

The Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) organized a virtual programmatic-focused roundtable discussion to share lessons learned from previous livelihoods programs and discuss medium-term strategies for future livelihoods programs in Jordan on Wednesday 3 June. The roundtable brought together 28 participants from 15 different agencies.

The refugee response in Jordan is at a critical juncture, with humanitarian and emergency needs increasingly overlapping with traditional macroeconomic development priorities. Ensuring access to livelihoods is a critical component of supporting people to achieve their preferred durable solution to their protracted displacement. Approaches that foster resilience and self-reliance can help mitigate harmful implications of protracted displacement, for instance by supporting skills-building, social networks and local economic development. Employment and sustainable income-generation support the social and economic empowerment of individuals and households, and ultimately enables displaced people's choice to their preferred durable solution.

## 1. PRESENTATION OF DSP RESEARCH

DSP presented findings from its recent programmatic brief collating lessons learned from livelihoods programs in Jordan over the past few years with its three member organizations, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LEARNED ON LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMS?

The presentation provided a selected number of lessons learned drawing from the programmatic brief.

- Legal awareness sessions and legal assistance have proven critical for the achievement
  of positive decent work outcomes, with combined programmatic experience showing that
  awareness of work rights has been found to be much lower than initially anticipated. When
  working with vulnerable people, calls for formalization of businesses should be approached
  with nuance. Implementers do not currently know at what threshold a small business would
  benefit from formalization to expand and grow.
- Examples of multi-stakeholder engagement have shown positive outcomes and lack of coordination has proven counter-productive to livelihoods objectives. For example, the lack of a coherent or common engagement strategy with the private sector has meant that implementers had sometimes had to compete against each other for their favor.
- A number of lessons can be learned on the need for longer-term programming and program adaptation:
  - Vocational programs need to become more adaptable and flexible, as traditional programs cannot be all absorbed by the market.
  - Tailored approaches towards job placement increase positive retention outcomes, while mentorship and coaching motivates workers to stay active in the labor market.
  - Longer timeframes for programs, coupled with unconditional cash and capacity building, improve the likelihood of successful livelihoods outcomes.
- The collective experience from the past years shows that **no one approach is the 'ideal formula'** to create sustainable livelihoods for displacement-affected people. With that in mind, the **current 'success' metrics** for livelihoods interventions require further evaluation.

Durable Solutions Platform, Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee and Norwegian Refugee Council. May 2020. Improving Self-Reliance and Resilience in Jordan: Lessons Learned from Livelihoods Interventions. <a href="https://www.dsp-syria.org/improving-self-reliance-and-resilience-jordan">https://www.dsp-syria.org/improving-self-reliance-and-resilience-jordan</a>

# HOW CAN WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT POLICY PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMMATIC LEARNING FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY EFFORTS IN THE MEDIUM-TERM?

- In the medium-term, the following two overarching policy priorities will be highly relevant:
  - Prioritizing macroeconomic policies that promote job creation, support demand and investment, and reduce bureaucratic barriers and costs for Jordanian and non-Jordanian entrepreneurs. Opening additional professions to non-Jordanians in sectors with higher growth-potential can help Jordan reap economic benefits.
  - Exploring strategies to promote the financial inclusion of refugee and vulnerable populations in Jordan. For instance, this could take the form of supporting a continued expansion of access to mobile wallets and their use in the marketplace, and promoting flexible approaches to proof-of-identity requirements etc.
- In the medium-term, selected programmatic priorities include:
  - Continuing to promote innovate livelihoods interventions by placing emphasis on iterative programming and short intensive interventions that develop transferrable skills in sectors such as IT, green and alternative energy, agricultural technologies, and entrepreneurship. Implementers need to have flexibility to innovate and change direction in the programs.
  - Exploring more digital solutions to business development support, especially to support the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and learning and skills building.
  - Linking businesses to available or new markets by helping to create value chains to complete production or create market linkages in Jordan or on the regional level.

# 2. COMPARABLE EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED ON LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING IN JORDAN

During this session, participants shared lessons learned from their livelihoods programs, including what worked well and the continued challenges. This included:

#### **DECENT WORK INTERVENTIONS**

It is important to incentivize (self-)enforcement at the governorate levels, including
increasing awareness of work rights and access to justice among employees. Experience
from promoting decent work in the agriculture, services and construction sectors over the
past few years has shown that the enforcement capacities for Occupational, Health and Safety
(OH&S) standards are limited. Currently, the enforcement system is highly centralized with a
lack of inspectors.

- Policy reform and the passing of by-laws in sectors that are under-regulated is a necessary precondition to introducing and supporting decent work standards, e.g. in the agricultural sector. A continued challenge is the lack of incentives for employers and the private sector to abide by the law and enforce these regulations. The short-term work contracts present an added layer of disincentive. While many programs encourage and support decent work standards on the basis of human rights of employees and this remains critical, employers also respond to a business case for applying decent work standards. Evidence by ILO in the garment sector in Jordan shows that compliance with labor standards has created more productivity.<sup>2</sup>
- In the medium-term, it is important to invest in the institutional capacities for
  enforcement including labor inspections. The agricultural sector has been a big focus
  for many given the decent work deficits. For labor inspections to take place, a regulatory
  framework needs to be in place, which is why by-laws in the agricultural sector are important
  and promising.

#### JOB MATCHING AND PLACEMENT

- Tailored approaches to job matching interventions, for example by gender, age, previous work experience and nationality, can bring about more positive retention outcomes. A key finding from IRC's Project Match is that understanding the segmentation of the labor market is helpful to better tailor job placements, which can reap better benefits for job seekers and employers.<sup>3</sup> By focusing specifically on industrial manufacturing in Irbid and East Amman, it was possible to understand the labor market and connect job seekers to employers more effectively.
- Unconditional cash provided in addition to tailored job matching services shows promising results in bringing about more positive retention outcomes. Another finding from Project Match is that an unconditional cash package given to all job seekers supports employment and retention, notably more Syrians than host communities, and more women than men. The package was unconditional and given at the job search stage. Recipients reported that they used the cash for a number of purposes including debt service, rent, health expenses, in addition to childcare and transportation.
- Wage subsidies for job matching and placement remain a major incentive for employers, but may not provide sustainable jobs. Another experience included matching job seekers with SMEs without providing wage subsidies to employers. When screening employers on a number of criteria to ensure that decent work and other standards were met, the majority of employers fell through the step, with only a small sample left who were mainly committed to the social agenda.
- Investing in job seekers' understanding of the job requirements ahead of their recruitment increases retention. Working closely with beneficiaries so they understand the job requirements and scope of the work before recruitment has ensured retention and sustainability. When job seekers know what they are applying for, the retention rate increases. Moreover, mentorship for three to six months after recruitment also helps mitigate against dropouts.

#### PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

 Engage in discussions with the private sector as early as possible to ensure that policy frameworks supporting displacement-affected people's livelihoods are aligned with private sector priorities. While implementers understand displacement-affected people's

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization and International Finance Corporation. 2016. Progress and Potential: How Better Work is improving garment workers' lives and boosting factory competitiveness. <a href="https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BW-Progress-and-Potential\_Web-final.pdf">https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BW-Progress-and-Potential\_Web-final.pdf</a>

International Rescue Committee. 2019. Match: Economic Wellbeing. Airbel Impact Lab. <a href="https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/employment-hub/">https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/employment-hub/</a>. It is estimated that Project Match achieved 35% more employment by tailoring interventions. See: S. Caria, G. Gordon, M. Kasy, S. Quinn, S. Shami, A. Teytelboym. May 2020. An Adaptive Targeted Field Experiment: Job Search Assistance for Refugees in Jordan. Preliminary Draft. <a href="https://maxkasy.github.io/home/files/papers/RefugeesWork.pdf">https://maxkasy.github.io/home/files/papers/RefugeesWork.pdf</a>

- livelihoods needs and challenges, the needs of the private sector are not fully understood. The Jordan Compact did not align well with the priorities of the private sector.
- The need to better understand and identify the needs of the private sector, including supporting their operational capacities and growth, moving away from financial incentives. When helping to fill occupations, it is important to get the commitment from employers to create a more favorable working environment. In order to do that, one could support the human resource departments, ensure that they have proper processes in place, provide inductions and mentorship among other things.

#### MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

- Close engagement with community-based organizations (CBOs) support both their
  capacities and provides better results in the interventions. According to a national
  organization, the establishment of a network of CBOs has been an important step to increase
  advocacy and engagement on the community-level.
- Creating linkages with other stakeholders incl. other private sector and investment actors is beneficial for business survival and expansion. An intervention aimed at linking freelancers with employers by providing financial and technical support to companies has shown the usefulness of unlocking more investment capital and moving beyond business development grants, especially during the pandemic outbreak.
- Coordination among livelihoods implementers to avoid duplication and better understand beneficiaries' needs is a continued need. Overlaps in livelihoods services meant that beneficiaries were sometimes able to "shop around" to get the most suitable services. As implementers, it is not always possible to know what other support a beneficiary is receiving and having a database of information on services would be useful in the future.

#### **SKILLS TRAINING**

- Skills training providers focus on open sectors for non-Jordanians and Syrian refugees and tailor trainings accordingly, but this might exclude Syrians with talent and skills. The regulatory framework limits the occupations and sectors Syrians can work in.
- Adapting training modalities to specific sectors and work patterns ensures better reach.
   Tailoring training delivery to the work pattern and conditions has proven successful, for example providing trainings on Fridays the day off for construction workers and trainings on site for agricultural workers.
- Employers are increasingly requesting trainings for their operations. Through experience training employees in the manufacturing sector, employers have increasingly requested training for their operations, e.g. in marketing, business management, developing job descriptions and performance assessments of employees.
- Last but not least, vocational TVET service providers' capacities should be supported in the medium-term.

#### INTEGRATED SERVICES: LIVELIHOODS AND PROTECTION

It is critical to situate livelihoods in the broader protection and policy environment
in Jordan and adopt a more holistic understanding of livelihoods. For instance,
programmatic experience has shown that some refugees struggle to engage in livelihoods
program due to stress and trauma. Integrating protection activities, such as psycho-social
support (PSS) services, alongside livelihoods services is a positive step towards integrated
programming.

### RETHINKING "SUCCESS METRICS" AND AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

- Experience has emphasized the need for better understanding the vast diversity of livelihoods strategies and attitudes of beneficiaries of livelihoods programs. More evidence gaps exist on what "success" metrics mean for job seekers and employers. For example, it may be that social security or long working hours are not their concern, but instead flexible working hours and the distance between their home and the workplace. Implementers focus on retention as a "success" metric may not be the best, or at least should not be the only, way to measure this. A sub-group of beneficiaries have preferred to take wage employment for a few months before returning to agricultural work.
- Avoiding assumptions related to the private sector as we are navigating efforts towards economic recovery is also critical. The ways in which "struggling sectors" are identified have not necessarily revealed the full picture of how sectors are coping with the immediate impact of the pandemic. The purchasing power and desire to spend in Jordan has decreased severely. Even companies and sectors that provide services that are in high demand, for instance delivery services have seen the demand decrease, fee prices fixed and new companies enter the sector and creating more competition. Implementers should be sensitive to the needs of the private sector, as companies may want a flexible workforce in order to mitigate risk in the coming months (i.e., they may want to hire people for less than three months at a time because demand for their product is still in flux).

# 3. MODERATED DISCUSSION ON MEDIUM-TERM LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES

A critical question for implementers will therefore be how to find space to create sustainable and formal jobs that meet the labor market demands. Medium-term strategies require a taking stock of lessons learned over the past years and an understanding of the socio-economic issues. Jordan's economy was already heavily favored towards informality before the pandemic outbreak. The government of Jordan wants to reduce the National Aid Fund (NAF) list and might need to absorb the potential return of up to half a million Jordanian expats who would be seeking employment in Jordan. This might have a strong impact on an already weak job market and negatively impact Syrian and non-Syrian refugees the most, potentially with firmer hiring quotas supporting the hiring of Jordanians over non-Jordanians.

The graduation approach presents a promising medium-term intervention, made more relevant because of the impact of COVID-19. With almost a decade into Syrians' displacement, the discussion needs to shift towards sustainable income generation and self-reliance through an integrated approach over a longer period. Efforts are still nascent and more lessons need to be learned along the way. With the impact of the pandemic, combining livelihoods, protection and rehabilitation services through a comprehensive approach is a positive step forward. A key challenge with a successful application of the graduation approach is the need to predict and understand the market over the next years, as the model foresees job placements two or three years from now. With the current uncertainty, market research and sectoral analysis is ever more relevant. Continuous advocacy with the government of Jordan, including NAF on the graduation approach could be highly relevant, including discussions on social protection mechanisms for vulnerable populations.

In the medium-term, we need to coherently engage with the private sector, strategically support growth areas and avoid making assumptions, for instance that micro, medium and small-sized enterprises (MSMEs) do not prefer long-term services and support. Experience over

the past months has shown that MSMEs do not necessarily want quick cash injections but that they are also interested in medium- and longer-term support strategies. An initiative launched to connect MSMEs to mentors in Jordan has seen a spoke in activity, on questions regarding how to manage the short-term as well as how to plan for the future and expand digital marketing. Moreover, while requests for job matching have decreased significantly, virtual job fairs have been in demand. While many employers are not currently hiring, they are interested to innovate and understand what this means for the future. This is a strategic time to expand into sectors with growth potential through innovation, for instance on green technology and renewable energy.

In order to best adapt programs, it is important to continuously capture economic trends, understand stakeholders' needs and document labor market behavior. The learning from interventions over the past years highlights the need to engage in close discussions with the private sector to ensure that policy frameworks and programs align with their priorities. Moreover, understanding the labor market behavior of refugees and vulnerable communities in Jordan will be critical over the next years. Experience over the past few months is already indicating differences in how and what type of jobs refugees are seeking, which can also provide indications about vulnerabilities. For instance, Syrian construction workers have been trying to find jobs in factories, which before the pandemic they were not.

### A NUMBER OF OTHER MEDIUM-TERM CONSIDERATIONS FOR LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- Expansion of the use and access to technology for businesses and beneficiaries. The use of media platforms and e-marketing channels has supported businesses already before the pandemic and has become further relevant. Moreover, the use and continued expansion of access to mobile wallets and their use in the marketplace should be prioritized.
- Strengthening coordination and information-sharing mechanisms. Over the next years, coordination between livelihoods implementers will be ever more relevant due to the increasing needs on the ground. The role of the livelihoods sectoral working group, which includes representatives of public institutions, UN agencies and NGOs, is critical in this regard. Collective learning efforts on livelihoods needs and opportunities will remain vital to influence strategic direction of programs and advocacy efforts.
- Rethinking the design and delivery of skills trainings. The vocational training sector has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, especially as many trainings were focused on the service and hospitality sectors. Many trainings were not able to continue through digital channels because trainees need to handle equipment or hardware and future trainings could explore simulation tools.

#### **About the Durable Solutions Platform**

The Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) is a regional initiative focused on generating evidence and convening strategic dialogue on durable solutions to displacement in the Syria crisis. DSP connects its research with key implementing organizations, advocacy partners and government to support strategic thinking on medium-term approaches to protracted displacement.

