

AUB study reveals job and mobility trends among alumni

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Nearly half of university graduates entering the labor market in Lebanon emigrate each year, in search of better job opportunities, according to an AUB-led survey on alumni trends.

Led by economist and AUB professor Jad Chaaban along with AUB Director of Alumni Relations Arabia Osseiran, the 2009 survey was conducted in collaboration with the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development with additional funding from the United Nations Development Programme. It was hosted by AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.

Titled "Higher Education and Labor Outcomes in Lebanon," the study was introduced by Rami Khouri, IFI executive director, during a launch ceremony on October 28 in West Hall. "It's important to understand why young people move around, how they see themselves, so that we could undertake more effective policy throughout the region," he said.

AUB President Peter Dorman commended researchers for conducting the study, saying: "This is an excellent example of what can be accomplished through strategic partnerships with other universities as well as with public and private organizations, both local and international. Our best chance to make a difference is when we work together to focus on our common challenges and take advantage of our strengths. "

Dorman added: "One of AUB's major priorities in the coming years is to expand and enhance the ways in which we respond to the needs of the community beyond our walls. Promoting sustainable and balanced growth, and helping to safeguard Lebanon's vital human capital are prime examples of things that are good for Lebanon and good for universities in this country. "

Education Minister Bahia Hariri, who attended the launch in her capacity as president of the Hariri Foundation, said that the purpose of endorsing such a study was to help develop and empower young people in Beirut and its suburbs. "We hope that this study will act as a launching-pad for in-depth discussions and more elaborate studies," said Hariri. "We also hope to look for solutions to the problems highlighted by the study in order to transform this country into one that can accommodate the potential of all its youth and young graduates."

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Marta Ruedas called the study a "very important piece of work."

She added: "This report will tell us if the labor market that young people are in is suited to the education they are getting and it will tell us about the policies required to redress the situation."

Arabia Osseiran overviewed the objectives of the study which surveyed over 400 university graduates from AUB, Universite Saint-Joseph, Lebanese University, and Beirut Arab University, through web-based questionnaires.

Osseiran said that more than 70 percent of respondents were AUB alumni. She recommended that the survey be repeated every five years and that all universities start building their alumni databases to expand study samples and enhance results.

The study recommended that comprehensive macro-economic reforms be implemented in order to stimulate investment in employment-generating sectors. Currently, the private sector is focused on real estate and financial services, fueled by petrodollars, noted Chaaban.

"The economy is not generating enough jobs to absorb the skilled labor," he added. Citing study results, Chaaban proposed that career guidance offices be set up in all universities, such as the one that exists at AUB. Additionally, mentorship programs involving alumni advising students on career options would also help guide students in their choices.

The study showed that up to 60 percent of graduates leave the country every year, not long after earning their degrees. As a result, researchers noted that despite the high investment the country is putting in developing skilled labor, it is not benefiting accordingly. Interestingly, emigrating alumni cited career advancement, not security issues or financial gains, as their primary reason driving them to leave, said Chaaban.

The full study is available on CD.