

**Impact Report Series, Issue 13**

# LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

*A qualitative assessment of  
Employment Service Centres*

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September 2018

**TAQEEM INITIATIVE**

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. UNRWA’s Employment Service Centres.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Qualitative evaluation of UNRWA’s ESCs.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Main findings.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. Discussion and conclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
References.....	28
Appendix 1 - Individual Questionnaire.....	29
Appendix 2 - Focus Group Discussion Guiding Questions .....	30
Appendix 3 – Organization of FGDs .....	32
Appendix 4 - FGDs Participant Suggestions to Improve ESCs.....	37

# Preface

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In June 2012, the International Labour Conference of the ILO resolved to take urgent action to tackle the unprecedented youth employment crisis through a multi-pronged approach geared towards pro-employment growth and decent job creation. The resolution – “The youth employment crisis: A call for action” – contains a set of conclusions that constitute a blueprint for shaping national strategies for youth employment. In 2016, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth was launched to facilitate increased impact and expanded country-level action on decent jobs for young people through multi-stakeholder partnerships, the dissemination of evidence-based policies and the scaling up of effective and innovative interventions.

The ILO has responded to this by investing more in understanding “what works” in youth employment and supporting governments and social partners to translate evidence into integrated employment policy responses. In 2013, the ILO set up the Fund for Evaluation in Youth Employment and the Area of Critical Importance: What Works in Youth Employment to foster knowledge sharing and provide financial and technical assistance for rigorous assessment of youth employment interventions. Regional approaches have since been established, including the Taqueem Initiative: What Works in Youth Employment, which targets ILO constituents in the Arab states and African region. Taqueem (“evaluation” in Arabic) applies an iterative cycle of capacity development, impact research and policy influence to improve evidence and support youth employment policy-makers to take evidence-based decisions for better resource allocation and programme design.

The “Impact Report Series” disseminates research reports from Taqueem-supported impact evaluations. Reports include baseline, endline and qualitative reports which describe the research designs, methodologies, interventions under investigation and policy and programmatic findings and recommendations.

This report presents the results of the qualitative assessment of UNRWA’s Employment Service Centres in Lebanon. It is part of a research project titled “Measuring the Impact of Employment Service Centres in Lebanon”, a joint collaboration between ILO, UNRWA and the American University of Sharjah (AUS). The overall objective of the project is to study the impact of the services provided by ESCs on the employability of the Palestinian youth refugee population through quantitative and qualitative assessments. This qualitative reports aims to provide an in-depth description and assessment of the context in which ESCs operate and potential channels through which ESC services might impact their beneficiaries. The research is based on focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with youth Palestinian jobseekers that are registered at the ESCs

We would like to acknowledge Samer Kherfi of the American University of Sharjah, Jonas Bausch of the ILO, Alexandra Irani and Rima Al Mokdad who authored the study.

The report was produced in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as part of an IFAD-financed project titled “Strengthening gender monitoring and evaluation in rural employment in the Near East and North Africa”. Through rigorous impact research, this

capacity development and learning grant project aims to understand “what works” in the promotion of gender mainstreaming, with the ultimate goal of reaching gender equality in rural employment outcomes across the region.

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# 1. Introduction

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The social exclusion and precarious living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been well-documented over the past decades. As Lebanon still considers the Palestinian refugees as foreigners under the Lebanese law, they are deprived them from basic rights enjoyed by the Lebanese and are not granted any special status. It is estimated that between 260,000 and 280,000 Palestinian refugees reside in Lebanon (PRL) as of 2010 (Chaaban, Ghattas, Habib, Hanafi, & Sahyoun, 2010). In recent years, the conflict in neighboring Syria has led over 42,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) to seek refuge in Lebanon and has added further pressure on the infrastructure and services within existing Palestinian refugee camps and the areas outside the camps. Sixty-three per cent of PRL live in the 12 refugee camps dispersed across the country while the rest live in areas adjacent to the camps or in gatherings further away from the camps (Chaaban et al., 2016).

A little short of two thirds of the PRL population is poor, a proportion that has not changed since 2010, and the discriminatory laws against them hinder their ability to improve their living conditions and livelihoods. Many Palestinian refugees live in homes with decaying infrastructure, in camps that lack recreational spaces, have insufficient access to roads, and deteriorated water and sewage treatment systems. Palestinian refugees are still prohibited from practicing several professions such as in the fields of engineering and medicine due to the precondition of holding the Lebanese nationality or the reciprocity of treatment policy. The PRL unemployment rate significantly increased to 23 per cent in 2015, up from 8 per cent in 2010, and reaching a high of 32.4 per cent for women. The average unemployment spell also extended from 6 months in 2012 to 9.3 months in 2015, a 55 per cent increase.

Around four out of five employed PRL are self-employed (32 percent) and wage labourers (48 per cent), most of who work in low-paying, low-skilled jobs that are more often than not subject to harsh, exploitive and insecure working conditions. In fact, Palestinian refugees working in all professions, except the senior ‘white collar’ occupations, experience poverty rates higher than 50 per cent (Chaaban et al., 2016). The majority of employed Palestinian refugees (71.4 per cent), work in elementary occupations (36.4 per cent) such as street vendors and door keepers, craft and related trade workers (21.6 per cent) and services and sales workers (13.4 per cent). The percentage of those working in elementary occupations, which usually are precarious in nature, has significantly increased from its 2010 rate of 23 per cent pushing a new segment of the workforce into low-skilled jobs.

Despite the 2010 amendments in the Labour Law and Social Security Law which resulted in waiving work permit fees and revoking the reciprocity of treatment policy for end-of-service and work-related injuries compensation, less than 3.3 per cent of Palestinian refugee workers have an official employment contract that enables them to apply for a work permit.

Due to restrictions and limitations on many of their rights, many Palestinian refugees depend on UNRWA to sustain their livelihoods and needs. The Agency works closely with government authorities and other international and non-profit organizations to provide resources and services to refugees. Some of the services it provides are relief services, such as its Social Safety Net Programme (SSN), health, education, and employment programmes. With regard to labour market access, one of UNRWA’s major activities includes a programme to establish emergency Employment Services Centres (ESCs) in the North in 2008

following the Nahr El Bared Crisis in 2007. Later on and based on the success of the ESC in the North, UNRWA established three additional ESCs in Saida, Tyre, and Beirut. The basic role of these centres is to provide public employment services, such as job matching services and job coaching and counseling sessions, to the Palestinian refugee population as they have no access to such services.

This report presents the results of the qualitative assessment of UNRWA's Employment Service Centres in Lebanon. It is part of a research project titled "Measuring the Impact of Employment Service Centres in Lebanon", a joint collaboration between ILO, UNRWA and the American University of Sharjah (AUS). The overall objective of the project is to study the impact of the services provided by ESCs on the employability of the Palestinian youth refugee population through quantitative and qualitative assessments. This qualitative reports aims to provide an in-depth description and assessment of the context in which ESCs operates and potential channels through which ESC services might impact their beneficiaries. The research is based on focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with youth Palestinian jobseekers that are registered at the ESCs. The FGDs focused on understanding:

- Primary challenges that young Palestinian refugees face in the Lebanese labour market.
- Services that ESCs registered jobseekers have access to.
- Exploring how ESCs services can affect employment opportunities and job search skills.
- Recommendations of jobseekers to improve the work of ESCs.

The rest of the report is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the main functions of the ESCs in facilitating access to the labour market for Palestinian refugees. Section 3 outlines the methodology of the qualitative assessment conducted, the selection of focus group discussion participants, presents descriptive statistics of the interviewed sample and discusses challenges and limitations of the study. Section 4 presents the main findings of the qualitative assessment. Section 5 discusses the findings and concludes with some recommendations and a way forward for the improvement of services provided by ESCs to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

## 2. UNRWA's Employment Service Centres

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The main purpose of UNRWA's ESCs is to provide job matching services to Palestinian refugees to facilitate their integration in the Lebanese labour market. The ESCs were established in 2008 as part of a larger joint initiative between ILO and UNRWA to improve access of Palestinians to decent work opportunities. Based on the success of the first ESC that was launched in the North, UNRWA established three additional ESCs in Saida, Tyre, and Beirut.

The Palestinian refugee population does not have to employment services provided by Lebanese authorities. As such, ESCs' primary task of UNRWA's is to provide the refugee population access to decent and sustainable jobs by conveying information about vacancies to job seekers and information about job seekers to potential employers through job matching criteria. Second, the ESCs facilitate the access to the labour market by offering job search skills training programmes, such as job coaching sessions and counseling services. As described in the ILO manual of UNRWA Employment Service Centres, the main functions are (ILO, 2013):

### 1. Job matching services

ESCs rely on job matching to bring forth available vacancies to potential job seekers. Matching relies basically on job descriptions from the employers' side and résumés or CVs from the job seekers' side. By obtaining enough information about the business or industry vacancies, ESCs are able to assist jobseekers in tailoring a résumés or CVs that addresses the needs potential employers. Upon applying at the ESC, jobseekers fill registration forms that allow the centres to build a profile of the jobseeker based on their experiences, skills and occupational preferences. This allows the centres to gather enough information on the type of work the jobseeker desires and their respective qualifications. Ultimately, ESCs focus both on job placement, which focuses on the needs of the jobseeker and the recruitment process, which in contrast focuses on employer needs and is driven by available vacancies.

### 2. Guidance and counseling services

Another important function of the ESC is to provide jobseekers with counseling and coaching session in order to enhance their employment prospects. The counsellor or placement officer provides jobseekers with coaching sessions on how to tailor their résumés or CVs on one hand and how to fill work application as well. ESCs also assist jobseekers in drafting cover letters that tailor the needs of the available job vacancy and builds their capacity to conduct a job search and to prepare for interviews.

During this process many factors are taken into consideration including the jobseeker's vocational skills and knowledge, work history and experience, educational background and training history and other work-related aspects. Based on the training needs of the jobseeker, different types of counseling are administered, which include career counselling, vocational counselling and employment counselling.

### 3. Labour market information

Another core function of the ESCs is to provide jobseekers and employers with labour market information. This task, administered under the guidance of the main field officers, allows:

- a. Jobseekers to adapt their job search strategies to the current needs of the market.
- b. Employers to better target their recruitment strategies.
- c. Training institutions to adapt their programmes and services.
- d. UNRWA and related institutions to better take the needs of Palestinian refugees into consideration.

#### **4. Labour market programmes and services**

The last function of ESCs is to increase their outreach. This step aims to “(a) gain the support of key religious and political Palestinian stakeholders for ESCs; and (b) use community networks to publicize the services of ESCs in hard-to-reach populations.” (ibid.) This approach ensures that ESC services would reach the most vulnerable groups of Palestinian refugees and not only graduate students.

ESCs can also refer jobseekers to active labour market programmes such as apprenticeships, internships and work trials all of which expand the jobseeker’s skills and improve their prospects to find a decent job.

### 3. Qualitative evaluation of UNRWA's ESCs

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#### *Evaluation design*

##### Description of methodology and guiding questions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were identified as the appropriate tool of the qualitative assessment. Focus group discussions allow researchers to bring together people with similar backgrounds or characteristics and discuss a common topic of interest. The FGDs method was found to be the most appropriate given the type of evaluation questions that the study is based on and its focus on the ultimate beneficiaries, in this case being the jobseekers registered at the ESCs.

FGDs allow participants to freely express opinions, ideas, and information that cannot be properly captured statistically. Also, FGDs are considered as a useful tool to provide a deeper insight on the opinions and experiences of different individuals who are involved in the same process. They are a good compromise between the diverse but succinct views obtained from a large sample and the more limited semi-structured key informant interviews. They also allow its participants to agree or disagree on certain topics and provides insights as to how a group of people thinks about certain issues, revealing the range of opinions and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in that particular group of people.

FGDs were guided by a moderator or group facilitator, who introduced the subject of discussion and allows the participation of all members of the group. Along with the moderator, an assistant recorded the minutes of the discussion. After the FGDs were finalized, transcripts of the focus group discussions were produced and translated to English. The transcripts were read over several rounds and findings were first categorized broadly based on the FGDs guidelines such as “labour market challenges” or “job seeking methods”. Consecutively, subthemes were developed and will be discussed in length in the findings section.

The main topics discussed in the Focus Group Discussion were:

- Participants were asked to introduce themselves, their age, area of residence, educational attainment, and current employment status.
- Participants were then asked to explain their employment pathway since their last graduation. Detailed information was asked about the job search techniques employed and the challenges faced in the labour market.
- Participants were asked to explain how they heard about and registered at the ESC. Also, questions on their perceptions of ESCs, the services provided, and their personal experience with the ESCs were asked.
- Participants were finally asked to suggest ways ESCs could improve their performance and the services they provide.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A full list of the used guiding questions is found in Appendix 2.

## Organization of FGDs

A total of 10 focus groups were conducted from 19 July till 8 August 2017 to cover ESCs across Lebanon. The FGDs were divided by geographic area, gender and education level:

- Four FGDs in Saida and two FGDs in each of the North, Tyre, and Beirut.
- FGDs were divided equally between female and male participants (five FGDs each).
- Six focus groups included participants with secondary education and below (2 FGDs in each of Saida, Tyre, and North) and the remaining four FGDs included participants with above secondary education (2 FGDs in each of Saida and Beirut).

## FGDs Preparations

### Contacting FGDs Participants

Participants were contacted two to three days before the set date of the FGDs and staff members were provided with a set text to read upon calling potential participants to ensure the same clear message is relayed to all and minimize confusion or bias.

### The FGDs Session Roll-out

FGDs were held outside ESCs to ensure participants are comfortable to voice their opinions regarding the ESCs and their employment status, and minimize any bias in their answers. Participants were asked to fill a questionnaire form that covers demographic, education, and employment questions<sup>2</sup>.

The number of participants in every focus group varied between a minimum of six and a maximum of thirteen participants.

## *Sampling*

The FGDs participant list was extracted from the ESC database of registered job seekers which includes information on their age, gender, area of residence, educational attainment, employment status, employment interests, years of experience, and contact information. The target group for the FGDs was restricted to ESCs members between the ages of 18-30 who registered at the ESC starting January 2015<sup>3</sup>. The sample was stratified by gender and educational attainment. All members who reached secondary education including vocational training (BT) were grouped together and those with tertiary education including vocational training (TS) were included in a separate group. For each FGDs, a list of 60-70 members was

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<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire is available in Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> In case registration dates were missing, the list for a certain area was ordered chronologically (by member ID as those are issued chronologically), and the most recent 60-70 observations were selected.

randomly selected to be able to successfully reach and confirm 6-8 participants per focus group. This large sample per FGD is required due to the low response rate as many participants are unreachable as they either change their numbers, share a number with their parents or leave the country. A total of 509 jobseekers were contacted over the phone, of which 133 confirmed attendance. Of the 87 participants that attended the FGDs, 10 participants were not invited but came with their invited relatives or friends and were allowed to participate in the discussion.<sup>4</sup>

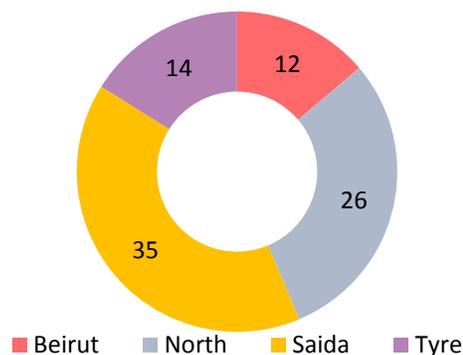
### ***Description of the study sample***

This section presents the sample characteristics that were captured through a short questionnaire filled by FGD participants before the start of the FGD session. The statistics included in the section are only meant to describe the FGD participants and should not be used to infer population level results. The results are not representative of the Palestinian population but at most, the statistics included, represent the views of those who are willing to attend FGDs at job centres. However, these statistics are useful for placing the main findings into an appropriate context...

### **Demographics**

A total of 87 participants attended the 10 FGDs that were held. Saida includes the highest number of participants as 4 FGDs were held there while only 2 were held in each of the other regions for logistic reasons (Saida is the closest field area to commute to and FGDs were held in pairs to cover both genders). Thirty-five participants attended the 4 Saida FGDs, 26 participants attended in the North, 14 participants attended in Tyre, and 12 participants attended in Beirut (figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of FGD Participants across Regions



The FGDs participant distribution mimics the distribution of registered jobseekers in the ESCs database. Between September 2012 and April 2017, a total of 11,076 jobseekers were registered in the four ESCs. The majority of the jobseekers are registered in Saida (37 per cent), followed by the North (22 per cent), Beirut (including the Bekaa region) (21 per cent) and Tyre (20 per cent).

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<sup>4</sup> One of the invited participants who had not confirmed attendance was in fact a person with disability and could not make it to the FGD. His father informed us of his condition and quickly briefed us about the challenges his son faces in accessing the labour market.

The FGDs participants were almost evenly split between men (51 per cent, 45) and women (49 per cent, 42) as shown in figure 2. In comparison, 43 per cent of the ESC database jobseekers are females. FGDs participants were young with an average age of 21.9 years old although the sample was extracted from the age group 18-30. This could be due to the fact that most FGDs participants got registered through the ESCs registration campaigns that are regularly held at the UNRWA Sibling Training Centre. The average age of participants varied by gender and educational attainment. In general, in the same educational attainment groups, the average age of females and males were almost the same (males were slightly older). Participants with above secondary education were on average older (22.0 years for females and 22.2 years for males) than participants with secondary education or below (21.2 years for females and 21.3 for males).

Figure 2: Distribution of FGD Participants by Gender

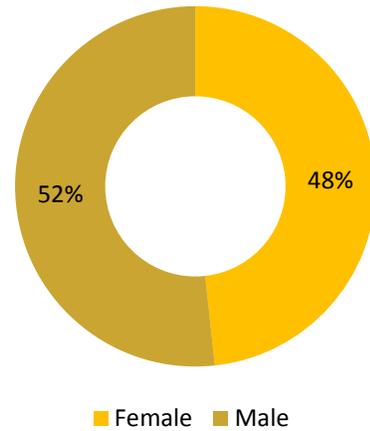
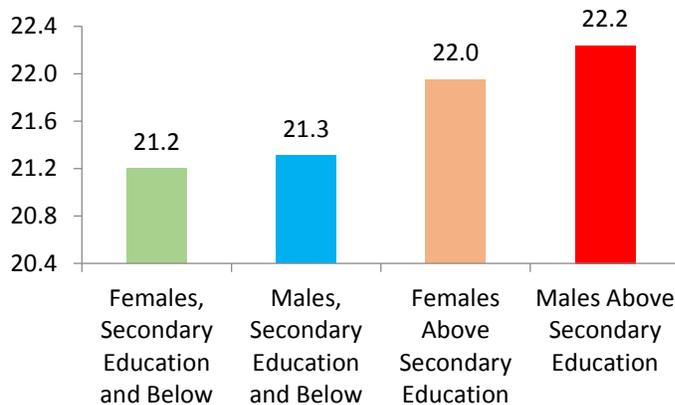


Figure 3: Average Age of FGDs Participants by Gender and Educational Attainment

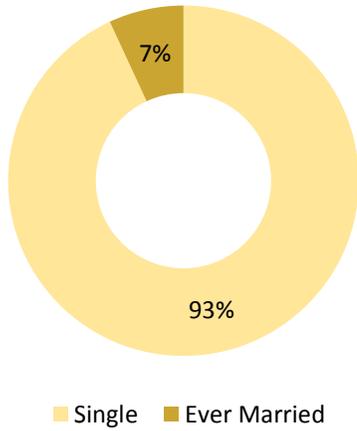


The majority of FGDs participants (over 90 per cent, 81) were single while only a minority were ever married<sup>5</sup> (7 per cent, 6) as shown in figure 4 most likely due to the young ages of participants. The small number of ever married participants explains the small number of participants with children where only 3 per cent of participants (3) reported having children (figure 5).

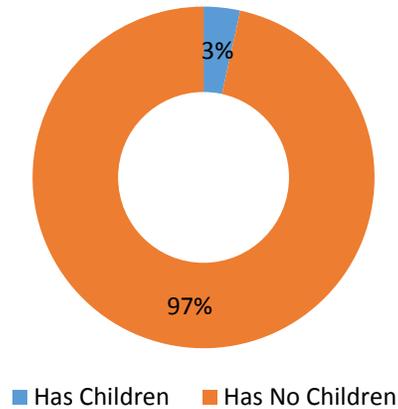
The young age of participants and the fact that the majority of them are single with no children renders the analysis of the focus group primarily based on this specific population cohort. The views of a sub-population that was ever married or has children cannot be correctly depicted from the FGDs results at hand.

<sup>5</sup> Ever married includes participants that are current married or were previously married.

**Figure 4: Distribution of FGDs Participants by Marital Status**

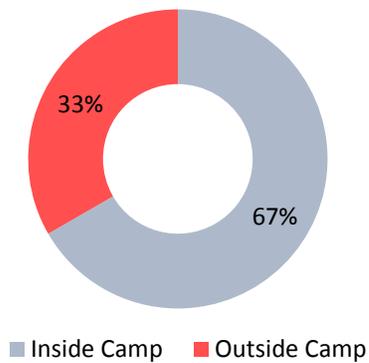


**Figure 5: Distribution of FGDs Participant by the Presence of Children**



Almost 67 per cent (58) of the FGDs participants) reported living inside Palestinian refugee camps while 33 per cent (29) of participants reported living outside the camps (figure 6). According to the ESCs database, 56 per cent of registered jobseekers living inside the confines of the 12 UNRWA Palestinian camps. Camp residents in the FGDs sessions mainly came from Ain El Helwe Camp in Saida, Beddawi Camp and Nahr El Bared Camp in the North, Bourj Barajneh Camp in Beirut, and Bourj El-Chemali Camp and Rashideyye Camp in Tyre<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 6: Distribution of FGDs Participants by Residence**



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<sup>6</sup> A full list of the abovementioned descriptive figures is found in Appendix 4.

## Education

FGDs were stratified by gender and educational attainment of registered ESC members. This gave way to the distribution of FGDs participants by formal educational attainment shown in figure 7. Participants were divided into two education groups: those who had reached secondary level education or less (including primary, intermediate, secondary, vocational BT trade) and those who had above secondary level education (including vocational TS/semi-professional)<sup>7</sup>.

The majority of participants (37 per cent, 32) had reached or completed intermediate education (up till grade 9), followed by 29 per cent (25) of participants for secondary education (grade 10-12), and 22 per cent (19) of participants for tertiary level education (university degrees including undergraduate and graduate). The remaining 13 per cent (10) of participants had either only reached primary education (up till grade 6) or had enrolled in vocational/technical education.

Nevertheless, the majority of participants (85 per cent, 54) had or are still completing vocational/technical training courses either at the UNRWA Sibling Training Centre or another vocational training centre. Sibling includes two types of 1-2 year courses: the trade track, which can lead to a BT certificate, and the semi-professional track, which can lead to a TS certificate. The trade track includes courses such as carpentry and furniture making, aluminum fabrication, electronics, refrigeration and air conditions and auto-mechanics. While the semi-professional track includes courses such as business administration, accounting, civil engineering, building and topography.

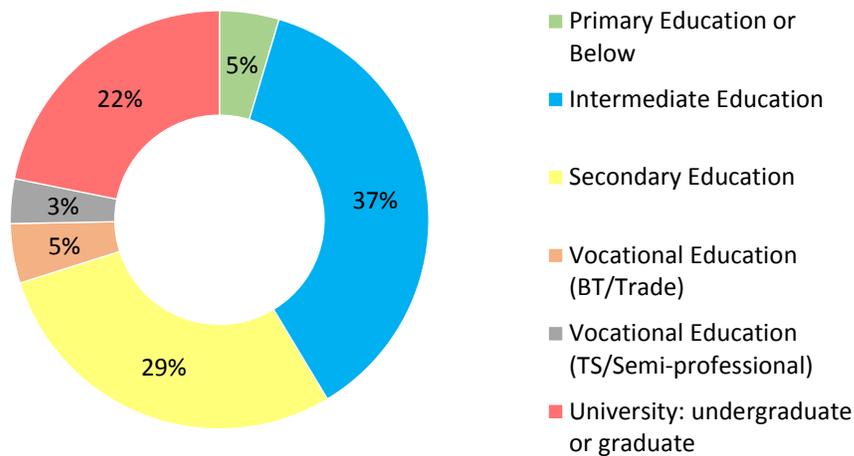
In comparison, the majority of registered jobseekers in the ESCs database reached university level education (23 per cent), followed by TS/semi-professional education (20 per cent) and BT/trade education (19 per cent). The discrepancy between the FGDs participants' education distribution and that of the ESC database is due to the fact that the sample was stratified by education level to ensure that the various challenges faced by different education groups are well reflected in the results of the qualitative assessment.

### Figure 7: Distribution of FGDs Participants by Educational Attainment

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<sup>7</sup> The Lebanese Technical and Vocational Education is divided into two basic fields: Vocational (Rehabilitation) Education and Technical Education. The technical field requires at least 9 years of general education and is divided into three levels: the Execution level, the Middle level and the Higher level:

- a. The Execution level lasts for 3 years and leads to the Technical Baccalaureate Certificate (BT) for production technicians. It includes professions like preschool education, documentation, programming, air conditioning, topography, advertising trades, industrial engineering, automobile engineering...
- b. The Middle level lasts for 2 years and leads to the Superior Technician Certificate (TS) for senior technicians and middle managers. It includes professions like social services, medical nurse, accountancy, optometry, radiologist, industrial automation, hotel management, civil engineering, electricity, electronics...
- c. The Higher level includes The Technical Bachelor Certificate (LT) which takes 1 year to complete and the Technical Educational Bachelor Certificate which takes 4 years. (European Training Foundation, 1999; UNESCO & UNEVOC, 2012)



### *Challenges and limitations of the study*

Several challenges were faced during the sample extraction, recruitment process, and the FGDs sessions and are summarized in this section<sup>8</sup>.

**The data quality of the ESC registration database affected the study and specifically the sample extraction.** Key information on such as the registration date of members and their educational attainment were missing for certain observations leading to their discarding prior to the sample extraction. Also, since the data is not updated regularly, some information risked being outdated and to a flawed distribution of participants in the FGDs groups. For instance, some participants with tertiary education were included in the FGDs groups of participants with “secondary education or below” because at the time of their registration they had only reached/completed secondary education.

**The recruitment process of FGDs participants also created a level of confusion among the contacted jobseekers.** Some participants had the impression that they were being contacted for a job interview. This poses the question whether these participants would truthfully share their opinions regarding ESCs as they might refrain from sharing any criticism if they thought the ESCs were linking them to potential employers. However, at the beginning of each session, FGD facilitators clarified the objectives of the exercise to avoid such. A high number of jobseekers had to be contacted to reach the required number of participants per FGDs with one of the main reasons being that jobseekers had changed phone numbers but this was not reflected in the ESCs database.

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<sup>8</sup> A more elaborate list of challenges is found in Appendix 6.

Results of the qualitative assessment are not representative of the ESCs registered jobseekers, and only reflect at best the views of jobseekers who would attend such FGDs sessions. Also, the sample size was small (87 participants) leading to further limitations in any attempt of inference.

## 4. Main findings

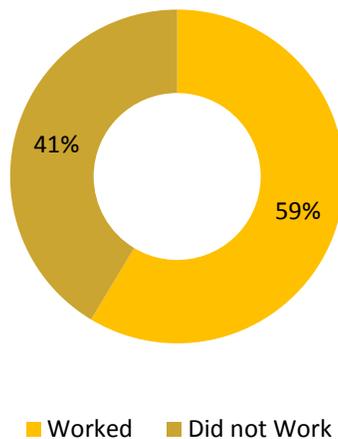
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The analysis of the data from the FGDs reveals a number of insights on the challenges young Palestinians face in the labour market, the job search strategies they employ, their attitudes and opinions on various employment related topics and their perceptions on ESCs and the role they play.

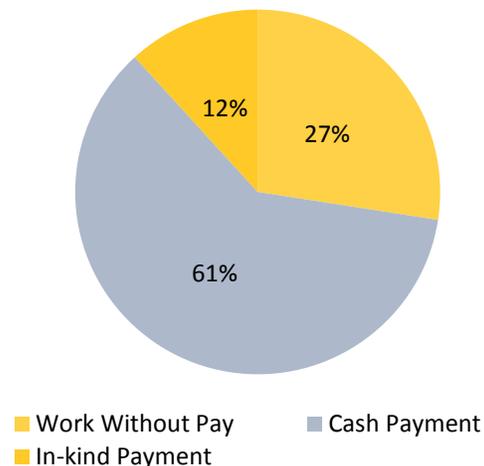
### *Labour Market Challenges*

**It is not the quantity of jobs that is lacking in the Lebanese labour market.** In fact, the majority of participants (59 per cent, 51) reported working in the previous week while 41 per cent (36) reported not working (figure 8). Working participants reported working either as interns, employees, or employers/self-employed. Out of the working participants, 61 per cent (31) of participants reported receiving cash payments as a means of remuneration. While 27 per cent (14) of participants reported receiving no form of payment; these participants were mainly interns. Only 12 per cent (6) of participants reported receiving in-kind payment in return for their work (figure 9).<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 8: Distribution of FGDs Participants by Work Status in the Previous Week**



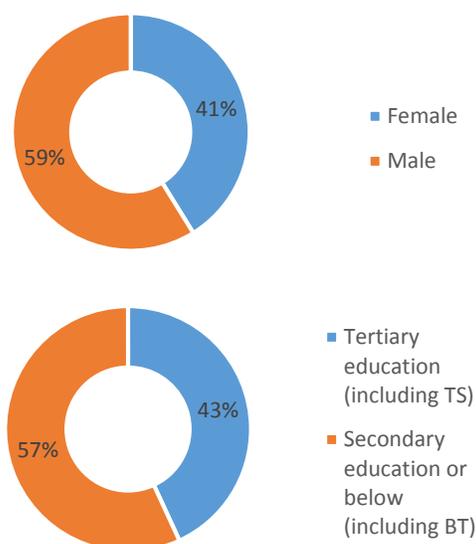
**Figure 9: Distribution of Employed FGDs Participants by Wage Type**



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<sup>9</sup> None of the FGDs participants (except for the Syrian girl who mentioned working in agriculture in Syria) mentioned working in agriculture or having any interest in the field. This is expected as only 2.3 per cent of employed PRL in Lebanon are skilled agricultural and fishery workers (Chaaban et al., 2016). The agriculture sector in Lebanon is weak and has been neglected for years leading to a continuous decrease of agriculture workers. It contributes to less than 10% of the country's GDP and employs less than a fifth of the active population. Also, most jobs in agriculture are tedious with very low pay and tend to be filled by PRS or Syrian refugees who are in more critical living situations. Noteworthy is the fact that Lebanon is a highly urbanized country and that most FGDs participants live in an urban context. Also, agriculture is mostly concentrated in the Bekaa valley, the only area that lacks an ESCs. This would explain the lack of interest in agriculture voiced by the FGDs participants.

Figure 10 Distribution of participants who worked last week by gender and educational attainment



per cent (30) of participants who mentioned having worked last week were male and 41 per cent (21) were female (figure 10).

**What is lacking is jobs with decent working conditions in sectors that Palestinian refugees are legally allowed to work in.** While most of the literature focuses on the high youth and women unemployment rates and the relatively low labour force participation rates among Palestinian refugees, when asked about how hard it was for them to find a job, participants revealed the widely available job opportunities that they choose to reject.

This is mainly due to the overlap of long hours, low pay and poor working conditions that characterize these jobs. In fact, 59 per cent of participants (51 out of the 87) mentioned having worked last week, yet not even a fifth of them mentioned being satisfied with their job. Of those who mentioned having worked for at least one hour last week, less than half, 43 per cent (22), were from the tertiary level education groups and a little more than half, 57 per cent (29), were from the secondary level and below education groups. While 59

**Twenty-seven participants mentioned having turned down jobs or quitting jobs due to the long working hours, low pay and poor working conditions.** Most either refused or quit the said jobs even without having an alternative, preferring to remain unemployed than to endure the poor working conditions. While, educational attainment was not a determining factor, the majority were males (16 participants). Three participants initially accepted the job though it was far from their place of residence, but after a while quit as the wages they earned were not enough to cover their transportation costs and sustain them. While it is easy to find jobs in the construction or agriculture sectors, those low-skill low-pay jobs are tedious and extend over long hours. This explains why both these sectors are usually avoided by Lebanese nationals, and have mostly employed foreigners such as Syrians and to a lesser extent Palestinians. The wages are sometimes as low as 130 USD for a part-time job and 200 USD for a full-time job as was reported by some participants.

**Twenty-four participants mentioned not being able to find jobs in their field of work or resorting to employment in a different field either permanently or temporarily until they are able to find a job in their sector.** Male participants tended to switch professions, from for instance work in aluminum to plumbing when they couldn't find jobs or wanted to move to better paying jobs especially after getting married and getting their first child. They also mentioned temporarily reverting to tedious manual labor in construction or delivery of goods (like drinking water gallons to households) to be able to support their family until they find better paying jobs in their profession. While female participants tended to temporarily find jobs as saleswomen in small retail and clothes shops. Table 1 shows the occupations held by the 39

participants who reported working for a wage based on the ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations classification structure. Although over a third of employed Palestinians work in elementary occupations, this occupation is under represented in the FGD group of participants most likely because they also constitute a lower proportion of jobseekers registered in the ESC data base.

The majority of employed FGD participants work in crafts and related trades, which is the second most common occupation among the employed Palestinian population in Lebanon.

**Table 1 Distribution of the employed by occupation**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary occupations (street vendor, food delivery, ironing)	3	8
Crafts and related trade workers (car mechanics, air condition repair, plumbing, paint, electrician...)	20	51
Service and sales workers (hairdresser, cashier, salesperson)	9	23
Technicians and associate professionals (secretary)	2	5
Professionals (engineer, teacher, accountant)	5	13
Total	39	100

**Nepotism or favoritism, also known as “Wasta” in Lebanese terms, is a factor affecting the hiring and promotion decisions for everyone in the country, Lebanese and Palestinians alike.** It is therefore not surprising that it was repeatedly mentioned by participants as a challenge they face in the world of work. They expressed the need for “Wasta” not only to get employed, but even to get selected for an unpaid internship. It is sometimes so flagrant that a female from Beirut mentioned once being interviewed and selected for the job and asked to report to work on the following Tuesday only to find out first thing in the morning on that Tuesday after reporting for her first day to work that another girl was offered her position. In her words she said: “her wasta was stronger than mine”.

**The presence of Syrian refugees has been mentioned by a few participants as a contributing factor to the scarcer job opportunities due to higher competition for the already limited pool of low-skill jobs and elementary occupations.** Yet one participant took this widely repeated statement by Lebanese and Palestinians alike a step further by saying that Syrians are not only creating competitions in low-skill jobs

but in white collar ones as well like in the field of pharmacy and engineering. Many opt to replace Lebanese and Palestinian employees by Syrians, who are offered a fraction of the wage. A locally known supermarket in Saida owned by a Palestinian man now mostly employs Syrians in all its branches as opposed to Palestinians as it is much cheaper. Another participant made it a point to clarify that although Syrian refugees were in fact creating competition over an ever shrinking job pool, there were not to be blamed.

**Palestinian youth are not only obstructed legally from applying to certain jobs, but are also discriminated against.** Twenty-one participants, equally distributed by gender, mentioned that being Palestinian, cost them an interview or a job, sometimes in sectors they are legally allowed to work in. Several participants mentioned that after being short-listed, interviewed and even almost hired, employers refrain from offering them the job. Reasons include not being allowed to legally work in the sector like in engineering, going through the hassle of issuing and renewing work permits<sup>10</sup>– something that could be avoided by simply hiring a national, or exceeding the quota set for businesses for hiring foreigners.

**Yet, above and beyond all the legal, bureaucratic and financial obstacles standing in the way of their employment, some participants mentioned the discrimination they also face.** Alaa and Sarah from Tyre both mentioned that employers prefer to hire Lebanese but if they do end up hiring Palestinians, they treat them poorly and pay them much lower wages. Yet Alaa, did also mention that at the firm where she completed her internship, they did not have a problem with hiring Palestinians. Mohamad from Beirut said that one company went as far as telling him that they pay Palestinians 1 dollar a day to express their disdain towards Palestinians. Having studied engineering but not being allowed to legally practice that profession, Mohamad mentioned that he and many other Palestinian engineers are often informally employed by big Lebanese engineering firms. While they do most of the work, the project is formally assigned to a Lebanese engineer, who gets all the credit and most of the pay (since the projects can only be signed and approved by a Lebanese engineer).

While some participants mentioned trying to hide their nationality from potential employers in the hope of getting employed, others are so tired from being rejected right before signing the contract that they started including their nationality clearly on the top of their resumes and personally mentioning it in case employers skipped reading it.

**Female participants voiced the double burden they face of being a Palestinian Woman.** They not only face labour market restrictions on Palestinians but also the social and cultural pressures that women are subjected to in their environments. While some females confirmed that communities within camps have now become more accepting of women joining the labour force and possibly finding jobs outside camps, others mentioned that they are still expected to be back home before sunset, even if their formal working hours surpass that. On the other hand, perceptions on camps differed between those living inside and outside camps. For example, female participants from Saida living outside Ein el Helwe camp considered it unsafe and would not look for a job there. While others living in the camp and working with kindergartens ensured that despite the regular gunshots and conflict, kids were safe.

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<sup>10</sup> Following the issuance of Law no. 129 of 2010, work permits for Palestinian refugees became free of charge.

While some women mentioned that their parents were encouraging them to search for jobs, others first had no intentions of joining the labour force after completing their studies but after getting bored at home, convinced their parents to get employed.

Despite the lack of jobs in their area of residence, some girls would never consider moving areas for a job or even leaving the country either because of their parents, or because they personally found it too difficult to live alone. Though they would be more open to that if they had relatives in these areas. There was a female participant who was open to moving all the way from the North to Beirut but that is because she will be moving there with her fiancé after they get married.

*“I think my problem is that I wear a hijab; some employers do not allow women with hijabs to work for them. Other employers do not allow you to work if you are Palestinian. The biggest problem is when these two factors come together, then it is very difficult to find a job.” - Karine from Beirut*

**Female participants from the Beirut FGDs also focused on the hijab as being an issue when seeking employment.** Some employers try to find out from a woman’s name whether she might be veiled or not and as Karine’s name sounds Christian, employers were sometimes surprised to see her veiled during interviews. The female participants from Beirut mentioned that the issue with the hijab was mostly inside the city of Beirut, whereas in the suburbs of Beirut, the veil is preferred in many institutions and hospitals. Another woman mentioned actually being rejected for a job after completing an interview for a company in the city of Beirut as they preferred veiled women. They even suggested hiring her if she veiled herself. These stories are an indication of the complexities women face in navigating into the world of work. Some women, in an attempt to avoid such incidents, started informing potential employers over the phone that they were veiled, Palestinian women.

**Lacking work experience was mentioned as a main challenge in landing a job mostly by participants from higher levels of education (10 out of the 12 participants).** Some participants then reverted to going for unpaid internships first in an attempt to fill the experience gap. Yet sometimes young job seekers get caught in the unpaid internship trap. A participant mentioned applying for a job at a child nursery in one of Tyre’s camps, but being told there were no open job positions. Yet she was contacted soon after to fill a 3-months volunteer position at the end of which she was asked again to renew her volunteering position for another 3 months. Only after she refused to volunteer, the nursery offered her a job. This was echoed by a few other female participants.

**Self-employment seems to be driven more by necessity than by opportunity among the FGDs participants.** Ten participants mentioned working in their family business or opening their own business. Some participants mentioned opening their business only after having unsuccessfully searched for jobs with good conditions.

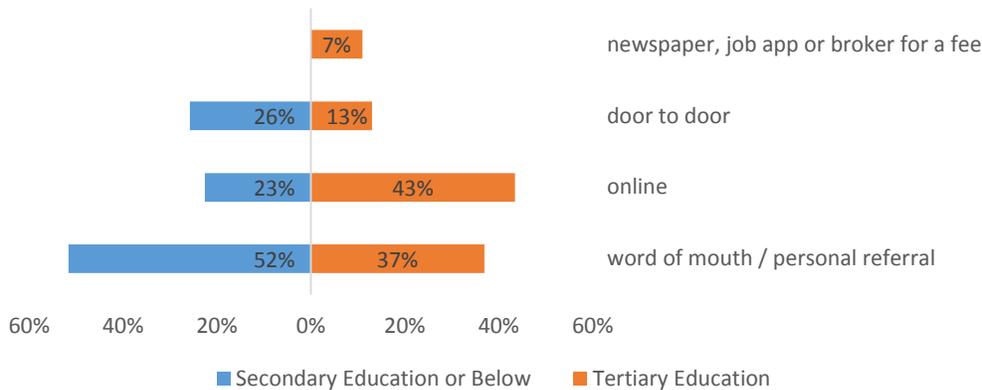
Others reverting to working in their family business, mostly male participants with their dads until they are able to find a job in their own sector. A male participant from Tyre mentioned wanting to open his own car repair business in Beirut. The job market is weak in Tyre and any jobs available pay very little. The market for car repair in Beirut is big and pays well, unfortunately, though he would prefer living in Beirut, living expenses are high and would cancel any profit made from working there. Another participant had opened

his own shop but was not able to generate enough revenue to cover the shop rent, business loans and support his family. He therefore reverted to close the business to cut his losses.

### *Job Search Strategies and Attitudes*

**When asked about the search strategies they employ to find a job, participants’ answers differed by education level.** While those with tertiary education level mostly relied on online job searches (43 per cent, 20) followed by personal referrals and word of mouth (37 per cent, 17)<sup>11</sup>, those with secondary education or below more heavily relied on word of mouth and personal referrals (52 per cent, 32) followed by door to door visits to companies to submit their CVs (26 per cent, 16) as is detailed in figure 11.

**Figure 11 Job Search Method by Education Level**



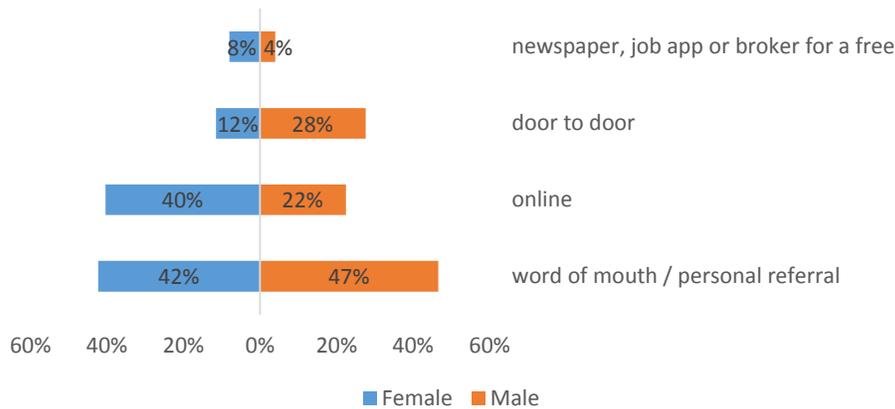
**The preference for a certain job search method was also characterized by a gender dimension.** While the word of mouth/personal referral method was almost equally employed by both genders (42 per cent (22) of females and 47 per cent (22) of males), the door to door approach was more heavily employed by males (28 per cent (16) of males compared to 12 per cent (6) of females). This can be attributed to the nature of the jobs males usually look for in the door to door method such as construction, electronics, mechanics, and other male dominated professions. While the online job search approach was more heavily relied on by females (40 per cent (21) of females compared to 22 per cent (13) of males) as shown in figure 12. Some of the mentioned online platforms used to search for jobs include general searches for companies using the Google Search Engine, company Facebook pages, the Saida City website, the UNRWA website, Daleel Madani (mostly for jobs in the non-profit sector), Hire Lebanese, and Bayt.com.

Three participants mentioned relying on newspapers to look for jobs such as “Waseet” available both offline and online. Two participants mentioned using a job app, or broker for a fee. They would pay for example 50 USD per year for the job broker who would help them find a job. If the participant successfully gets

<sup>11</sup> Participants sometimes mentioned more than one job search option.

employed, then the job search office would take a fraction or the full first month salary in other instances as well.

**Figure 12 Job Search Method by Gender**



Some participants, mostly males, mentioned that their teachers in Sibliin had linked them to internship opportunities and in some instances had helped them get employed. Others also voiced the importance of building personal connections that sometimes more easily materialize into job offers than online job applications.

**Females mostly rely on the door to door method in the child nursery profession as most nurseries are few and known in camps.** Yet they expressed how hard it was to find a job in that sector as most nurseries are Lebanese private entities that usually prefer to employ Lebanese women. Since UNRWA does not officially have child nurseries, the few that are found in camps are unregistered and have very limited job opportunities with poor work conditions and low pay.

**Similar to their Lebanese counterparts who prefer government positions over one in the private sector for their short working hours and extended benefits, some FGDs participants expressed a similar preference for UNRWA positions.** Yet, they wouldn't be very hopeful about landing such a position due to the limited availability, high demand and a recruitment process that is not very transparent. Some participants mentioned having volunteered for several months with UNRWA, but this did not materialize to a paid job position.

**Some participants got creative in their job search strategies.** A female from Saida designed and printed fliers and distributed them in her sister's class to advertise the private tutoring lessons she gives. Another female from the Saida FGDs who could not find a job in any child nursery, finally applied for a job in a Lebanese Shariaa school but got rejected because she was Palestinian. She decided to enroll in the school to take Shariaa courses to familiarize herself with the school and maybe try to apply again later on. The kindergarten teacher kept informally asking her for advice and help with the children.

Accordingly, she brought up the issue with the Sheikh managing the school and asked for a formal job assignment as she was already constantly giving free advice and help. After being an impossible task of decorating all the kindergarten classrooms in 4 days, she proved her determination and hard work and was offered a job at the school. She did mention though that the Sheikh and the staff did not expect her to be able to complete the task as she is a Siblin graduate and the vocational training UNRWA school does not have a good reputation among Lebanese employers.

### **Views on the UNRWA Siblin Vocational Training School**

*“I enrolled at the Lebanese University because my sister, who is enrolled in Siblin, told me that a university degree is better than a degree from a vocational training school.”- Ghada from Saida*

While the majority of FGDs participants were current or previous Siblin students (54 out of the 87 participants), some expressed the challenges they faced in the labour market with a Siblin certificate. Three male participants from Tyre mentioned that most of what they had learnt at Siblin was not practical and got not be directly utilized in the world of work. They prefer on the job training for the field of phone/accessories repair or short-term practical training workshops for car electricians.

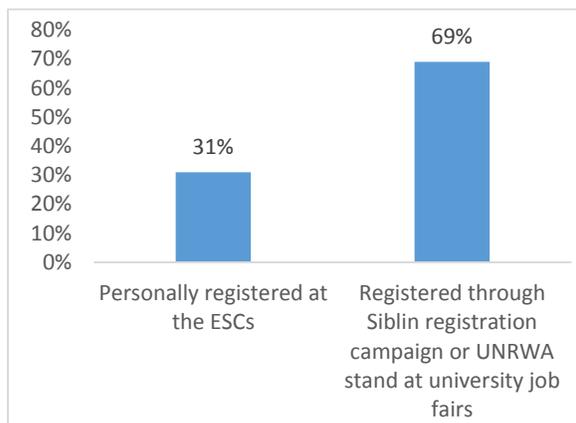
Some females in the child nursing profession, mentioned that Siblin should more closely monitor the market demand for jobs and accordingly guide its students in the most needed professions. While many women enroll in the child nursing track, there are barely any job openings in the sector as most kindergartens are Lebanese private schools that prioritize hiring Lebanese women.

**Participants also voiced their disappointment in the Siblin certificate, which they were told was acknowledged and approved of in 20 countries yet Lebanon does not seem to be one of them.** When employers find out that they are Siblin graduates, they either automatically reject them and mention that their Siblin certificate is not recognized. The negative perceptions of Siblin can also be framed under the overall negative reputation of vocational training in Lebanon and the Arab region as a whole.

### **Perceptions on ESCs**

Most of the FGDs participants (59 per cent, 51) had not heard of the ESCs prior to registering at one of the ESCs mostly either through the frequent Siblin registration campaigns that the ESCs hold or through the UNRWA stands at selected university job fairs (69 per cent, 60) as shown in figure 13. Through the Siblin campaigns, ESCs staff register in bulk Siblin students during which it seems, due to the high number of newly registered members, the ESC functions, member rights and responsibilities are not always clarified. Therefore, FGDs participants have given different feedback on these sessions whereby some mentioned having perfectly understood what

Figure 13 Method of ESC Registration



the ESCs do and have properly learned how to fill a CV, while others mention they do not recall being told their responsibilities such as regularly updating ESCs on their newly acquired skills and education degrees.

Many FGDs participants mentioned that the ESCs only function is to match their members in the database to jobs. Some were also confused and thought that the ESCs sole function was to provide UNRWA jobs. This confusion also stems from the fact that the ESCs Beirut office is housed inside the UNRWA LFO in Beirut. Participants were also hopeful that ESCs would be able to place them in jobs abroad after which the moderator explained that the ESCs job placement services were only restricted to Lebanon.

Also, the ESCs sessions on CV writing and interview skills were not highly valued by the members registered through Siblin as they already take such courses in depth at Siblin. While those who didn't attend Siblin were more interested in these sessions.

When asked whether they would recommend their friends to register at the ESCs some were positive, others were neutral and mentioned that they had nothing to lose by registering but did not have much hope for a positive outcome.

*“of course I would advise someone to register at the ESC, this service is for free. Other offices take money to find you similar jobs; some take you first salary after finding you a job.” - Amjad from Saida*

Some had negative views and thought that ESC staff inform their friends and people they know about the jobs opportunities they identify. Many have been registered at the ESCs for years but never received a call from them, which made them doubt the ESCs active efforts to place them in jobs.

Four participants mentioned having placed in jobs through the ESCs and 20 mentioned being contacted by ESCs either for job opportunities or group counseling sessions. Yet, one participant from Tyre mentioned that ESCs should not simply place their members in any job position, ESCs staff should first make sure that the job position offers decent working conditions. In fact, some participants mentioned that though ESCs staffs had contacted them for a job opportunity, they also advised them not to go for it as the job conditions were poor.

*“They gave us hope that we might find a job.” – Ibrahim from the North*

FGDs participants had a diverse list of recommendations to improve the ESCs exposure and their effectiveness in improving the employability of their beneficiaries. Their recommendations mostly focused on increasing engagement between ESCs and their registered jobseekers through regular meetings, weekly newsletters and updates on job updates and other information through social media and other chat applications. Participants also suggested expanding the pool of services ESCs provide to include internship

placement, job placement in opportunities outside of Lebanon, and technical training sessions directly relating to their occupations<sup>12</sup>.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

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The qualitative assessment detailed in this report was an informative exercise, which revealed the intricacies and complexities Palestinians face in the Lebanese labour market as well as the various job search strategies ESCs members employ and their perceptions of the ESCs.

The results from the 10 FGDs validate most of the already established challenges Palestinian refugees face in the world of work while shedding light on often overlooked specificities.

**It is not the quantity of jobs that is lacking in the Lebanese labour market as is often repeated in the literature, but jobs with decent working conditions in sectors that Palestinian refugees are legally allowed to work in.** Yet ESCs, have so far been focusing on the placement of jobseekers in any job, regardless of its working conditions, which has lead participants to reject such placements.

The majority of participants reported working in the week prior to the FGDs sessions, further validating their views that the main challenge they face is not unemployment, but the lack of decent work opportunities in their field of specialization. Almost a third of participants mentioned having turned down jobs or quitting jobs due to the long working hours, low pay and poor working conditions. An equal proportion of participants mentioned not being able to find jobs in their field of work or resorting to employment in a different field either permanently or temporarily until they are able to find a job in their sector. Lacking work experience was mentioned as a main challenge in landing a job mostly by participants from higher levels of education.

Accordingly, ESCs should focus their job placement strategies on identifying not only a larger quantity of jobs to cater for the growing database, but better quality jobs that ensure decent working conditions in a wider range of specializations. The centres should also expand their placement services to include internships, apprenticeships and work-trials that would smoothen the school-to-work transition and equip jobseekers with a set of skills that would increase their chances of landing a job.

**Female participants voiced the double burden they face of being a Palestinian Woman.** Above and beyond the labour market restrictions Palestinians face, these women also endure social and cultural pressures that often stand in their way of getting employed outside of camps, or continuing their education, or even working late or emigrating. It is crucial for ESCs to include a gender specific strategy for the placement, training and support of their female jobseekers. This could include screening job opportunities to ensure they provide a fair and safe work environments for their female employees as well as holding

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<sup>12</sup> A full list of suggestions is found in Appendix 5.

community level awareness sessions on the importance of integrating women in the world of work and considering them equal members in society at the personal and employment levels.

**While many participants mentioned not having heard of ESCs prior to their registration campaigns at the Siblin Training Centre and having low expectations regarding getting placed in jobs or improving their prospects of finding a job, some mentioned that ESCs gave them hope that they might be able to get employed.** ESCs are the only resort for Palestinians who are looking for support in finding employment. But most assume ESCs are corrupt or inactive due to their lack of engagement with their registered members.

**ESCs should also engage more with their members to build a trust-based relationship.** This would contribute to reducing the negative perceptions they have such as thinking the ESCs aren't active, or that ESCs are corrupt and only find jobs through favoritism. Maintaining regular contact with members even when they are not placed in potential job opportunities is vital.

In the past few years, ESCs have successfully expanded their database of registered jobseekers, which now includes over 11,000 members. The mass registration campaigns regularly held at the Siblin Training Centre have allowed ESCs to tap into the young generation of fresh graduates looking for a stepping stone into the labour market. The ESCs should now expand their outreach efforts beyond the 18-24 bracket of fresh graduates to target older age groups through diversified registration campaigns, increase their visibility by investing in marketing strategies and expanding their pool of staff to decrease the jobseeker to ESC staff ratio and increase engagement.

Finally, while CV and interview skill sessions are vital skills for any jobseeker, the ESCs offered services should be tailored to the needs of their beneficiaries. Such sessions are already covered at the Siblin Training Centre whose graduates constitute the majority of ESCs members. Such sessions could be offered to members who have not already undertaken such training. In addition, ESCs should expand the types of services they provide, based on the suggestions provided by FGDs participants to include more technical and market-based sessions that are sector specific as well as language and computer sessions.

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# Appendix 1 - Individual Questionnaire

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Date	Please type then correct if needed
Location	Please type then correct if needed
Group #	Please type then correct if needed

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

## Demographics

3. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your marital status?  Single  Ever Married
5. Do you have children?  Yes  No

## Education

6. What is the highest education you have reached or completed?
  - Primary school or below
  - Intermediate school
  - Secondary school
  - Post-secondary diploma
  - Vocational education (BT/Trade)
  - Vocational education (TS/Semi-professional)
  - University: undergraduate or graduate

## Employment

7. During the past 7 days, have you worked at least 1 hour either for yourself or someone else?
  - Yes, as paid/unpaid intern
  - Yes, as self-employed
  - Yes, as an employee
  - No
8. If you answered No to question 7, have you searched for a job during the past month?
  - Yes  No
9. If you answered Yes to question 8, what is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Is your occupation in the agriculture sector?  Yes  No

## Appendix 2 - Focus Group Discussion Guiding Questions

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Introductions	<p>1. Intro exercise: moderator to start the round of introductions and ask each participant to write their names. By turn, each participant will mention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Location (name of gathering or camp)</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Education level</li> <li>• Current employment status (employed (intern, part-time, full-time, unemployed, not employed and currently not looking for a job))</li> </ul> <p>Although these points will already be collected in the individual questionnaire, they will serve as an ice breaker and to introduce participants to each other to enrich the discussion.</p>
Job Search	<p>Currently unemployed</p> <p>2. Occupation sought (any; specific)</p> <p>3. How do you look for a job? Give examples.</p> <p>4. How long have you been actively looking for a job? Are you currently searching for a job? If the answer is no, why?</p> <p>5. What are the main reasons YOU are not finding a job?</p> <p>6. Have you rejected a job offer? Why?</p> <p>Points to keep in mind: women might face additional constraints in terms of location of job (proximity to area of residence), type of occupation, seeking higher education to improve skills, cultural and social norms, household chores and child care etc. PWDs might face additional constraints in finding jobs that suit them and being considered for a certain position.</p>
Employment	<p>Employed/intern</p> <p>7. How did you find the job? Be specific (response to ad, friends, etc.)</p> <p>8. How difficult was it for you to find the job? Explain.</p> <p>9. Are you satisfied with your job conditions (salary, benefits, and hours)? Why or why not?</p> <p>Points to keep in mind: women and PWDs might specify certain features they look for in a job, or discuss discrimination in terms of lower wages and working conditions.</p>
ESCs	<p>10. What do you know about the role of the ESC?</p> <p>11. How well known are the ESCs in your community? What is their reputation?</p> <p>12. Did you benefit from ESC services?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. If yes, which service did you benefit from?</li><li>b. If no, why didn't you use ESC services?</li></ul> <p>13. Did ESC services help you in any way? How?</p> <p>14. To what extent would you recommend the ESC to other jobseekers? Why?</p> <p>15. Can you think of as many as three ways by which the ESC can improve its role?</p>
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## Appendix 3 – Organization of FGDs

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A total of 10 focus groups were conducted from 19 July till 8 August 2017 to cover ESCs across Lebanon. The FGDs were divided by geographic area, gender and education level:

- Four FGDs in Saida and two FGDs in each of the North, Tyre, and Beirut.
- FGDs were divided equally between female and male participants (five FGDs each).
- Six focus groups included participants with secondary education and below (2 FGDs in each of Saida, Tyre, and North) and the remaining four FGDs included participants with above secondary education (2 FGDs in each of Saida and Beirut).

### *FGDs Preparations*

#### Contacting FGDs Participants

Participants were contacted two to three days before the set date of the FGDs. ESC staff were asked to confirm with 10-12 participants to ensure the presence of 6-8 participants based on attendance rates from previous activities.

ESC staff members were provided with a set text to read upon calling potential participants to ensure the same clear message is relayed to all and minimize confusion or bias. The text informs potential participants of the nature and purpose of the FGDs and that their transportation costs would be covered<sup>13</sup>. Still the text was not followed in an orthodox manner, which led to confusion among certain participants<sup>14</sup>.

On the morning of the FGDs, participants that confirmed attendance earlier were sent SMS messages as a reminder. This was implemented after the second FGD in Saida and seemed to have a positive effect on the attendance rate of future FGDs.

#### The FGDs Session Roll-out

FGDs were held outside ESCs to ensure participants are comfortable to voice their opinions regarding the ESCs and their employment status, and minimize any bias in their answers. At the start of the FGD, the moderator briefed participants on the purpose of the session and obtained their consent to audio record the

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<sup>13</sup> The transportation fee given to participants is symbolic and amount to less than 3 USD. It was set low on purpose so that it would not create an incentive to participate in the FGD but a slight nudge to attend especially for those who will be commuting using public transportation.

<sup>14</sup> Some participants in Beirut FGDs reported that they were not informed about the clear reason for the purpose of activity they were invited to, which created some tensions before the start of the discussion. They misunderstood that they were invited to a job interview. Accordingly, at the start of the FGD, two of the male participants in Beirut excused themselves and left as they had to report back to work. In other cases, participants still had hope that this exercise would lead to potential job opportunities and some even brought with them their relatives or friends.

session for transcription and research purposes. Participants were then asked to fill a questionnaire form that covers demographic, education, and employment questions. The questionnaire is available in Appendix 1.

The number of participants in every focus group varied between a minimum of six and a maximum of thirteen participants. In some focus groups, some participants brought their friends or siblings, who were allowed to attend, which increased the number of participants<sup>15</sup>. While most of the invited members were Palestinian, one was Lebanese and another was Syrian<sup>16</sup>.

A detailed schedule is found in table 2 below.

**Table 2 FGDs Schedule**

<b>Wednesday, July 19th</b>	<b>Thursday, July 20th</b>	<b>Tuesday, August 1st</b>	<b>Thursday, August 3rd</b>	<b>Tuesday, August 8th</b>
<b>Saida</b>	<b>Saida</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>Tyre</b>	<b>Beirut</b>
Males Secondary education and below 9:00AM- 10:30AM	Males Above secondary education 9:00AM- 10:30AM	Males Secondary education and below 9:30AM- 11:00AM	Males Secondary education and below 9:30AM- 11:00AM	Males Above secondary education 9:00AM- 10:30AM

<sup>15</sup> Uninvited participants are: Mohammad Al Hijawi (Lebanese), Samer El Farran, Ghida Khattab, Intisar Shhade, Mostafa Rabeei, Hussien Nasser, Youssef Ghneim, Maysaa Sattouf (Syrian), Layla Barakeh, Inshirah Azzam.

<sup>16</sup> They were not originally invited and were not part of the extracted sample.

Females Secondary education and below 11:00AM- 12:30PM	Females Above secondary education 11:00AM- 12:30PM			Females Above secondary education 11:00AM- 12:30PM
		Females Secondary education and below Time: 11:15- 12:30PM	Females Secondary education and below 11:30AM- 1:00PM	

### ***Pilot FGD***

A pilot FGD was held on 13 July to test the selected FGDs guiding questions, the rest of the FGDs process, logistics and participant attendance rate. The FGD was held at the UNRWA ESC office in Beirut and included 9 participants, who were all ESC registered beneficiaries. The exercise helped raise challenges and lessons learned to be implemented in the remaining 10 FGDs. As the participants were not a randomly extracted sample from the ESC registration database, the attendees were homogenous where all had recently graduated from Sibling, had not started a rigorous job search process and didn't have any employment history. Accordingly, they didn't contribute richly to the discussion, which ended after 45 minutes instead of the expected 1/1.5-hour session. This issue was addressed by extracting a random sample of participants to contact for the planned FGDs.

## Appendix 4 – Sample Demographics

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Area	Beirut	North	Saida	Tyre	Total
Total Number of Participants	12	26	35	14	87
Mean Age	24.8	21	21.6	23.3	21.9
Gender					
Female	6	13	17	6	42
Male	6	13	18	8	45
Marital Status					
Single	11	25	33	12	81
Ever Married	1	1	2	2	6
Children					
Yes	1	1	0	1	3
No	11	25	35	13	84
Residence					
Inside Camp	11	25	12	10	58
Outside Camp	1	1	23	4	29
Worked Last Week					
Worked	8	13	24	6	51

Did not Work	4	13	11	8	36
Interest in Agriculture					
Yes	0	1	0	0	1
No	12	25	35	14	86

*Note: The only individual that showed interest in work in agriculture is a Syrian female that attended with her friend (was not originally invited) and was allowed to participate in the FGD.*

## Appendix 4 - FGDs Participant Suggestions to Improve ESCs

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FGDs participants had a diverse list of recommendations to improve the ESCs exposure and their effectiveness in improving the employability of their beneficiaries. The below is a summary of their suggestions:

- Hold regular meetings with members to inform them of updates and activities and find out about their needs.
- Send out a weekly newsletter by email to inform members on new job opportunities or other important information.
- Stay in regular contact with members regardless of whether they were matched to a job opportunity that fits their profile.
- Though the contract signed between ESCs and their members stipulates that it is the members' responsibility to update the ESCs on their new skills, education and work experience, this is not materializing. Instead ESCs should make efforts to ensure the data base is updated yearly through regular contact with its members.
- Members should also be given the ability to update their profiles themselves through an updated ESC website.
- While it is understandable that ESCs staff cannot be expected to contact over the phone thousands of members, the use of Facebook messages and Whatsapp broadcast messages or SMSs could facilitate the process.
- Strengthen the ESCs Facebook page and engagement on social media as the current content is weak and only reaches a limited number of people.
- Market the ESCs through TV ads, billboards
- Expand the pool of job opportunities posted on Facebook.
- Some participants valued the personal contact they had with an ESC officer when they individually registered at the office and suggest that each member should be assigned an officer who maintains regular contact with them.

The ESCs should expand the services they provide and:

- Adapt the content of their CV writing and interview skills sessions based on whether members attended the Sibling Vocational Training Centre.
- Technical sessions on key skills such as computer skills and languages
- Focus on finding internships for members and not only job opportunities
- Give sessions to teach members how to search for jobs through various job search methods.
- Expand the pool of job opportunities to include ones abroad (outside of Lebanon).
- Ensure that the job opportunities they post and communicate to their members offer good working conditions and a living wage.
- Create a regularly updated list of companies by sector and area that they can share with members to help them proactively search for jobs on their own.