

STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS For Research and Consulting

## **Syrian Young Adults in the Labor Market**

Date: April -2026



# **SSRC**

**STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS  
FOR RESEARCH AND CONSULTING**

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## About us

Strategic Solutions for Research and Consulting (SSRC) is a research and consulting organization based in Damascus, Syria. The institution focuses on the production and analysis of data to support evidence-based decision-making. Its work centers on public opinion research, as well as the systematic measurement and interpretation of social, political, and consumer trends across the Syrian context.

SSRC provides research and advisory services, including the design and implementation of surveys, market studies, and analytical reports. Its methodological approach includes quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, such as Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. These methods are supported by data analysis frameworks and survey methodologies aimed at ensuring reliability and methodological consistency.

The organization's areas of engagement include sectors relevant to socio-economic development, such as business management, education, tourism, governance, social affairs, and community development. Through these activities, SSRC contributes to the generation of data intended to inform institutional planning, policy analysis, and program development.

SSRC operates across multiple regions of Syria, with field access extending from Abukamal to Tartus and from Aleppo to As-Suwayda. This geographic coverage enables the collection of data from diverse local contexts. The organization's work is oriented toward supporting analytical research and providing empirical inputs for stakeholders engaged in policy, development, and economic initiatives.

# 1. Executive Summary

As Syria moves toward recovery and reconstruction, young people aspire to decent work that provides financial stability and professional growth. However, the labor market remains unstable and under-regulated. This study examines the experiences of job-seeking young adults (aged 18–40) in Syria. It identifies key drivers of job instability, assesses the impact of employment challenges on young adults, explores skill needs and learning preferences, and examines expected support from stakeholders.

The study was conducted from December 2025 to January 2026 across eight governorates: Aleppo, Idlib, Tartous, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Daraa. A mixed-methods approach combined a structured survey (376 face-to-face interviews) with field observations and in-depth analysis. All respondents were job seekers, regardless of current employment status.

## Key findings

- Job instability is driven mainly by low wages (68%) that fail to meet basic living needs.
- A mismatch exists between education outcomes and available jobs, affecting (60%) both highly educated graduates and those with limited education.
- Young adults prioritize skills such as language (35%) and job-seeking competencies (33%), preferring hands-on learning, apprenticeships (69%), practical training (52%)
- Most urgent expectations: improving public services (76%) and working conditions (especially in the private sector). Civil society is expected to provide direct job opportunities (67%) while labor unions are expected to strengthen worker rights (70%).

## Recommendations

- Align labor market policies with young adults' capacities and aspirations.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships through apprenticeship and applied training programs.
- Encourage the private sector to create sustainable jobs in promising sectors and support small and medium enterprises.
- Civil society should support young adults-led projects rather than short-term project-based jobs and align vocational training with private sector needs—particularly for individuals with limited education.



## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 Public Sector Recommendations

#### 2.1.1 Recommendation 1:

<p>Establish an official labor market platform that provides accurate and up-to-date data on supply and demand to guide policies, education pathways, and young job seekers decisions.</p>	
<p><b>Problem set</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of reliable official unemployment data and regular national studies identifying in-demand jobs and skills in each governorate.</li> <li>● Young people get confused in choosing fields of study and career paths, as well as the problem of “not knowing what to do after graduation”, highlighted in the study.</li> <li>● Absence of a trusted platform for job postings exposes job seekers to fraud.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Proposed Solutions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a national platform integrating data from employment offices, social security institutions, and household surveys. This platform can then publish periodic reports on the most in-demand occupations, skills gaps, and the geographic distribution of available opportunities, thereby providing a clearer picture of the labor market for all stakeholders.</li> <li>● Develop an official government online platform where all public and quasi-public institutions are encouraged – or required– to post job openings transparently. This platform could also include practical resources such as career counseling services, resume-writing workshops, and interview preparation tools, all available in one place.</li> <li>● Strengthen employment offices and link them with local administrations to identify local job opportunities. For example, neighborhood committees or local municipalities could be invited to help identify temporary or seasonal job opportunities in their areas – such as maintenance projects, community greening initiatives, or local events – and share these opportunities with employment offices, thereby creating clearer pathways between job seekers and local opportunities.</li> </ul>

## 2.1.2 Recommendation 2:

Protect and improve conditions for vulnerable workers (daily wage laborers).	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increase in the number of day laborers due to basic education inaccessibility amongst the displaced population in recent years.</li> <li>• Young adults are forced to drop out of school and support their families due to the absence of a breadwinner or because of economic hardship, even when a breadwinner is present.</li> <li>• Exclusions of day laborers from protection under the current Labor Law (Article 5 of Law No. 17 of 2010).</li> <li>• Lack of contracts, insurance, and income stability, which increases feelings of insecurity and psychological stress.</li> <li>• Working long hours prevents them from finding time to develop their skills or continue their education.</li> <li>• The lack of vocational training programs and educational tracks tailored to this group and compatible with their work schedules.</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A study on making legal amendments to formally recognize daily work (day labor) in the Labor Law/Decree. This may include establishing a clear definition of a “day laborer” and creating a framework for formalizing employment relationships—even short-term ones—through simple contracts that guarantee a minimum daily wage and set reasonable limits on working hours.</li> <li>• Consider offering incentives to institutions and employers who take the initiative to regularize the status of their workers. This could take the form of partial tax exemptions or technical support, particularly for small businesses that register their daily and part-time workers in official records.</li> <li>• There is an opportunity to employ day laborers in reconstruction efforts by providing regular vocational training programs. These programs could be designed to award nationally recognized certificates and developed in partnership with the private sector, civil society organizations, and the General Federation of Trade Unions.</li> <li>• Create flexible education pathways for daily labor workers within government agencies and universities— such as evening classes or online learning options – enabling them to continue their education alongside their work.</li> <li>• Consider establishing a simplified registration mechanism that enables workers to obtain basic health and social insurance coverage,</li> </ul>

	including social protection in the event of work-related accidents and access to necessary medical treatment.
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### 2.1.3 Recommendation 3:

Improve the image of public sector jobs and restore young adults' confidence in working for public sector institutions, attracting individuals with advanced degrees and specialized expertise.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Negative perception of government jobs due to bureaucracy, nepotism, poor performance, marginalization of qualified individuals, and poor salaries has become widespread, particularly in the recent past.</li> <li>● Many qualified young adults prefer to work in the private sector or be self-employed because of the low financial and non-financial rewards offered by government jobs.</li> <li>● Holders of advanced degrees and experienced professionals have reported a lack of opportunities commensurate with their education and skills, leading them to take jobs below their qualifications or to emigrate in search of suitable opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It may be helpful to consider launching a communications effort – perhaps through official channels – that shares the goals of ongoing administrative reforms and affirms the public sector's commitment to competence and fairness. Such an initiative could assist in countering longstanding stereotypes and present government employment as a meaningful and competitive professional path.</li> <li>● One avenue worth exploring is reforming appointment processes to place greater emphasis on qualifications and specialization. This might involve forming diverse recruitment committees that include independent experts and academics to review applicants for leadership and specialized positions, helping to ensure that selection decisions reflect merit.</li> <li>● There may be value in revisiting compensation structures—not only considering adjustments to the minimum wage but also exploring ways to link incentives, bonuses, and rewards to measurable performance indicators (such as productivity standards or skill assessments) rather than relying solely on seniority or informal considerations.</li> </ul>

- Another possibility could involve establishing clear, transparent criteria for contract renewal or termination, making these guidelines publicly available, and providing accessible digital channels through which employees can raise concerns or appeal decisions—fostering a greater sense of fairness and accountability.
- For holders of advanced degrees and professionals with specialized expertise, it might be worth considering a dedicated career pathway. This could include appointments at a grade appropriate to their qualifications (rather than starting at entry level), compensation that reflects their experience, and a transparent probationary period followed by confirmation based on clear performance expectations.
- Encouraging innovation within the public workforce could be another meaningful step. This might involve creating small funding opportunities for development projects proposed by employees or recognizing those whose initiatives contribute to improving institutional performance or reducing costs, sending a signal that creativity is valued.
- Finally, there may be an opportunity to reach out to Syrian professionals abroad through national engagement initiatives. Thoughtfully designed incentive packages, competitive compensation, support with relocation, assurances of professional autonomy, and space to contribute creatively—could help convey that their expertise is not only welcome but genuinely needed.

## 2.2 Private Sector Recommendations

### 2.2.1 Recommendation 1:

Involving the private sector in providing direct, quality employment opportunities for young adults.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most young adults prefer hands-on learning, yet opportunities for this type of learning are virtually nonexistent, and half of them are calling for paid internships.</li><li>• Some young adults struggle with the vast gap between their skill levels and market demands.</li><li>• There is a crisis of confidence in current curricula and educational institutions, as many young adults do not prefer theoretical academic education due to a lack of practical application during their studies, and the fact that curricula are outdated and not kept up to date.</li></ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In-house training programs can be provided for young adults, with the goal of achieving a high rate of permanent employment among trainees. This can be implemented in Syria through partnerships with major companies in the energy, telecommunications, and industrial sectors.</li><li>• Adopt a community-based vocational training model: under this model, young adults affected by the conflict are trained in specific professions—in line with labor market needs—and are then provided with equipment to immediately start income-generating activities, while being organized into “production groups” or “village economic associations” to ensure sustainability and mutual support. The Syrian private sector can adopt this model in partnership with local organizations.</li><li>• Establish a national dual vocational training system (Dual System) through which the private sector commits to providing training placements in actual workplaces, in exchange for government support and tax relief.</li></ul>

## 2.2.2 Recommendation 2:

Strengthening the role of the private sector as a key engine for sustainable employment generation.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many young adults are experiencing limited financial liquidity, with a significant number seeking grants and loans to initiate small business ventures.</li><li>• In recent years, a significant number of small businesses have been forced to close, resulting in significant job losses and disruptions to supply chains.</li><li>• Limited access to financing and digital financial services is hindering the recovery.</li></ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The private sector in Syria has the opportunity to adopt support services for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through integrated programs. These programs include improving access to finance and financial inclusion and enhancing business performance through business development services (BDS) in planning, financial literacy, and marketing. They also include strengthening links with sustainable value chains.</li><li>• The Syrian private sector, in collaboration with the government, has the potential to establish SME Villages, which are small industrial zones featuring shared workshops and facilities.</li><li>• There is a possibility of establishing seed funds in partnership with international organizations to provide grants to startups led by women and young adults.</li><li>• The private sector can support the development of digital financial services by assisting financial institutions in creating digital products tailored to small businesses and expanding networks of authorized agents.</li></ul>

### 2.2.3 Recommendation 3:

Building institutional partnerships between the private sector, universities to ensure that educational outcomes align with the evolving needs of the labor market.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Approximately half of young adults with advanced degrees encounter a mismatch between their qualifications and the job market.</li><li>● Many young adults have also called for partnerships between universities and the private sector, reflecting the weakness of such collaborations.</li><li>● The majority of young adults expressed interest in advanced skills, but current curricula do not provide them.</li><li>● Graduates often lack practical, language, and technological skills.</li></ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The establishment of sector-specific advisory councils at universities, modeled after European practices, is a key initiative. These councils would include representatives from major companies in each sector, industrial, technological, and agricultural, who would meet periodically to review curricula and propose updates.</li><li>● Partnerships can be established to provide university laboratories and workshops with the latest equipment and to host experts from the workforce to teach applied courses.</li><li>● Field visits for students to factories and companies can be organized in addition to joint graduation projects to solve real-world problems faced by companies.</li><li>● Training programs for faculty members can be offered at companies. These programs are short in duration and allow employees to learn about the latest practices and technologies.</li><li>● Develop professional graduate programs (Professional Master's) in partnership with the private sector.</li></ul>

## 2.2.4 Recommendation 4:

Enabling the Syrian private sector to lead the digital transformation of the national economy by investing in digital infrastructure to create quality employment opportunities for young adults.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Power outages and internet disruptions have a significant impact on the productivity of young adults, affecting their ability to work and study.</li><li>● There is a significant digital divide between young adults' understanding of the importance of artificial intelligence and their ability to develop these tools.</li><li>● Young adults expressed concerns about self-directed online learning due to the lack of a supportive infrastructure.</li><li>● Arab countries often face challenges related to digital legislation, skilled workforce, and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote regions.</li></ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The Syrian private sector, in collaboration with the government, has the potential to establish technology parks and digital business incubators. These initiatives could provide crucial support for startups in the fields of programming and digital marketing.</li><li>● The Syrian private sector has the potential to develop digital service platforms, such as distance learning, consulting, and e-commerce, that can effectively utilize the country's young workforce.</li><li>● The Syrian private sector has the opportunity to invest in secure data centers that ensure national data sovereignty and provide a reliable environment for startups.</li></ul>

## 2.3 Civil Society Recommendations

### 2.3.1 Recommendation 1:

Shift livelihood programs from short-term jobs to support for sustainable projects.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The high demand for immediate job opportunities and grants indicates a reliance on short-term income solutions rather than sustainable livelihoods.</li> <li>• Temporary, project-based employment does not necessarily guarantee long-term economic stability.</li> <li>• Young adults encounter obstacles when attempting to initiate their own business ventures and projects. These challenges include a shortage of capital, inadequate guidance, and restricted access to markets.</li> <li>• Existing programs frequently provide funding but lack sustainable technical support, which can lead to a decline in project sustainability rates.</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish government-supported frameworks for business incubator programs led by nongovernmental organizations and target young entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• Small co-financed grants should be provided in conjunction with structured mentoring, simplification, and market linkage services.</li> <li>• Encourage partnerships among municipalities, NGOs, and chambers of commerce so that sustainable local value chains can be identified.</li> </ul>

### 2.3.2 Recommendation 2:

Align vocational training programs with the needs of the private sector.	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many young adults report training opportunities that are not linked to actual employment pathways.</li> <li>• Employers report difficulty finding candidates with practical experience despite available graduates.</li> <li>• Training programs are often supply-driven rather than demand-driven.</li> <li>• Unpaid internships limit participation among economically vulnerable young adults.</li> </ul>

<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Require publicly supported training programs to include formal private sector partnerships in curriculum design.</li> <li>● Provide government incentives (e.g., wage subsidies, tax deductions, recognition schemes) for companies that host trainees or apprentices.</li> <li>● Introduce paid apprenticeship schemes co-financed by government and donors to ensure accessibility.</li> <li>● Establish performance-based accreditation for training providers linked to job placement outcomes.</li> </ul>
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### 2.3.3 Recommendation 3:

<b>Integrating psychosocial support into employment and livelihood services.</b>	
<b>Problem set</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prolonged unemployment contributes to discouragement, loss of confidence, and reduced job-search persistence.</li> <li>● Existing employment programs focus on skills and placement but do not address psychosocial barriers.</li> <li>● Lack of career guidance services limits effective transition into the labor market.</li> <li>● Emotional strain reduces the effectiveness of training and livelihood interventions.</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Integrate career counseling and basic psychosocial support into public employment services and NGO livelihood programs.</li> <li>● Train employment center staff to deliver job-readiness coaching and referral pathways to specialized services.</li> <li>● Support peer-based job seeker groups and mentorship networks coordinated through civil society partners.</li> <li>● Allow employment and skills programs to allocate funding for resilience-building activities as part of workforce development.</li> </ul>



### 3. Project Background

Syrian young adults represent a cornerstone of recovery and reconstruction, forming the largest segment of the population. If effectively mobilized, their human capital can accelerate economic recovery and sustainability. However, the current labor market presents complex challenges that threaten their future during the transition period.

Due to the absence of accurate and regular official labor force surveys, there is no single precise figure reflecting the unemployment rate in Syria. According to the latest official figures (2022), the unemployment rate stands at 23.7%<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, the Minister of Economy in the transitional government estimates the rate to be 60%<sup>2</sup>, while assessments by international organizations indicate that the figure could reach 85%<sup>3</sup> when underemployment is factored in.

Signs of recovery are emerging, as evidenced by major investment agreements worth tens of billions of dollars, which are expected to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs. According to official projections, the unemployment rate is expected to drop to 15% starting in 2026. However, economists emphasize that this remains contingent on the provision of a secure and stable investment environment, alongside improvements to energy and electricity infrastructure.

Amidst these conflicting figures and estimates, the voices of young job seekers themselves have been largely absent. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Syrian young adults as they seek to answer a set of fundamental questions: What are the perspectives of Syrian young adults seeking employment (aged 18–40) on the realities of the labor market? What challenges do they encounter in their daily search for suitable job opportunities? And what skills do they need to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly changing job market? The study also examines the types of support young people expect from key stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Arabia, “Unemployment in Syria, conflicting figures amid an official absence of statistics” Sept- 2025

<sup>2</sup> Syria Now, Interview with the Minister of economic in “Salon of The Republic” talk show, oct/ 2025

<sup>3</sup> Independent Arabia, “Unemployment in Syria, conflicting figures amid an official absence of statistics” Sept- 2025

### 3.1 Study Objectives

**Main objective:** Generate actionable insights that consider the perspectives of Syrian young adults seeking employment (aged 18 to 40) regarding their experiences in the labor market through these **three sub-objectives:**

1. To examine and assess the impact of the multidimensional challenges young people face in seeking decent employment, including working conditions, education, skills, access to services, and psychological pressures.
2. To understand young people's views on the skills needed to succeed in Syria's labor market, and how they rate their own proficiency in those skills and identify their preferred methods for acquiring and developing these skills.
3. To identify the key forms of support that Syria's young adults seeking proper employment require from primary stakeholders—including the public sector, private sector, civil society organizations, and labor unions—to enhance their access to decent and stable employment.

### 3.2 Main Research Questions

1. What are the reasons behind job instability among Syrian young adults, and what drives them to continue searching for alternative employment opportunities?
2. What are the main challenges—and their effects—that unemployed Syrian young adults face in their efforts to obtain work opportunities, including working conditions (income and hours), educational attainment, skill proficiency, access to basic services, and psychological pressures? How do these challenges differ across governorates?
3. To what extent do information channels and sources relied upon by Syrian job-seeking young adults affect their awareness of available job opportunities?
4. What specific skills do Syrian job-seeking young adults believe are necessary for success and competitiveness in the Syrian labor market? How do they assess their own competence in these areas, and what methods do they prefer for acquiring and developing these capabilities?
5. What forms of support do Syrian job-seeking young adults need from key stakeholders—including the public sector, private sector, civil society organizations, and labor unions—to improve their chances of obtaining decent and stable work?

### 3.3 Knowledge Gaps Addressed by the Study

The situation in Syria is characterized by a severe scarcity of reliable information regarding the labor market and employment. This includes official statistical records, private sector data, academic research, and grassroots perspectives. This study addresses this comprehensive gap by providing primary data and qualitative insights in the following specific areas:

- Identify the experiences of Syrian young adults in the labor market, including the workforce outside formal employment structures.
- Identify the obstacles confronting young adults, including working conditions, educational level, skills, logistical barriers (e.g., transportation and infrastructure), and psychological pressures.
- Explores young people's perceptions of the skills required in the labor market from their own perspective. The study examines their beliefs about what is necessary to secure employment, their level of proficiency in these skills, and their preferences regarding mechanisms for developing them.
- Determine the forms of support that young people believe are necessary to improve their chances of securing decent and stable employment. The forms of support in question were identified as those provided by the public and private sectors, civil society organizations, and labor unions.



## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Labor Market Challenges

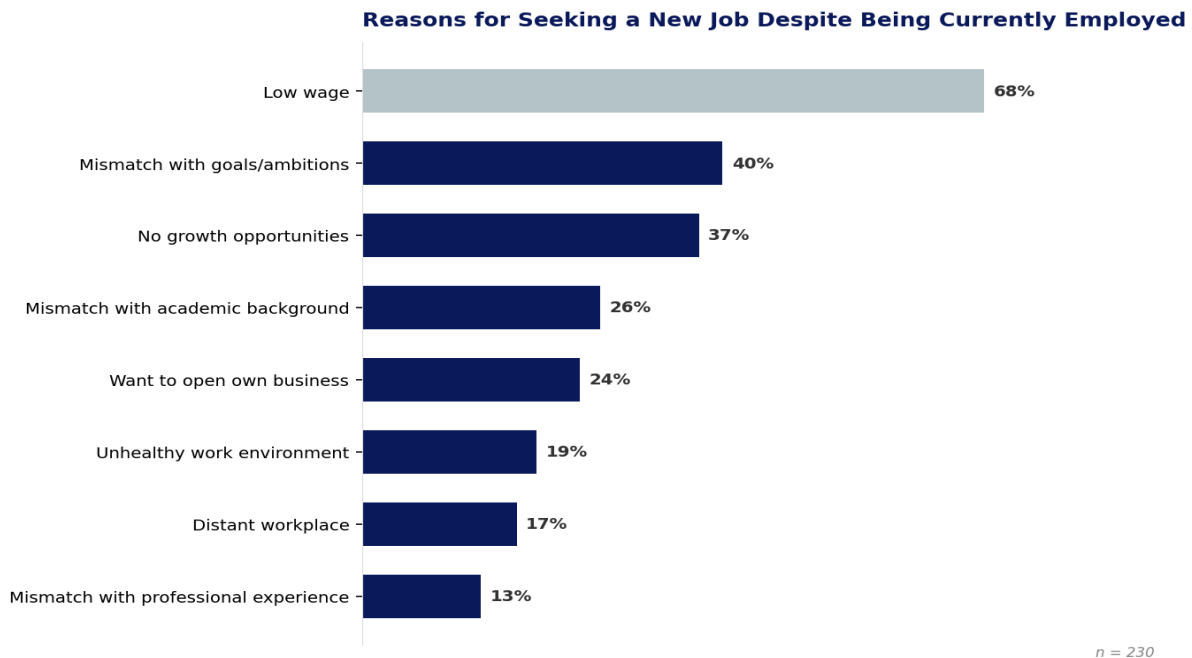
Various factors and challenges affect both employed individuals and job seekers. This section focuses first on identifying the main reasons that drive young adults—who already have jobs—to search either for additional work or for a completely different job. Second, it identifies the obstacles Syrian young adults face in the labor market while searching for employment opportunities—and assesses the degree to which these obstacles impact their ability to secure decent work.

#### ***The key findings can be summarized as follows:***

- Low wages are the most pressing factor driving employed young adults to seek new opportunities (68%).
- The mismatch between education background and available opportunities has a high impact on young adults (60%), leaving them unable to secure suitable work.
- Unfair working conditions, including low wages (79%) and long hours (56%)—have a significant impact, undermining job quality and overall well-being.
- Family and psychological pressures stemming from unemployment and insufficient income have a high impact (53%), leading to frustration and abandoned ambitions.

### 4.1.1 Causes of Job Instability

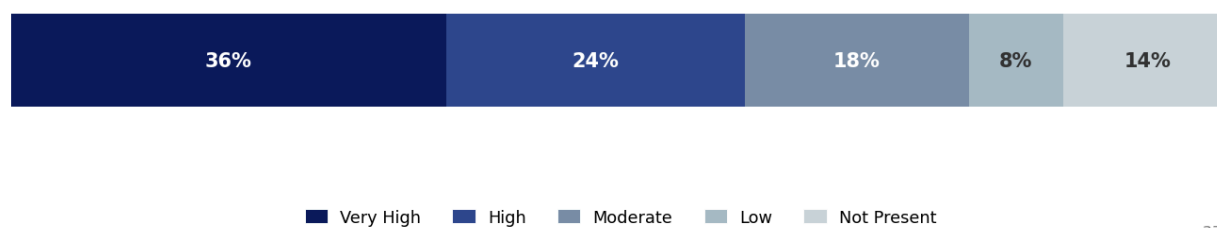
Indeed, of respondents who were currently employed and given the ability to select multiple responses, the majority (68%) indicated that they are currently seeking new work due to low wages. Furthermore, many reported that the mismatch between their current employment and personal goals and ambitions (40%), lack of growth opportunities (37%), and/or mismatch with their academic background (26%) are the primary reasons for seeking new employment opportunities.



### 4.1.2 The Education and Skills Gap

Young adults face a real challenge related to education and market requirements, as most respondents (60%) indicated a *very high* or *high* impact of the mismatch between their educational backgrounds and available job opportunities that are offered in the labor market.

### Impact: Limited Opportunities Matching Education Level



The data reveals a striking paradox: both the highly educated and the less educated struggle to find work. Among holders of higher degrees, around half (47%) reported that the mismatch between their education and labor market opportunities has a very significant impact. Similar patterns emerged across other education levels 45% of secondary school graduates, 43% of primary school graduates, and 36% of lower secondary graduates expressed the same level of concern<sup>4</sup>.

The statistics reflect a dual structural imbalance. The formal sector, devastated by "Many job opportunities require several years of experience, while others require a certificate of experience from a reputable organization." (Male, age group 18–23, Homs) conflict, cannot absorb specialized university graduates, leaving them trapped in roles far below their education level. Conversely, those with limited education often find themselves in an unstable informal sector lacking both security and advancement. At the governorate level, a majority in Rural Damascus (72%) and around half in Idlib (49%) reported that this challenge is very significant.

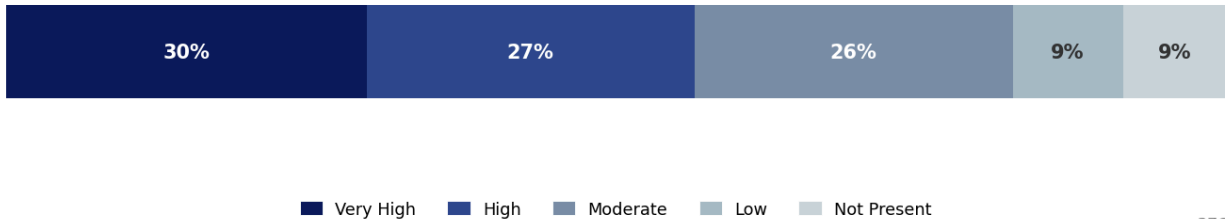
"I studied engineering for years, but all the job offers I get are in the sales sector... I feel like my investment in education has been wasted [...] the work is intermittent and not guaranteed; there is no future in this type of work." (Male, age group 24–30, Rural Damascus)

The study also shows a clear impact as a result of the mismatch between the skills and experience young adults possess and those required by the labor market. Most of the respondents (57%) said they face significant or very significant challenges in this regard. Education levels help explain this mismatch, as many respondents with only a general

<sup>4</sup> "All jobs require academic qualifications that I do not have. This is a major obstacle that causes me to miss many opportunities, including promotion opportunities in my current job." (Female, age group 24–30, Aleppo)

secondary certificate (43%), many with only a lower secondary certificate (44%), and many with only primary education (39%) reported that job opportunities do not match their skills.

#### Impact: Limited Opportunities Matching Skills / Experience



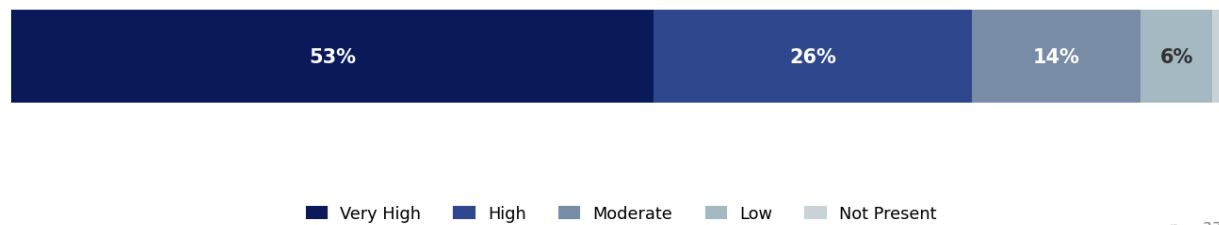
Field observations indicate that job seekers are trapped in a vicious cycle: they lack professional experience because opportunities are scarce, while job requirements demand advanced skills and at least one year of experience.

"Many job opportunities require several years of experience, while others require a certificate of experience from a reputable organization." (Male, age group 18–23, Homs)

#### 4.1.3 Challenges Related to Working Conditions and Compensation

The findings place low wages at the center of the labor market challenge, as the vast majority of respondents (79%) rated their impact as high or very high, while few (2%) reported that it has no effect. These numbers echo in the voices of respondents, who spoke repeatedly that salaries fail to cover basic living expenses—including bills and rent—noting that this often leads to the accumulation of debt, even for those holding multiple jobs.

### Impact: Low Wage Levels

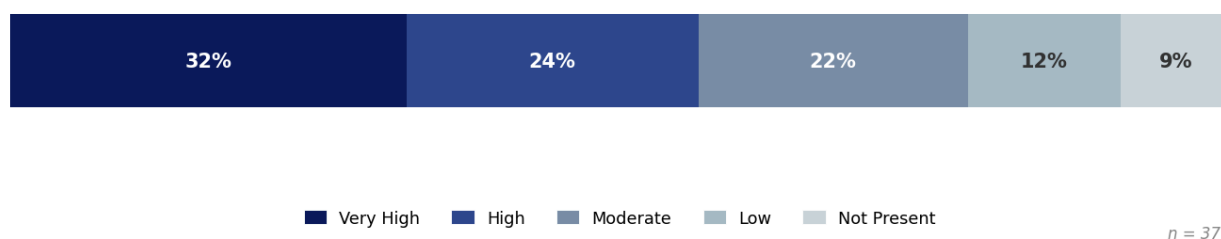


Many also indicated that they have deferred marriage and family planning “not as a matter of personal choice, but because meeting basic household demands feels economically out of reach.”

"Having a family, children, and responsibilities forces the breadwinner to do any available work; there is no luxury of choice." (Male, age group 24–30, Tartous)

According to most of the respondents (56%), long working hours have a high or very high impact. The results show an inverse relationship between lower education levels and bargaining power over working conditions. The majority (71%) of primary certificate holders and half (50%) of lower secondary certificate holders reported being forced to accept jobs with long hours— “up to 12 hours or working all week without leave for long periods,” as some respondents stated<sup>5</sup>. Under such conditions, finding time to study, develop skills, or pursue growth opportunities becomes nearly impossible.

### Impact: Long Working Hours



<sup>5</sup> "Long working hours have become a form of slavery." (Male, age group 18–24, Aleppo)

"All available opportunities do not offer any real wages; very long working hours with low wages that do not correspond at all to the working hours."(Male, age group 24–30, Aleppo)

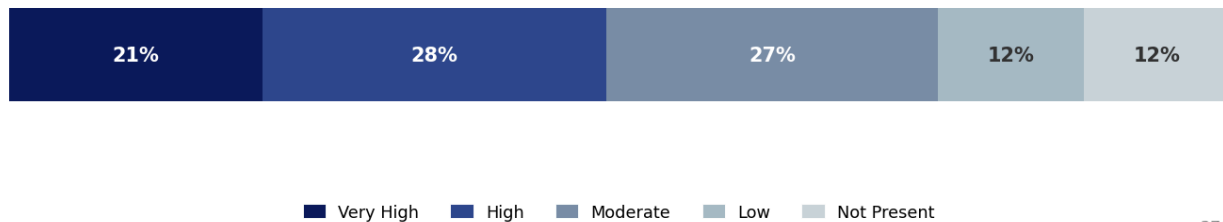
#### 4.1.4 Logistical, Geographic, and Security Challenges

Security conditions across most of Syria have improved significantly since the end of the war, allowing greater freedom of movement within and between cities. This shift is reflected in the survey findings, many (34%) respondents reported that security conditions have *no impact* on their work, with the highest proportion in rural Damascus (63%), while several (24%) reported only a low impact. However, the situation is not uniform. In Tartus (44%) and Aleppo (21%), respondents indicated that security still has a very high impact on their movement within cities. It is worth noting that both governorates experienced security incidents during the survey period, which may help explain the difference in perceptions.

Yet even with relative stability in many areas, transportation costs stand out as real and pressing obstacles, half of respondents (50%) reported the impact of transportation costs as high or very high.

The highest percentage of such responses was concentrated in Tartous (49%), followed by Idlib (34%), then Homs (33%). Some respondents indicated that “monthly transportation costs can sometimes reach a quarter of the salary.”

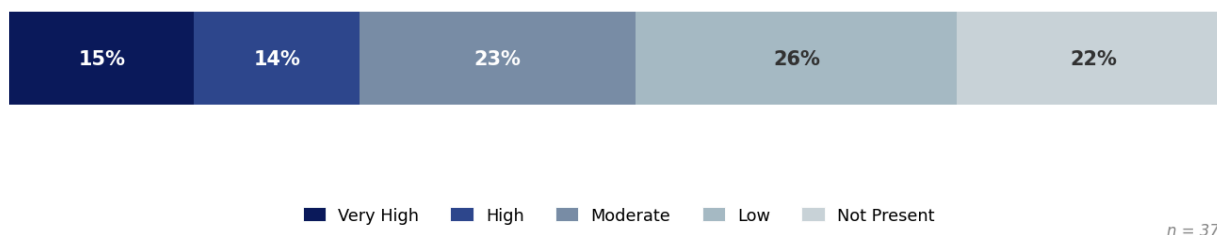
##### Impact: Transportation Costs



When it comes to transportation availability, the findings reflect differences in local conditions between governorates. Many respondents (26%) reported that this has a low impact on their search for or acceptance of offered opportunities, especially in Latakia (58%) and many in Idlib (29%). While a few respondents (16%) reported that the lack of transportation has a very high impact, forcing them to reject or ignore opportunities that require travel. This was especially pronounced among respondents in Rural Damascus (41%) and Aleppo (32%).

Behind these figures lies a harsh reality. In Daraya, like many other cities in Syria, entire towns and neighborhoods remain scarred by destruction. Many roads are either completely unusable or unsafe, leaving residents with no choice but to rely on narrow side roads and winding routes. A weak public transportation system adds to the burden, pushing people to depend on private taxis, small motor vehicles, bicycles, or simply walking. For job seekers in these areas, this often means turning down opportunities that require transportation—not out of choice, but out of necessity.

**Impact: Availability of Transportation**



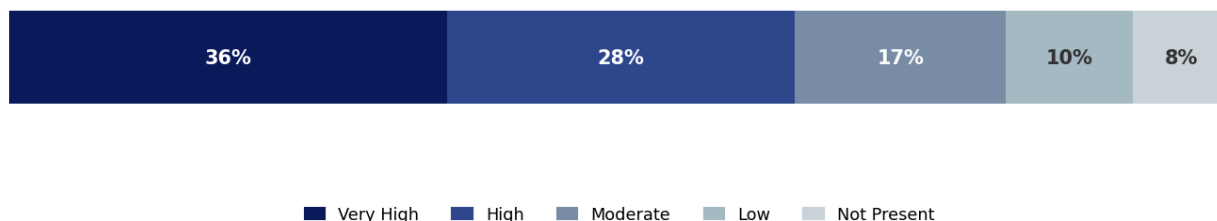
"Transportation is unavailable to our residential areas. I have to walk for half an hour to reach the nearest transportation point. Besides the rough and dark road, the numerous potholes and destruction, I'm constantly afraid of undetonated mines and stray dogs." (Female, age group 31–40, Daraya/ Rural Damascus)

Most of the respondents (64%) reported that the impact of weak services and their high cost (electricity, internet) is *high* or *very high*. Power outages and poor internet directly affect the work and productivity of stakeholders, especially those working in digital fields or who market their products online, in addition to the fact that their high costs constitute an additional financial burden.<sup>6</sup> Field observations show how the high cost or lack of these services prevents the initiation of private projects and shackles those whose work depends on them.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "the nature of my work, which involves repairing and extending electrical networks, has made me directly affected by power outages" (Male, age group 25–30, Tartous)

<sup>7</sup> "The high cost of services is a major obstacle to establishing a private massage and spa business." (Male, age group 18–24, Latakia)

### Impact: Weak Services & High Service Costs



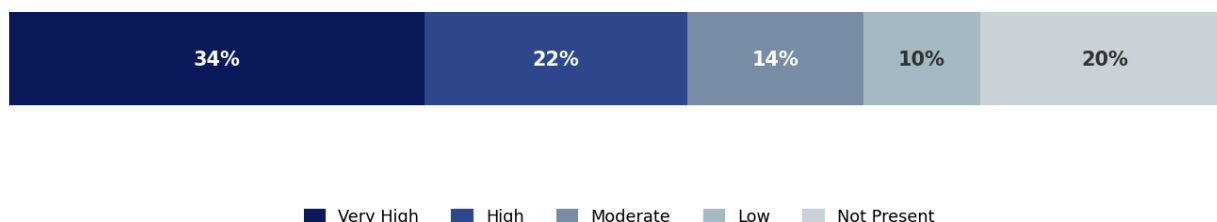
n = 376

"I was working online... my entire salary went towards cafe bills for electricity and internet." (Female, age group 31–40, Damascus)

### 4.1.5 Psychological and Social Challenges

Most respondents in the study (56%) reported that prolonged unemployment has a *very high* negative psychological impact, a perception that was prevalent particularly amongst male day laborers aged 31-40 (60%), followed by part-time workers (38%) and the self-employed individuals (33%). Several (22%) reported that the impact of prolonged unemployment is *high*.

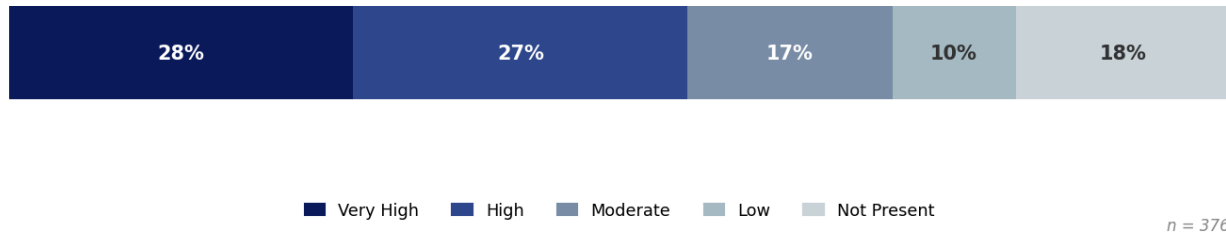
#### Psychological Impact: Extended Unemployment Period



n = 376

Additionally, approximately half of respondents (55%) expressed *very high* or *high* levels of frustration at taking on working in professional fields that don't align with their interests or passions, forced to take on or seek work they do not like. This combination of psychological despair and economic necessity explains why young people abandon their ambitions.

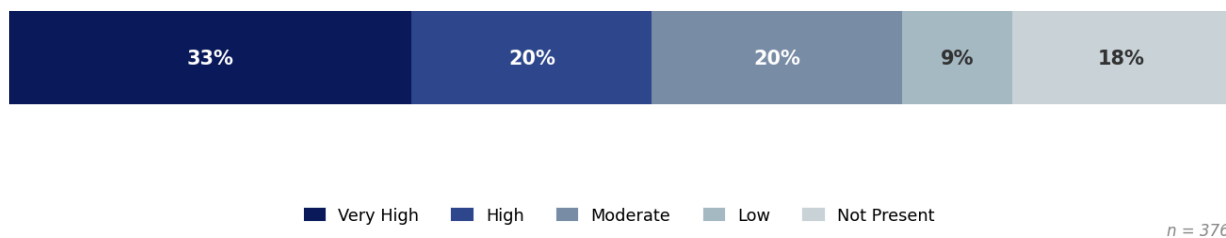
### Psychological Impact: Working Below Aspirations



"I'm looking for any job because my family depends on me. I've forgotten my dream of becoming a teacher, and now I only dream of a salary to pay the bills. My mental state is bad because I don't like my job and the salary is low, but currently there are no other options." (Male, age group 31–40, Homs)

Approximately half of respondents (53%) reported *high* and *very high* levels of pressure they face to attain a suitable income, with approximately half (45%) of male respondents reporting *very high* familial pressure. In addition, many day laborers (40%) and self-employed people (37%) reported *very high* challenges regarding the societal pressure of acquiring a livable income.

### Psychological Impact: Family/Community Pressure to Earn Income



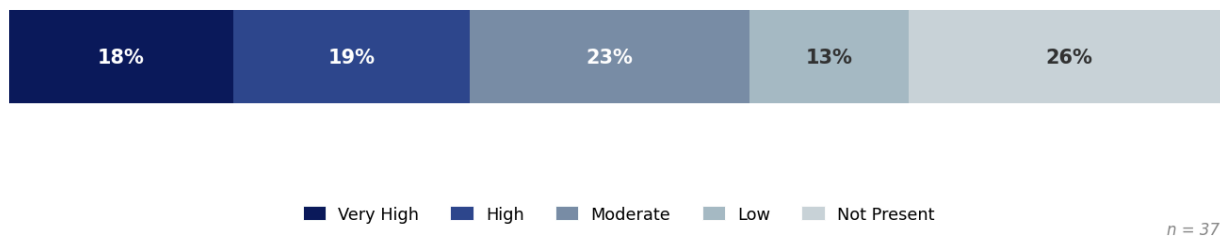
Society pressure comes in the form of access to marriage, as generally, a man will not receive family approval to marry a woman unless he can present a good source of income and a dowry. This is the reason many respondents stated that the urgency in finding an adequate income stems from access to marriage prospects.

Additionally, many men have financially dependent family members, especially given that in Arab culture, offsprings typically have to provide for their parents at a certain age, which adds greater stress on already financially destitute individuals.

"The pressure from family and society is immense due to the constant nagging and demands to find a good income, forgetting all the circumstances." (Male, age group 25–30, Rural Damascus)

Many respondents (37%) reported that the absence of psychological or social support in their search for employment has a *very high* or *high* impact on them. In contrast, many (26%) indicated that such an impact is not present.

**Impact: Absence of Psychological or Social Support**

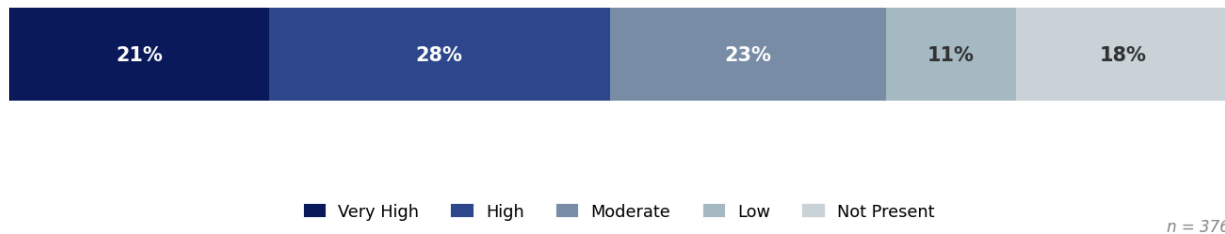


"I suffer from psychological pressure to compare myself to others, especially to people outside the country who have capabilities that I do not have." (Female, age group 25-30, Homs).

**4.1.6 Sources of Job Advertisements and Career Guidance**

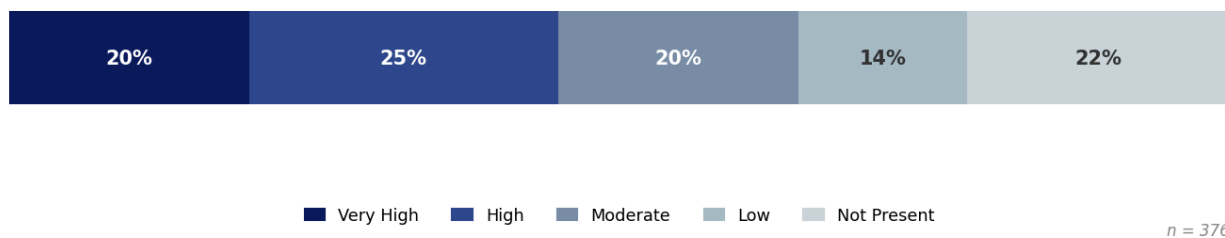
Despite the spread of job advertising sources (open sources, social media, phone applications), around half of respondents (49%) reported that the lack of reliable sources has a *high* or *very high* impact on their job search. Field observations indicate that the majority do not trust job opportunities advertised through social media and applications, while many consider searching for work this way to be ineffective. Some even questioned whether these are real opportunities at all, believing that they are merely fake advertisements that may serve other purposes such as exploitation or harassment.

### Impact: Limited Job Advertisement Channels



Furthermore, approximately half of respondents (45%) indicated that the absence of vocational guidance and a general lack of requisite skills has a *very high* or *high* impact on them, while several reported that it is *not present* (22%) or has a *low* impact (14%).

### Impact: Absence of Vocational Guidance (Employment Offices)



Field observations indicate that awareness of employment offices and career counselors remains relatively low.<sup>8</sup> This can be traced to the prevalence of corruption and nepotism, particularly in the previous period, where a family connection or knowing the right person in power was often enough to secure a job—regardless of education or experience.

"All the work I did in the previous period was obtained through connections and favoritism. There was no effect on the level of academic achievement; I could rely on previous relationships and acquaintances." (Male, Aleppo, age 18-40)

<sup>8</sup> "The employment office doesn't exist, so I can't assess my need for them or my position regarding them." (Male, age group 31–40, Damascus)

## 4.2 Work Skills

The findings in this section reveal that Syrian young adults are moving toward developing core skills they consider essential for entering the modern labor market, with near consensus that their professional aspirations are shifting away from traditional occupations based on physical or manual labor. Young adults prefer applied, direct learning mechanisms, which reflects demand for training programs focused on closing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

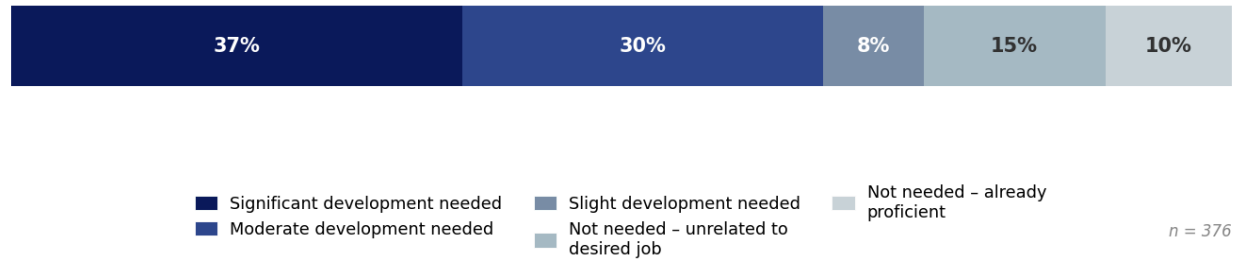
***The following findings further clarify Syrian young adults' perspectives regarding skills and skill acquisition mechanisms:***

- Syrian young adults believe the most urgent skills are language skills (35%) and job-search skills (33%).
- There is an almost general view that manual and physical skills are unrelated to the job they want (74%).
- Apprenticeship (52%) and practical training (76%) are the preferred methods for acquiring skills.

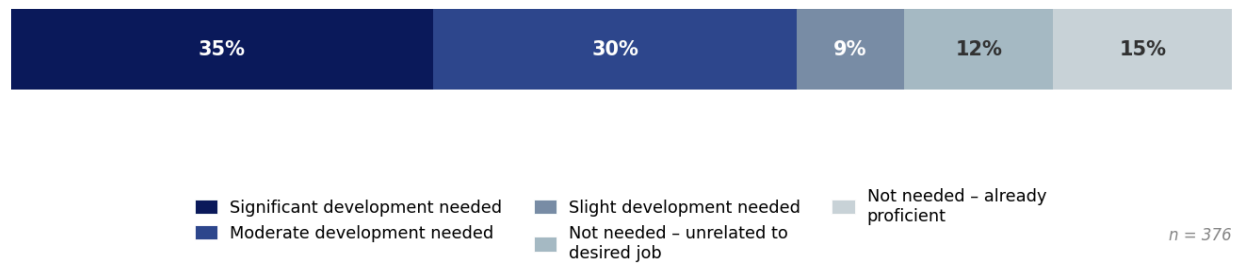
### 4.2.1 Priority for Language Skills and Job-Search Skills

Many respondents (35%) indicated that they are in urgent need of developing language skills, and many others (33%) expressed a strong need to develop job-search skills. These high percentages reveal young adults' awareness of the importance of these skills as a key gateway to remote work opportunities or jobs abroad, making them a strategic investment for escaping the limitations of the local market.

### Skill Development Need: Language Skills



### Skill Development Need: Job-Search Skills

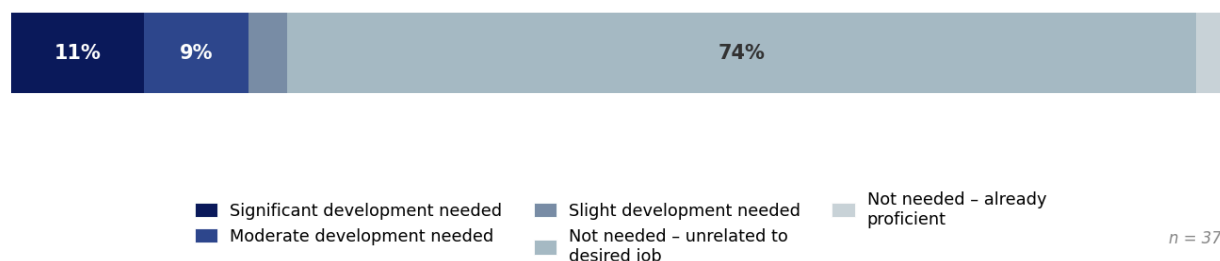


## 4.2.2 Strong Rejection of Traditional Skills and Shift Toward the Knowledge Economy

The vast majority of respondents (74%) stated that technical maintenance skills—are unrelated to the work they want. Most respondents (68%) also believed that manual skills, and equally physical and muscular skills (68%), are not relevant to their professional aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “I worked in many jobs requiring manual trades, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and painting, but no longer wished to work in these fields.” (Male, Age group 25–30, Homs).

### Skill Development Need: Technical Skills

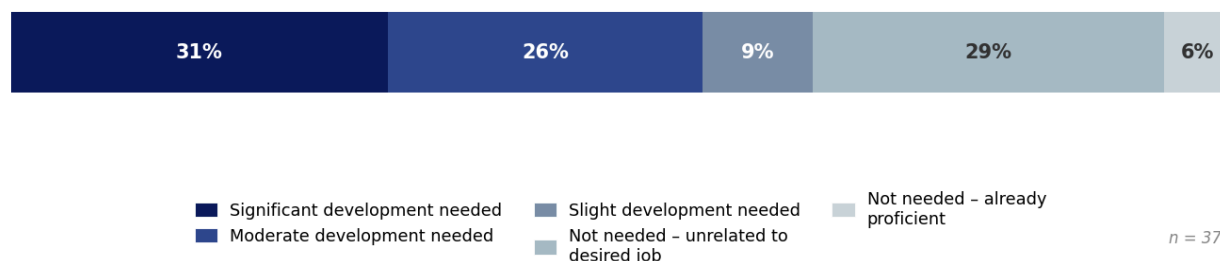


This near-total consensus reflects a societal shift in how desirable career paths are perceived. Other observations indicated that females see these skills as a means of self-reliance in daily life rather than as a career path.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.2.3 Tendency Toward Digital Skills and Variation in Perceived Importance

Many respondents (31%) indicated that they need to develop AI-related skills to a great extent. At the same time, many respondents (29%) also believed that these skills are not related to the work they want.<sup>11</sup>

### Skill Development Need: Artificial Intelligence Skills



This variation is especially clear when comparing educational levels: the overwhelming majority of those with less than university education viewed such skills as unrelated to the work they want.

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, one respondent said that skills such as driving are a luxury rather than a necessity for his profession. (Male, Age group 25–30, Homs).

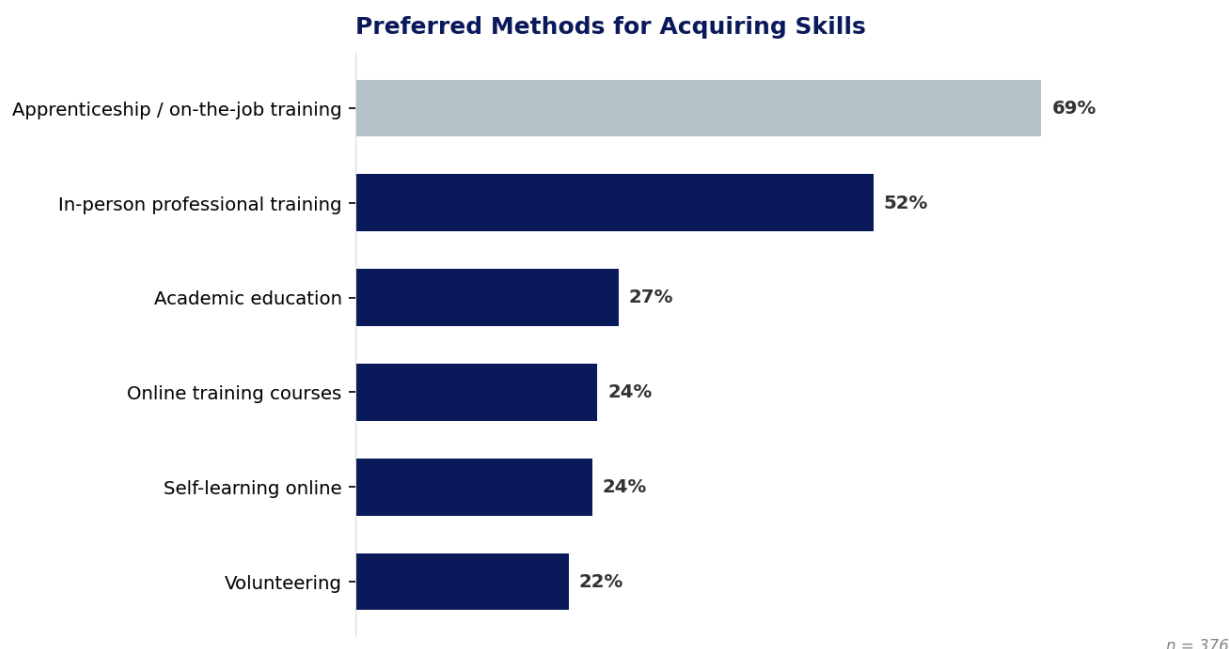
<sup>11</sup> One respondent considered acquiring AI skills is very important but said she does not like that skill and does not intend to develop it. (Female, Age group 25–30, Homs)

Several barriers help explain the limited interest in this skill, including lack of laptops as well as weak internet and electricity services. On the other hand, others saw it as an opportunity to work from home with a high income.

#### 4.2.4 Clear Preference for Application-Based and Directly Guided Learning Mechanisms

When given the opportunity to select more than one method, most respondents (69%) preferred apprenticeship, and approximately half (52%) preferred in-person vocational training courses as the best means of acquiring skills.<sup>12</sup>

This clear preference reflects strong demand for methods and approaches that provide direct and practical experience.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>12</sup> One respondent said, “Fieldwork is the most important and gives more experience.” (Female, Age group 31–40, Damascus)

<sup>13</sup> Researchers also observed skepticism toward alternatives, as some respondents expressed that “online vocational training does not achieve the desired result,” while others considered that “volunteering is an opportunity for organizations to exploit workers.” (Female, Age group 31–40, Homs)

## 4.3 Labor Market Support

Respondents emphasized that improving employment conditions and expanding access to job opportunities are critical to strengthening labor market participation. Respondents identified several factors that could play a role in addressing labor market challenges, particularly the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and professional unions. Across these institutions, respondents most frequently highlighted the need for improved services, better labor protections, and direct employment opportunities. In particular, respondents emphasized the importance of creating more stable employment environments, improving access to training and job placement opportunities, and strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and employers.

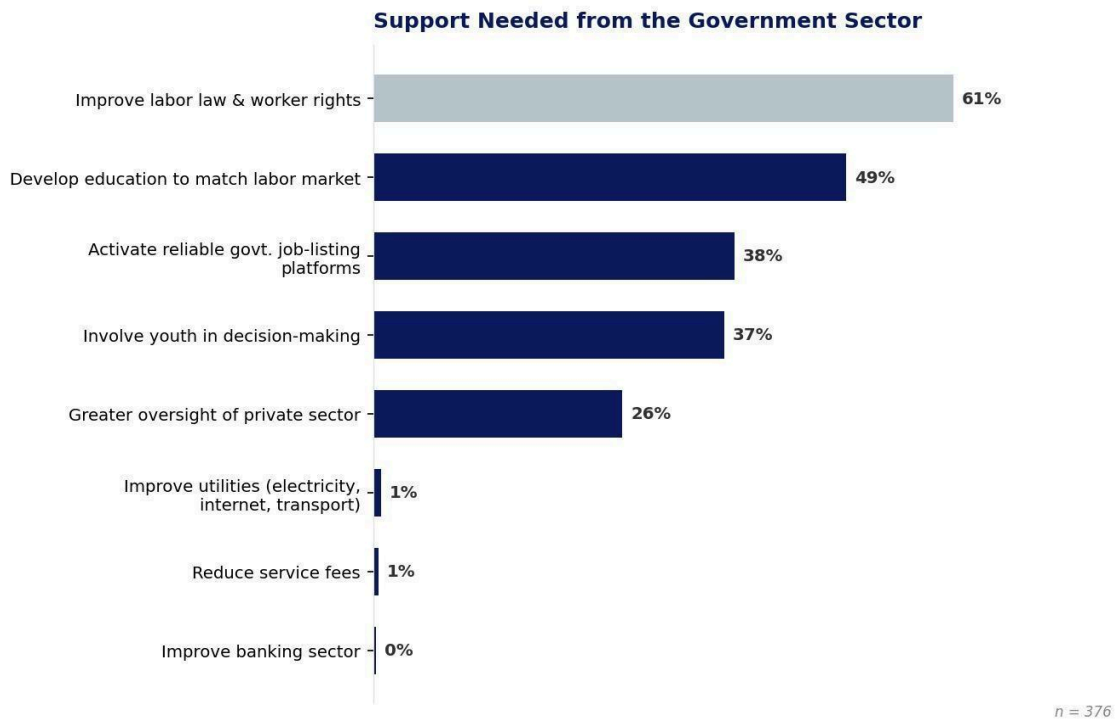
### ***Key findings from this section include:***

- Most respondents (76%) reported that improving public services is a key form of government support needed to strengthen employment opportunities.
- Most respondents (67%) indicated that improving working conditions within the private sector would help them secure and maintain employment.
- The vast majority of respondents (70%) reported that civil society organizations should focus on providing direct job opportunities.
- Approximately half of respondents (45%) indicated that professional unions should provide social protection such as health insurance and retirement programs.

### 4.3.1 Government Support

Given the ability to select multiple responses, most respondents (76%) reported that improving public services is the most important form of support the government could provide to strengthen the labor market. Most respondents (61%) also emphasized the importance of improving worker rights and protections, while most respondents (55%) reported that reducing service fees would help alleviate economic pressures faced by job seekers. Additionally, approximately half of respondents (49%) indicated that aligning education with labor market needs would improve employment outcomes.

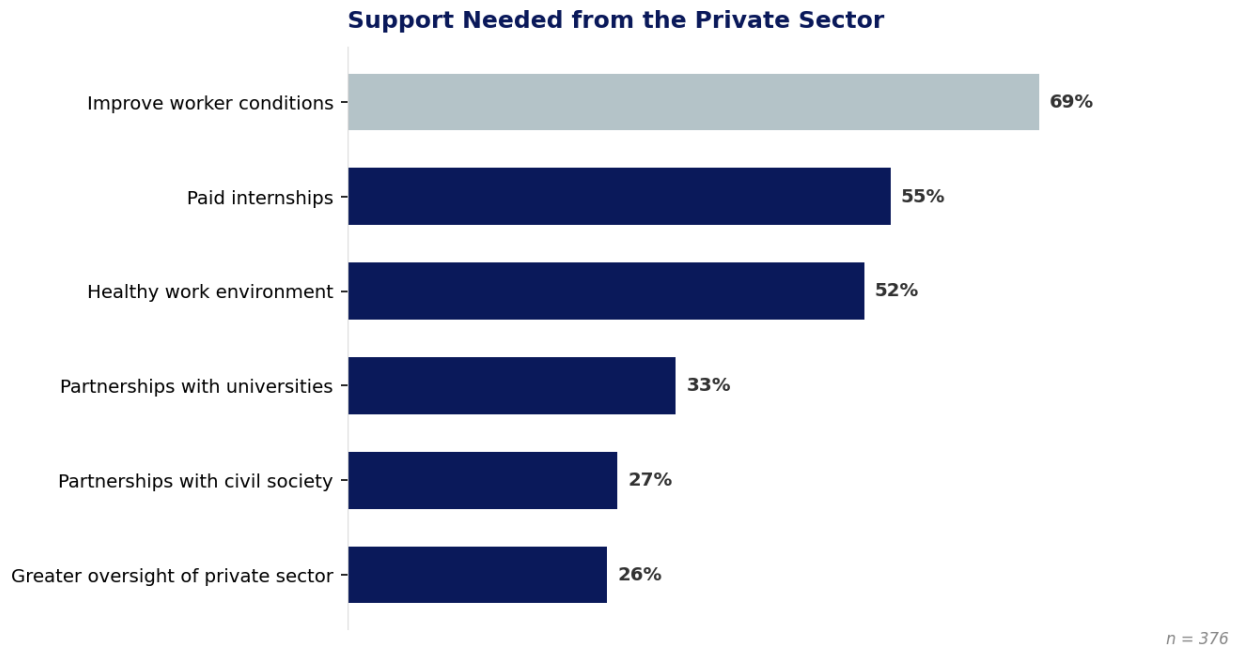
These findings suggest that respondents perceive structural and institutional challenges as key barriers to employment. In particular, respondents highlighted the importance of policies that improve the functioning of labor market institutions, strengthen worker protections, and ensure that education systems provide skills that are aligned with employer needs.



### 4.3.2 Private Sector Support

Respondents also emphasized the important role of the private sector in strengthening employment opportunities. Given the ability to select multiple responses, most respondents (69%) reported that improving working conditions would significantly improve their employment prospects. Approximately half of respondents (55%) indicated that paid internal training opportunities within companies would help them develop the skills needed for the labor market. Additionally, approximately half of respondents (52%) reported that creating healthier work environments would encourage greater participation and stability in employment.

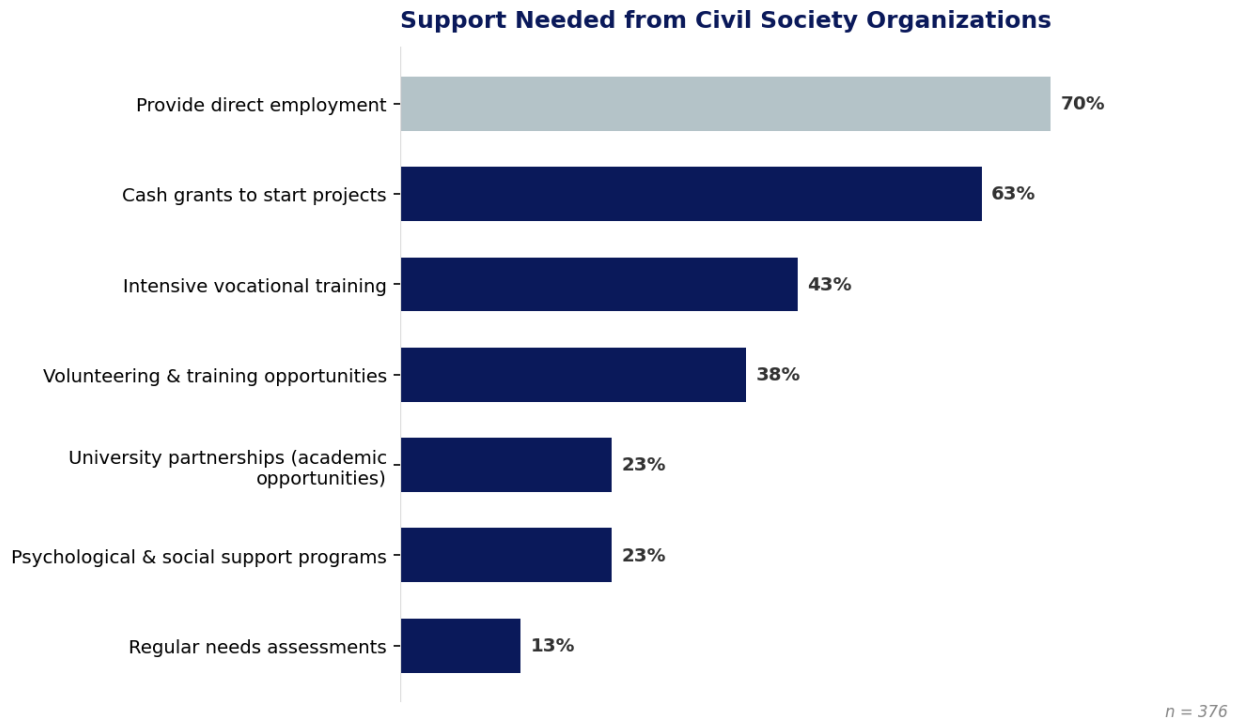
These findings suggest that respondents view private sector actors as key drivers of workforce development, particularly through training opportunities and improved workplace conditions. Strengthening relationships between employers and job seekers may therefore play an important role in improving employment outcomes.



### 4.3.3 Civil Society Support

Civil society organizations were also seen as an important source of support for job seekers. Given the ability to select multiple responses, most respondents (70%) reported that civil society organizations should focus on providing direct employment opportunities. Most respondents (63%) indicated that grants for starting small businesses or personal projects would support their entry into the labor market. Additionally, many respondents (43%) emphasized the importance of vocational training programs, while many respondents (38%) highlighted the need for volunteering and internship opportunities that could help them build experience.

These findings suggest that civil society organizations are perceived as important facilitators of both employment access and skills development. In particular, programs that combine training, entrepreneurship support, and job placement opportunities may help address both unemployment and skills gaps.

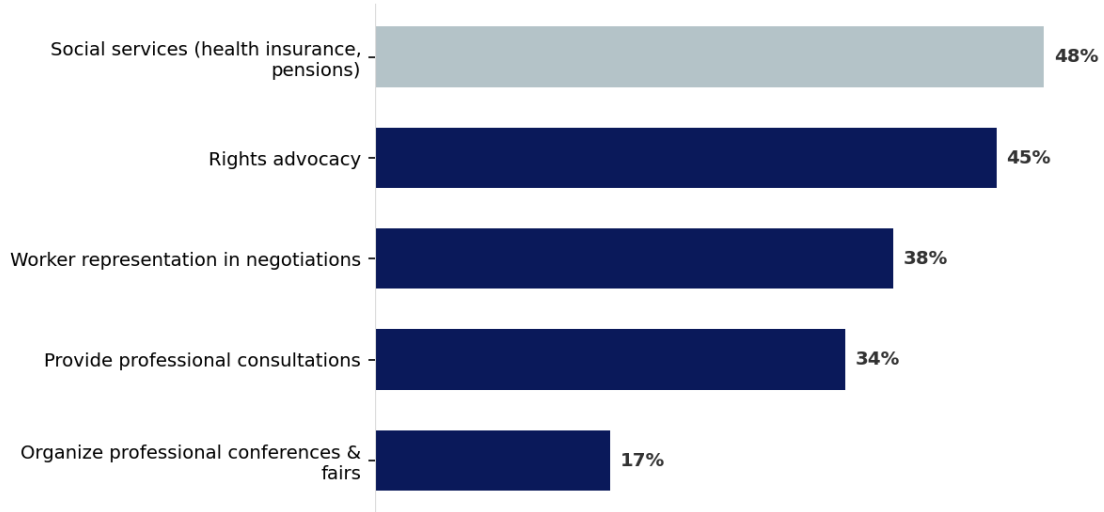


#### 4.3.4 Union Support

Respondents also highlighted the potential role of professional unions in improving employment conditions. Given the ability to select multiple responses, approximately half of respondents (48%) reported that unions should provide social services such as health insurance and retirement support. Approximately half of respondents (45%) indicated that unions should advocate for worker rights, while many respondents (34%) emphasized the importance of professional advice and guidance within specific sectors. Additionally, several respondents (38%) reported that unions should represent workers in negotiations with employers.

These findings suggest that unions are viewed as an important institutional mechanism for protecting worker rights and improving employment stability. Strengthening the capacity of unions to advocate for workers and provide professional guidance may therefore help improve labor market conditions for job seekers.

### Support Needed from Trade Unions / Syndicates



n = 376



## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Study Design

This research followed a quantitative descriptive-analytical approach, with the aim of diagnosing and systematically describing the trends and perspectives of Syrian young adults regarding their skill needs and the challenges they face in the labor market. The study relied on collecting primary data directly through a questionnaire administered to a sample of young Syrian jobseekers.

### 5.2. Study Population and Sample

The study population included Syrian male and female young adults aged 18–40 who were seeking work, regardless of their employment status at the time of the survey. The total sample size was 378 young men and women distributed across eight governorates: Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Rural Damascus, Latakia, Idlib, Tartous, and Daraa.

#### **Sampling method:**

A multistage random sampling method was used. Neighborhoods were randomly selected within each governorate, then respondents from the target age group in those governorates were randomly selected, and the questionnaire was administered through direct face-to-face interviews.

Quantitative Survey Demographics		
Gender	Male: 54.7%	Female: 45.3%
Governorate	Aleppo: 18.7%	Damascus: 16.1%
	Homs: 16.1%	Rural Damascus: 12.1%
	Latakia: 9.5%	Idlib: 9.2%
	Tartus: 9.2%	Daraa: 9.2%
Age	18–24: 33.2%	25–30: 35.0%
	31–40: 31.8%	
Education	No formal education: 0.5%	Primary: 4.5%
	Intermediate: 7.2%	Secondary: 10.9%
	Dropped out of university/institute: 2.7%	University/institute student: 26.9%
	Institute graduate: 10.1%	Bachelor's degree: 32.7%
	Postgraduate: 4.5%	
Marital status	Single: 65.7%	Married: 19.7%
	Engaged: 8.2%	Divorced: 4.5%
	Widowed: 1.9%	
Employment status	Employed: 61.3%	Unemployed: 38.7%
Employment type (of those employed)	Full-time: 40.9%	Part-time: 25.2%
	Self-employed: 13.9%	Freelancer: 13.5%
	Daily wage worker: 6.5%	
Has Financial Dependents	Yes: 46.5%	No: 53.5%

### 5.3. Research Instrument and Validation Procedures

Data were collected using a computerized questionnaire specifically designed for the study. Responses were collected and notes were recorded using the KoBoToolbox platform for field data collection. The questionnaire consisted of the following main sections:

- **Section One:** Informed consent, eligibility for inclusion in the study sample, demographic data, and employment status (gender, age, governorate, education level, current employment status, and reasons for looking for another job).
- **Section Two:** Questions on the challenges young adults face while searching for employment, beginning with a range of external challenges and their impact, including work conditions and requirements, accessibility to available opportunities, and obstacles related to infrastructure such as electricity, internet, and transportation. It also included questions on personal challenges related to psychology, family, and social pressures and their effects on young adults.
- **Section Three:** Assessment of skills and desire for development (11 skills, ranging from “smart application skills” to “artificial intelligence skills”) and preferred methods for acquiring skills (multiple-choice question).
- **Section Four:** Forms of support respondents expect from relevant actors (government, private sector, civil society, unions).

To ensure content validity, a team of local field researchers experienced in data collection and field interviews was selected.

Three researchers reviewed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also piloted on a test sample of 24 young adults to ensure question clarity and suitability of administration time, and wording was revised based on their feedback.

### 5.4. Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork and data collection were carried out between December 2025 and January 2026. Field researchers were trained in how to use the tool, the ethics of dealing with respondents, how to write notes, and how to encourage respondents to answer, with emphasis on obtaining informed consent.

### 5.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using proprietary code in Python and R languages. The analysis included:

- **Descriptive analysis:** calculating frequencies, percentages, and averages to present sample characteristics and general trends.

- **Inferential analysis:** using z-tests to compare responses across different groups (by gender, governorate, age).
- **Qualitative analysis:** classifying and summarizing responses to open-ended questions and researchers' notes in order to identify the main themes and interpretations.
- **Presentation of quantitative results:** a Modifier Chart was used to standardize the description of percentages in the final report.

Quantitative Modifier Chart	
0%	None/no respondents
1-25%	Several/few respondents
26-45%	Many respondents
46-55%	Approximately/around half of respondents
56-75%	The majority/most respondents
76%-99%	The vast majority of respondents
100%	All respondents

## 5.6. Study Limitations and Research Ethics

The study identifies several limitations, most importantly:

- **Geographical limitations:** Coverage was limited to eight governorates, which may not fully reflect the realities of all Syrian regions.
- **Security limitations:** Certain security incidents that occurred in Aleppo and Tartous during the survey period affected the expected timeline for completing field data collection.
- **Sample size:** Although adequate for analysis, the specified sample size may limit the generalizability of findings to all Syrian young adults.
- **Methodological limitations:** Some groups showed relative reluctance to answer questions related to the security situation, especially in Aleppo and Tartous.
- **Ethical considerations:** Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, with full assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, no linking of responses to identity, and use of the data solely for scientific research purposes.