

Every Action Counts: Determinants of young people's trajectories from education to employment in protracted displacement

By the Centre for Lebanese Studies and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice

Saturday 20th June 2020 is World Refugee Day. This year's theme is "Every Action Counts", highlighting refugees' contributions to their societies, and the importance of creating a more just, equal, and inclusive world in which no one is left behind. The Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice's (CENDEP) research programme "From Education to Employment" - funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) - works with young people living in protracted displacement in Lebanon and Jordan, seeking to understand their trajectories from education to employment.

Education is seen as a crucial aspect in young people's lives, affecting and reflecting their chances in life, their aspirations and dreams, their security, and their place in society. Insights into the impact of financial crises on youth transitions from education and into employment have advanced our thinking on the increasing uncertainty and precarity facing young people – an uncertainty that is now inherent in the 'new normal' following the COVID19 pandemic. However, there are still gaps in our knowledge when it comes to different groups of young people. Refugees are often not seen as a relevant group in research on school to work trajectories in the Middle East, and the Global South more generally.

One of the main questions that we are grappling with in our work is how young people's different social positions – their legal status, their gender, and their family background – and the inclusions and exclusions associated with these positions influence their trajectories from education to employment. In this blog we reflect on the results from our survey on the meaning of these social positions for young people's education outcome, employment outcome and employability. The survey collected information from 1442 young persons (aged 15 to 29 years old) with different nationalities (Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Lebanese), legal statuses and socio-economic backgrounds, in both Lebanon and Jordan.ⁱ

Legal status

In the survey we use two broad categories of legal status: being a citizen of the country where you live or being a refugee. One of the key findings of our research is that legal status is a significant determinant of young people dropping out of school.ⁱⁱ While nationals are less likely to drop out of school than refugees in both countries, the effect was much greater in Lebanon. Legal status also strongly effects educational outcomes in Lebanon where nationals are almost 20% more likely to reach higher levels of schooling, as compared to refugees. However, the same effect was not found in Jordan. In both countries, nationals are more likely to have a higher net monthly earnings than refugees, to be in a job relevant to their education, and to be satisfied with their job.

Gender

Gender is a determinant of educational outcomes in Lebanon where males are more likely to drop out than females. However, we do not find the same differences in Jordan. In contrast, males in both Lebanon and Jordan are more likely to be employed as compared to females: These findings demonstrate the weak link between education and employability. Our results from both countries

indicate that completing post-secondary or vocational training has no significant effect on the probability of being employed compared to those who only completed primary level or received no education. In Lebanon, completing secondary education may even reduce the probability of being employed, as compared to individuals who completed primary level/no education. Results from Jordan reveal that secondary education is not a significant determinant of employability.

Family Background and place

Family background and place of residence are significant factors in understanding young people's education and employment. Three key findings stand out in our research:

Firstly, that parents' education has an important role in determining the likelihood of dropping out and educational outcomes. Mothers' education seems to be of greater importance compared to father's education over all educational levels in both countries. For instance, having a mother with post-secondary education reduces an individual's dropout probability significantly compared to having a mother with primary education/no education. Similarly, our results indicate that the higher the mother's educational attainment (secondary/post-secondary) is, the more likely it is that a young person will have better educational outcome.

Secondly, place is a determinant of employability and employment outcomes with individuals residing in urban areas being more likely to be employed in Lebanon and Jordan. A young person living in an urban area such as Beirut is more likely to be employed compared to a young person residing in a semi-urban area such as the Bekaa.

Finally, in Lebanon, single young people are more likely to be employed compared to married/divorced young people, but the same effect on employability is not found in Jordan.

Towards a more inclusive understanding of young people in protracted refugee situations

The results presented show that legal status is an important determinant of education and employment outcomes, and that refugees continue to have lower outcomes than peers who are nationals of their host state. While this has important ramifications for refugee education, and employment policy in both countries, it is important to recognise that legal status is not the sole determinant of education and employment outcomes for young people living in Lebanon and Jordan. Gender, parental education background, and place of residence all have significant effects on young people's trajectories. The results also show important differences between young people's outcomes in Lebanon and Jordan.

These results highlight the importance of taking an intersectional approach to understanding young people's trajectories from education to employment and to understanding how their different statuses shape their trajectories within their national and local context. In order to work towards a more just, equal and inclusive world where no one is left behind, the lived realities of young people across social positions must be reflected. As we continue our research, we will be paying attention to how young people understand, explain, and navigate these influences on their trajectories from education to employment.

The full report will be published on CLS and CENDEP website next month.

ⁱ The overall study adopts a mixed-method approach. It combines a face-to-face survey of youth schooling and employment experiences with in-depth narrative interviews with young people (aged 15-29 years old) and their families. The face-to-face quantitative survey collected information pertaining to the young person's legal status, socio-economic profile, household living conditions, education and employment. It was conducted between August 2019 and October 2019. The selection of the sample was representative of the different legal statuses of the overall population in the areas where we worked, according to available statistics. The study covered three areas in Lebanon, Beirut, the South and Bekaa and nine districts in the governorate of Amman, Jordan. Hence, when referring to Jordan here, all cases are in the governorate of Amman.

ⁱⁱ Dropout: include any person who did not obtain an educational certificate that qualifies him/her to compete for a non-labour intensive job market.