



IMPROVING SELF-RELIANCE AND RESILIENCE IN JORDAN: LESSONS LEARNED FROM LIVELIHOODS INTERVENTIONS

POLICY BRIEF

MAY 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

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. This brief follows up on recent research conducted by the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP), in collaboration with Columbia University, on medium-term approaches to Syrian refugees' protracted displacement in Jordan,¹ by providing a closer examination of livelihoods interventions conducted in the past years of the response. Alongside evidence gathered in that study, it formulates practical recommendations for the medium-term (three to five years) as to how programmatic interventions can reinforce sustainable and lasting access to livelihoods.

DSP brought together its three member organizations, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in order to contribute to **collective learning** on livelihoods in Jordan, by taking stock of challenges and successes of livelihoods interventions in Jordan **up until February 2020** i.e. **before the COVID-19 outbreak**. While the lessons learned presented in this paper are drawn from DRC, IRC and NRC programmatic learning and DSP's research, they are intended to spark a wider reflection and strategic dialogue among the Government of Jordan (GoJ), international donors, private sector entities, UN agencies and the wider NGO collective on how livelihoods-focused policies and programs can better support resilience and self-reliance for Syrian refugees and host communities.²

1 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020. "In My Own Hands": A Medium-Term Approach towards Self-Reliance and Resilience of Syrian refugees and Host Communities in Jordan. <http://dsp-syria.org/my-own-hands>

2 Self-reliance, or the ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet its essential needs in a sustainable manner, is a crucial stepping-stone for a displaced person to move towards achieving a durable solution. Source: Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative. 2019. <https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org>. Resilience refers to the ability of displaced people, host communities and national systems to prevent, absorb and recover from shocks, while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development. Source: UNHCR. 2017. Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/58ca4f827.pdf>

The recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has already caused a serious global economic downturn, with short-term economic impact likely to translate into reductions in long-term growth for low- and middle-income countries.³ With current estimates pointing towards limited available strategies to mitigate the pandemic until a vaccine becomes available,⁴ it is likely that operational actors have to shift and adapt livelihoods interventions going forward. This brief does not assess the impact of COVID-19 and instead outlines programmatic lessons learned from the livelihoods response up until the pandemic outbreak, which contributes to strategic livelihoods response planning in the medium-term and will be essential to consider as programs adapt to the current context.

As DSP's research evidences that priorities and challenges experienced by vulnerable host communities and refugees are increasingly comparable, this document aims to contribute to collective learning and recommendations into the strategic direction for livelihoods efforts in Jordan. The brief first outlines existing regulations that determine access to livelihoods for refugees and non-Jordanians. It then lays out collective learning on tested livelihoods interventions, based on encountered challenges and positive outcomes and concludes with a number of recommendations to the GoJ, international donors, the private sector and the wider body of operational organizations to contribute to collective learning and recommendations into the strategic direction for improving self-reliance and resilience in Jordan.

Box 1: Data Sources for the Brief

- Recent research conducted by the DSP and the Program on Forced Migration and Health (PFMH) at Columbia University, which identifies future directions for the refugee response in Jordan and opportunities to support self-reliance and resilience in the medium-term;⁵
- Evidence from IRC's Project Match in Jordan, which has rigorously tested a set of innovative approaches for placing vulnerable populations and refugees in jobs;⁶
- The collective experiences of DRC, IRC, and NRC, including monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL) data, research reports, and first-hand accounts from field staff; and
- A learning workshop with DRC, IRC, and NRC, convened by DSP on 17 February 2020 in Amman, Jordan.

3 D. Evans and M. Over. 2020. 'The Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Low- and Middle-Income Countries'. Center for Global Development. https://www.cgdev.org/blog/economic-impact-covid-19-low-and-middle-income-countries?utm_source=200317&utm_medium=cgd_email&utm_campaign=cgd_weekly

4 S. L. van Elsland and R. O'Hare. 2020. 'COVID-19: Imperial researchers model likely impact of public health measures'. Imperial College London. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/196234/covid19-imperial-researchers-model-likely-impact/>

5 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

6 International Rescue Committee. 2019. Match: Economic Wellbeing. Airbel Impact Lab. <https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/employment-hub/>

2. CONTEXT

2.1. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING IN JORDAN

The Syrian conflict is in its ninth year, creating a protracted displacement crisis for Syrian refugees in host countries. Jordan hosts an estimated 654,568 Syrian refugees, comprising about 10% of the country's population.⁷ While almost half of Syrian refugees in Jordan are of working age, many remain unemployed,⁸ particularly in the northern governorates, which host large numbers of Syrian refugees.⁹ Jordan's national unemployment rate is 18.7%, with higher rates among women and youth (30% and 36% respectively).¹⁰ Informality characterizes Jordan's labor market, with twice as many Syrian refugees in Jordan working informally compared to those engaged in formal employment.¹¹

In response to the Syrian refugee challenge, the GoJ has piloted innovative new approaches in line with the 'humanitarian-development' nexus. There has been significant political momentum to promote sustainable livelihoods for Syrian refugees and Jordanians. Jordan's approaches to promoting access to livelihoods have been formalized through two main international policy frameworks, namely the 2016 Jordan Compact and the 2019 London Initiative, a 5-year pathway that renews focus on growth, jobs, and economic transformation.

The GoJ and its people have graciously hosted Syrian refugees, among many others, for almost a decade. Jordan has been an entrepreneurial partner to the international community, piloting many innovative strategies that have sought to address the protection and assistance needs of refugees alongside those of the host population, often bearing the costs and challenges associated with the Syria crisis.¹² Jordan has been facing stagnating economic growth and a high unemployment rate of 19% over the past few years, which coupled with the unexpected shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, adds even more pressure to the already floundering economy and puts the GoJ in a difficult position going forward.¹³

Box 2: Syrian Refugees' Limited Awareness of Work Rights

Programmatic evidence and research points towards a number of findings regarding Syrian refugees' awareness of work rights. Whilst refugees have a high level of knowledge about the application process for agricultural and construction permits, there is limited information about the process for applying for permits in other sectors open to Syrian refugees. Rules on social security rights and entitlements are a particular source of confusion. Whilst many Syrians would like to formalize their working arrangements, they face numerous problems including unregistered businesses which are unable to sponsor them, unwilling employers who cite costs and complexity, leading many Syrians to work in those sectors informally.

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- 7 UNHCR. 2019. 'Jordan October 2019 Fact Sheet'. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/72076> The number of Syrian refugees in Jordan remains contested, with the GoJ claiming that the number is far higher than the 654,568 officially reported.
 - 8 UNHCR. 2019. 'Jordan July 2019 Fact Sheet'. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/70665>
 - 9 Tiltnes AA, Zhang H, Pedersen J. 2019. 'The living conditions of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps.' Fafo Foundation. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/67914>
 - 10 Post L. 2018. 'Still in Search of Work: Creating Jobs for Syrian Refugees An Update on the Jordan Compact.' IRC. <https://www.rescue.org/report/still-search-work-creating-jobs-syrian-refugees-update-jordan-compact>
 - 11 JRPSC. 2019. 'Jordan Response Plan for the Syrian Crisis'; Lenner K., Turner L. 2018. 'Learning from the Jordan Compact'. Forced Migration Review. <https://www.fmreview.org/syria2018/lenner-turner>
 - 12 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.
 - 13 Laith Al-Ajlouni. 2020. 'Could COVID-19 push Jordan to the edge?' Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/could-covid-19-push-jordan-edge>

Syrian refugees in Jordan continue to pursue livelihoods in a restricted legal and policy space. Complex requirements and high costs make it hard for refugees to establish home-based businesses (HBBs), which have been promoted as an entry point for women into the labor force.¹⁴ Syrians who wish to establish a business outside of their home and who lack required capital must register as an investor and engage a Jordanian sponsor in a “joint venture”. However, Syrian refugees generally express a desire to open a business in their own name, without being exposed to the financial and legal risks of a joint venture.¹⁵ Moreover, the current Jordanian business environment does not easily enable private sector growth, with relatively high investment capital requirements and operating costs, onerous bureaucratic requirements, and frequent policy changes.¹⁶ Closed employment occupations and sectors tend to restrict livelihood opportunities for skilled and highly educated refugees.¹⁷ Taken together, these factors contribute to an environment whereby most Syrian refugees struggle to become or remain self-reliant. While there are many challenges, this brief lays out a number of suggested ways forward.

On 17 March 2020, Jordan declared a state of emergency in an attempt to control the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus,¹⁸ followed by a nation-wide curfew on Saturday 21 March 2020.¹⁹ While the situation remains undefined at the time of writing, vulnerabilities of the overall refugee population and of the poorest segments of society in Jordan are expected to increase. At the time of writing, some negative impact on people’s livelihoods is to be expected, including challenges for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), dismissal of workers and an increase of negative coping mechanisms such as debt. NGOs are working on adapting their livelihood programs in order to minimize the negative impact of the pandemic as much as possible.

The lessons summarized in this brief provide useful reference points for livelihoods actors up until the COVID-19 outbreak, in order to support strategic planning in the medium-term. This brief supports DSP’s contribution to supporting evidence-based policies and programs that support displaced Syrians’ and vulnerable host communities’ self-reliance and resilience.

2.2. LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING INTERVENTIONS TO DATE

This brief draws on extensive programmatic experience in Jordan implemented by DRC, IRC and NRC, summarized by the following type of interventions:

- **Interventions focused on decent work outcomes**

This includes the provision of legal awareness sessions, information and counselling to workers, heads of workers and employers on rights and obligations under the labor law and to community based organizations (CBOs) on decent work best practices and advocacy, as well as legal assistance through mediation, and community-based approaches to improving decent work outcomes.

In numbers: In 2019, the Justice Center for Legal aid delivered a total of 147 legal awareness sessions to 3,144 workers in the construction, agriculture and services sectors. A total of 10,451 beneficiaries were reached with information services, while 2,933 were reached with counselling services. Legal assistance services, including mediation, have reached 172 beneficiaries

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- 14 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.
 15 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.
 16 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.
 17 See also: Gordon, J. 2019. ‘Refugees and decent work: Lessons learned from recent refugee jobs compacts’. EMPLOYMENT Working Paper No. 256. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/working-papers/WCMS_732602/lang-en/index.htm
 18 Aljazeera English. 2020. Jordan imposes state of emergency to curb coronavirus pandemic. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/jordan-imposes-state-emergency-curb-coronavirus-pandemic-200317191104773.html>
 19 France 24. 2020. Jordan under virus curfew to launch home deliveries. <https://www.france24.com/en/20200323-jordan-under-virus-curfew-to-launch-home-deliveries>

- **Job placement and matching interventions**

This covers a number of sectors, including the manufacturing sector, by using technology-supported matching systems through Project Match, and engagement with employers.

In numbers: Over 1,200 people were supported through job placement activities across different sectors in Jordan.

- **Job retention-focused interventions**

This includes supporting employability and soft skills through on-the-job mentoring and coaching. This also includes engagement with the private sector, mainly employers of SMEs, to understand what skills they are looking for and support them in the hiring process to place trained and qualified beneficiaries in those jobs.

In numbers: Over 950 people were trained with soft skills and employability based on the skills gaps identified by 165 employers. Between 2015 and mid-2019, 10,513 beneficiaries received employment training, learning how to search for jobs, write resumes and build up their basic financial literacy skills, and 344 Syrians participated in a three-month apprenticeship in order to gain experience and have better chances at finding a suitable job.

- **Interventions focused on vocational trainings**

Including on building beneficiaries' skills on market information and employers' needs. Additionally, vocational trainings are also used to enhance the skills of beneficiaries' willing to take the self-employment pathway, for instance on renewable and green energy. Meanwhile, vocational trainings in the Azraq and Zaatari camps in 2019 included tailoring, welding, carpentry, jewelry making, mobile maintenance, barber, beautician and air conditioning maintenance.

In numbers: A total of 100 participants were trained on technical maintenance of the renewable energy systems. In the camps, a total of 2079 beneficiaries participated in vocational trainings.

- **Home-based Businesses (HBBs) support**

This includes business skills training, business growth grants, mentorship, and support with formalizing HBBs, in order to support refugees and vulnerable Jordanians to generate income and assets. These interventions were specifically targeted to support women and youth to leverage their skills and knowledge to generate income, and have helped women in starting or expanding businesses in sectors as diverse as plumbing, beekeeping, textiles, upholstery, catering, confectionaries and handicrafts.

In numbers: By mid-2019, 1,023 businesses were created (853 by women and 170 by men). A total of 34 beneficiaries received business growth grants and 41 received specialized trainings through private sector partners. Moreover, around 1000 people were enrolled in the mentorship program providing an opportunity to the business owner to receive weekly coaching by a trained mentor.

3. LESSONS LEARNED ON IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN JORDAN IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

This section draws on **operational data** by DRC, IRC and NRC, who have been engaged in support to livelihoods and economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable groups including host communities in Jordan since between 2014 and 2017, and presents **lessons learned** emerging as a result of assessing successes and positive outcomes, as well as challenges, from livelihoods interventions and research.

STRUCTURAL AND POLICY CHALLENGES

- **Underlying structural challenges in the economy, including informality and lack of decent work, affect all vulnerable workers in Jordan.** Macroeconomic challenges mean that vulnerable Jordanians, refugees and migrants often compete for lower skilled job opportunities, which are limited in availability and largely in the informal sector.²⁰ DSP's research showed that Jordanian and Syrian factory and agricultural workers both report dangerous working conditions, lack of occupational health and safety (OH&S) measures and different forms of exploitation.²¹ An often-cited reason for job placement dropouts is the bad working conditions. The limited availability of low-skilled jobs in the market, and socio-cultural impediments to working in certain jobs – particularly for women – are common obstacles faced in job placement and retention interventions. Incentive programs have been used to address some of these issues, but have not proven sustainable as higher drop-out rates are recorded when those incentives end.
- **Refugees face distinct vulnerabilities because of their legal status, which makes them more fearful of seeking justice and can limit their access work opportunities.** Syrian, as well as refugees of other nationalities appear less able to exercise their rights or to access justice compared to Jordanians, not least due to the increasing sector restrictions, which can make them more vulnerable to exploitation. DSP's research demonstrates that refugees, even when all their documents are in order, are vulnerable to intimidation, and when they are working informally or where their documentation is lacking in some way, their vulnerability is compounded.²² For instance, regulatory restrictions on occupations refugees are permitted to work in has been a core issue on expanding HBBs, limiting expansion and growth of HBBs and their ability to create jobs. Moreover, Syrian refugees living in Za'atari and Azraq camps face unique obstacles to achieving self-reliance, not least due to limited freedom of movement and challenges to create a value chain because of geographical isolation or lack of resources.

LEGAL CHALLENGES AND FORMALITY ISSUES

- **Legal awareness sessions and legal assistance has proven critical for the achievement of positive decent work outcomes.** Operational experience shows that beneficiaries identify information sessions and awareness raising on work rights as highly useful. This reinforces DSP's research finding that many refugees had limited options to justice and were so fearful for their situation that chose not to seek recourse in the face of lack of decent work

20 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

21 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

22 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

conditions.²³ Measurable success from delivering legal awareness sessions has been that the information made workers and job seekers more aware of their rights, and led to a number of actions being taken to hold employers accountable towards their legal obligations, for example amendments to workers' contracts that included provisions for safeguarding their rights, including enrolment in social security, success in resolving a case of sexual harassment in the work place, and in-court representation. Combined programmatic data has shown that awareness of work rights has been found to be much lower than anticipated, among both workers and employers. Across agencies, between 82% and 96% of beneficiaries from a combined total of 3,281 respondents, report that information is new to them.

Box 3: Improving Awareness on Work Rights Leads to Positive Actions

A measurable success from delivering 147 legal awareness sessions to reaching 3,144 beneficiaries (60% women, 55% non-Jordanians) workers between January 2019 until December 2019 is that the information increased awareness of their rights and led to certain actions being taken to hold employers accountable towards their legal obligations. According to data collected by the Justice Centre for Legal Aid, around 80% of participants stated that they would use the information to help other people who they know are facing a legal issue. Moreover, after over 130 individual legal counselling sessions, over half of beneficiaries were able to take a step towards solving their legal issue. These included mediation, hiring a private lawyer, and receiving representation services from legal aid providers.

- **Nuanced messaging to the most vulnerable persons on the benefits versus potential risks of formalization is critical, especially for HBBs.** Beneficiaries of HBBs, who tend to be relatively vulnerable, generally do not prefer to register their businesses, mainly due to fears of additional costs and exposure to local authorities. While explaining that formalizing is the right way forward in order to be compliant with the labor laws and regulations in Jordan and to increase access to bigger markets which can bring a higher return, real or perceived risks expressed by beneficiaries should be taken seriously. DSP research and programmatic evidence has shown that livelihoods programs face challenges in assisting business registration due to vulnerable beneficiaries' apprehension towards formalization. Implementers do not currently know at what threshold an HBB or micro- or small-scale enterprise has the potential to expand and grow.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- **A community-based and collaborative approach at the local level, enabling relevant stakeholders to act collectively, can lead to positive decent work outcomes.** Programmatic evidence shows that engaging a multitude of stakeholders through a broad-based dialogue, designed in a collaborative and inclusive way, can yield positive decent work outcomes. A project that established a 'community committee' in Karak to address decent work concerns in the agricultural sector brought together representatives from the farmer's union, civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the agricultural sector, workers and heads of workers. Through the broad membership base, the committee was able to collect information on the main challenges facing workers in the agricultural sector and inform the CSOs' advocacy agenda. The committee also invited the representatives from the Social Security Corporation (SSC), the directorate of agriculture, and the Ministry of Labor (MoL), to present on available grievance mechanisms and workers' registration procedures. The committee provided a platform for strengthened cooperation among a number of key stakeholders in the agricultural sector in Karak. For instance, in the committee's last meeting the issue of wage disparity among workers was discussed and a number of recommendations were put forward on how to tackle this issue among all stakeholders.

23 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

- **Further coordination and stronger linkages among operational actors is needed to support livelihoods outcomes, avoid duplication of programs and improve coherence when dealing with the private sector.** In certain geographical areas, especially northern Jordan, overlapping employment programs have created some confusion among beneficiaries seeking to navigate different kinds of support, and encouraged employers to insist on working exclusively with entities that provide the most ‘profitable’ incentives from their perspective. The lack of a coherent or common engagement strategy with the private sector has meant that service delivery agencies have sometimes had to compete against each other for the favor of the private sector. Furthermore, a common lesson learned is to connect beneficiaries to other livelihood actors, who can provide support that is more specialized. For instance, HBB owners and entrepreneurs have been successfully connected to actors who can provide specialized technical and capital assistance.

Box 4: Syrian Refugees’ and Jordanians’ Shared Challenges on Business Registration

In a recent assessment conducted with Syrian refugees and Jordanians in December 2019, respondents highlighted a number of challenges related to business registration. Weighing the risks of losing social assistance, through the National Aid Fund (NAF) or Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA), most respondents were hesitant to register a business immediately and preferred to wait until a later stage when the business was sufficiently profitable.

- **Engaging the private sector is the right approach, but operational constraints to coordination and differing priorities need to be addressed going forward.** Private sector institutions and NGOs speak different languages – while NGOs center on supporting the most vulnerable people without any incentives, the private sector’s main objective is profit-generation – therefore ‘translating’ each side’s objectives into common goals is necessary to achieve a successful outcome. On the ground, Syrian refugee and host communities expressed a number of challenges in terms of working in the private sector, including among other issues lack of decent work standards and exploitation.²⁴ Moreover, previous experience engaging private sector actors in grant management points towards certain operational challenges, including justifying expenditures, understanding the reasoning for, and sufficiently resourcing, monitoring and evaluation activities, as well as meeting co-financing requirements. A key component for successful collaboration is building positive relationships and trust, which requires flexibility and resources as it takes place over time.

ADAPTIVE AND LONGER-TERM PROGRAMMING

- **Vocational programs need to become more adaptable and flexible, as traditional programs face a lack of market absorption capacity, limited quality and relevance to employers.** Many traditional vocational programs have become obsolete, with the market not large enough to absorb graduates with similar skills, training curricula not updated to reflect the state of current technology, leading some employers to under-value vocational training certificates. A strong theme to emerge from DSP’s research was the need for vocational training and livelihoods interventions that are tangibly linked to employment and more closely aligned with labor market demands.²⁵ In order to respond to changing market needs and emerging gaps in skills development, it is important to place emphasis on iterative programming and short intensive interventions that develop transferrable skills in new and non-traditional sectors, such as IT, solar panel installation and maintenance, green and alternative energy, thermal retrofitting, agricultural technologies, and entrepreneurship.

24 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

25 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

- Increasingly tailored approaches towards job placement increase positive retention outcomes, while mentorship and coaching motivates workers to stay active in the labor market.** Traditional approaches to placement, such as job fairs or cash-for-work graduations, have limited proven success. Operational evidence from IRC's Project Match has shown a higher employment rates when job search support interventions are tailored to groups by gender (male/female), nationality (Jordanian/Syrian), amount of formal work experience, and education level (skilled/non-skilled). During Project Match's randomized control trial, average employment success rates for all beneficiaries were measured at 6 percent; however, when segmenting the labor pool and applying tailored interventions, employment success rates ranged from 3 percent to 18 percent. For example, unconditional cash interventions increased employment rates for Syrians by 1.7 percent over the control group. Linked to that, mentorship and coaching seems to present a motivating factor for people to remain active within the labor market, in terms of both remaining in their jobs but also looking for other work opportunities.
- Current "success" metrics for livelihoods interventions require further evaluation, with contextual understandings and bottom-up evidence able to complement internationally accepted metrics.** Operational experience shows that some of the current metrics, used to assess whether livelihoods interventions have been successful or not, require a review. For instance, on job retention, experience working with the private sector shows that retention of workers is not necessarily a goal for employers. Moreover, improved decent work conditions may not necessarily lead to better job retention. While retention remains a critical indicator, it may also overshadow other successes, for instance the acquisition of work experience, the building of social networks (see further below), or other unforeseen positive outcomes. Operational actors should also tackle underlying issues related to job rotation, including childcare responsibilities and transportation reliability. One thing emphasized by job seekers is the importance of flexibility and the ability to work multiple jobs (sometimes informally) and to move from one employer to another as conditions change (this is especially true for work in the agriculture and construction sectors). However, it is unclear to what extent employees would prefer flexibility and multiple jobs if the work environment were less challenging and decent work standards were enforced.

Box 5: Finding the Balance between Entrepreneurship and Vulnerabilities through HBBs

Based on 4 years of experience working with 6,275 vulnerable Jordanian and refugee entrepreneurs, 80% of them have used business start-up grants to start their business, while 20% have usually spent it on more urgent household priorities, such as health and rent. Of the 80% who used a business start-up grant to improve their business, around half remain active and operating 6 months later. Of those again, around half report generating an average profit of 150 JDs per month. While this amount is helpful, it is below the minimum wage and not enough to sustain the average household expenditure. Through the business skills training and counseling, business owners shared that HBB is typically not the only source of income. Most of the money generated through the HBBs seems to be used to cover rental costs and/or repay debt, business counseling efforts are geared towards teaching business owners to use revenues from the business to sustain it and not only to cover their basic needs.

- Longer timeframes for programs, coupled with unconditional cash and capacity building, improve the likelihood of successful livelihoods outcomes.** With target groups who are often more economically and socially vulnerable, capacity building through mentorship and coaching is a key component for HBBs to succeed. The needs encompass, among other things, financial literacy, basic literacy and numeracy, saving and business planning. Timeframes around six months to one year, which often shorten further due to waiting periods for government permissions; make it more difficult for programs to have a positive impact. A clear finding from the programmatic evidence is that setting up a HBB does not necessarily decrease vulnerabilities for said household. A HBB intervention does not support people to overcome vulnerabilities per se, but should be combined with other forms of support in order

to be impactful. Additionally, programmatic evidence suggests that an unconditional cash package can support the job search and generate employment success in the short-term for certain segments of the labor pool. While the some job seekers seem to use it to settle immediate payment needs in the short-term, such as medical bills, the evidence shows that cash assistance helps to overcome initial constraints for seeking work.

- **There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to improving livelihoods and self-reliance, with further testing and research required to increase the evidence-base on what works best in Jordan’s current macroeconomic and legal climate.** The collective experience from the past years shows that no one approach is the ‘ideal formula’ to create sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable people. Instead, it is apparent that solutions to improved economic opportunities have different entry points, require multi-stakeholder engagement, local or contextualized understandings of livelihoods metrics and concepts, as well as innovative approaches. Furthermore, the role of rigorous research and data analysis is critical in informing a more robust understanding of livelihoods outcomes and needs. DSP’s research highlights the need to integrate more meaningful outcomes into livelihoods interventions and policy frameworks.²⁶ On decent work for example, the emphasis should shift towards metrics that capture quality and conditions of work as well as meaningful changes in a household’s financial wellbeing.²⁷ In order to improve the positive impact of interventions, robust labor market assessments and private sector data are required.

REINFORCING SOCIAL COHESION OUTCOMES

- **Preliminary evidence points towards shared livelihoods services contributing to positive social relations and social cohesion outcomes for Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities.** Programmatic evidence on HBBs interventions in urban areas highlights an increase in Syrian participants’ feeling of being part of a community. Linkages made between individuals through the livelihoods program play a significant role in enabling access to job and business opportunities. A number of Syrian participants specifically expressed livelihoods support they received enabled improved positive relations between themselves and Jordanian community members, and helped diminish prejudice against refugees.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief has presented a stocktaking of challenges and successes of livelihoods interventions in Jordan up until February 2020, in light of DSP’s research findings on medium-term approaches to Syrians’ protracted displacement in Jordan. Taken together, the lessons learned suggest that when addressing the potential for refugee self-reliance and resilience in Jordan over the next three to five years, progress would be aided by an inclusive approach to addressing needs and priorities. International commitments have not materialized at the levels initially envisioned, making it politically and economically difficult for the GoJ to enact the kinds of labor market reforms necessary to adequately support self-reliance. Meanwhile, evidence shows that applying labor standards and regulations to certain populations only can segment the labor market, fuel exploitation, increase the vulnerability of certain groups and place downward pressure on wages and work conditions for all.²⁸

The immediate impact of COVID-19 highlights the critical need to bridge differences and find opportunities to complement humanitarian and development approaches, international, national, government and civil society collaborations, to improve the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable. While more evidence needs to be gathered on the economic impact of COVID-19, it will be critical to commit to ensuring sufficient support for livelihoods programming and conducive policies, including necessary adaptation to respond to the emergency.

26 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

27 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020.

28 Durable Solutions Platform and Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. 2020. Lenner K., Turner L. 2018.; International Labour Organization. 2018. ‘Decent Work Country Programme (2018 - 2022).’ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/genericdocument/wcms_656566.pdf

The lessons learned point towards a number of recommendations towards the wider livelihoods actors in Jordan in the medium-term. With these overarching considerations in mind, the GoJ, international donors, private sector and operational agencies should ensure that recovery and medium-term planning from the crisis emphasizes the importance of livelihoods, including through the following **key recommendations**:

The **Government of Jordan (GoJ)** should:

- **Continue fostering a more enabling environment for job creation, business and investment.** The GoJ is encouraged to prioritize macroeconomic policies that promote job creation, support demand and investment, and reduce regulatory and bureaucratic barriers and costs for Jordanian and non-Jordanian entrepreneurs. Such actions have the potential to be a 'win-win' for both the GoJ and refugees inside the country. In the long-run, enabling Syrians to formalize their successful businesses could benefit Jordan's economy by broadening the tax base and increasing Social Security contributions.
- **Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers.** The GoJ should invest more in monitoring the implementation of decent work and OH&S standards, especially in sectors and geographical areas where vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees, are present.
- **Explore opening additional professions to non-Jordanians in sectors with high growth potential that can serve local labor market and community needs.** This will enable Jordan to more fully realize the economic benefits and contributions that Syrian refugees bring. The recent closure of additional professions to non-Jordanians is fundamentally at odds with the goal of promoting self-reliance and resilience, and contributes to informality and a culture of dependency.

International donors should:

- **Invest in the GoJ's efforts to create jobs and foster a more enabling environment for businesses and investment, ensuring that these processes are inclusive of refugees.** International donors should invest in strategies that boost economic growth and job creation in Jordan, as these are critical to fostering self-reliance and social cohesion. For example, investments in transportation and infrastructure are a key government priority and an area where donors can usefully lend their expertise and support.
- **Integrate accountability for sustainable livelihoods indicators and meaningful outcomes into national policy frameworks.** Moving away from output indicators, an emphasis should shift to metrics that capture the quality and conditions of work. International donors are encouraged to integrate accountability for decent work indicators and meaningful outcomes into livelihood interventions and policy frameworks, including in a potential revision of the Compact, as well as supporting context-specific understandings of certain livelihoods concepts, including on decent work standards.
- **Engage and capacitate partners to pilot innovative new program approaches, with a focus on partnerships, sustainability and evidence-generation.** The realities of the labor market in Jordan call for a move away from traditional approaches and towards more adaptable and flexible interventions. Two key aspects to make this happen are on the one hand flexible funding, and on the other hand an easing of funding limitations on the specific sectors or geographical areas for implementation. Moreover, focus should be placed on strengthening private-public partnerships in a meaningful way, ensuring sustainability in the long-term and supporting continued evidence-generation.

Private sector actors should:

- **Enable dignified employment for refugees, migrants and vulnerable Jordanians, through hiring, providing on-the-job training and entrepreneurship support.** Private sector actors, especially larger companies, are well placed to support vulnerable groups by hiring directly, working with smaller enterprises that hire refugees and other vulnerable groups through sourcing or subcontracting work or through inclusive procurement mechanisms. Moreover, flexible financing through venture capital-like approaches can better enable piloting new approaches that can be scaled up in the future, and could go hand-in-hand with technical assistance.

- **Support the process of value chain development by linking businesses, led by either refugees or vulnerable host communities, to available or new markets.** Another way to support self-reliance is to help create value chains to complete production or create market linkages. While NGOs and other livelihoods actors generally understand the supply side well due to their direct contact with vulnerable populations, private sector actors are generally well placed to work on the demand side, including through market research, demand prediction and related trainings.
- **The private sector, together with the GoJ, could explore 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 for accessing financial services.

Operational agencies working on livelihoods should:

- **Address shared challenges between vulnerable host communities, migrants and refugees, while remaining aware of refugees' distinct vulnerabilities due to their legal status.** Programmatic evidence and research points towards many shared challenges and lived experiences between vulnerable host communities and refugees, but also to a number of distinct vulnerabilities resulting from refugees' precarious legal status. While interventions focused on improving structural challenges are critical to address shared concerns, such as decent work or business support, other interventions continue to be critical for supporting displacement-specific vulnerabilities, for instance legal awareness and documentation support.
- **Promote innovative approaches across the spectrum of livelihoods interventions.** Operational learning points towards a saturation of the market as a result repetitive livelihoods programs, mainly because of regulatory limitations placed on HBBs limiting the type of items or services they can produce (most notably food processing and soap making). Moreover, operational learning points towards limited success of traditional approaches to job placement or vocational training programs, highlighting the need to institutionalize innovation. For instance, this can be done through:
 - Increasing the **role of technology** in tailoring interventions across target groups. The use of intervention selection and job matching algorithms by IRC has demonstrated the potential for improving outcomes around labor market entry, job placement, and retention.
 - Developing **non-traditional vocational training programs**, which align better with labor market demands, and place emphasis on iterative programming and interventions that help build transferrable skills in new and non-traditional sectors. Collaboration with private sector actors can lead to successful outcomes due to their adaptability and responsiveness.
 - Exploring opportunities in **green technology**, which can strengthen the resilience of Jordan while allowing for job-creation for refugees. Successful innovation requires a systemic approach and it is always advisable to work with local partners and resources to develop context-specific innovation solutions. For instance, NRC has been implementing a renewable energy and energy efficiency project in Jordan with the aim of providing greener solutions for refugee populations and decreasing the pressure on host communities through interventions at shelter level (solar water heaters installation), public school energy efficiency upgrades, installation of solar panel systems and skills training for youth refugees on technical capacity to support on maintenance of the systems and allow them to access jobs opportunities in an increasing market.

- **Explore opportunities for piloting a graduation-type intervention, as elements of unconditional cash, capacity building and longer-term funding cycles currently support positive livelihoods outcomes.** Collective programmatic learning shows that longer duration of programs, unconditional cash – under certain conditions – and capacity building support do support employment and livelihoods. However, addressing vulnerability is not the same as improving retention, and clarity is needed when programming on the intended outcomes, namely programming to support the most vulnerable or to support the labor market, and where possible combining both.
- **Contextualize livelihoods definitions and understandings in order to develop appropriate metrics for measuring ‘successes’ in livelihoods outcomes.** In order to bring about positive change, it is vital to include voices of vulnerable communities and refugees, including on their employment preferences and the reasons for those. It is also important to understand the priorities and motivating factors for the private sector and other stakeholders to promote workers’ rights. For instance, the widely agreed upon success metric of job retention may not necessarily shared by the private sector. Programmatically, a closer working relationship with employers, in order to build trust to gain entry points into changing attitudes and behaviors, is a possible way forward. However, further evidence is needed on this, which should be followed by advocacy towards international donors and the GoJ.
- **Strengthen linkages between livelihoods actors in order to leverage respective advantages and specialized services.** Operational actors should actively seek out opportunities for collaboration and coordination, in order to link up different programs that have potential to build on each other and bring about improved livelihoods outcomes. For example, graduates of vocational training programs can be better linked to ongoing livelihoods support, HBBs can be connected to investment capital, in-kind support, mentorship and marketing support.
- **Ensure adequate mechanisms for data collection and data analysis in order to contribute to the broader learning agenda** on self-reliance and resilience in Jordan. The role of reliable and quality data is essential for designing new programs, adapting interventions, or developing new policies. In the medium-term, it will be critical to support research capacities of national and local entities, including organizations and universities, to ensure sustainability of efforts. A number of future research topics that emerge from this brief include (1) Identifying the threshold for formalization of small businesses to have a cumulative positive impact; (2) Assessing the feasibility and sustainability of scaling up community-based approaches to decent work; (3) Improving understanding on the incentives for the private sector to comply with laws and ensure improved work conditions.



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