

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In-depth Gender Sensitive Joint Labour & Market Assessment (LMA)

Programme: EU-funded *Empowering Youth Employment in Sudan*

Commissioned by: DRC (Lead) & Mercy Corps (Co-lead)

Workstream: Activity 1.1.2 – In-depth Gender Sensitive Joint Labour and Market Assessment (linked to 1.1.4 Inclusion/marketable skills; informs Outputs 1–2)

Implementation window: To start in March 2026 and completed by May 2026, during the programme's inception phase, with light touch refreshers as context shifts.

1) Background & Rationale

Since April 2023, conflict and displacement have profoundly disrupted labour markets, MSMEs, and service systems in Sudan. The programme will operate for 42 months (six-month inception period and 36 months for implementation) across nine states: North Kordofan, South Kordofan, Central Darfur, North Darfur, White Nile, River Nile, Gedaref, Khartoum, and Kassala. Its objective is to generate employment and income opportunities for conflict affected youth (15–35), with minimum 51% women and ≥5% youth with disabilities, and to strengthen MSMEs and training ecosystems. An early, joint, gender sensitive and protection aware LMA is required to focus investments, calibrate cash for work (CfW) and skills pathways, shape MSME support, and update targeting and partnership strategies.

The LMA should follow Mercy Corps' LMA modules (scope → secondary → primary → reporting/use) and best practice for humanitarian labour markets (decent work, displacement constraints, GBV/safety, child labour risk), ensuring data are fit for purpose in volatile contexts.

Moreover, Mercy Corps will integrate a Market Systems Development (MSD) lens into the LMA to ensure the assessment goes beyond identifying labour gaps to understanding the underlying constraints that drive systemic failure and exclusion, and to identify sustainable, inclusive solutions. The LMA will therefore: (i) focus on root causes that prevent market systems from serving youth (especially young women and youth with disabilities); (ii) identify changes that can last beyond programme closure; (iii) analyse the incentives and capacities of public, private and civil-society market actors and highlight opportunities for short-term facilitative partnerships; and (iv) define an adaptive learning agenda to support iterative piloting and scale-up as context evolves.

The LMA will also generate evidence to operationalize the programme's youth pathways system, including the criteria for youth segmentation, feasibility of the three starting tracks (job-connector, skills-builder and enterprise-starter), and the pivot point decision rules used to navigate youth between wage and self-employment pathways. State-level evidence will determine which pathways are viable, which require adaptation, and which should be de-prioritised. It will generate the granular, state-specific evidence needed to operationalise the existing tiering model, clarifying delivery feasibility, youth access constraints, pathway viability, and the adaptations required within each tier.

2) Purpose

To produce an evidence based, gender and protection sensitive analysis of labour supply, labour demand, and intermediation/system functions in the 9 programme states, identifying viable employment/enterprise pathways for youth and actionable, state-specific recommendations that directly inform Outputs 1–2, annual workplans, partner scopes, and indicator targets. The LMA will provide the analytical foundation to tailor delivery approaches within the existing Tier 1 and Tier 2 designations, identifying what is feasible in practice, where adaptations are needed, and how youth livelihood pathways should be sequenced or modified per state.

3) Objectives & Key Questions

3.1 Core objectives

1. Map labour demand and growth prospects in priority sectors and occupations relevant to youth (15–35), including decent work conditions with consideration for saturation risks and opportunities
2. Profile labour supply (skills, experiences, aspirations, constraints, time use/care) disaggregated by sex, disability, age band, migratory status; include child labour risk lenses.
3. Assess system functions & rules: TVET/training quality and access, job matching practices, finance (formal/informal), inputs/markets, childcare and mobility, documentation/rights, social norms, and workplace protection risks that shape labour outcomes, and strategies for prevention of exploitation and harassment.
4. Prioritise feasible employment/enterprise pathways and interventions (supply, demand, intermediation) for Outputs 1–2, with state-specific partner and policy asks.

3.2 Guiding questions (illustrative, to be finalised at inception)

- **Demand & sectors:** What sectors/roles are hiring or likely to expand? What vacancies and hard to fill roles exist? What are growth and labour intensity profiles by sector? What are decent work risks (wages, hours, safety, discrimination)? How do employers perceive youth (reliability, soft skills, gender norms), and what barriers limit youth hiring or apprenticeships?
- **Supply (youth):** What skills/experiences do young women/men possess? What time use and care constraints exist? What are mobility, documentation, and safety constraints (GBV/SEA risks, EORE context)? What are their aspirations, what is their risk appetite and what is their preference for wage versus self-employment. How do youth currently interact with labour and product markets (information channels, brokers, informal networks), and how do mobility, care, documentation and safety shape choices?
- **Intermediation/system:** How do employers recruit and youths find jobs (networks, agencies, online, “street corners”)? What is the TVET offer and quality (from a youth and employer perspective)? What financial services (VSLAs/MFIs) are accessible, and how are youth accessing and using financial services? What childcare/assistive devices/transport solutions are needed for equitable access? What rules (permits, work rights) matter most for IDPs/returnees/hosts? What micro-enterprises are viable for technical micro-enterprise conversion following unsuccessful intermediation attempts?
- **Pathways & interventions:** Which pathways (wage/self-employment), work-based learning, MSME support, job matching, financial inclusion and policy/advocacy actions are high return and conflict sensitive in each state? How should CfW link to longer term employment/ enterprise?

4) Scope

This Labour Market Assessment (LMA) will examine labour market dynamics, constraints, and opportunities across pre-identified localities in all targeted states, with equal attention to each context. Using a market-systems lens, the assessment will cover both demand-side (employers, value chains, MSMEs) and supply-side (youth capabilities, preferences, barriers) factors, as well as the supporting functions and rules/norms that shape employment outcomes. The LMA will also incorporate a state-level feasibility assessment for the programme’s tiered delivery model. This includes analysis of security, mobility, market accessibility, training venue feasibility, communication/connectivity constraints, and artisanal/TVET availability to support community-based and offline delivery modalities where needed. The scope below defines the geographies, populations, sectors, and how findings will be applied to program design and adaptive implementation.

- **Geographies:** 9 states—North Kordofan, South Kordofan, Central Darfur, North Darfur, White Nile, River Nile, Gedaref, Khartoum and Kassala. State prioritisation and sampling stratification will reflect

access/security and market concentration. Localities will be selected based on key operational and vulnerability criteria, to be reviewed with team and consultant.

- **Populations:** Youth 15–35 (IDPs, returnees, hosts; women ≥51%; ≥5% with disabilities); employers/MSMEs; TVETs; job matching actors; Financial Service Providers (FSPs); market committees; authorities; and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).
- **Sectors:** Long list by state, then short list of 3–5 high-potential pathways per state using rapid scoring (relevance, growth, feasibility, synergies).
- **Programme integration:** Directly informs CfW design (Output 1) and career counselling/TVET, entrepreneurship, MSME support, VSLAs, job platforms (Output 2); maps TVET by market demand.

Special geographic emphasis – Greater Kordofan: Given the evolving conflict dynamics and access constraints in Kordofan, and available evidence that markets remain broadly operational yet under sustained stress, the LMA will place enhanced analytical and sampling attention on North and South Kordofan (and connected trade corridors). This will include: (a) mapping key logistical hubs and supply corridors that influence labour demand and price transmission (e.g., El Obeid, Kadugli and Dilling, and adjacent corridor nodes such as Babanusa); (b) analysing market functionality, trader capacity and volatility risks, with particular attention to conflict-affected and/or sieged localities (including Kadugli and Dilling); and (c) assessing affordability and basic needs implications (e.g., state-level Minimum Expenditure Basket patterns) to inform CfW wage-setting and other programme transfer values where applicable.

5) Methodology

5.1.1 MSD-informed analytical framework

For each prioritised state and shortlisted sector/pathway, the analysis will apply an MSD structure by: (i) mapping the core labour-market transaction (job matching / work-based relationships) alongside supporting functions (skills development/TVET, finance, inputs and services, information, transport, childcare and other enabling services) and the rules and norms that shape participation (regulation, documentation, social norms, safety and protection risks); (ii) identifying underlying constraints and “why” they persist (capability, incentives, information failures, coordination gaps, conflict-related disruptions, exclusionary norms); (iii) assessing which market actors have incentives and capacity to address constraints more inclusively and resiliently, and what crowding-in potential exists; and (iv) defining initial system-change hypotheses and a facilitation strategy (temporary support only) to test through pilots and adapt over time.

5.1 Approach

A mixed-methods LMA combining secondary review and primary research, aligned to Mercy Corps’ five module process (scope → plan → literature → primary data → reporting/use). Gender, diversity & inclusion (GDI), protection and “do no harm” are mainstreamed throughout; decent work and child labour standards applied.

5.2 Secondary research

Compile macro labour/economic trends; pre/postcrisis shifts; legal/regulatory landscape; sector studies; prior LMAs; TVET/FSP mappings; security/access notes.

5.3 Primary data collection (examples)

- **Employer/MSME survey** (by priority sector; stratified by location/size; representative where feasible, else rigorous purposive with bias mitigation).
- **Youth survey** (disaggregated by sex, age bands, disability, migratory status) on skills, aspirations, attitudes, job search, time use/care, safety and mobility, decent work exposure, and coping.
- **KIIs** with large employers, chambers, authorities, TVETs, job agencies/platforms, FSPs, cooperatives, and market committees.

- **FGDs** with young women/men (segregated by age and sex), caregivers/guardians, and community leaders to probe norms, GBV risk, childcare, mobility, and intergroup tensions. Considerations of seasonal calendars, mobility and access need to be included.
- **Observation/ethnographic “day in the life”** shadowing of job seekers in urban hubs and **job seeker corners** (where safe).

5.4 Sampling & power

- **High-resource scenario:** representative employer/MSME samples by state/sector; youth surveys powered for gender/disability sub-analysis; multistate pooled models; qualitative saturation targets.
- **Lower-resource or access-constrained areas:** nonprobability but explicit purposeful sampling frames, parallel triangulation, and clear limitations statements. Avoid convenience sampling and document bias controls.

Kordofan sampling & access considerations: The sampling plan will intentionally oversample North and South Kordofan relative to other states (within the available budget and access constraints) to enable state- and locality-level insights in high-risk, high-need markets. Where physical access is constrained (e.g., siege conditions, road insecurity), the team will propose safe alternative modalities (remote KIs, phone-based employer/youth surveys through verified networks, and triangulation with routine market monitoring) and clearly document resulting limitations.

5.5 Assessment Outputs

Key analytical outputs

- **Market maps** detailing core labour transactions, supporting functions, and rules, accompanied by a constraint-and-incentive analysis.
- **Partner and incentive analysis** identifying priority actors, their motivations, and initial MSD facilitation options (what to test, with whom).
- **Pathway scorecards** and state-level opportunity matrices to assess viable employment and enterprise trajectories for youth.
- **Labour demand indicators** (e.g., vacancies, growth potential, labour intensity, and feasibility within the resource envelope).
- **Decent work risk dashboard**, including child labour risk flags by sector and age group.
- Design guidance to minimize market distortion across start-up kits, MSME grants, apprenticeships, and job-matching interventions.

Outputs

MSD-specific outputs will include: (i) partner landscape and incentive analysis for each shortlisted sector/pathway; (ii) initial system-change hypotheses and an intervention option set (what to test with whom, and what temporary facilitation would look like); and (iii) an outline of likely scale pathways and sustainability considerations (crowding-in, business models, and post-program continuation risks).

A dedicated annex/section will synthesise findings for Greater Kordofan, including supply corridor and hub analysis, market functionality and volatility risks, wage/transfer value considerations, and practical recommendations for sequencing activities under constrained access.

5.6 Gender, protection, disability & safeguarding

- **Gender-transformative lens:** norms, decision-making, resource/market access, time use, safety tradeoffs; embedded GBV risk analysis and safety audits; data collection/enumerator mix and safe spaces.
- **Child labour:** apply ILO thresholds (hazardous ≥ 18 ; minimum age 15); include vulnerability factors; integrate referral to education where relevant.

- **Disability inclusion:** use the Washington Group short set; map reasonable accommodation needs that would affect access to TVET/jobs and link to Activity 2.6.4.
- **Safeguarding & SIR:** staff briefed on first line response/GBV disclosures and **safe identification and referral** into programme protection services (Activity 2.6).

6) Team Composition & Roles

The LMA and all associated deliverables may be produced by an individual consultant, a team of consultants, or a consulting firm. Where a team or firm is proposed, bidders should clearly outline internal roles, responsibilities, and quality-assurance mechanisms to ensure consistency across all components of the report. The Consultant(s)/firm will work closely with DRC and Mercy Corps field teams throughout the assessment cycle, from inception and tool design to analysis and validation, and will coordinate directly with implementing partner teams and enumerators to ensure high-quality, timely, and context-appropriate primary data collection across the targeted states. The consultant(s) will provide clear guidance, training and supervision support (as needed), and quality assurance protocols for field data collection, including remote modalities where access constraints require adaptation.

DRC/MC will be responsible for:

- Enumerator recruitment (if required) with support and guidance of consultant/firm
- Fieldwork preparation, including logistics and coordination
- Data collection (with support from consultant/firm around training, technical guidance, quality review, etc.)

7) Deliverables & Timeline

The assignment is expected to require 40–60 working days over approximately March–May 2026, with timing adjusted as needed to reflect access, security, and operational constraints across target states.

- **March 2026: Desk Review and Inception Phase**
 - Desk review of existing studies, datasets, and program documentation
 - Stakeholder consultations
 - Development of MSD-informed analytical framework and sampling plan
 - Tool design, piloting, translation, and revision
 - Enumerator recruitment (if required) and training (DRC/MC responsibility)
 - Fieldwork preparation, including logistics and coordination (DRC/MC responsibility)
 - Finalization of data-collection protocols and clearances
- **April 2026: Primary Data Collection**
 - Design, coding, and deployment of quantitative and qualitative tools
 - DRC/MC teams will conduct full rollout of data collection across all target states, with adaptive methodologies and alternative modalities for constrained-access locations
 - Ongoing training, supervision, and troubleshooting for field teams
 - Continuous quality assurance and spot checks
 - Regular debriefs with field teams, partners, Mercy Corps, and DRC
- **May 2026: Analysis, Validation & Finalization**
 - Data cleaning, coding, and statistical/qualitative analysis
 - Market system mapping and synthesis of findings
 - Development of draft report and preliminary findings brief
 - Structured review and feedback from Mercy Corps, DRC, and local partners
 - Validation workshops and/or state-level meetings (as access allows)
 - Finalization of narrative report, slide deck, and summary brief

- Submission and dissemination of final deliverables, including cleaned datasets and tools

8) Quality Assurance, Ethics & Data Protection

- **Ethics:** informed consent; voluntary participation; confidentiality; risk-based approach; enumerator SOPs for GBV/child protection first line response and safe referral into programme services.
- **Do No Harm & Conflict Sensitivity:** routine context scans; balance host/IDP/returnee inclusion; avoid market distortions in messaging; align to peacebuilding structures in Activity 1.5 where relevant.
- **Data protection:** GDPR-aligned storage, encryption at rest/in transit, role-based access; local data retention schedule; deidentification in deliverables.
- **QC:** tool piloting; supervisor backchecks; audio consent (where appropriate); daily data review and cleaning; enumerator retraining loops.

9) Use of Findings (direct programme integration)

Produce **state-specific recommendations** that allow the program teams to map to the programme's **indicators and activities**, including:

- **Output 1 (CfW & public works):** infrastructure selection guidance from labour demand + gender/inclusion mapping; CfW wage levels vs. local rates; referral design from CfW → TVET/entrepreneurship/VSLAs.
- **Output 2 (youth employment & MSMEs):** State-specific TVET course menus; apprenticeship and employer-partnership models; MSME grant “use-of-funds” archetypes; job-matching platform content strategy; and VSLA/MFI linkage design, complemented by:
 - **Practical within-tier adaptations and engagement approaches**, including apprenticeship modalities tailored to different youth segments and market realities.
 - **Sector and kit-modality guidance** that prevents saturation and distortion, and ensures TVET/enterprise options reflect youth preferences, safety considerations, affordability, and real market demand.

Also provide policy/advocacy notes (work rights, documentation, safe mobility, childcare infrastructure) for targeted state-level engagement.

MSD integration in programme design: Findings will be translated into an initial MSD intervention portfolio and partnering strategy for Outputs 1–2, including (i) sector/pathway selection rationale; (ii) system-change hypotheses to test; (iii) a sequenced plan for piloting with a limited number of market actors and adapting based on results; and (iv) an outline scale-up approach (crowding-in of additional actors and geographic expansion) and sustainability markers to monitor as programme support is withdrawn.

For Kordofan, recommendations will explicitly address how to operate under market stress and access constraints (e.g., sequencing activities across more/less accessible hubs, risk-mitigation for employer engagement and job placement, and parameters for CfW wage-setting and transfer values informed by local affordability and market monitoring).

10) Proposed Table of Contents (Final Report)

1. Executive Summary & Recommendations (state-specific)
2. Introduction, Objectives, Methods & Limitations (including ethics)
3. Context Overview by State (displacement, markets, rules)
4. Sector & Pathway Prioritisation (long-list and short-list)
5. **Labour Demand** (vacancies, growth, labour intensity; decent work)

6. **Labour Supply** (skills, aspirations, time use, safety, child labour risk)
7. **Intermediation & System Functions** (TVET/job matching/finance/childcare/rules)
8. **Gender, Protection & Inclusion** (GBV safety audits; disability accommodations)
9. **State-Level Recommendations & Quick Wins** for Outputs 1–2
10. Risk & Assumption Register, Monitoring implications
11. Annexes: Tools, Sample, Tabulations, Market Maps, Consent

11) Qualifications – Individual Consultant, Team of Consultants, or Consulting Firm

Applications may be submitted by an individual consultant, a team of consultants, or a consulting firm. All proposals must designate a Lead Consultant who will serve as the primary technical lead and point of contact. Teams and firms should demonstrate combined capabilities that meet or exceed the qualifications described below, including clarity on roles, division of labor, and quality-assurance arrangements.

- **Proven experience leading and delivering labour market assessments** in fragile, conflict-affected and/or humanitarian settings, including end-to-end responsibility for methodology, tools, field implementation oversight, analysis, and reporting.
- **Demonstrated technical expertise in gender and inclusion**, including the ability to integrate **gender and GBV risk considerations** as well as **disability inclusion** throughout assessment design, data collection, analysis, and recommendations.
- **Strong quantitative and qualitative research skills**, including the design and implementation of **employer/MSME surveys** and complementary qualitative methods (KIIs/FGDs), with clear sampling strategies and rigorous quality assurance.
- **Language: Fluency in English is mandatory** (spoken and written), including strong report-writing skills. **Arabic is preferred** (spoken and/or written) and will be considered an asset for field coordination and data collection oversight. If the consultant (individual) does not speak Arabic, the proposal must include a clear and feasible plan for translation and interpretation; this should cover tool translation, field-team coordination, qualitative data collection, and validation processes to ensure accuracy and consistency across all Arabic-language materials and interactions.

For Consulting Teams or Firms (additional requirements):

- Demonstrated team capacity covering both quantitative and qualitative research methods and MSD/labour market analysis.
- Clear team structure, including identification of the Lead Consultant and key specialists.
- Evidence of firm-level or team-level quality assurance systems, data security protocols, and project management capacity.
- Availability of at least one fluent Arabic speaker within the team for field coordination, tool adaptation, and supervision (mandatory for teams/firms).
- CVs for all key team members, including level of effort (LoE) per person.

12) Proposal Submission

Bidders should submit a proposal that clearly demonstrates their capacity to serve as **Lead Consultant/firm**, working in close coordination with **DRC and Mercy Corps field teams, implementing partners, and enumerators/data collectors** supporting primary data collection across the nine target states (with enhanced analytical attention to Greater Kordofan).

Proposals should include, at minimum:

1. **Technical approach and methodology** – including an MSD-informed analytical lens, research questions, proposed mix of quantitative/qualitative methods, and how findings will translate into actionable recommendations for program design and adaptation.
2. **Sampling strategy and field implementation plan** – sampling rationale and stratification across all target states, approach for employer/MSME surveys and youth/household data collection as relevant, and contingency approaches for access-constrained areas (including remote modalities and triangulation).
3. **CV of consultant (and key team members, if applicable)** and confirmation of availability for **40–60 working days (March–May 2026)**.
4. **Workplan and timeline** – a detailed workplan aligned to the agreed schedule: March (desk review, tool development, field preparation/approvals), April (data collection), May (analysis, validation, final report and dissemination), including key milestones and review/feedback points.
5. **Management, coordination, and quality assurance plan** – describing how the Consultant/firm will coordinate with Mercy Corps/DRC field teams and implementing partners; data collection/ enumerator training and supervision approach; data quality controls; and data management procedures (including cleaning, secure storage, and documentation).
6. **Ethics, safeguarding, and do-no-harm** – approach to informed consent, confidentiality, safe referral pathways where needed, GBV-sensitive and disability-inclusive data collection, and data collection/ enumerator safeguarding protocols.
7. **Relevant experience and past performance** – examples of comparable labour market assessments (ideally in fragile/conflict-affected contexts), including references and sample outputs where possible.
8. **Financial proposal** – a detailed budget with clear assumptions and proposed milestone payments (level of effort by role/day rates; travel and field costs), aligned to the proposed workplan and methodology. The proposal should also include a **plan for how the consultant/firm will manage translation of survey tools and qualitative instruments**, to ensure accuracy and consistency across languages.