



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Among the countless events of 2025, for every time someone crossed the threshold of a public library for the first time, it was an event; every time the Kotobus puppets made a child's eyes sparkle in a small town in the Bekaa, it was an event; there are two that can truly be described as historic, both of which took place on November 25, 2025:

- The celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the first public library in Beirut, held under the high patronage of the Minister of Culture, Dr. Ghassan Salamé, who heaped praise on ASSABIL. Also in attendance were the President of the Municipal Council, Engineer Ibrahim Zeidan, and the representative of the Governor, General Abbas Housseiny.
- The naming of the Bachoura Library after the great writer Elias Khoury, who passed away a year ago and was a member of the first Honorary Committee of our association.

Long live the mission we continue to uphold with strength and determination, despite all obstacles, thanks to the efforts of a remarkable team and the generosity of an impressive number of friends: the joy of reading, free and open access to culture and information for all, and the formation of responsible citizens.

Antoine Boulad
President of the Board



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I was encouraged to respond to a call for volunteers at Beirut Municipal Public Library – Monnot, and I truly loved the experience. I especially enjoyed the collaborative, family-like atmosphere of the team, where everyone worked together without rigid hierarchies. The environment was supportive and motivating. During my time as a volunteer, I developed new skills, particularly in communicating with a diverse audience, including library users from different backgrounds and foreigners.

Volunteer
Elias Khoury Bachoura library



INTRODUCTION

In 2025, we renewed our collective commitment to ASSABIL's mission with determination and clarity. In a country still navigating economic fragility, social transformation, and recurring instability, our responsibility is to sustain and protect public libraries as spaces of knowledge, dialogue, and dignity. Together with our dedicated team, we reaffirmed our commitment to better support and engage our audiences in Beirut and across all regions of Lebanon, with particular attention to marginalized groups who rely on public libraries as safe, inclusive, and empowering spaces.

This year has demonstrated once again that ASSABIL is not only an institution, it is a living community. From the revitalization of rural outreach through our mobile library, Kotobus, to the expansion of women's leadership initiatives, youth engagement, educational partnerships, and large-scale cultural events, our work reflects resilience, adaptability, and long-term vision. Our team's professionalism, flexibility, and belief in ASSABIL's mission have been the driving force behind these achievements.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the Board and the General Assembly for their strategic guidance, trust, and continuous support.

Our volunteers, partners, donors, facilitators, and community members remain at the heart of everything we do. Their commitment enables us to continue bridging geographic, social, economic, and cultural divides and to ensure that culture remains a public right accessible to all.

As we move forward, we remain steadfast in our vision: strengthening public libraries as pillars of education, civic engagement, creativity, and social cohesion. In times of uncertainty, culture is not secondary, it is essential. And together, we will continue to uphold this conviction.

Ali Sabbagh
Executive Coordinator

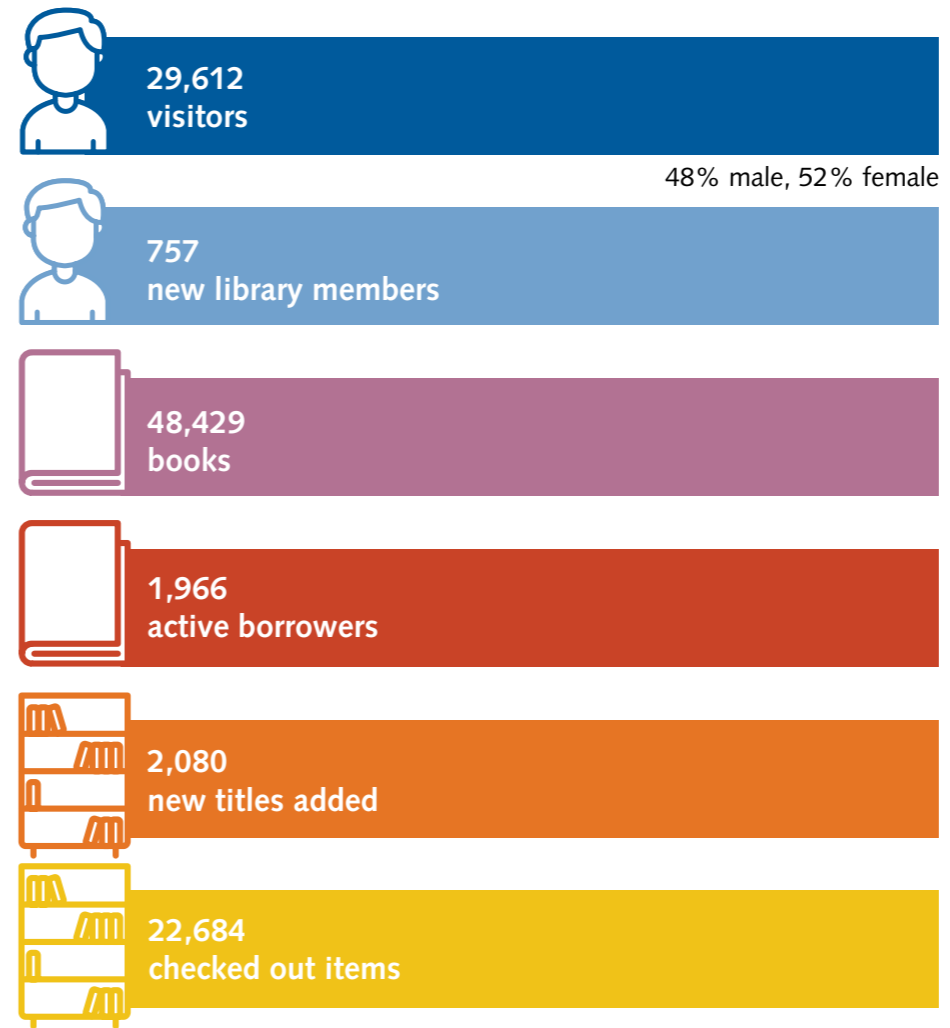


I discovered the Bachoura Public Library in Beirut 14 years ago, and ever since, I have been bringing my son along—even when he was just in preschool. The library is truly wonderful, but it's much more than a place to read and play. Every Friday, we joined the Story Hour, which made the library feel like our second home. For me, a book is more than just pages—it's an idea, a lesson, and a source of inspiration. I used to seek out books to support my son's growth and learning, and now, even though he is 14, we still visit the library regularly

User
Elias Khoury Bachoura library

POST-WAR RECOVERY & GROWING LIBRARY IMPACT

The Beirut public libraries have successfully recovered from the 2024 war, reaffirming their vital role in the city's cultural and educational life. In 2025, the libraries welcomed 29,612 visitors with a nearly equal gender distribution (48% male, 52% female), reflecting strong community engagement. The size of the collection has grown to 48,429 books, including 2,080 new titles. In addition, 757 new members joined ASSABIL, bringing the total number of active borrowers to 1,966. Library users checked out 22,684 items, demonstrating a sustained enthusiasm for reading and learning across the city.



The Beirut Public Libraries: Supporting Multilingual Reading

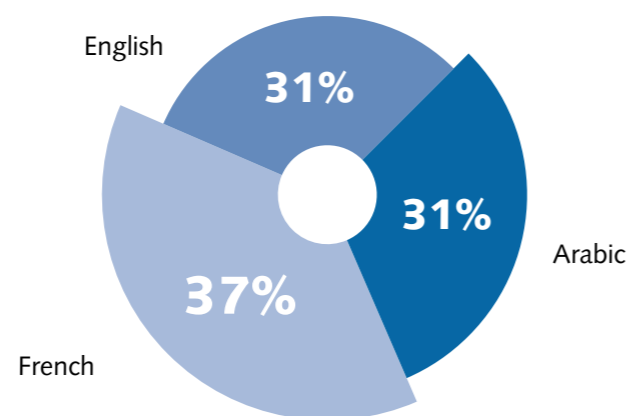
Lebanon's cultural richness is reflected in its trilingual reading habits, Arabic, French, and English. The Beirut public libraries play a key role in supporting this multilingual landscape by providing collections and programs in all three languages.





Reading Language Distribution – 2025

These statistics show a balanced engagement across languages, highlighting the libraries' success in meeting the needs of our diverse community.



Libraries' Infrastructure, Technology, and Sustainable Energy Enhancements

In 2025, the Beirut public libraries implemented significant improvements in infrastructure, technology, and sustainable energy, supported by key partner donors.

Security measures were strengthened with the installation of video surveillance cameras at the Bachoura and Monnot Libraries.

On the digital infrastructure front, the library system, which had been experiencing frequent shutdowns affecting both backend access and the online catalogue, was upgraded with a new web server, HTTPS hosting, and Sophos Web Server Protection. This upgrade, funded by GIZ, was successfully installed in the Monnot Library in December 2025, ensuring reliable and secure access to library resources.

In addition, the libraries advanced their green initiatives: the solar energy system at Bachoura Library was enhanced with support from Hypco Company, contributing to sustainable energy use. These developments demonstrate the critical role of donor support in improving library operations, safety, and environmental responsibility.

Public Libraries Objectives In Line With Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Our objectives align with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contributing to long-term positive change in education, social development, and community engagement:

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

The ASSABIL public libraries provide safe, welcoming community spaces that support mental and social well-being, offering an environment where people of all ages can gather, learn, and connect.

Key Achievements:

- **29,612 library visitors** overall, benefiting from safe and inclusive spaces
- **272 activities** conducted, engaging **3,223 participants** and fostering social interaction, supporting cognitive development and emotional well-being

SDG 4: Quality Education

The ASSABIL libraries promote literacy and lifelong learning by providing access to information, educational resources, workshops, and a tutoring program for children. They also build civic awareness and youth capacity for community engagement.

Key Achievements:

- **22,684 books** borrowed for free
- **4 language support courses** provided, with **44 children** enrolled
- **4 workshops** conducted, training **50 youth** on social change & active citizenship
- **1,200 students in 25 schools** engaged

SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth

ASSABIL strengthens skills, capacity, and employability of volunteers, contributing to human resource development and community empowerment. It also trains and recruits teachers in innovative story-based teaching techniques, enhancing educational impact.

Key Achievements:

- **50 volunteers** mobilized to assist with library operations
- **5 teachers** trained and recruited

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

By ensuring that public libraries are accessible to all, regardless of background, income, or nationality, ASSABIL promotes inclusivity and reduces social inequalities through free access to books, educational resources, and learning opportunities.

Key Achievements:

- **Free library membership** for all users, from very young children to 99-year-old adults, representing diverse nationalities and backgrounds

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities

ASSABIL libraries serve as vibrant public spaces where cultural and educational activities are organized, fostering a sense of community and promoting sustainable urban development.

Key Achievements:

- Libraries open **7 days** a week
- Community-focused activities and programs enhancing urban social cohesion

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, & Strong Institutions

Change-Oriented Approach (COA) workshops and Active Citizenship (AC) initiatives empower youth to engage in civic activities, promoting peace, justice, and social cohesion by fostering dialogue and community-driven change.

Key Achievements:

- **27 youth** engaged in two AC social initiatives in Beirut
- **30 individuals** participated in a COA workshop on youth life skills

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Collaboration with education specialists, teachers, and partner schools strengthens partnerships, facilitates knowledge exchange, and enhances learning outcomes.

Key Achievements:

- Collaboration established with **25 partner schools**



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

In 2025, ASSABIL implemented a rich and diversified cultural program that catered to a diverse audience, reflecting the variety of interests, cultural backgrounds, and age groups of its participants. A total of 272 cultural activities were organized, bringing together more than 3,200 participants. These activities were designed to encourage creativity, dialogue, and community engagement, and were hosted in accessible and welcoming spaces such as the libraries of Bachoura, Geitawi, and Monnot, which also provide free access to books, magazines, and the internet.

Activities Program

Book Clubs: A total of 30 book club meetings (11 in Arabic, 7 in English, and 12 in French) introduced readers to 30 authors.

Children's Storytelling: Weekly storytelling sessions captivated young audiences, with 146 sessions led by 6 storytellers.

Author Meetings: 23 recently published books were introduced through special events.

The Craft of Writing: we organized 11 encounters with 11 writers.

Ciné-Club: 15 film club sessions featured 15 screenings, each followed by discussions with the filmmakers, in collaboration with Nadi Lekol Nas.

Creative Writing Workshops: A total of 15 writing workshops (8 in Arabic and 7 in French).

Promoting Arabic & Youth Literature

Arabic Language Day

A celebration with a dictation competition.

ASSABIL/Boghossian Prize

In cooperation with the Boghossian Foundation, ASSABIL organizes the annual ASSABIL/Boghossian Prize for Arabic youth literature. In 2025, the results were as follows:

1- In the category of published books targeting children ages 8-12 years old: The prize was not awarded.

2- In the category of manuscripts targeting adolescents ages 13-15 years old: the manuscript "The Seventh of July" by Jana Salika won the prize.

SAWA: A Periodical Published by ASSABIL

ASSABIL continues to publish SAWA, the quarterly periodical it introduced in May 2021 to promote the Arabic language among young people between the ages of 11 and 15. The periodical, SAWA ("Together" in Arabic), is distributed in 6 schools and is available at the 3 municipal libraries for all visitors, as well as in a downloadable e-copy on our website. In 2025, one issue was published, as the association began preparing a new phase of development for the publication in partnership with Tabshoura. This upcoming project will transform SAWA into a fully digital and interactive e-periodical, expanding access, enhancing engagement, and reaching a wider audience of young readers.

Celebrating 25 Years of Beirut's First Public Library

In November 2025, ASSABIL launched the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Beirut's first public library with an official ceremony held at Bachoura Library, under the patronage and in the presence of the Minister of Culture, and with the participation of the President of Beirut Municipality, representatives of the Governor of Beirut, the Director General of the Ministry of Culture, as well as partners, donors, and long-standing friends of the libraries. The event marked a major milestone in the cultural life of the capital and inaugurated a four-month anniversary program. The celebration was also visibly embedded in the urban space, with a large commemorative banner designed by an ALBA student installed on the façade of the library, while advertising panels surrounding the building featured a special anniversary poster created for the occasion.

Activities implemented in 2025 focused on celebrating the library's history and community. These included the storytelling event "The Story of the Library"; the launch and signing of the illustrated book ASSABIL: 25 Years in collaboration with Samandal; an archival photo exhibition retracing the journey of Bachoura Library; a New Year 2026 greeting card competition; and a volunteer recognition ceremony organized on the occasion of International Volunteer Day to honor the longstanding commitment of library volunteers. The remaining components of the anniversary program will be implemented throughout 2026, ensuring the continuity of this milestone celebration.





Celebration of Important Days



International Women's Day: a special literary encounter with René Otayek around his book "Féministes arabes du Levant." The discussion provided an opportunity to explore the historical and intellectual trajectories of Arab feminist movements in the Levant, fostering dialogue on women's rights, social change, and contemporary challenges in the region.



Poets' Spring: an Arabic poetry recitation competition bringing together 35 students from various secondary schools.



Fête de la Musique: a concert by Kamandjaty Associatio in the garden of the Geitawi Library attended by 75 people.



International Day of Persons with Disabilities: ASSABIL organized a special edition of the Human Library, welcoming students from public secondary schools to take part in this unique and meaningful experience. Instead of borrowing books, students "borrowed" individuals with inspiring life stories, engaging in open and respectful conversations that challenged stereotypes and promoted empathy, inclusion, and understanding. The initiative created a powerful space for dialogue and reflection, and school principals, teachers, and students alike expressed their deep appreciation for the experience and its positive impact on awareness and social connection.



Translation day: a translation workshop from Arabic to French conducted by Dr. Mohammad Matar. The workshop brought together participants interested in literary translation and provided a space to explore the challenges of conveying meaning, style, and cultural nuance between the two languages.

Introduction of New Activities

The Philosophy Club

A new regular activity was introduced within the libraries program conducted by Dr. Mohammad Matar from the National Development Center. This initiative offers interested participants a dedicated space to discover and read selected texts by great philosophers, while engaging in open, guided discussions around their ideas. Beyond textual exploration, the club encourages collective reflection on key philosophical themes and questions, fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and a deeper appreciation of philosophy as a living practice connected to contemporary life.



Activities in Collaboration with the Beirut Heritage Association

Believing in the importance of networking with active cultural associations with whom we share objectives and values, a partnership was established with the Beirut Heritage Association, a cultural association that addresses all aspects of Beirut's heritage, especially those intersecting with Lebanon and the Arab world. This partnership resulted in the organization of 7 activities during 2025. These meetings shed light on works related to Beirut's heritage and/or on Beirut writers including Issam Chebaro, Jad Tabet, Bassem Fleifel, Nader Sraj, Edy Choueiry, Amine Farchoukh, and Antoine Boulad.

Advancing Arabic Comic Books: Empowering Children, Youth, and Creative Professionals

In 2025, ASSABIL implemented the project "Advancing Arabic Comic Books: Empowering Children, Youth, and Creative Professionals," with the support of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), in partnership with Samandal. Anchored in ASSABIL's mission to promote reading and creative expression in Arabic, the project addressed a significant gap in the creation and visibility of Arabic comic books as tools for literacy, storytelling, and cultural representation. Through four comic creation workshops, 108 youth developed foundational skills in visual storytelling and produced original comic panels, while four comic reading workshops engaged 72 children, strengthening their relationship with the Arabic language through interactive reading and discussion. In parallel, two advanced comic creation trainings engaged 25 illustrators, supporting professional skill development and resulting in the production of original publishable works, including a collective comic publication. Hosted at ASSABIL's public libraries, the activities contributed to reactivating these spaces as hubs for artistic production, dialogue, and experimentation. By combining youth participation, professional training, public exhibition of comic works, and the dissemination of new Arabic comic publications, the project reinforced comics as an accessible cultural medium and affirmed public libraries as inclusive spaces for creativity, learning, and cultural engagement.

Many other activities were also organized, such as a five-day book bazaar that attracted 319 buyers and generated \$4,050, which was entirely allocated to the acquisition of new books for the libraries.

ASSABIL wishes to thank all the facilitators, speakers, guests, and authors who took part in or moderated events in 2025

Film directors and facilitators: Dalia Fathallah, Rima Qobeissy, Michèle Tayyan, Miryam El Haj, Carole Mansour, Ramzi El Rassi, Wajdi Elyan, Joseph Khalouf, Rania Stephan, Haytham Al Amine, Antoine Kebabeh, Naja Achkar, Mohammad Naboulsi, and Nad,i Likolnas.

Authors and facilitators: Joumana Haddad, Najwa Barakat, Ziad Kaj, Houda Barakat, Mohammadd Abi Samra, Dominique Eddé, Georgia Makhlof, Nada Moghaisel Nasr, Gisèle Kayata Eid, Carmen Boustani, Selim Nassib, Percy Kemp, Issam Chebaro, Bassem Fleifel, Edy Choueiry, Amine Farchoukh, Antoine Boulad, Souleiman Bakhty, Nicholas Habib, Samira Ezzo, Zahi wehbeh, Lorca Sbeity, Jihad Darwiche, Hassan Mokdad, Rania Samara, Jad Tabet and Karim Koleilat.

Book club facilitators: Antoine Boulad, Suzanne El Amine, and Jana Maddah.

Storytellers and children's authors: Noura Kalache, Nataly Sabbagh, Sahar Tamim, Nadira Semaha, Nathalie Wardini, and Raja El Zein.

Musicians: Al Kamandjaty band.

Illustration workshop: Paul Merhi.

Writing workshop facilitator: Antoine Boulad and Ali Sabbagh.

ASSABIL/Boghossian Prize jurors: Suzane Abou Gaida, Jihad Darwiche, and Hala Bizri.

Debate Club: Raji Saiid.

Women's Day: René Otayek.

Editorial Committee of SAWA: Najla Khoury, Georgia Makhlof, Antoine Boulad, and Samia Boulad.

World Arabic Language Day: Sarah Chahine.

Reading sessions: Antoine Boulad.

Comic workshops: Lena Merhej, Barrak Rima, May Farra, Michèle Paulikevic, Maya Zankoul, Mohammad Alameddine, Stéphanie Khoury, Sandra Abou Jawdeh, Jihad Khatib, and Samandal.

ASSABIL also warmly thanks all of its volunteers.

Translation Club: Jamiu Abiola.

Philosophy Club: Mohamad Matar.

Arabic poetry recitation: Hassan Mokdad, Lorca Sbeity and Ali Sabbagh

Fundraising Committee members: Michèle Wardé, Dina Zouein, Ziad Bou Alwan, and Antoine Boulad.

SPREADING CULTURE FOR EVERYONE

In 2025, ASSABIL continued to expand its mission of making culture accessible to all by reaching communities across Lebanon through mobile outreach, public festivals, and institutional partnerships. Through innovative cultural programming in rural areas, large-scale public events in Beirut, and sustained support to libraries outside the capital, ASSABIL reinforced its commitment to inclusivity, social cohesion, and equal access to reading and creative expression. The following initiatives highlight the diverse strategies implemented to ensure that culture remains a shared public right rather than a privilege.

The Mobile Library “Kotobus”

In 2025, ASSABIL continued the implementation of the Kotobus Mobile Library, with the support of CPS–GIZ, reaffirming its long-standing commitment to ensuring access to culture, reading, and creative expression for communities without public libraries. As a mobile cultural and educational platform, Kotobus reached underserved rural areas across Lebanon while remaining responsive to the evolving needs generated by economic hardship, displacement, and instability.

Building on previous phases, the project maintained long-term engagement with the same six partner villages across Mount Lebanon, the North, the South, the Chouf, and the Beqaa. This continuity allowed the initiative to move beyond introductory outreach toward deeper community ownership, sustained participation, and programming increasingly shaped by local needs and interests.

Strengthening Community Engagement Through Culture

At the start of the project cycle, Opening Days were organized in each partner village to relaunch Kotobus activities and reconnect with residents. These events created a festive and inclusive environment through cultural performances, games, and recreational activities, while participatory surveys helped refine workshop themes and book selections based on community feedback.

Throughout the year, Kotobus conducted 108 mobile library visits (18 per village), engaging children, youth, and adults in storytelling, reading promotion, puppet shows, music, arts, games, and cultural activities. A total of 3,500 participants benefited from these visits, with women and girls representing approximately 60% of participants. During this period, 1,700 books were borrowed, and an additional 1,500 books were donated to the villages as permanent resources, strengthening sustainability beyond the project timeframe.

Creative Workshops & Cultural Clubs

The project implemented 12 creative workshops across the six villages, covering diverse themes such as handicrafts, soap-making, dairy production, culinary arts, music, drawing, macramé, creative writing, and movie screenings. These workshops provided psychosocial relief, encouraged intergenerational participation, and supported women’s empowerment through practical skills—some of which offered income-generating potential.

In parallel, five cultural clubs were established, including reading, cinema, and environmental clubs. These clubs created ongoing spaces for collective cultural engagement, dialogue, and community-led initiatives, reinforcing the project’s long-term impact and local ownership.

Educational Outreach in Beirut

In addition to rural outreach, Kotobus activities extended to Beirut through 10 educational workshops held in ASSABIL’s public libraries. These sessions reached 180 children from marginalized backgrounds, combining reading, storytelling, drawing, music, and psychosocial support. The libraries thus functioned as safe and inclusive spaces for learning, emotional expression, and well-being.

Adapting to Crisis & Responding to Emerging Needs

The Kotobus project demonstrated strong adaptability during periods of crisis. During the outbreak of war in late 2024, activities were temporarily redirected to shelter schools hosting displaced children. This rapid adaptation ensured continuity of cultural and psychosocial support and reinforced ASSABIL’s ability to respond effectively to emergency contexts while remaining aligned with its cultural mission.

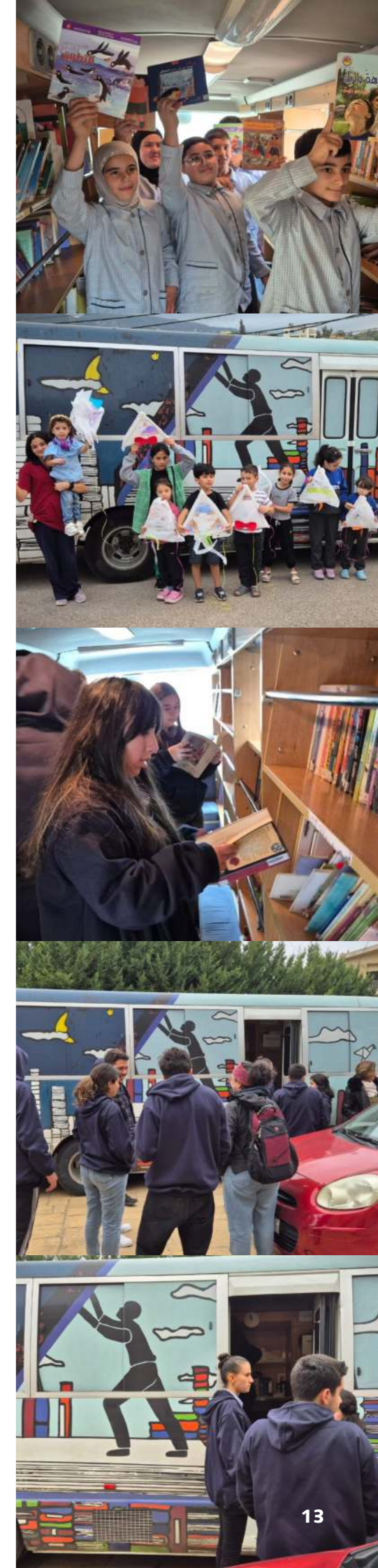
Final Gathering & Collective Recognition

The project concluded with a final event in Beirut that brought together participants from all six partner villages. Creative outputs from the workshops were showcased through exhibitions and performances, celebrating community achievements and strengthening connections between rural communities and the capital.

Impact & Outlook

Women played a central role in the project’s success, both as participants and cultural facilitators, contributing to strengthened social cohesion and peacebuilding at the community level. Through long-term engagement, the establishment of cultural clubs, and the donation of books, Kotobus reaffirmed its value as a flexible, inclusive, and sustainable model for cultural outreach in Lebanon.

Kotobus remains a flagship initiative in support of ASSABIL’s mission to make culture accessible to all, bridging geographic, social, and economic divides through reading and creativity.





Horsh Beirut Festival – 8th Edition (2025)

In September 2025, ASSABIL organized the 8th edition of the Horsh Beirut Festival, transforming Horsh Beirut into an open and inclusive cultural space through a rich and diverse program. Supported by the Field Support Services Project (FSSP), funded by the Government of Canada, and implemented in collaboration with the Municipality of Beirut, the festival remained free and accessible to all. Over three days, the program featured live music concerts by Jahida Wehbe and Al Kamandjati, theatrical performances including *Mjadra Hamra* by Yehia Jaber and *Grandfather's Tale about Lebanon* by Teatrino Beirut, puppet theater by the Lebanese Puppet Theater – Khayal, circus and clown shows by Cirquenciel and Clown Me In, a poetry evening in tribute to Palestine, as well as storytelling sessions, creative and environmental workshops, exhibitions, guided walks, a book corner, and local craft and food markets. The festival welcomed an estimated 5,000 visitors, with 22% attending Horsh Beirut for the first time, fostering positive interaction across communities and reinforcing the role of culture in reclaiming public space and strengthening social cohesion. The festival also benefited from the strong engagement of volunteers and the National Education Scout, whose support contributed significantly to organization, welcoming the public, and ensuring a safe and smooth flow of activities throughout the event.



Supporting Libraries Outside Beirut

ASSABIL continued its support for public libraries in various regions by funding different activities, training staff, and donating books. In 2025, ASSABIL was able to collaborate with the following libraries:

- Ansar Library in the Nabatieh district
- Barja Library in the Chouf district
- Mansoura Library in Western Bekaa
- Al-Houla Library in Al Burj al Shimali Camp
- Ghassan Kanafani Library in Beddawi Camp

Additionally, ASSABIL donated books to several public and school libraries as listed below, with the total number of donated books reaching 7,000:

Zouk Public Library, Nabichit Public Library, Baakline National Library, Rachaya El Fikhar Public Library, Barja Public Library, Bekfaya Public Library, Abadiah Public Library, Ghassan Kanafani Public Library, Beit el Yatim Obey Library, Youth German School, Beirut Annunciation Orthodox College, Collège Mariste N.D. de Lourdes Jbail-Amchit, Maahad el Arabi School, Chakib Erslan Public School, Antonine International School, Maison Centrale, Modern University for Business & Science (MUBS), University of Sciences and Arts in Lebanon (USAL), Montessori School, Lebanese prisons, UOB Library, Citronnier Nursery.



This festival reminded me that Horsh Beirut is not just a park, it's a place where people can meet, feel safe, and enjoy culture together.

*Visitor
Horsh Beirut Festival*



SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

ASSABIL believes in strengthening its role as an actively engaged association through the programs that it organizes and by networking with other associations rooted in their communities.

Reading into Peace

In 2025, ASSABIL continued the implementation of the Reading into Peace project, funded by UN Women through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). Building on progress achieved in 2024, the project focused on strengthening women's leadership, decision-making, and peacebuilding capacities in marginalized communities across Beirut, the South, the North, and Palestinian camps.

Implemented as part of ASSABIL's commitment to make public libraries safe, inclusive, and trusted community spaces, the project supported women and youth to engage more actively in civic life, dialogue, and community-led initiatives. This work took place in a highly challenging context marked by conflict, displacement, and instability, reaffirming the role of libraries as anchors of resilience and social cohesion.

Strengthening Women's Leadership and Community Structures

Throughout the year, the project delivered a comprehensive capacity-building program that equipped women with practical skills in leadership, communication, negotiation, digital tools, mental health awareness, and community mobilization. 470 women participated across six library locations (Beirut, Mansoura, Baddawi Camp, Barja, Borj Chemaly Camp, and Ansar), reporting increased confidence, initiative-taking, and engagement in public and community spaces.

In parallel, specialized technical trainings strengthened the role of public librarians conducted by professional trainers (M. Naji Saiid, Rima Awarki, Mohammad El Mays, and Mind Navy Training Center), enabling them to act as facilitators, community connectors, and promoters of inclusive programming within their libraries.

A central pillar of the project was the consolidation of 6 Women's Committees established in Beirut, the South, the North, and Palestinian camps. In 2025, these committees transitioned from supported structures to increasingly autonomous actors. They organized meetings, identified local priorities, and implemented community activities rooted in women's lived experiences, such as: Parents' Anger Management, Importance of Psychological Communication, Women's Role in Decision-Making, Women's Sport Day, Creativity and Talent Development Among Women, Standards for Protecting Women and Girls from Exploitation and Abuse During Disasters.

During periods of conflict and displacement, Women's Committees in Beirut and Barja played a critical role in emergency response. They organized psychosocial support sessions and coordinated the distribution of essential kits for displaced women and children, demonstrating women's growing capacity to lead, respond to crises, and shape collective priorities.

Youth Dialogue and Civic Engagement

The project also strengthened youth participation through the establishment of youth debate clubs in four libraries: Beirut, Ansar, Burj al-Chamali, and Baddawi. These clubs provided structured spaces for 57 young people, particularly young women, to develop communication, critical thinking, negotiation, and public speaking skills.

The debate cycle culminated in a final public debate addressing gender equality and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, offering youth a visible platform to engage with national policy issues and practice constructive civic dialogue.

Change-Oriented Approach (COA)

In Barja, the project successfully implemented the full Change-Oriented Approach (COA) cycle. Women who had completed a Training of Trainers (ToT) led a participatory community workshop that brought together youth and community members to identify shared challenges and develop collective responses. The workshop aimed to identify key factors affecting youth life skills and to analyze the role of various societal actors in supporting self-confidence, communication, and social engagement among young people.

This process reinforced women's roles as facilitators, conveners, and agents of local change, while strengthening dialogue across generations and social groups.

Impact and Stories of Change

By the end of 2025, women and young women demonstrated increased confidence, leadership, and visibility in community and decision-making spaces. Women-led committees moved from participation to ownership, while youth, especially young women, gained legitimacy as active contributors to public dialogue and peacebuilding.

The establishment of a Women's Committee revitalized a previously struggling public library, transforming it into an active hub for leadership, psychosocial support, and community resilience, even amid periods of closure and renewed instability.

Outlook

In 2025, the Reading into Peace project strengthened sustainable pathways for women and young women to access leadership, decision-making, and peacebuilding roles. By investing in women-led structures, youth dialogue, and public libraries as inclusive spaces, the project created lasting platforms for civic engagement that extend beyond its formal duration.

In a context marked by uncertainty and crisis, the project reaffirmed the power of women's leadership, community ownership, and culture-based engagement as foundations for resilience, peace, and long-term social change.



Public libraries as dynamic community spaces: "Libraries, Leaders, and Cultural Planners of Community-Based Action" project supported by Secours Catholique/Caritas France

Promoting Community Participation, Dialogue, and Social Change

Public libraries play a pivotal role in enhancing active citizenship, particularly among youth, by providing access to information, resources, and educational programs. They serve as hubs for civic education, offering workshops, seminars, and resources that promote civic literacy, democratic values, and engagement skills:

The change-oriented approach (COA) has now become embedded in ASSABIL's work philosophy. This approach has deepened our understanding of our visitors and the community, helping us refine our mission to enhance social cohesion and support community well-being.

ASSABIL continued to support youth engagement in Active Citizenship (AC) initiatives. Two major youth-led projects were implemented:

Library Box in Horsh Beirut Public Garden – Designed and managed by local youth, this innovative initiative promotes reading, book sharing, and recycling. Volunteers participated in a capacity-building workshop to strengthen their understanding of civic responsibilities, public space management, and co-creation of community initiatives.

Intergenerational Activities at St. Georges Elderly Day Care – Twelve youth volunteers (aged 15–25) were trained in elderly care and cultural programming. Over seven weeks, they organized storytelling, games, sensory and music therapy, and creative arts for 26 elderly participants, fostering social inclusion, skill-sharing, and well-being. The program concluded with a folkloric celebration of the International Day of Older Persons.

The Vital Role of Volunteers

Our volunteer program has been and continues to be a tremendous success. Launched in 2022, this initiative is challenging, but after two years, it has demonstrated strong community support and belief in ASSABIL's mission. Our positive reputation encouraged 52 people of diverse ages to volunteer, knowing that their efforts were making a meaningful impact. This commitment to social change is successfully mobilizing individuals from our community and fostering a culture of social responsibility. Volunteers played a vital role in library operations, supporting the smooth functioning of all services. Volunteers managed the circulation desk during extended hours and weekends, organized and labeled books, sorted collections, and assisted in distributing books to partner networks. Additionally, they provided essential support in organizing and implementing all types of library activities.



EDUCATION AS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

Public libraries play a pivotal role in supporting education as a catalyst for development. More than just providers of free access to knowledge, they serve as inclusive learning spaces that bridge educational gaps and empower communities. In times of crisis, libraries become resilient hubs, offering resources, literacy programs, and a safe environment where individuals, especially youth and marginalized groups, can develop critical skills, seize new opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to societal progress. By nurturing a culture of lifelong learning, public libraries help lay the foundation for a more informed, engaged, and resilient society.

Educational Program in the Beirut Public Libraries: Empowering Young Learners Through Storytelling using library resources, with the support of Secours Catholique/Caritas France

For the fifth consecutive year, the Beirut public libraries have strengthened their role as key partners in the education sector through ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education and schools across the city. In 2025, the Beirut public libraries continued their Elementary Education Program, helping 44 children benefit from innovative, story-based learning. The program promotes language development in Arabic, English, and French, creativity, and critical thinking.

According to teachers and parents, 100% of participating children showed measurable progress, demonstrating the libraries' impact in fostering literacy and a lifelong love for reading.

The Public Library at the Heart of the Educational Process: A Long-Term Partnership Serving Schools and Their Communities:

In 2025, ASSABIL demonstrated a strong and sustained commitment to working with partner schools through a diverse range of educational and cultural activities. ASSABIL organized 51 school-focused activities, directly benefiting 1,200 students in 25 schools. These activities included 34 library visits and reading sessions, Human Library events, philosophical discussions, Francophonie Month encounters, and creative workshops such as Samandal comic's appreciation and creation activities, as well as events celebrating Arabic reading and poetry. In addition, ASSABIL supported schools through the distribution of book donations to school libraries, alongside the implementation of the elementary tutoring program. This sustained engagement reflects ASSABIL's commitment to fostering reading, critical thinking, creativity, and cultural exchange, while strengthening long-term partnerships with schools across Beirut.

My School Neighborhood Initiative

The initiative aimed to introduce students to the history and heritage of their city, strengthening their sense of belonging and civic engagement. Through this initiative, Grade 10 students explored the streets surrounding their schools, researched the origins of their names, and uncovered the cultural and social significance embedded within them. The project enhanced students' research capacities by engaging them in archival work and the review of documents related to street naming and the biographies of the personalities concerned. Implemented in collaboration with the Beirut Heritage Association, known for its rich archives and research in this field, the project culminated in the public display of a brief biography near the corresponding street sign, bearing the name of the participating secondary school, thereby informing passersby about the historical figure after whom the street is named.



Volunteering at the festival helped me gain confidence and meet people from different backgrounds. I felt proud to be part of something positive.

*Volunteer
Horsh Beirut Festival*



ASSABIL AT A GLANCE

The ASSABIL Association (ASSABIL) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1997 to establish and promote public libraries and open cultural spaces in Lebanon. By creating public spaces for reading and culture, ASSABIL vowed to fill a void following the Lebanese Civil War, thus responding to a “social necessity”. At ASSABIL, we envision an inclusive world where culture and knowledge drive individual development and social transformation.

ASSABIL's three libraries are open 7 days a week for visitors and members, regardless of any religious, race, age, or socio-economic considerations.

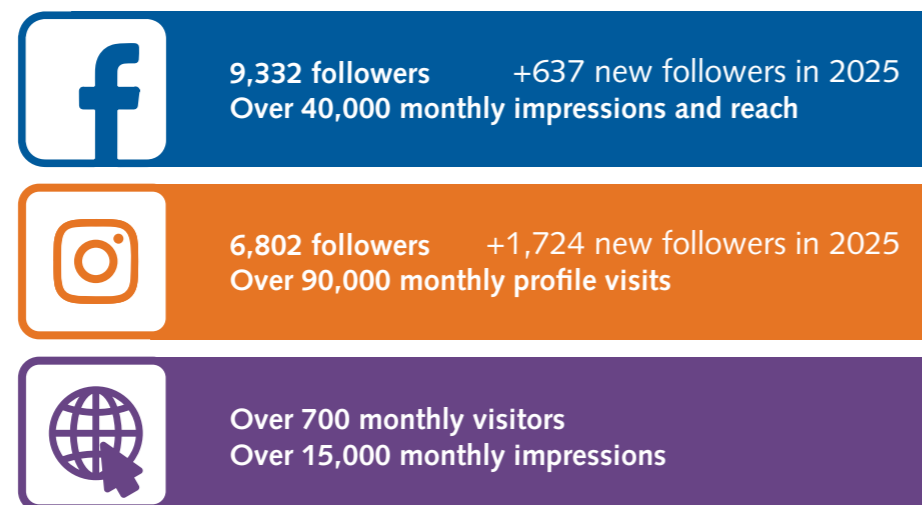
ASSABIL seeks to encourage people of all ages, religions, and socio-economic and educational backgrounds to benefit from library services. Our public libraries are a local gateway to information and knowledge, offering free access to around 50,000 books, magazines, and online resources.

The Bachoura library was the first to be established in 2001, followed by the opening of libraries in Geitawi-Jesuit Garden (2004) and in Monnot, close to the USJ campus (2008). ASSABIL is commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut to manage and operate the municipal public libraries in the neighborhoods of Bachoura, Geitawi, and Monnot. The year 2008 also witnessed the launch of the mobile library, Kotobus, which mainly serves remote public schools and non-formal education centers in need.

Communication and Visibility

In 2025, the association significantly expanded its presence across social media platforms compared to previous years, accompanied by a clear increase in audience engagement. This growth was driven by targeted communication and media strategies developed and implemented throughout the year, including projects, campaigns, and initiatives designed to reach wider and more diverse audiences.

The association also achieved strong and measurable engagement through the public's active interaction with digital content, as well as participation in activities and events organized both inside and outside the libraries. These efforts contributed to enhancing the association's visibility, expanding its outreach, and strengthening its connection with the community and its mission.



Financials

Annual budget: 400,000.00 USD

Donors: Secours Catholique–Caritas France, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Djeliya Internationale, FSSP, COBIAC, AFAC, BookAid International, Boghossian Foundation, Ambassade de France au Liban, UN Women, Hypco, and Wardé Foundation.

In addition, many individual supporters have made contributions through ASSABIL's online donation platform and through direct, in-person contributions.

Book donors: publishers, institutions, and private individuals.

Partners: Nadi IkolNas, Himaya, Liqaa (Jesuit Garden Neighborhood group), Tripulley, Beirut Heritage Association, Idrac, Al Kamandjaty Association, Samandal, Mouvement Social, and Nahnoo.

We express our heartfelt thanks to all institutional and individual supporters whose commitment sustains and strengthens our mission.



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