



**SEEDS**  
For Legal Entrepreneurs

# ANNUAL REPORT



**2018**  

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**2021**

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## A word by Loyal Sakr

Over the course of two years, we have lived through several crises in Lebanon, the first of which being the economic crisis, which ignited the revolution; the second crisis being the Covid epidemic which placed the country in an emergency state-silencing the revolution and prohibiting mobility and demonstrations under the pretext of preventing transmissions even when public squares were empty, and the people's tents were set up in a mere symbolic way to protest the authorities' performance that has impoverished people, plagued administrations with corruption, plundered depositors' money from banks, and failed to provide electricity to its citizens; and, the most recent crisis, being the Beirut Port Explosion.

We continued, under curfew and after the Lebanese Pound had lost 80% of its value, we continued to work, sowing hope, among ourselves to begin with, never doubting that this crisis will come to an end and that nothing remains the same in life. Hence, we insisted on continuing our work at SEEDS, spreading the culture of human rights and raising awareness on these rights. We considered that change is not impossible to achieve; although, we did not realize how close it was. We began to raise awareness on the importance of exercising the right to vote as a means of change and as a political right. We have also attached a major importance to freedom of expression in our programs knowing that there is no possibility for real change without freedom of opinion and expression that helps limit corruption and expose it, and holds officials accountable in the streets, at the parliament, and within the government.

At the end of the year 2020, after a 10-year long wait and a number of demands for its approval, a law aiming at criminalizing sexual harassment and rehabilitating its victims was passed. It was a great leap, after the domestic violence law, in the Lebanese legislation. The law notes in its Ratio Legis<sup>(1)</sup> that sexual harassment is a form of violence. Despite some of the flaws in the law, we worked to raise awareness of the sexual harassment law, tackled its weaknesses, and developed internal policies that protect against harassment, limit the defects of the law within workplaces, and help create a safe environment. We also redefined Article 534 of the Penal Code, which is used to criminalize homosexuality, in a manner consistent with human rights principles. We also worked to develop a safe space to prevent discrimination against LGBTQ persons at the workplace and within emerging parties that have adopted a human rights approach and that have prioritized the promotion of human rights in Lebanon as part of their political agenda.

Our goal is to create more safe spaces in the public and private sectors... Safe spaces that help improve productivity, create a sound and healthy environment among coworkers, and contribute to enhancing the well-being of employees, both men and women, in public and private institutions. Safe spaces for expression, assembly and association that promote public and individual freedoms, uphold democracy and pluralism, and preserve the essence of Lebanon, in this part of the world, which is freedom! The continuity of SEEDS for Legal Initiatives would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of our team, the executive committee, the advisory council, and our funders.

The impact underlined in this report was only made possible through your dedication, your efforts, and your support under nearly impossible working conditions. Thank you all!

(1) Logical element or principle

# Who we are?

Seeds for Legal Initiatives (SEEDS) is a non-profit organization founded in 2016 and based in Beirut, Lebanon.



## Our Vision

All people in Lebanon and the region, including all marginalized groups, are aware of their legal rights, of legal mechanisms and are empowered to seek justice that is based on human rights, equity and non- discrimination.



## Our Mission

To raise awareness on legal rights and advocate for legal reform through workshops, campaigns and law and policy drafts; and to provide legal advice and representation through the legal clinic.



## Our Objectives

- Raise awareness on legal rights through campaigns and workshops
- Ensure the law is accessible to all using a simpler everyday language
- Provide legal advice and representation through the legal clinic
- Advocate for legal reform through campaigns and law and policy drafts

## Awareness Initiatives

SEEDS multidisciplinary team of lawyers and communication experts aim to legally empower the youths, legal experts and the general public through capacity building and media productions. Our goal is to make legal information available and accessible to all.

### Our Legal Clinic Program

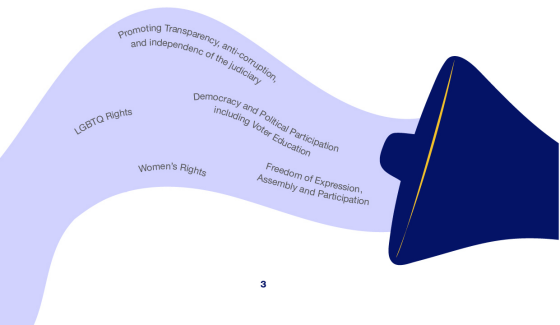
Our Legal Clinic, first established with the support of the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) and SIDA in 2019, is a platform that offers legal knowledge in a simplified and accessible way.

Its aims to promote freedoms and to legally empower all citizens to effect desired changes.

The clinic has expanded to include articles and media material presenting the **Constitutional and Legal articles** in addition to relevant **Legal Practices**. It now focuses on Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association, in addition to Democracy & Political Participation that was developed in 2021 with the support of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS).

### Our Awareness Campaigns

Our campaigns have primarily targeted:



Promoting Transparency, anti-corruption,  
and independence of the judiciary

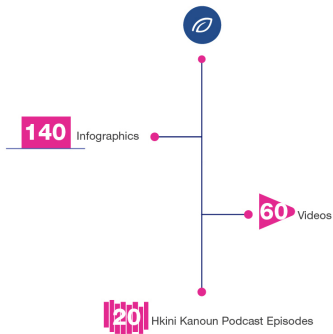
LGBTQ Rights

Democracy and Political Participation  
including Voter Education

Women's Rights

Freedom of Expression,  
Assembly and Participation

We have launched<sup>(2)</sup> over:



Main Topics:



(2) From January 2020 to December 2021

## Our Training Modules

### 500 Training Participants

#### LGBTIQ Rights

SEEDS offered several training modules on LGBTIQ rights in collaboration with Oxfam, FES and Helem and Hivos.

Training	Main Focus	Primary Target Group
Legal avenues to protect and defend LGBTIQ persons (2018 to 2021)	Legal Defense	Lawyers, Law Students, Case Workers, Journalists
Raising awareness on the rights and specific needs of LGBTIQ persons within the workplace (2021)	Internal Policy Development	Representatives of Private Sector Institutions & CSOs
The Legal and Social Needs of LGBTIQ persons in Lebanon (2021)	Advocacy & Reform	Political Activists, Representatives of Political Groups
Raising awareness on the rights and specific needs of LGBTIQ persons (2021)	Raising Awareness on LGBTIQ Rights	Gender Studies Students at the Lebanese American University
Establishing a Legal entity in Lebanon and drafting internal policies for LGBTIQ groups (2018-2019)	Establishing an Organization and internal Policy Development	LGBTIQ organizations and groups

Additionally, SEEDS offered a Training on “Shifting Opinions on the Rights of Women, LGBTIQ Persons, Stateless Individuals, Torture Victims, Refugees, and Migrant Workers” in collaboration with CLDH in April of 2019. The training mainly targeted NGO representatives, junior lawyers and students.

\* Across SEEDS workshops, the willingness of participants to engage with and learn about the struggles and rights of LGBTIQ persons has markedly increased since our first training in 2018 \*

#### Women's Rights

In collaboration with the Center for Inclusive Business & Leadership (CIBL) at the American University of Beirut, SEEDS delivered a training session on Law 205/2021 to Criminalize Sexual Harassment and the Rehabilitation of Its Victims and on the development of anti-sexual harassment policies at the workplace.

In Collaboration with KAS, SEEDS held, on March 08, 2021, a webinar on gender equality in the Lebanese law with a special focus on the electoral law and on women in media.



### **Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association**

From 2018 to 2021, and in collaboration with ICNL, SEEDS delivered several in-person and online workshops on the Lebanese framework for Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association, in addition to advocacy strategies to fight the restriction on civic spaces. The main target participants included lawyers, junior lawyers, journalists and CSO representatives.

### **Anti-corruption**

SEEDS is developing a module on guidelines to promote anti-corruption and transparency within CSOs. Workshop will be delivered in July 2022.

### **The Rights of the Missing and the Forcibly Disappeared**

SEEDS is developing an Online Module on the rights of the missing and the forcibly disappeared in collaboration with the Human Rights Legal Clinic at Université La Sagesse. It was published in 2022.



# Advocacy Initiatives

In addition to the many media campaigns that advocate for the rule of law and for freedoms in Lebanon and the region, SEEDS developed several research and policy papers that pushed for specific reforms on the private sector, national or international levels.

## LGBTQ Rights

In 2018, and in collaboration with Hivos and LebMASH, SEEDS developed a research paper on Sexual Orientation Change Efforts in Lebanon and put forth recommendations to the legal and health sectors to ban these harmful practices.

In 2019, and also with the support of Hivos, SEEDS also drafted and submitted an action plan to Tunisian LGBTQ organizations on banning the anal test in Tunisia.

## Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association

SEEDS is currently conducting a comparative legal study that aims to identify the legal stipulations that foster the restriction of freedom of expression in Lebanon and to from other legal frameworks around the world. It also aims to recommend specific amendments to the Lebanese Penal Code in order to ensure the protection of the right to criticize and the expansion of civic spaces. The study is conducted in collaboration with ICNL and is scheduled to be published by mid 2022.

The study came as a follow up to SEEDS' 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submission that recommended the decriminalization of defamation and its classification as a civil offense.



Advocacy  
Initiatives

## Women's Rights

At the end of 2021, and in collaboration with Fifty-Fifty, SEEDS developed 10 policy papers to support women candidates in preparation for the 2022 Parliamentary Elections. Furthermore, and in collaboration with the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund at UN Women, SEEDS is conducting a study to assess gender inclusivity in recovery efforts following the Beirut Port Explosion. Based on the study results, SEEDS will be pushing for tangible and impactful recommendations for donors and implementing partners to ensure gender responsive and women inclusive programming in Lebanon. The study is scheduled to be published by mid 2022.

## Policy Making – Theatre, Crafts and Arts Teaching in Lebanon

SEEDS participated in the development of research papers focusing on Modernizing cultural policy-making– improving theatre, crafts and arts teaching in Lebanon – and contributed the legal framework, interpretation and legal vocabulary. The papers were published by the Samir Kassir Foundation with the support of Friedrich Naumann for Freedom and Samir in 2021.



## Assistance Initiatives

## Assistance Initiatives

SEEDS offers legal consultancy and representation services especially in matters of censorship and restrictions to freedoms of expression, assembly and association, LGBTQ rights and women's rights. Furthermore, SEEDS launched its Legal Helpline in March 2021 with the support of Oxfam. The helpline offers legal information and referral pathways to callers. It focuses on LGBTQ rights but has also expanded in November 2021, with the support of ICNL, to include matters related to freedom of expression, association and assembly.



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# Institutional Capacity Development

As part of its mission to strengthen and expand its institutional capacity, SEEDS has:



Published its complete Policies Handbook in 2020 (version 2 published in 2022)

Developed its Strategic Plan for 2020-2022 (Currently developing the new 2022-2024 plan)

## HANDBOOK

## STRATEGIC PLAN

Expanded its team

In 2018:  
3 team members

In 2021:  
3 Executive Team Members  
1 Administrative Manager  
1 Senior Researcher  
2 Research Assistants  
6 Media Team Members  
2 Advisory Council Members

Created Professional Development  
Opportunities for its team

Communication Skills Training Sessions  
Helpline Operating Training Sessions  
Language and Research Skills  
Development Activities

## OPPORTUNITIES

## TEAM

# Collaborations



## **Feminist Platform**

September 2021 – ongoing

Lebanon's Feminist Civil Society Platform is formed of feminist civil society actors and activists who were convened by UN Women in the aftermath of the 4th of August blast and issued a unified Charter of Demands to put women's issues at the center of the disaster response plan. Since then, the Feminist Platform conducted various advocacy efforts including the contribution to the development of the Lebanon Reform, Recovery & Reconstruction Framework (3RF) sector plans as well as meetings with representatives of the donor community in Lebanon and the leadership of the United Nations, European Union, and the World Bank to share their gendered priorities and demands.



## **LGBT Task Force**

September 2021 – ongoing

The LGBTIQ+ Task Force is as a strategic forum and advocacy platform to promote issues and the integration of SOGIESC considerations in Lebanon



## **Collaboration with Beity Association**

August 2021 – March 2022

SEEDS collaborated with Beity Association on their project "Women's participation in disaster management accountability". The collaboration consisted of participating in training programs and offering legal advice and recommendations where required.



## **"Media Development in a Democratic Framework" Fellowship - MENA 2021**

May 2021 – ongoing

The main focus of the program was on media self-regulation. SEEDS was among the chosen organizations who took part in a number of workshops throughout the year. SEEDS also contributed to the program with an animation video presenting the concept of media self-regulation.



### **Independence of the Judiciary Coalition**

February 2021 – ongoing

This coalition of 50 organizations “aims to secure the independence and impartiality of the judicial institutions in Lebanon, and by extension their liberation from the ruling authority’s control, as a prerequisite for building a just and effective democratic state”.



### **Freedom of Expression Coalition**

July 2020 – ongoing

The coalition aims to defend freedom of expression and gathers 14 Lebanese and International civil society organizations so far. SEEDS is one of the founding members of the coalition.



### **Collaborations with Lebanese Academic Institutions**

2019 – ongoing

SEEDS collaborates with a number of Academic Institutions in Lebanon including the Human Rights Legal Clinic at Université La Sagesse (ULS), the Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU), the Center for Business Inclusion and Leadership for Women at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Université Saint Joseph (USJ) and others. Collaborations range from partnering up for the development and delivery of training modules including in an online format and offering internship opportunities to students.

## Partners (2018-2021)

Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) - UN Women

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

Oxfam Lebanon

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

Clooney Foundation

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)

Hivos

Helem

Mosaic

LebMASH





Samir Kassir Foundation

Daraj Media

CLDH

Fifty-Fifty

SMEX

The Lebanese Diaspora Network (TLDN)

Goethe-Institut Lebanon

Human Rights Legal Clinic – Université La Sagesse

Arab Institute for Women - Lebanese American University

Center for Inclusive Business and Leadership for Women (CIBL)

– American University of Beirut

Indiana University

Columbia University



# Team



## Executive Team

Layal Sakr - Founder, Executive Director & Chief Legal Officer

Lina Jarrous - Managing Partner, Programs Manager & Chief Communications Officer

Bianca Sallum - Chief Operating Officer & Grants Writer



## Management Team

Antoun Merheb - Administrative Manager



## Research Team

Roula Najm - Senior Researcher & Journalist

Strida Saghbiny - Legal Research Assistant

Regina Kallas - Legal Research Assistant



### **Media Team**

Souzie Hanna - Script Writer

Oleg Farah - Animator

Nazih Ghorra - Graphic Designer & Illustrator

Samer El Khatib - Film Producer

Eddy Jazra Production - Podcast Production



### **Advisory Council**

Dr. Carmen Geha - Inter-disciplinary Research Group on Migration, Pompeu Fabra University. Founding Member, Center for Inclusive Business and Leadership (CIBL) for Women at AUB

Lina Al-Khoury - MA - Mental Health Counselor. Certified Personal and Professional Life Coach, IFC.


## Contact us

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