

A BRIDGE TO FIRMER GROUND:
**LEARNING FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES TO SUPPORT
PATHWAYS TO SOLUTIONS IN THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CONTEXT**



CHAPTER

4

LIVELIHOODS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring that refugees have access to livelihoods is a crucial stepping-stone to support their resilience and self-reliance. Yet many Syrian refugees – and host community members – in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) are engaged in informal work and have varying degrees of access to formal, sustainable, and decent jobs. Their first obstacle to employment is the legal frameworks in their host countries. In Jordan and Turkey,¹ policies have shifted over time to allow refugees to receive work permits, while in Lebanon, formal labor is limited to those refugees sponsored as part of the kafala system.² These policies often limit the sectors refugees are allowed to work in, which can lead to a mismatch between their skills and those needed in the sectors open to them. Further difficulties—including cumbersome procedures, lack of information, and fees—also hold back refugees from getting work permits or creating their own businesses.³

Box 1. About this Project

This chapter is part of a research project by the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), titled “A Bridge To Firmer Ground: Learning from International Experiences to Support Pathways to Solutions in the Syrian Refugee Context”. As the protracted Syrian refugee crisis continues and refugee communities, host governments, and international donors and implementers attempt to move toward durable solutions, this project analyzes projects, policies, and approaches from around the world and draws lessons learned for the Syrian context. This report provides recommendations for host-country policymakers, regional and international bodies, and nongovernmental actors.

The other chapters of this research report are available [here](#).

Refugees also face challenges due to restrictions on their mobility and other social and economic rights. As mentioned above, in Turkey, refugees’ work permits allow them to work only in the province where they are registered.⁴ In Jordan, refugees’ opportunities are constrained by practical obstacles to mobility associated with the risk of losing their humanitarian benefits, such as shelter, housing, and healthcare when they move out of the province where they are registered.⁵ Box 2 below provides a summary of these difficulties.



By: Sam Tarling

Box 2. Syrian Refugees' Access to Labor Markets in the Syria Region

Jordan

In 2016, the Jordan Compact committed to expanding Syrian refugees' access to the labor market by granting 200,000 work permits in specific sectors in tandem with concessional financing and beyond-aid commitments such as trade concessions that relaxed rules of origin for exports to Europe—all to drive inclusive growth for both Syrians and Jordanians. Since then, Jordan has made several adjustments to expand livelihood opportunities, including: expanding eligibility to work in certain subsectors, making some work permits in certain sectors seasonal or not linked to a single employer, and offering home-based business registration.⁶

By the end of January 2020, nearly 180,000 work permits had been issued to Syrians (including renewals).⁷ At the time of the writing, Syrians can work in five sectors with a work permit: construction, agriculture, manufacturing, food and beverage services, and retail and wholesale trade – for the latter three sectors, work permits are tied to an employer.⁸ For the agriculture and construction sectors, work permits are not tied to a specific employer, but can be used for the entire sector.⁹ Agricultural work permits are requested through agricultural cooperatives and Construction work permits are issued through the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions. Moreover, Syrian refugees are also allowed to open home-based businesses in specific sectors – food processing, handicraft and tailoring. In June 2020, the World Bank and the Government of Jordan's program to expand Syrians' access to the formal labor market received a two-year extension and additional financing of USD 100 million to support greater flexibility in work permits (only one-third of Syrians in the country are permit holders).¹⁰

Turkey

In 2014, Turkey enacted a Temporary Protection regime for Syrian refugees that allows them access to social services, including health and education, but does not permit full labor market access and freedom of movement.¹¹ The current work permit system was established in 2016, allowing employers to request permits on Syrian workers' behalf as long as they have been under Temporary Protection for six months and work in the province where they are registered.¹² Additional regulations include a work permit fee of USD 67 (as of July 2019), one-year validity, and a hiring cap for each employer (although it can be waived).¹³ At the end of 2018, the government reported that about 65,000 permits had been granted.¹⁴ Syrians in Turkey have been able to engage in entrepreneurship, since companies founded by foreigners are granted the same rights as those started by Turkish citizens.¹⁵ Between the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and July 2020, Syrians had registered over 9,000 companies in the country.¹⁶

Lebanon

While Lebanon made policy commitments to improve Syrians' access to the labor market as part of the 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact, in practice the widespread lack of legal residency permits poses immense barriers to accessing livelihood opportunities—including work permits and business registration.¹⁷ The minority of Syrians who do have legal status can only access formal work with a permit (based on a June 2019 plan) in construction, agriculture, and the environment if they obtain a Lebanese sponsor, an arrangement with conditions such as ratio caps among nationals and foreign workers.¹⁸

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), both refugees and asylum seekers without a visa are allowed to work formally in the region if they obtain a KRI residency permit and are age 15 or older.¹⁹ Those who entered with a visa must have their employer acquire a work permit after they gain a residency permit. In August 2020, the ILO and KRI's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs signed an agreement to increase the number of formal jobs available to refugees, internally displaced persons, and host community members by building the capacity of employment service offices to create more decent jobs through integrated services, such as job and skills matching, career guidance and counselling, as well as on-the-job training.²⁰

In Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and KRI, Syrian refugees seeking livelihood opportunities do so in economies and labor markets that lack sufficient absorption capacity. For example, Lebanon faces a political and economic crisis that, coupled with the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to heightened economic vulnerability among Lebanese.²¹ In this and similar contexts, allowing Syrians access to national labor markets can risk feeding resentment among host communities.

All these difficulties in obtaining formal labor opportunities have led a large portion of refugees to work in informal jobs, where they are subject to significantly lower pay and vulnerable to exploitation.²² Informal employment can leave refugees unprotected by labor laws such as recourse against abusive employers, minimum wage guarantees, and access to social security. Sponsorship arrangements grant employers significant leverage over their employees, meaning that refugees have fewer means of leaving abusive work environments while maintaining legal status.²³ Syrian women and children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, wage disparities, and hazardous working conditions.²⁴

Finally, Syrian refugees are likely to face additional obstacles to accessing the labor market, such as language barriers and lack of resources and support networks.²⁵ They might encounter difficulties navigating unfamiliar regulatory frameworks to start their own business or getting their skills or previous certifications recognized. For entrepreneurs, a lack of networks and connections may make it difficult to develop a client base.

Globally, policies and interventions meant to support refugees' livelihoods are increasingly shaped by the development-oriented approaches of the Global Compact for Refugees and the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2014–18 Global Strategy for Livelihoods put forward by UNHCR also helped shift toward market-oriented approaches linking development and private sector actors.²⁶ Under this strategy, UNHCR and ILO developed an approach to integrated market solutions to improve the livelihoods of both refugees and host communities, under which they have conducted assessments and developed interventions.²⁷ UNHCR's 2019–23 strategy builds on this, emphasizing refugees' economic inclusion and holistic approaches to supporting affected communities.²⁸

As the approach to refugees' livelihoods has come to focus more on development, so too have practices, programs, and approaches from around the globe. The following four case studies present lessons learned across four areas: expanding access to the right to work (2), ensuring decent work opportunities for refugees (3), improving the economic resilience of host countries (4), and providing targeted support activities to refugees (5).

2. ACCESS TO THE RIGHT TO WORK

Although Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and KRI have policies and procedures in place to grant Syrian refugees the right to work, at least in some sectors and under some conditions, Syrians still face many challenges to accessing formal employment.²⁹ Since 2019, Ethiopia has also opened its labor market to refugees and its experience provides some lessons learned on how to roll out these policies.

ETHIOPIA'S REVISED PROCLAMATION ON REFUGEES

Country	Ethiopia
Years active	Since 2019
Key objectives	The section on work and livelihoods of the 2019 Refugee Proclamation in Ethiopia seeks to promote refugees' self-reliance by allowing their access to the formal labor market. It grants refugees and asylum seekers access to residence and work permits and supports the creation of livelihood opportunities for these populations. The proclamation also lays out an additional range of rights for refugees, from freedom of mobility to access to documentation and education.
Target population	More than 700,000 refugees and asylum seekers living in Ethiopia ³⁰
Budget	The Government of Ethiopia received funding from UNHCR and international partners (mainly the European Union, the World Bank, the Department for International Development, and the European Investment Bank) to support the implementation of the proclamation with capacity building and livelihood projects. ³¹

CONTEXT AND DESIGN OF THE POLICY

In September 2016, at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees and Migrants in New York, Ethiopia made nine pledges to promote the economic and social inclusion of its refugee population.³² These pledges were then incorporated in the country's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) roadmap in November 2017. The pledges covered six thematic areas: education, social and basic services, out-of-camp policy, documentation, work and livelihoods, and local integration.³³ Specifically, the Ethiopian government committed to provide work permits for refugees in sectors open to foreign workers, and to create more job opportunities open to them.³⁴ In January 2019, Ethiopia issued a new Refugee Proclamation, which replaced the 2004 version and outlined additional rights for refugees (Box 3). This new version has been essential to the rolling out of the CRRF and the launch of the Ethiopian Jobs Compact,³⁵ a project supported by international donors and multilateral development banks to advance national industrialization efforts and support the creation of 100,000 jobs, up to 30 percent of which could be allocated to refugees.³⁶

Box 3. What Does Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation Say about Work and Livelihoods?



Source: Created by the Migration Policy Institute

Ethiopia's revised Refugees Proclamation grants refugees the "most favorable treatment accorded to foreign nationals" to engage in wage-earning employment and self-employment. As such, recognized refugees and asylum seekers should be subject to the same labor and investment laws that govern foreign nationals in Ethiopia.³⁷

The proclamation also grants refugees equal treatment with Ethiopian nationals in a few cases, including in access to job opportunities created as a result of certain development projects designed with the support of the international community and the agreement of the Ethiopian government to benefit Ethiopian nationals and recognized refugees (for instance, the Jobs Compact).³⁸

Nearly one year after the release of the proclamation, the government moved forward with a series of regulations to actually implement the policy.³⁹ For instance, the Directive to Determine the Procedure for Refugees Right to Work, issued by the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) following the proclamation, established that refugees and asylum seekers should not pay any fee to obtain a residence or a work permit.⁴⁰ At the time of the writing, ARRA was also in the process of concluding memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs⁴¹ and the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency to roll out and coordinate the adequate administrative procedures.⁴²

While it is too early to assess the full impact of the proclamation on refugees in Ethiopia, it appears that its effects might be more modest than originally envisioned. So far, the proclamation and its accompanying directive on refugees' right to work have narrowed down the interpretation of the pledges regarding the conditions under which refugees can enjoy the right to work.⁴³ Only a few residence permits have been issued since 2019, mainly to refugees that are targeted under joint livelihoods and economic inclusion projects.⁴⁴ Similarly, a few work permits have been issued, and mainly to refugees who have completed technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and gained employment through an international project.⁴⁵

LESSONS LEARNED AND APPLICABILITY FOR THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CONTEXT

1



TO BE SUCCESSFUL, POLICIES THAT SEEK TO PROMOTE REFUGEES' INCLUSION IN LABOR MARKETS REQUIRE COMMITMENT AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.

- It is important to secure political will at the country level, building on drivers specific to the national context.
- It is also important to secure the commitment of international donors and implementing partners to fund capacity building activities and livelihood projects in the long term.
- A mechanism to monitor and secure collaboration between government and international actors and keeping their interest could accompany these efforts.

The Ethiopian experience highlights how the political commitment of host governments to grant refugees the right to work is intrinsically connected to donors' engagement in supporting local economic development. In Ethiopia, the pledges made by the government in 2016 and donors' initial interest in supporting them set the groundwork for a change in legislation. Yet the decisive spark came from the World Bank and the idea of launching a Jobs Compact in Ethiopia.⁴⁶ This helped secure the commitment of the Ethiopian authorities—even after major political changes in 2018 and internal restructuring within ARRA.⁴⁷ It also contributed to the mobilization of other humanitarian and development actors to fund more projects to support the implementation of Ethiopia's compact and livelihood pledges.⁴⁸

This strategy to expand international aid in the country was very welcome, though it came with some setbacks and challenges in keeping the interests of international actors and national and regional government.⁴⁹ For instance, in the beginning, most development actors concentrated efforts to advance the CRRF in those few regions where strong commitment existed, in order to maximize impact and provide a proof of concept that could be learned from and adapted to other refugee-

hosting contexts within the country.⁵⁰ But other regions might have felt neglected as a result and, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, donors and development actors have had to shift some of their priorities, ultimately slowing the implementation of the CRRF.⁵¹ As a result, at this point, there is concern that the regional and central government might lose interest in implementing the policy and reduce their commitment.

The four main countries hosting Syrian refugees have made strides toward opening their labor markets to refugees, often as part of efforts to attract development funding. This is especially so since the adoption of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (“3RP”) in 2014, which aims to encourage donors to increase their support to advance national response plans and provide multi-year funding.⁵² But as in Ethiopia, sustaining the political commitment of host governments as well as donors’ interest in the long term is challenging but goes hand in hand. This can entail developing a mechanism that monitors progress and new initiatives and helps secure the commitment of all parties.

2



PROMOTE AN OVERALL ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR REFUGEES TO FOSTER THEIR ACCESS TO LABOR MARKETS

- Ensure refugees’ freedom of movement is a prerequisite for their access to formal employment. This should be supported by other inclusive policies in the fields of education, social protection, and health, which are critical for refugees to fully enjoy their right to work.
- Supporting refugees’ training and vocational skills can expand their opportunities and facilitate their integration into the labor market.

Granting refugees the right to work is rarely sufficient for them to actually gain access to the formal labor market. While the Ethiopian framework is permissive, in practice refugees’ options are still broadly limited to job opportunities offered under donor-funded projects.⁵³ However, Ethiopia’s 2019 Refugee Proclamation includes a set of additional provisions accompanying the right to work, including access to financial services, education, the possibility to register life events, and an expanded out-of-camp policy aiming to secure freedom of mobility for up to 10 percent of refugees. These could positively impact on opportunities for refugees in the longer term. Besides these, job opportunities supported through vocational training are becoming increasingly available and facilitating refugees’ access to and integration in the job market.⁵⁴

Similar to the Ethiopian context, Syrian refugees face additional barriers to livelihood opportunities due to other restrictions on their rights. For example, refugees in Turkey still face many barriers to effectively accessing work permits,⁵⁵ ranging from documentation requirements to application costs and restrictions on their freedom of movement. This last dimension—freedom of movement—is particularly important, especially where refugees enjoy narrow economic opportunities.

3



SIMPLIFY ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND SUPPORT THE CREATION OF LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE REFUGEES’ ACCESS THE LABOR MARKET

- Ease or remove restrictions to refugees’ access to the labor market, such as fees for applying for work permits and documentation requirements.
- Clarify the procedures accompanying related legislation.
- Strengthen the capacity of national and subnational authorities to scale refugees’ access to work, as well as coordination between stakeholders.
- Engage the private sector in supporting opportunities for refugees.

In addition to a permissive policy, refugees' access to the labor market also hinges on the processes by which they get work permits and gain formal employment.⁵⁶ The relevant institutions need to be informed and trained in new procedures applicable to refugees.⁵⁷ Once Ethiopia's new Refugee Proclamation was issued in January 2019, it took nearly 12 months for the government to develop clear implementation guidelines, and the procedure for delivering work permits is yet to be outlined.⁵⁸ As the new proclamation cascades responsibilities down to regional governments, their limited capacity to handle refugee issues has raised additional challenges.⁵⁹ The federal government has sought to address these difficulties through increased cooperation with UNHCR and regional entities, in order to raise awareness, coordinate, create ownership, and build capacity.⁶⁰

This coordinated approach, as well as technical assistance efforts, is also relevant in the Syrian context, where similar challenges have been documented.⁶¹ For example, even though, in 2019, the Government of Jordan streamlined the process for Syrian refugees to access work permits this did not translate into a significant increase in their formal employment.⁶² Efforts to coordinate with employers and raise their awareness of how to respect and improve the conditions for decent work for refugees are also crucial to ensure refugees' rights are respected. The private sector has an important role to play in supporting opportunities for refugees, such as by facilitating vocational training and creating on-the-job training opportunities. Together, these efforts could help overcome refugees' difficulties related to language, navigating unfamiliar procedures, and interfacing with employers.

Recommendations

National governments:

- Promote a comprehensive policy framework, encompassing freedom of movement for refugees across sectors, while lowering barriers to accessing work permits and being hired.
- Clarify the procedures refugees need to follow and train the relevant national and regional authorities accordingly.
- Produce and disseminate guidelines for the private sector on how to secure the conditions for refugees' and vulnerable host community members' access to decent work.
- Set up an information-sharing platform with a monitoring system for donors, development actors, and the relevant authorities to prevent delays in implementation and avoid unmet expectations at the risk of loss of interest among the parties involved.

Implementing partners and civil society actors:

- Develop opportunities for vocational training (and language courses) for refugees and host communities.
- Support development projects in sectors relevant to the local economy, to create more jobs for refugees and host communities.
- Support monitoring and evaluation efforts to facilitate coordination among all relevant parties.
- In partnership with national and local authorities, educate refugees, employers, and host communities in new legislation and procedures and best practices.

International donors:

- Secure political will at the national and local levels.
- Work with international partners and national authorities to mobilize funding for livelihood projects and vocational training.

3. DECENT WORK CONDITIONS FOR REFUGEES

As donors and development actors increasingly engage in promoting refugees' self-reliance, programming and literature have focused primarily on the regularization of refugee labor and refugees' access to job markets, often without addressing the conditions of that work.⁶³ In the meantime, the issue of decent work—characterized by fair hours, income, workplace security, and freedom of organization⁶⁴—has come to the foreground of international policy more generally.⁶⁵ Initiatives like Better Work (including in Jordan) have sought to improve working conditions for all workers, including refugees, in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic services.⁶⁶ And while there are differences in how different industries are managed and regulated in each country hosting Syrian refugees, there are several aspects of the Better Work approach that could be applied regionally.

BETTER WORK INITIATIVE IN JORDAN

Country	Jordan, but the program also targets eight other countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Nicaragua, and Vietnam.
Years active	Since 2008
Key objectives	Improve working conditions, raise awareness of labor rights, and boost the competitiveness of the garment industry and other targeted sectors ⁶⁷
Target population	Factories in the garment industry (and additional sectors), workers in these sectors (particularly migrants and refugees), and the Jordanian government
Budget	In 2020, roughly USD 3 million from the United States, European Union, and Canada ⁶⁸

CONTEXT AND DESIGN OF THE BETTER WORK INITIATIVE

Since 1999, ILO has led efforts to promote decent work globally and in 2001, and launched Better Factory Cambodia, a project aimed at improving labor conditions in the garment industry.⁶⁹ Partnering with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), ILO expanded this to become the Better Work program, now involving 1,700 factories employing 2.4 million workers across nine countries.⁷⁰ The initiative does not specifically target refugees, but it has sought to increase protection for migrant and refugee workers more broadly. Around the world, refugees, due to their often-informal labor status, are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory and exploitative labor practices and work conditions, including denial of fundamental labor rights, low and noncompetitive wages, and forced labor.⁷¹ And while refugees' labor rights are protected under international law, including the right to join trade unions, in practice these protections have not been widely implemented and examples of good practice are limited.⁷²

In Jordan, a Better Work intervention was initiated in 2008 and at first focused exclusively on the garment industry, where the majority of workers are migrants. Following the 2016 Jordan Compact,⁷³ and with the support of the European Union,⁷⁴ Better Work Jordan (BWJ) expanded to the plastics, chemicals, and engineering sectors, and incorporated Syrian refugees more directly into its programming—although it does not work with sectors where the shares of refugee workers are largest, such as agriculture and construction.⁷⁵ In its efforts toward equal treatment for all workers (see Box 4 and below), BWJ has taken into account some of the specific challenges Syrian refugees face in factories, such as lack of understanding of laws and regulations.⁷⁶ While evidence of Syrians' working conditions in Jordan has been difficult to obtain, especially in the agricultural sector, studies have pointed to short contracts, low wages, lack of social security, and the presence of child labor.⁷⁷ Workers with permits are more likely to face better working conditions than those without permits.⁷⁸

Box 4. Better Work Jordan

The Better Work approach relies on two main pillars: encouraging factories to improve working conditions and helping national stakeholders play stronger roles in governing the labor market.⁷⁹ Activities include providing practical assistance to facilitate employer-employee cooperation, conducting compliance assessment reports, and strengthening regulatory frameworks and national labor inspectorates.⁸⁰

Aligning with Better Work's overall approach, BWJ has two primary activities: (i) building local stakeholder capacity to conduct assessments and audits, communicate with workers (including migrants and refugees), and better understand international labor standards; and (ii) working with trade unions and work representatives to improve engagement with members, address grievances, and enhance unions' inclusivity.⁸¹ BWJ closely collaborates with the Ministry of Labor, the Social Security Corporation, the Garment Trade Union, and the Jordan Chamber of Industry.⁸² Additionally, BWJ engages with factories, providing training and industry seminars and conducting assessments.⁸³

Based on independent research conducted at Tufts University, ILO and IFC report that, globally, Better Work has helped improve working conditions, increase pay, and create positive knock-on effects for workers outside factories.⁸⁴ And the program has reported improving working conditions in Jordanian factories in several ways. Specifically, it has helped Syrian refugees obtain a modified unified contract, better understand labor laws, gain representation in worker-management committees, and engage trade union leadership. Yet there are still improvements to be made, and continued success depends on the regular monitoring of compliance with regulations, ongoing and inclusive dialogue between workers and employers, the sustained engagement of stakeholders,⁸⁵ and addressing pressures coming from the global supply chain.⁸⁶ As of the end of 2019, BWJ worked with 94 garment factories and was beginning its expansion to additional sectors.⁸⁷ In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased disputes between workers and management, highlighting the need for stronger grievance mechanisms.⁸⁸

LESSONS LEARNED AND APPLICABILITY FOR THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CONTEXT

1



PROMOTE REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR ENFORCEMENT TO HELP GUARANTEE DECENT WORK CONDITIONS, INCLUDING FOR REFUGEE WORKERS.

- Laws and regulations should clearly guarantee decent workplace conditions, worker rights, and employer responsibilities, including for refugee workers.
- Government enforcement agencies, such as labor inspectorates, need to have the capacity to assess and enforce compliance with the regulatory framework, including for refugee workers.

The basis of a successful approach to promoting decent work for refugees and host communities is an appropriate legal and regulatory framework. Laws and regulations—including sector-specific work standards—ensure that employers can be held accountable and that employees are able to redress their grievances. These frameworks may differentiate between the rights afforded to nationals and those afforded to refugees,⁸⁹ and in the main countries hosting Syrian refugees do not apply evenly across sectors with large shares of refugee workers. For example, Jordan's existing regulatory framework for the garment industry, which underpins BWJ's ability to work effectively with factories, is fairly comprehensive and guarantees similar provisions for refugees and migrants with work permits as for nationals.⁹⁰ In other sectors such as agriculture, however, Jordan lacks sufficient regulations,

inhibiting the implementation of a BWJ-style program.⁹¹ Similar issues arise in Lebanon, where progress has been made toward reforming the sponsorship (kafala) system generally, but refugees are still vulnerable to exploitation because their ability to obtain legal status often depends upon their employer's sponsorship.⁹² Lebanon's agriculture sector, where many refugees find informal work, is largely excluded from labor regulations.⁹³

Beyond the development of a regulatory framework, the government's willingness and ability to monitor and enforce it are critical. In Jordan, the BWJ program builds the capacity of government inspectors through training and secondment programs, which cover issues facing vulnerable groups, as well as joint assessments.⁹⁴ BWJ also conducts independent assessments, including in factories where refugees work, providing an external backstop to reinforce the government's inspections.⁹⁵ In Lebanon, ILO engages in this line of programming, offering capacity building support to the government's labor inspection institutions at the policy and operational level.⁹⁶ These activities could be accompanied by independent or joint compliance assessments to evaluate their effectiveness. But training and building the capacity to conduct investigations are only a start. Investigations need to be followed with enforcement actions if violations are found. As such, governments must have the capacity and the will to act if necessary.

2



INCENTIVIZE EMPLOYERS TO IMPLEMENT DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS

- Sectors linked to global supply chains and markets increasingly face pressure to provide decent working conditions and abide by fair labor standards.
- Favorable trade conditions and targeted investments can incentivize efforts to improve working conditions in sectors with large shares of refugee labor participation.

Securing decent working conditions and practices for refugees requires the willingness of employers to implement these conditions and cooperate with national labor authorities to enforce regulations. Better Work has succeeded in gaining factories' participation in part because of their connections to the global supply chain. As global brands have increasingly faced pressure to improve working conditions in their supply chains, they have asked their factories—both wholly owned and subcontracted—to engage in programs such as Better Work.⁹⁷ Trade agreements linking favorable export conditions with decent work—such as the EU's relaxation of the Rules of Origin requirements as part of the Jordan Compact—also provide additional incentive, although evidence from Jordan shows the limitations of this approach.⁹⁸

The agriculture and construction sectors, where refugees are most likely to work, are less connected with global supply chains and markets and, as such, face less pressure from foreign investors, consumers, and governments to take the costly⁹⁹ steps necessary to regularize work and improve conditions. Economic incentives could be successful, as major economic powers such as the European Union have vested economic and human rights interests in the main countries hosting Syrian refugees. International funding to subsidize some of the costs of formalizing work and improving labor conditions could help ease employers into this model.¹⁰⁰ For example, the European Union could use trade incentives to promote formalized hiring of and provision of decent working conditions for Syrian refugees in industrial and agricultural sectors, for instance, in southern Turkey.¹⁰¹

3



RAISE WORKFORCES' AWARENESS AND ORGANIZATION, INCLUDING AMONG REFUGEES

- Refugees need to be aware of their rights and options for redress when those rights are violated.
- Refugee workers should have the ability to effectively use these options, including through the same channels available to nationals.

Refugee workers, particularly those in informal sectors, are often unaware of their rights and the complaint mechanisms available to them, or are unwilling to utilize them, for fear of losing assistance benefits or risking forced return.¹⁰² In Jordan, for example, Syrians' awareness of their labor rights is limited, especially about working outside the agricultural and construction sectors.¹⁰³ Addressing this requires raising awareness among refugees about rights and opportunities, something that can be facilitated, as BWJ has done, through greater refugee participation and organization in the workplace. This can, in turn, be fostered through the creation of workplace committees and refugees' inclusion in national unions and cooperatives, which are active in Lebanon and Turkey.¹⁰⁴ These steps, which could be difficult to undertake given the sensitivities surrounding union membership,¹⁰⁵ would also allow refugee workers the ability to advocate for themselves and for better working conditions. Achieving these organizational and awareness raising goals would require sustained engagement from key stakeholders, including trade unions and international organizations such as ILO.

Recommendations

National governments:

- Expand labor protections for Syrian refugees in all sectors where they work, including by strengthening the capacities of monitoring and enforcement bodies.
- Ensure that regulatory frameworks guarantee and support decent working conditions for all.
- Work with employers to enforce labor standards and remedy violations.

Implementing partners (including civil society actors):

- Identify specific challenges facing Syrian refugees in accessing decent work, including documentation of working conditions.
- Provide specific programming to address challenges unique to Syrian refugees in addition to mainstreaming them into efforts toward securing decent working conditions for all workers.
- Link decent work opportunities to existing job training and include the topic in awareness-raising programs to ensure Syrian refugees understand the grievance mechanisms available to them.
- Work with trade unions and workplace committees to include and advocate for the rights of Syrian refugee workers.

Donors:

- Advocate for regulatory frameworks that allow for and incentivize the formalization of refugees' labor.
- In conjunction with national authorities, continue to build the capacity of labor inspectorates to assess and enforce compliance with decent work provisions and support enforcement capacities for occupational health and safety standards.
- Incentivize employers' compliance with decent work provisions through economic and trade leverage.
- In conjunction with national authorities, raise awareness among refugees about their rights in the workplace and available grievance mechanisms.



By Mais Salman/DRC

4. INVESTING IN THE ECONOMIC RESILIENCE OF HOST SOCIETIES

Countries hosting large numbers of refugees may face additional pressure on public service delivery and in labor markets (at least where there is a margin for job competition in the informal sector to increase¹⁰⁶) and economic infrastructure. In the aftermath of the Venezuelan crisis, for instance, Colombia reported higher spending on education, health, housing support, and other basic services. Yet previous analysis has also shown that, if well managed, refugees' presence could result in economic growth in the medium and long term.¹⁰⁷ Programs like the one implemented by the Migration Unit of the Social Sector of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) precisely seek to help address the challenges resulting from large refugee flows and to turn refugees' presence into an opportunity for local development.

IDB MIGRATION UNIT – SOCIAL SECTOR

Countries	Latin America and the Caribbean
Years active	Since 2019
Key objectives	Help build the resilience of origin, destination, and transit countries involved in migration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Specifically, the economic opportunities projects have sought to facilitate the inclusion of migrants and refugees, as well as host communities, in labor markets and support sustainable growth
Target population	Migrants, refugees, and host communities in Latin America and the Caribbean
Budget	As of September 2020, over USD 100 million approved in grants (from the IDB Grant Facility) for the overall initiative, to leverage additional investment loans. ¹⁰⁸

CONTEXT AND DESIGN OF THE IDB MIGRATION UNIT

Since 2015, the deteriorating conditions in Venezuela have led over 5 million refugees and migrants to leave the country.¹⁰⁹ Many of them moved to neighboring countries—Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile—where some got asylum status, while others came under legal statuses created specifically to manage the crisis (see case study of Peru in Chapter 1 on Protection).¹¹⁰ Latin American countries initially welcomed these populations and, in most places, granted them formal access to the labor market. But the pressure on social and economic infrastructure rapidly increased, especially in regions where health, education, and broader economic systems were already strained. Access to sustainable and decent livelihoods opportunities has proved particularly challenging, and as many as 66 percent of Venezuelan refugees and migrants were unemployed or working informally prior to the COVID-19 crisis.¹¹¹ Many of their difficulties stemmed from a lack of access to information on the labor market, skills certification, and adequate job matching, as well as financial services for Venezuelans interested in starting their own business. The COVID-19 pandemic further deteriorated the access of Venezuelans to livelihoods, especially due to the temporary closure of the informal sector.¹¹²

All these challenges led IDB to launch the Migration Unit (former Initiative) in 2019. IDB had previously been involved in the migration field, the Plan for the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle introduced in 2014. At the time, however, the objective was primarily to address social and economic issues in Central America to curb irregular migration toward the United States.¹¹³ In contrast, the Migration Unit seeks to help countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to better manage migration flows and enhance the inclusion of refugees and migrants into host communities (Box 5).¹¹⁴ IDB's narrative supports turning these flows into a development opportunity for the region, while acknowledging their potential negative impacts on some segments of the economy or host communities in the short term.¹¹⁵

Box 5. IDB's Migration Unit

The Migration Unit covers a variety of sectors and is organized around four types of activities:¹¹⁶

1. Projects in four main thematic areas: identification services, basic services, social services, and economic opportunities. These projects are financed through IDB's financial (mainly concessional loans and grants) and non-financial instruments (technical cooperation and regional public goods). Most focus specifically on livelihoods and access to economic opportunities. In sum, IDB is financing and non-financing projects to strengthen labor market systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. This has included, for instance, projects to "strengthen employment policies in Colombia," or to "protect the jobs and income of vulnerable populations in Costa Rica."¹¹⁷ In Ecuador, Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Panama, IDB launched a technical cooperation initiative to encourage the use of new technologies, to promote the economic inclusion of refugees and migrants.
2. Policy dialogues on migration and forced displacement with national and subnational authorities in the region.
3. Data collection/generation and research on migration and forced displacement flows, migrants' socioeconomic integration and attitudes toward migrants. Dissemination of research findings.
4. Capacity building of the governments involved in managing migration and refugee flows.

As projects under the Migration Unit started relatively recently, it is too early to evaluate their full outcomes. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several interventions had to be put on hold or adapted to the new context and the looming economic recession. Nonetheless, the methodology adopted by the Migration Unit—its comprehensive approach to operations and knowledge generation, its investment in solid needs assessments, and its close coordination with recipient governments—can inform future programs to build the economic resilience of Syrian refugee host countries.

LESSONS LEARNED AND APPLICABILITY FOR THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CONTEXT

1


CONNECT ECONOMIC RESILIENCE PROJECTS TO POLICY DIALOGUES AND REFORMS CAN HELP MAXIMIZE THEIR IMPACT.

- Promote arenas for policy dialogue at the local, national, and regional levels.
- Leverage the financing of projects to negotiate progress on inclusive policy frameworks.

The Migration Unit finances various initiatives but also policy dialogues with governments in the region, as part of an effort to promote inclusive policy frameworks for refugees and migrants.¹¹⁸ As the Venezuelan crisis enters its sixth year, these initiatives are particularly needed to help overcome the barriers to the economic inclusion of Venezuelans and facilitate coordination among host countries. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, these regional dialogues have turned into a useful platform for stakeholders to share their concerns and good practices, from digitalization to accelerating the accreditation of foreign health professionals.¹¹⁹ At the same time, gaps remain in the legislation and its implementation while discussions on project financing could seek to better link an increase in financing with policy reforms favorable to the social and economic inclusion of refugees. Similar trends can be observed in the Syrian context, and elsewhere, where multilateral development banks have been more active in helping host governments cope with refugee presence—yet without always securing policy reform for refugees.¹²⁰

2


PROMOTE A REGIONAL APPROACH WHEN ADDRESSING COMMON ECONOMIC RESILIENCE CHALLENGES

- Promote a regional approach to a protracted refugee crisis, instead of financing interventions strictly at the national level.
- Enhance international cooperation and cross-learning and avoid competition that could be detrimental to local economies and refugee populations.

From the beginning, the Venezuelan crisis had a regional dimension, with an obvious need to coordinate the status and benefits granted to Venezuelan refugees and migrants across the region. Already in 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, and other partners established the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform to synchronize their interventions. The Migration Unit follows a similar approach with its ambition to develop common responses to the challenges experienced by countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region. This regional approach should help prevent a race to the bottom and competition among states to attract development funding. Similarly, a regional answer is needed to respond to the Syrian crisis, with aid and development actors seeking to coordinate within the Syria Regional Refugee Response.¹²¹ Learning from IDB and its partners regarding how to enhance coordination and cross-learning, and defuse tensions when managing refugee issues, should therefore be relevant.

3



BUILD AUTHORITIES' CAPACITY TO PROMOTE A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO CRISIS SITUATIONS.

- Ensure that authorities are well prepared to manage the challenges associated with refugee and migration issues. This requires conducting training with local authorities, and entities that have never worked on migration issues, possibly through remote learning methods.

As a development program, the Migration Unit integrated the need to work closely with local and national authorities early on in the process. To do so, IDB funded the development of online training modules for civil servants who had no prior experience in this field and for actors who needed to develop more targeted expertise on migration and forced displacement. As of 2020, 482 public officials from across the entire region had applied to join the course.¹²² The online nature of the training allows it to reach a broad audience at low cost, and it is now proving particularly appropriate in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Syrian refugee context, authorities have had to manage the effects of the Syrian crisis for nearly 10 years (and to refugee crises even longer, given previous forced displacement crises in the region), but gaps remain in knowledge of the rights refugees have access to. This is especially the case as the legislation in some countries has changed over time and there have been more efforts to promote a whole-of-government approach to some topics that were only managed by ministries of interior previously.

Recommendations

National governments:

- Identify sectors or regions that have been affected by refugees' presence and can benefit from development financing to increase their resilience.
- Share lessons learned and best practices with other host governments in the region, and refrain from engaging in a race to the bottom in terms of the rights and benefits granted to refugees and migrants.
- Link national and local authorities with capacity building opportunities in the area of refugee and migration issues.

Implementing partners and multilateral development banks:

- Link project financing to policy reform and the implementation of inclusive policies.
- Encourage cross-border dialogue, including among local authorities of regions directly affected by the presence of refugees and migrants.
- Carefully select the authorities to join capacity-building efforts, to ensure these activities have long-term impacts.

Donors:

- In addition to thorough needs assessments at the local and national level, encourage regional coordination to support cross-learning.
- Development interventions should be accompanied by a sustained dialogue about refugee and migration policies, to ensure that projects (especially those focused on economic opportunities) can reach their full potential. Discussions at the regional level might help defuse some of the tensions in national political scenes.

5. PROVIDING TARGETED SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR REFUGEES

Even when the policy and economic environment is conducive, refugees often face specific challenges to entering the job market or creating their own business. Despite the differences in the environments in Brazil and the four major receiving countries of Syrian refugees, there are similarities in the difficulties faced by refugee entrepreneurs. The experience of Migraflix in Brazil can provide some insights on how to further tackle them.

MIGRAFLIX'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT FOR REFUGEES

Country	Brazil
Years active	Since 2015
Key objectives	Promote the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants in Brazil through cultural entrepreneurship
Target population	1,024 migrants and refugees (with regular status) from Venezuela, Syria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, and Colombia have benefited from the initiative since its launch. ¹²³
Budget	Grant based (USAID, IDB, IOM) and in-kind donations

CONTEXT AND DESIGN OF MIGRAFLIX'S PROJECT

In Brazil, ensuring the social and economic inclusion of the country's 265,000 refugees¹²⁴ and 807,000 migrants¹²⁵ remains a pressing challenge.¹²⁶ Despite being legally permitted to work, refugees and migrants face numerous barriers to access decent and sustainable jobs.¹²⁷ Recent economic recessions have weakened labor market conditions in Brazil,¹²⁸ and a complex and costly credential recognition process hinders the ability of educated refugees and migrants to put their professional skills into practice.¹²⁹ Moreover, refugees and migrants often lack information or support services to navigate the job search. Even when job opportunities are available, they may not be able to take advantage of them because of language barriers, cultural prejudices,¹³⁰ or difficulties in procuring formal proof of address and bank account possession.¹³¹ At the same time, most employers lack adequate knowledge regarding the procedures to employ foreign staff, which might prevent them from carrying job applications from refugees.

In light of these obstacles, and as in various other forced displacement contexts, many refugees and migrants have turned to entrepreneurial activities, most of which are informal.¹³² There are several reasons for this: first, refugees and migrants are often unfamiliar with the legal requirements for registering a microbusiness or are unable to cover the fees to do so.¹³³ Second, refugees and migrants face hurdles accessing sources of finance due to legal and practical barriers to their financial inclusion.¹³⁴ Third, language barriers and other factors such as limited contacts with host populations due to their social status and living area can hinder their ability to develop and expand their customer base.¹³⁵ The Brazilian government has a range of resources available for entrepreneurs,¹³⁶ but these are not tailored to the specific needs of refugees and migrants. Organizations such as Migraflix, a São Paulo-based nonprofit organization, have stepped up to fill this gap (Box 6).

Box 6. Migraflif's Entrepreneurship Program for Refugees and Migrants¹³⁷

Migraflif seeks to assist refugees and migrants become self-reliant through “cultural entrepreneurship.” This entails supporting refugees and migrants to start their own businesses in gastronomy and other creative industries. At the same time, Migraflif aims to raise awareness about the cultural diversity that refugees and migrants bring into Brazilian society and thus shape a different narrative on migration and bridge the gap between displaced people, migrants, and host communities. Migraflif's entrepreneurship programs are based on three pillars:

1. An online-based training platform available for migrants with modules on entrepreneurial skills (business plan development, finance and accounting, marketing); industry skills (gastronomy, catering, performance arts); and soft skills (communication, leadership, collaboration, customer awareness, problem solving). If refugees and migrants need language courses, Migraflif connects them with peer organizations.
2. Migraflif provides legal and technical support for the registration of new businesses. It also helps entrepreneurs build their customer base through establishing partnerships with marketing firms, sales platforms, and other companies such as Facebook, Uber Eats, Airbnb, Accenture, and LinkedIn, among others.
3. Individual mentorship is provided by business professionals in relevant fields. Migraflif also helps link beneficiaries to banking and microcredit institutes to access financial resources through partnerships with financial institutions.

Migraflif works closely with Caritas and Missão Paz—two nongovernmental organizations that provide assistance to refugees and migrants upon their arrival to Brazil—to advertise its activities to newcomers. Refugees and migrants can also apply for the in-person program on Migraflif's website and access content online. In October 2020, Migraflif launched a mobile-friendly digital platform called Migralab with the support of IOM and Accenture.¹³⁸ Through the platform, Migraflif seeks to reach, engage, and empower refugees and migrants at anytime, anywhere. At the same time, Migralab helps to monitor the progress of entrepreneurs and present personalized content by using predictive analytics.

Migraflif has deployed its project in six cities (Boa Vista, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Brasília, Campinas), benefiting over 1,000 refugees and migrants from Venezuela, Syria, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After partaking in Migraflif, participants have reported an increase in their income-generation sources.¹³⁹ They have also expanded their social networks with other refugees and migrants, and their local communities, and report feeling more integrated into Brazilian society. While Migraflif has been able to fill in a gap and support displaced people, as a nonprofit organization with limited financial and staffing capacity, its impact remains small in scale. The digital platform Migralab is aimed at overcoming some of these capacity challenges, as well as the social distancing and in-person gathering restrictions introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its launch (and at the time of the writing), 1,330 migrants have enrolled in Migralab. Migraflif hopes to reach to 3,000 migrants and refugees by the end of 2021 through the platform.¹⁴⁰

LESSONS LEARNED AND APPLICABILITY FOR THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CONTEXT

1



TAILOR ACTIVITIES TO THE SKILLS AND ASPIRATIONS OF BENEFICIARIES

- Trainings should match the individual skills, lived experiences, and aspirations of participants.
- Establish flexible scheduling modalities to increase participation.
- Provide livelihood support (e.g., food, transportation, logistic support) throughout the trainings.

One of the key aspects of Migraflix's model is that it involves refugees and migrants in the design of the program by providing personalized trainings tailored to the qualifications and aspirations of each participant instead of a homogeneous one-size-fits-all model.¹⁴¹ While this approach leads to limitations in the number of participants who can enroll each cycle, it helps refugees and migrants attain deeper knowledge of the different aspects of running their business including identifying business opportunities, financing sector-specific needs, and developing a customer base, increasing the chances that the business developed during the program is sustainable. This model seems relevant to the Syrian context, where refugees have previously reported that training sessions are disconnected from both their aspirations and the needs of the local labor market.¹⁴²

Migraflix provides its tailored training and one-on-one mentorship in weekend sessions since most participants have other responsibilities during the week, such as other employment, or care responsibilities in the home. Participants are given a stipend to cover transportation costs for attending the in-person training, as well as food. It also offers childcare for participants who need it. Syrian refugees seeking livelihood opportunities have highlighted the importance of flexibility, the ability to sustain multiple jobs, and logistics support such as transportation and childcare.¹⁴³ Migraflix supports beneficiaries throughout the whole process and continues to provide mentorship even after the program ends.

2



BUILD ON PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND MATCH REFUGEES' SKILLS WITH THEIR NEEDS TO MAXIMIZE A PROJECT'S BENEFITS FOR BOTH PARTIES

- Establish partnerships with local companies so refugee entrepreneurs can secure access to local markets and build a solid customer base.
- Provide training in marketing (including via the use of social media platforms) to further expand entrepreneurs' customer base.

Through the development of partnerships with the private sector and training in the use of social media platforms as marketing tools, Migraflix bridges the gap between migrants, refugees, and local communities. First, Migraflix has developed partnerships with established companies that might require the services of the refugees and migrants who participate in the program. After participating in the program, refugee entrepreneurs render catering or other services like performance at company events. In addition, Migraflix has agreements with platforms like UberEats, Facebook Marketplace, and AirBnb to promote refugees' businesses and help them access local markets. This linkage between refugee and migrant entrepreneurs and private companies provides refugees with a critical boost in reaching new customers and expanding their networks within the local community. In parallel, Migraflix also trains them in marketing tools, so that they can consolidate their customer base.¹⁴⁴ Displaced Syrians have regularly reported lacking social networks to foster job opportunities or access to local markets.¹⁴⁵ Syrian refugees often end up relying on their personal networks, whereas a wider involvement of private actors may help them expand their market base.

Recommendations

Implementing partners and civil society actors:

- Develop personalized vocational training and entrepreneurship programs tailored to the needs, aspirations, and lived realities of participants instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, while taking into account labor market conditions and sector restrictions.
- Establish flexible scheduling to increase participation.
- Provide additional support, such as food, transportation, logistical support and childcare services, throughout the training period.
- Link refugee entrepreneurs with marketing tools and local companies so they can render services and build a customer base within the local community.



By: Elif Işık/DRC

6. CONCLUSIONS

Access to livelihoods is a critical step toward refugees' self-reliance. A prerequisite for refugees to engage in livelihood activities is to be granted the right to work and to avoid getting trapped in the informal sector where abuses are more common and more difficult to report. The experience of Ethiopia illustrates how critical it is to secure long-term political commitment, especially as political conditions in host countries are quickly evolving. It also shows that defining the precise conditions for refugees to access work permits and gain formal employment can be complex and encounter setbacks. Even refugees employed in the formal sector may face prejudices and other unfair treatment. It is essential that host countries, donors, civil society, and development actors mobilize to ensure decent employment conditions for all workers. The Better Work initiative in Jordan provides insights on how this can be achieved, but more efforts could still be deployed to target refugee workers. All these efforts need to be accompanied by serious efforts to support the economic resilience of host countries, where unemployment may already be high, and tensions may quickly arise if refugees compete for jobs with nationals. Development actors like the IDB have been active on this front in recent years, showing the potential of multilateral development banks to take a stronger role in addressing these questions and helping to finance large-scale initiatives. Finally, host governments, development actors, and other implementing partners need to acknowledge that refugees face specific difficulties in gaining employment or creating their own business. Addressing these demands a set of specific initiatives, like Migraflix in Brazil, to ensure conducive conditions for refugees.

Main Recommendations

National governments:

- Facilitate access to labor markets more broadly, 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.
- Clarify the procedures refugees need to follow to access work permits, and train the relevant authorities, including on the labor laws refugees fall under.
- Ensure that refugee workers are covered by existing labor laws on decent work, and that regular monitoring of workers' conditions also covers their situation.

Implementing partners:

- In partnership with national and local authorities, educate refugees, employers, and host communities on legislation and procedures by raising awareness and training local and national administrative staff.
- Develop tailored projects to address the specific needs (and skills) of refugee workers and entrepreneurs, in particular when it comes to job matching and entrepreneurship programs.

Donors:

- Mobilize resources to strengthen the economic resilience of host countries, through grant projects (e.g., capacity building activities for authorities, start-up packages) or loans (e.g., to support economic infrastructure altogether, or loans to financial institutions and other similar actors to stimulate the local economy), while insuring refugees' inclusion in the gains from these initiatives.
- Work with international partners and national authorities to mobilize funding for livelihood projects, to create more and better job opportunities for refugee and host communities. These can range from vocational training and job matching to support to the private sector and local entrepreneurship.
- Encourage policy changes in terms of access to formal employment and prioritize decent working conditions for refugees and host communities alike.

ENDNOTES

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- 21 Government of Lebanon and UNHCR Lebanon, "[Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020 \(2019 update\)](#)," updated January 31, 2019.
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- 35 Supported by the World Bank, the Government of the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the European Investment Bank.
- 36 Interview with UNHCR Ethiopia, August 26, 2020.
- 37 It is very restrictive as national laws and labor and investment regulations apply. Basically, for those trying to get a work permit under self-employment, the window of opportunity is very narrow since refugees (as foreign nationals) need at least USD 200,000 to start a business. As a result, they cannot extensively benefit from this scheme. The second possibility is for wage employment, but this is also tightly protected as the government prioritizes Ethiopian nationals.
- 38 In the new proclamation, there are two articles that grant refugees equal treatment as Ethiopian nationals, representing the biggest opportunity for refugees. These are: Art. 26(4) for refugees participating in joint projects (including the Jobs Compact) that are implemented by the international community and the Ethiopian government, and Art. 26 (9) that establishes that no restrictive measures for foreign nationals should apply to refugees or asylum seekers married to an Ethiopian national or who have one or more child in possession of Ethiopian nationality. According to the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), a joint project refers to an urban or rural development project designed with the support of the international community and the agreement of the Ethiopian government to economically benefit both recognized refugees and Ethiopian nationals.
- 39 In December 2019, ARRA issued the Directive to Determine the Procedure for Refugees Right to Work (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Directive No. 02/2019).
- 40 Directive No. 02/2019.
- 41 This MoU should ease some of the procedures and documentation requirements (e.g., providing valid passport and other documentation that refugees may not have). Interview with UNHCR Ethiopia.
- 42 At the time of this writing, the MoUs are still in the process to being released. The MoU with the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency is expected to help coordinate the provision of residence permits for refugees. Interview with UNHCR Ethiopia.
- 43 The main opportunity for refugees is given by their possibility to work in joint projects (coordinated between the government and international organizations) and getting the same treatment as nationals. However, opportunities for refugees to enter other areas and project is limited given that there are parts of the Ethiopian markets that are only reserved for nationals and the fact that the conditions under which refugees can engage in wage-employment or self-employment are very restrictive as the same requirements as for foreign nationals apply yet, in most cases, refugees are not compliant.
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