



ACTED/GAC LABOUR MARKET ASSESSMENT: IDLEB GOVERNORATE, SYRIA

Draft Assessment Report

April 2017

Prepared by International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS)



ACTED

i-APS
▶ People-first development

This report was commissioned by the Agence d'Aide a la Cooperation Technique et au Developpement (ACTED) and developed by the International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS).

The information and views expressed herein are those of the authors, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of ACTED or Global Affairs Canada.

Cover photograph: i-APS, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the design, implementation and validation of the Labour Market Assessment, International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS) is deeply grateful for the outstanding technical and management contributions of Wessam Alhaj Hassan and Charlene Brossard of ACTED.

We would also like to acknowledge the immense efforts of the design and data collection team, without which the assessment would not have been possible. We are grateful to the project Team Leader, Ghaith Ghaith Al Bahr, our i-APS Syrian colleagues in Turkey, and the i-APS Turkey and Headquarters teams. The generous funding provided by the Global Affairs Canada through ACTED was instrumental in ensuring this assessment took place.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	5
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	0
Labour Market Demand	2
LABOUR MARKET SECTORS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	2
EMPLOYMENT TRENDS	3
EMPLOYEE PROFILE PREFERRED BY EMPLOYERS	3
Labour Market Supply	4
EMPLOYMENT AND CANDIDATES' SKILLS AND INTERESTS	4
ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET	5
Vocational Training Providers	5
EXISTING TRAINING COURSES	5
CHALLENGES FACED BY TRAINING PROVIDERS	6
TRAINING OUTCOMES	6
II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	7
Description of the Region	7
Objective of the Labour Market Assessment (LMA)	8
III. SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	0
Desk Review	0
Semi-Structured Key Informant Interviews	1
In-Depth Interviews with Employers/Small Business Operators	1
Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	1
Interactive Forum on Vocational Training and Livelihoods	2
Facility Inventory – TVET VTC	2
Sampling	2
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	3
Labour market demand	3
LABOUR MARKET SECTORS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	3
CHALLENGING JOBS/POSITIONS FOR RECRUITMENT	6

WAGES AND CONTRACTS	8
EMPLOYMENT TRENDS	8
GENDER PROFILE PREFERRED BY EMPLOYERS	10
AGE PROFILE DESIRED BY EMPLOYERS	11
EDUCATION PROFILE PREFERRED BY EMPLOYERS	11
COMPETENCIES AND CROSS-SECTORAL SKILLS PREFERRED BY EMPLOYERS	12
DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED BY EMPLOYERS	13
ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES	14
ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS TOWARDS IDPs	14
ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS TOWARDS VOCATIONAL TRAINING GRADUATES	15
RISKS AND CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYERS	16
Labour market supply	17
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILL INTERESTS	17
CHALLENGES FOR JOB SEEKERS	18
ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET	19
WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET	19
Vocational training providers	20
EXISTING TRAINING COURSES	20
CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FACED BY PROVIDERS	22
EMPLOYABILITY PROSPECTS OF TRAINEES	23
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	25
VI. ANNEXES	32
A. Terms of Reference	32
B. Acronyms	32
C. Survey Schedule	32
D. Questionnaire template	32
E. Field data used, including baselines	32
F. Map of locations surveyed	32
G. Bibliography	32
H. Photos	32

List of Tables

Table 1. Brief presentation of the methods used for the LMA. 1
 Table 2. LMA sampling per location and assessment tool. 2

List of Figures

Figure 1. Comparison of active sectors by area. 3
 Figure 2. Comparison of the sectors with the most vacancies, by area..... 5
 Figure 3. Comparison of challenging positions for recruitment, by area..... 7
 Figure 4. Average monthly salary provided to employees, by area. 8
 Figure 5. Number of employees hired in the past six month, by area..... 9
 Figure 6. Number of employees planned for hire in the next six months, by area. 10
 Figure 7. Employee Gender Preferences, by area. 10
 Figure 8. Preferred age range of employee, by area..... 11
 Figure 9. Preferred minimal educational qualification level of employee, by area. 12
 Figure 10. Competencies and cross-sectoral skills desired by employers, by area. 12
 Figure 11. Documentation required from job applicants, by area. 13
 Figure 12. Preferred status of employee, by area. 15
 Figure 13. Challenges IDPs face in finding employment, by area. 15
 Figure 14. Likelihood of employing vocational training center graduates for relevant vacancies, by area. 16
 Figure 15. Risks and challenges facing small businesses, by area..... 16
 Figure 16. Primary method of employee recruitment, by area..... 19
 Figure 17. Jobs considered suitable for women, by group. 20
 Figure 18. Suggested sectors and positions for vocational training, by area..... 25

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS) conducted a Labour Market Assessment (LMA) in Idleb Governorate for the ACTED Project, “*Multi-year humanitarian response and stabilization assistance to help build the resilience of conflict-affected communities in opposition-held areas of Syria*”. The Project, funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), is designed to address reduced agricultural production, collapse of the agricultural value chain, the damaged business environment, lack of vocational training, the discrepancy between skills needed by the labour market and skills available, and the disproportionate impact that the collapse of livelihoods activities has had on women and girls. The programme is designed to help men and women mitigate the most significant barriers they face in accessing livelihoods and help them to better meet their own needs, without the reliance on continual humanitarian hand-outs or negative coping strategies. The learning from this assessment will be used to understand the labour market needs per district within Idleb, the gaps in skill sets among the population residing in each district, and the availability of training programmes. Using this information, ACTED shall be well placed to develop appropriate vocational training programmes and opportunities that are designed not only meet local business needs but also, to ensure programmes are tailored to specific needs; such as women and the disabled.

Idleb Governorate continues to be the destination to which IDPs from across the country seek refuge. The arrival of thousands of people in the past six months from Darayya, Khan Elshih, Moadamiyet Elsham, Qudisya, Hama and At-Tall towns has further strained the already stretched resources of the host community, as well as the capacity of humanitarian organisations in the Governorate. More than 900,000 IDPs from across Syria currently reside in Idleb Governorate. Of the total population number (1.78 million), 1.3 million are assessed to be in need of one or more forms of assistance.

To first understand the dynamics of the labour force and employment in Idleb, as well as the range of existing vocational training centers, ACTED commissioned i-APS to conduct a Labour Market Assessment. The objectives of this LMA were to understand which skills to offer through Vocational Training (VT) that are relevant to the labour market needs in Northern Idleb and to identify specific VTs that would be most beneficial/impactful in improving beneficiaries’ chances to attain sustainable livelihoods.

To achieve these objectives, a multi-methods approach was used. This included: 1) desk research of relevant documents and literature, 2) Key Informant interviews, 3) focus group discussions, 4) Facility Survey 3) and in-depth interviews (Table 1).

TABLE 1. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE METHODS USED FOR THE LMA.

Methodology	Respondent Profile	Sample Size
Desk Review	The Assessment Team reviewed the ACTED project implementation plan, requested additional ACTED documents, and continued to review relevant documents for the duration of the assessment finally coming to fruition in this final report.	66 documents reviewed
Key Informant Interviews	KII lists were developed by the Assessment Team with input from ACTED and implementing partners. The questionnaire was structured to accommodate the target groups of local authorities, local councils, ACTED staff members, Syria Relief, and other NGO/CSO staff offering job opportunities and training. This was adapted to target questions at VTC staff, and another targeted at two specialists in e-marketing on online employment opportunities	14
In-Depth Interviews with Employers/Small Business Operators	Assessment Team collected quantitative data by conducting 70 individual in-depth interviews through survey questionnaires with employers in the industries of construction, agriculture, livestock, retail trading, NGO sector, service providers,	70
Interactive Forum on Vocational Training and Livelihoods	A one-day interactive Forum attended by 10 participants from 8 different agencies (i.e. ACTED, CARE/ Syria Resilience Consortium, IRC, PiN, Syria Relief, WATAN/ Syan, Masters, i-APS).	1 day
Focus Group Discussions	A total of six FGDs took place in Idleb City with three types of groups disaggregated by male and female: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employed males and females. 2. Unemployed males and females. Males and females who need to change vocations due to disability.	6
Facility Survey	Facility Inventory – TVET VTC	1

Labour Market Demand

Labour market sectors and employment opportunities

Findings from the assessment identified the key sectors in each location assessed and correspondingly, the sectors with the most available employment opportunities. The assessment further identified positions of high demand that are in short supply because they draw insufficient numbers of qualified or interested applicants. Findings from interviews with 70 employers (57 M/13 F) conducted in all locations show that **retail trade, sewing/textiles, the medical field, and agriculture are active sectors in at least three locations, while blacksmith/metalwork are predominant in two.** Manufacturing dominates the economy of Ma'rat Al Nu'man, followed by agriculture, while a strong NGO/humanitarian aid sector is present in Idleb City. Correspondingly, these sectors also have most job vacancies available.

Jobs that tended to struggle to recruit candidates often require more extensive technical skills, such as electronics/electrical repair and maintenance, mechanics, or engineering positions, or those that involve specialised and intensive training/education such as nursing and midwifery. In Idleb City, key informants noted that recruitment is difficult for mechanic positions, as well as for those aforementioned specialised positions (i.e. in Sarmada, nursing, midwifery, and engineering positions). In Saraqeb and Ma'rat Al Nu'man, according to key informants, employers struggle to fill vacancies for electronics specialists (both locations) and engineering positions (Saraqeb), along with positions in office work (Saraqeb), sewing/textile (Ma'rat Al Nu'man), and food production (both locations).

Across the areas assessed, employers tend to pay on average between 50-100 USD a month (47%), with lower amounts (<50 USD) commonly provided (44%). Most contracts provided across all the areas are full-time (89%) and tend to be permanent (81%). In Ma'rat Al Nu'man, however, nearly half (47%) said that the majority of contracts are seasonal, which is likely linked to the area's key agriculture sector and its high reliance on seasonally dependent labour.

Recommendation: Depending on the locations chosen, feasibility (in terms of training length required to develop the skills, certifications needed, availability of essential tools and equipment, cost), and types of beneficiaries targeted, ACTED should consider offering courses in sewing/textile, NGO field work, office work, blacksmith/metal work, among others, to effectively prepare candidates to meet local job market demand and increase their prospects for employability after the training.

Employment trends

Employers who were surveyed collectively employ 251 individuals (198 men/53 women), including 5 men with disabilities and 3 women with disabilities. The average firm size among sampled employers was 3.7 employees, with firms likely to be largest in Saraqeb and smallest in Ma'rat Al Nu'man. Women are employed by 15 employers (21%), 6 of whom are men located in three areas (mostly Idleb City, Saraqeb and Sarmada). 8 individuals with disabilities are employed by 6 employers, 4 of whom are female. Half of these employers are based in Idleb City, with the remaining in Ma'rat Al Nu'man. 35 employers have employed a total of 62 IDPs at some point, with most of them located in Idleb City (43%) and Sarmada (40%).¹

The findings also suggest a robust level of hiring activity across the areas assessed, at least among the employers surveyed, with three fourths having hired at least one employee in the past six months. Those expecting to hire collectively have **plans to hire 81 new employees, with the most potential growth in Sarmada and Saraqeb.**

Employee profile preferred by employers

Nearly three fourths of all employers surveyed (71%) indicated a **strong preference for male employees**, as opposed to 16% with no preference. Employers were more likely to express a **preference for hiring younger employees than older ones**, with 40% preferring candidates between the ages of 18-23. Very few respondents did not have an age preference, suggesting that age discrimination could be a potential challenge for older workers. A significant number of all respondents expressed no educational preference (41%). Higher levels of education, at least from the secondary level, are preferred more in Idleb City and Sarmada than in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and Saraqeb.

According to the employers surveyed, **many employers did not find a candidate's disability status to be an impediment to employment with them**, with 39% willing to hire individuals with disabilities, and 30% "maybe" willing to do so. The majority of respondents (70%) expressed no preference for an applicant's displacement status.

While more than half of all the respondents (53%) claimed that they would "likely" hire graduates, including a majority of respondents in Sarmada and Idleb City, employers were not as keen in the other areas; more than half (53%) in Saraqeb and 40% in Ma'rat Al Nu'man are unlikely to hire a graduate.

¹ Two employers are based in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and four in Saraqeb.

Reading and writing skills, followed by communication skills, were the most commonly desired employee competencies, according to two thirds of all employers surveyed (66%). Employers also expressed a preference for previous work experience with a similar business, although to a much lesser extent in Sarmada.

Employers still largely prefer or require formal professional references from previous employers in order to vouch for a candidate's experience (51%). Employers also tend to have no use for CVs, with only 8% of respondents in Idleb City requiring this document.

Recommendation: *For individuals with disabilities, limited mobility can impose constraints and challenges on the types of work accessible to them, depending on their condition. For this reason, ACTED should consider providing courses on sewing/textile/knitting, food production/processing, beauty salon/hairdressing, among others, that can facilitate home-based work, or work where clients come to individuals with disabilities. These positions would also be applicable for women who face movement limitations (by family, for instance) or prefer to work from home.*

Labour Market Supply

Employment and Candidates' Skills and Interests

The qualitative findings suggest that women are more likely to gravitate towards more domestic work and roles traditionally more designated for women. These include sewing, knitting, handicrafts, and beauty salon specialties in addition to several office-based roles within NGOs. However, there are still key constraints for female participation in the labour force such as persisting social norms and pressures, prohibitions by local authorities, and employers' reluctance to hire women. After several years of conflict, many households throughout Idleb have lost their male heads of household because of displacement or as a casualty of the conflict, forcing women to increasingly become the heads of their households and to seek work.

Men across all the FGDs (n=23) were predominantly attracted to working in the mechanical and electrical sectors, such as with the repair of mobile phones, computers, and cars. Moreover, whereas men with disabilities (n=7) were interested in acquiring skills relevant for office work, such as accounting, unemployed men (n=8) were largely drawn to working in the health/medical fields. However, similar to the female unemployed participants, unemployed men were also keen to access jobs in the humanitarian aid sector due to the good salaries and in order to help people. Additionally, men expressed interest in learning how to sew and knit, acquiring cross-sectoral and soft skills (e.g. communication, interview, management skills), and skills for the health/medical sector (e.g. physiotherapy, nursing, or psychosocial work).

Recommendation: *As the assessment found that unemployed FGD male participants in Idleb City were interested in learning sewing, textile and knitting skills, ACTED should explore targeting men specifically with these types of courses. Before proceeding, however, ACTED should corroborate if male targeted sewing and knitting classes would actually be culturally appropriate and desired by men, specifically those unemployed, in the final locations selected.*

Recommendation: *Although embarking in online work would likely be a challenge for many Syrians, given the difficult operating environment in terms of internet connection, electricity and access to equipment and software, ACTED should still explore if translation, graphic design, data analysis, and other types of online work could be feasible for select individuals, including individuals with disabilities and women who need or prefer to work from home, who have sufficient levels of education, computer skills and access to computers/mobile devices to facilitate this type of work.*

Access to the Labour Market

The assessment found that employers across all the areas assessed showed a strong preference for recruiting through relatives and friends, although in Saraqeb referrals from other business owners also proved popular. Very few employers use an employment agency or referrals from training agencies, although the latter method might be affected by the level and quality of outreach and networking that agencies conduct towards them, or their unfamiliarity with these services.

Vocational Training Providers

Existing Training Courses

The assessment mapped out four key in-person vocational training providers in Idleb City, Saraqeb, Sarmada, and in Ma'rat al Nu'man. The largest of these is the Mulham Center for Capacity Building based in Idleb City which covers key competencies in short-courses for college-educated male and female participants to access careers in the NGO sector. Women Now Training Center (Saraqeb) and Al-Imam Sewing Training Center (Sarmada) enroll female participants to provide training in sewing, hairdressing, nursing, English, and use of basic computer software. Darna Training Center in Ma'rat Al Nu'man provides largely English and computer software courses to both men and women. ACTED's training center in Idleb City, currently less operational as the area is now under opposition control, provides computer software training, electronic device maintenance (e.g. television, electronic circuits), and vehicle repair training to about 100 male trainees.

Challenges Faced by Training Providers

The qualitative findings identified several key challenges faced by vocational training providers. Most critically, ongoing security issues prohibit the retention of good staff, protecting trainees on the route to the vocational training centers, and sustainable funding for vocational training centers considering the risk of deteriorating security in various districts within Idleb Governorate. Additionally, inputs for vocational training, e.g. first aid kits, electronics, or sewing kits, are relatively costly, often not available locally, and must be imported from Turkey. Various training centers also expressed challenges in identifying and funding skilled trainers in sectors that are in demand, and therefore, are limited in the scope of trainings they can provide.

Recommendation: *If ACTED's centers are not currently equipped with sufficient numbers of tools and equipment, ACTED should consider adding more items, if costs allow and procurement is not an issue, given that the assessment found that a lack of practical training due in part by a shortage of equipment and tools contributed to insufficient skill building among focus group participants who were former trainees.*

Training Outcomes

Perceptions on training outcomes (employability and employment) are quite mixed between employers and trainees, and depending on the courses the trainees participated in. Mulham reported that a high proportion of their (college-educated) trainees secured employment in the NGO sector. Al-Imam further reported that many of their female graduates have established sewing and knitting businesses. In contrast, ACTED and Women Now reported that approximately 1 in 10 of training graduates were able to secure employment; these findings corroborate graduates' perceptions on their chances of employment. Among the focus group respondents who have previously participated in vocational trainings, they reported that the vast majority (90%) of the trainees were unable to secure jobs due to limited relevant vacancies and insufficient funds to start their own business.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Description of the Region

Idleb (Arabic: إدلب, also spelled Edlib or Idlib) is a city in north-western Syria, capital of the Idleb Governorate, and 59 kilometres (37 mi) south west of Aleppo. It has an elevation of nearly 500 meters (1,600 ft) above sea level. In the 2004 census by the Central Bureau of Statistics, Idleb had a population of 98,791 (2004 census) and in 2010 the population of Idlib was around 165,000 (2010 census). The inhabitants are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims, although there is a significant Christian minority. Idleb is divided into six main districts: Ashrafiyeh (the most populous), Hittin, Hejaz, Downtown, Hurriya, and al-Qusur.

A major agricultural centre of Syria, the Idleb area is also historically significant, containing many "dead cities" and man-made tells. Idleb contains the ancient city of Ebla, once the capital of a powerful kingdom. Idleb is a major production centre for olives, cotton, wheat and fruits, particularly cherries. Other principal crops include almonds, sesame seeds, figs, grapes and tomatoes. In 1995 there were roughly 300 hectares planted with various citrus crop. Olive oil pressing and textiles are some of the city's local industries. The nearby city of Aleppo has an important economic presence in Idleb.

The Central Government, which does not have a presence in Idleb, is the largest state-like actor in the labour market. It provides salaries and pensions to an estimated two million Syrians, but the majority of Syrians depend on some measure of aid and the war economy.²

Within Idleb and Hassekah Governorates, overall 26% of people are still dependent on food distributions as a primary source of food while at least 45% of the entire population of Idleb and Aleppo are relying on continuous water trucking for safe drinking water.³ The repercussions of unmet basic needs have been severe and far-reaching – 38% of children in Idleb Governorate have suffered from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) for example, lack of access to safe drinking water has increased the rate of water borne diseases and led to cholera outbreaks such as the one experienced in Idleb in late 2015, and 45% of households have reported burning furniture, productive assets, and waste as alternative heat sources during the winter months.⁴

Coupled with the collapse of basic services in Syria as a result of the conflict, there has been widespread destruction of livelihoods and employment opportunities – in Idleb Governorate in 2016, for example, 51% cite a lack of resources to buy food as their biggest challenge in feeding their families, and 67% state that food items are now too

² Salvaging Syria's Economy, Chatham House, David Butter, March 2016

³ Northern Syria Market Monitoring Exercise: January-August 2016 Overview, Reach, October 2016

⁴ *Ibid*

expensive.⁵ The inability of people to access and maintain sustainable livelihoods means that those who are vulnerable remain unable to meet their own basic needs or to weather shocks and stresses, perpetuating the reliance on in-kind humanitarian material distributions.

In a 2016 CARE assessment, Dana City (one of the areas targeted by the ACTED/GAC project) key informant interviews (KIIs) identified the most vulnerable group as IDPs hosted by relatives, followed by non-displaced host populations. Male participants in the assessment prioritized needs as livelihoods, food and then shelter, whereas women, prioritized shelter then health. Of the households (HHs) surveyed in Dana, 51% had one member of the family generating income, while 49% did not have a source of income. In addition, 25% of the families surveyed reported at least one child (under the age of 18) engaged in income generating activities.⁶

IDLEB GOVERNORATE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS SNAPSHOT

- More than 713,625 people in need of humanitarian assistance, 361,182 males, 352,443 females and 354,136 people in collective centers and camps.
- Ranked second along with Rural Damascus and Aleppo and after Dar'a, as a governorate most in need of jobs and emergency employment.
- 80% to 90% of the population needs access to markets in terms of business restoration and agricultural inputs.
- Idleb is one of two governorates most affected by the absence of banking and money transfer services.
- Idleb is the governorate that is most seriously affected by lack of electricity, with the majority of the governorate having extremely limited access to electricity.
- 587,981 people are food insecure, 908,840 lack access to healthcare, 248,437 are malnourished, 145,422 are in need of shelter, 584,780 are in need of NFIs and 1,172,791 are in need of water, hygiene and sanitation assistance.
- 248,437 are in need of livelihood assistance.

Objective of the Labour Market Assessment (LMA)

This LMA was designed to ensure that the training provided by ACTED-implemented GAC-funded Project “*Multi-year humanitarian response and stabilization assistance to*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Northern Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, CARE, February 2016



help build the resilience of conflict-affected communities in opposition-held areas of Syria”, complements the current identified gaps in the labour force.

The main objectives of the assessment were to;

1. Identify skills that can be offered through Vocational Training (VT) that are relevant to the labour market needs in Idleb.
2. Identify specific VTs that would be most beneficial/ impactful in improving beneficiaries' chances to attain sustainable livelihoods.

III. SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A multimethod approach was used to conduct this assessment. This included: 1) desk research, 2) semi-structured KIs, 3) in-depth interviews through survey questionnaires, 4) focus groups with employed men and women, unemployed men and women, and men and women who due to disability can no longer engage in their former livelihood activities; 5) gathering views and opinions about labour market needs for conflict-affected peoples through hosting a one-day interactive forum with invited practitioners familiar with the VT sector in the Northern Syria context; and 6) creation of a Facility Inventory for TVET VTC.

Desk Review

The Assessment Team reviewed the ACTED project implementation plan and continued to review relevant ACTED documents for the duration of the assessment finally coming to fruition in this final report. In addition to this, 66 secondary data documents were reviewed as part of the desk top review process (Annex G).

The key secondary data sources considered were:

1. OCHA (2017). Turkey | Syria: Developments in Idleb Governorate and Western Countryside of Aleppo (as of 15 February 2017).
2. Ovensen, G. & Sletten, P (2007). The Syrian Labour Market. Findings from the 2003 Unemployment Survey. Fafo report. 170 pgs.
3. REACH (2015). Northern Syria Market Monitoring Exercise - Idleb Governorate February 2015.
4. REACH (2016). Northern Syria Market Monitoring Exercise: January-August 2016 Overview.
5. REACH (2016). Northern Syria Market Monitoring Exercise. September 2016.
6. REACH (2017). Syria – Displacements within Northern Syria. IDP locations – as of March 11, 2017.
7. Save the Children (2014). Youth labour market & entrepreneurship opportunities in the KRG assessment.
8. Save the Children (2015): Understanding livelihoods in northern Syria: how people are coping with repeated shocks, constant change and an uncertain future. An assessment using a Household Economy Approach and hazard mapping to better understand livelihoods in northern Syria.
9. European Training Foundation: Vocational Education and Training in Syria and its relevance to the Labour Market.

The information yielded from these sources provided important insights on:

- Understanding market functionality in Syria and the ways in which markets cope with challenges created by the conflict.
- The decision-making within families across Syria, specifically how gender, cultural and socioeconomic factors play a role in the decision to move or stay.

- An overview of the Syrian national vocational education and training systems and key challenges the systems face in a wider socio-economic development strategy

The analyses have enabled identification of the gaps between labour market demands and the characteristics of the labour force, and of the sectors with potential to strengthen the labour market and increase employment opportunities.

Semi-Structured Key Informant Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were held with eight people in the areas decided upon jointly with ACTED staff. Quantitative data was collected through KIIs by means of a set of common survey questions with likely answers specific to the information that is being collected on the labour market, types of business, skills needed, jobs available and the gap between skills available vs. skills needed. More qualitative information was collected through follow-up questions to the quantitative survey questions.

KII lists were developed by the Assessment Team with input from ACTED and its implementing partners. The questionnaire was structured to accommodate the target groups of local authorities, local councils, ACTED staff members, Syria Relief, and other NGO/CSO staff offering job opportunities and training. This was adapted to target questions at VTC staff, and another targeted at specialists in e-marketing on online employment opportunities. 14 KIIs were conducted in total.

Instruments used in KIIs, and the list of interviewees, can be found in Annex D.

In-Depth Interviews with Employers/Small Business Operators

Seventy (70) individual in-depth interviews were conducted through survey questionnaires with employers in the industries of construction, agriculture, livestock, retail trading, NGO sector, service providers.

Targeted sampling was used to select employers for the survey in all four locations.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

A total of six FGDs took place in Idleb City with three types of groups disaggregated by male and female:

1. Employed males and females.
2. Unemployed males and females.
3. Males and females who need to change vocations due to disability.

The FGDs had on average 8 participants, and lasted on average 1.25 hours, to allow adequate time for each person's active participation. To ensure comfortable and active engagement of each participant in the discussion, enumerators conducted separate discussions based on gender and community affiliations. FGDs were conducted with adult males and females ranging in age from 19-45.

The full question/moderation guide can be found in Annex D.

Interactive Forum on Vocational Training and Livelihoods

A one-day interactive Forum was implemented under the facilitation of i-APS on March 9, 2017, at ACTED's premises in Gaziantep. The Forum, which attracted the participation of 10 participants from 8 different agencies (i.e. ACTED, CARE/ Syria Resilience Consortium, IRC, PiN, Syria Relief, WATAN/ Syan, Masters, i-APS), aimed at eliciting options about labour market needs for conflict-affected people in Syria, and at cultivating future effective partnerships. Under this context, the event focused on sharing knowledge and experience amongst vocational training practitioners as well as indentifying skills, gaps, and potential opportunities in the vocational training sector. The outputs of the Forum have been included in a dedicated report separately submitted to ACTED.

Facility Inventory – TVET VTC

The current TVET VTC (Vocational Learning High School) was visited on the 26th of March 2017, photographed, assessed, and an inventory taken of materials, capacity, and history of use, according to a structured questionnaire. This contained questions about: size and status of the facility, number of training and support rooms, physical status of rooms (including basic structure of windows, doors, chairs, roof/ ceiling, etc.), numbers and condition of chairs and tables, number of teachers, current and previous courses taught.

Sampling

The sample sizes and the assessment modalities for each area are shown in Table 2. The map of the assessment sites (identified in red) is included in Annex F.

TABLE 2. LMA SAMPLING PER LOCATION AND ASSESSMENT TOOL.

Location	Employer Survey		KII		FGD
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Ma'rat Al Nu'man	14	1	3		
Saraqeb	15		2	1	
Sarmada	13	2	2	1	
Idleb City	15	10	3		6 (23 M/22 F)
Gaziantep			2 e-marketing based KIIs (both male)		
Total	57	13	12	2	6

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Labour market demand

Labour market sectors and employment opportunities

The assessment found that all of the four areas surveyed had diversified economies, but with overlap observed among several key sectors, as Figure 1 shows.

FIGURE 1. COMPARISON OF ACTIVE SECTORS BY AREA⁷.

Idleb City		Sarmada		Saraqeb		Ma'rat Al Nu'man	
Sewing/textile	48%	Sewing/textile	60%	Retail trade	67%	Manufacturing	100%
Medical	44%	Retail trade	53%	Blacksmith / metalwork	60%	Agriculture	67%
NGO / humanitarian aid	44%	Agriculture	40%	Medical	53%	Medical	47%
Agriculture	36%	Construction	40%	Sewing/textile	47%	Blacksmith / metalwork	33%
Retail trade	32%	Other – Electronics Maintenance, Telecommunications	20%	Agriculture	33%	Transportation	27%
Manufacturing	24%	Beauty salon	20%	Transportation	33%	Other – Carpenter / furniture maker, Dairy production, Home food production	27%
Construction	6%	Transportation	20%	Humanitarian sector	13%	Retail trading	20%
Blacksmith / metalwork	16%	Medical	13%	Barber/hairdresser	13%	Barber / hairdresser	13%
Other – Money transfer & Exchange	12%	Livestock	13%	Construction	0%	Sewing/textiles	0%
Beauty salon	8%	NGO / humanitarian aid	7%	Other	0%	NGO / humanitarian aid	0%
Industry	8%	Manufacturing	7%	Beauty salon	0%	Construction	0%

⁷ Idleb City (n=25), Sarmada (n=15), Saraqeb (n=15), Ma'rat Al Nu'man (n=15), all areas (n=70). These sample sizes apply to all Figures with data analysed by area throughout the report.

Barber/hairdresser 8%	Industry 7%	Manufacturing 0%	Beauty salon 0%
Transportation 4%	Blacksmith / metalwork 0%	Industry 0%	Industry 0%
Livestock 0%	Barber/hairdresser 0%	Livestock 0%	Livestock 0%

Findings from interviews with 70 employers (57 M/13 F) conducted in all locations show that retail trade, sewing/textile, the medical field and agriculture are active sectors in at least three locations, while blacksmith/metalwork are predominant in two. Manufacturing dominates the economy of Ma’rat Al Nu’mān, followed by agriculture, while a strong NGO/humanitarian aid sector is present in Idleb City, due to its use as a regional base for many NGO offices.

Interviews conducted with eight key informants (all male) from local councils and NGOs in all areas assessed further corroborate these findings. They showed that NGO/humanitarian aid, medical and sewing/textile industries are major sectors in Idleb City’s economy (along with agriculture, manufacturing, construction, blacksmith/metalwork, mechanic, barber/hairdressing and electronic repair), while retail trade, blacksmithing/metalwork, and agriculture are key to Saraqeb’s. Meanwhile, manufacturing, sewing/textile, the medical field, NGO/humanitarian aid, and agriculture are active sectors in Sarmada, while manufacturing, agriculture, the medical field, blacksmith/metalwork, humanitarian aid and barber/hairdressing are major industries operating in Ma’rat Al Nu’mān.

According to employers surveyed in each location, a handful of industries – including NGO field work, office work, manufacturing, and sewing/textile – are more likely to have the most employment opportunities available, as Figure 2 illustrates. Indeed, in at least three locations, the sectors with the most employment opportunities available were found in NGO and office work, followed by the sewing/textile industry. Notably, this includes Saraqeb, where more than nine in ten respondents indicated that NGO field work has the most employment opportunities, despite it not being identified as a key part of the economy. This suggests that training opportunities targeted at this sector could help meet the demand for qualified, skilled NGO staff in the area.

In Idleb City, respondents reported that many vacancies are also concentrated in the NGO/humanitarian aid sector. Key informants similarly named NGO field work as full of employment opportunities, along with office work and various other sectors.⁸ Coupled

⁸ These include opportunities in blacksmith/metalwork, manufacturing, sewing/textile, nursing, mechanic work, and as electronic specialists.

with the high availability of office work vacancies, as 44% of employers indicated, there is strong potential for organisations to provide training courses to help meet this demand, such as in project management, finance, and monitoring and evaluation/data collection, while keeping in mind the specific hiring needs of local organisations.

Sectors identified as the most active in each area are also more likely to have the most vacancies, according to employers and key informants. Looking at Ma'rat Al Nu'man, for instance, most employment opportunities are concentrated in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, as affirmed by both employers and key informants.⁹ Similarly, in Sarmada, both groups identified office work and sewing/textile (considered a key sector there) as highly employable sectors there.¹⁰ In Saraqeb, nearly two thirds of employers noted that most vacancies are found in blacksmith/metalworking and retail trade, two of the area's most active sectors, although key informants differed in their opinion. Instead, with the exception of NGO field work, they identified a range of other sectors that have high employment opportunities, including office work, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, mechanic work, and work as electronic specialists.

FIGURE 2. COMPARISON OF THE SECTORS WITH THE MOST VACANCIES, BY AREA.

Idleb City		Sarmada		Saraqeb		Ma'rat Al Nu'man	
NGO field worker	60%	Office work	53%	NGO field worker	93%	Manufacturing worker	47%
Office work	44%	Food production	47%	Blacksmith / metalwork	67%	Agricultural worker	47%
Sewing/textile	44%	Sewing/textile	47%	Retail trade	67%	Sewing/textile	27%
Nurse	32%	Engineer assistant	33%	Transportation worker	60%	Office worker	27%
Manufacturing worker	28%	NGO field worker	27%	Sewing/textile		Electronic specialist	27%
Mechanic	24%	Construction	20%	Manufacturing worker	27%	Mechanic	27%
Retail trade	20%	Midwife	13%	Agricultural worker	20%	Carpenter	27%
Engineering assistant	20%	Nurse	13%	Barber/hairdresser	7%	Retail trade	20%
Electronic specialist	16%	Manufacturing worker	7%	Food production	0%	NGO field worker	13%

⁹ Ma'rat Al Nu'man key informants specified that most vacancies were found in construction, food production, electronic specialist and mechanic work.

¹⁰ Sarmada key informants also mentioned vacancies in NGO field work, construction, for engineering assistants, for telecommunication specialists and in finance.

Food production	16%	Blacksmith / metalwork	7%	Nurse	0%	Midwife	13%
Agricultural worker	12%	Mechanic	7%	Mechanic	0%	Barber / hairdresser	13%
Blacksmith / metalwork	12%	Retail trade	7%	Midwife	0%	Nurse	7%
Transportation	8%	Other	7%	Carpenter	0%	Transportation worker	7%
Midwife	8%	Carpentry	0%	Electronic specialist	0%	Other	7%
Carpentry	8%	Electronic specialist	0%	Beauty salon specialist	0%	Food production	0%
Construction	8%	Beauty salon specialist	0%	Other	0%	Beauty salon specialist	0%
Beauty salon specialist	8%	Barber/hairdresser	0%	Office worker	0%	Construction worker	0%
Barber/hairdresser	4%	Transportation	0%	Construction	0%	Blacksmith / metalworker	0%
Livestock worker	4%	Agricultural worker	0%	Engineering assistant	0%	Engineering assistant	0%
Other	4%	Livestock worker	0%	Livestock worker	0%	Livestock worker	0%

Challenging jobs/positions for recruitment

In addition to mapping out the labour market and employment opportunities in the areas assessed, the assessment sought to identify the positions which are in high demand by employers but have short supplies of candidates due to few qualified or interested applicants. What emerged from the employer interviews is that jobs that tended to struggle to recruit candidates often require more extensive technical skills, such as electronics/electrical repair and maintenance, mechanic or engineering positions, or involve specialised and intensive training/education, such as nursing and midwifery.

Key informants echoed similar views, with many highlighting the same challenging positions for recruitment. In Idleb City, key informants noted that recruitment is difficult for mechanic positions, as well as for those mentioned by employers in Figure 3 below, while in Sarmada they specified that nursing, midwifery, and engineering positions often lack sufficient candidates. In Saraqeb and Ma'rat Al Nu'man, according to key informants, employers struggle to fill vacancies for electronics specialists (both locations) and engineering positions (Saraqeb), along with positions in office work (Saraqeb), sewing/textile (Ma'rat Al Nu'man), and food production (both locations).

FIGURE 3. COMPARISON OF CHALLENGING POSITIONS FOR RECRUITMENT, BY AREA.

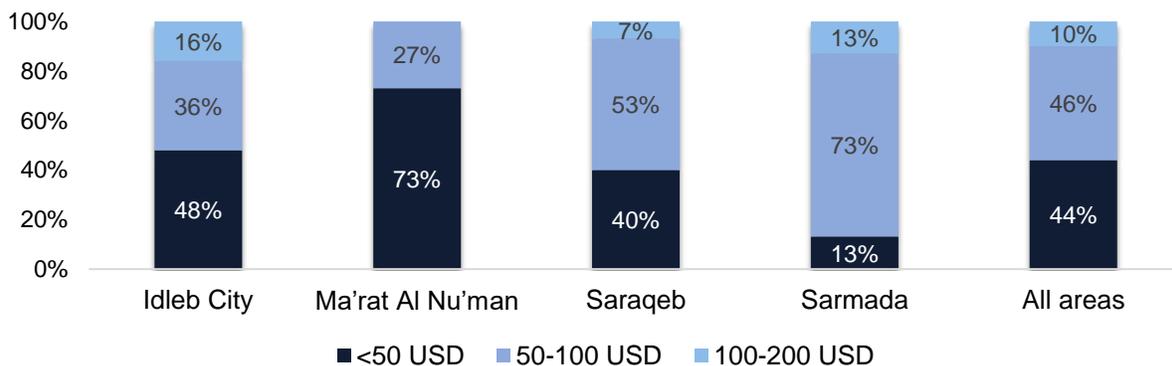
Idleb City		Sarmada		Saraqeb		Ma'rat Al Nu'man	
Electronic specialist	40%	Engineering assistant	73%	Engineering assistant	47%	Manufacturing worker	67%
Food production	36%	Electronic specialist	40%	Electronic specialist	40%	Agricultural worker	33%
Nurse	36%	Nurse	33%	Office worker	27%	Transportation worker	27%
Midwife	36%	Midwife	33%	Construction worker	20%	Electronic specialist	20%
Manufacturing worker	32%	Other - Electronics maintenance, Computer programmers, Financial specialists, Accountants	27%	Food production	13%	Mechanic	20%
Office worker	28%	Sewing/textile	13%	Sewing/textile	13%	Midwife	20%
Mechanic	20%	Mechanic	13%	Mechanic	13%	Blacksmith / metalworker	13%
Sewing/textile	16%	Office worker	13%	Other - Sewing worker (seaming and twisting)	13%	Sewing/textile	13%
Engineering assistant	12%	NGO field worker	13%	Manufacturing worker	13%	Nurse	7%
Beauty salon specialist	8%	Beauty salon specialist	7%	Nurse	7%	Beauty salon specialist	0%
Agricultural worker	8%	Manufacturing worker	7%	Midwife	7%	Carpentry	0%
Retail trade	4%	Food production	0%	Carpentry	7%	Construction worker	0%
Carpentry	4%	Retail trade	0%	Blacksmith/metalworker	7%	Engineering assistant	0%
Other - Physicians	4%	Carpentry	0%	Retail trade	0%	Food production	0%
Construction worker	4%	Agricultural worker	0%	Beauty salon specialist	0%	NGO field worker	0%

NGO field worker	4%	Construction worker	0%	Agricultural worker	0%	Office worker	0%
Transportation worker	4%	Blacksmith/metalworker	0%	NGO field worker	0%	Other	0%
Blacksmith / metalworker	0%	Transportation worker	0%	Transportation worker	0%	Retail trade	0%

Wages and contracts

Across the areas assessed, employers tend to pay on average between 50-100 USD a month (47%), with lower amounts (<50 USD) commonly provided (44%), as Figure 4 demonstrates below. Nearly three-fourths of respondents noted that wage rates tend to be lower in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and higher in Sarmada (73%). While the reasons for this discrepancy are not clear, the fact that one of Ma'rat Al Nu'man's key sectors is agriculture, which tends to involve shorter-term, seasonal work, likely plays a role. Furthermore, as retail trade accounts as one of the major industries in Sarmada and Saraqeb, this might explain the relatively higher wages observed in these areas.

FIGURE 4. AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY PROVIDED TO EMPLOYEES, BY AREA.



Most contracts provided across all the areas are full-time (89%) and tend to be permanent (81%). These contracts predominantly involve year round work (86%), with higher levels seen individually in Saraqeb (100%), Sarmada (100%) and Idleb City (92%). In Ma'rat Al Nu'man, however, nearly half (47%) said that the majority of contracts are seasonal, which is likely linked to the area's key agriculture sector and its high reliance on seasonally dependent labour.

Employment trends

Of the 70 employers surveyed, only two reported having no employees at the time of the assessment. They collectively employ 251 individuals (198 men/53 women), including 5 men with disabilities and 3 women with disabilities, with an average of 3.7 employees. Women are employed by 15 employers (21%), six of whom are men located in three areas (mostly Idleb City, Saraqeb and Sarmada). The majority of employers with female

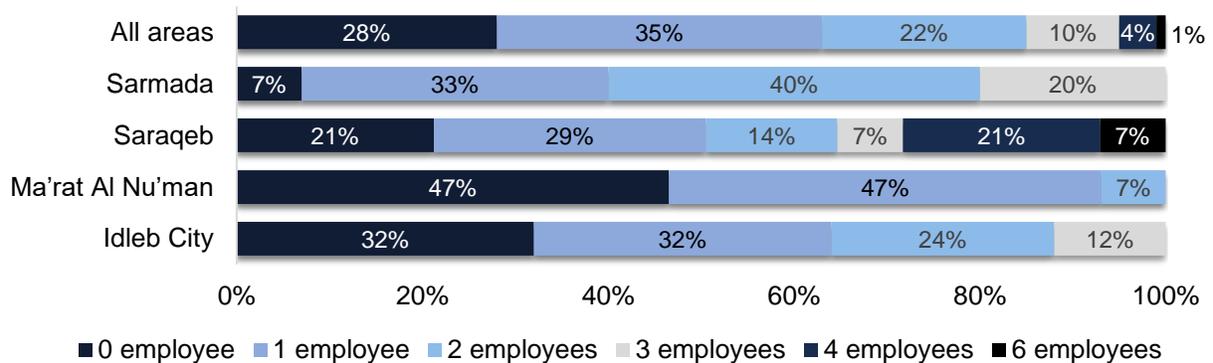


staff (both male and female) are based in Idleb City (60%), followed by Sarmada (27%), Saraqeb (7%) and Ma'rat Al Nu'man (7%). Of the six male employers with female staff, only one of them prefers employing men, with the other two preferring female employees. While these findings suggest that it may be feasible for female employees to find work with male employers in certain contexts, it is also possible that many of the 17 female staff employed by the men are relatives.

Eight individuals with disabilities are employed by six employers, four of whom are female. Half of these employers are based in Idleb City, with the remaining in Ma'rat Al Nu'man. Thirty-five employers have employed a total of 62 IDPs at some point, with most of them located in Idleb City (43%) and Sarmada (40%).¹¹ Of these employers, the vast majority (89%) had no preference regarding their employee's displacement status, although three of them did admit a preference for hiring citizens/members of the host community.

The findings also suggest a robust level of hiring activity across the areas assessed, at least among the employers surveyed, with three fourths having hired at least one employee in the past six months, as Figure 5 illustrates below. At the area level, there were some notable differences. While nearly all the employers interviewed in Sarmada had taken on at least one employee (93%) in the past six months, only about half in Ma'rat Al Nu'man had hired someone. And in Saraqeb, more than a quarter reported hiring at least four employees during this period, a notable departure from the numbers hired by most employers in the other locations.

FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES HIRED IN THE PAST SIX MONTH, BY AREA.

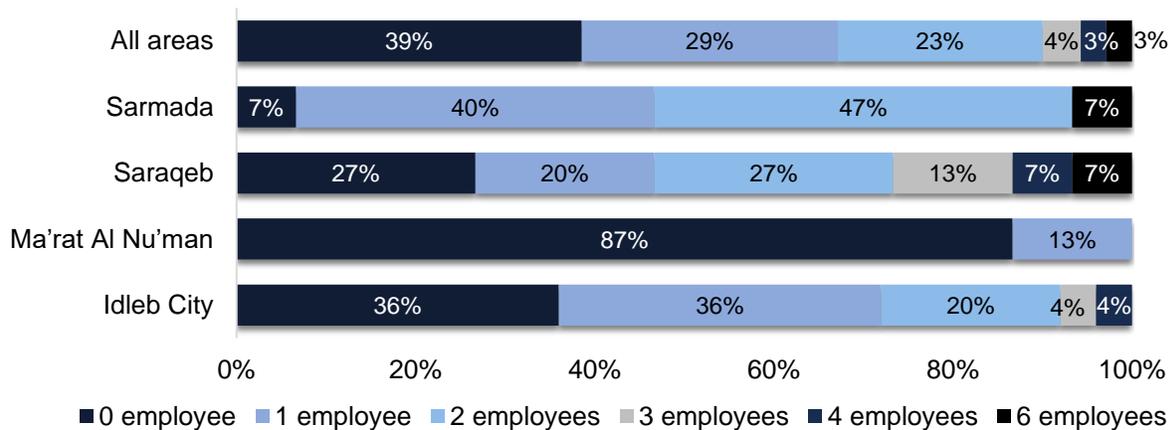


To gain a sense of the future hiring outlook, employers were asked about their hiring plans in the next six months. Of those expecting to hire, they collectively have plans to hire 81 new employees. Compared to past hiring activity, however, about 10% fewer are expected to hire employees in the coming months, as Figure 6 indicates below. Looking

¹¹ Two employers are based in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and four in Saraqeb.

at the specific trends in each area, the hiring outlook looks worse in Ma'rat Al Nu'man, where nearly nine in ten have no plans to hire in the future, in comparison to the other locations, where employers' future six month hiring trends do not deviate for the most part from their past six month hiring trends as demonstrated in Figures 5 and 6.

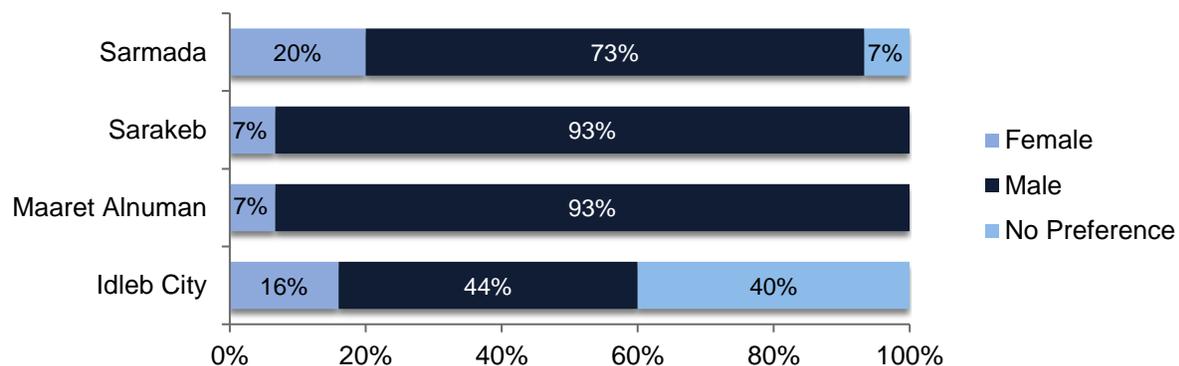
FIGURE 6. NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PLANNED FOR HIRE IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, BY AREA.



Gender profile preferred by employers

Across the areas assessed, the assessment found a wide range of employer preferences regarding employee profile. Predictably, nearly three fourths of all employers surveyed (71%) indicated a strong preference for male employees, as opposed to 16% with no preference, as Figure 7 illustrates below. There was some variability in attitudes observed at the area level, as Figure 7 depicts, with 40% of employers in Idleb City, including 27% of 15 male employers and 60% of ten female employers, open to the idea of hiring women. This variation seen between Idleb City and the other areas might stem in part from the city's more populous and urbane environment, where attitudes are likely to be less conservative than in the other locations. As a result, agencies may find greater leeway in the types of vocational training courses and employer arrangements that can be provided to women in Idleb City.

FIGURE 7. EMPLOYEE GENDER PREFERENCES, BY AREA.

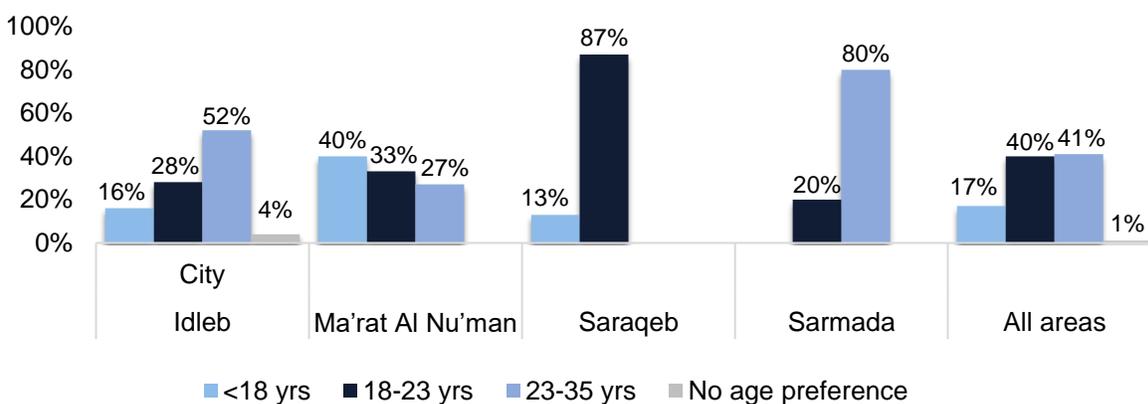


Age profile desired by employers

According to Figure 8 below, employers were more likely to express a preference for hiring younger employees than older ones, with 40% preferring candidates between the ages of 18-23. Very few respondents did not have an age preference, suggesting that age discrimination could be a potential challenge for older workers.

Notably, almost one in five employers expressed a preference for hiring workers under the age of 18. The legal working age in Syria is 15, so these employers would be within their right to employ workers as young as this, although in reality children and youth younger than the legal working age are often found working in Syria, especially in the informal and household economy.

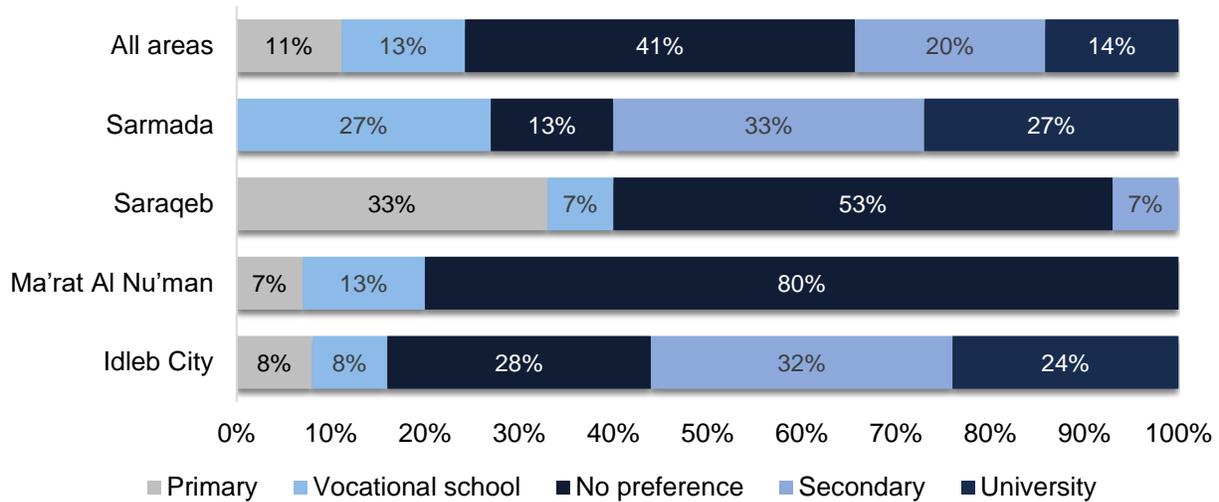
FIGURE 8. PREFERRED AGE RANGE OF EMPLOYEE, BY AREA.



Education profile preferred by employers

The assessment found that employers' educational requirements for employees did not reveal a consistent trend across the areas assessed, although a significant number of all respondents expressed no educational preference (41%), as Figure 9 indicates below. Higher levels of education, at least from the secondary level, are preferred more in Idleb City and Sarmada than in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and Saraqeb, although the reasons for this disparity are not understood. Furthermore, although 40% of respondents in Idleb City generally have no preference with regard to their employees' gender, since a similar proportion also expects a qualified candidate to have at least a secondary level of education, this pattern could disproportionately preclude women from becoming eligible for many vacancies there.

FIGURE 9. PREFERRED MINIMAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE, BY AREA.



Competencies and cross-sectoral skills preferred by employers

Figure 10 below reveals that reading and writing skills, followed by communication skills, were the most commonly desired employee competencies, according to two thirds of all employers surveyed (66%). However, area level differences indicate that while Saraqeb’s employers place high value on their candidates being equipped with sufficient reading/writing skills (93%), only a third of employers in Sarmada seem to value these skills. Unlike Saraqeb and Idleb City, the fact that Sarmada does not have the most vacancies in NGO field work, which likely requires solid reading/writing competencies for job performance, might account for this discrepancy, although not necessarily with Ma’rat Al Nu’mān, where nearly three fourths also prioritised reading and writing skills.

FIGURE 10. COMPETENCIES AND CROSS-SECTORAL SKILLS DESIRED BY EMPLOYERS, BY AREA.

Competency/skill ¹²	Idleb City	Ma’rat Al Nu’mān	Saraqeb	Sarmada	All areas
Computer skills	20%	0%	0%	40%	16%
Reading and writing	64%	73%	93%	33%	66%
Languages	32%	0%	0%	40%	20%
Financial management	12%	7%	13%	27%	14%
Management	12%	0%	0%	7%	6%

¹² Multiple response possible.

Experience in same business	24%	53%	7%	47%	31%
Other – Communication skills	24%	53%	20%	47%	34%

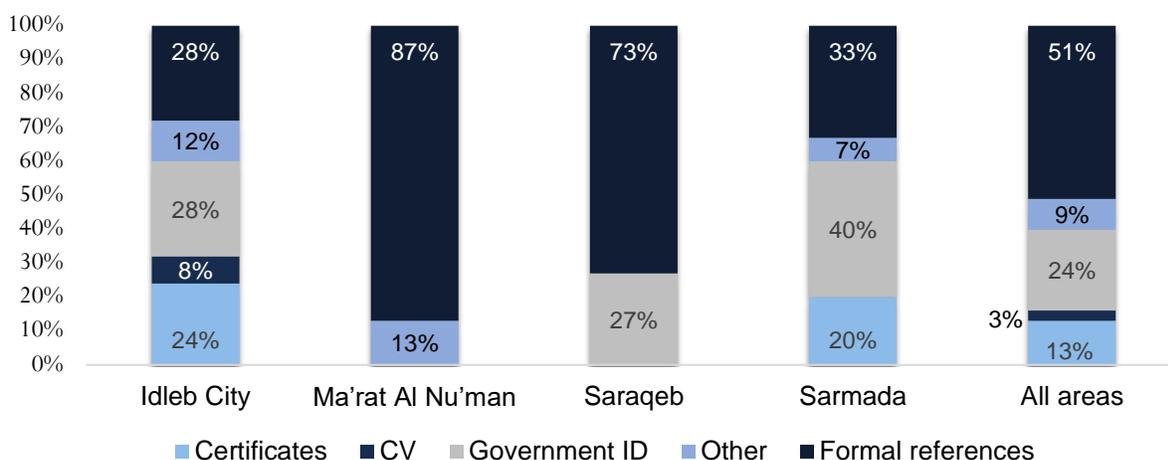
Interestingly, employers in Ma’rat Al Nu’mān and Saraqeb do not appear to prioritise computer skills, perhaps as a result of the particular makeup of their markets — agriculture and manufacturing as the most active sectors in Ma’rat Al Nu’mān, and retail trade and blacksmith/metalwork as the most active ones in Saraqeb — where such skills might not be necessary for effective job performance. Employers also expressed a preference for previous work experience with a similar business, although to a much lesser extent in Sarmada. This requirement could be a barrier to employment for qualified vocational training graduates who lack prior experience in the sector.

Documentation required by employers

As Figure 11 shows below, employers still largely prefer or require formal professional references from previous employers in order to vouch for a candidate’s experience (51%). Depending on the local context, this may present more of a challenge for women who desire to join the labour force but lack the experience or formal references needed by employers.

Employers also tend to have no use for CVs, with only 8% of respondents in Idleb City requiring this document. However, as vacancies in certain sectors, like NGO and office work, may require CVs from applicants, depending on the position, it is advisable that training on CV preparation is provided in the event one is required.

FIGURE 11. DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FROM JOB APPLICANTS, BY AREA.



Attitudes of employers towards individuals with disabilities

According to the employers surveyed, many did not find a candidate's disability status to be an impediment to employment with them, with 39% willing to hire individuals with a disability, and 30% "maybe" willing to do so. Respondents in Idleb City (52%) and Sarmada (60%) were more likely to consider hiring individuals with a disability than in Ma'rat Al Nu'man (20%) and Saraqeb (13%). Furthermore, nearly a quarter (73%) in Ma'rat Al Nu'man said they would "maybe" consider hiring someone with a disability, raising the possibility that with appropriately skilled trainees and strong outreach by vocational training centers, these employers could be persuaded to change their mind.¹³

Attitudes of employers towards IDPs

When asked about hiring IDPs, the majority of respondents (70%) expressed no preference for an applicant's displacement status, as Figure 12 illustrates. As the conflict has caused significant displacement within Idleb governorate, affecting many communities, many Syrians have perhaps become normalised to this reality.

That said, at least a third or more in Idleb City, Ma'rat Al Nu'man, Sarmada expressed reluctance in hiring IDPs, preferring to recruit from the host community instead. The issue with them might be a lack of familiarity with members from outside their community. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges facing IDPs in gaining employment is the widespread lack of trust towards them, as Figure 13 shows below. At the area level, this view also emerged as the most significant challenge facing IDPs in Idleb City (60%), Sarmada (67%), and to a lesser extent in Saraqeb (40%). Compounding this issue is the fact that many employers still prefer to recruit through personal networks, making it potentially even more difficult for IDPs to make inroads with prospective employers.

¹³ One in five in Sarakeb and Sarmada indicated that they would "maybe" hire a person with disability, along with 16% in Idleb City.

Figure 12. Preferred status of employee, by area.

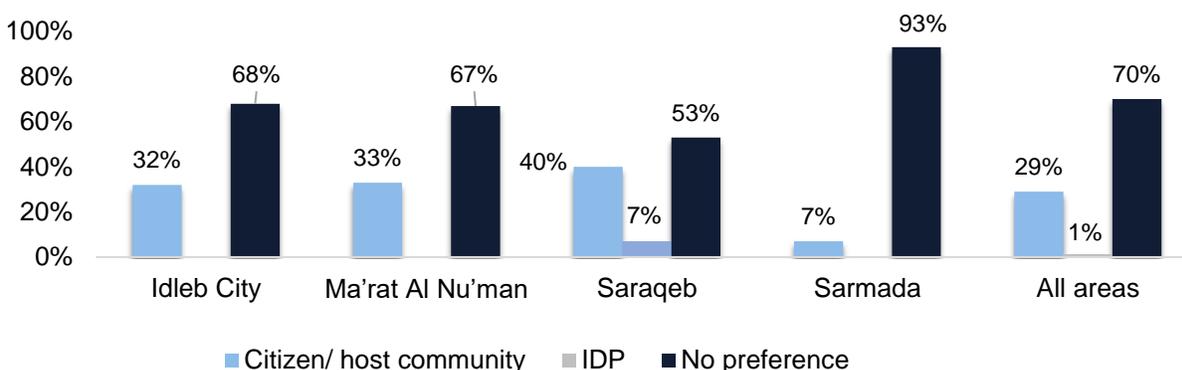


FIGURE 13. CHALLENGES IDPS FACE IN FINDING EMPLOYMENT, BY AREA.

Type of challenge ¹⁴	Idleb City	Ma'rat Al Nu'man	Saraqeb	Sarmada	All areas
Lack of trust	60%	27%	40%	67%	50%
Culture	28%	20%	7%	7%	17%
Lack of knowledge	44%	67%	47%	0%	40%
No tools	32%	53%	33%	27%	36%
Lack of skills	36%	20%	0%	13%	20%
Other	0%	7%	7%	7%	4%

Attitudes of employers towards vocational training graduates

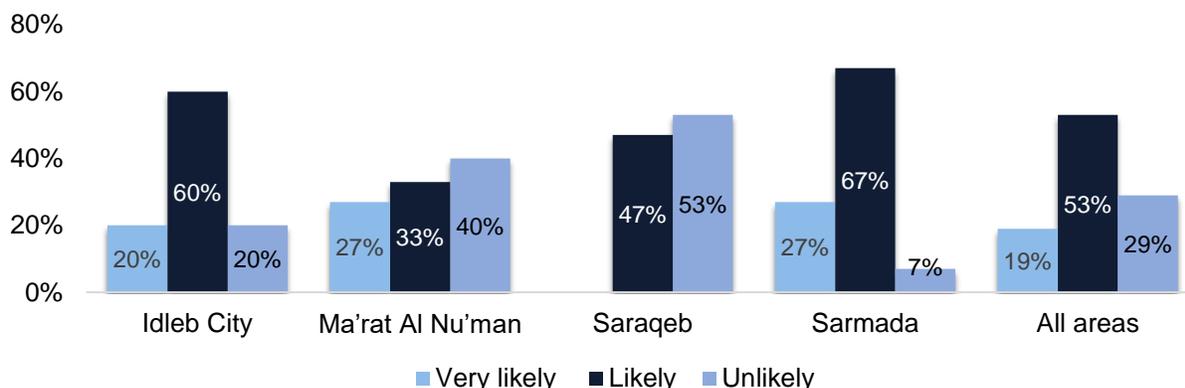
Employers surveyed across all the areas showed no consistent trend in their willingness or not to hire qualified graduates of vocational training centers. While more than half of all the respondents (53%) claimed that they would “likely” hire graduates, including a majority of respondents in Sarmada and Idleb City, employers were not as keen in the other areas; more than half (53%) in Saraqeb and 40% in Ma’rat Al Nu’mān are unlikely to hire a graduate, as Figure 14 reveals below. As the reasons behind this attitude are not well understood, outreach and follow-up on the part of vocational training centers may help better understand and address employers’ views and concerns.

On a more positive note, at least one in five in Idleb City, Ma’rat Al Nu’mān and Sarmada said they would be “very likely” to employ graduates. In fact, across the areas, seven

¹⁴ Multiple response possible.

employers in Sarmada (47%), four in Idleb City (28%), four in Saraqeb (27%), reportedly have already hired vocational training graduates who successfully completed training in the past year. Although a majority surveyed in Ma'rat Al Nu'man (100%), Saraqeb (73%), and Idleb City (52%) did not employ any graduates, this finding could be due to a number of unknown reasons, including receiving no applicants from these centers.¹⁵

FIGURE 14. LIKELIHOOD OF EMPLOYING VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTER GRADUATES FOR RELEVANT VACANCIES, BY AREA.



Risks and challenges to employers

Against the backdrop of Syria's protracted conflict, employers in Idleb face an increasingly challenging environment for operating their businesses. Insecurity risks are prevalent for 81% of the employers surveyed, as Figure 15 shows below, while currency fluctuations, which are increasingly common as the conflict progresses, pose challenges for nearly half (43%) in managing their costs and expenses. This problem appears to be a particularly acute in Saraqeb, according to 87% of employers surveyed there. Further compounding these issues is the inability of more than a quarter of employers (26%) to access the necessary tools/inputs for their businesses, particularly in Idleb City and Sarmada. Finding appropriately skilled labour is another challenge for some (24%), and seems to be a much more significant issue in Idleb City and Ma'rat Al Nu'man.

FIGURE 15. RISKS AND CHALLENGES FACING SMALL BUSINESSES, BY AREA.

Risk/challenge ¹⁶	Idleb City	Ma'rat Al Nu'man	Saraqeb	Sarmada	All areas
Security	80%	100%	60%	87%	81%

¹⁵ 40% in Sarmada and 20% in Idleb City did not know. 13% in Sarmada did not hire any graduates.

¹⁶ Multiple response possible.

Transportation	20%	33%	7%	0%	16%
Military groups	20%	0%	0%	47%	17%
Appropriately skilled labour	36%	40%	13%	0%	24%
Labour costs	28%	0%	7%	0%	11%
Unavailability of tools/ inputs	36%	20%	7%	33%	26%
Currency fluctuation & availability	40%	27%	87%	20%	43%
Other – Weak purchasing power of consumers	4%	0%	7%	0%	3%

Labour market supply

Employment and skill interests

Through the FGDs, the assessment found a range of skillsets and employment interests specific to the different needs of women and men, as well as of those who are employed, unemployed, and have disabilities. Overall, women in the FGDs (n=22) tended to gravitate more towards traditional female dominated and female accepted work. Specifically, employed women (n=8) and women with disabilities (n=6) were more likely to express an interest in working with sewing and knitting skills, handicrafts, as beauty salon specialists, and in hairdressing, than unemployed women (n=8). As six of the eight unemployed female participants already had some knowledge of sewing and knitting, they were understandably desirous to gain skills in other areas. It is worth noting that women with disabilities might also be attracted to the types of jobs described above because the work could more easily be performed at home and is more compatible with their condition. Indeed, for exactly this reason, the female participants with disabilities were also interested in learning skills that could facilitate online work from home.

Both employed and unemployed women were drawn to work in the health/medical sector, specifically in physiotherapy, nursing and psycho-social work, and in child education (e.g. kindergartens). Moreover, unemployed women were attracted to skills useful for NGO/humanitarian aid work, largely because these types of jobs tend to pay well, while employed women desired to acquire more computer software and application skills with Microsoft Office, email, and other electronic communication programmes. As several employed women were already equipped with some basic computer knowledge, they

were keen to improve upon these skills or graduate to more sophisticated software and applications.

Men across all the FGDs (n=23) were predominantly attracted to working in the mechanical and electrical sectors, such as with the repair of mobile phones, computers, and cars. Moreover, whereas men with disabilities (n=7) were interested in acquiring skills relevant for office work, such as accounting, unemployed men (n=8) were largely drawn to working in the health/medical fields. Like the unemployed female participants, unemployed men were also keen to access jobs in the humanitarian aid sector due to the good salaries and in order to help people. What was also noteworthy was the interest shown in learning sewing, knitting and textile skills by the unemployed men. As the sewing/textile sector has one of the highest availability of employment opportunities in all the locations assessed, as discussed previously, it is not surprising that those who are unemployed would gravitate to skills and a sector that has a better chance of securing employment.

Participants, regardless of status, also underlined the importance of acquiring the soft skills necessary to conduct a job search and for other employment functions. These skills include how and where to locate vacancies, and the ability to prepare a CV, conduct job interviews, and communicate and negotiate well with prospective employers or clients. Additionally, employed participants added that business planning, management and leadership skills, such as how to conduct a feasibility study, should be offered to those planning to open a business.

Challenges for job seekers

Through the FGDs conducted with unemployed participants and individuals with disabilities, the assessment found that both groups face similar challenges in their efforts to find work. Poor or a lack of access to internet connection (made more difficult by high internet prices, frequent power outages, and no generators to compensate for these outages), as well as a lack of regular access to computers and/or mobile phones, were cited as key obstacles to their job search.

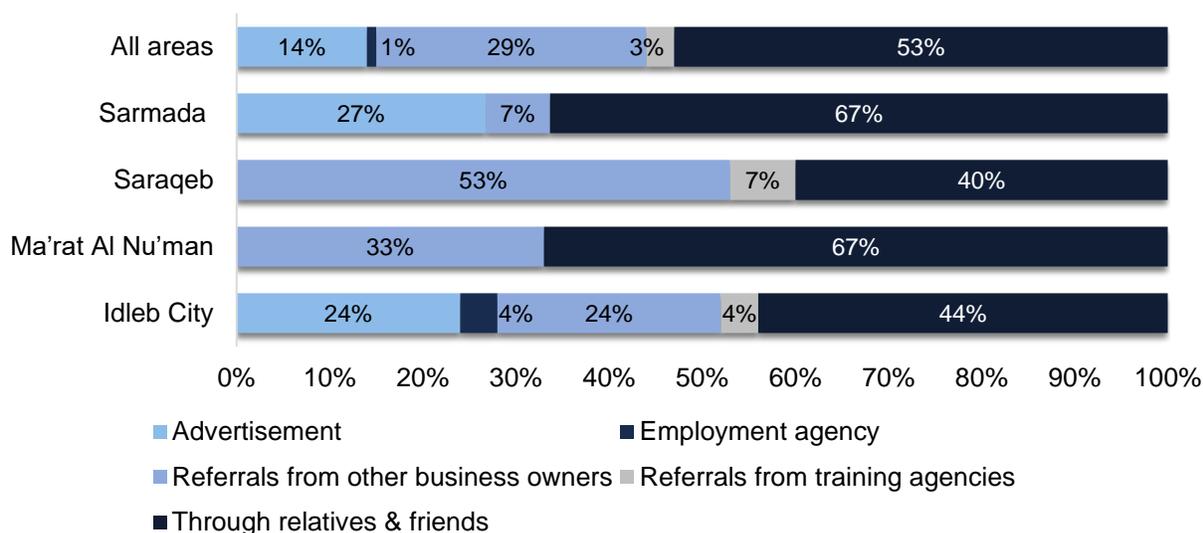
Both groups also remarked about lacking the necessary tools and inputs to effectively carry out jobs in which they are interested. For instance, sewing machines, physiotherapy tools, and electronic maintenance tools were noted as specific items needed in order to secure and perform these types of jobs.

Participants with disabilities also reported facing challenges with transportation which can complicate their job search efforts. Specifically, they often require specialised forms of transportation currently unavailable in order to be mobile.

Access to the labour market

The assessment found that employers across all the areas assessed showed a strong preference for recruiting through relatives and friends, although in Saraqeb referrals from other business owners also proved popular, as Figure 16 illustrates below. Very few use an employment agency or referrals from training agencies, although the latter method might be affected by the level and quality of outreach and networking that agencies conduct towards them, or unfamiliarity with these services. Surprisingly, employers in Ma'rat Al Nu'man and Saraqeb tend not to rely on advertisements, but as this question required respondents to reveal their primary method of recruitment, it is possible that employers in these areas are in fact using a range of recruitment strategies, including advertisements.

FIGURE 16. PRIMARY METHOD OF EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, BY AREA.



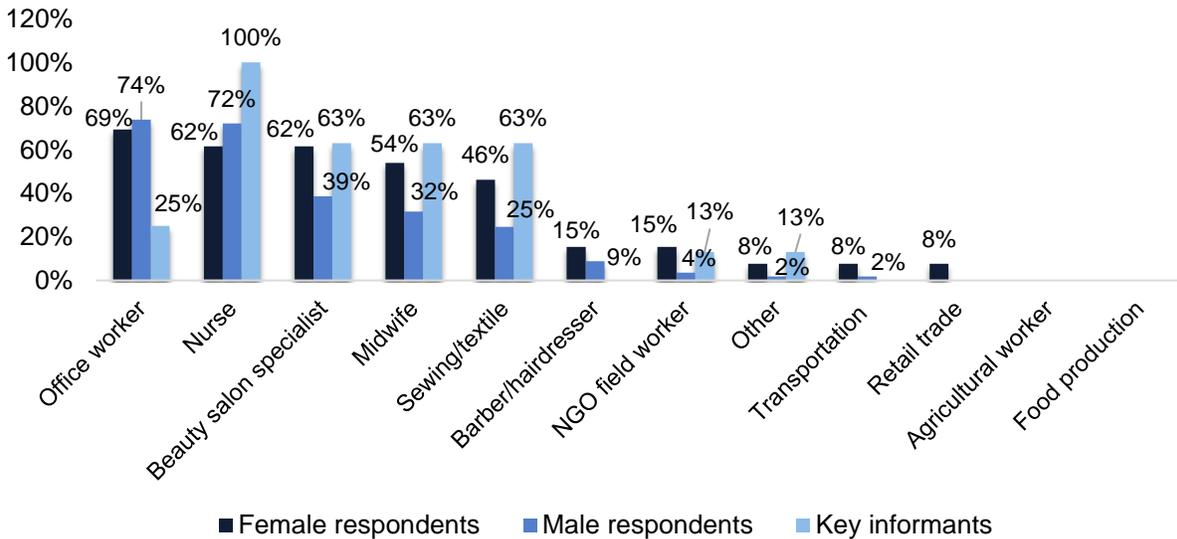
Women in the labour market

The assessment found that while women are certainly participants in the labour force, as demonstrated previously by the fact that 19% of the employers interviewed are female, and that employers have 53 female staff, representing 21% of the total number (251) employed, there are key constraints specific to their relationship with the labour market. On the one hand, women often face social norms and pressures, as well as official prohibitions by local authorities, which can restrict their ability to participate fully in public life, including elements of the labour market. For instance, although the employer surveys revealed that 40% of the 15 employers with female staff are men, as discussed above, it warrants caution in assuming that women are for the most part able to work alongside men in the areas assessed. These women may be related to the men or work in separate facilities.

On the other hand, because many households have lost their providers, either due to displacement or as a casualty of the conflict, women are increasingly forced to become heads of their households and seek work, but usually without sufficient skills or education.

In terms of women’s participation in the labour market, the assessment found general consensus among women, men, and key informants about the key sectors and jobs considered most suitable for women. As illustrated below in Figure 17,¹⁷ these fields include office work, nursing, sewing/textile, midwifery, and work as a beauty salon specialist. Notably, the findings also reveal some key differences between women and men on the types of work deemed unsuitable for women by both groups. For instance, women are two times more likely than men to view sewing/textile work to be suitable for women, and three times more likely than men to view the same with NGO field work. Although one woman (8%) also indicated that transportation work is suitable for women, generally this doesn’t seem to be the case, as unemployed FGD participants highlighted this specific profession as being particularly unacceptable for women.

FIGURE 17. JOBS CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR WOMEN, BY GROUP.



Vocational training providers

Existing training courses

To map the services of existing vocational training providers in the region, the assessment staff conducted key informant interviews with one staff member from one provider in each of the areas assessed. The four providers interviewed were:

¹⁷ Female respondents (n=13), male respondents (n=57), key informants (n=8).

- Mulham Center for Capacity Building, Idleb City (male) – Supported by Mulham volunteers
- Women Now Training Center, Saraqeb (female) – Supported by Women Now Organisation
- Al-Iman Sewing Training Center, Sarmada (female) – Supported by a private center
- Darna Training Center, Ma'rat Al Nu'man (male) – Supported by Basma Wa Zaituna Organisation

In addition to these providers, the assessment staff conducted a site visit to ACTED's vocational training center in Idleb City, partially functional at this time, and interviewed two social media and online work specialists (both male) in Gaziantep, Turkey, regarding their views on the opportunities and challenges of entering into the online work market.

Of the four centers visited, the Mulham Center for Capacity Building (hereafter Mulham) primarily provides courses on project management, monitoring and evaluation, and finance. Their courses cover key competencies useful for NGO/humanitarian aid work. The center, which was established in 2017, likely emerged to meet the demand for aid workers with the growth of NGO/humanitarian aid agencies in Idleb City. While the center caters to both men and women ages 20-40, including those unemployed, only graduates with a university degree are eligible. They do not have programmes targeted specifically for people with disabilities. On average, courses involve about 100 hours of training for each trainee.

Two of the centers provide trainings targeted at women of all age groups. Women Now Training Center (hereafter Women Now) provides courses on hairdressing, sewing, knitting, handicrafts, nursing, basic computer software, and English language, while the Al-Iman Sewing Training Center (hereafter Al-Iman) offers sewing, knitting and embroidery classes. Additionally, Women Now reported that about 30% of their participants comprise IDPs.

Darna Training Center (hereafter Darna) provides courses on computer software and maintenance, as well as on English, management, and sewing, with courses lasting on average three months. Men and women of all age groups have attended courses at the center, and have included both IDPs and host community participants.

ACTED's center currently provides four courses on vehicle repair, electronic device repair and maintenance (televisions, electronic circuits, video/CD/cassette maintenance), computer repair, and electrical training. Twenty-five trainees attend each course, for a total of 100 trainees. Prior to the area falling to opposition control, the center was able to

train about 1000 trainees a year. The center is also equipped with training rooms for courses on blacksmith/metalwork and carpentry, but the blacksmith section does not contain any equipment/tools (as they were stolen), and the carpentry section lacks personal carpentry tools for training.

ACTED's center currently targets men, but given the increasing need for women to find work as heads of their households, the staff expressed a desire to expand into courses for women, particularly in sewing, textile, knitting, nursing, midwifery, hairdressing, beauty salon specialties and first aid.

The two online work specialists have provided training courses in Turkey for Syrians on social media marketing, e-marketing, self-branding, and online freelancing. Although they have not provided courses in Syria, they would like to expand into this market. According to them, there is a large international market available for online work, including for translation, photography, graphic design, website design, motion graphic, video editing/montage, voice over/voice recording, data analysis, computer/mobile app programming, 3D/digital animation, text writing (typing), and e-marketing services.

Challenges and constraints faced by providers

The challenges faced by the vocational training providers mainly revolve around security, operational and human resource constraints. In addition to security issues, providers face difficulty at times locating suitable and secure facilities for their trainings, and securing continual funding. As a result, providers must sometimes forego certain trainings requiring specialised or expensive equipment and skilled trainers.

Providers noted that access issues to specific training tools and equipment, in terms of availability and cost, also posed a challenge. While some equipment can be procured locally or shipped from Turkey, other items, such as sewing machine spare parts, are not readily available in local markets. Other tools and equipment are quite costly, such as first aid kits, knitting tools, sewing parts, hairdressing materials, computers, and manufacturing machinery, making these types of trainings expensive to run.

Another key challenge facing providers is locating skilled trainers. Providers noted several sectors and fields where they are unable to locate qualified trainers, including physiotherapy, psycho-social support, leadership training, electronic device maintenance, and trainers of photo designing programmes. As a result, even with the desire and the means to deliver specific trainings, providers could continue to remain limited in the types of trainings they can offer if qualified trainers are unavailable or difficult to recruit. On an encouraging note, although one provider initially had issues finding qualified trainers, they were able to address this issue by advertising on social media sites like Facebook and

their website. This suggests that there are effective solutions available to other providers that may be successful for them.

Fortunately for ACTED, its vocational training center is currently staffed with skilled trainers who have been with the center for up to twenty years. However, as they have not received their salaries from the Syrian government in the past year, there is a risk that some might leave if this situation persists.

Employability prospects of trainees

When asked about the employment prospects of trainees, providers were largely positive in their outlook, with some notable differences. Although Mulham reported that a high percentage of their trainees have secured employment, it is worth remembering that the center only accepts university graduates, and that their courses are geared towards meeting the needs of the large NGO/humanitarian aid community in Idleb City. As discussed previously, the NGO/humanitarian aid field comprise one of the top sectors with the most available vacancies in Idleb City, so, not surprisingly, candidates equipped with the skills and knowledge desirable for NGO/humanitarian work are likely more employable.

The employment outlook for trainees of the other providers was also encouraging, particularly with regards to self-employment prospects. Darna reported that most of their trainees had been able to secure jobs, start businesses, and improve skillsets in existing positions. A similar picture emerged with providers targeting women. According to Women Now, about one in ten of their trainees had found a job, about half had started their own businesses, and nearly a third had experienced improvement with their skills for jobs already held. Al-Iman reported that most of their female trainees had established sewing and knitting businesses.

ACTED's center reported that in the past year about one in five of their trainees have established businesses while one in ten have secured jobs. The remaining trainees, while consisting of those who didn't find work, also comprised many individuals who fled Syria as refugees. This situation highlights the potential risk that providers face in investing time, training and resources into trainees. As the protracted conflict results in an increasingly difficult living situation for many in Syria, there is a possibility that some, if not most, graduates will end up leaving the area or country at some point after the training.

According to the online work specialists, about a quarter of trainees found work online or secured some contracts after promoting their services online. That said, it is not clear if these individuals were already well educated or had some robust knowledge of social media and technology prior to working online. Given that online work is initially difficult,

and requires significant up front time marketing and promoting one's services, as the online work specialists acknowledged, it is probably not suitable for some individuals who will be supported by ACTED, such as those without significant education or computer skills.

Moreover, the graduates who found online work were likely based in Turkey, where good internet connection, few power outages, lack of electricity access issues, and access to computer equipment and software applications can easily facilitate the work. As the operating environment in terms of these aspects is more challenging in Syria, embarking on online work is likely to be more problematic for many Syrians for these reasons.

In comparison to the providers, a much dimmer perspective emerged among recipients of vocational training programmes regarding prospects for employability. For instance, among unemployed focus group participants, where eight individuals (four female/four male) had previously attended trainings,¹⁸ both women and men indicated that the majority of participants in their courses (up to 90% in some cases) had not been able to secure jobs or establish businesses, primarily due to limited vacancies and lack of funds to start up enterprises. Instead, according to them, the trainings tended to benefit individuals with jobs who experienced some improvement in their skills.

That said, it is worth noting that most of the trainings attended by these focus group participants were very short, lasting on average 3-7 days. Given that the trainings offered by the providers interviewed are much longer in length, up to a few months depending on course type, this difference could account for the better employment outlook described by providers than the focus group participants. Indeed, two providers recognised the value of longer trainings, especially for equipping trainees with more advanced skills and training them for technically complicated work, such as maintaining and repairing electronic devices. There is also the possibility that providers provided a rosier outlook about their trainees' employment prospects to assessment staff with the hope of securing more funding.

¹⁸ The women participated in trainings on sewing and knitting, physiotherapy, first aid, handicrafts, and literacy skills. The men attended trainings on HR, electronics maintenance, data management, and nursing.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Employment and training opportunities by sector and area

Findings from the assessment identified the key sectors in each location and correspondingly, the sectors with the most available employment opportunities. In addition, the assessment identified positions of high demand that are in short supply because they draw insufficient numbers of qualified or interested applicants. In light of these findings, and depending on the locations chosen, feasibility (in terms of training length required to develop the skills, certifications needed, availability of essential tools and equipment, cost), and types of beneficiaries targeted, ACTED should consider offering courses in the sectors and industries identified below to effectively prepare candidates to meet local job market demand and increase their prospects for employability after the training.¹⁹

FIGURE 18. SUGGESTED SECTORS AND POSITIONS FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING, BY AREA.

Sector/position	Idleb City ²⁰	Sarmada	Saraqeb	Ma'rat Al Nu'man
Agriculture				
Blacksmith/metalwork				
Construction				
Electronics Specialist (repair/maintenance)				
Engineering Assistant				
Food production				
Manufacturing				
Mechanic ²¹				
Midwife				
NGO field work				
Nursing				
Office work				
Retail trade				
Sewing/textile				
Transportation				

¹⁹ These suggestions do not necessarily preclude other types of courses.

²⁰ Cells highlighted in light blue indicate the sectors/positions of high demand but in short supply.

²¹ This should include motorcycle repair, as ACTED's center in Idleb City reported this trade can also be lucrative given the widespread use of motorcycles in Syria.

As a caveat, however, there is one provider in Idleb City (Mulham) which offers NGO/humanitarian aid relevant topics. Therefore, it might be prudent for ACTED not to provide similar courses in order to avoid duplication. On the other hand, as Mulham only accepts university graduates, ACTED might consider offering these types of courses to groups excluded from Mulham.

Furthermore, there were two vocational training providers not visited during the assessment – Bassamat Training Center, in Saraqeb, and Shine Center, in Ma’rat Al Nu’mān. If these two locations are selected, ACTED should verify the courses offered at these centers to avoid duplication, and to ensure there are sufficient labour market opportunities, and demand from the communities, available for both facilities if the same courses are provided.

2. Employment and training opportunities for women

Given that the assessment found that not all types of work are culturally appropriate for women or desired by them, but that increasing numbers of women require skills to work as heads of their households due to the conflict, ACTED should consider including courses in the following sectors and skills with women’s participation in mind. In addition to sectors which tend to have many employment opportunities, the list below includes sectors/jobs that are difficult for recruitment and which drew interest from focus group participants.

- Sewing/textile/knitting
- Office work
- Midwifery
- Nursing
- Physiotherapy
- NGO/humanitarian aid
- Child education (e.g. teaching, working in kindergartens)
- Beauty salon/hairdressing

As another caveat, there are currently vocational training providers in Saraqeb (Women Now), Sarmada (Al-Iman) and Ma’rat Al Nu’mān (Darna) offering sewing and knitting courses for women. As a result, if there is limited demand for these courses or insufficient labour market opportunities to match all the graduates from these centers, ACTED might want to refrain from offering sewing and knitting courses for women in these locations, or only target specific groups such as female individuals with disabilities and/or unemployed men (see more below).

Moreover, in light of the child care responsibilities which fall predominantly on women in these contexts, potentially significantly limiting their participation in outside activities, and

in order to ensure and increase women's participation in the trainings, ACTED should consider providing child care staff at their facilities to care for children while mothers attend the courses.

3. Non-traditional employment and training opportunities for men

As the assessment found that unemployed focus group male participants in Idleb City were interested in learning sewing, textile and knitting skills, ACTED should explore targeting men specifically with these types of courses. Before proceeding, however, ACTED should corroborate if male targeted sewing and knitting classes would actually be culturally appropriate and desired by men, specifically those unemployed, in the final locations selected.

4. Employment and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities

For individuals with disabilities, limited mobility can impose constraints and challenges on the types of work accessible to them, depending on their condition. For this reason, ACTED should consider providing courses in the following sectors that can facilitate home-based work, or work where clients come to individuals for people with disabilities. These positions would also be applicable for women who face movement limitations (by family, for instance) or prefer to work from home.

- Sewing/textile/knitting
- Food production/processing
- Beauty salon/hairdressing
- Electronics repair/maintenance (specialists)
- Computer repair/maintenance
- Mobile phone repair

5. Online work opportunities

According to the two online work specialists interviewed in Gaziantep, there appears to be a robust international market for various online work — for English-Arabic translation, voice-over/voice recording in Arabic, text writing/typing, data analysis, computer/mobile app programming, website and graphic design, motion graphic, video editing/montage, and photography (for instance, according to them, some Syrians have found work with Aljazeera and other channels in motion graphic and photography) — for which Syrians are well-poised to take advantage of, particularly with companies focused on the Middle East and Arabic language markets. In light of this information, although embarking on online work would likely be a challenge for many Syrians, given the difficult operating environment in terms of internet connection, electricity and access to equipment and software, ACTED should still explore if providing training on any of these topics could be feasible for select individuals — including individuals with disabilities and women who

need or prefer to work from home — who have sufficient levels of education, computer skills and access to computers/mobile devices to facilitate this type of work.

6. Cross-sectoral and soft skills

As participants in every focus group underlined the need for skills required for the job search process or development of a business, ACTED should consider complementing the vocational training courses with classes on various soft and cross-sectoral skills. The types of skills to consider offering include but are not limited to:

- CV preparation training
- Job interview training and practice
- Basics on how and where to conduct a job search (online sites, physical places)
- Communication skills (verbal and electronic)
- Negotiation skills
- Leadership/management skills
- Computer skills
- Business development/planning/feasibility study skills
- Marketing (through digital and physical means)²²
- Budgeting

7. Employer outreach

As the assessment found that nearly 30% of all employers surveyed were unwilling to hire vocational training graduates, including more than half of employers in Saraqeb and 40% in Ma'rat Al Nu'man, and that many preferred hiring young employees, ACTED should further explore the reasons for these attitudes in the locations selected. Efforts could entail, for example, staff outreach and focus group discussions conducted with employers in target areas to probe more deeply about their attitudes, concerns, constraints and other factors which impact their desire or ability to hire vocational training graduates and older workers. Information gathered from these efforts could inform locally relevant adjustments to the vocational training programmes to help address employer concerns or constraints.

Furthermore, ACTED should consider equipping vocational training centers with outreach staff who conduct periodic visits with prospective employers to promote the programme and any candidates who might fulfill their hiring needs, and to keep abreast of employer needs. The staff could be based in an employment office established at the training center which is dedicated to employer outreach as well as to providing information on vacancies,

²² Vocational training providers, in particular, recommended providing training on marketing skills and strategies. For example, one provider encourages their graduates to provide free samples to promote their products.

job search resources, and business development information for trainees and graduates.²³ Regardless of the modality chosen, building strong networks and relationships with employers will ensure that the training center is continually able to adapt to changing requirements in the labour market, and strengthen the possibility that employers will turn to the center for recommendations for their vacancies.

8. Job placement

Nearly a third of all the employers surveyed expressed a preference for employees with previous work experience in a similar business, with higher levels observed in Sarmada and Ma'rat Al Nu'man. As this requirement can hinder the employment prospects of qualified vocational training graduates with no prior experience, ACTED should consider incorporating an apprenticeship or internship programme component where feasible. Based on the hiring needs of interested employers, ACTED would place appropriate male and female candidates in these roles, with the expectation that employers would agree to hire, or consider hiring, the apprentices/interns upon successful job performance. Such a programme would not only enable prospective employers to assess a trainee's skills, competencies, and work ethic prior to making a hiring commitment, but also support trainees to acquire practical experience in the sector.

Moreover, in lieu of, or in addition to an apprenticeship/internship programme, ACTED could roll-out a mentorship scheme to enable trainees, in particular women and individuals with disabilities, who are interested in establishing businesses, to gain experience, exposure, and guidance with successfully self-employed men and women on the needs, challenges, and risks of running a business. For women and individuals with disabilities joining the labour force for the first time or with limited experience, linking them to other women or individuals with disabilities as mentors and role models could also yield indirect benefits for their self-confidence and motivation.

As implementing an apprenticeship/internship/mentorship programme is potentially resource and time intensive (identification of interested and suitable employers/business owners, regular follow up with employers/business owners and apprentices/interns, providing full or matching stipends, etc.), ACTED could start a pilot project limiting involvement to the best performing students in the training, to groups which typically face more challenges in finding work such as individuals with disabilities and women, or to specific sectors where practical experience and demonstrated competency of skills, such as in the trades, is essential.

9. Tools and inputs

The assessment found that a key challenge that unemployed and persons with disabilities focus group participants have faced in their employment search was a lack of tools and equipment necessary to perform specific jobs or to establish their own businesses. To support trainees to achieve these goals, or to enable them to continue to perform the job once hired, vocational training centers supported by ACTED should consider providing tools to successful graduates in fields where these items are required, where possible. For expensive tools/equipment, the centers, if equipped with training workshops with equipment (sewing machines, welding tools, machinery, etc), could enable graduates to use the workshops, either freely or with a fee, when not in use during a training. Alternatively, if financially feasible, ACTED could establish workshops dedicated for use, with a fee, by graduates and business owners who may not have the funds yet to buy their own tools/equipment. Moreover, the centers could allow graduates to rent transportable tools/equipment on a rotating or by need basis, or implement another arrangement. A range of modalities are possible.

If the centers are not currently equipped with sufficient numbers of tools and equipment, ACTED should consider adding more items, if costs allow and procurement is not an issue, given that the assessment found that a lack of practical training resulting in part by a shortage of equipment and tools contributed to insufficient skill building among focus group participants who were former trainees.

Additionally, given that job seekers in the FGDs reported that weak/lack of internet connection and lack of computers and mobile devices were challenges to searching for a job, ACTED should consider developing a computer lab in the centers for trainees to have access to appropriate technology for their job search. The lab could also be part of an employment office established to be an employment and business development resource center for trainees, as mentioned above.

10. Grants and start-up funds

Discussions with focus group participants revealed that another challenge faced by vocational training graduates is lack of start-up money to establish businesses. In addition, the assessment found that the majority of male employers interviewed expressed a preference for hiring men (87%), and that women working with men is generally considered socially unacceptable. As a result of these findings, ACTED should remain committed to its intention to support trainees – including women and individuals with disabilities who may face challenges in finding employment with others due to cultural attitudes – with small grants to establish businesses where possible. As the findings also revealed that a higher proportion of the graduates of a couple of vocational training providers interviewed had established businesses instead of finding work with employers,

there appears to be potential for ACTED to increase trainees' employment prospects through self-employment opportunities.

11. Training duration and content

As focus group participants noted previously, vocational trainings have largely been ineffective in their experience usually because of their short duration (anywhere from 2-7 days) and lack of practical training provided (sometimes due to a shortage of training tools and equipment). In light of this finding, and the fact that nearly a third of employers surveyed were reluctant to hire vocational training graduates, ACTED should ensure that training courses are based on the amount of time required to acquire essential skills for specific sectors or positions. Trainings should ensure that generous time is built into the curriculum for on-site practical training and guidance, even if the theoretical component of the course only requires a short period.

Furthermore, to ensure trainings actually equip candidates with the skills employers look for in a specific position, ACTED could either consult local employers, such as those who have expressed interest in hiring trainees in the future, to understand the key skills and competencies they require before developing the training curriculum, or vet pre-existing curriculums with them to determine any gaps.

12. Partnerships

ACTED should consider developing partnerships with other organisations to provide trainings where it lacks the capacity or personnel to offer the training directly. In these instances, ACTED could provide specific trainings – on cross-sectoral skills, for instance – and manage the apprenticeship/internship/mentorship component (if implemented) while the partner offers the technical experience, staff and curriculum for the vocational training component. For example, if ACTED desires to offer sewing and knitting courses in Sarmada, it could partner with Al-Iman, or similarly with existing providers in other places, for the courses that ACTED would like to offer.

Additionally, given the high demand for skilled health professionals as a result of the conflict, and focus group participants' interest in these positions, ACTED should consider forming partnerships with Syrian and international health organisations to provide trainings for current health professionals and/or to individuals seeking to enter the health sector. Although the training requirements for some positions may fall beyond the scope of what ACTED and its partner can provide in order to effectively prepare candidates for the positions, such as lengthy trainings or a high level of training not feasible at the centers, ACTED could explore, in partnership with these agencies, the positions in high need by health care facilities (possible examples: nurses, technicians, etc.) which can be fulfilled by them.

13. Coordination

Given that the NGO/humanitarian sector has many vacancies available in areas like Idleb City, ACTED should coordinate with other actors in the NGO/humanitarian community to determine where it could equip trainees with the skills considered desirable for positions with these organisations. For example, many NGOs have need for data collectors and enumerators, especially female ones which can be a challenge for organisations to recruit for; therefore, ACTED could establish agreements in which other organisations commit to hiring these individuals upon successful completion of the training and internship (if implemented).

VI. ANNEXES

- A. Terms of Reference
- B. Acronyms
- C. Survey Schedule
- D. Questionnaire template
- E. Field data used, including baselines
- F. Map of locations surveyed
- G. Bibliography
- H. Photos