



ASFARI INSTITUTE FOR
CIVIL SOCIETY & CITIZENSHIP
معهد الأسفاري للمجتمع المدني والمواطنة
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT

GLOBAL
ENGAGEMENT
INITIATIVE



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCES
Department of Political Studies
& Public Administration

RE-IMAGINING CITIZENSHIP IN THE ARAB REGION

A CONFERENCE ON GOVERNANCE,
REFORM, EDUCATION & DISPLACEMENT

September 5–6, 2026 American University of Beirut



CONFERENCE PROGRAM

DAY 1: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2026

9:00 am–12:00 pm	A LEGO® Serious Play Experience <i>(by invitation only)</i> <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> An interactive, hands-on workshop facilitated by Dr. M. Evren Tok, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, an internationally recognized practitioner of LEGO® Serious Play (LSP) who has delivered more than 500 customized sessions across multiple countries. Blending co-design, systems thinking, and gamification, the workshop will invite participants to explore how citizens and public institutions can collaboratively shape better policies and services.
12:00–12:30 pm	Opening Reception <i>2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i>
12:30–1:00 pm	Opening Remarks <i>Bathish Auditorium, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> • Lina Abou-Habib, director, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB) • Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, president, American University of Beirut (AUB) Keynote Speech: • Dr. Marwan Muasher, chair, International Advisory Board, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB); vice president for studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1:00–2:00 pm	OPENING PLENARY I: Is Citizenship Moving Forward in the Arab World? <i>Bathish Auditorium, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Lina Abou-Habib, director, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB) Speakers: • Dr. Marwan Muasher, chair, International Advisory Board, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB); vice president for studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace • Dr. Bashshar Haydar, professor of philosophy, AUB
2:00–3:00 pm	Lunch <i>2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i>

DAY 1: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2026

3:00–4:15 pm	PANEL 1: Reimagining the State: Technology, Institutional Design, and Fiscal Citizenship <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Lamia Moubayed Bissat, president, Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan Presenters: • Dr. Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari, assistant professor at the Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University • Dr. Ziad El Sayegh, executive director, Civic Influence Hub (CIH) • Dr. Nancy Kanbar, associate professor and head of department, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Lebanese University • Gaelle Abi Khalil, policy researcher, Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan	PANEL 2: Constitutions, Trust, and Political Reform <i>Auditorium B, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Elie Al Hindy, associate professor of government and international relations, Abu Dhabi Experiential College Presenters: • Dr. Kaddour Mehiri, associate professor of public policy, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies • Judge Dr. Rana Akoum, advocate general at the Court of Appeal in North Lebanon • Dr. Noura K. Assaf, senior lecturer in political science and international affairs, University of Balamand
4:15–4:30 pm	Break	
4:30–5:45 pm	PLENARY II: Building Citizenship Bridges: Education, Peacebuilding, Civil Society, and the Future of Active Citizenship in Lebanon <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Lina Abou-Habib, director, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB) Speakers: • Dr. Lina Comaty, advisor to the First Lady for special projects, NCLW Executive Board Member • Jumanah Zabaneh, programme management specialist, UN Women Lebanon	

DAY 2: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2026

9:30–10:30 am	PLENARY III: The Missing Link: Higher Education and the Future of Public Decision-Making <i>Auditorium B, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Mohamad Alkadry, professor and former founding director, School of Public Policy, University of Connecticut Speakers: • Dr. Youness Abouyoub, head, Governance and State-Building Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division (ECRI), United Nations • Dr. Tania Haddad, interim chair of the political science and public administration department and director of the Global Engagement Initiative, AUB • Dr. Sofiane Sahraoui, secretary general, International Institute of Administrative Sciences • Dr. Esmat Zaidan, professor and associate dean, College of Public Policy, Hamad Bin Khalifa University
10:30–11:40 am	PANEL 3: Financing Hospitality: Aid, Intermediaries, and Refugee Governance <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Khaldoun Abou Assi, provost associate professor, Department of Public Administration & Policy, American University Presenters: • Pablo Pastor Vidal, PhD candidate in international human rights law, Lund University • Nessma Alkhatib, feminist researcher and human rights lawyer; executive director, Sanad Foundation for Women's Legal Support PANEL 4: Teaching Citizenship: Curricula, Comparisons, and Disciplinary Innovation <i>Auditorium B, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Marwa Farag, associate professor, School of Public Administration and Development Economics, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies Presenters: • Zena Ismail, independent researcher • Maria Al Makhdisi, MA student, AUB • Rabab Hteit Marouni, PhD candidate in education, Lebanese University
11:40–12:00 pm	Break

DAY 2: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2026

12:00–1:15 pm	PANEL 5: Bodies, Borders, and Belonging: Gender and Family in Migrant Citizenship <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Noha El Mikkawy, Member of the Asfari Institute International Advisory Board Presenters: • Mariam Oulhiad, PhD researcher in sociology and anthropology, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, Morocco • Maria Maalouf, researcher in social science, Centre for Lebanese Studies	PANEL 6: Cultivating Democratic Citizens: Training, Communication, and Civic Action <i>Auditorium B, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Youness Abouyoub, head, Governance and State-Building Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division (ECRI), United Nations Presenters: • Dr. Marguerite El Asmar Bou Aoun, assistant professor and program coordinator, Saint Joseph University of Beirut • Dr. Antoine Abrass, adviser for communication, academic, and cultural affairs, Spanish Embassy • Dr. Joanna Azar, associate professor and head of the Social Sciences Program, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) • Dr. Elie Al Hindy, associate professor of government and international relations, Abu Dhabi Experiential College
1:15–2:15 pm	Lunch <i>2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i>	
2:15–3:30 pm	PANEL 7: Informal Citizenship: Migrant Labor, Displacement, and Grassroots Response to Crisis <i>Auditorium A, 1st Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Sofiane Sahraoui, secretary general, International Institute of Administrative Sciences Presenters: • Tala Abdulghani, researcher, Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship • Yara Abdelkhalek, architect, urban researcher, and community activist; presenting research on behalf of Ahel	PANEL 8: Educating for Resilience: Governance, Policy, and Reform amid Crisis <i>Auditorium B, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i> Moderator: • Dr. Ra'ed M. BenShams, advisor to the Minister of Cabinet Affairs for Public Service Development, Kingdom of Bahrain Presenters: • Dr. Rachel Saliba, senior researcher, Centre for Lebanese Studies • Naa'ma Al-Hendi, master of public administration graduate and researcher, American University in Cairo • Younna Yarak, research assistant, Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR)
3:30–3:45 pm	Break	
3:45–4:45 pm	Closing Plenary IV <i>Bathish Auditorium, 2nd Floor, West Hall, AUB</i>	

PANEL 1

**REIMAGINING THE STATE:
TECHNOLOGY, INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN,
AND FISCAL CITIZENSHIP**

**Governance with Intelligence:
How AI and Stakeholder Engagement Shape Modern Citizenship Behavior**
Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into governance systems is transforming interactions between governments and citizens, particularly in regions pursuing digital modernization and institutional reform. In the Arab world, AI presents significant opportunities to improve public service delivery, administrative efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. Drawing on stakeholder theory, public value theory, and digital governance perspectives, this paper develops a conceptual framework explaining how AI applications, including predictive analytics, algorithmic decision-making, smart public services, and digital participation platforms, influence citizen attitudes and behaviors. The paper argues that the benefits of AI-driven governance depend not only on technological capacity but also on meaningful engagement with policymakers, public officials, citizens, businesses, and civil society organizations. Effective stakeholder engagement can strengthen trust, accountability, legitimacy, and inclusion, encouraging civic participation, policy compliance, and cooperation with public initiatives. Focusing on the Arab context, the paper highlights the social and institutional conditions necessary for AI-enabled governance to foster digital citizenship and strengthen state-society relations.

Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari is an assistant professor at the Graduate School of Public Policy at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. He holds a PhD in governance and policy and teaches graduate courses on artificial intelligence, digital governance, public sector innovation, technology policy, and public administration. His research examines the intersection of technology and governance, particularly how emerging technologies reshape public institutions, policymaking, regulatory systems, and citizen-state relations. His broader interests include AI governance, digital government, smart cities, institutional reform, governance capacity, and comparative public policy. He has published and presented research on AI governance, digital state capacity, crisis management, citizen participation, environmental governance, and public sector innovation. He is the author of *AI and the State: Transforming Public Governance and Policy in the Digital Age and Cutting-Edge Technologies and Public Policy*.

Engineering Governance Systems for Inclusive Citizen-Centric Development in the Arab Region

Ziad El Sayegh and Nancy Kanbar

This study examines how governance systems in the Arab region can be re-engineered toward inclusive, citizen-centric development amid persistent institutional fragility, inequality, geopolitical instability, and rapid digital transformation. It argues that good governance and inclusive citizenship are mutually reinforcing foundations for sustainable development, social cohesion, and resilient state-society relations. Moving beyond traditional state-centric and transactional social contracts, the study proposes a transformative governance framework grounded in accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, equality, and respect for diversity. It examines cultural, constitutional, social, and religious barriers to inclusive citizenship and identifies pathways for reform through stronger institutions, judicial independence, civic participation, education, social justice, and constructive interfaith engagement. Particular attention is given to redefining post-Arab Spring social contracts and strengthening collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society, and citizens. The study also examines the opportunities and risks associated with digitalization, artificial intelligence, e-governance, and e-democracy.

Dr. Ziad El Sayegh is executive director of the Civic Influence Hub (CIH) and an expert on public policy, migration, and refugees. He holds a PhD in public diplomacy and international relations, master's degrees in philosophy and theology, a diploma in mediation in diplomatic and political relations and international conflicts, and a certificate in labor policies and social protection. He has been a senior international fellow at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut since November 2024 and has served as a member of Lebanon's Election Supervisory Authority since December 2025.

Dr. Nancy Kanbar is an interdisciplinary scholar specializing in environmental policy, education, and development economics. She is currently associate professor and head of department at the Lebanese University and has taught at several universities, including George Mason University, AUB, LAU, NDU, and Haigazian University. Her research focuses on sustainable development, governance, behavioral change, citizen engagement, and development policy. She has provided expert consultation to government agencies and international organizations, including the World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP, UNEP, and IFPRI, and has coordinated and reviewed EU-funded Erasmus+ projects. Dr. Kanbar contributed to the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and served as a lead author for the Arab Millennium Assessment. She holds a PhD in environmental science and policy from George Mason University, a Master's degree in science education from the Lebanese University, and a master's degree in agricultural economics and development from AUB.

The Part-Time State:

Public Wage Erosion, Institutional Collapse, and the Crisis of Citizenship in Lebanon

Gaelle Abi Khalil

This paper examines the erosion of public wages and pensions in Lebanon since 2020 and the absence of adequate policy action to address their collapse. It argues that fiscal deterioration in the civil service is not merely an economic problem but a foundational driver of deteriorating service delivery, declining public trust, and the broader crisis of governance and citizenship. Over the past six years, once-stable public employment has become a source of poverty and disillusionment, forcing civil servants to choose between professional duty and survival. The result is the emergence of a "part-time state": an institutional apparatus operating intermittently and at minimal capacity as public servants rely on informal coping mechanisms to sustain their livelihoods. Drawing on fiscal data, policy diagnostics, and testimonies from Lebanese public servants, the paper examines how declining salaries and pensions have hollowed out public administration. It argues that fiscal justice is fundamental to rebuilding administrative capacity, public trust, and citizenship in Lebanon.

Gaelle Abi Khalil is a policy researcher specializing in governance and state-society relations in Lebanon and the Middle East. She has more than eight years of professional experience in governance, public and security sector reform, and policy research. She is currently a policy researcher and chief economist at the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan and a non-resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Abi Khalil holds a Master of Public Policy from the University of Oxford, a master's degree in comparative politics, and a bachelor's degree in political science from Saint Joseph University of Beirut.

PANEL 2

CONSTITUTIONS, TRUST, AND POLITICAL REFORM

The Effects of Democratization, Corruption, and Economic Conditions on Political Trust and Voter Turnout in Electoral Autocracies:

Evidence from Arab Countries

Kaddour Mehiriz

This study examines the effects of democratization, corruption, and economic conditions on trust in government and parliament and on voter turnout in Arab countries. It uses two-way fixed-effects models and multilevel regressions, drawing on data from the Arab Barometer, World Bank, International Labour Organization, Transparency International, and Varieties of Democracy Project. The results indicate that democratization and reductions in corruption increase voter turnout and trust in parliament, although their effects on trust in government are not consistent across statistical models. Improved economic conditions positively affect trust in government and parliament but negatively affect voter turnout. The findings suggest that Arab citizens exhibit more sophisticated political attitudes and behaviors than previous research on electoral autocracies has indicated. The study also demonstrates that political trust and voter turnout follow distinct and, in some respects, conflicting logics.

Kaddour Mehiriz is an associate professor of public policy at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar. He holds a PhD in public administration, with concentrations in policy analysis and management, from the École nationale d'administration publique in Canada. Before joining the Doha Institute, he was a lecturer at Laval University, a senior program evaluator at Science-Metrix, and a research associate at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique. His research spans fiscal federalism, science and technology, climate change adaptation, public health, and work-life balance policies. His work has appeared in leading journals in public administration, public policy, evaluation, risk analysis, and public health.

Citizenship in the Arab Region:

Between Constitutional Promises and Lived Realities

Rana Akoum

The Arab uprisings of 2010–11 catalyzed constitutional reforms across the Middle East and North Africa, placing citizenship, democracy, and gender equality at the center of political and legal debates. This research examines the extent to which post-2011 constitutional amendments transformed citizenship in the Arab region, with particular attention to gender equality and the rights of underrepresented populations. Using comparative constitutional analysis and primary sources, including constitutions, legislation, and judicial rulings, the study examines Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt as three distinct constitutional trajectories. It argues that post-2011 reforms created important symbolic openings for reimagining citizenship but largely failed to produce substantive transformation. Implementation gaps, executive dominance, and entrenched legal pluralism continue to constrain citizenship. Bridging the gap between constitutional text and lived reality requires institutional safeguards, independent judiciaries, and sustained civic engagement.

Judge Rana Walid Akoum holds a Ph.D. in Law from the Lebanese University and a B.A. in Public Administration from AUB, and is an IVLP alumna and Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow. With over twenty years on the bench, she currently serves as an Advocate General at the Court of Appeal in North Lebanon. Since 2015 she has been the Ministry of Justice's focal point with UNODC on anti-corruption and its representative before Parliament on related legislation, and she heads OMSAR's task team on UNCAC compliance. She also leads the Ministry's International Cooperation Office. She is the author of four books on civil registration of undocumented Lebanese persons, business law, human rights, and insolvent bank administration.

Youth Perceptions of Citizenship through Engagement in Public Sector Reform in Lebanon, 2021–25

Noura K. Assaf

This paper examines how youth engagement in public sector reform shapes perceptions of citizenship in Lebanon. Drawing on contemporary theories of lived, everyday, and digital citizenship, it considers how participation in decision-making can introduce new behavioral norms, reduce information asymmetries between young people and the state, and complement formal bureaucratic structures through experimentation, transparency, and interactive technologies. The study argues that meaningful engagement in public sector reform can foster a sense of inclusion and activate everyday citizenship. Using qualitative analysis based on a survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, the research examines structured youth initiatives in Lebanon between 2021 and 2025. It explores whether participation changes young people's perceptions of the public sector and citizenship within a pre-existing context of low trust. The findings aim to inform more youth-centered approaches to reform and public policy and contribute to more inclusive, responsive, and resilient institutions.

Noura K. Assaf is a senior lecturer in political science and international affairs at the University of Balamand. She holds an MA and PhD from the University of Warwick and has more than 15 years of experience in university teaching and thesis supervision. She previously worked as a researcher at the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research and as an editor and publication specialist at the Bahrain Economic Development Board. Assaf is a certified mediator. Her research interests include citizenship and democratic models, youth engagement in public sector reform, conflict regulation and transformation, and governance in plural and transitional societies.

PANEL 3

**FINANCING HOSPITALITY:
AID, INTERMEDIARIES, AND REFUGEE GOVERNANCE**

**The Price of Hospitality:
The World Bank's Global Concessional Financing Facility in Lebanon**
Pablo Pastor Vidal

The mass displacement of Syrian refugees to Jordan and Lebanon has driven new approaches to migration governance, challenging conventional understandings of state sovereignty and international responsibility. This paper examines the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), established in 2016 by the World Bank, United Nations, and Islamic Development Bank to provide concessional financing to middle-income countries hosting refugees. Drawing on doctoral research in Lebanon, the paper examines GCFF not simply as a financial mechanism but as a governance model that reshapes how states manage displacement. It analyzes how projects are designed and implemented through networks of international organizations, national ministries, and regulatory frameworks. The paper argues that while GCFF is presented as a mechanism for aligning humanitarian and development objectives, it also transforms the role of the state and redefines inclusion. It promotes conditional and partial economic inclusion for refugees while reinforcing containment and potentially increasing host countries' debt burdens.

Pablo Pastor Vidal is a PhD candidate at Lund University's Faculty of Law and a researcher in the European Research Council-funded project Refugee Finance: Histories, Frameworks and Practices (REF-FIN). His research examines refugee and migration finance mechanisms and their implications for international protection, particularly the shift from funding to financing in humanitarian governance. He holds an MA in European interdisciplinary studies from the College of Europe and a double degree in law and political science from Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. He is also a research affiliate of the Refugee Law Initiative at the University of London and a member of its Working Group on Externalisation.

**Refugees and Displaced Persons in Egypt:
Challenges in Accessing Services and the Role of Government Policies
and Civil Society**
Nessma Alkhatib

This paper examines the situation of refugees, migrants, and displaced persons in Egypt, with particular attention to refugee women as a group vulnerable to multiple forms of violence, exploitation, and social and legal exclusion. It explores challenges in accessing healthcare, education, legal protection, and employment, while analyzing legislative and policy gaps affecting integration and participation in the host community. Particular attention is given to gender-based violence, protection and reporting mechanisms, and access to legal and psychosocial support. The study also examines the roles of the state, civil society organizations, and international organizations in providing services and strengthening protection mechanisms. Using a multi-method approach combining analysis of official and international reports and documents with interviews involving targeted groups and key stakeholders, the paper highlights the need for comprehensive policies and a clearer legal framework that protects refugees' rights, particularly those of women and children, in accordance with international human rights standards.

Nessma Alkhatib is an Egyptian feminist researcher and human rights lawyer with more than 16 years of experience in feminist and human rights work. She serves as executive director of the Sanad Foundation for Women's Legal Support, where she works to advance women's rights, access to justice, and the elimination of gender-based violence and discrimination. She has participated in numerous regional and international conferences focused on women's rights and combating violence against women. Her work centers on advocacy, legal empowerment, and advancing gender justice through research, documentation, and policy engagement.

PANEL 4

TEACHING CITIZENSHIP: CURRICULA, COMPARISONS, AND DISCIPLINARY INNOVATION

How Civic Is Civic Education in Lebanon?

A Study on Civic Education and Political Identity in Post-Taif Lebanon's Secondary Schools

Zena Ismail

In postwar Lebanon, civic education was introduced as part of efforts to rebuild national belonging, promote social cohesion, and prepare students for democratic life following the Taif Agreement. The 1997 national curriculum positioned schools as central spaces for shaping citizenship, participation, and coexistence. This study examines how civic education constructs political identity through the official curriculum, state-approved textbooks, and teachers' classroom practices. Using a qualitative research design, it combines curriculum and textbook analysis with semi-structured interviews with civics teachers from public secondary schools across Lebanon. The analysis examines pluralism, social cohesion, democratic participation, critical thinking, and lifelong learning across curriculum objectives, textbook content, classroom pedagogy, and teachers' interpretations. Findings suggest that although the curriculum adopts the language of democratic and active citizenship, implementation remains largely descriptive, limiting opportunities for critical dialogue and meaningful civic participation.

Zena Ismail recently completed an MA in public policy and international affairs at the American University of Beirut. Her research examines civic education, citizenship, and political identity in post-conflict societies. She previously worked as a social protection and labor consultant at the World Bank, contributing to labor market and human capital policy research in the Middle East.

Rethinking Citizenship Education:

Case Studies from Tunisia, the UAE, and Lebanon

Maria Al Makdissi

This report examines citizenship education in the Arab world through case studies of Tunisia, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates, representing post-revolutionary reform, political sectarianism, and a rentier system, respectively. Grounded in a critical education framework inspired by Freire and Illich and supplemented by Arab thinkers, the study analyzes how citizenship-related K–12 curricula shape students' civic identities and political agency. Across the three contexts, it finds that citizenship education remains largely rote and theoretical, emphasizing social cohesion and national loyalty over critical thinking, democratic participation, and human rights. The analysis also considers how standardization, privatization, and market-driven educational priorities affect education's role in nurturing active citizenship, as well as the growing importance of informal education and social media. It calls for citizenship education grounded in local histories, empowered teachers, and substantive political transformation of curricula rather than limited curricular adjustments.

Maria Al Makdissi holds bachelor's degrees in education and political science and international affairs and a master's degree in educational supervision. She is currently an MA student in political studies at the American University of Beirut. Her work focuses on citizenship education, curriculum politics, and the Lebanese national curriculum, particularly contested history education. Her research has examined citizenship and change following Lebanon's 2019 uprising, teacher preparation, and the relationship between sectarianism, security, and citizenship during the Lebanese Civil War. Her professional experience also includes coordinating early childhood development projects across several Arab countries.

Biology Citizenship Education through the Knowledge, Values, and Practices of Lebanese Biology Teachers

Rabab Hteit Marouni

“Biology Citizenship Education” (BCE) refers to promoting global citizenship education themes of environmental sustainability, social justice, and individual development through biology teaching. This mixed-methods study examines BCE in Lebanon. The quantitative component uses a closed-ended questionnaire administered to 128 secondary-level preservice and in-service biology teachers to explore their knowledge, values, and practices. The qualitative component uses semi-structured interviews with 10 participants to examine preservice teachers’ readiness to connect BCE themes with the national biology curriculum. Findings indicate that teachers’ BCE knowledge exceeded their values and practices, while values concerning gender and racial equality improved relative to the 2008 BIOHEAD-Citizen project. Preservice teachers successfully connected biology topics, including plants, soil, and genetics, to environmental sustainability and social justice, although they identified curricular constraints and resistance to social change. The study recommends explicitly embedding BCE objectives in curricula and strengthening teachers’ ethical and disciplinary competencies.

Rabab Hteit Marouni is a PhD candidate at the Lebanese University’s Doctoral School of Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences and holds a research master’s in education from the same institution. Her master’s research examined teachers’ roles in promoting social justice and gender equality within a global citizenship education framework. Her doctoral research explores teachers’ acceptance of emerging technologies in Lebanese classrooms. She has also authored policy analyses on rights, inclusion, and governance across the Arab region for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and has worked on national education initiatives in coordination with Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

PANEL 5

BODIES, BORDERS, AND BELONGING: GENDER AND FAMILY IN MIGRANT CITIZENSHIP

Reimagining Citizenship:

The Lived Experiences of Sub-Saharan Migrant Women in the Arab Region

Mariam Oulhiad

This paper explores how Sub-Saharan African migrant women experience and understand citizenship in Morocco. Rather than focusing solely on legal status, it examines citizenship as a lived experience shaped by everyday life, access to rights, and feelings of belonging and exclusion. Drawing on ethnographic research, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, the study examines how race, gender, migration status, and economic circumstances affect migrant women’s lives. It highlights barriers in healthcare, employment, housing, and social participation while examining how migrant women build support networks and develop strategies to navigate exclusion and claim recognition. The paper argues that citizenship is not only a legal status but also an everyday practice shaped by social relationships, recognition, and access to rights. By centering migrant women’s voices, it contributes to discussions on migration, social justice, and citizenship in the Arab region.

Mariam Oulhiad is a PhD researcher in sociology and anthropology at Cadi Ayyad University in Morocco. Her research focuses on migration, health, and gender from intersectional and postcolonial perspectives, with particular interest in the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African migrant women. Using ethnographic and qualitative approaches, she examines health and illness, social exclusion, access to healthcare, and the intersections of race, gender, and migration. Her broader research interests include medical anthropology, migration studies, citizenship, and social justice across the Southwest Asia and North Africa region.

Between Borders and Bodies:

Reimagining Citizenship through the Health Rituals of Sub-Saharan Migrant Women in Morocco

Mariam Oulhiad

This paper examines the relationship between health, the body, and citizenship through the experiences of Sub-Saharan African migrant women in Morocco. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, it explores how women navigate illness, healthcare systems, and everyday practices of care while living under conditions of legal and social insecurity. The study focuses on how migrant women understand health and seek treatment through public health services, community support, religious practices, and informal healing networks. It demonstrates how access to healthcare is shaped by race, gender, migration status, stigma, and discrimination. The paper argues that health is an important site through which citizenship is experienced, negotiated, and sometimes denied. Through migrant women's experiences, it demonstrates how the body becomes a space in which broader questions of rights, belonging, and recognition are expressed, offering a perspective on the relationship between migration, health, and social inclusion in contemporary Morocco.

Mariam Oulhiad is a PhD researcher in sociology and anthropology at Cadi Ayyad University in Morocco. Her research focuses on migration, health, and gender from intersectional and postcolonial perspectives, with particular interest in the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African migrant women. Using ethnographic and qualitative approaches, she examines health and illness, social exclusion, access to healthcare, and the intersections of race, gender, and migration. Her broader research interests include medical anthropology, migration studies, citizenship, and social justice across the Southwest Asia and North Africa region.

Displacement, Micro-Solidarities, and Citizenship:

Wartime Social Cohesion in Lebanon

Maria Maalouf

Lebanon's political life is structured around sectarian and partisan affiliations, with authority and allegiance often mediated through political parties and local power centers. Drawing on the experience of Baalbek-Hermel during the 2023–24 Israeli aggression on Lebanon, this paper examines how wartime practices of hosting, sharing hardship, co-managing space, and contesting exclusion can reshape citizenship beyond rigid, status-based definitions. Based on semi-structured interviews with displaced families, host households, and key informants, the study analyzes how shared vulnerabilities generated micro-practices of cooperation, hospitality, care, and mutual reliance that temporarily reoriented belonging beyond sectarian and partisan lines. Drawing on Isin's distinction between active and activist citizenship, it examines routine hosting and shared governance as forms of active citizenship and instances of claim-making that disrupt exclusionary practices as activist citizenship. The paper traces how everyday interaction can develop into mutual recognition and potentially more durable forms of local cooperation.

Maria Maalouf is a social sciences researcher at the Centre for Lebanese Studies with a background in law and strategic studies. Her work explores displacement, governance, and education in crisis contexts, with particular attention to how legal and policy frameworks shape the lived experiences of Lebanese and non-Lebanese people in Lebanon. She holds a bachelor's degree in law from the Lebanese University and a master's degree in strategic research jointly from the Research and Strategic Studies Center at the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Lebanese University. Her research combines policy analysis with qualitative fieldwork. Before joining the Centre for Lebanese Studies, she worked with nongovernmental organizations advocating for women's rights and the rights of people with disabilities and completed a research internship at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut.

PANEL 6

CULTIVATING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS: TRAINING, COMMUNICATION, AND CIVIC ACTION

Training in Democratic Citizenship at USJ: Lessons Learned from Empowering Teachers and Youth in Lebanon **Marguerite El Asmar Bou Aoun**

In a region where citizenship is often weakened by political instability, polarization, and limited civic education, the Training in Democratic Citizenship program at Saint Joseph University of Beirut offers a model for strengthening citizen engagement through education. Developed and implemented with secondary school teachers, the program equips educators with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to introduce responsible, participatory, and inclusive citizenship practices in classrooms and communities. This paper presents the program's experience, methodology, and outcomes, focusing on its pedagogical approach and effects on teachers and students. The training combines theoretical foundations—including human rights, democratic values, critical thinking, and the ethics of responsibility—with practical workshops that support teachers in developing citizenship projects with students. Twenty teachers from different regions and educational backgrounds were trained, each implementing an original project addressing themes including civic participation, media literacy, environmental responsibility, dialogue across differences, and social cohesion.

Marguerite El Asmar Bou Aoun is an assistant professor and program coordinator at Saint Joseph University of Beirut. She holds a PhD in philosophy of religion from the University of Strasbourg. With more than 12 years of experience in academic teaching and program management, her research lies at the intersection of philosophy, religion, and politics. Her areas of expertise include belief, authority, freedom of religion or belief, institutional leadership, and the instrumentalization of belief in contemporary societies. She is also a founder and implementer of the Training in Democratic Citizenship program at Saint Joseph University of Beirut, a capacity-building program for schoolteachers.

Communication Strategies in Building a Democratic Citizenship: The Lebanese Case **Antoine Abrass**

Citizenship education has become a cornerstone of building democratic and equitable societies. This paper explores the theoretical foundations of citizenship education and applies them to Lebanon, where citizenship is shaped by political sectarianism, socioeconomic inequalities, and distrust of state institutions. Drawing on national and international literature, it analyzes individual, societal, and systemic dimensions of citizenship and contrasts traditional approaches to civic education with more critical and holistic models. The paper argues that communication is central to citizenship education in Lebanon because of its potential to transform perceptions, overcome sectarian divisions, and create inclusive collective narratives. It identifies curriculum reform, teacher training, media literacy, youth participation, and sustainable public policies as key strategies. The paper concludes that building active and transformative citizenship requires an interdisciplinary approach integrating human rights, sustainability, interculturality, gender equality, and communication as a mechanism for social cohesion and democratic strengthening.

Antoine Abrass is adviser for communication, academic, and cultural affairs at the Embassy of Spain in Lebanon and a professor at the Lebanese University and Saint Joseph University of Beirut. He holds a PhD in leadership and human resources management. His work focuses on strengthening cultural and academic initiatives between Spain and Lebanon, institutional governance, media analysis, and the strategic management of higher education. He previously served as head of the Spanish Department at the Lebanese University and collaborates with Instituto Cervantes in Beirut. He is also cofounder and strategic director of VISTA GROUP.

Volunteering:

Individual Perseverance and Community Resilience in Lebanon

Joanna Azar

Amid Lebanon's ongoing socioeconomic and political instability, volunteering has emerged as a pathway for youth perseverance and civic renewal. This study analyzes reflective reports from students enrolled in the Civic Engagement Journey course at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik to understand how volunteering contributes to personal and community resilience. Findings indicate that volunteering fosters perseverance in adversity, with students framing hardship as a shared human condition that strengthens endurance and mutual understanding. It also prompts ethical reflection through exposure to suffering and serves as an emotional anchor that reinforces hope, belonging, and meaning. At the community level, volunteering reinforces resilience through solidarity, generosity, and collective care while supporting strained local organizations. Students also understand volunteering as a form of active citizenship and resistance to collapse. The study highlights volunteering as a transformative practice that can shape resilient individuals and cohesive communities and suggests that embedding such experiences in education can contribute to reimagining citizenship in the Arab region.

Joanna Azar is an associate professor of social sciences and head of the Social Sciences Program at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK). Her expertise lies in media and political sociology, with research focusing on information disorder, fact-checking, and relationships among media, society, and politics. She also conducts research on civic engagement, community resilience, and the wellbeing of Lebanese women activists. She has more than 15 years of university teaching experience in Arabic, English, and French and teaches courses on society, media, journalism, negotiation, and politics. A 2019 US Department of State Study of the United States Institutes scholar in journalism and media, she has authored more than 1,000 newspaper articles and provides training on misinformation, media literacy, and freedom of expression.

Beyond Sectarianism and Assimilation:

Inclusive Citizenship as a Framework for Reimagining National Identity in Post-Assad Syria

Elie Al Hindy

The fall of the Assad regime has reopened a fundamental question for Syria's political transition: how can a new state accommodate religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity while fostering national unity and political stability? This paper considers competing models of citizenship, including majoritarian nationalism, ethnic particularism, and communal power-sharing. Drawing lessons from neighboring Lebanon and Iraq, it argues that institutionalizing sectarian identities can, if not properly managed, entrench social divisions, weaken state institutions, and undermine shared national identity. The paper proposes inclusive citizenship as a more sustainable framework for rebuilding Syria. Drawing on the Arab conceptualization of intercultural and diversity-embracing citizenship developed by Adyan Foundation, it conceptualizes citizenship as a dynamic relationship grounded in equal rights, human dignity, public participation, and recognition of diversity. Inclusive citizenship, it argues, can reconcile unity and diversity by protecting cultural, religious, and ethnic particularities while fostering a common civic identity based on shared responsibility for the public good.

Elie Al Hindy is an associate professor of government and international relations at Abu Dhabi Experiential College. His research focuses on inclusive citizenship, minorities, consociational democracy, governance of pluralistic societies, human rights, civil society, youth participation, religion and politics, peace education, and Middle Eastern studies. He holds a PhD in government and international relations from the University of Sydney, an MBA in international affairs, and bachelor's degrees in political and administrative sciences and international affairs and diplomacy. His senior leadership experience includes serving as executive director of Adyan Foundation, director of the Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies, and chair of academic departments in Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.

PANEL 7

INFORMAL CITIZENSHIP: MIGRANT LABOR, DISPLACEMENT, AND GRASSROOTS RESPONSE TO CRISIS

Care Without Rights:

The Kafala System, Compounding Crises, and the Political Agency of Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon

Tala Abdulghani

Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon have faced structural exclusion from labor protections and crisis-response systems for nearly four decades. This paper examines how the kafala system, gendered and racialized labor relations, and the privatization of care have produced and sustained this exclusion and how Lebanon's crises since 2019 have intensified existing vulnerabilities. Drawing on human rights and humanitarian investigations, intergovernmental data, legal and policy materials, and scholarship on Lebanon's political economy and migrant organizing, the paper makes three claims. First, kafala is a racially and economically structured regime of labor control embedded in Lebanon's postwar political economy. Second, successive crises have intensified existing vulnerabilities, while the financial collapse has generated new forms of vulnerability through the erosion of real wages. Third, migrant domestic workers are active political subjects whose organizing constitutes a form of class struggle under significant legal and social constraints. Meaningful reform therefore requires confronting both discriminatory legal arrangements and the political-economic structures underpinning migrant domestic labor.

Tala Abdulghani is a researcher at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut, where she works on gender justice, migration, social protection, care work, and civil society in Lebanon and the wider WANA region. Her research interests include feminist politics, migrant and refugee rights, and social movements. She is also involved in grassroots organizing and advocacy in Lebanon, with a particular interest in connecting research, political organizing, and social justice.

Civil Mobilization in Emergencies:

A Study of Community Initiatives in Lebanon during the Israeli Aggression (2023–2024)

Yara Abdelkhalek

The Israeli aggression on Lebanon (2023–2024) marked a critical moment during which broad-based civil mobilization emerged, led by community initiatives, volunteer groups, and community networks seeking to respond to humanitarian needs amid limited official response. The significance of these experiences lies not only in their capacity to provide relief, but also in what they reveal about the potential of community organizing and collective power-building in emergency contexts. The study addresses a central question: How can emergency response become an entry point for building more sustainable community organizing capable of bringing about change? The study adopts a qualitative methodology based on mapping and classifying more than 65 community initiatives that were active during the aggression, alongside an in-depth examination of five initiatives representing diverse models in terms of organizational structure, leadership, resource mobilization mechanisms, and relationships with local communities. The findings show that the initiatives most capable of responding effectively and sustaining their work were not necessarily those with the greatest resources, but rather those grounded in existing social networks, grassroots leadership, relationships of trust, meaningful participation, and flexible organizational structures.

Yara Abdelkhalek is an architect, urban researcher, and community activist. She holds an MS in architecture and an MS in urban planning and works in research and advocacy. Her interests focus on urban organizing and the ways local and community organizing shape cities. Her current work explores urbanization and its relationship to law and the state through the lens of violations of the right to the city, with particular attention to community organizing as a tool for influence and social change. She is also committed to knowledge sharing, public engagement on urban issues, and collaborative approaches to urban practice. She is presenting this research on behalf of Ahel, which commissioned the study.

PANEL 8

EDUCATING FOR RESILIENCE: GOVERNANCE, POLICY, AND REFORM AMID CRISIS

From Global Frameworks to Local Meanings: Rethinking Education Systems Resilience in MENA

Rachel Saliba

Resilience has become a dominant concept in global education policy, yet its meanings and implications remain contested. Rather than rejecting resilience as an externally imposed framework, this paper argues for reclaiming and redefining it through regional and national perspectives. Drawing on findings from the MENA Observatory on Education Systems Resilience under the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), the paper analyzes education policies and reform plans in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen to examine how resilience is conceptualized, governed, and embedded in national strategies. While critics associate resilience with neoliberal approaches that shift responsibility for managing crises from states to individuals and communities, the Arab region offers broader understandings. The concepts of *murunah*, emphasizing coping and adaptation, and *sumud*, emphasizing collective endurance, resistance, and transformative change, provide a more locally grounded continuum. The paper proposes a MENA-rooted understanding of education systems resilience that balances stability with transformation, efficiency with equity, and resilience with public responsibility and participatory governance.

Rachel Saliba is a senior researcher at the Centre for Lebanese Studies. She holds a PhD in organizational leadership from Eastern University in the US, where her doctoral research examined defining moments in the professional leadership development of Lebanese women. Her interdisciplinary background also includes an MBA in project and operations management and a BA in advertising and marketing. At the Centre for Lebanese Studies, she leads the MENA Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange project on education systems resilience and contributes to the six-year Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis program. Her work bridges organizational leadership, gender equity, education, and social transformation in crisis-affected contexts.

Educational Governance and Policy Implementation in Conflict-Affected Contexts: The Case of Hadhramout, Yemen

Naa'ma Al-Hendi

Education is a critical component of societal resilience and development in contexts affected by conflict and instability. This study investigates challenges facing K–12 education in Hadhramout, Yemen, and examines the extent to which government interventions have addressed these challenges. Using a qualitative case study design, the research draws on 31 semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals, educational supervisors, government officials, and union representatives. Findings show that economic decline, conflict pressures, internal displacement, resource and infrastructure constraints, limited professional development, an outdated curriculum, teachers' strikes, and weak academic governance have compromised educational quality. Although education offices have implemented initiatives in coordination with local authorities and international organizations, their impact has been constrained by governance deficits, corruption, and top-down policymaking that excludes street-level educators from decision-making. The study concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening educational governance, improving teacher capacity, and promoting equitable and sustainable education reform in Yemen's fragile context.

Naa'ma Al-Hendi is a Yemeni researcher and recent master of public administration graduate from the American University in Cairo, where she graduated with a GPA of 3.967 and was inducted into Pi Alpha Alpha, the international honor society for public affairs and administration. Her research focuses on education governance, policy implementation, and public administration in conflict-affected contexts, particularly Yemen. Her master's thesis examined the impact of conflict on education governance and policy implementation in Hadhramout Governorate. She has presented research on teacher motivation and educational challenges in Yemen and previously worked in a government-supported education program serving women excluded from formal education.

Behind the Policy Door: The Role of Advisory Actors and Interest Groups in Shaping Education and Social Protection Policies in Lebanon

Younna Yarak

This paper examines how advisory actors and interest groups shape education and social protection policy in Lebanon's consociational and sectarian political system. Using a qualitative approach based on document review and 10 interviews with policy advisers, interest-group representatives, civil servants, and policymakers, the study analyzes the factors shaping social policymaking and their implications for education and social protection. Drawing on the ideas, interests, and institutions framework and the advocacy coalition framework, it examines the influence of interests and ideology in a weak institutional environment. Findings suggest that nongovernmental organizations, syndicates, and political parties seek to influence policy according to their interests and objectives, while policy advisers have more limited influence despite providing valuable knowledge, expertise, and technical support. Policy decisions remain largely driven by ministers and policymakers and are shaped by donor conditions, contractual barriers, clientelism, and recurrent crises. The paper argues that Lebanon's political environment and perpetual emergencies significantly shape social policy priorities and outcomes.

Younna Yarak is a Lebanese policy and research professional specializing in governance, public policy, and public administration, with a focus on institutional reform in the Middle East and North Africa region. She holds a BA in political science from the American University of Beirut and an MS in international social and public policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She currently serves as a policy and research assistant at the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), where she contributes to public sector reform initiatives supporting institutional strengthening, governance, transparency, and administrative performance. Her interests include governance reform, public administration, social policy, and citizen-centered institutions.

