



STUDENT EMPOWERMENT, ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION IN LEBANESE UNIVERSITIES

StEER-Leb

Self-Assessment and Need Analysis (SANA) Report





Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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Introduction

This report is elaborated within the frame of the EU co-funded project “StEER-Leb: Student Empowerment, Engagement and Representation in Lebanese Universities”. The StEER-Leb project’s main objective is to boost student empowerment, engagement and representation infrastructures in Lebanese universities.

For more information about the project: www.steer-leb.eu

In order to provide Lebanese universities with resources, tools and capacity building activities that match their needs and expectations, the first year of the project was dedicated to the need analysis. This preparatory phase was composed of two work packages: **Work Package 1**, entitled “**Self-Assessment and Need Analysis**” and **Work Package 2** that consists of **Shadowing Visits** in European universities, namely the University of Cadiz (Spain), the University of Rouen (France) and the University of Bologna (Italy).

The online survey, drafted within the frame of the first work package, has been disseminated among Lebanese universities and 1010 responses have been collected. The survey was open to all universities in consultation with the Directorate General of Higher Education in Lebanon.

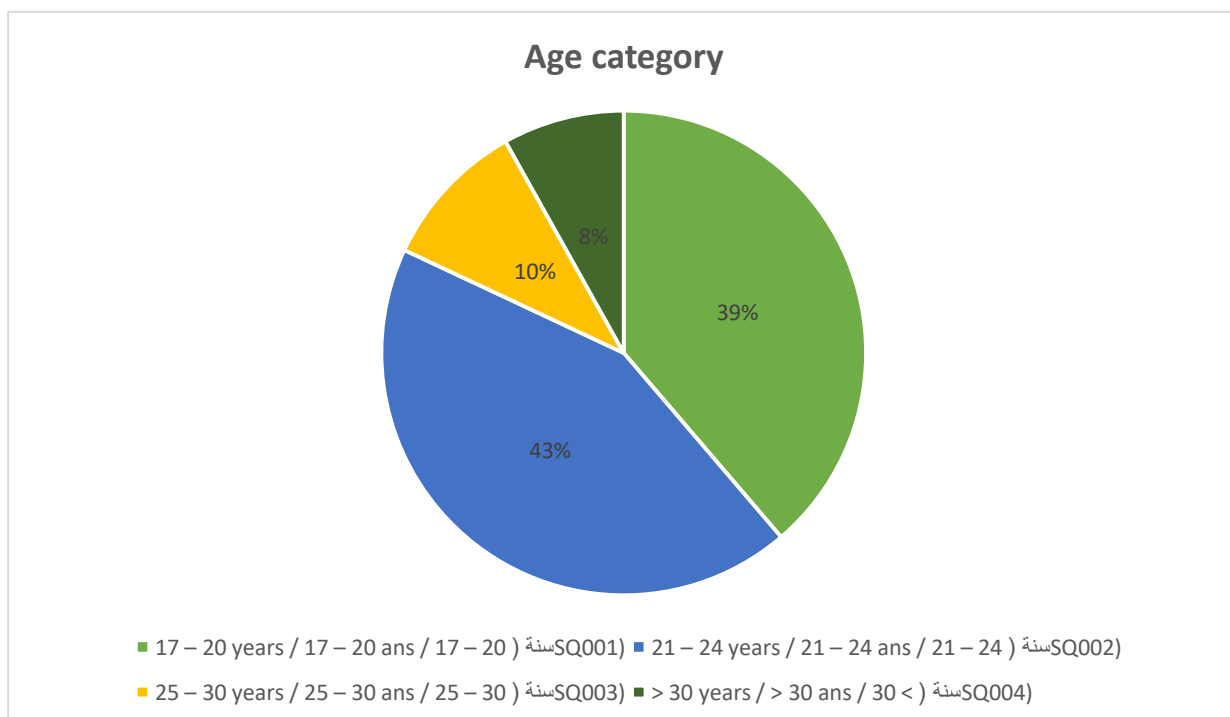
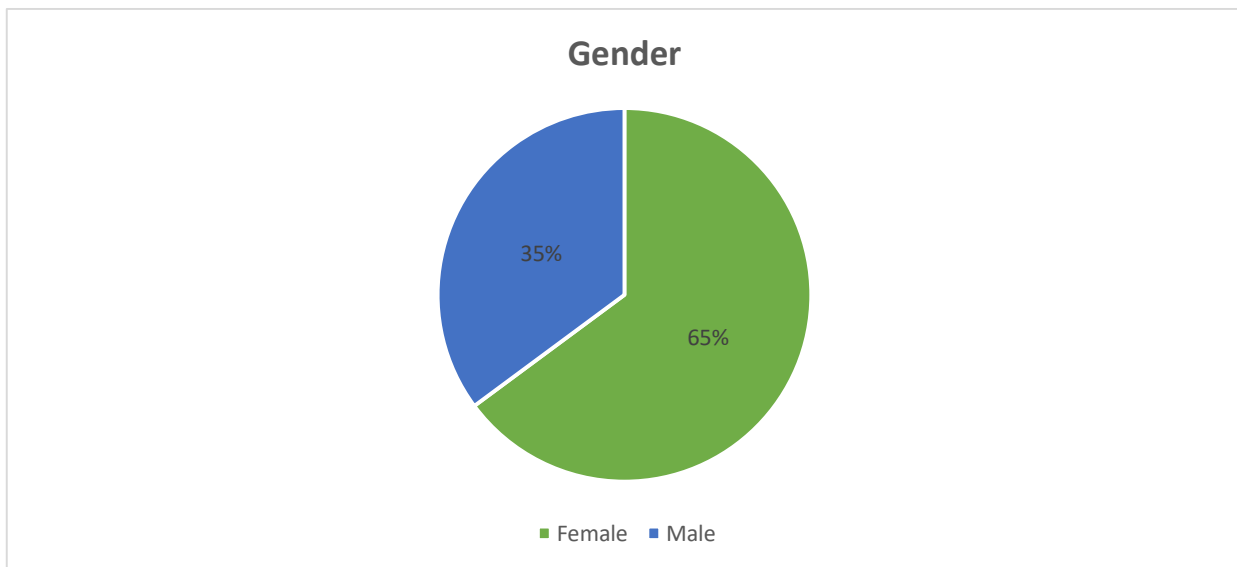
This report aims at presenting the results of the online survey. For a pdf version of the survey, please refer to “Annex 1: SANA Survey”.

Fruitful debates and discussions have been also conducted during the elaboration of the survey and within the frame of the shadowing visits. The shadowing visits organized in the three pre-mentioned universities have been a great opportunity for both EU and Lebanese students and staff to exchange about the existing structures and practices in their countries. The results of the second work package have been a great added value to analyze the results of the survey and prepare the future activities of the project.

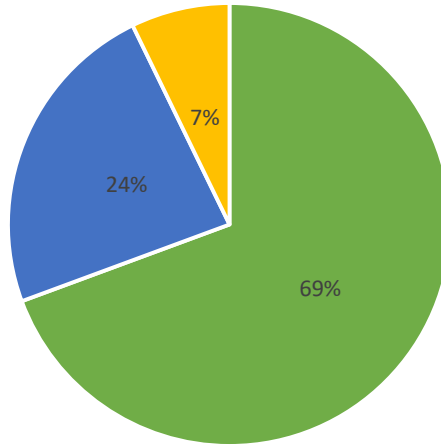
The current situation in Lebanese universities has been analyzed according to four axes:

- 1- Existing structures and programs to support student engagement and representation
- 2- Student influence on Universities’ decisions
- 3- Engagement and motivation of students
- 4- Expectations of students

Preliminary Remarks: Profile of Respondents

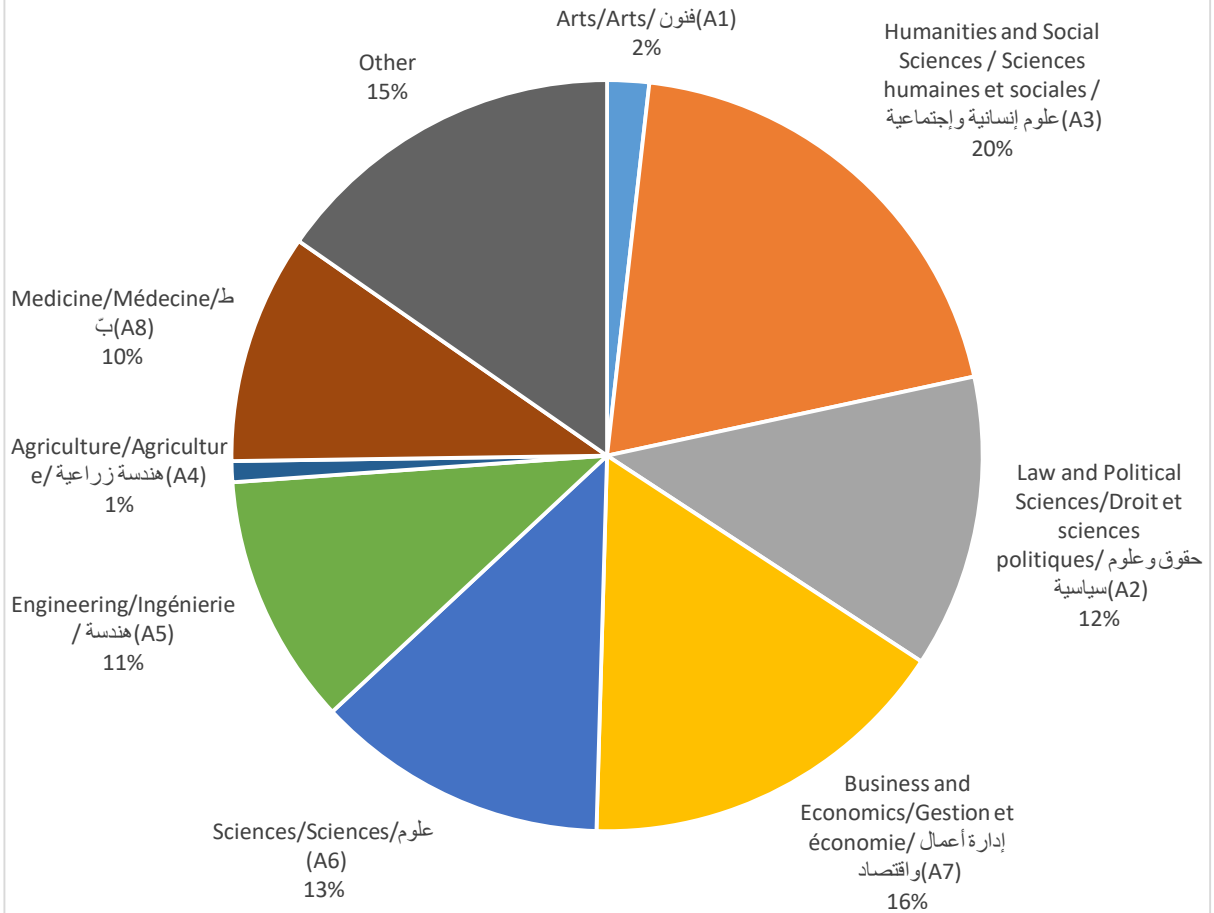


Cycle of Studies

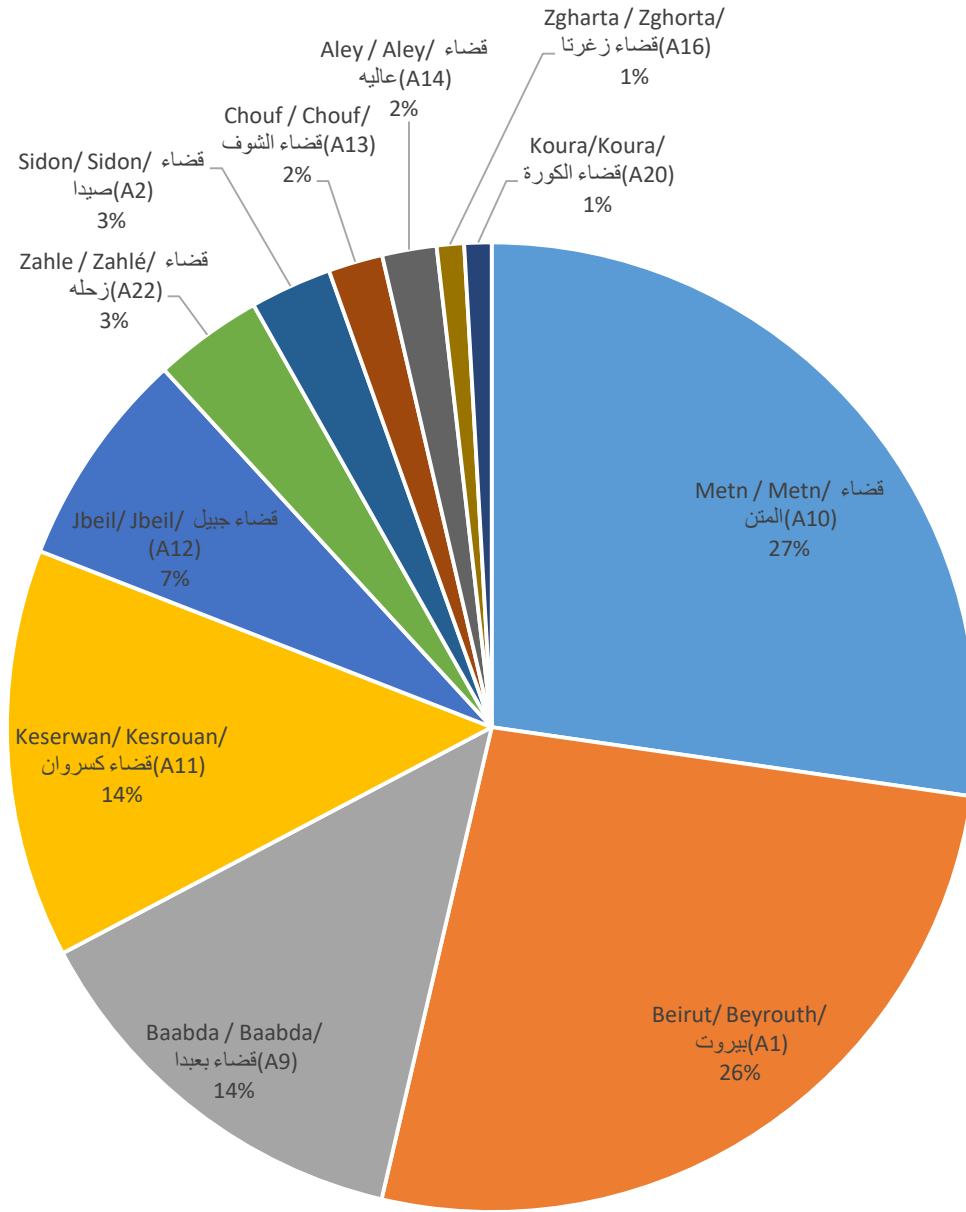


- Cycle 1 (Licence, Bachelor, Undergraduate, etc.) / Cycle 1 (Licence, Bachelier, Premier Cycle, etc.) / (إجازة المرحلة 1: SQ001)
- Cycle 2 (Master, Graduate, etc.) / Cycle 2 (Master, Deuxième cycle, etc.) / (ماستر المرحلة 2: SQ002)
- Cycle 3 (Post Graduate, PhD, Doctorate, etc.) / Cycle 3 (Postuniversitaire, PhD, Doctorat, etc.) / (دكتوراه المرحلة 3: SQ003)

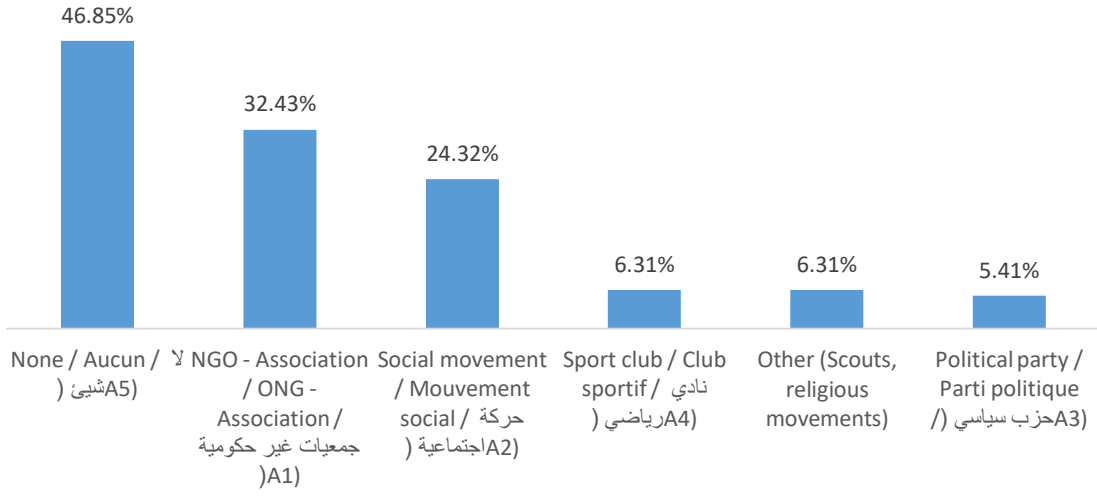
Faculty/Major Faculté/Spécialisation الكلية/الاختصاص



Region of residency: Région de résidence: : محلّ الإقامة

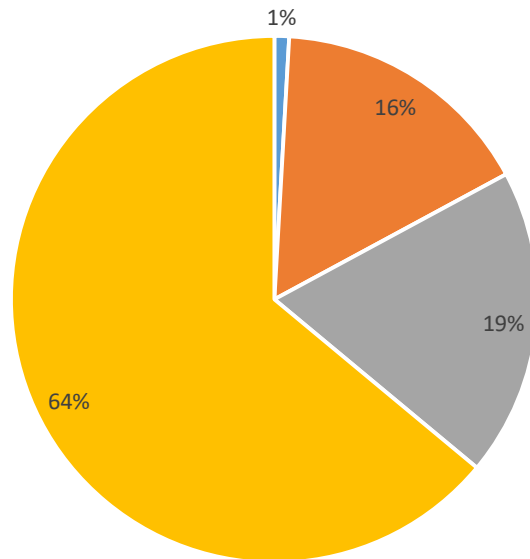


Outside the university, are you a member of: En dehors de l'université, êtes-vous membre de: خارج الجامعة، هل أنت منتسب (ة) إلى:



Are you currently employed? Exercez-vous actuellement une activité professionnelle? هل تعمل/تعملين في الوقت الحالي؟

- No answer / Sans réponse / لا جواب (SQ004)
- Yes part-time / Oui à temps partiel / بدوام جزئي (SQ002)
- Yes full-time / Oui à temps plein / بدوام كامل (SQ001)
- No / Non / لا (SQ003)



1) Existing structures and programs to support student engagement and representation

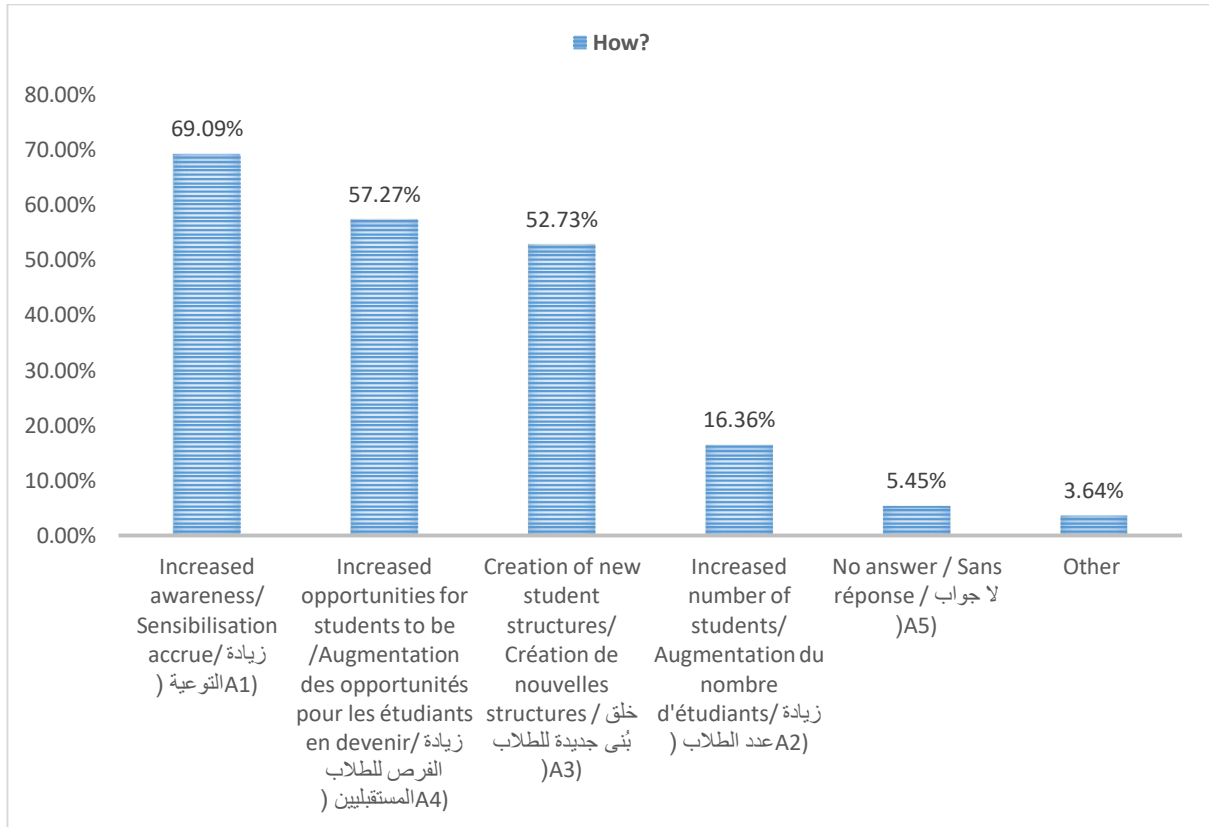
Through the online survey and the shadowing visits, existing structures and programs that aim at supporting student engagement and representation have been identified. Lebanese universities are more and more committed to increase student engagement through the development of new representation policies and student facilities, structures and programs. Lebanese universities are integrating student representation and participation in their strategic plans and priorities, especially in the current international context. Student representation is a requirement of many international accreditations and it is important to note that an increased number of Lebanese universities are developing their quality assurance policies and are now engaged in accreditation procedures with international agencies. This international standard also contribute to the creation and development of the identified structures.

Below are the main structures and programs that exist in Lebanese universities:

- **Students Offices:** Student offices are university units or departments which provide student support. Their mission is to ensure the students growth and development during their academic experience. These offices can include Admissions Office, Registrar Office, Student Affairs Office, Social Service Office, Careers Office, Psychological Counselling Office, International Affairs Office, and many more. Their objective is to improve the experience of students at the university, from their arrival until they graduate (and even after through the Alumni offices). Student offices provide support on different levels: academic, professional, social, cultural, etc. They contribute to the quality of the learning experience and the academic success of students. An important role of student services is to prepare students for active participation in the society.
- **Student councils:** Student councils (or senates, unions, government, cabinet, etc.) are composed of student representatives who represent university students. The student council is the voice of the student body and its mission is to share students' ideas, opinions, and concerns with the university's administration. It also aims at organizing specific activities and programs for students. Council members are usually elected. In Lebanon, members may be also nominated or selected after a draw but in all cases, they would be volunteers. The existence of student councils should ensure the participation of students in the university governance.
- **Student clubs:** Student clubs (or societies, organization, associations, chapters) are structures operated by students. Clubs provide university students with opportunities to organize and participate in activities and interact with peers. Through these clubs, students learn to be involved and work with each other, balance their academics with organizational and volunteer commitments, and work for others to achieve desired goals and develop specific skills. There is a wide variety of clubs focused on different interests: academic, sport, civic engagement, community services, culture, politics, religion, etc. Student clubs are recognized by the university and operate according to the university by-laws and clear regulations.
- **Representative structures of political parties:** Those structures aim to represent political parties in university campuses where students can present their political views in order to cause political, environmental, economic, or social change.

- **Committees and class delegates:** The purpose of committees and class delegates is to voice the views, suggestions and concerns of the students in an appropriate manner to the concerned units at the university.
- **Action groups:** Groups of students who organize activities/actions on specific topics. This structure is not officially created such as the case of student clubs. They could be temporary created for specific actions or projects.
- **Simulation programs:** These are programs that engage students in co-curriculum activities that enhance civic engagement. E.g.: Model United Nations, Leadership programs, Young Arab Voices, UNESCO clubs, etc.
- **Courses and programs to encourage student engagement:** These programs are included in the curriculum and elaborated by the university to encourage student engagement. They include civic engagement courses, internships in NGOs, final projects related to sustainability and society needs, etc.
- **Competitions:** Competitions are events/activities organized either solely by the university or by the university and international partners which tend to reward winners at the final stage. Competitions can be organized in various fields.
- **Student initiatives:** Student initiatives are limited-duration projects or activities run by students. Students initiatives are also punctual actions of students to raise awareness or consult other students about a specific topic: social media campaigns, polls, online voting, etc.
- **Pastoral care services:** Structures and services established to support all pastoral and social activities, namely liturgical celebrations, spiritual accompaniment, conferences, spiritual retreats, pilgrimages, humanitarian and social activities, socio-cultural outings, scout movement events and sports activities.
- **Athletics Sports:** Athletics sports include sports activities, outings, competitions on and off campus that can be in collaboration with sports institutions and organizations.
- **Tutoring centers:** Tutoring centers are centers where senior students provide academic support to other students. Tutoring is usually a one-on-one system, however, group sessions can also be also organized.

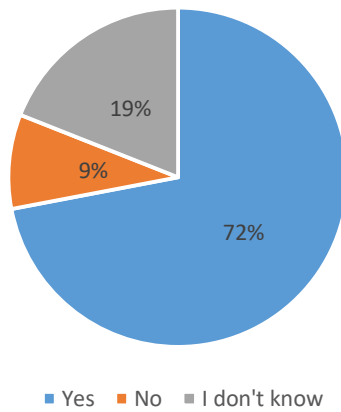
According to the survey's results, students are aware of the existence of the structures in their university. However, being aware of the existence of structures and policies does not mean that students are aware of the modalities of participation. Communication and information about the modalities of participation and benefits of participation could be improved. The lack of details about the existing programs explains somehow the low participation of students.



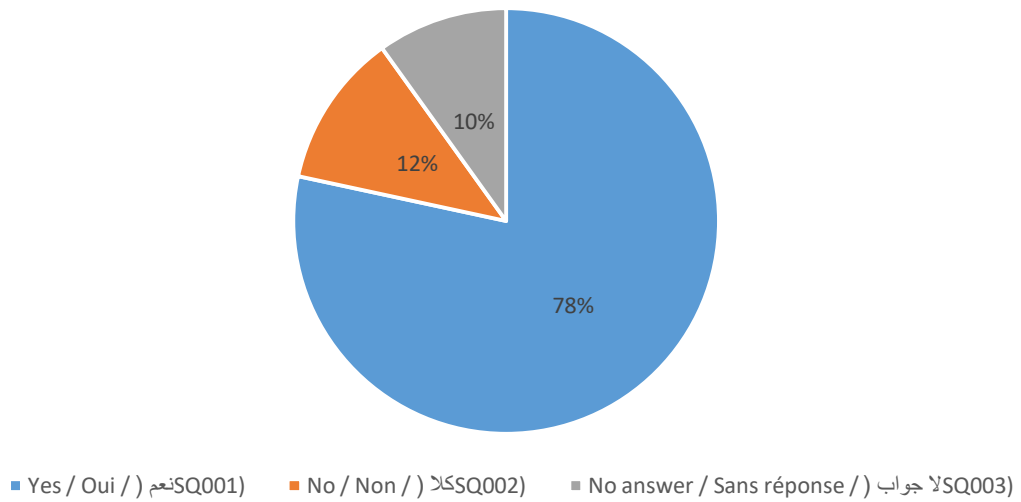
In addition to communication, the content of the structure also explains the lack of participation of students. Even if students recognize the commitment of their university to increase student engagement and representation, they do not feel well represented or are not committed to participate in the representation system. Encouraging student representation is not enough if the proposed system does not match students' expectations. Even if the respondents are aware of the existence of a representation system in their universities, a majority of them do not feel themselves represented and are expecting a better system of representation.

Creating structures and programs is a first step but this does not guarantee the participation of students. The existence of programs and structures are the basis of student representation and engagement, however, modalities, regulations and communications are necessary pillars of participation in order to offer opportunities that match students' needs and expectations.

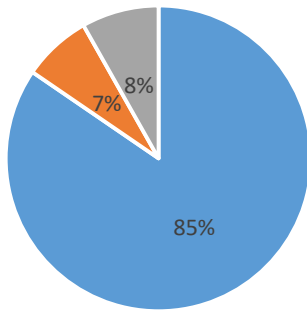
Does your university have a policy to ensure student representation?



To your knowledge, does your university encourage a strong student engagement and participation?

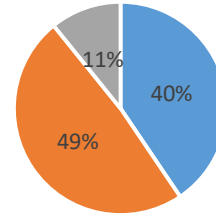


In your opinion, should the student representation at your university increase?



- Yes / Oui / نعم (SQ001)
- No / Non / كلا (SQ002)
- No answer / Sans réponse / لا جواب (SQ003)

In your opinion, regardless the modality of representation, do you consider yourself represented?



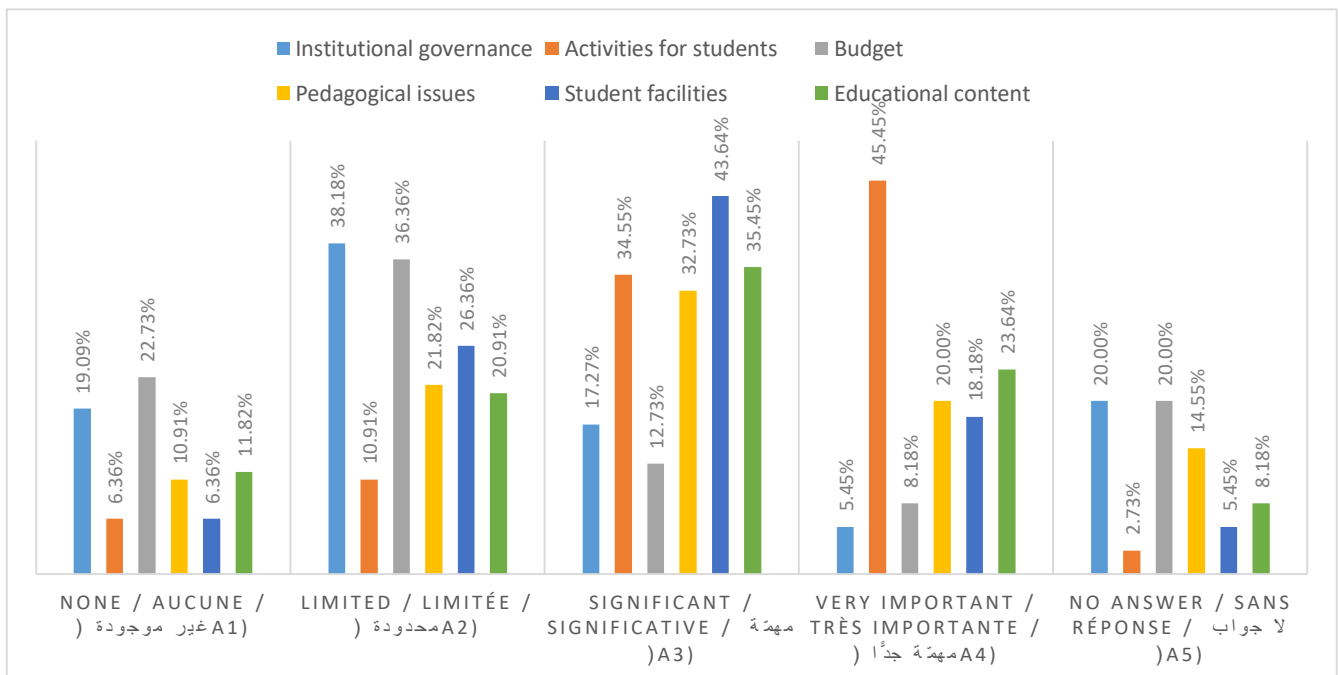
- Yes / Oui / نعم (SQ001)
- No / Non / كلا (SQ002)
- I don't know / Je ne sais pas / لا أعرف (SQ003)

Universities cannot expect to increase student representation and engagement only by creating structures and programs. They also need to encourage the participation and provide students with the needed resources and skills to be active.

2) Student influence on universities' decisions

If students are aware about the representation policy in their university, they consider that they do not have a significant influence on the university governance and budget. On another hand, they consider that they have a better influence on the educational content, pedagogical issues, and student activities and facilities.

Influence of students on university decisions (perceptions of students):



Students perceive that their voices and expectations are taken into consideration by their university, however, they think that they have a limited role in the decision making process and structures of the university. Students' opinions are mainly gathered through "feedback surveys" and "online consultations" and a limited number of higher education institutions are including student councils in the governance of the university (participation in the university board meeting, right to vote for major decisions, inclusion of students in academic and administrative councils, etc.).

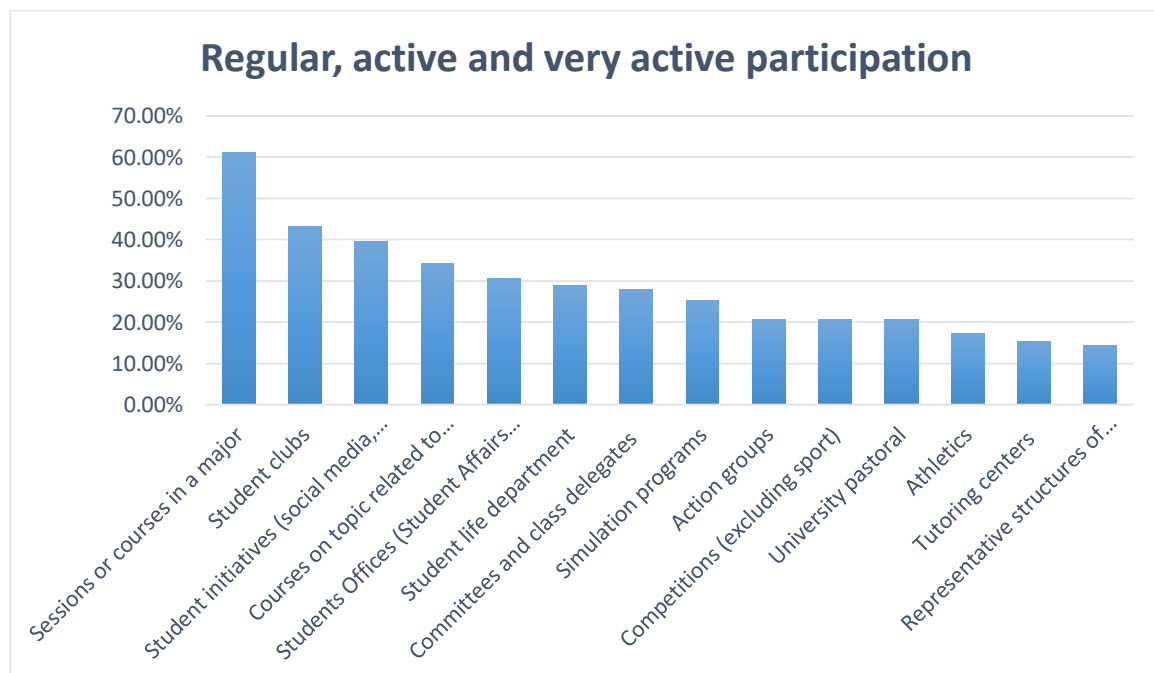
To ensure the participation of students in the university governance, the most common practice is the creation of student councils/senates. The selection procedures of students should be transparent and democratic in order to ensure their credibility among the student body.

3) Engagement and motivation of students

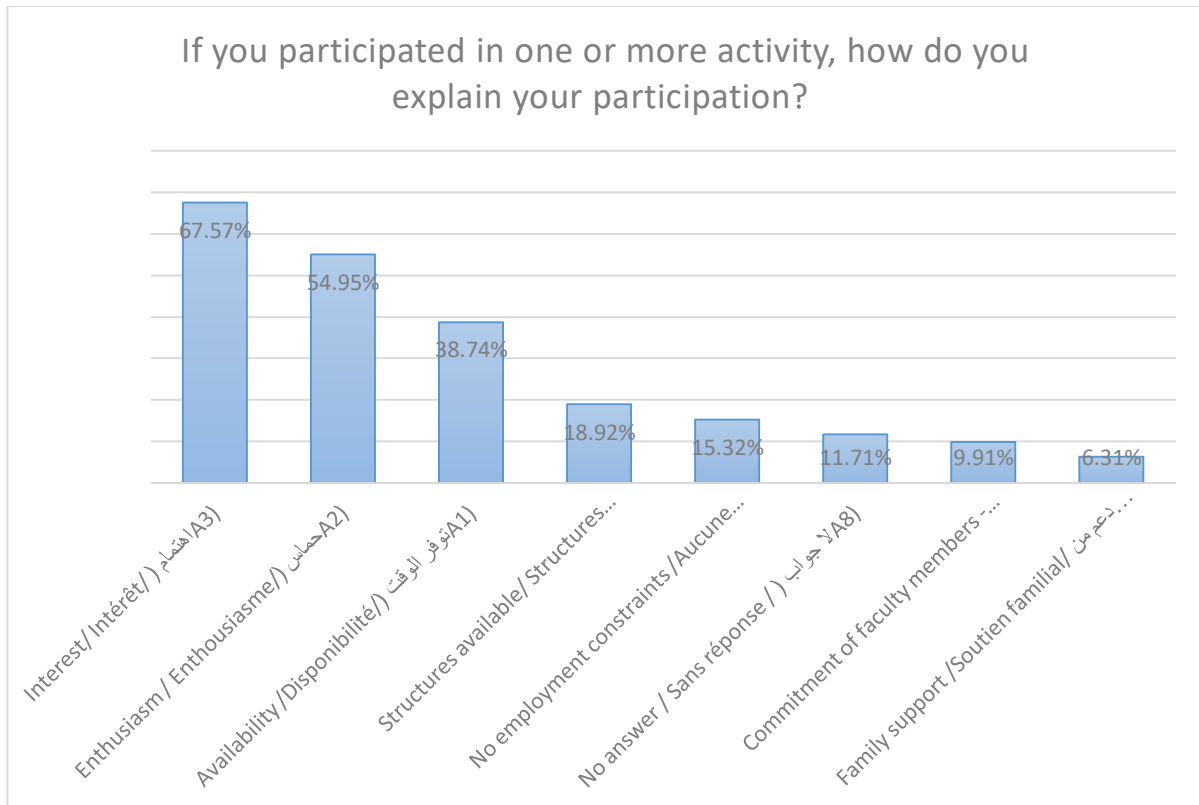
The participation of students is the main challenge identified by higher education institutions, not only in Lebanon but in Europe too. This is a common challenge and the StEER-Leb project aims at supporting universities to address this obstacle and increase the participation and the engagement of their students.

Students are mainly participating in specific activities related to their field of studies or personal interest.

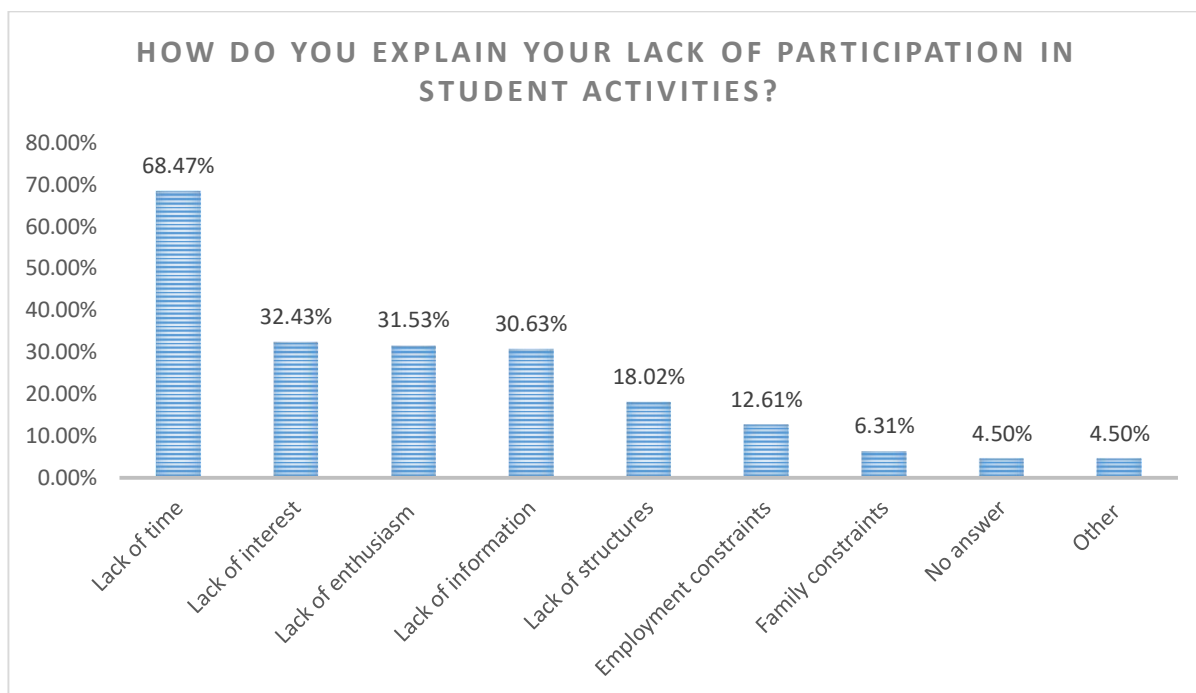
According to the survey's results, students mostly participate in sessions about a course in a specific major. This can be explained by the fact that this participation is part of their curriculum and does not require the allocation of extra time. The second most popular structure is the student club. Students are more motivated to participate in structures focused on a specific topic, related to their field of study for instance.



The reason of the higher participation of students in student clubs is confirmed by the question related to the motivations of students. The main motivation for students is the interest and the enthusiasm for the proposed program and activities. Student clubs are usually created and managed by students and the activities developed are consequently addressing students' needs and expectations.



Students who are not participating in the identified structures and programs mainly explain their non-participation due to a lack of time. The main challenge for universities is consequently to provide students with a favorable environment in order for them to spend more time on campus and perceive their engagement as an added value, and increase students' interest in clubs and students' activities and programs. During the shadowing visits and the conducted debates, the lack of time has been discussed and analyzed. Students who use this reason to explain their non-participation prefer to spend their free time for other activities, outside the campus. The lack of time is strongly linked to the lack of interest and enthusiasm for the suggested program and activities.



By offering programs that are more in line with student expectations, universities will be able to encourage a higher number of students to participate. Providing students with opportunities to develop their own programs, activities and events contributes to increasing their engagement. Universities are consequently encouraged to increase students' autonomy.

4) Expectations of students

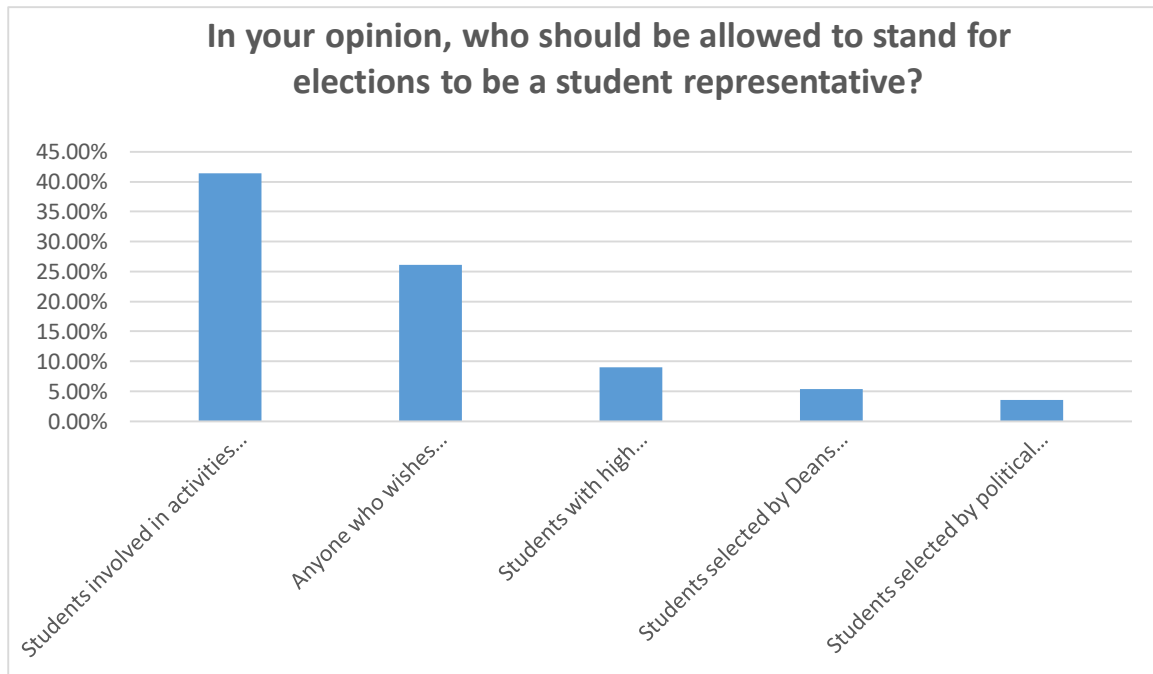
As mentioned before, student representation could be improved through the development of systems which are more in line with students' expectations. Four criteria should be taken into consideration:

- Type of the representation system: council, senate, committee, etc.
- Level of representation: institutional, academic unit, department, program.
- Modality of representatives' selection: elections, nominations, draws. The main challenge is to ensure the transparency of the selection system.
- Responsibilities and duties of representatives: role in the decision-making process and university governance, agendas, feedback and communication with students, etc.

The survey allowed to identify that the representation systems in place in Lebanese universities are not matching the expectations of students. Consequently, through the future activities of the project, students and staff will work all together on the four above mentioned criteria.

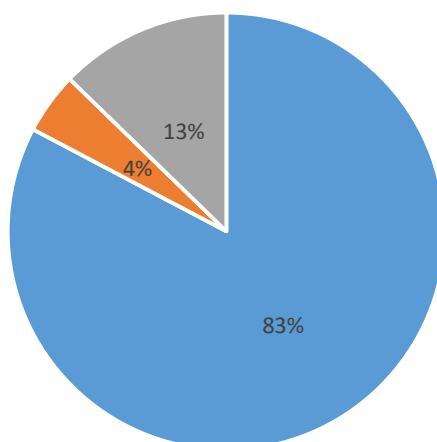
As mentioned during the preparation of this project, one of the main challenges of student representation in Lebanon is related to political clashes and the involvement of political parties in elections and student representation systems. However, the conducted survey shows that students are rejecting the system of having representatives selected by political parties.

- 5) This analysis, in addition to the debates organized during the shadowing visits, confirm that students expect apolitical structures and programs. Students are also expecting to have increased opportunities to participate in activities that are related to their field of study and to their personal interest.



The higher education system in Lebanon accounts for more than 40 institutions, with a remarkable level of competition between them. Except the Lebanese University, all institutions are private and the level of cooperation between them is limited to a few institutions. Consequently, students from these institutions are not used to meeting and working together. However, students are ready for more cooperation and joint activities. Students from Lebanese universities face common challenges and interests. 83% of respondents are favorable to the creation of a national structure to represent students at the national level.

In your opinion, should a National Student Representation Structure exist?



■ Yes/ Oui/ نعم (SQ001) ■ No /Non/ لا (SQ002) ■ I don't know /Je ne sais pas / لا أعرف (SQ003)

Conclusions

Through the survey results and the debates organized during the StEER-Leb activities, several challenges and needs have been identified in terms of students' representation and engagement.

The participating universities are all committed **to increasing and improving student engagement, representation and empowerment**. During the visits organized to other Lebanese universities, the same commitment has been observed.

Students are expecting **structures that address their needs and interests**. Universities should provide them with **more autonomy** through the management of their clubs and councils to develop **agendas and activities that are matching their interests**. Providing students with more opportunities and more autonomy will increase **the trust** within the university community: between **students and the administration** and between **students and their representatives**. During the shadowing visits, student representatives highlighted the lack of credibility of the representation system. They regularly face critics and remarks from the student body: lack of legitimacy, lack of concrete power and influence, lack of action, etc. This is confirmed by the survey, despite the existence of student councils and representatives, **students do not feel themselves represented**. Universities should support student representatives on this matter by providing them with **resources, skills, and a real role in the university governance**. Universities must enable and empower students to develop a student life run by students for students.

Results of the survey, combined with the results of the debates organized during the shadowing visits, contributed to identify the main needs to increase student engagement, representation and participation. The capacity building activities will be elaborated according to the below roadmap:

- A) **Developing clear procedures and structures of representation and engagement:** As mentioned in this report, the existence of structures and programs is a first step. The project

aims consequently at supporting universities to develop efficient structures and ensure student participation (modalities, by-laws, budgets, spaces, etc.).

- B) **Raising awareness among university students:** Being involved and participating in the student life is a real added value for students. This is part of their university experience.
- C) **Recognizing students' engagement:** Participation is based on volunteering and activities are conducted during the free time of students. During the needs-analysis phase, the importance of recognition has been highlighted by all partners. However, a good balance should be determined between a rewarding system and a symbolic recognition: Recognition should not be the motivation of student engagement.
- D) **Developing students' soft skills:** Students highlighted that they need to acquire specific skills to be more engaged in student life: management skills, communication skills, public speaking skills, etc. This project aims at developing training sessions for students to develop these skills to enable them to manage clubs, organize events, conduct campaign and increase their credibility.

Capacity building activities will include trainings and workshops for both students and staff members. A training manual will be elaborated, based on these activities' results in order to transfer the acquired skills, resources and tools to students and staff from other universities.

Finally, regular meetings and events of Lebanese students will be organized in order to build the basis of the National Structure. A crucial need for more cooperation between students at the national level has been clearly emphasized during the first phase of this project and the objective is to create the good conditions to create such a structure.