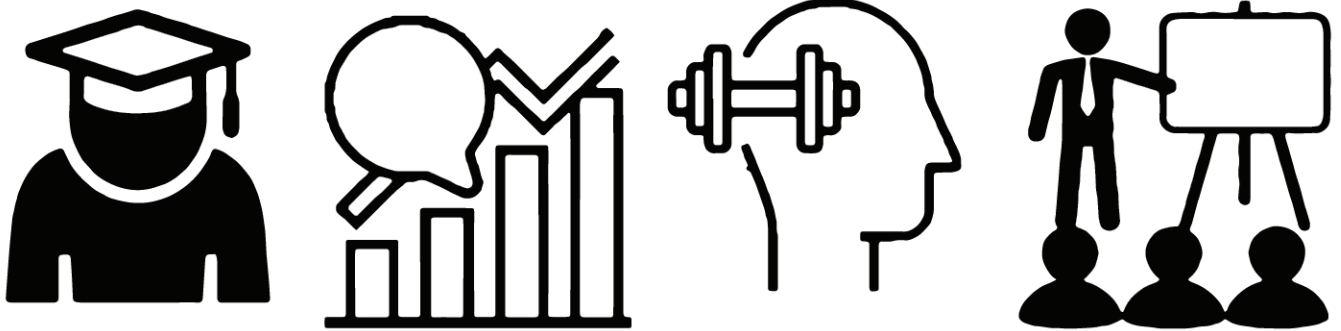




# Labor Market Survey in Lebanon

2021



*Implemented by Asmae Association in partnership with  
Association Najdeh under Fostering the Socio-Economic Inclusion  
of Vulnerable Youth*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This document was created as a result of an independent consultancy service designed to assess the Labor Market needs in Beqaa region within the framework of a project implemented by Association Najdeh who, with funding from Le Centre de Crise et de Soutien (CDCS) and through partnering with Asmae-Association Soeur Emmanuelle (Asmae), is planning and implementing a one-year project entitled “Fostering the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Vulnerable Youth (FSEIVY)” with the aim of promoting youth socio-economic empowerment and resilience in the Beqaa region, and notably refugee youth. The study was conducted during challenging times in Lebanon when unemployment rates have reached unprecedented percentages, driven by an economic crisis and repetitive lock-downs caused by the spread of COVID-19 virus. Despite challenges, constructive findings have been reached with the valuable contribution of key informants who have given their time and patience for an extensive data collection process that included surveys, meetings, and key informant interviews. Special thanks are due to the participating youth, enterprises, SMEs, vocational training centers, and NGOs who provided important insights. Last but not least, special thanks are due to the Najdeh and Asmae teams who facilitated the whole process and gave vital input.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>Asmae</b>	Asmae-Association Soeur Emmanuelle
<b>AUB</b>	American University of Beirut
<b>CAS</b>	Central Administration of Statistics
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>LMS</b>	Labor Market Survey
<b>LPDC</b>	Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee
<b>Najdeh</b>	Association Najdeh
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>PRL</b>	Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon
<b>PRS</b>	Palestinian Refugees from Syria
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
<b>SSN</b>	Social Safety Net
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
<b>VT</b>	Vocational Training

# LABOR MARKET SURVEY – BEQAA, LEBANON

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon has been recently hit by a series of events that have been negatively impacting all residents' lives and livelihoods, especially the refugees. Having weak infrastructure and an incapacitated government, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the Beirut port-blast in August 2020 brought the Lebanese economy and poverty rates to unprecedented levels. Although the socio-economic situation is shattering all across the country, regional disparities exist with areas such as Beqaa, having higher poverty and unemployment rates. The impact has been more severe on the refugees who face two main struggles: unemployment, or employment with exploitative working conditions in low-paying and low-skilled jobs.

Moreover, according to the American University of Beirut (AUB) Socioeconomic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (2015), women suffer more, with female Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL) being five times less likely to be employed. Additionally, a disproportional effect is noted on youth unemployment experiencing the highest unemployment rates among all age categories. Thus, efforts to direct youth to sectors where they have a higher chance to get employed have become a fundamental need which constitutes one of the main aims of this Labor Market Survey (LMS).

The study was initiated with an in-depth desk review followed by data collection that extended between 11 March 2021 and 17 April 2021. A mixed methodology was utilized, combining qualitative and quantitative data from mapped stakeholders. A mixed survey was administered to youth and NGOs, while interviews were conducted with vocational training providers, enterprises, and SMEs. A total of 146 responses were obtained.

### *Main Findings*

The findings of this assessment conclude the definite existing gap in employability in the Beqaa area, and notably among PRS and PRL, especially in terms of matching graduates' skills and knowledge with market needs. This is one reason why many youths work in a field different from their education, indicating a mismatch between what educational institutions are providing and what the market demands. Nevertheless, the main challenges facing youth and graduates lie within the country's economic and legal frameworks, with nationality being an added constraint. More opportunities seem to exist for Palestinians within the NGO sector than within the private sector due to the leniency NGOs exhibit.

Despite the above, seasonal opportunities do exist in Beqaa for daily semi-skilled workers. Although construction and commerce used to be the highest two employment sectors for Palestinians, one of the main sectors in Beqaa with growth potential are the Agriculture and Food Industry. Even amidst an economic recession, this sector may remain open as it produces necessities that help sustain the country. It is also worth noting that employment in agriculture (and construction) does not require a work permit.

The most mentioned skills in demand that can improve employability were interpersonal skills (mainly communication) and technical skills.

### *Key Recommendations*

With the skyrocketing economic, political and financial crises, potential sectors for refugee employment have grown scarce. However, based on this study, the following recommendations can be forwarded:

- To equip students/ graduates with soft skills, life skills, and interpersonal skills, including training them on CV writing, interviewing skills, communication, and business etiquette.
- To sign Memorandum of Understanding with workshops, agencies, companies, and NGOs to allow fresh graduates to conduct internships/ apprenticeship.
- To explore the possibilities of introducing innovative specialties through which the youth can work online (such as graphic design and social media marketing), promoting self-employment and opening up additional opportunities for them abroad.
- To consider establishing an employment platform that would connect youth to potential employers.
- To provide career guidance, counseling, and orientation to youth enrolled at UNRWA schools, with focus on grades 7, 8, and 9, directing them towards vocations needed by the market.
- To conduct a consolidated tracer survey tracking Palestinian refugee youth graduates of vocational training centers across Lebanon.

## II. FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEE YOUTH IN LEBANON

### 2.1 Background

After years of corruption, financial mismanagement, political instability, and an economic recession, the Lebanese economy spilled over into a full-blown crisis in October 2019, where massive protests all over the country called for change. According to UNHCR 2020 statistics, nearly 60% of the Lebanese population, 90% of Syrians in Lebanon, and almost 80% of Palestinians in Lebanon have either lost their income-generating possibilities or have had their salaries reduced. On top of the deepening economic crisis, fluctuating Lebanese to the Dollar exchange rate, and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic came the Beirut port explosion. In addition to being a humanitarian disaster, it brought additional economic shocks that reinforced the ongoing financial crisis that had already increased the headcount poverty rate, surging to 55% (UNESCWA, March 2021).

It is important to note that the situation varies on a governorate level. For example, the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) found that unemployment rates are generally higher in the North and the Beqaa. Leaders Consortium (2017) claim that the Beqaa has a 30% poverty rate and an 11% extreme poverty rate. In addition to that, Beqaa's share of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) distribution in Lebanon is barely 8% (Ministry of Economy and Trade, 2014), which can be translated to limited work opportunities in the region. These figures have become outdated and are expected to have gone much worse over the past year and a half. Nonetheless, they are a reflection of the dire economic situation in the once ever-green Beqaa Valley.

As much as the situation is difficult on the Lebanese population, it is even harder on refugees. According to the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC), over 174,000 Palestinian refugees and 42,000 PRS live in Lebanon where they suffer additional challenges on top of their refugee status, such as restrictions on their right to work, own property, etc. The number of PRL is set even higher by UNRWA to reach 475,075 (as of January 2019), out of whom around 9,460 reside in Wavel Camp (as of June 2018)<sup>1</sup>. Irrespective of the disagreement on numbers, there is a definite agreement on the restrictions facing Palestinian refugees on the type of jobs and industries they can be hired for, with 36% employed in elementary occupations such as agricultural laborers, sales and service workers, cleaners, etc. Other factors contributing to the unstable working conditions are the lack of employment benefits where 87% of employed PRL do not benefit from either sick or annual leaves. They also suffer from a lack of written contracts, with only 14% of the PRL labor force having an employment contract. Having only verbal agreements with employers means that employment could be terminated at any time without notice (UNRWA,

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<sup>1</sup> According to UNRWA, these figures do not claim to represent the actual number present in the country as some "refugees may have left over the years and UNRWA does not track the habitual movement of refugees out of its fields of operation".

2017) and compensation. Therefore, refugees struggle with unemployment and the majority of those employed are in low-paying and low-skilled jobs that are usually subject to exploitative working conditions.

According to the American University of Beirut (AUB) Socioeconomic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (2015), women suffer more, with female PRL being five times less likely to be employed. Regionally, in 2015, the PRL poverty headcount rate was already at 60% in the Beqaa with unemployment at its highest there. Moreover, a disproportionate effect was noted on the unemployment of youth who experienced the highest rates of unemployment among all age categories.



*Figure 1: Overview of the Economic, Political, and Legal Situation facing PRL in Lebanon*



## 2.2 Economic Framework

Lebanon is a country exposed to an ongoing social and economic deterioration. With the constant depreciation of the country's local currency value, the current financial and economic crises have led to an inflation of market prices, thus decreasing the purchasing power of households and disabling them from meeting their day-to-day needs; even those who are assisted by international organizations' programs. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a pivotal role in the further deterioration of the economic life of refugees in Lebanon and their employability. Ever since the outbreak, approximately 90% of the Syrian population and 80% of the Palestinian population residing in the country have either lost their potential source of income or encountered a reduction in their salaries. With quasi-absent state institutions and the absence of proper governance, the Global Pandemic has come to expose further the absence of safety nets and economic insurance for refugees in Lebanon.

De facto, such dire socio-economic circumstances set the refugee community holistically at additional risks of losing their jobs or not getting employed in the first place. Concurrently, the situation leads to an increase in the numbers of illegal employment – an already existing trend in this context. Consequently, refugee women and children are at further risks of exploitation, possible trafficking, forced labor/child labor, and all forms of violence. Additionally, the low-paid jobs maintained by refugees barely enable them to secure their basic needs. As a result, and according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), around half of the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon (approximately 57.7%) is economically inactive, with a comparable percentage in Beqaa (58.4%).

Moreover, as a result of the legal restrictions on their employment, the same report indicates that Palestinians work predominantly in the private sector with a percentage reaching 86%. UNRWA and civil society organizations attract a larger share of females. Finally, the study reflected that, due to the nature of the Lebanese economy, 56% of the Palestinian labor force work in construction (23%) followed by commerce (27%) while only 2% work in hospitality, although it was a booming sector. As for gender, sectoral discrepancies exist whereby women tend to be more present in the education and health sectors while construction and commerce are male dominant.

According to UNRWA's Survey on the Socio-economic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015, the primary source of income for PRL is self-employment at 41%, followed by wage labor at 37.8%, and UNRWA assistance through the social safety net (SSN) program at 33.5%. Additionally, formal employment for Palestinian refugees is strictly limited by the underlying laws regulating refugee affairs. Therefore the phenomenon of financial indebtedment is largely common among the community – making Palestinian refugees further vulnerable.

While many PRL and PRS are struggling with unemployment, most of those who are employed are involved in low-paying and low-skilled jobs that most of the time expose the individual to harsh, exploitative and dangerous working conditions. Except for the "white collar" occupations, professions of all types mirror poverty rates of over 50%. Socially, it is important to note that refugees have started adopting food-related strategies focused on reducing purchase costs through buying lower priced

and lower quality food, thus food with a poorer nutritional value. Therefore, a lack of a reduction in the economic income has resulted in unhealthy and damaging coping strategies.

### **2.3 Political Framework**

Politically, the refugee crisis has had a long history in the Lebanese context. While Palestinian refugees have needed support and suffered from different challenges and discrimination since their first influx in 1949, the Syrian crisis that erupted in 2011 has also taken its toll on the Palestinian community and overall political dynamics. Lebanon became home to the largest number of refugees per capita relative to its total population, putting a severe strain on its fragile infrastructure, economy, and security. Years of political deadlocks, corruption, and bad governance have culminated in the apparent spiraling Lebanese state. Nevertheless, what remained constant across the years is the presumption of the Lebanese government that granting Palestinian refugees their civil rights will lead to their nationalization.

Making matters worse, President Trump abruptly announced in 2018 that his administration would no longer fund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), reversing a policy of support by every American president for over 70 years in an attempt to put additional pressure on Palestinians to make a deal with the Israelis. While some donors like Canada, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates stepped in to offset part of what the United States cut, UNRWA reduced its services in light of funding deficiency, hurting a vulnerable population who in the international community's eye was not considered citizens of any nation.

### **2.4 Legal Framework**

Lebanon has a long-standing ambiguous legal framework for addressing refugees in general. It has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its accompanying 1967 protocol, and the Palestinian cause is treated indifferently. The primary instrument that governs employment in Lebanon is the Labor Law of 1946, in addition to governmental decrees and decisions issued by the Ministry of Labor as well as customary practices. Both the laws and practices are unjust when it comes to the employment of PRL.

In essence, the Lebanese Labor Law protects foreign employees' rights and grants foreign employees the same rights as Lebanese employees at the termination of their employment, subject to reciprocity in the employee's country of origin and the employee having obtained a work permit from the Ministry of Labor. Noting that the law of reciprocity cannot be applied to the Palestinians, they were initially deprived of working in 72 professions in Lebanon. Moreover, work permits valid for one year are expensive to the Palestinians and are often avoided.

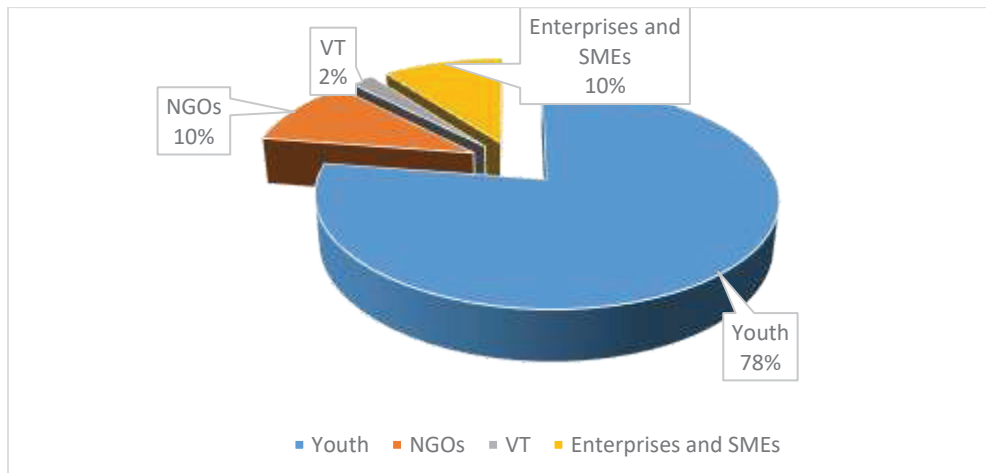
In early 2005 the Lebanese Ministry of Labor introduced an amendment to Lebanon's labor law affecting Palestinian refugees, opening the way for Palestinian refugees to work in a number of previously restricted fields, such as clerks and security guards. Nevertheless, conditions for employment in certain professions (having Lebanese citizenship for ten years and reciprocity) remained unchanged. Accordingly, liberal professions that are part of syndicates have not been required to amend their bylaws. Therefore, in practice, PRL continue to be prohibited from employment in at least 39 professions. PRL are not allowed to work in 22 professions in the healthcare sector (including medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, psychology), three professions in engineering (including agricultural engineering and typography), two professions in the public sector and law (including law and public service), five professions in transport and fishing (including teaching car driving and coastal navigation and fishing), three professions in the services and day-care (including opening or managing a nursery), and four professions in other fields including public accounting and tourist guiding. Concurrently, Palestinians who stood to benefit from the amendment are still required to obtain a work permit from the relevant ministry and pay the required fees. Moreover, the decision did not rectify the discriminatory situation affecting Palestinians in relation to social welfare benefits whereby Palestinian refugees are required to contribute to Lebanon's social welfare programs but are unable to claim any benefits.

As a result, a big part of PRL and PRS employment in Lebanon remains illegal with no contracts, with wages below the official minimum wage rate, and with no access to benefits (sick leave, annual leave, end-of-service indemnity...). Refugees also face differential treatment in the workplace and a lower chance of accessing better-paid positions. They are paid less than their Lebanese colleagues who practice the same profession and execute the same tasks.

### **III. LABOR TRENDS' ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

This LMS was initiated with an in-depth desk review with two aims; first, ensuring that duplication is avoided and complementarity maintained with existing research and second, to help refine the data collection tools if needed. Key documents were reviewed as listed in Annex B. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that little information was found on the labor market trends focusing on the Beqaa region and on the Palestinian refugee context.

Following, data collection was extended between 11 March 2021 and 17 April 2021. A mixed methodology was utilized, combining qualitative with quantitative data from mapped stakeholders. A mixed survey was administered to youth and NGOs, while interviews were conducted with vocational training providers, enterprises, and SMEs. A total of 146 responses were obtained.



*Figure 2: Distribution of Consulted Stakeholders*

An effort was made to outreach to employment agencies. However, according to some who informally provided their input, the area rarely uses the services of such agencies due to both parties' (employer/employee) unwillingness to pay the fees.

For NGOs, a database of 266 organizations working in Beqaa valley was compiled and the survey link was sent to them by email. Unfortunately, only eight responded. The LMS team interviewed seven more to raise the number to 15.

For enterprises and SMEs, a list of 51 companies was shared by Najdeh. Unfortunately, more than half of the contacts did not answer or refused to participate in the study. Nevertheless, after extended efforts, the LMS team succeeded in obtaining responses from 15 enterprises and MSMEs.

For the youth, sampling mainly relied on convenience sampling based on stakeholders' willingness and ability to participate. Such sampling was conducted in coordination with Najdeh and Asmae. Nevertheless, noting that the project focuses on three areas in Beqaa – Wavel camp, Saadnayel gathering, and Bar Elias gathering – the youth sample was stratified as shown in the table below to total 100, with 80% females and 20% males. In total, 113 responses were received, out of which 67% were females and 33% males.

*Table 1: Planned Sample versus Responses Received*

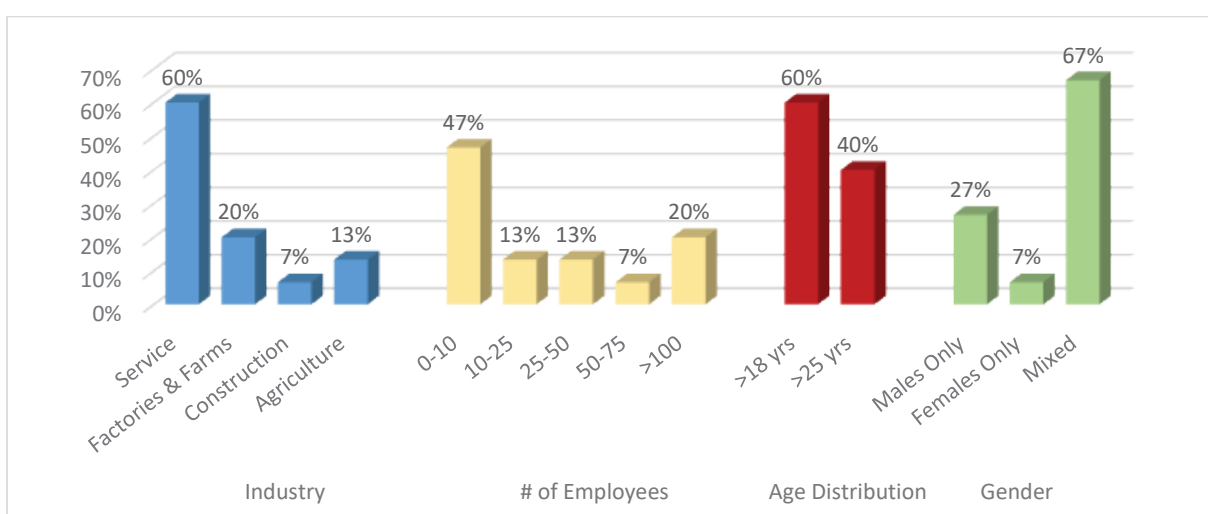
Area	PRL			PRS			Syrian			Lebanese			Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Target: Wavel Camp – Sample distribution	18	5	23	8	2	10	1	0	1	1	0	1	35
Reached: Wavel Camp	19	6	25	5	3	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
<b>Variance</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Saadnayel & Bar Elias Sample distribution	42	10	52	4	1	5	2	1	3	4	1	5	65
Reached: Gatherings	24	16	40	9	6	15	5	2	7	14	4	18	80
<b>Variance</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-4</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-13</b>	<b>-15</b>

## IV. LABOR DEMAND AND MARKET TRENDS IN THE BEQAA

### 4.1 From the Perspective of Enterprises and SMEs

#### 4.1.1 Sample Profiling

Despite many refusals to participate, 15 enterprises and SMEs working in Beqaa Valley were interviewed. Of those, 9 work in the service industry, 3 in factories and farms, 1 in construction, and 2 in agriculture. The majority employ less than 10 employees and from the age group of 25 years and above. While only 4 employ males only, the rest have employees from both genders. Nevertheless, the majority employ Lebanese only.



*Figure 3: Profiles of Consulted Enterprises and SMEs*

### ***4.1.2 Recruitment Facts***

60% of interviewees stated that they rely on personal connections for recruitment, while 40% rely on social media. Additionally, few rely on word of mouth (20%), referrals (13%), recruitment agency support (13%), and advertising (7%).

When recruiting for professional jobs, the majority look for education and experience (40%) or mainly experience (27%). Other factors considered include nationality, computer skills, and other skills such as communication and sales. As for unskilled and semi-skilled labor, experience is the leading factor sought out (27%), followed by personal skills and basic literacy. Some consider as well personal characteristics (willingness to learn fast), nationality, equipment expertise, computer skills, and technical degrees.

### ***4.1.3 Gaps and Challenges***

When asked about the sectors where employment is demanded in Beqaa, the majority (60%) pointed to the agriculture and food industry sector, while other sectors mentioned included poultry and farming, technology, manufacturing (including plastic), engineering, personal care and home services, and trade. As for the gaps in skills among employees, 40% mentioned soft skills, such as communications, teamwork, and customer service, while others mentioned a problem in youth commitment and willingness to work hard. To 53% of the interviewed enterprises and SMEs, the greatest challenge that faces youth employment nowadays is the economic crisis and their inability to offer job opportunities. Other challenges mentioned included the low salaries offered (27%), the lack of experience and effort to accumulate experience (20%), with few mentioning additional factors such as the lack of opportunities to be well educated, the lack of career guidance, the lack of hope, and the lack of job security.

When asked if they would hire non-Lebanese, 53% indicated their willingness to do so, 13% refused to and an equal percentage said only if they have to, 13% indicated that they might if the worker is legal, and 7% indicated that they would give preference to Lebanese workers.

## **4.2 From the Perspective of NGOs**

### ***4.2.1 Sample Profiling***

15 NGOs filled a survey either online or through direct interviews to fill in the questionnaires. 33% of the surveyed NGOs work in the Health sector, 33% in the Child Protection Sector, 33% in Vocational Training and Career Counseling, and 27% work in Gender Based Violence and Women Empowerment. Concurrently, few work in Shelter, Detention, Capacity Building, Psychosocial Support (PSS) and Case Management, Education, and the Environment.

Majority of surveyed NGOs (53%) work with Syrian refugees (including PRS), which indicates some shift in support. 33% stated that they work wherever there is a need, while only 13% indicated that they work with PRL.

#### ***4.2.2 Recruitment Facts***

Many NGOs face a high turnover rate reaching 80% at times, especially that their employment is often project-based.

#### ***4.2.3 Gaps and Challenges***

When asked about the sectors where employment is demanded in Beqaa, 40% pointed to social work, 27% to psychology, and another 27% to health-related fields. Other sectors mentioned include legal, engineering, childcare, data entry, finance and accounting, agriculture, and education especially with the prevalence of online schooling. As for skill-gaps, 40% mentioned that what is more important is having prior experience, while another 40% identified skills-gaps in soft-skills, such as communication and dealing with others. Other gaps identified included computer and digital skills, English language, writing skills, case management, and facilitation skills.

60% of the NGOs surveyed are willing to employ non-Lebanese, which reflects a wider acceptance of refugee employment within this sector than the private sector. As for challenges facing the youth today, NGOs pointed to the economic crisis and the lack of employment opportunities (67%), followed by the lack of experience, lack of orientation and counseling, irrelevant education and experience, discrimination, Wasta (reliance on acquaintances), and drop-out.

### **4.3 From the Perspective of Vocational Training Providers**

#### ***4.3.1 Sample Profiling and Offerings***

Three Vocational Training (VT) providers operating in Beqaa area were interviewed, with one having over 35 years of experience. The degrees offered by these centers varied to include agriculture, computer, languages, handicrafts, media and advertising, personal care, hospitality, graphic design, accounting and marketing. Graduates are of mixed nationalities, with decreasing numbers following the pandemic. To determine majors, the centers mainly post their offerings and check demand. They also try to balance student needs with the needs of the market.

With the current situation, they do not update their courses, neither in terms of content nor in terms of specializations offered, and especially courses that are certified by the government. Moreover, it has become harder for them to operate with the limited funding and youth's inability to pay.

When asked about tracing graduates to check employability, only one of the three centers indicated that it does so.

### 4.3.2 Challenges

According to the VT centers, youth face lack of job opportunities caused by the instability in the country, the economic crisis, and the lack of production plants which usually take a large number of employees. Two of the three centers believe there is no gender discrimination and females have equal employment opportunities while the third center believes that females have less chances due to cultural constraints that view a female’s main role as becoming a housewife.

## 4.4 From the Perspective of Youth

### 4.4.1 Sample Profiling

113 youth filled in the electronic survey that was circulated via WhatsApp mainly through Najdeh. The majority of the sample was female PRL having a university education and falling within the age-group 18 to 22 years.

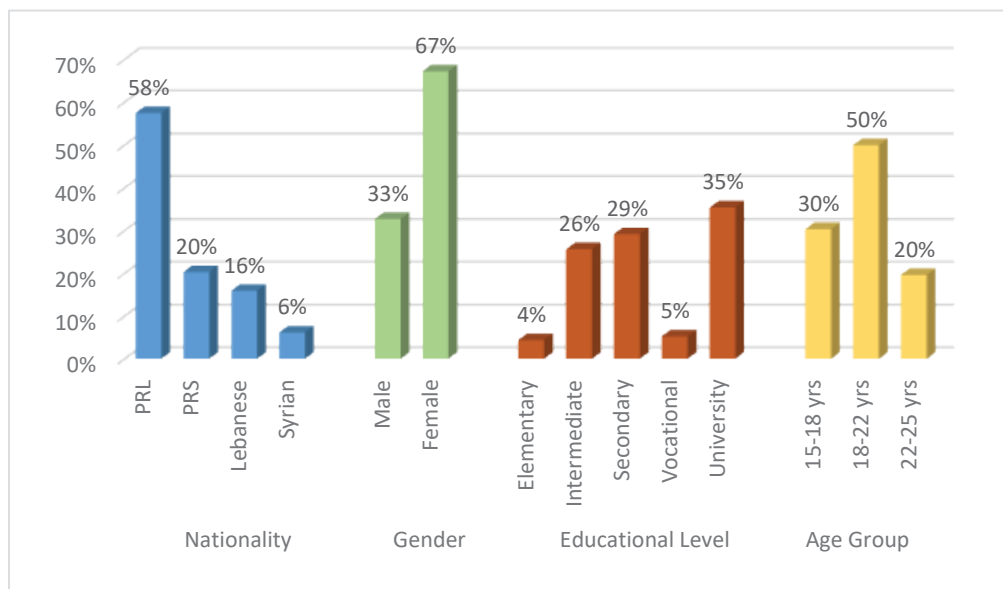


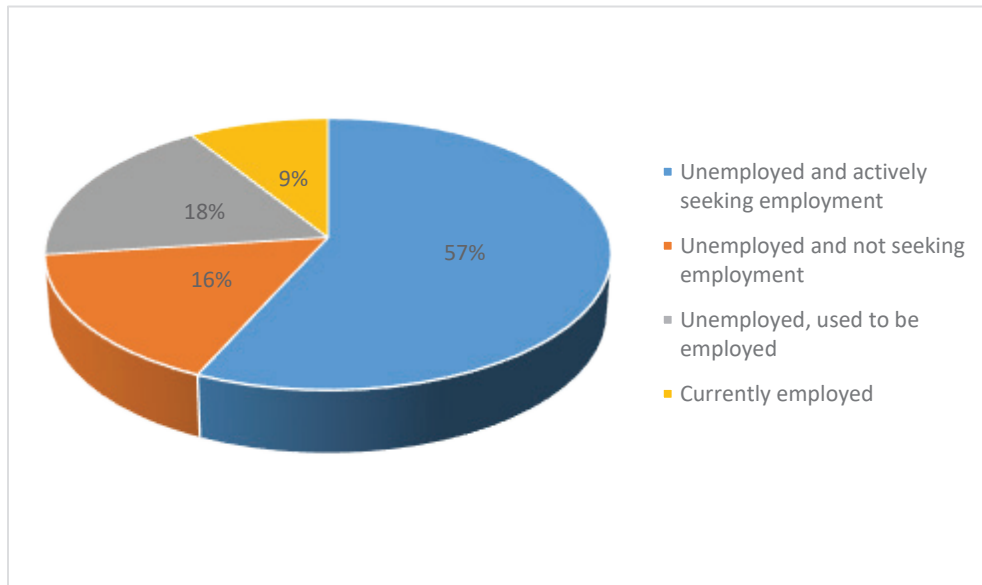
Figure 4: Profile of Surveyed Youth

### 4.4.2 Employment Status and Facts

The vast majority is unemployed and actively seeking employment with only 9% currently employed. Moreover, the majority of those who are working or used to

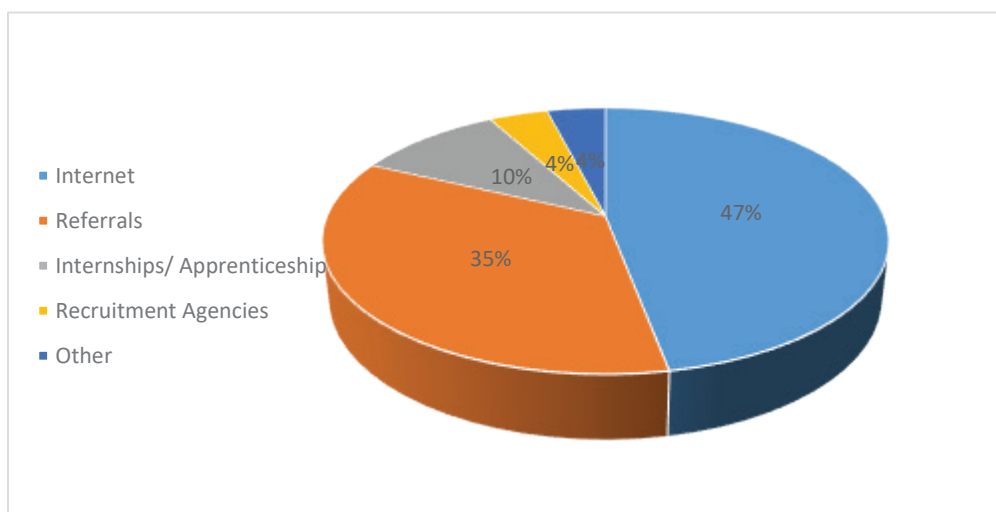


work were in the Arts and Culture sector followed by Child Protection, Vocational Training, and Health. Few worked/ are working in factories and agriculture as sales representatives or production line workers. 47% worked/ are working in their field of specialty while 53% work in different fields.



**Figure 5: Employment Status of Consulted Youth**

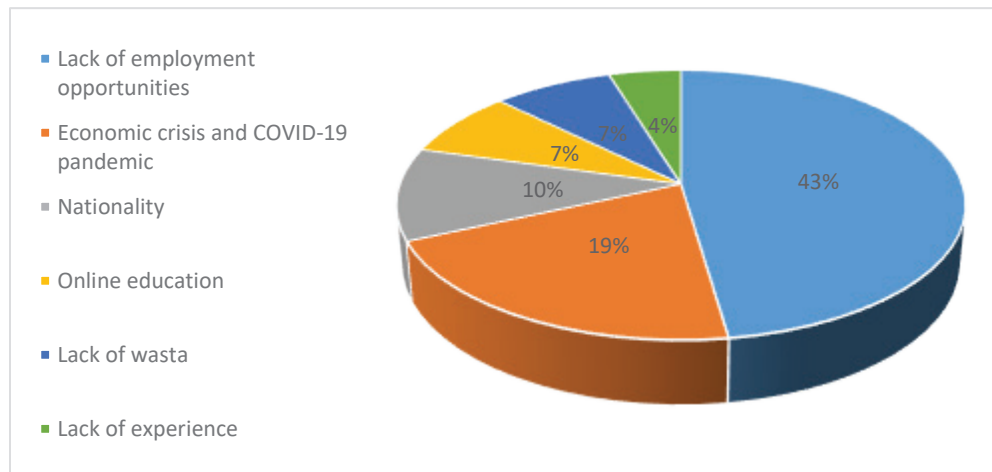
The majority search for recruitment online followed by referrals with few relying on internships and recruitment agencies.



**Figure 6: Sources of Recruitment Consulted by Surveyed Youth**

### 4.4.3 Challenges

The main challenges facing the youth are the lack of employment opportunities, especially in their field of specialization. The situation has become even worse, and challenges aggravated following the recent economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Figure 7: Challenges faced by the Youth*

29% of the surveyed youth believe that the online education harmed the quality of the education and information they have been receiving. Few also believe that they need to acquire experience to improve their employability, possibly through internships and apprenticeship. Some requested digital training, including training on an accounting software as well as language training.

## V. MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this assessment conclude the definite existing gap in employability, especially in terms of matching graduates' skills and knowledge with market needs. The main challenges facing youth and graduates lie within the country's instability, leading them to search for vacancies outside the country. With minimal opportunities at hand, political instability, and unsustainability of businesses, chances of employability are rendered even more scarce.

### 5.1 General Findings

In general, there is a reluctance to participate in a study that seeks information about employment, especially that many companies do not provide written contracts nor benefits. Moreover, considering the current economic situation, employers in Beqaa have quite limited available vacancies due to the unaffordability of extra costs, leading them to employ only when in need, and such needs are usually seasonal. Many youth work in a field different from their education due to many factors, indicating a mismatch between what educational institutions are providing and what the market demands.

Despite the above, seasonal opportunities exist in Beqaa for daily semi-skilled workers. Although construction and commerce used to be the highest two employment sectors for Palestinians, one of the main sectors in Beqaa with growth potential is the Agriculture and Food Industry. Even amidst an economic recession, these sectors may remain open as they produce necessities that help sustain the country. It is also worth noting that employment in agriculture (and construction) does not require a work permit.

The most mentioned skills in demand that can improve employability were interpersonal skills (mainly communication) and technical skills. However, vocational training centers reported a sharp decline in the engagement rate as people are currently unwilling to pay for the institutional fees. Concurrently, enterprises and SMEs reported having a preference for employing natives. All things considered, the results highlight a key finding on the employability of semi-skilled labor, specifically non-Lebanese. Nationality is an additional factor influencing employability and requires additional interventions in advocacy efforts on the policy level. More opportunities exist for Palestinians within the NGO sector than within the private sector due to the leniency NGOs exhibit.



Figure 8: Employment Gaps from Different Perspectives

## 5.2 Key Recommendations

With the skyrocketing economic, political and financial crises, potential sectors for refugee employment have grown scarce. However, based on this study, the following recommendations can be forwarded:

- To equip students/ graduates with soft skills, life skills, and interpersonal skills, including training them on CV writing, interviewing skills, communication, and business etiquette. These skills are considered to have the potential to increase graduates' capacity to find jobs or help them to perform in their current ones better. Similarly, to provide customer relations training for youth/ graduates to train them on how to communicate with customers appropriately. During the study, most individuals lack these communication skills, whereby their attitude and tone of voice in servicing clients seem rude and disrespectful. Youth should be trained on work etiquette along these lines, noting that some tend to leave work without notice if they find more suitable employment.
- To sign a Memorandum of Understanding with workshops, agencies, companies, and NGOs to allow fresh graduates to conduct internships/ apprenticeship; this will increase their experience and, consequently, their employability. Concurrently, by doing so, youth will be exposed to equipment, methods, and tools currently used in the market.
- To explore the possibilities of introducing innovative specialties through which the youth can work online (such as graphic design and social media marketing), promoting self-employment and opening up additional opportunities for them abroad. Moreover, some traditional vocations may be revived with the economic crisis, such as sewing, noting that people are now more likely to fix their clothes than buy new ones and personal care, noting that people are more likely to seek such services at home than go to salons.
- To consider establishing an employment platform that would connect youth to potential employers noting that many youths rely on online platforms to search for jobs. Moreover, to network with employment agencies who are formally or informally working in Beqaa.
- Noting that many youths nowadays are financially incapable of enrolling in universities, provide career guidance, counseling, and orientation to youth enrolled at UNRWA schools in grades 7, 8, and 9, directing them towards vocations needed by the market.
- To conduct a consolidated tracer survey tracking Palestinian refugee youth graduates of vocational training centers across Lebanon.

## Annex A: List of Consulted Stakeholders

### Enterprises and SMEs

- Studio Focus and Focus Products
- Computer Center
- Salon Basam Younes
- Salon Aida Shehade
- Mourad Flowers
- Tanous Zoughaib
- Liban Cave Trading and Industry
- Banna Pro
- Michel Daher Social Foundation
- Taanayel Les Femmes
- Tanmiyeh
- Bonjus
- Agriquest
- Tannous Chehadeh
- Moussawi Steel/ Ahmad Moussawi

### Vocational Training Providers

- Maharat Center
- Days of Hope
- Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union

### NGOs

- Medair
- Shield
- LOST
- DRC
- International Medical Corps
- El Marj SDC
- Himaya
- WCH
- Abaad
- RDFL
- Amel
- AVSI
- UNRWA
- Tafaol

## **Annex B: List of Consulted Documents**

American University of Beirut (2015). Survey of the Socioeconomic Status of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon.

International Labor Organization (2012). Palestinian Employment in Lebanon: Facts and Challenges.

Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (2017) Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon; Key Findings Report.

UNDP (2016). Mind the Gap: A Labor Needs Assessment for Lebanon.

UNDP (2018). Vulnerabilities Report.

UNHCR (2019). Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

UNHCR (2020). Key Findings of the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

UNHCR (2020). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2017-2020 update).

UNRWA (2017). Protection Brief – Palestine Refugees Living in Lebanon.