

Identifying Barriers and Opportunities to Labor Mobility Pathways

FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

RESEARCH REPORT

MAY 2022





DSP is a joint initiative of six NGO members: Action Against Hunger (ACF), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxfam, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Save the Children. Established in 2016, DSP seeks to support a collective agenda on durable solutions in the Middle East through joint research and cross-learning opportunities, evidence-based policy engagement and capacity strengthening on durable solutions concepts, approaches, and programming amongst members and partners.



Talent Beyond Boundaries is a global not-for-profit organization, launched in 2016. TBB's mission is to open labor mobility pathways for refugees, providing displaced people with a safe, legal option to resume their careers and rebuild their lives. TBB has developed formal programs with several governments to expand accessibility of their skilled migration programs to refugees and employs a team to directly facilitate the job recruitment and migration processes for refugees, predominantly in the Middle East, as they move to third countries for international employment. TBB has an established presence in Australia, Canada, Jordan, Lebanon, the United Kingdom, and the United States and has so far provided solutions to over 600 refugees through labor mobility pathways. It is also working with replicating partners across the world, including in Latin America, South Asia, and East Africa.



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ABBREVIATIONS

DSP:	Durable Solutions Platform
IDI:	In-depth Interview
INGO:	International Non-Governmental Organization
LGBTQ+:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer+ (Community)
NGO:	Non-governmental Organization
SGBV:	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
TBB:	Talent Beyond Boundaries
UN:	United Nations
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the millions of Syrians who are unable to return home or to integrate locally in their countries of first asylum, third-country resettlement remains an important durable solution. While 114,058 Syrian refugees whose countries of asylum were Jordan or Lebanon have been resettled since 2011, over 700,000 are currently identified with resettlement needs.¹ With annual opportunities for resettlement meeting less than 5% of those identified, resettlement remains out of reach for the vast majority of refugees in need of urgent solutions. Compounding this pre-existing gap, resettlement numbers slowed dramatically in 2020 due to COVID 19-related travel restrictions, with resettlement departures to third countries only recently resuming in earnest and are now nearly reaching pre-pandemic levels.²

Given the persistent lack of durable options for most of Syria's displaced, complementary pathways to resettlement have become an increasingly core component of holistic policy and advocacy responses on behalf of Syrian refugees. One of the complementary pathways being explored for its potential to facilitate the achievement of durable solutions for refugees is that of labor mobility.

Globally, there are many ways in which an individual may migrate for work purposes. These include, but are not limited to, economic immigration schemes that provide permanent residency to successful applicants with targeted sets of skills and experience, such as the Canada Federal Skilled Worker Program, as well as temporary work permits, which migrants may be able to transition to permanent residency over time.

However, most skilled migration pathways were not designed with refugee circumstances in mind and as a result, block the majority of refugees from accessing them. This means countries are deprived of much needed human capital in growth sectors, while refugees are prevented from using their skills as a solution to their protracted displacement.

In recent years, the governments of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have launched groundbreaking labor mobility pilots for refugees, while committing to over 2,350 visas to principal applicants, in addition to their family members, on pathways that can lead to permanent residence or citizenship.

Although hundreds of refugees have already benefited from these pilots, a series of barriers are disproportionately preventing refugees from taking advantage of these opportunities at a larger scale.

These barriers are generally divided into host country barriers and third country barriers. The OECD and UNHCR recently conducted research on key challenges in third countries; however, limited analysis has been conducted at the host country level.³

This study intends to help fill this research gap by evaluating the intersectional systemic barriers experienced by refugees in the context of labor migration and complementary pathways in Jordan and Lebanon.

It outlines the challenges that Syrian refugees, in particular, face at different stages of the labor mobility process while based in Jordan and Lebanon. It then presents a case study that highlights some of the solutions developed to overcome identified barriers and outlines recommendations for overcoming host country barriers directed to NGOs in Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR, Third Countries, the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon, and international donors.

1 UNHCR. Resettlement Data Finder Portal. <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#u5Et>

2 Ibid.

3 OECD and UNHCR (2021). Safe Pathways for Refugees. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNHCR%20Safe%20Pathways%20for%20Refugees%20II%20Web-version001.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

The ramifications of Syria's more than decade-long conflict have made it the largest displacement crisis globally. With nearly 5.7 million Syrian refugees based in nearby countries, and a further 6.7 million internally displaced, the call for durable solutions for displaced Syrians has never been more necessary.⁴

In the Middle East, countries hosting Syrian refugees face worsening political challenges, economic crises, and highly volatile security environments, each exacerbated by an ongoing global pandemic. Jordan's economy has been growing at a meager 2.4% for over a decade, and the COVID-19 crisis exposed much of its structural weaknesses, including an unemployment rate that reached a record high of nearly 52% for youth in late 2021.⁵ For Syrian refugees in the country, over 60% currently fall below the extreme poverty line and two thirds of refugee households are unable to meet their essential food needs.⁶

In Lebanon, the situation is even more severe. About 80% of the country's population of nearly 7 million are considered to be living in multidimensional poverty, a rate which has doubled since 2019.⁷ Economic and political instability has led to a rapid decline in the local currency, a crippling fuel crisis, and a deprivation in basic public services including healthcare, housing, and education. The World Bank ranks the country's financial crisis as among the most dire worldwide since the mid-19th century.⁸

Strained systems in both countries have resulted in legal and bureaucratic restrictions targeted at refugees, often coupled with discrimination and social tensions, which deplete their access to basic human rights and needs.⁹ As a result, Syrian refugees continue to face a challenging socio-economic environment.

With ongoing challenges for local integration in their host countries and uncondusive conditions for a safe and dignified return to Syria, resettlement is often the desired – or only – durable solution for certain vulnerable refugees. However, resettlement opportunities remain extremely limited, a reality that has been exacerbated by recent global challenges like Covid-19 travel restrictions and international crises which have led to competing interventions, such as the global Afghan response and the Ukraine crisis.

International declarations have sought to rally countries to do more to provide solutions for refugees. The September 2016 commitments made in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF),¹⁰ as well as the work on the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees,¹¹ demonstrate the increased interest of governments and international organizations in expanding third country organized admissions.

The New York Declaration specifies that states should “intend to expand the number and range of legal pathways available for refugees to be admitted to or resettled in third countries. States should also “consider the expansion of existing humanitarian admission programmes, possible temporary

- 4 UNHCR. Operational Data Portal. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.233399062.988085477.1645221023-503858657.1642560556
- 5 Press Release , Department of Statistics, Jordan: 23.3% is the unemployment rate during quarter four for 2021 (2021). http://dos.gov.jo/dos_home_a/main/archive/unemp/2021/Emp_Q42021.pdf
- 6 WFP (2021). Funding crunch forces WFP to scale back food assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan. <https://www.wfp.org/news/funding-crunch-forces-wfp-scale-back-food-assistance-syrian-refugees-jordan>
- 7 UN ESCWA (2021). Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021): Painful reality and uncertain prospects. https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_policy_brief_-_en.pdf
- 8 World Bank (2022). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/01/24/lebanon-s-crisis-great-denial-in-the-deliberate-depression>
- 9 World Bank (2013). World Bank Group Engagement in Situations of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: Lebanon and Jordan, The Case of the Refugee Crisis. <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/LebanonJordanRefugeeShock.pdf#:~:text=Both%20countries%20put%20the%20number,1.4%20million%20Syrians%20live%20there.&text=in%20Lebanon%2C%20some%201.2%20million,fifth%20of%20the%20entire%20population>
- 10 UNHCR (2018). Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: Delivering more comprehensive and predictable responses for refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>
- 11 See UNHCR (2018). Towards a Global Compact on Refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/towards-a-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

evacuation programmes, including evacuation for medical reasons, flexible arrangements to assist family reunification, private sponsorship for individual refugees and opportunities for labor mobility for refugees, including through private sector partnerships, and for education, such as scholarships and student visas.”¹²

Objective 5 of the GCM also confirms a commitment to “adapt options and pathways for regular migration in a manner that facilitates labor mobility and decent work ... and responds to the needs of migrants in a situation of vulnerability, with a view to expanding and diversifying availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration.”¹³ Additional schemes complementing resettlement have been increasingly pursued, particularly those which allow for regulated pathways as an alternative to unsafe migration attempts to reach economic security and personal safety. In light of this, international efforts have supported the growth and expansion of complementary pathways to resettlement as a means of expanding durable solutions for refugees.

Complementary pathways are “avenues that complement refugee resettlement and by which refugees may be admitted in a country and have their international protection needs met while simultaneously they are able to support themselves and potentially reach a sustainable and lasting solution” to their displacement and displacement-related vulnerabilities.¹⁴ Complementary pathways can take a variety of forms, including education, family reunification, community sponsorship, and labor mobility programs.

Despite recent positive developments on labor mobility pathways, a series of barriers still prevent many refugees from accessing them. These barriers are generally divided into two types: host country barriers and third country barriers. Recent studies have outlined key challenges existing in certain third countries, particularly on a policy level, however, limited analysis has been conducted at the host country level.¹⁵ While barriers range across different country contexts, this analysis focuses on those experienced by Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.



- 12 UN General Assembly (2018). Draft Resolution submitted by the President of the General Assembly: Draft outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. <https://www.unhcr.org/events/conferences/57b6d8464/draft-outcome-document-19-september-2016-high-level-meeting.html>. Emphasis added.
- 13 See Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018). Intergovernmentally Negotiated and Agreed Outcome. https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180713_agreed_outcome_global_compact_for_migration.pdf
- 14 UNHCR (2022). Complementary pathways for admission to third countries. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/complementary-pathways.html>
- 15 OECD-UNHCR (2021).. Safe Pathways for Refugees II. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNHCR%20Safe%20Pathways%20for%20Refugees%20II%20Web-version001.pdf>

BACKGROUND

LABOR MOBILITY AS A COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAY

Labor mobility schemes can enable Syrian refugees to legally enter and remain in a third country through employment. While millions of people immigrate for work each year, the traditional skilled migration pathways that they travel through largely exclude access to people in refugee circumstances, as they were not designed with their situations in mind.

Certain documentation, funding requirements, and other procedural needs that would be considered reasonable and attainable for non-displaced persons are typically challenging to access or meet by refugees displaced from their countries of origin. For example, a Syrian refugee who has been working illegally at a company in Lebanon due to restricted employment rights will not be able to provide the proof of work experience required for a standard labor mobility stream. He or she will also not be able to provide a required financial statement, given the lack of access to banking in the country. Lack of a valid passport will also make him or her ineligible to sit for the required language examination for the visa application. Meeting basic requirements like these are considered very challenging for refugees. However, an individual's refugee status should not exempt him or her from pursuing a labor mobility pathway. In fact, the high levels of education and in-demand skill sets found in the Syrian refugee population indicates that Syrians are often well-placed to take advantage of labor mobility opportunities. According to a study on safe pathways for refugees conducted by UNHCR-OECD, from 2010 to 2019 Syrians [and Iraqis] accessed work and education permits in OECD countries at a higher rate than other nationalities that significantly constitute refugee populations.¹⁶

With this reality in mind, international efforts in recent years have worked to unlock labor mobility as a complementary pathway by both supporting refugees to access existing pathways through traditional immigration channels, and advocating for third countries to develop refugee-specific visa pathways which include protection safeguards and concessions. The Governments of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have spearheaded these efforts by piloting their own skilled visa programs, and more countries have expressed interest to follow. The labor mobility pilots in each of these countries currently provide mechanisms for refugees to access temporary or permanent residency that may lead to citizenship along with protections from refoulement. In order to access these visa programs, refugees must be matched with an international job opportunity and meet all visa requirements.

THE LINK BETWEEN RESETTLEMENT AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

A durable solution is reached when a displaced person no longer has any protection nor assistance needs related to his or her displacement, and can exercise his or her rights without discrimination linked to displacement.¹⁷ There are three internationally recognized pathways for refugees and IDPs to achieve durable solutions, namely voluntary return in safety and dignity, local integration, and resettlement (for refugees) or settlement elsewhere in the country (for IDPs).¹⁸

Resettlement is defined as the organized transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought asylum to another destination state that has agreed to admit them as refugees and to grant them permanent settlement and the opportunity for eventual citizenship.¹⁹ As a durable solution, resettlement should involve the granting of refugee status and long-term residence rights. Although that has traditionally been the case, some recently developed European resettlement programs grant an initially temporary status. Even then, the status given by the third country resettlement state provides protection against refoulement (in this case deportation back to Syria) and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependents with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals, and therefore provides a durable solution.²⁰

16 Ibid.

17 IASC (2010). IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. <https://www.unhcr.org/50f94cd49.pdf>

18 Ibid

19 UNHCR (2011). UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, <http://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf>; Van Selm, J. (2014). Refugee Resettlement. In E. Fiddian-Qasbiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. Sigona (Eds.), *Refugee Resettlement*. Oxford University Press

20 European Resettlement Network. (2012). Selection phase, <http://www.resettlement.eu/journey/selection-phase>

Complementary pathways can serve to increase the range of regulated means by which refugees may achieve temporary or permanent solutions to their international protection needs. They may offer permanent residence and status immediately in the same way as resettlement usually does, or contribute to initially short-term solutions, through temporary residence rights and through various visas. In this latter scenario, the solution may become sustainable or durable over time, as status is made more secure. In all cases, solutions are most effective when their details and implications are fully communicated to beneficiaries.²¹

The major difference between resettlement and admission through a complementary pathway might be in terms of the status granted to the beneficiary on arrival, as this can sometimes be initially short-term on complementary pathways, and might, in the case of labor mobility and scholarships, be linked to the activity for which the individual is (and where relevant their family members are) admitted, and not involve acknowledgement of the need for protection. Even where the status is that of worker or student, however, certain protection safeguards should be met, as highlighted in UNHCR's Key Considerations paper for Complementary Pathways²², including protection against refoulement as well as a clear and predictable path to longer-term status.²³

Labor mobility for refugees can provide young educated refugees and experienced professionals admission to a third country with employment upon arrival. It can also be a way for those who are less skilled to access legal employment via migration aimed at lower skilled workers. The advancement of these pathways also affords opportunities under a broader solutions perspective.

By creating equitable and accessible skills development opportunities in host countries with a clear age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) focus, a larger portion of the refugee population would arguably be equipped with the skills to contribute to their self-reliance, their host community, as well as potentially to utilize upon return to their country of origin in the future. With the protracted context of the Syria situation, it is important to build a holistic and sustainable approach to preserving and investing in the human capital of refugee communities, not only for currently skilled refugees, but for generations to come.

A GLANCE AT EXISTING REFUGEE-SPECIFIC LABOR MOBILITY SCHEMES

The Governments of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have committed to relocate refugee talent through their skilled migration programs and apply additional flexibility for refugee applicants to avoid inequitable exclusions. Over the next two years, they have committed to over 2,350 visas for refugees accessing skilled migration. The following provides a brief overview of each established program.

In Brief: Australian Skilled Refugee Pilot

The Australian Government's pilot, called the Skilled Refugee Labor Agreement Pilot, was established in partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries in 2021. It enables Australian businesses to sponsor skilled refugees to work at their company and reside in Australia on a permanent or temporary basis with a pathway to permanence. The businesses must be endorsed by Talent Beyond Boundaries. Over 70 refugees have benefited from this program and there are currently 200 visas allocated for principal applicants (with additional visas offered to their family members) over the next two years. On average, the immigration process takes around three months.

21 Paragraph drawn from Durable Solutions Platform (2018). Access to Resettlement and Complementary Pathways for Syrian Refugees. <https://www.dsp-syria.org/access-resettlement-and-complementary-pathways-syrian-refugees>

22 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2019). Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees to Third Countries: Key Considerations. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ceb3fc4.html>

23 Ibid.

Examples of Visa Concessions

- Waiver of skills assessment requirements and minimum work experience requirements
- Flexible arrangements for candidates without valid travel documents or identification papers
- Waiver of labor market testing requirements.
- Reduction of minimum English language requirements to 'Functional English' (demonstrated via approved testing)
- Increase in age requirements allowing sponsorship of people up to 50 years old).

Examples of Companies Hiring Refugee Talent from Jordan and Lebanon: Accenture, Deloitte, Harvey Beef, IRESS

In Brief: Canadian Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP)

The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) is an agreement established in 2018 by the Government of Canada in collaboration with UNHCR, Talent Beyond Boundaries, and RefugePoint. Its goal is to provide durable solutions for refugees with the skills and qualifications Canadian employers need by utilizing and amending its existing skilled migration schemes. In 2021, Phase II of the EMPP was introduced and pledged to offer visas to 2,000²⁴ refugees (plus additional visas for their family members) over the next two years. On average, the immigration process takes between six to nine months.

Examples of Visa Concessions

- Flexible arrangements for candidates without valid travel documents or identification papers
- Waiver of application fees (as well as biometrics and medicals)
- Work experience requirement to minimum 1 year in no defined time under federal programs
- Easier access to settlement funds for refugees with a valid job offer, such as access to immigration loans or grants
- Flexibility in work experience requirement for federal immigration pathways (new requirement is to have acquired one year of full-time work experience which is not within a specified period of time for AIP and RNIP).
- Expedited processing stage to 6 months at the federal stage
- Targeted rounds of invitation to some provincial nominee programs for EMPP
- Expedited, responsive communication, in most cases, with the government(s) on applications

Examples of Companies Hiring Refugee Talent from Jordan and Lebanon: Shopify, Bonfire, Glen Haven Manor, Ice River Springs

24 The original public policy announced 500 refugees but a December 2021 mandate letter published by the Canadian Prime Minister to the newly appointed Minister of Immigration mandated an increase to 2,000 primary applicants. Government of Canada. December 16, 2021. Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Mandate Letter. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-immigration-refugees-and-citizenship-mandate-letter>

In Brief: UK Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot

In July 2021 the UK government launched the Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot in partnership with TBB as a hybrid humanitarian-skills pathway for refugees and other forcibly displaced workers that eliminates certain requirements or administrative processes. Under this pilot, employers are able to sponsor refugees via a specific Skilled Worker visa route. Refugees under this pilot will be entitled to a 5 year Skilled Worker Visa, and then Indefinite Leave to Remain (providing criteria is met). Dozens of nurses have already traveled via this pathway and there are 250 more spots available.

Examples of Visa Concessions

- Case by case flexibility with refugee-specific concerns, including travel documents or IDs
- Free priority processing with visa decisions made in 5 - 10 days

Examples of Companies Hiring Refugee Talent from Jordan and Lebanon: HCA Healthcare, National Health Services, PSR Solutions

While each scheme is inclusive of a range of industries and job categories, labor needs and shortages are relatively shared across each country. Among the most currently in-demand include: Accommodation & Food Services, Accounting, Administration/Office Support, Engineering, Healthcare & Social Assistance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Manufacturing/Production, Operations/Logistics, Sales/Marketing, and Skilled Trades.²⁵



25 In-demand roles determined based on corporate engagement data shared by Talent Beyond Boundaries and Manpower Group. See: Manpower Group, The Talent Shortage. 2022. <https://go.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage>

Spotlight: Selection of Job Positions for First 150 Refugees to Relocate via Talent Beyond Boundaries to Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom		
Industry	Job Position(s)	Country(ies) of Placement
Accommodation & Food Services	Chef Prep Cook	Australia Canada
Business Management	Business Analyst / Consultant Executive Assistant	Australia
Engineering	Civil Engineer Engineering Manager Kitchen Designer Mechanical Engineer	Australia Canada
Healthcare	Continuing Care Assistant / Personal Care Worker Dental Technician Doctor (Pediatric Consultant) Personal Care Worker Nurse (Range of specialities including ER, Oncology, Surgical) Physiotherapist	Australia Canada United Kingdom
Information Technology	Applications Support Front-End Software Engineer Full Stack Software Developer IT Analyst PHP Software Engineer Tech Support Advisor Test Analyst	Australia Canada United Kingdom
Law	Paralegal	Australia
Skilled Trades	Butcher Carpenter / Cabinet Maker Maintenance Mechanic Specialist Machinist Tool and Die Maker	Australia Canada

METHODOLOGY

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the above mentioned objectives, and focused on Syrian refugees.

A survey was conducted with 586 Syrian respondents based in both Jordan and Lebanon. These respondents were randomly selected from the Talent Catalog, a database created by Talent Beyond Boundaries featuring the academic and professional profiles of nearly 40,000 refugees predominantly across the Middle East. The survey sample was randomized and designed to include Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon from a wide range of age groups, educational backgrounds, and English language levels. Data collectors used the Talent Catalog’s search mechanism to extract thousands of profiles of eligible participants (Syrian refugees residing in Jordan or Lebanon) and sent emails requesting their participation in the digital survey. Of those emailed, 590 responses were submitted, with 4 of the responses determined negligible. The digital survey was conducted in November 2021.

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Sex	Female	98	17%
	Male	487	83%*
	Other	1	-
	It should be noted that the gender distribution of respondents in the survey is proportional to that of refugees registered in TBB’s Talent Catalog, which is 16% females and 84% males.		
Age	18-24	79	14%
	25-31	221	38%
	32-40	197	34%
	41-50	85	15%
	51+	2	-
Highest Level of Education	Elementary School	44	8%
	Middle School	133	23%
	High School	58	10%
	Some Bachelor’s degree	97	17%
	Bachelor’s degree	202	34%
	Master’s Degree	41	7%
	Doctoral Degree	4	1%
English language proficiency - Speaking	Beginner	263	45%
	Intermediate	204	35%
	Fluent	96	16%
	No answer	23	4%

In terms of qualitative methods, the study used in-depth interviews (IDI’s) with 10 refugees in Jordan and 10 refugees in Lebanon using purposive and snowball sampling; and 20 key informant interviews with third country embassies, international NGOs, host and destination country NGOs, and academics working in the areas of labor mobility, refugee protection, migration and policy.

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Sex	Female	5	25%
	Male	15	75%
Age	25-31	6	30%
	32-40	12	60%
	41-50	2	10%
Highest Level of Education	Middle School	1	5%
	High School	0	0%
	Some Bachelor's degree	1	5%
	Bachelor's degree	17	85%
	Master's Degree	1	5%
English language proficiency - Speaking	Beginner	1	5%
	Intermediate	9	45%
	Fluent	10	50%
Accessed a Skilled Labor Pathway	Yes	15	25%
	No	5	75%

Given that Talent Beyond Boundaries is the only identified implementing organization working on labor mobility for refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, interviews were conducted with multiple staff from various levels (referred to as “implementing key informants”) to capture critical insights from an operational level. Interviews took place between November and December 2021.



KEY BARRIERS & FINDINGS

Based on survey responses and qualitative interviews, this research identified a number of findings that fall within four defined categories of barriers reflective of the step-by-step process refugees must undergo to access labor mobility pathways. They include barriers to (1) engagement and outreach, (2) international recruitment, (3) skilled visa processing, and (4) exit and departure procedures.

This study found that the barriers experienced by refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are similar, however a few barriers have been found to be more prevalent in one host country or another, and other barriers have been found to be less prevalent. Details on these differences are mentioned throughout the key barriers and findings section.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

The study revealed that, prior to engaging with a labor mobility implementing organization, most refugee respondents were either entirely unaware of existing labor mobility pathways available to them, or they had a high level of misunderstanding about their eligibility to access them. Despite growing momentum and publicity around the introduction of labor mobility pathways for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, **most survey respondents indicated an initial lack of knowledge of such emerging opportunities (73%).** Once informed that there are existing labor mobility opportunities for refugees, almost half of respondents (48%) assumed immediate ineligibility due to incorrect expectations that their lack of identification documents, nationality, and refugee statuses would automatically disqualify them when applying for a skilled visa on a refugee-specific labor mobility pathway. In the qualitative interviews, these findings were nearly equal between refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. One female in-depth interview respondent in Jordan reported learning about the pathway after her brother accessed the pathway and relocated to Australia.

Many respondents (77%) also presumed their immediate family members would be excluded from accessing a pathway alongside them, thereby dissuading the interest of some in moving forward. When the respondents were made aware that concessions to all these factors have been embedded within existing labor mobility pilot programs in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, 96% expressed strong interest in accessing them.

Among those (27%) who had prior knowledge of labor mobility pathways, 76% indicated that there was **not enough information publicly available to enable them to make an informed decision on whether it was a suitable option** for them as well as how to access opportunities and assess their eligibility. They also highlighted confusion in how the pathways fully work and requirements associated with the pathways, particularly at the recruitment and visa level. This information gap is largely attributed to a few reasons: the limited number of implementing organizations in both Jordan and Lebanon to spread standard and clear messaging, as well as the reality that most existing labor mobility pilots only officially launched within the last four years, vary in their requirements, conditions, and concessions, and have often evolving guidelines.²⁶ A female software engineer in Lebanon reported during the in-depth interviews that it was difficult to fully understand the concept of labor mobility for refugees because she did not know the details of the pathways.

Another potential contributing factor may relate to the methods used to disseminate information. While there has been traditional practice to use the networks of other refugee-serving agencies as well as INGOs to spread messaging on existing pathways through in-person information sessions, 83% of respondents indicated they are far more receptive to receiving information relating to their refugee circumstances through social media.²⁷ That said, in-person or online live meetings were highlighted as more beneficial after an initial awareness has developed in order to give refugees the opportunity to ask questions about the pathways.

As a key informant explained: “We spent the first few years relying on local partners across Lebanon to share information we provided about skilled pathways to their refugee beneficiaries. But this

26 The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) was the first initiative launched by the Government of Canada to test skilled migration streams for refugees. It launched in 2018 and was soon followed by similar programs in Australia and the United Kingdom.

27 Information sessions took place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic which placed restrictions on public gatherings.

resulted in a lot of misinformation since we weren't clarifying what was being explained to also carefully control expectations setting. Over time, we realized the most effective way to reach refugees in the country is through Facebook. [Refugees have it] and use it daily - it's increased our engagement exponentially."

Only 8% of respondents indicated they were informed about labor mobility pathways via UNHCR outreach efforts - including both via social media outreach and in-person information sessions. This finding highlights a missed opportunity for more engagement at the INGO level. The very few remaining respondents found out by word of mouth.

The study also highlighted that there is a discrepancy in levels of awareness between different global pathways. Among refugees who had previously heard of labor mobility options, 78% were knowledgeable of the EMPP in Canada, whereas only 37% were aware of solutions to Australia and 32% to the United Kingdom, respectively. These results warrant further investigation, albeit the distinctly wider scope of the EMPP in Canada in terms of pledged visas and publicity, in contrast to any other pilot, may be a strong contributing factor to higher awareness of Canadian pathways. That said, to date, the Displaced Talent Pilot in the United Kingdom is presumed to have granted the most visas comparatively.

This research also highlighted that some refugees are discouraged from accessing labor mobility pathways due to fear of fraud and distrust. After initially learning about labor mobility as a solution for refugees, a third of respondents expressed concerns that it could be a "scam." Many cited instances in which they had been targeted previously, largely through online platforms like LinkedIn, by fraudsters posing as recruiters from companies with offers to sponsor their immigration for work. These scams often require an initial transfer of funds to initiate the visa process, which in certain cases amounted to several years' worth of savings for some refugee victims.

A portion of respondents (26%) added that they were skeptical of labor mobility as a viable solution because they doubted the interest of employers in recruiting anyone from a refugee background, as well as the willingness of governments to grant them visas. "I wasn't convinced that an international company would be willing to hire a Syrian from an unstable country. They already have skilled citizens whom they can hire directly using limited effort and time," explained a 40-year-old Syrian refugee software developer based in Jordan.

An important finding from the study showed that when properly informed about labor mobility as an option, **some refugees were less likely to consider irregular migration routes.**²⁸ Awareness of refugee-specific labor mobility pathways as a potential solution to displacement can deter refugees from considering non-legal options, and encourage them to consider engaging in a labor mobility scheme instead. As a refugee in Lebanon explained, "When we moved to Lebanon, we started researching and going through YouTube videos. We found out about the pathways available but the details were vague and unclear. We previously thought that illegal methods were the only ones available." This finding further reiterates the importance of disseminating complete and accurate information about labor mobility as a complementary pathway on social media and other public avenues.

BARRIERS TO INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT

The study found that refugees who seek international career guidance in order to engage in recruitment processes face difficulties accessing it. Over 90% of respondents found it hard or very hard to conduct an international job search on their own, and 77% were too discouraged to even attempt to apply. Several cited a lack of awareness of platforms to access guidance and job searches, and found job descriptions to be intimidating and difficult to navigate. A female software developer in Jordan noted, "The job descriptions are very detailed, intricate, accurate, and complex which is very different from the simple job descriptions that we are used to in the region. [They] make you think you are not good enough." Most refugees are accustomed to traditional job seeking methods, including outreach to family members and friends to provide employment information; they often have little experience with online applications and require assistance but are unsure where to find it.

28 This corresponds with a finding from Talent Beyond Boundaries' 2020 Global Evaluation, which claims that 48% of 259 surveyed refugees were less likely to consider an irregular journey after learning that labor migration pathways existed. See: Talent Beyond Boundaries (2020). Global Evaluation. <https://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org/s/TBB-Global-Evaluation-2020-Final-external.pdf>

Nearly half of survey respondents also cited challenges crafting their resumes and identifying resources to support in the process, particularly to tailor their experiences for job postings relevant to their skills. In addition, 65% of respondents stated that it is difficult to find resources to prepare for an international job interview. "I had no experience in doing interviews with international companies. I realized that what international employers looked for in the interview was the value I can add to the company and not just the technical physical work I can do. I had a hard time figuring out how to deliver the message to the employer throughout the interview. I gave direct one-phrase answers without any details and felt nervous about that. I found the behavioral questions difficult," explained a female computer engineer residing in Lebanon. In-depth interviews revealed that refugees in Jordan and Lebanon equally experience challenges with interview preparation and require support in preparing for their international job interviews.

In Jordan, more refugees interviewed in-depth experienced difficulty qualifying for job interviews and stated that they benefited significantly from interview preparation support, and would have been less prepared had they not received it.

While key informants implementing labor mobility programs try to offer international career guidance to address these issues and help prepare refugees for their recruitment processes, most face capacity issues which limit their ability to address the needs of all applicants. Moreover, refugees are largely unaware of educational institutions and employment centers that can alternatively provide such services.

Reliable technology and stable internet connectivity can also be determining factors to accessing a solution. Apart from rare instances where employers choose to conduct recruitment processes in-person by traveling to the host country, the international recruitment of refugees largely relies on remote conferencing tools, requiring functional technology and stable internet. In Lebanon, for example, almost one-third of refugees who have participated in interviews with international recruiters cited internet disturbances due to regular electricity cuts; this finding was reinforced through in-depth interviews with refugees in Lebanon, however this challenge is much less prevalent among refugees in Jordan; only one refugee in-depth informant in Jordan reported challenges accessing stable internet. A female refugee web-developer in Lebanon interviewed by an Australian technology company noted, "The problems of power outages and the internet are great challenges for me. I tried to get over them as much as possible...I went through two interviews and I had a very weak internet connection so the interviewers were annoyed a lot. I became stressed back then."

Although implementing key informants explained that they often provide employers with advanced warning that there might be technological issues, the disruption disturbs the assessment of a refugees' performance and employers often opt to move forward with other applicants. In some instances, employers have agreed to alternative methods for an interview, including via Whatsapp voice notes or pre-recorded videos, although this is uncommon.

Additionally, the lack of reliable internet impedes a refugees' ability to prepare for exams required for certain trades and skilled visa schemes. As a male refugee nurse residing in Lebanon explained, "[When refugee healthcare professionals are] studying for their [OET] exams that they need to complete before they arrive to the UK - sometimes they don't have all the practice questions which are online because they don't have power and electricity for more than two hours for a whole day - sometimes they send photos of the material for them to study using their cellphone lights - many online exams had to be rescheduled because of the power instability." The worsening situation in Lebanon provides little hope that electricity outages will decrease any time soon, thus power and internet challenges are not expected to improve in the near future.

The survey also revealed that over half of respondents do not have access to working computers. While the majority own mobile phones that they are able to use for job searches and related applications, certain technologies for interviews and skills assessments as well as software for CV editing are only operative on computers. To overcome these barriers, implementing NGOs may offer vouchers and computers for loan when possible, or in some cases refugees may be asked to facilitate the recruitment processes from the NGOs' physical offices, when mobility is not an obstacle. However these options often require certain levels of transportation and cost, which are not always possible to access.

During the recruitment process, irregular work patterns and long stints of unemployment hinder refugee eligibility for employment opportunities. In both Jordan and Lebanon, refugees face numerous restrictions to accessing legal work in most professional industries.²⁹ According to the study, 83% of respondents reported lack of access to legal work, with almost 60% having faced protracted unemployment. The remainder are forced to work informally in often poorly paid menial jobs, risking exploitative labor, arrest, and deportation. 59% of respondents stated that their long stint of unemployment due to their refugee situation has made it harder for them to attract an international employer.

Lack of access to sustainable employment means that refugees in protracted displacement not only face financial hardship, but also face the atrophy of their existing skills, education levels, and professional networks. Laws in both Jordan³⁰ and Lebanon³¹ exclude Syrians from accessing a majority of employment sectors, resulting in refugees either seeking informal work in restricted sectors, working outside their skillset in sectors where the legal environment allows, or, being kept out of the labor market completely - therefore preventing refugees from accessing sustainable employment. This reality carries a number of implications that inhibit refugees from accessing labor mobility options. When left out of the workforce for a prolonged amount of time, refugees often can no longer meet recent work experience requirements set by employers and governments.

In Canada for example, certain visa pathways under the EMPP require at least one year of relevant work experience over the last five years. Even if refugees have decades of professional experience prior to their displacement, they are considered ineligible if they cannot meet time-bound work experience requirements. As a 41-year-old male refugee physician in Lebanon explained, “I worked as a cardiovascular surgeon in Homs, Syria for almost 15 years and now I have been unemployed in Lebanon for nearly 8. I was once a man with a good reputation and thriving at my job. Now I have no work rights nor ability to get out of the country [through a labor mobility scheme]. I have lost so much of my medical training and skills in this time; I am no longer considered qualified to practice.”

Another consequence of lack of refugee access to stable work in host countries comes during the CV review stage by employers. Key informants revealed that **some employers misinterpret irregular work patterns on refugees’ resumes**, often due to circumstances from displacement, as indications of poor commitment or lack of reliability. “An employer once told us that he did not want to consider a candidate because he seemed to jump around too much between companies and worked in random positions. He thought this meant the candidate was not trustworthy, but we had to explain this was because of his situation as a refugee in Lebanon.” explained a key informant.

Syrian refugees also revealed that they seek access to up-to-date vocational training that is targeted at high-demand positions in third countries at the international level. Through comments by multiple key informants and refugee participants, the study revealed that refugees often lack up-to-date technical skills that are required in certain industries abroad. For example, several key informants highlighted instances in which refugees put forward for international jobs in the IT sector did not progress because they lacked knowledge of the most recent programming languages, softwares, or approaches.

As a male refugee Software Engineer explained, “The skills required by the international employers are overwhelming. They expect us to do a lot of things we didn’t have the opportunity of experiencing. In my field as a programmer, I specialize in specific programming languages and didn’t have the ability to discover other languages as an asylum seeker.” Implementing key informants were unaware of educational institutions they could refer the refugees to in order to update their skills specifically for global labor markets.

29 For a more detailed analysis of the legal and policy frameworks for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, see: Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. “In My Own Hands”: A Medium-Term Approach towards Self-Reliance and Resilience of Syrian refugees and Host Communities in Jordan. January 2020. <https://www.dsp-syria.org/my-own-hands>; and Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. January 2020. “Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities.” <https://www.dsp-syria.org/addressing-protracted-displacement-lebanon>

30 World Refugee and Migration Council (2021). Moving beyond Humanitarian Assistance. <https://wrmcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Jordan-Syrian-Refugees-WRMC.pdf>

31 American University of Beirut (2020). Timeline of major policies influencing the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/infographics/2019-2020/20210208_Timeline_of_major_policies_influencing_the_livelihoods_of_Syrian_refugees_in_Lebanon_infog.pdf

This study also revealed that proof of work experience and degree certificates are the most challenging types of documentation to obtain during recruitment. In some recruitment processes, employers require applicants to provide proof of their previous work experience. This is usually requested in the form of an official letter from the employer and sometimes accompanied with former contracts or examples of pay stubs for verification purposes. It should be noted that while this type of documentation is also often required in general skilled visa programs, the existing refugee-specific labor mobility pathways outlined earlier in the paper to Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom do not require them.

Given the precarious work arrangements of many refugees in Jordan and Lebanon due to restrictive labor laws, many local employers are unwilling to provide documentation proving employment of a refugee as it may put the company at legal risk. As explained by a male refugee working as an environmental engineer in Jordan, "I also faced some challenges in proving my experience since I had an illegal job contract and the employer wasn't willing to give me proof of experience. I was able to get it in the end but not in all the experiences I had." For refugees who are required to show proof of employment while in Syria, many are unable to as the companies may no longer exist or their management teams have fled the country.

Refugees in both host countries similarly reported facing major challenges in proving past employment to prospective employers, as well as challenges in obtaining documentation for themselves and their families, and also faced particular challenges in obtaining documents from Syria.

Nearly half of respondents indicated that obtaining certificates of educational degrees was also a challenge. Many would need to request the certificates from their institutions in Syria, which could be problematic due to accessibility issues. In some cases, the institutions no longer existed.

Refugees who completed part or all of their degrees in their host countries but were unable to pay the costs had requests to their institutions for release of their transcripts and certificates refused until their payments were completed.

The study also revealed that cultural and religious standards specific to women from refugee communities sometimes block them from moving forward in certain recruitment opportunities. Intersectional barriers related to gender and culture were cited on multiple accounts in the research; of the surveyed sample, 17% identified as female; this is reflective of the number of female refugees registered in TBB's Talent Catalog, which is 16%. While qualified for job opportunities, some female refugee interviewees noted that they would not be willing to engage in recruitment opportunities at companies that would require them to work alone with men, citing religious reasons.

In one example, a female refugee marketing specialist almost refused an offer at a private company in the United Kingdom because she would need to make pitches to clients that are often only men. While the company guaranteed her accommodations to prevent these situations and meet her specific needs, this is not always the case.

Implementing key informants also highlighted a common occurrence among female refugees with backgrounds in healthcare who refuse to provide certain care for male patients. As one explained, "Nearly every time a refugee turns down a healthcare position - particularly in personal care support - it's a woman who is uncomfortable with aspects of the job that require her to clean and groom male patients. This is understandable given the culture refugee women are coming from but to international employers, this is a hard requirement."

Interviews also revealed hesitancy from some female refugees of moving forward with recruitment opportunities as single women. They preferred to opt out until they were married so that they could travel with someone.

An additional barrier intersecting between gender and culture is the care of elderly parents, which often is placed on refugee women, who usually assume the role of caretaker for both children and older parents. Several implementing key informants noted that on numerous occasions, significantly more refugee women, in comparison to men, have declined moving forward with job opportunities because they would be unable to travel without their elderly parents through current visa streams and are unwilling to leave them behind. 21% of survey participants reported that they have elderly relatives they are largely responsible for.

BARRIERS TO SKILLED VISA PROCESSING

Language barriers present a challenge for most Syrian refugees, as many do not meet the minimum language requirements for skilled visa pathways and often face challenges in getting registered for official examinations. According to an implementing key informant, at least 70% of refugees who are identified as having the appropriate skills for international job opportunities are excluded from advancing because they would not be able to meet the minimum English requirements for the visa. They explained, “it is very common that we come across a number of candidates who are perfect fits for positions and who we expect the employers will be keen to hire, but we cannot put them forward because we are certain they will not pass the language exam.” In-depth interviews from both host countries similarly experienced challenges improving English language and preparing for English language testing.

A minimum English language requirement is set for most refugee labor mobility programs in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, with the average requiring an IELTS General Exam score of 4.5 across all bands, or equivalent score through other accepted examinations. In order to register for these exams, refugees must provide valid passports that must be presented and verified on the day of the exam. While a key informant indicated that its organization is often able to work with test administrators to accept alternative or expired passports as a solution, this process is often time consuming and would likely not be possible for refugees to resolve independently without the presence of the third party to facilitate.

Limited access to financial services, such as banking and loan options, also pose challenges to covering visas’ high costs. Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon face limited financial inclusion in both countries. **Restrictions in the banking system and on cash have made any sort of payments related to visa applications very difficult.** Banking systems across both Jordan and Lebanon impose restrictions on refugee communities that are strongly felt during the visa application stage.³²

While the visas are most often sponsored by the employers, several associated steps to the application process have proven costly for refugees, including the issuance and translations of essential documents and registration for official examinations. In Jordan and Lebanon, most refugees are not permitted to open official bank accounts or receive personal loans of any sort. This has made transactions such as money transfers, wiring funds, and safely saving money a challenge for members of the refugee community. Although some concessions have been made in programs to reduce costs, this challenge has yet to be fully overcome.

The study also revealed that lack of legal status in the host country does not allow for safe mobility while meeting requirements for the visa application. Refugees pointed to local mobility challenges, particularly in Lebanon, while trying to complete tasks related to their visa processes including biometrics, medicals, and document collection due to their illegal residency statuses in the host countries. If caught, refugees could potentially be arrested, detained, or deported back to Syria. One in-depth interviewee stated that even while having residence in Lebanon, the employer did not believe the refugee actually had residency and so the refugee faced an additional burden in proving that he had legal residence. Restricted mobility due to nationality and refugee status were highlighted as challenges in both host countries during the in-depth interviews, as refugees from both host countries equally indicated feeling nervousness around mobility inside their country of asylum out of fear of facing any issues with government authorities, and will go out of their way to avoid passing through police checkpoints, if possible. Another refugee interviewed said that even while having the needed documents to gain legal status, those documents were not accepted due to him coming from Syria. In an effort to combat irregular entry, Lebanese authorities have implemented expedited administrative processes and excessive restrictive measures on Syrian refugees that have led to the deportation of several thousands from the country in recent years.³³

Labor mobility visas are also often too complicated for refugees to navigate without external assistance. Almost two-thirds of respondents in the study indicated that it would be difficult for them to complete a skilled visa process independently without the direct guidance of an implementing organization, INGO, or migration agent. This was particularly underscored by refugees with unique

32 UNHCR (2019). Refugee Access to Financial Services in Jordan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/refugee-access-financial-services-jordan-march-2019>

33 DSP and LCPS. 2020. Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities. <https://dsp-syria.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/DSP-LCPS%20report.pdf>

personal circumstances including child custody issues, ill or disabled family members, or severely vulnerable situations such as severe financial insecurity; complex cases like these require particular attention within the application, and external support. For example, one refugee from Jordan described, “I am divorced from my first wife and I care for our three children. This led to a delay in my file because of personal family problems but it was resolved. UNHCR helped in providing me with a paper advising that the children travel with me after they did an extensive study of my household and my treatment of my children.”

A key informant working for a third country embassy emphasized that while visa applications do require significant information from each applicant and can be challenging to navigate “whenever there are gaps due to a refugee’s particular situation, embassies can try to apply considerations when possible” and that, “refugees can always provide an explanation [in their application to the embassy].” During in-depth interviews, one refugee in Lebanon also noted fear that he would be forced to sign a contract he did not understand.

Long visa processing times can also adversely risk both the well-being of refugees and their job offers. Processing times for labor mobility visa applications have ranged from a few weeks to up to two years. Refugees interviewed for this study frequently highlighted experiencing adverse mental health impacts due to long processing times. One refugee in Lebanon explained, “My wife and I are living in fear that our file might get rejected. [We are facing] psychological anxiety. [The inability to migrate has made me feel] depressed and even contemplate suicide.”

Another candidate in Lebanon faced the compounded challenge of having his visa application delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic: “The main challenge was waiting for 2 years... We didn’t know what to do especially after Covid started spreading and most countries closed. The rejection would have been devastating. It would have impacted us psychologically a lot. It’s like telling the person that you don’t have any chance of surviving.”

In-depth interviews found that refugees in Lebanon and Jordan universally reported feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression about their living situation, often stemming from nervousness about instability in their lives, little to no access to opportunities as well as stress and depression around the fear that their visa application would be rejected.

The study revealed that visa processing delays are sometimes due to administrative errors from the third country. Key informants noted that embassy representatives sometimes confuse the concessions offered in the pilots while assessing visa applications and therefore apply requirements meant for traditional skilled migration streams or asylum cases, resulting in even longer processing times.

In one example, a refugee was asked to retrieve a document that was not required for the refugee-specific labor mobility pilot being applied to. The time and effort taken to attempt to acquire this document ended up delaying the candidate’s application by at least four months and the embassy was not responsive during this period despite attempted interventions by both the implementing organization and refugee’s legal representative. The refugee’s employer in the third country grew frustrated and considered withdrawing the job offer altogether.

BARRIERS TO EXIT AND DEPARTURE FROM JORDAN AND LEBANON

Refugees face multiple requirements and costs to be able to depart their host countries. Even after securing a skilled visa in-hand to a third country and legal travel documents for the primary applicant and their family members, the process of leaving a host country has its own set of challenges and is significantly more difficult in Lebanon.

Some of the biggest barriers with exit permits in Lebanon are the exorbitant fines that refugees residing without valid residency must pay, averaged at \$200 USD per illegal year, otherwise they may face severe complications at the airport including denial of departure or a permanent ban.³⁴ Of respondents who either have job offers or are former refugees who have relocated to third countries through a labor mobility program, over half indicated that they faced

34 This is the established rate prior to the currency crisis which continues to regularly fluctuate.

problems paying their exit fees.³⁵ This challenge was similarly cited by refugees in both host countries, based on findings from in-depth interviews.

Additionally, the procedure for paying exit fees can be unclear and unpredictable, making it difficult for refugees to navigate quickly. As explained by a 34-year-old female refugee in Lebanon, “[...]you don’t know what documents they will ask you for when you apply for an exit permit, and you won’t know until you apply.” Expensive exit permit processes in Lebanon contribute to many of the economic burdens that refugees face, which place pressure on themselves and their family members living in already-vulnerable situations.

It is worth noting that the exit permit process in Jordan requires several steps but is more predictable for Syrians and includes a minimal processing fee.

Refugees also face a series of other departure-related expenses, which place an additional economic strain during the departure process, and have limited financing options to cover them. In current implementation schemes, employers are asked to cover as many costs as possible, however, this is not always possible and refugees are sometimes required to pay for certain expenses.

“Sometimes not being to work will affect their opportunities to apply - also the inability to save money will affect their relocation cost payment - the employers pay for the first few months of accommodation, flights, and other big costs but if a refugee was looking for a job themselves and the employer didn’t want to pay then it becomes a major barrier,” explained a key informant.

Pre-departure expenses often include: flights, COVID-19 tests, transportation fees to the airport, and personal costs to prepare for travel. These are separate from the exit fees described previously. If the employer is unable or unwilling to cover pre-departure expenses, implementing key informants noted that they will try to identify alternative solutions to cover costs such as providing grants or loans through partners or cost-sharing arrangements between employers and refugees.



35 In most refugee labor migration processes implemented by TBB, employers are required to cover most migration costs for the refugee worker - including fees for the visa application and migration agent - but this often does not include pre-departure costs at the host country level. Instead, refugees either cover these costs independently or pay for them using a grant or loan facilitated by TBB and/or corresponding partners.

Spotlight: Miles4Migrants(M4M) is a US-based non-profit charity that uses donated frequent flyer miles to provide flights for refugees to relocate to third-countries. M4M is an official partner of Talent Beyond Boundaries and has flown dozens of TBB refugee candidates and their family members to Australia and Canada so far. International flights are often the most expensive element in the immigration process and are sometimes not covered by the employer. By incurring these costs, Miles4Migrants has removed the financial burden on the refugees themselves. Despite these benefits, the flights selected by the organization are often the cheapest options which usually include longer routes with multiple layovers and unlike flights booked via IOM, refugees and their family members are not escorted through airports by designated staff. That said, the impact of M4M's service is high and it continues to be a significant cost-saving solution.

Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon also face the challenge of paying off their debts prior to exiting their country of asylum. Many refugees have accumulated debt over the course of their displacement, in order to pay for medical expenses (mainly pharmaceutical drugs), rent, and groceries.³⁶

There are also a lack of financing options to cover the aforementioned departure expenses. While implementing key informants pointed to some private foundations and NGOs in third countries that assist in covering such expenses, they are limited and only do so on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, refugees must source the costs themselves which is often extremely difficult. According to the 2021 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), «Lebanon's compounded socio-economic crisis has pushed almost the entire Syrian refugee population into a situation of severe economic vulnerability.³⁷ Syrian refugees in Lebanon face worsening situations and greater insecurity due to the economic and health crises which continue to deteriorate. The situation in Jordan is also difficult, and has been compounded by the pandemic and pre-existing vulnerabilities. "In Jordan, since the pandemic first struck and the country and society locked down, poverty is estimated to have increased... by 18 percentage points among Syrian refugees... [and] many refugees were already living beneath the poverty line so there were fewer to be drawn under by the crisis."³⁸

The increased vulnerability and financial insecurity of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon make it difficult to impossible for refugees to finance the expenditures required in labor mobility programs without external financing options, which are currently limited.

Worsening economic situations in host countries have placed an even heavier financial strain on refugees, further hindering the ability of refugees to independently pursue solutions to their displacement. "Not having a bank account nor access to reliable income is incredibly all-consuming; there is no way someone can consider anything else when they are consumed with feeding their families and themselves," explained a key informant.

In Lebanon, a greater number of refugees interviewed experienced challenges accessing labor mobility stemming from financial difficulties. Most in-depth interview respondents in Lebanon do not have a bank account, and face difficulties paying costs associated with obtaining documentation and paying for exit permits and other exit procedures. However, refugees in Jordan and Lebanon equally reported struggling to afford general living expenses like food, shelter, education, and transportation.

Without access to many financing options, most refugees would not be able to independently afford the costs of accessing this solution, including the cost of exit expenses. 67% of respondents who traveled to third countries revealed they would not have been able to access another funding solution if the implementing organization had not connected them to funding support, and an additional 22% did not know if they would have been able to access alternative funding. A refugee in

36 DSP and LCPS (2020).

37 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) (2021). VASyR 2021: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/vasyr-2021-vulnerability-assessment-syrian-refugees-lebanon>

38 Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, World Bank Group and UNHCR (2020). Compounding Misfortunes. <https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/World-Bank-UNHCR-MENA-COVID-Compounding-Misfortunes-2-1.pdf>

Lebanon explained, “If we had to shoulder the costs ourselves, we would not have been able to do it - my employer and [the implementing organization] are covering just about everything.”

The second goal of the Global Compact for Refugees’ Three Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways emphasizes the need to expand access and availability of complementary pathways for refugees by developing financial mechanisms, such as funds or loans for refugees to facilitate access to complementary pathways.³⁹ Implementing key informants noted that they have addressed this barrier in different ways. In certain cases, the implementing organization covered some of the expenses itself or with partners, or approached zero to low-interest lending institutions in the third countries to provide any required funding directly to the refugees. In the latter case, the refugees were not required to pay back the loans until relocating to the third country and reaching economic security. If a visa were to be rejected or a job offer canceled, the implementing organization would pay back any debts on behalf of the refugee. It should be noted that in some cases, refugees have refused interest-bearing loan options due to religious reasons, and instead opted to apply for immigration loan programs in third countries, if available; for example some refugees relocating to Canada have applied for an Immigration Loans Program (ILP).⁴⁰

Spotlight: The Cameron Foundation, an Australian philanthropic organization, currently provides zero-interest loans directly to refugees with job offers globally through Talent Beyond Boundaries. These loans are disbursed at the pre-departure stage while the refugee is still in the host country and covers essential costs including document translation fees, language exams, medicals and biometrics, and internal travel expenses. The Foundation provides loans up to \$5,000 Australian dollars per refugee candidate plus his or her family members.

Recognizing the strong need to expand financial assistance to refugees accessing labor migration pathways, the Cameron Foundation recently established a subsidiary charity called the Pathway Club, which will act as a “pay it forward” fund among relocated refugees. Although it is not legally binding, the beneficiaries of Pathway grants are expected to become benefactors, donating the money back to the fund once they are acclimated in their third countries and can afford to do so. That money will then be reused in order to help other refugees relocating to third-countries via labor migration. The funding for the Pathway Club will be seeded by the Cameron Foundation and is expected to be refugee led. Pathway Club is intended to replace the need for the Cameron Foundation loans while scaling access.

Refugees cannot directly apply for funds; they must be referred by an organization engaged in labor mobility for refugees. The Pathway Club will use Wise for its banking, enabling processing in any currency. The organization aims to assist refugees relocating to any destination globally.

39 UNHCR (2019). The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. <https://www.unhcr.org/5d15db254.pdf>

40 Government of Canada Website. Immigration Loans Program (ILP). <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/service-delivery/immigration-loans-program.html>

CASE STUDY

The following case study outlines the experience and challenges of a female refugee (“Candidate”) from Lebanon who has accessed a labor mobility pathway service from a third-country.

Background: The Candidate has a higher education degree and managed to work informally in Lebanon. The Candidate heard about Talent Beyond Boundaries from social media. She created a profile in the Talent Catalog and was shortly thereafter contacted by TBB staff who informed her that an employer in a third country had expressed interest in her skills and qualifications and would like to meet her, but she could not proceed as she lacked the required English level to meet visa requirements. The candidate spent the subsequent six months learning English intensively using resources - including a study aid and access to online platforms provided by TBB - and was able to improve her English skills to meet the required level. She was soon interviewed by another employer and hired immediately.

Challenges & Solutions. The chart below outlines the primary challenges the candidate experienced while accessing a labor mobility pathway as well as mitigation efforts and solutions provided.

Key Challenges	Solutions/Mitigation
Lack of experience applying to international employment opportunities as well as awareness of available career guidance resources (for resume building and interview preparation). Stage: Recruitment (pre-interview)	TBB was able to guide her through all aspects of the recruitment process. They also created her CV and secured mock interviewers.
Inability to meet the minimum English language requirements both for the job opportunity as well as the visa pathway Stage: Recruitment (pre-interview) + Skilled Visa Processing (pre-visa application)	Intense IELTS preparation using resources provided by TBB.
Inability to register for an official English language proficiency exam in Lebanon due to an expired passport. Stage: Skilled Visa Processing (visa application preparation)	TBB engaged with test administrators at the British Council and the Candidate’s expired passport was deemed acceptable for verification purposes.
Difficulty understanding the requirements of the visa process. Stage: Skilled Visa Processing (visa application preparation)	TBB connected the candidate with a pro-bono migration agent in the third country and provided detailed information about the visa application process to clarify any confusion.
Challenges related to the candidate’s legal papers required in the visa application, including lack of valid passports, birth registration documentation for daughters, settlement papers, proof of employment, and proof of a bank account Stage: Skilled Visa Processing (visa application preparation and processing)	Explanations were provided to the third country government by the Candidate’s migration agent and concessions were granted.
Loss of savings to cover departure and exit permit costs due to the depreciation of the value of the Lebanese Pound. Stage: Host Country Exit and Departure Procedures (post-visa approval)	TBB facilitated a private donation to cover most of the candidate’s high exit fees and pre-departure costs. Miles4Migrants covered her and her family’s flight costs.” The employer provided a furnished house on arrival to mitigate the Candidate’s lack of savings for the first few months following relocation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The following recommendations to address barriers to labor mobility pathways experienced specifically at the host country level in Jordan and Lebanon are drawn from the insights of this research and are categorized as “operational” and “policy” for multiple actors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Third Countries

- **Expand existing pilots and develop additional programs** to increase labor mobility opportunities and commitments in third countries for refugees.
- **Commit to visa determinations within a six-month timeframe or less** in order to prevent loss of job opportunities due to employer needs and potential implications on refugees’ well-being.
- **Broaden dependent visa eligibility criteria to include elderly and/or disabled extended-family members** in order to create equity and expand labor mobility access to more refugees, particularly women, with potential cultural responsibilities.
- **Recognize unpaid and internship experience as well as experience obtained in home country** whenever proof of work experience is required for a visa pathway.

Governments of Jordan and Lebanon

- **Enable and promote temporary professional opportunities for refugees including remote employment** to provide refugees access to work experience that can overcome certain employer and visa eligibility requirements. Such programming will also bridge the experience gap particularly for recent graduates and build a professional portfolio as they attempt to enter the international labor market.
- **Remove exit fees for refugees migrating through labor mobility pathways** in order to ensure that their financial resources are allocated toward other aspects of departure and relocation.
- **Facilitate refugees’ access to labor markets**, through efforts to ensure refugees’ freedom of movement and by removing barriers to refugees’ access to work permits or employment. Such measures could ultimately benefit countries of first asylum by allowing for a better trained workforce.

UNHCR

- **Together with third country governments, lobby the governments of Jordan and Lebanon to recognize the positive aspects and mutual benefits presented by refugee labor mobility schemes** in order to promote collaboration and smoother operational processes, as well as to promote increased data sharing on refugee departures and destinations which will improve information gathering on the scale of access to labor mobility by refugees, and will also demonstrate responsibility and burden sharing with host countries.
- Coordinate with relevant stakeholders, including through UNHCR’s role as co-chair of the UNHCR-MENA Complementary Pathways Regional Contact Group as well as chair of the country-specific Durable Solutions Working Groups, to **advocate for complementary pathways related to: responsibility-sharing, protection safeguards, and bridging information gaps** on the context and specific situation of refugees.
- **Support the inclusion of labor mobility to third countries in national and regional-level strategic planning processes.** This includes the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)⁴¹, the Jordan Response Plan (JRP)⁴², and the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP)⁴³.

41 UNHCR & Government of Lebanon. February 2022. Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/90915>

42 UNHCR & Government of Jordan. (July 2020). Jordan Response Plan 2020-2022. <https://www.jrp.gov.jo/Files/JRP%202020-2022%20web.pdf>

43 The 3RP is headed by UNHCR & UNDP including the 5 regional countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq. 3RP website, accessed April 2022. <https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>

- **Sensitize the governments of Jordan and Lebanon on the need to provide clearer exit guidelines and ensure safe mobility where necessary for refugees traveling on complementary pathways** to prevent confusion by refugees as well as additional financial strains and departure delays.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

NGOs and INGOs in Jordan and Lebanon

- **In collaboration with UNHCR, raise awareness among refugee communities about existing labor mobility pathways, selection criteria, expectations, and navigation of the application process.** Utilize social media channels for widespread reach in each country.
- **Provide access to internet vouchers and loaned computers** where possible to meet recruitment requirements - including for interviews, skills testing, and presentations. This also helps lower the chances of technical problems and disruptions due to electricity cuts throughout the recruitment process.
- **Invest in capacity building programming for international recruitment, including the development of courses like business English, CV building while explaining refugee circumstances to employers, and interview preparation,** in order to increase international hiring rates. The implementation of such programs will help refugees overcome common recruitment errors, make their applications more attractive to employers, and prevent potential situational and/or cultural misunderstandings during interviews.
- **Work with educational institutions and vocational training programs to ensure that curriculum responds to up-to-date international labor market demands and is easily accessible.** Working with livelihood actors such as ILO and UNHCR who can support in providing adequate tracking of labor market needs, will contribute to essential designing of new programs, interventions, and policies. For example, curriculums should incorporate soft skills training, digital literacy, soft and technical interview preparation, English language conversation classes, and more rigorous English qualification exam preparation. Vocational programs should be designed based on internationally in-demand sectors such as: healthcare, skilled trades, information technology and software engineering, finance and accounting, accomodation and food industry, and manufacturing and production.
- **Promote increased access to in-person and remote internships** in order to amplify the professional experience of recent graduates to enhance their chances of international employability.
- **Create a refugee referral network among NGOs to support the identification of skilled refugees and more efficiently match refugees with employment opportunities as they present themselves.** This will prevent international opportunities from going unfilled and create a consistent chain of professional talent for employers to select from.



Third Countries

- **Ensure embassy staff are fully trained in processing procedures relating to refugee labor mobility visa applications** and assign a liaison to communicate regularly with representing migration agents to clarify issues, build awareness on the context and situation of refugees, and avoid unnecessary delays.
- **Provide clear visa processing time expectations to avoid frustration from both refugees and their employers.**
- **Work with UNHCR and INGOs to promote labor opportunities and link to new partners in the private sector along with language and education institutions.**
- **In collaboration with UNHCR, develop a strategy to protect and warn refugees against potential scamming schemes** related to labor mobility and migration.
- **Ensure eligibility criteria for existing labor mobility pathways are clearly defined and accessible.**

UNHCR

- **Support NGOs in Jordan and Lebanon to facilitate refugee job matching and fill knowledge and evidence gaps of refugee professional skills**, including their educational backgrounds, language proficiencies, and previous employment histories to inform strategic job-matching efforts and educational training programs.
- **Promote and redefine labor mobility processes and programming as providing solutions not only for the refugees that relocate**, but also enhancing equity and access within in-country programming to broader refugee communities using an AGDM focus, and by promoting labor mobility to industries and employers and expanding opportunities in third countries.
- **With support from NGOs in Jordan and Lebanon, advocate for language qualification testing providers to adopt flexible policies on identification documents for refugees and to reduce exam fees.**
- **In collaboration with NGOs and other INGOs, explore and provide a loan access solution**, particularly to cover all pre-departure related fees including translation, biometrics, medical, transportation, and any personal relocation costs.
- **Leverage and secure international funding towards labor mobility programs** to expand implementation across regional organizations as well as to create an evidence base by improving data on complementary pathways, to enable more holistic advocacy for funding and expanding opportunities.

International Donor Organizations:

- **Channel funding to cover pre-departure costs** for refugees including flights, transportation fees, health tests, and personal expenses.
- **Consider labor mobility as a recognized humanitarian intervention and durable solution pathway that is eligible under future funding guidelines** in order to enable scalable operational growth. The burdens that host countries bear in protecting refugees are alleviated when refugees reach durable solutions in third countries through labor mobility. Funding should be allocated to implementing NGOs to enable and expand labor mobility pathways.
- **Support implementing NGOs in Lebanon who are dealing with the implications of changing banking regulations amid regional economic instability.** Where possible, donors should be understanding of these challenges and be willing to identify adaptive measures.



CONCLUSION

This report intends to contribute to the understanding of intersectional systemic barriers experienced by refugees in the context of labor mobility and complementary pathways in Jordan and Lebanon, and highlights emerging themes and actionable recommendations to key stakeholders on how to tangibly overcome these barriers.

Because of the intersectional nature of the challenges at hand, developing solutions for refugees through complementary pathways and particularly through labor mobility requires taking a creative and holistic approach to deconstructing barriers embedded across protection environments in host countries. Ensuring sustainable pathways to skilled migration systems requires actors to address core structural issues in regulatory frameworks in host countries.

Legal residency, the right to work, accessible and quality protection services (especially in education), and access to vocational and livelihood options are all crucial to this outcome; as is ensuring gender barriers are addressed, and that refugees historically excluded from labor migration systems have equal opportunities. Creating more equitable opportunities for refugees, both for those currently eligible and those historically excluded from skilled migration pathways, requires fundamental shifts of rights frameworks in host and origin countries.

This begins with interrogating and exposing the structural barriers entrenched in legal, policy and social paradigms that prevent refugees from accessing the requirements for employment abroad. This process is equally about ensuring individuals have the organization to pursue the solutions that they wish; and can make free and informed decisions about their futures whether that involves return, integration, or onward travel via a complementary pathway. Ultimately, ensuring safer protection environments in countries of asylum promotes overall quality and access to a range of solutions – and places the individual at the heart of the decision-making process.

Labor mobility as a complementary pathway to resettlement has developed substantially in the past few years as evidenced by the growing number of refugees that have accessed this pathway. It is also proving to be a viable solution for potentially thousands of displaced persons globally given its transformative impact on the lives of refugees and their families, and its ability to address gaps in the global labor market, which will secure buy-in from the private sector and governments. As labor mobility pathways for refugees continue to develop and expand across the globe, the long-term challenge and role of refugee protection actors is to ensure that these pathways are made visible and accessible to refugees at the host country level.

