

# THE DEMOCRATIC ECONOMY

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REPORT 2021

THEME 04

TOWARDS A  
DEMOCRATIC ECONOMY

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## Alternative Syndicates & Social Solidarity Structures

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## Report

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# About

## The Democratic Economy

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The Democratic Economy Initiative is a year-long conversation that tackles different key components needed to pave the way for a democratic economy in Lebanon.

Under the umbrella of the initiative, four thematic conferences are taking place covering the different components including: Solidarity Economic Enterprises; Digital Currencies, Technology, and Innovation; Reimagining MSMEs; Alternative Syndicates and Social Solidarity Structures.

The aim of the initiative is to bring together an eclectic audience including academics, activists, NGOs, international donors, community members, technologists, practitioners and researchers, located both locally and globally, to engage in meaningful dialogue around the existing socio-economic realities in Lebanon, to collectively ideate and recommend contextual and practical solutions, pathways and options.

This report discusses the fourth thematic conference around Alternative Syndicates and Social Solidarity Structures, which was held over three consecutive days: December 1, 2, and 3, 2021. It conveys the main findings of the conference and reflects on possible solutions and recommendations.

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## Acknowledgements:

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Art directed by Carole kaakour and implemented by Mostafa Olwan.

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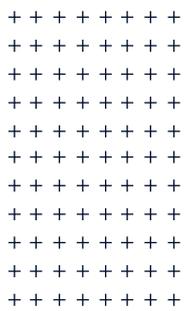
## Summary:

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The dominant neoliberal thinking structures in Lebanon enforced by the political class ruling in a context of elite-maintained sectarianism have been a major opponent standing against promoting welfare mechanisms and workers unions. This report examines the situation of existing syndicates and social safety nets in Lebanon and highlights the different challenges they face and reflects on future pathways and recommendations.

The social protection landscape in Lebanon is an array of scattered unsustainable schemes, where most of the population does not benefit from formal social protection mechanisms and is sometimes forced into a series of clientelist relations in order to secure the minimum standards of living and well-being. Furthermore, this system is tied to formal employment, excluding a majority of people working in the informal sector in addition to the elderly and people with special needs. Thus, the importance of building mutual aid networks and solidarity structures where people contribute as the main actors in the process and exchange according to needs and capabilities.

This should be coupled with strong worker's unions that have a double role to play, including mobilizing workers for mass action regarding their day-to-day issues, in addition to building new organizational structures through which workers are involved in the decisions that affect their lives and living conditions. Such alternatives will help people meet and participate voluntarily because of their passion for injustice and care for their communities. Adding to that, their work will be politicized and rooted in anti-capitalist principles and gender and disability justice. Finally, major reforms on the levels of existing syndicates and social safety nets are crucial to drive sustainable change, promote social and economic inclusion, and induce economic growth. Creating and strengthening organized movements and alliances, in addition to enacting new social protection policies and employment protection schemes, are among the recommendations that pave the way towards a democratic economy.



# List of speakers



## **Abdelmajid Ezzar**

holds a degree in Medical Biotechnology from the Higher Institute of Biotechnology in Monastir. With a rich experience in the agriculture sector, Mr. Abdelmajid currently holds the position of Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Cooperative Company “Al NoorPoultry”, in addition to being the elected President Tunisian Union for agriculture and fisheries.

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## **Adonis, Firas, and Iskandar Emad.**

Adonis Emad holds a Master’s degree in rehabilitation and organization of the geographical area, Iskandar Emad holds a Master’s degree in Public Administration and Marketing, and Firas Emad is an expert in organic farming. Together they developed “Gharset Kheir” initiative, which is a student, youth and women’s initiative that aims to develop the agricultural sector in a voluntary cultural aspect by integrating the segments of society to achieve the principle of community solidarity, and urging the young generation to adopt a productive mentality by breaking the traditional image inherited from the agricultural sector.

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## **Dr. Ahmad Dirany**

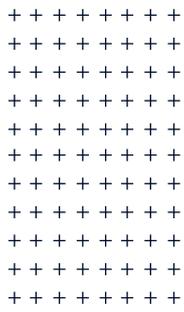
is a former Professor at the Institute of Social Sciences - Lebanese University. Dr. Dirany is a labor and union activist, a contributor and participant in many strikes and labor movements. He is an expert in training matters on labor laws, social security and union work, and a social researcher.

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## **Farah Kobaissy**

is an independent researcher and consultant on gender and social justice. Her research is invested in intersectional feminist movements’ building, focusing on the informal and formal labor organization in the Middle East and North Africa. She has completed her master’s degree in Gender Political Economies at the American University in Cairo and Jawaharlal University in Delhi.



# List of speakers



## Ghassan Slaiby

is currently working as an independent consultant, after working for a long time as a regional secretary in the International Federation of Public Services Unions, and before that as a consultant for the General Labor Confederation in Lebanon during the war and three years after its end. He is the author of several books and research papers, including:

“Fi Al Itihad Quoah”, about the problems of the General Labor Union in Lebanon  
The Arab Trade Union Movement, Research Perspectives  
The October 17 uprising, the phenomenon and its social and political backgrounds.  
He recently published literary texts under the title „Zahra Fi Hae‘t“.

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## Ghina Abou Shackra

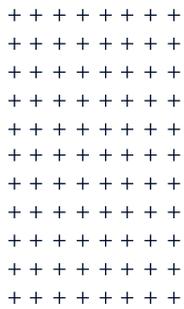
is a dreamer, a believer in the inherent goodness of people, and a rebel against injustice. With a passion to create positive change in her community, she pursued a master’s degree in NGO Management. She has been volunteering with different organizations since 2009. She is currently serving as the 2021 National President for Junior Chamber International (JCI) Lebanon, which is part of an international volunteer-based organization with the aim of creating development opportunities for youth and driving their transformation into global change makers, entrepreneurs, networkers, and communicators.

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## Hala Camille Dahrouge

After more than 20 years of passionate involvement in the advertising sector as Creative Director and Copywriter, my natural drive to constantly find solutions led me in 2019 to create, develop and lead LibanTROC, an innovative spontaneous social media platform that has grown into a nonprofit organization. That forced shift allowed me to redirect my energy into the humanitarian landscape, with LibanTROC becoming a safety net connecting more than 75.000 members and providing all kinds of solutions to address the current dramatic crisis



# List of speakers



## Hanna Mikhael

born and raised in Lebanon, has earned his diploma in Agriculture engineering from the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) and his Master in plant protection from the American University of Beirut (AUB). Hanna conducted two studies targeting the Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*) on apples, in the North of Lebanon; starting with the monitoring of the pest to determine its life cycle and introducing new sustainable, ecological and environmental practices to manage this pest. In parallel, Hanna was working in different NGOs, agricultural private companies and UN-agencies and was always focusing in his field visits, training and consultancies on the importance of sustainable agriculture practices compared to conventional practices. In January 2020, Hanna and his friends created a Facebook group known as “Izraa”. Izraa is a nonprofit, virtual community that provides free online service consultancy, market for farmers and empowers people to plant at home, wherever they are

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## Hashem Adnan

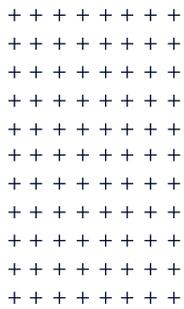
is a searching body and soul. He came to this planet in 1984, landed in Lebanon and loved the 80ies despite all its traumas. Hashem is a director, playwright, actor and organizer based in Beirut. He acquired his BA in acting and directing from the Lebanese University in 2006. He played the mad man in his graduation collective project and this mad man lives inside him ever since. He is particularly interested in the politics behind every breath, bite, text and event. He practices performance as a space of re-creation of reality and is interested in art practices that operate outside of the neoliberal realm and at their potential collective, cooperative and individual structures and methods

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## Hind Hamdan

is a gender and socio-economic development specialist as well as a policy advisor on trade unions’ work in the MENA. She has an MSc in Migration, Mobility and Development with an emphasis on gender studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and a MSc in Management from ESCP Europe in Paris. With extensive research experience on gender issues, she has also been working with a Dutch workers’ confederation as the MENA region independent policy advisor.



# List of speakers



## **Maher Abou Shackra**

is a social and political activist. He is a Consultant in social and political research design and founding member of Daleel Tadamon, an organization that supports, organizes and develops solidarity structures and institutions of a democratic economy. He has more than 15 years of experience designing research and studies, research methodologies and tools, and experience in structuring and organizing socio-political and community driven initiatives and economic projects. Maher holds degrees in Management Informatics and Psychology. He published his book „Al-Akel, Safar Fi Aalam Moujarrad“ published by Al-Farabi House in 2013, and he has a number of articles in the social and political fields.

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## **Maroun Karam**

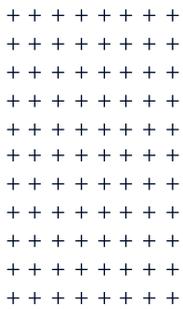
is the co-founder & president of “Baytna Baytak” (“Our home is your home”), a nonprofit organization based in Beirut, Lebanon. First established to support healthcare frontliners working against the COVID-19 pandemic, Maroun grew the organization in record time to face an even more daunting challenge: rebuilding Beirut after the devastation caused by the Port explosion on August 4th, 2020. Harnessing his experience as a longtime scout leader and prolific digital marketing entrepreneur, Maroun mobilized and organized thousands of volunteers overnight to help the people repair their homes and reopen their businesses.

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## **Nadim El Kak**

is a researcher, freelance writer, and postgraduate student in sociology at the American University of Beirut. He is based at The Policy Initiative, a new local think tank, where he leads research projects on Lebanon’s anti-establishment movement. His current academic research examines the interplay between neoliberal ideology, counterrevolutions, and radical political imaginaries. He is also the author of a chapter on Lebanon’s alternative labor movement in a forthcoming book on the 2019 revolutionary uprising.



# List of speakers



## **Nizar Rammal**

is a managing partner at For Development, c.c, a Lebanese civil company that provides consulting, resources production, and training services to the public sector and the local, regional and international nongovernmental and UN agencies organizations on advocacy and lobbying, community development and mobilization, strategic planning, and management leadership, Facilitation and interactive training skills and tools, and non formal education. Rammal holds degrees in Community Mobilization/Organization from Saint Joseph University in Beirut and followed specialized courses on Conflict Transformation and Development at the Eastern Mennonite University in West Virginia- USA. He is an accredited trainer for the American University of Beirut's Faculty of Public Health, as well as the Johns Hopkins University Regional Center for Communication.

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## **Dr. Rana Jawad**

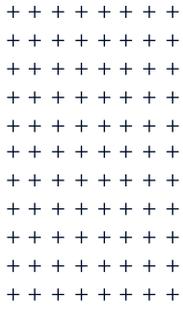
is senior lecturer in social policy at the University of Bath. She is the co-founder and convener of the MENA social policy network [www.menasp.com](http://www.menasp.com), the world's only dedicated knowledge exchange platform for social policy issues in the Middle East region. She has 20 years' experience in research on social policy in MENA countries and is recognized internationally as a leading scholar in her field. As well as authoring key academic publications on the institutional and political development of social policy in the MENA region, she is regularly consulted by international agencies and governments. She has extensive experience of managing large academic and consultancy projects as well as commissioning research for UKRI as part of the current GCRF-funded project examining the relationship between social policy and conflict prevention in the MENA region. She has various research advisory roles including as a member of the peer review college of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council and as an advisory board member of the International Labour Organization's International Social Security Review journal.

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## **Said Issa**

is a writer, researcher and expert in labor and union affairs, EU accredited expert in social dialogue, Board Member of the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability at the World Bank, Member of the Executive Office of the Lebanese Observatory for Workers and Employees Rights in Lebanon, Former Director of Field Projects and Public Relations at the Lebanese Association To promote transparency, the branch of Transparency International in Lebanon and a member of the General Authority of the Lebanese Association for the Promotion of Transparency - No Corruption. He has a large number of published articles, research and studies.



# List of speakers



**Nur Turkmani**

is a Lebanese-Syrian researcher and writer based in Beirut. Her work focuses on economic development and social movements in the Middle East.

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**Pierre Khoury**

has been a political activist since 2008 and a member of the political relations council at Lihaqqi. He is one of the organizers of Metn Solidarity, an initiative where voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services are done between the members for mutual benefit.

He has a degree in theatre and a bachelor's in business administration.

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# Introduction

The dominant neoliberal thinking structures in Lebanon enforced by the political class ruling in a context of elite-maintained sectarianism have been a major opponent standing against the promotion of welfare mechanisms and structures which prioritizes people's livelihood and well-being. Since the country's independence in 1943, the prevailing political and economic models were designed to serve the interest of the governing authorities and to sustain their power through building and strengthening their networks of clientelism. Historically, "syndicates and professional orders have played a main role against this establishment. However, since the end of the civil war, the ruling political class has made major efforts to control and close the workers' unions and movements to dissidents" [7].

As neoliberalism continues to spread further in Lebanon and the region, hierarchies are becoming more rigid within the corporate organizational structures, negatively affecting the workers' rights. Even worse, most of the syndicates, labor unions, and existing safety nets in Lebanon are coopted by the ruling and sectarian class.

As a result, profession syndicates and new independent political movements have emerged since the uprising of October 17 in 2019, standing against the sectarian rule, endemic corruption, the stagnant economy, the rising inequality and unemployment, and social injustice.

This report aims to provide a snapshot of the current labor movement in Lebanon and explore the critical role of alternative syndicates and social solidarity structures in driving the needed change towards a democratic economy in Lebanon. It will also discuss the relevant contributions of this sector, while providing feasible recommendations and reflecting on the relevant approaches that are crucial for their presence and operation within this democratic economy.



Asanitation worker employed by Lebanese company Ramco pauses for a quick rest while working a shift at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in June, 2020. Photo by [Marwan Tahhan](#) - The Public Source



Throughout the conference, speakers discussed and examined the current situation of existing syndicates and social safety nets in Lebanon, highlighted the different challenges they face, and reflected on future pathways and recommendations, including restructuring and reorganizing existing syndicates towards more democratic ones, and infrastructuring social safety nets to promote their sustainability and transformation towards social solidarity structures.

Moreover, the importance of mobilizing and organizing people to actively participate in decision-making was highlighted throughout this conference.

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# The Lebanese Labor Context

## 1. LABOR SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Lebanon has been witnessing multiple transversal crises that are currently affecting the employment and livelihoods of the entire population in general, and that of the already poor and vulnerable Lebanese and refugee populations in particular.

The crises exerted a heavy impact on the different sectors and were mainly driven by diverse challenges, including the ongoing major economic, public health, humanitarian, and political challenges. In fact, the cross-cutting effects of years of mounting public debt, the informal adoption of strict capital controls by the banking sector, the Lebanese pound depreciation and inflation, the limited access to foreign exchange and imports, the political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Port Explosion, and the huge number of refugees in the country, represent the major challenges that the country is currently facing [8, 20].

More specifically, the public safety measures applied as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic have further shattered the already vulnerable economy and had adverse effects on most sectors, especially on micro and small enterprises which constitute a major part of the Lebanese economy. This has resulted in a significant drop in labor demand in this sector [6]. It is worth noting that the Lebanese labor market suffers from structural deficiencies which stand at the root of the prevalence of long-term unemployment. According to a recent report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), these deficiencies include “insufficient job creation, skills mismatches, unattractive working conditions/wages, and a lack of effective efforts to integrate youth and women into the labor market” [9, p.87].

Moreover, when it comes to labor supply in Lebanon, it is worth mentioning that the Lebanese education system is highly privatized with only one main public university, the Lebanese University, with affordable annual fees. In addition, the majority of students usually opt for majors and professions that are traditionally and socially well esteemed such as law, engineering, and medicine, thus leading to an overabundance of graduates against

the limited available number of occupations and job opportunities [23]. By the same token, technical and vocational education and training in Lebanon are usually associated with low wages, poor working conditions and lack of career prospects, which discourage youth from entering this field and make them keep it as their last resort.

In brief, significant gaps still prevail including the limited number of vacancies advertised, and the mismatch between the present skills available among employees and those demanded by employers, all of which exacerbates the country’s already weak functioning system [11]. In addition, the combined impact of the crises translated into increased poverty and unemployment rates, especially among women and youth, in addition to business closures, falling wages and hours of work, a drop in overall demand for goods and services due to a change in consumption patterns, and an increased emigration rate creating a ‘brain drain’ that affected companies seeking skilled personnel. This, in turn, resulted in a vicious cycle of job losses, income inequalities, and lower levels of economic activity and productivity [9, 10, 20].



“The Lebanese economy is constructed in a way that stands against the public interest, against the public service, and against the basic human rights to obtain appropriate health care, education care, and so on”.

**Nizar Rammal**

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## 2. INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT

According to the ILO, around 77% of total employment in Lebanon is informal, with informal employment being defined by the characteristics or nature of the job, in what relates to the terms and conditions of employment along with any protections or benefits received by the employee [9].

The Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics sees almost total informality in the households' activities corresponding mainly to domestic workers (97%) followed by the sectors of agriculture (88%) and construction (nearly 84%) [14].

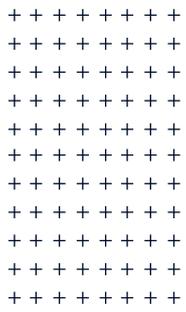
The informal employment rates are extremely high among Syrians and Palestinians (95 % and 93.9 % respectively), in comparison to Lebanese workers from vulnerable households (64.3 %) [9].

Amidst the current challenges that Lebanon is facing, many informal workers were forced to leave their jobs, or were subject to major reductions in their salaries or working hours. In fact, and especially during times of crises and reduced economic activity, informal work arrangements can represent significant threats to the employees, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups.

This translates to the Lebanese labor market being characterized by poor and unsafe working conditions, low wages, and lack of protection schemes including health care coverage, social security coverage and paid annual and sick leaves, among others.



A sanitation worker employed by Lebanese company Ramco pauses for a picture while working a shift at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. April 6, 2020. Photo by [Marwan Tawfik](#) - The Public Source



# Snapshot of the Current Labor Movement in Lebanon

## 1. EXISTING SYNDICATES: REALITY AND CHALLENGES

The existence of a workers' movement and unions in Lebanon dates back prior to the civil war, despite the sectarian boundaries that were spread in the country. This movement was known to be organized and active to a certain extent, and was strengthened by the surge of international labor movements and the rise of communist parties in the Arab world, as well as being complemented by the growing industries in the country back then. However, it was always fragmented and weakened by the governing system after the end of the war, in addition to being affected by the emerging socio-economic and political challenges [4]. In reality, unions developed a life independent of their membership and began to operate over their heads, diminishing their power within limits set by the sectarian and capitalist class.

Following the country's independence in 1943, unions played a pivotal role in protecting workers' rights through advocating for the enactment of the labor law, which was stipulated by the Lebanese parliament in 1946. This was followed by the establishment of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) in 1958, and the subsequent authorization of various unions and confederations [2, 19]. Labor and demands-based movements in Lebanon evolved throughout the years, in which unions advocated for several rights including wage increase, paid holidays, the establishment of a social security fund, among others [2, 4, 15]. It should be pointed out that most of the strikes called for during that period were from outside official unions or union leadership.



Photo by [Christelle Hayek](#) - Unsplash

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After the civil war, labor and union movements, including syndicates and professional orders, were influenced by different ideologies and became a reflection of the larger political context in which they operated, namely the sectarian political system. In fact, politically affiliated parties interfered in most of these movements. This was the trend over the years in an effort to advocate for their economic and political agendas and sustain their governing power [15, 19]. This period also witnessed the emergence of internal conflict and structural weaknesses within the GCLW, accompanied by the authorization of unions and federations depending on political affiliation [19].

This facilitated the control of the ruling class over the GCLW, and even made it a tool in their hands to work against the workers' own interests at times, thus hindering the true purpose of union work especially with the existing economic system that did not leave room for any union formation [2, 3, 7].

Also, the period was marked by a fragmentation of organized labor and the increasing control enforced by the ruling state, in which the latter succeeded in breaking the labor unity and increasing the control and hegemony of the state and its sectarian parties over the labor movement. For example, the political class used division as a strategy in an attempt to gain more influence over the labor movement. This was done by creating several unions representing the same category of workers. For example, successive labor ministers authorized the establishment of unions allied with their respective political parties, which has resulted in the creation of up to five unions representing cab drivers until now [7].

Moreover, the workers' movement and the mobilization of workers are weakened by the existing deficient labor market, by which the small size of the majority of enterprises leads to a limited capacity of association of workers, as well as by the existing governmental policies, which favors the state's agenda. Thus, reducing the impact and effectiveness of the labor movement [4].

Moreover, the monetary and fiscal policies post-war were intentionally designed to serve the interest of the ruling sectarian class and stood against the development of the productive and private sectors, in favor of investing in the construction and trade sectors [2]. It is worth noting that the productive sectors including agriculture and industry constitute the main pillars of a strong economy, as they are the engine for job creation and resource distribution [3]. As a result, and until the present, this promoted an inflated public sector, a rise in micro and small sized enterprises and the dominance of the informal labor sector, all of which have led to the subsequent limitation of the capacity of labor movements and workers' unions across the different sectors and enterprises [3].

Yet, and until now, several noteworthy labor mobilizations still take place. Some examples include the 94-day strike held by employees of the Electricite Du Liban (EDL) in 2012 after pressures of layoffs, as well as the creation of a union by Spinneys employees which resulted in the registration of a significant number of employees in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and in ensuring judicial protection from work discharge [12].

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It is worth mentioning that the Spinneys union did make some more or less symbolic gains, but this came at a huge cost. The success of this union was very limited in scope and this attempt did not leave any real organizational remnants behind it. Moreover, the “Union Coordination Committee, including a coalition of League of Public Sector Employees, primary and secondary public school teachers’ leagues, and the Union of Private School Teachers, launched large-scale mobilizations demanding salary scale for civil servants, public and private school teachers” [2, p.7]. Also, the year 2015 witnessed the creation of a union for domestic workers in Lebanon, making it the first union of this kind in the Arab world [4]. Although this union was created, however, it suffered from major gaps including issues pertaining to the adequate representation of migrant domestic workers, in addition to serious claims of patriarchal, dominant, and regressive behavior linked to a male figure who took control over the union.

More recently, and in light of the ongoing crises that the country has been facing, the uprising of October 17, 2019 comprised a revolution against Lebanese-style neoliberalism. Rage against the ruling sectarian regime was finally unleashed amidst the escalating financial crisis and the incompetency and failure of the government to respond to the basic needs and rights of the population. This has subsequently shed light on the importance of suppressing the existing neoliberal policies and having effective unions and movements tailored at organizing the agendas of the labor movement in a way that achieves a democratic transition and liberty from the ruling class.

In fact, just one month after the revolution, the opposition stemming from this movement elected Melhem Khalaf to head the Beirut Bar Association. This shed light again on discussions related to the crucial role of syndicates and professional orders in driving the needed change, and highlighted the importance of liberating those from the control of the ruling class. Later on, in 2020, several breakthroughs were significant including the victories of secular and independent groups in student body elections at several private universities [7]. However, the primary challenge pertains to the organization of such movements in order to eventually pave the path towards a new democratic political and economic system. In fact, the structural challenges and weaknesses in providing a clear roadmap, along with organizing and mobilizing people on a larger scale, go back to the outrageous efforts of the post-war regime which has been systematically working over those years to coopt or repress any effort at a collective organization, as this constitutes a major threat to its neoliberal sectarian ideology. As a result, most unions and syndicates have become defenders of the interests of the sectarian ruling class.

According to Ghassan Slaiby, a former regional secretary in the International Federation of Public Services Unions, in the Lebanese system and law, there is so-called freedom to create and organize unions according to sectors, because the labor law stipulates the specification of the professions to which workers are entitled to belong, but no decree was approved on this issue, and unions can thus take all the required forms. The problem lies not only within the structure itself, but also with the lack of trust for existing unions, especially by the younger generation. Therefore, all the people who participated in the uprising and the popular youth movements are completely far away, since the union leadership was against the uprising. On the other hand, there is a large sector which is not represented by any unions, and this includes a large private sector and an informal sector.



“A systematic campaign has been organized against the labor movement and the role of unions and workers in the society, as this movement harms the interests of the political class and elites who work together on similar agendas”.

**Nadim El Kak**

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Moreover, the existing syndicates lack democracy, efficient internal programs, and transparency of actions and services (financials, programs, initiatives, leadership), according to Hind Hamdan, who is a gender and socio-economic development specialist as well as a policy advisor on trade unions’ work in the MENA.

Other challenges hindering the effective function of unions and syndicates include, but are not limited to the following: (1) Limited awareness of the workers regarding their rights and the importance of unions; (2) the absence of a culture of collective work; (3) the limited knowledge of the role of unions and professional orders; (4) administrative malfunction of union bodies; (5) the passivity of unions regarding the protection of workers, especially regarding uninformed dismissals; (6) gaps in the current Lebanese labor law in what relates to the need for prior authorization from the Ministry of Labor for the formation of any labor organization and its associated consequences, as well as the exclusion of all workers not subject to the terms of this law from being allowed to organize trade unions; (7) the direct interference and supervision from the government on internal affairs of unions as per the current legal frameworks, which also allows it to halt the operation of unions in case of any activity or action not falling under its political agenda; and (8) the apathy of media [2].

In brief, unions are intrinsically political as their existence questions power, class, and decision-making processes. Initially, unions were created as a response to a system that has always neglected the needs of the great majority of the working class. They constitute a place where workers can stand by solidarity with each other and gain strength from numbers, shift the power dynamic between employees and employers, and fight for a common purpose [24]. However, the established unions are mostly reactive rather than proactive, which means that they try to improve only a few specific situations rather than the overall well-being of the working class. They also shifted from their primary aim of organizing class conflicts to becoming a group of representatives of workers acting in their own interests while disregarding the interests of those who elected them. It is worth noting here that, in most cases, decisions are taken either by the union leader or by a tiny minority of members. For instance, it was noted that unions deviated from the original role ascribed to them, which mainly involves protecting and improving the workers’ rights and working conditions. Moreover, members of the Lebanese Association of Professionals reported that functional challenges are also present among newly emerging alternative groups, and are not just restricted to the existing union structures and professional orders [2].

In this regard, the development of unions as merely economic organizations without the political goal and aspect- beyond the traditional sectarian and political affiliations- has turned them into bureaucratic syndicates with interests separate from those of the working class. On the other hand, workers who care about their economic condition cannot be indifferent to the political structure in their country [26]. This kind of unionism is done via activist social mobilizations and calls for social change beyond the issues related to the workplace [2]. For instance, labor unions should include workers from different groups and nationalities and should take on fights and support struggles against oppressions, including racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, and the list goes on. Moreover, there is not enough evidence to show the effective work of unions in Lebanon to end the exploitative social system, and only few of them have worked to improve the conditions of the workers within this same system while collaborating with the bosses.

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## A. DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN ORDERS AND SYNDICATES

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It is important to differentiate between “professional unions” or orders, and syndicates.

Legally, “professional unions” or orders are formed by virtue of a law passed by the parliament. These entities have their own laws and policies, and are not regulated by the Lebanese labor movement or the law on social security. One of the main requirements to practice the profession is membership in these unions. As such, “the main concern for these entities is first to ensure the interests of members and determine the terms of membership in order to protect the profession” [15, p.9]. It also should be pointed out that non Lebanese cannot practice these professions in Lebanon.

On the contrary, “trade unions” are mainly regulated by the Lebanese labor law and the law on Social Security. However, membership in these entities is optional, so people can join the union but it is not a requirement for practicing their profession. The process of creating a trade union involves submitting an application by a group of individuals to the Minister of Labor. The major drawback is that these individuals do not have any legal protection, and thus the employer is entitled to terminate their employment. This has promoted the creation of unions with no real representation and helped achieve fake victories for traditional parties in GCLW elections [15].

Theoretically, the main goal of the Orders is to protect the people by ensuring close supervision of the practice of the profession through various mechanisms provided for in the Professional Code. For instance, in order to contribute to improving the quality of care and the health of the population, the order of physicians strives for excellence, particularly by promoting the professional development of its members. However, they were accused several times of always protecting the doctors regardless of whether they made mistakes.

For the sake of clarity, professional syndicates include self-employed and white-collar employees such as pharmacists, engineers, physicians, nurses, lawyers.

In contrast, unions bring together blue-collar workers from the working class such as tobacco cultivation workers, Electricite Du Liban workers, and public sectors employees. Classically, white-collar are considered middle class and blue-collar as working class and the distinction would be mainly based on the „non-commodity producing“ character of white-collar work. However, under capitalism and the socio-economic changes brought by neoliberalism, the division and differentiation have been made more complex. Hence, those who do not own the means production whether they are professionals or considered as ‘non-skilled’ workers belong to the same class, the working class.



Photo by [Executive Magazine](#)

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## 2. EXISTING SOCIAL SAFETY NETS: REALITY AND CHALLENGES

While governments are expected to play the primary role in providing care services to all the people, and especially marginalized groups; Lebanon lacks a coherent and comprehensive system in place to provide financial assistance and support services to the population. In fact, “Lebanon’s social protection system is characterized by unequal levels of protection provided to various segments of the population and significant coverage gaps that leave large portions of the population without any support” [18, p.3]. The social protection system is tied to formal employment, excluding a majority of people working in the informal sector in addition to elderly and people with special needs.

The main formal social protection schemes in Lebanon are summarized as follows:

**(1) The National Social Security Fund (NSSF).** NSSF is Lebanon’s main social insurance mechanism and provides formally employed workers and their dependents (spouse, children and parents over 60 years) with health insurance, family allowances and end-of-service indemnities. Several gaps still prevail when it comes to the NSSF and these include:

- ▶ Exclusion of informal workers, unemployed, the self-employed, and retirees. People working informal jobs include those in agriculture, construction, housekeeping, artisanal work, and childcare, seasonal work, among others.

- ▶ End-of-service indemnities is a one-off lump-sum, and thus, it does not ensure income security in older age and exposes beneficiaries to serious financial risks as they grow older especially with inflation and money losing its value over time. It is also worth noting that access to NSSF schemes is highly subject to citizenry and ethnicity and social hierarchy as workers from many European countries have full access to social security services whereas Palestinians, Syrians, and some Lebanese workers are excluded. [17]

The above-mentioned challenges make “Lebanon the only country in the MENA region which has not yet established a pension scheme for workers in the private sector, and one of only 16 countries worldwide that does not provide a disability pension” [18, p.3]

**(2) The Public Pension.** This plan covers civil servants of the central government as well as the country’s security forces including the army. The contributions to the pension are not enough to cover its liabilities; therefore, the fund relies heavily on subsidies from general tax revenue to cover this structural deficit [18].

**(3) The National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP).** The NPTP is Lebanon’s main social assistance scheme. It was officially launched by the Government of Lebanon, in October 2011, as the first poverty-targeted social assistance program in Lebanon with the objective to “provide social assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable Lebanese households” and can be linked to the Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1) regarding the access to social protection schemes, as means to end poverty. Eligibility is decided based on proxy means testing for the level of poverty of the beneficiaries to be selected. The program provides the vulnerable Lebanese with a range of basic social services and in-kind support. These include exemptions for counterpart payments for public health services, registration for public schools and, for the poorest amongst NPTP recipients. The cost of the program is partly covered by international donors and the package of services provided is very modest [18]. It should be noted that its outreach capacity and impact have been very limited in scope [17].



Photo by [Hussein Kassir](#) - International Alert

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Moreover, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) in Lebanon is part of the formal social safety nets (SSNs) by providing social protection and assistance through its social development centers (SDCs), NPTP, and services provided by contracting with NGOs and welfare institutions. Also, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) contribute to this system through their specialized services and programs. The work implemented by UN agencies and a number of International NGOs is also included, particularly in addressing the needs of the displaced and refugees in Lebanon [16].

Other **social assistance programs** such as those related to persons with disabilities are very limited in scope and are not adequately equipped with resources. In general, the social safety nets system has always been **weak** in a country where economic and financial systems are barely functioning. Moreover, displaced people from Palestine and Syria are not eligible for any of these programs.

This has led to very high levels of inequality and social injustice. Several laws have been passed in an attempt to address the gaps in the social safety net, but corruption and political dysfunction have restricted any opportunity to expand and administer pre-existing and new programs [13].

On another note, Lebanon is currently functioning with multiple exchange rates, including the black market rate which is subject to major fluctuations, in addition to socio-political instability.

Despite this, neither the official exchange rate nor the minimum wage have been adjusted to reflect the real market value, all of which has resulted in a significant loss of purchasing power and a major increase in the numbers of the vulnerable population being unable to afford their basic needs and necessities. This was also coupled with the country's inability to provide adequate protection schemes to its population which also increased the number of vulnerable populations in the country [9, 21].

Furthermore, throughout the years, the consecutive Lebanese governments have been excessively relying on social assistance programs that target the vulnerable population in an effort to alleviate poverty. This over-reliance has mainly contributed to diminishing the promotion of a “universal, inclusive, and life-cycle approach to social security and protection” [17, p.5].

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## A. DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL SAFETY NETS

According to the World Bank, social safety nets (SSNs) are measures designed to provide regular and predictable support to poor and vulnerable people. Social safety net programs can include cash assistance, in-kind transfers, social pensions, health care services, social welfare services, education allowances, unemployment benefits, exemption of certain taxes and fees, and school feeding programs, among others. A distinctive feature of social safety nets is their non-contributory character, that is, beneficiaries do not have to pay or contribute financially to receive the benefits [22].

**Formal** SSNs are a collection of official social security systems administered by the state and donor organizations. They are usually guided by economic and social principles. Other definitions include formal contributory programs administered by the state, semi-private or private institutions [16, 22].

**Informal** SSNs or informal system of securities can be defined as institutional measures, to greatly varying degrees, where beneficiaries rely heavily upon community and family relationships to secure their basic security needs [20].

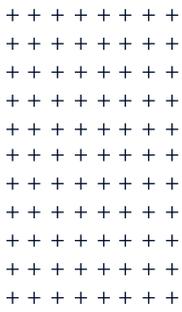
They are usually guided by religious and cultural, as well as family and community values [16].

In Lebanon, social assistance delivered by the government is extremely narrow in coverage as previously mentioned. Thus, and in light of this government-led social protection system, the population suffering the most from deprivation, including women, older adults, children, those living in poverty, and refugees, relies heavily on services and **informal** social protection provided by other prominent actors rather than the state, including civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, sectarian parties and their affiliate organizations, as well as families [13].

In fact, the lack of a formal state social protection and welfare system in Lebanon paved the way for an informal one, thus strengthening and maintaining clientelism networks, promoting an inconsistency in quality and implementation, and poor coordination of existing programs, and reinforcing the current system and sectarian influence of political parties [1, 13].



Photo by AFP



# Exploring Alternative Syndicates

## 1. THE WAY FORWARD IN THE UNION MOVEMENT

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Unions are crucial in maintaining rights in various sectors including health, education, safety, and even the right to voice out concerns. In Lebanon, the uprising of October 17, 2019 has reinforced the importance of standing against the ruling class and shed light on the importance of having effective unions and movements to help pave the way towards the needed change. This was influenced by what was happening in the Arab region, where alternative unions have been a pivotal element of important movements that took place in efforts opposing the regime, such as in the case of Sudan. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) experience is one of the few examples in the Arab region of how organized and structured unions drive change. Their efforts in 2018 to mobilize the protests in Khartoum were essential in efficiently leading the movements back then. This was among one of the efforts led by organized unions which played a key factor in overthrowing the Sudanese. However, one of the success factors of their revolution lies in the fact that the protest movement succeeded in mobilizing the workers after making unrelenting efforts behind the scenes of dictatorship [5].

In Lebanon, the October 2019 uprising has opened up new dimensions and created a massive momentum for alternative solidarities and modes of collective organization based on class or group interests. In fact, it was a starting opportunity to build the basis of an ongoing alternative process of social and political transformation amidst the multiple challenges.

During the conference, Mr. Slaiby mentioned that unions are retracting from negotiation and putting forward political proposals that targets policies directly because they do not have solutions at the level of sectors, a phenomenon that exists abundantly in the world. So, there is definitely a need for a general orientation towards reforming the state’s policies in the first place. Moreover, amidst difficult and fierce crises, as in the case of Lebanon, it becomes more difficult for the poor classes, which are greatly affected by these crises, to have the time and effort to organize, especially when there are clientelist networks for parties working against them, as mentioned by Nadim El Kak, who leads research projects on Lebanon’s anti-establishment movement.

According to Farah Kobaissy, who is an independent researcher and consultant on gender and social justice, alternative syndicates should be built on the basis of a democratic inclusive structure with a true independent representation, i.e. structured with a wide representation of the different categories of laborers, including informal workers, women, domestic workers, youth, LGBT community, etc.

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In fact, labor unions have a double role to play which includes mobilizing workers for mass action regarding their day-to-day issues, in addition to building new organizational structures through which workers are involved in the decisions that affect their lives and living conditions.

The unions should not exist to improve the workers' conditions under an exploitative system, but to end exploitation and workplace coercion. Adding to that, unions must avoid bureaucracy, reduce paid posts to the necessary minimum and rotate leadership. Alternative unions prepare the workers for the reconstruction of a just and democratic society. In practical terms, unions, amid the businesses closures in Lebanon, should support workers and inform them about re-operating and managing their closed workplaces. They should help them organize while creating a sense of solidarity, pushing them to use their economic power to fight injustice and inequalities. Moreover, targeted efforts towards creating a network of organized workers can help transform the current prevailing Lebanese economic model which is not tailored to meet the interests of the people. This can also promote the liberation of unions from the control of the ruling class once the workers themselves are organized in a way which collectively enhances economic and political liberty.

That being said, unions must be restructured and decentralized, starting with eliminating the unions leaders' privileges and ending with setting a new guide that has a particular political outlook. Speaking of a new guide, it would be worth mentioning that it must encompass union democracy tools, women's rights in the workplace, in addition to supporting strikes and rejecting wage restraint. While many believe that improving workers' conditions requires building alternative unions, others consider that influencing existing unions by joining them is needed. Given that the current unions do not get attacked by the government or political parties, establishing a strong unit for direct action in the existing unions would be considered to be easier than setting up new unions under the current law. This will have to go hand in hand with organizing the unorganized workers and sectors. The organizing work must be done in conjunction with internal work within the established unions in order to win the membership over to a participatory and democratic perspective.



“I think the gap between the people and the syndicates is a very huge one. We cannot simplify it only with technical issues, it is an ideological one where people do not believe in the role of syndicates as means to secure their rights and benefits”.

**Hashem Adnan**

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Yet, establishing alternative, independent, self-managed unions is seen as the ideal solution amid the current situation, which to some degree aims to dismantle, eliminate, and radically transform the current system. The main difficulties would be the absence of pre-existing organization to rely on and organize workers in their sectors and those who lost faith in the traditional syndicates and labor movement.



Photo by [Beirut Today](#)

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## 2. RESTRUCTURING OF THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LEBANESE WORKERS (GCLW)

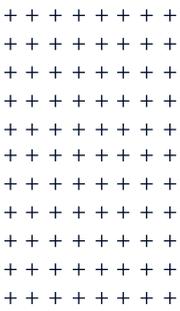
It is widely known that mainstream political sectarian parties have infiltrated and controlled trade and professional unions. Reclaiming union action and achieving their independence is a major step to be achieved within the democratic economy scope. The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) “gradually submitted to the ruling class and became one of its pawns, rather than taking on a crucial role in advocating for workers’ rights” [15, p.3].

The period after the Lebanese civil war witnessed growing conflicts within the GCLW and was affected by the post war political situation and the neoliberal economic policies. In 1992, the GCLW organized massive demonstrations against the collapse of the Lebanese pound exchange which resulted in the resignation of the prime minister back then. Later on, the impact of the GCLW began to decline gradually and the ruling class authorized the creation of a large number of trade unions and federations, depending on their political affiliations, as means to control the decision-making process within the GCLW. This enhanced major divisions within the GCLW which weakened its struggle facing the state. As a result, and since 1997, the GCLW joined the ruling authority and represented their interests instead of advocating for the rights and interests of workers and employees [19].

Within this context, it is obvious that the current structure of the GCLW is not representative of the workers in Lebanon, is coopted by the political parties, and is not organized on the basis of industries. Therefore, there is a vital need to establish a new structure that reflects a true representation of the workforce, and which can work to foster the independent and autonomous role of unions in major actions and decisions [19]. It is worth noting that some members of union confederations within the GCLW mentioned previous attempts to start an internal restructuring from within the union [2].



Photo by [Marwan Tahtah](#) - The Public Source



# Exploring Social Safety Nets and Social Solidarity Structures

## 1. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SECURITY PENSIONS

The main rationale for social protection systems relies on their ability to reduce poverty and vulnerability and enable participation and human development at the individual level. However, the capacity of such systems extends beyond the individual level and targets the macro-economic and societal level, in which they promote collective economic growth, increased productivity, and reduced inequalities [18].

The social protection landscape in Lebanon is an array of scattered unsustainable schemes, where most of the population does not benefit from formal social protection mechanisms and is sometimes forced into a series of clientelist relations in order to secure the minimum standards of living and well-being. In other words, the significant fragmentation of the provided schemes and social protection measures has left the society with a substantial coverage gap, which promoted social injustice and left behind a significant proportion of the population.

Moreover, the criteria to access such programs do not consider the current and rapidly evolving context. All of these current adopted measures and policies remain “inadequate and insufficient to mitigate poverty and vulnerability – both in the short and the long run – in the absence of a comprehensive social policy and universal, inclusive, and life-cycle social security scheme” [17, p.7].

Within this context, the October 2019 uprising in Lebanon has re-actualized social demands, called for social justice, and highlighted the need to structure social policies in order to ensure social inclusion and social protection. Demands have been raised for universal social protection rights and highlighted the necessity of reforming the labor law to include all workers and protect employees [17].

As such, it is very crucial to target this issue from a human rights-based perspective and design a social protection system that covers all citizens regardless of their social status or identity. This approach shall recognize social protection as everyone’s rights rather than a privilege and should focus on securing the access of the population to their basic needs and rights, including food, health, shelter, and education. On the other hand, according to Maher Abou Shackra, who is a consultant in social and political research design, it is crucial to develop alternative social safety nets that fulfill these basic needs for society

through an organizational process that creates a network based on non-discrimination, solidarity, and justice, without the presence of a hierarchical dependency.

These alternative networks can thus secure a sense of solidarity by providing a more participatory and empowering alternative to the current state sectarian networks. This shall be a process of cooperation and organization to build sustainable structures through which assistance can be exchanged, not in the sense of charity, but rather in the sense of mutual aid, where people contribute as the main actors in the process and exchange according to needs and capabilities.

The question remains whether a social welfare state could be established and provide formal social safety nets to all Lebanon’s residents or should people build their own solidarity structures independently from the confessional and clientelistic system. It is therefore important to note that governments can set their own rules on who is entitled to social security schemes and despite the importance of such programs, their impact remains minimal and does not address the real causes of poverty and inequalities. Having said that, a universal social security scheme should be implemented by the state coupled with alternative solidarity structures established by the people. More precisely, social clinics, collective kitchens, time banks, self-managed workers’ collective and other similar forms should be built by the people.

This range of actions will help cover a great part of socio-economic and basic livelihoods needs of human beings. Such alternatives will be based on mutual aid and help people meet and participate voluntarily because of their passion for injustice and care for their communities. Adding to that, their work will be politicized and rooted in anti-capitalist principles and gender and disability justice.



“Sustainable interventions include empowering the vulnerable groups, especially women, and considering them as economic activists”.

**Abdelmajid Ezzar**

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## 2. POWER TO THE PEOPLE: INCLUSION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

In Lebanon, informal social protection schemes are being used as a substitute to formal ones, given the limited ability, coverage and unreliability of the latter to secure the basic needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Needy people find, at least temporarily, protection against small risks and some kind of security in case of adverse events. As such, several stakeholders play a crucial role in providing social assistance to those excluded from formal SSNs and these include, but are not limited to, families, communities, CSOs and NGOs. It is crucial to ensure, in the long term, that these informal protection schemes are replaced by alternative networks which are built on the principles of social justice, inclusion, non-discrimination and are free from any political interference.

People in Lebanon established different kinds of solidarity initiatives as a response to the different crises, which were accompanied by support from donors and funding agencies. These initiatives, and to a certain extent, filled some gaps that the government left unaddressed and promoted the concept of solidarity among people. However, the vast majority of them follow the NGO model of donors and charity approach. Also, some of these initiatives are more empowering than others, but, they all lack the political dimension which is a key element to drive the needed change. As such, their sustainability and role in driving the needed political and economic change need to be further explored.

Several examples of initiatives that were established and which provided some sort of assistance for the vulnerable populations in Lebanon can be mentioned. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

**A. “Baytna Baytak”** (“Our home is your home”), which is a nonprofit organization based in Beirut, Lebanon. It was first established to support healthcare frontliners working against the COVID-19 pandemic. After the blast, Maroun Karam, the co-founder and president, mobilized and organized thousands of volunteers to help the people repair their homes and reopen their businesses.



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**B. “Gharset Kheir”** initiative, is a student, youth and women’s initiative that aims to develop the agricultural sector in a voluntary cultural aspect by integrating the segments of society to achieve the principle of community solidarity, and urging the young generation to adopt a productive mentality by breaking the traditional image inherited from the agricultural sector.

**C. “Junior Chamber International (JCI) Lebanon”**, is part of an international volunteer-based organization with the aim of creating development opportunities for youth and driving their transformation into global change-makers, entrepreneurs, networkers, and communicators.

**D. “LibanTROC”**, is an innovative spontaneous social media platform that has grown into a nonprofit organization. LibanTROC became some sort of a safety net connecting more than 75.000 members and providing all kinds of solutions to address the ongoing crises.

**E. “Izraa”**, is a nonprofit, virtual community that provides free online service consultancy, markets for farmers and empowers people to plant at home, whenever they are.

**F. “Metn Solidarity”** is a nonprofit, virtual community that provides free online service consultancy, markets for farmers and empowers people to plant at home, whenever they are.

It is worth noting that it is crucial to highlight the importance of networking and coordination among these initiatives in order to avoid duplication and waste of resources, thus increasing the impact on the ground and reaching out to a wider array of beneficiaries.



# Towards a More Democratic Economy: Recommendations and Implications

Throughout history, the subsequent Lebanese governments have mainly been focused on reforms of an emergency nature, rather than effective policy-making and sustainable long-term planning. As a result, many sectors and major issues in the country have suffered neglect, corruption and bad governance, and have drowned the country in the realm of sectarian elites.

In this context, there is an urgent need to develop new approaches to address existing gaps and protect the wellbeing and livelihoods of the population, accompanied by establishing a new social contract and social justice.

Major reforms are crucial, especially on the levels of

existing syndicates and social safety nets, in order to drive sustainable change, promote social & economic inclusion, and induce economic growth. With stronger representation, inclusion in decision and policy-making, democracy, and mobilization, these entities would be able to oppose dictatorship, drive democratic and transformational change, promote social and economic freedom, and enhance social protection.

Based on a synthesis of what was previously mentioned in this report and discussed in the conference, the main suggested recommendations targeting labor unions and social safety nets structure include the following:

## 1. Recommendations targeting Labor Unions

- Creating and strengthening organized movements and alliances, including syndicates and unions. This can be done by promoting a decentralized authority by pushing for urgent reforms that are mainly targeted towards the empowerment of the local community. Work and efforts to unionize the employees and workers are a must given that people have little faith in trade unions. The informal sector, including migrant workers, domestic workers, young people, and women, should be included in unionization efforts in addition to the private sector and public sector employees. [25]

- The workers' movement needs to change its organizational and legal framework to become more inclusive and democratic and to develop a long-term plan for the mobilization of trade unions that extends beyond occasional responses to incidents and governmental choices. [25]

- Promoting collective bargaining mechanisms on all levels and among the different sectors, especially with the public sector. It is worth noting that although the TDE approach differs from the traditional approach when it comes to social dialogue; however, it is pivotal to start by involving all stakeholders in the process. In other words, engaging several stakeholders in decision-making including

the people, the government, and the professional and voluntary organizations, among others. It is also crucial to find common ground with the operating system, as this could enhance the trust and accountability between the government and the community. Moreover, this would allow negotiations and thus might impact economic and social policies.

- Amending labor legislations to be in line with international labor standards and increasing the margin of freedom of unionizing activities as well, taking into account the Lebanese labor context, workforce specificities, and the several prevailing challenges.

- Abolishing the mandatory preemptive authorization of the Ministry of Labor for the establishment of any new union, as well as the ministry's supervision on union activities.

- Abolishing discriminatory laws against foreign workers such as the sponsorship system (Kafala) and laws limiting the sectors in which they can operate.



- Enforcing the workers' right to organize themselves, including all workers in the private and public sectors and the formal and informal economy, as well as migrants and refugees.

- Promoting bottom-up approaches in designing interventions and in restructuring existing models. For example, workers should be empowered to organize themselves and should be engaged throughout the process. This can be done by providing them with the adequate tools and resources and engaging them in roundtables and focus group discussions. The initial beneficiaries to target can include workers in the restaurant and foodservice industry, as they represent a huge sector which includes workers from different nationalities.

- Establishing an alternative structure for the GCLW using a bottom-up approach that reflects a true representation of the workforce, and which can work to foster the independent and autonomous role of unions in major actions and decisions.

- Strengthening grassroots movements, which in turn would support wage laborers and foreign workers in their organization under new frameworks.

- Supporting the building of strong rank and file initiatives, building power from below; whether that is as members of mainstream unions or as members of the smaller independent unions.

- Building campaigns against fire and rehire and tackling the normalization of zero-hours contracts.

- Investing in evidence-based research based on evidence and analytical reviews that assesses the current situation of syndicates and labor unions, and analyzes the gaps in the system. This comprises the basis for informing policymaking and designing tailored interventions.



## 2. Recommendations targeting Social Safety Nets Structure

- Designing and creating sustainable alternative social safety nets that fulfill the basic needs of the society, including food, shelter, education and health. It should be noted that the government is responsible for securing these needs through an organizational process that creates a network based on the principles of non-discrimination, inclusion, solidarity, rights and social justice. This helps lay the foundation for a more robust and inclusive social security system to enable the current population and future generations to have income security at older ages. This includes: (1) enacting new social protection policies and employment protection schemes; (2) extending social protection scope and coverage to include the major population which is unprotected; (4) ensuring overall accessibility and inclusion across sectors (3) unleashing the right to protection from the pre-existing conditions of belonging to a clientelist network. This shall be a process of cooperation and organization to build sustainable structures through which assistance can be exchanged, not in the sense of charity, but rather in the sense of mutual aid, where people contribute as the main actors in the process and exchange according to needs and capabilities.
- Promoting the approach of non-contributory pensions or social pensions which are tax-financed cash transfers paid regularly to older people regardless of their social security contributions [18].
- Embracing welfare entitlements and mechanisms for the population in general, and for marginalized groups in particular as a form of empowerment rather than charity.
- Investing in evidence-based research based on evidence and analytical reviews which assesses the current situation of social safety nets, and analyzes the gaps in the system. This comprises the basis for informing policymaking and designing tailored interventions.

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