Understanding the social protection needs of civil society workers in Lebanon

Towards strengthening social rights and security for all.

OXFAM

تيار المجتمع المدني

دعم لبنان LEBANON SUPPORT

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شبكة عملي حقوقي
My work, My rights Network

المفكرة القانونية
THE LEGAL AGENDA

المرصد اللبناني لحقوق العمال والموظفين

تيار المجتمع المدني

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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Lebanon Support, Civil Society Movement, nor any of their partners.

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INTRODUCTION

The social protection landscape in Lebanon is characterised by its fragmentation and exclusionary nature, leaving the most vulnerable and marginalised with little access to any kind of safety net. Workers in the civil society sector are particularly affected by this situation notably as a result of the increased casualisation of employment within the sector, and of more structural factors inherent to financing mechanisms and streams of nonprofits. Civil society sector employees are, as such, often informal workers, and on short-term contracts. Even workers with fixed or open term contracts remain excluded from protection mechanisms as many NGOs struggle with their own institutional sustainability and face challenges in, notably, covering their staff's social protection costs from their budgets. This renders this category of workers, that is largely composed of women, particularly vulnerable.

While literature on civil society is abundant, research on social protection is less pervasive, focusing on patronage networks that operate in lieu of social protection. With research at the intersection of these two themes still lacking, this action-oriented research aims to inform practitioners and decision makers on social protection status, needs and gaps of workers in the civil society sector. It formulates targeted recommendations that aim at enhancing access to civil society workers to social protection.

1.1 Methodology

This report adopts a participatory research approach, initiated by actors from the sector[1]. This method puts research participants at the heart of the research process, ensuring their participation in the formulation of action oriented recommendations, and their ownership and uptake of research results and recommendations.

It relied on mixed-methods, integrating qualitative (in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (survey) data.

Qualitative fieldwork included 5 focus group discussions across the Lebanese territory, and took place during the first 3 weeks of July 2019, in Beirut/Mount Lebanon, North, South, Bekaa, and Beirut. The study also relied on 10 key in-depth interviews with relevant civil society and labour stakeholders. The key informant interviews were conducted in the first half of August, after the focus group discussions, and aimed to identify the main social protection frameworks, challenges and opportunities, priorities, and cross-check some of the assumptions and recommendations raised in the focus group discussions.

In order to complement the above-mentioned qualitative data, a survey targeting workers in the civil society sector – whether freelance consultants, daily workers, interns/volunteers, part-time, or full-time members of staff – was launched. Data collection spanned the period from 16 July until 7 August 2019. Responses were collected online, with the survey being massively disseminated via the following means: targeted emails among networks and contacts, notably the "My Work, My Rights!" network[3], publishing of survey on Daleel Madani, Lebanon's civil society network[4], considerable dissemination through social media, in addition to phone calls with over 140 respondents representing a diverse sample from across the country.

[1] Anonymity and volunteer participation to the research was ensured through various means including: written consent, oral consent for phone interviews, or online collection of de-identified data for the survey.

[2] In spite of recourse to mixed-methods and the quantitative component of this research, still, inherent limitations were observed due to the short timeframe of the research, the limited understanding of research participants of social protection and the importance of the study. This study is, thus, not exhaustive and its findings only correspond to the sample studied, at this stage.

1.2 Research participants

The focus groups involved the participation of workers from the civil society sector, with one focus group discussion targeting individuals in executive management positions, in Beirut/Mount Lebanon. Participants in the focus groups were identified through an initial list of contacts in each region via local NGOs, and relied on a snowballing effect. A total of 31 focus group attendees was recruited for the study. Diversity was ensured in terms of gender, age categories, types of NGO (local or international), years of experience, type of contract, and nationalities (most were Lebanese, 1 Palestinian, 1 Syrian, 2 had a double nationality - French, 1 had no nationality). In addition, 2 persons with physical disabilities also took part in the focus groups.

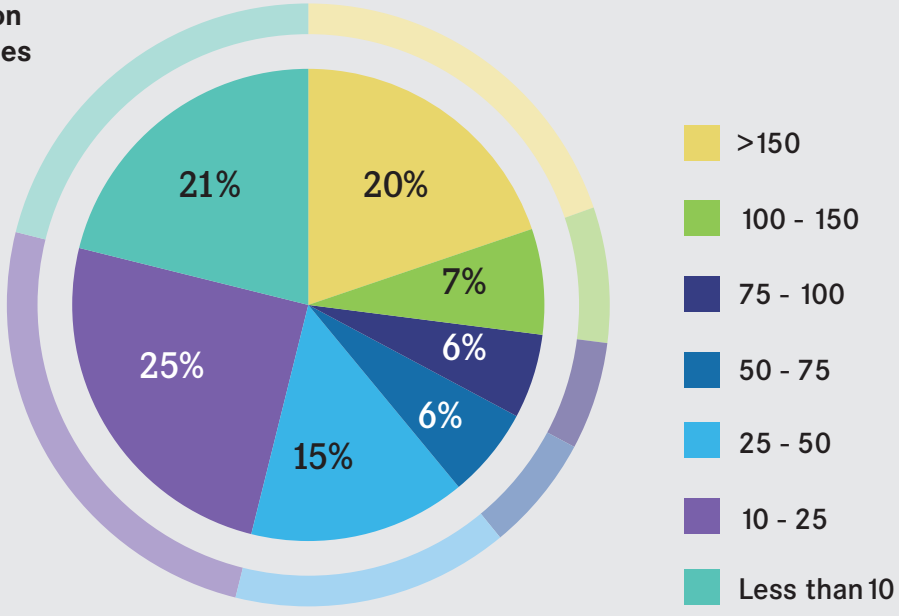
Relevant civil society and labour stakeholders for the key informant interviews included local and international non-governmental organisations, the Ministry of Labour, the National Social Security Fund, the International Labour Organisation, a mutual fund, and a donor. However, the donor identified refused to be interviewed, upon discussion with their management, while asserting their commitment to "respecting Lebanese law".

The final number of survey respondents reached 373, a sample of workers from various organisations in the civil society sector, but most notably from local CSOs (61.9%), and international CSOs (33.6%). These organisations were relatively equally distributed in terms of size, based on number of employees (as graph 1 below shows). These results also highlight the large discrepancy and gap in sizes of civil society organisations, with 21% having less than 10 employees, and 20% over than 150 employees.

[3] This network was launched by Oxfam, in partnership with the Lebanese Observatory for Workers' and Employees' Rights and the Legal Agenda, and with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, with the objective of improving protection for all employees and workers in Lebanon.

[4] Daleel Madani (daleel-madani.org) gathers over 1600 civil society actors on its directory, and receives over 1million clicks per month from civil society workers, consultants, researchers, donors. It is established as the main reference for civil society in Lebanon.

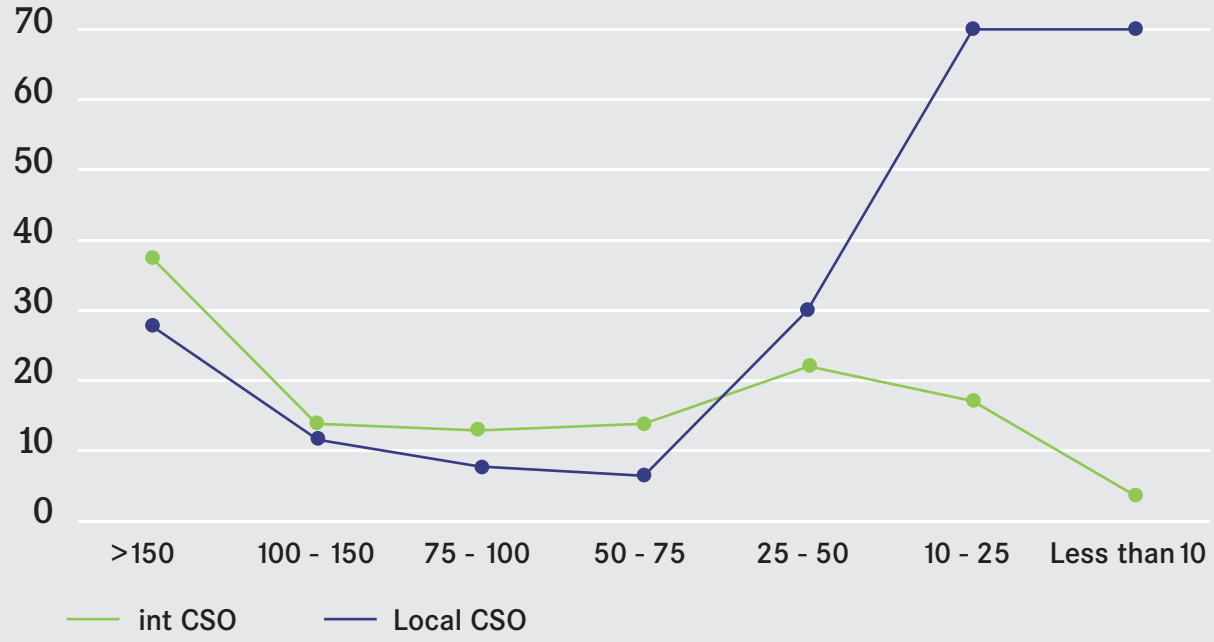
Fig.1 Size of organisation per number of employees



However, it is noteworthy here to mention that while local and international CSOs tend to share similar sizes, they are at opposing ends and diverge completely the smaller the number of employees is, with local CSOs tending to be smaller than international ones.

This may be attributed to availability of funds, or sustainability of the organisations' action. It can also relate to freedom of association in Lebanon and the relative ease of creating local NGOs[5].

Fig.2 Comparison between international and local CSOs in terms of size



[5] This ought to be nuanced though, as recently the civic space has been witnessing increased restrictions. Read "Civil Society in Lebanon: the Implementation trap." Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, Léa Yammine, and Amreesha Jagarnathsingh, (2019).

The sample of survey respondents is representative of workers in the sector, with a majority of women being represented (58%) and a majority of workers between 25 and 44 years old (64%), confirming the assumptions of the civil society sector relying largely on a young workforce composed of women.

The majority of respondents were Lebanese (85%), a rate that is understandable given the current crackdown on foreign workers led by the Ministry of Labour in June 2019, as part of its policy against "illegal foreign employment," which may have contributed to fears among the foreign working class and avoidance in taking part of such studies.

This campaign and its consequences can also be considered as an indicator of the lack of social protection available to foreign workers in the civil society sector particularly, and Lebanon at large.

Fig.3 Distribution of respondents by gender identity

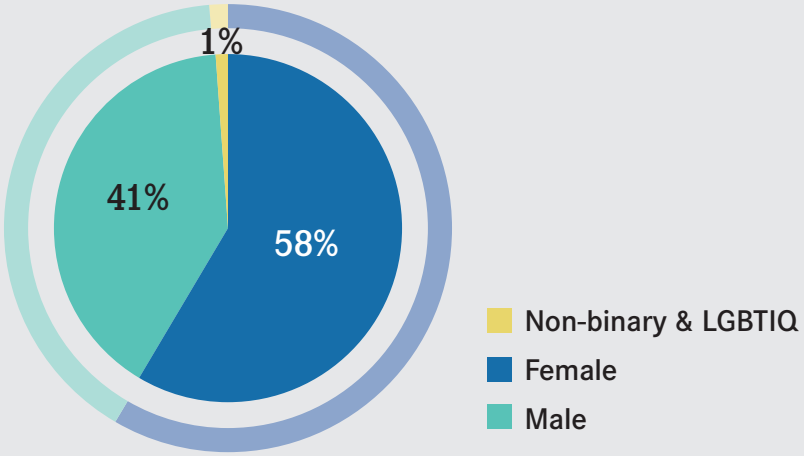


Fig.4 Distribution of respondents by age range

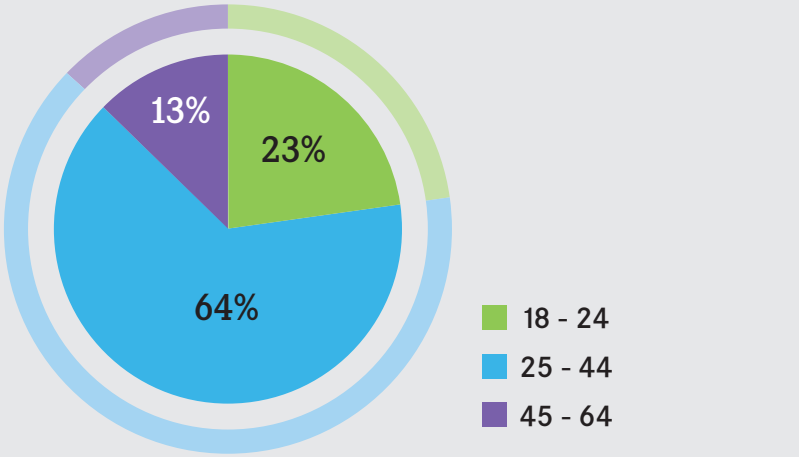
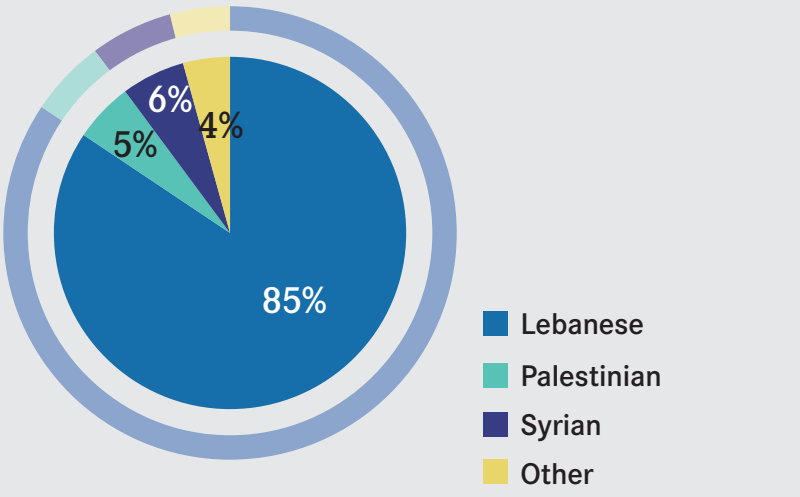


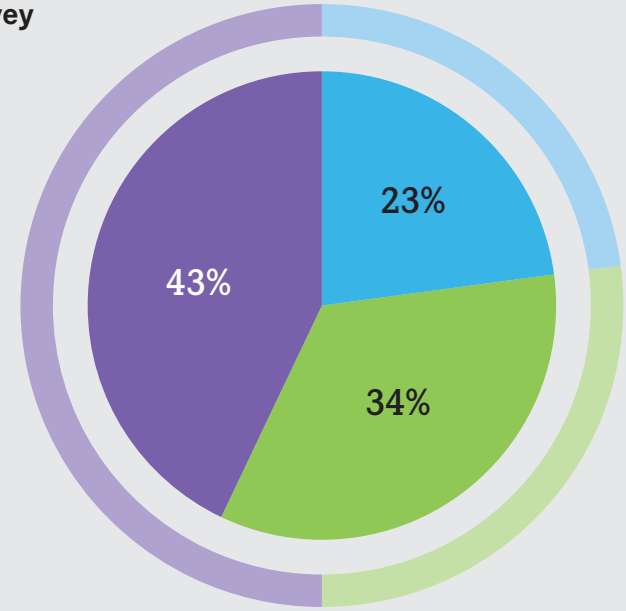
Fig.5 Distribution of respondents by nationality



Finally, our survey aimed to gather the responses of employees from various positions, in order to understand the needs and situations of all workers. As such, a majority of 43% of respondents occupied non managerial positions (such as case worker, field assistant, etc.), 34% were in intermediate managerial positions (like project manager), and 23% were in executive and high managerial positions (like head of departments, directors, etc.).

As such, the survey, while not exhaustive, can be considered to efficiently depict an overview of workers in this sector.

Fig.6 Positions of survey respondents



Executive / high managerial position (e.g. director, head of department, board member, etc.)

Intermediate managerial position (e.g. project manager)

Non managerial position (e.g. case worker, field assistant, etc.)

SOCIAL PROTECTION HYBRIDITY: FRAGMENTATION, PRIVATISATION, AND CHARITY

2.1 Understanding National Social Security Systems

In Lebanon, social protection schemes are fragmented and do not cover all categories of people.

National social protection systems are generally categorised into a typology that is mainly based on the architecture of their institutions and the extent of coverage they provide.

The following main types are generally distinguished:

The Bismarckian model, named after German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who, with the introduction of a statutory health insurance (1883) in Germany, paved the way for a social insurance system that primarily aimed at countering the emerging organisation of the working class by ensuring workers against work-related risks (Longuenesse, Catusse, and Destremau, 2005). The Bismarckian system is characterised by the following three points: the insured persons are employees; the financing is done via contributions that are calculated based on income; the contributions to be paid are based on wages or salaries.

This model is marked by a strong familialism: the male head of the family is the source of social protection, the wife and the children benefiting from derived rights as right-holders (Longuenesse, Catusse, and Destremau, 2005).

The Beveridgian model, is named after William Henry Beveridge, who in 1942 presented a comprehensive report to the British Parliament on social policy. This model aims to cover the entire population against all social risks, including unemployment. In this model, the individual right to social security is based on social citizenship, and the benefit is the same for all. It is characterised by the following: it encompasses the entire population; it is primarily financed by the state budget through taxation; it calls for uniform, lump-sum contributions.

Two variants are distinguished within the Beveridgian model. On the one hand, the liberal conception which aspires to fight in a targeted way against poverty and unemployment, with minimal and very selective intervention of the state. On the other, the social-democratic conception, also called Scandinavian, characterised by its universalist aspirations, and which aims at providing all with an income in order to reduce inequalities through redistribution.

In the latter model, the state provides finances, and regulates social welfare services for all citizens, over their lifetime (Longuenesse, Catusse, and Destremau, 2005).

A fourth category has been added by scholars, steering away from the predominant Eurocentrism of the above categorisations, **the patrimonial model.** This model consists of a paternalistic system that can include totalitarian tendencies. Its extreme form corresponds to the rentier model of the Gulf oil states; while it resembles the so-called Scandinavian type, it is not based on a social contract and lacks any formal form of democracy. Its main characteristics are: it is state funded; citizens benefit from universal access to benefits; the system is discriminatory as it excludes non-citizens, and access is sometimes restricted to non eligible citizen categories (ex. *the bidouns* of Kuwait) (Destremeau and AbiYaghi, 2007).

While this typology is insightful to understand models and schemes, in reality, national systems of social security are generally all hybrid forms of the above mentioned models (Destremau , Lautier, 2003). The following section will present the national social security schemes as well as the wider social protection landscape in Lebanon.

2.2 A restrictive and fragmented model in Lebanon

Lebanon's "merchant republic" (Gates, 1998), characterised by economic *laissez-faire,* has never been a social state. Its political economy is rather constructed around the commercial and banking sectors, with modest public health and education institutions, with, since the state foundation, a generalised "discharge" (Hibou, 1999) tendency of social responsibilities and services towards private intermediary institutions (Catusse, 2009).

General Fouad Chehab, President of the Republic between 1958 and 1964, is often presented as the initiator of developmental policies in Lebanon and more specifically of the Lebanese social protection system. Influenced by the developmentalist ideas of the Dominican fatherL. J. Lebret, director of IRFED, who directs a mission study and prospection (Lebret, 1960-1961), he launched a policy of social redistribution and territorial development including the creation of the first national public university, development of the public transport network, the multiplication of the network of public hospitals, etc. (Catusse, 2009).

The social protection system that is then initiated is of Bismarkian inspiration. It is fragmented into various funds, the largest being the National Social Security Fund (NSFF), created in 1963. The NSFF mainly provides end-of-service indemnities, social allowances, and health coverage for private sector employees[6].

Two separate funds exist for civil servants:

1) the Cooperative of Civil Servants established in 1963, that offers more generous benefits to its members compared to the NSSF,

2) the military enjoy their own cooperatives and pension schemes.

In addition to these national funds, many private social protection schemes established by syndicates and orders of liberal professions, such as lawyers, engineers, physicians, pharmacists and others exist. They vary in terms of benefits but all provide health coverage and pensions after retirement.

Other private insurance companies also offer health coverage (Melki, 2000), following various schemes and plans, the prices of which increase proportionally to the services offered.

At last but not least, a plethora of associative and charity solidarity initiatives also offer social protection to the most vulnerable populations. While "development" non-governmental organisation flourished during the mandate of Fouad Chehab, in the frame of the development plan put in place by the Office for Development social welfare (ODS), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, established in 1952, subsidised many charities (Catusse, 2009). Post-war Lebanon saw the prevalence of association or partisan-run social services consecrating a charitable business model based on mainly primary affiliations and clientelistic logics (AbiYaghi, 2014).

In a nutshell, the contributory social protection system in Lebanon is directly dependent on access to the labour force, and formal employment, and typically ends with retirement.

[6] The NSSF is financed via contributions that are calculated based on wages, with employers bearing the bulk of the cost, encouraging many to either declare lesser salaries, or not declare employees altogether.

[7] In February 2002, decree No. 7352 was issued, creating a separate fund within NSSF to provide sickness benefits for voluntary adherents, such as former adherents who lost their eligibility after retirement or unemployed, employers, liberal professions, self-employed persons who can opt to pay a yearly subscription, however, as it is constantly underfunded, its operationality is limited.

What does the Lebanese National Social Security Fund mainly cover?

- **Sickness and maternity:** covering the costs of medical care, including hospitalisation and ambulatory care such as consultations, tests, medication, for the workers and their direct family members. It also offers indemnity and compensation for workers in case of interruption of work due to sickness or maternity.
- **Work-related accidents and injuries:** still not implemented.
- **Family and education allowance:** provides additional support, based on needs, to the "legal" wife and up to 5 children of the man worker.
- **End of service indemnity:** a lumpsum offered to the worker upon retirement.

Important note: the NSSF provides no protection to the elderly, as health coverage subsides when one leaves the workforce, rendering the NSSF as a temporary social protection net that only covers individuals during their years of work[7].

As in other restricted Bismarckian systems, coverage of the mandatory system hardly reaches a portion of the population. While technically, all formal employers are required to register their employees in the NSSF, in reality, many employers evade declaring their workers. As a result, recent figures suggest that almost half of the workforce in Lebanon does not have access to any social safety net (Nasnas et alii, 2007), except for some health coverage by the Ministry of Public Health in some cases[8]. The most vulnerable populations, the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed, have only very modest public safety nets.

The health care system, largely publicly funded[9], is of relatively unsatisfactory quality when it comes to public hospitals, which leads the people who can afford it to go to private – expensive – structures while they remain funded by the state. Large segments among the most vulnerable groups of workers, as well as foreign labour and informal workers are partially covered or not covered at all, or are not aware of the social protection benefits they are entitled to. It is up to the private sector, individuals, families, organisations or employers, to bear the bulk of the expenses, which directly feeds into patronage practices.

In this context of a fragmented and limited social protection landscape, the non-governmental sector finds itself as one of the main social protection providers (Catusse, 2009). Beyond patronage and dependency dynamics this can entail, and that have traditionally caught the attention of scholars and practitioners, looking at the labour conditions, the social protection needs (or lack of) of individuals who work in the civil society sector proves to be as insightful. It sheds light on the labour conditions within one the most dynamic recruiting sectors in the country[10] on the one hand, and, on the other, on structural dysfunctions and exclusionary dynamics it carries.

[8] The formal state social security system is very much inspired by the Bismarckian tradition where protection is linked to formal employment in both the private and public sectors. Some observers note that some safety nets programmes as well as the Ministry of Health coverage are elements of a Beveridgean tradition as they are financed through taxation. The system as a whole is nevertheless far from qualified as Beveridgean since there is no universal coverage for all citizens. (Abdo, 2019).

[9] As V. Geisser and F. Marranconi put it "public funding for private health". In Vincent Geisser & Filippo Marranconi (2014).

[10] Figures from Daleel Madani (daleel-madani.org) alone refer to over 5250 job vacancies announced and published over the year of 2018.

LABOUR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION PRECARITY IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

Research on civil society workers has mainly looked at the "professionalisation" (Dauvin and Simeant, 2002) of mainly 'transnationalised middle-class experts' (Escobar (2012: xvi), often working as expatriates, and generally in mid level and managerial positions. More recently, literature on the "aid industry" has started investigating the mental health of developments professionals (Bennett and Erberts, 2015; Eriksson et al., 2013) of aid workers, the insecurity they have to navigate (Fechter and Hindman, 2011; Schneiker, 2016). It has also started researching local "field" staff of international governmental or non-governmental organisations (Corpus Ong and Combinido, 2017), shedding light on the subalternity and precariousness of local labour in the global aid industry (Pascucci, 2019). While these contributions offer valuable insights, they focus primarily on civil society actors from the "global North", and their offshoring of operations in field locations, mainly in the "global South", and they do not fully grasp the reality of the sector in a context such as Lebanon.

Indeed, the "civil" sector in Lebanon, dates back to the *Nahda* era in the XIXth century (Karam, 2006) and precedes the "modern" form of what has become the Lebanese state in 1943. While there are no exhaustive figures on the actual number of civil society actors operating in Lebanon today, qualitative studies suggest that approximately 250 new non-governmental organisations were registered yearly in the nineties (Karam, 2006), while national repositories register peaks in new initiatives after recurring humanitarian crisis.

Data from daleel madani shows that civil society actors in Lebanon cover a wide range of intervention sectors and thematics, ranging from direct aid and assistance in times of war and crisis, to more long term development (Karam, 2006; Moghnieh, Lebanon Support, 2016)[11].

In a context of dire economic recession since the mid 1990s (Ramadan, 2000), extreme liberalisation, high public debt, high unemployment rates, precarious labour, occasional, and temporary labour (Nasnas *et al.*, 2007, p. 36), the civil society sector appears to act as a magnifying glass, shedding light on structural dysfunctions within the labour market at large, where the lines between what is formal and informal work are blurred.

[11] In this vein the "localisation" agenda that has, in the light of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 set forth a commitment to put local actors at the forefront of aid interventions in order, among others to deliver more efficiently, is not specifically relevant in the case of Lebanon who witnesses a high level of expertise and professionalisation of a diverse civil society spectrum.

3.1 The formal informal *continuum*

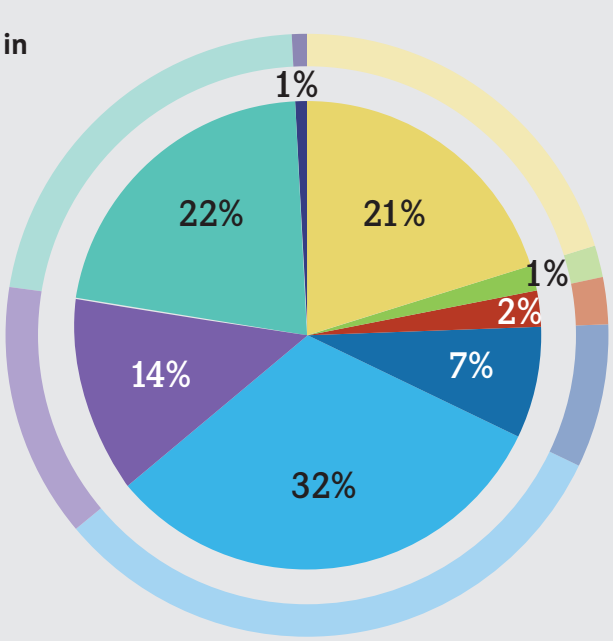
While often and increasingly perceived as an exit from unemployment, civil society work remains precarious, with some stressing the uncertainty that is inherent to this sector, dependent on fundraising efforts, crises arising, and available projects.

> **It is all bound by time, every project is only over a specific timeframe**
>
> (Man, worker in local civil society organisation in the North, focus group on 3 July 2019, in Tripoli.)

Data from Daleel Madani shows that an average of 437 jobs published monthly in 2018 (over 5,250 per year), by international CSOs, local CSOs, UN agencies, and others. The majority of jobs announced were for full time positions (73%), while 13% were consultancies, and 8% were part time – trends that are in line with our survey results, as 65% of respondents are employed full time. Without a doubt the civil society sector can be considered an important recruiter in Lebanon.

Although the civil society sector mainly advertises full time positions, taking a closer look at contract types suggests that not all these positions are long term and secure. Indeed, as the graph below shows, 32% of our respondents are on fixed term contracts, which are more often than not tied to the implementation of a project. This casualisation of work is in line with a global trend that affects both local and international staff (Fechter and Hindmann, 2011).

Fig.7 Types of contract in civil society sector



The renewability of such positions being contingent on the continuation of projects, the certainty of retaining such a position in the sector seems foggy, only 14% of our respondents have had their contracts renewed in the past 2 years or more. Several research participants have also explained how they accumulated consecutive consultancy contracts in several NGOs for the past few years, and were trying to break out of that informal and precarious cycle in vain. What is more, the consecutive renewal of fixed term contracts, rather than open contracts, contributes to consecrate a certain form of informality and labour instability. Many focus group respondents have also reported working during the first 3 months with no contract, another example of this informality.

Moreover, the sector relies on a large number of volunteers and interns (with 22% of our respondents falling under these categories), some of whom are working full time. Although volunteering and internships allow the training and socialisation of a younger generation of professionals, it has become a form of hidden labour.

While such opportunities ought to target primarily young fresh graduates, they are increasingly becoming routinised forms of work arrangements that allow employers in the civil society sector not to duly declare collaborators, and to hire foreign labour, especially lately, with the enactment of the recent Ministry of Labour policy against "illegal foreign employment", in June 2019, and that has resulted in a crackdown on workplaces that hire notably Syrian and/or Palestinian individuals.

However for many of our respondents, being a volunteer is rather linked to their engagement in civil society beyond financial considerations:

> **As volunteers we often have to pay ourselves for activities we implement. We do this to grow and for us it is a way to also ensure effective citizenship and for our values. In a very professionalised civil society, where everybody is doing this as their job, it is important to keep a volunteering and public engagement spirit**
>
> (Woman, worker in local civil society organisation in the Bekaa, focus group on 6 July 2019, in Chtaura.)

Still, many respondents occupying volunteering positions have stated receiving remuneration in the form of per diems, in lieu of formal salaries. This mainly applies to non-Lebanese workers as a way to circumvent difficulties in securing work permits for foreign workers, including "expatriates". Beyond the artificial binary opposition between what is considered formal and informal, our findings rather corroborate the idea of a *continuum* between formal and informal activities (Destremau and AbiYaghi, 2007).

Hence labour in civil society illustrates a wide variety of working "arrangements". Some, at the formal end of employment, benefit from a set of social security provisions, benefits and advantageous work packages, in addition to private insurance.

However, the continuum from formality to informality exists even in formal agreements: formally employed managers or staff can benefit from certain social protection elements (private insurances, work contracts, private retirement schemes, etc) while lacking others (social security mainly). Towards the more informal end, there are far greater numbers of self-employed people (drivers for example or consultants), where workers are most vulnerable and less protected. Moreover, the further one moves towards the informal end of the continuum, the more likely it is that one will find lower waged women workers as the sector relies on "invisible" gendered work, notably domestic and care work, within the stereotyped vision of women as "caregivers", rendering them lacking protection and vulnerable (Dalia Mitri, Lebanon Support, 2015).

Moreover, many respondents have voiced an unseen – and unwaged – component of work within civil society organisations: care or affectual labour.

Many women workers employed in local organisations have stressed the value that is given to commitment and "generosity" especially for organisations that are either charity or service delivery based.

Similarly, local workers employed in international organisations have reported that while they are primarily recruited for their contextual knowledge, their positioning as intermediary links between their (foreign) organisation and their "beneficiaries" oftentimes necessitates the "mobilisation and management of workers' affective sphere and practices of care [that] are partially unacknowledged, and often uninsured" (Pascucci, 2019).

These findings shed light on reproduction of power dynamics within the civil society sector.

3.2 Scarce protection, reproduction, and exclusionary dynamics

Steering away from the normative assumption of civil society's role to contribute to democratisation and reform, our findings rather illustrate how civil society can oftentimes contribute to reproducing power dynamics and hence maintaining status quos. The sector being composed of a diverse range of actors, with an equally diverse range of available resources and work approaches, reproduces, in practice, dynamics of gender, class, colonial attitudes, etc. Several respondents in our focus groups have highlighted discrepancies in work packages and access to benefits between international organisations and local ones, but also within the same organisations.

Most notably, this has been voiced by respondents working in INGOs reporting differences with their "expatriate" colleagues.

> **There are different social benefits between local and international NGOs [...], I work with an international organisation, and they offer me social security, health care, maternity, end of service, but also paternity. So they give me more than what the Lebanese labour law requires.**
>
> (Man, worker in international civil society organisation in Bekaa, focus group on 6 July 2019, in Chtaura.)

> **As volunteers we often have to pay ourselves for activities we implement. We do this to grow and for us it is a way to also ensure effective citizenship and for our values. In a very professionalised civil society, where everybody is doing this as their job, it is important to keep a volunteering and public engagement spirit**

(Woman, worker in local civil society organisation in the Bekaa, focus group on 6 July 2019, in Chtaura.)

A more patent trend that was emphasised in focus groups discussion was the discrepancy between project based NGOs (either local or international) – especially those responding to the Syrian crisis and in which employment was reportedly unstable – and other NGOs in which salaries were low, but employment and funding were more stable.

Women have particularly reported patriarchal dynamics within their workplaces, interestingly highlighting that such practices are not systematically performed by men, corroborating previous research notably in women organisations (Salameh, 2014; AbiYaghi, 2016).

These qualitative findings seem to be substantiated by quantitative survey results: only 54% of respondents believe their organisations provide equal benefits to all their staff regardless of gender/sexual identity, while 23% do not know for sure.

Beyond these dynamics, all respondents shared the notion that social protection for civil society workers remained partial, fragmented, and insufficient. 49% of our respondents appear to be formally registered with the NSSF. Still, only 65,7% of those have received access to the fund from their employer, with many benefitting from family members' NSSF for example, or from the syndicates they are registered in. All freelance consultants are excluded, so are volunteers, and "invisible" workers such as drivers, cleaners, etc.

> **Many local organisations recruit professionals such as architects, nurses, lawyers, etc. These people already benefit from coverage from their respective syndicates. [...] So when they enter an organisation and have the choice between the organisation's social security and staying with their own, they prefer to stay with the syndicate's social security as it is first class [...].**

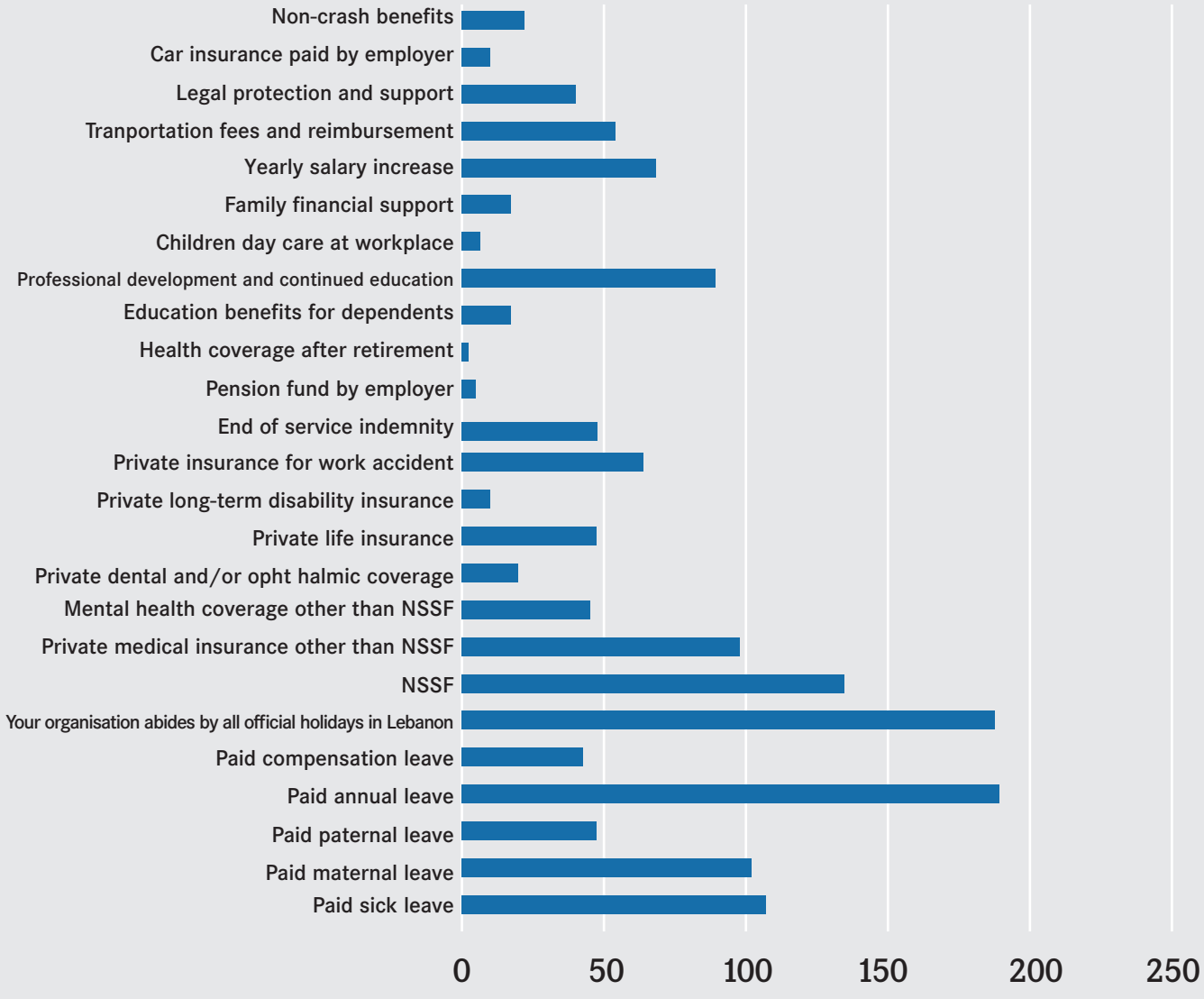
(Man, worker in local civil society organisation, in North, focus group on 3 July 2019, Tripoli).

Several individuals in focus group discussions have also raised the issue of CSOs only registering a small number of their employees with the NSSF, thereby not providing benefits equally to all employees.

This is however nuanced by participants in focus groups, which while showcasing a certain understanding of more structural funding issues NGOs face, also illustrates an interiorisation of precarious conditions and their normalisation to a certain extent:

> **The organisation's limited resources play a role in this. They want to provide benefits equally, but cannot do so with their limited capacities.**
>
> (Woman, worker in local civil society organisation in Bekaa, focus group on 6 July 2019, in Chtaura.)

Fig.8 Benefits civil society workers in Lebanon enjoy



When asked about the benefits they had access to, the two most recurrent benefits mentioned by survey respondents were paid annual leave and official holidays, setting the expectations around social protection quite low.

In qualitative field research, and when asked to define social protection, most of the respondents could not coin a comprehensive understanding of the term, oftentimes linking it to "national security and safety"

Internalisation of precarity, low expectations, combined with a lack of knowledge about workers' rights and of understanding of the notion of "social protection," contribute to putting workers in a position of inability to negotiate, whether individually or collectively. Even when workers attempt to negotiate their work conditions or organise to demand more benefits, they are quickly silenced by more prevalent structural factors.

Many of our respondents voiced concerns as to the lack of solidarity and collectivity among workers in the sector, some going as far as talking about preferential treatment among team members in the same organisation as well as privileged relations with administration based on friendship, kinship, etc.

> **I used to work in an international organisation. I loved my job but was unhappy with my salary and benefits. Other local colleagues shared the same frustrations, so some of us decided to collectively discuss this with the management. A few months later, we were all laid off supposedly due to budget limitations**
>
> (Woman, worker in civil society, nterview on 1 July 2019, Beirut).

3.3 Dissonance between social and economic capital

In spite of such existing exclusionary and informality dynamics, the large majority of survey respondents (85%) would still consider work in the civil society sector if they were to change position.

Indeed, many research participants maintained that their work in the civil society sector corresponds to their commitment as engaged citizens in the public sphere. This corroborates previous research on engagement in Lebanon where activists engagement appears as a "proxy" for public employment for the "greater good" (AbiYaghi, 2013). As one civil society worker puts it:

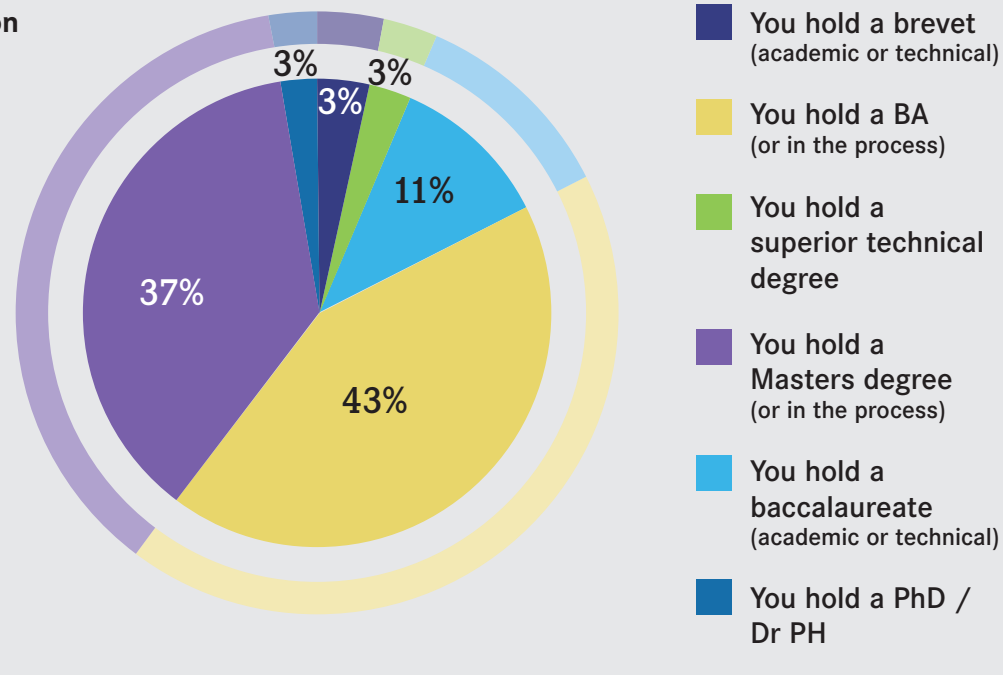
> **It is public engagement for public good; but not employment as a civil servant**
>
> (Woman, worker in civil society, interview on 18 July 2019, Beirut)

Qualitative responses ranged from the necessity of “doing good to the most disenfranchised” to “having a long term policy impact”. Participants did not shy away from expressing the symbolic gratifications work in the associative sector entails.

> **I am doing this [work] for a cause. I believe in it. It has long hours, we often work during the weekend, but the cause gives me the sense that I am doing this for a reason. And this is important. And this feeling is more fulfilling than the salary I get at the end of the month. In my village, in my family, everyone knows and respects what I do.**
>
> (Woman, worker in civil society, interview on 2 July 2019, Beirut).

Hence, for many of the research participants, working in civil society organisations was considered as rewarding and in line with their ethical commitments. This social and cultural capital of these workers appears to be mainly acquired through their employment in civil society organisations. Indeed, the majority of respondents reported a level of education equivalent to a Bachelor degree, followed closely by Masters as shown in the graph below.

Fig.9 Level of education of respondents

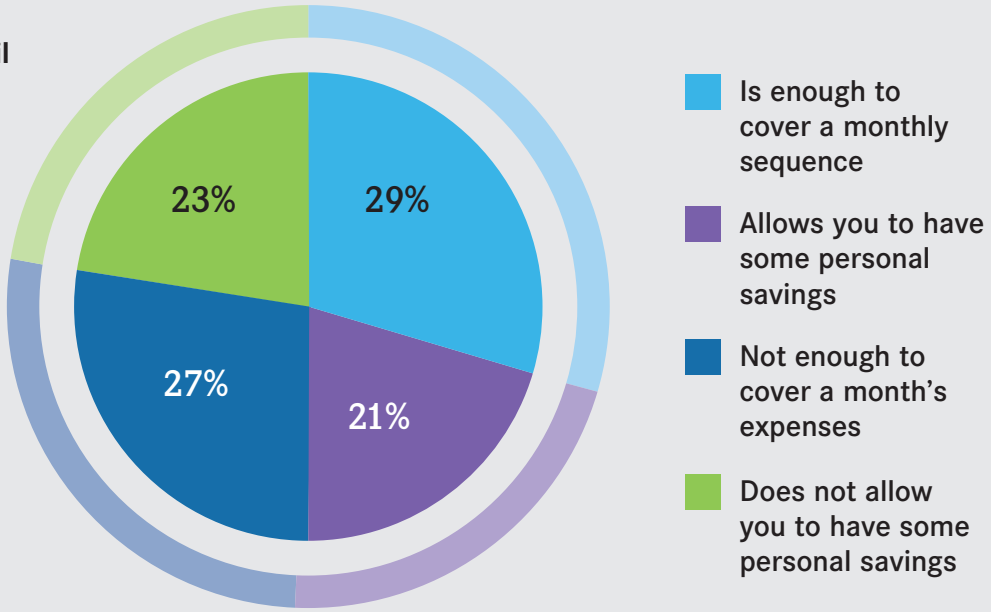


[12] See: http://uis.unesco.org/country/LB

These figures are generally in line with the overall figures on literacy rates in Lebanon (99%), the level of education of 80%, and a gross enrolment university rate of 38% in 2017[12].

Although a majority of our respondents consider their positions as commensurate with their education level or their years of experience (76% combined), nearly half consider their salaries not commensurate with neither their academic degree nor their years of experience (respectively, 25% and 23%). Moreover, 27% find their salaries and remunerations not enough to cover their monthly expenses, and 23% are not able to have some personal savings which could constitute a form of a safety net in the absence of more formal social protection schemes.

Fig.10 What does the monthly salary of a civil society worker allow



[13] See the definition of NGO-isation in Lebanon Support's bilingual Gender Dictionary: https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen-dictionary/n/34583

3.4 The structuring political economy of civil society

Donor dependency, reliance on technical performance expertise and indicators, and project-based action are some of the features of trend for NGO-isation and professionalisation of civil society[13]. While, as discussed, above, project-based approaches contribute to the precarity of civil society employment and its inscription in a formal-informal continuum, it also directly conditions workers' wages and access to social protection, as donors commonly impose restrictions and limits on spending for what is categorised as "human resources," sometimes refusing to fund staff altogether. Moreover, our survey results show that 30% of the respondents saw their salaries imposed, based on the rate defined by the project, rather than based on a salary scale taking into account education and level of experience.

> **The funding organisation comes and says I will give you a project, and I want to give employees on this project 1000USD, and it publishes job vacancies on Daleel Madani for like 6 employees with a salary range of 800 to 1000USD, so naturally, I cannot come here and blame the organisation implementing the project, since it is the external organisation or the donor controlling all the rules of the project**
>
> (Man, worker in local civil society organisation, in North, focus group on 3 July 2019, Tripoli).

> **Basically, everything depends on the donor**
>
> (Woman, worker in local civil society organisation, in North, focus group on 3 July 2019, Tripoli).

The reported limited wages in the sector (as seen in the previous section) are pushing some workers to prefer not having deductions made to their salaries, which may lead them to privilege other private social protection providers, including family and/or clientelistic networks.

> **When you already earn what is merely sufficient to get you through the month, and they come to you and say hey I will deduct this or this amount for social security or retirement. I don't want to and I don't think this should be how this works for our sector. They should be like an agreement between the concerned ministries, I don't know labour or social affairs, to have specific conditions ensuring our social protection without further burdening us or our civil society employer. I mean how can I protect the employee in an organisation and I don't know if they're staying 6 months, 1 year, or 10, I could do this law that should protect on the one hand, the employee, but also on the other, the organisation.**
>
> (Man, worker in local civil society organisation, in North, focus group on 3 July 2019, Tripoli).

Moreover, donors' restrictions on administration costs and overheads affect the perennity of organisations, rendering them unable on the longer term to cover their costs generally, and specifically those relevant to their core team members (non project based), ie. salaries and social security.

As mentioned earlier in this report, many research participants have raised the issue of organisations only registering a small number of their staff to social security, thus not providing equal benefits to all.

Research participants showed an awareness of these power dynamics and the overall political economy underlying the sector, often putting into perspective the margins within which local NGOs operate, rather than putting all the responsibility on their employers:

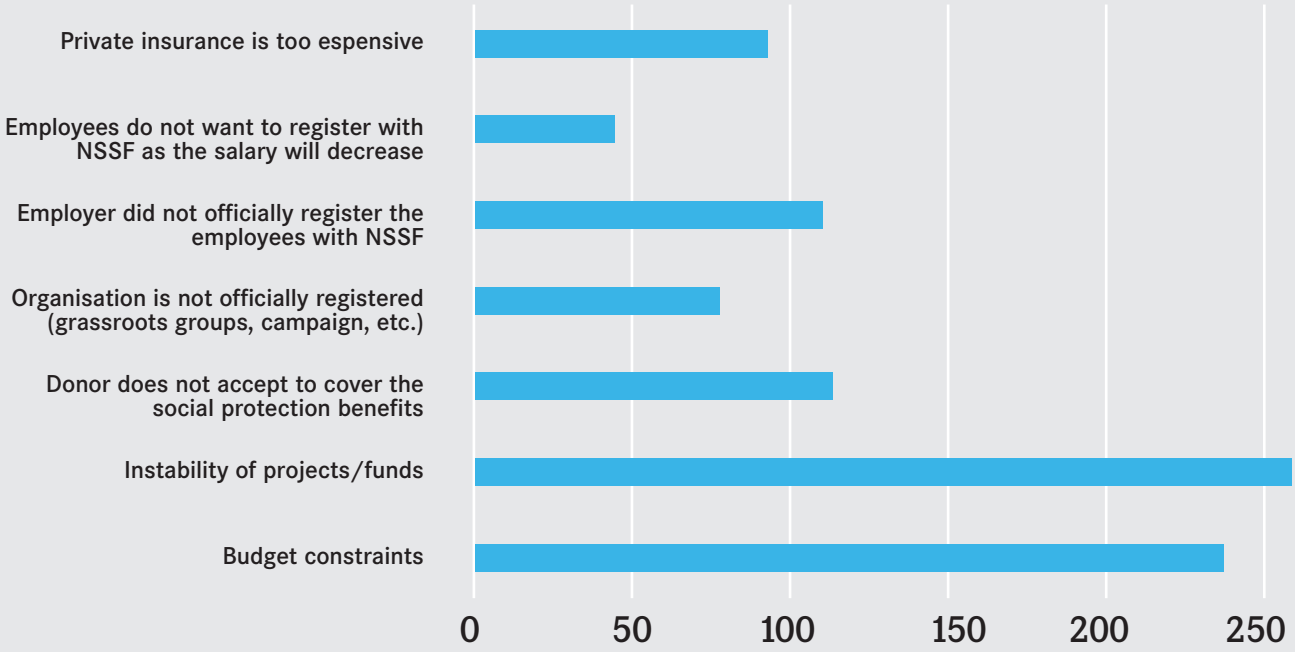
> **A local NGO cannot be required to offer the same benefits as a private enterprise that seeks profit. Non-profits depend mainly on individual and institutional grants, that are oftentimes linked to projects or activities**
>
> (Man, worker in local civil society organisation, in North, focus group on 3 July 2019, Tripoli).

> **"All local civil society organisations have to refuse the condescending work approach and the uneven power dynamics.[...] There's also the sustainability of the organisation itself to keep in mind."**
>
> (Man, worker in local civil society organisation, in Beirut, focus group on 23 July 2019, Beirut).

Indeed, the majority of survey respondents find instability of projects and funds, in addition to budget constraints as the main reasons CSOs are not able to provide rights and social protection benefits to their teams. On the flip side, the least cited reason is the employee's unwillingness to register in the NSSF to preserve their full salaries. This further reflects civil society workers' awareness of structural factors conditioning organisations' work and their impact.

A general trend among research participants was the recommendation to have a specific legislative or administrative category for civil society organisations to ensure a minimal level of protection for workers in the sector.

Fig.11 Main reasons CSOs are not able to povide certain rights /benefits according to our respondents



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The necessity for action on the level of the state, as the main duty bearer in charge of protecting workers in the country, is patent across all research findings whether in the civil society sector or another. This is further bolstered by the fact that workers in this specific sector have been fulfilling the social and welfare role of the state. In addition, findings shed light on the need for forging a sense of solidarity among workers in the civil society sector, through collective organising, and pushing for the recognition of their social rights.

The below recommendations are based on survey responses, interviews, focus groups, and consultative meetings.

The Lebanese state should

- Develop, in participation with civil society actors, as well as other stakeholders, a comprehensive national and universal social security framework. This should, at the very least, entail a reform process of the NSFF to ensure universal coverage, retirement pensions, and unemployment allowances. At best, it would lead to the merging of all social protection schemes in one unified fund that would ensure universal and equal benefits and coverage.
- Establish a state funded specific administrative scheme within the NSSF dedicated to non-governmental organisations.
- Establish national priorities and strategies for social development and rights, and encourage the donor community, INGOs, and NGOs to align with these priorities, specifically in the sectors of livelihoods, social assistance, social services, and protection.

- Promulgate a law encouraging and protecting civil society volunteers. Such a law would reinvigorate civic engagement in the country on the one hand, and ensure the protection of volunteers and their rights on the other.

The donor community and international NGOs should

- Abide by national law, and ensure protection for all their collaborators.
- Ensure that discrepancy in work packages and benefits between local and international staff is reduced.
- Advocate, through the partnerships with and funding provided to ministries, for the adoption and enactment of fairer social protection provisions, and push for a universal social protection scheme based on national priorities.
- Revise and adjust funding schemes, ceilings, and restrictions, notably on human resources, including provision of social protection to partners' employees, in line with human rights principles and the commitments to localisation, in the vein of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

Local NGOs should

- Ensure all workers are aware of their rights and entitlements, part of existing schemes, in the frame of broader awareness raising on social protection regulations.
- Ensure that all workers receive a minimum of social protection benefits on the short term, while seeking to achieve, on the long term, universal protection.
- Develop comprehensive salary scales based on cost of living, education level, years of experience, and positions, updated regularly, and used in negotiation of grant agreements with their respective donors.
- Organise collectively to preserve the rights of all workers in the sector, including freelancers and volunteers, in the form of a syndicate, or a mutual fund cooperative that would on the one hand, ensure greater solidarity among civil society actors and workers, and, on the other, include social protection provisions that can complement those provided by the state's social security.

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