

THE BURDEN OF CORRUPTION:

How Systemic Exploitation Marginalizes Vulnerable Communities in Lebanon

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Purpose of the Research

This research was initiated to explore the real and often overlooked impact of systemic corruption on Lebanon’s most vulnerable populations. By examining the intersection of governance failures and marginalization, the study seeks to shed light on how corruption not only undermines public institutions but actively deepens social inequality and exclusion.

In alignment with the goals of the BINA’ project, this report aims to provide evidence-based insights to inform policy reform, strengthen civic advocacy, and promote equitable governance. It is our hope that this work contributes to a broader conversation on integrity, justice, and the right to a dignified life for all in Lebanon.

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This report reflects a collective effort to advance accountability and social justice, and we are thankful for the collaboration and dedication of all those involved.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corruption in Lebanon is a deeply embedded issue that fuels economic decline, political instability, and social inequality. Lebanon's corruption is not merely a by-product of poor governance but a fundamental feature of its sectarian power-sharing system. Political elites exploit public resources, undermining state institutions and depriving marginalized communities of essential services, thereby worsening economic disparity and public distrust. Additionally, Lebanon's fragile institutional framework, entrenched patronage networks, and economic dependencies—both domestic and external—further sustain corruption. The country's post-war economic policies, which prioritized financialization and privatization, also contributed to a form of corruption that extends beyond sectarian affiliations, enabling elites to extract wealth and control public institutions for personal and political gain.

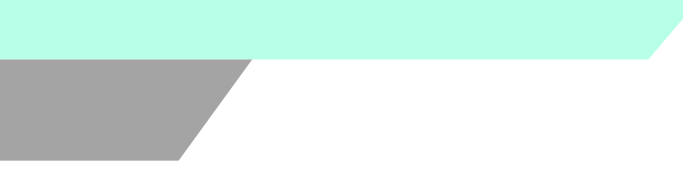
The historical roots of Lebanon's corruption lie in its sectarian political system, which prioritizes loyalty over merit and public welfare. Since the Taif Agreement, power has been distributed among sectarian factions, fostering patronage networks that reward political allies instead of serving national interests. However, corruption in Lebanon also stems from structural economic weaknesses, elite-class dominance, and external interventions, which have historically shaped governance and institutional fragility. These factors, alongside a governance model that blurs the lines between public and private interests, have allowed corruption to flourish across government institutions, making reforms difficult and perpetuating systemic inefficiencies.

Corruption in Lebanon permeates key sectors, including public services, infrastructure, healthcare, and the judiciary. From bribery in public administration to favouritism in awarding contracts, corruption undermines service delivery, making it difficult for ordinary citizens to access education, electricity, clean water, and medical care. Public procurement is often rigged, leading to inflated costs and poor-quality infrastructure projects.

The Lebanese economy has suffered immense damage due to corruption, with public funds routinely misappropriated. Mismanagement and embezzlement of resources have pushed the country into an economic crisis, resulting in unsustainable debt, hyperinflation, and capital flight. The collapse of the banking sector, influenced by politically connected financial institutions, has further eroded trust in the country's financial system.

Marginalized communities bear the brunt of corruption, as they face systemic barriers to essential services and economic opportunities. Low-income families, women, refugees, persons with disabilities, and youth struggle against corruption that limits their access to healthcare, education, and employment. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory judicial practices, while youth are often forced to rely on nepotism for job opportunities.

The judiciary and law enforcement institutions are compromised by corruption, preventing accountability and justice. Courts and police agencies, which should serve as checks on corruption, are instead influenced by political elites who use them to protect their interests. Many judicial appointments are based on sectarian affiliations, and bribery is common in legal proceedings, eroding the rule of law.



Political interference and weak governance structures enable corruption to persist despite public dissatisfaction. Oversight institutions lack independence, and regulatory bodies are often staffed with individuals loyal to the ruling class. The absence of transparency in public financial management, combined with weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws, perpetuates a culture of impunity.

Addressing Lebanon's corruption crisis requires strengthening anti-corruption institutions and implementing systemic reforms. Independent oversight bodies must be empowered with the authority to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. Judicial independence must be safeguarded, and public sector hiring practices must be reformed to prioritize merit over political affiliation.

Transparency and public engagement are essential for reducing corruption and restoring trust in institutions. Digital governance tools, whistle-blower protections, and open data initiatives can help limit opportunities for bribery and fraud. Encouraging citizen participation in monitoring government activities will increase accountability and pressure decision-makers to enact reforms.

Without decisive anti-corruption measures, Lebanon risks prolonged economic and political instability that will continue to harm its most vulnerable populations. To rebuild trust and stabilize the nation, Lebanon must enforce transparency, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and dismantle entrenched patronage networks that have controlled public resources for decades.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption has long impacted Lebanon, and in the context of protracted, overlapping crises, from ceaseless political turmoil to economic freefall to increased social division, corruption is not only a symptom but an accelerant of deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities that continue to undermine social trust and cohesion. This study sets out to understand how corruption is experienced by marginalized groups within Lebanon, who are bearing the brunt of these crises. At a time when the country and its people remain reeling from the effects of a catastrophic explosion that hit Beirut in August 2020 and when an existential economic crisis rages, the goal is to highlight the ways that corruption intensifies vulnerabilities and disparities, with a focus on the most impacted societal groups.

At the heart of this inquiry is an ambition to chart the terrain of corruption's footprint, with particular attention to already vulnerable groups, including refugees, low-income families, women and girls, the young, disabled, and elderly. Often, these communities find themselves on the margins of discourses on corruption despite being subject to its most severe consequences. This study aims to clarify the complex dynamics that enable corruption practices and their harmful effects on marginalized populations through a methodologically sound approach that includes a review of the literature, interviews with critical stakeholders, analysis of quantitative survey data, and qualitative data through interviews and discussions.

Corruption in Lebanon is complex and multifaceted, which would be enabled through engagement with diverse stakeholders. In other words, it is perpetuated through the interactions and engagements of various groups, including civil society organizations, government representatives, the private sector, and marginalized communities. In addition to providing evidence of the impact of corruption on the underprivileged, this research aims to contribute to the development of innovative recommendations to enhance accountability, increase access to essential services, and broaden the scope of public funding distribution so that the benefits could touch the larger number of people. This study is driven by the need to properly understand how corruption impacts marginalized communities to build a better world for the Lebanese society. By offering targeted policy recommendations, the research aspires to contribute meaningfully to the vital efforts of policymakers in drawing strategies for addressing corruption.

II. DESK REVIEW

2.1. Background and Theoretical Frameworks

2.1.1. Brief History and Socio-Economic Context of Lebanon

Prior to Lebanon's independence, the country was governed by Ottoman rule until 1920, and then by French rule until 1943. Hence, the country has greatly been affected by the French legal framework and Ottoman civil law (Wickersham and Nsouli, 1971; Assi, 2014). The 1943 National Pact, which claimed independence from French rule, gave birth to the confessionalist system that the country is run by today (Bogaards, 2019); since then, power in Lebanon has been distributed proportionally according to different religious sects. The president of Lebanon was to be of the Maronite Christian sect, the prime minister of the Sunni Muslim sect, and the speaker of the parliament of the Shia Muslim sect.

The outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War was also a crucial point in the country's history. The division of the country into numerous different political and religious factions, in addition to the massive influx of Palestinians into the country during the time, eventually resulted in the breaking out of the Civil War in 1975 (Rowayheb, 2011). The war ended in 1990 with the National Reconciliation Accord, more informally known as the Taif Agreement. This agreement aimed to abolish the existing sectarianism and representative structure of ethnic groups and restore political stability to end the war (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). However, Lebanon hosts around eighteen different sects and religious groups, and the Taif Accord proved unsuccessful. Power is still distributed among these sects based on historical agreements rather than actual demographic proportions, maintaining a political sectarian system. While the Taif Agreement ended a 15-year civil war, it was too inconsistent to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the country's numerous ethnic and religious groups (Rosiny, 2015). Furthermore, Lebanon has not conducted an official national census since 1932, as updating census data could reveal demographic changes that might lead some communities to demand more political power, potentially fuelling governance struggles and raising concerns about corruption.

Dr. Bassel Salloukh, in his book, states that the Taif accord "established a more balanced consociational power-sharing system," which effectively formed a "larger, more clientelist, more corrupt public sector" (2021). Each political party has its own interests and works only for its own goals and people, striving to redirect benefits to certain communities. The parties are dividing Lebanon to unequal parts because of the unbalanced power. This unbalanced power structure has divided Lebanon into unequal parts. The existing power structure has consistently allowed several groups to attain high levels of political power and propagate the clientelist system, making Lebanon one of the most corrupt nations in the world, ranked 149th in corruption by the World Bank.

The corruption built in the country's power structure and clientelist system also translates to higher inequality among Lebanese citizens and residents. Corruption diverts public goods and resources towards already privileged groups, leaving less for the broader population. This diversion of resources leads to unequal access to essential services, which perpetuates and exacerbates existing inequalities. For example, Dubar and Nasr (1982) claim that the most striking indicator of inequality between citizens is unequal access to education: an indicator of sectoral, as well as social, discrimination. Healthcare and infrastructure are also public sectors in which inequality is high (Kukrety,

2016). In addition, the extent to which the Lebanese public administration is corrupt and characterized by partiality is directly proportional to the degree of inequality among the citizens, and it is especially apparent in the disparity in the wealth between the upper and the lower socioeconomic classes. Low-income citizens receive relatively much less of the distribution of services, public goods, and resources (Assouad, 2023). Services reserved by sects, i.e., the sects have the sole right to distribute these goods and services, have also exacerbated the degree of inequality within the Lebanese population (Uslaner, 2005). As discussed by Nagle and Clancy (2019), practically everything is subject to the purview of the sectarian groups and parties, ranging from medical care, education, supply of electricity and gas to childcare.

The political instability and gradual political polarization after the Taif agreement eventually led to the assassination of former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic Hariri in an explosion in Beirut, which also killed 21 other people. Lebanon went through a crisis for 18 months – also known as the “Cedars Revolution” – characterized by widespread, although non-violent, protests. The problem was resolved after the completion of the Doha Agreement in Qatar, which resulted in complete polarization between two groups: the “March 8” alliance, which has a pro-Syrian stance, in opposition to the “March 14” alliance, an anti-Syrian alliance group (Clark and Zahar, 2015).

The sectarian power-sharing structure permeates every sphere of society and governance in Lebanon. Because political elites use the networks of patronage that arise from the consociational system to promote their interests, it established an uncompromising political system predicated on pursuing private benefits. Lebanon's economic, political, and social stability is aggravated by the absence of institutional reform and turbulent relations with its neighbours, thereby hampering the country's ability to reach an internal consensus and opt for structural transformation.

This entrenched patronage system creates opportunities and incentives for forms of corruption that are particularly damaging to already disadvantaged groups. For instance, women and girls often face discrimination in accessing education and healthcare services due to favouritism towards male-dominated networks (Abou-Habib, 2011). Youth struggle with high unemployment rates as job opportunities are frequently allocated based on political loyalty rather than merit (Anstorp, 2020). Persons with disabilities are often excluded from social services and public infrastructure improvements because these resources are diverted towards the elites' interests (Kukrety, 2016). This pervasive corruption disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and perpetuating systemic inequality.

2.1.2. Overview of the Lebanese Political System and Governance

The Lebanese political system of governance can be described as a consociational sectarian political system, which began in 1843. It was later institutionalized as a confessional system by the French mandate. As a consociational democracy, Lebanon's political structure is built around a power-sharing system that distributes political power proportionally, according to the divisions between the many religious communities represented in the country (Crow, 1962). Around a hundred political parties in the country represent the 18 religious groups.

The political system that has existed for almost two centuries has constantly allowed and

enabled people in power to exchange political favours with individuals for political support – also known as a clientelist structure in politics (Badaan et al., 2020). Each major politician, more notoriously known by the name “za’im”, has developed their own patronage networks, which usually get rewarded with some political favour, such as a bureaucratic or government job.

Lebanon's biggest drivers of corrupt politics are the absence of parliamentary accountability and the unregulated financing of political parties. Because of the opaqueness of the government's actions and a shortage of academic research, it is challenging to provide a comprehensive overview of corruption in Lebanon; yet, the historical facts and events show that corruption has been prevalent in Lebanese society since the country's independence (Haase and Davis, 2017). The Lebanese elite is almost always exclusively tied with corrupt activities, as the Lebanese government is very centralized (Abou Assi and Bowman, 2017), which makes the political power densely concentrated in the hands of a limited number of people with authoritative positions.

The power in Lebanon is divided in multiple factions where each faction is basically controlled by a small number of powerful figures that deals in the backroom between themselves. The sectarian power-sharing system in Lebanon not only aggravates the abuse of power on behalf of the elite but also propagates informality and instability in the economy (Boege et al., 2009). This system creates an environment where political factions prioritize their interests over national development, leading to fragmented and inconsistent economic policies. The competition for control and resources among these factions results in an unstable economic environment where formal institutions are weakened, and informal networks thrive, hindering inclusive growth and public investment.

Generally, an independent government not characterized by a tremendous and unfair concentration of power should follow the political doctrine of the Trias Politica Model, referring to the complete separation of powers, namely a legislature, an executive, and a judiciary (Ackerman, 2017). One area most prone to corruption is the Supreme Judicial Council of Lebanon, which is responsible for selecting and supervising judges. While the council should theoretically be completely independent of any external political compliance, the Lebanese Ministry of Justice has significant control over it, as it usually appoints eight of the ten members of the council. Hence, the executive's power over the judiciary jeopardizes judicial independence (Assi, 2014).

2.1.3. Legal and Theoretical Framework

The legal and theoretical framework addressing the impact of corruption on marginalized groups in Lebanon necessitates a multidimensional analysis, incorporating insights from recent academic research that underscores the intricate relationship between corruption, legal infrastructures, and the exacerbation of vulnerabilities marginalized communities face. This framework is grounded in the analysis and insights derived from scholarly research, which collectively emphasize the multifaceted nature of corruption and its disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations.

The legal framework addressing the impact of corruption on marginalized groups is anchored in international conventions such as the United Nations Convention against

Corruption (UNCAC) (2004), which provides a comprehensive set of standards, measures, and rules that all countries can apply to strengthen their legal and regulatory regimes to fight corruption. The UNCAC emphasizes the importance of both preventive measures and punitive responses to corruption, highlighting the need for transparency, accountability, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

The theoretical framework incorporates insights from socio-political and economic theories to understand how corruption exacerbates the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups. To explain how corruption and discrimination relate to each other, McDonald et al. (2021) discuss that discrimination renders disadvantaged groups more vulnerable to corruption, results in the effects of corruption being unequally experienced across society, raises barriers to prevent victims of corruption from seeking justice while corruption can inhibit efforts to investigate and overcome discrimination, and corruption can take forms such as sextortion that are intrinsically discriminatory.

Scholars such as Clausen et al. (2011) and Akkoyunla and Ramella (2020) have explored how corruption undermines economic development, erodes trust in public institutions, and disproportionately affects people with low incomes and disenfranchised. These theories suggest that corruption acts as a barrier to equitable access to services and resources, further entrenching social and economic inequalities.

Kaadbey and Naber (2019) offer a critical examination of feminist interventions during the 2015 anti-corruption protests in Lebanon. Their research reveals how gender intersects with corruption, disproportionately affecting marginalized women. They argue that women are more likely to be victims of corruption, such as bribery and extortion, due to their socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Additionally, women are often excluded from decision-making processes related to anti-corruption measures, hindering their ability to address issues that specifically impact them. To combat these challenges, Kaadbey and Naber (2019) propose incorporating gender-responsive strategies into the legal framework, including quotas for women's representation in anti-corruption bodies and targeted support for women-led anti-corruption initiatives.

For instance, grand corruption schemes involving embezzlement might drain public budgets, leaving fewer funds to pay for essential public services like health and education, which groups like women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities etc are likely to be more reliant. Petty administrative corruption and extortion at the level of service delivery may also deprive these groups of access to these services, especially as they are likely to be poorer than other population groups.

Zayter (2022) proposes a legal framework that leverages social enterprises to empower marginalized communities and combat corruption. The author posits that by providing legal support to social enterprises, these entities can generate income and create jobs for marginalized populations, reducing their dependence on corrupt systems for livelihood. Increased economic stability among these groups is expected to diminish their vulnerability to bribery and extortion, while fostering a more resilient and self-sufficient community. Moreover, social enterprises often operate with transparency and accountability principles, contributing to a broader anti-corruption culture.

Halawi's (2019) examination of dirty money in the Lebanese banking sector sheds light on the broader economic implications of corruption, affecting economic stability and

trust. This form of corruption disproportionately impacts marginalized groups, who are often the most vulnerable to economic instability and exploitation (Akkoyunla and Ramella, 2020; Halawi, 2019).

Lastly, McClearn et al. (2023) delve into the precarious conditions faced by marginalized populations in Lebanon, particularly women and refugees. Their research underscores how systemic corruption exacerbates vulnerabilities within these communities. By examining specific instances of corruption, such as bribery in public service delivery or the misappropriation of aid, the authors demonstrate how these practices disproportionately impact women and refugees. For example, women may face increased risks of domestic violence due to financial pressures induced by corruption, while refugees might be denied essential services like healthcare or education due to corrupt officials. The study identifies poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to justice as primary root causes of marginalization that render these populations more susceptible to the detrimental effects of corruption.

The intricate interplay between corruption and marginalization in Lebanon demands a comprehensive understanding of the systemic factors that perpetuate vulnerability. While the research presented offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of this issue, it is imperative to delve deeper into the root causes that render certain segments of the population disproportionately susceptible to the detrimental effects of corruption. Factors such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, and limited access to resources serve as underlying drivers, exacerbating the challenges faced by marginalized communities.

By unravelling these complex dynamics, policymakers and researchers can develop targeted interventions to disrupt the cycle of corruption and empower those most affected.

2.2. Corruption in Lebanon

2.2.1. Overview of the Nature and Extent of Corruption in Lebanon

In order to understand the nature and extent of corruption in Lebanon, it should be mentioned that corruption is pervasive along multiple levels of the Lebanese society.

Since the end of the civil war, the political system in the country has been fuelled by constant clientelism and nepotism, which does not necessarily restrict the issue to high-level government officials (Corstange, 2018). This means that the embedment of corruption in Lebanon is systemic, a corrupt pattern deeply ingrained into the country's society and institutions. A sectarian political system like Lebanon's, which is fuelled by selective clientelism, is usually a precursor for widespread corruption. The gist of Lebanon's power-sharing system was to establish adequate representation of the country's different sectarian communities. Nevertheless, this has never been the case, as the system has evolved to create mutually beneficial relationships between political elites and their private sector allies. The "state" has only been the means for the political elite to achieve self-benefit, thereby further systemizing corruption in the country (Barroso Cortés, 2020). This systemic corruption undermines the principles of fairness, accountability, and effective governance, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and eroding public trust in state institutions.

Such corruption is documented in the literature to resemble the “principle-agent” relationship, in which the agent (for instance, a corrupt politician with their patronage network) abuses power handed to them on behalf of the principal for personal benefits at the expense of the principal and public servants (Persson et al., 2019). Information asymmetry between the two entities gives rise to conflicting interests. It creates the agency problem, where misaligned incentives between the agent and principal give way to the former to maximize their self-benefit through corrupt actions. Goweder (2014) claims that police corruption in Lebanon is a prime example of the principal-agent relationship; the police officer has far surpassed their law enforcement role. Instead, they illegally benefit from their high-level positions at the expense of citizens, often by stopping citizens and demanding bribes in exchange for getting out of a ticket. This principal-agent relationship is further embedded into the system through the erosion of the already underdeveloped institutions of the country. This becomes very apparent in the commercial setting. Firms with concentrated ownership, and especially family firms, exploit the weak institutional setting to get better access to resources. They do so by abusing their political connections and family ties. Such institutional voids make the corporate governance system flawed, as minority shareholders are essentially unprotected (Jiang and Peng 2010). The persistence of weak institutions has allowed politically connected business elites to thrive while ensuring that regulatory frameworks remain ineffective in curbing corrupt activities.

However, corruption in Lebanon is not solely rooted in sectarianism. A broader analysis of Lebanon’s political economy suggests that institutional weaknesses, elite economic dominance, and foreign dependencies also play a significant role in perpetuating corruption. From a structuralist perspective (Barroso Cortés & Kéchichian, 2020), Lebanon’s history of weak state institutions and informal power networks existed long before modern sectarian power-sharing arrangements, indicating that corruption is embedded in the country’s economic and administrative history. A class-based analysis further suggests that corruption is better understood through an elite-class perspective, in which economic elites monopolize resources, using clientelism as an economic strategy rather than a purely sectarian one (Goudie & Stasavage, 1998). Additionally, post-war economic policies, particularly those prioritizing financialization and privatization, have deepened corruption beyond sectarian affiliations. The reconstruction model after the war facilitated the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elites, enabling them to extract wealth and control public institutions in ways that served their business and political interests (Dibeh, 2005). These alternative perspectives indicate that corruption in Lebanon is not merely a by product of sectarian governance but is also shaped by broader structural and economic dynamics.

According to Fahed-Sreih (2023), Lebanon is rated as one of the most corrupt countries by Transparency International. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index of 2020, Lebanon's score decreased by five points from the CPI of 2012, reaching a very low score of 25. In 2022, Lebanon ranked 150th in terms of the CPI among the 180 countries and territories studied by Transparency International (2022). Corruption is pervasive in Lebanon to the extent that even a very low CPI has not prompted any official authority to investigate or urgently address corruption, which affects the socio-economic fabric of Lebanese society.

In terms of the Human Development Index, Lebanon has fallen from its ranking between 2005 and 2021, falling from 70th to 112th. During this period, the country

persistently scored an HDI above 0.700, considered a high level of human development, and had an average above that of the Arab states, which is around 0.703 (UNDP, 2019). Nevertheless, the poverty rate remains high to this date, with about 80% of the country's population living below the relative poverty line and 36% living in extreme poverty (ACAPS, 2023). For context, on the global scale, around two-fifths of the world's population is below the relative poverty line (Hassel et al., 2022).

One of the most reliable and widely used corruption indicators is the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the flagship of Transparency International. This index measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, taking insights from experts and businesspeople. In the case of Lebanon, the government has consistently scored below 30 over 100 between 2012 and 2023, which is a very low score. In 2023, the country ranked 154th among 180 countries, scoring 24/100. In the 2024 CPI, Lebanon's score declined further to 22, marking the largest drop in the Middle East and North Africa region. This decrease reflects a deteriorating perception of public sector integrity in the country. Consequently, Lebanon's global ranking fell to 154th out of 180 countries.

To further quantify the extent of corruption in Lebanon, reviewing some of the World Bank Governance indicators concerning the issue is worthwhile. The control of corruption estimate, which captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, has Lebanon ranking in the 13th percentile as of 2022. The country also ranks in the 7th percentile in terms of the government effectiveness measure, which captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies (World Bank, 2022). The problem of corruption exists insofar that political instability has become one of the main challenges of doing business in the country, as the bribery rate stands at around 41%, which means that a large portion of the citizens and businesses reported paying bribes when coming into contact with public officials and institutions (Transparency International, 2019).

2.2.2. Key Sectors Affected by Corruption and Their impact on Economy and Governance

Political parties in Lebanon, which should stand for bringing together those who share similar political views in the hopes of electing as many of their members to parliament as possible, are considered one of the most corrupt institutions in the country. Most of these parties exist primarily as vehicles to serve the narrow interests of their leaders, rather than to represent a particular strand of political opinion, considerably falling short of any accountability measures. That is because they act as blocs rather than parties, and these blocs are mostly made up of family allegiances (Joseph, 2011). Moreover, there are few preventive and anti-corruptive measures to limit, let alone monitor, the financing of political parties and their candidates.

From a citizen's perspective, despite having full legal rights to healthcare, many individuals in Lebanon find themselves financially strained, unable to afford the exorbitant costs of medical services. This stark disparity in access is a direct consequence of a corrupt governance system that systematically diverts resources away from public services and into the pockets of the elite. Corruption manifests in various ways within the healthcare sector, including inflated drug prices, embezzlement of public funds

allocated for hospitals, and the preferential treatment of politically connected individuals. This has led to a two-tiered healthcare system where the wealthy enjoy high-quality care while the poor are left to fend for themselves. The rural-urban divide exacerbates this inequality, with limited healthcare facilities and personnel in rural areas.

As a result, Lebanon faces a public health crisis characterized by high rates of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and smoking, compounded by low levels of physical activity. These health indicators rank among the worst globally, highlighting the severe consequences of a corrupt system on the well-being of the population.

Corruption in public works projects has become a systemic issue in Lebanon, with a significant portion of public funds diverted through illicit channels. As highlighted by the Lebanese Transparency Association (2017), the system is rife with irregularities and underhanded dealings despite the existence of oversight mechanisms. This rampant corruption directly jeopardizes public safety by incentivizing contractors to cut corners, use substandard materials, and expedite construction processes to maximize profits. To secure lucrative contracts, corrupt contractors often collude with officials to bypass regulations and quality control measures. The result is infrastructure that is prone to collapse, posing serious risks to the public. The proliferation of dangerous potholes on Lebanese roads is a stark example of the consequences of this pervasive corruption, as it reflects shoddy workmanship, inadequate materials, and a disregard for public safety.

Another sector that is regarded as highly corrupt in the country, and the one with which the public struggles the most, is public administration. The public administration of Lebanon lacks funding, and there are disparities in access to essential public services. Significant misuse of resources and understaffing plague the efficiency of this sector, as job opportunities in public administration are hampered by sectarianism and nepotism, which also undermines meritocratic hiring practices (Haase, 2018). Corruption in public administration can also impose additional transaction costs on private firms, which can result in businesses resorting to bribery to speed up the process.

Police corruption is also a severe issue in the country, as a significant number of people in Lebanon have been surveyed and acknowledged that they had to pay a bribe to the police (Transparency International, 2019). Police employment aligns with confessional power-sharing agreements, fostering the perpetuation of patronage networks rather than ensuring fair treatment by law enforcement entities. Effectively, the Lebanese people have no formal mechanism to submit complaints and file reports for abuse, nor is there a proper anti-police corruption mechanism.

Apart from the mentioned, the integrity of a country's legal system depends heavily on a solid judiciary, as corruption in the court threatens the rule of law. Over half of the country's population views the judiciary as corrupt (Transparency International, 2019). Despite its essential role, the judiciary in Lebanon faces significant political interference and has become subject to intense political manipulation. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index (2019) ranks Lebanon 98th out of 144 countries in terms of judicial independence.

Studies by Stel and Naudé highlighted the inefficiencies in electricity delivery in Lebanon, where Electricité du Liban (EDL) is responsible for power supply. Despite being state-owned, Lebanon ranks poorly in global power indices. Citizens often resort to

private generators due to frequent outages, resulting in double payment. The financial strain on the electricity sector has also contributed to Lebanon's rising public debt (World Bank, 2023). The proliferation of diesel generators has led to environmental and health concerns, with significant carcinogen exposure in densely populated areas.

Corruption within EDL is rampant, with unpaid bills and electricity being unaccounted for (Transparency International, 2022).

The garbage crisis of 2015 exemplifies political corruption, as sectarian interests and institutional weaknesses hindered effective waste management, resulting in environmental degradation and health risks. Beirut's pollution levels rank among the highest in the Middle East, with transportation and electricity production identified as significant contributors. The legacy of the civil war exacerbates environmental issues, with toxic waste disposal suspected to have occurred during the conflict. For instance, the garbage crisis was prolonged due to the inability of political factions to agree on a waste management plan, with lucrative contracts often awarded to politically connected firms rather than those with the best technical expertise. Despite recent political shifts, corruption and mismanagement persist, underscoring the need for systemic reform.

In the public contracting sector, the political elite can undermine an entire society for its benefit by offering government jobs and contracts exclusively to its followers, making biased decisions to favour their political parties and maintain their positions (Fahed-Sreih, 2023). One of the most evident symptoms of corruption is in public procurement where public financial resources are channelled to private sector companies owned by politically affiliated entities. Transparency International Lebanon's work on transparency in Beneficial Ownership in Public Procurement Reforms in Lebanon provides a reference in this regard and showcases how such practice undermines competition, thus exacerbating inequalities further.

2.3. Socio-Economic Impacts

2.3.1. Analysis of the Socio-Economic Implications of Corruption on the Lebanese Society

Corruption undermines economic progress by reducing efficiency in both public and commercial sectors, allowing individuals to gain power through patronage rather than aptitude (Farida and Ahmadi-Esfahani, 2008).

Fahed-Sreih's (2023) main findings argue that corruption significantly influences Lebanon's business and economy. However, people who hold the government's power allow such corruption to persist. Corruption is directly linked to decisions made by politicians, specifically the political elite. Lebanon's post-war agreement to relinquish military power and restructure civilian institutions resulted in limited institutional control mechanisms that were often politically influenced (Farida and Ahmadi-Esfahani, 2008).

In 2001, a UN report stated that the Lebanese Government incurred over \$1.5 billion annually due to extensive corruption, accounting for almost ten percent of Lebanon's yearly GDP – a substantial percentage. A 2023 IMF report highlights that the Lebanese government continues to face substantial financial losses due to corruption, with

inefficiencies and mismanagement contributing to the economic crisis (IMF, 2023). Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index also ranks Lebanon 149th out of 180 countries, reflecting the persistent and systemic nature of corruption, which exacerbates economic instability and affects nearly 10% of the GDP (Transparency International, 2023).

In 2019, thousands of Lebanese citizens initiated a revolution to bring about change. However, due to overwhelming corruption in Lebanon, the revolution faced insurmountable challenges against the oligarchs. According to Fahed-Sreih, the main catalyst for this revolution was the economic crisis, which began with multiple economic difficulties. As stated in 2023, "Lebanon had the third-highest Debt to GDP ratio in 2017, at 158.4 percent" (p.5), with a gross public debt of \$86.2 billion and a GDP growth plummeting to 0.2 percent in 2019. The debt in Lebanon contributed significantly to the crisis because it was implemented to satisfy private benefits, as we saw before, due to corruption.

As a result, about 34 percent of companies reduced their employees' salaries, prompting around half of those employers to cut staff salaries by approximately 39.7 percent. Four out of every five households lost their jobs and could no longer afford basic needs such as medicine, fuel, and food ("Lebanon: Rising Poverty, Hunger Amid Economic Crisis," 2023). Additionally, banks ceased dollar withdrawals after 2019; people cannot afford any more a decent life, and with a decrease in their salaries, they cannot withdraw money from the banks because they are claiming that they have no more money. In fact, the banks gave loans to the government, but because of the corruption, the government could not repay the banks, and that was a major pillar of the crisis and money withdrawal. This is tied to corruption as, according to Chaaban et al. (2016), Lebanese banks are highly correlated with the political elite, making them susceptible to corruption. They found that fifteen of twenty banks had a board chair tied to a political elite, with six members of each bank board serving in public services. This allowed for the unprofessional distribution of loans for political favours, concentrating fifty percent of loans to only two percent of companies (Stel, 2013). Corruption also extends to foreign companies that had to bribe public officers to conduct their work. Furthermore, findings by Diwan and Haidar on Politically Connected Firms suggest that firms linked to political parties decrease job opportunities for Lebanese society by around 7.2 percent (Fahed-Sreih, 2023).

Lebanon's corruption in the banking system destroyed the trust between the banks and many stakeholders such as investors, the diaspora of Lebanese people, Lebanon's donors, and the international community. Financial mismanagement, dangerous investing practices, and political meddling point to the vulnerabilities to corruption generated by a lack of transparency and accountability (Azhari, 2020). This corruption, as indicated by local and foreign investors' unwillingness to cooperate with Lebanese banks, destroys the investor trust. Lebanese people dispersed from their homeland limit their contribution to Lebanon's economic development which consists of remittances and financial ties to support its family and communities. In addition, corruption increased the lack of confidence in donors and the international community. The situation exacerbates Lebanon's socioeconomic problems and endangers its stability.

2.3.2. The Exacerbation of Inequality and Poverty

Poverty has ravaged the Lebanese population, and it appears that the corrupt government has failed to take any initiative to restore the situation. Additionally, corruption stifles economic growth by creating an unpredictable business environment, discouraging investment, and perpetuating nepotism and favouritism in employment practices. This environment disproportionately affects children, older people, and workers, who suffer from social and economic disparities due to the lack of effective governance and equitable resource distribution (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Peace and protection have dissipated from the country, further exacerbating the struggles of the population as they grapple with poverty and inequality.

This perspective is not only shared by many authors but is also embraced by most of Lebanese society. Surveys conducted by ESCWA demonstrated that, from the Lebanese point of view, corruption is the major cause triggering social and economic inequalities (UN ESCWA, 2022). These inequalities extend beyond lifestyle and security to assets, where the Lebanese population is divided and subject to disparities. A significant gap exists between the wealthiest ten percent, owning almost seventy percent of the assets in Lebanon, and the remaining ninety percent (UN ESCWA, 2022). Poor people had their bank accounts frozen, while the richest ones could evacuate their money out of the country because no laws controlled them, given their proximity to the political elite (UN ESCWA, 2022). This highlights the impact of corruption, which has favoured the wealthiest and neglected the existence of the poor. In fact, the richest ones in Lebanon are either the political elite or people close to them. In both cases, they used their power and connections with the banks to cross the law and evacuate their money out of the country. Whereas the rest of the population with no political connections lost their money to the banks.

Additionally, after the Beirut Port explosion, many Lebanese lost everything—houses, businesses, parents, and families. With COVID-19 compounding the situation, many small businesses closed down, especially in marginalized areas (UN ESCWA, 2022; Fares et al., 2021). Furthermore, even electricity was cut off in certain areas because corruption unjustly divides Lebanese wealth, with the political elite controlling the country's resources entirely.

Exacerbated by the absence of social protection and safety net strategies as well as crisis management strategies, according to Assouad (2022), the income of Lebanese society is polarized, with the top ten percent receiving four times the amount earned by the poorest fifty percent of the population, while the remaining forty percent takes only thirty percent of the Lebanese income.

This severe income inequality is further driven by corruption. Corrupt governance, entrenched in the power-sharing agreement, results in inefficient and wasteful public spending, diverting funds that could have been used for social safety nets and equitable development. As a result, there are insufficient resources to provide adequate social protection, leaving the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population without support and exacerbating the income gap.

2.4. Impact on Marginalized Groups

In Lebanon, the fabric of society is deeply affected by pervasive issues of marginalization, with certain groups bearing the disproportionate brunt of corruption's impact. While a significant portion of the Lebanese population faces marginalization, specific groups are particularly vulnerable due to the direct or indirect effects of corruption. Among the most vulnerable are low-income citizens, women and girls, the youth, persons with disabilities, and older people, each facing unique challenges that are often overlooked or inadequately addressed by existing policies. Due to their increased vulnerability to the effects of Lebanon's ongoing political, social, and economic crises, these groups are relevant as marginalized communities. Acknowledging their specific vulnerabilities is a crucial step toward developing targeted interventions to mitigate the impacts of marginalization and foster a more inclusive society.

Attention should also be directed to the gendered effects of corruption. According to Hark (2021), only 3% of bank loans are given to women, highlighting the difficulties female entrepreneurs face who want to challenge gender stereotypes and make an economic contribution. This disparity can be attributed to the intertwined relationship between Lebanese banks and the corrupt political elite, which perpetuates gender bias. The political elite, often involved in banking decisions, prioritize their interests and those of their allies, who are predominantly male, thereby marginalizing women from financial resources. Moreover, the corrupt political elites leave women in the workforce vulnerable to workplace injustices like sexual harassment and inadequate maternity leave benefits. Corruption undermines the enforcement of workplace regulations, allowing issues such as sexual harassment to persist unchecked. Women are less likely to receive adequate maternity leave benefits because corrupt officials often prioritize their gains over implementing and enforcing equitable policies. The corrupt environment discourages the development and enforcement of protective laws for women, perpetuating gender inequality. Despite the obvious need for change, practical steps to empower and protect women are still lacking.

For the elderly population, corruption in Lebanon manifests through inadequate healthcare, pension systems, and social services, further marginalizing this vulnerable group. Studies such as the one by Hachem et al. (2022) have illuminated the dire circumstances facing older Syrian refugees in Lebanon, underscoring the broader challenges within the host country's healthcare system that also affect Lebanese elders. Chemali et al. (2008) advocate for significant reforms to provide more robust and more sustainable care for older adults, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change to address the healthcare requirements of this vulnerable group. Additionally, Khoury and Karam (2020) discuss the compounded impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on an already strained public health system, with significant adverse effects on older people's mental and physical well-being. Corruption exacerbates these issues by diverting funds and resources meant for public health and social services, leading to a lack of adequate support and infrastructure for the elderly. This misallocation of resources, driven by corrupt practices, has left the health system ill-prepared to handle the pandemic, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations such as the elderly. Together, these studies paint a grim picture of the state of elderly care in Lebanon, calling for immediate action to ensure the well-being and dignity of the nation's older population amidst ongoing economic and health crises.

Lebanese youth face significant barriers in education, employment, and political participation, largely due to systemic corruption. As we stated earlier, studies, such as the study by Dibeh et al. (2019), highlight how nepotism and favouritism within the educational system and job market obstruct merit-based progress and contribute to high youth unemployment rates. This environment encourages emigration and reduces youth engagement in politics, further disenfranchising them. Mikhael and Norman (2018) discuss the socio-economic challenges facing young populations in Lebanon, noting that corruption exacerbates poverty and limits access to quality education and job opportunities. Abouzeid et al. (2021) emphasize the impact of Lebanon's humanitarian crisis on young people, highlighting how corruption diverts aid and resources away from those in need, worsening the living conditions and prospects for youth. Bouzid (2016) provides empirical evidence on the correlation between corruption and youth unemployment, showing that regions with higher levels of corruption have significantly higher youth unemployment rates. This is attributed to corrupt practices such as bribery and nepotism, which undermine fair competition and hinder job creation. These findings underscore the need for systemic reforms to enhance the socio-economic prospects for Lebanese youth.

Corruption significantly hinders the rights and access to services for persons with disabilities in Lebanon, impacting their inclusion in education, healthcare, and community life. The research by Shuayb and Doueiry (2023) on the impact of COVID-19 on the education and healthcare services for persons with disabilities in Lebanon underscores how systemic issues are magnified during crises, leaving disabled individuals further marginalized. Corruption plays a role here by diverting funds intended for emergency response and support services, leading to inadequate resources and infrastructure to address the needs of PwDs during the pandemic. Similarly, Wehbi (2012) discusses the challenges and opportunities in advancing a disability rights agenda in a context of conflict, highlighting how war and instability complicate advocacy efforts for disability rights. Corruption exacerbates the situation for PwDs by facilitating the misallocation of resources, undermining the implementation of disability-inclusive policies, and allowing discriminatory practices to persist unchecked. Additionally, Damaj (2008) emphasizes the social construction of disabling identities, indicating how policies and societal attitudes influenced by corruption and lack of accountability construct barriers to inclusion. Corruption not only depletes resources meant for the support and integration of disabled individuals but also perpetuates a culture of exclusion and discrimination.

It is imperative to incorporate these insights with a call for comprehensive international and local interventions to improve the analysis of how corruption affects marginalized groups in Lebanon. Building a more inclusive and just society in Lebanon requires addressing the underlying causes of corruption, establishing solid legal frameworks to protect vulnerable populations, and ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources.

2.5. Gaps and Objective of the Brief

2.5.1. Challenges and Gaps

The exploration of corruption in Lebanon, particularly its impact on marginalized groups, confronts several challenges inherent in researching and addressing such a pervasive issue within a complex socio-political context. A primary challenge lies in the fact that corruption is typically a concealed and secretive phenomenon, deeply embedded in various layers of governance and intertwined with Lebanon's unique political system, characterized by patronage networks and clientelism.

One significant challenge in researching corruption in Lebanon is the opacity and complexity of political and economic systems, often cited as both a cause and effect of pervasive corruption (World Bank Group, 2020; 2022). This systemic issue is exacerbated by the sectarian political structure, which complicates transparency and accountability mechanisms (Alagha, 2021; Murtada, 2018). Moreover, the existing literature frequently highlights the lack of comprehensive data and the difficulty in obtaining accurate information due to fear of reprisal or political sensitivities (McClearn et al., 2023).

While there is a body of literature addressing the broader aspects of corruption in Lebanon and valuable insights into its mechanisms and consequences, specific studies focusing on its impact on marginalized groups are less prevalent. This gap is notable in the context of Lebanon's economic crisis, where the effects of corruption exacerbate existing vulnerabilities among the poorest and most marginalized communities, including refugees, migrant workers, and those living in poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2021b; WFP, 2023). It is also worth noting that quantitative data and analysis are the foundation of the majority of studies on corruption in Lebanon (Fahed-Sreih, 2023). Thus, more in-depth knowledge of the problem and its root causes could be obtained through qualitative research examining the political, social, and cultural aspects of corruption in Lebanon. Furthermore, the literature often lacks comparative analysis that would display drivers and factors contributing to corruption, as well as detailed case studies that could provide insight into the mechanisms through which corruption affects these groups and potential strategies for mitigation (Fahed-Sreih, 2023).

2.5.2. Objectives

Given the identified challenges and gaps in the literature, this study seeks to address the critical need for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of corruption on marginalized groups within Lebanon's unique socio-political landscape. The overarching objective of this research is to delve into the complexities of corruption and its detrimental effects on the most vulnerable segments of Lebanese society, with a focus on refugees, women and girls, the elderly, the youth, and those living in poverty. By investigating the socio-political dynamics that facilitate corruption and its pervasive effects, this study aims to uncover how corruption exacerbates these marginalized groups' vulnerabilities.

Research Objectives:

1. Investigate the effects of corruption on marginalized groups: This involves a detailed examination of how corruption specifically impacts these communities, considering the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by Lebanon's economic crisis.
2. Understand socio-political dynamics facilitating these effects: By exploring the interplay between Lebanon's political economy – shaped by sectarianism, clientelism, elite economic dominance, and foreign dependencies – and corruption, the research seeks to identify the structural factors that perpetuate bribery and other forms of corruption and its impact on marginalized populations.
3. Develop targeted recommendations for mitigating corruption and supporting these communities: Drawing on the insights gained from the investigation, the research will propose actionable strategies aimed at promoting transparency, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and providing support to marginalized groups affected by corruption.

Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute valuable knowledge and practical recommendations to policymakers, NGOs, CSOs, and the international community, fostering efforts to combat corruption and mitigate its harmful effects on Lebanon's most vulnerable populations. By addressing the complex dimensions of corruption and its repercussions, the research endeavours to facilitate the development of targeted interventions that can lead to a more equitable and just society in Lebanon.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to tackle the extent to which corruption in Lebanon impedes the lives of marginal communities in Lebanon. In this research, marginalized communities include, and are limited to, low-income populations, urban and rural populations, women and girls, youth (18–30), persons with disabilities, and older adults (51 and above). The end goal is to uncover how corruption specifically impacts these communities, considering the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by Lebanon's economic crisis.

This paper utilizes a mixed-methods approach for conducting the study, which combines elements of quantitative and qualitative data in order to address the research question. The advantage of using such an approach lies in the combination of detailed insights from qualitative data such as interviews and quantitative data such as surveys (Brannen & Moss, 2012). The main centrepiece of this work lies in the primary data, which is collected through exclusive interviews with several local civil society organizations (CSOs). Specifically, eight CSOs were contacted for interviews. Each CSO specializes in its service in a certain area and serves a certain marginalized community in the country. The five CSOs are:

1. Restart Center: Established in 1996, Restart Center is a non-governmental organization active in the field of rehabilitation for victims of torture and violence. The main marginalized communities it covers are people with disabilities and mental health beneficiaries.
2. TIPS (Tripoli Institute for Policy Studies): Established in 2021, TIPS is immersed in the field of economic and social policy issues, aiming to mediate between researchers and decision-makers. The main marginalized community it serves is the low-income population.
3. ADA (Assi Development Association): ADA is an NGO that aims to work on developing their area of intervention, which is the Northern Beqaa area. The organization also strives to empower the area to fully utilize its financial and human resources. The main marginalized community it serves is the low-income population.
4. KAFA: Established in 2005, KAFA (enough) is a secular NGO that aims to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence & exploitation against women and children. The main marginalized community it serves is women and girls.
5. Arc En Ciel: Established in 1985, Arc En Ciel is a Lebanese NGO that has worked with and for thousands of beneficiaries and people with difficulties for the sustainable development of society. The main marginalized community it serves is people with disabilities.

As can be seen from the list of CSOs, this combination allows us to investigate each marginalized community in depth separately. As each CSO serves a specific marginalized community, the interview questionnaire varies slightly from one CSO to the next. This is to conduct tailored interviews concerning each specific community to uncover the impact of corruption on these communities as observed by these organizations.

Hence, the interviews conducted can be viewed as semi-structured interviews. That is, they are a mix of structured interviews with a fixed set of questions prepared in advance and unstructured interviews that are conversational and open-ended. In this way, there

is more room for detailed responses by the CSOs while maintaining a reasonable degree of flexibility and validity. As the interviews primarily discussed corruption affecting different marginalized communities, a great deal of information and insights were harnessed and used in the analysis. The interviews conducted were one-on-one interviews; that is, the researchers interviewed one organization at a time. All interviews were conducted online, where the researchers virtually met with an official or representative within the organizations to provide valuable judgment concerning corruption. Each interviewee expressed their own opinions, experiences, and perceptions towards the issue, also speaking on behalf of the marginalized communities and voicing their concerns.

As mentioned, the interview questionnaire slightly differed from one interview to another. That is because each CSO specializes in serving a specific marginalized community and hence needs a questionnaire tailored to the needs of that community. That being said, the interview questionnaire had two main sections. The first section contained general questions that were asked to all organizations without exclusion. With a total of 11 questions, this section aims to gather comprehensive information from organizations about their objectives, impact evaluation methods, and the types of corruption encountered, particularly in marginalized communities. The second section is a list of questions specific to each marginalized community. The number of questions varies between three and six, depending on the specific marginalized community being discussed. Regardless of the communities being discussed, the second section exclusively addresses corruption and its nuanced impact on these communities.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews represent the primary data of the study. As mentioned, the methodology of this research follows a mixed-methods approach, in which both qualitative and quantitative data are used to render the qualitative information more relevant to public perception. The quantitative data used represents a secondary source of data. These data are gathered from the SAHWA Youth Survey and the Arab Barometer. Both are cross-sectional and cross-national surveys conducted in MENA countries, and both surveys contain both qualitative and quantitative data. The SAHWA survey involved surveying the youth aged between 15 and 29 in five MENA countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia) in 2015 and 2016. Meanwhile, Wave V of the Arab Barometer was based on a nationally representative probability sample of the population aged 18 and above. All data were collected in face-to-face public opinion surveys.

Data from these two surveys were used to compare and contrast with the interview data and to observe any common patterns or discrepancies arising from the collected responses. The interview data is also compared with the desk review and the existing literature to determine whether the results align with, diverge from, or add new dimensions to the existing body of knowledge, in addition to strengthening the practical and policy implications of the research and supporting evidence-based recommendations and interventions.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. General Perceptions on Corruption

The interviews with representatives from the five civil society organizations (CSOs) highlighted a unanimous consensus on the pervasive nature of corruption in Lebanon. With no exception, all CSOs view corruption in Lebanon as systemic. At the sharp end, the CSO representatives and the communities they work with describe it as an omnipresent barrier that affects every aspect of daily life, from accessing basic services to the functioning of the judiciary. For instance, they reported that citizens often encounter demands for bribes in exchange for routine government services. Additionally, the lack of accountability and transparency in political and judicial processes has led to widespread disillusionment and mistrust among the public. It is not isolated or confined to a single sector; it is embedded into the fabric of the nation's political, judicial, and socioeconomic systems. This is true both before and after the 2019 economic crisis and the political collapse that the country underwent. Nevertheless, these corrupt practices became more apparent and intense. Specifically, street-level bribery became more pervasive, with citizens increasingly required to pay bribes for routine public services such as obtaining permits, accessing healthcare, and processing legal documents. Additionally, there was a notable intensification of corruption schemes involving networks of politicians colluding with business interests. These schemes often included preferential treatment in public contracts, kickbacks, and embezzlement of public funds, further entrenching systemic corruption and exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities. Many institutions have completely lost control of their operations in terms of monitoring and implementing public policies, and ensuring the respect basic human rights. One such institution is the judiciary system, which has become much more susceptible after the 2019 economic crisis and the Covid pandemic to corrupt practices and will be discussed further in further subsections. The desk review complies with this view, highlighting the systemic nature of corruption in the roots of the country, which is further promoted by a clientelist system that relates political power with economic interests. This entrenchment of corruption is facilitated by Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing arrangement, which has historically allocated power among different religious sects, thus fostering a fertile ground for nepotism and favouritism. This power-sharing agreement not only entrenches corrupt behaviour but also disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including women and girls, low-income families, and persons with disabilities. These communities rely more heavily on public services, which are severely undermined by corruption.

For instance, the allocation of resources is often influenced by sectarian affiliations rather than actual needs, leading to inefficiencies and inequities in public service delivery. This results in lower-quality healthcare, education, and social services, which marginalized groups depend on more than dominant social groups. Women and girls face additional barriers due to gender biases embedded in these corrupt systems, which can hinder their access to education and justice. Low-income families, struggling with limited financial resources, are disproportionately affected by demands for bribes and the lack of transparent public financial management. Persons with disabilities often find themselves excluded from essential services due to systemic neglect and corruption that prioritizes certain sectarian interests over equitable service provision.

In essence, the corrupt practices arising from Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system directly undercut the quantity and quality of public services, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of already marginalized communities and perpetuating cycles of poverty

and exclusion.

Importantly for marginalized communities, who are more likely to rely on public service provision, corruption reduces the capacity of the state to deliver essential services (Hall, 2012). Moreover, studies have shown that in environments where corruption is rampant, public confidence in institutions diminishes, leading to a disengaged and disenchanting citizenry (Morris & Klesner (2010); Uslaner (2004)). In fact, according to the Arab Barometer, between the years 2019 and 2022, the proportion of citizens that trust the government decreased drastically, falling from 38% to 67%.

Indeed, with corrupt practices going unchecked, people in Lebanon have progressively lost trust in the institutional integrity of the government and its branches. For example, 81% of the Lebanese sample in the Arab Barometer have little to no trust in the government, while 75% have lost trust in the courts and the legal system of the country. This erosion of trust is particularly hurtful to the country in times of crisis, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port explosion, when effective and trustworthy governance is most needed. In fact, it was reported that 82% of Lebanese respondents to the Arab Barometer disagreed with the statement "political leaders are concerned with citizens' needs" (Arab Barometer Wave V, 2019).

In a situation in which the state is unable or unwilling to provide basic services and where trust in institutions is critically low, many people in need and many marginalized communities are forced to turn to their lifeline or last resort: civil society.

The consequences and repercussions of corruption represented a major concern for the CSOs, who noted that corruption has led to the misallocation of resources and is already depleting public funds, with substantial amounts siphoned off through embezzlement and fraudulent schemes. This has a twofold impact: on one hand, it hinders the operations of CSOs by reducing the available funding and resources needed for their initiatives, indirectly affecting marginalized communities. On the other hand, it directly impacts these communities by degrading the quality and availability of essential public services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. Rampant corruption severely hampers the operations of CSOs by reducing the availability of funding and resources, making it difficult for them to support marginalized communities effectively. Regardless of the effect on the CSOs and the communities they serve, this will have a severe effect on the country's economic stability and - by extension - the political situation. In addition, the social ramifications of high-level corruption are profound, where resources meant for public welfare are diverted into private pockets, this exacerbates inequalities and marginalizes the already disadvantaged sections of society.

It was also highlighted how political corruption has seriously questioned the democracy in the country as well as the system of governance. This includes the manipulation of electoral processes, patronage systems, and the pervasive influence of money in politics. Such practices undermine democratic processes and entrench the power of corrupt political elites and religious leaders, also known as "zaims." Ample amounts of literature can be found describing Lebanon's confessionalist system, which incentivizes political leaders to prioritize sectarian interests over national interests.

4.2. Women and Girls

The reality of the situation is that corruption has worsened gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination in already traditionally “male” societies, especially when discussing societies in rural areas. First, corruption impedes access to the formal justice system. The growing phenomenon of plaintiffs having to pay court officials illicit fees in order for their case to be heard has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, particularly those who are poor and have experienced violence, as they often lack or are perceived to lack access to financial resources. Second, as the formal judicial system has come under strain and the need to make informal payments makes justice inaccessible for many, more cases are being handled by religious leaders. These alternative dispute settlement mechanisms tend to discriminate against women and girls in male-dominated societies. Third, coercive corruption by security forces hinders law enforcement agencies' ability to tackle gender-based violence, as victims may be subject to further corruption and discrimination at police stations.

The CSO representatives interviewed for this study firmly emphasized the toll that corruptive practices are taking on women and girls. For example, KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation has specialized units that offer comprehensive support, including legal assistance, social counselling, and psychological support to women and children survivors of violence, in addition to conducting awareness-raising campaigns, research, and advocacy to influence policy changes and enhance legal protections. The organization expressed some of the new challenges women and girls are facing as marginalized constituencies of Lebanese society. In the last 4 years, especially since the October 2019 revolution, Lebanon has seen a complete collapse of the political and judicial systems, especially with regard to the courts. This added to the challenges faced by women, especially in rural areas, where gender-based discrimination and inequality are already prevalent.

According to the representatives from KAFA, corruption levels increased both in civil courts and institutional courts. Since the economic collapse, court officials have started forcing everyone who is resorting to justice to pay extra fees, way beyond the established fees, to enter courts and carry on with their lawsuits. The presentation of basic complaints was halted unless the plaintiff bribed the court officials. Citizens are being forced to pay for minimal basic services, such as the judge being in the courtroom on time. These difficulties are taking a serious toll, specifically on women, because women who are seeking justice for the abuse or violence they have experienced often barely have the means to pay for basic court costs. The addition of illicit fees can make the price of having their voices heard unaffordable. These problems were exacerbated during COVID, as judges started striking, but even after COVID, these problems, rooted in both judicial corruption and capacity issues, continue to impede the right of women to access justice. Even nowadays, where we can remotely assume that the economic situation is semi-stable, representatives from KAFA were surprised to see a sharp increase in court fees. In addition, some courts have started discriminating against women, according to KAFA. This is evident across various civil and religious courts in Lebanon. Over time, the impartiality of the judicial system has been affected by the interplay of private interests and the influence of religious authorities. With the ongoing strain on the formal justice system, there has been a growing tendency to refer certain cases to religious figures or local leaders, including traditional “zaims.” While these structures play a significant role in Lebanese society, concerns have emerged regarding their impact on equitable access

to justice, particularly for women. In some instances, gender-based biases persist, and corruption further complicates the judicial process, whether through inconsistent rulings or unequal treatment within courtroom settings. The reliance on religious authorities, who may prioritize sectarian interests over justice, further undermines the integrity of the judicial process and perpetuates gender inequality.

On another aspect, we are also encountering major corruption from the Internal Security Forces. Women who report domestic violence in police stations are also being forced to pay bribes for the forces to conduct their job of investigating and ensuring safety, according to KAFA. This corruption in law enforcement discourages women from filing complaints and means there is no clear-cut data on how corruption affects the safety of women. In addition, Assi Development Association (ADA) also provided insights regarding the situation for women and girls. Generally, the lack of safety and justice resulting from corruption pertains to both males and females and across the whole of the country.

4.3. Low-Income Populations and Rural Areas

The low-income population is arguably the most affected by corruption in Lebanon. In the Arab Barometer, over 52% of the respondents stated that their income does not cover the cost of living and is causing them significant difficulties in 2019. The median income of the youth surveyed in the SAHWA Survey is 1 million LBP, while the median income of the general population revolves around 10 million LBP, according to Human Rights Watch.

The CSOs interviewed for this study underscored that the poor bear most of the burden of corrupt practices in public service delivery, particularly in sectors like healthcare, education, and social services. Corruption in these sectors manifests in various forms, such as embezzlement of funds, bribery, and favouritism, which significantly reduce the quantity and quality of services provided. For instance, embezzlement of healthcare funds results in poorly equipped hospitals and a lack of essential medicines, disproportionately affecting those who cannot afford private healthcare. In education, bribery can lead to unqualified individuals being hired as teachers, compromising the quality of education for children from low-income families. Similarly, favoritism in social services means that resources intended for the most vulnerable are diverted to those with connections, leaving the poor without crucial support. This systemic corruption deepens the inequalities faced by marginalized communities, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.

In poorer rural areas, according to the ADA, most infrastructural development projects, such as providing street lighting, do not get the deserved funding, so the quality would not be of the requested standard. One prominent example is potholes on the roads. Barely any money is dedicated to fixing the poor quality of the roads in rural areas, which is causing more and more accidents.

In addition, the problem of corruption in public employment affects the whole country and not just the northern regions. For many high-level government positions, potential candidates go through an exam tailored for that position. The highest scorers pass through the next steps of further interviews. However, in Lebanon, even after someone scores the highest in a certain exam, there is a high chance that this individual would not

be selected because of the existing sectarian power-sharing structure, which distributes high-level government job positions to different religious sects to establish adequate representation of the country's different sectarian communities. The degree of corruption is to the extent that sometimes the position would remain empty for several years until those in power came to an agreement on whom they should appoint to conduct the job. In fact, over 95% of Lebanese respondents in the SAHWA Youth Survey believe that nepotism occurs in the country. The marginalized communities are most affected by nepotism because they are less likely to have the influential networks necessary to secure these positions, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exclusion from opportunities for advancement.

According to ADA, in rural areas, corruption is primarily experienced when dealing with the Internal Security Forces, members of local municipalities, and ministry representatives. It has happened that the Ministry of Agriculture has neglected duty and allowed civil violations to continue unchecked. In addition, a similar instance has occurred with the Ministry of Energy, where they neglected people violating the rules of using local rivers.

Generally, municipal elections are not done in a proper manner, i.e., following a proper list of candidates to vote for. In the Northern area, most election candidates are from large families or tribes from the area and are virtually guaranteed to reach positions of power. This is a major flaw that opens the doors for corrupt activities such as vote-buying, nepotism, and the manipulation of electoral outcomes. These practices undermine the integrity of the elections and ensure that power remains concentrated in the hands of a few influential families, preventing fair representation and accountability. The public is generally becoming more aware of the corrupt political environment that they live in, especially as CSOs hold more focus group sessions with local citizens to address instances of corruption. Earlier in 2024, the ADA conducted a survey asking the public in the North whether they were aware of the laws pertaining to public municipal spending. It turned out that only 40% were aware of the law, but only a small fraction knew the specifics of the regulations. Over 70% of respondents were not aware of their right to access information. This works to the advantage of corrupt individuals who conduct illegal activities, knowing that the public is generally unaware of their right to access information. This lack of awareness disproportionately impacts poorer individuals, who are less likely to be informed about their rights and more vulnerable to exploitation by corrupt officials who conduct illegal activities with impunity.

Tripoli Institute Policy Institute (TIPS) also adds to the topic of low-income populations. In terms of work, employment opportunities are influenced by favouritism and nepotism, with limited job openings available. Monopolies in certain industries further restrict fair employment opportunities, often without transparent recruitment processes. This situation may even lead to the hiring of non-Lebanese individuals over local candidates. This is crucial, especially given the fact that Tripoli hosts some of the most economically disadvantaged people; this area has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. Petty corruption is also pervasive in the area in the interactions between low- and mid-level public officials and ordinary citizens who are often trying to access basic goods or services. For context, according to the 6th wave of the Arab Barometer, 94% of the people surveyed from North Lebanon expressed that they have “no trust at all” for the government, while the percentages in richer areas such as Mount Lebanon and Beirut are 76% and 42%, respectively. Evidence suggests that poorer regions like Tripoli

experience higher incidences of corruption due to the lack of oversight and accountability, coupled with the desperation of citizens who resort to bribery to receive essential services. This correlation between poverty and corruption exacerbates the socio-economic disparities in these regions, trapping marginalized communities in a cycle of deprivation and exploitation.

4.4. People with Disabilities and Mental Health Problems

The extent of the impact of corruption on the lives of people with disabilities and mental health problems is not limited to facing significant barriers to accessing healthcare and social services, which are worsened by corruptive practices. It also includes substandard quality of care. An interview conducted with a representative of the Restart Center offered more insights on the challenges of these marginalized communities. This local NGO's main vision is to achieve the full prohibition of torture and ill-treatment in Lebanon. For people with moderate to severe mental health problems seeking care, access to specialized mental health services could often be denied, either arbitrarily or as a means to pressure individuals and their families into paying bribes. There is unequal access for certain nationalities that are denied access to certain services. Some centres have started prioritizing nationalities based on political affiliations and other considerations, as political patronage networks monopolize spaces in care facilities and distribute them to their supporters and clients as a form of resource allocation. There are also observations on the institutional and individual levels that are displaying discriminatory behaviours due to the same reasons. This discrimination is linked to corruption, as individuals and institutions may favour certain nationalities to gain political favour or financial benefits, thereby ensuring that services and resources are distributed through corrupt networks rather than on the basis of need. Another point that affects access to specialized services is the problem of emergency care. In times of crisis, like the Syrian crisis, there was a general reluctance from some governmental and non-high-end hospitals to take charge of mental health emergencies. This sometimes even results in the refusal of cases in emergency rooms for mental health patients. While this is primarily a capacity and regulatory challenge, the lack of oversight and accountability has led to situations where patients and their families are forced to pay bribes to receive emergency care. There is no formal body that forces hospitals to take in such patients.

In terms of drug shortages, there are unequal donations and distributions of drugs among the primary healthcare centres (PHCs), which are within the network of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and which have integrated mental health treatments into their operations. Such disparities in funding are observed to have a sectoral or political nature. Certain psychiatric wards are known to follow a certain political faction, so this results in corruption both in the form of discriminatory care and unequal access to funding. This political affiliation distorts resource allocation, as political actors maximize control over available funding to reward their community rather than allocating resources based on need or public interest. Additionally, this alignment results in discriminatory care, where patients who do not belong to the favoured political faction receive lower quality care or are denied services altogether.

Through the lens of quality of care, there is a lack of a legal framework that can guide mental health interventions while safeguarding the rights of patients with mental health problems and defining the rights and limitations of the practicing professional.

Such a framework must consist of an inclusive foundation that encompasses all hospitals and mental health patients. These observations are based on public and organizational experiences rather than formal studies. In 2006, a draft piece of legislation was proposed to the parliament, but the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) added its own amendments to this agenda. Not only does no one have access to this draft or the amendments that were made, but more importantly, the law was never passed. A request from the Restart Center to access to this information was rejected. Without a clear and transparent legal framework and without a proper monitoring body, the quality of care provided to people with mental health challenges is greatly inconsistent. There is also the absence of a proper complaint and reporting mechanism in many psychiatric wards. Common corruption-related complaints include staff embezzling funds, misallocation of resources, and instances where patients or their families are asked to pay bribes for better treatment or faster service.

Arcenciel, a prominent NGO in Lebanon, also articulated the severe impact of corruption on people with disabilities during the interview conducted for this study. Their representative highlighted that people with disabilities are often extorted for illicit fees by healthcare workers to obtain necessary medical equipment and services, which are supposed to be provided free or at subsidized rates by the government. This practice places a disproportionate financial burden on disabled individuals and their families, who are already struggling with the economic challenges associated with their conditions. Additionally, corruption in public transportation and infrastructure projects means that many initiatives meant to improve accessibility for disabled people are either poorly executed or remain incomplete, further marginalizing this vulnerable group. For instance, funds allocated for constructing accessible facilities and upgrading public transport systems often get diverted or mismanaged, resulting in substandard or unfinished projects. This misappropriation not only wastes resources but also leaves people with disabilities struggling to navigate a poorly designed environment, reinforcing their isolation and limiting their opportunities for social and economic participation. The lack of accountability and transparency in these projects exacerbates the situation, making it difficult for advocacy groups to push for necessary reforms and improvements.

4.5. Detainees

Detainees are one of the most vulnerable groups; enclosed in institutions they are exposed to severe risks of corruption and other forms of illegal and unethical behaviour. That is because there is little to no monitoring in such enclosed institutions.

For context, local prisons are overcrowded by 320%. Inmates sleep on mattresses on the ground and in rotation due to the lack of space. Inmates who also belong to the LGBT community or those who are Syrian refugees are rarely given minimum rights to sleep in prison cells – they either take turns in sleeping minimum hours, or resort to sleeping elsewhere such as in bathrooms – or the right to access minimal medical care.

Restart Center has a unit dedicated to providing rehabilitation services to all inmates, with a special focus on vulnerable persons, such as survivors of torture, inmates with mental health disorders, those vulnerable to radicalization, and refugees. In an interview conducted for this study, a representative of the Restart Center pointed to three main drivers of corruption in prisons.

The first component is food security in prisons as there is no transparent procurement process when it comes to procuring food for detainees. There is extensive opacity with regard to the companies and their affiliates who secure contracts to supply prisons, raising concerns about potential corruption. According to information provided by Restart's representative, the company in charge of the food is influencing the right of detainees to have access to proper food security. Part of the reason is that the Internal Security Forces (ISF) directorate does not have the means to pay the full amount, although it is not clear whether the lack of available funds is linked to the prevalence of corruption, and money intended for prisons is actually being embezzled or used for kickbacks. This lack of transparency can lead to lower quality or quantity of food for prisoners, violating their right to a basic standard of food security. Hence, prison directorates have decided instead to cut off the number of meals served to the detainees. Essential proteins like meat or chicken are only served once per week. These practices severely affect detainees' access to proper nutrition.

The second component is the existence of small mini markets in prisons, where prisoners can buy certain items. According to penitentiary law, these markets can be managed by local NGOs in collaboration with a prison committee. However, according to Restart, there is some suggestion that these markets are managed by large suppliers who artificially inflate prices, which are three times higher than prices outside prisons. The third component is that there is no monitoring body that monitors detention centres. According to Restart representatives, prison wardens have resisted efforts to establish an independent complaint mechanism inside detention centres, despite it being a recommendation of the United Nations against torture. There are no channels for detainees to raise complaints and provide feedback.

In addition, in North Lebanon, 80% of detainees are pretrial inmates, meaning they have not been convicted yet. Some of them have even spent more time in detention than their original sentence before being tried. When someone is detained without seeing a judge for a very long time, this can be defined as arbitrary detention. This is perceived to be a punitive action against the detainees because every inmate is innocent until proven guilty. Corruption plays a significant role here as it undermines the efficiency and impartiality of the justice system, leading to extensive delays and resulting in people waiting years for a trial.

There are also allegations of torture and mistreatment against detainees through investigation interviews, despite the fact that Law No. 65 of 2017 criminalizes torture in Lebanon. As of June 2024, there has never been any trial against anyone for the act of torture, despite the many claims by the detainees and many files charged against prison guards and officials. This suggests that the internal security forces may exercise undue influence over the judicial system. Also, there has been an increased risk of morbidity and mortality, yet there is no clear process of investigation regarding the deaths of inmates.

To establish proper monitoring mechanisms inside places of detention, Law No. 62 was issued in 2016 and created the National Preventive Mechanisms. This formal body, staffed with personnel authorized to conduct unannounced visits, has the legal right to access places of detention at any time at any time to monitor the situation of persons deprived of their liberty. This is according to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), which Lebanon has ratified; the country is legally bound by

this. Unfortunately, the members of the committee were appointed based on political affiliation and religious representation. Hardly any member has a background in human rights or expertise in monitoring places of detention. They were simply assigned per political party. In addition, more than half of the people in the committee have been granted permission not to visit detention sites, albeit for health reasons and being outside of the country. Recently, Law 62 was amended, claiming that the mandate will only start when all regulatory decrees of the mandate are ensured. One of the regulatory decrees is to have a budget from the government for the members of the committee. And since there is no proper budget, they have stopped applying the law. Hence, the impact of the National Preventive Mechanism is not clear, which is the only committee in Lebanon to have a legal mandate to monitor places of detention, a right that CSOs do not enjoy. While the National Preventive Mechanism could have offered an opportunity to ameliorate the situation of the detainees, the shortcomings with its operational model mean that civil society organization in Lebanon in practice challenge its legitimacy.

The final component has to do with minors in detention. The minimum legal age for detention is twelve years old, yet children as young as nine years old are being held in detention. According to Restart, they are almost always detained longer than the legal timespan for detention, which is 48 hours. In fact, over 70% of the minors are detained for approximately 43 days before being released. In addition, no social worker would be present in the investigation with the children in most cases, which is illegal. Despite the existence of the Criminal Code of Lebanon, implementation and accountability are virtually absent. According to Restart, in most cases, corrupt ISF personnel do not contact social workers, which results in minors being detained longer than the legal timespan.

4.6. Youth

Youth in Lebanon are greatly affected by the pervasive corruption that impedes their prospects for education and employment. Assi Development Association (ADA) reported that young people are often forced to pay bribes to senior officials secure educational certificates or job placements. This practice not only creates significant barriers to economic participation but also fosters a culture of cynicism and apathy among the youth. In fact, 95% of the Lebanese sample in the Arab Barometer stated that “wasta” is prevalent in the country in terms of jobs and delivering services. The literature also corroborates this idea; Dibeh et al. (2019) observe that the Lebanese youth encounter substantial obstacles in employment and political participation due to nepotism and corruption within the job market and educational institutions. Young people, who should be the driving force behind the nation's future, find themselves disheartened and disempowered by systemic corruption.

The lack of transparent and fair recruitment processes due to corruption in job placements excludes many talented young people from fulltime gainful employment. Besides limiting the youth's economic mobility, this also encourages youth migration as they seek to find better jobs and educational opportunities abroad.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensuring fundamental human rights—including access to work, gender equality, protection from violence, and the right to adequate housing—must remain a priority within all governance frameworks. To implement these rights effectively, transparency and anti-corruption measures must be systematically integrated into public policies and processes. These efforts are crucial not only for upholding the rule of law but also for guaranteeing that marginalized communities, including rural populations, women, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged groups, can fully exercise their rights.

In this context, the recommendations presented in this section fall into three overarching categories. The first emphasizes embedding transparency and anti-corruption measures that prioritize marginalized communities. This entails adopting accessible and inclusive tools for information sharing, reporting corruption, and monitoring government actions, with a particular focus on services and funds intended for marginalized populations. The second category highlights the importance of ensuring community participation and empowerment in anti-corruption and governance processes. This involves fostering mechanisms such as community monitoring of public procurement, citizen reporting on aid distribution, and active participation in budgeting processes. Finally, the third category focuses on strengthening institutional accountability and developing tailored mechanisms to protect marginalized groups. This requires equipping public institutions, including the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) and oversight bodies, with adequate resources and authority to specifically address corruption that affects these populations. Measures such as expanding whistleblower protections, ensuring legal aid and representation for victims of corruption, and improving aid-tracking systems are integral to this approach.

1. Community Participation and Empowerment in Governance

Marginalized communities must actively participate in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies. Community-led initiatives, such as citizen oversight of public procurement, reporting on aid distribution, and participation in budgeting processes, should be institutionalized to strengthen accountability.

2. Expanding Transparency and Access to Information

A national multilingual online portal should be developed to improve access to government data. Community outreach programs should educate marginalized groups on their right to information, and detailed government expenditure reports must highlight allocations benefiting these communities.

3. Protecting Whistleblowers from Vulnerable Backgrounds

Whistleblower protection mechanisms must be expanded to safeguard individuals from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. Legal and financial support should be provided for whistleblowers facing retaliation, and strict penalties should be enforced against officials who engage in reprisals.

4. Ensuring Fair Public Procurement and Service Delivery

Inclusive procurement policies should be promoted to prioritize businesses owned by women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups. Social impact assessments must be mandated for public contracts, and civil society organizations should be

involved in monitoring procurement processes to prevent discrimination in service delivery.

5. Enhancing Legal and Judicial Protections

Legal aid programs must be established for marginalized communities affected by corruption. Fair trials and state-appointed legal representation must be guaranteed for corruption-related grievances. Judicial independence reforms should be implemented to prevent political interference in cases impacting vulnerable groups.

6. Improving Equitable Aid Distribution and Social Protection

Real-time aid-tracking systems should be strengthened to monitor fund allocations to marginalized communities. A civil society oversight body must be established to monitor social protection programs, and a community-driven complaint mechanism should be implemented to address aid mismanagement.

7. Strengthening the National Anti-Corruption Commission's Role

The full operationalization of NACC must be ensured, with a mandate to protect marginalized communities from corruption-related exploitation. The commission should be required to publish periodic reports on corruption cases that disproportionately affect these populations.

8. Combating Bureaucratic Corruption in Social Services

E-governance reforms should be implemented to reduce bureaucratic corruption and improve access to essential services. Mobile registration programs must be established to enable rural populations to access social benefits, and accountability measures should be strengthened for public officials managing social services.

9. Enhancing Accountability in Financial Aid and Public Spending

Dedicated monitoring units within NACC must oversee the allocation of funds intended for marginalized groups. Anti-money laundering mechanisms should be reinforced to prevent fund diversion in social protection programs. Lebanon's compliance with international financial regulations should be strengthened to ensure transparency in public spending.

Corruption and the International Aid During the 2024 War in Lebanon

Introduction

The recent war in Lebanon has had a devastating impact on the country and the people. On November 24, the Lebanese Ministry of Health announced that 3,768 people had been killed and 15,699 others were injured since October 8, 2023. The World Bank estimated that the initial economic losses suffered by Lebanon at about \$ 8.5 billion. The conflict led to a reduction in real GDP growth by at least 6.6% in 2024. About 166,00 people lost their jobs, equivalent to a decrease in income of \$168 million (World Bank, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024a).

Lebanon is facing a severe displacement crisis involving both a large population of Syrian refugees and a growing number of internally displaced people (IDPs) due to recent conflicts, especially the ongoing conflict with Israel. This conflict has led to around 1.4 million Lebanese people being forced to leave their homes. The war also caused significant damage to various services, such as schools and hospitals, making the impact of the war even worse. Lebanon's widespread corruption worsens this crisis, making it harder for these displaced groups to access the necessary basic services. This annex will look at how corruption adds to the struggles of these displaced communities, whether they are Syrian refugees or Lebanese citizens who had to flee their homes.

Background: Displacement in Lebanon

Lebanon has both a large number of Syrian refugees and, recently, many displaced Lebanese citizens due to the conflict with Israel. These two groups add pressure on Lebanon's limited resources, creating competition for things like healthcare, housing, and jobs. Corruption in Lebanon, deeply embedded in many areas of society, makes these challenges even more demanding. Both Syrian refugees and Lebanese IDPs often face additional barriers because of corrupt practices.

The majority of displacements have occurred from targeted areas in the South, Beirut, and Baalbek. Many of the displaced Lebanese citizens or Syrian refugees stayed in overcrowded shelters such as houses in safer areas or schools; others were forced to stay in the open-air areas such as Martyr's Square in Beirut. Despite the risks awaiting them, other Syrians decided to leave Lebanon due to this war, and it was estimated over 240,000 Syrians sought to escape back to their country. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency displacements, over 100,000 escaped to Syria only by 29 September 2024, and an estimated 40% were Lebanese. Additionally, approximately 3,200 Syrians went on risky boat trips to places like Cyprus or Turkey (Mixed Migration Centre, 2024).

An estimated four million people in Lebanon needed assistance to meet their basic needs. It was also found that thousands of Syrians who were displaced from targeted areas became homeless and without assistance. Therefore, most Syrian refugees had to rely on organizations such as IOM, UNHCR, and UNRWA to provide them with their basic needs. Additionally, due to the scarcity of available spaces and houses, most of the Syrian refugees have found themselves homeless and sleeping on the streets after being displaced from the targeted areas (Al Jazeera, 2024b).

Lebanon received various forms of aid from different countries. For instance, 4 tons of

multiple medicines were sent, preceded by a first batch of 7 tons from the Brazilian pharmaceutical industry. Additionally, 200,000 tons of flour and wheat and 150,000 litres of fuel were sent to Lebanon from Iraq (MTV Lebanon, 2024a). The UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency, and Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent several shipments to Rafik Hariri International Airport, including over 127 tons of emergency aid for both Lebanese and Syrian refugees (MTV Lebanon, 2024b; UNHCR, 2024). Furthermore, 136,500 sleeping mats and 750 plastic tarpaulins were distributed to vulnerable Lebanese families. Furthermore, the EU-funded humanitarian projects announced €60 million in humanitarian aid for needy people, including Syrian refugees. In addition, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other organizations such as UNICEF, the World Food Program, UNDP, and Save the Children have provided aid for refugees and Lebanese citizens. More than 58,000 food parcels were distributed to various families each month. In addition, 40,000 mattresses and blankets and 64,000 personal hygiene kits were provided. These food parcels, mattresses, blankets, and hygiene kits were distributed to several areas in Lebanon where displaced people are located, such as Akkar, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Zahle, Matn, Chouf, and Western Beqaa.

Key Areas Affected by Corruption

A large body of literature covers the different aspects of corruption that can deter humanitarian aid. The most significant challenge is the diversion and misappropriation of aid: bribery in this case primarily leads to the diversion of aid resources by those in positions of power, including government officials, local leaders, or even aid agency staff (Carr & Breau, 2009). In addition, aid workers frequently encounter demands for bribes at various stages of the aid distribution process. Aid distribution can also be inequitable, often manipulated to benefit certain groups over others. Ethnic, political, or tribal favouritism can determine who receives aid, as those with connections to people of power are prioritized over others who may be in greater need.

Corruption in the country also contributed to food insecurity, especially since the economic crisis. This has been done by smuggling subsidized goods, leaving citizens without access to affordable essentials (Abouzeid et al., 2021). Masterson and Lehmann (2020) claim that humanitarian aid provided to displaced and refugees in Lebanon can be diverted to armed groups through theft, taxation, or looting. These loots increase the resources available to insurgent groups, potentially funding their operations and recruitment efforts. This is especially concerning, as they might exploit refugee populations, especially in camps, because they can blend in and gain access to aid. Previously existing literature confirms this correlation between aid and conflict escalation due to aid diversion. However, Masterson and Lehmann challenge this assumption, finding no substantial evidence that humanitarian aid increased refugee mobilization into armed groups in Lebanon (2020). BouChabke and Haddad (2021) also note camp supervisors (commonly known as "Chawich") sometimes coerce refugees to sell aid at reduced prices to landlords.

In the same context, corruption also affected the healthcare sector, where many displaced people struggle to get medical care. This includes both Syrian refugees and displaced citizens who already have limited access to healthcare. Only a small fraction (10%) of healthcare is delivered through public facilities, which are poorly equipped and managed (Aoun & Tajvar, 2024). Also, patients bear significant costs, with over 60% of healthcare expenditures being out-of-pocket. This significantly reduced accessibility for

poorer demographics (Gjertsson, 2021).

In terms of education, corruption makes it hard for refugee and displaced Lebanese children to attend school as well. Despite the large resources dedicated to refugee education, these resources don't always reach those in need, creating gaps in educational access. According to UNICEF, over 1.2 million children have been deprived of education due to public schools being inaccessible, damaged, or repurposed as shelters for displaced families (AP News, 2024). In fact, Save the Children reports that half of Lebanon's public schools have been converted into shelters, marking the sixth consecutive year of educational disruption for approximately 1.5 million children (Save the Children, 2024). This situation worsens the existing educational crisis in Lebanon, where children have lost up to 60% of school time over the past six years (Phys.org, 2024).

Israeli airstrikes have caused extensive destruction across Lebanon (especially in Southern Lebanon and the Southern Suburbs of Beirut), destroying and destroying nearly 100,000 housing units (World Bank, 2024). Displaced families, whether Syrian or Lebanese, often live in poor, overcrowded areas. Landlords are charging rents much larger than the current market rate to displaced families that are able and willing to rent an apartment. These families can also not access basic services because the conflict has further damaged the country's already fragile water and electricity infrastructure. At least 13 water facilities have been damaged, disrupting the water supply for nearly 200,000 residents in the South and Nabatiyeh regions (ANERA, 2024).

Finally, corruption also limits job opportunities for displaced people, often resulting in exploitation (low wages and lack of protection). Approximately 166,000 individuals have lost their jobs due to the conflict, equivalent to \$168 million in lost earnings (World Bank, 2024). This environment disproportionately affects displaced individuals, who often lack the social and political connections needed to secure stable employment, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Corruption has a huge impact on Lebanon's displaced people. It deepens poverty, increases social and economic struggles, and forces people into situations where they must rely on unfair or unsafe arrangements. Both Syrian refugees and Lebanese IDPs have limited ways to get help, and corruption makes this even harder. Corruption keeps displaced people in a cycle of poverty, limiting their chances for a stable life.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- **Improving Transparency in Aid Management:** Establishing a national aid-tracking system to monitor aid distribution and to avoid diversion or favouritism is essential. For instance, it would be beneficial to abide by the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard to improve data sharing and accountability across aid programs.
- **Advocating for Anti-Corruption Reforms:** The country must implement healthcare, housing, and employment reforms to reduce bribery, embezzlement, and favouritism. This includes developing public oversight mechanisms for government spending and delivery of services, as well as establishing a penalizing system for corruption to promote accountability.

- **Supporting Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** Grassroots organizations that directly aid displaced people were core agents in the attempt attempting to alleviate the situation. Such CSOs need capacity-building opportunities to expand their role in combating corruption. These organizations must also be given the right and obligation to monitor aid distribution to ensure equal access to resources.
- **Sector-Specific Recommendations:** To reduce the reliance on private sector healthcare, which is virtually equivalent to reducing out-of-pocket medical expenses for displaced populations, there must be an increase in funding for public healthcare facilities. Medical supplies and services must also be distributed equitably, with strict oversight to prevent theft and mismanagement. The most important recommendation for the education sector is to rehabilitate public schools and prioritize reopening facilities repurposed as shelters. Specific oversight mechanisms must be developed for housing and basic services to prevent landlords from exploiting displaced families. In addition, for the reconstruction process in highly damaged areas, the procurement and contracting process must be done publicly transparently.
- **Addressing Systemic Inequalities and Favouritism:** To tackle systemic inequalities (which were present long before the current war), the Lebanese government must pass strict anti-discrimination policies in aid distribution to prevent ethnic, political, or tribal favouritism, in addition to establishing a proper complaint mechanism for displaced populations to report inequities and corruption without fear of retaliation.

Conclusion

Dealing with the corruption that affects Lebanon's displaced populations – both Syrian refugees and internally displaced Lebanese citizens – is crucial for ensuring their basic human rights are respected. That is because corruption not only increases the mental and psychological difficulties associated with displacement but also reduces access to essential services like healthcare, education, and housing. Addressing these issues through transparency, accountability, and targeted reforms aims to reduce the suffering of displaced communities while promoting community-building and resilience. By focusing on such practical solutions, the country can create a fairer and more supportive environment for its most vulnerable populations.

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