

IMPACT OF THE CIVIL WAR ON ALEPPO'S JOB MARKET

By Karam Shaar

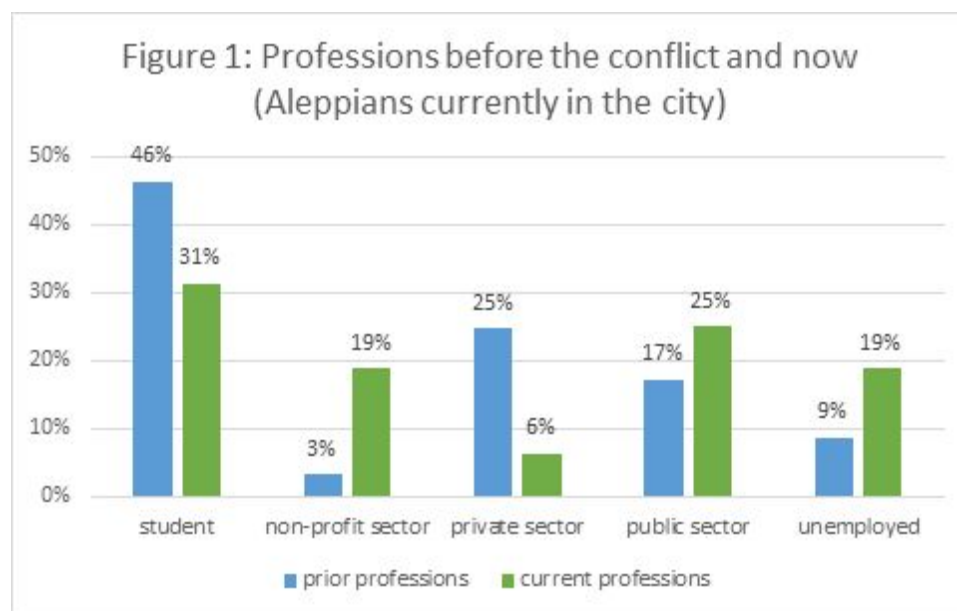
Email: karam.shaar@vuw.ac.nz

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Acknowledgments

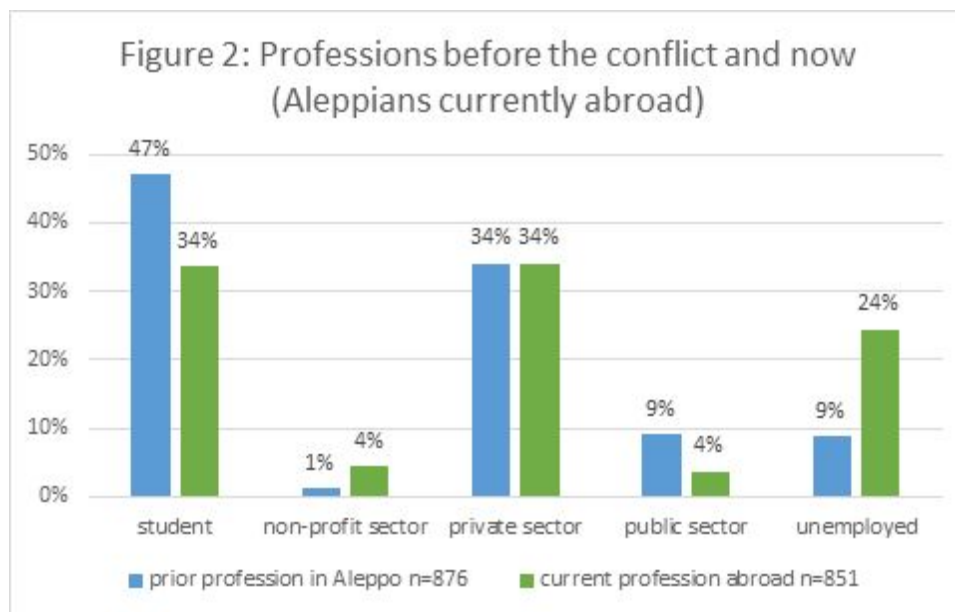
This paper has largely benefited from the constructive review of The Aleppo Project staff. I alone am responsible for the remaining errors.

In late 2014 and early 2015, [The Aleppo Project](#) surveyed 1001 Aleppians within their city and abroad. After several years of war, Aleppo's job market has changed considerably and unemployment has skyrocketed. As expected, the conflict has dramatically changed employment patterns throughout the city. I attempt in this paper to understand the impact of the ongoing civil war in Syria on Aleppians' jobs by taking advantage of the [data](#) collected by The Aleppo Project.



Similar to the 11.5 per cent unemployment rate in Syria reported by the World Bank in 2011, nine per cent of respondents within Aleppo said they were unemployed before the war. Public sector employment in rebel-held Aleppo increased as the opposition began to provide public services. It is observed that almost all the respondents who deem themselves to be currently employed in the public sector are in fact residents of rebel-held Aleppo, which indicates that they are, most probably, employees of the temporary public service bodies which exist in the area administered by the opposition. As a genuine proxy for unemployment, there was a sharp fall in private sector employment by almost 76 per cent.

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The unemployment rate among Aleppians abroad also skyrocketed due to the civil war. Whereas roughly nine per cent of Aleppians displaced abroad described themselves as unemployed before the conflict, the figure increased to 24 per cent at the end of 2014, an increase of 281 per cent.

As expected, most Aleppians who left the city lost their jobs in the public sector. At the same time, the percentage of Aleppians working in the private sector has remained unchanged.

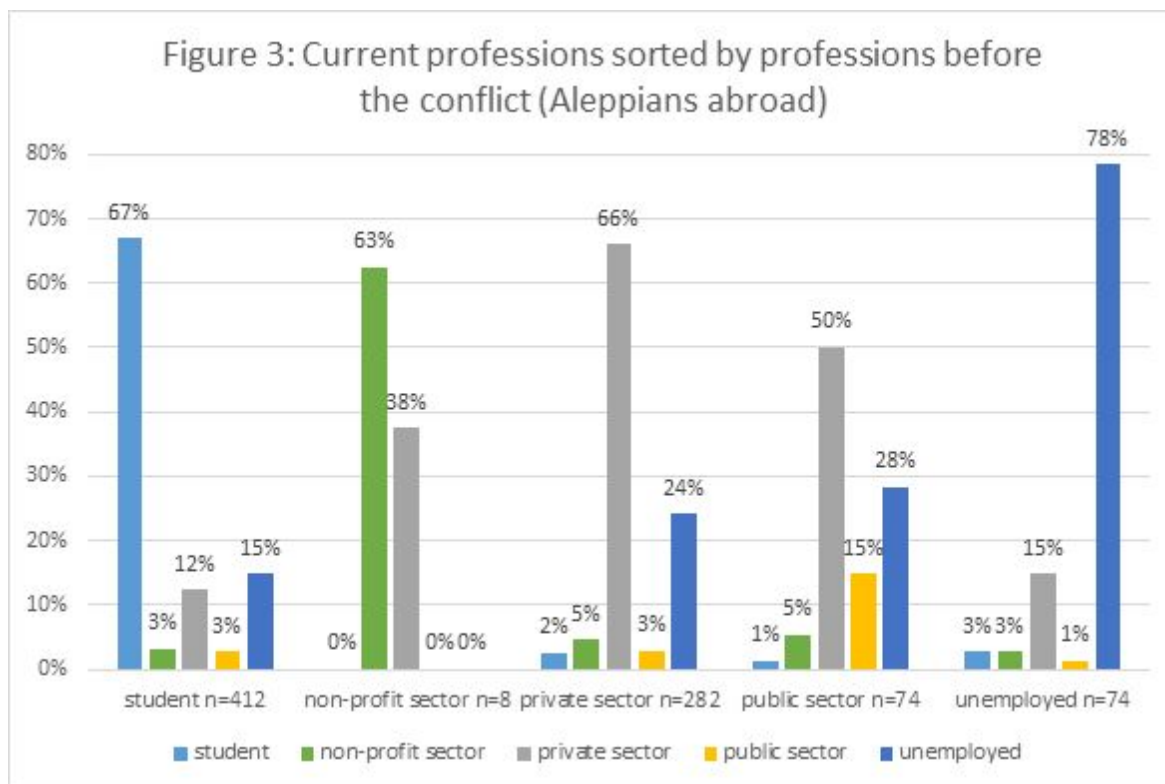
The percentage of self-identified students has decreased dramatically since the start of the war. Some students may have completed their studies, especially in government-controlled Aleppo where most schools and universities continue to operate.

Given the widespread destruction of schools and non-existence of universities in rebel-held Aleppo, limited higher education opportunities for displaced university students, and the difficult financial situation for many families, it is highly likely that many of these students have simply stopped going to school.

Since the start of the conflict, non-profit employment increased as local, humanitarian and international organizations began to provide a wide-range of emergency services. In addition, it is possible that a higher percentage of non-profit employees than the general population have completed surveys because of their interest in civic engagement and sharing their views.

Comparing professions from before the war and at the end of 2014 permits one to take a closer look at the impact of the conflict on specific types of employment. For example, what happened to those who were students in Aleppo before the conflict?

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Among the 412 respondents who were students in Aleppo before the conflict, 67 per cent are continuing their education abroad, 15 per cent have become unemployed, 12 per cent found employment in the private sector, and three per cent joined the non-profit and public sectors respectively.

Among those who were unemployed in Aleppo, 78 per cent are still unemployed abroad. For those who used to work in the public sector, 28 per cent are now unemployed. Twenty four per cent of former private sector employees are now unemployed. Fifteen per cent of former students are now unemployed.

There is a strong connection between profession before the war and current unemployment rates outside Aleppo. First, those unemployed before the conflict are much less likely to be employed because of increased competition in the job market in Aleppo and abroad as a result of the conflict.

Second, public sector employees mostly lost their jobs when they left the country. This is supported by the fact that merely 15 per cent of former public sector employees outside Aleppo are still employed in the same sector.

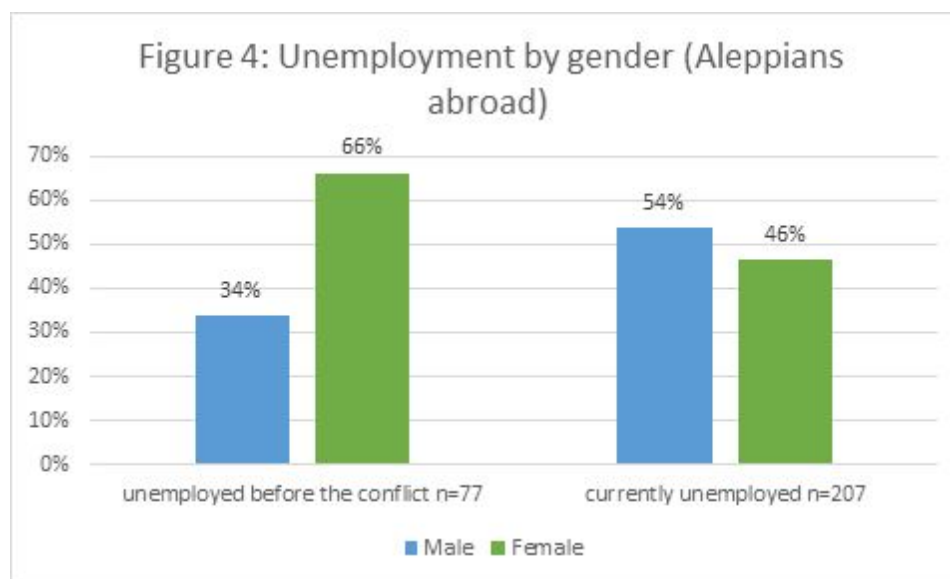
Third, it is easier for private sector workers to find employment abroad than those who worked in the public sector. At the same time, however, former private sector workers are still less likely than the generally better-educated and younger former students to find jobs abroad. That is to say that former students have been better-able to find jobs abroad and have lower levels of unemployment than others who left Aleppo. Convincing these much-needed

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productive, young, and educated Aleppians back to their city to contribute to its reconstruction after the conflict may be difficult.

A post-conflict Aleppo will face substantially elevated rates of unemployment. In part, this is because as seen in The Aleppo Project's [Will You Return to Aleppo?](#) data snapshot, those with fewer economic opportunities abroad will probably return to Aleppo first. This will have profound impacts on the policies through which the transitional period and the process of reconstruction should be administered.

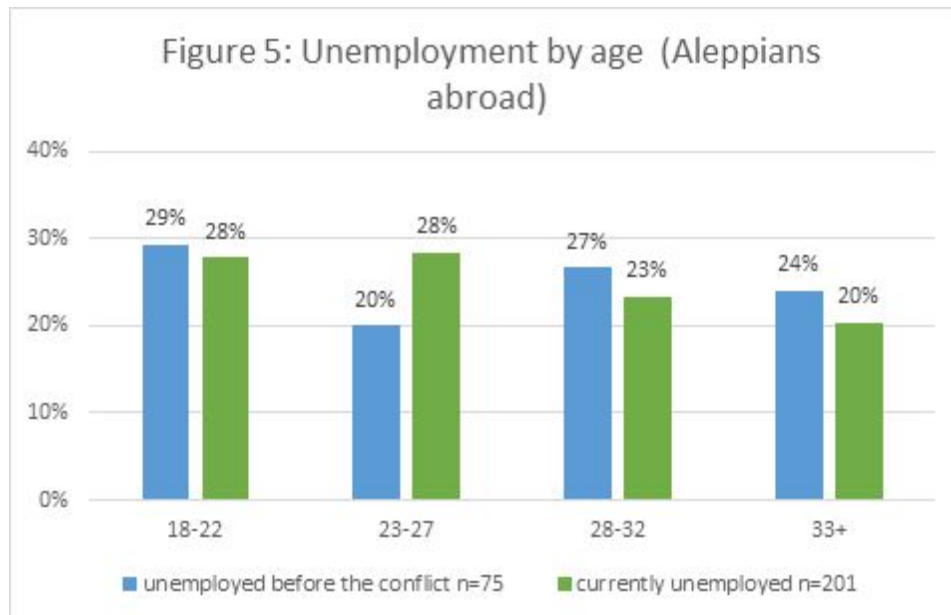
Although high levels of unemployment could accelerate the process of reconstruction by providing cheap labour, it is also destabilizing and might cause new unrest if not tackled in a reasonable amount of time. High levels of employment are likely to be one of the most serious challenges for a post-war Aleppo. To mitigate the negative impacts of high unemployment, policymakers should focus on labour-intensive reconstruction projects.



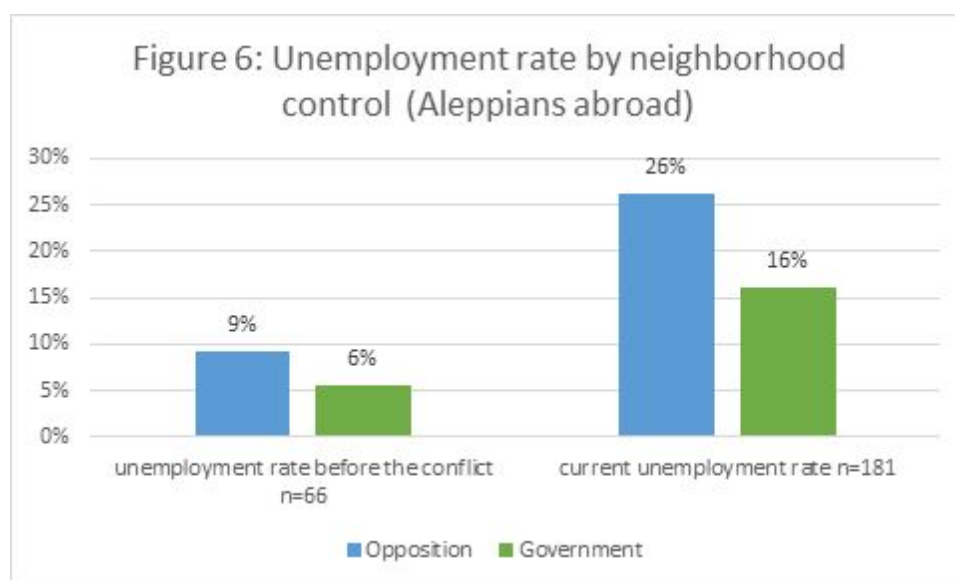
Since the beginning of the conflict, unemployment has substantially increased among Aleppians abroad and males were hit harder. In fact, there has been a strong increase in male unemployment accompanied by an almost equally sharp fall in female unemployment. Given that the survey results include significantly more responses from men than women one should take care extrapolating these results to the general population.

Why the difference? One explanation is that Aleppian culture, and the wider Islamic and Middle Eastern cultures in general, discourage even qualified women from work, especially at times of relative prosperity.

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Among other factors that explain unemployment of Aleppians abroad is age. Like many other countries, the general downward trend of unemployment suggests an inverse relation with age up to a certain point. Among the many theoretical explanations that might be true, one suggests that younger people are more likely to be unemployed as they are not familiar with the mechanisms of the job market and are less compelled to work because they are less likely to be the main source of income for a family.



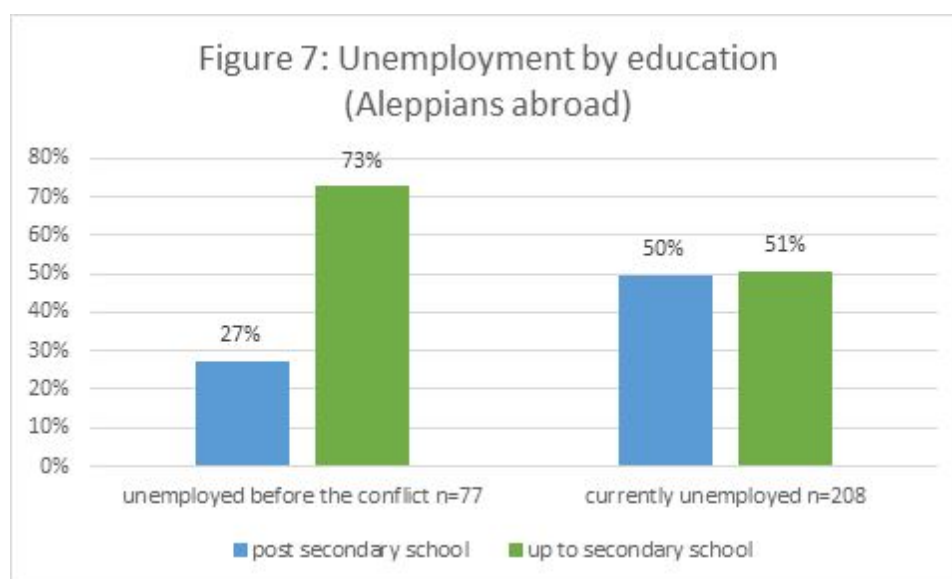
The chart above compares the rate of unemployment between neighbourhoods controlled by the opposition and government as of September 2015.^a It also strongly suggests that higher

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unemployment in eastern Aleppo before the conflict probably contributed to its fall into rebel hands.

Unemployment rates in rebel-held areas have been and continue to be higher than in government-held areas. This is largely expected because western government-controlled Aleppo has enjoyed better public services in general compared with the east, which has long suffered from lower standards of living and poorer services.^b

Those from rebel-held Aleppo continue to have significantly higher rates of unemployment due to a range of factors, including higher levels of unemployment before the conflict and lower levels of education. They also have been less able to start new businesses because of limited savings, repeated displacements, and the fact that their communities have been hit hardest.



The chart above breaks down unemployment rates before and after the conflict based on education level.

Before the war, Aleppo's job market functioned like most job markets in the world at times of peace where the least educated are the most likely to be unemployed. Over the course of the conflict, however, this has changed. As of the end of 2014, educated Aleppians were more likely to be unemployed than before the conflict.

Unemployment among Aleppians abroad with a post-secondary education has increased in part because many Aleppians have relocated to Turkey. This means that all Aleppians, regardless of education, are equally likely to face a language barrier. With the exception of a lucky few, most Aleppians are probably more likely to work in a job that does not require a formal education. Another contributor to the rise in unemployment among the educated is

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that it is hard to practice many professions outside Syria without legal equalization of Syrian academic qualifications, which, if allowed, might take months or years due to bureaucracy.

Those with a post-secondary education are more likely now than before the war of being unemployed.

In summary, both the educated and less educated are more likely to become unemployed. Being educated makes an Aleppian less likely to become unemployed abroad.

^a A note about neighbourhood categories. Aleppo Project researchers divided districts/area provided by respondents into five groups based on which group controlled the area as of September 2015. We did not include blank, ISIS and Kurdish-controlled district responses in these graphs because their numbers were insignificant. Government-controlled neighbourhoods (343 responses) included aj-Jamilyeh, al-A'azamiyeh, al-Akramiyeh, al-Andalus, al-'Aziziyeh, al-Buhooth al-'Ilmiyeh, al-Furqan, al-Hamdaniyeh, al-Isma'iliyeh, al-Iza'a, al-Jamilyeh, al-Khaldiyyeh, al-Kura, al-Mal'ab al-Baladi, al-Martini, al-Meridian, al-Midan, al-Mogambo, al-Muhafaza, al-Suleimaniyeh, al-Villat, al-Waha (outside city limits), ash-Shahba', ash-Sheikh Taha, as-Sabeel, as-Sayyed Ali, as-Siryani, as-Suleimaniyeh, az-Zahra', Baghdad Station, Masaken, New Aleppo, New Siryani, Nile Street, Qurtoba, Tishreen Street and University. ISIS-controlled neighbourhoods (3 responses) included three areas outside the city limits, al-Bab, Manbij, and Tadeef.

Kurdish-controlled neighbourhoods (29 responses) included al-Ashrafiyeh and ash-Sheikh Maqsoud.

Mixed-control neighbourhoods (143 responses) included al-Jdaydeh, as-Saba'a Bahrat, Citadel, Handarat Camp, Maysaloon Cemetery, Salah ad-Deen and Sayf ad-Dauleh.

Opposition-controlled neighbourhoods (393 responses) included aj-Jalloum, al-A'ajam, al-Abraj, al-Ansari, al-Ansari Sharqi, al-'Aqabeh, al-Aseeleh, al-Bayyada, al-Belleramoon, al-Farafra, al-Fardos, al-Hellok, al-Kallaseh, al-Mashhad, al-Qaterji, Aqyol, ash-Sha'ar, ash-Sheikh Fares, ash-Sheikh Khudr, as-Salheen, as-Sukkari, Azaz (outside city limits), az-Zebdiyyeh, Ba'aedeen, Bab al-Hadeed, Bab an-Nairab, Bab an-Nasr, Bsetneh, Bustan al-Basha, Bustan al-Qaser, Aleppo Countryside (outside city limits), Hanano, Hretan (outside city limits), Jub al-Qubbeh, Kafar Hamrah (outside city limits), Khan al-Asal Villas (outside city limits), Masaken Hanano, Near Ummayyad Mosque, Ourem al-Kubra (outside city limits), Qadi Askar, Qal'et ash-Sharif, Qarleq, Sahet Bizeh, Suleiman al-Halabi, Tareeq al-Bab and Tell az-Zarazeer.

^b For a comprehensive discussion of this issue in particular, kindly refer to The Aleppo Project's [Data Snapshot](#) on returning to Aleppo after the conflict.