

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT – LEBANON 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 5 years, Lebanon has faced a series of acute crises that have compounded the existing political instability, a refugee crisis and the economic depression hindering the country's development for over a decade. These crises, including the harsh economic downturn, were further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating explosions in the Port of Beirut in August 2020. This led to a rapid decline in the socio-economic situation, affecting both Lebanese citizens and refugees. While some clashes between the host community and refugees occurred, most were contained by local authorities. However, the potential for further deterioration and social tensions remains high if reforms are not put in place and subsidies continue to be removed.

The war in Ukraine gave rise to a significant further increase in food and fuel prices in 2023 and even caused some food shortages. Lebanon's economic crisis has been marked by a near collapse of the banking sector and a steep decline in its gross domestic product (GDP). Political instability persists, with no new president elected and the caretaker government struggling to implement the necessary reforms, leaving the Lebanese economy in a situation of unparalleled uncertainty.

Thus, Lebanon faces its most devastating socio-economic crisis in recent history. Since October 2019, the Lebanese pound has drastically devalued – by over 98% – causing a staggering 210% inflation between June 2021 and June 2023. The cost of meeting essential needs has risen more than 14 times since the crisis began. Consequently, real GDP plummeted by 10.5% in 2021 and was projected to contract by a further 6.5% in 2022, making economic recovery in the short-term challenging.

This crisis threatens to push vulnerable populations, which include Lebanese citizens, migrant workers and refugees, further into poverty unless something can be done urgently to provide them with their essential needs such as food, electricity, health and education. Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees and over 489 000 registered Palestinian refugees, which is causing an immense strain on resources.

Human Rights Watch reports several issues in Lebanon, including justice, the economic crisis, freedom of expression, women's rights, and others. Approximately 3.9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, which exacerbates tensions in the community, incidents and violence. This evolving crisis has caused a huge setback to developmental gains that had previously been made, has increased vulnerabilities and intensified humanitarian needs.

Education and training have suffered significantly, impacting educational strategies, access and attendance. More than 10% of Lebanese children do not have access to education due to economic hardship, and this has been compounded by teachers' strikes and safety concerns, which has especially affected girls' schooling.

Unemployment rates stand at 29.6% but are difficult to monitor due to the growing informal economy. Even before the crisis, Lebanon struggled with unemployment, and a substantial number of jobs needed to be created to absorb new market entrants. Job opportunities remain limited, particularly in poorer areas, which puts a strain on host communities.

The humanitarian community raised \$198.21 million in 2023 to provide life-saving assistance to vulnerable Lebanese people, migrants and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. A study that was carried out forecast a potential employment rate of 49.59% in 2023, contingent on security and economic stability. However, despite efforts to create jobs in various regions and develop a start-up ecosystem in Beirut, the country's economy still lacks sufficient highly-skilled-job opportunities.

1. KEY POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Political developments

On top of the refugee crisis and the economic depression that has deprived the country of harmonious and stable development for more than a decade, Lebanon has experienced other acute crises over the last 5 years, exacerbating its long-lasting political instability.

Based on the results of the parliamentary elections held on 15 May 2022, a new government was formed on 23 June 2022, with the prime minister being appointed for a new term. The government first had to face the economic impact of the Ukraine crisis – wheat shortages and global increases in commodity prices – on top of the ongoing economic and financial crises. Secondly, it had to continue negotiations with the IMF on the implementation of a set of reforms in the banking and energy sectors, for which no measures have been taken so far. This has been a major impediment that has continued to fuel tension in the country. In addition, the current President's term ended on 31 October 2022, and no candidates have been found so far despite all the efforts made during the first half of 2023. The current government has taken on a caretaker role, with limited responsibilities, which shows once more that the crisis is widening and spreading its impact through all levels of Lebanese society and its economy.

The failing governance model is also discouraging local and international businesses from investing in the country. The combination of these factors is slowly destroying the country's social and institutional infrastructure, without which Lebanon has little hope that the much-needed structural changes will be implemented. The impact is clearly visible in public institutions, where civil servants are working 3 days a week or not showing up to work at all, or even leaving public service completely. This can be observed by a visit to a public institution. On a more positive side, the private sector is growing, especially in services and the hospitality industry.

Demographics

Primary data on the recent demographic and systemic vulnerabilities among the Lebanese and migrant population remains limited despite efforts to increase data collection and collective analysis. Lebanon's total estimated population increased from 4.953 million in 2010 to 5.592 million in 2021, to go down again to 5.489 million in 2022.

The country is undergoing a demographic transition, characterised by a sharp reduction in fertility rates and a significant increase in life expectancy. The relative size of the 15-24 year olds age group decreased from 28.8% in 2010 to 24.7% in 2021, but increased to 26.6% in 2022. Lebanon's age-distribution profile is somewhere between the regional average and that of the more developed regions of the world. There are proportionally fewer children and more elderly people than in nearby countries. Population growth has significantly exceeded natural population growth, owing to a net inflow of migrants to the country. It can be confirmed that Lebanon is host to the largest number of refugees per capita in the world (1 out of every 8 refugees), and there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country, 950 000 of whom are registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR 2023). As of March 2023, the total number of UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is 489 292, these people living in 12 camps and 156 gatherings. However, data retrieved from UN agencies and private NGOs never matches data from local government, and the word 'estimate' is usually key. This is especially the case given the insufficient resources to monitor the internal movement of refugees and the huge percentage of unregistered refugees among the population, which are not accounted for in any studies.

Key economic developments

Lebanon is facing its most devastating socio-economic crisis in recent history. Since October 2019, when the crisis began, the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value, leading to year-on-year increase inflation of 210% between June 2021 and June 2022 (Fitch, 2022). Fitch expects the inflation rate to hit 255% by the end of 2023 (Fitch, 2023). In February 2023, annual inflation reached 190%. In February 2023, the cost of the food Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) in LBP increased by 48% compared to January 2023 (LERP 2023). The national minimum wage, which was USD 450 in 2018, is now worth USD 18 according to the black market exchange rate (World Bank, 2022). These figures became more severe as the Government removed all subsidies in 2023. Moreover, the unemployment rate reached 29.6% in 2022, compared to 11.4% in 2018-2019, with unemployment among the displaced population standing even higher: 42% for Syrian women and 27% for Syrian men (ILO, CAS 2022).

Lebanon used to be a middle-income country with an open and largely service-oriented economy. It has a strong commercial tradition of domestic free trade and investment policies. In July 2022, the country was downgraded to a lower-middle-income country for the first time in 25 years. The crisis has been characterised by a near collapse of the banking sector and a brutal contraction of GDP. With a few exceptions, 2022 studies reported negative growth and significant loss of staff in most sectors as compared to results reported in 2018 or 2019. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain the main form of business organisation, particularly micro and small enterprises. There is also a large and growing informal sector in the country, especially in agriculture, which represents a serious risk to the national economy. On the positive side, with the drop in the services sector and in tourism, Lebanese turned to revitalising agriculture, manufacturing and the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry now mostly relies on Lebanese workers, but salaries in all sectors studied have significantly dropped, meaning it is harder to recruit new workers and to retain existing staff.

Given the socio-economic developments of the last 3 years, it will be difficult for the economy to improve in the short term. Subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty, real GDP is predicted to contract by a further 6.5% in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). The United Nations recently estimated that at least 1 million Lebanese people need support to cover their basic needs.

The private sector is heavily constrained by the current situation and unable to move forward. The rising costs of basic requirements for energy, fuel and human resources have a big impact. The housing sector presents another challenge that requires a societal change in land and property arrangements, and a translation into a genuine right to adequate housing. Prices on the market are now mostly in USD and the variance in costs is embedded into the final price that the consumer pays.

The previous government had issued a financial recovery plan in response to the economic situation. However, the plan faced major pushbacks throughout 2022 and the first half of 2023, so it has not been properly implemented yet. Government negotiations with the IMF resumed in January 2022, but no real achievements can be reported so far. The main points and conditions requested for the deal focus on the need to restructure the financial sector, reform the energy sector, develop sustainable budgets, provide better services without draining public resources and effectively implement transparent anti-corruption financial plans (IMF, 2022). A 'staff-level' agreement was reached between the IMF and the Lebanese authorities on 7 April 2022, which unlocked a further 4-year USD 3 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) (IMF, 2022). However, most of the required actions have not been implemented, such as the adoption of capital control laws, reforms in the banking sector and other sectors, or a delayed approval of the 2022 budget. Such delays add further costs to the country and population while prolonging the period until economic recovery. Political instability has maintained the status quo; to date, no new president has been elected and there is no solution on the horizon. The caretaker government is still unable to implement tangible reforms, thus leaving the Lebanese economy in a situation of massive and unprecedented uncertainty.

Key social issues

The economic and financial crisis in Lebanon continues to weigh heavily on the population, with the depreciation of the local currency against the dollar reaching even lower levels than in previous months – LBP 38 000/USD in September 2022 (UN Inter-agency, 2022), and LBP 90 000/USD in September 2023 (official Lebanese app for money exchange). This not only had a significant impact on the cost of living and on purchasing power, but also created social problems, mainly in terms of an increase in the number of pupils dropping out of school, higher rates of child labour, more early marriages among girls. It has also led to increasing social tension and deteriorating safety conditions among refugee and host communities, which has led to bloody clashes that were contained by local authorities but are expected to be repeated at any moment.

The increased cost of living and people's inability to afford their basic needs, such as rent, food or healthcare, have led households to resort to negative coping strategies, the most common being child labour and early marriage. As in 2022, child exploitation, including the worst form of child labour, remained the most prominent child protection issue reported across all sectors. Consequently, children from different population cohorts are increasingly at risk of exploitation, physical and emotional abuse, child labour and early marriage. Alarming, a shift was observed in the average age at which girls are getting married, as girls as young as 12-13 years of age were subjected to early marriages (Child Protection Working Group 2023). More boys are involved in child labour (6.8%) than girls (1.9%). In terms of regional distribution, the Northern regions and Akkar witnessed the highest child labour rate of all the regions, reaching 6.1% and 6% respectively (UNICEF, 2022). Child marriage is mostly prevalent among Syrian refugee girls, increasing from 20.4% in 2021 to 21.9% in 2022. In terms of regional distribution, Baalbeck-Hermel and Beirut witnessed the highest increase in early marriages, from 11% to 22% in Hermel and from 27% to 35% in Beirut (ACAPS, 2022). Generally, those who get married move to urban areas where there are better job opportunities, which explains the lower rates in other areas. The increase was also triggered by higher rates of children dropping out of school, in particular girls.

The intensification of the economic crisis has further widened the gap between the Lebanese population and Syrian refugees, creating more social tensions that are, in the main, fuelled by the widespread perception that refugees get support in 'fresh dollars'. Although this policy was less widely applied in the first half of 2023, it remains an issue that always provokes host communities. Such tensions reportedly triggered at least 7% of the incidents linked to schools, rendering them an unsafe environment for children (ACAPS, 2022).

The current crisis in Lebanon, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic in the preceding years, has also impacted the health system. A lack of reliable electricity, fuel and water supply threatens the daily operations of hospitals and health facilities. Currency exchange rates and cash flow restrictions on US dollars have limited international purchasing power for essential medicines, supplies and various reagents, while local suppliers – including pharmacies – suffer from similarly depleted stocks. In 2023 the medicines shortage diminished, but this had no impact on the cost to end consumers, who must ultimately pay a higher price for medicine and medical services compared to the past. In Lebanon, now, only those who can afford medical treatment can get it. These combined factors threaten the continued operation of healthcare facilities and pharmacies. The 'exodus' of doctors and nurses moving from Lebanon to go abroad is further jeopardising the healthcare sector and the health of the people living in the country.

Moreover, lower rates of routine immunisation in both the public and the private sector leave Lebanon at a higher risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. Threats to the performance of the healthcare sector have further increased with the cholera outbreak that occurred in the country at the end of 2022. To make things even worse, not only have all insurance companies shifted to using a foreign currency, they have also increased annual insurance premiums, thereby creating even more medical hardship for families, the elderly and children.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Trends and challenges

Education and training – in particular educational strategy, education expenditure, access, attendance and NEETs – have been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the devastating explosions that shook Beirut in August 2020, the high numbers of refugees, the political deadlock and the economic crisis. The crisis has also had a severe impact on the education sector, compromising the wellbeing of school-aged children in Lebanon. Many of the most vulnerable are being deprived of their right to education and are at a higher risk of exploitation and abuse than previously. More than 10% of the 1.2 million Lebanese children do not currently have access to education, mainly due to economic vulnerabilities. Teachers' strikes, which are linked to their low salaries and the high costs of fuel and transportation, have largely contributed to the disruption of learning for a third scholastic year. Even when schools function, the lack of transport and safety issues are often reported as barriers to attending school, especially for girls.

Education strategy and legal framework for education

In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) developed a 5-year General Education Plan 2021-2025 to address critical education needs for children in crisis contexts. The plan focuses on vulnerable children, ensuring they have access to inclusive and high-quality learning, whilst also further building the skills they need for the future. It also provides a commitment to keep schools open for all children, including the most vulnerable.

The plan comprises three pillars:

- Increasing equitable access, attendance and completion of education for all learners in Lebanon, with a focus on the most vulnerable.
- Improving the quality of education and learning outcomes for all students and strengthening citizenship.
- Building a more effective and resilient education system, with policies, plans and resource allocations informed by evidence, in collaboration with stakeholders.

One of the deficiencies in programming policy interventions remains the lack of reliable national education data. A lack of timely information and insufficiently detailed disaggregated enrolment figures hamper evidence-based programming. In 2018, the Ministry started the process of digitalising data collection, both at central and at school level, but this process has not been completed, nor are any updates available on the status of the project.

In response to the dramatic situation in the country, the Emergency Response Plan 2021-22 (ERP) was announced for Lebanon during the International Conference in Support of the Lebanese People on 4 August 2021. In 2023, the ERP attracted funding commitments from key donors totalling approximately USD 200.2 million. The Lebanon Emergency Response Plan for 2023 is of a strictly humanitarian nature, designed to respond to the critical needs of the most vulnerable people among the Lebanese population, migrants and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL). The 2023 ERP and LCRP Education sector response strategies are developed under the umbrella of the MEHE's plan, which aims to assist all children to complete basic education and have equitable access to secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education. The five-year plan also aims to strengthen resilience, so that crisis situations can be managed effectively. Under the ERP, the education sector has a total budget of USD 21.91 million, destined for a total of 140 000 children.

This means that the influx of money into the country to support educational developments, if confirmed by donors, will be massive. However, the new Education Action Plan still needs to be implemented properly, otherwise no real changes will happen and the risk of fragmentation between interventions will remain high. Implementation of the plan is crucial for Lebanon, which is currently relying solely on international aid with few checks on spending – a situation which is likely to lead to another cycle of teachers' strikes and the education system grinding to a halt once again.

Education expenditure

Public expenditure on the general education sector in 2020 (see statistical annex) was around 1.7%, a significant decrease from 2019 when it was 2.6% of GDP. The last available World Bank report published in 2021 stated that education expenditure accounted for less than 2% of the country's GDP in 2020. This lower percentage could be the result of the school closures. In 2021, schools were closed for more than 75% of the academic year (World Bank, 2022). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the 2021-22 school year was 'exceptional' due to the many strikes incurred during the year.

Lebanon has both a private and a state education system. The former charges for admission, while the latter is essentially free of charge. The sector has witnessed the internal migration of students from private to state schools in recent years, with more than 45 000 students having moved to state schools since 2019. The reason for this is that many families could no longer afford to pay the tuition fees for private schools. This internal migration may be reversed partially now that families are managing to pay fees for private schools again, especially after all the strikes occurring over the past 2 years, which have caused families to fear that enrolling their children at a state-run school will put children at risk of missing out on their education. Before the crisis, only 30% of Lebanese students were enrolled in state schools; this figure went up to 36.5% during the 2020-2021 academic year. To date, no actual data has been published by the MEHE. In addition to internal migration, the state education system also needs to accommodate 600 000 Syrian children and has already increased its capacity by 77% over the last 6 years (Lebanon's Education Sector Plan 2021-2025, March 2022). This huge increase in the student population is creating enormous pressure on the state education system, which is based on insufficient budgetary resources and needs major restructuring. In September 2022, the Minister of Education and Higher Education convened a meeting of the entire donor community to seek dedicated funding for all levels of education for the new academic year and in view of the reform process currently undertaken by the Ministry. This meeting resulted in the promise of monthly financial compensation for teachers, but strikes are still ongoing due to the complexity in delivering the payments, namely Bank transfer in LBP or via Western Union in USD.

Access, participation and early school leaving

Data obtained from the Lebanon Education Sector on Children in Lebanon (Save the Children, 2022) revealed that, for the 2020-2021 academic year, the total school-age population was around 2 018 927, of which only 1 281 881 students were enrolled in education. In January 2023 the situation did not improve, since all state schools in Lebanon were closed, bringing the estimated total number of children currently out of school to over one million. This figure includes almost 300 000 students who are registered to attend the morning shift and nearly 170 000 children from the afternoon shift, as well as over half a million children who were already out of school. In September 2023, schools should open again at full capacity.

Moreover, at the end of 2022, based on the multidimensional poverty index, an estimated 1.45 million school-aged children are in need of support to access education, including about 662 000 Lebanese children (52% girls), more than 715 000 Syrians (51% girls), about 56 000 Palestinian refugees (52% girls) and about 13 300 migrants of other nationalities (73% girls). Of the 1.2 million Lebanese children, an estimated 187 000 of them (16%) do not have access education at all, mainly due to economic vulnerabilities. Out of around 720 000 displaced Syrian children, more than 453 000 of them (about 63%) are out of formal education – around 28 000 of these Syrian children (57% girls) were

enrolled in various non-formal education programmes up until September 2022. Children with disabilities are also highly vulnerable. Based on secondary data collection, around 300 000 children aged 0–17, a total of 13% of this age group, live with disabilities (Strategic Response Plans – Education Sector 2017-2022).

The situation becomes even more worrying if we consider that the dropout rates in 2022 were higher among girls (3.2%) than boys (2.6%), mostly within the 6 to 17 years age range (UN Inter-Agency, 2022). In terms of regional distribution, the dropout rates were higher in vulnerable areas such as Bekaa, Akkar and the Southern regions. In addition, the number of those finishing school is highly unequal between economic groups, with only half of 18-year-olds from the lowest economic groups completing school. Limited career guidance for students is one of the primary reasons for high drop-out rates. The expectation is that this decline will continue given the current context unless the 2023-2024 academic year starts properly.

A study conducted by Lebanese American University in 2022 (LAU, 2022) revealed that the monthly income of teachers stood at USD 131, with transportation costs reaching USD 128 per month, leaving them with USD 3 to spend on their basic needs for the entire month. The country is therefore struggling to retain teachers, putting an additional strain on the public education sector, which is already facing severe constraints in terms of available school infrastructure, education quality and service delivery. This remains the case for teachers in the public sector, where the vicious loop between increasing wages and increasing costs of living represents the real issue at the root of the strikes.

As regards TVET, figures provided directly by the DGVTE show that in the 2022-2023 academic year, 68 599 students were enrolled in the public sector (63 260 Lebanese, 4 219 Syrians and 1 120 other nationalities), while 41 101 students were enrolled in the private sector (37 551 Lebanese, 1 453 Syrians and 2 097 other nationalities). Recent reports from TVET institutions and directorates indicate that enrolment in TVET has increased in the last couple of years in both the private and public sectors, and there are currently 160 public TVET schools around the country, managed by the Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training (DGVTE).

PISA results

The results published for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD 2019) undertaken in Lebanon indicate that schools in Lebanon perform badly and that Lebanon is one of the lowest ranked countries, with more than two-thirds of the students not reaching basic literacy. In Lebanon, 32% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex, criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so. Some 1% of students in Lebanon were top performers in reading, meaning that they attained Level 5 or 6 in the PISA reading test (OECD average: 9%).

However, 67.8% of students performed poorly in reading, 59.8% performed poorly in mathematics, and 62.2% of students performed poorly in science. Challenging socio-economic circumstances exacerbate underachievement in PISA tests, impacting students' overall performance at school.

Although the PISA data is not up to date and expected to be disseminated soon, the data used in this document is still valid as the local quality indicator 'that is the official exam' was reported to be of inferior quality in 2022 (LEB ECONOMY, 2023).

The multiple crises occurring in the country have not only caused the number of pupils dropping out of school to rise and low enrolment rates but have also impacted students' learning performance. There is an urgent need to evaluate teaching methods and propose new ways of learning, update curricula and introduce more rigorous monitoring of teacher performance. CERD, the national monitoring body responsible for the continuous training of teachers, will need to play a crucial role in this regard.

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)

According to the Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey Update carried out in 2022, the youth unemployment rate increased to 47.8%, from 23.3% in 2018-2019. According to the available data, 29.6% of unemployed young people had been seeking employment for 2 years or more and 19.2% for 1 to 2 years (ILO, CAS 2022). Moreover, the percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) was 29.1% in 2022. This percentage was higher for young women (32.1%) than for young men (26.1%) (see statistical annex).

The opportunities for young people to find employment have become scarce. The intensified competition over low-paid jobs or in informal sectors further increases vulnerability. On the other hand, young people from a foreign background have little to no belief in the Lebanese education system and what it has to offer and always prefer to start working at an early age to make ends meet instead of continuing their studies. This is exacerbated by the general tendency (supported in some cases by the legal rules on jobs for refugees) of low-skilled jobs being offered only to foreigners and not to Lebanese people.

2.2 Initial VET and adult learning

Strategic and legal framework for initial VET and adult learning

In 2018, the Lebanese government launched and adopted the National Strategic Framework (NSF) for TVET 2018-2022, which has been the main policy document for TVET in recent years. Although the framework represented an important step towards better collaboration between government institutions and stronger partnerships with the private sector, it is not yet fully operational for several reasons, including the overall difficult situation in Lebanon.

In the meantime, a new NSF is being prepared under the lead of the Directorate General for VET in cooperation with UNICEF, the ILO, GIZ and IECD. It was expected to be launched in early 2023 but, unfortunately, has been delayed, and is now expected to be launched in the first quarter of 2024, relabelled with the timeframe 2024-2029.

The ETF is also involved in this process. An extensive consultation process took place to ensure that this new framework addresses real needs and identifies key priorities. The primary focus will be on providing adequate education and TVET learning to the whole of society, contributing to a skilled labour force and business community who can give a boost to the economy. Overall, the new NSF should provide guidelines for any immediate issues and forecasts for the next 5 years. The framework starts from short-term needs, such as solar panels in all TVET schools to ensure there is always electricity and therefore schools are able to open.

VET governance and financing arrangements

The education system, including VET, is governed by the MEHE. A few bodies work under the auspices of this Ministry: the Directorate General for Education, the Directorate General for Higher Education and the Directorate General for Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE). Public VET training providers do not have any autonomy and depend fully on DGVTE management decisions. At the same time, large numbers of private training providers (covering around 60% of training on offer) have management and funding independence, providing they use the state examination system and comply with DGVTE quality control measures.

In addition, the Ministries of Social Affairs, Agriculture and Labour and other government agencies are responsible for vocational training provision for unemployed people and other specific target groups, especially Syrian refugees. The main institution offering adult education and continuing training courses should be the National Employment Office (NEO), although this is still only partially functional

due to the limited resources available. The Chambers of Commerce also offer training courses through their own centres. As a result of all the recent crises, including the ongoing Syrian situation, there has been a proliferation of service providers offering private accelerated training.

The main challenge for Lebanon remains the lack of clear governance in the country, which has an impact on VET governance and financing arrangements. The decision-making system is closely linked to the established balance of powers between religious groups at all levels of the system. Therefore, while society and the business community can move more swiftly and respond to the changing socioeconomic environment, government structures are slow and, in some cases, paralysed. These circumstances, as well as the past and current crises and challenges faced by the country, also have an influence on education reforms and the education system.

Qualifications, validation and recognition

In 2023, there have been no national developments regarding qualifications and recognition of prior learning (RPL) systems, since there has been no progress in developing the national qualifications framework. Under the Lebanon five-year General Education Plan 2021-2025, there should be a comprehensive eight-level national qualifications framework (NQF) in Lebanon, covering all types of education and training. The latest developments to report were in 2019, when the Minister of Education and Higher Education adopted Decision 374/M/2019 on the VET component of the framework, applying to levels 1 to 6 of the planned full LNQF (ETF, 2021). This legislation does not apply to the general qualifications framework, however.

Likewise, with the 504 253 Syrian children (aged 3-18) living in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2022), the MEHE has adopted different strategies to ensure that Syrian children receive formal certification and recognition for their educational achievements, but there are still strong voices opposing the recognition of educational achievements for Syrians, making this process hard to achieve.

Quality and quality assurance

Currently, quality assurance in VET focuses primarily on accrediting providers against criteria largely relating to school infrastructure and the like, rather than on improving provision and qualifications. The new National Strategic Framework for TVET – currently being finalised – does, however, call for a more holistic QA system.

Competency-based approaches to assessment are not systemically used and final assessments are mainly theoretical in content. Additionally, quality assurance systems are not developed for the online learning and certification is not available for distance learning, digital or e-learning modalities (EDPU, 2022). There is neither an official accreditation system nor any accredited centres to deliver distance learning, all of which hinders the further integration of quality assurance mechanisms for TVET programmes, especially for the existing blended TVET programmes and courses.

The DGVTE has taken a significant step ahead in relation to the quality and accreditation department; a new head of department has been recently appointed, in the hope that this will bring about a more operational department and a new wave of quality and quality assurance activities in TVET.

The report published by the ILO in 2021 entitled 'Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon' analysed the different quality mechanisms pursued by the DGVTE, the Ministry of Agriculture and non-formal TVET providers. The ILO study confirmed the lack of a functional quality assurance system in Lebanon but proposed scenarios to fill this gap in QA. Still, no developments can yet be reported in this field, mostly due to the complex situation the country is facing, in particular the education sector.

Work-based learning arrangements

The importance of work-based learning was highlighted in the 2022 'Livelihoods Sector' strategy, which emphasised: 1) the importance of strengthening the links between market-based skills training and work-based learning opportunities; and 2) strengthening the links between work-based learning and support for businesses. As such, it was deemed important to produce a work-based learning guidance note for partners in the livelihoods sector implementing or planning to implement these activities, to ensure consistency between similar initiatives. (Livelihoods Sector, December 2022)

Despite the effort of the international community, Lebanon (excluding the Vocational Secondary Certificate (LP) – dual system) lacks structured WBL schemes that can be applied at national level.

As for Lebanon's broader VET system, there are numerous challenges associated with apprenticeships. It is difficult to keep teachers up to date with new technological developments in their fields. Companies lack qualified trainers who can create links between theory-based education offered at VET schools and practical training provided by firms. These two key components of the apprenticeship system create serious gaps in training.

Another important challenge is the relatively low cost of employing foreign workers in Lebanese companies, which leads employers to prefer to hire foreigners over Lebanese workers, thereby diminishing the offer for WBL placements. Furthermore, the ever more intense economic crisis is putting pressure on students to look for better opportunities outside Lebanon. Students entering the labour market are not motivated by the low wages on offer and the limited job opportunities, thus emigration is perceived as the best option for a decent life.

A significant improvement with regard to WBL, including in terms of the link between the private and public sector, is the MoU signed between the DGVTE/Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Industry to provide students with internship opportunities and potentially help to create jobs. This MoU, whilst supporting the monitoring of the TVET system, will also take advantage of the involvement of technical school in Kab Elias's for the initiative in the food industry (NNA 2023).

Digital education and skills

The shift to distance learning triggered by the Covid crisis brought about many challenges that impacted learners, caregivers and teachers, and strongly relied on the digital skills of end users. Distance learning was not widespread in Lebanon prior to Covid, and the sudden transition was difficult for many, especially while the country was grappling with the economic crisis. Most children consulted (71%) reported that the transition to distance learning was difficult (Lebanon Education Sector, 2021).

In Lebanon, digital education depends mostly on i) access to remote tools and technology, ii) connectivity and electricity and iii) availability of online content that enables online remote learning. Additionally, capacity and skills gaps in using available online platforms and devices make access to and use of online tools even more complex, requiring careful strategic planning. Therefore, improving access to online remote learning has become a critical factor in the acquisition of digital skills and, at the same time, in reducing learning losses.

Even though online learning is not accredited in Lebanon, the Covid-19 pandemic obliged institutions to go through this new experience to satisfy the market. Furthermore, e-learning is considered highly profitable to universities, which is why it is beneficial for educational institutions to work with the governmental sector to provide accreditation for degrees acquired online (Layal Hamade, March 2022). The Distance Learning Plan 2021 recognises the importance of enhancing the digital literacy skills of both students and teachers so that they can find, evaluate, create and communicate information, and aims to encourage their digital citizenship. However, certain challenges have so far hindered the effective implementation of this plan, mainly due to the current evolving socio-economic

situation. The same applies to the 2020-2050 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, which highlighted the importance of developing software to provide interactive education – a goal that has not yet become a reality.

The study conducted by the Economic Development Policy Unit in 2022 (EDPU, Blended TVET & Distance Learning Lebanon Assessment, 2022) merely confirmed that the lack of ICT infrastructure for blended physical and digital learning was made worse by the electricity supply issues and internet outages experienced, adding to the exclusion of learners from low-income and refugee families. The sometimes-difficult access to modern technologies and internet connectivity affected teachers as well as students. Another challenge to online learning remains the cost of purchasing, installing and maintaining the software and hardware needed to implement online learning in schools and universities.

On a more positive note, in September 2023, with support provided by the World Bank and UNICEF, a new national online learning platform, 'Forastech', was launched. The aim behind the platform is to provide young people in Lebanon with easy access to affordable, subsidised digital skills training endorsed by global tech giants like Microsoft, LinkedIn, etc.¹.

Statistics on education and training

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has its own information system that collects data from schools for the purpose of publishing the official exams results and having more up-to-date information on the number of students in school. The Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) also has its own education management information system and publishes annual statistics on students, schools and teachers. The statistics include information on student enrolment in different initial and continuing education programmes (by gender) in both public and private schools, accounting for regional distribution, the number of teachers by gender in these same situations and the teachers' qualifications. The Central Administration of Statistics of Lebanon (CAS) also collects data on education in Lebanon. Each entity had its own information system before the information management system was unified in 2021. This should have been put in practice for the academic year 2022-2023 but was not possible due to the situation in the country. No developments are reported for the coming academic year, 2023-2024.

There are no statistics or systems put in place for tracking graduates in education and training. Tracer studies would normally be highly recommended. However, some attempts at these have already been made in Lebanon by international organisations in recent years and have proved to be ineffective and not easy to achieve. No systematic school-to-work transition surveys are being conducted, which makes difficult to assess whether programmes are effective in improving the employability of graduates. The main challenges in developing and implementing these surveys lie in the Ministry's limited financial and human resources. The economic crisis added to the burden, making it even more difficult to employ additional human resources to carry out such surveys.

The ILO conducted a study on the tracking of graduates (ILO AICS-Supported Skills Training Programme, 2022), which was based on a skills training programme to improve accessibility to labour markets for 1 436 Lebanese and refugee graduates, previously implemented over the course of one year. The study published in 2022 indicated that more than half of the interviewed respondents had not found work since they graduated at the end of 2020, citing the economic crisis as the main issue (fewer job opportunities, low wages, etc.). This number is even higher among female graduates due to personal reasons such as marriage or pregnancy.

With the need for more data for evidence-based policymaking and programme planning, the ILO joined forces with UNICEF to support the Directorate General for Technical and Vocational Education

¹ More information on Forastech is available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/09/14/new-digital-platform-to-upskill-lebanon-s-youth-and-link-them-to-the-job-market>

(DGVTE) to develop its own Education Management Information System (EMIS) and make it fully operational. According to news released in May 2022, during the first phase of the project, the system was piloted with 35 publicly run technical schools, while the second phase will focus on scaling up and expansion to implement it nationwide. In the meantime, the ILO proposed a joint project on tracking TVET graduates together with the Ministry of Labour. However, to date, there are no results available nationally that allow the mobility of graduates and the effectiveness of students transition from the education system to the world of work.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Trends and challenges

Labour market characteristics

Weak job creation and low-quality jobs remain the main factors driving persistent poverty and the lack of inclusive economic growth. The labour market in 2022 was characterised by increased skills gaps, lack of interest in the jobs on offer due to low wages and poor working conditions, and limited capacity for investment, which in turn translated into lower capacity for growth (UNICEF, ILO, 2022).

Prior to the crisis, agriculture, industry and construction were considered the main sectors for job creation (Government of Lebanon, 2017). However, the current crisis has led to reduced growth in these sectors, construction being the most affected as it represents the highest share of vulnerable employment (ILO, CAS 2022), followed by the trade sector. SMEs are faced with considerable obstacles arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the collapse of the banking sector, the LBP/USD exchange rate and soaring energy costs. An increasing number of businesses are having difficulties paying their clients due to the complicated economic situation, as banks are levying high interest rates on deposits (ETF, 2021). On the other hand, the crisis and the government measures during COVID-19 catalysed the growth of information communication technology (ICT) and e-commerce, with a positive spillover effect into digital businesses and the green economy (ILO, UNICEF 2022). This is in line with the 2018-2030 economic vision for Lebanon to 'become a knowledge-driven digital nation, at the forefront of innovation, acting as a talent hub for technology, outsourcing, creative industries and education' and aimed to revamp the secondary and tertiary curriculum to incorporate technology. The vision also indicated five sectors, supported by government action in infrastructure, legislation, fiscal policy and public administration, which could make a significant contribution to Lebanon's economic aspirations: agriculture, industry, tourism, financial services and the knowledge economy. Another aspiration of the vision was to set up an effective institutionalisation mechanism to ensure successful implementation.

In a study by the ILO, job creation was found to be more likely to be concentrated in the services sector, where high levels of informal work and big risks of layoffs are commonplace (Al Tahrir Institute, 2023).

At a practical level, some initiatives were taken in 2023 in the agriculture sector, such as one led by a group of NGOs under the 'Basatin programme'. This is a four-year Consortium programme contributing to the recovery of small farms in difficulty and maintaining employment opportunities for vulnerable populations by providing support to farm owners. (Berytech, 2023). This example, however, shows that economic growth often depends on initiatives and programmes led by INGOs and NGOs, with little or no support from the Lebanese government. Of course, in this transition phase, until a new president is elected and a new government formed, government-led initiatives remain difficult to launch and implement.

Labour market and employment challenges in general

The Lebanese labour market is primarily characterised by low labour-market participation, underutilisation of labour, high rates of informal work and low employment rates, particularly among women; it also suffers from the pressure of refugees and the lack of migrant integration into the labour market.

The emigration and immigration of workers has also had a significant impact on the labour market, especially in terms of a brain drain. Large numbers of young and well-educated people have left the country, resulting in a relative scarcity of skills and a reliance on foreign workers to fill the gap. Many

refugee workers accept lower wages (even below the Lebanese minimum wage) and less favourable working conditions in order to gain employment. While this practice may provide a short-term solution to meet demand for labour, it may also potentially lead to longer-term problems related to the future supply of qualified Lebanese workers and encourage the expansion of low-productivity economic activities. In addition, the increasing number of Syrian refugees who have already worked under dire conditions is providing fierce competition with the local labour force, since Syrians are ready to work under the worst conditions (Al Tahrir Institute, 2023). In 2023, the Ministry of Labour adjusted the minimum wage to LBP 9 000 000 (USD 92) per month. Considering the current situation, even this small adjustment could help workers to at least survive this crisis period with soaring energy, fuel and food prices.

As a result of the above, the number of Lebanese citizens leaving the country increased from 17 721 in 2020 to 79 134 in 2021 (Information International, 2022), representing a 446% increase between 2020 and 2021 alone. It is highly likely that more Lebanese young people will leave due to perceived better opportunities abroad and to escape the pressure of the economic crisis. There have also been cases of Lebanese emigrants coming back from Gulf countries after realising that the favourable working conditions and salaries that used to be reserved for Lebanese people over there have changed after the general political and financial crisis.

Employment

According to the 2022 Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey (LFHLCS), the labour force participation rate was 66.2% among men and 22.2% among women. Trade (both wholesale and retail) still accounts for the largest share of employment (20% of total employment), with public administration and defence in second place (around 10-12%), followed by manufacturing (around 10-12%) (ILO, CAS, 2022). The share of employment in the informal sector increased by 13.1 percentage points to reach 48.3% in 2022 (ILO, CAS, 2022). The construction sector had the highest rate of informal work (84%), followed by hospitality (69.2%) and real estate, business and administration (66.1%) (ILO, UNICEF, 2022)

A study by Statista in 2023 reveals that the rate of employment in Lebanon is projected to reach 49.59% in 2023, but this is of course linked to security and economic stability. According to ILO-modelled estimates, in 2023 the employment rate will be 41.4% (age 15+), 27.9% (age 15-24) and 45.4% (age 25+).

In terms of the geographical distribution of employment opportunities, although investments by donors and international organisations have helped to create jobs in rural areas and other regions, and to develop a start-up ecosystem in Beirut, the number of jobs created is still not sufficient. As the Lebanese economy does not generate enough high-skilled jobs to absorb university graduates, higher education has not led to better labour market outcomes.

As mentioned above, the crisis and government measures during the COVID-19 pandemic have catalysed growth in ICT and e-commerce. Still, the overall digital readiness of the business sector and society remains low and is highly jeopardised by basic problems such as electricity and internet connection.

Unemployment

According to the 2022 Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey (LFHLCS), the overall unemployment rate rose from 11.4% in 2018 to 29.6% in 2022, indicating that almost one third of the population is unemployed. The youth unemployment rate increased from 23.3% in 2018 to 47.8% in 2022, while the female unemployment rate stood at 32.7% (CAS, ILO, 2022). Considering time-related underemployment and the size of the potential labour force, including factors such as being discouraged from searching for jobs, the survey revealed that 29.4% of the extended youth labour force were in various forms of labour underutilisation. In 2022, the highest rates of labour

underutilisation were experienced among the youth population (15-24 years) (64.2%) and women (57.1%) (CAS, ILO, 2022).

The most recent data from the CAS still confirms that the unemployment rate is at a staggering 29.6%, but with the spread of the informal economy on one side, and the trend of new job creation (both formal and informal) on the other side, it is hard to monitor the data properly. Unemployment and high levels of informal labour were serious problems even before the crisis. As early as in 2012, the World Bank was suggesting that the Lebanese economy would need to create six times as many jobs just to absorb the regular market entrants. Unemployment is particularly high in some of the country's poorest localities – nearly double the national average in some – which puts considerable strain on host communities. According to public opinion, the biggest threat is now the hunger, poverty and desperation caused by the country's economic collapse. In 2023, the humanitarian community will require USD 198.21 million to provide life-saving assistance to vulnerable Lebanese people, migrants and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (LCRP 2023).

Statistics on labour market and employment

The Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey (LFHLCS) was implemented between 2018 and 2019 as a one-off exercise, but a follow-up survey was conducted in January 2022. However, there are no indications currently that this will become a regular exercise.

There is still no labour market information system in Lebanon, nor a clear plan to develop one. Neither does the country collect administrative data on registered unemployed people or implement active labour market programmes on a regular basis. All of this hinders systematic data collection and the analysis of labour market trends. Most of the existing surveys and analyses are performed with the financial support of donors and are not repeated over time. The Ministry of Labour and the National Employment Office – in cooperation with the ETF and a dedicated task force – worked for more than 3 years on designing and implementing a national employers' survey aimed at better understanding the demand for workers. This survey has ended its third pilot phase and was in the process of being integrated into the Ministry of Labour job platform when the crisis deteriorated further and has therefore been temporarily put on hold.

Overall, the system lacks the instruments needed to gain an understanding of the problems associated with the transition from education to work. In a national effort towards more structured career guidance support at schools, Guidance Employment Offices (GEOs) have been established within selected VET schools since 2014 and submit monitoring reports to the DGVTE every 6 months, including data on the number of jobs acquired by VET graduates and links to the private sector. Over the years, the network has expanded from 8 to 23 GEO offices, and in October 2022, 33 new GEOs were nominated by the Minister of Education and Higher Education thanks to the noteworthy efforts of the DGVTE and its staff. With such support from the DGVTE, there is potential for scaling up nationally. Great hope is placed in the growing focus on Career Guidance by the national and international community, which is for the first time joining forces with the ETF, other international organisations and national authorities to come up with a common orientation package starting from primary school onwards. Still, to proceed in this direction, full support is needed from national authorities, including on the financial side of this initiative. This would really represent a big step forward in making TVET more attractive and in creating a stronger link between education and business.

Poverty

According to Human Rights Watch, Lebanon is facing several issues in 2023, including justice and accountability, the financial and economic crisis, the electricity crisis, freedom of expression, women's rights, migrant workers, etc. In January 2023, it was estimated that a total of 3.9 million people in Lebanon needed some form of humanitarian assistance. Communal relations are deteriorating at all

levels and are increasingly leading to incidents, rhetoric escalations and violence. Lebanon is experiencing a constantly evolving multi-layered crisis which is exacerbating long-term structural vulnerabilities, reversing previously made development gains and leading to acute and increasingly visible humanitarian needs among the most vulnerable populations. This year, the Lebanon Emergency Response Plan 2023 was launched to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people in Lebanon. The plan aims to provide assistance to 1.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

The critical situation in Lebanon led to a growing number of people being deprived of access to healthcare, medicine, employment, education and housing. To date, no effective government-led plans have been put into action to alleviate poverty; only donor-funded projects providing multi-purpose cash assistance to the refugee and host population have been implemented (ESCWA, 2022).

Despite the partial recovery of non-tradable sectors like tourism, catering and transport, the Ukrainian war has further exacerbated the situation by depleting the country's wheat reserves, sporadically increasing the price of fuel and threatening food security (UN News, 2022). According to a recent statement by the UN Resident Coordinator in June 2022, around 2.2 million Lebanese people need help with accessing food and other basic needs, a 46% increase from 2021, while around 1.95 million need support in accessing healthcare services, a 43% increase from August 2021 (UN News, 2022). The second Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) for Lebanon, conducted in May 2023, reveals that 25% of the population analysed, comprising 1 411 000 individuals, are projected to experience acute food insecurity, while 45% of the total population are struggling to maintain adequate food consumption and cannot afford some essential non-food expenses.

Furthermore, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported recently on food safety and poverty rates in Lebanon, stating that the 'dollarization of the economy' went at a faster pace than expected, mostly due to the lack of trust in the local pound. Lebanon recorded the second worst food inflation in the world in June 2023 (WFP, 2023). One of the WFP's initiatives was to scale up the e-card assistance component of the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP); in June 2023, it reached 88% of its 2023 target to assist 430 000 individuals by December 2023. The WFP continues to support the Lebanese Government in building unified and sustainable social safety nets and strong food systems, and engaging with the global School Meals Coalition on the goal of ensuring that every child receives a healthy and nutritious meal in school by 2030 (WFP, 2023).

3.2 Employment policy and institutional settings

Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field

Despite a clear need for it, Lebanon still has no specific employment strategy or action plan. The last three Ministers for Labour had started a process of reforms aimed at bringing Lebanon's labour-related regulations and institutions into the 21st century: for instance, updating the labour code, which dates back to 1946, reforming the Kafala sponsorship system for migrant workers, regulating foreign workers in Lebanon, especially Syrians, and reforming the National Social Security Fund. However, the many changes in government over the last few years have not been conducive to a concrete follow-up of the reforms initiated in 2019 by the Ministry of Labour.

The Ministry of Labour is responsible for labour-related legislation and policies, including employment conditions, labour relations and labour inspection. The Ministry has been planning to enhance its capacities since early 2017 by hiring new staff. This process is still on hold because of the continuous changes in government over the last 3 years and the overall situation.

The MoL's latest actions have mainly involved 'firefighting', e.g. trying to increase the minimum wage to catch up with the high cost of living (HCL), adjusting employees' daily travel allowance', which has already been adjusted several times due to rapidly changing gas prices (PWC, 2023). Another

initiative launched by the MoL is a website explaining workers' rights and their duties at work; the website 'Hokooki' was launched after being developed and funded mainly by the EU, ILO, and AICS. However, given other more urgent priorities for coping with the current crisis, the website seems far from achieving tangible outcomes (MoL. 2023).

Passive labour-market and social-protection policies are still underdeveloped. The current national social security system provided by the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) covers only around half of the Lebanese labour force. However, due to the current economic crises, the NSSF received a significant blow when its savings lost most of their value due to the currency devaluation, and it can no longer cover medical bills for more than 10% of their original value (Lebanon News, 2022). Prior to the crisis, the NSSF had savings of USD 8 billion, whereas they currently stand at below USD 450 million, representing a decrease in value of more than 95%, a decrease which also impacted employee pension plans and savings.

The reform of the public service employment contracts remains an important issue in Lebanon. Following the official governmental circular from 2019, the reform was put on hold, with no revision after the last mass salary adjustment made to the public sector budget in 2019 (PCM GOV). Considering the freezing of public employment contracts, the increasing average age of public servants and the growing need for new and qualified staff, public institutions might soon run out of qualified staff. Working for a public institution in Lebanon is no longer an attractive prospect, as it was before crisis. More and more qualified staff are moving to the private sector or moving abroad, while the public sector faces a huge crisis.

Initiatives to increase the capacity of the public employment services

After years of cooperation between the National Employment Office (NEO) and the Ministry of Labour, and the dedicated task force for preparing the national employers' survey, things slowed down on these fronts in 2022; the NEO office lacks the basic infrastructure (e.g. no generator is available during scheduled power cuts) to enable its staff to work properly.

Other types of ALMPs, such as employment mediation, career counselling and guidance, employment stimulation and entrepreneurship incentives, are still fragmented and often linked to individual projects. Another government institution involved in the provision of training related to ALMPs is the National Vocational Training Centre (NVTC), which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Affairs. In 2019, the NVTC began to provide continuous vocational training courses (under the form of 'accelerated vocational training') in a more systematic way. However, all such initiatives have been put on hold given the multiple economic crises and the inability of the public sector to function in the context of reduced wages, high transportation costs and political instability. Thus, little effort has been placed on relaunching NVTC activities that would require additional resources from the government.

In addition, private employment agencies are gaining ground in Lebanon, mainly offering services to migrant workers coming to work in Lebanon and Lebanese workers wanting to work abroad. Some attempts have been made to regulate these agencies, especially those dealing with domestic workers, but Lebanon has not yet ratified ILO Convention 181 on Private Employment Agencies (from 1997) or Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (from 2011). A website launched by the Ministry of Labour in February 2022, which allows jobseekers in Lebanon to register their profiles and upload their CVs on the website and to search vacancies posted there by companies, seems to be on hold for the moment; no statistics or follow-up reports have been published from this website since it was launched. Nevertheless, on 10 October 2022, the Minister of Labour launched another digital platform for jobs open to Lebanese citizens abroad prior to the World Cup in Qatar. Companies based in Qatar were able to post temporary and permanent job vacancies for Lebanese citizens.

A study conducted by Macrotrends revealed that the number of Lebanese people migrating from Lebanon is 24 568 per 1 000 population, that is a 19.53% increase from 2022 (MacroTrends 2023). This sheds light on the current labour market situation and the scarce job opportunities.

Donor support to the employment policy field

Given the current situation in the country, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2021 is still the overarching programme for all sectors in need. The plan was updated in 2023 to include further actions concerning the labour market and employment, falling under the Livelihood sector. It is a joint plan between the Government of Lebanon and international and national partners, aiming to respond to challenges holistically, with medium-term, multi-year planning to deliver integrated and mutually-reinforcing humanitarian and stabilisation interventions. It includes both short-term and long-term actions to stimulate local economic development and market systems to create income-generating opportunities and employment. The Plan operates on two levels: supporting businesses in key economic sectors by creating short-term income opportunities for the most vulnerable; and working with private sector and governmental institutions to bring about a more favourable environment for job creation. Creating short-term opportunities will be achieved through technical and soft skills training based on new labour market needs, and by providing work-based learning and career guidance for women and men seeking jobs. In the longer term, the plan envisages a stronger cooperation with the Ministry of Labour to strengthen labour inspection capacity and provide decent working conditions within Lebanese-owned enterprises. In 2022, the beneficiaries included 242 755 vulnerable Lebanese citizens, Syrians and Palestinians, with donor support amounting to USD 333 million and 64 partners involved in different projects and initiatives. The target is to create 40 000 short-term employment opportunities, 50% of which would be for displaced Syrians and Palestinians, with 15 000 individuals to be supported with training to increase their employability. The plan also provides 26 000 individuals with career guidance, job matching and work-based learning opportunities. The focus is on new entrants to the market, in particular women and girls.

Initiatives to boost employment

In addition to the updated Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2023, the Government has been working on a rescue plan to reduce the impact of the crisis as part of the overall reform plan proposed in the context of the IMF deal.

It should also be noted that the private sector is somewhat recovering by paying salaries in USD and not in local LBP currency and pricing their goods and services in foreign currency too (also in USD). This is the current trend among most businesses, although it is not spread equally across the whole country. The trend has not been mirrored in the public sector, which represents nearly half of Lebanon's workforce, thereby creating a massive gap in income between private and public sector workers. This situation is leading public servants to either leave their jobs or to find a second job in the private sector alongside their public sector role.

KEY DONOR PROJECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

EU-funded technical assistance to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, budget 3 664 420 Euro, duration 01/01/2023 - 30/04/2027. This action contributes to the overall objective to build a better equipped education system able to deliver quality basic education. The aim is to help ensure learning continuity under a multiple crisis context through a more resilient education system that can provide quality, inclusive and safe education for all children as per the objectives of the MEHE's 5-year general education plan 2021-2025. The specific objectives of this contract are set out below.

- **Outcome 1:** enhance the governance capacities of the MEHE in the field of strategic and operational planning, monitoring and reporting, budgeting and public finance management.
- **Outcome 2:** enhance the capacities of the MEHE to deliver quality teaching and learning through management and educational staff empowered with 21st century skills development.
- **Outcome 3:** enhance the performance of the public education system (MEHE) through improved management and business operating procedures.

The GIZ project, 'Improving the Quality and Attractiveness of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon' (QuA-VET) supports the Directorate General for Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE) and individual employers to align vocational education and training with the needs of the Lebanese economy, in sectors showing sustainable employment potential (10/2021-10/2024).

The aim of the **GIZ project 'Employment Promotion'** is to improve the employment situation of young Lebanese adults (aged 17 to 35), women and people with disabilities, in selected pilot regions of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The project will identify employment opportunities and design activities providing relevant labour market skills and qualifications to make people more employable. The project will also support MSMEs in selected job-creating sectors to improve their competitive position, leading to better working conditions, safeguard existing jobs and/or create new ones. (02/2-09/24).

SOLIFEM – co-funded by the EU and the ILO, the project supports the transition from the informal to the formal economy through tripartite social dialogue in Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). It will pursue this objective by strengthening the capacity of the ILO tripartite constituents to act through social dialogue. Developing the capacity of young women and men in the formal and informal labour markets will help them overcome challenges in accessing formal jobs. [Home - Solifem](#) (ilo.org)

ENABEL - With funding from the European Union, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is implementing the ENABEL programme, aimed at fostering self-reliance beyond social assistance and promoting economic inclusion for vulnerable and marginalised communities in targeted areas. ENABEL focuses on improving skills for employment for both non-Lebanese individuals and host communities. Equipping individuals with the necessary skills and opportunities, the programme fosters economic inclusion and social cohesion in the Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North/Akkar and South/Nabatieh governorates, and potentially the Bekaa governorate, based on the needs identified.

SkillUp – With funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the project is a component of the ILO Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning (GPSL3), which supports the establishment of effective skills and a lifelong learning skills system. The Lebanon SkillUp component helps constituents and stakeholders to improve the skills development system in Lebanon, facilitating vulnerable groups with access to the labour market and help in making the transition. The

project focuses on providing market-responsive skills training and work-based learning, enhancing skills utilisation and productivity, and improving skills governance and the quality of the TVET system.

PROSPECT – With funding from the Netherlands, the Lebanon ‘Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities’ (PROSPECTS) focuses on enhancing the resilience of the country’s crisis-distressed labour market and creating better livelihoods for both Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees. It does so by promoting the development of market-relevant skills, enhancing employment placement services and labour market governance, strengthening social protection schemes and promoting micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) as well as certain sectors, including the agriculture and agri-food industry, with potential for decent job creation.

The **UNICEF adolescent and youth programme** component supports the development and institutionalisation of inclusive policies, services and learning opportunities for adolescents and young people, and their empowerment. Overall, the programme is helping to achieve this outcome and is contributing to the development of young girls and boys, helping them reach their full potential, become productive and promote peace and tolerance (2022-2023).

The **UNICEF Generation of Innovation Leaders (GIL) programme** is as a connected grid of educational facilities equipped with multi-purpose learning and working areas. It is an integrated hub for young people in communities across Lebanon, providing a dynamic ecosystem for creating and developing youth-led start-ups and SMEs, fostering innovation, technology and entrepreneurship.

EDU TOP, implemented by the COMI consortium and other organisations, and funded by the Italian Cooperation, is a programme that promotes a fair and inclusive professional and technical training system of high quality that responds to the needs of the labour market. It favours the most excluded members of society, with a specific objective to increase the number of vulnerable young people with the necessary skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.

The **2023 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)** brings together 118 partner organisations to assist more than 3.2 million crisis-affected people living in Lebanon. USD 3.59 billion is needed to meet urgent needs and provide protection and immediate relief assistance to 1.5 million displaced Syrians, 1.5 million vulnerable Lebanese people, 31 400 Palestinian refugees from Syria and 180 000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon, while seeking to mitigate the impacts of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon’s infrastructure, economy and public institutions.

Global Fund for Education in Emergencies, ECW Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) Lebanon, USD 12 million, 3 years starting in 2022. Viewed as a bridge between the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and the Sector Plan, the MYRP was set up to mitigate the various factors that make children and teenagers vulnerable and have an impact on their learning opportunities. The focus is on stabilising and strengthening the sector to ensure that all girls, boys and teenagers have access to and can take part in education and learning processes. The programme aims to be gender-responsive and protective, whilst ensuring that crisis-affected girls and boys have better learning outcomes. On a macro-level, the programme will work on mobilising resources efficiently to scale implementation and ensure effectiveness.

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LEBANON: STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	
1	Total population (,000) ⁽¹⁾	4995.8	6398.9	5781.9	5662.9	5592.6	5489.7	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %) ^{(1)C}	27.5	24.9	26.2	26.7	26.6	26.6	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	8.0	0.5	-6.9	-21.4	-7.0	M.D.	
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	Agriculture	3.9	3.3	3.2	3.1	1.4	M.D.
		Industry	13.8	15.7	12.5	6.6	2.8	M.D.
		Services	71.9	73.8	79.3	87.4	94.1	M.D.
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	1.6	2.1	2.6	1.7	M.D.	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	5.5	6.3	8.1	9.9	M.D.	M.D.	
7	Adult literacy (%) ^C	M.D.	M.D.	95.3	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%) ^{(2)C}	Low	M.D.	M.D.	52.8	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Medium	M.D.	M.D.	19.9	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		High	M.D.	M.D.	26.8	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	27.4	26.2	26.2	28.0	27.6	M.D.	
12	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	N.A.	70.4	67.8 ⁽³⁾	N.A.	N.A.	M.D.
		Mathematics	N.A.	60.2	59.8 ⁽³⁾	N.A.	N.A.	M.D.
		Science	N.A.	62.6	62.3 ⁽³⁾	N.A.	N.A.	M.D.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	Total	M.D.	M.D.	48.9	M.D.	M.D.	43.4
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	70.6	M.D.	M.D.	66.2
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	29.4	M.D.	M.D.	22.2
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	M.D.	M.D.	51.1	M.D.	M.D.	56.6	

	Indicator		2010	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	29.4	M.D.	M.D.	33.8
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	70.6	M.D.	M.D.	77.8
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	Total	M.D.	M.D.	43.4	M.D.	M.D.	30.6
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	63.6	M.D.	M.D.	47.4
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	25.1	M.D.	M.D.	15.0
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) ^{(2) C}	Low	M.D.	M.D.	41.7	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Medium	M.D.	M.D.	36.6	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		High	M.D.	M.D.	52.0	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
17	Employment by sector (%) ^C	Agriculture	M.D.	M.D.	3.5	M.D.	M.D.	4.1
		Industry	M.D.	M.D.	20.5	M.D.	M.D.	21.9
		Services	M.D.	M.D.	75.6	M.D.	M.D.	73.8
18	Incidence of self-employment (%) ^C		M.D.	M.D.	29.3	M.D.	M.D.	25.5
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) ^C		M.D.	M.D.	20.3	M.D.	M.D.	19.2
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	Total	M.D.	M.D.	11.3	M.D.	M.D.	29.6
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	9.9	M.D.	M.D.	28.4
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	14.3	M.D.	M.D.	32.7
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) ⁽²⁾	Low	M.D.	M.D.	8.7	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Medium	M.D.	M.D.	12.3	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		High	M.D.	M.D.	14.5	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%) ^C	Total	M.D.	M.D.	23.3	M.D.	M.D.	29.6
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	24.4	M.D.	M.D.	28.4
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	21.4	M.D.	M.D.	32.7
23	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	M.D.	M.D.	23.5	M.D.	M.D.	29.1
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	17.9	M.D.	M.D.	26.1
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	28.9	M.D.	M.D.	32.1
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Total	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.
25	Human Development Index		0.770	0.746	0.745	0.726	0.706	M.D.

Last update: 07/09/2023

Sources:

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database

Indicators 7, 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics

Indicators 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23: in 2018 CAS in cooperation with ILO (LFSLCS), 2022: CAS/ILO LFS 2022

Indicators 8, 16, 21: ILOSTAT

Indicator 12 - OECD PISA 2018 Results (Volume I) Annex B1

Indicator 25 – UNDP

Notes:

(1) Estimation.

(2) Low = Basic (ILOSTAT) + Less than basic (ILOSTAT), Medium (ILOSTAT), High (ILOSTAT)

(3) applies to 2018

(4) applies to 2022

(5) Low (ISCED 0-1): Less than basic (ILOSTAT), Low (ISCED 2): Basic (ILOSTAT), Medium (ILOSTAT), Advanced (ILOSTAT)

(6) Data refers to the period April 2018-March 2019

Legend:

C= ETF calculations

N.A. = Not Applicable

M.D. = Missing Data

ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population ('000)	The total population is estimated as the number of people having their usual residence in a country on 1 January of the respective year. When information on the usually resident population is not available, countries may report legal or registered residents.
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15-24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15-64 (or 15-74 or 15+).
3	GDP growth rate (%)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 U.S. dollars. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	The share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1-5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), revision 3 or 4. Industry corresponds to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) tabulation categories C-F (revision 3) or tabulation categories B-F (revision 4) and includes mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, construction, and public utilities (electricity, gas, and water). Services correspond to ISIC divisions 50-99 and they include value added in wholesale and retail trade (including hotels and restaurants), transport, and government, financial, professional, and personal services such as education, health care, and real estate services. Also included are imputed bank service charges, import duties, and any statistical discrepancies noted by national compilers as well as discrepancies arising from rescaling.
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write a short simple statement on his/her everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

	Description	Definition
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group. This is usually measured in terms of the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with, at most, a lower secondary education who were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0-2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under two years) for data up to 2013 and to ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	This indicator covers the enrolments in a in a given level of education of children/youths belonging to the official age group corresponding to the given level of education.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case, upper secondary), expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in all programmes (vocational and general) at that level.
12	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are the 15-year-olds who are failing to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The activity rate is calculated by dividing the active population by the population of the same age group. The active population (also called 'labour force') is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed people. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) c	The inactivity/out of the labour force rate is calculated by dividing the inactive population by the population of the same age group. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the population of the same age group. Employed people are all people who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed persons by the population of the same age group. Employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated. Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0-2), Medium (ISCED level 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
17	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data are presented by broad branches of economic activity (i.e. Agriculture/Industry/Services) based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.
18	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the self-employed (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.

	Description	Definition
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months)). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: low (ISCED level 0-2), medium (ISCED level 3-4) and high (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-24 who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
23	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	The indicator provides information on young people aged 15-24 who meet the following two conditions: first, they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the ILO definition); and second, they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25-64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question on participation in education and training. The information collected relates to all education or training, whether or not it is relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. If a different reference period is used, this should be indicated.
25	Human Development Index	The index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

ABBREVIATIONS

ALMP	Active labour market policies
AUB	American University of Beirut
CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
CERD	Center for Education Research and Development
CVA	Cash and voucher assistance
DGTVET	Directorate General for Technical and Vocational Education
ERP	Emergency Response Plan
ETF	European Training Foundation.
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GEO	Guidance and Employment Office
GDP	Gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LFHLCS	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey
LNQF	Lebanese National Qualifications Framework
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEO	National Employment Office
NSSF	National Social Security Fund

NSF	National Strategic Framework
NVTC	National Vocational Training Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPE	Personal protective equipment
QA	Quality assurance
SAB	School advisory board
SMEB	Survival and minimum expenditure basket
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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