



TRANSFORMING LIVES STORIES

Female Vocational Training Students Tackle Gender Biases in Lebanon

USAID/CSP Scholarship Program Opens Doors for Women in Male-Dominated Sector



Bouchra Bahrei, taking the electronics module under the Repair & Maintenance of Industrial Machinery Vocational Course at Tamkeen Institute

“I feel that by proving many people wrong by succeeding in this course, other women will hopefully take a step forward in this sector too.”

**Bouchra Bahrei,
USAID/CSP
Scholarship Recipient**

“Long-standing gender biases are prevalent throughout Lebanon, which place significant barriers to women in accessing the labor market,” stated Sara Ibrahim, a 30-year-old vocational training student and recipient of a USAID scholarship. In fact, the country has one of the highest overall gender gaps in the world (ranking 145 out of 153 in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2021), and amongst the lowest rates of women’s labor market participation, hovering at 29% for women against 76% for men. To address this, the workforce development component of USAID’s Community Support Program (CSP) encourages women to participate in traditionally male-dominated sectors as part of its efforts to improve the employability skills and create job opportunities for some 1,000 Lebanese individuals,

As a former science teacher in Tripoli, North Lebanon, Sara is aware of the importance of tackling the biases in society. “I never accepted the limits placed on women here,” she shared, “I wanted to challenge myself even further so I decided to take this course to show that women can also succeed in this sector.” She is one of six women who are currently undertaking the recently initiated Repair & Maintenance of industrial machinery (R&M) vocational course at CSP’s partner, Tamkeen Vocational Institute in Tripoli. “The process did not differentiate between men and women; it even encouraged us to apply – which was great to see!” she said. “By making this course accessible to us, USAID/CSP is giving us the opportunity to challenge and change these longstanding perceptions.”

Bouchra Bahrei – a 25-year-old scholarship recipient who is equally enrolled in the course – always dreamed of following in her father’s footsteps as an electric engineer, but she was often discouraged: “They used to tell me that women cannot work in this sector, that it is too dangerous for us, and that I would never succeed in it,” she declared, “Now that they see what I am doing in this course, they have become much more supportive.” Similar to Sara, Bouchra paid little notice to the limitations imposed on women: “I find it normal that we can work in this domain, even though still too few may believe it.” Once she completes her course, Bouchra will make use of these newly acquired skills to support her father and his business: “He is very proud of what I am achieving through this vocational training, and has become confident that I will be able to work by his side to run the workshop, and perhaps take his place when he eventually retires.”

“One person cannot change the perceptions of the entire country,” Bouchra humbly declared, “but can always contribute towards it.” As the eldest of five daughters and a son, she is already seeing the impact she is having on her younger siblings, “My sisters have become inspired. I hope to remove the limits for them to follow their dreams, regardless of their gender.” Sara also sees her potential to inspire other women to aspire to greater things: “Teaching is in my blood, and I would love to encourage future generations to believe in themselves and take part in whichever domain they wish.”