

# LOCAL SKILLS MATTER



# Entrepreneurial Communities:

## Sparking change in communities in the ETF partner countries



**The Lebanese Entrepreneurial Community is about a partnership brings together schools and private sector in Beirut through a collective effort led by Injaz Lebanon, a non-governmental organisation. The partnership has been running entrepreneurial learning programmes where students are introduced to the business world and experience a real-life situation of creating a company with guidance from a corporate volunteer from the local private sector.**

**In the community, linking local businesses to contribute to local skills development involves a number of actors, some of whom are highlighted below:**

- INJAZ Lebanon (non-governmental organisation) (lead)
- Citibank
- Technica SAL
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers
- Ministry of Education and Higher Education
- Gibran Public School for boys and girls
- Laure Moghayzel public school for girls
- Greenfield Private School for boys and girls
- Beirut Baptist School for boys and girls
- Al-Ahlia school for boys and girls

Youth unemployment is an important challenge for Lebanon. Unemployment across the country is over 40% and those under the age of 25 are four times more likely to be unemployed. In order to inspire and equip young people with relevant skills, INJAZ has been connecting local businesses to local secondary schools through their entrepreneurial learning programmes since 2001. In 2004 INJAZ signed a key agreement with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education which has since enabled it to operate in public schools. The partnership with the ministry has been essential for the continuity and outreach of the entrepreneurial learning programmes that cultivate the collaborative advantage among government, INJAZ, and local businesses.

For over 12 years, INJAZ has served as a broker between the government and the private sector and brought their respective strengths (or even monopolies) to a collaborative effort that gives back to the community. For the government the direct benefit of INJAZ's activities has been the provision of hands-on entrepreneurial learning in public schools much before such an initiative could have been led by the government. Local businesses would have found direct philanthropy logically challenging and thus a barrier to donating their time and resources to the community, but through the partnership they have had the opportunity to donate to a meaningful cause, which is close to the needs of the local population.

The Lebanese case is an example of the lasting contribution to local skills that a non-governmental organisation can make. The tremendous learning value of over 12 years of experience in entrepreneurial learning in Beirut could be capitalised on by the government as it is about to embark on donor funded entrepreneurial learning programmes in the country's secondary vocational schools. The learning value from previous and extensive practice in Lebanon is not consolidated here by the Ministry of Education which is likely to result in a steeper learning curve and an additional cost for the government.

# Learning business: Lebanon leads the way in engaging students with business skills



**Project:**

The Lebanese Entrepreneurial Community brings together schools and the private sector in Beirut



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In recent years several business incubators have been established to support young entrepreneurs in Lebanon. There are numerous benefits apart from private wealth creation such as putting the brakes on a brain drain, as tens of thousands of young people have left the country to seek opportunities abroad. Despite these levels of migration, unemployment remains high. According to the World Bank, the number of jobless in Lebanon is set to double this year to 20 per cent, with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the region. This is part of what Soraya Salti, Regional Director of INJAZ Al Arab, calls the “100 million youth challenge,” with the region facing “the looming deadline of 2020”.

INJAZ Al Arab is the regional affiliate of Junior Achievement (JA) Worldwide, a US-based global initiative with nearly a century of experience in inspiring young entrepreneurs. INJAZ Lebanon takes the three pillars of JA Worldwide – work readiness, entrepreneurialism, and financial literacy – and brings schools and businesses together to enable young people to succeed when they leave school, whether they go on to create their own business or join an existing organization as an employee. The companies of INJAZ Lebanon governing board members provide financial support by sponsoring events, projects, or specific schools. Additional funding comes from development agencies, but INJAZ Lebanon has not, so far, had direct government funding. The private sector is therefore the key strategic partner. In addition to funding projects, companies allow employees time off to mentor the young people on the programmes, and generally bring the business world into the classroom.

Citi Bank’s philanthropic arm, Citi Foundation, is a strategic partner, holding the chair on JA’s international governing board. Elissar Antonios, CEO of Citi Bank Lebanon, outlines the aim of the Company Programme, which Citi Foundation funds. “We work with underprivileged students to educate them and empower them with entrepreneurial skills that will allow them to set up their own companies, create their own jobs, and create jobs for their families. INJAZ identify the appropriate schools and we provide Citi mentors to work with the students there. Citi is present in over 100 countries, so for us to be able to implement

the things we want to with Citi Foundation we have to look for strong partners. It would be very difficult for us to deliver our CSR objectives on our own."

### Youth first

As Development Adviser for INJAZ Lebanon, Fayza Saad Mehanna speaks passionately about the contribution that INJAZ can make. "Lebanon has a very youthful population with over 40 per cent below 24 years old, and we also have a high level of unemployment. The INJAZ programme is designed to help tackle this. The focus on entrepreneurial skills helps to create jobs through supporting new businesses and by promoting wider employability." Leila Kabalan was seventeen when she first got involved with the INJAZ Lebanon Company Programme.





"I remember they came to our high school and told us 'we have this programme, where you can start your own company, you can do whatever you want. You are given some shares and you have to sell them. You'll be given a mentor from the private sector to help you, but you do all the work.' To have someone come into the school, which was very structured, very focused on academia, and tell us 'you have the freedom to do whatever you want' was very exciting for us."

Soon Kabalan and her group of friends were staying on after school to finish their project work, setting themselves deadlines, and developing ideas for their nascent business. They presented their idea at a national competition where they won best company of the year. Such was the impact that Kabalan says the experience "really shaped who we are."

Between 8,000 and 9,000 students have participated in the INJAZ Lebanon Company Programme since it was set up in 2001. There are several strands in the programme, and students from the ages of 12 to 24 take part. Fayza Saad Mehanna says there are good reasons for opening the programme to students as young as 12. "We start early with entrepreneurship because we believe it is a skill that can be taught. We don't believe entrepreneurs are born, we believe you can become an entrepreneur; and the earlier you start learning, the better."

### Hard-won soft skills

Rabih Murr, head of the upper school division at Al Ahliah School in downtown Beirut, has worked with INJAZ Lebanon for seven years. He sees a lot of common objectives, particularly in taking the learning experience out of the classroom and bringing it closer to the demands of work.

"What we have noticed is that many of the students who excel at the INJAZ Company Programme are not necessarily high achievers in class. They tend to be students who have skills that they can only make use of when they start practical work. Maybe they are not good at studying from a book and taking a written exam, but when it comes to people skills and negotiation skills, to getting a good offer, to convincing the media to have them on a show to talk about their products, they are skilled in those areas."

### Young Leaders speak

The ETF's Young Mediterranean Leaders network gives young people in the region opportunities to talk about education, training, and employability. In Lebanon transitioning from school to work is a major concern, and recent ETF workshops found Lebanese youth full of ideas for improving matters.

**Source:** Lebanon's Youth On Education, Training And Careers, [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)



However, there is evidence that these students engage more with their formal education once they become part of the Company Programme, as Saad Mehanna points out; "Through our entrepreneurship programme our students develop ambition, motivation, self-knowledge, they know better what they want to do in life. And they get higher grades at school because when you become more ambitious and more motivated you realise the importance of education."

But, for Murr, it's the benefits of practical application that stand out. "One of the outcomes that we look at in order to evaluate the success of such programmes is the commitment of students, and we have noticed that year after year students are becoming more committed. Last year they were willing to stay during the summer, they worked until mid-August, meeting at school, meeting with their volunteers, meeting in their different departments, in order to finalize their product, which was an iPhone cover made of recycled plastic."

Leila Kabalan's experience highlights the commitment that young entrepreneurs have to demonstrate, whether they're learning to bargain with a manufacturer; or getting out into the street to sell directly to consumers; or managing the inter-personal dynamics that arise within a team, particularly when things aren't going to plan. "As a company we believed in our mission," says Kabalan, "but some people were saying 'what is this, why should I buy it?' So you learn how to harness what you believe, and how to communicate it, and those are very important soft skills."

Being able to harness your belief in yourself, as well as in your business, is vital. This is something that Tony Haddad knows from his own experience. His dream was to create a company that could make conveyors and automation systems in Lebanon, and sell them to the world. He started his company Technica with one small workshop making equipment and was soon increasing the company's product portfolio and market share, eventually becoming an approved vendor to numerous multi-national companies, selling in 32 countries with offices in seven. He set out to build a model company, one that would make money and make the world a better place. Uncomfortable with the



implication of guilt carried by the word 'responsibility' in corporate social responsibility, Haddad preferred the idea of creating shared value, or CSV. "I started using the term CSV instead," he recalls, "as it has a more positive tone. So I said whatever creates value for my enterprise has to, at the same time, create value for the community."

### Real life learning

This ethos made Haddad and Technica natural partners for INJAZ Lebanon, and Haddad became a mentor, awards judge, and sponsor for the Company Programme. It also impressed the government; after a visit to Technica's head office, Haddad's approach of displaying company values on posters and banners was adopted by the Minister for Industry. The American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University both invited Haddad to serve on their advisory boards, providing input into their engineering



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curriculum and ensuring it matched industry needs. Those involved with the INJAZ Company programme see vocational and academic learning as complementary. As a teacher, this is Rabih Murr's view; "I believe, and this is what INJAZ and the school believe, that learning should move more towards real-life experiences. Working in a classroom between a book and an exam is not sufficient, it does not provide the twenty-first century skills that companies today require."

Participating in the Company Programme doesn't end once students have started a business or found a job. Many go on to become mentors themselves, providing the benefit of their experience to the next generation. This is what Kabalan herself has done, putting it with characteristic charm; "INJAZ is your family. If you get married, you don't stop talking to your parents! It is the same with INJAZ, the students, the staff, the upcoming

#### Entrepreneurship is for life

Developing a national Lifelong Entrepreneurial Framework in Lebanon was high on the agenda at an ETF workshop in 2013. As ever seeking ways to bring partners together, the workshop focused on connecting policy makers with the private sector and national media.

**Source:** Dissemination Workshop on Entrepreneurial Learning in Lebanon, [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

students – INJAZ does a very good job of keeping us in the circle.”

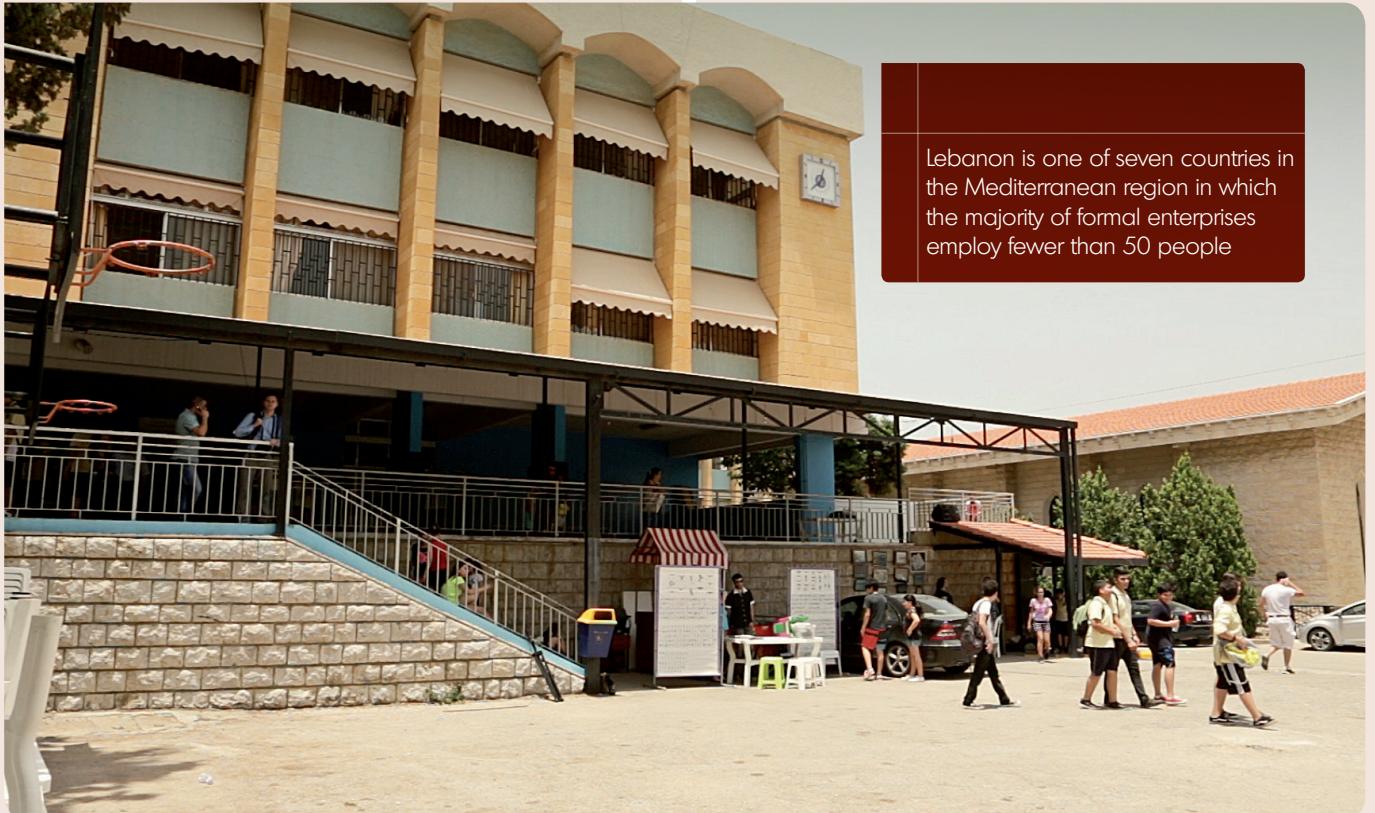
Kabalan has become a role model for the Company Programme, as someone who has gone on to become an employee with an entrepreneurial mind-set. Fayza Saad Mehanna is proud of her achievement. “Leila Kabalan has a very good position at the American University of Beirut, she is someone who was able to apply the entrepreneurship skills that she learned from our programmes, such as teamwork and leadership, within an organizational environment.”

For Saad Mehanna there is only one possible vision for the future of INJAZ Lebanon. “Expansion! We want to be in every school in the six regions of Lebanon, working hand-in-hand with the business sector and the government. This is our dream. We teach our students to dream, and to use their imagination.”

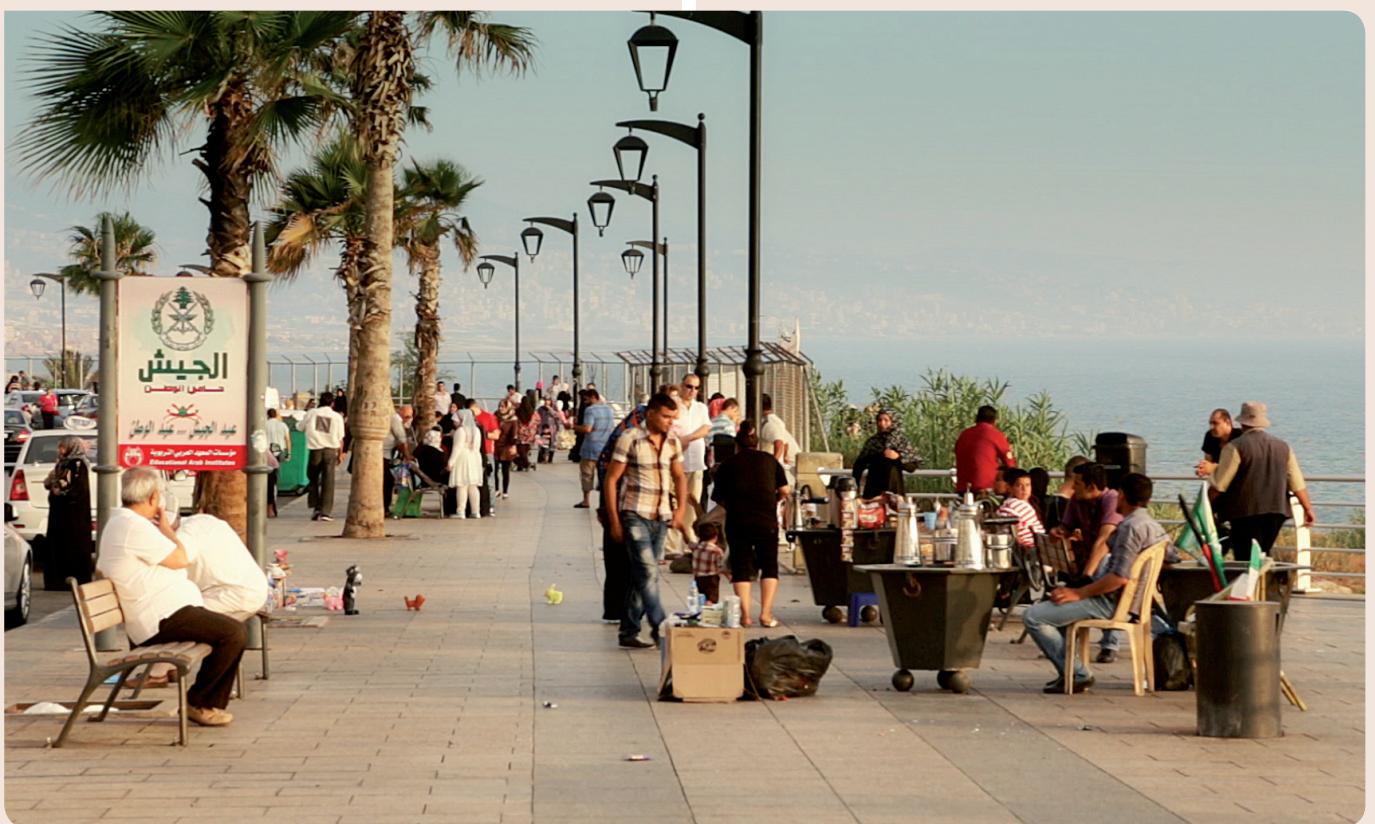
### **Small can be beautiful**

Lebanon is one of seven countries in the Mediterranean region in which the majority of formal enterprises employ fewer than 50 people. While small and micro businesses are vital to economic well-being, they can also struggle to fund the growth necessary for job creation

**Source:** Employability in the Mediterranean Region,  
[www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)



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The ETF is an EU agency that helps transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

