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'Each one of us had a dream'

Gender-responsive education and economic empowerment for refugee youth in Lebanon

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Cover photo: 20-year-old Syrian woman who works in agriculture, Lebanon, 2021 © Marcel Saleh

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Display items

Acronyms

CAS — Central Administration of Statistics

GAGE — Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence

GCR — Global Compact on Refugees

GDP — gross domestic product

ICT — information and communications technology

ILO — International Labour Organisation

LBP — Lebanese pound

LFHLCS — Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey

LHIF — Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum

LOST — The Lebanese Organisation of Studies and Training

MAP — Medical Aid for Palestinians

NEET — not in employment, education or training

NGO — non-governmental organisation

NPTP — National Poverty Targeting Programme

OECD — Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PD — positive deviance

PRL — Palestine Refugees from Lebanon

PRS — Palestine Refugees from Syria

RED — Rural Educational Development Organisation

SDG — Sustainable Development Goal

Tdh — Terre des hommes

TVET — technical and vocational education and training

UN — United Nations

UNHCR — United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA — United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

WFP — World Food Programme

Introduction

On a per capita basis, Lebanon is hosting the largest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2021d). One in every eight people living in Lebanon is recognised by UNHCR as a refugee (UNHCR, 2021a, 2022). Echoing global trends – in which the absolute number of displaced persons has continued to grow in tandem with the proportion who are in protracted displacement[1] – the vast majority of the Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon have been there for a decade or longer (UNHCR, 2022; Crawford et al., 2015). As consensus has grown that short-term, purely humanitarian responses have become unsustainable, the international community has begun to support longer-term efforts aimed at simultaneously promoting refugee self-reliance and the national economies of host countries. Nowhere is the importance of this twinned response as manifest as in Lebanon, where the GDP flatlined in 2011 – in part due to the population displacement driven by the outbreak of civil war in Syria – and has plummeted since 2019, due to the confluence of the Covid-19 pandemic and political and fiscal mismanagement so extreme that the World Bank has dubbed the current crisis a 'deliberate depression' (World Bank, 2020, 2021a, 2022).

Agreements made in 2016 between the international community and the Lebanese government were meant to rekindle economic growth (then absent for five years) and create jobs for both Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens (IRC, 2020). In exchange for multi-year commitments from donors and development banks, the government agreed to improve refugees' access to education and the labour market, by easing permitting (residency and work) requirements. As the economic crisis has deepened, however, promises have been largely abandoned. This has resulted not only in an explosion of current need – as poverty and food insecurity have spiked, especially for refugees – but also growing concerns about how to meet SDG targets relating to youth skills and employment (SDG 4 and 8) and best support the young people transitioning to adulthood amid intertwined and escalating crises.

This report, which draws on an extensive review of secondary data alongside primary qualitative data collected from Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon in the first half of 2021, aims to shed some light on how adolescents and young adults have managed to access employment or advanced education despite the difficult context in which they are coming of age. Attending to gender norms, and the ways in which they disadvantage girls and boys in different ways, we explore – using a case study approach – what sets the most successful young refugees apart from their peers. The report begins with a review of existing data, to introduce the reader to the complexity of Lebanon. We then present our qualitative research methods and our findings. Cognizant of the limited capacity of the Lebanese government, we conclude with programming implications and recommended actions for donors, UN agencies and NGOs to support disadvantaged adolescents and youth in line with the SDG targets related to youth employment.

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1   UNHCR defines protracted displacement as a situation in which at least 25,000 refugees from the same nationality have been in exile in the same host country for at least five years.

Lebanese context

The Lebanese context is difficult to summarise neatly, given Lebanon's complex history and its current economic crisis (see Box 1). This is made more difficult yet by the government's long-standing inability to collect and curate accurate data. Drawing on primarily on international sources, below we provide brief synopses of Lebanon's population, its economy and labour market, its educational system, and its social protection mechanisms. Across domains, we disaggregate experiences and outcomes by nationality, gender and age where possible. It should be noted upfront that because reporting is delayed, many of the statistics here capture pre-crisis (before 2019) Lebanon.

Population

The World Bank (2021b) reports the population of Lebanon was nearly 6.9 million in 2019. This figure is markedly higher than the 4.8 million reported by the government on its 2018–2019 Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey (LFHLCS) (CAS et al., 2020). Differences are in part because the national survey excludes Palestinians living in formal refugee camps and settlements and those living in the country illegally (CAS et al., 2020). They are also, however, due to Lebanon's 'notoriously unreliable' collection of statistics (Smyth, 2019).

Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR, 2021d). Despite the government's refusal to recognise Syrians as refugees, as of November 2021, there were just over 844,000 Syrian refugees registered with

UNHCR in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2021d; NUFFIC, 2020). This is down from a high of 1.2 million in 2015 – when UNHCR suspended registration at the request of the Lebanese government (UNHCR, 2021a,b). It is estimated that 1.5 million Syrians live in the country (UNHCR 2021a). Because the government of Lebanon has not allowed UNHCR to establish refugee camps for Syrians, all Syrian refugees live in Lebanese cities and villages or in informal tented settlements scattered throughout the countryside (UNHCR Lebanon, 2021). UNHCR (2021a) reports that in 2020 over half (58%) of Syrian refugees live in shelters below humanitarian standards; many continue to live in so-called 'collective shelters', which are overcrowded and often unfinished (ACTED, 2014). Syrian refugees over the age of 15 are required to have residency permits. These are administratively difficult to acquire (by government design) and cost US$200 per person. UNHCR (2021a) reports that over 80% of Syrian refugees lack legal residency. Lack of documentation complicates Syrians' daily lives, as it leaves them vulnerable to abuse by authorities (which restricts their mobility) and prevents them from accessing services (including education). Nonetheless, living undocumented in Lebanon is seen as preferable to returning to Syria – which remains a 'death country' (HRW, 2021c).

While there are over 450,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, the 2017 Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings found just over 180,000 living in the country (PCBS and CAS, 2018)[2]. Of these, just over 165,000 were Palestine refugees from Lebanon (PRL)[3] and nearly 18,000 were

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2   LHIF (2021) notes the census is contested – there is concern it is an undercount.
3   PRL have been living in Lebanon since their displacement; nearly all were born in Lebanon.

Box 1 Lebanon's current crisis

Since 2019, Lebanon's economy has been caught in an accelerating downward spiral, which the World Bank (2021a) predicts will rank in the top three most severe global economic crises of the last 150 years. As such, Lebanon in the spring of 2022 bears little resemblance to Lebanon of 2018. Due to the confluence of a financial meltdown that was effectively 'deliberately' engineered by ruling elites, the Covid-19 pandemic and an explosion that levelled the port of Beirut in 2020 (World Bank, 2020, 2021a), Lebanon's GDP per capita has fallen 58% (World Bank, 2022), food prices have soared over 400% in the last two years (Karasapan and Shah, 2021), the electrical grid has collapsed (Durgham and Sly, 2021) and there has been a resurgence of sectarian street fighting (Hubbard and Santora, 2021).

Recent events, however, cannot be understood without historical context. Lebanon has been a country that has been precariously held together since it won independence from France in 1943. Government offices – and public sector employment – are allocated on the basis of religion, with the balance between different sects of Islam and different branches of Christianity reflecting the country's demographic make-up (Barshad, 2019)[2]. For decades, the balance of power was premised on government posts allocated on the basis of the country's last census, which was undertaken in 1932 (Maktabi, 1999). Starting in the mid-1970s, however, the country fought a civil war for 15 years (1975–1990), in part to rebalance positions and quotas to better reflect the population at the time (ibid.). Other factors that contributed to the war included regional inequalities as well as inequalities between different religious groups (poverty was more spread among Muslims and rampant among Shia); and two camps that have different visions for Lebanon, one pan-Arabism and another Lebanese nationalist. The presence of Palestinian militias and Christian fear of them taking over the state, were also important drivers, as was the growing Muslim population that sought more power in what was then a Maronite-Catholic dominated state.

Since then, an uneasy truce has mostly held – albeit at the cost of creating one of the world's least equitable countries and further marginalising the Palestinian and Syrian refugee population – predominantly Sunni Muslims – that would, if included, alter the religious make-up of the country (Leaders for Sustainable Livelihoods, 2019; Barshad, 2019; ESCWA 2021; Smyth, 2019; Assoud, 2017). It is also worth noting that the historical legacy of the civil war continues to shape attitudes towards refugees. In the case of Palestinians, many Lebanese (especially Christians) still accuse the Palestinians of starting the civil war in Lebanon. In the case of Syrian refugees, reluctance to include them is universal in Lebanon among all groups mainly due to the complicated history of Syrian intervention in civil war and occupation of Lebanon as well as the large number of Syrian refugees.

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1   The World Bank (2021a) terms the crisis 'deliberate' for two reasons, both related to political consensus. First, the country is unable to come together to enact effective policy due to sectarianism. Second, the ruling elite are united in their resistance to changing a system that benefits the few.

2   Allocation is done equally between Christians and Muslims (50% Muslims & 50% Christians) and proportionately between the denominations of each sect (Of Christians: Maronite Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Protestant.

Palestinian refugees from Syria (ibid.). Of the Palestinians living in Lebanon, the census found 83,000 were living in one of 12 formal refugee camps, the largest of which was Ein el-Hilweh (home to 54,000 people (PCBS and CAS, 2018; Anera, 2021). Camps are physically and socially walled off from the host communities they are near, are extremely overcrowded, and beset by worsening violence – as rival political factions have jockeyed for control in the absence of active policing by Lebanese authorities (UNRWA, 2017; Anera, 2020; UNDP, 2020)[4]. Another 40,000 Palestine refugees were living in informal gatherings adjacent to these formal camps (PCBS and CAS, 2018). Most Palestinians[5], even those whose families have been in Lebanon since 1948, do not have citizenship—which is carefully curated to protect the balance of power (Maktabi, 1999). Nearly all Palestinians, however, do have legal residency.

The economy and labour market

As noted above, Lebanon's economy is currently in a nearly unparalleled state of crisis (Harake et al., 2020, 2021a, 2022; OCHA, 2021). This crisis is both new and old. The World Bank (2021b) reports that the last time Lebanon achieved significant GDP growth was 2010, when the economy grew 8%. Between 2011 and 2017, real growth was negligible. The fall of GDP began in 2018 and picked up speed in 2019, when it fell 6.7%. In 2020, it plummeted 20.3% (compared to 1.5% in Jordan) and in 2021, fell another 10.5% (World Bank, 2022). With inflation topping 280% between June 2019 and June 2020 (ESCWA, 2021) – and then climbing a further 145% in 2021 (World Bank, 2022) – and

nearly one-fifth of workers out of work and unlikely to return given that one-fifth of firms have permanently closed (OCHA, 2021; World Bank, 2021a), the poverty rate and the poverty gap have exploded. ESCWA (2021) estimates that the national poverty rate jumped from 28% in 2019, to 55% in 2020, to 74% in 2021.

While Lebanon is ostensibly an upper-middle income country with a 'high' level of human development, it is also one of the world's most unequal countries (ESCWA, 2020; Bastagli et al., 2019; Assouad, 2017). It has one of the world's highest per capita concentrations of billionaires and relies on the private sector to deliver 'public' services (ibid.). For example, 69% of households rely on bottled water, 84% of households have a private source of electricity (CAS et al., 2020) and at least 60% of students attend private schools (World Bank, 2021a). This has tremendous implications for how households in Lebanon experience poverty.

Refugee households are, as Karasapan and Shah (2021) note, 'a crisis within a crisis'. UNHCR (2021a) reports that in 2020, 89% of Syrian households were living in extreme poverty and 49% were food insecure – rates up 34 and 20 percentage points (respectively) over the year before. By the end of 2021, UNHCR (2021d) reported that food insecurity rates had reached 96%. Crisis impacts on Palestinian refugees are poorly measured, in large part because budget cuts have left UNRWA unable to prioritise data collection (Aljazeera, 2018; Hatuqa, 2021; UNRWA, 2021a; LHIF, 2021). However, given that in 2015[6] 65% of PRL and 89% of PRS were already poor,

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4   Government authority inside of camps is limited due to a historical – and now defunct – agreement between the government of Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization (UNHCR, 2016).
5   Some Christian Palestinians were naturalised in the 1990s for political reasons.
6   The last national-level survey of Palestinian 's socio-economic conditions was conducted in 2015.

they can be assumed to be dire (Chaaban et al., 2016). In mid-2020, Terres des hommes reported that nearly 40% of Palestinians living in Lebanon had lost employment and income had dropped in over 60% of households.

Prior to the crisis, labour force participation[7] rates varied significantly (see Figure 1). Unsurprisingly, given that Lebanon is ranked 139 out of 156 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in terms of women's economic participation and opportunity, due to social norms that value men for their productive roles and women for their reproductive roles, rates vary more by gender than by nationality (WEF, 2021; USAID, 2019). The World Bank (2021b) reports that in 2019, at the national level, 76% of men and 23% of women were in the labour force. UNHCR (2020) reports that in 2020, 74% of Syrian men and 14% of Syrian women were in the labour force.[8] In 2015, 69% of PRL men and 66% of PRS men were in the labour force; figures for women were 17% and 14% respectively (Chaaban et al., 2016).

Unemployment rates, which capture only those who are both out of work and actively seeking employment, have been effectively static since 2009 (World Bank, 2021b). Nationality and gender interact in complex ways (see Figure 2). The World Bank (2021b) reports that in 2019, at the national level, 5% of men and 10% of women were unemployed. USAID (2019) observes that women's higher unemployment rates are primarily the result of patriarchal gender norms that limit their access to resources and decision-making. It reports, for example, that while women own more than 30% of micro and small business in Lebanon, only 3% of bank loans go to women (ibid.)

Refugees' unemployment rates are staggeringly higher than national averages (see Figure 2). Among Syrians, who are legally able to work only as manual labourers in three poorly paid sectors (agriculture, construction and sanitation) and even then require expensive work permits sponsored by Lebanese citizens, 38% of men and 45% of women are unemployed (UNHCR, 2021a). One-quarter of unemployed Syrians report there are no jobs where they live (ibid.). Among PRL, who have

Figure 1 Labour force participation rates, by nationality and gender

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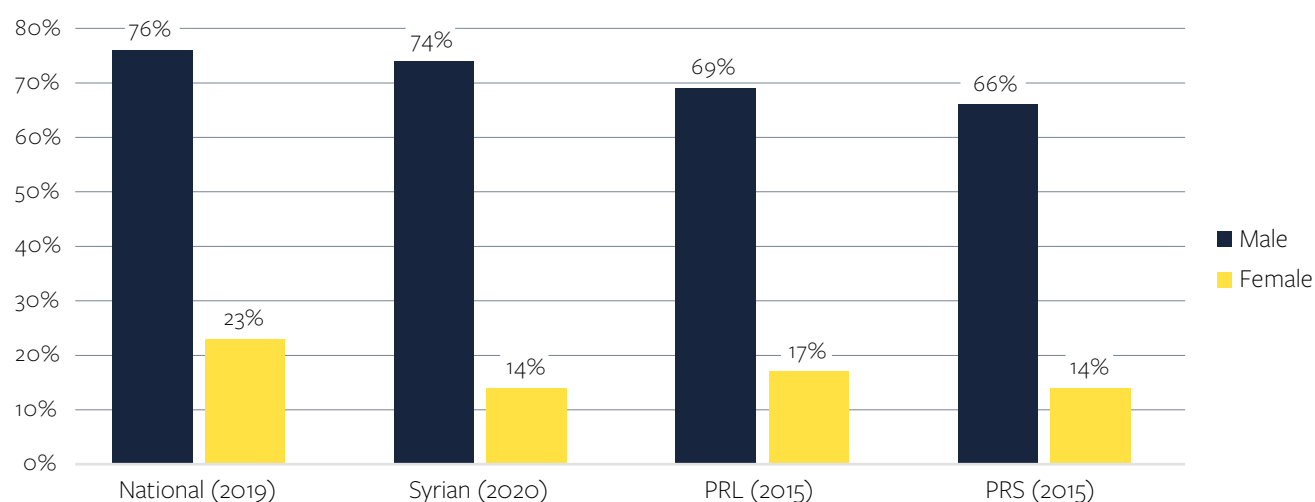
7   This includes those who are working and those who are actively seeking work.
8   World Bank figures are modelled ILO estimates, making them internationally comparable.

Figure 2 Unemployment rates, by nationality and gender
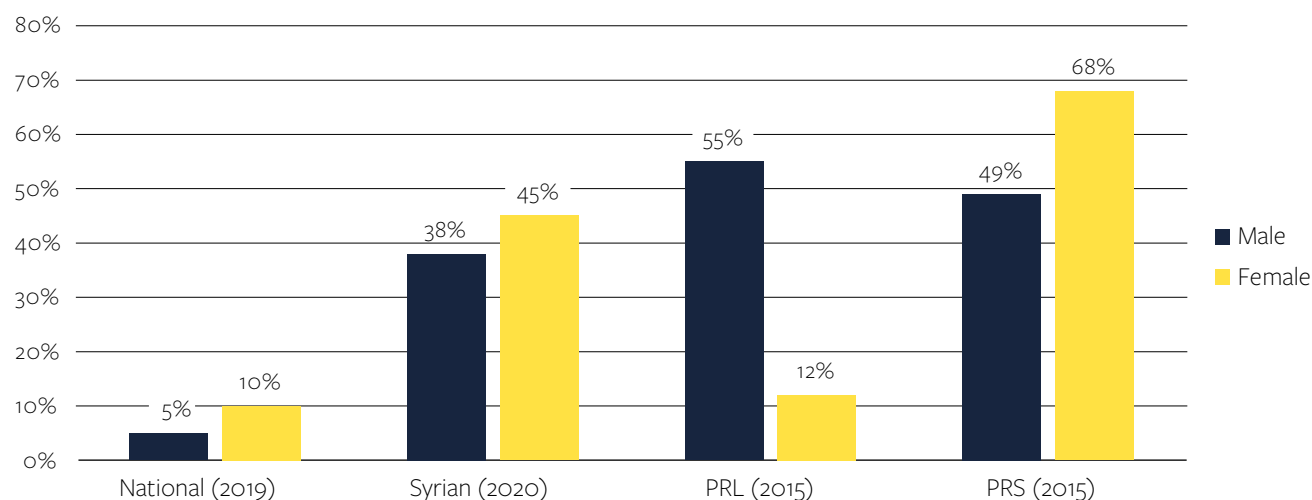
more options than Syrians but are barred from more than 20 types of professional work, rates are 55% and 12%, respectively (Chaaban et al., 2016). Chaaban et al. (2016) observe that PRL women's lower unemployment rate reflects their lower labour force participation rate (17% versus 69% for PRL men), but also their greater odds of being employed by UNRWA and NGOs. PRS women have the highest unemployment rate in Lebanon – 68% in 2015 (ibid.). In more recent research with Palestinians living in Lebanon, unemployment was identified as the 'core' of all economic and social issues (UNDP, 2020). Refugees' access to employment is further complicated by municipal curfews, which in many locations require that they be off the streets as early as 6:00 pm.

Employment is not a panacea for refugee households, as both Syrians and Palestinians are overwhelmingly concentrated in the informal sector (which represents over half of the total employment available in Lebanon), are poorly paid, and lack any access to labour market protections (UNHCR, 2021; IRC, 2020; Chaaban et al., 2016). Chaaban et al. (2016) report, for example, that 36% of PRL work in 'elementary occupations' (e.g. street vendors and shoe shiners) and that 98% of PRS have only verbal contracts with their employers. Leaders for Sustainable Livelihoods

(2019) report similar risks for Syrians, with 75% earning below the minimum wage and only 4% having written contracts with their employers.

Self-employment is also a challenge for refugees, given that they are not allowed to own property in their own names or access formal financial institutions (IRC, 2020). Entrepreneurs must therefore depend on informal arrangements with Lebanese friends and acquaintances to register or even rent assets such as real estate, cars and machinery, and on family and friends for informal loans to start or scale up their own businesses (ibid.). The IRC (2020) reports that the Lebanese authorities fine Syrians who lack the requisite documentation and often close their shops and businesses.

Although the proportion of 10–17-year-old children in Lebanon who work was extremely high a decade ago (ILO and MoL, 2013), the majority of adolescents and young adults are not yet active in the labour market. At a national level and including both males and females, the youth (aged 15–24) labour force participation rate was 30% in 2019 (see Figure 3)(World Bank, 2021b). In line with broader patterning, young men are far more likely to be economically active than young women (43% versus 17%)(ibid.). Refugee youth labour

Figure 3 Youth labour force participation rates, by nationality and gender
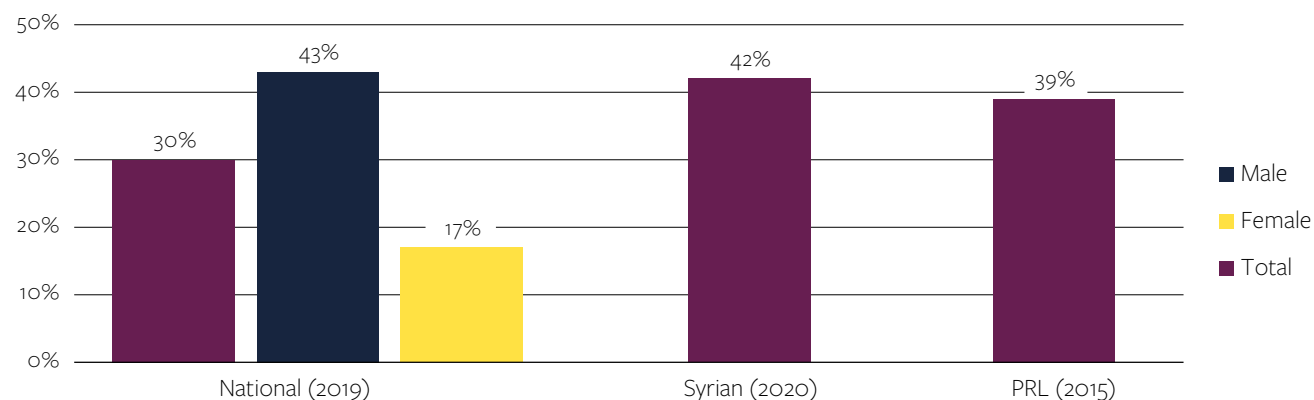
force participation rates are higher than national averages, reflecting refugee households' greater economic vulnerability. UNHCR (2021) reports that 42% of Syrian young people aged 18–24 were participating in the labour force in 2020.[9] In 2015, 39% of PRL aged 15–24 were economically active (Chaaban et al., 2016).

Youth unemployment rates are far higher than those of adults. At a national level, and including both males and females, 17% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were seeking – and unable – to find employment in 2019 (see Figure 4)(World Bank, 2021b). Young females, doubly disadvantaged by gender norms and age, were much more likely to be unemployed than young

males (21% versus 15%)(ibid.). Refugee youth, legally limited like the adults in their communities to only a subset of jobs (and practically limited to those that are close), have unemployment rates many times the national average. UNHCR (2021) reports that 45% of Syrian young people aged 18–24 were unemployed in 2020. Chaaban et al. (2016) report unemployment rates of PRL and PRS youth (15–24) of 36% and 57%, respectively. Youth unemployment in Lebanon tends to be quite protracted. Noting that the LFHLCS excludes refugees, who face the most employment-related restrictions, CAS et al. (2020) reports that of unemployed youth, 11% have been unemployed for at least a year.

Figure 4 Youth unemployment rate, by nationality and gender
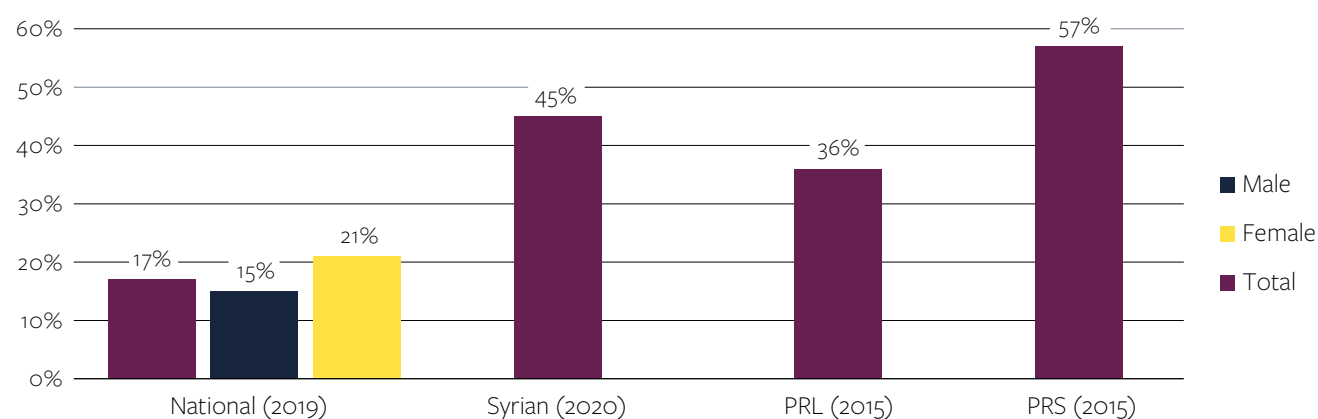
9   UNHCR (2021) notes that the inclusion of only those over the age of 18 means that figures are not directly comparable.

At the national level and including all those of working age (15–64), higher levels of education are associated with higher rates of unemployment for both males and females—in part because those with more education are more likely to be in the labour market (World Bank, 2021b). This pattern is amplified in the case of young people. Again noting that the LFHLCS excludes refugee youth, CAS et al. (2020) report that young people (15–24) with a university education are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with only an elementary education (36% versus 18%)(see Figure 5). The same survey found a significant skills mismatch between young workers and their jobs,

with over-education more of an issue than under-education and both more common for male workers than their female peers (see Figure 6).

Youth labour force participation and unemployment rates, especially in contexts where uptake of secondary and post-secondary education are relatively high (see education section below), are best understood alongside the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). In Lebanon, nationality and gender shape young people's risk of being NEET. At the national level, 18% of young men (15–24) and 29% of young women are out of work, school and training (World Bank, 2021b) (see Figure 7). Rates for Syrians – for whom access to both education and the labour market are far more restricted – are more than twice as high, with 54% of young men and 78% of young women NEET (UNHCR, 2021a). For Syrians, the risk of NEET grows as young people transition into adulthood and effectively lose access to education (see discussion below). Of girls, 50% of those aged 15–18 but 57% of those aged 19–24 are NEET. For boys the gap is larger still; 64% of those aged 15–18 are NEET, versus 89% of those aged 19–24 (ibid.). There does not appear to be evidence about how

Figure 5 Youth unemployment rate, by level of education

Figure 6 Skills mismatch between young workers and their jobs

Figure 7 Rates of NEET, by nationality and gender
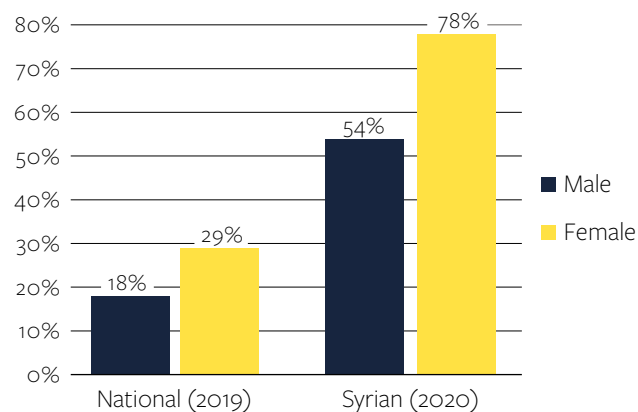
many Palestinians are NEET. However, there is widespread concern that limits on Palestinians' employment are causing young people to disengage from education – as they see no point in learning if they cannot translate their skills into work (Chaaban et al., 2016; Shuayb, 2014).

Education and training for work

Education in Lebanon is also shaped by history. Of the nearly 1.3 million students enrolled in Lebanese schools, 60% attend private schools – with public schools seen as 'the last resort' for those without means[10] (World Bank, 2021c; USAID, 2020; USAID, 2021). The World Bank (2021c) observes that this is unique in the region and is due to private schools – mostly funded by religious groups – having existed before public schools. This figure also, however, captures the lasting damage done to government services by the civil war and the political stalemate that has prevented the government from addressing access and quality issues (WENR, 2017; USAID, 2021). This stalemate is also evident in the lack of data regarding education in Lebanon. The UNESCO (2021a, b) database reports on very few educational outcomes – and what it does report is often years out of date. Refugee students have little access to private schools. Syrian students almost exclusively attend government schools, for free, primarily during the afternoon shift (USAID, 2020). A large majority of Palestinian refugees (81% of PRL aged 6–15) attend schools run by UNRWA (USAID, 2020; Chaaban et al., 2016). Lebanon is the only country in which UNRWA provides secondary education, due to poor government provisioning (Shuayb, 2014).

Education in Lebanon, which is provided in English and French alongside Arabic, is divided

into five stages (WENR, 2017). Pre-school is only available only to those who attend private school. Elementary school, which consists of six grades, is divided into two cycles and is compulsory. Intermediate school is a single three-year cycle, is also compulsory and is divided into two tracks (academic or technical/vocational). Students pursuing different tracks take different exams at the end of the cycle, both of which are recognised with certification (the *Brevet d'Etudes* or the *Brevet Professionnel*). Secondary school is a final three-year cycle that is not compulsory. It too is divided into academic and technical/vocational tracks. Academic students sit the *Baccalauréat* at the end of the cycle. Technical students sit either the *Baccalauréat Technique,* which requires significant study of general education subjects (e.g. maths, Arabic, etc..), or the *Certificat Professionnel de Maîtrise,* which requires practical training. UNESCO et al. (2019) reports that while the technical/vocational track is formalised and relatively well developed, it remains far smaller than the academic track. Only 16% of intermediate and secondary students are enrolled. NUFFIC (2020) adds that this is because it is underfunded and undervalued.

Enrolment rates vary by educational stage, nationality and gender – and are far from universal even at the elementary level and even for Lebanese students (see Figure 8). The LFHLCS reports elementary net enrolment rates of 93% for Lebanese girls and 92% for boys (CAS et al., 2020). With primary completion rates low and declining (Abdul-Hamid and Yassine, 2020 as cited in World Bank, 2021c), by the time they reach intermediate school only 79% of Lebanese students are enrolled – with a gender gap in girls' favour (CAS et al., 2020). Just two-thirds of Lebanese adolescents enrol in secondary

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10   Bastagli et al. (2019) report that 5% of poor students versus 66% of wealthier ones attend private schools.

Figure 8 Lebanese enrolment rate in school
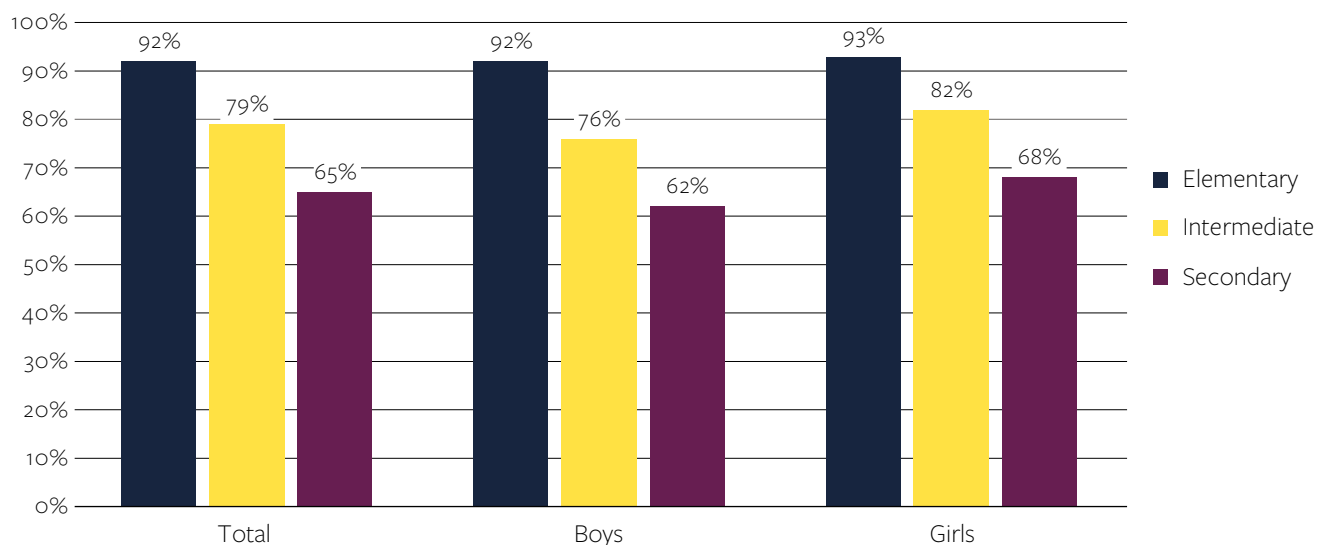
school, with girls maintaining their advantage (68% versus 62%)(ibid.). The World Bank (2021c) observes that educational outcomes in Lebanon are among the world's least equitable. Only half of the country's poorest 18 year olds will ultimately complete their schooling.

The government and the international community have worked diligently in recent years to scale up public education to accommodate the needs of Syrian learners (GOL and UN, 2018). Despite this, however, Syrian children are far less likely to

enrol in school than their Lebanese peers (see Figure 9). UNHCR (2021a) reports that only 67% of elementary- and intermediate-aged Syrian girls and boys were enrolled in education in 2020.[11] Syrian enrolment in secondary education has been increasing in recent years, albeit from an extremely low base. UNHCR (2021) reports that in 2020, 32% of boys and 27% of girls were enrolled.[12] For the Syrian refugee children who are not enrolled in school, administrative and financial barriers are the most pressing (though language matters). HRW (2021) reports that over a

Figure 9 Syrian enrolment rate in school

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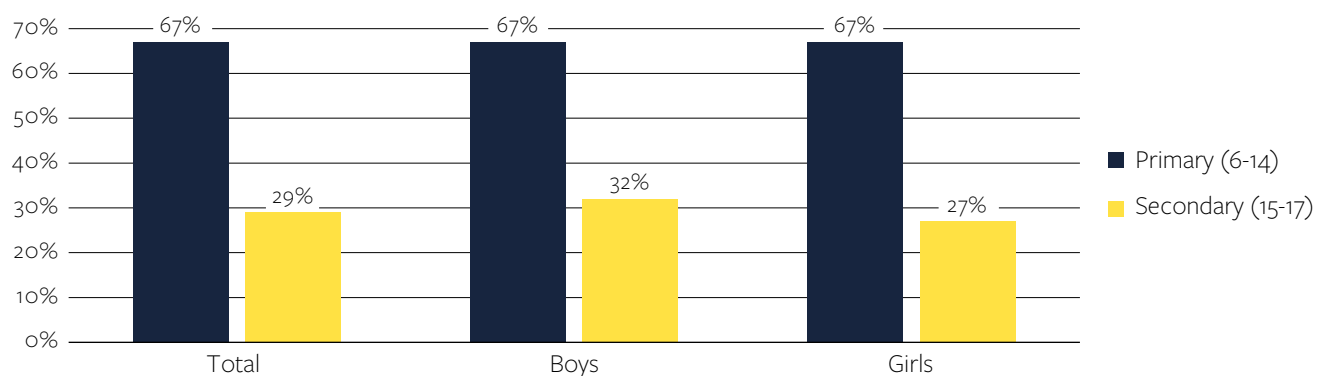
11   Using 'non-Lebanese' as a proxy for Syrian, the LFHLCS allows for further disaggregation. It reports an elementary net enrolment rate of 74% and an intermediate net enrolment rate of 29% (CAS et al., 2020).
12   It should be noted that school was in-person for little of 2020, due to the pandemic, so enrolment figures should be interpreted with care.

quarter (29%) of Syrian children are out of school because Lebanese schools refuse to admit them, despite government policy. UNHCR's (2021a) vulnerability assessment highlights unbearable costs. For primary-aged children, the cost of educational materials (30%) and cost of school transport (25%) were the top two reasons for non-enrolment provided by caregivers (UNHCR, 2021a). For secondary-aged students, these figures were 21% and 16% respectively (ibid.) – but are complicated by the fact that Syrians over the age of 15 are often not allowed to sit exams unless they have a residency permit, which costs US$200/ year (HRW, 2021a). Only 14% of boys and 11% of girls had these permits in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021a). Other reasons for adolescents' non-enrolment are gendered. Of those aged 15–18, 30% of boys are out of school because they need to work; 25% of girls are out of school due to marriage (ibid.).

Palestine refugees, because they have access to UNRWA schools, are more likely to be enrolled in formal education than their Lebanese and Syrian peers (see Figure 10). In 2015, at the elementary level, nearly all (97%) of PRL were enrolled (Chaaban et al., 2016). At the intermediate level, PRL students maintain their advantage over their non-Palestinian peers and a significant gender gap opens in girls' favour (89% versus 79%). With the caveat that Palestinian figures are older (2015 versus 2018), which may impact conclusions (especially as Palestinian enrolment has been growing in recent years), PRL are less likely to attend secondary school than their Lebanese peers (61% for PRL versus 65% for Lebanese). Girls are more likely to enrol than boys (65% versus 58%), which Chaaban et al. (2016) attribute to girls' higher success rate on the *Brevet* and boys' drop-out as a result of their involvement in child labour. They add that the boys most at risk of non-attendance and drop-out are those from the most vulnerable households. PRS students are less likely to enrol in all levels of education than their PRL peers, in part because they are more economically vulnerable (and cannot afford the real and opportunity costs of education) and in

Figure 10 Palestinian enrolment rate in school
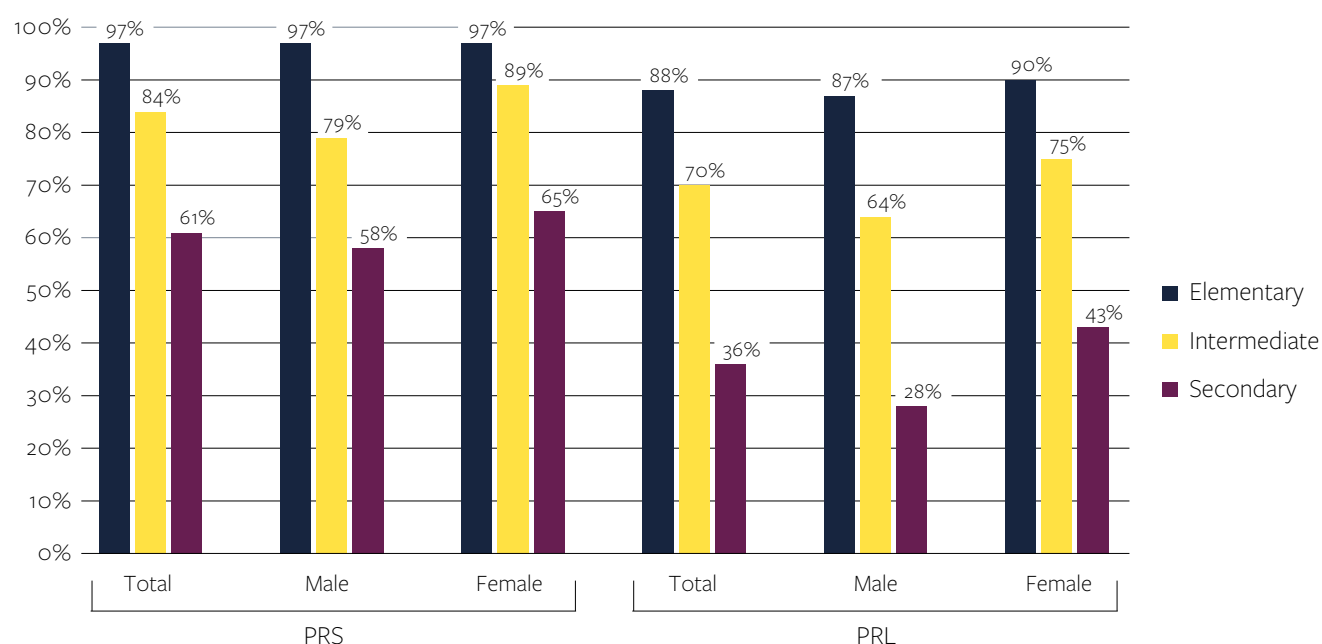
part because they are less likely to live in formal camps – which reduces their access to UNRWA schools. Drop-out is markedly more common in the year before students sit the 9th grade exam, which Chaaban et al. (2016) attribute to their higher odds of having an irregular legal status in the country and thus being unable to sit the exam.

Educational quality in Lebanon is extremely poor and has been declining for years, in large part because the sector is funded at a rate of less than half the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (2% of GDP versus 4.4%) but also because it has been further stressed in the last decade by the influx of Syrian students (World Bank, 2021c; GOL and UN, 2018). The World Bank (2021b) estimates that the average child in Lebanon will develop only half of his or her potential human capital. Poor learning outcomes are evident on international tests. On the 2018 PISA test, which is taken by 15 year olds, only 32% of students in Lebanon scored as minimally proficient in reading (compared to an OECD average of 77%) (OECD, 2019). Just 40% scored as minimally proficient in maths (compared to 76%). Figures for science were 38% and 78% respectively. Disparities between schools are among the largest in the world, largely due to differences between private and government schools (World Bank, 2021c). The quality of education provided by UNRWA schools is also poor. With the caveat that Palestinian adolescents' aspirations for formal education have been dropping for years, because they are required to study a formal academic curriculum but are then prohibited from all forms of professional work, Shuayb (2014) reports that in 2010, only 43% of

UNRWA students sitting the 9th grade *Brevet* exams received a passing score. At some schools, the pass rate was under 15% (ibid.).

The cascading set of crises that have faced Lebanon since 2019 have pushed the educational system to the brink of collapse (HRW, 2021b; World Bank, 2021c). Many students last attended school over two years ago, when civil unrest in the autumn of 2019 forced schools to close (Save the Children, 2021). For those who were back in the classroom when pandemic-related lockdowns were put in place (in the spring of 2020), there has been sporadic access to distance education via WhatsApp[13] (and on other online platforms at private and UNRWA schools). However, because nearly all schools were closed for the entire 2020–2021 school year, HRW (2021b) concluded that 700,000 students had lost an entire year of education (see also World Bank, 2021c). As the economic crisis has continued and deepened, students have begun dropping out en masse. HRW (2021b) reports that over 40,000 children dropped out of school last year; it adds that up to 120,000 have been forced to transfer from private to public schools because their families can no longer afford the fees, which has cascading implications for educational quality (see also OCHA, 2021). Schools were meant to open for in-person lessons in the autumn of 2021. However, owing to fuel shortages (which have left schools without electricity and students without transportation), teacher strikes (organised to protest salaries that have eroded 90% over the last two years) and teacher shortages (15% of all teachers have left the country since the onset of the crisis), government schools have been open for barely any of the 2021-2022 school year (HRW, 2021b; World Bank, 2021e).

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13   The government of Lebanon ostensibly broadcast lessons on the television, but this was only for a few weeks and uptake was minimal because few households have access to electricity to support television use.

The post-secondary educational landscape in Lebanon is also complex. It is dominated by the country's single public university (Lebanese University), which charges low fees to Lebanese and Palestinian students, enrols the plurality of all university students in the country[14] and consumes 20% of the national post-secondary budget (CAS et al., 2020; World Bank, 2021c). Lebanese University has 50 branches, but those outside Beirut offer an extremely limited set of majors. There are also three dozen private universities in Lebanon, which offer an array of three- and four-year degrees modelled on those offered in other countries (e.g. France, the Unites States, Egypt, Germany), as well as several technical colleges that offer two- and three-year programmes of study (WENR, 2017; UNESCO et al., 2019; El-Ghali et al., 2017).

With the caveat that it excludes those who live in formal and informal camps and settlements, the LFHLCS reports that 35% of young adults aged 20–24 are enrolled in education (see Figure 11)(CAS, 2020). Females are more likely to be enrolled than males, mostly because young men are more likely to be employed (39% versus 32%). Lebanese young adults, who pay lower fees and are allowed to enrol in any major they want, are six times more likely to be enrolled than their non-Lebanese (primarily Syrian) peers (42% versus 7%). Fox (2019) observes that while Syrian enrolment in university is extremely low, the number of scholarships available for Syrian students now exceeds the number of Syrian students who qualify for university. This is largely because secondary school has become a 'plugged pipeline', with Syrians' lack of residency permits a significant obstacle to their regular attendance and access to required exams. Chaaban et al. (2016) report that in 2015, 54% of Palestinian young people between the ages of 19 and 24 were enrolled in university. Because Palestinian students are only accepted into Lebanese University if there are seats unwanted by Lebanese students, and are permitted only a handful of majors, it is more common for them to enrol in private universities—despite the expense-- than Lebanese University (38% versus 16%) (see Figure 12).

Young people in Lebanon are much more likely to pursue a university education than TVET. UNESCO et al. (2019) report that at a national level only 5.3% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are enrolled in TVET. NUFFIC (2020) adds that Syrian students' access is even more limited. In the 2016–2017 school year, less than 2% of the

Figure 11 Enrolment of young adults aged 20-24

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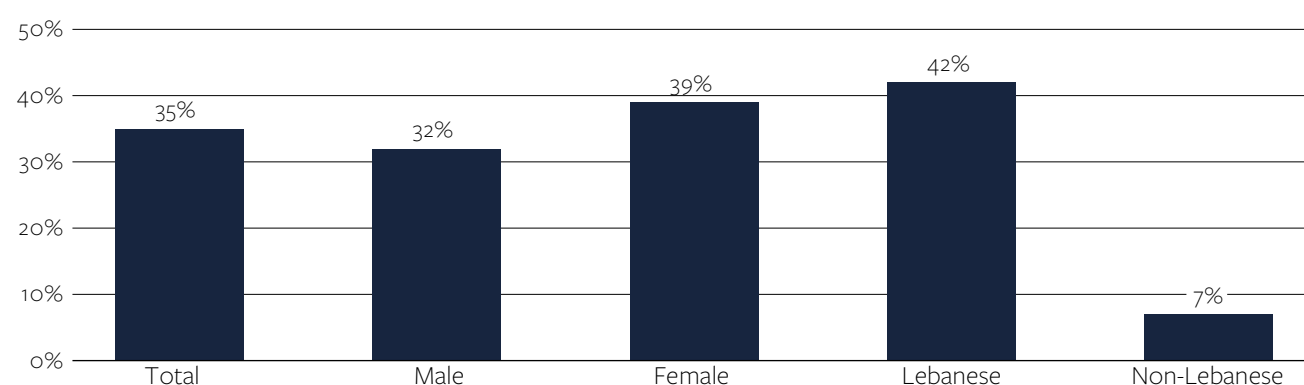
14   Just over one-third of all university students are enrolled at LU (WENR, 2017), which enrolled 79,000 students in 2020 (LU, 2021).

Figure 12 Palestine Refugees from Lebanon youth enrolment, by institution type
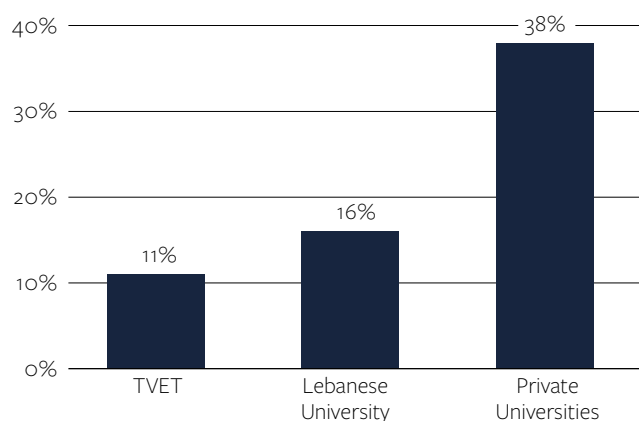
85,000 TVET students in Lebanon were Syrian; at government-run elementary schools, on the other hand, Syrians make up half the student body. Although UNICEF (2021) is working to scale up formal and informal skills training programming for refugees, Syrians' access to even informal programming remains limited. In their survey of Syrian young people (aged 18–32) living in Lebanon, Karyotis et al. (2018) found that fewer than 5% had participated in a language course, a work placement to gain experience, computer skills training or career counselling. Reflecting broader patterns, Palestinian young people also prefer university education over TVET. Chaaban et al. (2016) report that in 2015, 11% of PRL youth between the ages of 19 and 24 were enrolled in TVET – half through UNRWA and half through private schools (see Figure 12).

Social protection

Social protection, like other services in Lebanon, is fragmented and highly privatised (Huelzer and Divine, 2020; Bastagli et al., 2019). It fails to reach even the majority of the Lebanese population and specifically excludes refugees (ibid.). The country's sole programme targeting poverty is

a decade old and is called the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP). Prior to the crisis it was reaching 43,000 households with a cash transfer aimed at improving food security (World Bank, 2020). The NPTP is currently being scaled up, with World Bank support, to meet the crisis-driven surge in food insecurity, poverty and educational exclusion (World Bank, 2021d). Unconditional cash will be provided to nearly 150,000 households for the next year. Households with adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 will be given a top-up transfer calculated to cover the costs of education, including books, uniforms and connectivity (ibid.).

Social protection is provided to Syrian refugees by the international community (Bastagli et al., 2019). Before the crisis, the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR supplied debit cards worth US$27/month/capita (ibid.) that could be used to purchase food at 400 selected shops. They also gave 64,000 of the most vulnerable households US$175/month (ibid.) to pay for other items. Demand far outstripped supply as, even prior to the crisis, 125,000 households were identified as needing cash support (ibid.). The WFP also provided school feeding, primarily targeting double-shift schools with a large number of Syrians enrolled, and UNHCR provided nearly all refugee households with cash assistance for winter fuel (ibid.).

In the face of the crisis, support has been rapidly scaled up. The WFP is now providing support to one-sixth of the population. There are three modalities of support: food e-cards, cash-for-food e-cards and multi-purpose cash e-cards (WFP, 2021). Food e-cards can be used at certain shops for food only. These are provided to 300,000 Syrian households and are worth US$66/month/capita (as of October 2021) (ibid.). Cash-for-food e-cards are provided to 45,000 refugee

households and are also worth US$66/month/capita (ibid.). They can be used at any shop or to withdraw cash. Multi-purpose cash e-cards are given to the most vulnerable Syrian households (as determined by UNHCR). They are unrestricted and include not only cash for food (US$66/month/capita) but a top-up of US$265/month/household (ibid.). Mindful of UNRWA's budgeting woes, the WFP is also providing support to 14,000 PRS through a different card. In the winter of 2020–2021, UNHCR provided winter cash payments to 822,000 households (UNHCR, 2021c).

UNRWA provides social protection to Palestinian families. The Social Safety Net Programme offers quarterly cash payments and reaches almost 62,000 individuals in Lebanon (UNRWA, 2021b). Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (2021)

observes that due to budget cuts, beneficiary headcounts have been frozen for more than six years. UNRWA is attempting to respond to the crisis, but has few financial means with which to do so. Starting in September 2021, it is making a one-time cash payment to households with children worth $40/month (UNRWA, 2021c).

In an attempt to further buffer children from the worst of the crisis, UNICEF is now also offering unconditional cash to Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese households with children. The 'Haddi' scheme launched in the summer of 2021 and provides families with US$40–80/month, depending on how many children they have (Azhari, 2021). Haddi is aimed at helping families keep their children enrolled in school and heading off the threats of child labour and child marriage.

17-year-old Palestinian boy working in a coffee shop, Lebanon, 2021 © Elie Matar

Framing and methods

Our research employs a PD approach that uses 'thick data' (see Figure 13) to understand the factors that contribute to young refugees' ability to secure the foundations for skills, economic security and – eventually – empowerment. PD refers to a behavioural and social change approach that takes as its starting point the observation that in a particular context, a minority of individuals – confronting similar challenges, constraints and resource deprivations as their peers – will achieve a more desirable outcome, due at least in part to a confluence of their own strategies and the supports available to them. In studying such individuals or 'positive deviants/outliers', the PD approach aims to identify innovative solutions to context-specific challenges (BetterEvaluation, 2021).

Drawing on this framing, this research relies on a purposively selected sample of young Syrian and Palestinian refugees who have managed, despite the difficult Lebanese context, to access employment and/or advanced education. The young people included in our sample are between

the ages of 15 and 24 and are mixed regarding gender, nationality and whether they live in formal refugee camps or host communities. They are also mixed regarding whether and how they are pursing work versus higher education. Although the bulk of this report uses a case study approach that relies on carefully interrogating the lives of the 25 young refugees who completed individual interviews, it is also informed by individual interviews with the parents and spouses of successful young refugees, group interviews with young refugees who have been awarded university scholarships or are training for work or working, and key informant interviews with programme implementers, international NGOs, UN agencies, employers and civil society organisations (CSOs) (see Table 1).

Our research tools, which are included in full in Annex 2, were aimed explicitly at uncovering and exploring the antecedents of young people's PD and how programming has contributed to it. With case study participants, interviews were structured first to explore how the young person framed their own life history and successes and then on programme participation. Specially, we inquired about: (1) intervention characteristics; (2) intervention perceptions; (3) intervention choices/constraints; and (4) links to future aspirations. Since the interviews took place following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also aimed to understand how lockdowns and service closures had impacted on a sub-sample of the youth in our study. We also looked at what support they had received (if any) from programmes they had participated in and what coping strategies they had relied upon. With the young participants taking part in group interviews, tools were designed to elicit programme characteristics that had supported success and their thoughts about

Figure 13 Thick data to illuminate positive deviance
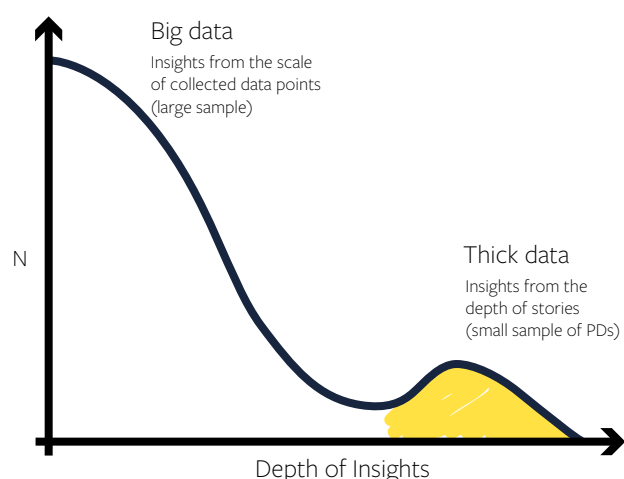
Source: Global Development Institute, 2020

Table 1 Qualitative sample breakdown by gender and nationality

	Gender	Nationality	Total number of individuals
Individual interviews with young people	10 females 15 males	16 Syrian 9 Palestinian	25
Individual interviews with parents and spouses of young people	10 mothers 4 fathers 3 husbands	9 Syrian 8 Palestinian	17
Group discussions with young people studying at TVET and university	4 groups – females 4 groups – males	4 groups – Syrian 4 groups – Palestinian	
Key informant interviews			13

areas for improvement. In interviews with parents and spouses, conversations were structured to understand what forms of economic and social support families had provided that had enabled outliers to break the mould.

Interviews with key informants allowed us to explore strengths and weaknesses of intervention designs and implementation, as well as barriers and enablers to youth economic participation in Lebanon.

17-year-old Palestinian girl studying to become a nurse, Lebanon, 2021 © Marcel Saleh

Findings

Starting with the case study young people who completed individual interviews – and contextualising these with the successful young people who took part in group interviews as well as with our broader and ongoing participatory research (Devonald et al., 2022; Presler-Marshall et al., 2021; Youssef et al., 2020)– we have chosen to present our findings on economic outliers as two groups. Specifically, we will first discuss the young refugees who are out of school and pursuing their own livelihoods and then those who have managed to find an entry point into advanced education and are learning skills they hope to translate into future employment.

Figure 14 maps out the trajectories of our case studies, capturing the high-level details of individual stories (using pseudonyms to protect respondents' privacy) as of the first half of 2021. Details include what occupation or educational credentials each young person is currently pursuing, their aspirations and type of school where relevant, and whether they have a scholarship. Young people are placed into one of five categories. The first category of young people, shown in the leftmost column, are those who entered the labour market after completing intermediate education. The second category of young people are those who entered the labour market after completing secondary-level TVET. The third category, shown in the middle column, are those who are using secondary-level TVET as a 'back door' to gain entrance to university. The fourth and fifth columns include young people who are studying at the tertiary level. Some are at schools that offer TVET and others are at university.

It should be caveated that our findings must be interpreted in context. Specifically, this research was originally proposed and designed in early 2019 – with data collection meant to take place in late 2019 and early 2020. However, due first to the escalation of Lebanon's crisis and the street violence that ensued, and then to the Covid-19 pandemic, fieldwork was postponed for over a year. Data was collected between December 2020 and July 2021, in a Lebanon that bore little resemblance to the Lebanon of 2019.

Livelihoods

GAGE's ongoing participatory work with Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon echoes existent survey data regarding access to decent work—it is all but impossible to find. This sample, however, is somewhat different, as many of the young people have managed to find (or make) work, despite Lebanon's difficult labour market. Below we focus on teasing out lessons from the experiences of this purposefully selected group of young people—starting with the pathways they have taken, what they have in common, and the impact of gender norms and then concluding with what supports and services they feel would further elevate their trajectories.

Pathways

Of the successful young workers taking part in our research, most entered the labour market after completing intermediate education, but without attending secondary-level education or training. In line with national level statistics, these young refugees are disproportionately male, due to restrictive gender norms that limit girls' access to work (see below). They are also disproportionately Syrian, since Palestinians have better access to secondary school.

Figure 14 Case study refugee youth

Elementary education	→	Aarshad has autism and dropped out after first grade. He is training to be an electrician – he would eventually like to work.	
↓			
Intermediate education	→	Daaria dropped out after 7th grade, because she needed to care for younger siblings – she has a TVET certificate in hospitality. She took a crochet class and sells small items via WhatsApp but is not using her credentials because her fiance' will not allow. Her brother left school after 7th – her sister completed 12th.	

Legend: Girls (yellow) | Boys (blue) | Palestinians (green border) | Syrians (red border)

Labour market (or not) | **Technical Secondary School** (all students completed at least 9th grade) | **Academic Secondary School** (all students completed 12th)

Under Technical Secondary School: **Labour market** | **Springboard to university**

Under Academic Secondary School: **Tertiary level TVET** | **University**

Labour market (or not):

Adil, who wanted to be a dentist, completed 9th grade and is a successful barber.

Abia, who wanted to be an engineer, completed 9th grade and works in a salon. She took several related and unrelated training courses.

Taahir completed 9th grade (but could not sit the Brevet) and took a phone repair course that has not been transformatory because he needs more tools.

Basam, who wanted to be a military officer, completed 9th grade and took a gastro course. He works in a restaurant via course placement.

Kadeem, who wanted to be an engineer, completed 9th grade and took a cash-for-work course on agriculture. He owns a small shop that sells vegetables.

Adara completed 9th grade and took an information technology course - she would love to be a chef, but sees no potential for finding a job.

Labour market (Technical Secondary):

Tadris studied carpentry in a formal programme and works in the field.

Sabir, who wanted to be a doctor, attended a Syrian secondary school for two years and then studied TV and radio infomally for 3 years. He does photography and satellite installation.

Springboard to university:

Laben is at private TVET with a 75% scholarship, stuyding graphic design. He plans university next. He works with his dad and also sells artwork on Instagram.

Wadi finished secondary school in Syria but in Lebanon attended privateTVET in order to credential for university - which is where he is currently enrolled in computer science.

Tertiary level TVET:

Raba attended Syrian secondary school and is now studying laboratory sciences at a private TVET school. She was initially funded by UNHCR.

Maazina attended Syrian secondary school and is now studying nursing at a public TVET school. She was initially funded by UNHCR and Save the Children covered her transport costs.

Madia attended Syrian secondary school and is now studying laboratory sciences at a private TVET school. She was initially funded by UNHCR.

Nabi is studying infomatics at a private TVET school without a scholarship. He plans to study computer science at university next. He works doing internet installation.

Oman is studying electrical engineering at Siblin - he has one year of university (dropped out due to cost despite partial scholarship) and one other tertiary TVET degree already. He works as a waiter.

University:

Nisim finished secondary school in Syria. He is now studying accounting in graduate school at LU, with a full scholarship.

Aeden is studying audio-visual/cinema at private university with a full scholarship from the school. He works as a freelancer.

Oza is studying biology, without a scholarship, at LU. She works as a tutor.

Jabira (a Palestinian from Syria) is studying English at LU with no scholarship. She attended Lebanese secondary school because her family has very good English.

Junia is studying TV/marketing at the graduate level with a full scholarship. She attended Lebanese secondary school because her sister was able to support her English.

Ilaf is studying business at the graduate level at a private university. Scholarships have funded her studies. She went to Syrian secondary school.

Fahia is studying dental lab at a private university with a partial scholarship. She identifies strongly as a non-camp dweller.

Raashad owns a spice store and works for an educational centre after dropping out of university (due to costs) and taking several economic empowerment courses.

Some of these young workers have found employment due to personal social and financial capital. Abia, for example, found work in a salon through her mother who also works there. Personal capital has been especially important to those who have opened their own businesses, due to the capital required for start-up in a context where refugees are barred from accessing formal financial services. Kadeem, for example, owns his own vegetable stand, which would not have been possible without support from his father and grandfather, who owned supermarkets in Syria. He explained,

'My father helped me to open a vegetables store... he gave me material and money that I needed and taught me how to buy the vegetables from the market... my grandfather taught me how to do accounting and how to know how much profit I am gaining... he also taught me how to bargain for prices in the vegetable market to get good prices and make a profit....'

Adil, who is a barber, was able to launch his own business because he bought his equipment from

Box 2 Economic empowerment programming in Lebanon

Economic empowerment programming – aimed at youth, women and refugees – is extremely common in Lebanon. Noting that this sample was purposively selected because of programme participation, meaning that it would not be appropriate to use it to benchmark how common, the 89 young refugees taking part in our ongoing participatory research, who were selected for vulnerability (not success), reported having taken courses provided by 22 different organisations. These included international organisations, such as ActionAid and the Norwegian Refugee Council, as well as regional and national organisations, including Anera, LOST, MAP and Nabaa. Economic empowerment courses range from nine days long (for training programmes associated with cash for work) to three years long (photography classes). They teach more technical skills (e.g. accounting and computer repairs) as well as those that are more manual (e.g. blacksmithing and sweet making).

The majority of the 21 economic empowerment courses that participatory research participants reported having taken were ostensibly open to all nationalities, though overwhelmingly utilised only by Syrians and Lebanese. This is because Syrians are the primary targets of donor funding and live in Lebanese host communities, whereas Palestinians have seen funding evaporate in recent years and live in formal refugee camps that are physically and socially walled off from those host communities. Courses taken by Palestinians were largely taken only by Palestinians, because they were offered within the camps. Palestinians in our research were not only especially likely to report being isolated from other groups by programme delivery, they were also the most likely to report active discrimination. A Palestinian girl reported, *'The teachers always reminded us that we are Palestinians and cannot complain about things in the school... Lebanese were preferred and favoured in everything and they made us feel that Lebanese students are above us.'*

It was common for young people –in both this research and GAGE's ongoing participatory research—to report having taken three or four different empowerment courses. In part this is because courses provide out-of-school adolescents with opportunities for socialisation that are otherwise quite rare, especially for girls. For boys, however, serial programme participation primarily reflects their understanding of the Lebanese labour market. Because jobs are scarce, it is necessary to maximise their skills as well as their social networks. A young Palestinian man in a group discussion observed, '*Without a variety of work, you can't survive in this country. You have to work at whatever is available.*' Several employed young people also highlighted that a key advantage of taking many courses is becoming well known at the organisations that deliver those courses. A young Syrian man in a group discussion explained, '*Through the work courses, we knew new people... Instead of seeking construction work and so on, I seek work in associations.*'

Although the direct links between short-term economic empowerment programmes and decent employment are tenuous, largely because of the Lebanese context, young participants in this research often reported lasting impacts on soft skills such as communication and leadership. These in turn helped graduates better advocate for themselves and grow their incomes over time. One young Syrian man described how he was '*too shy to talk and ask for raise or for normal working hours,*' before he took a course that simultaneously taught him to repair electronics and voice his needs. A Palestinian girl who attended a private TVET programme added that her course had not only taught her to cook but '*to take responsibility.*'

his former employer, who migrated to Europe and is allowing Adil to pay him back slowly over time. He recalled,

> My employer in the barbershop wanted to migrate and he told me that he will leave the shop for me and I can pay him whenever I have money.

Another group of young people who have found work that they are happy with without more advanced education or training have been able to do so in part due to their participation in economic empowerment programming (see Box 2). Taahir, for example, took a class in phone repair that enabled him to find work in a phone repair shop. He explained, '*After I finished the Phone Repair course, I started working in a phones store,*'

Similarly, Basam was offered a job working in the kitchen of a restaurant because of a cooking course that he took when he lost his previous job. He reported,

> The restaurant I used to work in for the past five years closed due to Covid. While I was looking for a job, I came across a 40-day working opportunity at a local organisation... The course provided me with a skill I lacked at my work and a job opportunity as they hired me to work at the organisation's restaurant when they knew I have a lot of experience.

Two young Syrian women who took part in a group interview also attributed their work – as a hairdresser and a baker – to courses they had taken. One recalled,

> I joined a cooking course and I discovered how much I liked it and how much capability I have and the talent I had for it... I started an Instagram page and I put on it the food that I make; now I have customers and I started planning to open my own shop.

Economic empowerment programmes also support the livelihoods of young refugees by helping them to upskill in ways that support their existent employment. Kadeem, for example, reported that a recent class in agriculture was beneficial to him because now he knows more about the vegetables he sells and how to acquire them at lower cost:

> The agriculture course helped me learn more about agriculture and vegetables and what do they need to grow in case I wanted to expand my business and plant but most importantly I learned to buy products from the farmer himself and not the distributor as it would be cheaper.

Abia similarly believes that a course in hairdressing has improved her skills – without her having to practise on actual customers. She explained, *'In the institution, you can try on your friends, and the trainer explains everything for you.'*

Another group of successful young workers entered the labour market after obtaining secondary level education or training. These young people are again disproportionately male, due to restrictive gender norms that limit girls' work (see below) but are far more likely to be Palestinian rather than Syrian because of paired push-pull factors. Palestinians are pulled into secondary-level TVET by UNRWA's Siblin Training Centre, which offers an array of certificates and

is completely free. Tadris, who studied carpentry for two years and has worked in the construction sector since graduation, explained,

> A Siblin certificate is well reputed...maybe even more than the state certificate...and it doesn't require money, everything is secured...your transportation, education, clothes are even given there for working in.

Palestinians, especially boys, are pushed into secondary-level TVET because of marginal returns on academic education. Several boys in group discussions reported that the most common job for Palestinian men who have graduated from university is driving a taxi, because Lebanese law prevents them from working in the fields in which they studied.

By contrast, Syrians do not have access to Siblin. They must choose between public and private TVET centres. Both have disadvantages. The former is considered poor quality and the latter are expensive. A young Syrian man in a group discussion, for example, explained that his parents would have never allowed him to take courses at a public TVET school. He said,

> My parents would have not agreed that I register in a public school. The education at private schools is better as the teachers teach well, the attendance is obligatory and there is more order while at public TVET schools, the students run away from school and no one cares if they do.

What sets those with successful livelihoods apart?

The young refugees who are successfully pursuing livelihoods in Lebanon have several things in common. First, they are relatively more educated, usually due to a confluence of personal ambition and family and peer support. Second, they are emotionally resilient enough to adapt their aspirations to the Lebanese reality and 'make do', at least in the short to medium term.

The young refugees in our economic outlier sample, with only two exceptions (see Figure 14) (see Box 3) – have completed at least 9th grade. This is a significant accomplishment, especially for Syrians. As noted above, the enrolment rate of Syrian children aged 6–14 is only 67% (UNHCR, 2021a). High real and opportunity costs, especially for transportation for girls and vis-à-vis child labour for boys, stringent administrative rules that make enrolment contingent upon paperwork that many families cannot produce, and poor-quality education in the afternoon shifts in which Syrian students are enrolled mean that many Syrian refugees leave school well before the 9th grade. Low educational attainment is especially common among Syrian refugees who are now older adolescents or young adults, as they primarily arrived in Lebanon before double-shift schools were opened and often after having already been out of the classroom in Syria for years. That nearly all of the Syrian refugees taking part in GAGE's ongoing participatory work have completed less

Box 3 'He started to communicate with people... and then he started to change...'

Aarshad is a 15-year-old Palestinian boy who left school after first grade because the teachers were not prepared to address his learning needs, which are shaped by autism. Thanks to active support from his parents and extended family, he is enrolled in a non-formal skills training course to become an electrician.

Because '*the regular schools would not accept him*' (Aarshad's mother explained), Aarshad spent most of his childhood with relatively little interaction with non-family members. This did not sit well with his parents, who want him to succeed despite his autism. His mother explained, '*His father and I encouraged him to take courses to learn a skill and gain experience since he had left the school... I wanted him to do something with his life.*'

Aarshad has begun to thrive since he joined the course. He has dreams large and small. He reported, '*I wish to be like my uncle.... He's an electrician, I'd like to open a shop and become an electrician.... My dream is to get a car*'.

While Aarshad's parents are happy that he is learning skills that may one day support him to be independent, they are thrilled that he is learning skills that help him connect with those around him. Aarshad's father explained, '*He became daring with people.... When he started to go out and go to work and take courses, he started to communicate with people, and talk to them and then he started to change.*'

than five years of education underscores that even the young Syrian workers in this sample who haven't completed 9th grade should be seen not as 'drop-outs' but as educational successes. Palestinians in this group, while less extraordinary than their Syrian peers, have none the less demonstrated relatively better investment in education, given that the most recent national-level survey of Lebanon's Palestinian population found intermediate enrolment to be only 84% (79% for boys) (Chaaban et al., 2016).

Young people generally ascribed the educational success that underlaid their economic success to a confluence of personal ambition and interpersonal support – especially from parents but also from friends. When asked what sets her apart from her peers who did not manage to sit the Brevet exam, a Syrian girl in a group discussion replied,

> I have passed through the war just like any Syrian girl. I had to stop my studying for several years; about three years.... I said to myself, no, I have to return back to study by any means.

Tadris, who studied at Siblin, also identified himself as the architect of his own success. He stated, '*I did everything I thought about.*' Young people also consistently spoke about the importance of parental encouragement and supportive peer groups. A Syrian girl in a group discussion observed that her family had '*stood beside me through crucial and necessary stages.*' A Palestinian boy in a group discussion, now at Siblin, added,

> If people around him are illiterate, a boy will not want to study because he will not have anyone encouraging him to do it.... All of my friends continue their studies.

The importance of practical support – including financial support – also featured in several young refugees' narratives about their educational success. Sabir, for example, reported that his parents had paid for him to attend a private Syrian secondary school for two years and a Palestinian boy in a group discussion admitted, '*If a boy had to provide for his family, he wouldn't be able to go to school.*'

Successful young workers have a second commonality: they are emotionally resilient enough to have been able to recalibrate their dreams to reality. Moreover, rather than seeing their dreams as thwarted they are pivoting their ambition into turning their work into careers. Although a few young refugees who are working in skilled trades are pursuing their preferred occupations, this is relatively uncommon. Syrian workers universally reported that they had wanted to attend secondary school and then university. However, the barriers that prevent most Syrians from completing intermediate school pale in comparison to those that block access to secondary school. Secondary enrolment not only requires passing the Brevet exam given at the end of 9th grade, which is challenging for Syrian students in part because it requires they pay an exam fee and in part because they are poorly prepared in afternoon-shift schools. It also requires a valid residency permit – which costs hundreds of dollars each year. The mother of a Syrian girl who was not able to attend secondary school in Lebanon explained, '*school fees here are very expensive.*' In addition, the Lebanese secondary school curriculum is not one that most Syrian students are well placed to master – primarily because it is delivered in English (or French). A Syrian boy in a group discussion, now studying at a private TVET school, admitted, '*I was not able actually to face the school. I was not qualified for it.*' Another boy in that same

group added, '*The language was too difficult for me.*' Palestinian workers focused not on the unattainability of secondary and post-secondary education, although they admitted that school violence pushes many adolescents out of school, but on the legal impossibility of translating advanced academic education into professional employment. Raashad explained,

> I left school at Grade 9 because I wanted to study directly something vocational.... I used to see many guys who are university graduates in the camp and who were all idle at homes with nothing to do. You would find an engineering graduate who is working as a painter, at the end they were all doing vocational work. Palestinians here have no right to become anything, like my father, he wanted to open a lab and it is forbidden in Lebanon.

Another young Palestinian man, who took part in a group discussion, agreed:

> Academic education is useless for Palestinians in Lebanon. It is better for us to start learning something vocational early on.

What stands out about the young refugees who are now actively pursuing livelihoods is how they have been able to take their childhood dreams – for engineering, medicine and maths – and channel at least a large measure of that enthusiasm into their chosen occupations. Abia, who is working as a hairdresser despite earlier aspirations for engineering, explained:

> I dream to study at the university, but it's known that this dream is not going to be achieved. So, is it better to stay in the house and do nothing?

> No! I should think about something else, I know that my dream is not going to be achieved, so, I should think about another thing for me.

Sabir, who had planned to study medicine, has similarly transferred his aspirations to something more attainable. He reported that what he now wants for his future is to '*be the owner of a photography studio, and I have two, three staff working with me.*' Although Palestinians' enthusiasm was more muted – in large part because they and their families have had decades in which to see even small dreams thwarted – most of the boys and young men taking part in our research are still determined to build their own futures. A young man in a group discussion explained,

> I'm not the type who plans for long periods, usually I think about the next stage when I finish the current one, I am now thinking of establishing my own project during the next year. When I fulfil this dream, I will think about the next step.

Gender norms and work

In GAGE's ongoing participatory research, girls overwhelmingly fall into one of three categories: 1) those who are enrolled in school or formal training, which is especially common among Palestinians given their better access to education in Lebanon, 2) those who are out of school and are unmarried, many of whom participate in empowerment programming, and 3) those who are married, who only rarely have access to any form of formal or informal learning opportunities. Regardless of which category they fall into – and reflecting national patterning regarding access to

Box 4 'I want to build my future'

Abia is a 19-year-old Syrian girl who – very unusually – has paid work outside of the home. She works in a salon, alongside her mother and aunts, who arrange their work hours around their domestic responsibilities. She reported, *'My two aunts and my mother have been working for about 30 years in this job.... My mom works in three salons.... My mother can't come every day... she has chores and she's a housewife.... Ever since I was young, my mom taught me to do hair... I do manicure, brows and hair. I can do hair. I also do wax.... My brother is also learning.'*

Becoming a stylist is not what Abia imagined for herself when she was a child. She had thought to attend university and study engineering. She said, *'If I were in Syria now, I would have been in college now, a sophomore probably. But the basics of studying here in Lebanon are different than in Syria.'* Besides, she added, education is not well linked to employment for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. She reported, *'I know a lot of people who go to college, but they don't find work.'*

Abia has thrown herself into her work, which she believes offers a solid income regardless of whether she stays in Lebanon or returns to Syria. She stated, *'I just have a hobby and I put my mind to learning it.... I could go and work in Beirut or, if I went back to Syria, I might open a salon with my brother, my mother will be old then.... I want to build my future.'*

the labour market – the refugee girls taking part in GAGE's ongoing participatory research are not employed.[15]

The findings of this research echo this patterning and underscore how difficult it is for refugee girls in Lebanon to engage in paid work. Of all the girls and young women in this sample, only two of those who did not attend secondary school were working outside of the home (one of whom was Abia – see Box 4 below – the other of whom was a Palestinian in a group interview). Both took courses on hairdressing, and both were working in salons. In addition, of this group of girls and young women, only two were working from home. One crochets and was selling her wares via WhatsApp (Daaria), and the other (a Palestinian from Syria in a group interview) had just opened a home bakery, using cash she had won in a NGO-run pitch competition to buy supplies. Both had learned their hard skills – and better honed their soft skills – in empowerment programming. Adara reported of her course, *'Now I have many friends and a stronger personality and I gained more self-confidence.'* Only one girl in our sample, a Palestinian in a group interview, had completed secondary-level TVET (at Siblin). She was not working. Indeed, she admitted that she had not really thought of connecting her training (in childcare) to employment. She said,

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15   It should be noted that this does not mean that Syrian refugee girls do not work. Of those who live in informal tented settlements, it is relatively common for girls and young women – even those who are married and have children – to work alongside family members as agricultural labourers. However, girls' earnings are universally turned over to their husbands (or in-laws).

> I didn't think whether I work or not.... If I won't work later, I will have an experience to deal with my own kids, in future.

Of the young people working to fund further education, only three were female (one of whom was Oza and the other two of whom were Palestinians in group interviews). All worked from home. Two tutored younger students and one sold clothing online.

Respondents agreed that girls and young women are largely prohibited from paid work due to restrictive gender norms that position boys and men as breadwinners and girls and women as financially dependent caretakers. Taahir reported, *'Families usually refuse to allow girls to work.'* A 20-year-old Syrian woman in a group discussion added,

> Most of the families in my community are like that... they live by the old traditions, their daughters must get married at the age of 15.

If females must work for pay, because households are poor or (more rarely) because the girl or woman insists, respondents highlighted that girls' job options are limited. Less educated girls may work from home or (more rarely) alongside a relative, to ensure that they are safe from the sexual harassment that reflects on family hoNisim. A young Palestinian man explained,

> I do not want my sister go out alone and I will be worried if men would harass her at work.... I would only allow her to work with me if I have a store.

Restrictions on girls' work are so rigid that one of the two girls in our sample who works outside the home, a Palestinian in a group interview, admitted that she was hospitalised after being beaten by her father for refusing to accede to his command to give up her job at a salon. She recalled,

> I used to get beaten a lot by my parents to the point to that I was hospitalised, but I still refused to stay at home because I wanted to get out to learn and work, I wouldn't stop.

Girls and young women with more education have more options, as the types of jobs that require education are seen as safer – and more socially acceptable – for females. Raba explained, '

> If the guy dropped out and didn't complete his study, he might be able to get a job, but if the girl dropped out, she couldn't get a job.

A 25-year-old Syrian man, in a group discussion, added that the best jobs for females are sequestered offices (preferably at NGOs) where interaction with the public is limited. He said,

> She cannot work in places where she communicates and deals with a lot with people, it should be a job with little interaction with people.

For less well educated girls and young women, marriage, or even engagement, effectively eliminates the potential for paid work. This is because the girls most likely to marry early tend to come from – and marry into – more conservative families, who prioritise girls' domestic work and are vigilant about protecting their wives (and

fiancés) from interaction with other men. Daaria, who had hoped to work in a hotel after completing her course in hospitality, explained,

> My fiancé would only accept that I work if I do not have long and late working hours... But because this is not available, I will stay at home after marriage.

For the girls and young women who are pursuing tertiary-level education and plan to work after marriage, respondents reported that complicated negotiations between girls, their natal families and their marital families can begin years before graduation. Madia, for example, reported that she had changed her major to ensure that she could arrange any future paid work around family life. She stated,

> I wanted to study nursing instead of medical lab technology as I like it because it has more interaction with people, but my mother and husband and the people around me dissuaded me because they told me that the working hours are long and I would have had to work night shifts and I have a daughter to take care of.

A young Syrian man in a group discussion, married to Ilaf, agreed that support for women's work has limits. He said,

> I like and I want my wife to study and work but without neglecting her family. I like her to be strong where she can handle many situations in life... Eventually her life should revolve around her children and husband.

Supporting young refugees' access to decent work

Research participants, when asked what support and changes would help improve young refugees' access to decent work, had a number of recommendations. Some of these recommendations were based on their own experiences – and the barriers they had surmounted – and others were based on the experiences of their peers who had been less successful at finding work.

Participants – especially Syrians – emphasised a need for improved access to quality education and training. Critically, of young Syrian workers, none had wanted to leave formal education (see Box 5). All were prevented from continuing their schooling by high real and opportunity costs and administrative barriers. Furthermore, none appear to have known about the secondary-level TVET opportunities that might have provided them with the skills training that might support more decent employment (or access to tertiary-level education).

Palestinian workers primarily highlighted the need for more affordable training opportunities outside of Siblin, which is the sole institute that caters to Palestinians and is unable to meet the needs of those who do not live within easy travelling distance (especially girls, given restrictions on their mobility). Some spoke of the high fees charged by private TVET institutes and others of the limited number of places open in the institutes with the best track records of placing students. A young Palestinian man explained,

> Many students want to enrol in the institute, but they cannot find places, if the institute is bigger, many students will be able to join to study in it.

Box 5 'If I had a regular degree... it would have been better for me'

Sabir is a 22-year-old Syrian man who is successfully self-employed. He instals satellite services, a trade which he learned from his grandfather, and is also a wedding photographer. Although he is earning an independent income, he still very much regrets not being able to complete his education.

Sabir came to Lebanon when he was 15. His parents, afraid for his safety, sent him to live with an aunt and uncle, who were long-term residents of Lebanon. He recalled, '*I came out because I was a young man at home, and we had raids, they killed my two cousins, so my father was afraid for me.*'

Because his family is deeply committed to education, Sabir tried several times to find a route that would eventually help him access university. First, he reported, he tried a Lebanese school. He said, '*I tried to enter a Lebanese school.... I could not, because I had to get papers from Syria, to be able to enter.*' Next, he continued, he attended a private school run by the Syrian Coalition. When, after two years, he learned that the credentials offered by this school would not allow him to enter either Lebanese or Syrian universities, he dropped out. He said, 'a*ll the doors closed in my face.*'

Sabir is diligent and tenacious and after three years studying radio and TV in an NGO-run TVET programme is earning enough to meet his basic needs. He said, '*I do not like to sit, I like to continue to work by God.*' He still, however, regrets having left school: '*If I had a regular degree... it would have been better for me.*' Indeed, although Sabir has a wide variety of short- and medium-term goals inside Lebanon, including opening his own photography studio if he can access credit to buy his own camera, he is in the longer-term interested in migration – so that he can go back to school. He said, '*If I travel abroad as a refugee, I have the right to study.... even if I am 50 years old.*'

Young refugees also emphasised a need to tackle the myriad legal barriers that make it difficult to engage in decent work. For Syrians, access to work permits – which requires social and financial capital that most lack – is a major hurdle. Adil, who is a barber and ostensibly 'owns' his own shop, explained,

> We are forbidden to work as Syrians in Lebanon, we need to get permits and to have a sponsor and this costs a lot of money and the process is complicated.

Raashad, who runs a spice shop with his brother, added that 'ownership' is a misnomer – as neither Syrian nor Palestinian refugees are legally allowed to own or even rent property in Lebanon. He explained that to satisfy the authorities, who close all businesses that are not legally registered, refugees are forced to register property in the name of Lebanese citizens:

> Although I opened a store, I am always worried that the general security will come and close it as they closed the stores of many Syrians

before.... They sometimes come and check if you have papers for the store... we say that the store is rented by a Lebanese person.

For Palestinians, army checkpoints at camp entrances are a significant barrier to work. Harassment by authorities prevents many from obtaining work outside the camp. Refugees' legal status also leaves them vulnerable to work exploitation, as with job opportunities so rare, few can afford to complain. Tadris reported,

Companies ask to employ graduate students from my vocational institute so that they can use us.... They make Palestinians work more than anyone else, and give them very low salaries.... The companies do not register us or give us insurance, but we cannot say anything because if someone loses his job, he cannot find something else.

Lack of capital, a consequence of refugees' legal status in Lebanon, emerged as a particularly strong theme. Young people, and their parents, observed that because Syrians and Palestinians are barred from accessing banks, few have access to the credit that would enable them to start or expand their own businesses. Sabir, who would love to expand his satellite installation business, explained,

As a Syrian refugee it is impossible to take a loan from the bank and I cannot borrow money from anyone to expand my satellite business.

Palestinians added that former sources of credit have dried up, as donor budgets have collapsed,

and priorities have shifted. Tadris, who would prefer to open his own carpentry business rather than accept difficult jobs and low wages, noted that UNRWA is no longer able to extend loans to Siblin graduates. He said,

We do not have any chance to start our own work.... They told us that we can get a US$10,000 loan from UNRWA when we graduate to start a small business, but they had stopped it by the time I graduated.[16]

Several young people observed that asset transfers – even quite small ones – would help them earn larger and more stable incomes. Taahir, who took a phone repair course and was provided with a small kit upon graduation, reported that if the kit had been better equipped he would be able to do more types of repairs and earn a higher income. He said,

I work at home using the kit that the organisation gave me when we finished the Phone Repair course, but it is basic things that I can do using this kit as it is not advanced.

A young Palestinian woman in a group discussion who had previously attended a hairdressing class agreed that courses must provide proper tools if they are to lead to improved opportunities. She recalled,

In my time they didn't provide us with the full tools, they were lacking... they should've given us the full tools for a salon, if they had given us the full tools there would've been hope.

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16   Loans were issued in US dollars and were stopped due to UNRWA budget cuts that pre-date the current economic crisis.

Advanced education

It is difficult to disentangle cleanly the educational trajectories of young refugees living in Lebanon. This is due in part to the complexity of the Lebanese educational system, but also to the way in which young people often pursue different pathways over time, looking for an entry point to the labour market. It is especially difficult to disentangle the educational pathways of Syrians, who have limited access to both academic secondary school and university and consequently sometimes use secondary-level TVET as a 'back door' to university.

Secondary-level studies

As noted earlier, the Lebanese educational system includes two secondary-level pathways, one vocational and one academic. Although the academic pathway is seen as more prestigious, both result in credentials that can be used to continue at the tertiary level. Critically, especially for Syrians, students who choose the vocational pathway at the secondary level are not excluded from the academic pathway at the tertiary level.

Academic pathway
Palestinian students who completed academic secondary school universally did so at UNRWA schools. Although several young people who left formal education before completing 12th grade – and sitting the Baccalaureate – complained of under-resourced classrooms and poor-quality instruction, Palestinian students have a clearly delineated academic pathway. This is not the case for Syrian students.

Some Syrian adolescents – in our sample a mix of girls and boys[17] – have been able to enrol in

government-run secondary schools. This requires that they can provide required documentation, pay fees, and speak and read English (or French) well enough to master content. With exceptions, our research suggests that the Syrians most able to take advantage of this pathway are those whose family members are both unusually well-educated and better off financially. Several students, for example, reported that their parents had invested years – and considerable financial resources – into obtaining educational records from Syria. Others reported that their university-educated parents or older siblings had helped them make the leap into English language instruction. Junia, a young Syrian woman now in graduate school, recalled,

> I studied in a Lebanese school…. I wanted to drop out, we used to go home and tell our family that we don't want to go to school anymore; however, our sister helped us so much as she was an English graduate, and she helped us in the afternoons for six hours a day until we adjusted.

Other Syrian students enrol in private secondary schools that cater to Syrians. On the one hand, these schools – whose enrolment is not captured in official enrolment figures – do not have onerous administrative barriers, are affordable, use Arabic as the primary teaching language and deliver quality education more consistently. This makes them preferred over schools using the Lebanese curriculum – especially those run by the government. On the other hand, they entail considerable commitment on the part of students and families because students must sit exams in Syria. Raba, a young Syrian woman now studying at a private tertiary-level TVET institute, explained,

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17   At the national level it is more common for Syrian boys to enrol in secondary school than Syrian girls.

> I could not study in Lebanese schools because the [Lebanese] curriculum is hard and is in English and the schools are expensive.... I studied in a Syrian school in Lebanon, which prepared us for official exams in Syria. I took both the Grade 9 and Grade 12 official exams in Syria. This is how I could finish school in Lebanon.

Critically, while sitting exams in Syria is not physically risky (at least at the moment), as schools generally arrange transport and liaise with border agents, many students are unable to then document their exams – which can prevent them from accessing and then completing post-secondary education.

TVET pathway

Our research found that it is not uncommon for Syrian students to use secondary-level TVET as an alternative pathway to university studies. Although this route can entail years of additional real and opportunity costs (see Box 6), it can give those who are barred from academic secondary school – because they lack paperwork, cannot pay fees or have insufficient English – a second chance to achieve their educational aspirations. Because girls face additional gendered barriers to accessing secondary-level TVET, given that there is a smaller set of private single-sex schools considered appropriate for them, all of the young people in our sample who were taking this route were male. In addition, all were attending private

TVET schools (because government-run schools were considered poor quality) and had families highly supportive of advanced education. A Syrian mother, whose son (Nabi) is hoping to move to university next year after completing his TVET programme, explained:

> *'I encourage him to complete his education after to finish the third year in the institute and to move to the university to get a university certificate not a certificate of an intermediate institute.'*

Given their access to UNRWA-run secondary schools, only a few of the Palestinian boys and young men in our sample were using secondary-level TVET as a way to position themselves for university. One acknowledged that he preferred it to academic secondary school, because he disliked more abstract learning. He said,

> I like to study something, how do I tell you? Not to just memorise, something like drawing and whatnot. It's better than memorising and writing and so on.

Another noted that for those who had dropped out of secondary school, and were thus 'behind' their peers, TVET credentials could provide a faster way for them to catch up.

Box 6 'They are creating an illiterate generation'

Wadi is a 24-year-old Syrian refugee who is currently enrolled in his first year of university. He is studying computer science. He lives in West Bequaa with his parents, both of whom are well educated, and his two younger brothers, both of whom gave up on formal education years ago because they were unable to surmount the barriers that Wadi has tenaciously worked though.

Wadi, who completed 11th grade in Syria before he and his family were forced to flee to Lebanon, has always wanted to become a computer scientist. When he arrived in Lebanon, he immediately tried to enrol in school in order to complete his secondary education. He met nothing but resistance from Lebanese authorities. They wanted proof of his education in Syria, challenging given that 'my papers were burnt' in the war. They wanted a residency permit, which required not only cash that Wadi's family did not have, but a Lebanese sponsor who 'also owns property'. When his paperwork was finally completed, authorities still refused him, because of 'bureaucracy... once it's mid-year, you aren't allowed to register then.'

After five years, during which Wadi studied on his own, taking free online courses to 'strengthen myself' so that when he entered school he was not feeling 'weak and ignorant', he was finally allowed to enrol in TVET. He chose a private three-year programme in information technology that confers a qualification equivalent to secondary school and allows for university admission. This programme came with its own set of challenges. First, Wadi explained, his out-of-pockets costs were higher than they were meant to be – because UNICEF never reimbursed his fees, despite promises to do. He said, 'They were supposed to give me the money back; they didn't.' Second, he added, 'the vocational teaching system is neglected' in Lebanon. He was not allowed to study 'modern' programming languages (e.g. Java or Python) but was instead forced to practise with 'a programming language that one can say is dead'. Escalating violence in Lebanon further complicated Wadi's TVET studies. With roads closed, he was sometimes forced to walk miles through the mud, with plastic bags over his shoes, because the bus driver could not complete the route. He recalled, 'they had closed the roads and burnt tires... he used to just drop me.... I used to carry shopping bags in my school bag and wear them on my feet to walk the way there.' Mohamed, however, was determined. He said, 'There are students who are happy to have days off... but our studies were cut for a long time and I fought to complete my education.'

TVET degree in hand, Wadi was granted a place at an inexpensive private university in the autumn of 2020. He is paying full price because between the pandemic and the crisis no one has 'in any way acquainted us with scholarships and opportunities'. He is not impressed thus far. Although he is technically studying computer science, he was allowed to take only two courses, in maths and English, because computer science courses are oversubscribed. Since he already has a TVET degree, and is ready for advanced coursework in his field, Wadi finds this very frustrating: 'They should have registered me, even if it was full, I should have had the priority.' In addition, online education is not being provided in a useful and engaging way. He explained, 'I'll be lying if I tell you that I have attended online classes, I haven't, not once. I watch the recording.' Although he is frustrated and bored, Wadi refuses to give up – even if it takes him years to complete his degree. 'I have to learn, to study, to do well... eventually I hope I can do what I want by God's will,' he explained.

Wadi is very concerned at how unusual he is and blames the Lebanese government for creating 'an illiterate generation'. He observed, 'with their own hands they have set a hundred obstacles... it is very scary, really scary.... If the child knows nothing about social or moral values, no education, no culture. What will he become? I don't know!'

Tertiary-level studies

Young people studying at the tertiary level, like their younger peers at the secondary level, take one of two pathways: TVET or university. Although TVET institutes have historically been seen as more occupational than universities, today there is a considerable overlap between majors and coursework. Fields such as nursing and graphic design are offered by both.

TVET pathway

In our purposively selected sample, the young refugees attending tertiary-level TVET programmes are disproportionately female, Syrian, graduates of private Syrian secondary schools,[18] and studying in the allied health fields (e.g. nursing and laboratory sciences) that are both perceived as 'feminine' and provide relatively better access to the labour market. Of the girls pursuing this pathway, as opposed to going to university, cost emerged as *the* key factor. Because government-run Lebanese University charges Syrians much higher fees than Lebanese or Palestinian students, and private universities are expensive for all, those without scholarships can only rarely access university education. Madia, who is studying laboratory sciences at a public TVET institute, explained,

> I want to continue my university studies and I applied to a university scholarship… but they select very few people for the scholarship.

Maazina, who is studying nursing at a public TVET institute, added that UNHCR support – which has been withdrawn as the crisis has required funding priorities to shift towards humanitarian relief – has been critical to helping Syrians access TVET. She stated, *'UNHCR paid my tuition for three years, this is how I could study.'*

Young people in group discussions highlighted that Palestinian girls are less likely to pursue tertiary-level TVET than their Syrian peers. This is because Palestinians pay lower fees at Lebanese University, but also because they have better knowledge of the scholarship opportunities at private universities due to their enrolment in UNRWA schools.

Although the young Syrian women attending tertiary-level TVET had initially preferred university, because it is more prestigious, most admitted that they have come to see TVET as genuinely better. Raba, a Syrian studying laboratory science, reported, *'Now with my experience, I would choose vocational education again.'*

With the caveat that many girls had low expectations, given the discrimination they face in the community, most noted that their TVET teachers have been nothing short of amazing. Maazina stated that at her school, educators go out of their way to support Syrian students. She explained,

> Many teachers would help us with the language and explain in Arabic…. We asked the director of the vocational institute for help, and she volunteered to help us with the ministry as there was a large number of students facing the same issue and we could lose our education because of it.

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18   This is in part because those who complete the academic pathway at Lebanese schools cannot access tertiary-level TVET courses without first obtaining a secondary-level TVET credential.

Several girls in group discussions added that TVET also has practical advantages over a university education. Specifically, it affords more and earlier opportunities for hands-on learning and is better linked to the labour market. A young Syrian woman observed,

> I honestly liked vocational training. It saves time. It is intense, but I only spent two years instead of spending four or five years in the university. Its point of strength is that we take practical work from the first year whereas, university students have to wait until the third year to take practical courses.

There are only two young men in our sample who are studying at a tertiary-level TVET institute. Oman, a Palestinian who dropped out of university after a year – so that his family could afford his sisters' university fees– already has one TVET degree and is now studying electrical engineering. He is taking this route because he is persistent in the face of Lebanon's poor job market for Palestinians. He reported, *'I'm the type of person who tries many times to get what I am thinking about.'* Nabi, a Syrian, is using tertiary-level TVET to prepare himself to pursue computer science at university (see Box 7). Although he completed academic secondary school in Syria (because his parents did not know that his Syrian-issued intermediate certificate could be used to enter secondary school in Lebanon), his grades were not good enough to win him the full scholarship that he needs to make university attainable. He explained,

> I got a scholarship at a private university, but I could not register in it because it was for

maximum 80% and I do not have the money to cover the rest of fees... so I decided to continue in vocational education and work harder to get a good GPA to be able to get a full scholarship at university.

Academic pathway

As noted earlier, refugees' access to university is heavily dependent on their nationality. Palestinian students, although they are offered only 'left over' spaces and are limited in what they are allowed to study, pay the same fees as Lebanese students at Lebanon's single public university. Syrian students are charged far more. Oza, a young Syrian undergraduate, reported, *'I pay more. Three or four times more. The Lebanese pay 300–400. I pay 1.3 million.'* [19]

Private universities are extremely expensive for all. Unsurprisingly, given refugees' high poverty rates and universities' high costs, nearly all of the young people in our sample who are studying at university have won at least partial scholarships – some funded by international organisations and others by universities themselves. All university students necessarily have the strong academic skills that have made scholarships possible. Of the Syrian university students in our sample, all attended Lebanese secondary schools, rather than Syrian secondary schools. This speaks to the family support that these students had to transition to English (or French) language learning (see above).

University students are often highly focused on migration. Given legal restrictions on the occupations open to refugees, most – especially boys – are hopeful that their academic credentials will improve their odds of getting out of Lebanon. A young Syrian man studying at university stated

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19 As of March 2022, 1.3 million LBP is approximately $850.

Box 7 Online employment

Given the legal barriers that prevent refugees from accessing whole sectors of work, online employment emerged in our research as a promising entry point for young people. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the girls and boys taking part in our research to be earning income online. In some cases, online earnings were largely incidental to young people's online lives. Laben and Daaria, for example, were selling crafts (drawings and crocheted items) on Instagram and WhatsApp respectively. In other cases, online work was tied to years of study and appeared likely to result in a full-time career. Aeden is a freelancer in audio-visual production, which he studies at university, and most of the boys pursuing computer science education discussed the online work that might result.

The mother of Nabi, one of the boys planning a career in computer science, reported that she had worked carefully with him to choose his major – fully aware that online employment is a rare route around Lebanese law. She recalled:

We went to the institute in that time, and we saw the available choices for him. The available choices for him were nursing, accounting, computer programming and informatics. He chose the informatics specialisation. Honestly, we talked together and discussed the choices together. I said to him that nursing is very nice and you can provide many nice things for the people, but in the end, you will be a nurse. So, you can't start up a private hospital and you can't start up any private clinic. Also, the jobs of nursing are limited; they can be employed at the hospitals only. Regarding the other specialisations such as the computer programming and the informatics, these specialisations have a wider scope. I said to him that he can start up a company; there is more development. So, we chose the specialisation which contains more chances for development.

in a group discussion: *'I asked myself, what am I doing in Lebanon? There is no chance. So I started seeking to travel.'* A few Syrians remain hopeful that they will one day return to Syria, building their futures as they help rebuild the country. A young Syrian woman in a group discussion with other undergraduates reported, *'My plan is to complete my education and return to Syria.'* Most, however, like their Palestinian peers, expressed strong preferences for the Global North, where *'you can find work anywhere for good money'* regardless of nationality (Palestinian boy). A young Syrian man explained, *'I love to say Canada, Germany, Australia, any such country.... In Lebanon I am a "non-existing" person.'*

What sets those pursuing advanced education apart?

Regardless of what and where they are studying, the young people pursuing advanced education are unanimous that their success is a result of a constellation of factors. Echoing their peers who are successfully earning their own livelihoods, students first identify their own determination to succeed. This, they admit, has been heavily shaped by family support for education. Knowledge, apparently serendipitously acquired, about how the Lebanese educational system works and how to apply for scholarships has also been critical to

helping young people access advanced education, which some are funding through their own work (see Box 8 and the following sub-section).

Without exception, the young refugees who are studying at the tertiary level identify their own *'determination to reach the goal'* as key to their success (as a Syrian girl studying at tertiary-level TVET told us). Most acknowledged that their determination has been driven by their aspirations for financial success. Nisim, a Syrian now in post-graduate study, explained that his ambitions for education – and professional work – were shaped by his childhood experiences in Syria. He said, '

> In the village back in Syria there are few educated people, and these were the only ones living comfortably, that is why I put in mind that I want to study in a university…. My ambition drove me to continue my studies.

Fahia, an undergraduate, added that growing up in a poor Palestinian household in Lebanon has made her keenly aware that her only hope for a better future lies in her hands. She stated,

> We can see our future before our eyes. I know what's going to happen to me in the future, I calculate everything, I wake up every day with an already set plan for the day, because I know that this is my life. I'm not born with a golden spoon in my mouth, to travel, live, go, do this and that, our life is based on hardship, "How am I going to make enough to eat, tomorrow?"

Parents taking part in group discussions also often identified their children's determination as key to their success. A Syrian mother of two sons, one at tertiary-level TVET and the other out of school at age 17, explained,

Box 8 Paying for school

Quite a few of the students in our sample who are pursuing advanced education are working to fund their studies, as scholarships are not only rare (outside of this purposively selected sample) but are not large enough to cover living expenses. This category is mixed in terms of nationality but is almost exclusively male. The ways in which these students are generating income are highly diverse. Some, like Oman, who is a waiter, have low-skilled jobs that are unrelated to their fields of study. Others, like Nabi, who does internet installations, are engaging in skilled trades. Several of the post-secondary students in our sample have managed to use their accumulated skills – including their computer skills – to support self-employment that is related to their field of study. For example, Laben creates artwork that he sells on Instagram using skills he honed while studying graphic design. Aeden works as a freelancer in music and film to fund his studies in audio-visual production. As with their peers who are out of school and engaged in earning their livelihoods, working students in our research emphasised the importance of flexibility and luck in finding (or creating) employment. Oman, who has a tertiary-level TVET certificate in business and is now pursuing another certificate in electrical engineering, explained: *'I wanted to work using my business certificate and I applied to many places, but they all asked for experience, and I do not have experience…. I found a job as a waiter in a restaurant and took it.'*

> I have two sons and I have brought them up in the same way, they live in the same family and we provided them everything the same... one loves the education.... His brother has not commitment... this desire comes from the person himself.

Similar to their working peers, the young refugees pursuing advanced education are also emotionally resilient enough to tolerate challenges, setbacks and course changes. This is true not only of those who are studying at TVET when they would have preferred university, but also of university students. Several spoke at length of delayed matriculation due to lost paperwork, failed exams resulting in extra tutorial sessions and discrimination in the classroom. Nisim, a Syrian now in graduate school, recalled that his transition to university had been difficult. He said,

> There was tension between Lebanese and Syrian students because Syrians were studying for free [because they had scholarships]. Their knowledge of the English language was also mocked.

University students, both Syrian and Palestinian, also noted that their choice of majors is quite restricted by Lebanese law, forcing many to spend years studying subjects that do not especially interest them. A Palestinian boy in a group discussion, studying accounting at university, reported, *'I wanted another major that was unavailable.... This is reality and it is not up to my desire.'* Nearly all of the young refugees enrolled in tertiary-level education have families who are highly supportive of education. In some cases, this is because parents (or other family members) are themselves well educated and serve as role models. In other cases, this is because parents are not well educated and aspire to more for

their children. Aeden, a Syrian undergraduate, reported *'Education is sacred in my family.'* A young Palestinian man studying at a TVET institute agreed: *'The biggest support that I had for continuing my education was my family.'* Both boys and girls were well aware that their families' commitment to higher education was heavily dependent on having at least some open financial space. A Syrian boy studying at a tertiary-level TVET institute, when asked how he had managed to continue his education, replied, *'My financial situation was a little better than my friends.'* Junia, a Syrian graduate student, admitted that although her family had *'suffered a lot to fix our papers... for us to be able to study,'* at least the suffering had been bearable.

In stark contrast to their peers who are not pursuing tertiary-level education, the Syrian students who are enrolled in TVET or have won university scholarships were quite likely to have had at least some outside help in identifying *how* to access higher education. Madia, for example, explained,

> At the Syrian school in Lebanon, we had a teacher who gathered the students and told us about all the scholarships that are available in Lebanon.... He explained a little bit about the different specialisations in order for us to know what we want.

Raba added,

> We asked the administrator [at the university she had originally hoped to attend]... he told us that I can register in their TVET school instead and that the UNHCR covers the fees there....

> My Syrian friends and I knew nothing about all these details, neither [about] the universities nor the scholarships, nor that there is vocational education available for us.

University students were more likely to identify their friends as sources of information. Aeden reported '*I got this scholarship by coincidence when my friend told me that there is a university offering full scholarships to Syrians, so I applied and got accepted.*' Junia added,

> I had difficulty completing this scholarship application as it is very complicated…. I communicated with my friends who helped me.

Gender norms and advanced education

Most research participants agreed that it is harder for refugee girls to pursue education than boys. This was true for adolescents as well as their parents and for those with both lower and higher levels of education. It was especially pronounced among Syrians and regarding girls who are engaged or married. This is because, observed a Palestinian boy, '*In general, parents care about boys' education more. If a girl fails in school, they would tell her to stay at home.*' Where respondents disagreed, and felt girls were prioritised for education over boys, explanations primarily centred around girls' education as necessary to their securing acceptable work. Raba, a young Syrian woman studying laboratory sciences at a tertiary-level TVET institute, noted of her family:

> In my family, they prioritise girls' education because the boy can do any work but for the girl, she needs education to find a proper work in her specialisation.

Syrian families, respondents reported, are overwhelmingly likely to prioritise marriage and motherhood over girls' education. Nisim, a young Syrian man now in graduate school, admitted that this is often true even in families that value education. He stated,

> Frankly, in my family girls' education is not important. In our customs and traditions, the girls should get married and they do not complete their studies or go to university, they stay at home.

Ilaf, now attending graduate school with a full scholarship, added that fathers are often especially resistant to girls' education. She recalled of her secondary-level education,

> My father did not allow me to study…. I used to go to school and come back behind his back before he gets back home…. I went to Syria for my 12th grade official examinations and I didn't tell my father…. My mother knew for sure, and she supported me, but she was always scared and used to transfer her fear into me.

Girls' access to tertiary-level education is especially limited because classes are co-educational. Junia, a young Syrian woman now in graduate school, stated, '*Some families have such backward mentalities! … Girls aren't allowed to go out or go to mixed schools.*' Palestinian girls face relatively lower barriers to accessing advanced education – and are indeed more likely to do so than their male peers. A key informant

at UNRWA observed that most scholarships go to girls because *'boys do not always apply'* and quite a few Palestinian parents observed that their daughters are far more interested in formal education than their sons. The father of a young man who is a barber and whose daughters are at university, explained *'the girl is intelligent and excellent but despite the fact that I hired teachers for the boys as well... they did not study.'* That said, Palestinian girls face extremely high barriers to using their education. As a Palestinian boy in a group discussion observed, it is acceptable for girls to obtain certificates and degrees, but as it is *'wrong that a girl works'*, diplomas must be used for nothing other than *'to hang it on the wall'*. Fahia, the only Palestinian girl at university to complete an individual interview, agreed that her plans to pursue a career after graduation mark her as an outlier. When asked why her beliefs are different from those of her peers, she replied that it was because she spent so much time outside of the camp: *'My grandfather's house is outside of the camp, I used to spend all of my time there.'*

Restrictive gender norms leave married girls with especially limited access to education (see Box 9). In some cases, this is because of demands on girls' time. Maazina reported that her husband made it extremely difficult for her to continue in her nursing programme. She said,

> He told me that I should stop studying as all girls do when they get married... I had to wake up early in the morning to prepare my husband's breakfast, clean and wash dishes quickly before going and when I return, I need to get the lunch ready by the time he arrives home.

In other cases, husbands restrict girls' access to education in order to ensure that girls do not interact with other young men. A Palestinian girl in a group discussion reported, *'He (my husband)*

would also make problems with me because there were two boys with us on the bus.' Echoing broader patterns, all of the girls and young women in our sample who are pursuing advanced education have one thing in common: ambition. However, narratives surrounding girls' ambitions are often more complex than those surrounding boys' ambitions. In an environment in which few women work, girls pursuing advanced education yearn to be the exception to the rule and have their own independent careers. Fahia, a young Palestinian woman who refused to marry as a child and is now at university pursuing a major that her community considers a *'specialty for boys'*, explained:

> My parents submit to the fact that we're living in this society.... But I refused it.... I want to reach somewhere no one has ever reached, I don't want to be an ordinary person nor live routinely, I want to achieve many things in life.

Jabira, a Palestinian from Syria also studying at university, agreed with this sentiment. She said, *'I don't want to be in this world a number. I want to do something.'* Several Syrian girls studying at tertiary-level TVET institutes also echoed this need to defy stereotypes – and the central role of education in permitting defiance. A girl in a group discussion stated,

> I didn't want to stay home, get married, give birth to two children before 20. I don't like this stereotype image. I have to be something else.

Another added,

> The girl is not allowed to work until she finishes her studies and graduates, and she must work in her specialisation, but there is no other work.

With only a few exceptions (see Box 9), the girls and young women who are succeeding in advanced education share another commonality – they have families who are not only supportive of education in general, but of girls' education more specifically. Jabira, when asked what sets her apart from the girls who do not make it to university, replied: *'The first thing is my family. They love knowledge, they love the girl, especially the girl." My mother was widowed at a young age, so she says, "Your certificate is your weapon." Moreover, my father, he says the same thing, "I am not always yours. You are now dependent on me, but I will not always be here for you."'* Although girls mentioned support from myriad family members, including fathers willing to sell assets to pay tuition, grandfathers who cancel arranged marriages, uncles who provide educational loans, aunts and female cousins who are inspiring role models, and older brothers who provide laptops for online study, it is girls' mothers that stand out as especially critical to supporting girls' lofty educational aspirations. A Palestinian girl in a group discussion who is attending tertiary-level TVET explained, *'The best thing I had is that my mother stood with me.'*

Supporting advanced education

The young refugees pursuing advanced education had myriad recommendations for how to improve educational access and outcomes. As with young workers, these suggestions were shaped by their own experiences as well as those of their less educationally successful peers and family members.

All of the young refugees who are studying at the tertiary level underscored the importance of more opportunities for financial aid. Syrians' narratives focused on having to choose TVET over university, difficult scholarship applications, the need to sit

out years of school as they waited to be chosen for a scholarship, and the inevitability of having to drop out if scholarships are lost. Raashad, who was forced to leave university after a single year of study because he could not afford it, explained,

> In 2018... I applied to Spark [a scholarship that covers the cost of university for Syrians]... they called me, and said to me that my file is under evaluation, and until now, I am waiting!

Palestinians' narratives also focused on scarce opportunities and years of delay, but also touched on how nepotism and pledges of political loyalty have come to dictate whose studies will be funded. A young Palestinian man in a group discussion explained that he had been denied a scholarship because he refused to join – and carry arms for – a political faction,

> We went to the people who are responsible for Palestinians, and it didn't work because of nepotism.... If I don't belong to a party, it will not work. Why should I hold a gun while we are all one folk?

Despite their having had access to more information about the Lebanese educational system and scholarship opportunities than their peers who did not pursue tertiary-level education, Syrian students at both TVET institutes and universities reported a need for more institutionalised educational guidance. Madia, who was fortunate enough to have a teacher at her private Syrian school who took the time to lay out educational options, admitted that *'this was not typical at the school'*. Nisim, who reported that he only learned of university scholarships through his friends, added that he had also lacked guidance on how to register. He said,

Box 9 'Even if I have to leave my husband, I will not give up my dream'

Madia is a 22-year-old married Syrian woman living in central Bequaa with her mother and her young daughter. She is studying laboratory science at a private tertiary-level TVET school and hopes to join her husband in Europe in the coming years.

Madia studied in Syria until the end of 11th grade. Then she got married and immediately fell pregnant. Although her husband had *'promised me during our engagement to allow me to continue my studies',* the pregnancy led her marital family to insist that she abandon her education and focus on marriage and motherhood. She recalled, *'He asked me where you will put the baby and how would you all go and leave her?'*

Fortunately for Madia, when their daughter was only a few months old her husband and his family were approved for immigration to the Netherlands. Madia returned to live with her parents while she waits for her own paperwork to be processed. Her mother was very much in favour of education and volunteered to provide all necessary practical and financial support so that Madia could complete her secondary education. Madia recounted, *'My mother was the one who insisted.... Immediately after he travelled, I went to register and sat for the high school exams.... I was living with my family, and my mother was taking care of my daughter. He was away, and he was not sending money for us, so he was not able to say anything.'*

Madia looks back on her senior year with pride because she did not *'surrender and give in'.* With her parents' help, she was able to juggle an infant and a very demanding academic schedule. She recalled, *'It was really hard because my daughter was little.... When I go back home, I would be tired, and I would not be able to talk to her or do anything with her. I also have a lot of pressure from studying, because the senior high school year is really hard, especially because I was in the scientific stream.'*

Madia got lucky again soon after she graduated from high school. A teacher at the school, which was a private school using the Syrian curriculum for students living in Lebanon, arranged a session for her and other recent graduates – to help them understand their post-secondary options, including for funding.

With only a year left in her degree programme, Madia is committed to having not only a job – but a career. She plans to work full time when she joins her husband in the Netherlands and reports that if tries to stop her, she will divorce him. She reported, *'Even if I have to leave my husband, I will not give up my dream. This is the path I have in mind.'*

When asked how she has managed to succeed, despite myriad obstacles including displacement and early marriage, Madia keenly observed that it has not been one thing – but many. She has needed her own willpower, the unrelenting support of her parents, and the fortuitously timed migration of her husband. She explained, *'The support from my family, the travel of my husband, I had my determination made me continue. If one of them was missing I would not have been able to continue.'*

I did not know what to register at university, I changed my major three times as I did not know the difference between them.... I wanted to study computer science and at university it was called computer engineering and [as] the scholarship did not cover engineering majors I thought I cannot take it, I did not know that it is the same thing and now I cannot change major... I did not know who to ask, I did not know where to go, and who can guide me.

who attended Syrian secondary schools, and even those who attended Lebanese secondary schools, reported that learning complicated material in a non-native tongue is often overwhelming. Madia, who is studying laboratory sciences at a TVET institute, explained, *'I try really hard to memorise things, but it feels like I'm memorising English not the substance itself.'* Nisim, now in graduate school, added,

Box 10 'Help me just a little'

Oza is a 20-year-old Syrian woman who is in her third year at Lebanese University – despite not having the support of her parents. Although her three older siblings dropped out of university when her parents' income dropped and tuition become unaffordable, Oza began paying her own way by tutoring younger students.

Oza is majoring in biology, which she admits is *'not my favourite subject'*. She would have preferred to 'enrol in computer engineering' and was indeed well positioned to do so, since *'I'm the only one at school who got a full mark in physics and maths, both of them.'* She acquiesced to biology in order to please her parents.

Although Oza has worked to please her parents, her parents – unlike the parents of other respondents – have not been especially supportive of her education. She pays her own tuition and fees. She reported, *'(My father) doesn't pay anyone's tuition.... I registered for the university at my expense.... I didn't ask my parents for even 1,000 LBP since I started.'* Even more frustrating, she continued, her parents devalue her time and demand that in addition to working and studying, she also do the housework. She explained, *'I'm studying something that I don't like.... Besides, I have a student, and I really work hard with him. It's not easy. Sometimes I spend three or four hours with him helping him learn. This is without exams. I arrived home very tired. They start to blame you, "You did nothing." They don't think that I'm doing anything even though I pay my tuition. My existence doesn't matter.'*

Depressed and overwhelmed, Oza admitted that recently she begged her father, *'"Help me just a little!" ... He only shouted at me.'*

Syrian students also highlighted the need for TVET institutes and universities to do a better job supporting English language learning. Students

They gave us English remedial courses at the university before we started our major courses.... But, even though they gave four

English remedial courses at university for Syrian students, many students could not adapt and *left the scholarship because of the English language.... I still cannot speak the language properly.*

Syrian students also reported that they are dogged by bureaucratic Lebanese requirements for paperwork even at the tertiary level. Those at both TVET institutes and universities observed that it is not uncommon for students to complete their coursework and yet be denied a diploma because they are unable to document – after years of tertiary-level study – that they have the requisite secondary education. This is particularly the case for students who attended private schools that cater to Syrians and then sat exams in Syria. Nisim, a Syrian graduate student, explained,

There are currently many students who graduated from the university, but they could not receive the university degree, because they could not get Baccalaureate (Grade 12) degree equivalence from the Ministry of Education.

Maazina, a Syrian nursing student, added,

I tried to get the equivalency and I have been working on this for a year, but I have not been able to get.... If I do not get it, I will not be able to get a certificate from the institute. I am always worried that my studies will be in vain.

University students – regardless of whether they are Palestinian or Syrian – also reported a need for tighter links between their coursework and future employment. Unlike tertiary-level TVET students who, as noted above, are given opportunities to practise what they are learning, those at university reported only *'theoretical'* coursework that is

'explained in a manner that it won't be beneficial for you afterwards in the field' (Aeden). Nisim explained,

What I am studying in the university is not related to work done and needed in the labour market.... I started discovering this slowly as we learn using different programs from what the companies use.... I had to teach myself to be relevant in the job market.

Impacts of Lebanon's compounded crises

The compounding crises unfolding in Lebanon, which a Syrian boy in a group discussion described as a *'catastrophe',* have radically shifted refugees' day-to-day lives because it *'has destroyed everything for everyone'* (Raba's father). Young people who were working have seen even their limited options evaporate, as *'there are no work opportunities'* for refugees due to the economic collapse (Adara). Businesses including restaurants and salons have cut opening hours or closed, as patrons have disappeared. Abia noted, *'These days, we don't have many clients... our work has declined a lot.'* Given high inflation, several young people added that they cannot afford to work – as transportation is likely to cost more than they can earn. Daaria explained,

> I became hopeless of finding employment.... Even if I find work, the pay became very low with the crisis.... The salaries are not enough for transportation now... so what will that do for me?

Those in school, while also detailing the inadequate nature of the online education that has been required to manage the Covid-19 pandemic, are similarly focused on the collapse of the labour market and the impact of inflation. Laben explained,

> I used to work as a waiter in a restaurant from the afternoon until midnight and pay for everything by myself... now with the crisis, we can't buy anything, it's very expensive and transportation has become much more expensive.... I had saved money from my previous job and I'm spending that now for

school, but it won't be enough especially if we start taking classes in school and I need to pay for transportation.

For the Syrian families whose daughters have been pursuing tertiary-level TVET certificates, the loss of UNHCR scholarships – as funding priorities have shifted to humanitarian assistance – has been devastating. Raba's father, who noted that he had been counting on his daughter to help support the family after graduation because he is too ill to work, reported that he had taken on debt he could ill afford in order to ensure that her studies had not been in vain. He said,

> When my daughter started studying at the vocational school, UNHCR covered her fees, but they stopped now.... I do not have the money to pay the fees as we were already struggling to provide money for the transportation.... I could not let her lose the years she studied, so I had to borrow money for her to be able to continue her education.

Although university students, particularly boys, were focused on migration before the crisis, since Lebanon's economic collapse interest in migration has exploded. A Palestinian girl in a group discussion summed up how she and her peers feel about their future in Lebanon: *'There is no life here.'* Parents agreed. A Palestinian mother in a group discussion, who said that she could not bear to discuss the impacts of the crisis, stated, *'there is no scope here'.* Worryingly, because opportunities for formal migration are rare there is growing interest among boys and their parents in irregular migration, despite its many risks. While no parents

in our sample admitted to having helped their sons get out of Lebanon, quite a few reported knowing how to do so. A Palestinian father explained,

> Most of the people who travel nowadays, cross Turkey, Greece and they travel on foot... There are routes by sea and over land.... It is possible to obtain fake identities and travel by air. It is twice as expensive to travel by air.

Implications for policy and practice

Refugee young people living in Lebanon have long faced myriad high barriers to their successful acquisition of skills and employment. Lebanese laws and policies are explicitly aimed at making it difficult for them to access formal education and making it all but impossible for them to access decent work. The economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have only served to make matters worse, as high unemployment and inflation have worked in tandem to further restrict access to work and school.

Although in the shorter-term, the primary need of refugee youth and their families is for stepped-up humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs, in the medium- and longer-term, as Lebanon's intersecting crises begin to abate, there is an urgent need for the international community to refocus efforts on how to support young people to ready themselves for independent adulthood. Our research with positive deviants suggests that to meet the Sustainable Development Goals donors should prioritise the following:

Support for primary and intermediate education

- Work with the Ministry of Education to reduce the administrative barriers that keep Syrian children out of school – including recognising the certificates provided by private Syrian schools. In the short-term, use placement testing to determine grade level rather than school records when records are not available. Donors could work with the Ministry of Education to develop this testing and then fund low-income students' tests.
- To help offset the real costs of education, provide low-income students with educational

assets (or vouchers) including school supplies and uniforms. Distribution should be at least annual, available to students until the end of secondary school and include Lebanese students as well as refugees to foster social cohesion.
- To help offset quality deficits in the short- and medium-term – and better support all students to academically thrive – provide after-school tutorial support in both schools and community venues. Programmes should be open to all, regardless of nationality, and target not only older students who are already struggling, but younger students who are working on foundational skills. Courses should pay special attention to helping students to develop strong English language skills.
- To reduce the strain on government schools, provide vouchers for low-income students to attend private schools. While efforts should be inclusive of Lebanese students, to improve social cohesion, they could prioritise the private schools that are catering to Syrian students – given those schools' track records of supporting Syrian refugees to learn – and work with those schools to develop documentation that would meet requirements for continued enrolment in Lebanon's higher education sector.
- To improve young people's longer-term educational and occupational trajectories, provide school- and community-based programming aimed at improving psychosocial well-being and supporting the development of life skills such as communication and leadership. Programming should be inclusive of nationality and carefully tailored to address gender norms.
- To address low enrolment rates, especially in adolescence, design awareness-raising

18-year-old Syrian boy working in construction, Lebanon, 2021 © Marcel Saleh

programming for parents and young people, emphasising the importance of education to not only work, but broader life chances. Tailor messages for gender and nationality, using popular media and sports figures as possible.

Support for secondary and higher education

- To ensure that Syrian young people and their families understand how the Lebanese educational system works, in terms of gateway exams and vocational versus academic pathways, provide adolescents and parents with school- and community-based information and guidance starting no later than early intermediate school. Also provide secondary school students with school- and community-based information about scholarship opportunities and guidance that includes active support for the application process.
- To help offset the real costs of higher education, scale up the provision (and amount) of tertiary-level scholarships including to low-income students of all nationalities, and/or transport vouchers (e.g. bus tickets) for low-income students of all nationalities. Over the longer term, work with the Ministry of Education to reduce tuition fees required of Syrians and other refugees.
- To support Syrian secondary and tertiary students to thrive academically, ensure that they have access to continued support to learn English (or French).

Support for work skills

- To ensure that students and their families – especially Syrians – are aware of TVET programming and its advantages vis-à-vis labour market opportunities, raise awareness and actively promote the vocational pathway, starting in intermediate school. Tailor messaging to account for gender norms, to improve girls' and women's access to employment over time.

- To support young people's access to the labour market, work with TVET institutes, universities and the Ministry of Labour to strengthen links between schools and local labour markets, and use economic empowerment programmes to help them find and enter niche markets, attending to hyper-local contexts and taking care not to over-saturate markets.
- To support young people to find and keep decent work, ensure that universities, TVET institutions and economic empowerment programmes help them develop soft skills alongside harder employment-related skills.
- Over the longer term, work with the Ministry of Labour to remove barriers to refugees' work – including the requirement that they have work and residency permits, and limits on employment.

Support for self-employment

- To help young people launch their own businesses, ensure that economic empowerment programmes provide graduates with necessary tools and other assets, as well as access to credit on favourable terms. In the case of refugees, also provide them with logistical (including financial) support to access work permits and overcome legal barriers.
- To improve the odds that young people's businesses will prosper, support young entrepreneurs with programming aimed at developing their business and computer skills. Over the longer term, work with the Ministry of Labour to remove barriers to refugees' self-employment, including the requirement that they have work and residency permits and prohibitions against their accessing saving and credit opportunities.

Support for girls

- To address restrictions on girls' mobility, provide them with transport or transport vouchers for education, training and internships, and in the most conservative areas consider single-sex transportation to overcome restrictive gender norms.
- To address the gender norms that leave girls with little access to higher education and especially paid employment, provide them with empowerment programming focused on raising their aspirations and strengthening their communication and negotiation skills, whilst simultaneously investing in gender norms change programming targeting parents and husbands .

Support for Palestinians

- To address Palestinians' social exclusion and foster social cohesion, make greater efforts to include them in programming currently attracting primarily their Lebanese and Syrian peers, and also work with UNRWA and other actors to ensure that scholarships are transparently distributed to those who have earned them. Over the longer term, work with the government of Lebanon to remove the barriers that are responsible for Palestinians' social and economic exclusion, including their lack of citizenship and their confinement to camps and settlements.
- To address the fatalism that is lowering Palestinian boys' and parents' aspirations for education and work, pair awareness-raising and hands-on programming aimed at highlighting what is possible – even under current Lebanese law – using local role models as possible.

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Annex 1: Alignment between the economic empowerment commitments for refugees of the SDGs and the GCR

SDG targets related to youth economic security and empowerment		GCR Indicator Framework	
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere		**GCR Objective 2: Enhance refugee self-reliance.**	
1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day	1.1.1 Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural) (Tier 1) (Disaggregation availability: sex and age (youth band incl.) dimensions only for those employed)	Outcome 2.1: refugees are able to actively participate in the social and economic life of host countries.	2.1.2 Proportion of refugees who are able to move freely within the host country. (Tier 1) (Disaggregation: This indicator is required to be disaggregated by country of origin.)
1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age (Tier 1)	Outcome 2.2: refugee and host community self-reliance is strengthened.	2.2.2 Proportion of refugee and host community population living below the national poverty line of the host country. (Tier 2) (Disaggregation: At a minimum, this indicator is required to be disaggregated by age and sex.)
	1.2.2 Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions (Tier 2)		
1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable	1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable (Tier 2) (Disaggregation availability: age and disability)		

SDG targets related to youth economic security and empowerment		GCR Indicator Framework	
1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance	1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure (Tier 2)		
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all			
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill (Tier 2) (Disaggregation availability: sex)		
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all			
8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex (Tier 2) (Disaggregation availability: sex)		
8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of employees, by sex, age, occupation and persons with disabilities (Tier 2) (Disaggregation availability: sex)	Outcome 2.1: refugees are able to actively participate in the social and economic life of host countries.	2.1.1 Proportion of refugees who have access to decent work. (Tier 1) (Disaggregation: This indicator is required to be disaggregated by country of origin.)
	8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities (Tier 1) (Disaggregation availability: sex, age (youth band incl., and disability)		

SDG targets related to youth economic security and empowerment		GCR Indicator Framework
8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training	8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training (Tier 1) (Disaggregation availability: sex)	
8.b By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization	8.b.1 Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy (Tier 2)	

Annex 2: Instruments

1: Individual interview: Participants in economic empowerment programme/ TVET

Who: Young people who have made choices and had opportunities that set them out from their peers in terms of economic empowerment – such as going to TVET or skills building programmes

Objectives: To explore why and how some young people are able to break the mould in order to understand how to support more of their peers do so in the future.

To understand the following four aspects of adolescence outlier experiences:

- Programme characteristics
- Programme perceptions
- Programme choices/ constraints
- Links to future aspirations

Materials: Four forms to be filled out with the individual respondent: a) programme characteristics table, b) programme strengths and weaknesses, c) choices and constraints mapping, d) aspirations timeline.

Please print these in A3 format.

1 Programme characteristics

History/What/Who
- What programme are you in?
- What's the goal of the programme? (Including different components if it's multi-component)
- What are you learning? Describe what you do?
- Where? Under which organization?
- How did you find about it? How did you apply?

Conditions
- How long is the programme? How intensive is the programme?

Inputs
- What are the qualifications/conditions to get in?
- Is the program open to anyone? Is anyone excluded?
- Who funds it/pays for the training?
- Is transport included?

Outputs
- What is the teaching like?
- Tell me about the instructor/s—Who is she/he? (age, gender, nationality, experience level)
- Who else is in the class? (nationality, age, gender, etc)
- How much interaction is there between students in the class itself?
- Do you see the students outside the class/ program? Did you make any friends? If yes, where do you see them? What do you do?

Please use a timeline looking backwards from now to understand the steps involved in starting your programme participation. Then use different coloured markers to annotate key points related

to the four categories of Who? Conditions? Inputs? Outputs? On the timeline chart. You will need four coloured markers.

Timeline of programme participation

History, what and who		Input
Year XXX		Now
Conditions of work		Outputs
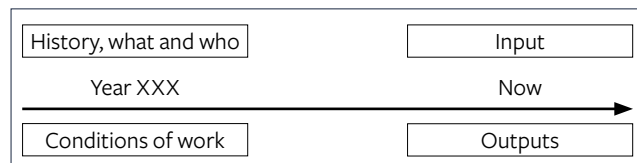
In addition to questions above focus on:

- Did they finish school or drop out? When? Why? Map it out on the timeline.
- When did they start vocational training?

2 Programme perceptions

Discuss overall strengths and weaknesses of the programme. Overall, what do you like about the training? Dislike? Please write these down in two columns on a flipchart – see worked-through example in figure below.

- Does the instructor appear to know the content/skill well? Is she/he a good teacher? Is she/he a kind and supportive person?
- Are there any specific changes you'd make? (Go back and mark them on the timeline.)
- Overall, what has been your parents' reaction to course of study? Are there changes they would make? What choices have your siblings made?
- Are they similar to yours? (Go back and mark them on the timeline.)
- What have been your peers' reactions to the course of study?
- Do you think these perceptions are shaped by your gender in any way? If so, how? Would an adolescent girl/young woman likely have a similar or different experience to you (if talking to a boy, vice versa)?

Strengths	Areas for improvement

Strengths and areas for improvement example

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Gaining experience in soft skills needed for the labour market	Cost of transportation to attend course is high, need subsidised transport option
Gaining a certificate/ qualification	Limited linkages to market opportunities – need programme implementers to make introductions to employers
Networking with like-minded peers	Programme is overly theoretical, need to make it more practical and interactive
Having a trainer who is also a role model in terms of their professional behaviour	Would have been good to have learned financial literacy as well

Strengths and areas for improvement example

3 Choices and constraints regarding programme participation

- How did you choose this programme and this course of study? What were your other options and of your other options why did you make this choice? (Fill out chart below)

Why this course?	What was option 2 and why did it lose compared to the programme you chose?	What was option 3 and why did it lose compared to the programme you chose?

- Thinking of yourself compared to your peers – in the neighbourhood/ in school/ community centre/ at the mosque/ church – what or who helped make this choice possible for you?

Programme participation enablers

Factors related to who I am	E.g. personality, interests, formative event or experience
Support from my family	E.g. financial support, emotional support, role modelling
Support from others	E.g. teachers, community centre facilitators, religious leaders, neighbours
Role models	E.g. inspirational (positive or negative) person – in person or in the media/ online
Other	E.g. luck, custom, etc.

- Did you face any barriers as you worked to get here? What? How did you overcome them? Were any of these barriers gender-specific?

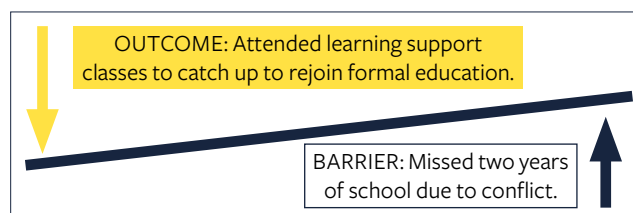### Aspirations timeline

Where I want to be:

Steps I need to take to achieve my aspirations:

People whose advice I need to seek to know the steps:

1 year   3 years   5 years   10 years

Barriers I need to overcome:

Barriers

OUTCOME: Attended learning support classes to catch up to rejoin formal education.

BARRIER: Missed two years of school due to conflict.

Choices and constraints

| Option 1: |
|---|
| Option 2: |
| Option 3: |

Barrier	→	Outcome

- What has prevented your peers from taking a similar path? What could be done to help more students get to a similar place?

4 Links to aspirations

- What's next? On figure below, plot out one year, three years, five years, 10 years. How does the course you are attending fit into your aspirations?
- What factors shaped your aspirations? (E.g. role models, desire to have a lucrative profession, desire for professional respect, limited options in locality etc.)
- What barriers can you see to transition points on your timeline and have you thought through how you will overcome them? (Mark barriers below the line in red.)
- Have you sought advice on these next steps? If so from whom? Or what information source? What gaps in advice and information if any have you faced?
- How do your current aspirations compare to those you had when you were a young adolescent (10–14 years)? If they have changed, why is this?

Aspirations timeline example
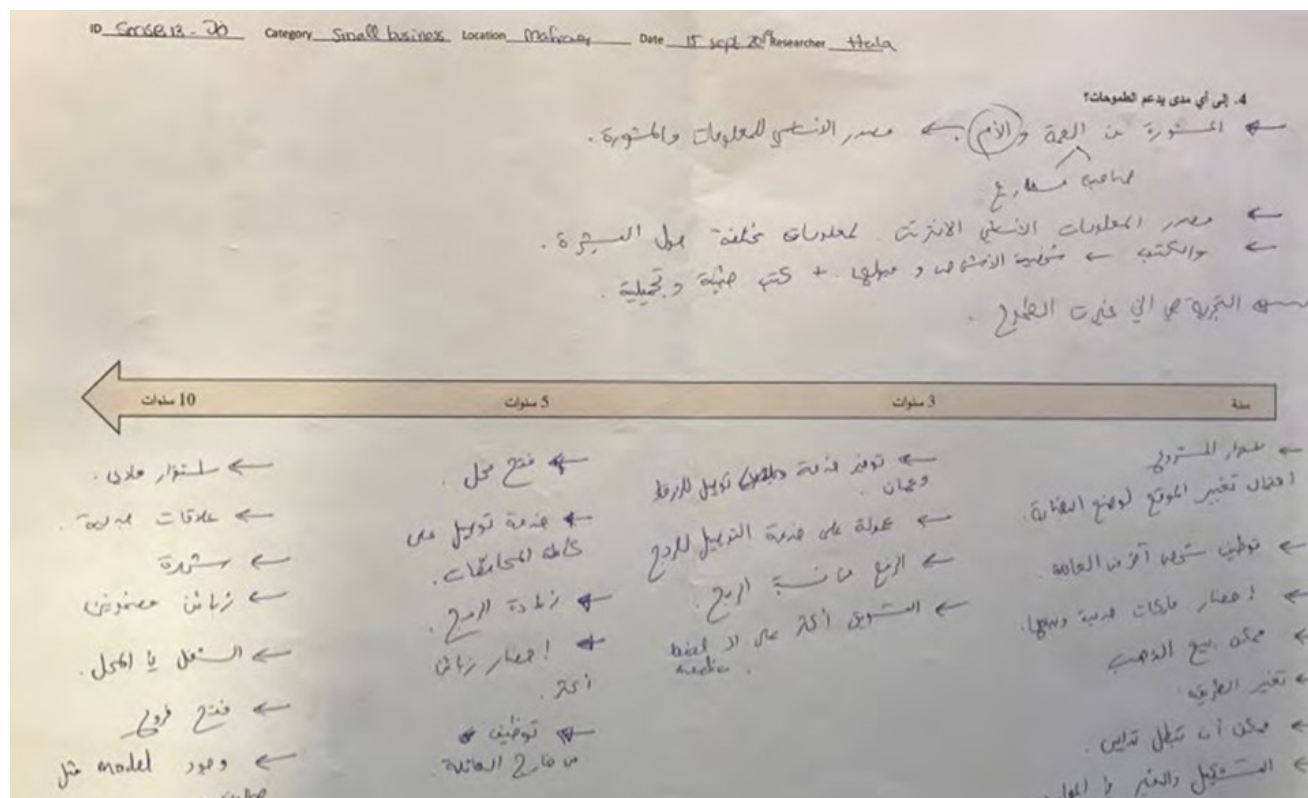
2: Interviews with disadvantaged university students

### 1 Education characteristics and history

History/What/Who
- What you studying? What degree are you currently working towards?
- Which college/university?
- Do any of your parents/siblings have a university education? Is university education important in your family? Why?

Inputs
- How are you funding your studies?
- If you received a scholarship who from and how much? What did you need to do to qualify for the scholarship?
- What were the qualifications to get in?

Outputs
- Tell me about your instructors – who are they? (age, gender, nationality, experience level)
- Are your instructors generally knowledgeable about their topics? Are they generally good teachers? Are they generally kind?
- Do you feel like you are learning new things? How would you assess the quality of the education you are receiving?
- Who are your fellow students? (nationality, age, gender, etc)
- How much interaction is there between students in the classroom? Is the interaction between students largely positive/neutral/negative?
- How much interaction is there between the students outside of the classroom? Is this interaction largely positive/neutral/negative?

Figure 11: Timeline of education

History, what and who	Input
Year XXX	Now
Conditions of studies	Outputs
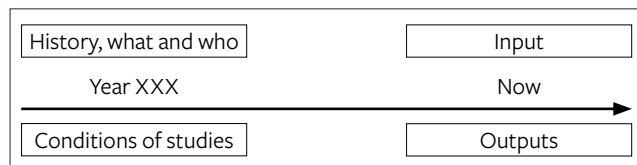
- What do you like about your university and course of study?

In addition to the questions above, focus on:

- When did they finish school? Was it disrupted at any point?
- When did they start university?

2 Programme perceptions

- Discuss overall strengths and weaknesses of the course. See worked through example below.
- Would you make any changes to the programme? (Go back and mark them on the timeline.)
- Overall, what has been your parents' reactions to your course of study? Are there changes they would make? What choices have your siblings made? Are they similar to yours? (Go back and mark them on the timeline.)
- What have been your peers' reactions?
- Do you think these perceptions are shaped by your gender in any way? If so, how? Would an adolescent girl/young woman likely have a similar or different experience to you (if talking to a boy, vice versa)?

Strengths and areas for improvement

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Studying a respected course	Cost of transportation to attend course is high, need subsidised transport option
Gaining a certificate/ qualification	Limited linkages to market opportunities – need professors to make introductions to employers
Studying with peers with similar academic interests	Course is very male- dominated and not welcoming for female students
Having a professor who is also a role model in terms of their professional behaviour	The scholarship amount is quite low and so it's challenging to balance part-time work and study

Strengths and weaknesses (areas for improvement)

Strengths	Areas for improvement

3 Choices and constraints regarding programme participation

- How did you choose this path versus others? (Fill out the chart below.)

Why this course?	What was option 2 and why did it lose compared to the programme you chose?	What was option 3 and why did it lose compared to the programme you chose?

- Thinking of yourself compared to your peers – in the neighbourhood/in school/at the mosque – what or who helped make this choice possible for you?

- Did you face any barriers as you worked to get here? What? How did you overcome them? Were any of these barriers gender-specific? (Fill out image below.)

Factors related to who I am	E.g. personality, interests, formative event or experience
Support from my family	E.g. financial support, emotional support, role modelling
Support from others	E.g. teachers, community centre facilitators, religious leaders, neighbours
Role models	E.g. inspirational (positive or negative) person – in person or in the media/ online
Other	E.g. luck, custom, etc.

Barriers
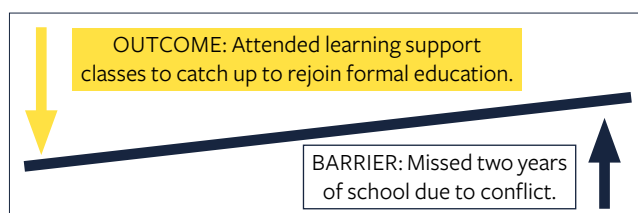
Choices and constraints

Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Barrier ⟶	**Outcome**

Aspirations timeline

- What has prevented your peers from taking a similar path? What could be done to help more students get to a similar place?

4 To what extent does the programme support aspirations?

- What's next? On figure below, plot one year out, three years, five years, 10 years. How does the course you are attending fit into your aspirations?
- What factors shaped your aspirations? (e.g. role models, desire to have a lucrative profession, desire for professional respect, limited options in locality etc.)
- What barriers can you see to transition points on your timeline and have you thought through how you will overcome them? (mark barriers below the line in red)
- Have you sought advice on these next steps? If so from whom? Or what information source? What gaps in advice and information if any have you faced?
- How do your current aspirations compare to those when you were a young adolescent (10–14 years)? If they have changed, why is this?

3: Interviews with business owners

1 Business characteristics and history

History/What/Who
- What is your business? What is the history of your business? When did it start?
- What were your and your family's circumstances when you started your business? Were your parents or other siblings in work? Were you in school? What motivated you to set up your business – e.g. push factors (poverty, no option for schooling) or pull factors (love what doing, excited about making money)?

- Who is your client base? How do you market your services to them? Do you have repeat customers – why/why not? Do you have any challenging customers/ clients?
- Who do you work with? Who are your work colleagues? (age, gender, nationality, etc.)

Conditions of work

- How many days/hours a week do you work? When you are not working, what are you doing? (e.g. research about your business, networking to find new clients, a second job, gaining new work-related skills etc.)?
- How much do you earn per unit? (e.g. hour/day/week/ month) How do you set your prices? Is there much competition in your sector? From whom?
- Where do you work? (e.g. at home, on the street, in a shop). Is this location unsafe in anyway?

Inputs

- Did you need any particular training/skill set to open your business? What? How did you get it? (can be formal training or informal)? Were you eligible for TVET training courses – i.e. what is the minimum qualification required?
- Did you require cash/start-up capital to start your business? How did you get it?
- Did you need credit to start your business? How did you get it? Even if you didn't take credit, was it an option to you – why/why not?
- Did you need credit to start your business? How did you get it? Even if you didn't take credit, was it an option to you – why/why not?
- Did you need any formal permission/ permit to start your business? How did you get it?
- Do you need any particular equipment to run your   business?
- Do you have insurance for your business? Why/why   not? Awareness about insurance options?
- Have you had any sort of financial education class?

- When? From whom? What about marketing?
- Do you have an advisor/mentor? What do you consult them about? Did you get advice from a guidance counsellor while at school?
- How do you market your work? To what extent do you use social media – e.g. Facebook – to market?

Outputs

- Do you save any of your earnings? What percentage do you aim for? How do you save? Do you have a bank account? What do you spend your money on? What proportion do you give to your family? Is this similar or different to your peers? Is your family putting pressure on you to earn more? Do you pay taxes? Register as self-employed?

Timeline of business

Please use a timeline looking backwards from now to understand the steps involved in setting up the business. Then use different coloured markers to annotate key points related to the four categories of Who? Conditions of work? Inputs? Outputs? On the timeline chart. We will need four coloured markers.

Timeline of business

History, what and who		Input
Year XXX		Now
Conditions of work		Outputs
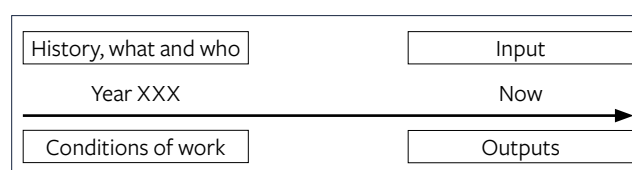
2 Perceptions of employment

Discuss overall strengths and weaknesses of having your own business. Example:

Strengths and areas for improvement

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Gaining experience in soft skills needed for the labour market	Cost of transportation to attend course is high, need subsidised transport option
Gaining a certificate/ qualification	Income is volatile
Interacting with diverse clients	Need for more training
Having independence	Would have been good to have learned financial literacy as well

- Overall, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of your business in terms of how it supports you and your family?
- Are there things that you would like to change? What recommendations would you give program designers or policy makers about what would facilitate small business ownership for young people?
- What does your family think of your business? Are there changes they would make? (Add them to timeline)
- What have been your peers' reaction to your business?
- Do you think these perceptions are shaped by your gender in any way? If so, how? Would an adolescent girl/young woman likely have a similar or different experience to you (if talking to a boy, vice versa)

Strengths and weaknesses (areas for improvement)

Strengths	Areas for improvement

3 Choices and constraints regarding programme participation

- How did you choose this option (starting your own business? (Fill out the chart below.)

| Why this business?	What was option 2 and why did it lose compared to the business you chose?	What was option 3 and why did it lose compared to the business you chose?

- Thinking of yourself compared to your peers in school/ community centre/ the neighbourhood, what led you to start your own business when others do not?

Business enablers

Factors related to who I am	E.g. personality, interests, formative event or experience
Support from my family	E.g. financial support, emotional support, role modelling
Support from others	E.g. teachers, community centre facilitators, religious leaders, neighbours
Role models	E.g. inspirational (positive or negative) person – in person or in the media/ online
Other	E.g. luck, custom, etc.

- Did you face any barriers as you worked to get here? What? How did you overcome them? Were any of these barriers gender-specific? (Fill out image below.)

Barriers
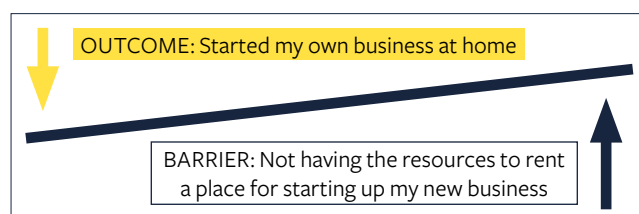
- What has prevented others from taking similar path? What could be done to help more peers get to a similar place?

Choices and constraints

| Option 1: |
| Option 2: |
| Option 3: |

Barrier ⟶	Outcome

Aspirations timeline

Where I want to be:

Steps I need to take to achieve my aspirations:

People whose advice I need to seek to know the steps:

| 1 year | 3 years | 5 years | 10 years |

Barriers I need to overcome:

3 Links to aspirations

- What comes next for you? Think one year/three years/ five years/ ten years out?
- What barriers can you see to transition points on your timeline and have you thought through how you will overcome them?
- Have you sought advice on these next steps? If so from whom? Or what information source? What gaps in advice and information if any have you faced?
- How do your current aspirations compare to those when you were a young adolescent? If they have changed, why is this?
- What factors shaped your aspirations?

FGDs with adolescents – Most Significant Change

Why: to understand what young people think is valuable about these initiatives without having predefined parameters

Who: participants from TVET, university scholarship, work permits, skills building programmes.

Materials: flipchart paper, post-its (green, orange, yellow), markers.

1 Most significant changes

Since you have been participating in the programme or course, what has been the most significant change for you?

Probes
- Ask each participant to take three post-it notes and ask them to write down 3 key changes that they value that have risen as a result of the programme on green post-it notes (if they are participating in different programmes assign them A, B, C and ask them to put that letter on the post-it also.
- Then ask for 2 volunteers to describe what they found most important and stick the cards on a flip chart.
- Next ask the rest of the group participants to place their cards on the flipchart, grouping similar changes together (the group facilitator can help with this – but if the adolescents are capable also good to get them involved in deciding on category names)

- The facilitator will then look at these clusters of changes, and ask those who contributed to talk more about why they selected this particular change, illustrating it with their own experience / before what were you like, now what are you like and what was the change process?

2 Analysis with the group of significant changes

- Then ask the participants to jointly rank the changes from most important to less important with a reason - rank the clusters of factors as a whole not specific examples/ (e.g. 'learning a new skill' vs 'meeting friends')
- How long do programme participation effects last? / Primarily during course participation or are there also legacy effects after the programme has ended? (e.g. if dropped out of school? If married?) [use different coloured markers for short-term vs longer-term benefits]
- Ask participants to think about gender differences in impact, and any other key category that could shape perception of significant change (e.g. disability, marital status)

3 Concerns and scope for changes

- Next ask the programme participants to reflect on what concerns they have vis-à-vis the programme/short-comings and how the programme could be improved
- Ask them to write down two key areas for improvement on orange post-it notes and to share and cluster these into similar types of issues
- Then ask the group to rank these from the most important to the least important.

Flipchart examples
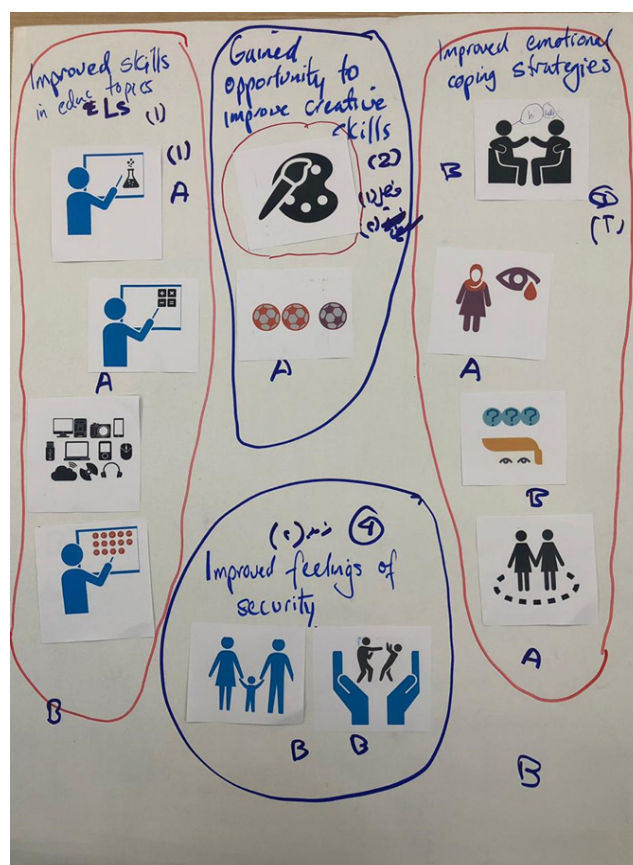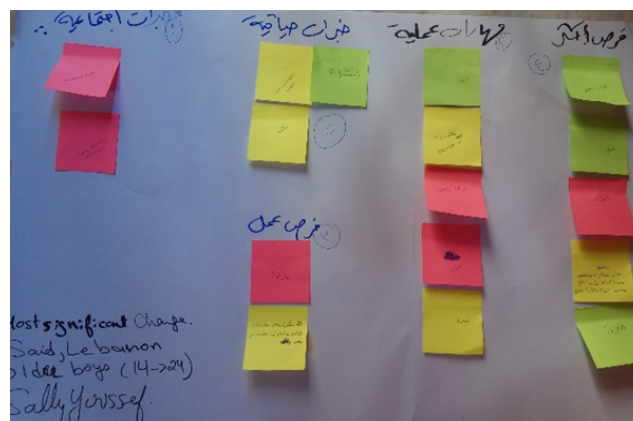
Most significant change FGDs – programme implementers

Who: Programme implementers/service providers who are delivering programming for adolescents and youth.

Objectives: To understand the significant changes that the programme implementers value in the programme for a) the adolescents they serve given their particular context and b) for themselves as facilitators think is valuable about these initiatives.

Materials: flipchart paper, post-its (green, orange, yellow), markers.

Probes related to programme benefits

Since you have been in your role, what have been the most significant changes in your view for the adolescents you serve?

- Ask each participant to take three post-it notes and ask them to write down on green post-it notes three key changes that they value in terms of the effects they observe in the adolescents that they serve as a result of the programme.
- Assign each implementing organisation a letter, starting with A, and ask them to add that to the post-it notes.
- Then ask two volunteers to describe what they found most important and add the cards to a flipchart.
- Next, ask the other group participants to place their cards on the flipchart, grouping similar changes together.

- The facilitator will then look at these clusters of changes, and ask those who contributed to talk more about why they selected a particular change, illustrating it with their own experience/observations and what the change process was.
- Ask the group to discuss similarities and differences across contexts (e.g. urban/rural) and also the extent to which these changes have been shaped by shifts in the broader national and international humanitarian context – e.g. rising unemployment, declining donor funding, declining coverage of social protection for refugees, fractured social cohesion between nationalities.

Analysis with the group of significant changes

- Ask the participants to jointly rank the changes from most important to least important, with a reason – rank the clusters of factors as a whole, not specific examples (e.g. 'learning a new skill' vs. 'meeting friends').
- How long do programme participation effects last? Primarily during course participation or are there also legacy effects after the programme has ended? (E.g. if adolescents ceased participating in the programme, dropped out of school, married or engaged in work activities?) [Use different coloured markers for short- term vs. long-term benefits.]
- Ask participants to think about gender differences in impact, and any other key category that could shape perception of significant change (e.g. disability, marital status.)

Probes related to programme benefits for the programme implementers themselves

- Since you have been in your role, what has been the most significant changes for you professionally and personally?

- Ask each participant to take three post-it notes and ask them to write down on pink post-it notes three key changes that they value in terms of the effects on themselves professionally and/or personally as a result of the programme.
- Assign each implementing organisation a letter, starting with A, and ask them to add that to the post-it note.
- Ask for two volunteers to describe what they found most important and add the cards to a flipchart.
- Next, ask the other group participants to place their cards on the flipchart, grouping similar changes together. The facilitator will then look at these clusters of changes and ask those who contributed to talk more about why they selected a particular change, illustrating it with their own experience/observations and probe after what the change process was?
- Ask the group to discuss similarities and differences by gender/age/nationality.

Analysis with the group of concerns and scope for changes for adolescents and for facilitators
- Next ask the participants to reflect on what concerns they have vis-à-vis the programme/shortcomings for adolescents, and how the programme could be improved.
- Ask them to write down two key areas for improvement on orange post-it notes, and to share and cluster these into similar types of issues.
- Then ask the group to rank these from the most important to the least important.
- Finally ask the participants to reflect on what concerns they have vis-à-vis the programme/shortcomings for facilitators and how the programme could be improved.
- Ask them to write down two key areas for improvement on yellow post-it notes and to share and cluster these into similar types of issues.

- Then ask the group to rank these from the most important to the least important.

FGDs with parents – vignettes

Who: Parents of adolescents and youth involved in economic empowering programming.

Materials: flipchart paper, post-its (green, orange, yellow), markers.

A: Academic track

Story 1: Rana's story
Rana's daughter is 18 years and she is a Syrian refugee living in Irbid in a small village in a host community. Her daughter got a reasonable Tawjhi score but not high enough to get a scholarship to university, which she would need given her household's poverty. Her daughter would like to attend TVET college in Irbid city to study computer science as she thinks it would be a practical course that she could use in Jordan and also in Syria if they return back as her husband plans in the next few years. The problem is that Rana and her husband are concerned about their daughter's safety travelling to the TVET college as there are no other girls going from her village and also it would be a struggle – although not impossible – financially to cover the tuition costs. Her daughter has said she will help to cover her expenses by doing henna painting for friends and relatives, underscoring how committed she is to the idea of getting a higher qualification. Rana would like to support her daughter but is facing a dilemma as to how best to persuade her husband, given she also has some misgivings about the distance to the college.

Probes

- Does this story resonate with you? Why/ why not?
- How important do you think post-secondary education is for your children?
- What are your thoughts about TVET college as compared to other pathways, e.g. university?
- What would you recommend that Rana does? (probe around safety, finances, prestige). What other challenges may Rana face in supporting her daughter?
- How do you think the story would have been different had Rana been thinking about a son not a daughter and why?
- How could the government or NGOs better support young people like Rana's daughter to obtain post-secondary qualifications? (probe around loans for education, transportation subsidies, information portals on qualifications and funding, open days for parents etc.)
- What are your aspirations for your children in terms of employment in the future? For your sons? For your daughters? If similar or different, why? How typical are your aspirations for your children compared to your friends/ peers?

Probes

- Does this story resonate with you? Why/ why not?
- How important do you think post-secondary education is for your children?
- What are your thoughts about university education compared to other economic empowerment pathways?
- What would you recommend that Mohammed does? (probe around finances, prestige, concerns about drugs and poor psychosocial well-being)
- What other challenges may Mohammed face in supporting his son?
- How do you think the story would have been different had Mohammed been thinking about a daughter not a son and why?
- How could the government or NGOs better support young people like Mohammed's son to obtain post-secondary qualifications? (probe around loans for education, transportation subsidies, information portals on qualifications and funding, open days for parents etc.)
- What are your aspirations for your children in terms of employment in the future? For your sons? For your daughters? If similar or different, why? How typical are your aspirations for your children compared to your friends/ peers?

Story 2: Mohammed's story

Mohammed's son is 19 years old and he is a Palestinian refugee living in Jerash (Gaza) camp. He has always wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and support him with their small car mechanic workshop on the edge of the camp but his son is an excellent student and has set his sights on university. He could potentially secure a scholarship to partially cover his fees but Mohammed is concerned that his son's desire to study psychology is not very practical and that if he does support him to get a degree he will eventually end up very disappointed as there are so few avenues for formal employment for Palestinians without national ID. Mohammed feels torn between supporting his son's dreams – as he has always told him education is critical - and being the 'voice of reason', especially as he sees a number of young men in the camp who have gone to university only to end up idle afterwards, depressed and sometimes mixed up with drugs, as they are unwilling to take on more menial tasks when they feel to get a placement in their field of study.

B: Non-Academic track

Story 1: Abdulla's story

Abdulla is a 25 year old Jordanian from Mafraq and recently married a 17 year old girl who is in Grade 11. A condition of the marriage was that he support her to finish secondary school and then to get a bachelor's in Engineering. Abdulla is supportive of his wife's educational aspirations as he thinks it will be helpful to have two incomes in these uncertain economic times and it will mean that she can also better support any future children they might have with their homework. However, his friends' wives have all dropped out from education and they warn him that he is taking a risk by letting his wife travel to school each day by herself and moreover, that at university she will be mixing with other young men. These concerns are starting to nag away at Abdulla and he is beginning to have second thoughts about his promises to his wife and his in-laws.

Probes

- Does this story resonate with you? Why/ why not?
- How important do you think post-secondary education is for young women?
- What would you recommend that Abdulla does? (probe around finances, prestige, concerns about drugs and poor psychosocial well-being)
- What other challenges might Abdulla face in supporting his wife to continue her studies?
- How do you think the story would have been different had Mohammed been thinking about TVET or his wife setting up her own small business?
- How could the government or NGOs better support young people like Abdulla's wife to obtain post-secondary qualifications? (probe around loans for education, transportation subsidies, information portals on qualifications and funding, open days for parents etc.)
- What do you envision your wife doing in the future in terms of education and work? How similar or different is your vision compared to those of your friends?