



Cluster Project Evaluation: Improved access to skills and employment opportunities in Lebanon – Independent Final evaluation

QUICK FACTS

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Administrative Office: ILO Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)

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Evaluation manager: Narendra Nadh Choudary, Bollepalli

Evaluation consultant(s): Rafael Munoz-Sevilla

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The ILO in Lebanon has implemented two projects funded by UNICEF and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS). These projects aim to improve the availability and quality of labour market information; develop competency-based training programs relevant to labour market demand; and provide post-training services and market-based skills training for vulnerable Lebanese and refugees to enhance their employability.

Present situation of the project

The UNICEF project was implemented from January 2017 to March 2023. The AICS project was implemented from January 2019 to March 2023. Both projects were implemented in a coordinated manner by one team.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted to examine the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and potential impact of the two projects and to provide recommendations for future similar projects. This evaluation also identified as lessons learned and good practices. The evaluation looked at the project activities, outputs and outcomes within the wider context of the country and UN interventions. Geographical coverage was nationwide.

The primary clients of this evaluation are the ILO Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS), ILO constituents in Lebanon, other government entities, UN and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), and the donors (UNICEF and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation).

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluator addressed the evaluation questions defined in the terms of reference, including the integration of the ILO cross-cutting issues (gender equality and non-discrimination, international labour standards and social dialogue). The evaluation used several sources of evidence, combining primary qualitative data with secondary quantitative data. Qualitative data were obtained from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were obtained from the performance reporting data presented by the ILO in the progress reports to UNICEF and AICS, as well as from other secondary sources. Data collection methods and stakeholder perspectives were triangulated to bolster the credibility and validity of the results.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Relevance and strategic fit

The ILO skills projects in Lebanon are highly relevant. The projects are fully aligned with broader ILO policies and strategies and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the projects largely respond to the needs of the beneficiaries. Moreover, in the current context of prolonged and multi-faceted crises, skills/vocational training has a significant potential for enhancing employability amidst the Lebanese and Syrian youth.

Coherence and validity of the design

Both the UNICEF and AICS project designs were found to be solid. In addition, the projects complement each other and are aligned and complementary with on-going national efforts as well as with ILO initiatives aiming at enhancing the quality and relevance of TVET. However, achieving the projects' objective of *improved employability and access of vulnerable Lebanese and refugee graduates from skills training to the labour market through improved formal and non-formal TVET in Lebanon* should be understood as a strategic goal that involves a substantial dedication of time and resources (both technical and financial).

Project progress and Effectiveness

The skills projects proved effective in achieving the expected results. The ILO provided extensive capacity building to project partners' and did significant contributions to improve the availability and



quality of labour market information. The ILO and partner NGOs conducted seven community-based assessments. Also, four national sectoral labour market studies were conducted by the ILO in collaboration with the National Employment Office. Additionally, in collaboration with the Association of Lebanese Industrialists the ILO developed an on-line skills anticipation questionnaire for regular anticipation of labour market needs. Moreover the projects provided technical and financial support to conduct two tracer studies.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the project partners the ILO developed competency-based curricula for ten occupations. These curricula were applied in skills training programmes by partner NGOs. Moreover, the ILO implemented a work-based learning pilot with three UNICEF partners.

The projects also contributed to improving the institutional capacities for the provision of post-training services to vocational training graduates. In addition, the ILO elaborated a proposal for the reform of the NEO, conducted a review of the existing referral mechanism in the TVET sector, and developed a mapping of training and post training service providers and a blueprint for an improved referral system.

Additionally, the ILO and UNICEF provided technical assistance to several Ministries in the elaboration of the National Strategic Framework (NSF) for TVET (2018–2022) as well as in the preparation of the NSF 2023-2027

The projects were faced with multiple external challenges beyond their control. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the socio-political crisis in the country affected and disrupted the projects implementation. A significant internal factor that caused additional challenges for the project management and implementation was the insufficient human capacity to undertake the set activities. Nevertheless, the ILO demonstrated a significant level of flexibility to adapt to the highly challenging implementation context.

Efficiency of resource use

The results that have been achieved to date justify the expenses of the ILO skills projects. Overall, all project activities delivered good value for money. Moreover, given the complexity of the projects, the large number of institutions involved and the insufficient project staff, the evaluator is of the opinion that the projects could not have achieved the same results at a lower cost.

Impact orientation

The UNICEF-ILO partnership was instrumental in the development of the NSF. The importance of having such framework for TVET in Lebanon lies in that it provides a roadmap for developing and implementing policies and programs that are aligned with the country's economic and social goals. In addition, such a framework can (potentially) help ensure that TVET programs will be responsive to labour market demands.

The ILO projects also facilitated partnerships between key stakeholders to promote collaboration and cooperation in the TVET sector. This has the potential contribute to strengthening the governance as well as the quality and relevance of TVET.

In addition, the ILO projects made important contributions to aligning TVET programs with market needs and promoted increased private sector involvement in providing internships, apprenticeships, and other workplace-based learning opportunities for students. This, in turn, can potentially increase employment opportunities for TVET graduates.

Additionally, the ILO provided support for the development of skills assessment and certification systems. If implemented, such system can ensure that the skills and knowledge acquired through TVET programs are recognized and valued by employers, thereby enabling graduates to secure quality jobs.



Moreover, the ILO projects contributed to delivering market-relevant skills training, including WBL, to vulnerable youth and adults in the agriculture, construction, hospitality, craft, and health sectors, although it was not possible for the evaluation to measure the eventual positive changes in the lives of the ultimate project beneficiaries.

Sustainability

Overall the ILO laid the foundations for sustainability, to some extent, through high quality technical assistance in policy development, governance, capacity building, labour market information, curricula development, harmonization of skills training approaches, promotion of WBL schemes, etc. Nevertheless, the projects’ timeframe is an important barrier for sustainability. In this regard, national efforts towards skills development will depend on continued technical and financial support. Without on-going and continued ILO commitment, the sustainability of project outcomes is not likely in the mid-term.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations

- 1. Maintain support to national efforts towards skills development and lifelong learning.** It is recommended that the ILO and the donor community continue to provide technical and financial assistance to the Government and key private actors (employers, unions, NGOs) for the improvement of the quality and relevance of the Lebanon’s TVET systems as well as access for Lebanese and refugee youth to the labour market.
- 2. Design a long-term integrated strategy/programme on skills development and lifelong learning for Lebanon.** The ILO RO should design an integrated and all-encompassing long-term programme on skills training and lifelong learning for Lebanon. Such a programme should tap into on the knowledge and expertise that was generated through past and on-going “skills projects”. Some priority interventions for this programme are suggested below (recommendations 3 to 10)
- 3. Improved governance of the TVET system.** It is recommended that the ILO continue to strengthen the capacity of the DGTVE managers and staff, to ensure that TVET programs are well-managed, coordinated, and responsive to labour market needs. It is also essential for the ILO to continue promoting collaboration and partnerships among the DGTVE, private sector employers, industry associations, unions, and the Ministry of Labour.
- 4. Support the development of institutional capacities of social partners.** It is recommended that the ILO supports the institutional capacity building of Lebanese social partners, particularly workers’ organizations, to enable them to engage more effectively in skills development.
- 5. Expanded access to vocational training.** It is recommended that the ILO continues to provide technical and financial support to expand access to vocational training, especially among vulnerable populations. This may include: a) promoting awareness and advocacy campaigns to change negative attitudes and stereotypes towards vulnerable populations and to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive TVET; b) providing support for infrastructure, electricity, equipment, and materials to ensure that schools are operational; and c) facilitating accessibility for students by providing scholarships, educational materials, transportation, meals, etc.
- 6. Enhanced TVET quality and relevance.** The ILO should continue working with TVET providers (including NGOs) and the private sector to further develop/update labour market studies and skills assessments; competency-based curricula; tracer studies; and employer satisfaction surveys to ensure that the skills programmes are up-to-date and relevant to current industry needs. It is also important to



continue supporting the alignment and standardization of non-formal training programs, as well as the development of a quality assurance system that includes standards, assessment tools, and procedures for monitoring and evaluating TVET programs.

7. Continued development of Work-Based Learning/apprenticeships schemes. In the short term, the ILO should promote public-private partnerships to create on-the-job training opportunities and apprenticeships. In the mid-term, the ILO should continue to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour, DGTNET, unions, and employers in the development of a national framework for quality apprenticeships.

8. Strengthened support to school-to-work transition. This can be achieved by providing technical and financial support for various initiatives, including the development and integration of core employability skills into competency-based training programs; the strengthening of career guidance and counselling services for students; the provision of employment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood training, as well as post-training support for students; and further support for the establishment of a comprehensive, cross-sectoral referral services network.

9. Technical support to SMEs: enterprise development, enhanced productivity competitiveness, employment creation and transition to formality. The ILO should provide technical assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Lebanon through capacity-building and mentoring programmes that focus on improved business management, enterprise development, productivity improvement, competitiveness enhancement and employment creation. Moreover, the ILO can provide advisory services and support on how to reduce informality and facilitate a transition of businesses to formality.

10. Mainstream gender approaches. In future skills development initiatives it is recommended for the ILO and the national partners to conduct a gender-based analysis to identify the specific needs and challenges faced by women in accessing and participating in TVET programs; develop gender-sensitive curricula; encourage gender balance in training; provide gender-sensitive support services (i.e. childcare, transportation, counselling services) to enable women to participate in the TVET programs without additional barriers. It is also important to monitor and evaluate gender outcomes of the TVET programs to measure their impact on women's empowerment and gender equality.

11. A repository of ILO products. It is recommended that an organized repository be created for the products that have been developed by ILO skills projects in Lebanon. This repository should include various materials such as labour market studies, methodological approaches, competency-based curricula, and training materials.

Main lessons learned and good practices

Lessons Learned

1. Availability of appropriate staff levels is key to project performance. The shortage of human resources assigned to the projects overburdened the project staff. The lesson learned is that future interventions would benefit from having a continued sufficient number of staff.

2. Implementation schedules. The lesson learned is that in order to ensure the sustainability of ILO interventions, an integrated and long-term strategy needs to be developed with durable commitment from the ILO, the donor community, the national government, and other partners. A long-term implementation timeline is also necessary.

3. Flexibility to adapt to a changing and challenging context. The evaluation learned that in order to achieve a strong engagement strategy that is sustainable in the mid-term, the ILO should adopt an integrated approach that combines responses to immediate and urgent needs with mid-term development assistance. By addressing pressing needs in the short term, the ILO can create a



foundation for sustainability in the future.

4. Continuing engagement of ILO constituents (MOL, employers and workers' organizations) in developing the TVET sector is instrumental in ensuring that TVET programs are aligned with the requirements of the labour market and facilitate opportunities for decent work. In addition, the ILO constituents have an important role to play in the governance of the TVET system in Lebanon.

Emerging Good Practices

1. Combining ILO and UNICEF's comparative advantages. Together, UNICEF and ILO offer a substantial and in-depth experience with implementing skills development projects on the ground in Lebanon as well as in the broader Arab States region. Due to the complementary mandates and expertise the ILO and UNICEF have managed to leverage their respective strengths to provide comprehensive and complementary support to the TVET system in Lebanon.

2. Building on ILO experiences and resources. Successful implementation of the skills projects builds on previous ILO experiences, programs, and resources, as well as collaboration and coordination with key stakeholders. Participation from stakeholders has also been a critical element in the ILO skills projects, which have involved and closely worked with various institutions such as government agencies, NGOs, UN agencies, and employers. Additionally, tapping into the existing expertise and resources of the ILO, including regional, HQ, and ITC specialists, through coordination and collaboration, has been crucial in providing effective technical assistance to project partners.

3. ILO's integrated approach to Skills development. The ILO skills projects were designed and implemented to provide an integrated approach on skills development. Integrated approaches to support TVET development are crucial for meeting industry demands, enhancing employability, supporting economic growth, responding to changing needs, and encouraging lifelong learning. However, in the current Lebanese context, these approaches will take time to be fully developed and consolidated.