

# **YOUTH LABOUR** **MARKET ASSESSMENT** **OF URBAN LOCATIONS**



**Save the Children**

**Executive Summary**  
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The Lebanese economy has witnessed major changes in the last decade triggered by both local and regional socio-political developments. Employment has become increasingly difficult to secure, particularly for youth. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 17.5% of youth in Lebanon aged 15 to 24 are unemployed. Syrian and Palestinian populations in Lebanon are more likely to accept hazardous working conditions as they often have few alternatives. Young people play an integral role in their communities and should be connected to decent work opportunities that promote their personal growth and wellbeing.

Save the Children retained Euromena Consulting to conduct a Labour Market Assessment (LMA) to identify employment opportunities for Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese youth aged 14 to 19 in five target areas: Bourj el Borajne, Chatila, Bourj Hammoud, Ain el Helwe, and Saida. The objective of this LMA was to collect robust data on job opportunities for youth, barriers to labour market entry, and recruitment practices in the target regions. The study used surveys with business owners, interviews with key stakeholders, and focus group discussions with employed and unemployed youth.

# I. OVERVIEW OF THE LEBANESE LABOUR MARKET

The Lebanese labour market is characterised by high unemployment, high informality, the dominance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and low productivity across many sectors.

The ILO reports that the economic downturn in Lebanon has had a disproportionate effect on the youth, with young Lebanese suffering unemployment rates three to four times higher than the overall unemployment rate. A high degree of informality in the labour market contributes to poor working conditions, which are further exacerbated by the unsustainable nature of many MSMEs. Ultimately, the increased demand for a low-skilled workforce drives an oversaturation of less productive sectors.

Legal constraints also pose obstacles to employment for some vulnerable populations in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees are barred from working in any syndicated profession and as a result, they tend to occupy informal, low-skill, and low-paid positions in the sectors in which they are permitted to work. Work for Syrian refugees is generally restricted to the agriculture, environment, and construction sectors.

Lastly, there is a lack of coordination among official and non-governmental stakeholders that conduct LMAs and provide assistance to job seekers. Consequently, resources are not always used in an efficient manner.

## II. REGIONAL ASSESSMENTS

This section highlights trends in both supply (working conditions and entry barriers to the job market) and demand (sector mapping, skills, hiring practices, and key challenges).

### A. CHATILA

Chatila, a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut, suffers from a weak and fragmented job market. However, Chatila is relatively more accessible given its specific urban location, making mobility to and from the camp easier and diversifying the types of jobs that are available to camp residents.

#### I. SUPPLY ANALYSIS

##### Working Conditions

Working conditions for employed youth within Chatila are challenging. Children below the minimum working age of 14 are often compelled to enter the job market to support their families, and the high rates of informality increase the likelihood of exploitation. Abuse may involve withholding wages, sudden termination, and even physical harm. Fieldwork findings indicate that youth aged 14 to 19 perform low-skill jobs that rarely contribute to their personal and professional growth.

##### Barriers to Entry

Refugees in Chatila who lack valid documentation fear detention by security forces. As such, they are less likely to seek employment that requires mobility outside the camp. Findings from the FGDs indicate that regardless of documentation, perceptions of bias against Palestinian job-seekers reduce youth motivation to explore potential work opportunities. The fieldwork also revealed that most occupations are dominated by a single gender, either wholly male or wholly female.

Language barriers prevent youth from entering certain industries. Although English skills are not considered a formal requirement for low-skill employment in Chatila, a number of youth who participated in FGDs expressed interest to enter sectors that require basic English, such as digital technology.

## II. DEMAND ANALYSIS

### Sector Mapping

Major sectors of employment in Chatila include the food and beverage industry, retail (e.g. clothes and small shops), private health clinics, construction, education and childcare, manufacturing, beauty-related businesses (e.g. hairdressing), and NGO-related employment.

Across all sectors, there is significant competition for a small pool of low-skilled jobs, the job market is oversaturated, and employment options are limited.

### Skills, Hiring Practices, and Challenges.

Given the low-skill nature of employment in Chatila, business owners cite soft skills like common sense and work ethic as most needed for youth in the job market, in addition to oral and written communication skills.

Hiring practices rely heavily on recruiting through personal contacts, including by word of mouth and through family and friends. More public advertisements are not preferred as they usually generate an overwhelming response rate.

Major challenges for business owners in Chatila include high energy costs, economic instability, and the cost of access to skilled labour.

## B. BOURJ EL BORAJNE

Bourj el Borajne is a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut whose growth and stability has been affected by overcrowding, weak infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and a growing population with significant humanitarian needs.

## I SUPPLY ANALYSIS

### Working Conditions

Working conditions are generally poor in Bourj el Borajne due to the camp's deteriorating infrastructure. Some refugees are subject to exploitation in the workplace due to their lack of legal status. Vulnerability and exploitation suppress wages because such populations are more likely to accept lower pay and worse conditions for lack of alternatives.

### Barriers to Entry

The oversupply of low-skill labour reduces the number of income-generating opportunities for families. The lack of sustainable employment hinders long-term professional pathways for youth. The fieldwork suggests that males tend to switch professions regularly to find better-paying jobs, especially when they get married or have children. Females lack long-term opportunities and often work for short durations of time, for instance, by helping their spouses or running small shops.

## II. DEMAND ANALYSIS

### Sector Mapping

Major sectors of employment in Bourj el Borajne include food and beverage, retail, construction, education and childcare, healthcare, beauty-related sectors, manufacturing, computers, and entertainment. Employment options in the camp are limited and there is high job competition across all sectors due to an oversaturated labour force.

### Skills, Hiring Practices, and Challenges

Important skills cited by business owners in Bourj el Barajne include soft skills, customer service, oral and written communication, and foreign language skills for the computer and entertainment sectors.

Business owners exclusively cited word of mouth and informal networks as their preferred recruitment methods, as public advertisements generate an overwhelmingly high response rate.

Key challenges for business owners in the camp include energy costs, market competition, and political and economic instability.

## C. BOURJ HAMMOUD

Bourj Hammoud is a densely populated suburb of Beirut. It is characterised by high income inequality among resident nationalities, a weak education system, and poor socio-economic conditions.

### I. SUPPLY ANALYSIS

#### Working Conditions

Bourj Hammoud is characterised by street-level commercial enterprises such as small shops and stores. Business owners serve predominantly local clients but also cater to a citywide array of consumers seeking affordable prices for basic products. Working adolescents participating in FGDs discussed the urgent need for them to work to support their families. Low-skill jobs, the youth explained, are the most common type of employment and the most immediate solution for those looking to find an income generating opportunity.

#### Barriers to Entry

Adolescents must often pay high transportation costs relative to the wages they earn. Moreover, limited growth in the area's main economic sectors have led to

extremely low demand for workers

The youth who participated in FGDs in the area expressed three additional barriers to employment: lack of career counselling, lack of advanced English level training, and lack of motivation to seek better jobs due to their perception of employee bias against foreigners.

### II. DEMAND ANALYSIS

#### Sector Mapping

Key economic sectors in Bourj Hammoud include food and beverage, beauty-related sectors, retail, crafts, manufacturing, jewellery and leather-making, and electronics and phone repair, among others.

There is limited potential for growth across all sectors, businesses are forced to close due to declining revenues, youth are employed in low-skill jobs that offer minimal potential for growth, and child labour is prevalent.

#### Skills, Hiring Practices, and Challenges

Business owners in Bourj Hammoud report that customer service skills, soft skills, and oral communication are in greatest need of improvement.

In addition to word of mouth, employers in Bourj Hammoud rely on recruitment methods such as print advertisement and contacts with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools.

The main challenges employers face are the effects of economic crisis, high competition, and high operating costs.

## D. AIN EL HELWE

Ain el Helwe, located in the South of Lebanon, is the largest and most densely populated Palestinian camp in the country. Palestinian and Syrian communities in Ain el Helwe are particularly vulnerable, given the high levels of poverty and insecurity within the camp.

### I. SUPPLY ANALYSIS

#### Working Conditions

Political instability and economic insecurity have contributed to severe working conditions in the camp. Youth participants in the FGDs also voiced that once they start a job, employers tend to fire them shortly after, citing reasons such as not being allowed to hire Palestinians or not wanting to go through the hassle of applying for and renewing work permits.

#### Barriers to Entry

Youth in Ain el Helwe suffer from severe security and political challenges, which hinder movement and reduce economic productivity. Limited job opportunities due to higher competition for the already limited pool of low-skill jobs is also a significant barrier to entry into the labour force. Even if the youth are skilled and prepared to work at an appropriate age, there is very little demand in the market for new recruits across all economic sectors.

### II. DEMAND ANALYSIS

#### Sector Mapping

Major sectors of employment in Ain el Helwe include retail, food and beverage, entertainment, beauty-related sectors, services, transportation, manufacturing, and health, among others. The mapping illustrates that employment opportunities in Ain el Helwe are limited and characterised by a high degree of informality, partially a result of residents' limited mobility due to political instability.

#### Skills, Hiring Practices, and Challenges

Business owners in Ain el Helwe cited customer service, soft skills, and oral communication as the most needed in their community. They further indicated that they desire technical skills that are specific to certain occupations (e.g. healthcare).

Most business owners prefer to recruit new hires via word of mouth and personal networks, though some utilize social media as well.

In addition to similar challenges faced by employers in other camps, Ain el Helwe is subject to tight security measures. The most severe challenges for business owners in Ain el Helwe include political uncertainty, economic instability, and energy costs. The costs of raw materials and skilled labour represent additional, albeit less severe challenges for these employers.

## E. SAIDA

Saida, located in the South Governorate, is Lebanon's third-largest city. Though it has relatively well-developed education and healthcare sectors, many residents lack access to basic services and live in poverty.

### I. SUPPLY ANALYSIS

#### Working Conditions

Working conditions for youth in Saida are highly dependent on the size and nature of employers; larger employers in the construction and retail sectors have more organised work protocols, whereas industrial sectors in the area offer poor working conditions, including hazardous environments in factories and car mechanic shops.

Tutoring is one of the most common forms of employment, especially among girls, as it offers more flexible working hours and entails limited risks. According to the FGDs, the most common risks faced by working girls in Saida include exploitation, abuse, social marginalisation, and employment discrimination.

### Barriers to Entry

Youth in Saida expressed three key challenges to finding employment: the lack of specific skills needed to enter new sectors (e.g. graphic design and computer programming), such as computer skills and basic English writing; the inability to secure adequate employment upon graduation from school (including university); and limited vacancies in low-skill sectors.

## II. DEMAND ANALYSIS

### Sector Mapping

The main economic sectors in Saida include retail, food and beverage, agro-industry, mechanics, construction, tourism, manufacturing, and port services. Saida boasts a variety of sectors that historically offer significant employment opportunity, but demand for additional labourers in these sectors has diminished as a consequence of economic downturn. However, some sectors show potential for growth, including renewable energy, heating and cooling systems, and education.

### Skills, Hiring Practices, and Challenges

The most important skills for the surveyed business owners are oral communication, followed by soft skills, office administration, planning and organisation, problem-solving, foreign language, teamwork, and customer service.

For business owners in Saida, word of mouth remains the most commonly used method of recruitment, followed by contacts with schools and universities, and contacts with government officials (namely the municipality of Saida).

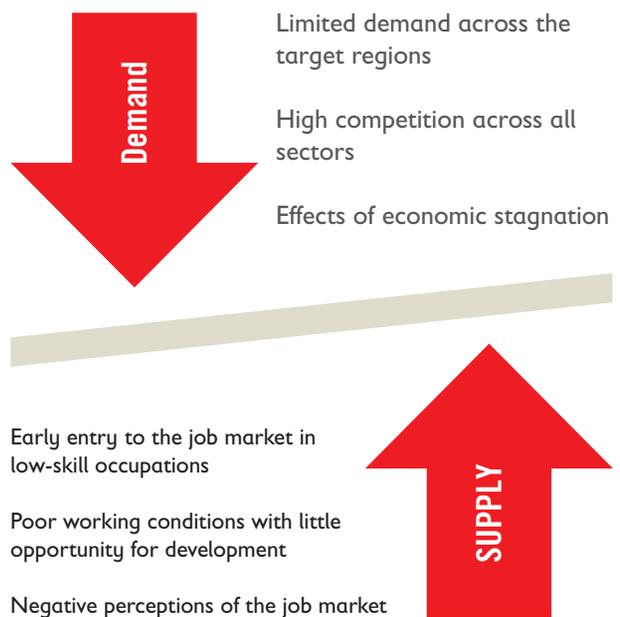
Business owners in Saida state that the key challenges they face are economic instability, government regulations, political uncertainty, raw material costs, skilled labour costs, and market competition.

## III. REGIONAL COMPARISONS

The surveys and interviews conducted across the five regions demonstrate that employers do not currently suffer from a shortage of labour. Most employers, in fact, report an excess of labour in the overall market. The main shortages were reported in the healthcare and economic and social development sectors.

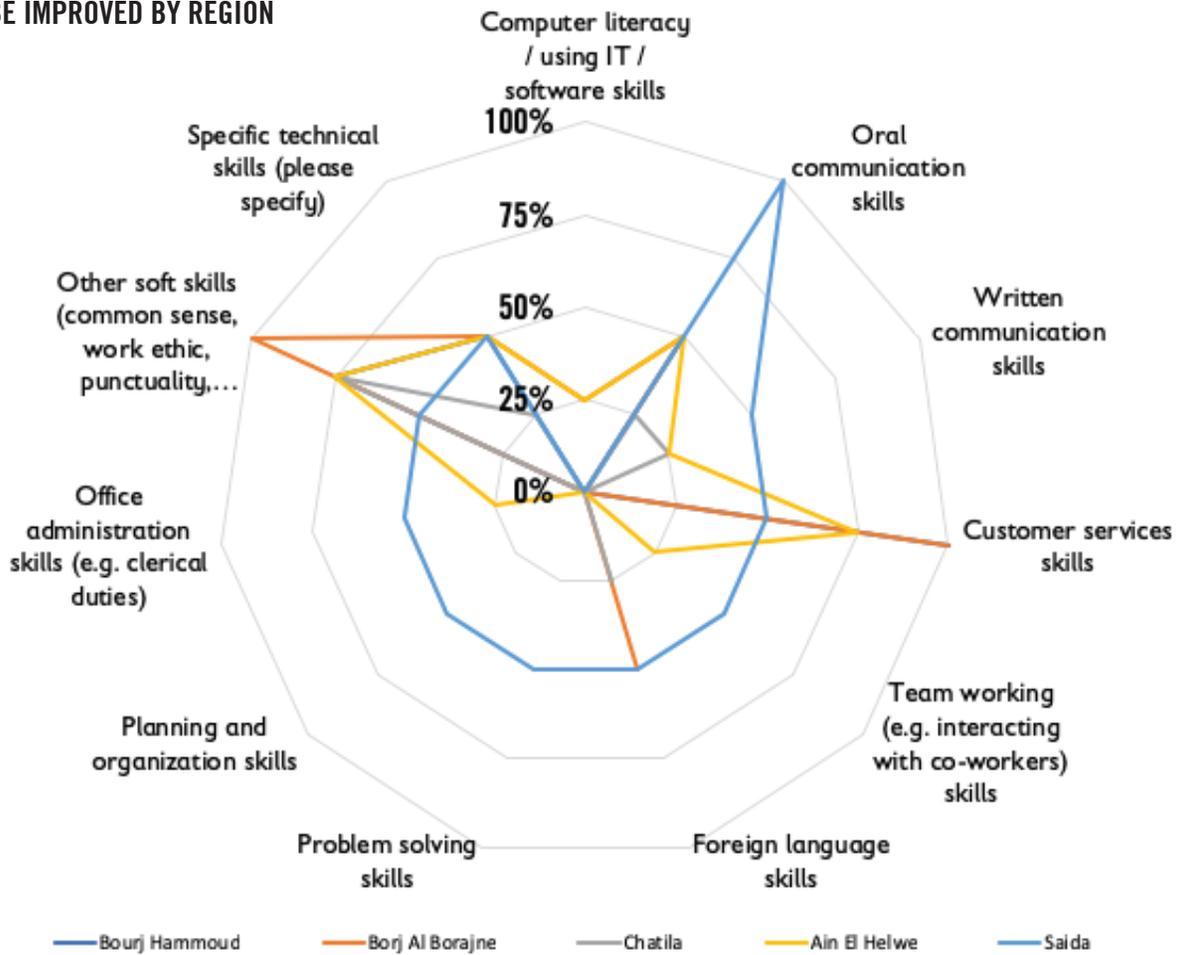
The findings also indicate that male participation in the labour market is greater than female participation, with a high proportion of Syrians in low- to medium-skill jobs across sectors. However, women's participation in the workforce is stronger in some sectors such as healthcare and childcare.

The graph below summarises the main similarities among the five target locations, across supply and demand factors.

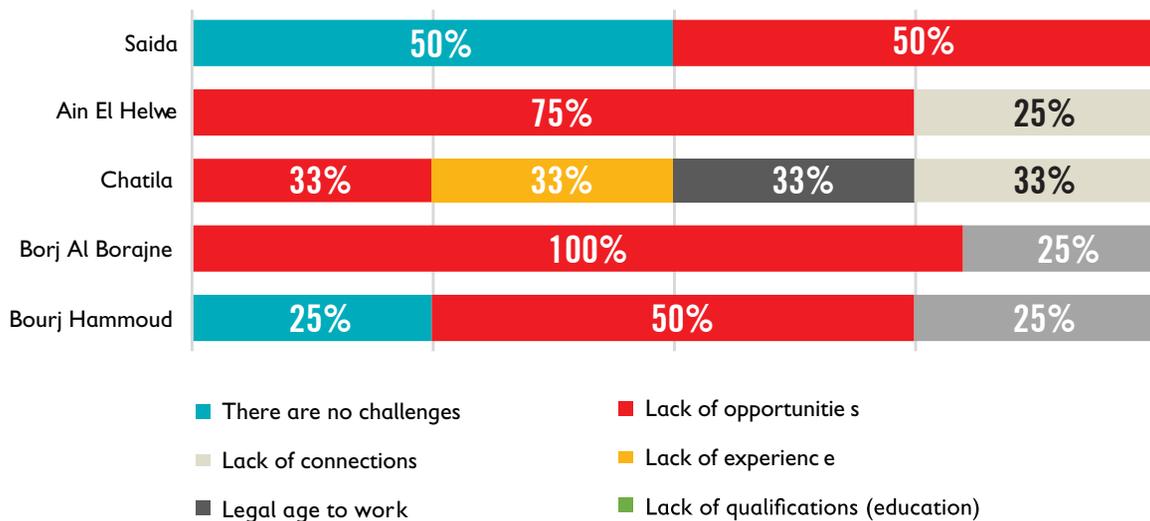


The most sought-after skills vary by region, as do the biggest challenges.

### EMPLOYEE SKILLS THAT NEED TO BE IMPROVED BY REGION



### CHALLENGES FACING THE YOUTH BY REGION



## IV. OPPORTUNITIES

The most significant employment opportunities may be found in sectors with the following characteristics:

- Potential for growth
- Legal work for Syrians or Palestinians
- Existing or future demand for employment

On the basis of these criteria, the following list presents potential examples of sectors that may be targeted for additional youth employment and training:

### DIGITAL MEDIA

- Graphic design
- Animation
- Computer programming
- Design
- Creative consultancy
- Game development

### ENVIRONMENT

- Environmental consultancy
- Environmental education
- Conservation
- Sustainability
- Port and marine environmental management

### WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Energy from waste
- Hazardous waste
- Recycling coordination, management, operation, and sales
- Industrial and medical waste management
- Pollution
- Wastewater

### OIL AND GAS

- Geoscience
- Drilling

- Pipeline
- Offshore maintenance
- Machine operations

### HEALTH

- Nursing
- Mental health
- Social support
- Palliative and personal medical care

## V. ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. NGO COORDINATION

NGOs working in the same regions sometimes duplicate economic and social initiatives, especially those that focus on youth empowerment, TVET curriculum development, and skills training. The general perception of youth in this study is that these programmes do not cover specialisations within subsectors, but rather provide a general understanding of one occupation. Additionally, the frequency with which individual NGOs conduct LMAs suggests that better data sharing would increase efficiency.

NGOs located in the same areas that work on similar training content should coordinate amongst each other to improve access to key information, and to better refer youth to specialised skills training.

### 2. OVERSATURATION OF ECONOMIC SECTORS

Across all targeted regions, there is an oversaturation within the market across economic sectors. This is due to the very limited demand for new recruits across regions, and the lack of capacity among businesses to grow and expand.

There is a need to work with different stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, to strengthen existing initiatives and spur new projects in different areas.

### 3. OVERSUPPLY OF LABOUR

The oversupply of labour across economic sectors contributes to tensions among vulnerable communities, and it increases the number of unemployed youth who must resort to negative coping mechanisms to meet their basic needs.

There is a need to shift the focus of initiatives away from the supply side to focus on creating demand among employers and businesses who can provide work opportunities through full-time jobs, internships, and apprenticeships.

### 4. GENDER DIVIDE

The gender gap between males and females greatly hinders the economic integration of young females in the job market. Restrictive social norms, including the expectation for females to assume a caregiver role, lead to the exclusion of women and girls from the job market, leaving them with few options for income-generation.

### 5. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Adolescents who participated in the FGDs expressed a lack of confidence in the feasibility of securing financially sustainable employment that promotes their personal and professional development. Many interviewees also expressed a desire to have a “normal” life in which they could go to school, meet peers within their age groups, spend time outdoors, and embrace their teen-age-hood.

To address adolescent mental and emotional wellbeing, there is a need to integrate psychosocial support in livelihoods programming.

### 6. LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The use of foreign languages such as English and French as languages of instruction in schools is significant barrier to access to quality of education for vulnerable youth, especially for non-Lebanese children whose original language of instruction in their home countries was

Arabic. Youth in the target regions also expressed interest in working in sectors that require English language speaking and writing skills.

Youth should be trained on written and oral language skills, with a focus on business writing skills that enhance their ability to enter the job market. Additionally, instructors in schools and training centres should be better capacitated to teach foreign languages.

### 7. UNCERTAIN FUTURE MARKET TRENDS

There is a lack of clarity among both governmental and non-governmental institutions on how the market will evolve in the near future, and which economic sectors will generate employment opportunities. Accurate, updated information about the market would help shape the development of curricula for both TVET and non-TVET courses.

Training providers should liaise with government and private stakeholders to access market-based data from key actors (such as academics and government ministries). Increased knowledge of market dynamics across occupations and sectors may inform the development of more applicable training content.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This LMA highlighted some of the major issues faced by vulnerable communities in urban locations across Beirut and the South. The high level of economic vulnerability among communities in these areas has led many to adopt negative coping mechanisms that further increase protection risks. Thus, there is an urgent need to address livelihoods needs through holistic programming that integrates skills acquisition, career guidance, psychosocial support, and social protection.



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