

ANNUAL REPORT 2021





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Dear friends,

Following a calamitous 2020, 2021 brought its own dose of crises. The lingering pandemic, with the ever-present risk of new lockdowns, the deteriorating medical system, in addition to the social and economic effects of the crisis, represented a burden almost beyond what we could bear. Unfortunately, the pandemic was not the only calamity Lebanese citizens and residents had to face. The devastating collapse of the financial and economic situation added a heavy layer to the daily lives of all residents who found themselves struggling to secure their basic needs.

In these turbulent times, ASSABIL stayed true to its mission and main goals: offering safe and open public spaces for all members of society where access to culture and knowledge is widely secured, regardless of any economic, social or racial consideration.

Fortunately, the Geitawi Public Library was finally re-opened in November 2021 after almost two years of closure due to the global health crisis and the Beirut port blast. It was a moment of joy for us to see this cozy warm place crowded with visitors demonstrating how much they had missed the library. With the Geitawi library re-opening, we were back to having our three libraries fully functioning, in addition to the Kotobus, our mobile library, and its continuous voyage around Beirut as well as other cities and neighborhoods.

Responding to a growing demand for books and publications, ASSABIL strengthened its book collection this year to serve better our diversified audience in three languages. Concurrently, ASSABIL strived to maintain its rich program of activities. To adapt and cope with the overarching situation and its challenges, some of those activities were held online, making them accessible to a wider audience interested in books and culture on the Lebanese socio-economic situation and many other themes.

With the dedicated team and an unflinching belief in the power of our work, we strived to keep the libraries available and responsive to the expanding needs of our audience in these highly challenging and unprecedented times.

This report is a testament to what happens when you are trusted, and a commitment for the coming years.

See you all in our libraries...

Cathy Khattar
President of the Board

TABLE OF CONTENTS

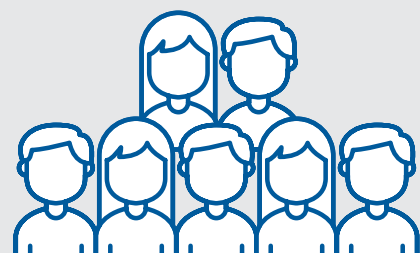
ASSABIL at a Glance	4
Our Libraries in 2021	6
Projects & Programs	8
Capacity-building & Advocacy	14
Communication & Visibility	15
Organization & Finances	16

“

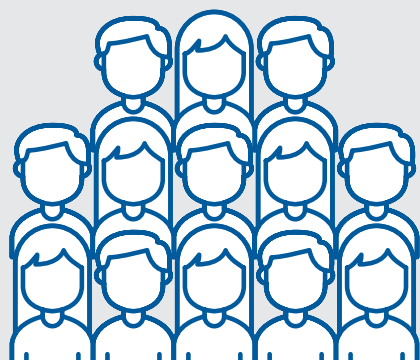
A great choice of books for all ages, a possibility to fly away, to forget oneself, to dream... Great for adults as well as for children. Warm employees, we are always made to feel welcome. I never thought I would find such libraries in Lebanon. And in the situation we are going through, I find the librarians and the library itself extraordinary. Thank you very much.

Sakina Tabbara Jalloul
Geitawi Library member

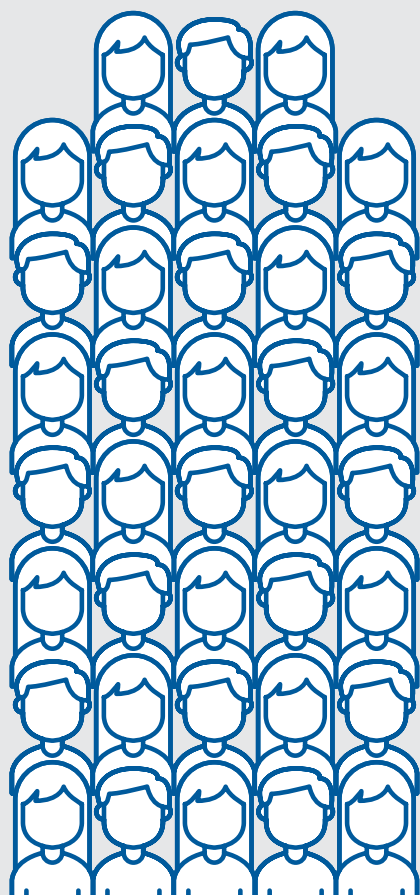
”



7 board members



13 full-time & part-time employees



38 members of General Assembly

ASSABIL AT A GLANCE

Our Vision

We envision an inclusive world where culture and knowledge drive individual development and social transformation.

Our Mission

As a non-sectarian NGO, we facilitate cultural participation and knowledge-sharing through public libraries and public spaces. We promote reading, unlock imaginations and nurture critical thinking thereby promoting the development of well-informed communities, both citizens and residents.

We develop capacities, network with community stakeholders and share our expertise with public libraries, cultural actors and educational institutions all over Lebanon. This work is to ensure that inclusive programming strategies are applied with state-of-the-art tools and provide equitable knowledge access to reach those most in need and encourage their active participation in civic life.

Our Objectives

Through the creation and operation of public libraries, ASSABIL seeks to contribute to the development of a well-informed and engaged citizenry and the formation of a secular and inclusive society in Lebanon.

Our activities fall within these areas:

Public Libraries Development
Reading Promotion
Cultural Participation
Community Outreach
Capacity-Building
Advocacy and Lobbying



“

I'm a French student studying Arabic in Beirut, so I don't share all the harsh conditions of people living here. I was very happy though to find a public library in Beirut.

It's nice to work surrounded by books in a place where you're not a "consumer." I feel free to come here whenever I want, and it's very useful since it's not easy to study at home without electricity!

Hana
Monnot Library member

”



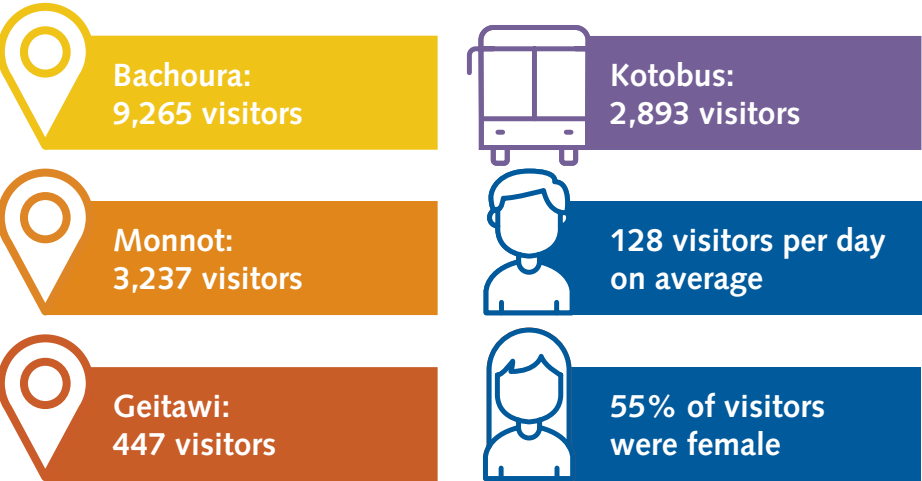
OUR LIBRARIES IN 2021

ASSABIL is commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut to manage and operate the municipal public libraries in the neighborhoods of Bachoura, Geitawi & Monnot. We also operate a mobile library – the Kotobus – that makes regular visits to municipalities, schools and community centers in multiple regions across Lebanon.

Visitors

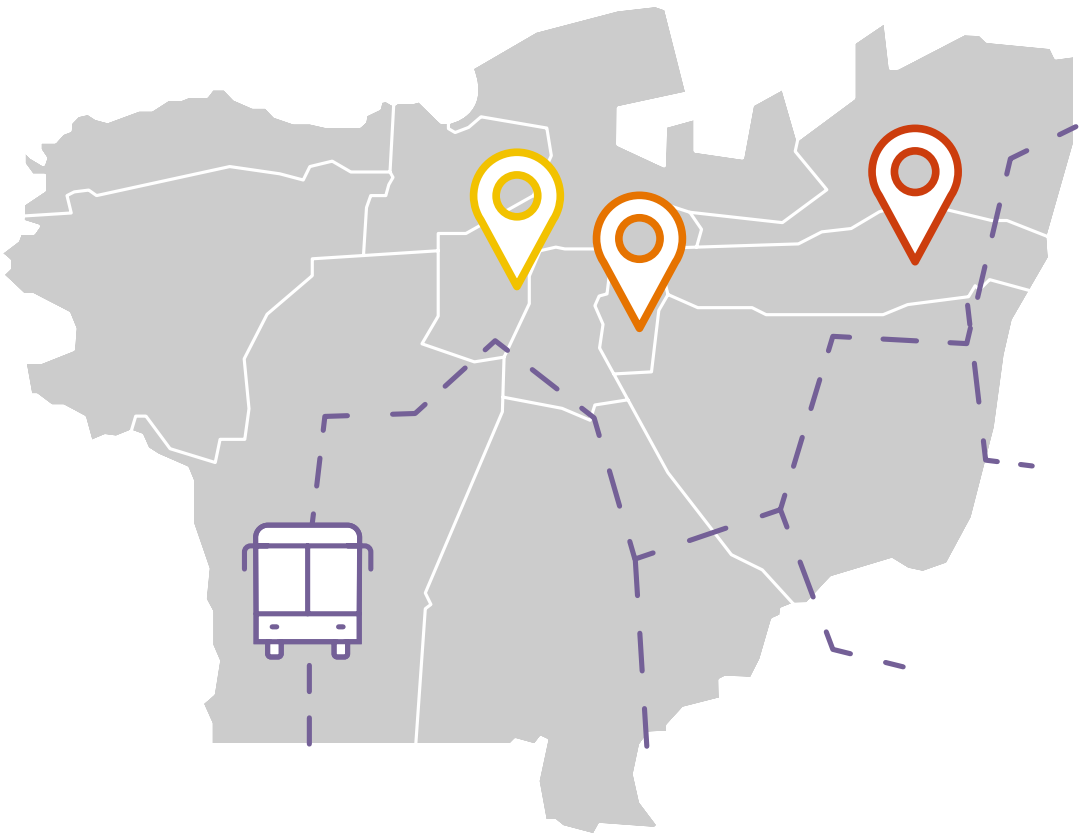
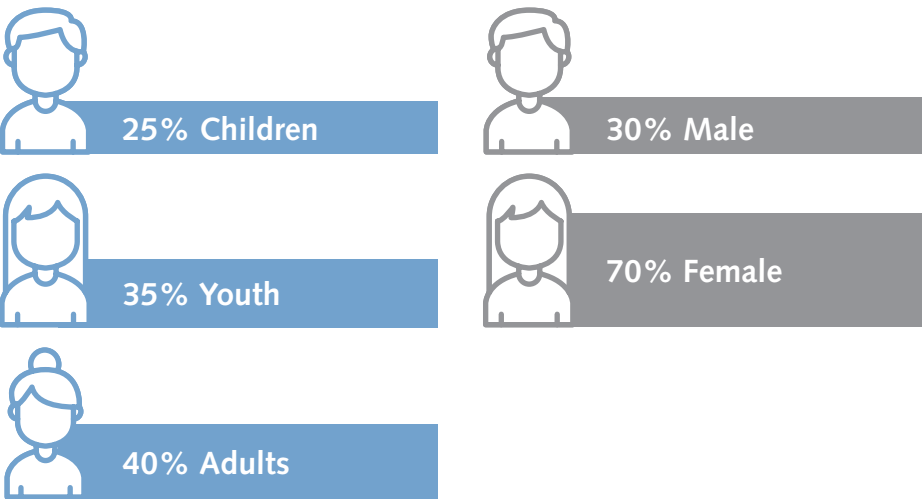
Due to the lockdown, the Bachoura and Monnot libraries were closed between January and April 2021. The Geitawi library did not reopen until November due to its location inside a public garden, the Jesuit Garden, which was subject to additional Corona procedures.

There were a total of 15,842 visitors to the three municipal public libraries and kotobus



Members

ASSABIL witnessed 786 new members at the three libraries in 2021



Bachoura
23,000 titles
Opened in 2000

Monnot
7,400 titles
Opened in 2004

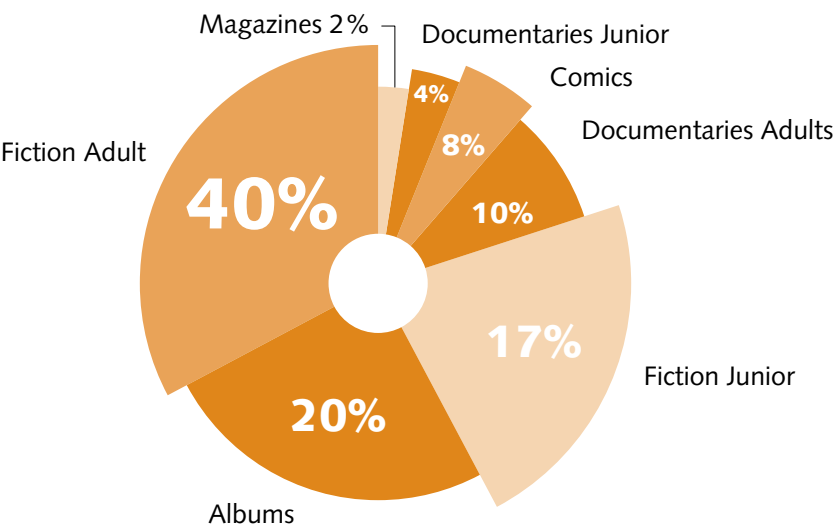
Geitawi
10,400 titles
Opened in 2008

Kotobus
Mobile library
7,453 titles
On the road since 2008

Book Lending



Top 7 borrowed collections are similar in all 3 libraries:



Purchase of New Furniture for Geitawi & Bachoura Libraries

Following the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020 in which the three municipal libraries were damaged, ASSABIL carried out the physical reconstruction of the libraries. In 2021, ASSABIL continued the rehabilitation process, replacing the old and damaged furniture in the Geitawi and Bachoura libraries and redesigning the interior of the Bachoura library.

PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS IN 2021

Reading Promotion

Promoting a love of reading is one of the primary goals of our library programs. Our weekly activities include storytelling sessions for children and welcoming classes of public and semi-private school students, in coordination with the Ministry of Education. Each month (starting in July 2021), we organized three book club meetings to discuss books written in Arabic, French and English. ASSABIL also celebrated special days and events that contribute to an appreciation of reading and language:

An intensive program of activities during National Reading Week in April

A celebration of Arabic Language Day in December and Women's Day in March.

We also organized a number of "meetings with authors" to discuss various literary topics.

Cultural Activities

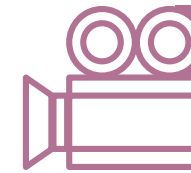
The Corona pandemic did not prevent ASSABIL from organizing its regular cultural activities. During the long periods of lockdown, we moved our activities online to a number of different platforms. With the easing of restrictions, we decided to have a mixed program of physical and virtual activities in order to reach a wide audience that has grown accustomed to online events and to be able to draw on a diversified pool of experts and cultural creators (such as authors in the diaspora) to participate in, or moderate, events. In addition to our established activities, ASSABIL also introduced some new activities.

In 2021, ASSABIL organized a variety of weekly and monthly cultural activities in cooperation with local partner institutions and experts as well as one-off events.

Monthly book clubs to discuss literature in three languages: Arabic, French and English

Weekly storytelling sessions in the three libraries

Question and Answer discussions with authors about their latest books



A monthly film club in cooperation with Nadi LikolNas



Concerts



"The Story of the Hour," monthly seminars dealing with trending topics on the local scene



Events celebrating various occasions and international days, such as International Women's Day and World Arabic Language Day



"Panorama of the Arts," a monthly event which sheds lights on various arts, including their emergence, the stages of their development, major themes, main figures and pioneers



Handicraft activities

ASSABIL wishes to thank all the facilitators, speakers, guests and authors who took part in or moderated events in 2021:

Film directors and facilitator: Rawane Nassif, Ghassan Halawani, Antoine Wakeed, Badih Massaad

Authors: Dominique Eddé, Alawia Soboh, Roula Douglas, Amir Taj El Sir, Michele Gharios, Corinne Boulad, Nader Siraj, Antoine Boulad, Katia El Tawil

Panorama of the Art speakers: Ziad Bou Alwan, Roger Assaf, Ghada Waked, Zeina Kayaly, Jamal Fayyad, Karim Dib, Gerard Bejjani

Book Clubs facilitators: Antoine Boulad, Suzanne El Amine, Randa Sbeii

The Story of the Hour speakers and moderators: Jacque Mokhbat, Atika Berry, Hanady Shatila, Mishka Mourani Moujabber, Rachelle Karam, Rana Najjar, Rabih El Shamaii, Madeleine Badaro, Ramzi Salamé, Tammam Nakkash, Ahmad Tamer, Sandra Dao, Youssef Ghantous Rahil Dandash, Kamal Hamdane, Miryam Mhanna, Léa Azzi

Storytellers: Elissa Chams, Randa AboulHosn, Nada Matta, Tala Harake, Rania Zbib Daher

Musicians: Al Kamandjati and Walkabout Drum Circle

Handcrafts by: Donia Al Koussa



Total number of organized activities: 116 with 2000 attendees (1,212 women, 788 men)



Beirut Public Libraries Offer Distance Learning Support

In order to provide educational support to students taking part in distance learning, ASSABIL organized a tutoring program in the spring semester. Teachers provided tutoring in languages, mathematics and science; 30 students from public schools participated. We also provided students with tablets and internet access so that they were able to take part in the program. In addition, ASSABIL distributed stationery to approximately 300 students. We plan on resuming the program once the teachers' strike is suspended.

Teaching Children: Reading is Fun

The ASSABIL mobile library, the Kotobus, regularly visits pupils in public and semi-private schools, as well as at childcare and non-formal educational centers. This year we added new stops to the itinerary of the Kotobus in collaboration with the Chiah, Beit Merry and Beyssarieh municipalities. Kotobus activities seek to spark and nurture a love of reading among children between the ages of 2 and 13 and raise awareness about different topics and issues, such as gender, the environment, and children's rights. Kotobus visits include book lending and activities such as storytelling, games and artistic activities.



2,889 children beneficiaries

Engaging the Community and Improving Social Cohesion

At the center of our vision is ensuring that public libraries are shared community spaces. We work to build bridges between different groups and strengthen social cohesion throughout Lebanon. Our initiatives in 2021 included a series of creative workshops and open days in the framework of a program funded and supported by GIZ entitled "Public libraries act against xenophobia: resources and activities for public libraries throughout Lebanon."

This program tackled challenges related to social cohesion in Lebanon by enhancing public libraries as inclusive spaces and fostering appreciation for diversity. Public libraries in Lebanon are meeting spaces for different communities. They welcome all population groups to utilize the space and promote mutual understanding and respect. This project strengthened librarians' skills in inclusive cultural programming, upgraded resources that promote tolerance and mutual understanding and respect and supported a range of activities in public spaces for all age groups (children, youth, adults).

Outputs from the Project

1. The Living Together Toolkit developed in 2020 was printed and a set of books and activity materials that are part of the toolkit were purchased and distributed to the partner libraries.



2. Open days and exhibitions that presented the results of the creative workshops organized in four different libraries across Lebanon (Beirut, Barja, Baddawi Camp, Tyr).

3. 14 creative workshop (comics, photography and writing in Arabic, French and English).

4. A booklet was published presenting the final outputs from the workshops.

Partnerships with NGOs

ASSABIL believes in public space, collaboration and partnership. We work with our NGO partners on transforming our libraries into open and inclusive urban spaces in Beirut. This year, ASSABIL joined efforts with Himaya, Medair and Amel to support our distressed community by hosting 62 psychosocial support and awareness sessions on many topics such as violence against women, child protection (in the Bachoura public library). As testified by our partners, there is no doubt that our libraries are safe spaces where families and children can be heard.



Based on a mapping activity to identify the existing services and stakeholders in the Basta and Bachoura area, Himaya entered into a good partnership with ASSABIL. It is always challenging to find safe indoor locations in the area, and the public library emerged as the only suitable place for child protection interventions. The library is a safe and child-friendly place. It is nice, calm and secure. Children enjoyed being there during the sessions delivered by the trained animators. The activities tackled topics related to child protection and life skills through different tools and methods, such as Lego activities, arts and crafts, puppet shows, storytelling, group work and more.

The Bachoura library is also a peaceful place where young people can be productive and work efficiently in silence.

Fabienne Akiki
Himaya



Supporting Active Citizenship: Volunteering at Public Libraries

The Beirut Municipal Public Libraries is proud to work with a dedicated and diverse group of 7 community members who responded to our call for volunteers. In such hard times, the volunteers provided invaluable assistance in reshelving, book binding, and organizing activities. Their help was vital to our libraries' ability to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of our community patrons.

Thank you to all of our volunteers who contributed their time and talent: Feryal Solh, Fatmeh Solh, Ghinwa Saleh, Joumana Rifai, Sundus Al Rifai, Khalida Eid and Claude Karam.



Volunteering with ASSABIL has strengthened my sense of belonging to the Beirut public libraries. It is great to organize and bind books that we may, perhaps, borrow one day. It also reduced my stress level and gave me a sense of accomplishment with these charged feelings surrounding us. And it was an opportunity to discover the wonderful library staff!

Sundus Al Rifai
Volunteer at Bachoura Library



Encouraging Free Creative Expression

Offering free creative workshops that are open to everyone is an important way to promote cultural participation. In 2021, ASSABIL organized 14 creative workshops for young people on different topics: comics workshop facilitated by Samandal; photography workshops facilitated by Dar Al Moussawer; writing workshops in Arabic facilitated by Fatima Charafeddine; French facilitated by Antoine Boulad; and English facilitated by Mishka Mourani Moujabber.

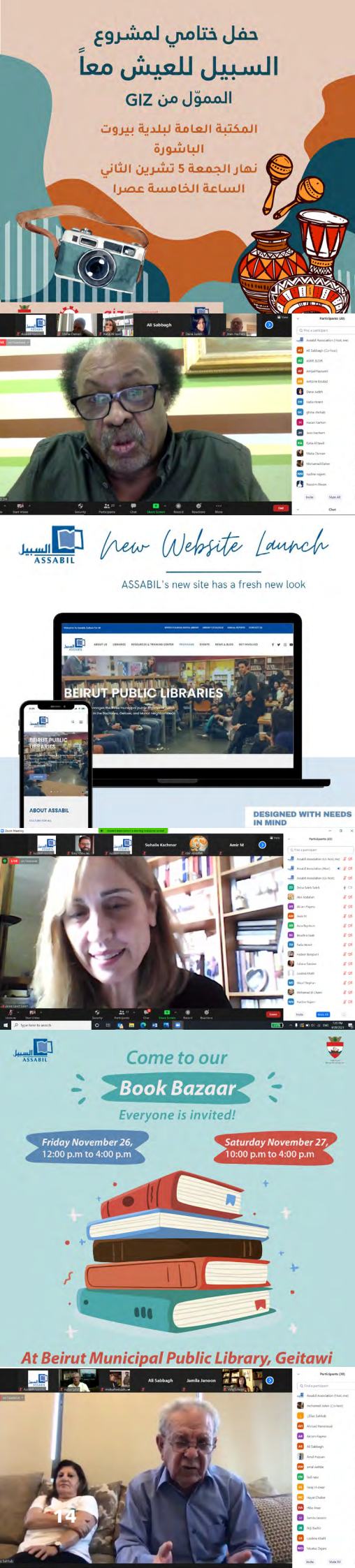
The workshops took place in the following libraries:

- Beirut Municipal Libraries of Bachoura and Monnot
- Taawon libraries in the Borj Chemali and Baddawi refugee camps
- CLAC of Barja
- Public library of Hermel

A total of 108 youth participated in these events. A booklet was also published presenting the final products of the workshops.

In addition, throughout 2021, Lebanese poet Antoine Boulad facilitated regular creative writing workshops in French at the Beirut Municipal Libraries.





CAPACITY-BUILDING AND ADVOCACY

Expertise and Support for Municipalities and Public Libraries

In 2021, ASSABIL was asked by the Kesrwan Ftouh Federation to provide expertise and assistance in setting up a new network of 4 municipal libraries and a mobile library. ASSABIL prepared a study for the federation that included a library concept, a plan for the different sections of the libraries, a list of required furniture and equipment, an organizational chart, library cataloguing system specifications, acquisitions policy and the bill of quantities (BOQ).

ASSABIL continued to support public libraries and cultural centers all over Lebanon. We distributed more than 10,000 books received from several donors and provided library equipment and furniture to three public libraries.

As part of our ongoing commitment to building the capacity of library professionals, we offered three-day training workshops by Tanya Ghorra on tolerance to enhance the facilitation skills of librarians in dealing with children, students and parents promoting mutual understanding.

Promoting Arabic Youth Literature

ASSABIL/Boghossian Prize

In cooperation with the Boghossian Foundation, ASSABIL organizes the Boghossian/ASSABIL Prize for Arabic youth literature. In 2021, the focus was on books published in Lebanon for readers between the ages of 8 and 12. The jury consisted of Antoine Boulad, Najla Khoury and Georgia Makhoul. The prize went to Saleh Ibrahim (author) and Hussein Al-Ribaii (illustrator) for their series Karim published by Dar Al Banan.

The 2022 Boghossian/ASSABIL Prize will be dedicated to manuscripts targeting young readers between the ages of 13 and 15 as well as published books targeting children between the ages of 8 and 12.

SAWA: A Periodical Published by ASSABIL

In May 2021, ASSABIL introduced a new quarterly periodical «سوا» to promote the Arabic language among young people between the ages of 11 and 15. The periodical is distributed in 5 schools and is available in the 3 municipal libraries for all visitors. It can also be downloaded directly [from our website](#).

The editorial committee consists of poet and ASSABIL member Antoine Boulad, writer Georgia Makhoul and writer Najla Khoury.

COMMUNICATION & VISIBILITY

During 2021 ASSABIL engaged intensively with its audiences, developing its communication strategy and enhancing its visibility in order to promote the services and activities offered to the public.

A new interactive website was launched in October with smoother navigation, a fresher look and new features such as the events calendar, the E-resources page, and the ASSABIL team page.

Our Social Media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram gained new followers: ASSABIL's Instagram followers exceeded 2,000 followers, a significant increase from the 1,148 followers in 2020. On Facebook, we welcomed 873 new friends. The total number of followers on the various social media channels reached 8,754, compared to 7,026 in 2020.

Total followers: 8,754
People reached: 90,612
Total posts: 246 to promote activities, the collection and new arrivals, reader reviews, ASSABIL news...

“It was a pleasure working with such a homogeneous team that is always flexible and very responsive. You were always trying to find new and creative ways for the dissemination of culture, which is a need that few are concerned with especially given the harsh situation that Lebanon is going through. We felt it was crucial to support the employment of 5 employees to sustain storytelling activities as well as archiving and book binding. It was lovely to see the kids interacting with the stories and the important social messages passed on by the storytellers through the activities, building a generation of readers when books are becoming unaffordable and screen time is invading kids' social habits. Jobs were created for a vital cause!

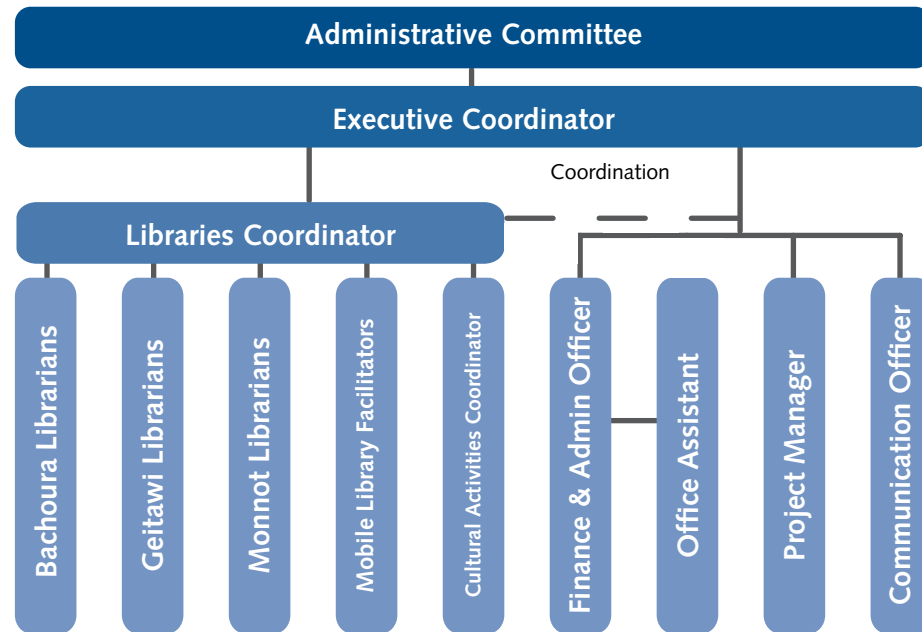
Elissa Rizk
Beirut Field Officer, Tri-Pulley

”



AFAC ARAB FUND FOR
ARTS AND CULTURE
الصندوق العربي
للثقافة والفنون

ORGANIZATION AND FINANCES



Introducing New Team Members

ASSABIL is happy to announce the addition of Nourhane Chami and Zafer Mohsen to our team!



Nourhane Chami, Communication Officer:

She joined the ASSABIL Association in March 2021. She has an MA in Digital Media from the Lebanese University, Faculty of Information. She worked previously as a journalist and an assistant producer.

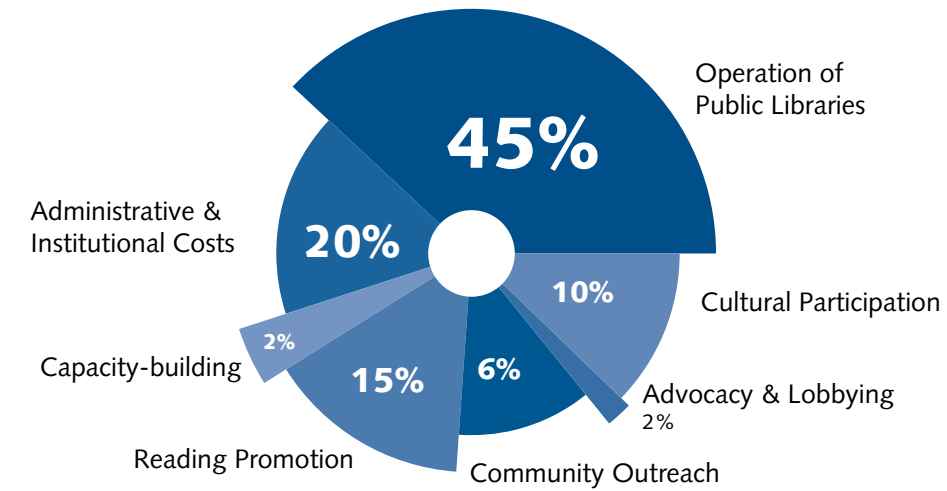


Zafer Mohsen, Cultural Activities Coordinator-Librarian:

He joined the ASSABIL Association in June 2021. He has an MA in Information Science from the Lebanese University. He previously worked as an information manager and data entry supervisor.

Annual Budget

The total annual budget of 2021 was 601,648 USD.
The following is the breakdown:

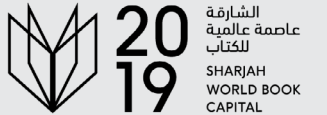


Funding Partners

International donors and partners: Secours Catholique – Caritas France, GIZ, Prince Claus Fund, Fondation de France, French Embassy in Lebanon, DJELIYA Internationale, Book Aid International, Boghossian Foundation, British Council, Medair, GVC (Gruppo Di Volontariato Civile)

Regional donors: Taawon, AFAC (Arab Fund for Arts and Culture), Culture resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy), Shariqa Book Capital 2019

Local donors and partners: Municipality of Beirut, Himaya, Amel Association, Nadi Ikolnas, Tripuley.



Culture is
a basic need



ASSABIL

Ras el-Nabeh, Mohammad el-Hout Street
Naoura Bldg. 1st floor
Beirut – Lebanon

T +961 1 664 647
M +961 70 109 979
www.assabil.com

