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IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRATED SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR DISADVANTAGED ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN LEBANON

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
NOVEMBER 2023

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ACRONYMS

BLN	Basic Literacy and Numeracy
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CfW	Cash for Work
DiD	Difference-in-Differences
DGVTE	Directorate General of Vocational Training and Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Implementing Partners
IPW	Inverse Probability Weighting
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
KII	Key Informant Interview
LRC	Lebanese Relief Council
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOL	Ministry of Labor
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSC	Most Signficant Change
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

This report is the final evaluation report for the impact evaluation of the Integrated Skills Training Programme for Disadvantaged Adolescents and Youth in Lebanon. UNICEF Lebanon contracted the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a two-year, mixed methods impact evaluation of the Integrated Skills Training Programme (hereafter referred to as the 'Skills Training Programme') to assess its relevance and impact. The evaluation investigates the impact of the Skills Training Programme through the lens of four domains: employment, employability, healthy lifestyles and social cohesion, and empowerment.[1]

Overview of the Intervention Being Evaluated

UNICEF developed the Skills Training Programme with funding from the Government of Germany for implementation from 2020–2023. The programme supports youth (aged 15–24) to build the skills they need to access-employment and income-generating opportunities. The programme aims to achieve three objectives, including (1) increased access to competency-based training (CBT); (2) increased employability and income-generating activities; and (3) enhanced empowerment and personal development. It targets both Lebanese and refugee (Syrian and Palestinian) youth. The programme is funded by the German Government through KFW Development Bank and it works through three primary implementing partners (IPs), including Anera, LOST, and the Lebanese Relief Council (LRC). These partners deliver an integrated package of learning, skilling, empowerment, and employment support services[2] through their community-based vocational training institutes.

Youth participants in UNICEF's skills building programme receive a core package of mutually reinforcing interventions, including (1) basic literacy and numeracy (BLN) Level 1 or 2; (2) competency-based training (CBT)); (3) life skills training; and (4) employment support services or cash for work (CfW). The skills building project is divided into two phases: the training and the work-based learning. Most youth who successfully complete the trainings have the opportunity to benefit from a workplace-based learning opportunity, including employment support service or income generation opportunity where they can learn further, practice the acquired knowledge, and establish a link with the local labour force/private sector. This facilitates the transition from training to employability, as. the cash for work (CfW) component includes on-the-job training and referral to employment.

Evaluation Purpose and Intended Audience

AIR's summative evaluation of the Skills Training programme, which falls under the umbrella of the broader UNICEF TVET programme, aims to inform decision making on the scale up and continuity of the programme. UNICEF Lebanon and its partner, KfW, commissioned an impact evaluation to identify opportunities to improve implementation by making changes to future programme design. According to the Terms of Reference (TOR) *(see Annex B)*, the primary intended users for this evaluation include UNICEF's Management and Youth & Adolescents teams, IPs, and KfW. Primary users can use findings to improve programme design, implementation, and sustainability. Secondary users for the evaluation include the TVET sector in Lebanon, government stakeholders, UNICEF offices in the MENA region and/or those implementing TVET programming, and other relevant organisations and donors, such as the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, German Agency for International Cooperation, and the ILO.

Evaluation Objectives and Scope

The main objective of this evaluation is to assess the impact and relevance of the Skills Training programme on beneficiary youth, on their communities, as well as for other stakeholders. The study incorporates a tracing component, tracking one cohort (made up of a subset of youth from each of the three IPs) using quantitative surveys at two points in time (baseline and endline). The study examines the impact of the project through the lens of four domains:

- Employment and other labour market outcomes
- Employability and other learning outcomes
- Healthy lifestyles and social cohesion
- Empowerment

1. According to the TOR, this domain was previously defined as 'Psychosocial well-being and self-efficacy' but AIR has renamed it based on feedback from UNICEF.
2. While Anera and LOST offer all 4 components of the skills training programme, LRC does not offer BLN. Because we do not disaggregate impacts by programme component, the results are an average impact over this mix of components.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation included complementary quantitative and qualitative components to generate mixed-methods evidence on the four domains framing the evaluation. Specifically, the quantitative component uses a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design that compares participant youth in the Skills Training Program with comparison youth not participating in the Skills Training Programme. Since some youth in the comparison group received other types of life skills and vocational training, the analysis makes two types of comparisons: (i) All treatment youth versus all comparison youth, and (ii) all treatment youth versus untrained comparison youth.

The evaluation included a youth survey at baseline and endline, and surveyed employers at endline only. The quantitative analysis sample comprises 577 treatment youth at baseline and 361 treatment youth at endline, and 470 comparison youth at baseline and 521 comparison youth at endline. The quantitative analysis also includes a sample of 77 employers, which covers all CfW employers willing to complete the survey. Across three rounds of data collection, AIR conducted qualitative interviews with UNICEF, IPs, training institute staff, Directorate General of Vocational Training and Education (DGTVE) staff, and drop-out youth, in addition to focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth (including 6 story circles), parents of youth, and training facilitators. We also conducted Most Significant Change (MSC) analysis workshops with youth to review the stories of change and selected the two most significant stories.

KEY IMPACT RESULTS

Employment.
Increased employment relative to untrained youth and increased likelihood of formal employment.

Employment Quality.
Sharp increase to hours of employment, possibly exceeding desired levels.

Employability.
Mixed results with improvements to higher order thinking and negative results for creativity.

Healthy Lifestyles.
Negative impacts on empathy, but improved quality of interaction between genders.

Well-being.
Limited negative impacts relative to untrained youth.

Key Findings

We find that UNICEF's Skills Training Programme increased medium-term employment at roughly a year post-training for participant youth relative to youth who received no training, but find no significant difference in employment relative to comparison youth who attended other vocational or life skills training programmes. Youth who participated in the Skills Training Programme were roughly 10% more likely to secure employment than youth who received no training. Participant youth were no more or less likely to secure employment relative to comparison youth overall. There was, however, a strong impact on the likelihood of formal employment of about 4 percentage points.

In line with this quantitative finding from the impact evaluation, qualitative interviews and focus groups revealed a modest perceived increase in employment. However, youth faced lingering obstacles to securing jobs, many of which stem from the current economic crisis in Lebanon. Amongst the unemployed, Skills Training Programme trainees were 13 percentage points more likely to be unemployed because they were unable to find a job. For example, youth reported extremely limited job vacancies, low pay, discrimination by gender and nationality, long distances to work sites, and high transportation costs as fundamental barriers to finding and maintaining employment, which are issues more salient for those who possess the skills and desire to find employment rather than those who may be unable to seek employment in the first place.

Youth who participated in UNICEF's Skills Training Programme were very positive about their experience, often citing improvements in their mood and an appreciation for the opportunity to interact with others. Roughly 86% of treatment youth were either likely or extremely likely to recommend the Skills Building Programme to others. Most employers, too, were satisfied with the youth that worked for them during CfW and expressed a willingness to hire them long-term. However, when hiring for long-term employment, CfW employers were typically not able to pay youth the same rate they were paid during CfW which created some challenges regarding salary expectations. Despite youths' positive perceptions of the Skills Training Programme, some did express frustration over their inability to find jobs upon completing the programme. While many youths were already frustrated by the limited job opportunities available before they participated in UNICEF's Skills Training Programme, participants did suggest potential improvements to the programme including adding levels and specialisations within certain sectors, providing certification, and providing additional support after CfW to help youths find jobs. Regarding the additional levels and specialisations, youth and implementing partners commented that agricultural training, for example, should focus on the particular type(s) of farming or "agro-food" practices conducted in their area in that season as opposed to more general farming techniques, including those that require trainees to have access to land. In healthcare, youth noted that those without a healthcare background required more training than those with some previous experience in the sector. Youth also suggested logistical modifications such as an increased transportation allowance during the life skills training, CBT, and CfW and greater flexibility with scheduling (particularly for youth attending school or with existing part-time jobs) during the life skills training, CBT and CfW. The Skills Training Programme had mixed impacts on youths' employability, as measured by positive impacts on their Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) score relative to comparison youth and negative impacts on their Creativity score relative to untrained comparison youth as well as possible negative impacts on youths' well-being, as measured by their Self-Management, compared to untrained youth. This negative result for youths' emotional regulation could follow from frustration youth felt at having gone through trainings yet still facing challenges finding employment. The result on the HOTS score shows that the Skills Training Programme performs better with respect to that compared to other vocational training programmes although this finding is driven by only two significant individual items within the overall HOTS composite score so the overall finding for treatment versus comparison may not be as robust. Youth creativity was negative for each of the three measures within the composite score relative to both comparison groups, suggesting that there may have been a smaller negative effect on creativity relative to all comparison youth but that it was not large enough to be detected. Qualitatively, most youth reported feeling more ready for employment specifically because of their participation in the skills programme. Youth cited the applied experience gained during CfW, the job-seeking and interviewing behavior learned during the life skills component, and the content and technical skills acquired during CBT as the main reasons behind their increased self-assessed employability. Over 95 percent of youth who participated in the Skills Training Programme reported that they took something from it that better prepared them for the labour market. Most youth in the qualitative sample said the training helped them develop the technical- and soft-skills they felt were needed to gain employment, although they would have liked more time to further hone their skills during the programme. Youth specifically noted the lack of certification and employers' requirement for them to have up to a year of relevant experience remained barriers to finding a job.

A large majority of youths (80%) received CBT in the same sector that they went on to do CfW in, demonstrating alignment throughout implementation. However, relatively few youths (10%) went on to find employment in that same sector. In some cases, youth reported being offered a job by their CfW employer, but declined because the wage offered was lower than what they received during their CfW experience. In other cases, youth were simply unable to find suitable employment for the reasons mentioned previously (limited job vacancies, low pay, discrimination, long distances to job sites, and high transportation costs). Employers, for their part, suggested that trainees may not have received training in the most promising sectors for youth entering the labor market: for example, while 20% of employers felt IT was the most promising sector in terms of job opportunities,

only 4% of interviewed CfW firms operated in the IT sector. Most employed youth reported working in agriculture (46%), culinary (13%), and construction (12%), sectors that did not feature prominently among CfW employers, which more frequently operated in the health care and culinary sectors, and were not typically considered the most promising in terms of job opportunities for youth entering the labour market.

Programme impacts and experiences varied slightly by gender and nationality, with females showing impacts that were more positive relative to males and refugees showing impacts less positive relative to Lebanese for all domains other than Well-being, for which there were no statistically significant differences between subgroups. The more positive impacts for females may have come through their improved ability to get out of their house, meet people, and learn new things that were otherwise less available to females. The positive impacts for Lebanese may have come through Lebanese treatment youth avoiding—at least temporarily--the nationalistic rhetoric increasingly prevalent in the country. The programme had a greater positive impact on reported pay for females, and females showed more promising positive results in terms of effects on healthy lifestyles and social cohesion. Nevertheless, the trainings had an overall negative effect on youths' empathy for others, possibly following from increased interactions between youths from different backgrounds and the negative rhetoric around nationality prevailing in Lebanese society. With the Skills Training Programme's focus on serving diverse populations and bringing them together in one set of trainings, these increased tensions may have been stronger than the tensions following other trainings with less emphasis on social cohesion. Qualitatively, respondents reported more differences in programme experiences and outcomes according to gender and previous exposure to the sector as opposed to nationality. Comparing the experiences of males and females, training facilitators, parents, and youths themselves tended to point to larger shifts in the mentality of female participants. Respondents often reported female youth were more open and outgoing following participation in the Skills Training Programme and showed greater interest in seeking employment. Despite these more positive observations, some female youth still reported they were discriminated against when they sought employment in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as painting. Further, by law, refugees are allowed to work in three sectors only, and some refugee youth felt employers preferred to hire Lebanese youth in those sectors. Additionally, some Lebanese participants perceived that employers prioritised hiring Syrians and alluded to the fact that Syrians accept lower pay.

Key Conclusions

The Skills Training Programme operates in a remarkably challenging environment, in a country facing a social crisis and one of the worst economic crises in modern history (World Bank, 2021). The training successfully maintained youth enrolment throughout the programme, with roughly 90 percent of youth who entered the programme being able to complete it. The fact that the programme achieved positive impacts on employment for youth who participated in the training versus those who received no training despite the deteriorating economic situation and the many labour market challenges (including most notably limited job vacancies and low wages) is quite promising; as are the positive perceptions of the programme from youths themselves. Also encouraging is the perception of CfW employers about the employability and competence of the youth completing the Skills Training Programme, and the fact that most CfW employers would like to hire programme graduates.

Moving forward, the evaluation highlighted potential improvements that can be made to enhance the effectiveness of the programme. These include ways to facilitate youths' participation in the programme (more varied training levels or more scheduling flexibility during the life skills, CBT, and CfW components) and ways to potentially improve employment outcomes by revisiting the sectors and specialisations to verify whether they remain worthy of continued focus, to prioritise those with the best employment outcomes and—to the extent possible—focusing on sectors and specialisations that include certification, which only applied to about 17 percent of treatment youth. While most of the sectors covered by UNICEF's Skills Training Programme have the potential to lead to certification, administrative hurdles that were exacerbated by COVID-19 and the economic crisis have delayed ministerial approval for the programme to offer certification.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons emerged from the evaluation findings that may inform future vocational training programming in challenging environments such as Lebanon. The following lessons are further expanded upon in the conclusion of the report:

› Tailoring programming to youths' needs and minimizing potential overlaps with other programmes. There are a multitude of vocational trainings, life skills trainings, and other support programmes for youth operating in Lebanon. To the extent possible, given that the Skills Training Programme is a 3-year programme and activities are planned well in advance, future programming should explore ways to take stock of what is being offered in each area and tailor offerings to the unmet needs of youth in that location.

› Lebanon is an extremely challenging environment for delivering trainings, especially given the economic crisis that has compromised the demand for labour. Delivering a vocational training program during competing crises assumes that there are open jobs trainees can fill. The direct goals of a vocational programme become very difficult to achieve when there are external factors that suppress labour demand.

› Promoting gender transformation and working to remove employment-related gender stereotypes are critically important efforts, and ones that UNICEF and the private sector are commendably taking on through the Skills Training Programme. However, the realities of gender norms in Lebanon's labour market presented challenges for female graduates of the programme seeking employment. Females who received training in traditionally male sectors (painting, sanitation) during the programme sometimes reported being turned away from permanent jobs based on their gender which was a source of frustration. There is no simple answer for how to address this, but the evaluation team suggests being mindful of the practical realities of the labour market as the Skills Training Programme continues its important work of challenging gender norms and advancing gender equality.

› It is difficult to determine appropriate salaries for CfW in a volatile economic environment. While the Skills Training Programme paid youth a seemingly fair wage during CfW, in doing so the programme may have inadvertently set unrealistic expectations for youth about their long-term salaries.

Recommendations

The evaluation team developed the below recommendations based on the data collected over the course of the evaluation as well as informal discussions with programmatic staff, implementers, and other stakeholders. These recommendations are briefly summarized below:

› Calibrate transportation reimbursement. Implementers could examine whether funding for youths' transportation throughout training and work-based learning is sufficient. While most youth reported receiving transportation support and the vast majority of youth were able to complete the programme, youth often said that travel to and from trainings or CfW could be financially challenging for them.

› Create separate training tracks. Future rounds of CBT could potentially consider offering different specialisations within sectors or levels of training to account for youths' diverse backgrounds.

› Training duration. Future iterations of the CBT/CfW could explore ways to allow for more flexibility in training duration to ensure time for specialisations in some sectors, to ensure youth feel confident in the skills they have acquired, and—to the extent possible—ensure that the length of training and workplace-learning satisfies sector requirements.

› Conduct regular, detailed market assessments. The Skills Training Programme design is based on an ILO market assessment that preceded programme implementation, but it may be useful to regularly and systematically reassess the market conditions and provide implementers more flexibility to better align with growth industries that may provide better long-term prospects for youth.

› Prioritise certifiable industries. Where possible, and acknowledging the ongoing work of UNICEF, ILO, and GIZ to secure ministerial approval to provide certificates, implementers could consider prioritising training in industries and for jobs where external certifications are available. If external certification is not

possible, UNICEF could explore the possibility of providing their own certification or certificate of completion to provide youth with documentation once they have successfully completed the programme.

› Identify opportunities to synergise with other training programmes. The evaluation showed that there are many other organizations delivering vocational and life skills trainings in the same areas. Rather than duplicating these efforts with the CBT or life skills training, the Skills Training Programme could partner with these organizations to examine whether and where overlaps exist, and ultimately refine the scope and coverage of each programme to ensure that as many youths as possible receive training that meets their specific needs.

› Prioritize basic psychosocial well-being. The triple crisis in Lebanon is driving youth into deteriorating mental health and psychosocial well-being. While the life skills component was initially envisioned to primarily support employability and social cohesion, the training could potentially extend its focus to basic psychosocial well-being. Indeed, UNICEF has confirmed plans to roll out a well-being component in 2024.

› Create centralised monitoring system. A centralised management information system could help different implementers track youth who have participated in trainings more systematically. Such a system would be effective in monitoring youth who repeat trainings, to gain repeated access to CfW. The system could also provide a means for real-time monitoring and evaluation of training activities. Extending monitoring to youths' post-training employment can ensure that youth struggling to find a suitable job received the support they need. The programme can provide youth found to be persistently unemployed with the employment support services required to find employment.

1. Preface

UNICEF contracted the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct an impact evaluation of the German Government-funded Integrated Skills Training programme for Disadvantaged Adolescents and Youth in Lebanon, which falls under the umbrella of the broader UNICEF Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) project. The overall goal of the Skills Training programme is to provide technical and vocational training to young people and ensure job seekers are accessing employment and income generating opportunities. Lebanon is experiencing a severe economic crisis in which the Lebanese lira has continued to depreciate, with inflation in the triple digits reaching over 117% in 2023 (Lebanese Central Administration for Statistics, 2023; World Bank, 2021). Banks have witnessed diminishing foreign exchange reserves and high import subsidies on items such as food, fuel, and medication, causing a breakdown in basic services (World Bank, 2021). Policy responses to date have done little to assuage these crises, and events such as the 2020 Beirut port explosion have increased the potential for political unrest. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened Lebanon's fragile economy by increasing rates of unemployment (individuals who are jobless) and underemployment (individuals who are underpaid or underutilized in their job) (ILO, 2020a). According to recent reports, 29.6% of the population was unemployed in 2022, with female youth (ages 14 – 25) having some of the highest unemployment rates across governorates in the country (ILO, 2022). Intermittent lockdowns during and after the pandemic also strained the country's economy, food security, and public health sector (Aoun & Barakat, 2022; Corriero et. al., 2022; Hajjar & Abu-Sittah, 2021; Kharroubi et. al., 2021). Collectively, these three factors constituted the "triple crisis" and pose significant challenges for youths and implementers alike in Lebanon. To add to this, Lebanon has faced an additional crisis with the influx of Syrian and Palestinian refugees since 2011, which has further burdened public energy, education, and health infrastructure. In this context, some of the most vulnerable populations in Lebanon, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees and approximately 250,00 Palestinian refugees, are struggling to find gainful employment (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2021; VASyr, 2021). Given the current environment, youth face an uncertain job market and, according to a recent survey, 1 in 5 young people in Lebanon said they felt depressed or have little interest in doing things (UNICEF, 2021).

2. Background

The Skills Training programme takes place in a complex environment that directly shapes the structure and approach to the evaluation.
In this section, we describe the overall programme context and how it determines the research approach by shaping the theory of change (ToC).

2.1. Existing Evidence

Although there is mixed evidence across the literature on best practices in employment interventions globally, findings from systematic reviews highlight employment successes are associated with trainings involving both hard and soft skills and complementing trainings with practical experience. A review by Kluve and colleagues (2017) found that youth employment interventions can result in positive job and income effects for youth. A systematic review by Tripney and colleagues (2013) found that TVET interventions had positive effects for several employment outcomes, with the strongest evidence for formal employment and monthly earnings (Tripney et al., 2013). At the same time, a review of skills training in fragile and conflict-affected countries (Pompa, 2014) noted that programmes combining life skills with on-the-job training can improve employment opportunities. Similarly, a USAID review found that programmes combining training with work experience have the greatest effect on participation in the formal sector (Fox & Kaul, 2017). A paper by Severens and Taha (2010) reviewed innovative pilot approaches implemented by USAID to develop the skills of youth in the Middle East and North Africa. This paper highlighted several lessons learned, including providing financial support to participants, measuring outcomes from the start of the intervention, integrating opportunities to mobilise, track and support alumni, and providing certification for participants (Severens & Taha, 2010). Other studies evaluating skills building programmes have found that soft skills trainings can have limited long term impacts (Groh et al, 2016). A review of the evidence of job training programs internationally shows that they tend to generate impacts only when local labour markets do not function (McKenzie, 2017). In addition, utilizing a competency-based training (CBT) approach to TVET can help avoid a mismatch between training programmes and the needs of the labour market (ILO, 2020b). In the context of Lebanon, a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) document presents guidelines on skills training in Lebanon, drawing on the abovementioned lessons from the literature (ILO, 2018).

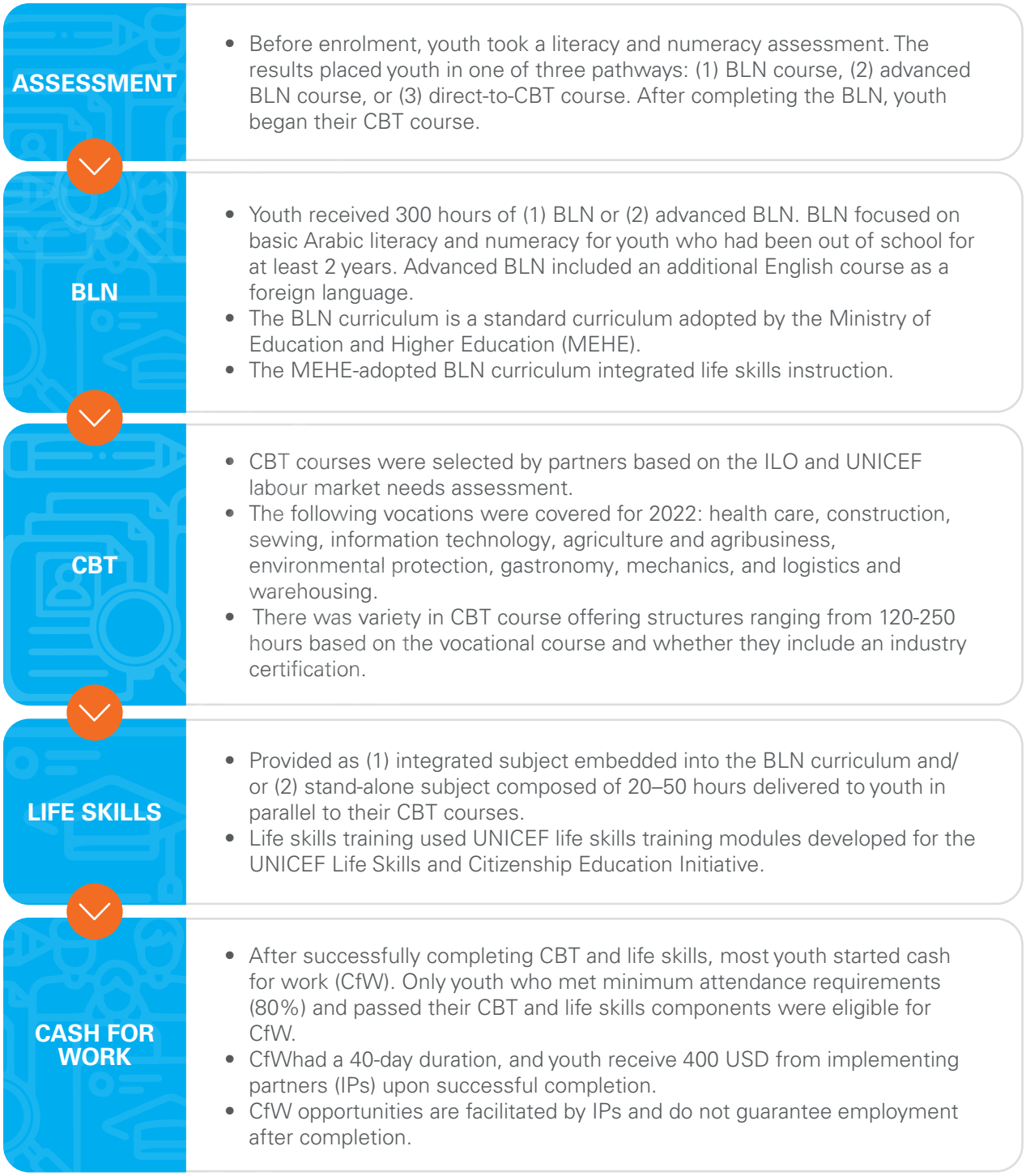
In addition, many studies have been conducted on the effects of soft skills training – also referred to as 'life skills', 'transferable skills', '21st century skills', or 'core skills' – on youths' employment outcomes and other cross-sectoral outcomes, such as reproductive health, civic participation, and violence prevention. UNICEF and the World Bank's Measuring Life Skills publication builds on the MENA Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Conceptual and Programmatic Framework by defining life skills, reviewing the evidence base, and reviewing available instruments for assessing those skills (Hoskins & Liu, 2019). For example, a systematic review by Lippman and colleagues (2014) found that 3 of 11 soft skills constructs, including social skills, higher-order thinking skills, and self-control, were most associated with positive outcomes in employment, workplace performance, income, and entrepreneurial success amongst youth aged 15–29 (Lippman et al., 2015). A study by Gates and colleagues (2016) found that three soft skills constructs, including positive self-concept, higher-order thinking skills, and self-control amongst youth were associated with positive outcomes in employment, sexual-reproductive health, and violence prevention, highlighting how life skills development in youth contributes to broader benefits for youth and their communities (Gates et al., 2017). Further, according to a global survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, 74 per cent of employers are concerned about finding young employees with the requisite soft skills and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the skills gap (UNICEF et al., 2021).

2.2. Overview Of Intervention

UNICEF developed the Skills Training project with funding from the Government of Germany for implementation from mid-2020 to mid-2023. The programme supports youth (aged 15–24) to build the skills they need to access employment and income-generating opportunities. The skills training programme, which operates under the umbrella of UNICEF Lebanon's Youth and Adolescent Development Programme, aims to achieve three objectives, including (1) increased access to CBT; (2) increased employability and income-generating activities; and (3) enhanced empowerment and personal development. It targets both Lebanese and refugee (Syrian and Palestinian) youth. The programme is funded by the German Government through KFW Development Bank and works through three primary implementing partners (IPs), including Anera, LOST, and the Lebanese Relief Council (LRC). These partners deliver a full package of learning, skills training, empowerment and employment support services[3] through their community-based vocational training institutes.

3. While Anera and LOST offer all 4 components of the skills training programme, LRC does not offer BLN. Because we will not disaggregate impacts by programme component, the results will be an average impact over this mix of components.

Figure 1. Overview of the Skills Training Programme



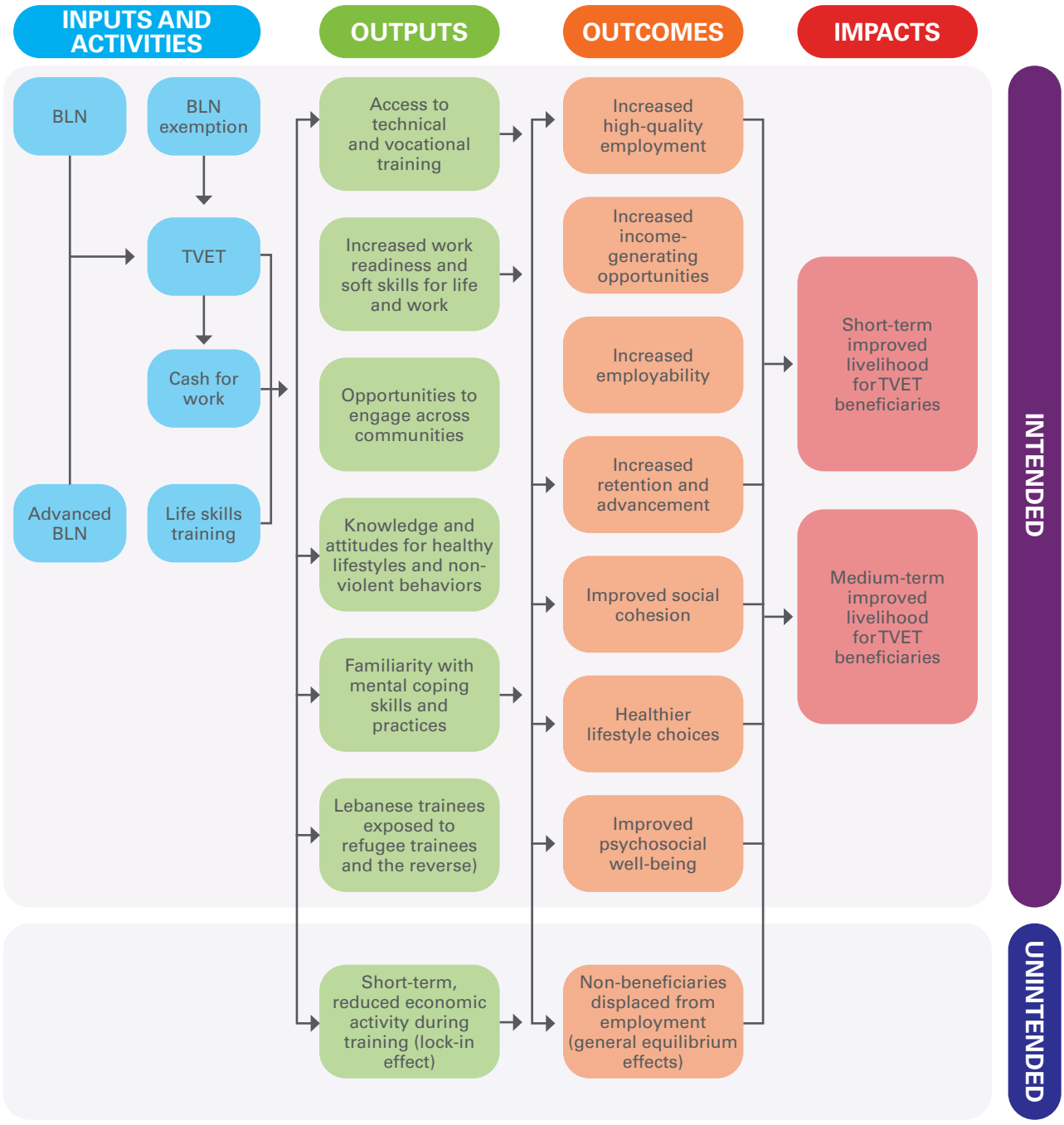
Youth participants in UNICEF's skills building programme receive a core package of mutually reinforcing interventions, including (1) basic literacy and numeracy (BLN) Level 1, Level 2, or both; (2) CBT; (3) life skills training; and (4) employment support services or cash for work (CfW). The skills building project is divided into two phases: the training and the work-based learning. Thus, many youth who successfully complete the trainings have the opportunity to benefit from an employment support service or income generation opportunity where they can learn further, practice the acquired knowledge, and establish the link with the labour force/ private sector. This facilitates the transition from training to employability. It includes on-the-job training, the cash for work component (CfW), and referral to employment. In Figure 1, we illustrate the content of these components and youths' pathways through the Skills Training programme. The programme is implemented through a cohort model in which several groups, aligned to vocational courses, initiate their pathways on the same start dates. These start dates differ by cohort and groups and are staggered throughout the year. UNICEF's Skills Training programme helps youth succeed in their local economies despite the challenges facing youth in Lebanon following the triple crisis. While the project has been ongoing since mid-2020, the current evaluation focuses on youth who were newly enrolled in 2022.

According to partners, youth completed all programme components (BLN + CBT + life skills + cash for work) within 3-5 months of recruitment, since some vocational tracks took longer to complete than others *(see Annex A for additional information on partners including programming locations and vocational courses offered).*

2.3. Theory Of Change

AIR generated a ToC model to inform our research design (see Figure 2). AIR received inputs on the ToC during a co-creation workshop with UNICEF and the Government of Germany in October 2021 and revised the model accordingly. The ToC highlights the main steps that connect the initial activities to the ultimate theoretical impacts. We begin by describing the main inputs of the programme: BLN, CBT, life skills training, and CfW. The ToC model then describes the programme outputs, which represent the immediate changes emerging from the inputs and activities. The outputs generally include access to the vocational training activities and familiarity with the lessons delivered during the trainings. Those outputs may yield the outcomes highlighted in Figure 2, (e.g., improved labour market outcomes, improved employability, and healthier lifestyle choices, etc.). The last piece of the ToC is the impacts stage, which shows the overall goal of the Skills Training programme: to support the short- and medium-term livelihoods of youth in Lebanon.

Figure 2. Theory of change for the skills building programme



ASSUMPTIONS

- Students remain engaged in training.
- Labour market has the capacity to absorb trainees.
- Trainees can find open jobs.
- Market needs assessment yields in-demand courses.
- Supportive household relationships for participation.

MODERATORS

- Access to trainings.
- Vocational path choices.
- Employee gender.
- Moderators.
- Refugee status.
- COVID-19 rates.
- State of Lebanese economy.
- Policy environment.

3. Evaluation Purpose, Objectives, And Scope

AIR developed the evaluation plan in close coordination with UNICEF Lebanon and KfW. During a series of co-creation meetings in October 2021, AIR established the goals and methodological approach to the study. As agreed upon during the inception phase, the evaluation is guided by the OECD-DAC evaluative criteria and specifically covers the criterion of relevance and impact. In this section, we describe the purpose, objective, and scope of the evaluation. We also describe the questions we aim to answer and the constructs we will use to generate evidence.

3.1. Evaluation Purpose And Intended Audience

AIR's summative evaluation of the Skills Training programme, which falls under the umbrella of the broader UNICEF TVET programme, aims to inform decision making on the scale up and continuity of the programme. UNICEF Lebanon and its partner, KfW, commissioned an evaluation to identify opportunities to improve implementation by making changes to future design. According to the Terms of Reference (TOR) *(see Annex B),* the primary intended users for this evaluation include UNICEF's Management and Youth & Adolescents teams, IPs, and KfW. Primary users can use findings to improve programme design and implementation. Secondary users for the evaluation include the TVET sector in Lebanon, government stakeholders, UNICEF offices in the MENA region and/or those implementing TVET programming, and other relevant organisations and donors, such as the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, German Agency for International Cooperation, and ILO.

3.2. Evaluation Objectives

The main objective is to assess the impact of the Skills Training programme. The evaluation aims to establish whether, and the extent to which, the Skills Training programme affected employment, quality of employment, employability, social cohesion, and well-being.

3.3. Scope Of The Evaluation

3.3.1. Thematic Scope

The study examines the impact of the programme through the lens of four domains:

1. Employment and other labour market outcomes
2. Employability and other learning outcomes
3. Healthy lifestyles and social cohesion
4. Well-being

3.3.2. Geographic Scope

The Skills Training programme operates in seven governates and around 200 cadastres and the three IP programs cover six of the seven governorates. For the purposes of this evaluation, the quantitative component sampled from 25 cadastres across seven governorates. For the qualitative component, AIR worked with UNICEF's three IPs to select a subset of the quantitative sample in three governorates and cadastres, accordingly.

3.3.3. Chronological Scope

The evaluation spanned 25 months. After an initial desk review and discussions with partners, the evaluation team conducted a baseline assessment in April-July of 2022, shortly after the programme had finalized recruitment (March 2022) and during the initial phases of implementation for the 2022 cycle. The study included data collection at baseline (April-July 2022), midline (October-November 2022), and endline (May-August 2023), which provides a long enough duration to capture the medium-term impacts of the skills building program following programme completion. AIR, in partnership with Statistics Lebanon, implemented quantitative surveys at baseline (before youth participate in programme activities) to capture a benchmark of youth outcomes before the training and again at endline (roughly 12 months after treatment youth started programme participation) to understand any changes in youth empowerment, employment, employability, healthy lifestyles and social cohesion, and psychosocial well-being and self-efficacy. Qualitative data collection occurred at baseline, midline (about 4 months after youth started programme participation and around the training component's conclusion), and endline. This aligns with best practices for tracer studies in which a sufficient lag time from exit is required to see employment or work effects. Data collection covered all three IPs, with roughly proportional shares of the sample served by each IP.

3.4. Evaluation Questions

AIR streamlined the evaluation questions during the inception phase after reflecting on discussions from the co-creation workshops with UNICEF and KfW. The evaluation questions, which motivated instrument design, were developed based on the ToC and study objectives. The evaluation questions are organized by OCED-DAC criteria.

3.4.1. Relevance

1. To what extent are youth more likely to be employed or working in the sector in which they receive vocational training?
2. To what extent do skills training programme graduates meet the human capital needs of employers.
3. What are youths' and stakeholders' general perceptions and feedback on the skills training programme?

3.4.2. Impact

1. To what extent has participation in the skills training programme increased the employment amongst youth?
2. How has participation in the skills training programme affected the quality of employment amongst youth?
3. How has participation in the skills training programme affected employability and learning outcomes amongst youth?
4. How has participation in the skills training programme affected healthy lifestyles and social cohesion amongst youth?
5. To what extent has participation in the skills training programme affected psychosocial well-being and self-efficacy amongst youth?
6. How do programme impacts vary by gender and nationality?

AIR created an evaluation matrix to map the research questions to indicators (see Annex C). In the next section, we outline the key indicators that we used to investigate the constructs associated with each domain.

3.5. Key Concepts

During the co-creation, AIR worked with UNICEF and KfW to narrow the outcome domains to a set of key definitions and skills constructs. While employment was the primary focus of this evaluation, the skills programme had other important focuses on promoting soft skills and broader wellbeing, which are also subjects of this evaluation. In narrowing these definitions, we considered (1) the skills training programme goals in general; (2) the learning objectives of each module of the skills training programme's Life Skills package; (3) international donor standards for measuring employment in youth programmes; and (4) other youth development practitioner literature on measuring soft skills or life skills. For the domain on employment and labour market outcomes, we sourced primarily from the ILO's standard approach to measuring employment and support (ILO, 2018b and 2009). For the domains on employability, healthy lifestyles, and empowerment, we mainly sourced from UNICEF's MENA LSCE Conceptual and Programmatic Framework (UNICEF, 2017). Yet, we also aligned the definitions to the current thinking, practices, and psychometric literature around measuring soft skills – which implicates some changes in the UNICEF LSCE definitions purely for assessment purposes. The works cited on these measurement practices are also included in UNICEF's Measuring Life Skills evidence review publication (Hoskins & Liu, 2019). One such example is the Gates and Lippman publications which found that decision-making and problem-solving have the same underlying skill in a measurement context, so a more effective way to measure is together through combining into "higher-order thinking skills" (Gates et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2015). We present the definitions for our key concepts associated with each domain and the validated tool or scale we will use to measure it *(see Annex D)*. We have incorporated indicators based on these definitions into the evaluation matrix and designed the data collection instruments after carefully considering the indicators and associated definitions.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

For the assessment and overall practices, AIR followed the United Nations Evaluation Group Code of Conduct, which requires both an inclusive conflict- and a gender-sensitive approach to research and adherence to the 'do no harm' principle, as well as transparency, confidentiality, accuracy, accountability, and reliability, amongst other key principles. With regard to the protection of vulnerable individuals and communities, AIR respected and adhered to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Refugee Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as well as other human rights conventions and national legal codes that respect local customs and cultural traditions, religious beliefs and practices, personal interaction, gender roles, disability, age, and ethnicity. Further, AIR ensured that the evaluation complied with UNICEF's Procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children and UNICEF's Procedures for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection, and Analysis. Finally, the evaluation was guided by the ethical principles of openness, transparency, participation, independence, impartiality, credibility, responsibility, honesty, and integrity. Before data collection, the AIR evaluation team obtained approval letters from AIR's institutional review board (IRB). AIR's IRB has conducted expedited and full board reviews of research involving human subjects for more than 25 years. AIR is registered with the Office for Human Research Protections as a research institution and conducts research under its own Federalwide Assurance FWA00003952 *(see Annex F for further details on ethical considerations.)*

4. Research Design

AIR developed a rigorous, mixed-methods quasi-experimental evaluation design to help UNICEF Lebanon, KfW, and other stakeholders understand the impacts the Skills Training programme has had on targeted youth, which aspects of programme implementation were successful, and possible opportunities for improvement.

4.1. Evaluation methodology

AIR designed complementary quantitative and qualitative components to generate evidence on the four domains framing the evaluation. AIR conducted a youth survey at baseline and endline, reaching 1,048 participants and comparison youth at baseline, and 881 respondents at endline. We also conducted an employer survey and collected data from 77 employers at endline only. Across three rounds of data collection, AIR conducted 48 interviews with UNICEF, IPs, training institute staff, Directorate General of Vocational Training and Education (DGTVE) staff, and drop-out youth, in addition to 36 focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth (including 6 story circles), parents of youth, and training facilitators. AIR also conducted 2 Most Significant Change (MSC) analysis workshops with youth to review the stories of change and selected the two most significant stories. We outline our methodology in more detail throughout this section. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, this study was able to holistically analyse, triangulate, and further explore findings gleaned from the research. While the quantitative approach identified the statistics prevalence, significance, and differences in intended programme outcomes, the qualitative approach further explored these dimensions from the personal experiences of beneficiary youth, their families, programme trainers and employers, implementing partners, and key stakeholders.

4.1.1. Quantitative

AIR conducted an impact evaluation using a quantitative study of youth participating in the Skills Training programme and similar youth who do not receive vocational training. The evaluation draws on comparisons between youth who entered the programme and youth entering other, non-vocational programs administered by implementing partners. The core of the evaluation involved a baseline study and an endline study to measure the changes that occur within the two groups over time. All youth who participated at baseline were contacted again at endline to repeat the survey.

AIR used a similar quasi-experimental design to conduct a parallel impact analysis within the same programme evaluation by comparing treatment youth to youth who received no training (untrained comparison). In practice, this parallel set of analyses involves two comparisons:

- All treatment youth versus all comparison youth
- All treatment youth versus untrained comparison youth

The methodology is the same for both analyses, but only differ in how the evaluation defines the counterfactual. Specifically, the evaluation used a generalised difference-in-differences (DID) approach that allowed us to compare changes in outcomes for youth in the treatment group to changes in outcomes for (1) comparison youth and (2) youth who report no training at endline.

Two key features of the DID design were particularly useful for deriving unbiased programme impacts. First, we used pre- and post-treatment measures to "difference" out unmeasured, fixed (i.e., time-invariant) individual characteristics that may affect outcomes, such as youth education levels, geography, gender, age, and other important characteristics of youth. We compared employment, employability, well-being, and healthy lifestyle impact indicators for youth before and after the training for both those scheduled to enter the training (treatment group) and those not scheduled to enter the training (comparison group). This methodology allowed us to benchmark the change in the indicator against its value in the absence of the training. Second, we used the change in the comparison group as a counterfactual to account for general trends in the value of the indicators. For youth who were (1) in the comparison group or (2) in the comparison group but reported no training, we compared the impact indicators for all youth surveyed at baseline with the impact indicators for youth at endline.

4.1.2. Qualitative

The evaluation's qualitative component served both to explain and to triangulate the findings gleaned through the quantitative approach, as well as uncover any unintended outcomes. AIR used KIIs, IDIs, FGDs, and the MSC participatory method. Exploration of the broader set of youths' relationships, experiences, and environments was warranted to further understand the results, drivers and inhibiters of results, and perceived impact of the programme. Further, consulting with individuals surrounding the youth, who could observe behavioural or attitudinal changes, supported validation of the findings that emerged from use of the quantitative approach. The Skills Training programme's intended areas of impact, particularly life skills and social cohesion (e.g.,

communication and empathy), can be highly subjective and may not have the same meaning across age, gender, and cultures. As widely discussed in the life skills and psychosocial well-being measurement literature (Galloway et al., 2017; Kautz et al., 2014), these competencies – which include skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours – are influenced by young people's experiences, environments, relationships, and cultural contexts. At the same time, increases in these competencies can influence young people's relationships, environments, and experiences. For refugee youth and Lebanese youth, the diversity in programme beneficiaries' experiences undoubtedly will affect how young people interact with the programme material. The qualitative methods ensured that the team considered each of these aspects.

Key informant interviews. AIR began by conducting KIIs with the DGTVE to understand the TVET policy and quality standards for short-term courses offered by private providers and non-governmental organisations, understand how TVET policies affect refugee training offerings, and contextualise the background in which the Skills Training programme exists. AIR then conducted KIIs with UNICEF and IPs, who provided a deeper understanding of the programme model, its adaptation for refugees and non-refugees, and perceptions of its results. AIR also conducted KIIs with representatives from training institutes and employers, who have had direct contact with the youth population and who are well positioned to comment on youths' demonstrated knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to help validate quantitative findings. Further, these training institutes and employers helped yield deeper insight into the norms and rules that govern diverse young people's lives and that could be catalysts or barriers to the study's intended outcomes. KIIs used a semi-structured interview approach with a different protocol for each respondent group to ensure comparability so that each KII investigated the appropriate objective for the respondent, research questions, and the programme's intended areas of impact. This enabled the respondent to have a role in the direction of the conversation and also enabled the interviewer to obtain the most relevant information. In light of the COVID 19 pandemic, AIR remained flexible in its data collection approach and, when necessary, pivoted to virtual KIIs.

In-depth interviews. AIR conducted one-on-one IDIs with youth who dropped out from a course during midline. In doing so, we aimed to identify their perceptions of the programme, barriers to retention, and areas for improvement. IDIs are intensive interviews with individual respondents that provide an opportunity to perform a thorough investigation of challenges associated with retention in the Skills Training programme.[4]

Focus group discussions. AIR conducted FGDs with young people's parents or household members and youth. The FGDs investigated observer and youth perceptions of young people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices as related to their employability skills, social cohesion, healthy lifestyles practices, and other life skills, as well as contextualised their experiences relative to labour market outcomes. Focus group discussions are well suited to obtaining diverse perspectives on particular issues and offer the possibility of observing intragroup dynamics and norms during the discussion (Morgan, 1996). The group dynamic of an FGD also allows for building consensus, trust, and freedom of expression suited to gathering information on non-observable competencies and largely subjective impacts, such as behaviour, knowledge, sentiments, and feelings. FGDs comprised up to 6–8 participants. The evaluation team utilized both gender-segregated and integrated FGDs to examine dynamics between and within groups. The assessment used gender-separated FGDs (by males and females) to enable greater freedom of expression and create a deeper, more trusting environment to explore gendered issues regarding the Skills Training programme's implementation and impacts. Because one of the objectives of the programme is to build social cohesion between refugee groups by integrating different nationalities through trainings, some FGDs included a mix of refugee and non-refugee youth to observe group dynamics to support the researchers' understanding of social cohesion. Given the current COVID 19 situation in Lebanon and consultations with counterparts, Statistics Lebanon provided personal protective equipment and a physical configuration that allowed for at least 2-meter social distancing in accordance with World Health Organization guidelines.

Most significant change. The MSC methodology involved the collection of stories from beneficiaries as its principal form of data

4. AIR's inclusion of IDIs at midline relies on implementing partners' ability to access and recruit drop-out youth. If it is not logistically feasible to recruit drop-out youth, we will instead expand the number of KIIs within our sample.

collection. The stories of change, or data, were collected from the youths' perspectives and in their own words, to describe the most important change experienced in their lives as a result of the programme. Stories were analysed in a participatory approach through 'domains of change', a set of loosely determined areas for the process or initiative under investigation, and the most representative stories were selected (Davies & Dart, 2005). MSC helps us understand what 'impact' and 'significant change' mean for the Skills Training programme's youth participants and how this aligns with the programme's ToC, while adding depth to the findings from the quantitative approach. AIR's MSC process included (1) 6 story circles implemented with youth participants during the allotted time for FGDs and (2) 2 MSC analysis workshops (at endline). AIR collected youths' stories through six story circles (three for young men and three for young women) as an additional component of the youth participant FGDs. Trained, young facilitators first led youth in trust-building exercises and posed to the group the following question: "What has been the most significant change in your life since joining the Skills Training programme?" Each story circle participant was given several minutes to share their experience of change with their peers, encouraging exchange and building a shared understanding, while the facilitators recorded their story. Facilitators then led participants in an exercise to select the two stories deemed most representative of each story circle groups' experience of change. The facilitators video-recorded the two selected stories to be used in the analysis workshops so that workshop participants could hear the stories directly from their peers. Before entering the analysis phase, story circle participants voted on two representatives from their group to participate in the MSC analysis workshops. AIR held two MSC analysis workshops, each composed of 12 of the voted representatives. During the workshop, the participants (1) screened the 12 films – two per story circle – and selected the two most significant stories to represent the impact of the programme, and (2) analysed all 120 collected stories during the respective round. To analyse the stories, facilitators guided the youth in a pile-sorting process to aggregate the stories and identify the domains of change. With narrowed domains of change, facilitators guided youth to identify the enablers or inhibiters of change, as exhibited by each story. Because of the COVID 19 pandemic, the AIR evaluation team followed the same precautions as for FGDs. We provide an overview of the research objectives for each respondent *(see Annex E)*.

4.2. Sampling

This evaluation relies upon a baseline, rapid qualitative follow-up, and endline mixed methods sample. The quantitative design sampled youth at baseline and endline. The qualitative component included data collection at baseline, the rapid qualitative follow-up, and endline.

4.2.1. Quantitative

The quantitative sample relies on two main data sources. First, the quantitative study draws on a sample of treatment and comparison youth at baseline and endline. Second, the quantitative study draws on a sample of employers engaged with trained youth for an endline-only descriptive study.

Youth

AIR drew a random sample of youth aged 15-24 from programme registration records for the treatment group. These youth had completed all pre-training screening and implementers estimated that greater than 95% of these youth followed through to attend the training. AIR created the comparison group from UNICEF IPs' administrative records of youth who receive different kinds of programming, such as nutrition or sanitation programming, as well as child protection implementers who serve youth unaffiliated with the Skills Training programme. At endline, implementers' administrative records showed that fewer than 10 youth from the comparison group ended up receiving the intervention. Given the high training rate in the treatment group and the low training rate in the comparison group, this evaluation has a low risk of contamination. That is, the sampling strategy generated a treatment group who largely received the Skills Building training and comparison groups who largely did not receive the Skills Building training, even though some received other trainings.

The sampling strategy aimed to provide a diverse set of youth for the evaluation who would collectively cover the subgroups of interest. We outline the locations of the quantitative sample in Table 1. This sample covers all treatment youth who entered the programme and who agreed

to participate in the survey. It also covers a random subsample of comparison youth drawn from administrative lists. This sample therefore roughly reflects the overall geographic distribution of youth in the Skills Training Programme. The majority of the treatment group at baseline comes from the North and Baalbeck El Hermel governorates, with 30.8 percent coming from the other five governorates covered by this evaluation. Baalbeck El Hermel also provides a large share of the comparison sample (58.9 percent), but no other governorate represents more than 16 percent of the sample. The endline sample shows the same general geographic distribution amongst respondents. We outline the demographic characteristics of the quantitative sample in Table 2. The table presents the number of youth who are female or refugees, the two primary subgroups of interest. The baseline sample was slightly more Lebanese than refugee (55.6 percent vs. 44.4 percent) and slightly more female than male (52.9 percent vs. 47.1 percent). These shares did not change appreciably between the baseline sample and endline sample.

Table 1. Study sample by governorate

Study Arm	Governorate	Baseline	Endline
Treatment	Akkar	30	30
	Baalbeck El Hermel	139	84
	Beirut	9	4
	Bekaa	22	6
	Mount Lebanon	81	21
	North	212	165
	South	84	50
	Total Treatment	**577**	**360**
Comparison	Akkar	68	51
	Baalbeck El Hermel	269	351
	Beirut	9	3
	Bekaa	73	74
	El Nabatieh	0	1
	Mount Lebanon	29	23
	North	20	13
	South	2	5
	Total Comparison	**470**	**521**

Table 2 presents the sample of youth for the baseline and endline rounds of the evaluation. 61.7% of the baseline youth were available and willing to participate at endline (647 of 1048); these youth constituted the longitudinal share of our sample. An additional 234 comparison youth who had not completed a baseline were added at endline to ensure sufficient statistical power.

Table 2. Demographics of survey respondents

Study Arm	Gender	Nationality	Baseline	Endline	
				Continued Sample	*Added Sample*
Treatment	Male	Lebanese	197	58	3
		Refugee	99	77	0
	Female	Lebanese	192	81	3
		Refugee	89	108	0
	Total Treatment		**577**	**359**	
Comparison	Male	Lebanese	89	72	14
		Refugee	108	131	54
	Female	Lebanese	104	115	34
		Refugee	169	203	95
	Total Treatment		**470**	**521**	

Note. The numbers of youth by sex and refugee status omits those who did not respond these questions.

The evaluation sampling strategy augments the baseline sample to add additional youth to account for high non-response rates amongst youth who participated in baseline surveys. Table 3 shows the important difference between the added sample for endline only and those who completed both baseline and endline. While all youth were drawn at random from administrative lists for data collection, we see that the added sample is slightly older, more likely to be refugees, more likely to be living in an informal settlement, and having completed fewer years of school. These differences likely relate to the differences between youth who are willing to complete two rounds of surveys and those who are only willing to complete a single round of surveys. All subsequent analysis accounts for these observable, time-invariant characteristics.

Table 3. Comparison youth continuing in and added to the sample

Characteristic	Continued Sample	Added Sample	T-test
Female (%)	58.3	65.5	1.62
Age (Years)	19.1	19.7	2.16**
Refugee (%)	57.1	75.6	4.34***
Living in informal settlement (%)	35.8	47.2	2.59***
Years of schooling (Years)	9.8	8.4	2.86***
Married (%)	22.5	22.3	0.05
N	324	197	-

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.

The evaluation will make comparisons between the treatment group and two subsamples of the comparison for the impact analysis. Table 4 presents demographic statistics each group. The first set of three columns provides descriptive statistics and the results of t-test for statistical difference between treatment youth and all comparison youth, then the same set of values for treatment youth and untrained comparison youth, and then all comparison youth and untrained comparison youth. These results shows the differences between the treatment group and each analytical comparison group to be similarly statistically significant. The treatment group has a smaller share of females than the whole comparison group. The treatment group is older, has a smaller share of refugees, and had completed more years of schooling than either the whole comparison group or the untrained comparison youth. All of these findings align with the baseline evaluation of the Skills Training programme which found that there were meaningful preexisting differences between treatment and comparison youth. Further the roughly even distributions of male-female and Lebanese-refugee in the treatment group as well as the average level of education being less than secondary school completion suggests that the programme succeeded in reaching the most vulnerable youth.

Table 4. Summary of relevant analytical subsamples

Characteristic	Treatment vs All Comparison			Treatment vs Untrained Comparison			All vs Untrained Comparison		
	Treatment	All Comparison	T-test	Treatment	Untrained Comparison	T-test	All Comparison	Untrained Comparison	T-test
Female (%)	47.1	61.0	4.13***	47.1	52.8	1.32	61.0	52.8	2.06**
Age (Years)	20.9	19.4	8.62***	20.9	19.0	9.65***	19.6	19.0	1.59
Refugee (%)	32.0	64.1	9.85***	32.0	80.4	12.64***	64.1	80.4	4.37***
Informal settlement (%)	34.4	40.1	1.71	34.4	43.9	2.26***	40.1	43.9	0.95
Years of schooling (Years)	11.6	9.3	7.24***	11.6	7.4	11.59***	9.3	7.4	4.63***
Married (%)	19.7	22.5	0.97	19.7	24.8	1.42	22.4	24.8	0.67
N	360	521	-	360	214	-	521	214	-

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.

Having a sample size that is sufficiently large to detect small but meaningful effects of the intervention is vital. This analysis includes 577 treatment youth at baseline, 361 treatment youth at endline, 470 comparison youth at baseline, and 521 comparison youth. This sample will have an 80 per cent chance of detecting a minimum detectable effect size of 0.177 standard deviations for the impact on the probability of paid employment if we look at the entire sample, and 0.246 standard deviations if we restrict our analysis to girls or Lebanese participants. These effect sizes correspond to a relatively successful and positive effect on employment compared to typical impacts of vocational training programs (Chinen et al., 2016).

Attrition

Evaluation attrition occurs when youth who participated in baseline surveys are missing in the endline sample. Attrition can complicate an evaluation because it decreases the longitudinal sample size (leading

to less precise estimates of program impact) but can also introduce selection bias to the sample, which can affect the values of impact estimate and reduce its generalizability.[5] Attrition can occur either differentially or overall. Differential attrition takes place when treatment and comparison youth differ in the types of individuals who leave the sample. Differential attrition can bias analysis when it undoes baseline equivalence. Overall attrition involves the total number of youth who are missing at endline relative to the baseline sample. Overall attrition changes the youths' characteristics remaining at endline relative to the whole baseline sample. To the extent that the baseline sample represented the overall population of youth served by the Skills Training Programme, overall attrition can affect the generalizability of findings to the broader population. Smaller attrition of both types implies closer adherence to the original study design. In this section, we summarize baseline to endline attrition by providing the results of an attrition analysis for similarities at baseline between (1) treatment and comparison youth for all youth who remain in the sample at endline (differential attrition) and (2) all youth at baseline and the remaining youth at endline (overall attrition). We find some evidence of differential attrition between baseline and endline but not at levels to suggest that the original study design is compromised. We also find overall attrition to be higher from baseline to endline relative to what we would expect if attrition were at random.

Overall Attrition. This evaluation saw a roughly 36 percent attrition rate. The baseline sample either completed the survey again at endline (n=649), declined to participate (n=92), or could not be found (n=309). This level of non-response is common among surveys of youth (USAID 2023). In testing for overall attrition—a systematic difference between youth who participated at baseline and remained in the study and youth who participated at baseline but left the study—we find that there are more statistically significant differences between the two groups than would be expected at random. The full set of overall attrition results are presented in Annex G. We find that 9 of the 49 indicators we test show statistically significant differences at the 90 percent confidence level, whereas attrition at random would have yielded only about 5 indicators. Reassuringly, these statistically significant differences are relatively low in magnitude, with an average size of 0.17 standard deviations. Further, the overall attrition is lower amongst impact indicators, with 4 statistically significant differences out of 32 impact indicators.

Differential Attrition. We tested all demographic variables and impact indicators for differential attrition—a systematic difference between treatment and comparison youth who remain in the sample—and find moderate levels of differential attrition. Nevertheless, this differential attrition does not seem to compromise the impact study. These tests suggest that there are 11 statistically significant differences between remaining treatment youth and remaining comparison youth at the 90 percent confidence level. These differences are more than the 5 differences that would be expected to happen at random. However, this differential attrition is again concentrated among the time-invariant demographic characteristics such as age, refugee status, and level of education, with 6 statistically significant differences out of the 32 impact indicators. Lastly, the baseline equivalence tests showed higher rates of imbalance than we see remaining at endline. In other words, the differential attrition was amongst the youth who were less-well suited for the analysis using comparison youth as a counterfactual for treatment youth. The youth who completed a survey at both baseline and endline were more similar than the overall baseline sample.

Employers

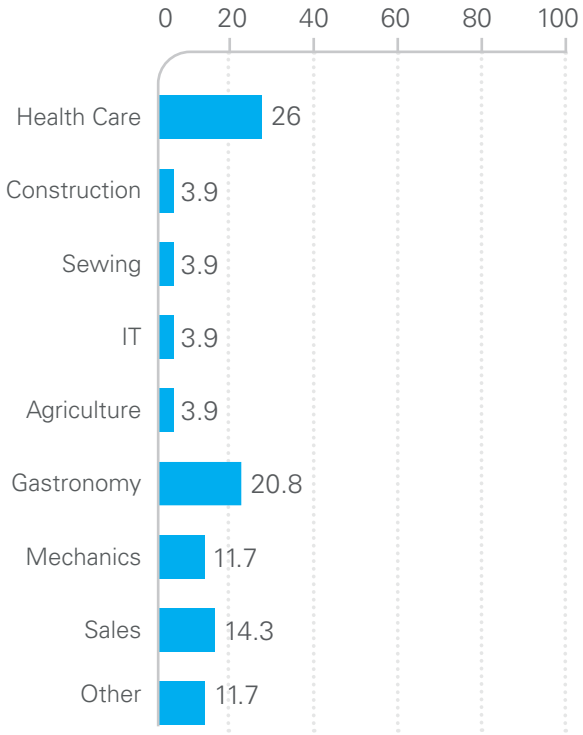
The evaluation relies on a population-level sample of employers who had partnered with the Skills Training Programme to provide on-the-job training to graduates of the Skills Training Programme. There were 157 employers whose information was available from administrative records. The evaluation team reached out to all employers and were able to complete the employer survey with 77 of these employers. Table 5 shows that the employer survey respondents' location generally reflected the youth survey respondents' locations with Baalbeck El Hermel being the most common (63 percent). The sectors most represented by the employer sample include health care (26.0 percent) and gastronomy/culinary (20.8 percent). Figure 3 shows the other sectors represented in the employer sample.

5. What Works Clearinghouse (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/documentsum.aspx?sid=19)

Table 5. Location & Sex

Governorate	♂ Male	♀ Female
Akkar	1	2
Baalbeck El Hermel	10	33
Beirut	0	0
Bekaa	8	15
Mount Lebanon	0	0
North	1	4
South	3	0
Total	23	54

Figure 3. Employer Sector



Firm sector N=77

4.2.2. Qualitative

From the quantitative random sample, AIR purposively sampled a selection of youth for the FGDs and MSC. The criteria were determined with UNICEF, KfW, and IPs and included nationality, vocational training 'group' (e.g., crafts, technician, etc.), participation in BLN, and participation in on-the-job training/CfW, amongst others. All youth-facing FGDs/story circles were gender-segregated, implementing two FGDs/story circles per governorate (one male and one female), to account for the complex, gendered perceptions regarding employment and mitigate any group social norms that may have hindered young women's or men's willingness to express themselves freely. Selecting a qualitative subsample of the quantitative random sample enabled us to triangulate quantitative and qualitative evaluation data, and to provide additional data sources for sampling. For the KIIs and FGDs with training institute staff, employers, training facilitators, and parents/households, AIR purposively selected participants in consultation with UNICEF and partners based on their proximity to the Skills Training programme, knowledge of youth participants, and location. We selected a mix of training institutes that delivered a variety of certified and uncertified courses. At the national level, we purposefully selected DGTVE, UNICEF, and IP staff in consultation with UNICEF Lebanon. In seeking participants for KIIs and FGDs, the team selected sufficiently diverse respondents to derive a range of viewpoints. AIR conducted a total of 48 KIIs (including 6 IDIs), 36 FGDs (including 6 story circles), and 2 MSC analysis workshops to review the stories of change and select the two most significant stories (see Table 6).

Table 6. Overview of qualitative sample

Estimated Dates	Baseline March 2022	Midline June 2022	Endline December 2022[6]
Qualitative Activities Detail	• 12 KIIs - 3 with IPs - 4 with UNICEF - 3 with training institute staff - 2 with DGVTE • 9 FGDs - 3 with parents or household members - 6 with youth (mixed participant and non-participant)	• 8 KIIs - 5 KIIs with IPs - 3 with UNICEF • 6 IDIs with youth who dropped out of the programme • 6 FGD-only sessions - 3 with training facilitators - 3 with parents or household members	• 22 KIIs - 3 with IPs - 4 with UNICEF - 3 with training institute staff - 12 with employers • 9 FGD-only sessions - 3 with parents or household members - 6 with non-participating youth • 6 FGD/story circle sessions with participant youth • 2 MSC workshops with participant youth (sub-group of story circle participants)

4.3. Indicator Measures

4.3.1. Quantitative

To estimate programme impact, AIR used primary quantitative data to understand key indicators of the labour market, employability, well-being, and health lifestyle indicators. This process entailed using a youth survey instrument to collect one round of baseline data on individual youths' characteristics in March-June 2022 and one round of endline data on the same indicators in June-September 2023, including employment status as defined in our key indicators and a set of skills constructs to assess key outcomes including employment, employability, healthy lifestyles and social cohesion, and empowerment. All employment outcomes aligned with the ILO's standardized definitions and measures. Following a mapping exercise during the inception period that focused on mapping the outcome definitions to the literature on soft skills measurement with youth and relevant tools, stakeholders decided to source our survey questions from internationally validated instruments and scales, including the Workforce Outcomes Reporting Questionnaire; YouthPower Action Youth Skills Assessment Tool; Emotional Regulation Questionnaire; and UNICEF's Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey to cover these four domains in addition to the demographic and background information. AIR and its partner Statistics Lebanon pre-tested all tools with youth in communities outside the study cadastres and conducted psychometric testing to validate the inclusion of these modules. This testing concluded that the soft skills modules were sufficiently difficult, properly differentiated high and low skills, and was reliable.

The evaluation team used survey software to minimise measurement error during data collection. Carefully designed survey frameworks allowed for automated skip patterns and built-in logic checks to ensure the quality of data. The evaluation team piloted all indicator measures prior to data collection and the survey framework adjusted prior to commencing fieldwork. The AIR team developed statistical code to perform additional data quality checks to verify data quality and performed analysis of preliminary data to identify emerging tools. The measures collected from respondents at endline aligned with the measures collected at baseline to ensure consistency in the indicators over time.

6. The endline data collection date will depend on final partner implementation plans.

4.3.2. Qualitative

AIR worked closely with Statistics Lebanon to collect data for the qualitative portion of this study. Statistics Lebanon recruited enumerators with experience collecting qualitative data and hired a balance of male and female enumerators. All qualitative data collection was digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in Arabic or English and then transcribed in English before analysis. The evaluation team carefully reviewed all transcripts to ensure the completeness and clarity of English translations.

4.4. Analysis

4.4.1. Quantitative

The AIR team used a difference-in-differences (DiD) technique to assess the impact of the Skills Training programme. DiD is an estimation technique that compares the changes over time for the treatment youth with the changes over time for comparison youth who do not have access to the Skills Training programme. This analysis provides the net impact of the Skills Training programme relative to whatever would have happened to youth had they not had access to the Skills Training programme. To provide a more robust set of findings, the evaluation also compares the changes over time for the treatment youth with the changes over time for comparison youth who do not receive any vocational or life skills training of any kind. This additional analysis provides the total impact of the Skills Training programme relative to youth receiving nothing. We use DiD because treatment and comparison youth had different observable characteristics before they started the trainings. By incorporating baseline data, the pre-training data will 'difference out' any pre-existing imbalance. The endline data measures the extent to which the treatment youths' outcomes improved more than those of the comparison youth.

The evaluation uses cross-sectional regression techniques to estimate the impact of the integrated package intervention pilot. We estimate the equation:

$$Outcome_{yt} = \phi + \alpha_1 \cdot TVET_y + \alpha_2 \cdot \mathrm{Post_t} + \beta_1 \cdot \mathrm{TVET_y} \cdot Post_t + \gamma_1 \cdot \mathrm{X_{yt}} + \varepsilon_{yt}$$

where the explanatory variables are defined as follows:

- ϕ is the mean value for the comparison group at baseline;
- $Outcome_{yt}$ measures the outcome of interest for youth y at time t;
- $TVET_y$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 if youth y received the TVET training and zero otherwise;
- $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 for endline observations
- X_{yt} is a set of background characteristics of youth y at time t; and
- ε_{yt} is an unexplained model error for youth y at time t.

The parameter of interest is β_1, which determines the impact on youth directly attributable to the Skills Training programme. The evaluation repeated this same estimation technique for the treatment youth versus comparison youth analysis and the treatment youth versus untrained comparison youth analysis.

4.4.2. Qualitative

The AIR team analysed data from KIIs and FGDs using the Nvivo qualitative software programme. We developed a preliminary coding structure aligned with the evaluation questions and primary topics included in the KII, IDI, and FGD protocols. We assigned multiple coders to analyse the data and compare coding across multiple transcripts to ensure inter-rater reliability. Coders made slight modifications to the coding structure during data analysis as new themes and findings emerged. The qualitative and quantitative teams met regularly to ensure triangulation across the two datasets, discuss emerging findings, and the overall story of the report. Qualitative researchers characterised the prevalence of responses and examined any differences across geographic and demographic subgroups (e.g., gender, nationalities, respondents). Based on the analysis, the team distilled key findings and themes related to the evaluation questions. MSC analysis was conducted through the MSC analysis workshops, using a participatory approach with youth, as previously explained. A participatory approach to MSC analysis ensured that the findings were youth-driven, providing an opportunity to compare them against findings from researcher-led analysis, ultimately strengthening a holistic set of findings while embedding positive youth development principles. Findings from the MSC analysis were triangulated with findings from the FGDs and KIIs, particularly to mitigate positivity bias, as well as to validate MSC domains of change, drivers and inhibiters of change, and final story selection. The final stories selected by the youth during endline are included in this report (and the others are included as Annex E) to highlight youths' voices on the most important impacts they experienced from the programme. These stories add rich information to complement the findings from the quantitative approach.

4.5. Methodological Limitations

AIR strived to deliver the most rigorous findings for this study. Nevertheless, the study faces some limitations. In this section, we describe those limitations, as well as risks to our study, and the approach the team took to mitigate those limitations and risks.

4.5.1. Quantitative

The quantitative design is limited by four main factors:

1. Selection Bias. Due to the likelihood that certain youth, such as the more motivated, sought out the Skills Training programme, we cannot rule out the possibility that the treatment group systematically differs from the comparison group in unobserved ways that evaluation tools cannot measure. This bias is particularly salient for the analysis comparing treatment youth to untrained comparison youth because that analysis involves selection of the treatment group into the Skills Training programme and then selection within the comparison group out of receiving other trainings. Our econometric approach involving baseline outcomes to benchmark pre-existing differences should mitigate this risk but cannot eliminate it altogether. Such risk of bias is present in all quasi-experimental designs and requires cautions in interpreting results subject to this risk, as there is a greater chance that statistical differences are driven by factors other than the training itself.
2. Duration of Impacts. The study covers roughly 1 year between baseline and endline. This duration means that the quantitative findings do not capture any long-term impacts and instead can only capture short-term to medium-term impacts. Thus, this study provides no evidence as to the long-term impacts of this evaluation. This limitation could lead us to understate the benefit of the programme. To the extent that the skills youth acquired from the training position them to succeed when the Lebanese economy recovers, the sustained impacts could be much larger.
3. Implementation Environment. The Lebanese economy has deteriorated over the course of the study. Thus, even a well-designed and well-implemented Skills Training programme would struggle to achieve impacts, especially for outcomes dependent on the broader market such as employment. The study may therefore fail to detect impacts on certain outcomes of interest even if the training successfully developed youths' employability.
4. Estimation Assumptions. DiD provides a valid estimate of programme impact as long as the parallel-trends assumption holds (Abadie, 2005; Angrist & Pischke, 2008). In other words, trends in outcome measures (e.g., probability of employment) for treatment and comparison youth should move in tandem in the absence of the programme. Since we do not have multiple rounds of pre-training data to test this

assumption, we rely on the study design that exploits the similar characteristics of treatment and comparison youth.

During the inception phase, the evaluation identified contamination bias and low take-up to be other possible risks to the study, but these possible risks appear to not have materialized. As discussed above, the number of youth from the comparison group who received the training is less than ten, which suggests that contamination did not occur. Low take-up also appears to not have posed a methodological problem because implementers reported that more than 95 percent of treatment youth entered the training and roughly 90 percent completed the training.

4.5.2. Qualitative

The qualitative approach includes three primary limitations: (1) a relatively limited geographic scope, (2) reporting bias amongst respondents, and (3) a small number of employers included in our sample. In terms of geographic scope, we were limited to visiting three cadastres within three governorates, even though the Skills Training programme is implemented across 200 cadastres within seven governorates in Lebanon, with a range of geographic, cultural, geopolitical, and socioeconomic characteristics. Although the AIR evaluation team purposively sampled to achieve variation, we were not able capture the full range of experiences amongst Lebanese and refugee participants. Further, participants were expected to present reporting bias in KIIs and FGDs/story circles. For example, the bias towards stories of success is a common challenge to an MSC approach. By integrating traditional qualitative methods, including KIIs and FGDs, with a host of other stakeholders, our qualitative design allowed us to capture negative experiences and challenges. Finally, we were only able to speak to a limited number of employers who represent a diverse range of vocations.

5. Findings

We now present the evaluation findings according to the research questions, which are organized according to two OECD/DAC criteria: relevance and impact.

5.1. Impact

This section focuses on the impact that the skills training programme had on participating youth—that is, how did key outcomes change as a direct result of the training. In this section, we present impact estimates in tables. These tables present separately to answer each research question. For the table of results under each research question, the first column presents the overall impact estimate of the training (treatment vs. comparison) and the second column presents the impact of the training relative to receiving nothing (treatment vs. untrained comparison). The next pair of columns present the treatment endline mean and sample size. The last pair of columns present the comparison endline mean and sample size. The results presented in the main body of the report are the impacts on the raw indicator, such as the percentage of youth or the number of hours. Annex I presents all impact results in standardized mean difference form, so that impacts on each indicator can be more comparable within this evaluation and to external evaluations. Annex H presents all impact results disaggregated by gender and refugee status.

5.1.1. To what extent has participation in the skills training programme increased the employment amongst youth?

EMPLOYMENT FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- The training improved youth employment relative to youth who participated in no trainings, but there was no impact relative to youth who participated in other organisations' trainings.
- The training increased the likelihood that youth would find formal employment.
- Employers typically were willing to hire a trainee, but only at lower wages than the CfW salary.

Qualitative Findings
- Youth largely felt that the programme had improved their employment prospects.
- However, programmatic and contextual barriers, such as delays in certification and limited jobs in the region, made it difficult for them to gain employment after the programme.

We find that the entire Skills Training Programme was effective at increasing overall employment relative to youth who received no training by about 10 percentage points, but that this impact disappears when accounting for the other vocational and life skills training programmes available to youth. This finding suggests that the programme improved youth's employment overall but may not have done so any more than another training programme would have. Nevertheless, the 0.22 SD magnitude of this impact relative to untrained comparison youth is somewhat large compared to similar trainings in other contexts (Chinen et al., 2016). Further, it appears that the employment results were concentrated in formal employment. Using a proxy measure of formal employment of being employed and receiving benefits, we find that the training increased formal employment by around 4 percentage points relative to all comparison youth or 6 percentage points relative to untrained youth. While the overall rates of formal employment are low at 8 percent for the treatment group, shifts toward formal employment suggest that the training was more effective at increasing the desirable types of employment that have better protections for workers. Table 7 provides all impact results for youths' employment outcomes. This table shows that the Skills Training Programme collectively improved youths' likelihood of employment by 10 percentage points but that it was not more successful than the alternative vocational and life skills trainings completed by some comparison youth.

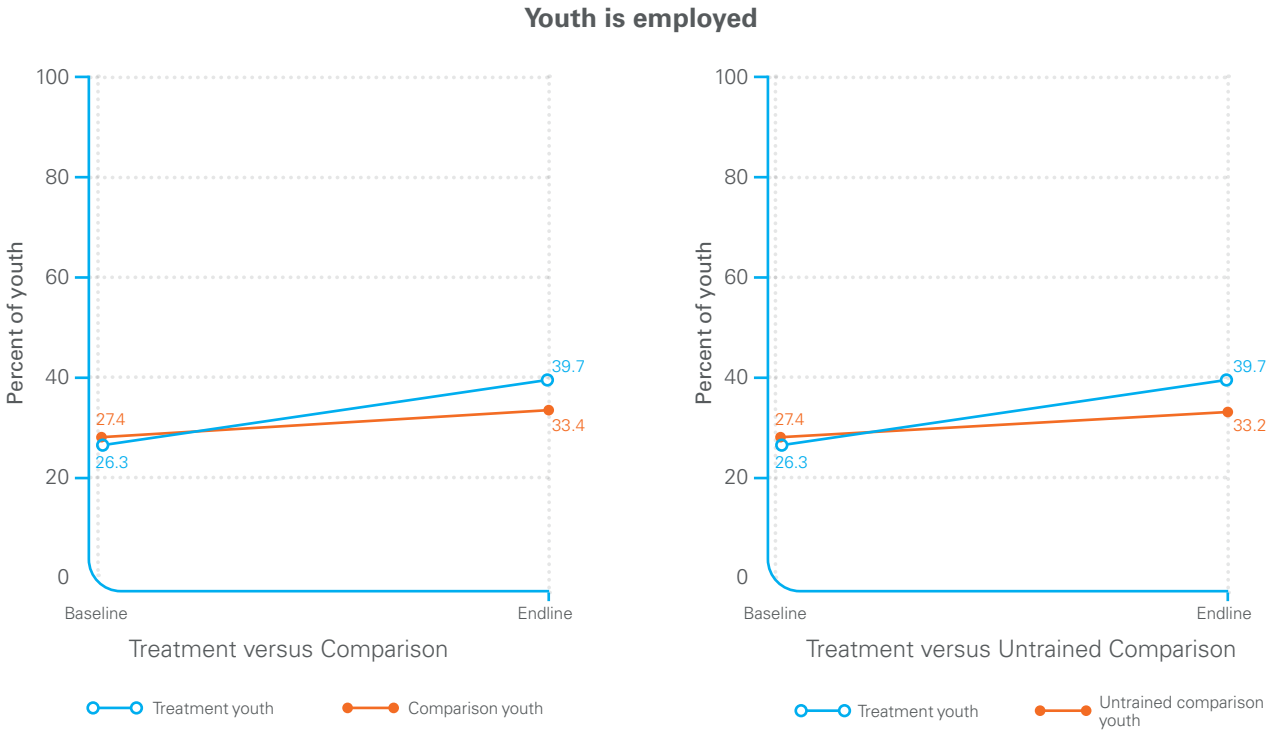
Table 7. Impacts on youth employment

Outcome	Impact – Treatment vs Comparison	Impact – Treatment vs Untrained	Endline Treatment Mean	Endline Treatment N	Endline Comparison Mean	Endline Comparison N
Employment						
Youth is employed	0.07	0.10**	0.40	360	0.33	521
Formal employment	0.04***	0.06***	0.08	360	0.03	521
Unemployment						
Unable to find work	0.04	0.13**	0.59	217	0.47	347
Looked For Job	-0.09***	0.00	0.54	217	0.46	347
Hours Looking For Job	1.56	0.37	8.38	117	8.62	159
Would Accept a Job	0.01	0.04	0.97	217	0.91	347

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Treatment vs. Comparison standard errors clustered at cadaster.

When we consider the overall employment rate between baseline and endline, we see that the treatment group improved by a larger amount than the comparison youth. Figure 4 maps the change in the employment rate for the treatment group (dark blue) versus the comparison group (light blue) on the left and the treatment group (dark blue) versus the untrained comparison group (light blue) on the right. All groups start at very low employment rates and increase, but only to employment rates lower than 40 percent. This low rate of employed youth reflects the broader economic challenges with unemployment common throughout the country. The increase for the whole comparison group (27.4 to 33.4 percent) was nearly the same as for untrained youth (27.4 to 33.2 percent).

Figure 4. Trends for employment



Baseline Treatment N=577: Baseline Comparison N=470; Endline Treatment N=360; Endline Comparison N=521; Endline Untrained Comparison N=214

Qualitative respondents also reported some increased employment opportunities. Youth who were able to secure jobs following the programme mostly reported either becoming self-employed or continuing with the employer that hired them during CfW. This was backed up by sentiments from employers who were actively involved in training youth as well, who said they hired beneficiary youth at their organization after completion of CfW (see Section 5.2.1 for further details on matched employment). One Lebanese male youth also highlighted that the skills training programme allowed youth to open their own businesses more successfully: *I know 3 participants from the same session who opened a salon together. Each one studied a different skill and they opened the salon together. It's really successful."* Other youth also shared, "*Some of them gained experience in professions, such as paint, sanitary. They gained experience and skills during the trainings, worked with a contractor and which pushed them to enhance their experience and were able to work alone or with some other employer."*

Nevertheless, many youth who graduated from the programme felt that their training did not improve their employment prospects. This was largely attributed to challenges in the design, relevance, and implementation of the programme. For example, some youth felt that the training courses were not broad or relevant enough to job opportunities in their trained industry. Others felt that the limited number of CfW days—which offers 40-80 days of experience, as opposed to the 1year of required experience by Lebanese employers—had hindered their ability to find employment after the programme. However, it is important to note that the programme is intended to help youth build the foundational skills and tools needed for possible future employment, and thus subsequent trainings and work experience do not fall under the programme's scope. Youth also noted that delays in receiving certificates have made it difficult for them to gain employment after the programme. According to IPs and youth, graduates of the programme should receive a certificate of attendance from UNICEF for completing the CBT training, as well as

a certificate of CfW employment from the employers. But FGDs and KIIs with beneficiary youth reveal there is some confusion as to which entity is responsible for providing the CfW certificates. Youth, who had asked for CfW certificates from employers, said employers told them the certificate was issued by UNICEF and that employers could not issue these certificates. This also created some confusion as to who youth were employed by during CfW, with many of them believing they were employed by UNICEF or UNICEF-affiliated organizations for their placement. Youth across genders and nationalities said that despite their CfW experience being highly desirable to employers, the lack of a certificate blocked them from being employed:

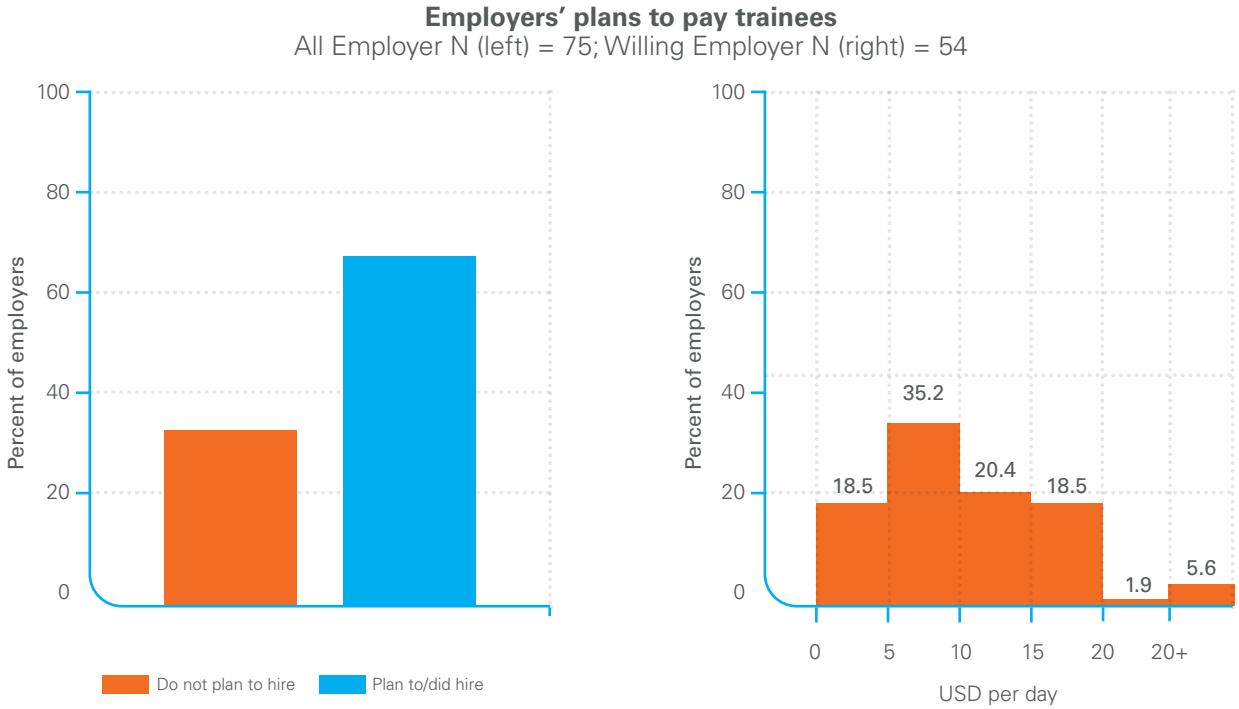
"I have applied to many jobs. One place requested a certificate noting that I have worked with UNICEF in food industry. He said that he will immediately hire me. I wanted to get a certificate, but they couldn't help me because UNICEF didn't permit giving certificates." Youth, Baalbek

This sentiment was supported by several youth in the Baalbek and Saida regions, who said they had not received "any certificate for this project" yet, despite having started the programme over a year ago. Some of these youth went on to say that without the certificate the programme had minimal impact on their employment and employability: "This didn't help me out when I finished. We cannot take further steps without a certificate. I didn't benefit from it at all." One female youth said she was nervous that jobs she had applied to would request a certificate that she could not provide, as she had yet to receive it from the programme:

"I want to work in the same major. In Baalbek, I couldn't find any, although I have applied to several hospitals but didn't have an opportunity... I have mentioned it in my CV, but they will certainly ask for a certificate later on and I don't have it."

Some youth also reported that CfW employers were less willing to hire them for long-term employment. One possible reason for this is that a majority of employers would only be willing to hire youth at a daily wage lower than what youth had received during CfW. Figure 5 shows the share of employers willing to hire youth on the left and, for those willing, the daily wage at which they would be willing to hire. Nearly one third of cash for work employers said that they were not looking to hire a trainee, with 56.5 percent citing no need for additional staffing. Of those willing to hire a trainee, over half of employers said that they would be willing to pay less than 10 USD per day. Taken together, these findings suggest that roughly one third of employers are unwilling or unable to hire (30.3 percent), roughly a third would hire a trainee if they took a pay reduction relative to cash for work (53.7 percent of 69.3 percent), and the remaining third would hire the youth at or above the salary paid for CfW. Youth often reported that they received job offers with unsuitably low pay and could not find employment for this reason (see Section 5.1.2. for further details on quality of employment and compensation).

Figure 5. Employers' willingness to hire and pay trainees



Left panel includes all employers. Right panel includes only those willing to hire a trainee

The evaluation also detects some differences in employment outcomes for youth who are unemployed. Table 7 shows that compared to unemployed youth who received no training, youth who received the Skills Training Programme were 13 percentage points more likely to be unemployed because they were unable to find a job. This finding suggests that those trained youth were unemployed for reasons out of their control, rather than reasons such as returning to school or caring for family members. This finding could be driven, in part, by the selection bias introduced through youth choosing to enter the program, since those willing to search for vocational training might be inherently more likely to search for a job. Concerningly, the evaluation also detects that among unemployed youth, the trained youth were 9 percentage points less likely to have searched for a job during the previous four weeks than all unemployed comparison youth. In fact, more than half of the unemployed treatment youth reported that they had not searched for a job over the previous 4 weeks, which suggests low expectations for eventually finding employment.

Though many youth said they had low expectations for being employed, they also recognized that the limited employment prospects were likely a result of the wider social and economic challenges in Lebanon. For example, the current political and economic context was shrinking the job market, preventing youth from gaining employment:

"The situation has changed. In the past, there were lots of vacancies but nowadays, it's not the same anymore. Lots of companies shut down due to the crisis and they're all dismissing employees and workers in order to cut costs and be able to survive."

Moreover, women, particularly refugee women, said that community perceptions and discrimination against female labor barred them from seeking employment or contracts in the industry they were trained in:

"When an apartment needs to be painted and you tell them that you can paint, they will not surely accept that. It's not about my parents but the community. Is a girl painting my house? Shall I hire a girl to paint my house? This is a man's job and people don't accept that."

A few female youths also said their families objected to the employment opportunities they were given, either because they required relocating to Beirut or because their families did not approve of the nature of the work.

As such, while the programme does improve the chances of some youth being employed, others have faced programme and contextual obstacles that have had no or negative impacts on employment prospects.

5.1.2. How has participation in the skills training programme affected the quality of employment amongst youth?

QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- There are limited indications that the quality of improvement improved.
- The training increased the hours worked per day by about 1.3 hours per day, to roughly 8.3 per day.

Qualitative Findings
- Youth were largely dissatisfied with the pay, hours, and overall quality of potential jobs compared to the standards within CfW.
- Female youth reported receiving lower salaries than their male counterparts.

The impact analysis shows limited results for the quality of employment but does clearly show a marked increase in the number of hours worked by employed youth (see Table 8). Treatment youth report working between 1.29 and 1.90 more hours per day than the comparison or untrained comparison youth, respectively. While increasing the number of hours worked can bring benefits of increased income for hourly workers, it appears to not be the case as employed youth report being overworked. Also, the model fails to detect any impact on the employed youths' monthly income; that is, the evaluation cannot conclude whether pay increased or decreased. Treatment youth reported working an average of 8.33 hours per workday over the previous month. The CfW program aimed to have youth working 7 hours per day with one hour of break, so increasing the post-CfW workday appears to be a negative finding.

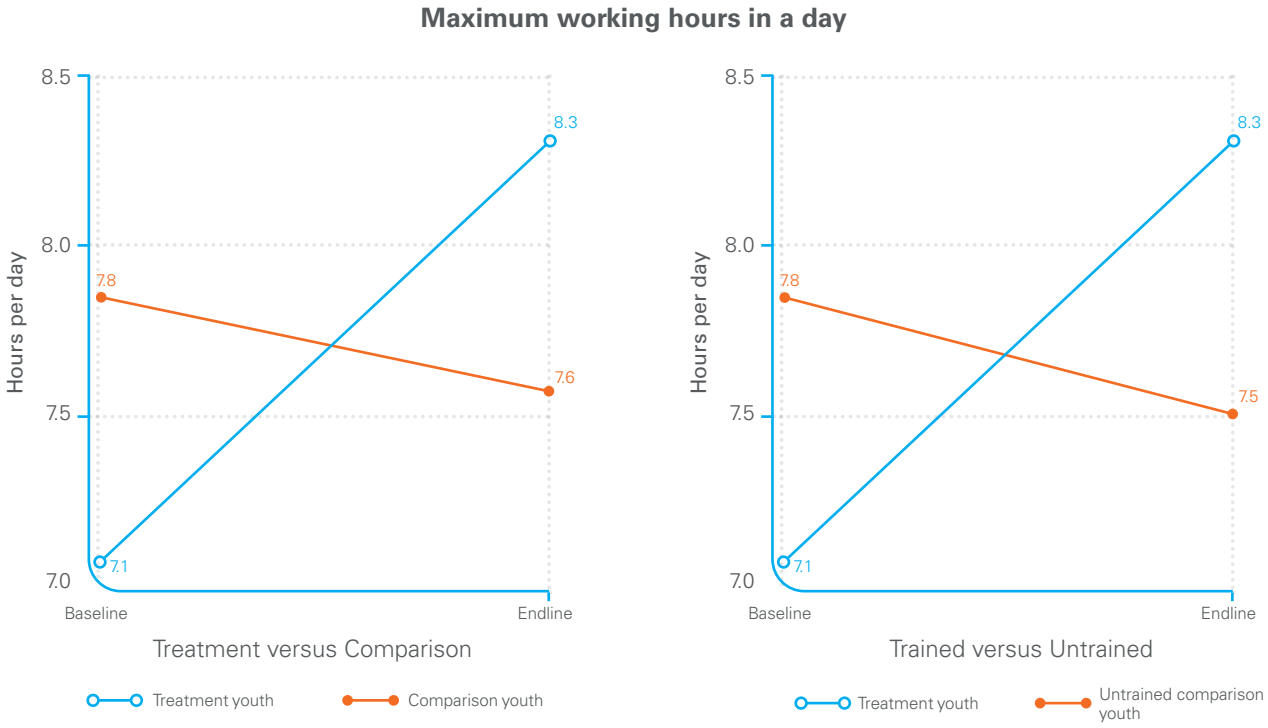
Table 8. Impacts on youth employment quality

Outcome	Impact – Treatment vs Comparison	Impact – Treatment vs Untrained	Endline Treatment Mean	Endline Treatment N	Endline Comparison Mean	Endline Comparison N
Has a job with regular hours	0.06	0.14	0.69	98	0.59	144
Works at least full week	0.03	0.06	0.69	101	0.74	109
Maximum working hours in a day	1.29***	1.90**	8.33	110	7.60	115
Take home pay (log LBP, monthly)	-0.38	-0.05	14.14	110	13.62	148
Received non-salary benefits from employer	0.13	0.22*	0.40	68	0.18	85
Satisfied with employment	0.04	0.01	0.64	143	0.53	174
Can only satisfy household expenses	0.12	-0.03	0.28	143	0.43	174
Can only satisfy personal expenses	-0.01	0.02	0.48	143	0.45	174
Can satisfy both household and personal expenses	0.03	0.02	0.17	143	0.26	174

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Treatment vs. Comparison standard errors clustered at cadaster.

Treatment youth underwent a sharp increase of 16.9 percent in the average number of hours worked per day relative to baseline, whereas comparison youth saw a slight decrease of 2.6 percent. Figure 6 shows the changes in the typical maximum working hours in a day over the previous four weeks for treatment youth (dark blue) and comparison youth (all and only untrained, light blue). Comparison youth's decline from 7.8 hours per day to 7.6 hours per day aligns with the overall deterioration of the labor market over the course of the study. However, treatment youth saw the opposite trend, with the maximum working hours increasing from only 7.1 hours per day at baseline to 8.3 hours per day at endline. As noted above, youth suggested that their working hours may have overshot their desired workday length so that increased working hours could be an indication that employment quality got worse.

Figure 6. Trends for hours worked



Note: Baseline Treatment N=96; Baseline Comparison N=70; Endline Treatment N=110; Endline Comparison N=115; Endline Untrained Comparison N=115

There are limited indications that employment quality may have improved. The only improvement the impact model detected was a sizable impact on the likelihood that treatment youth receive non-salary benefits relative to youth who receive no training. Table 8 shows that employed treatment youth were 22 percentage points more likely to having non-salary benefits such as paid vacation, transportation benefits, or health care. This impact translates into a 0.53 SD effect. While improving access to benefits suggests a move toward higher quality employment for youth, there were no other statistically significant impacts suggesting improved quality of employment.

As previously highlighted, youth were largely dissatisfied with the pay, hours, and overall quality of potential jobs compared to the standards within CfW (see Section 5.1.3 for further details). Many youth felt exploited in the number of hours and limited pay they received when they accepted job offers; a significant number of youth also reported turning down job offers given the sub-par benefits and compensation. Compensation was a key factor in whether youth accepted or rejected job offers.

Many youth reported turning down jobs, or feeling exploited and overworked in the job they accepted due to the low salary. For example, one male youth said, "There are jobs in Saida, but the salaries are really bad. They're not paying suitable salaries. I'm not asking for a really high salary, but the minimum required." Youth noted salaries in agriculture and restaurant work were particularly low: "Working in restaurants is slavery! They make the employee work for 12 hours and pay $200 or $250 [per month], including transportation, break, and food. $250 at this current time are not enough. Transportation fees cost around $80-$100." Many other youths echoed these sentiments, arguing that the available jobs did not pay a living wage. Among treatment youth at endline, the average monthly salary was 9 million LBP (roughly 90 USD) per month, and only 5.1 million LBP for those employed in the agricultural sector. According to a recent ILO report, these rates are higher than the average monthly wages (2.28 million LBP) earned in individuals' primary jobs in Lebanon in 2022 (ILO, 2022). However, the mean 2022 wage rates were based on an average 41-hour workweek, and do not reflect the extended hours some beneficiary youth may have had to work in

their sector (ILO, 2022). Further, there is a wide range in the cost of living across regions served by the Skills Training Programme, so the same salary better covers one's costs in some areas than others.

As discussed in Section 5.2.1, most employers said that they would only be willing to hire CfW trainees at a daily rate lower than the 10 USD per day that youth had been receiving during CfW. In addition to this, youth also discussed disparities in employment quality and benefits between genders and nationalities. Specifically, female youth respondents highlighted their salary was far lower than their male counterparts. While a number of factors could play into pay disparities, female Lebanese respondents speculated it was due to a widely held community stereotype that men have more responsibilities and are the primary caretakers or breadwinners in the family:

"The male's salary always exceeds the female's salary. I have no idea about the reason behind that, but they say that the male is taking care of a family. It would be the same job for women though. He earns a better salary than she does. There is no justice, no equality."

For example, one youth respondent said their employer paid male employees twice as much as her, despite her working more hours:

I have worked as a cashier in a restaurant for a while. I used to work for 9 hours while the guy who takes the next shift worked for 7 hours. He used to earn double the salary. We all know that it's normal for them. The guy always has more responsibilities therefore he earns more. – Youth, Female Lebanese

Refugee and Lebanese respondents both highlighted that refugee status and nationality play a significant role in the quality of employment; with refugees experiencing less pay and benefits than their Lebanese counterparts. Syrian and Lebanese youth both said that, while Syrian youth may have more employment opportunities given their willingness to work for less pay, the type and quality of employment tended to be exploitive. Even highly skilled individuals in the health industry faced disparities in operating businesses, as one female Lebanese youth pointed out:

"In social differences, you're talking about refugees. I know a refugee who has studied dentistry and finished his studies. He works in a clinic, his salary is very low, his income is very low, no one even knows him. On the other hand, a Lebanese guy has a clinic, isn't in need, he earns more money, his prices are much higher and people really know him. There is a difference socially, among refugees and Lebanese people."

Overall youth largely felt that, despite the increase in non-salary benefits, the programme had little to no benefit on improving the quality of employment prospects after graduation. These findings indicate that contextual and societal factors are likely limiting the programme's potential to improve employment quality. Additionally, the reported increase in non-salary benefits for youth corresponds to recent sector reports, which indicate employers in Lebanon have been ramping-up social benefits to compensate for low wages (ILO, 2023).

5.1.3. How has participation in the skills training programme affected employability and learning outcomes amongst youth?

EMPLOYABILITY & LEARNING OUTCOMES FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- Impacts on employability are mixed, with no overarching implications for overall employability.

Qualitative Findings
- Youth self-reported feeling more ready for employment following the Skills Training Programme and said they gained confidence and practical experience through CfW.

The impact analysis finds small, mixed effects of the Skills Training Programme on treatment youths' employability (see Table 9). The impact results appear more modest than the qualitative findings, perhaps in part because employability is a rather difficult construct to measure, and these three outcomes may not have captured all the dimensions of job-readiness that youth felt changed during the programme. There is a 0.25-point impact on the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) Score suggesting that the training improved youths' employability. However, the analysis also suggests that the training reduced youths' creativity on the magnitude of 0.66 points on the Creativity Score. Importantly, neither the impact on the HOTS Score nor the Creativity Score are particularly large, at 0.19 SD and-0.17 SD respectively. Overall, these results combine to suggest no transformative impacts on youths' employability. Qualitative findings, as described below, showcase youths' and parents' perceived impacts of the program on interpersonal communication, however the impact analysis fails to detect any impact on the Cooperation and Communication Score.

Table 9. Impacts on employability

Outcome	Impact – Treatment vs Comparison	Impact – Treatment vs Untrained	Endline Treatment Mean	Endline Treatment N	Endline Comparison Mean	Endline Comparison N
HOTS Score	0.25**	-0.07	10.64	360	10.69	521
Creativity Score	-0.40	-0.66**	3.01	360	3.30	521
Cooperation and Communication Score	-0.24	-0.13	11.55	360	11.50	521

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Treatment vs. Comparison standard errors clustered at cadaster.

Most youth self-reported feeling more ready for employment because of their participation in the skills programme. Specifically, youth cited the applied experience gained during CfW, the job-seeking and interviewing behavior learned during the life skills component, and the content and technical skills acquired during CBT. That said, some youth felt as though they did not have enough time to hone their skills during the programme and mentioned the lack of certification and employers' requirement for them to have up to a year of relevant experience remained barriers to finding a job.

Youth consistently mentioned that the practical experience of CfW made them more ready for employment. One implementing partner referred to CfW as a "simulation for the regular work environment" which was a sentiment widely shared by youth themselves. One youth from Baalbak explained why CfW was the most useful part of the programme: "It's real work. We're working in the field." In addition to CfW, youth mentioned learning how to apply and interview for jobs during the life skills component, including details like how to prepare your CV, how to send professional emails, how to use Microsoft applications like excel and PowerPoint, and even what to wear in a professional setting. To this end one youth reported learning the importance of, "Committing to time when we have the interview, be self-confident and speak in a polite manner. We shouldn't show any bad behavior… how to answer in a way that would enable us to be accepted."

Even some youth who dropped out of the skills programme shared positive perceptions of their peers' employability: "[Youth] are having employability skills in order to know how to apply for a job, how to deal with people they work with. These 40 days of CfW are training that would strengthen them to face

obstacles when applying to any job later on and giving them really strong experience." Some employers, too, corroborated the self-reported employability of youth, giving positive feedback on the work ethic and employability of youths that completed the programme: "They didn't have experience at all, but they had consciousness sand competencies. Once we assign them a task, they just do it till the end. They ask [questions] until they accomplish it successfully."

In terms of content learned and technical skills acquired, youth gave examples of specific knowledge and skills learned in their respective sectors (cooking/food preparation, sanitation, agriculture, painting, and so forth). Both youth and their parents said that youths were applying these practical skills at home and would be prepared for jobs in the sector even if they had not found one yet. A male refugee youth from Tripoli shared, "In case I don't find a job, I can always be able to repair sanitary at home. It's a good profession, gaining more experience" while a male Lebanese youth from Akkar said, "I can install a water tank for my mom! I know how to install a water tank and fix many things at home. I can work in a sanitation accessory shop; I know all the names. I can work as a cashier if willing to search for a job. It really benefited me." Other youths and parents had similar observations, noting how the newly acquired skills were useful both at home and for future potential employment.

For the youth who still felt unprepared for the labor market upon completing the skills programme, most either reported the duration of the programme was too short for them to sufficiently hone their skills or that employers required a certificate or proof of sustained relevant experience (up to a year) that precluded them from securing jobs. Of course, the economic environment and the limited job opportunities available are also important to consider in the context of youths' self-perceptions of employability.

5.1.4. How has participation in the skills training programme affected healthy lifestyles and social cohesion amongst youth? How has participation in the skills training programme affected healthy lifestyles and social cohesion amongst youth?

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- Employees experienced a sharp decrease in their empathy, possibly suggesting the outside nationalistic narrative took hold more in youth interacting with other groups more.
- Youth reported more frequent and more positive interactions with the opposite gender.

Qualitative Findings
- Youth, parents, training facilitators and implementing partners reported increased camaraderie across genders and nationalities, new friendships, and positive social interactions during the Skills Training Programme.

The impact of the training on youths' healthy lifestyles and social cohesion suggest that it increases the frequency and positivity of interactions between youth of different genders and nationalities, but there may be some negative, unintended effects to reduce youths' overall empathy. The impact analysis for social cohesion, in Table 10, shows that treatment youth were 11 percentage points more likely to have daily interactions with youths of other nationalities and 10 percentage points more likely to have daily interactions with youths of the opposite gender relative to comparison youth who did not participate in any training. The findings also show that treatment youth were 6 percentage points more likely to report that their most recent interaction with the opposite gender was positive. These findings collectively show that the Skills Training Programme improved the frequency of interactions between youth compared to if they hadn't participated in any training and improved the quality of employment relative to all comparison youth.

Table 10. Impacts on healthy lifestyles and social cohesion

Outcome	Impact – Treatment vs Comparison	Impact – Treatment vs Untrained	Endline Treatment Mean	Endline Treatment N	Endline Comparison Mean	Endline Comparison N
Empathy Index Score	-1.93***	-1.80***	20.13	360	21.78	521
Had Daily Interactions with Same Nationality	0.05	0.07	0.78	360	0.67	521
Had Positive Interactions with Same Nationality	0.00	-0.03	0.87	346	0.84	487
Had Daily Interactions with Other Nationalities	0.06	0.11**	0.51	360	0.31	521
Had Positive Interactions with Other Nationalities	-0.01	-0.05	0.87	312	0.84	378
Had Daily Interactions with Same Gender	0.05	0.06	0.79	360	0.69	521
Had Positive Interactions with Same Gender	-0.01	-0.02	0.91	354	0.90	491
Had Daily Interactions with Other Gender	0.04	0.10**	0.36	360	0.26	521
Had Positive Interactions with Other Gender	0.06**	0.04	0.84	273	0.75	325
Respect for Diversity Index	-0.55	-0.18	23.06	360	23.01	521
Uses a negative coping strategy	0.02	-0.02	0.42	360	0.43	521
Uses a positive coping strategy	0.03	0.07	0.45	360	0.32	521

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Treatment vs. Comparison standard errors clustered at cadaster.

Many youths, parents, training facilitators, and implementing partners observed positive changes in youth's lifestyles and social cohesion over the course of the life skills programme Specifically, respondents observed increased camaraderie across genders and nationalities, new friendships, and positive social interactions. Youth who did not participate in the skills training programme were more likely to report instances of negative coping strategies in their communities, such as drugs, theft, and occasionally even suicide. A small minority of youth and parents did not observe any changes in lifestyle or social cohesion, which they attributed to the short duration of the programme rather than the programme itself being ineffective.

Many youth and training facilitators reported collaboration and increased social cohesion over the course of the skills programme. As one training facilitator explained, "At the start, the students would be divided into groups, Palestinians sitting all alone, same thing for Lebanese and Syrians who are also sitting all alone. We don't set the seating. They are always sitting that way. After a period of time, you feel they are more connected, more engaged, they all sit together." Many others, including a male refugee youth from Tripoli, corroborated this experience: "When we started working together and met each other in a better way, I feel that the nationality obstacle or language [was] broken! We have broken that obstacle after one or two weeks." Youths reported working "hand in hand" towards a shared objective and building a sense of camaraderie along the way. Employers, too, observed youths' good teamwork and ability to work under pressure. To this end one employer said, "The good thing is that they come already understanding the meaning of teamwork, they have very good communication, working under pressure. Many times, they are under pressure, they know how to manage it."

Parents and youths overwhelmingly reported an appreciation for the opportunity to interact with peers and build friendships, with some saying the programme built their confidence and encouraged them to be more outgoing. The changes in social behaviour were more apparent for females, both Lebanese and Syrian. As one female refugee youth from Tripoli reflected, "My personality got stronger. I used to be very shy. I felt that, during this training, my personality got stronger and of course, there was a financial return." Countless other female youth reported similar stories, such as this female from Baalbek: "I was not sociable at all. I am really different now." Parents corroborated these accounts, saying their children (females in particular) were more "courageous", more "open", and generally more likely to go out and do things or help with tasks at home. While social changes were more apparent for female youths, male youths, too, observed changes in themselves. A Lebanese male youth from Baalbek told us, "Because I met lots of people, communicated with them, so I think I became more confident." Indeed, many youths attributed their increased confidence to the repeated opportunities for social interaction during the skills programme.

However, findings from youth surveys also very strongly point toward the programme having negative effects on youths' overall empathy. Table 10 shows that the training caused youth to have between a 1.93 to 1.80 point lower Empathy Index Score, which corresponds to moderately large impacts between-0.46 SD and-0.43 SD. While it may seem paradoxical to have more frequent and positive interactions between youth and less empathy, the qualitative evidence presented in Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 highlights youths' frustration with going through a full set of trainings but still being out of work. These tensions may also be exacerbated by an increasingly acerbic national rhetoric regarding nationality.

5.1.5. To what extent has participation in the skills training programme affected psychosocial well-being and self-efficacy amongst youth?

WELL-BEING FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- Impact findings suggest that the training did not improve youths' psychosocial wellbeing.

Qualitative Findings
- Parents, implementing partners, and youth themselves consistently observed positive changes in youths' sense of empowerment and psychosocial well-being, including more optimism and confidence.

Overall, the impact analysis finds the programme had limited impacts on youths' psychosocial well-being and self-efficacy. Table 11 presents impact results for this set of indicators. The only statistically significant result is a-0.39 point impact on the Self-Management Score. The magnitude of this impact is moderately large, at-0.28 SD, and could be driven by a similar dynamic as the negative result found above for empathy. The Self-Management Score primarily captures youths' ability to control their emotions. To the extent that youth are frustrated and depressed by their ongoing unemployment and the overall situation in the country, as commonly reported, they may feel stronger emotions that they find more difficult to regulate.[7] However, this finding only applies when comparing treatment youth to untrained youth, which suggests that this finding could be driven in part by selection bias.

Table 11. Impacts on well-being

Outcome	Impact – Treatment vs Comparison	Impact – Treatment vs Untrained	Endline Treatment Mean	Endline Treatment N	Endline Comparison Mean	Endline Comparison N
Self-Concept Score	0.06	-0.16	16.35	360	16.31	521
Self-Management Score	-0.22	-0.39***	6.28	360	6.37	521

Note. Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Treatment vs. Comparison standard errors clustered at cadaster.

7. UNICEF Lebanon. (2022, January 28). Searching for Hope UNICEF Lebanon | 2022; A Grim Outlook for Youth as Lebanon Teeters on the Brink of Collapse. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/7746/file

Qualitatively, parents, implementing partners, and youth themselves consistently observed positive changes in youths' sense of empowerment and psychosocial well-being. Specifically, youth displayed more optimism and happiness, more confidence, and a sense of financial empowerment and feeling productive. A smaller number of youths also self-reported greater discipline and control over their emotions.

In terms of optimism and general happiness, one implementing partner commented, "We have heard the feedback from youth…it really changed us, it really changed our pessimistic thinking to the optimistic thinking, self-reconciliation, good communication, accepting the other, violence-free communication. We were witnessing that at the end of the course." Parents and youths echoed these sentiments, with parents repeatedly saying youths were in a "better mood" and had more energy and interest to do things. Several parents reported positive changes in sleep patterns: for example, one refugee parent from Tripoli shared, "…it has empowered them, morally… they wake up early because they have work, and they have some tasks to do. They're not sleeping all the time anymore." Indeed, several youths (of both genders and nationalities) reported feeling depressed before starting the training. Unfortunately, for some, the changes in mood ended when the skills program ended: a parent from Akkar shared, "I felt that he was very happy at work. His mood changed, better psyche. He was leaving happy, coming back happy, full of energy" but when the training ended and he did not find employment, reverted to old behaviors of sleeping a lot and feeling depressed.

In addition to feeling happier and more hopeful, parents, implementing partners, and training facilitators reported an increase in youths' sense of financial empowerment and general productivity. Parents frequently made comments like "My daughter was happy because she was able to help me, financially I mean" (parent, Tripoli) and "They were earning money, buying whatever they want. They feel less stress that way" (parent, Akkar) and "Fatima had a small amount of money, but this made her understand her real value. She's having a training and earning money, the first step to work and be productive" (parent, Baalbak). Beyond earning money during CfW, some youths—especially females—demonstrated a new desire for employment following their participation in the skills program. One parent from Tripoli shared, "My daughter was not studying or leaving [home] or going out. She didn't have any friends. She was a housewife. Once she enrolled in this program, she wanted to find a job. She was more open. She used to clean the house, wipe the floor but not anymore. She wants to find a job now instead of house chores." Lastly, implementing partners and training facilitators noted youths' increased sense of accomplishment: one gave an example of a youth proudly reporting that they had fixed something at home that no one had been able to fix before, and another reported youths' feelings of pride contributing to a heating project in Baalbak-Hermel that warmed poor families' homes.

A smaller number of youths, of both genders and nationalities, reported improvements in discipline and emotional control. Regarding discipline, which is an employability skill, a male Lebanese youth from Baalbak shared, "I learned that one should be really disciplined in such work, in addition to interaction with the employer…One should come one time, work well, take break for 15 minutes." Others made similar comments and indicated that the skills programme required a level of discipline that they were previously unfamiliar with. In terms of emotional control, the youths that reported improvements tended to say they learned how to control their anger and respond to frustrating situations in an appropriate way. For example, a male refugee youth from Tripoli shared, "we learned how to control our reactions, in a way that wouldn't harm ourselves and not hurt the other person. I was really applying that in my life, with my parents and my friends. Whenever there is a case and I might have a negative reaction, or anger, I think over and over, assess the situation: is that worth such reaction? Is my reaction exaggerated?" Similarly, a male youth from Saida said he was now able to respond rationally when something bad happened in his life. Female youths, too, observed changes in their levels of emotional control, but tended to focus more on patience and communication one's emotions rather than managing anger: a female refugee youth from Tripoli reported that the lifeskills training helped her be more patient and communicate better with her children.

5.1.6. How do programme impacts vary by gender and nationality?

DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS

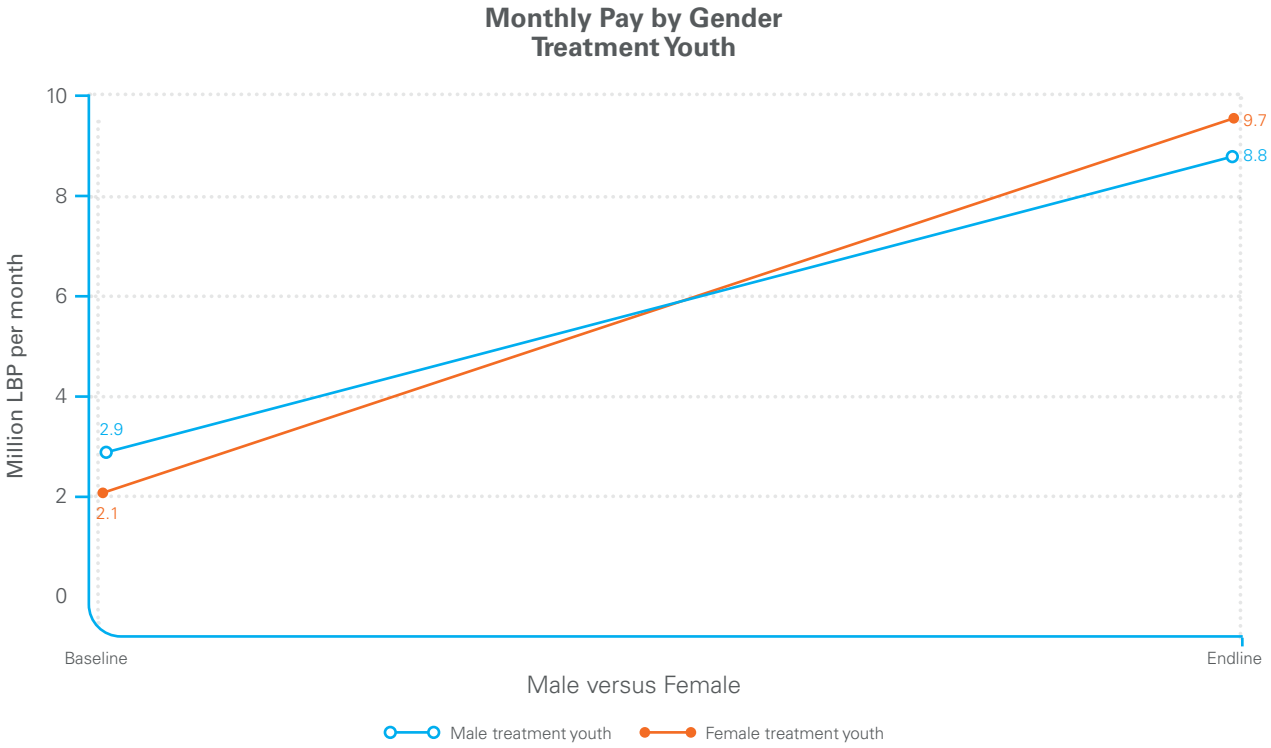
Survey Findings
- Impact results suggest that the trainings had a better impact on Lebanese youth than refugee youth on social cohesion indicators.
- Similarly, the findings suggest better impacts for female youth than for male youth on such outcomes as pay and social cohesion.

Qualitative Findings
- Training facilitators and parents observed a greater shift in mentality among female youth, who became more open and confident following participating in the Skills Training Programme.

Tests for differential impacts show that female youth and refugee youth experienced the Skills Training programme differently from their male and Lebanese counterparts. Overall, the impacts were more positive for females and more negative for refugees. Table 12 through Table 15 show the statistically significant differential impacts for females and refugees. The first column of results shows the differential impact for females (refugees) while the second column of results shows the standalone impacts for males (Lebanese). The full set of differential impacts are presented in Annex H, with positive impacts signifying that the impact for females/refugees was larger and with negative impacts signifying that the impact for females/refugees was smaller.

The evaluation finds that the Skills Training Programme was slightly more effective for females than it was for males in terms of employment and healthy lifestyles. The impact of the program seems to have supported females' pay in particular relative to the impact on males. Figure 7 shows the changes over time for males (blue) and females (pink). While both genders' monthly pay increases, the increase is steeper for females so that females' monthly pay actually overtakes male's monthly pay. One should be cautious in interpreting the magnitude of the increase, since Lebanon experienced economy-wide inflation. However, the inflation would not likely have affected genders differently. Further, the impact on pay, is quite large, with treatment females' pay increasing by roughly 0.99 SD compared to treatment males when restricting the comparison group to untrained youth. While this impact is substantial, the magnitude of the finding should be interpreted with caution. This differential impact relies crucially on the comparison of employed treatment males (77 at endline) to employed treatment females (32 at endline). There is a similarly substantial differential impact on females regarding the likelihood that they can satisfy their household expenses. The training led females to be 33 percent more likely to meet those expenses, than males, when considering all comparison youth. This finding likely follows from the same dynamics that drove increased pay for women, since better impacts on pay could naturally carry over to better capacity to covering expenses.

Figure 7. Trends for in monthly pay by gender



Note: Includes baseline observations of youth who left the sample,
Baseline Male N=84; Baseline Female N=38;
Endline Male N=77; Endline Female N=32

The clearest example of the programme better serving females, is through their approach to healthy lifestyles and social cohesion. The Skills Training Programme increased the likelihood of interacting with males by 26 percentage points more than the reverse for males. The sharp increase in opposite-gender interaction for females, relative to males, resonates with qualitative findings, which show that females felt less isolated and more empowered. Further, the programme increased the likelihood that females engaged in positive coping strategies, such as volunteering or participating in civic activities, by between 15 points relative to all comparison youth and 21 percentage points relative to untrained comparison youth.

When comparing males and females, training facilitators noticed a larger shift in mentality among female youth: "We all noticed the different personality, especially with females. Females who feel socially isolated or not leaving home to work. They have this courage; they believe they can do!" Another training facilitator agreed, recounting the following story from his painting training course:

"When it comes to females, in painting training specifically, they come fully dressed the first and second day, full makeup. They think they will be watching, since they are females and won't work. We witness that a lot on site. By the end, they wear jeans, just anything, because they know they will be painting, the shoes might get dirty. In the training center, we don't give them the boots, gloves, helmet, vest, but once they go to work, at some point, they need to really paint! I will be going to really work! The mentality starts changing."

Several training facilitators and employers perceived females to be more focused and diligent, and therefore more successful in learning new skills through the technical training. Additionally, some employers expressed more interest in permanently hiring female trainees. To this end, one employer shared, "When there is a test and training, the female is more successful and therefore we can see more female candidates [working here]." Despite these perceptions from training facilitators and employers, the implementing partners argued there were minimal differences between males

and females and that they worked hard to remove any gender stereotypes related to employability or the types of sectors males and females can work in by providing CBT and CfW opportunities in traditionally male sectors to both genders. As for the youth themselves, there were few observed differences by gender except for less female interest in certain sectors (such as electricity and solar) and some reports that females faced discrimination and had trouble securing jobs in the sectors in which they were trained (such as painting) because of societal norms. Some youth's parents also voiced concerns about females working in sectors such as painting or construction.

Table 12. Statistically significant differential impacts on females, Treatment vs Comparison

Outcome	Differential Gender Impact	Impact for Males
Employment Quality		
Can only satisfy household expenses	0.32**	-0.17*
Social Cohesion		
Had Positive Interactions with Same Gender	-0.10*	0.05
Had Daily Interactions with Other Gender	0.26***	-0.06

Note: Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Standard errors clustered at cadaster.

Table 13. Statistically significant differential impacts on females, Treatment vs Untrained

Outcome	Differential Gender Impact	Impact for Males
Employment		
Looked For Job	0.30**	-0.16*
Employment Quality		
Take home pay (log LBP, monthly)	2.21*	-0.65
Social Cohesion		
Had Daily Interactions with Other Gender	0.26***	-0.04
Uses a positive coping strategy	0.21**	-0.04

Note: Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%. Standard errors clustered at cadaster.

Differential impacts on refugee youth seem to have been limited to more negatively affecting their healthy lifestyles and social cohesion compared to the impact on Lebanese. Table H.9 in Annex H shows that the impact of the Skills Training Programme on youths' Empathy Score was lower for refugees than for Lebanese by about 0.42 SD. The training also made refugee youth less likely to report positive interactions with other nationalities (19 percentage points) and with the opposite gender (24 percentage points). By design, the training brought youth together from different backgrounds, therefore increasing their exposure to each other. Stakeholders reported increasing nationalistic rhetoric, meaning that by simply bring youth from different backgrounds together the programme may provide more opportunity for youth to have a negative experience with one another. However, this is likely more reflective of the broader dialogue rather than anything related to programme specifics.

Qualitatively, respondents reported more differences in programme experiences and outcomes according to gender as opposed to nationality. Many also focused on the difference in education or previous experience as influencing their programme experience, as one training facilitator put it,

"…according to the nationality, there was no difference. They were all the same. However, it depends on the background. Some people didn't study media but love this field. Others who started with content creation. There was a female who has graduated media. She was able to understand quicker. The exercises done showed better results than others, because they have experience or even a small background about the topic. This was the only difference."

Youth also voiced that it was "hard to catch up with" peers who already had experience in the sector and many suggested it would be better if courses were leveled to accommodate those without previous experience in the sector. Refugees, particularly Syrian, may have had their schooling disrupted and bring lower levels of education and experience to the trainings. A small minority of respondents observed differences in youth outcomes by nationality; by law, refugees are allowed to work in three sectors only, and some refugee youth felt employers preferred to hire Lebanese youth in those sectors. Additionally, some Lebanese participants perceived that employers prioritised hiring Syrians and alluded to the fact that Syrians accept lower pay.

Table 14. Statistically significant differential impacts on refugees, Treatment vs Comparison

Outcome	Differential Refugee Impact	Impact for Lebanese
Employment		
Unable to find work	0.21*	-0.05
Employment Quality		
Creativity Score	-1.39***	0.36
Social Cohesion		
Had Positive Interactions with Other Nationalities	-0.18**	0.03

Note: Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.

Table 15. Statistically significant differential impacts on refugees, Treatment vs Untrained

Outcome	Differential Refugee Impact	Impact for Lebanese
Employability		
Creativity Score	-1.45**	0.43
Cooperation and Communication Score	0.65*	-0.52**
Social Cohesion		
Empathy Index Score	-1.74*	-0.74
Had Positive Interactions with Other Nationalities	-0.19*	0.04
Had Positive Interactions with Other Gender	-0.24**	0.22***

Note: Statistical significance denoted by * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.

5.2. Relevance

Assessing the relevance of an intervention provides deeper insight into how the programme's goals and implementation fit the needs of beneficiaries. It also identifies challenges and gaps that can be addressed to improve programme impacts. In this section we explore how relevant the programme was for youth and employers in the workforce, and the challenges that have affected its applicability to youth in the current context.

5.2.1. To what extent are youth more likely to be employed or working in the sector in which they receive vocational training?

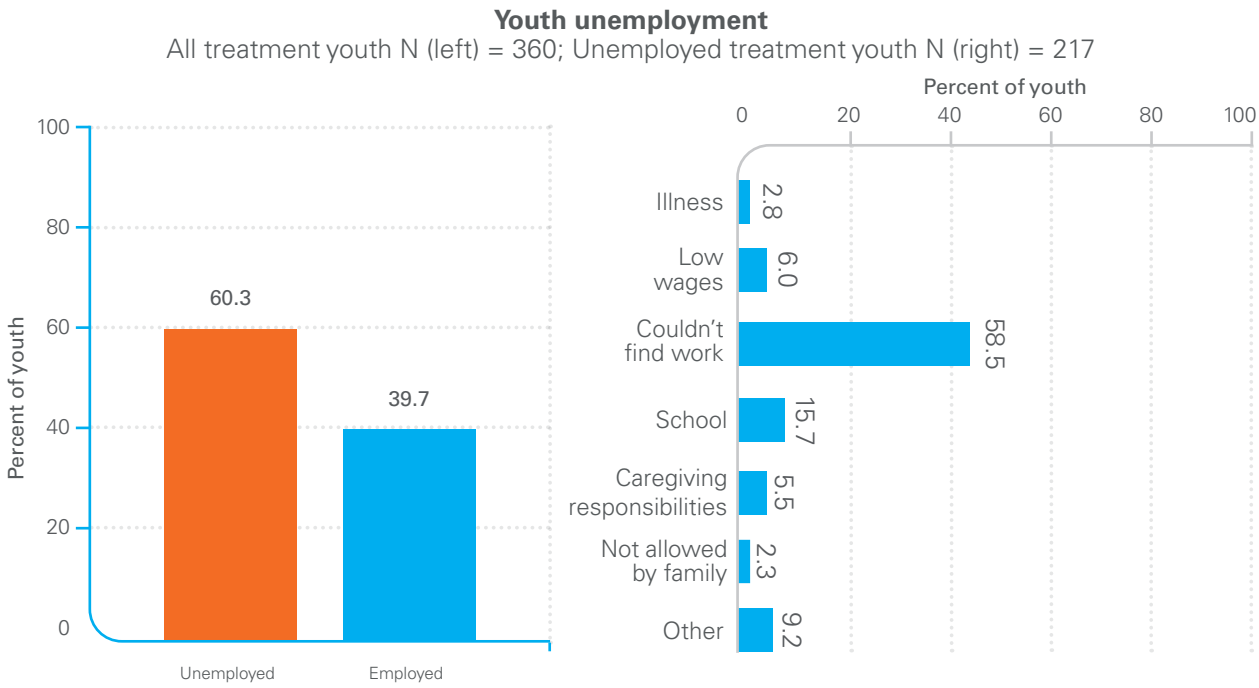
EMPLOYMENT IN TRAINING SECTOR FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- There was a high level of alignment between CBT and CfW, but low levels of alignment between CBT and permanent employment.

Qualitative Findings
- There were mixed perceptions on whether youth were more likely to be employed in the sector in which they trained.
- Some testimonies point to CfW employers permanently hiring youth after the programme, others said contextual and societal barriers prevented them from gaining employment in their trained sector.

The youth in the evaluation sample faced high levels of unemployment. At endline, 60.3 percent of treatment youth were unemployed. Figure 8 shows the unemployment rate on the left and the reasons for unemployment on the right. The most common reason that youth said they were not working was that they could not find work. Some of the youth who gave this reason may have only been unable to find employment at a suitable wage, which was the reason given by another 6.0 percent of treatment youth. This pervasive unemployment demonstrates the need for skills building and matching with employers.

Figure 8. Youth unemployment



Left panel includes all treatment youth at endline.
Right panel includes only treatment youth unemployed at endline

About 9 in 10 beneficiary youth stated that they had not found employment that matched their training. According to youth surveys, we find that alignment between vocational training is high for youth as they proceed to the cash for work but that youth struggle to find long-term employment in the same sector. Figure 9 shows the share of treatment youth who reported that their CBT sector aligned with their cash for work sector, on the left, and the share of treatment youth who reported that their CBT sector aligned with their primary job sector, on the right.

Figure 9. CBT alignment

Note: 142 treatment vouth reported alianment between CBT and CW (left): 103 treatment vouth reported alianment between CBT and their main iob (riaht)

We see that about 80 percent of the treatment youth who participated in cash for work reported that it matched their CBT sector. This alignment suggests that youth generally could build on the skills they developed during the CBT training during their CfW placement. However, after youth completed CfW, they appear to have had a more difficult time finding permanent work that matched their training and CfW sector. Just 10 percent of youth reported a job title that aligned with the sector of their CBT training. This figure suggests that youth could not apply the skills they gained during CBT and CfW in their longer-term employment. However, this low rate may underestimate the synergies between CBT and longer-term employment t. First, some youth reported job titles that could not clearly be mapped to a sector, such as "day laborer." So, some of these youth may actually be working in the same sector. Second, youth may be working in an adjacent sector that utilizes the skills they learned during CBT. These results are similar for both sexes and nationalities, except Refugee youth who report less alignment between CBT and CfW than Lebanese youth (58.7 percent vs. 89.5 percent, t-stat = 4.51). This difference may follow from the challenges that Refugee youth face in entering legally-approved sectors.

There were more mixed views during qualitative interviews on whether youth were more likely to be employed in the same sector they were trained in. Most employers who were directly involved in training youth beneficiaries said they consistently and currently hired graduates from the programme at their business. Restaurant, health and nursing, and library employers in particular noted that they hired a great number of program graduates from each cohort. As such, program beneficiaries who were trained in these sectors were likely hired by their same CFW employers or in a similar technical field. Some youth, such as a Lebanese beneficiary from Akkar, also reported that they had trained in two fields, either through consecutive CBT trainings or supplementary trainings from other programmes, and then sought or gained employment in one of the fields that was in high demand; increasing their chances of being hired in an area of interest. Even when youth were not matched with employment in their trained sector, many of them felt that the technical and life skills they had learned were applicable to every-day life situations and would drastically improve their ability to provide support for their families. Nevertheless, some youth also reported that upon completion of cash for work, they did not gain employment in their trained sector. Many youth said they had received a job offer with their cash for work employer but did not accept, due to wage offers being lower than that offered during cash for work. Figure 5 in Section 5.1.1 above shows that a majority (53.7 percent) of employers would be willing to employ youth on if they accept a pay cut relative to their CfW salary. This drop in salary may have also driven some youth to seek other types of employment. For example, focus groups with beneficiaries revealed some youth went on to develop their own businesses and sought self-employment opportunities to continue pursuing the field they were trained or interested in. According to implementing partners and beneficiary youth, training areas that have produced the most self-employment opportunities are agriculture, electricity and solar power, and sanitation.

Respondents discussed the challenges they faced in gaining employment or opening up their own business in the sector they were trained in. These challenges include regional differences and location, gender discrimination and societal norms, and refugee status.

Region & Location. Both employers and youth said that hiring or gaining employment was often based on location, and that employers preferred hiring local applicants or faced restrictions hiring applicants who required more travel. Some employers noted they would like to hire additional program graduates but faced obstacles to help them do so. The cost of transportation and geographic barriers, in particular, made it difficult for employers to hire qualified youth, and for youth to accept jobs outside their immediate region. Transportation costs and duration often hindered youths' ability to travel to and from work, making it difficult for employers to hire youth who needed transportation. Parents and youth also said that some sectors and jobs were not as available in some regions over others, and thus there was a shortage of job opportunities in youths' sectors of interest within their regions or communities. Employers also report that there were some disconnects between sectoral opportunities for youth and the training sectors (see Section 5.2.3).

Gender Norms. Youth and employers noted there were obstacles for hiring women in certain employment sectors. For example, some employers felt that women were less equipped to perform the "electricity" work they were hiring for, despite the women having gone through the required training. Female youth also said that they faced obstacles gaining employment in a traditionally masculine field, such as painting and sanitation, due to societal beliefs and the possible stigma of conducting such work when it is disapproved of in the community. Refugee women in particular said that these jobs were even more scrutinized for a "veiled female." They went on to say their work in this area would not be accepted by the community, despite their interest and desire to work in the field.

Refugee Status. There are limitations to the jobs refugees can and can't do in Lebanon given their status. This may result in employers being legally-bound to hire Lebanese youth or being biased in their selection of workers—both towards and against refugee youths' favor. In a mixed-gender and nationality focus group, youth said there are restrictions on refugees for opening up their own business; this may push more to seek available employment outside of their area of interest rather than pursue self-employment. Additionally, both refugee and Lebanese youth mentioned that employment of refugees may also be tied to religion in certain regions. For example, respondents noted in the Baalbek region, employers typically hire Sunni or Shiite youth and restrict employment of refugees and Lebanese from other background or religions. Lebanese youth, and some employers, also noted that some businesses may opt to hire more refugees based on the assumption that they are willing to work for a lower wage than their Lebanese counterparts. While this may lead to more Syrian refugees being hired in positions, the quality of work and pay may not meet the expected standards.

Given that the goal of the programme was to improve general employability and not to simply promote employment in a training sector, the misalignment between trainings and employment sectors may not be concerning if youth can leverage their CBT skills in other employment areas or professions. Overall, while employers and programme implementers were more likely to report that youth had been hired in their matched technical sector, many Lebanese and refugee youth felt there were contextual challenges that prevented them from gaining employment in their area of interest.

5.2.2. To what extent do skills training programme graduates meet the human capital needs of employers.

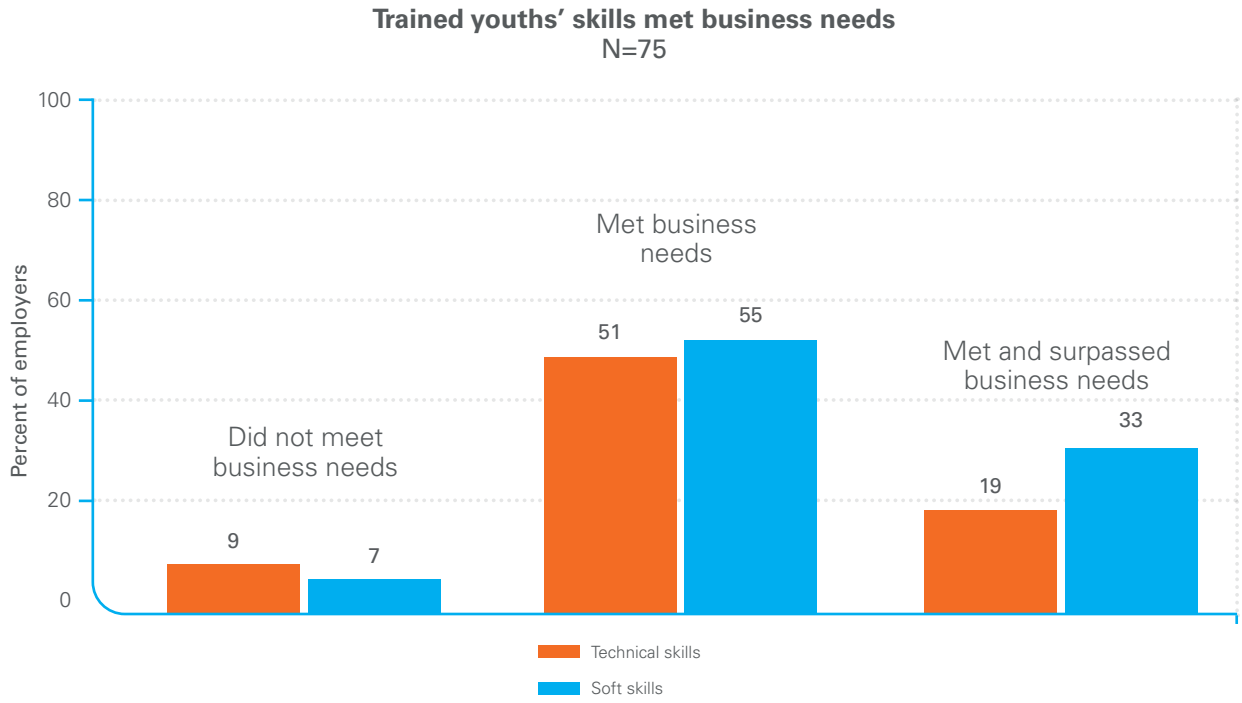
TRAINING GRADUATES MEETING EMPLOYER NEEDS FINDINGS

Survey Findings
- Employers overwhelming felt that the trainees met or exceeded their business needs for soft and technical skills.

Qualitative Findings
- Employers felt that youth predominantly held all the required skills needed for employment in their sector.
- Practical experience from CfW placements was key to preparing youth's technical skills.
- Some employers felt youth lacked motivation to work or continuing employment after CfW.

Employers generally felt that youths' skills met their business needs. Figure 10 shows employers' satisfaction with youths' technical skills (dark blue) and youths' soft skills (light blue). These figures show that employers overwhelmingly felt that trainees at least satisfied their business needs in terms of both technical and soft skills. Less than ten percent of employers reported that youth either couldn't satisfy their needs for technical skills or for soft skills. This finding suggests that the youth left the training capable of meeting the human capital needs of employers.

Figure 10. Employer satisfaction with youths' skills



Note: Omits employers who reported that skill level was not applicable

This sentiment was mostly supported by employers in the qualitative interviews, who largely agreed that youth met a majority of their human capital needs. Employers such as those directly involved in supervising and coaching beneficiary youth, felt that programme youth were adequately prepared for their assigned work and employment. Some employers felt that the level of preparedness differed by individual and that some youth were capable and prepared while others were not, as one employer indicated. Some employers, however, indicated that they preferred hiring female graduates from the programme, citing their communication skills and level of training or focus as being greater than their male counterparts.

Moreover, employers noted that many of the youth in the program were also well prepared in some technical- or life-skills that were useful, but not others, as one employer said:

"When it comes to technical part, website training for example, there were 2 females having the training so they were working in a company. These 2 girls… one was great, she was performing all the tasks immediately, while the other was a bit weaker because she was not fluent in English language. When it comes to programming, she was excellent but I think she only had a problem, a weakness in English language."

Employers recognized that not all youth would carry all needed skills in each sector and that many of the hired youth complemented each other with varying skills and competencies. For example, the employer above went on to say that—because one graduate excelled at business relations and communication, while the other

excelled at managing the technology needed to complete tasks—these two graduates were able to support the employer in separate ways. Employers also recognized that many of the skills youth need for their employment sector must be learned on the job or in a practical setting. For example, one healthcare employer noted that youth who graduated from the nursing training programme were not trained to treat wounds or burns. However, after running the hires through the procedure two or three times during CfW, they were able to develop the competencies to treat said wounds and burns without supervision.

On the other hand, some employers felt that while the needed skills were typically there, many youth who gained employment through the CFW opportunity at their organization were not motivated to work beyond CfW.

Some employers thought this could be due to youth's motivation to move abroad or start their own business, or stem from a lack of motivation to work for others. Additionally, some employers noted that youth saw the CFW as an opportunity to gain a certificate or pay, but not as an opportunity to learn and gain experience in a field. This sentiment was backed up by employers across organizations and regions, who noted that because the CfW programme guarantees payment to youth beneficiaries, some youth are not motivated to see it as a long-term opportunity but rather a means to a single payment.

5.2.3. What are youths' and stakeholders' general perceptions and feedback on the skills training programme?

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRAINING FINDINGS

Survey Findings

- Youths' generally felt the training prepared them for the labour market and would recommend the training to others.
- Employers reported that their trainings did not align with the sectors they felt were most promising for youth.

Qualitative Findings

- Youth and stakeholders had positive perceptions of the programme's ability to develop relevant skills, and to engage them in productive trainings in an otherwise difficult context.
- Youth and their families had negative perceptions of the programme's ability to help them find a job or gain employment after graduation.
- These negative perceptions likely stem from misconstrued expectations of the programme's role and responsibility after CfW.
- Beneficiary youth, dropout youth, and IPs experienced challenges during implementation that influenced negative perceptions of the programme.
- The combined contextual and programmatic challenges have disrupted the mechanisms by which the outputs in the TOC influence the intended outcomes.

In general, youth and stakeholders had positive notions about the TVET programme as a whole. It is important to note that youth were mainly interested and motivated to join the program for three reasons: (1) with the expectation of helping them find a job or gain employment; (2) to learn new skills and use the training as an opportunity to develop themselves; and (3) to use their time more productively than staying at home, being bored, and doing nothing. As such, youth and parent perceptions of the programme largely stemmed from its ability to meet or succeed these expectations. Youth and parents felt positive about the programme meeting or succeeding their expectations in developing their skills and utilizing their time more productively. As such, among youth who received the training, they report a high willingness to recommend the programme to others. Figure 11 shows the number of treatment youth by likelihood of recommending the programme. 85.7 percent who answered the question were either likely or extremely likely to recommend the Skills Building Programme.

Figure 11. Youths' recommendation for the programme

Beneficiary youth and their parents said they were largely satisfied with the quality of trainings, the capabilities of trainers, and the dollarization of CfW payment. Additionally, a main theme discussed by youth was the equal importance of all three components of the programme and how youth had been able to utilize skills from the BLN, life skills, and technical training components of the course. Implementing partners also see the program as a valuable and beneficial activity for youth; youth were receiving skills for personal development and being trained in areas needed by the labor market. The program takes a capacity building approach to ensure youth can support themselves and sustain their own futures down the line, as an implementing partner highlighted:

"This enables people to sustain themselves. I feel that it's much better than humanitarian aid: food kits are a burden because you are feeding them on a daily basis. You need to teach them how to feed themselves. So, you need to teach them how to fish rather than giving them a fish every day."

Additionally, implementing partners saw the programme as an effective tool to build the capacity of the wider community. Implementing partners highlighted that not only does the programme employ and engage a number of community members to implement the trainings and the CfW opportunities, but it also engages local businesses to ensure many of the services youth are trained in (and subsequently seek employment in) benefit the community as well:

Figure 12. Employer sector

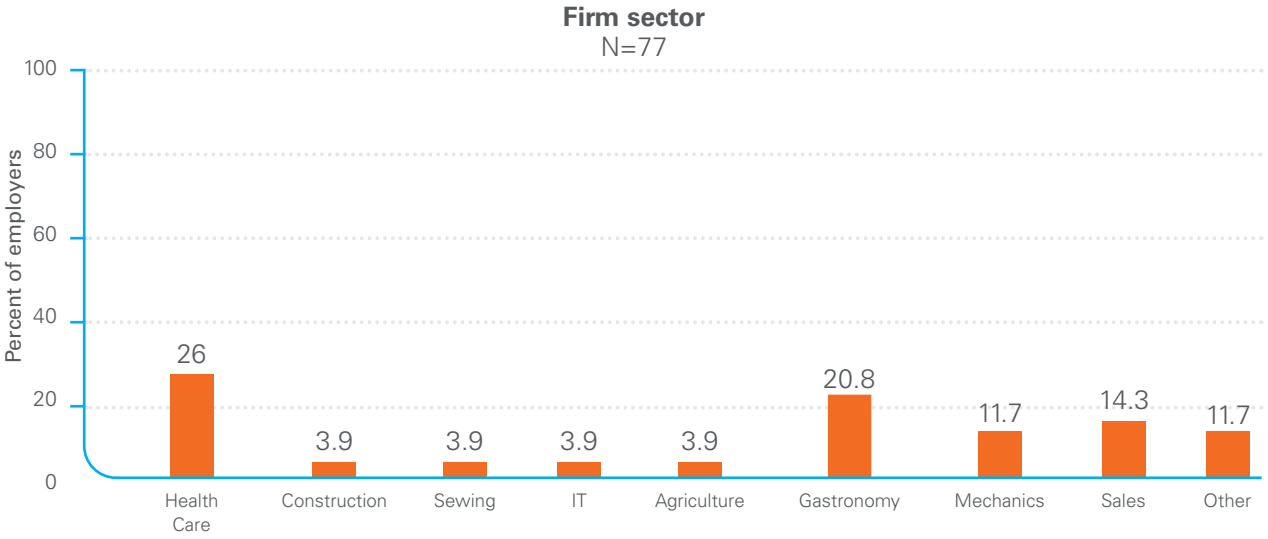


Figure 13. Employer's view of most promising sector

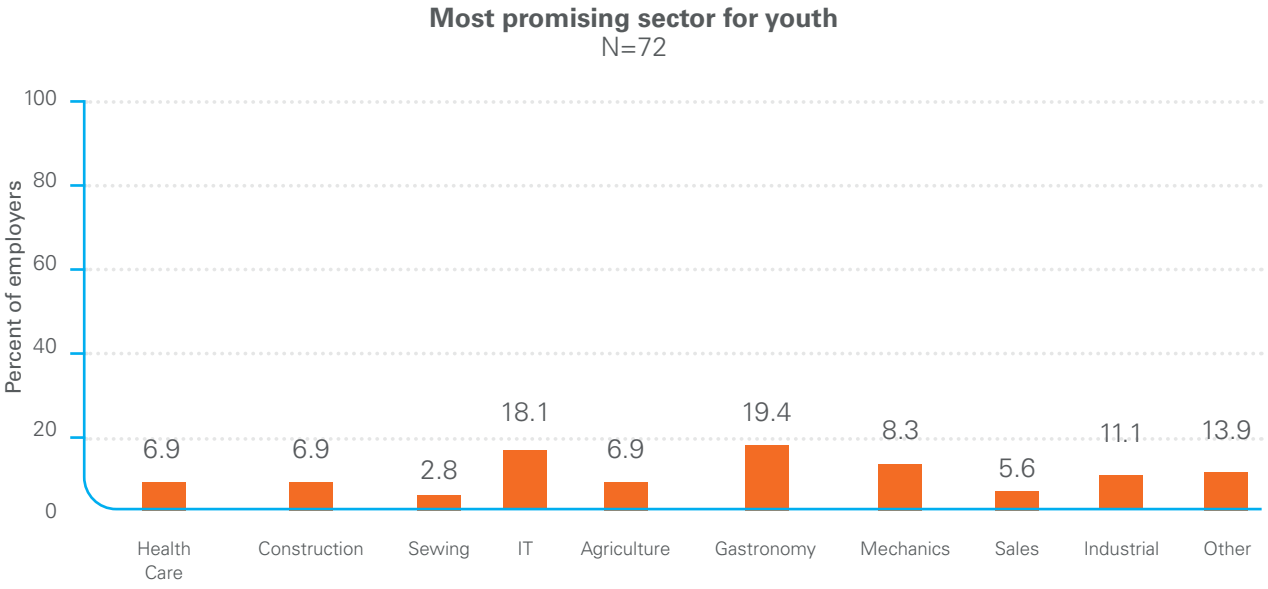
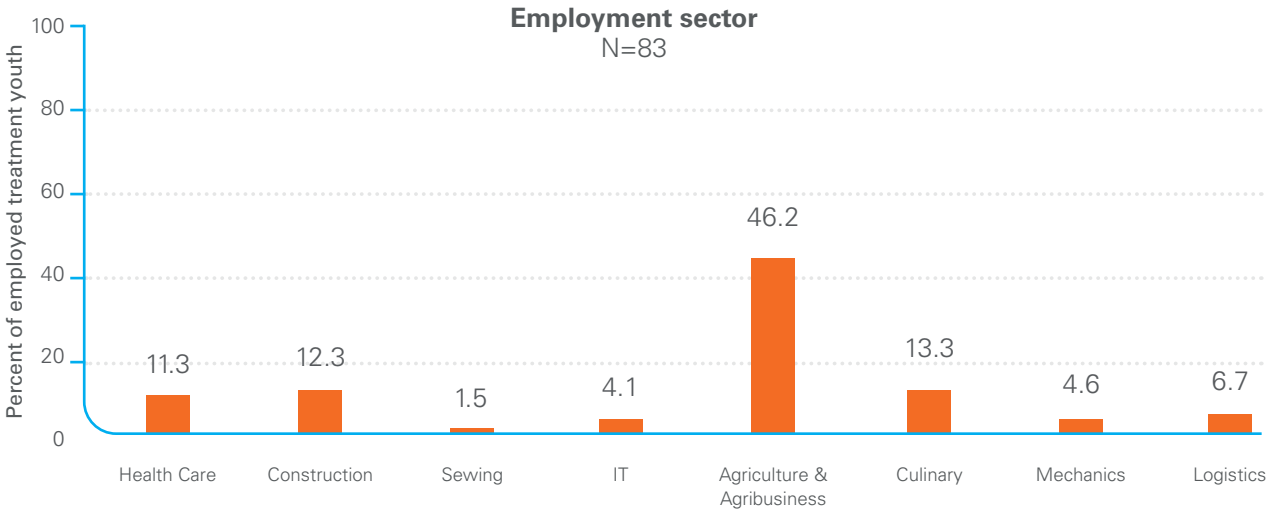


Figure 14. Youth employment by sector



Note: 60 youth worked in non-CBT job sectors

"We are on the ground. Our community mobilizers are part of the community, they reflect that. During the work, we do rehabilitation for houses through the training, through the CfW. We are in touch with the people on the ground. We take initiatives to repair infrastructure. We are always on the ground with the community and honestly, the positive feedback really shows" IP-LRC

Nevertheless, some youth and parents felt that aspects of the programme, particularly regarding helping youth find a job after the programme, had not met their expectations. Many felt that the programme had much more limited links with employers and jobs than they were initially told, and that the programme did not deliver on its promise to secure opportunities for youth:

"She couldn't find a job in the other sector, she applied lots of CVs but it's not working. They have promised her during this program but in vain. They didn't call her. They called her once and promised her to get a job in the next program. The program has finished and they didn't get back to her at all" – Parent, Saida

Respondents also felt there may be some misalignment between training sectors offered in the programme, and promising or growing sectors within the labor market. Employers suggested that the trainees they hosted may not have received training in the sectors most promising in terms of job growth. Figures 12 through 14 show the sector in which the firm operates on the top panel, the sector that the employer believes to provide the most promise for youth in the middle panel, and the employment sectors of treatment youth in the bottom panels. There are similarities between the two employments. For example, roughly 20 percent of employers feel that gastronomy or culinary employment is the most promising for youth, suggesting strong alignment between job potential and actual training. Nearly 20 percent of employers believe that IT is the sector providing the greatest opportunities, although only 4 percent of the CfW firms operated in the IT sector. Similarly a plurality of firms (26.0 percent) operate in the healthcare sector, but only 6.9 percent of employers viewed healthcare as the more promising sector for employment. Finally, we see that employed youth were typically working in sectors that do not align with CfW employers nor the most promising sectors.

These youth most frequently reported working in agriculture (46.2 percent), gastronomy (13.3 percent), and construction (12.3 percent). This finding shows that employed youth were working in sectors different from CfW sectors and with more limited possibility for growth. However, it is important to note that sectors that were seen as less promising by employers, such as agriculture and construction, may have higher youth employment rates because they are available to refugees. Since refugees are permitted to work in the agriculture and construction sectors, this could influence the discrepancy between sectors of interest and actual sectors of hire for youth. While implementing partners regularly report conducting mini-market assessments to update trainings when needed, there may be further room to improve the match between the trainings youths receive and the sectors that provide potential job opportunities.

On top of difficulties with applying and finding jobs, youth and parents also noted issues with trainers not following up and guiding youth during the job application process. While parents and youth recognized there were contextual factors that affected employment prospects, the lack of engagement from trainers or programme personnel was perceived as a key barrier to employment. As follow-ups with trainers to assist youth with applying to jobs is not included in the programme, this finding shows that miscommunication or misperceptions of the programme's role has led to expectations of the programme that do not fit within its criteria.

Some youth also felt that the CfW component of the programme does not provide enough experience or meet the requirements for employment in Lebanon. For example, youth noted that CfW placements are often too broad or generalized to be applicable in a real-life-setting or job, and that jobs often require a year of experience—which the CfW' 40-80 days of experience does not meet.

Challenges

Implementing partners, beneficiary youth, and youth who had dropped out of the programme also highlighted some of the challenges they faced during implementation that either influenced rates of dropout or negative perceptions of the programme. For youth, some of the main challenges during implementation included: transportation, scheduling challenges,

delays in certification, and delays in payment. Implementing partners echoed many of the same concerns and challenges youth reported, but added additional issues such as delays in training due to contextual factors, youth employment expectations, selection criteria for CBT and CfW, and preferences for practical training. Figure 15 provides a breakdown of the key challenges during implementation and resulting effects on both youth and the programme.

Figure 15. Challenges Faced During Implementation

TRANSPORTATION

Some youth said the distance between their communities and the training center or CFW placement was far, not only making travel difficult but also much more expensive than the transportation costs covered by the programme. Dropout youth also cited transportation costs as a major reason for leaving the programme.

SCHEDULING CHALLENGES

Youth and implementing partners noted that training hours did not accommodate existing job or education schedules outside of the Skills Training Programme, with trainings being scheduled during working hours. This pushed some youth to accept night shifts for their jobs. As a result, some beneficiaries trained and worked for a consecutive 18 hours, leaving them burnt-out and exhausted. Dropout youth also said training schedules forced them to choose between existing work or education and the training programme.

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

One main reason for dropout rates was the attendance requirement and inflexibility with absenteeism. Many youth who dropped out noted they had to be absent given extraneous reasons, such as family obligations and taking care of sick family members (or having illnesses themselves) which then rendered them ineligible to graduate from the training programme.

DELAYS IN CERTIFICATION & PAYMENT

Two youth focus groups highlighted that there had been significant delays in receiving certificates or accreditation of completion from the programme; causing them stress in being able to pursue jobs without it. Youth also noted there were delays in receiving the CFW payment from the programme. Implementing partners also noted that this was an issue and said they had been facing challenges with local banks to secure payments to the beneficiaries.

TRAINING DELAYS

Implementing partners noted some centers faced internet and electricity issues which made it difficult for them to deliver the hybrid-BLN portion of the program. Given the current context in Lebanon, some trainings had to be delayed or rescheduled due to political or security issues in the region.

EMPLOYMENT EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

Implementing partners identified issues with the efficacy and applicability of the CFW program. The pay rate and currency (USD) of CFW often does not reflect the practices of Lebanese companies or employers. Pay rates are typically much lower and often pay their employees in Lebanese pounds—the CFW thus often gives youth an unrealistic impression of the workforce and discourages them from accepting job opportunities that do not reflect the CFW standards.

DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN CBT AND CFW

Many youth join the program with the expectation of receiving a CFW opportunity. Selection for the CBT course is higher than CFW—roughly 70-80% of CBT beneficiaries get selected for CFW. Thus some qualified, eligible beneficiaries may not be selected and are disappointed with the program for encouraging them to attend trainings and sacrifice other obligations without pay.

PREFERENCES FOR PRACTICAL TRAINING

IPs noticed youth in the programme typically prefer practical training over the theoretical training received in CBT or BLN. This can make it difficult for teachers to get through materials during these courses. However, many IPs and trainers said they tried to incorporate games and other physical elements into the theory-based trainings to increase engagement.

Overall, the skills training programme was seen as relevant and necessary for youth in the current context. Beneficiaries, their families, and implementing partners saw the programme as a needed resource to help youth develop their professional skills and enter the workforce. However, contextual and programmatic challenges have made it difficult for the programme to achieve some of its intended effectiveness and relevance to youth in Lebanon. Contextual challenges, such as the economic crisis, have limited available jobs in the workforce and shrunken the capacity for youth to find jobs that match their area of training. Societal gender norms also dictate whether female graduates of the programme are able to find employment in the sector they are trained or interested in. Additionally, legal obligations and biases in hiring refugees has sparked perceived competition for available jobs, which could influence social cohesion outcomes after the programme. Programmatic challenges—including scheduling conflicts, strict attendance requirements, and discrepancies between CfW and Lebanese job standards—make it difficult for youth to complete the programme, sustain livelihoods or education during the programme, as well as navigate employment prospects after the programme. These combined factors have disrupted the mechanisms by which the outputs in the TOC influence the intended outcomes. In other words, access to services and vocational, soft skills, and healthy lifestyle trainings do not necessarily improve employability, social cohesion, and psychosocial wellbeing in the current context. While the programme conducts extensive market research to provide appropriate trainings that meet the current needs of Lebanon's workforce, these findings point to the need to expand and contextualize these assessments further.

6. Lessons Learnt

Several lessons emerged from the evaluation findings that can inform future vocational training programming in a challenging environment such as Lebanon during the triple crisis. In particular, the results of this programme evaluation highlight the following lessons:

Estimating programme impacts. In the complex Lebanese context, it can be impractical to limit beneficiaries' access to similar programming. This dynamic environment, especially for a vocational training programme like the Skills Training Programme, makes longer-term impact evaluations more difficult to conduct. Other options, such as delayed randomisation, could allow for unbiased impact estimates, albeit over shorter timeframes such as upon the conclusion of a training.

Tailoring programming to youths' needs, minimising potential overlaps with other programmes, and maintaining flexibility to adapt to a dynamic context. There are a multitude of vocational trainings, life skills trainings, and other support programmes for youth operating in Lebanon. To the extent possible, given that the Skills Training Programme is a 3-year programme and activities are planned well in advance, future programming should explore ways to take stock of what is being offered in each area and tailor offerings to the unmet needs of youth in that location.. These needs can change quickly and there may be opportunities for youth employment that emerge so this stocktaking should be a continuous process.

Lebanon is an extremely challenging environment for delivering trainings, especially given the economic crisis that has compromised the demand for labour. Delivering a vocational training program during competing crises assumes that there are open jobs trainees can fill. The direct goals of a vocational programme become very difficult to achieve when there are external factors that suppress labour demand.

Promoting gender transformation and working to remove employment-related gender stereotypes are critically important efforts, and ones that UNICEF and the private sector are commendably taking on through the Skills Training Programme. However, the realities of gender norms in Lebanon's labour market presented challenges for female graduates of the programme seeking employment. Females who received training in traditionally male sectors (painting, sanitation) during the programme sometimes reported being turned away from permanent jobs based on their gender which was a source of frustration. There is no simple answer for how to address this, but the evaluation team suggests being mindful of the practical realities of the labour market as the Skills Training Programme continues its important work of challenging gender norms and advancing gender equality.

Providing appropriate salaries. CfW payments appear to be fair given the expenses faced by youth in Lebanon. However, these salaries above market wages may have inadvertently established unrealistic expectations for employees. Ideally a program that provides a CfW component will roughly match that payment with market wages but not be so low as to cause financial hardship for trainees.

7. Recommendations

This study is an impact evaluation with a key objective to provide evidence on the impactimpactimpact and relevance of the Skills Training Programme that can both feed into broader policy discussions and learning about the unique environment of Lebanon. The evaluation team developed the below recommendations based on the answers to the evaluation questions and other findings that arose through analysis but may extend beyond the defined scope of the evaluation. These recommendations have each regularly arose throughout data collection and during informal discussions with programmatic staff, implementers, and other stakeholders. These recommendations, in no particular order, include:

Reassess amount of transportation reimbursement. Transportation is an ongoing challenge for youth as the economic crisis in Lebanon has increased transportation costs. Implementers of the Skills Programme could ease the burden on youth by increasing funding for youths' transportation throughout training and work-based learning. While most youth reported receiving transportation support, youth often reported that they still could not afford to travel to training or CfW. Additional transportation support could mitigate this challenge, although doing so would of course increase the cost per youth and potentially impact the number of youths reached. To ensure that this support is enough but not too much, funds could be delivered as regular reimbursements.

Create separate training tracks. Differentiating tracks or levels of training in future rounds of CBT to account for the diverse backgrounds that youth bring to training would make the training even more valuable to youth. The difference in existing skill levels is particularly challenging for sectors where advanced skill is required. For example, youth entering the healthcare track may need basic training or may already have basic skills and only need advanced training.

Training duration. Allowing for more flexibility in setting training duration for future iterations of the CBT/CfW ensures sufficient technical training as youth enter the labour market. Implementers and youth both reported that trainings could be too short for youth to truly master some job's skill requirements (e.g., skilled trades), but that the duration was already sufficient for other job sectors (e.g., painting). For each sector, existing training durations should be reviewed.

Regular, detailed market assessments. The Skills Training Programme design is based on an ILO market assessment, but local market conditions should be regularly reassessed. Regular programme-wide reassessments (including assessments of local labour markets in programme areas) would more precisely calibrate the trainings to align with growth industries that may provide better long-term prospects for youth.

Certifiable industries. Where possible, and acknowledging the ongoing work of UNICEF, ILO, and GIZ to secure ministerial approval to provide certificates, implementers could consider prioritising training in industries and for jobs where external certifications are available. If external certification is not possible, UNICEF could explore the possibility of providing their own certification or certificate of completion to provide youth with documentation once they have successfully completed the programme. Youth, employers, and implementers alike felt that youth who could achieve a recognized certification through the Skills Training Programme were better positioned as they entered the job market than those who received training but had no certification to show from it.

Identify opportunities to synergise with other training programmes. The evaluation showed that there are many other organizations delivering vocational and life skills trainings in the same areas. Rather than duplicating these efforts with the CBT or life skills training, the Skills Training Programme could partner with these organizations to examine whether and where overlaps exist, and ultimately refine the scope and coverage of each programme to ensure that as many youths as possible receive training that meets their specific needs.

Prioritize basic psychosocial well-being. The triple crisis in Lebanon is driving youth into deteriorating mental health and psychosocial well-being. Youth regularly cite depression and suicidal ideations when speaking about their well-being. Whereas the life skills component initially envisioned primarily supporting employability, the training can deliver even more support by extending the focus to basic psychosocial well-being.

Create centralized monitoring system. A management information system designed for different implementers would provide a centralized system to track youth who have

participated in trainings. Such a system would be effective in monitoring youth who repeat trainings, to gain repeated access to CfW. The system could also provide a means for real-time monitoring and evaluation of training activities and would complement UNICEF's tracking of individual beneficiaries. Extending monitoring to youths' post-training employment can ensure that youth struggling to find a suitable job received the support they need. The programme can provide youth found to be persistently unemployed with the employment support services required to find employment.

8. Conclusion

The Skills Training Programme operates in a remarkably challenging environment, in a country facing competing social and economic crises. The fact that the programme achieved positive impacts on employment for youth who participated in the training versus those who received no training, despite the deteriorating economic situation and the many labour market challenges (including most notably limited job vacancies and low wages), is quite promising; as are the overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the programme from youths themselves. Also encouraging is the perception of employers about the employability and competence of the youth completing the Skills Training Programme, and the fact that most employers would like to hire programme graduates.

The Skills Training Programme increased employment for participant youth relative to youth who received no training, but this positive impact disappears when we include comparison youth who attended other vocational or life skills training programmes. In line with this quantitative finding from the impact evaluation, qualitative interviews and focus groups revealed a modest perceived increase in employment but many lingering obstacles to securing a job, many of which stem from the current economic crisis in Lebanon. Youth perceived extremely limited job vacancies, low pay, discrimination by gender and nationality, long distances to work sites, and high transportation costs as fundamental barriers to finding and maintaining employment.

Youth who participated in the Skills Training Programme were very positive about their experience, often citing improvements in their mood and an appreciation for the opportunity to interact with others. Roughly 86% of treatment youth were either likely or extremely likely to recommend the Skills Building Programme to others. Most employers, too, were satisfied with the youth that worked for them during CfW and expressed a willingness to hire them long-term. However, CfW employers were typically able to pay youths less over the long term than they were paid during CfW which created some challenges with regards to expectations. Despite youths' overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the Skills Training Programme, some did express frustration over their inability to find jobs upon completing the programme and suggested potential improvements such as an increased transportation allowance, greater flexibility with scheduling (particularly for youth attending school or with existing part-time jobs), and more variation in the levels of technical training provided in each sector.

The Skills Training Programme had a limited impact on youths' overall employability. Qualitatively, most youth reported feeling more ready for employment specifically because of their participation in the skills programme. Youth cited the applied experience gained during CfW, the job-seeking and interviewing behavior learned during the life skills component, and the content and technical skills acquired during CBT as the main reasons behind their increased self-assessed employability. That said, some youth felt as though they did not have enough time to hone their skills during the programme and mentioned the lack of certification and the need for up to a year of relevant experience remained barriers to finding a job.

While most youths (80%) received training (CBT) in the same sector that they went on to do CfW in, relatively few youths (10%) went on to find employment in that same sector. In some cases, youth reported being offered a job by their CfW employer but declining because the wage offered was lower than what they received during CfW. In other cases, youth were simply unable to find suitable employment for the reasons mentioned previously (limited job vacancies, low pay, discrimination, long distances to job sites, and high transportation costs). Employers, for their part, suggested that trainees may not have received training the most promising sectors in terms of job growth: for example, while 20% of employers felt IT was the most promising sector in terms of job opportunities, only 4% of CfW firms operated in the IT sector. Most employed youth reported working in agriculture (46%), culinary (13%), and construction (12%), sectors that did not feature prominently among CfW employers and were not typically considered the most promising in terms of opportunities.

Programme impacts and experiences varied slightly by gender and nationality, with females showing better impacts than males and refugees showing slightly worse impacts than Lebanese. The programme had greater positive impact on reported pay for females, and females showed more promising positive results in terms of effects on healthy lifestyles and social cohesion. Qualitatively, respondents reported

more differences in programme experiences and outcomes according to gender and previous experience as opposed to nationality. Comparing the experiences of males and females, training facilitators, parents, and youths themselves tended to point to larger shifts in the mentality of female participants, which is a promising finding in terms of the programme's potential to be gender transformative. Respondents often reported female youth were more open and outgoing following participation in the Skills Training Programme and showed greater interest in seeking employment. Despite these more positive observations, some female youths still complained they were discriminated against when they sought employment in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as painting. A small minority of respondents observed differences in youth outcomes by nationality; by law, refugees are allowed to work in three sectors only, and some refugee youth felt employers preferred to hire Lebanese youth in those sectors. Additionally, some Lebanese participants perceived that employers prioritised hiring Syrians, alluding to the fact that Syrians accept lower pay.

These findings suggest that, though the TOC model is still relevant, contextual barriers often disrupt the mechanisms by which the inputs and outputs of the programme influence the intended outcomes and impacts. Quantitative surveys and qualitative testimonies highlight the positive perceptions and takeaways youth had about the programme, which left them feeling prepared—both on a technical and psychosocial level—for employment. However, the economic crisis and lack of available jobs are inhibiting youth from achieving the programme's intended impact: to improve short- and medium-term livelihoods for youth. Thus, while youth may personally feel they have gained the needed skills upon completing the programme, they are unable to fully apply these skills and experience the impacts of gaining these skills given current contextual challenges. To mitigate this, this evaluation provides lessons learned and recommendations to help strengthen the pathways for change in the TOC in Lebanon's current context.

Moving forward, the evaluation highlighted potential improvements that can be made to enhance the effectiveness of the programme. These include ways to facilitate youths' participation in the programme (through higher transportation allowance and more scheduling flexibility) and ways to potentially improve employment outcomes by revisiting the sectors and specialisations offered to prioritise those with the best employment outcomes and—to the extent possible—focusing on sectors and specialisations that include certification.

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