-representation among communities displaced by conflict and crisis.<sup>19</sup> The UNHCR notes that over half of the 65.6 million forcibly displaced people worldwide are under the age of 18, placing stress upon their access to education and healthcare and increasing their vulnerability to trafficking, child marriage, and other forms of violence.<sup>20</sup> This is reflected in the Syrian refugee crisis where 45 per cent of the 5.6 million registered refugees are under the age of 18.<sup>21</sup> Gender and age together can also combine to create a double vulnerability. In the Syrian crisis, adolescent girls in particular have been identified as an often-invisible cohort that faces specific risks related to their transition to adulthood.<sup>22</sup>

In relation to this, it should also be noted that there is emerging research within the sector that focuses specifically upon adolescent girls. In particular, the **Women’s Refugee Commission** (WRC) has undertaken initiatives to influence programming for adolescent girls around issues including displacement, child, early and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and disability.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the **Population Council** has carried out reporting and thematic reviews focusing on adolescent girls, though this is not specific to the crisis context.<sup>24</sup> The **UN Population Fund** (UNFPA) has also produced a number of reports examining adolescent marriage, pregnancy and motherhood<sup>25</sup> as well as the impact of disaster and conflict upon adolescent girls,<sup>26</sup> as has the **International Rescue Committee**<sup>27</sup> and the **Overseas Development Institute** through the *Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence* (GAGE) project.<sup>28</sup> Finally, **Plan International** has produced numerous studies which focus upon young people and, particularly, adolescent girls. These include studies on adolescent girls in disaster and climate change, safety in urban centres, SRHR, and adolescent girls’ needs in humanitarian settings.<sup>29</sup> The growth in focus upon adolescent girls builds an evidence base around the unique vulnerabilities and issues that they face, as well as providing the humanitarian sector with a layered and deeper understanding of the impact of crisis upon different civilian populations.

However, while we are seeing a focus upon age and gender – and encouragingly some focused research on adolescent girls themselves – the humanitarian sector still has some way to go in ensuring comprehensive engagement with the issues facing adolescent girls.<sup>30</sup> While the rhetoric is often in place, the attending methodology, analysis and findings remain superficial.<sup>31</sup> In contexts with limited resources, there is still a struggle to ensure that language around ‘prioritisation’ and ‘life-saving’ is not used as a vehicle for dismissing the need to ensure gender-sensitivity in assessments right from the initial stages of the response. Moreover, even where sex-disaggregated data and analysis exists, it often conflates ‘women and girls’, ‘young people’ or ‘children’ together. While these broad categorisations serve different needs, this can obscure the, sometimes stark, variations in experience and capacity that both age and gender bring. Therefore, opportunities to further examine the intersections between gender and age, particularly in the crisis context, still need to be prioritised.

### 1.8.2. Vulnerable and refugee adolescent girls in Lebanon

Since the outbreak of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, there has been a growing body of literature examining the unique issues facing Syrian refugees – including women and girls – as they seek refuge throughout the region. This report uses as its foundation the existing research that has focused on the broader experiences of Syrian refugees relocating to neighbouring countries. By considering Syrian refugees in Cairo, for example, Save the Children found that the educational needs of young women and girls had not been addressed. Furthermore, they found that the restricted freedom of movement due to fear or overprotection contributed to feelings of isolation and exclusion by young women.<sup>32</sup> The report also found that Syrian girls had been subject to high levels of harassment from men in public places.<sup>33</sup> Parents shared concerns about the safety of their daughters, especially as they believed kidnapping and harassment were significant risks for young women.<sup>34</sup> This perception reinforced protectiveness, providing reasons why they ‘were found to be kept indoors more than is usual in either Egypt or Syria’ and that their families ‘rarely take them out to entertain and socialize’.<sup>35</sup>

Further research that explored the experiences of Syrian boys and girls in Jordan and Lebanon have also highlighted the challenges confronting adolescent Syrian refugees.<sup>36</sup> A report by **Mercy Corps** found that many young females were ‘at risk of harassment and attack’ in public places such as the market place as well as ‘being harassed inside the homes by fathers, brothers and sometimes mothers’.<sup>37</sup> Syrian girls had also experienced

'verbal abuse' and 'feared beatings', especially if they were to speak out about their conditions at work.<sup>38</sup> Opportunities for education had also evaporated as attending schools had become 'almost impossible' resulting in many young Syrians having long breaks in their education.<sup>39</sup> A study by the **International Rescue Committee** (IRC) also cast a wider view of how adolescent girls were coping in Jordan, especially with issues such as exploitation, violence and child marriage and found that girls continued to be harassed, especially by young men.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, the **UNFPA** has been active in seeking to identify and ameliorate the challenges confronting Syrian women and adolescent girls. In Lebanon, it was estimated that there were over 94,000 female-headed families, over 296,000 women and girls of reproductive age, with a further 20,597 pregnant women.<sup>41</sup> Part of the UNFPA's response to the Syrian crisis has been to provide resources to Syrian refugee girls and women in Lebanon. These included measures such as providing reproductive health kits, especially for rape survivors, and providing information to women concerning healthy nutrition.<sup>42</sup> The UNFPA has also provided counselling and psychological support to survivors of gender-based violence.<sup>43</sup> This literature covering the region provides important research which enables comparison between refugee experiences in different urban contexts.

In addition, this report will draw heavily upon the specific research focused on the experiences of Syrian refugees who relocated to Lebanon. **Oxfam** and the **ABAAD-Resource Centre for Gender Equality**, for example, shed light on the changing gendered social roles of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. In doing so, they examined the stresses experienced by all Syrian refugees but also emphasised the specific concerns of women and girls. For instance, Syrian female-headed households were found to be in a more precarious situation in Lebanon when compared to male-headed households. This was primarily due to higher unemployment as well as concerns about child marriage.<sup>44</sup> Early marriage also emerged as a matter of concern while exploitation, access to education and anxiety about gender-based harassment were prominent issues for women and girls.<sup>45</sup> Such concerns are not exclusive to adolescent girls: in a study by **UNHCR** almost 11 per cent of young Syrian and PRS men aged 12 to 24 reported experiencing sexual harm or harassment in Lebanon.<sup>46</sup>

Research has also explored how young Syrians are coping with displacement and living in host communities, specifically in Lebanon. **ANERA**, for instance, undertook research into the experiences of displaced youth living in North Lebanon, Bekaa and Nabatiyeh. It showed how young women aged between 15 and 25 felt isolated, while child marriage was on the rise as young Syrian refugees and their families sought to avoid economic hardship.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, some girls and young women reported feeling liberated, in certain ways, living in refugee communities: they were less controlled by male family members and they saw opportunities to work and leave the house.<sup>48</sup>

Research has continued to show how the vulnerability of women and adolescent girls affected by the crisis is having a toll on their physical and psychological health. **GAGE**, for example, found that Syrian refugee girls commonly faced growing violence at home, child marriage and sexual harassment, and the rate of forced marriage was far higher for Palestinian refugees from Syria compared to longer-term Palestinian refugees.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the physical health of Syrian refugee girls was fragile, especially since most do not eat more than twice a day.<sup>50</sup> Limited access to education and information about health have contributed to findings that only one per cent of Syrian girls interviewed reported that they were happy.<sup>51</sup> As the conflict continues into its eighth year, there is growing research that explores the longer-term impacts that displacement and resettlement has had on adolescent girls, especially on their educational opportunities, health, psychosocial wellbeing, and agency and economic empowerment.<sup>52</sup>

The experiences of adolescent Syrians in Lebanon were also the focus of research by **Plan International**. By concentrating on the issues of labour and child marriage, the research found that one-third of all adolescent girls and boys identified emotional abuse as a key risk in their community while a quarter of all adolescent girls and boys mentioned physical violence.<sup>53</sup> Sixteen per cent of adolescent girls also thought that sexual violence was a prominent risk to them.<sup>54</sup> This has prompted bodies such as the UNFPA to advocate for the creation of safe spaces for women and girls affected by the Syrian crisis.<sup>55</sup>

The findings presented in this report build on this existing literature. In some cases, they confirm and update existing findings, while in others the report compares the Beirut context with other urban centres throughout the region, or provides specific detail about the experiences of adolescent girls in the urban, refugee context.



## 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS: SITES OF INSECURITY

This section of the report presents the research findings. It is structured according to the nine modules identified in 1.4.6 and each section addresses the research questions outlined in section 1.1. As such, each section presents adolescent girls' perceptions of the risks and barriers they face as they navigate their way through the urban context, as well as the strategies they adopt to address them.

### 2.1. Housing

***"The housing situation is in utter crisis. Some houses are overcrowded and unsafe."*** Female police officer, Bourj Hammoud

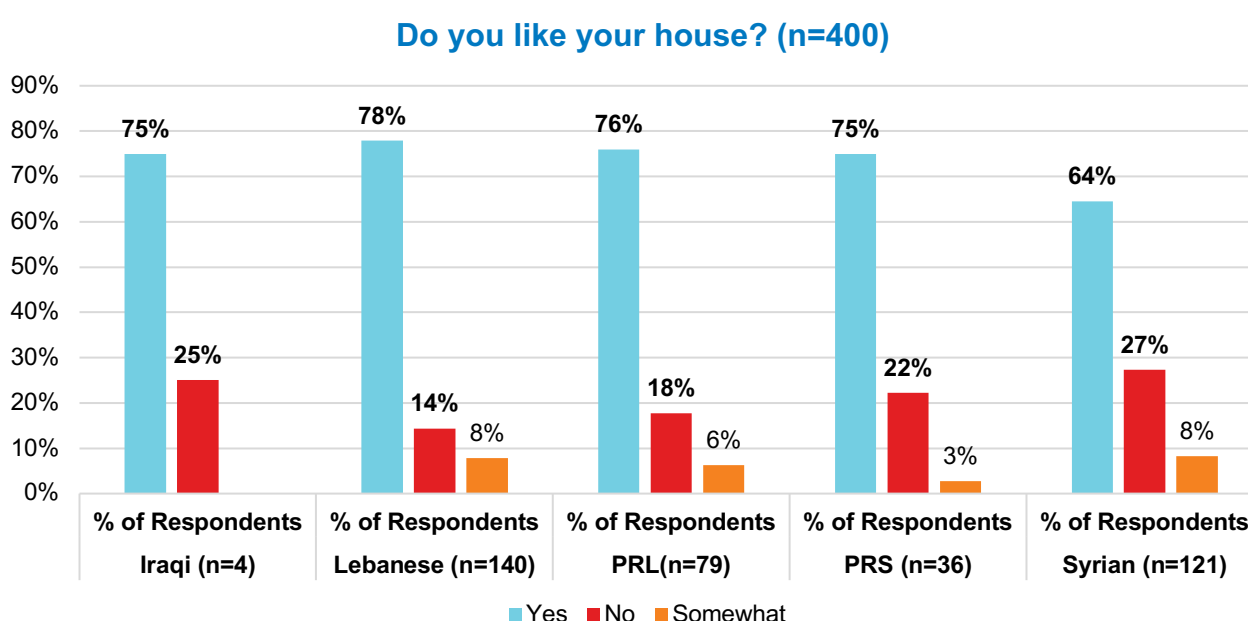
Access to safe, adequate housing is a major issue in all three sites. Overcrowding and poor infrastructure, including lack of clean drinking water, a safe and stable electricity supply and adequate sanitation, have created difficult living conditions for both established and recently arrived refugee communities. The increase in refugee arrivals has generated a sharp demand in housing, leading, in some cases, to a dramatic increase in rents. Substandard and dangerous extensions to existing housing have also been built, and existing apartments divided to accommodate the population increase. Across Lebanon, it is reported that just over half of the displaced Syrian population are living in substandard shelter conditions in cramped urban centres, contributing to existing inter-communal tensions.<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.1.1. Attitudes Towards Housing

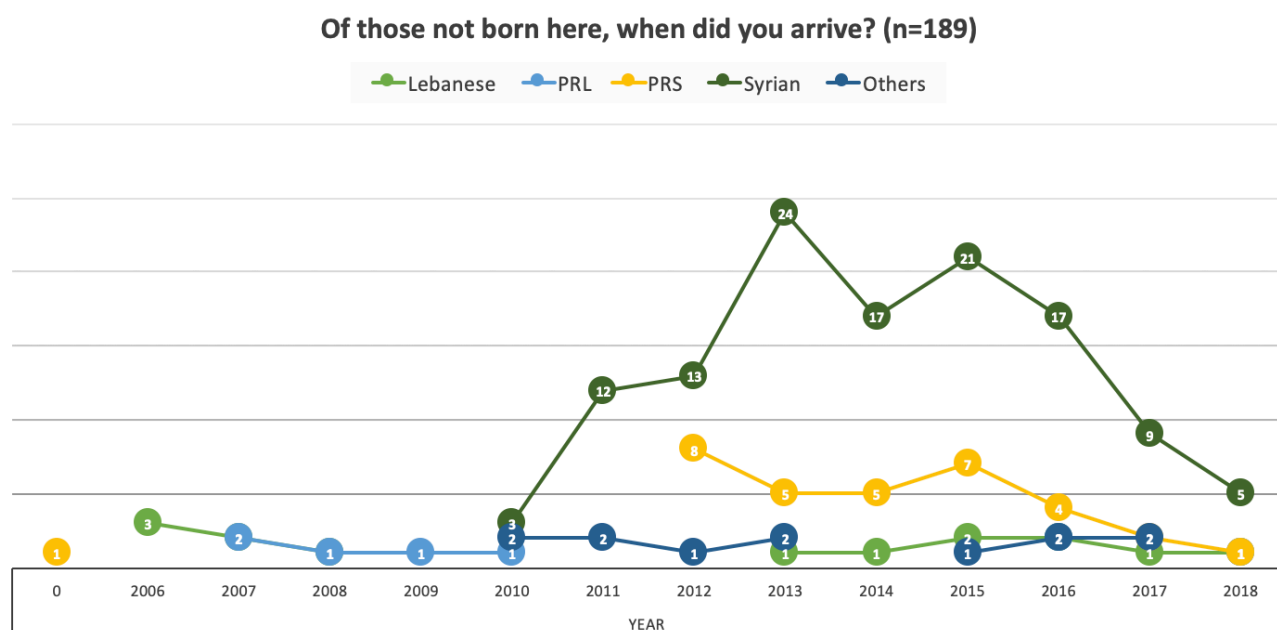
Predominantly, adolescent girls in the three research sites reported living in apartment-style accommodation in multi-floor buildings. Particularly in the case of more recent refugees, single apartments have been redesigned, with partitions installed to create two or three apartments. In many cases, this requires families to share utilities such as bathrooms or kitchens. Across all groups, girls report living with their immediate family: parents and siblings, with only a small number reporting that they lived with extended family.

Of the adolescent girls surveyed for this research, 73 per cent responded that they liked their housing. This is a surprisingly high figure in light of the issues raised above, and not one that was consistently corroborated by the FGDs. However, in both the survey and FGDs, nationality and age appear to be significant factors shaping girls' attitudes to housing (see Graph 3), with location playing a smaller but discernible role. In terms of nationality, Lebanese and PRL girls had the most positive attitude towards their housing. It is important to acknowledge that most of these girls have lived their entire lives in the same house, providing them with little opportunity to compare it to other types of housing. In fact, 53 per cent (or 211 of the 400 girls surveyed) had lived in the same place since birth or early childhood (see Graph 4). One 19-year-old Lebanese girl reported: ***"I'm very comfortable in it [my home]. I feel that if I want to be comfortable, I go home immediately. Our home is our comfort."*** A 13-year-old Lebanese girl similarly noted: ***"Our house is six rooms, I like it and I'm comfortable in it. I wouldn't want to add anything to it."*** A PRL girl reflected: ***"I like my home because all the memories are there."***

Graph 3: Attitudes towards housing, by location

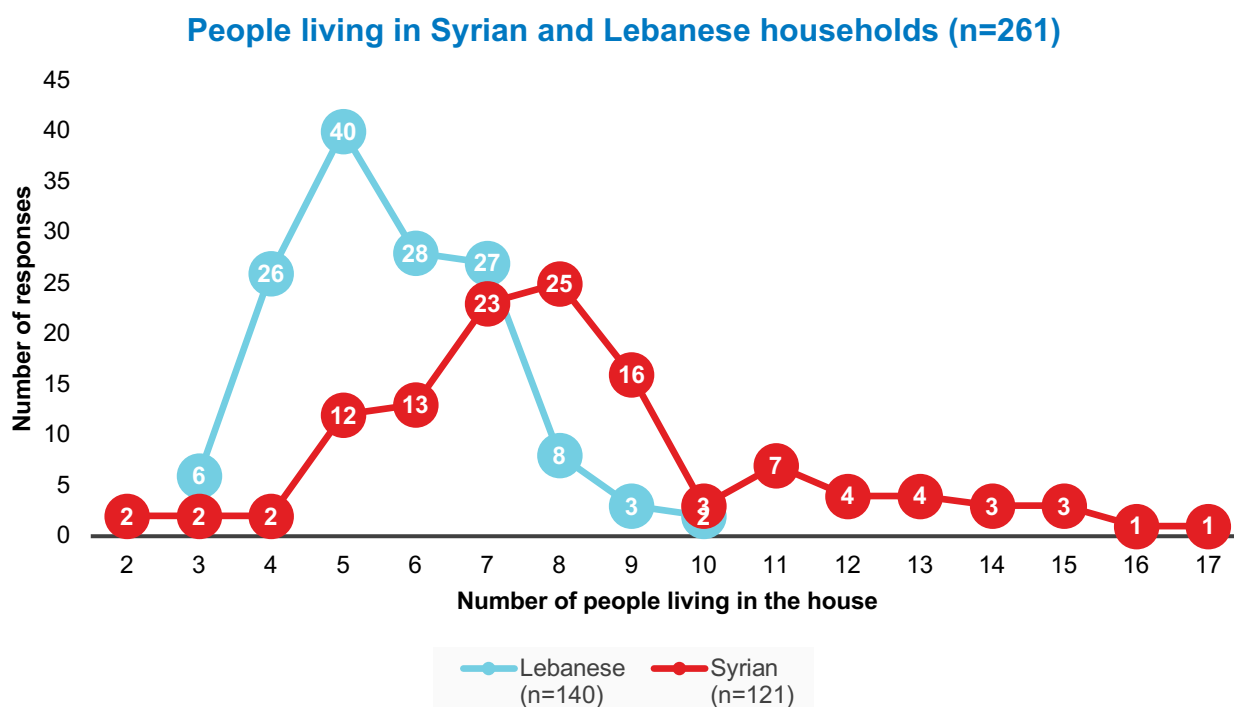


Graph 4: Number and date of girls arriving in Beirut, by nationality



The girls who were more likely to dislike their housing were recently arrived refugees, including Syrian or Palestinian girls from Syria who arrived after 2011. When asked why they did not like their housing, Syrian girls replied that it was because it was too small and overcrowded. Syrian girls reported living in houses with, on average, eight or nine occupants, while Lebanese girls reported much smaller average household sizes of around four or five (see Graph 5). Moreover, Syrian girls suggested that their apartments had fewer rooms and poorer amenities than more established refugee communities. Many Syrian girls were quick to make an unfavourable comparison between their current housing and their former housing in Syria. An 18-year-old from Bourj Al Barajneh noted: ***“We live in a really small house here. In Syria, we were living in a big house. Here it’s really small. I don’t have any personal space here. I don’t have my own room. I don’t feel too safe here.”*** Another 18-year-old Syrian girl from the same FGD stated: ***“It’s not comfortable; it’s not in good condition. Here we don’t have clean water. We can’t live the way we used to live in Syria.”*** Girls who lived on the ground floor of their apartment complained about air pollution and threats from passing strangers, while those on upper floors spoke of leaking roofs and poor infrastructure.

Graph 5: Number of people per household, by nationality



While nationality was the most significant determinant of whether girls liked their housing, age was also a relevant factor. The research found that older girls were less likely than younger girls to feel comfortable at home. For older girls, the lack of privacy, crowding, and having to share a room was a major concern. This was particularly the case for Syrian girls. An 18-year-old Syrian girl stated: ***“I wish we had a room for the girls in the family alone. I don’t have any space to myself.”*** An NGO representative in Bourj Al Barajneh noted that the cramped conditions and shared bathroom facilities created discomfort, vulnerability to harassment, and health risks, particularly for older girls in terms of experiencing puberty and managing their menstrual hygiene. There were further complaints from older girls about noise (including music and general street noise) that inhibited their ability to study and sleep.

Finally, there was a small but discernible difference in terms of location. Adolescent girls in Bourj Al Barajneh were most likely to like their housing (84 per cent), followed by Shatila (71 per cent) and finally Bourj Hammoud (62 per cent). In comparing her previous housing in Shatila with Bourj Al Barajneh, one 15-year-old Syrian girl said: ***“When I used to live in the Shatila camp we didn’t have access to any water. Here it’s a bit more comfortable. We have water, even though it’s sometimes salty.”***

### 2.1.2. Perceptions of Safety and Being Welcome in Neighbourhoods

Nationality, followed by age, similarly emerged as the most significant factors shaping adolescent girls’ perception of safety and sense of feeling welcome in their immediate neighbourhood. While Lebanese (87 per cent) and PRL (100 per cent) girls reported feeling welcome in their neighbourhood, only 65 per cent of Syrian and 56 per cent of PRS girls shared this feeling. Again, this might be explained by the sense of familiarity and ‘home’ that the former feel, compared to more recent arrivals.

While intercommunal tensions appeared to play a role in why adolescent girls felt unsafe and uncomfortable in their neighbourhoods, a more prominent theme in the FGDs was the behaviour of men and their use of drugs and alcohol. Revealing a sense of community spirit, a 15-year-old Palestinian girl in Shatila camp noted: ***“All the neighbours are Syrian. If they need anything my mother helps them and if we need anything, they help us but the people on the street are always on the street. Some of them are trouble-makers and smoke weed. I never feel safe there, especially as a girl.”*** On the other hand, another 15-year-old Palestinian girl in Shatila said of her neighbourhood: ***“I like my home because all the memories are there. [B]ut I also hate it because if we leave the house, we always fear for ourselves. The whole building is Syrians and we’re the only Palestinians. They all smoke weed.”*** While participants did not specify that the ‘trouble-makers’ were male, the presence of large concentrations of single men in the neighbourhoods – along with drug and alcohol abuse – was raised as a concern by all members of the community. In an FGD in Bourj Hammoud, Lebanese mothers spoke of drug trading and harassment by drunk men in their apartment blocks and neighbourhoods, noting that they feared for the safety of their daughters, while adolescent boys in Bourj Al Barajneh described drug usage as being on the rise and a challenge that adolescents needed to navigate. In Bourj Hammoud, a community leader and a municipality officer both noted that some apartments are rented out to large groups of single men. In these cases, they continued, adolescent girls may experience harassment walking past the building, or using the stairs or shared spaces in these buildings.

Age is also a factor in shaping attitudes towards their neighbourhood with adolescent girls feeling less welcome as they got older. While the difference was slight (70 per cent of older respondents compared to 74 per cent of younger girls felt welcomed), it was particularly the case for Syrian girls. Only 48 per cent of Syrian girls aged 15-19 years-old reported feeling comfortable in their neighbourhoods, with several citing street harassment and harassment by neighbours as their major concern. Younger girls appeared less concerned. As one 13-year-old Palestinian girl in Bourj Al Barajneh put it: ***“Actually, they [neighbours] bother me a bit...I mean they bother my father more than they bother me. Me, nothing bothers me.”*** [said in a strong voice with a smirk]

The presence of intercommunal tensions was far more pronounced among the parents and adolescent boys. Adult members of the Syrian community expressed a belief that they were being exploited by host or established communities, citing the high price of rent and the poor quality of housing. They also spoke of being subject to violence by more established communities. In Bourj Al Barajneh one Syrian father noted that if there were issues with Syrians, Palestinian residents would band together to attack them, with another saying: ***“the scenes remind me of films we watched about black people in the U.S. during the 60s and 70s, there is racism”*** (see Section 2.6.4).

Alternatively, more established communities noted that the rapid influx of Syrian refugees had created a housing and sanitation crisis, and increased tensions. The qualitative data showed that fathers and adolescent boys from Lebanese communities harbour hostilities toward Syrian communities, accusing them of instigating violence. One Lebanese father noted: ***“To be honest, I have weapons in the house to protect myself and those around me [...] The Syrians here are all against the Syrian regime. [...] You will find Nusra and ISIS supporters around us. [...] Enough said.”*** Another reflected: ***“Their countries have no safety. How do we expect them to contribute to safety here?”***

## 2.2. School

There are many barriers that affect adolescent girls' ability to access education. They include:

overcrowding and other limitations in administration, infrastructure and resources at schools, the experience of discrimination and harassment which makes girls less willing to go and varying community attitudes towards attending school across the nationality groups and locations in which adolescent girls live.

Despite these challenges, adolescent girls demonstrate a strong desire to attend school and they show resilience in the education space, especially in terms of how they seek to use the knowledge they gain from school to improve their communities.

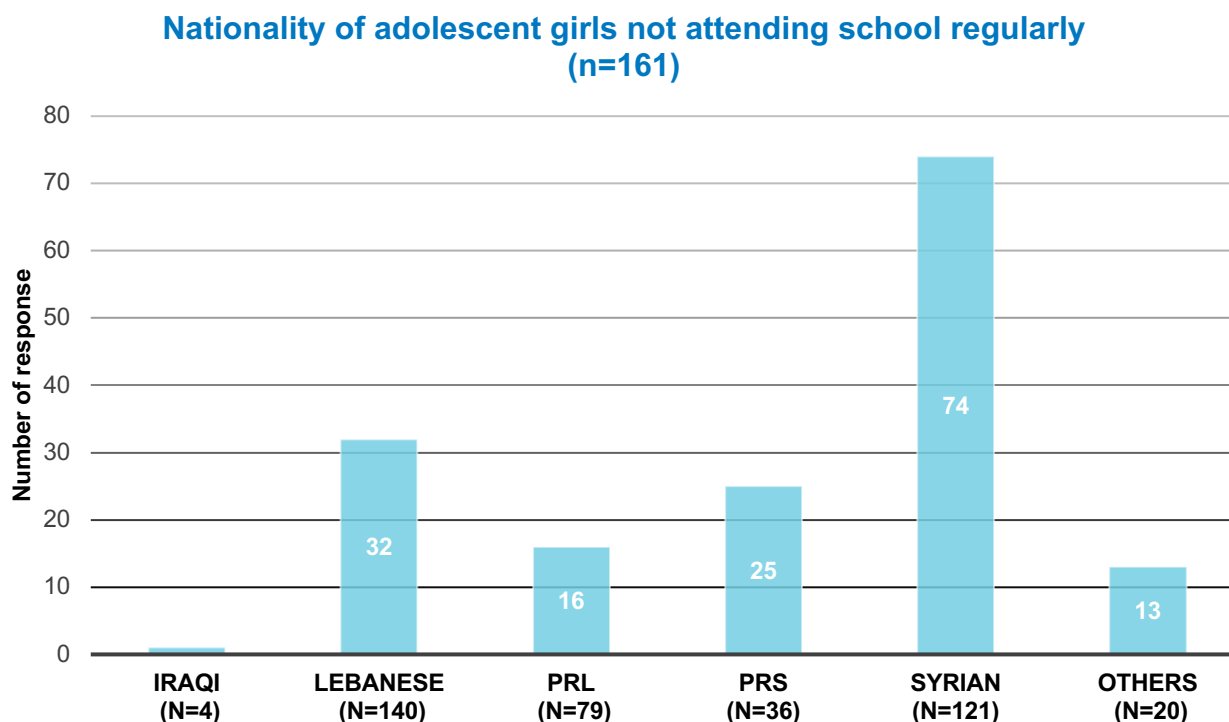
### 2.2.1. Access to Education

Overall, 60 per cent of the adolescent girls surveyed for this research reported that they regularly attend school. However, both nationality and age presented as significant factors in adolescent girls' access to education.

In terms of nationality, there are high rates of attendance among established nationality groups (Lebanese and PRL girls), while low rates are evident among more recently arrived refugee groups (Syrian, PRS and Iraqi girls). Palestinian girls in the refugee camps can access the education services provided by UNRWA which are not available to non-Palestinian communities (see Section 1.4.2). This potentially accounts for the high rates of attendance among PRL girls (see Graph 6).

Syrian girls have the lowest attendance rates. The research found that conflict and forced migration had caused disruption to their access to education. Of the girls surveyed, 15 per cent said they had a break in their education. Many of these were Syrians and Palestinians from Syria. In discussing their experiences of school in Syria, many reported that they kept attending until it was no longer safe to do so. Describing the impact that war had on their education, an 18-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh told us: ***"We stopped [going to school] because of the war."*** While another in the same FGD noted: ***"We had liked to continue [to attend school in Syria] till the last point when the bombs started to fall."*** Once in Beirut, Syrian girls reported difficulties in settling into school. As one 17-year-old Syrian from Bourj Hammoud said: ***"Since I came [to Bourj Hammoud 7 years ago], I haven't enrolled [in school]. We weren't able to [enrol]; we were moving from house to house. We weren't capable."*** Partly due to these challenges, Syrian girls had the highest rates of school non-attendance overall (see Graph 6), consistently across the three sites (see Graphs 8, 9 and 10).

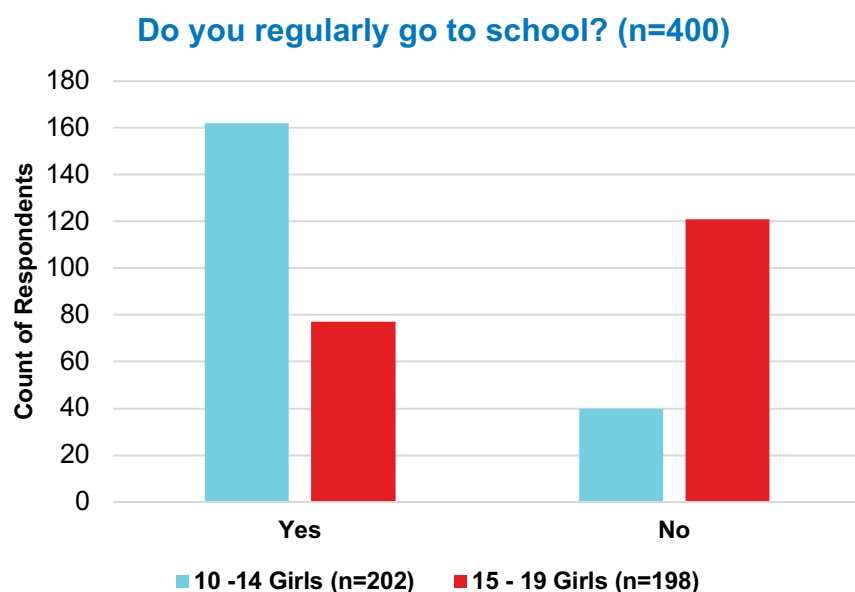
Graph 6: Regular non-attendance at school, by nationality



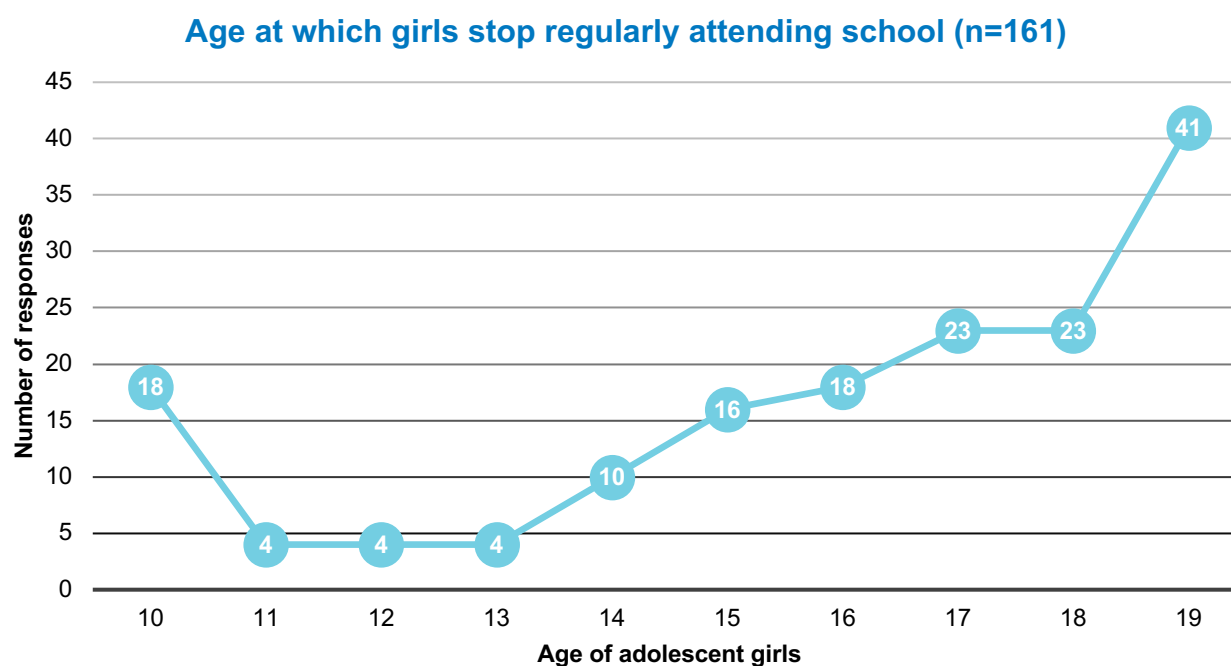
Age is also a significant factor shaping girls' school attendance. While 60 per cent of girls said they regularly attend school, the older the girl gets, the less likely she is to go to school regularly (see Graph 7). Of the girls surveyed, 80 per cent of those aged between 10-14 regularly attend school, compared to just 39 per cent for the older cohort. As demonstrated in Graph 8, the age at which girls' non-attendance begins to rapidly increase is 14. However, it should be noted (as shown in Graph 8) that 41 of the 19-year-old girls may have graduated from secondary school, though none reported attending university.



Graph 7: School attendance, by age



Graph 8: Age at which girls report regular non-attendance at school

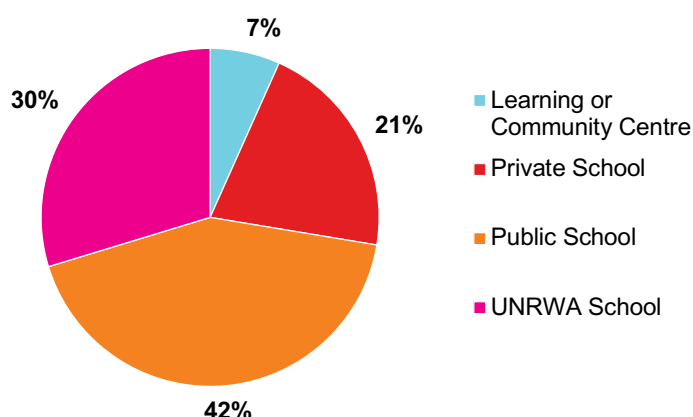


### 2.2.2. Types of schools attended

Adolescent girls reported engaging in four main modes of education: public schools provided by the Lebanese Government, private fee-paying schools, UNRWA schools (which are only open to Palestinian girls), and informal modes of education that are provided by community and learning centres. The largest proportion of adolescent girls went to public schools, followed by UNRWA schools, approximately one in five went to private schools, and just seven per cent reported attending learning or community centres (see Graph 9).

Graph 9: School attendance, by type

### Types of school attended by adolescent girls (n=239)

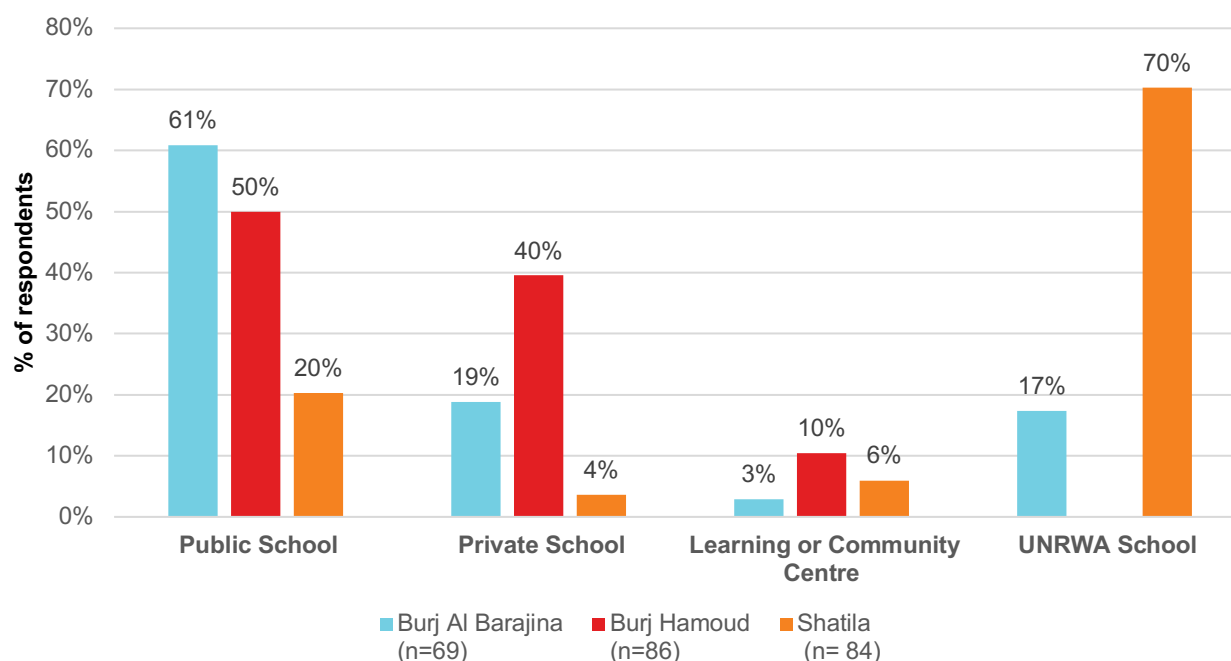


Both nationality and, to some extent, location appear to play an important role in the type of education adolescent girls receive. The research suggests that Palestinians are accessing UNRWA schools in the two camp sites (Bourj Al Barajneh and Shatila), while Syrian girls are going to public schools and learning centres. None of the Syrian or PRS girls, from a sample size of 47 and 11 respectively, reported attending private school. Lebanese girls, on the other hand, are being educated in a mixture of public and private schools. This was consistent across the three sites, with the exception of Bourj Hammoud which does not have UNRWA schools, as demonstrated in Graph 12.

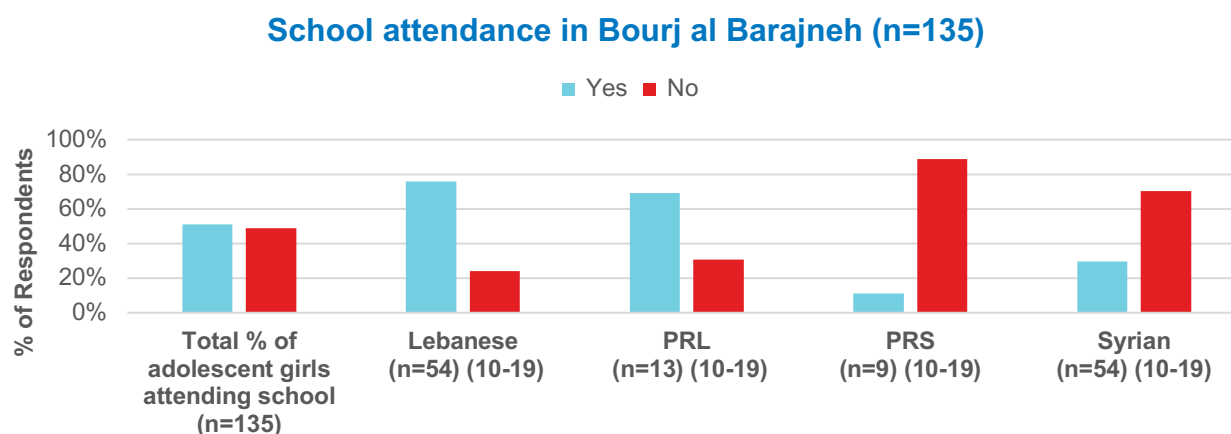
Location appeared to play a role in determining both the rates and types of schools that girls attended. This is outlined in the graphs below: graph 10 shows the types of schools attended by girls in each of the three research sites, while the following three graphs further disaggregate by nationality. It shows for example that in Shatila, where there is a high proportion of Palestinians, 70 per cent of all adolescent girls attended a UNRWA school, and PRL girls had the highest rates of attendance of all nationality groups. Interestingly, Syrian girls are more likely to attend school in Bourj Hammoud (the non-camp site), rather than in the camp sites.<sup>57</sup>

Graph 10: School attendance type, by location

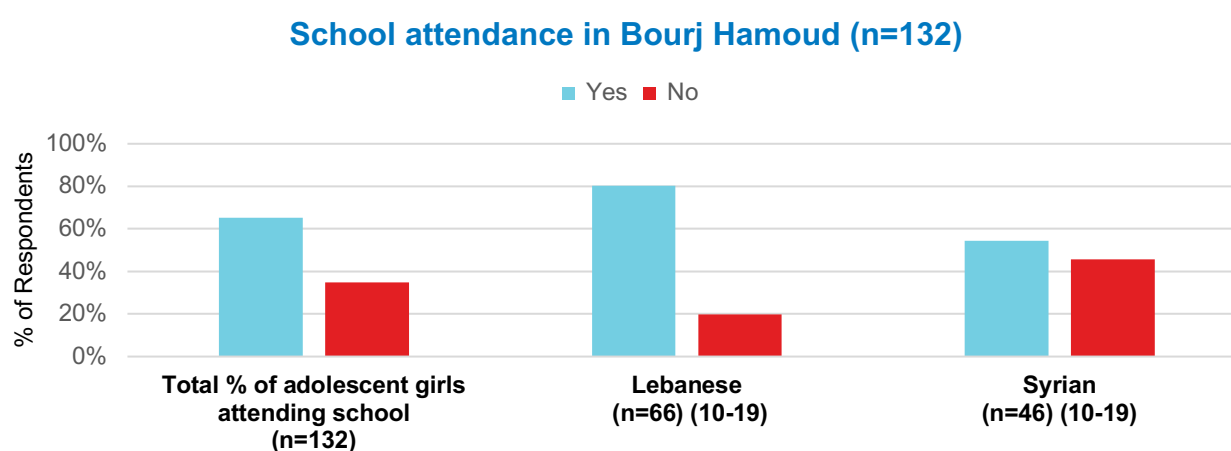
### School attendance type by location(n=239)



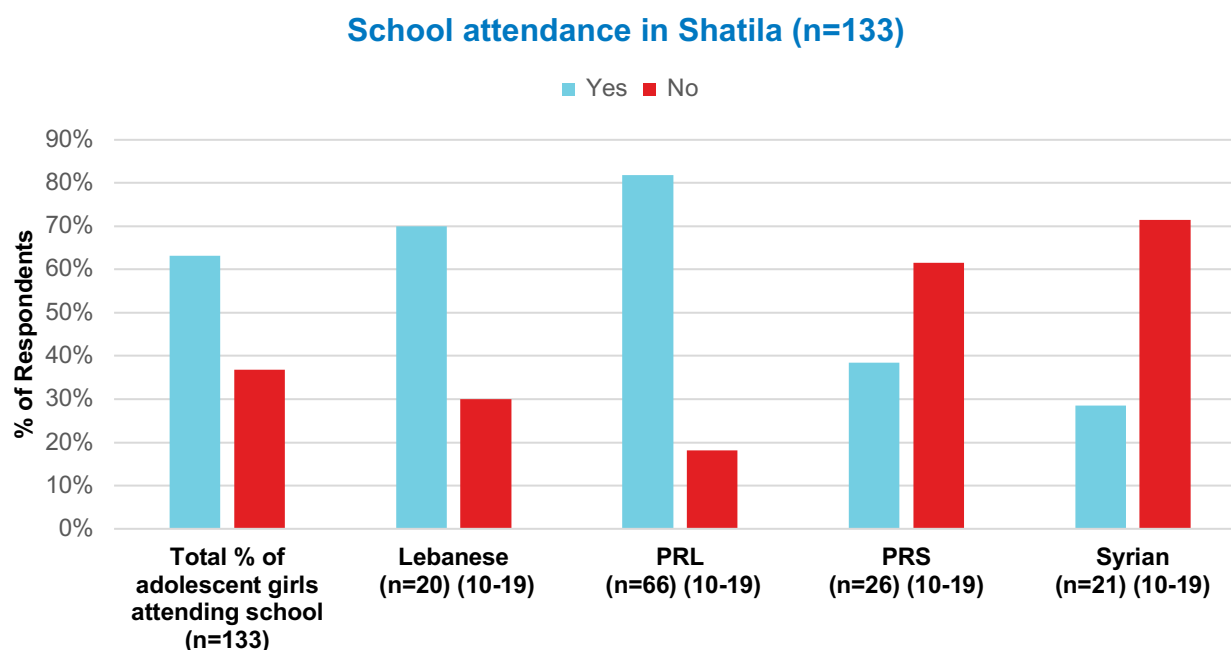
Graph 11: School attendance in Bourj Al Barajneh, by nationality



Graph 12: School attendance in Bourj Hammoud, by nationality<sup>58</sup>



Graph 13: School attendance in Shatila, by nationality

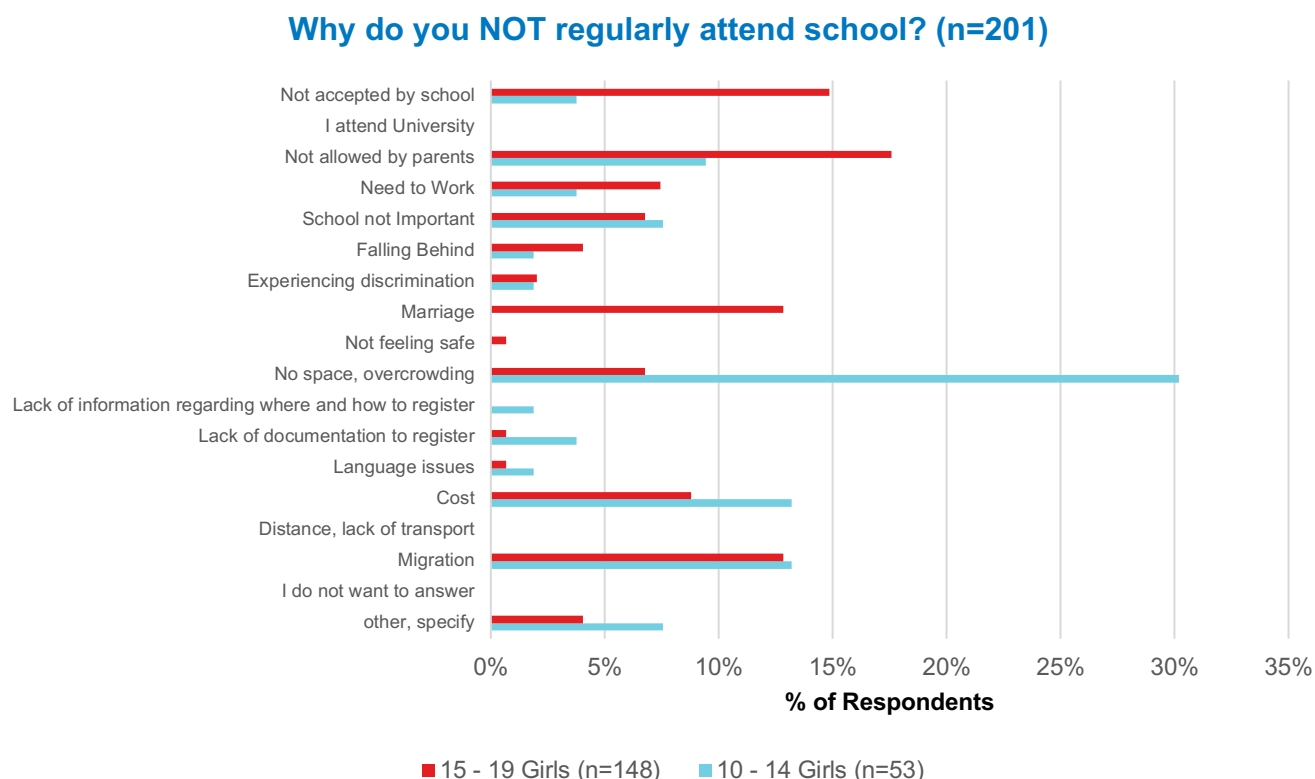


### 2.2.3. Barriers to School Attendance

Adolescent girls identified numerous barriers to their school attendance demonstrating that age, nationality, and location all played a role in shaping their capacity to attend school regularly. When the girls who did not attend regularly were asked why, there appeared to be a marked difference according to age see Graph 14). For younger adolescent girls, aged 10-14, the most common answer given by the survey respondents was overcrowding (30 per

cent), followed by the costs involved (13 per cent) and migration issues (also 13 per cent). Furthermore, nine per cent of younger girls reported that they were not allowed to attend school. For the older cohort of girls, parental consent was the primary reason given as to why they did not attend school (18 per cent), while not being accepted by the school was the second reason (15 per cent). Significantly, 13 per cent identified marriage as a reason they did not attend school.

Graph 14: Reasons for not attending school, by age group



A number of these issues were also raised in the FGDs. Girls who spoke about education in the FGDs highlighted their frustration at not being able to access educational opportunities due to cost, administrative constraints, and limited resources. An 11-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh complained: **“Whenever we go [to enrol at school], they tell us there is no vacancy,”** while an 18-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh stated: **“There aren’t any schools in the camp and the public schools don’t have any space for us. Private schools are expensive.”** Further experiences concerning administration have led to frustration, as this story told by a 17-year-old Syrian girl in Bourj Hammoud illustrates:

**“I don’t go to school. Mama tries to enrol me in the public school, she gave them the papers and everything and I started, then they told my mum, ‘Your daughter isn’t enrolled. And she’s not at the school.’ Mama went to the school...registered her name and gave them all the necessary papers. They told her to let me enrol on Wednesday; I enrolled on Wednesday and then they told her, ‘your daughter isn’t registered, her name isn’t on our file...’ My mother looked for a school. But none of them want me.”**

In addition to these administrative barriers, and perhaps contributing to them, some adolescent girls report experiencing discrimination in trying to access education, while others faced harassment in the school environment due to their status as refugees.<sup>59</sup> For example, a 15-year-old Syrian girl living in Bourj Hammoud recalled that: **“There’s a lot of discrimination in schools, if you want to go and register in school, they tell us we’re Syrians and cannot register.”** A 17-year-old, also living in Bourj Hammoud, recounted how being teased about being a refugee led her to dislike school: **“In schools, for instance, they also say, ‘You’re Syrians, you’re Syrians, go back to your country, you’ve exhausted us.’ This is why I ended up hating school, because of these occurrences.”**

This sense of discrimination led to some Palestinian girls in Shatila feeling relieved when they could attend schools for Palestinians only. As one 13-year-old explained: **“Before we were in class with Lebanese students and everyone would be fighting. Now we feel like everyone is from the same origin. It feels better.”** A 14-year-old confirmed this experience: **“we felt discrimination from the other students in the old schools. Not just in schools, if you say a Palestinian word we’re mocked. They ask us if we’re Palestinian, laugh and leave.”**

Girls also emphasised the challenges concerning limited infrastructure: when they do attend school the conditions are not conducive to creating a positive learning environment. According to one 12-year-old PRL girl living in Bourj Al Barajneh: **“...we’re sitting next to each other. We get bothered because the desks are small.”** Another 12-



year-old Palestinian girl living in Bourj Al Barajneh added: ***“...there is a lot of noise in the class. The teacher tries to keep everyone calm, but it doesn’t always help. We try to tell them to calm down and they don’t.”***

There are also accounts of gender-based harassment disclosed by girls explaining why they do not attend school, as in the case of this 13-year-old living in Shatila:

***“I stopped [attending school] three weeks ago because of the principal. There’s a boy who keeps harassing me and the principal has known for a while and doesn’t do anything about it. Last time I ended up hitting him and decided I wasn’t comfortable anymore in the school so I stopped going. The principal hits all the kids as well. There’s lots of things like this that happen.”***

Similarly, a 14-year-old PRL girl living in Bourj Al Barajneh recalled: ***“There are some boys that stand next to the school and verbally harass the girls.”*** These experiences have a negative impact not only on the girls’ learning outcomes, but also on their sense of freedom and safety.

It appears that adolescent boys also experience harassment and violence within school from staff. In one FGD involving nine adolescent boys in Bourj Hammoud, many of the participants disclosed incidents of violence including allegations of a principal who hits students with a stick, a teacher who pulls students’ hair, teachers who slap students’ faces and teachers beating children with a ruler. Furthermore, some boys experienced verbal abuse as teachers referred to them as ‘donkeys’ and their classes as an ‘animal farm’. Parents also spoke of how their sons experienced violence. In one case, a Palestinian mother in Bourj Al Barajneh recalled how her 13-year-old son was threatened with violence on his way to school and that ***“now my boy goes to work with his father at 8am in the morning and comes back early.”***

Early and child marriage also emerged as a barrier to education for adolescent girls. Of those who did not attend school, 13 per cent (all in the older cohort) identified this as the reason. When asked to give their view on why older girls leave school, the overwhelming perception of the older girls is because of marriage. Some younger girls, however, also saw early marriage as a barrier to continue their schooling: in one FGD 13 and 14-year-old Syrian girls in Bourj Al Barajneh explained:

Syrian girl, 13: ***“Some girls, their parents oblige them to leave school to get married. My friends all got married and now they have kids. A friend of mine is now 12.5 years and her parents made her marry a 25-year-old guy...Another girl got married when she was 13 years to a guy who is older than her and she has a baby now, she lives near the school.”***

Interviewer: Does she go to school?

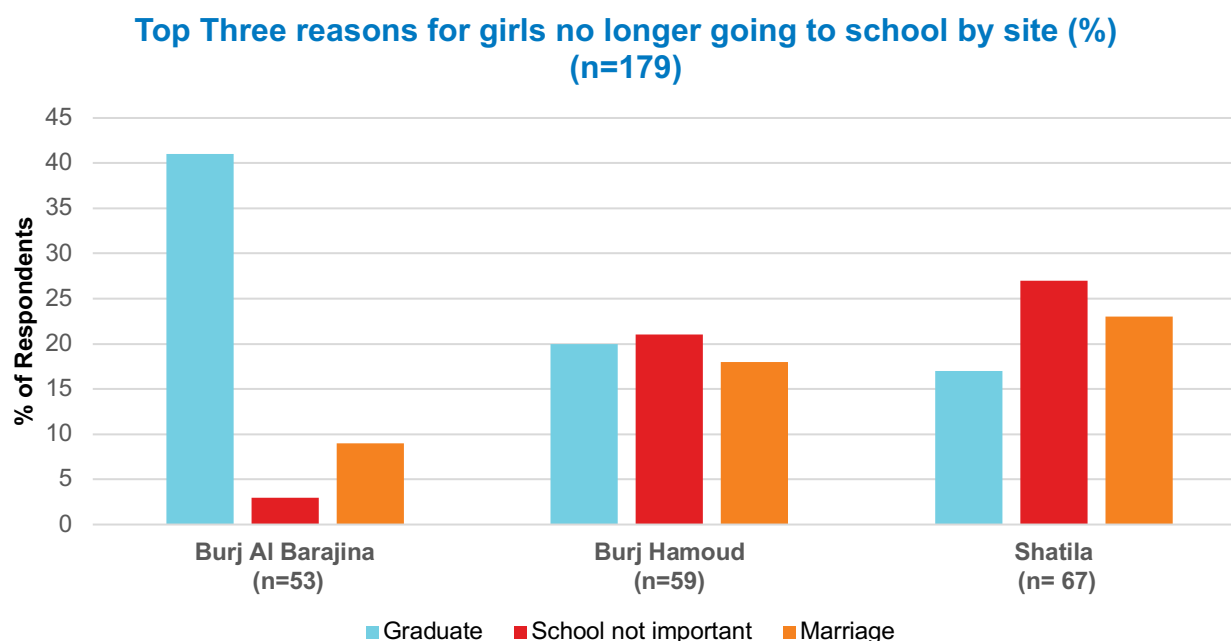
Syrian girl, 13: ***“No, her husband doesn’t allow her.”***

Syrian girl, 14: ***“Me too. My friend is 14 years old and is married.”***

The response from some boys about the importance of girls going to school demonstrated negative gender-based attitudes. One 17-year-old Palestinian boy in Bourj Al Barajneh commented: ***“a girl is with half a mind. Let her go to school, maybe the second half will be developed.... girls like education and don’t have to work a lot and will end up getting married and going to their husbands’ house. Boys have to work.”***

While parental permission rated highly in the survey responses, it was not raised by girls in the FGDs as a prominent reason why girls did not attend school. Parents, on the other hand, had mixed feelings towards education. Some parents praised local schools in FGD discussions: amongst other things, they talked about how a strong syllabus and the efforts of some individual teachers enhanced the value of schools for their daughters. Other parents, however, were not as positive in their assessment, especially as some felt the costs for sending their children to private schools was prohibitive. Some Palestinian mothers in Bourj Al Barajneh spoke of how girls who were not performing strongly at school would stop attending or would have their parents take them out of school to save money. Many parents placed great value on their children’s education. As one Syrian father living in Bourj Al Barajneh, who argued for his girls to continue their studies, put it: ***“our lives are dedicated to our children.”***

Graph 15: Reasons for not attending school, by location



There was also some variation in response according to location. As Graph 15 shows, in Bourj Al Barajneh, the top reason girls said they would leave school was due to graduation, followed by marriage and school not being important. In Bourj Hammoud, there was a more even spread of affirmative responses to these reasons, where slightly more said that girls leave school because it was not important. The group that most often said that school was not important was the Lebanese 10-14 age group. In Shatila, an overwhelming majority of girls said that school was not important. The second most popular reason for girls no longer going to school was marriage, while the least common reason for leaving school would be because she graduated. Graph 15 shows the stark difference in attitudes towards their education held by adolescent girls across the three sites, with significant work needing to be done in Bourj Hammoud and Shatila to improve girls' expectations and opportunities to remain at school until graduation.

#### 2.2.4. Enjoyment of School

***"I like learning and seeing my friends. Otherwise I would stay home and not see anyone."***

Syrian girl, 15, Bourj Al Barajneh

For girls, and in particular refugees, schools can play a significant role in their lives beyond equipping them with knowledge about academic subjects. In particular, school may enhance social inclusion by helping refugees build a sense of belonging as well as incorporating them into the wider community.<sup>60</sup> Girls strongly enjoyed certain aspects of school, such as the interaction with their peers. As outlined in Section 2.5.2, spending time with peers is also an important element of maintaining their psychosocial wellbeing.

Ninety-five per cent of all girls who regularly attended reported that they enjoyed school, with their responses in FGDs often reflecting on the positive interaction with their peers. However, as seen in the earlier section, there were still key issues for them in terms of their safety and the quality of the learning environment.

When asked about what they liked about school, girls emphasised the social interaction opportunities with their friends and peers as well as opportunities for learning. Typical responses included:

***"Friends, and nothing more."***

Lebanese girl, 14, Bourj Hammoud

***"My friends and teachers."***

Lebanese girl, 10-14, Bourj Hammoud

***"I like learning English here. But I also like leaving the house and seeing my friends."***

Syrian girl, 18, Bourj Al Barajneh

#### 2.2.5. Building Capacity of Girls for Their Future

***"It's our weapon to work, to give to our community, to be cultured, so you're not 'ignorant'."***

Lebanese Girl, 10-14, Bourj Hammoud

The majority of adolescent girls showed positive attitudes towards education. Not only did they believe that education would benefit them directly, but they also saw it as a way to support and enhance the resilience of their community and broader society. Indeed, many girls felt that their education would equip them to face future challenges. Typical responses included:

***“...the girl nowadays, her weapon is her education.”***

Palestinian girl, 13, Bourj Al Barajneh

***“...our families support us. They tell us to study because it’s in our interest.”***

Syrian Girl, 17, Bourj Hammoud

***“So, we can be part of our communities and contribute and be part of conversations.”***

Lebanese Girl, 10-14, Bourj Hammoud

The references to ‘weapons’ seem to show how school is regarded as a defence or tool by girls to be able to protect and support themselves in the future. Similar sentiments were expressed by the parents and guardians of adolescent girls. A Lebanese father in Bourj Hammoud commented: ***“Education is my daughter’s weapon.”*** He further noted the role that education plays in equipping girls for their roles in society: ***“Girls are our daughters, our mothers, half our society. We need to empower them through education and work, also so that they can raise better men.”***

## 2.3. Safe and Dignified Work

Research conducted for this report found that paid labour among vulnerable and refugee adolescent girls in the three research sites is fairly uncommon across all nationality groups. However, the risks to those girls who do work are significant and include exploitation (principally hard work for little pay) and abuse (including harassment from employers). While few girls work outside the home, the vast majority across all nationality groups work in the home. While the girls report that this does not adversely impact schooling, there is a risk that long hours of household labour can limit study and recreational time as well as the time needed to access services and take advantage of other potential opportunities for advancement.

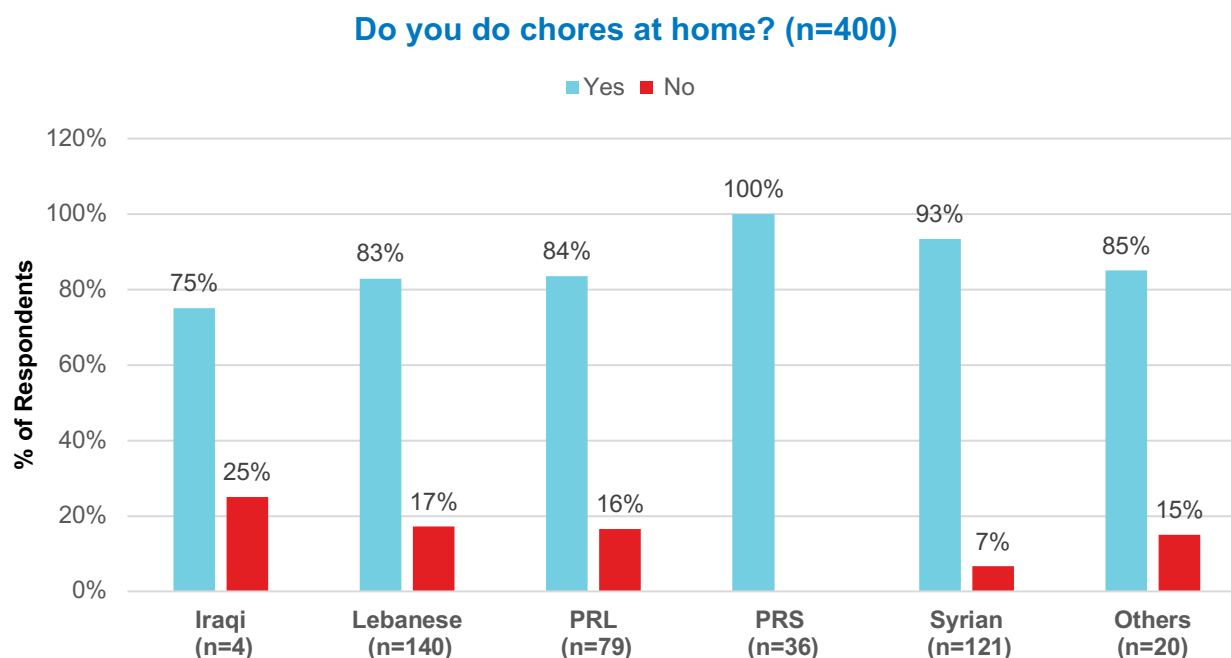
### 2.3.1. Household Labour

***“I am the only girl at home, so every day I wake up really early, my mother doesn’t force me, I wake up on my own, to clean the house.”***

Palestinian girl, 12, Bourj Al Barajneh

The vast majority of adolescent girls across all research sites and nationality groups report that they work in the home. Most girls said they did chores at home (88 per cent). More recent refugee arrivals were more likely to report doing household chores (see Graph 16). Unsurprisingly, adolescent girls in the higher age group are more likely to do household chores than the younger cohort. Almost all girls agreed that girls do more work in the home than boys (see Graph 17). In contrast, most girls (68 per cent) said that boys work outside the home more than girls.<sup>61</sup>

Graph 16: Household chores, by nationality



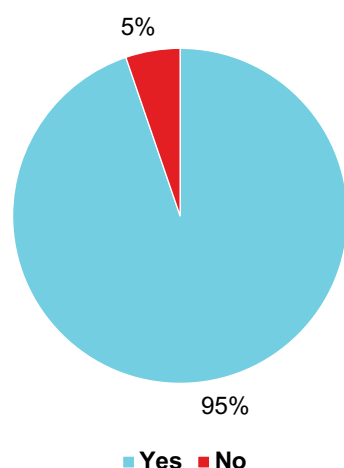
Of those girls who did household chores, almost half of the older girls (49 per cent) and almost a quarter of the younger girls (24 per cent) report working more than two hours a day. When asked what type of chores they do, the most frequent answer was cleaning, followed by cooking, caring for siblings, and shopping for essentials (see Graph 18). While girls reported spending a considerable amount of time on these tasks, the vast majority of girls (93 per cent) said that it did not interfere with their school attendance or school work. However, some NGO representatives did say that domestic labour does affect the opportunities for girls to study at school and also work

outside the home. Some civil society representatives suggested that girls do more chores around the home today because mothers work to contribute to the family income, while for other interviewees girls doing chores around the home is simply a customary practice.

***“I clean and wipe the floors, I do the dishes. I do the laundry, I take care of my brothers. I do everything. But my mother would be working all day so I come from school and I tidy up and then study. It’s normal.”***  
Lebanese girl, 16, Beirut (location unknown)

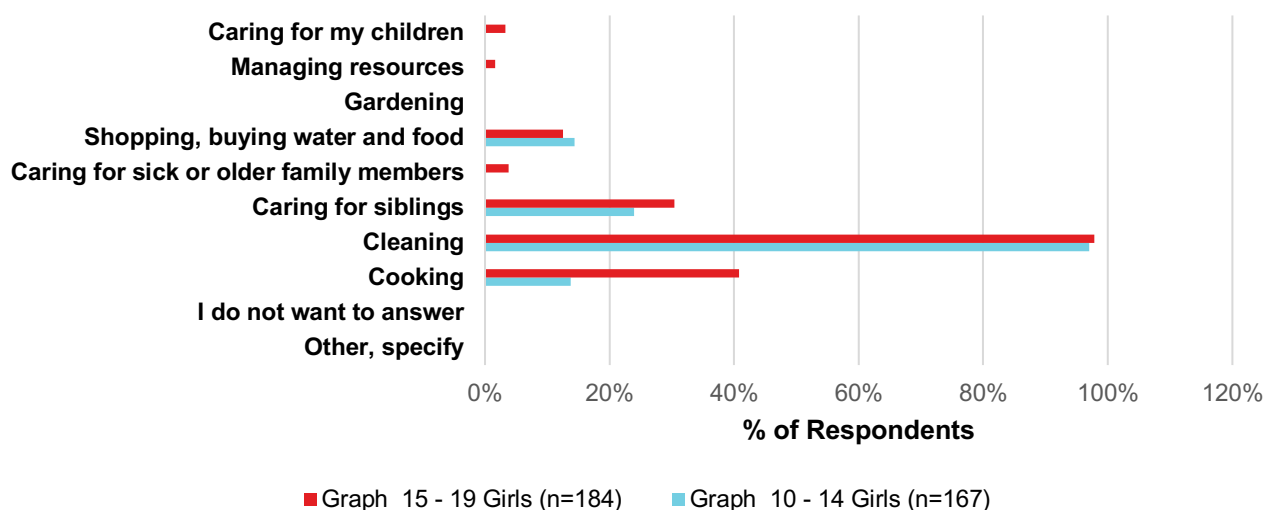
Graph 17: Perceptions of boys’ contribution to household chores

### Do girls work in the home more than boys? (n=400)



Graph 18: Types of household chores, by age

### What type of chores do you do (n=351)



### 2.3.2. Paid Labour

In addition to working inside the home, 35 girls reported working outside the home, with 30 of those girls being in the older age bracket.<sup>62</sup> Most of the girls who work do so in a store or market (two aged 10-14 and eight aged 15-19), as a teacher (seven girls in the older bracket), or as a cleaner for a house or restaurant (one aged 10-14 and six aged 15-19). However, two girls secure incomes for their families by begging on the streets: one Syrian girl aged 13 in Bourj Al Barajneh and one Iraqi girl aged 10 who lives in Bourj Hammoud. As one of the worst forms of child labour this leaves girls at high risk of further exploitation and abuse.<sup>63</sup>

As only 35 of the 400 girls work outside the home, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data: a similar proportion of girls from each of the three research sites work and Lebanese girls aged 15-19 are the most likely to work: ***“It’s true, they’re making boys rest, and making girls work a lot. Especially in one-dollar shops, girls stand on their feet for a very long time.”*** Syrian girl, 15, Bourj Hammoud. It is worth noting that of the 15 girls under the age of 17 that reported working, just one is from the host community. Civil society representatives

confirmed that, despite the low numbers, there were significant concerns regarding exploitation, harassment (including from employers) and abuse for those who do undertake paid employment.

Of those who do work, most work five to seven days a week (including four girls aged 10-14 who work seven days a week) and between five and ten hours a day. This would clearly have an impact on their ability to attend school and pursue other activities, and could limit their ability to access services.

The fact that few girls work outside the home could be due to cultural factors, as indicated in some of the key informant interviews with representatives of the local government, police, religious leaders, and UNRWA. There may also be some legal constraints facing newer refugees who lack the necessary paperwork to access employment,<sup>64</sup> or it may be due to security concerns on the part of the girl or her family. Conversely, a few FGD participants identified that girls were working outside of the home more than previously, although numbers remain small. Reasons for this increase could include shifting cultural norms, as well as increased poverty and the difficulties facing parents and caregivers trying to find employment.<sup>65</sup> As one girl noted: ***“Recently, a lot of girls are working. There is more dependence on girls.”*** Syrian girl, 17, Bourj Hammoud.

There are critical welfare issues for those engaged in child labour, in particular the small number of younger girls who work so many hours and/or who beg on the streets. This is likely to have an adverse impact on their education as well as pose additional protection risks. It is clear that the girls themselves also recognise the security risks, given 57 per cent of those engaged in work feel their work is not safe. This includes many of those girls who work as a cleaner in homes or restaurants, in shops, or in factories. A number of civil society organisations and government representatives, and religious leaders also said they thought girls who worked faced harassment, including sexual harassment, and exploitation, with girls and particularly refugee girls being paid less than others.

Another issue that could impact girls' security is the fact that just over a quarter of the girls who work (nine of the 35) say their place of work is not near where they live, and that a fifth (20 per cent) of all girls who work say they do not feel safe travelling to work (see Section 2.4.1 for a further discussion on girls' movement around the city). Some civil society representatives also confirmed that the abuse faced by girls who work includes harassment on the way to and from work, as well as from those she works with, or for, while at work.

Of those who are not working outside the home, 11 per cent among the higher age group are trying to find work. Given this is almost as many as have jobs, this could indicate scarcity of employment and/or discrimination when applying for jobs.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.4. Freedom of Movement

***“A lot can happen to a girl by herself on the road. There are lots of men around”***

PRS girl, 14, Shatila

Freedom of movement is critical in providing adolescent girls with opportunities to develop friendships and social support networks.<sup>67</sup> It is also crucial in allowing girls access to healthcare, education, and other vital services. Limiting girls' access to these opportunities has serious long-term consequences including decreasing their well-being and increasing their risk of isolation and health problems, as well as making them less able to access information and make informed decisions.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.4.1. Moving around the city alone

***“In our neighbourhood, there's no safety. I only feel safe with someone older than me.”***

Lebanese girl, 10, Bourj Hammoud

While living in and around cities has many advantages such as being in closer proximity to employment, education and health services,<sup>69</sup> vulnerable and refugee adolescent girls living in Beirut highlighted several barriers that restrict their freedom of movement. At first glance, it appears that many girls were allowed by their parents/caregivers to move about the city alone, with 58 per cent of all adolescent girls reporting that they were allowed to go out alone during the day. A closer examination, however, shows that girls do so with well-founded fears: ***“Honestly, I only feel safe with my mum or dad. Nothing else. Just my parents. I feel very scared alone.”*** Lebanese girl, 13, Bourj Hammoud

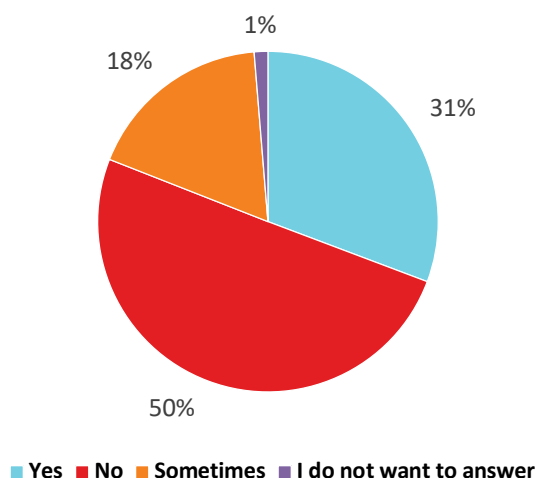
Only 31 per cent said that they felt safe travelling around the city alone during the day. This figure dropped to 13 per cent when asked about moving around the city alone at night time. The data shows that girls experience and witness high levels of sexual harassment, threats and violence and as one girl commented: ***“In the camps the streets are very scary.”*** Syrian girl, 13, Bourj Al Barajneh.

While there was some variation across the three sites and nationality groups, this finding was consistent for all adolescent girls.



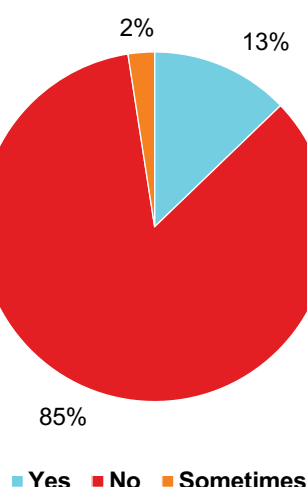
Graph 19: Perceptions of safety during the day

### Do you feel safe moving around Beirut during the day? (n=231)



Graph 20: Perceptions of safety during the night

### Do you feel safe moving around Beirut at night? (n=164)



The survey results showed that in the established Palestinian camps, newly arrived refugee girls – particularly Syrians – were less likely to be allowed by their parents/caregivers to go out alone during the day. In Bourj Al Barajneh, for example, only 43 per cent of Syrian girls and 22 per cent of PRS girls were allowed to go out alone during the day, compared to 61 per cent of Lebanese girls and 85 per cent of PRL girls. In the non-camp site of Bourj Hammoud, Syrian girls were granted slightly more freedom by their parents/caregivers. Here, 54 per cent of Syrian girls reported that they were allowed out during the day, while only 52 per cent of Lebanese girls had the same permission. Parental permission may be a product of assessing need – to attend school, for instance – alongside perceived risks and concerns about safety. While it is clear that all parents and caregivers worry about allowing their daughters to go out alone, the particularly high levels of concern among Syrian parents is consistent with the findings from a report by Save the Children in Cairo which cited fears of harassment and violence in their new communities as a significant reason for keeping their girls at home.<sup>70</sup>

In the FGDs, the girls reflected on their community's attitudes towards their freedom of movement. ***"The community around us does not allow the girl to go out on her own,"*** as one 13-year-old PRL girl said. Other girls outlined similar views. A 17-year-old Syrian girl living in Bourj Hammoud commented: ***"Some girls aren't allowed out of the house, they stay stuck inside."*** Similarly, a 15-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh stated: ***"We never go out alone. We can't go out alone."*** Some girls accept the limits on their freedom of movement: ***"Lots of girls are annoyed by the fact that girls can't go out whenever they want but they should understand that their parents worry about them and that's why they're protective."*** PRS girl, 14, Shatila

The primary concern of adolescent girls across all three sites and nationality groups was GBV, including sexual harassment (see also Section 2.6.2). Numerous girls spoke of being harassed or chased by men and boys. A 14-year-old PRS girl from the Shatila camp noted: ***"Yes guys whistle and sing at us [when we're walking on the street] but we keep walking and ignore them."*** In a more threatening case, a 17-year-old girl in Bourj Hammoud said: ***"I used to be comfortable walking on the streets, but recently I haven't been able to walk on my own. There are a lot of boys that chase me."*** Another Syrian girl from Bourj Hammoud reported: ***"On Saturday, mama and I went down at night to the one-dollar shop and this one guy chased us all the way to our building, he came up in the elevator and didn't want anyone specifically from the building...He roamed from the first building to the last, and then went back down to chase us again."***

Other girls were concerned about being kidnapped or raped. One 10-year-old Lebanese girl in Bourj Hammoud stated: ***"There are kidnapping of kids and girls, so I don't like to leave our house."*** A 12-year-old Lebanese girl also in Bourj Hammoud spoke about her fear: ***"I don't feel safe at all, except with my cousins or uncle...There is a lot of harassment, rape ... drug cases."***

The behaviour of drunk and drug-affected men, as well as the perception of this as a risk, raised specific concerns for adolescent girls (see also Section 2.1.2). An 18-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh described this as the major reason why she did not go out alone: ***"No we're too afraid [to go out alone]. There are always drunk men who harass us and even the ones who aren't drunk harass us."*** Stories such as this were common among the girls interviewed, as one 13-year-old Lebanese girl from Bourj Hammoud said: ***"I don't feel safe – there are many drunk people and sinning...– there is rape as well."*** Another commented: ***"I feel safe only at home, with mum and dad. Otherwise not at all."***

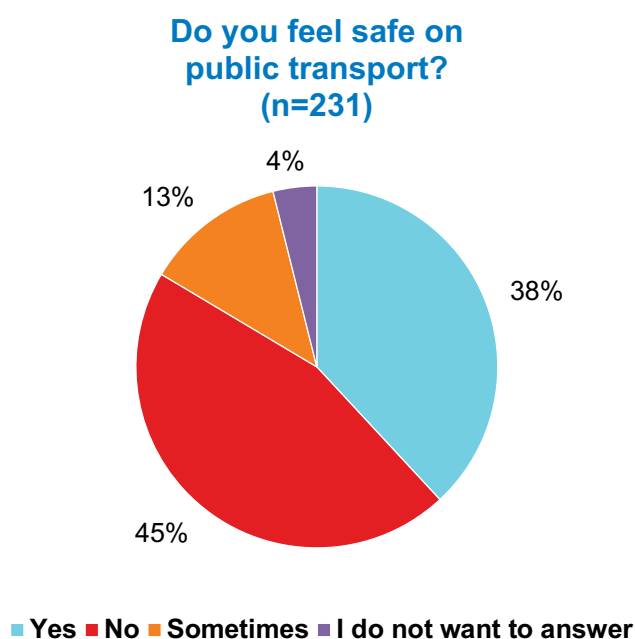
Adolescent boys corroborated the gendered aspects to freedom of movement. Boys felt they had more freedom in navigating the city as they had greater physical strength than adolescent girls and they could fend for themselves. In the words of one 19-year-old Lebanese male in Bourj Hammoud: **“Of course there’s a difference [between adolescent girls and boys]. A man can handle himself wherever he goes.”** A 14-year-old Palestinian girl from Syria living in Bourj Al Barajneh drew attention to the gendered dynamic which gave adolescent boys greater freedom of movement than adolescent girls: **“...my brother is super relaxed and has little responsibility. When I complain to my father, he says, ‘he’s a boy.’ What does that mean?”** Similarly, a 16-year-old Palestinian girl living in Bourj Al Barajneh commented: **“My brother has a lot more freedom than me.”** While another 15-year-old Palestinian girl living in Shatila stated that young men were **“allowed to do anything.”**

#### 2.4.2. Safety on Public Transport

Public transport in the research sites refers to privately run buses, and shared van and taxi services. Being able to use these is crucial in allowing girls to move around the city in order to access services and build and maintain social networks and peer support. Just over 55 per cent of all adolescent girls who responded in the survey said they used shared taxi services regularly, which made it the most popular form of transport. The second most popular form of public transport was buses which were used by 29 per cent of respondents, while just 15 per cent used vans to move around the city.

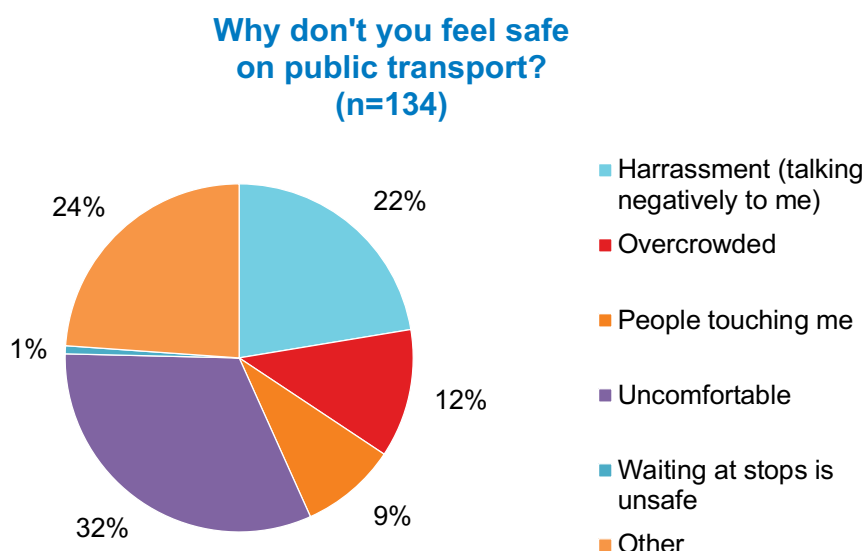
The response of adolescent girls shows that many are concerned about safety on public transport. As demonstrated in Graph 21, only 38 per cent of girls reported feeling safe on public transport, while 45 per cent said that they did not feel safe. In terms of nationality, Syrian and PRL girls reported feeling the most unsafe (both at 50 per cent) while 42 per cent of all Lebanese girls reported feeling unsafe on public transport.

Graph 21: Perceptions of safety on public transport



As demonstrated in Graph 22, girls spoke overwhelmingly of feeling uncomfortable while over one in five girls specifically pointed to verbal harassment being the main concern for them as well as people touching them.

Graph 22: Reasons for not feeling safe on public transport

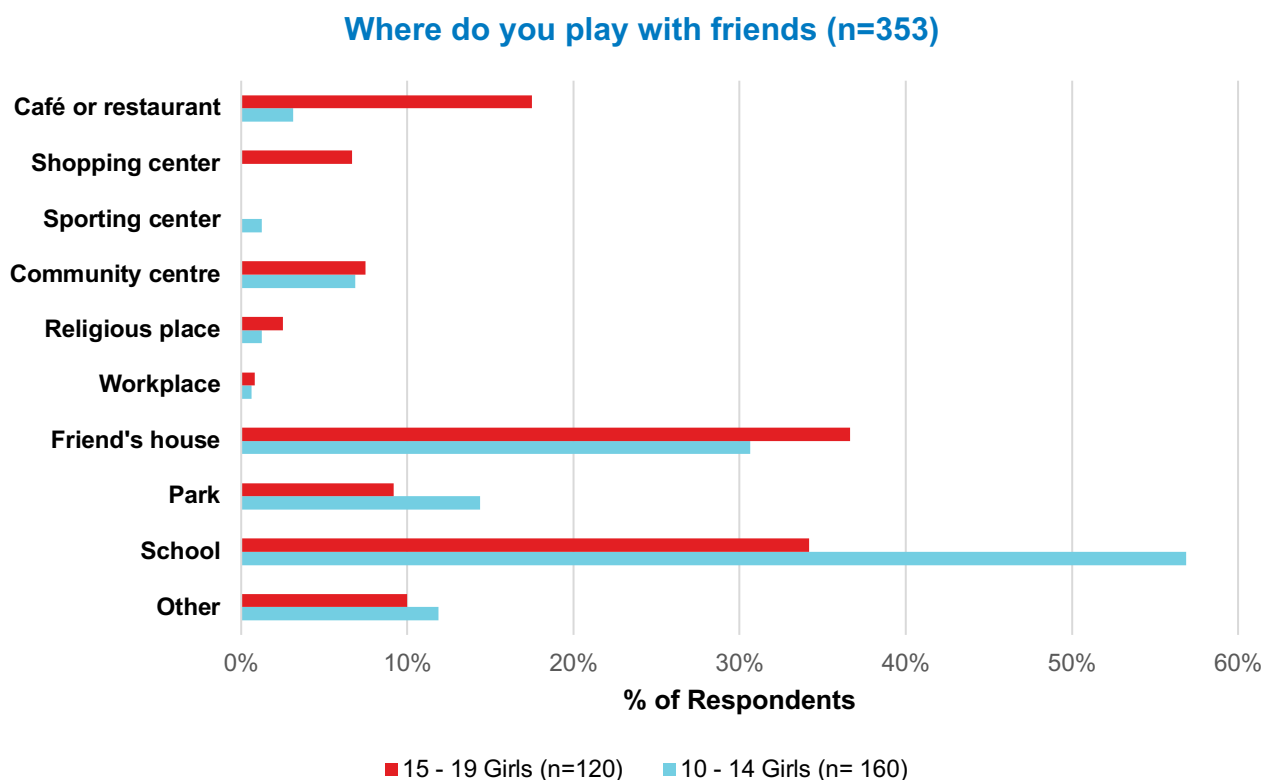


In this context, it is unsurprising that 73 per cent of girls said they were not allowed to go on public transport on their own. Parents and guardians were also concerned about the safety of their adolescent girls using transport services, especially if they were using taxis. Again, a gendered dynamic was apparent as parents told stories about taxi and van drivers saying crude or offensive things to their daughters. Furthermore, some parents did not allow their daughter to get into an empty taxi, preferring instead to call private taxi companies for safety. Some parents were also hesitant to allow their daughters to get onto empty buses, allowing them to travel on buses only if there were other passengers.

#### 2.4.3. Places to Feel Safe and to Play

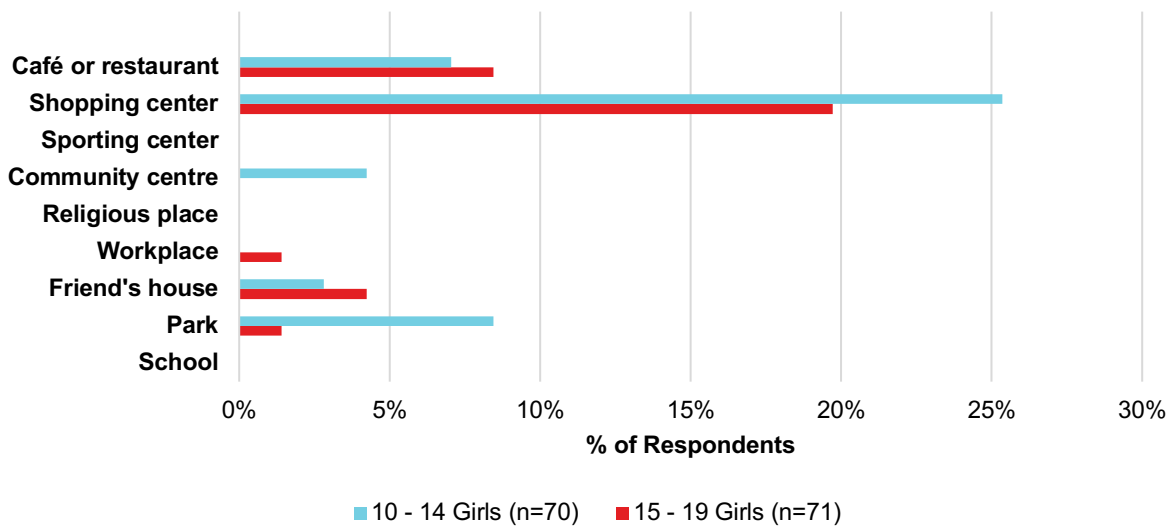
Places where girls can express themselves without fearing harm or judgement and build social support networks and play are important to their social development and wellbeing.<sup>71</sup> The research suggests that adolescent girls make an important distinction in terms of public and private spaces when thinking about their safety and enjoyment.

Graph 23: Places to play with friends, by age group



Graph 24: Places that are unsafe, by age group

## Which of these places are UNSAFE?

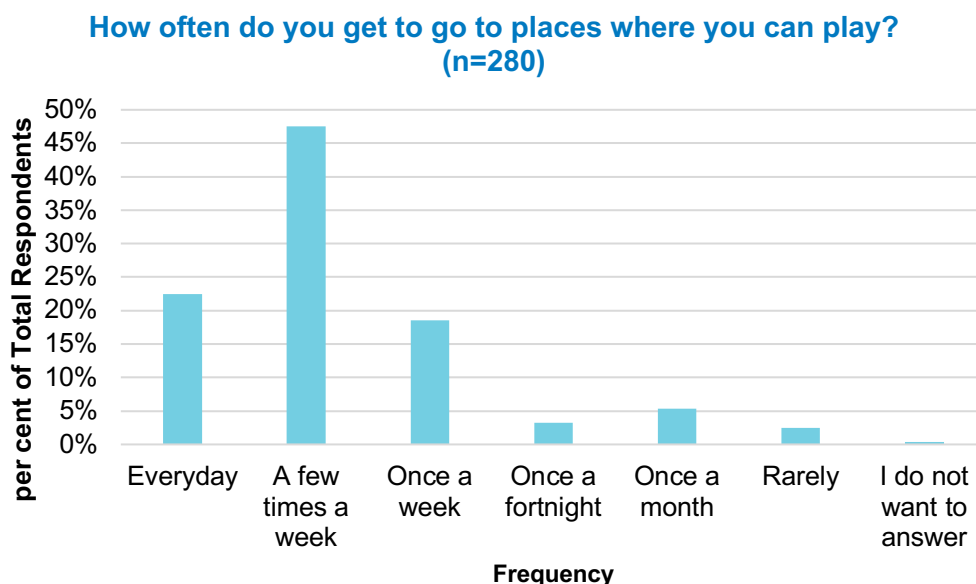


Overwhelmingly, girls feel less safe in open public spaces such as shopping centres, parks, cafes and restaurants. In particular, younger girls reported feeling less safe in parks and shopping centres than older girls. However, parks elicited mixed responses from girls: in Bourj Al Barajneh girls overwhelmingly identified parks as places where they felt safe, but this was not the case in the two other sites. This may be because of the facilities, their location and the presence and behaviour of other users. While younger girls tended to describe parks as unsafe, there is evidence that they continued to use them, perhaps due to the lack of alternatives.

Alternatively, regulated community spaces were generally considered to be safe by adolescent girls. Schools were seen as a popular place where girls go to play with friends, especially for the younger cohort (see Graph 23). This figure is no doubt related to the higher school attendance rate by younger girls (see Section 2.2.1).<sup>72</sup> Schools also rated particularly highly in Bourj Al Barajneh. Importantly, as shown in Graph 24, few girls identified other regulated community spaces such as religious places, sporting and community centres as being unsafe (with the exception of three girls aged 10-14 in Shatila who considered community centres unsafe). However, this may be due to their lack of engagement in such spaces (see Section 3.3).

Finally, friends and relatives' houses were generally seen as safe places, and places where adolescent girls can play. This suggests that adolescent girls feel safer in, and have greater access to, private as opposed to public spaces.

Girls reported that they were afforded sufficient time to play, despite their household and other responsibilities (see Section 2.3.1). For almost 50 per cent of girls, the opportunity to play with friends is something they can do a few times a week, while almost 23 per cent of girls can be in places to play with friends every day (see Graph 25). On the other hand, 11 per cent of girls said they were able to get to places to play with friends only once a fortnight or longer. This was mainly dependent on gendered dynamics within the community. As discussed earlier, many girls said they did not feel safe walking around the city, while parents were also hesitant to let their daughters out of the house. The situation was different for boys: in discussing their experiences, adolescent boys provided insight as to how they enjoyed more freedom as they were able to go to cafés to socialise with their friends with one 19-year-old Palestinian from Bourj Al Barajneh saying his day “**starts at 9.30pm!**”



#### 2.4.4. Parental Attitudes to Girls' Safety and Opportunities to Play

***"If my girl is five minutes late when coming back from school, I go crazy. None of my kids go out ever."***

Palestinian mother, Bourj al Barajneh

When discussing the safety of their children in public spaces, parents describe a climate of fear. This fear was shared across the nationality groups and sites. A Lebanese father from Bourj Hammoud also argued that the situation has deteriorated in recent times: ***"There is too much corruption in the streets, in the schools, even in the homes. There was love before; there was community. Today there is violence and as parents we are always trying to stop it before it starts with our children."*** There is also an apparent sense from some who have been living in Beirut for a longer time that recent concerns about safety have been driven by the influx of refugees. In discussing the contemporary setting, a Lebanese father from Bourj Hammoud maintained: ***"There are too many nationalities. This has led to brothels, drugs, and pornography. I worry about my thirteen-year-old girl a lot because of this atmosphere."***

## 2.5. Health

For refugee adolescent girls, the conflict and prolonged displacement have taken a heavy toll on their health and psychological well-being. While access to healthcare in Beirut is widely considered to be good, there are some barriers particularly for those most in need, notably Syrian girls. Of further concern is the fact that sexual and reproductive healthcare services are rarely accessed by adolescent girls, even though data suggests a need for such service provision. There are also barriers to receiving Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). Although there is an evident need, given the trauma many girls have suffered during conflict and displacement, the hardships and violence they continue to suffer, and the fact that many girls report feeling sad or lonely much of the time.

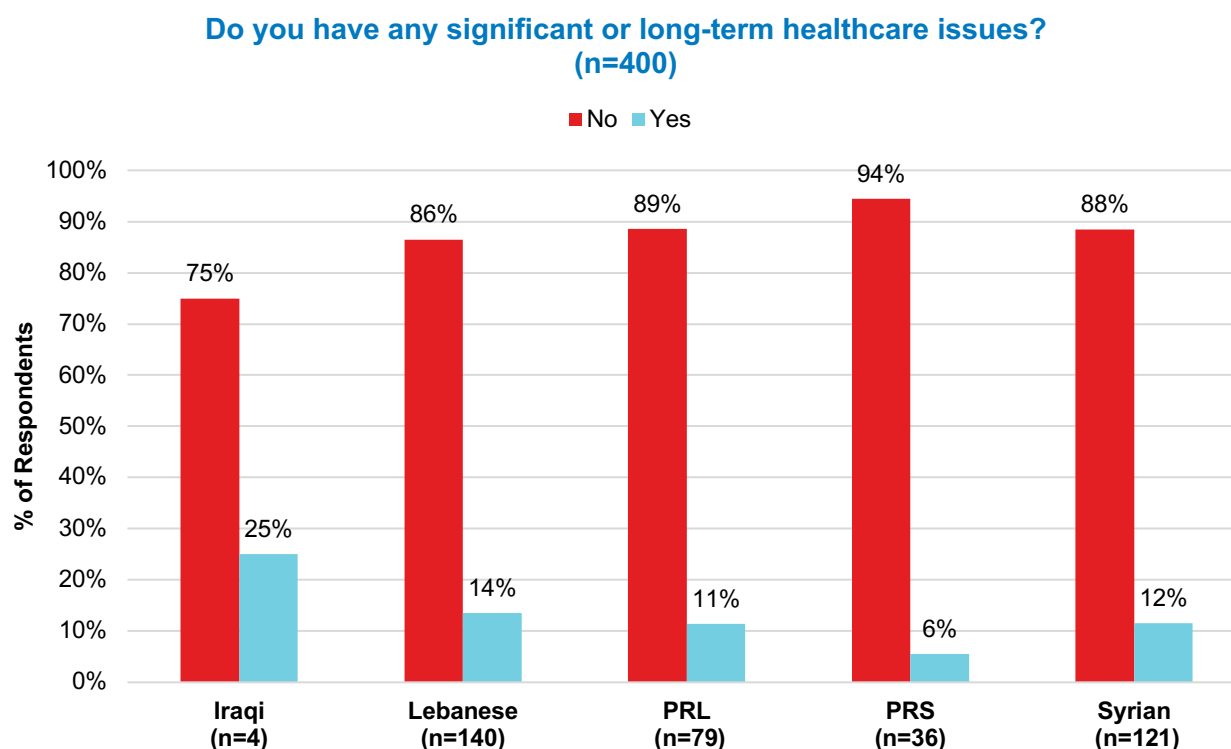
### 2.5.1. Physical Health

Significant numbers of girls across all nationality groups contend with serious health issues, and sometimes have little recourse to the healthcare they require. A sizeable proportion of girls reported that they have difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, using their arms, hands or legs, or talking, remembering and concentrating: 66 out of the 400 girls surveyed (17 per cent) experience these difficulties in their everyday life. The proportion was higher among PRL girls, especially in the older age bracket, with 28 per cent of PRL girls aged 15-19 experiencing such difficulties.

A number of girls - 45 out of 400, which equates to 11 per cent of the survey sample - also said they had significant or long-term healthcare issues. Iraqi and Lebanese girls were particularly likely to report this, although, for the Iraqi group in particular, the sample size was too small to make any generalisations (see Graph 26). Of those who do have a significant or long-term healthcare issue, almost half (42 per cent) said they were not getting help for it: 10 out of the 14 Syrian girls who reported long term health problems said they were not getting help.



Graph 26: Significant or long-term healthcare issues, by nationality



While most girls, 85 per cent, said they go to a doctor or a health clinic if they need to, a large number do not. Syrians are particularly unlikely to see a doctor or go to a health clinic with 24 per cent saying they would not do so. It appears that there may also be reluctance to seek the advice of healthcare professionals on the part of Iraqis and other non-host communities but the numbers are too low to draw any firm conclusions.

The primary barrier to accessing healthcare is cost, with more than half, 31 out of 61 girls, giving this as the reason why they did not go to a doctor or clinic. Civil society organisations provided similar feedback, confirming that this was a barrier to accessing medical care across all nationality groups. Another six girls said it was because they were frightened of going to the doctor: five of these girls are in Shatila, three of whom are Palestinian girls aged 15-19 years old. This fear need not be related to concern about discriminatory treatment, but may simply be a fear of medical practitioners and practices. For instance, one 12-year-old Palestinian girl in Bourj Al Barajneh said: ***“I am so scared of medicine, so I don’t go! I’d rather wait a week to heal than go to the doctor.”*** Eleven girls, seven of whom are Lebanese girls aged 15-19 in Bourj Hammoud, said it was because they did not need to go to a doctor, while six, four of whom are Syrian girls aged 15-19 in Bourj Al Barajneh, said it was because they go to a pharmacist instead. This data indicates that adolescent girls may not be accessing appropriate care including check-ups and other preventative steps.

Safety in traveling to health services also emerged as a barrier: 22 per cent of all girls said they do not feel safe while travelling to the facilities. This is corroborated in Section 2.4 which finds that girls perceive and experience high levels of harassment and threats when travelling alone. However, the actual location of the healthcare services did not emerge as a barrier for adolescent girls. Only one girl said she did not go to a doctor or clinic because it was too far away. When asked how far the nearest healthcare facility was, only 51 out of 400 said it was 30 minutes or more away, while only 13 said it was an hour or more. The proximity of healthcare services was corroborated in both FGDs and interviews.

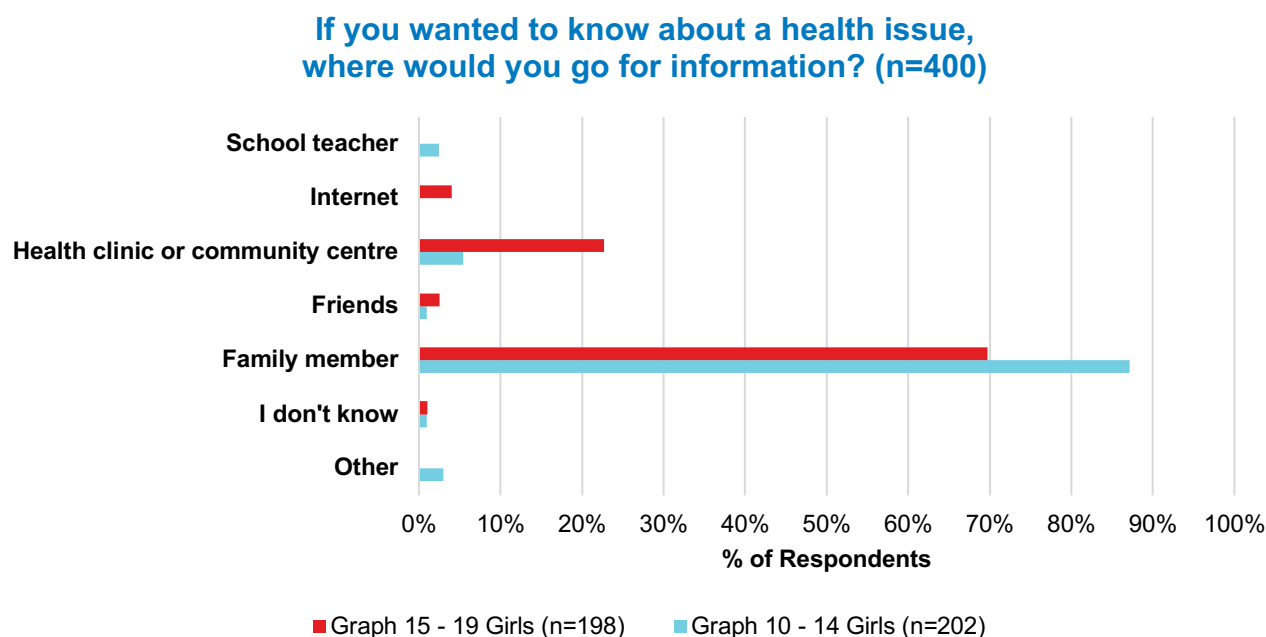
While discrimination did not explicitly come through the survey as a reason for girls to avoid seeking medical attention, some FGDs revealed that discrimination does exist, although to what extent was unclear. A Palestinian mother in Bourj Al Barajneh told the story of her daughter:

***“She married a Lebanese guy, and she got a child from him who was born with respiratory problems. One time he had an emergency and was taken to the hospital, but the admission offices refused to let them in because they thought the child was Palestinian. They waited until the child’s grandfather got proof that the child was Lebanese, but when he got in it was too late, the child died, and they nevertheless had to pay the admission fees after that.”***

Finally, social and cultural sensitivities around certain issues – particularly sexual and reproductive health, and mental health matters – emerged as a barrier for girls accessing health services. Of those girls who do see a doctor when needed, the vast majority said it would be for infections and diseases (81 per cent), while much smaller proportions said it was for matters related to SRH (nine per cent) or for mental health issues (0.6 per cent).

When asked where they access information about healthcare issues, girls overwhelmingly, averaging at 79 per cent, said they get this information from family members, rising to 87 per cent of girls aged 10-14. (see Graph 30).

Graph 27: Accessing information about health issues



Most interviewees confirmed that SRH issues were still sensitive matters in certain communities and are not spoken about. Civil society representatives also noted that the fact that many girls cannot go to the doctor alone, but need to go with their mother, can limit the type of assistance they seek, particularly for SRH services and information. Other research has also shown that Syrian girls in particular lack access to information on SRH issues. This is of particular concern given that there are indications that child marriage within this community is rising, in part due to poverty.<sup>73</sup> Despite these challenges, one UNRWA representative said that slowly these issues are beginning to be addressed through awareness-raising and training.

### 2.5.2. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

Very few girls, only two of the 339 girls who said they would go to a doctor or clinic if needed, reported that they would seek formal medical attention for mental health issues or for psychosocial support. However, a significant number of girls said they felt sad or lonely on a regular basis. This may mean that some of these girls do have MHPSS needs, but are simply not seeking help. In FGDs, some participants suggested that it was difficult to access MHPSS because of the stigma associated with it, which could explain the discrepancy. Research conducted elsewhere suggests this stigma might prevent parents from taking their daughters to the doctor, or mental health service providers, for mental health issues, because they are concerned it might affect the girls' marriage prospects.<sup>74</sup> In interviews, civil society representatives from Beirut also concurred that girls did suffer from mental health issues, but that this was not unusual among refugee populations. Some civil society representatives also said that there was little awareness of mental health services among these populations.<sup>75</sup>

When asked how they feel on most days, most girls said that they felt OK or happy, but a sizeable proportion, 15 per cent, or 60 out of 400 girls, said they felt sad. (see Graph 28). Syrian girls aged 15-19 in particular were more likely to say they feel sad on most days: 17 out of 60 girls, or 28 per cent.

Iraqi girls, as well as older PRS and the Others group, also reported that they feel sad, but the numbers of respondents were too small to draw any firm conclusions. Girls said, that when they do feel sad, they seek support from family (70 per cent of respondents), or friends (16 per cent). A few, five out of 400 girls, said they ask for support from school teachers, while over ten per cent, 45 out of 400 girls, said they do not ask anyone for support. Many girls also said that on the days they do not feel good, spending time with friends and family is what makes them feel better.

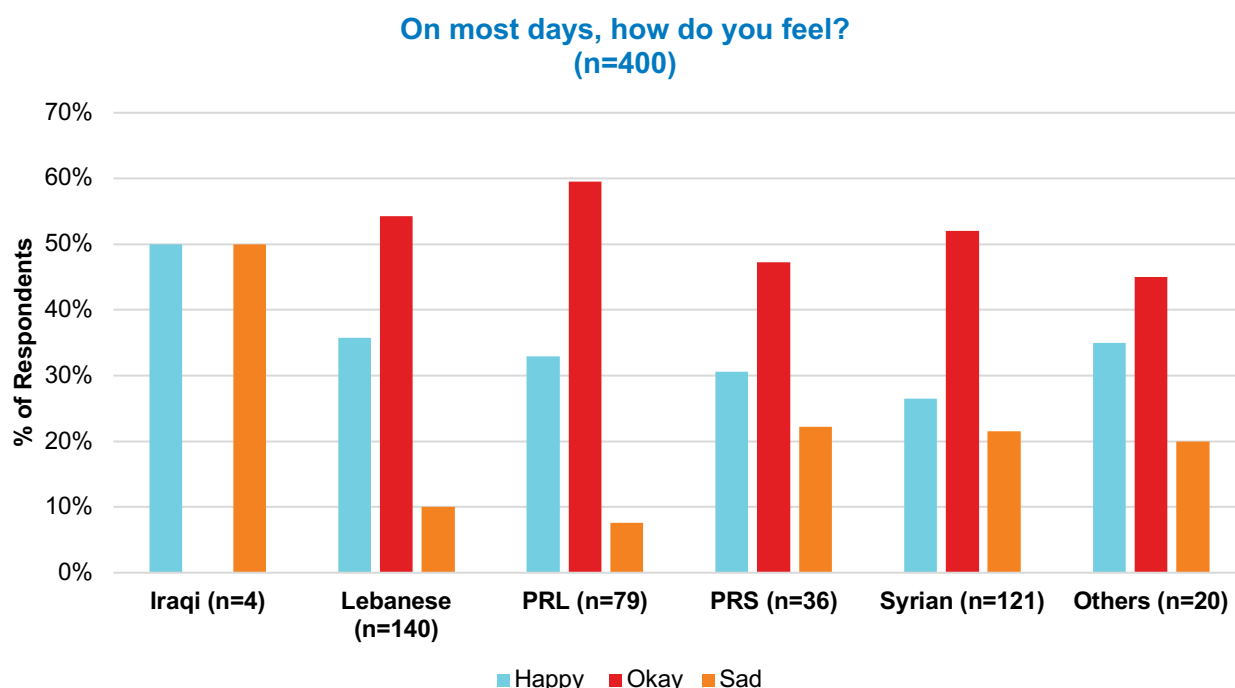
**“Being with my friends, talking and laughing together. This is what makes me feel happy.”**

Palestinian girl, 12, Bourj Al Barajneh

However, as outlined in Section 2.4.3, the ability to go out and spend time with friends can be limited, primarily due to safety concerns and because there are few places for girls to be with people their own age. This leaves girls without adequate access to peer support and without the mental health benefits that come from playing and socialising with friends.

.. [In response to the question 'what makes you sad?'] ***"We don't go out much. We are here in Lebanon for five years now and if I tell her to let us go out, she refuses."*** Syrian girl, 14, Bourj Al Barajneh

Graph 28: Wellbeing self-assessment, by nationality

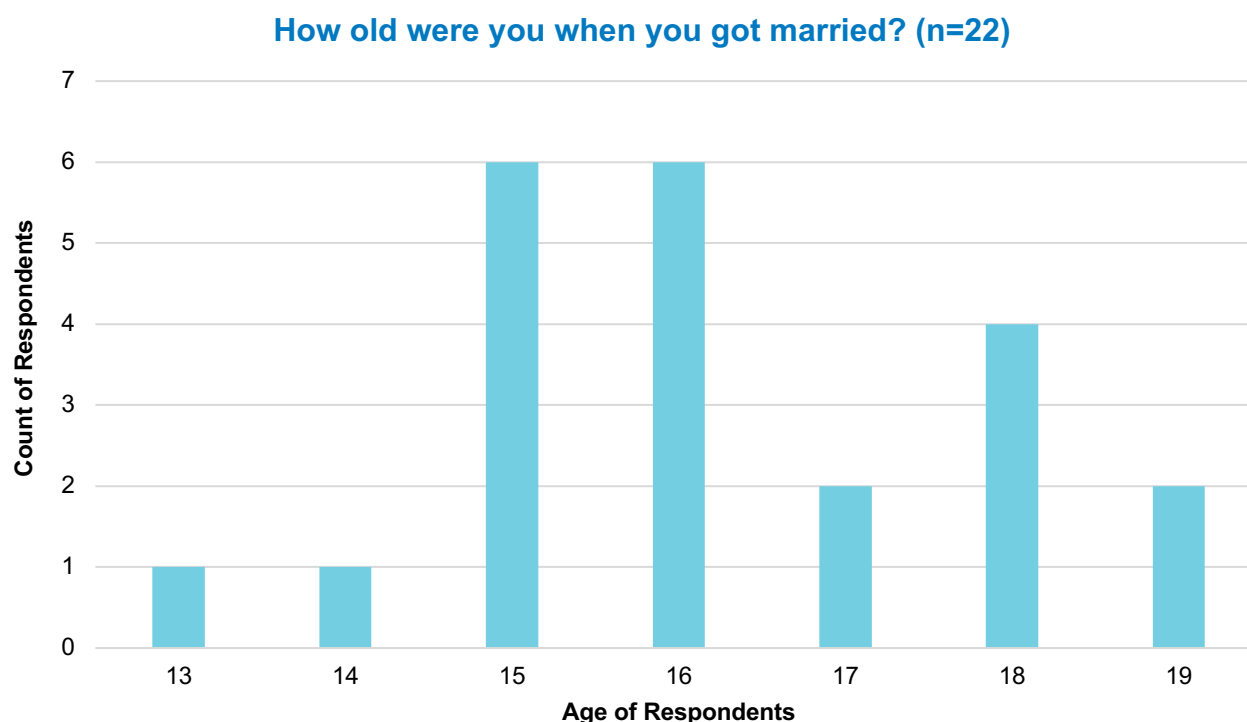


More than half (54 per cent) of all adolescent girls said that they feel isolated and lonely always, most of the time, or sometimes. Like the findings regarding happiness above, Syrian girls aged 15-19 were particularly likely to feel isolated or lonely, with 73 per cent saying they felt like this always, most of the time, or sometimes. Gender norms and cultural expectations may exacerbate feelings of sadness or loneliness if, for instance, girls are expected to stay inside more. There are examples of this: Syrian girls noted that boys tend to socialise outside with friends, while girls often stay inside on their own (see Section 2.4). Other research has also shown the adverse impact on girls' well-being of restrictive gender norms, which limit girls' freedom of movement and lead to their isolation, as well as hindering access to mental health support.<sup>76</sup>

Parents and caregivers also acknowledged the negative impact of isolation upon adolescent girls. Although some Syrian fathers in Bourj Al Barajneh commented that because young girls cannot protect themselves against harassment, they keep them inside for their own protection, others realised that girls were adversely affected by the lack of public spaces in refugee camps where girls could play. In Shatila, Syrian mothers also said that their daughters' wellbeing has been heavily affected by restricted freedom of movement. Similarly, a community leader in Shatila mentioned that keeping girls inside for protection, combined with the overcrowded and violent environment in which they lived caused unhappiness among Syrian girls. In Bourj Hammoud, Syrian girls themselves acknowledged that their wellbeing was affected by the restrictions on their movement.

The FGDs revealed the gendered aspect to this issue. For example, one Syrian father from Bourj Al Barajneh said: ***"Take a 12-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl, the boy can go outside and play, but the girl can't. She stays at home bored, while he is outside playing."*** Other research has suggested that boys have more freedom of movement than girls across the Middle East and North Africa and across nationality groups, with parents restricting whether and when girls can leave the home.<sup>77</sup> However, despite this, some Palestinian girls in Shatila, thought that girls were generally happier: ***"Even if they're allowed to go out at night and things like that it feels like they're [boys are] sad inside"***

A community leader noted that in some cases these issues of isolation and loneliness led to child marriage becoming a more attractive option than it might otherwise be. Of the survey sample, 22 of the 400 girls reported being married (six per cent), while a further 15 girls (four per cent) were engaged. As demonstrated in Graph 29, the most common age for marriage was 15 and 16. While this was spread across the nationality groups, a majority were Syrian or PRS girls. Civil society representatives in Beirut also said that child marriage was growing as a problem because of harsh living conditions and poverty, and because parents who do not have legal residency cannot work. It was also suggested that some parents saw child marriage as a way to protect their children, particularly against sexual violence.<sup>78</sup> Other research has similarly noted that child marriage has been increasing in Syrian communities, as well as taking place among Lebanese communities.<sup>79</sup> Care International has also highlighted the prevalence of child marriage among the Syrian population, describing it as a response in large part to economic hardships.<sup>80</sup>



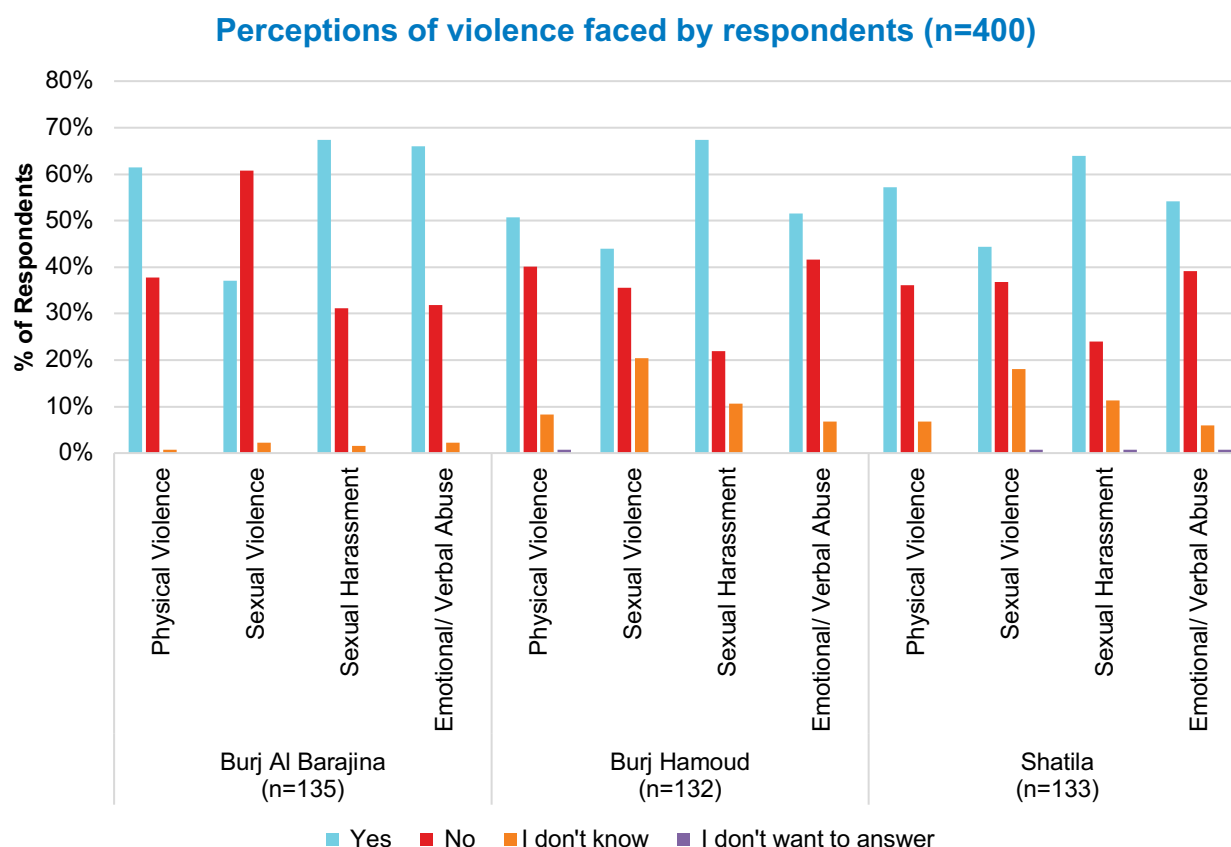
Conflict and forced displacement also have a major impact upon the mental health of refugee girls. Research undertaken by GAGE<sup>81</sup> notes that not only have Syrian girls, and others displaced from conflict, suffered and witnessed war, and the violence and atrocities associated with war, they now live in poverty and in tough environments that are violent, overcrowded, and insecure.

When asked what made girls happy, girls in all groups and all sites said that it was being able to meet and play with friends, underscoring the need for there to be safe spaces for girls to get together. One 12-year-old Palestinian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh spoke for many when she said: ***“I like to play with my friends. When I stay home alone, I get bored.”*** The only significant distinction was in Bourj Hammoud where “sleeping” and “crying” were cited by 23 girls fairly evenly across both age groups as what they did to make themselves feel better on days when they did not feel good. However, going out with friends and family and playing with friends were almost as popular. ‘Sleeping’ and ‘crying’ could be strategies or coping mechanisms but they also can be symptoms of depression or other mental health concerns, particularly if they continue or interfere with functionality. As one girl commented: ***“Yes, if he’s [a boy] upset, he can just go outside with his friends. But if a girl is sad, she’ll just lock the door on herself and cry.”*** Syrian girl, 16, Bourj Hammoud

## 2.6. Experiences and Perceptions of Safety and Violence

Adolescent girls in the three research sites face and perceive very high levels of violence and abuse in their everyday lives. More than half of all survey respondents said girls of their age face physical violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment and emotional or verbal abuse where they live (see Graph 30). The FGDs also suggested that this heightened level of violence that permeates their lives is “normal:” girls indicate that they are accustomed to it, if not desensitised to it, and sometimes participate in it.

Graph 30: Perceptions of violence faced by girls, by location and type.

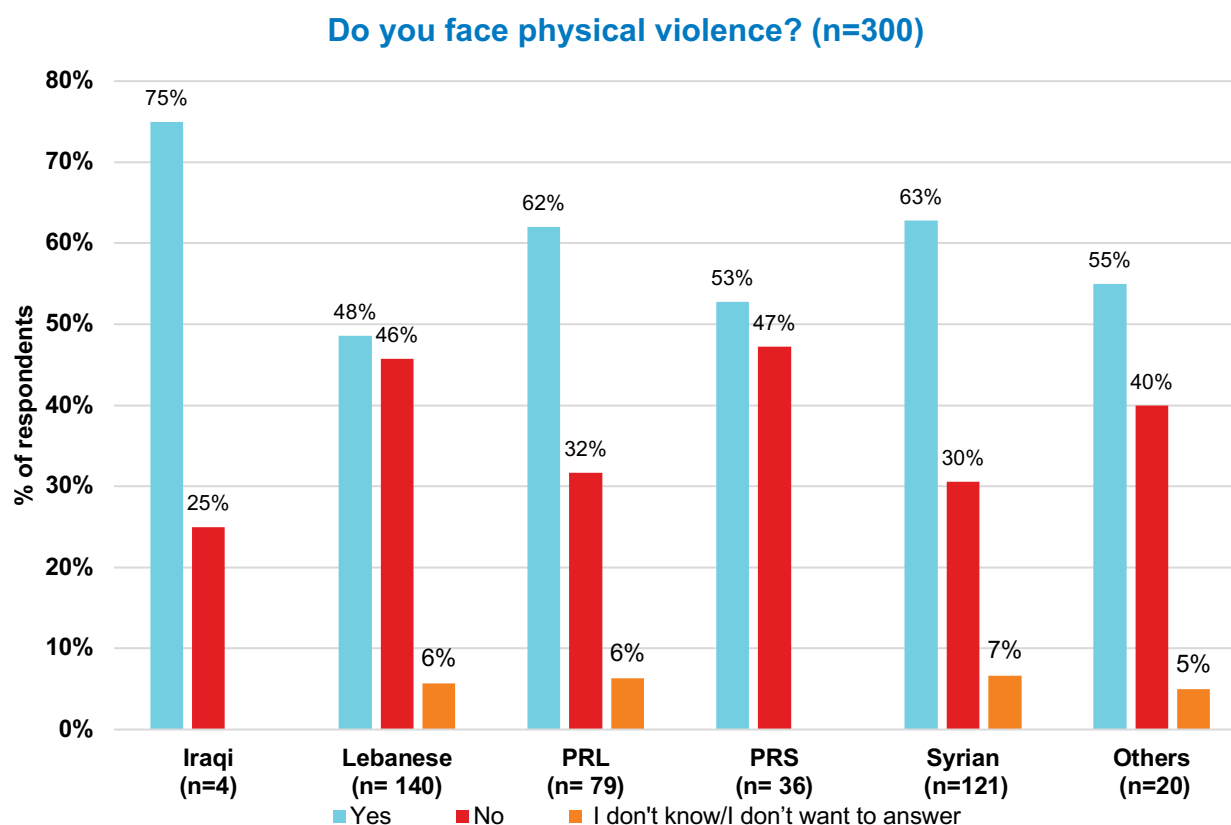


### 2.6.1. Physical Safety

More than half, 57 per cent, of girls reported that girls of their age and nationality face physical violence where they lived. This is a staggering 226 out of 400 respondents. Nationality appears to play an important role in shaping perceptions of physical safety. Lebanese girls appeared less likely to perceive threats, while girls from refugee communities perceived high levels of threats of physical violence (see Graph 31). This finding was reasonably consistent across the three sites. Girls in Bourj Al Barajneh were particularly likely to agree that adolescent girls of their nationality faced physical violence with 61 per cent, or 83 girls agreeing. In Shatila, 57 per cent, or 67 girls, agreed, while in Bourj Hammoud, it was 51 per cent, also 67 girls.



Graph 31: Perceptions of physical violence, by nationality



Violence inside the home was commonplace and consistently reported by adolescent girls. In the FGDs, it was discussed by a small number of girls as being what they described as disciplinary in nature. This was corroborated by governmental and UNRWA representatives who mentioned that disciplinary violence in the home can be very harsh, particularly in PRL and PRS communities and, in their opinion, to a lesser extent within Syrian and Lebanese communities.<sup>82</sup>

Violence outside the home was also discussed by a few girls in FGDs, notably Palestinian girls, as being commonplace in their environments, where disagreements can become violent (see Sections 2.1.1 and 2.4.1 for discussions on safety in public places). While it is important to recall that girls were not asked direct questions about their own experiences of violence (see Section 1.6), the matter of fact way in which these girls spoke of violence in their everyday lives could be an indication of the extent to which they have been exposed to, and harmed by, violence. This was notable in a FGD with young Palestinian girls in Bourj Al Barajneh, one of whom said: ***“There was this girl, my age, I used to hit her. So, her grandmother and mother came and they made a huge story out of it, and then fought with my mother. And sometimes, as well, gunshots happen.”***

While a number of Syrian girls acknowledged that safety was better in Beirut than it had been in their conflict-affected homeland, the presence of numerous strangers in their neighbourhoods caused them concern. One Lebanese girl also said she felt unsafe in Beirut because she no longer knows everyone where they live. Similarly, a Syrian boy also said he used to feel safer in Aleppo because everyone knew each other and would defend each other.

A number of others said they feel less safe in Beirut for other reasons, including poor camp conditions and overcrowding. These feelings were articulated by both girls and a number of mothers across the different national groups. One 16-year-old Lebanese girl said: ***“There are buildings near us with people who fight amongst themselves and there are gangs. You see people drunk on the street all night and getting into fights, the other day we saw people at 6 am getting into a fight with knives.”*** Palestinian and Syrian mothers similarly expressed concern regarding unsafe living conditions and, particularly, the high levels of violence and drug use.

## 2.6.2. Sexual violence and harassment

Civil society representatives in Beirut confirmed that in addition to physical violence, sexual violence was ‘everywhere’ and ‘consistent’. Some mentioned such violence is particularly prevalent in camps and in small, overcrowded spaces where tensions can increase. When asked whether adolescent girls of their nationality in their area faced sexual violence, almost half, 42 per cent, said they did with a further 14 per cent saying they did not know. Perhaps surprisingly, while girls in Bourj Al Barajneh were the most likely to say that girls faced physical violence, they were the least likely of girls from all three sites to say they face sexual violence. Nonetheless, the proportion of girls in Bourj Al Barajneh who said girls faced sexual violence was still significant at 37 per cent - 50

out of 135 girls surveyed. In both Bourj Hammoud and Shatila, 44 per cent of girls surveyed said girls of their nationality faced sexual violence in their areas (see Graph 30). There were no discernible variations between the nationalities. One civil society representative also referred to survival sex and trafficking as a means of overcoming poverty.<sup>83</sup>

Perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment are also of great concern. When asked whether adolescent girls of their nationality in their area of residence faced sexual harassment, approximately two-thirds of adolescent girl respondents, said they did, with a further eight per cent saying they did not know or did not want to say, leaving only a quarter of respondents, 26 per cent, saying girls of their nationality do not face sexual harassment where they live.

**“In our street, you can’t be comfortable at all...In our street there’s been a lot of harassment of girls... physical harassment.”**

Lebanese girl, 15, location unknown

As noted in Section 2.4, high levels of harassment negatively impact upon girls’ freedom of movement. As one 18-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh said: **“A girl can’t go out at night after dinner because of harassment. We go out with friends or family but very rarely.”** Sexual harassment appears widespread across all sites and all nationalities. Data did not reveal which men in particular were the perceived perpetrators, but did suggest that the threats were perceived as all-pervasive, with some girls commenting that the only people they felt safe with were family members.

### 2.6.3. Emotional and verbal abuse

**“The streets are filled with insults. When children go to school, they hear insults like ‘When will we be done with you? When will you go back to your country?’ These insults are from both Palestinians and Syrians.”**

Syrian mother, Shatila

**“Yes, you’d be walking on the streets and they’ll shout out, ‘you’ve taken our money; you’ve taken our money; you’ve taken our houses; you’ve taken our houses.’”**

Syrian girl, 17, Bourj Hammoud

Adolescent girls described widespread emotional and verbal abuse, with over half - 57 per cent - reporting that this is an issue that they face. For instance, one 15-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Al Barajneh said: **“There are lots of examples. We’d be going to Dahye and someone says ‘Stay away Syrians, why are you coming here.’ Lots of times Palestinians also make fun of us or harass us.”** Girls in Bourj Al Barajneh were particularly likely to say that adolescent girls of their nationality faced emotional or verbal abuse where they lived: another 15-year-old commented: **“If anyone harasses you, you can’t do anything because you’re Syrian.”** This correlates with the high level of physical violence girls living there say is prevalent against adolescent girls. Among those living in Bourj Al Barajneh, 36 out of 54 Syrian girls, 33 out of 54 Lebanese and 10 out of the 13 PRL respondents all said girls of their nationality faced abuse, as did all four girls in the ‘Others’ category. (see Graph 30).

### 2.6.4. Discrimination

**“We’ll be walking on the street, and they’ll tell us we’re Syrian and stuff, and we’re also sensitive you know. They discriminate and differentiate between Lebanese and Syrians, and why they’re doing that, I don’t know.”**

Syrian girl, 17, Bourj Hammoud

In addition to gender, nationality shaped girls’ perceptions of abuse. As we have seen above adolescent girls described and received emotional and verbal abuse focused often on their nationality and perceptions of discrimination based upon nationality were widespread among both adolescent girls and boys. When asked about discrimination, most Syrians, Palestinians and Lebanese girls and boys who participated in the FGDs expressed the feeling that they were discriminated against more than other nationality groups.

One Palestinian boy aged 17 from Bourj Al Barajneh noted: **“There’s racism – first Lebanese, second Syrians, and third Palestinians. Palestinians used to be second, but now they are the very, very last on the list.”** Similarly, an 18-year-old, also from Bourj Al Barajneh, said: **“You can’t get a job, or go to school or buy a car because you’re Syrian”** and a 17-year-old Syrian girl from Bourj Hammond stated: **“Yes, they [people on the street] tell us we’ve made Lebanon dirty.”** One Lebanese girl from Bourj Hammoud, however, commented that people are discriminated against more widely: **“There’s a lot of discrimination not just against Sunnis. It could be against Shi’as, Lebanese, Syrians...”** which points to the complexity of the situation that adolescent girls, and boys, are trying to navigate.

### 2.6.5. Responses to Violence

When girls were asked what they would suggest a friend do if she experienced any form of violence, by far the most popular response was to tell her family, with over two-thirds saying they would recommend this course of action. The next most popular response was to inform the police, but only a few people, eight per cent, said they would advise their friend to do this. This was mostly consistent across the nationality groups, although Lebanese girls seemed even less likely to advise their friend to go to the police, with only two girls recommending this course

of action. This underscores the importance of families and family networks, particularly for girls facing various sources of insecurity and threat. The fact that only a few girls, even from the host community, might consider reporting a violent incident to the police, demonstrates that these girls may not have adequate access to security and justice. Reasons identified in secondary data include: fear of repercussions or ill-treatment by the police, risks of stigmatisation when it comes to certain types of crimes, language, logistical and financial barriers, lack of trust and confidence.

While public perception of the police was not the focus of this research, a number of Lebanese girls, boys and parents did express lack of confidence in the police because of their inaction when incidents happen: this came up in FGDs in Bourj Hammoud in particular. Palestinian girls and boys in Shatila and Bourj Al Barajneh expressed similar sentiments, while some Syrian girls in Bourj Al Barajneh, and boys in Bourj Hammoud, said that they feared the police arresting them for something they had not done. Although at least one boy also said their presence made him feel safe. Another, a 19-year-old Palestinian boy in Bourj Al Barajneh, expressed fear of security providers because of distressing experiences he had had in crossing checkpoints in Palestine. Syrians and Lebanese also expressed concern about crossing checkpoints in Beirut fearing they would be targeted. Some civil society representatives in Beirut confirmed that there was widespread distrust of the police, either because of refugees' prior experiences in their home countries or because the police have been known to harass people in Beirut.

Girls were similarly unlikely to recommend service or support providers to their friends if they experienced any form of violence, with only four per cent listing this as an option. When probed, 82 per cent of girls said that they did not know where such services could be accessed. This was similar across all sites and nationality groups. Those who did know of such services provided many examples, including various associations, centres and professionals. Lack of knowledge of and inclination to recommend service providers suggests further work is needed to ensure support services are adolescent-friendly and made available to girls (and boys) in need. Young people need to be made aware of the existence of such services through awareness-raising campaigns and outreach, and any barriers to access identified and removed: for instance, taking measures to ensure confidentiality, and communicating this to communities to build trust. Qualitative data from FGDs with girls and parents suggested there was lack of trust in others, as well as an expectation that violence is part of their everyday life, which results in many young people not even telling their own parents when they are the victims of violence.

#### 2.6.6. Perceptions of violence against adolescent boys

Interestingly, when girls were asked whether boys of their nationality face physical violence where they live, responses were not too dissimilar to girls, with 58 per cent of girls saying boys of their nationality do face physical violence. In Bourj Al Barajneh, girls reported that boys of their nationality were at a higher risk of physical violence (73 per cent) than girls (61 per cent). In other words, there appears to be high levels of violence against adolescents in all three sites and boys may be at slightly higher risk because they have greater freedom of movement, at least outside the home.

***“My mum fears for my 15-year-old brother more than me. She warns him about things more than she used to warn me...she tells him to tell where he is at all times. If someone tries to talk to you, you ignore; walk in public spaces.”***

Lebanese girl, 19, Bourj Hammoud

Far fewer girls reported that boys of their nationality face sexual violence where they live, only 11 per cent of all 400 respondents. However, twice as many girls thought boys were at risk of sexual harassment. Of course, while these figures fall far below the number of girls who are perceived to be at risk of sexual violence and harassment, the perception of a threat against boys is evident. It is also important to note that, as many girls are likely to feel uncomfortable discussing sexual violence against either girls or boys, it is possible that the threat of sexual violence against both is even higher than the data suggests.

Of similar concern is the high proportion of girls, 57 per cent, who believe boys of their nationality face emotional or verbal abuse; exactly the same proportion as consider girls face such abuse.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS: SITES OF SUPPORT AND RESILIENCE

### 3.1. Community-Based Activities & Groups

Adolescent-focused programs, activities and groups in Lebanon are supported by a variety of organisations, including NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), UN agencies, political parties and government actors. However, many activities appear to be run on an ad-hoc basis, and cater to small groups of adolescents. Knowledge about where and when these activities are run was inconsistent across both the adult and adolescent respondents. There was, however, a general consensus among parents and caregivers that participation in some organised activity or group outside the home was beneficial to adolescent girls. Mothers in particular reported that these activities were of benefit to their daughters, noting that they were important for giving girls their own space as well as an opportunity to learn, express themselves, be creative, and simply get out of the house. One mother said that when there are activities in the area, she sees a completely different and positive side to her children, adding that girls just feel suffocated at home.

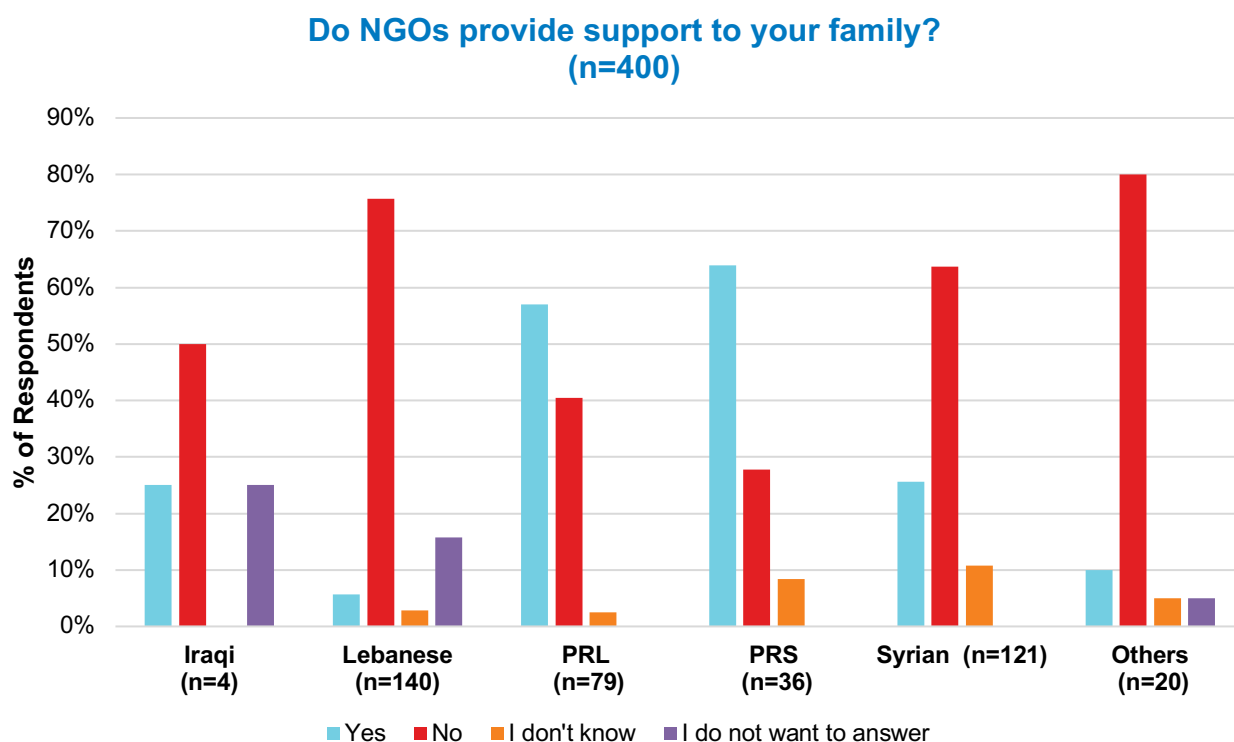
Overall, few girls involved in the research were active in community-based activities, programmes or groups. This appears to be more pronounced according to nationality. The data suggests that the more established a nationality group is in the area, the more likely girls of that nationality are to be involved in community groups. Twenty-five per cent of Lebanese girls and 23 per cent of PRL girls reported being involved in local activities, with participation in Scouts being the most common. For recent arrivals, 19 per cent of Syrian girls and no PRS girls were involved in community activities. Syrian girls appeared to be more likely to be involved in religious-based events such as Quran readings at local mosques. This is despite the fact that girls did not identify the mosque as being a particularly safe space for them (see Section 2.4). Participation rates for adolescent girls in community activities were highest in Shatila and Bourj Hammoud, 38 and 42 per cent respectively, while girls in Bourj Al Barajneh reported only 20 per cent participation. However, across the three sites, there was consensus from girls and their mothers regarding the lack of availability or awareness regarding such groups: again, it was highest in Bourj Al Barajneh. One 15-year-old Syrian girl from this area noted: ***“Yes, for young girls, it’s just from school and back. There are no places for her to play. There are games, but no places for her to play – this is the problem.”*** This is despite the fact that girls in this area identified the local parks as their main safe place.

One in five girls noted that they were not allowed to participate in community activities by their parents/caregivers. This appeared to be a far greater restriction upon recent refugees with 34 per cent of Syrian girls and 56 per cent of PRS reporting that this was the main reason they did not take part. However, it should be noted that the sample size is low and this was not corroborated in the qualitative data. In contrast, it was only a concern for two per cent of Lebanese girls.

The older girls got, the less likely they were to report involvement with a community activity, though it was unclear why. Of the girls who reported being involved in a community group or activity, 41 per cent were aged between 10 and 14, while this number dropped to 26 per cent for the older cohort. Boys appeared to be less active in community activities, and showed greater pessimism toward them.

### 3.2. Basic Assistance

Adolescent girls report that their families receive either none or insufficient financial, resource-based or service provision support from external agencies (see Graph 32). Just over half of Palestinian girls reported that their families receive basic assistance from UNRWA, with 60 per cent of Palestinian girls describing this support as insufficient. Only Lebanese girls reported that their family receives support from the Lebanese government, though this was only 11 per cent, and there were a high number of girls who reported not knowing whether or not their families receive external support for basic needs.



This suggests that adolescent girls have limited direct engagement with, and knowledge of, the opportunities – both recreational and services/assistance – provided by external agencies in their communities. As discussed in Section 2.5, only 18 per cent of girls knew where they could access support from an external agency if they experienced violence, while only four per cent of girls would seek such assistance. This highlights an opportunity for direct engagement between adolescent girls and external actors.

### 3.3. Engagement with social and political issues

***“The community needs to see us as capable people. We can do anything boys can do and there are some things we can do that boys can’t do.”***

Palestinian girl, 15, Shatila

Residents in the three research sites contend with a complex array of social and political issues. These include identity politics, local governance issues, and broader historical and geo-political concerns including civil conflict and violence in their homelands. Inter-mingled with this are the issues surrounding access to economic, social and political rights. A community leader in Shatila noted: ***“one cannot understand the camp without understanding its politics, and how within this camp, there are so many factions and divisions on family lines and political lines.”***

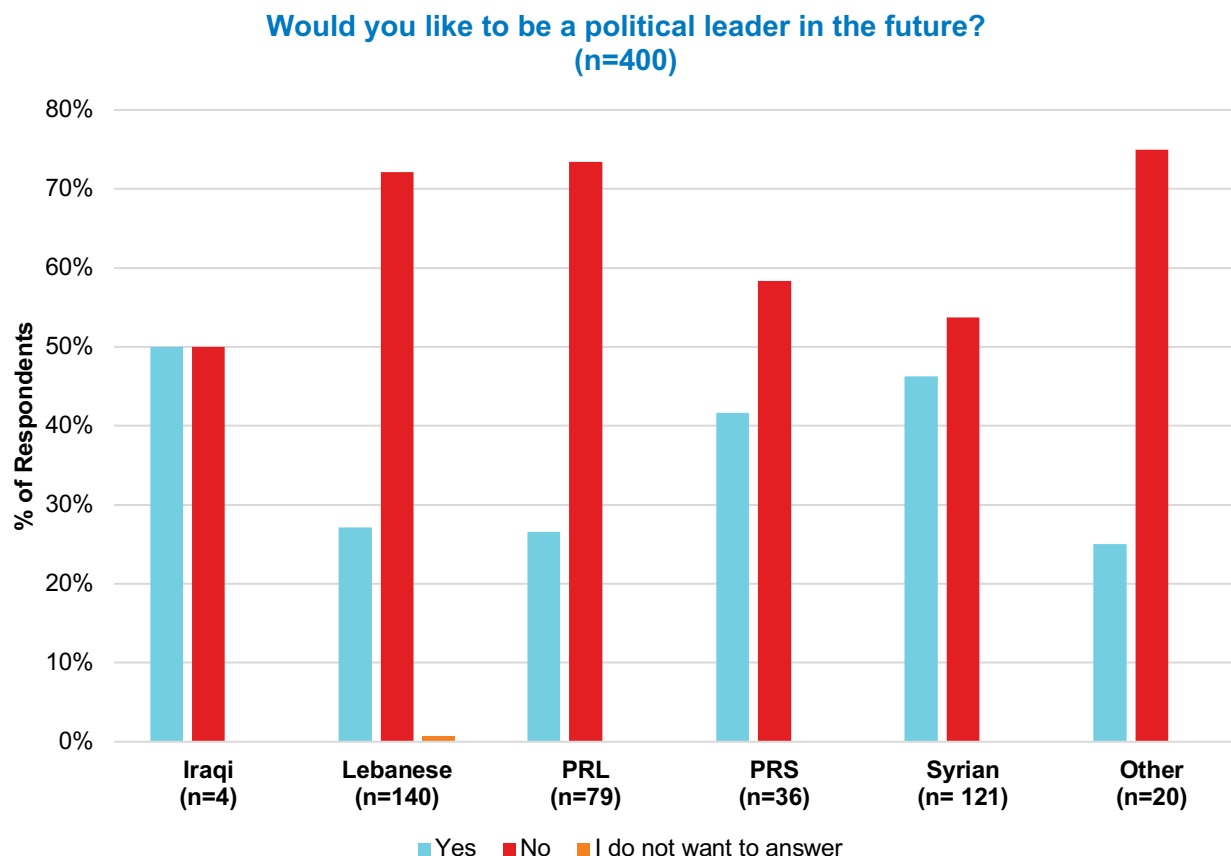
The research shows that adolescent girls demonstrate a strong awareness of the social and political issues which they and their communities face. They further show a commitment to working towards a peaceful community. Across the nationality groups, girls showed a strong interest in issues that have an impact on their daily lives: including ending violence against women and girls, the rights of the child, and the right to education. In these discussions, Lebanese girls in particular showed an interest in politics and demonstrated confidence in discussing political issues. Both girls and their parents reported that they were mostly supported by their families to discuss the political issues affecting them, though fathers were least supportive of girls becoming engaged in politics. One 16-year-old Lebanese girl said: ***“I like talking about politics with my friends,”*** a statement echoed by a 19-year-old Lebanese girl: ***“I like knowing what’s going on in the country and staying informed... We talk about the members of parliament and ministers and what they do.”*** Syrian girls involved in the FGDs similarly showed a great deal of commitment to social and political issues. When asked who she discussed political issues with, one 17-year-old Syrian girl stated: ***“Sometimes I tell my mother, other times I just keep it in my heart.”*** Palestinian girls, on the other hand, were reluctant to discuss political and social issues.

Despite expressing an interest in politics, none of the girls were willing to couch these discussions in terms of political activism. When asked in the survey if they were interested in local political issues, 85 per cent of adolescent girls replied that they were not. This was consistent across the nationality groups with the exception of PRL girls, where nine of the 13 respondents replied in the affirmative (though this was not reflected in the FGDs). When asked if they would like to be a political leader in the future, a higher rate of 34 per cent said yes, with recent arrivals from Syria being the most likely to agree. In contrast however, one Syrian girl (aged 10-14) noted: “Our dreams are not to be leaders.”



The broader community were less likely to acknowledge girls' interest in politics. One religious leader from Bourj Al Barajneh speculated that girls might be interested in gender equality and education issues, and an NGO representative suggested that girls wanted greater decision-making power in issues that affected them. However, none of the other NGO representatives or community leaders showed awareness of the social and political issues that the girls were passionate about.

Graph 33: Aspirations to political leadership



### 3.4. Hopes for the Future

Despite the trials they are facing, girls feel optimistic about the future. They show personal ambition, as well as a belief in the resilience of their communities with 75 per cent of adolescent girls reporting that they felt optimism for themselves and their community. While levels dropped slightly for the older girls, this view was consistent across the nationality groups and the three sites.

Education is identified as the primary means of securing a strong future. One 19-year-old Lebanese girl noted: ***“As long as I’m learning and working towards fulfilling my future, I’m hopeful because I’m making progress.”*** Similarly, a 13-year-old Palestinian girl stated: ***“...you don’t have anything for your future except learning. If you stopped with learning, all the doors close in your face.”*** Parents also supported this view. One Syrian mother remarked: ***“My daughter would kill herself for an education. She has her bag and pencils and books ready. She did this by herself; she bought the pencils and books by herself. Really.”*** Some of the Syrian fathers also acknowledged the value of education, noting that in Lebanon their daughters were able to learn English which would provide them with opportunities in the future.

Across both age groups, Syrian girls exhibited professional ambition. In the FGDs, Syrian girls said that they wanted to be teachers, lawyers, engineers, tailors and doctors, among other professions. In contrast, Lebanese girls in FGDs were more interested in official roles such as joining the army or the police force, while Palestinian girls were cognisant of the restrictions placed on them by their status as a Palestinian refugee.<sup>84</sup> As one 13-year-old Palestinian girl stated: ***“I want to be a journalist but they tell me I can’t be because I am Palestinian. There are a lot of thing we would want to do, but you are deprived from doing it because of your nationality.”***

Both girls and boys reported that their optimism was somewhat undermined by gender-specific challenges. In particular, Palestinian girls report that they are concerned about early marriage and pregnancy, and violence against women and girls, while boys describe physical violence, drug and alcohol abuse and the lack of employment opportunities as the major issues challenging them.

NGO representatives and community leaders generally shared the enthusiasm that adolescent girls have for their future, noting that real improvement for adolescent girls will come when broader community issues and attitudes are addressed. One NGO representative stated that when she looks around her community, she sees girls who are already empowered in themselves, the problem is that their society cannot support them. In fact, a number of NGO representatives and community leaders saw the need for a hybrid solution which addresses the core issues facing the community such as housing, employment and access to services, working alongside supporting communities to address discrimination and empowering adolescent girls.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1. Concluding comments

Refugee and vulnerable adolescent girls in Beirut face multiple barriers and risks in navigating their lives in this complex setting. The three research sites are in protracted crisis: limited governance, overcrowding, poor infrastructure and housing, discrimination and insufficient services create a challenging context for adolescent girls to grow up in. In addition, many of the girls themselves are dealing with the recent trauma of conflict and the consequences of forced displacement, while others are dealing with the changes to their neighbourhood brought about by the recent influx of refugees from Syria. Furthermore, while it differs according to nationality and legal status, girls face (or will face) legal and other restrictions on their access to services, future employment and movement outside of the areas in which they live.

The needs of these communities are great. However, it is important to ensure that the needs of adolescent girls are not deprioritised or marginalised in responses to this crisis. This research has shown that there is a very real threat that this may occur. While girls are demonstrating confidence, strength and resilience in their everyday lives, they are simultaneously at risk of not being heard and of enduring far-reaching rights' violations. In particular, this research has shown that not only are the challenges and opportunities facing adolescent girls unique, they are also – within the demographic of adolescent girls – shaped by a number of factors.

In the first instance, the research shows that **attitudes towards gender** remain a persistent cause for these risks across research sites, age and nationality groups. Gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence, and expectations of gender roles, shape the levels of freedom adolescent girls have to move freely and safely about their communities and access services and opportunities. This is most evident in access to education where early marriage and parental consent act as gendered barriers, and in access to sexual and reproductive health where stigma and cultural attitudes limit access for girls.

The research has also found that **age is a significant factor in girls' everyday lives**. As girls become older, they feel more at risk, are more likely to feel lonely and isolated, see themselves as having fewer opportunities, and are less optimistic about the future. Older girls report having less access to education, feel less safe in their movement around the city, experience and perceive greater harassment, are more at risk of child and early marriage, and feel the loss of privacy at home when compared to younger girls.

Similarly, adolescent girls recognise that **nationality can be a major determinant in their experiences** in Beirut. Palestinian girls recognised that their status affords them some protections and opportunities such as access to UNRWA services, while also curtailing future opportunities in terms of employment. Broadly speaking, the data suggests that Syrian and PRS girls, along with other more recent refugee arrivals, had less access to services including education, perceived or experienced greater threats to their safety, including discrimination, and were less comfortable at home and in their neighbourhoods.

Similarly, **cultural attitudes** – particularly around gendered roles and responsibilities – shape girls' experiences. These cultural attitudes may be informed by a combination of nationality, religion, geography and socio-economic class. The research found, for example, that early marriage was more likely to be a concern for girls recently arrived from Syria while Lebanese girls were more likely to report greater social freedom.

**Intercommunal tensions** also played a role in determining the risks and barriers facing girls. In particular, a stark division emerged between the experiences of more established and recently arrived communities. PRL and Lebanese girls were more likely to engage in community-based activities and groups. Girls who had more recently arrived were more likely to live in cramped, uncomfortable and unsafe conditions, and less likely to engage and feel safe in the community.

In the face of these challenges, adolescent girls have developed **coping mechanisms**, strategies and capacities that can positively shape their own security and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. These include seeking out the support and advice of family and friends, participating in household management, remaining engaged in the social and political issues facing their communities, and maintaining ambitions for their future. It is therefore clear from the findings presented in this report that while adolescent girls have vulnerabilities in many areas of their lives, they are also – and will continue to be – significant agents in the everyday survival of their communities. It is, therefore, important for humanitarian and development actors, including government, UN, and civil society actors in Lebanon, to address the causes of their insecurity as well as to support girls in being agents of change.

The recommendations that follow are drawn from this key finding. They seek to highlight the priorities identified by girls and to incorporate their suggestions and directions for change. In doing so, they are designed to acknowledge both the vulnerabilities of adolescent girls, and their agency and capacity to positively shape their communities.

## 4.2. Recommendations

As this research illustrates adolescent girls are not a homogenous group with a single shared set of experiences, fears or hopes, and there are marked differences, as well as similarities, in the experiences of adolescent girls of different ages and different nationalities. It is important that, in crisis situations, humanitarian and development organisations, as well as government authorities, recognise this and respond to the complexity and diversity of their needs.

### Participation

- Ensure needs' assessments disaggregate data by sex, age and disability status at a minimum: conduct gender, age and inclusion analysis for all areas of programming that incorporate differentials for adolescent girls and listens to the voices and perspectives of adolescent girls as well as engaging adolescent boys.
- Invest in and deliver specific programmes targeting the unique needs of adolescent girls in protracted refugee urban contexts, ensuring agencies work together to avoid duplication and gaps and that the specific needs of the most vulnerable are prioritised.
- Ensure that the development of these programmes is directly informed by adolescent girls, not least the most vulnerable and across different nationality groups and locations.
- It is harder to find refugees in a city. They are not confined to a camp and have more freedom to move around. Therefore, steps must be taken, through increased community outreach, to ensure they are consulted as part of designing a response and providing appropriate services.
- Allow adolescent girls to shape programme design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation processes: including ensuring accountability mechanisms are accessible to adolescent girls.
- Ensure programmatic interventions set clear targets and include specific indicators in programme monitoring and evaluation frameworks that assess the outcome of the programme for adolescent girls: disaggregating by younger and older cohorts if possible and by other diversity considerations.
- Ensure that adolescent mothers and married adolescents are included in adolescent-targeted initiatives and general programming, by providing childcare support for example, and that tailored interventions which account for their needs are considered.
- All actors should provide or support leadership opportunities for adolescent girls, such as training and workshops that allow peer-to-peer engagement and build confidence.

### Protection

- Girls demonstrate ambition, drive and optimism for the future, but reference barriers and limitations to accessing education and participating fully in public life. Girls must be supported through gender-transformative programming and influencing that tackles the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and legislation: aiming not only to improve the daily condition of girls but also to advance their position and value in society.
- Child and early marriage is a continuing problem amongst adolescent girls in Beirut and must be addressed as a matter of urgency. A twofold response which requires legislative and attitudinal change should be adopted: the government of Lebanon should set a minimum legal age of 18 for marriage for both men and women, in alignment with international standards, and key actors should simultaneously work with communities to demonstrate the negative impact that early marriage has on adolescent girls.
- Adolescent girls report feeling isolated and lonely, particularly as they get older. The gendered barriers to girls leaving the house, attending school, building and maintaining social support networks and friendships and playing must be addressed, through parent and community programmes, and programmes for girls, such as girls' clubs.
- Relevant actors should support more community projects designed to raise community awareness around issues of gender equality, CEFM, early pregnancy, other forms of violence against women and girls, and children and youth rights as well as MHPSS issues, in order to prevent GBV and reduce barriers for survivors seeking supportive services.
- Agencies should develop programmes that aim to improve community-police relations between displaced populations and in communities where there are high levels of violence.
- Community groups and external actors should support social cohesion initiatives and anti-bias trainings which aim to strengthen relationships between different nationality groups, recognising there is often distrust, animosity and discrimination between them.
- National and municipal government should undertake gender reviews of laws, policies and guidelines already in place in Beirut to ensure that urban planning prevents and responds to violence in the community, which affects girls disproportionately. Responses must take the gender and age dynamics of such violence into account. Sufficient budget must be allocated at national and local levels to ensure full implementation.
- Investment in community-based protection mechanisms should continue and be expanded. This can include support to adolescent girls and their communities to identify risks and design initiatives and strategies to address these risks, as well as support of community, women, and youth committees and groups.

- Support specialised protection, MPHSS and SRH services for girls and boys who are survivors or at-risk of GBV, in particular child marriage and sexual violence.<sup>85</sup>

## Community

- Key stakeholders involved in the delivery of services and aid must work together to address any actual disparities in distribution of resources, support and services.
- Girls should be supported and enabled to develop their social networks, which are a source of happiness for them. Schools, community centres and recreation areas are key sites for this.
- Fund and deliver economic empowerment programmes which aim to lift the families of vulnerable girls out of poverty and build the skills of adolescent girls.
- Invest in and support the development of better and, ideally, more housing, recognising girls live in overcrowded houses, which undermines their wellbeing and safety.

## The City

- Different actors will need to come together to create multi-level, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships for an integrated approach to girls' safety in cities, including in public spaces and while using public and private transport: girls' participation in urban planning procedures will be key to any successful programme.
- Duty bearers should urgently address the gender-based harassment and other threats of GBV, as well as the gender-based barriers that are stopping adolescent girls from moving freely throughout the city: to include better infrastructure, the positive engagement of law enforcement, and effective reporting mechanisms.
- Clear codes of conduct on sexual harassment prevention should be established in communities and camps: all members of the community including men and boys should be engaged in tackling GBV and dismantling the barriers that impede girls' freedom of movement. It will be imperative that programmes sensitise them to the safety and inclusion issues facing women and girls in their communities.
- Girls have identified parks as places where they would like to spend time. More must be done to ensure that girls are able to use parks safely and freely, so that they can play, and relax outdoors without fear or inhibition. This may include having a security guard and defined opening hours with signage.
- Support more (and more accessible) community activities that include access to girl-friendly safe spaces for adolescent girls: recognising the importance to their well-being of having safe spaces to socialise with friends.

## Schools

- Ensure education interventions incorporate and address the barriers for girls' participation and learning: including ensuring schools have adequate capacity and resources to accommodate these vulnerable adolescent girls, as well as addressing instances of gender-based harassment and other forms of GBV in and around schools.
- Ensure education interventions include vocational, accelerated and life skills opportunities for girls who have been out of school.
- Schools should have codes of conduct to ensure everyone can learn free from violence.
- Use education initiatives as a platform for psychosocial support and healing for adolescents.
- Provide support and opportunities for married girls, and girls with children to return to school.
- Schools must address discrimination against adolescent girls who are refugees, particularly recent refugees, so that all girls are able to participate in education. The school curriculum should actively combat discrimination or prejudice on the basis of sex, gender, caste, language, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or culture.

## Health

- Improve access to healthcare for girls with serious, long-term, or conflict-related healthcare issues: in the first instance by supporting further research which investigates the barriers to healthcare for this especially vulnerable group.
- Prioritise the provision of adolescent girl-friendly information and services, particularly around sexual and reproductive health and rights, recognising that girls infrequently access such information from doctors because they generally attend with their mothers: recognising the importance of such information particularly related to child and early marriage.
- Improve confidence among adolescent girls to access specialized protection and SRHR service providers in the event of an incident of GBV, in particular within the first 72 hours for sexual violence incidents.



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**Cover photo:** A young refugee photographed in the Akkar region, northern Lebanon. © Plan International / Sima Diab

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No photographs were taken during the course of this research. Girls featured in images in the report are not the same as those that participated in the research.

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## Plan International in Lebanon

Plan International began operating in Lebanon to address the biggest issues faced by the most vulnerable children in refugee and host communities. There are currently around 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, causing a huge strain on the country's resources. Plan International Lebanon's response priorities are ensuring the most vulnerable children can get an education; working with communities to keep children safe from all forms of violence; supporting young people to learn skills, get good jobs, earn a living and play a meaningful role in society.

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## About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

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