

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS IN PREPARATION FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS

---

## A DESK REVIEW

UNDP & UNHCR

**PREPARED BY**  
Dr. Merve Hosgelen

**DECEMBER 2021**





---

Published by  
**United Nations Development Programme &  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

Front Cover Photo by  
**Rana Sweidan/UNDP**

Designed by  
**Zeinab Kobeissi**

Copyright 2022

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Refugee Returns &amp; Livelihoods – Host Countries.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Trends in Refugee Returns.....	10
<b>Refugee Return &amp; Livelihoods Context in Host Countries.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Turkey.....	13
Lebanon.....	18
Jordan.....	22
Iraq.....	25
<b>Chapter 2: REFUGEE Return Conditions &amp; Livelihood Needs, Gaps &amp; Opportunities–In Syria.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Livelihoods needs and support in Syria.....	33
<b>Priority Areas for Livelihood Interventions.....</b>	<b>35</b>
Increasing Labor Force Skills.....	35
Providing Area-based Market Needs Assessments.....	36
Reviving the Agriculture Sector.....	36
Stimulating Entrepreneurship and SME Growth with Cluster Development Strategy.....	37
Empowering Women.....	38
Integrating Social Cohesion into Livelihood Programming.....	39
<b>Chapter 3: Summary of Recommendations for Strengthening Livelihood Assistance in the Context of Refugee Return.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Recommendations Relevant For Syria.....	40
Recommendations Relevant for Host Countries.....	42

# Tables

Table 1: Total Number of Self-Organised Refugee Returns (2016-2020).....	9
Table 3: Number of Refugee Returns by Country, 2016-2020.....	10
Table 4: Spontaneous Returns bY IDPs by Governorate, 2017-2020.....	11
Table 5: Challenges Experienced by Economic Sectors In Syria.....	18
Table 6: 3RP Livelihood Sector Achievements in Turkey (2020).....	31
Table 7: 3RP Livelihood Sector Achievements in Lebanon (2020).....	40
Table 8: 3RP Livelihoods Sector Achievements in Jordan (2020).....	47
Table 9: 3RP Livelihood Sector Achievements in KR-I (2020).....	52
Table 10: Percentage of Returnee Households (IDPs and Refugee Returnees) Indicating Livelihoods as Top Priority by Regions.....	58
Table 11: People in Need by Early Recovery and Livelihoods Sector.....	58
Table 12: Funding against the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020.....	59
Table 13: Labor Market Assessment- Idleb Governorate, April 2017.....	63

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Dr. Merve Hosgelen, with generous feedback received from members of the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group's (RDSWG) workstream on Livelihoods and Return Preparedness. Special acknowledgements go to Verena Vad, Ryan Marshall, Annika Gerlach, Helene Michou, Kathryn Achilles, Yolanda Davila Hernandez, Francesco Baldo, Muhaned Rubayee, Karim Sahyoun, David Makin-Taylor, Tammam Sbeih, Nuha Abdallah, Saudia Anwer, Chiara Lorenzini, Philippe Clerc, Yousra Taleb, Rawhi Afaghani, Minako Manome, and Abdallah Al-Laham for contributing to the preparation process of this report, either as peer reviewers or as key informants.

The views expressed in this publication belong to the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations generally, or the United Nations Member States.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 10th year anniversary of the Syria crisis has again highlighted the protracted nature of the displacement it has resulted in and the importance of a continued discussion around durable solutions. While refugee returns to Syria remain limited in scale, most Syrian refugees in neighboring countries according to the UNHCR's 6th Regional Perception and Intention Survey continue to hope to return one day. Access to livelihood factors heavily into refugees' return decision-making as well as affects their overall wellbeing. Against this backdrop, UNDP's Sub-Regional Response Facility (SRF) and UNHCR have commissioned this study to better understand the dynamics around livelihoods and durable solutions, including the recent challenges and opportunities that Syrian refugees face in host countries from a livelihood's perspective, as well as identifying the extent to which on-going livelihoods support to refugees in host countries are helping to meet the existing or potential future needs. The report aims at improving the knowledge on the essentials of livelihoods preparedness for durable solutions, including refugee return, and offering recommendations on how the currently offered livelihood interventions can be strengthened to support Durable Solutions.

This report is particularly intended to inform the efforts of the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group's (RDSWG) Livelihoods Return Preparedness Workstream.

# Legal and policy conditions for refugees accessing livelihoods in host countries



## TURKEY

The Temporary Protection Regulation provides Syrians with access to national systems such as health, education, social services in addition to employment. Work permit regulation grants Syrians the right to apply for work permits and provides access to formal employment. Between 2016 and 2019, a total of 132,497 work permits have been issued to Syrians. Syrians can enroll in technical and vocational education training and in apprenticeship schemes offered by the Ministry of National Education. They are also allowed to start and develop their own businesses.

In spite of the overall enabling policy environment, the labor force participation rate of Syrian refugees stands at 44 percent (81 percent for men and 14 percent for women). Majority of Syrian women in Turkey are not actively seeking employment because of their childcare responsibilities, not getting permission to work from husband or extended family, taking care of elderly, and housework. Reasons for the limited labor force participation by Syrian refugees include: the large number of informal workers; formal employment in certain professions is only accessible to Turkish citizens; limited access to capital and financial services; a quota restricting employers hiring Syrians under temporary protection; limited language skills hindering access to quality education, training and jobs as well as the challenging process to validate diplomas and certificates.



In order to address some of these challenges, 3RP partners are working on a number of initiatives including skills building programs. Further improvements should be made in supporting the growth and scaling up of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), easing access to information on SME support to Syrians, increasing skill building efforts as well as entrepreneurship training, strengthening job-matching for unskilled Syrians with - available job opportunities, promoting digital diversified livelihoods opportunities and scaling up the agriculture sector.





## LEBANON

The preliminary findings of the 2021 Inter-Agency Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon suggests higher labor force participation although primarily in the informal economy. Despite the relatively low unemployment, around 90 percent of the refugees live in extreme poverty due to low wages and/or underemployment. According to the VASyR nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon have sunk further into poverty and vulnerability during the year. Almost all Syrian refugees are classified as working poor. Refugees are commonly un- or underemployed due to lack of opportunities, skills and education or family responsibilities. Many stable and/or higher paying employment fields and opportunities are limited to Lebanese nationals, especially those in the science, education, and public sectors.

The lack of formal status for many refugees in Lebanon limits refugees' access to basic services, housing and formal livelihood opportunities, limits their movement and puts them at risk for detention, deportation and prosecution. In 2020, only 20 percent of Syrian refugees aged 15 years and above reported having legal residency. Moreover, the process to renew approvals are complicated and expensive.

The lack of residency documents and the costs associated with applying for work permits poses a challenge for many wanting to access formal employment. This results in most Syrian refugees relying on informal, low skill and low pay work, such as in the agriculture and construction sector. The season nature of much of the work in these two sectors results in un- or underemployment, particularly during the winter months.

The number of Syrian owned SME businesses in Lebanon is limited due to a lack of financial resources among most refugees and government support, the extensive paperwork needed for their formal registration (also requiring residency and work permits) as well as the inability of refugees without residency status to open banks accounts in the country.



In order to improve the economic and livelihood situation of Syrian refugees, access to social security assistance is needed. Expanded work permits and legal residency for Syrians, to allow them to access more formal work opportunities is also an important step towards this. Another practical step would include improving support to agribusinesses. As the agricultural sector is one of the main employment sectors for Syrian refugees, this would help improve livelihood options and the increasing food production and infrastructure would aid with food security in Lebanon.



## JORDAN

Before 2016, most Syrian refugees in Jordan were not legally allowed to work, due to work permit restrictions. From 2016 to present, employment opportunities and work permit numbers increased due to the Jordan Compact, a joint initiative by the government of Jordan and the International Community, which promised to provide 50,000 work permits for Syrian refugees in 2016 and additional 150,000 in the following years, in return for concessional financing and preferential trade agreements for the government. The Jordan Compact was an innovative approach that not only supported employment for Syrian refugees but also access to basic education for refugee children. Despite the many successes of the scheme a key area of weakness continues to be the integration of female refugees in the labor force, with only 7 percent of all work permits going to women. Syrian refugees are legally allowed to operate home-based businesses (HBBs), under certain sectors. To operate businesses outside of the homes, Syrian refugees are required to have a Jordanian partner, or significant capital, as well as documentation such as a valid passport. Prohibitions exist for foreign business ownership in certain sectors.

The overall unemployment rate is 23 percent, but rates are higher for both women and youth. Fee free work permits issued through the Jordan compact scheme are restricted to sectors that are open for foreign labor, particularly the agriculture, construction and manufacturing sectors. In 2021, a new flexible work permit is being implemented, which will be issued without being tied to a specific employer, helping to streamline the issuance process.

Jordan's labor market is highly segmented and informal, and despite the opportunity for work permits, the majority of refugees continue to be employed within the informal economy.

The process to license and register a home-based business has by many perceived as unnecessarily cumbersome, with for example variation across the different Governorates. Progress is being made in supporting refugees in this regard and 2021 an increase in demand among beneficiaries wishing to access this opportunity was observed, despite continued limited access to financial support for HBB business growth. Women's participation in the labor market has been limited due to hiring discrimination, transportation issues, impact of family responsibilities, reported harassment, and other societal factors. Young graduates often struggle to integrate in the market as their education does not match employment opportunities and skills needed in the country.

Growth of the private sector is key to Jordan being able to produce the required number of needed job opportunities including for refugees. A new paradigm is necessary, promoting economic development and opportunities in Jordan. Areas of importance for refugees are access to financial institutions, improving job seeking platforms, bridging the training to employment gap, supporting access to employment through large infrastructure programmes and expanding services for free and low-cost childcare.





## IRAQ

There are no legal restrictions on Syrian refugees' right to work, however, policies and laws on livelihoods and employment are equivocal and imprecise. The official policy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I's), which hosts the majority of Syrian refugees, is that Syrians who are registered with the UNHCR or who have a residency card can access employment with no employment ratio or private sector restrictions.

While, Iraq has one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the world, especially among women and the youth, it is comparatively high among male Syrian refugees (in some cities, over 50%). Most refugees work without formal contracts or benefits, and rely on low-skill jobs, particularly within the agriculture and construction sectors. Support to SMEs and agribusinesses is needed to provide new products and jobs. Food production and marketing systems could be particularly useful to help revive agri-businesses.

Lack of sustainable employment opportunities is the main vulnerability reported by Syrian refugees residing in KR-I and the key root of some protection concerns like child labor and GBV. Un- or underemployed refugees seek relocation to camps and relying on debt to cope with their inability to meet basic needs. Underfunding for the refugees response in the country, included for the Livelihood sectors results in limited livelihood programming to address existing gaps.



## The impact of COVID-19

The wider impact of the pandemic has in most of the host countries exacerbated the already concerning unemployment figures, disproportionately affecting women and youth. Many Syrian refugees in the region work in the informal sectors and are reliant in low skill, daily labor, providing them with little or no formal security when they are unable to work due to sickness or restrictions. Low pay and underemployment have resulted in widespread poverty among refugees, limiting their ability to accumulate savings that they could otherwise fall back. Humanitarian programs have been put in place to support refugees and host community but are limited due to a lack of funding and competing priorities for example in Lebanon and Iraq.

## Current challenges and opportunities in accessing livelihood opportunities in Syria

-Nearly 2.5 million jobs were lost between 2011 and 2015, with the construction and industry sectors accounting for 47 per cent, followed by the agriculture sector with 20 percent. As of 2020, employment to population ratio (aged 15+) was estimated at be 40.3 percent. This ratio was as low as 11.4 percent for women.

-While livelihoods opportunities have been insufficient even before the outbreak of COVID-19, the pandemic has exacerbated the situation. For example, a marked decline was experienced in private and public sector employment with a simultaneous increase in daily labor. and the COVID-19 measures limiting people's ability to work.

-The average monthly household income is estimated at 138,964 SYP (63 USD), with significantly lower earnings among refugee returnees and IDPs, 92,559 SYP, and 88,623 SYP respectively. Returnees along with other vulnerable groups, are reportedly struggling to meet basic needs due to the high cost of living having been exacerbated by fluctuations in the value of the Syrian Pound,

-Throughout Syria, it is estimated that only a quarter of households have access to formal or informal credit, suggesting that such support mechanisms are out of reach for many. Although informal support mechanisms are fairly common in Syria, opportunities for businesses and start-ups to access available start-up capital or finances to grow are limited.

# Priority Areas for Livelihoods Interventions in Syria

Targeted and coordinated area-based humanitarian interventions, including through private sector engagement and skills mapping and training, are needed particularly in return areas. These ensure a broader, needs based strengthening of the local market.

Conducting local level market assessments in a consortium type approach to improve their quality and streamline efforts.

Creating a long-term commitment plan and providing more finances to strengthen the agriculture sector, aiding the growth of agri-businesses. A more accessible system to purchase and distribute seed cereals and cash crops at subsidized rates would increase crop output and food supply.

The growth of SMEs, which account for most of Syria's economy pre-crisis, is essential for rebuilding Syria's economy, generate new jobs and provide stable wages. Entrepreneurship should be promoted through improved access to capital funding and incentives.

Providing entrepreneurship training, providing individuals with the aptitude to identify business opportunities, and building knowledge and skills to capitalize on them. It includes instruction in chance identification, commercializing a concept, managing resources, and initiating business speculation.

Empowering women to access the labor market through greater inclusion in skill training, provisions of childcare and financial support for female lead SME including HBBs.

Improving social cohesion in displacement and return areas with the help of Early Recovery and Livelihood (ERL) partners, local authorities, civil societies, organizations, and community members and leaders. Inclusive livelihood opportunities and conflict mediation and resolution skills capacity building can help refugees, returnees and other community members building stronger bonds and mitigate discrimination and exclusion.



# INTRODUCTION

With the Syrian crisis entering its 10th year, the pursuit of durable solutions for Syrian Refugees has gained increasing attention. Most Syrian refugees continue to say that an eventual return to Syria is their preferred option. In successive surveys and assessments of refugee intentions, livelihoods remain one of the key factors in return decision-making, along with security and access to housing and basic services. Indeed, concerns around livelihoods have only increased in light of COVID-19 and the socio-economic impacts in Syria and across the region which has seen growing levels of poverty, food insecurity and socio-economic hardship.

Against this backdrop, the UNDP Sub-Regional Response Facility (SRF)<sup>[1]</sup> and the UNHCR have commissioned this study to better understand the dynamics around livelihoods and durable solutions, including voluntary return, including the recent challenges and opportunities that Syrian refugees face in host countries from a livelihood's perspective, as well as identifying the extent to which on-going livelihoods support to refugees in host countries are helping to meet the existing or potential future needs. The report aims at improving the knowledge on the essentials of livelihoods preparedness for durable solutions, including refugee returns and offers recommendations on how the currently offered livelihood interventions can be strengthened to support Durable Solutions. This report is particularly intended to inform the efforts of the

Regional Durable Solutions Working Group's (RDSWG) Livelihoods Return Preparedness Workstream.

The report is split into three chapters. The first chapter looks at the recent trends in durable solutions, particularly refugee return, and the current socio-economic situation influencing access to livelihoods in Syria and host countries. The second chapter looks more in detail on current livelihoods interventions and priority areas in Syria. The third chapter provides specific recommendations on how to improve the livelihoods situation in both Syria and in host countries, in the context of refugee returns and pursuing durable solutions.

The analysis is extensively based on secondary literature review of published and unpublished reports from 3RP countries and Syria. To understand context specific trends, a number of key informant interviews were also conducted

[1] The SRF was established to bring a robust development response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The SRF mainstreams a resilience-based development response through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and extracts best practices and lessons learnt from the on-going efforts. The SRF aims to improve sub-regional coordination, cost-effectiveness, and harmonization of a comprehensive, multi-country response under the leadership of the governments neighboring Syria which host the greatest number of Syrian refugees.

*[1] The SRF was established to bring a robust development response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The SRF mainstreams a resilience-based development response through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and extracts best practices and lessons learnt from the on-going efforts. The SRF aims to improve sub-regional coordination, cost-effectiveness, and harmonization of a comprehensive, multi-country response under the leadership of the governments neighboring Syria which host the greatest number of Syrian refugees.*

# CHAPTER 1:

## DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS – HOST COUNTRIES

### TRENDS IN REFUGEE RETURNS

UNHCR has verified the return of over 300,000 Syrian refugees from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as of later November 2021<sup>[2]</sup>. A gradual increase was recorded from 28,320 verified returns in 2016 to 93,669 people returning in 2019. This trend slowed in late 2019 and stopped with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Returns have since mid-2020 been taking place at a lower but stable pace. Of the total number of refugee returnees between 2016 and 2021, 41 percent arrived from Turkey, 22 percent from Lebanon, 20 percent from Jordan, 17 percent from Iraq and 1 percent from Egypt. Aleppo, Al Hasakeh and Idlib were the governorates receiving the greatest number of refugee returns.

**Table 1 Total Number of Refugee Returns verified by unhcr (2016-2021)**

YEAR	Total Number of Refugee Returns verified by UNHCR
2016	28,549
2017	50,705
2018	55,049
2019	94,971
2020	38,235
2021	32,949 (up to 30 November 2021)

[2] The UNHCR and 3RP, Registered Syrian Refugees in Host Countries, November 2021.



**Table 2 Number of Refugee Returns by Country, 2016-2021**

	<b>Total Number of Refugee Returnees (2016-2021)</b>	<b>% Share of Total Number of Refugee Returnees by Host Country (2016-2020)</b>	<b>% Share of Total Number of Refugee Returnees by Host Country 2021 (up to 30 November)</b>
<b>TURKEY</b>	<b>121,995</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>LEBANON</b>	<b>50,705</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>IRAQ</b>	<b>55,049</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>JORDAN</b>	<b>94,971</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>EGYPT</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300,458</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: MENA - Durable Solutions Dashboard - November 2021 - Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey

Meanwhile, a much larger number of returns by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), has been recorded, with a total of nearly 3.1 million people engaging in spontaneous returns between 2017 and 2020. The largest number of total spontaneous IDP returns in 2017-2020 period was recorded in Aleppo (27 percent of the total), followed by Dar'a (18 percent) and Idlib (15 percent).

**Table 3 Spontaneous Returns by IDPs by Governorate, 2017-2020**

	Number of Spontaneous IDP Returns				Total # of IDP Returns 2017-2020	% Share of the Total 2017-2020
	2017	2018	2019	2020		
<b>Aleppo</b>	469,729	177,790	64,455	119,354	831,328	26.9%
<b>Al Hasakah</b>	10,287	18,709	54,530	9,170	92,696	3%
<b>Ar-Raqqa</b>	62,081	160,861	11,824	4,258	239,024	7.7%
<b>As-Sweida</b>	199	2,460	1,645	50	4,354	0.1%
<b>Damascus</b>	6,971	12,822	342	805	20,940	0.7%
<b>Dar'a</b>	13,540	446,710	89,552	13,275	563,077	18.2%
<b>Deir-ez-Zor</b>	524	173,636	78,905	21,428	274,493	8.9%
<b>Hama</b>	120,757	48,019	24,870	9,055	202,701	6.6%
<b>Homs</b>	9,540	35,129	43,960	8,965	97,594	3.2%
<b>Idleb</b>	32,817	138,085	79,919	225,312	476,133	15.4%
<b>Lattakia</b>	132	605		0	737	-
<b>Quneitra</b>	665	42,751	8,583	0	51,999	1.7%
<b>Rural Damascus</b>	37,068	156,995	35,550	4,783	234,396	7.6%
<b>Total</b>	764,310	1,414,572	494,135	416,455	3,089,472	100%

Source: OCHA, IDP Spontaneous Returns Excel Data October 2020

## DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND LIVELIHOODS CONTEXT IN HOST COUNTRIES

This section provides an overview of the livelihood and socio-economic context for Syrian refugees in host countries. The overall socio-economic and legal conditions of Syrian refugees vary according to the host countries. Although difficult economic conditions or lack of work permits (along with lack of security or legal residency within host countries and implicit and/or explicit pressure from host countries to leave or socio-cultural differences) can be considered as “push factors”<sup>[3]</sup>, research reaffirms that host country conditions affect returns in complex ways and a lower quality of life in exile does not always increase refugee returns<sup>[4]</sup>. The people who actually undertaken the return journey often made their decision based on the situation in Syria, such as improved security conditions, nostalgia/family reunification with family and a sense of duty.<sup>[5][6]</sup>



### TURKEY

**Turkey hosts the largest refugee population in the world with 3.64 million Syrians living under temporary protection, 58 percent of which are of working age<sup>[7]</sup>.**

More than 98 percent of the Syrian refugees live in host communities, with a high concentration of them living in southeast Turkey. Some 50 percent of the refugees reside in four municipalities: Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hatay and Sanliurfa, respectively<sup>[8]</sup>. Turkey's labor market has undoubtedly been affected by the Syrian crisis and in the face of an economic downturn since 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic, loss of jobs and livelihoods is on the rise. The unemployment rate for the adult population is estimated at 13 percent as of December 2020<sup>[9]</sup>. This rate is 23 percent for young people aged 15 to 24 and 30 percent for young women<sup>[10]</sup>.

**In terms of Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods, the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) provides Syrians with access to national systems such as health, education, social services in addition to employment<sup>[11]</sup>. Work permit regulation grants Syrians the right to apply for a work permit and access to formal employment, though those working in the agricultural sector do not require a work permit. Between 2016 and 2019, a total of 132,497 work permits have been issued to Syrians<sup>[12]</sup>.**

[3] UNDP, *Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria*, December 2019.

[4] The World Bank, *Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, 2020.

[5] UNHCR, March 2021, *Sixth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*.

[6] UNDP, *Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria*, December 2019.

[7] Government of Turkey, *Temporary Protection Statistics*, Directorate General of Migration Management, 12 December 2020.

[8] *ibid.*

[9] International Labor Organization, *ILOSTAT database*. Data retrieved in September 2020.

[10] *ibid.*

[11] *Temporary Protection Regulation, National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities*, October 22, 2014, Article 26 (4), accessed at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56572fd74.html>.

[12] According to Turkish Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services (MoFLSS) statistics, the total number includes permits granted both to Syrians under temporary protection and to Syrians with regular residence permits.

If Syrians receive a work permit however, they cannot benefit from cash assistance provided to the most vulnerable households through the Emergency Social Safety Net program (ESSN)<sup>[13]</sup>. Syrians under temporary protection can register with and benefit from services from ISKUR, the Turkish Public Employment Agency, after six months of residence in Turkey. Such services include counseling, job matching, skills training, entrepreneurship support, on-the-job training, and job placement support. As of December 2019, 11,470 Syrian refugees were registered with ISKUR<sup>[14]</sup>. **Syrians can enroll in technical and vocational education training and in apprenticeship schemes offered by the Ministry of National Education, although the interest is documented to be low. They are also allowed to start and develop their own businesses.**



**In terms of the current livelihoods for Syrian refugees, labor force participation stands at 44 percent (81 percent for men and 14 percent for women)** while unemployment is around 13 percent based on the Household Labor Force Survey (HLSF) 2017 and ILO calculations<sup>[15]</sup>. Other estimates suggest that 911,106 Syrian refugees are actively participating in the labor market and 800,000 are working informally<sup>[16]</sup>. Moreover, half of the Syrian refugees between the age of 15 and 24 are neither in employment, nor in education or training<sup>[17]</sup>. Furthermore, although 84 percent of refugee households are found to have at least one person working in their houses, only 3 percent of them have a work permit, suggesting that a vast majority of Syrians are employed informally<sup>[18]</sup>. The estimated number of Syrian refugee working women is as small as 157,000<sup>[19]</sup>. Since 2011, Syrians have invested more than \$300 million into setting up enterprises in Turkey, resulting in the employment of around 100,000 people<sup>[20]</sup>. There are 8,329 registered companies with Syrian owners or partners. However, it is estimated that there are over 10,000 registered and unregistered businesses in total<sup>[21]</sup>. Evidence suggests that the higher integration of the Syrian owned enterprises with the local economy results in higher employment numbers including higher employment rates for women<sup>[22]</sup>.

[13] The ESSN which has been running since 2016 with funding from the European Union Facility for Refugees (FRIT), is providing monthly cash assistance to 1.8 million vulnerable refugees to help them meet basic needs.

[14] Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, Employment Support Project for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities, by the World Bank, December 2019.

[15] Caro, L. P., Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market, ILO Office in Turkey, February 2020.

[16] Government of Turkey, Exit Strategy.

[17] Ibid.

[18] WFP and Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings, 2019

[19] Atlantic Research Council and UNDP, Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey, July 2020

[20] TEPAV, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, Bulletin of Companies with Syrian Capital, March and April 2019.

[21] Ibid.

[22] UNDP REPORT SMES mapping 2019

There are several challenges for Syrian refugees to access livelihood. **First, the vast majority of Syrian refugees work informally and often do not earn enough to become self-sufficient, while also being at risk from non-compliance with minimum wage legislation and the possible denial of workplace rights[23].** For example, average income for Syrians working on an irregular basis is estimated to range between TRY 1,000 (for women) and TRY 1450 per month (men) in Istanbul[24], which is half of the official minimum wage[25]. The impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the vulnerability associated with informal work or casual labor opportunities, with many refugees and host communities facing a sudden and unexpected loss of livelihoods[26].



**Second, Syrian entrepreneurs have indicated the need to have better ways of accessing capital and financial services;** easier access to information on taxes, work licenses, employment; and finally, the improvement of their Turkish language skills. One study highlighted that more than 95 percent of the Syrian-owned enterprises have never used and have no knowledge of incentives, grants or funds available to entrepreneurs in Turkey, largely due to lack of information or the amount of bureaucracy involved in accessing them[27].

**Third, by law, there are certain professions where only Turkish citizens can perform.** These include being a dentist, nurse, pharmacist, veterinarian, manager at a private hospital, lawyer, notary, private security officer, customs officer, or tourist guide. Jobs in the marine and fishing industry are also restricted to Turkish citizens. Skilled Syrians who had jobs in above fields prior to the conflict cannot continue working in these professions in Turkey, unless they seek options to become Turkish citizens.

**Fourth, for businesses, there is also a quota to adhere to in employing refugees under temporary protection.** Based on this quota, businesses are only allowed to employ one refugee under temporary protection for every 10 Turkish nationals employed, which is one of the hurdles identified by Syrian refugees and businesses alike.

[23] Caro, L. P., *Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market*, ILO Office in Turkey, February 2020.

[24] Caro, L. P., *Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market*, ILO Office in Turkey, February 2020.

[25] Turkish Red Crescent and WFP, *Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings*, 2019.

[26] 3RP, *3RP Partner Support to Turkey's Response to COVID-19*, May 2020.

[27] *ibid.*



**Fifth, Syrian youth are both challenged by limited opportunities to quality education, training and jobs as well as lack the skills that correspond to labor market needs.**

One major limitation that Syrian youth experience in accessing livelihood opportunities is the language barrier. Four out of five Syrians have only basic Turkish language skills, 18 percent are at an intermediate level, and only three percent have an advanced command of the language<sup>[28]</sup>. The labor demand surveys conducted by ISKUR<sup>[29]</sup> and World Bank<sup>[30]</sup> refer to Syrians being less competitive in labor market due to their poor language skills. Women are further disadvantaged by traditional gender roles that discriminate their full participation in socio-economic life. The lack of adequate education and vocational skills are some limiting factors to youth employment. Besides language issues, businesses report problems related to lack of skills of Syrian workforce. On average, 46 percent of Turkish companies mention inadequate workforce is a challenge and 18 percent of businesses consider it as their biggest challenge. This is not surprising as 82 percent of Syrian heads of households are educated below high school level and one-third are illiterate<sup>[31]</sup>.

**Sixth, for educated Syrian refugees, validating their diplomas or certificates and getting formal recognition is a remaining challenge.** Often, there is lack of information of the procedures required and the challenges around providing legal documentation.

There have been considerable achievements in enabling Syrian refugees to participate in TVET initiatives. Syrian refugees also have limited information on incentives, regulations and opportunities for starting businesses or gaining formal employment (i.e., accessing financial support, attaining work permits, receiving ISKUR support, etc.).

In addition to work on-going by the Turkish government, 3RP partners have been working to improve the enabling environment and address some of the challenges outlined above. Key programmes included facilitating vocational or other types of training, helping with the establishment of start-ups and SMEs, career counselling and business mentoring support. The 3RP support complements interventions provided under socio-economic support with finances from the Facility for Refugees in Turkey which includes vocational skills training; on the job training; provision of basic labor market skills training (navigating jobs market and operating in Turkish workplaces); support to TVET including apprenticeships and upgrading schools with modern equipment; job advisory and counselling; language training; skill certification services; job placement; support to work permits; and institutional capacity development of Government of Turkey labor market institutions, as well as cash-for work programmes and micro-grants.

[28] WFP-TRC, *Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey*, 2019.

[29] ISKUR Survey of Turkish companies, *presentation of results to Livelihoods Working Group*, November 2018.

[30] World Bank, *Assessing Critical Skills and Occupations in Demand in the Turkish Labor Market: Strengthening Economic Opportunities for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens (FRIT)*, January 2019.

[31] WFP, *Refugees in Turkey: Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise (Round 2)*, May 2018; Kayaoglu and Erdoğan, in *Labor Market Activities*, found 78 percent of adults educated below high school.

## Recommendations for Improving Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

**Supporting the growth/scaling up of Turkish and Syrian owned businesses is key to facilitating job creation opportunities for Syrian refugees.** Provision of technical, managerial and advisory support to SMEs with high growth potential is needed to help them scale up as well as provide competitive services/products in new and emerging markets and to a larger customer base, which eventually translate into the creation of jobs. This can be achieved through online and blended forms of high-quality business support training, one-on-one coaching, mentoring and networking opportunities to enhance SMEs managerial capacities, market access, use of technology and innovation.

**It is important that there is more accessible information for Syrian businesses to receive available support including grants.** Syrian businesses have reached their current scale with little support<sup>[32]</sup>. Only 13 percent of businesses are aware of incentives. This interest can well be capitalized in promoting better integration of Syrian refugees in the private sector and forging partnerships between Turkish and Syrian owned businesses.

**Skills building initiatives for Syrian work force is crucial.** Currently offered TVET courses need to increase their reach and be complemented by the provision of Turkish language training for those who need it. TVET courses need to lean towards equipping people with skills in green sectors of the economy, such as recycling, solar energy, agri-tech or waste management.

**Initiatives that help match unskilled Syrians who are looking for work with available and relevant jobs is much needed.** According to an ISKUR survey, 38 percent of vacancies in 2018 did not require any education<sup>[33]</sup>. In that respect, job matching efforts that can be provided by a wide range of stakeholders and support to ISKUR to handle an increased case load would be important steps in the right direction.



[32] Atlantic Research Council and UNDP, *Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey*, July 2020

[33] ISKUR, "Survey of Turkish Companies," presentation of results to 3RP Livelihoods Working Group, November 2018.

**Entrepreneurship among Syrian refugees needs to be more widely promoted through entrepreneurship training, idea pitching events, innovation labs or business acceleration camps.** Targeted support needs to be extended to those educated or trained young people and women who have previously received some form of entrepreneurship or related training (TVET or informal) in order to help facilitate the formation of new start-ups and self-employment opportunities. Continued support is also needed for newly established start-ups in the first two years of operation for greater probabilities of survival and growth.

**Promotion of digital livelihoods opportunities has become ever so relevant in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.** Discussions on digital work rarely addresses the needs of and possibilities for refugees, migrants and displaced people, thereby bypassing chances for this population to become part of the future economy<sup>[34]</sup>. Digital work widens opportunities, markets, and networks, but these opportunities need to be made more accessible to displaced people and refugees. It is possible to provide more digital on-the-job training and internship opportunities for Syrian refugees. For example, a digital skills passport can serve as a platform to verify one's formal and informal training and work experiences under one umbrella.

**Agriculture sector has consistently been the least funded in recent years in 3RP countries but scaling up is essential<sup>[35]</sup>.** Extending livelihood support to farmers and agribusinesses is the utmost importance.



## LEBANON

**Lebanon, the country which has the largest concentration of refugees per capita globally, hosts 865,531 registered Syrian refugees as of December 2020**, 43 percent of which are of working age (372,000 people)<sup>[36]</sup>. Lebanon, remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crisis. The impact of the financial crisis as of October 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosion at the Port of Beirut in 2020, has pushed vulnerable communities in Lebanon including Syrian refugees into poverty. In line with the government policy, there are no formal refugee camps in Lebanon. Therefore, all Syrian refugees live in host communities with a high concentration in areas closer to the Syrian borders. Some 39 percent of the refugees reside in Bekaa, 27 percent in North Lebanon, 23 percent in Beirut and 10 percent in South Lebanon<sup>[37]</sup>. Lebanon's labor market has undoubtedly been affected by the multiple crisis of the last years. Half of the population has fallen below the poverty line and unemployment is rising rapidly<sup>[38]</sup>. For Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the percentage has increased to 89 percent of refugees living in extreme poverty in 2020, compared to 55 percent only one year before<sup>[39]</sup>. **The economic crisis, closures and lockdowns from COVID-19, the imports that Lebanon rely on, particularly food products, were delayed amongst other reasons, resulting in inflation<sup>[40]</sup>.**

[34] UNDP, *the Migrant Union, Digital Livelihoods for People on the Move*, 2019.

[35] Kirisci, *How the EU and Turkey Can Promote Self-Reliance*, 2020

[36] UNHCR, *Refugee Situations- Operational Portal*, Lebanon, December 2020.

[37] *ibid.*

[38] World Bank, *Lebanon's Economic Update*, October 2020.

[39] UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, *VASyR 2020*, January 2021.

[40] UNHCR, *Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Persons of Concern in Lebanon*, April 2021.

**The average inflation rate climbed to 85 percent in 2020 (4th highest inflation rate in the world), causing the drastic increase in food prices clothing, transportation, healthcare, rent and education[41].** The increased food prices have caused refugees to spend more than half of their income on food in 2020, and borrow money in order to buy food, resulting in further impoverishment and debt[42]. Due to COVID-19, 60 percent of Syrian refugees reported that they have been permanently laid off from their jobs[43]. As a result, the main source of income for Syrian refugee households is in the form of World Food Programme financial assistance cards and programmes[44]. At the country level, unemployment among the labor force was reported at 39 percent in 2020, up from 31 percent in 2019, with a higher percentage for women compared to men. The average monthly income was recorded as USD 66, ranging from USD 28 in Baalbek-El Hermel to USD 127 in Beirut. Women headed households had a much lower average income at USD 47. Only one-third of refugees had regular jobs and 13 percent had more than one part time job to sustain a basic living. The most recent vulnerability assessment showed that the percentage of Syrian households that cannot meet the Minimum Expenditure Basket increased to 91 percent in 2020 from 73 percent in 2019[45]. This is not only due to lack of livelihood opportunities but also partly due

to the high inflation and the depreciating transfer values of the development assistance. In the context of extreme economic hardship that is faced by both host communities and refugees in Lebanon, there is certainly increasing competition over resources for survival which eventually reflects in increased social tensions.

In terms of Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods, Lebanon's residency policy for refugees makes it difficult for Syrians to maintain legal status, therefore constraining their access to work, housing, education and health care as well as exposing them to risks of exploitation and abuse [46][47]. Only 20 percent of individuals (above 15 years old) reported having legal residency in 2020, compared to 22 percent in 2019 and 27 percent in 2018.[48]. **Some 80 percent of Syrian refugees aged 15 years and above lack legal residency and therefore risk detention and deportation for unlawful presence in the country. As of 2020, the labor force participation rate for Syrians in Lebanon was 43 percent, 74 percent among men and 14 percent among women[49].** The unemployment rate was 39 percent in 2020, with a much higher percentage among men at 46 percent. For women, 8 percent were unemployed but 86 percent were outside the labor force[50]. The main reason cited for not working was the lack of work opportunities in the different areas at 25 percent, followed by family responsibilities and medical conditions[51].

[41] Khraiche, D. and Goyeneche, A., *Lebanese Inflation Hits Record High as Food Prices Soar 400%*, February 2021, accessible at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-11/lebanese-inflation-hits-record-high-as-food-prices-soar-400>

[42] UNHCR, *Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Persons of Concern in Lebanon*, April 2021.

[43] 3RP, *Syria Crisis: Regional Needs Overview 2021*, December 2020.

[44] UNHCR, *Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Persons of Concern in Lebanon*, April 2021.

[45] Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, *Key Findings of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, February 2021.

[46] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021, Lebanon Chapter*, 2020.

[47] Ibid.

[48] UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, VASyR 2020, January 2021

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.



The order of the **main sectors that employ Syrians has changes to agriculture (32 percent as compared to 17 percent in 2019) [52], construction (24 percent compared to 21 percent), and other services (15 percent compared to 13 percent) [53].**



**There are several challenges for Syrian refugees to access livelihood opportunities in Lebanon. The primary challenges, as mentioned above, is the lack of legal status for many refugees. Second, even for those who are able to legally work, many employment fields are for Lebanese nationals only,**

**including administrative and banking jobs, jobs in education, engineering, nursing, pharmacy, medical laboratories, medical, and law professions. Syrians, like all foreigners, need a work permit to be allowed to work in Lebanon** including in construction, electricity, carpentry, blacksmithing, and sales.

Fees as well as preconditions for work permits remain high while residency requirements are burdensome [54]. In 2017, another regulation was issued to limit the number of foreign workers per company to a maximum of 1 foreigner per 10 Lebanese workers.

Third, while Syrians are able to set up and run their own business activities under full foreign ownership, reportedly there have been cases of **government crackdown on Syrian businesses [55]. Syrians are therefore operating their businesses in a constrained legal environment and mainly in informal settings. Fourth, the number of work permits granted is minimal, ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand a year [56].** This leads to a considerable number of Syrians that work without contracts in informal sectors, which exposes them to certain protection risks. Fifth, **while similar cultural values and language were identified as conducive to establishing business, rising competition over resources has meant such positives have not been fully taken advantage of.**

[52] Some of the changes in main employing sectors, can be explained by measures linked to COVID-19. The agricultural sector for instance experienced only limited restrictions on its activities during lockdown.

[53] UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, VASyR 2020, January 2021

[54] International Rescue Committee (IRC), A Decade in Search of Work A review of policy commitments for Syrian refugees' livelihoods in Jordan and Lebanon, June 2020

[55] The World Bank, Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis, 2020.

[56] Atlantic Research Council and UNDP, Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey, July 2020



There are significant challenges in delivering livelihoods interventions in Lebanon. For example, **there is a 50 percent quota promoted by the government of Lebanon for targeting of Lebanese nationals against any humanitarian livelihood programming funded by the UN agencies, donors or NGO partners [57].** While this quota is desired, refugees can be enrolled to a larger percentage if a lower number of Lebanese is interested to engage. Nonetheless, 3RP partners have tried to address some of the difficulties outlined above. **Such support has focused on supporting Lebanese MSMEs and cooperatives with financial and non-financial services and technology transfer, cash-for-work schemes, as well as employment-related training.**

## ***Recommendations for Improving Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon***

Given the economic situation is extremely fragile affecting both Lebanese and Syrians in Lebanon, **it is important that adequate social security assistance is extended to both communities to help them cope with the recent economic shocks and enable them to meet their basic needs.**

**Continued advocacy is needed to improve work conditions for Syrians and widening legal pathways for formal work.** Informal sector remains as the primary avenue for Syrian refugees to find work, often at great risk of exploitation and unsafe working conditions, as excess supply

has placed downward pressure on wages and work conditions.

**Improved support to Syrian farmers and agribusinesses in Lebanon is at the utmost importance.** There is an opportunity to improve basic cultivation as well as agriproduct value chains, including packaging, food handling, food safety, transportation and storage. Reinforcing knowledge on production techniques and different value chains is important for future use, even if the knowledge is not put in practice in Lebanon through employment. This is also true for TVET programs offered to Syrian refugees and the need to cater for and address the technical skills gap in agri-tech, agribusinesses and construction required for sustainable agriculture. It is important that the beneficiary selection processes for livelihood programs ensure inclusive and equitable outcomes for all.

**Private sector engagement is crucial for crafting market-based livelihood interventions that feed from and foster technological innovation.** In that aspect, it is important that digital opportunities are capitalized on including e-work, e-commerce and e-learning opportunities. Strengthening vocational training, life skills and career guidance opportunities and ensuring market relevance of these are important for Lebanese and Syrian youth alike.

**Improved coordination between livelihoods and agriculture working groups would provide better complementarity of initiatives offered to communities in need.** Further analysis can look into structures that would yield the best results.

[1] *ibid.*



## JORDAN

Since 2011, Jordan has provided refuge to more than 1.36 million Syrians, 90 percent of which are living among host communities mainly in Amman and in northern governorates[58]. Currently, there are 663,507 registered Syrians, 47 percent of which are aged between 18 and 59 [59]. Amman, Irbid and Mafrq governorates alone host 74 per cent of the Syrian refugees[60]. Some 81 percent live in urban areas and 29 percent are in the age bracket of 18 to 35, making urban Syrian youth the largest refugee segment in Jordan[61]. In 2020, the unemployment rate was 23 percent [62] and an even higher unemployment rate at 35 percent among youth (ages 15-24)\_[63]. According to a 2017-18 survey, the unemployment rate for Syrian refugee men was estimated at 23 percent while this rate was double for women[64]. At the national level, women's labor force participation remains very low at 14 percent compared with men at 63 percent[65].

In terms of Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods, **before 2016, although there was no law against Syrian refugees working, the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan were not able to work**

**legally, as only a few met the requirements of the work permit regulations.** At the end of 2015, only 5,700 Syrian refugees were working legally in Jordan [66]. However, in 2016, the Government of Jordan committed to providing 50,000 work permits for Syrian refugees, rising to 200,000 in the coming years[67]. In return for removing some of the barriers preventing Syrian refugees from entering the labor market, **the Jordan Compact was established as a key avenue for job creation where concessional loans from the World Bank and donor support were used to finance the development of Special Economic Zones.** This enabled hiring a blend of refugees and locals for companies whose goods would then be allowed to enter the EU on preferential terms[68].

**As a result, the work permits issued to Syrians increased substantially after 2016.** Between January 2016 and December 2020, the Ministry of Labor of Jordan issued 215,668 work permits to Syrians, 51,037 of which were given to refugee camp residents. In 2020 alone, 38,756 permits were issued, of which only 7 percent were provided to women[69]. Fee free work permits are valid for any sector open for 'foreign' labor, with the majority of the work permits issued in the agriculture, construction and manufacturing sectors.

[1] UNHCR, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>

[1] *ibid.*

[1] Another 25% of Syrian refugees reside in Zaatar, Azraq and Zarqa camps also in the northern part of the country.

[1] *ibid*

[1] International Labor Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2020.

[1] ILO, *Challenging Market Becomes More Challenging: Jordanian Workers, Migrant Workers and Refugees in the Jordanian Labor Market.*

[1] Tiltne, A., Zhang, H. and Pedersen, J., *The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan - Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps, Fafo-Report, April 2019*

[1] International Labor Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2020.

[1] Atlantic Research Council and UNDP, *Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey*, July 2020

[1] World Bank, *Program Document on the Proposed Loan and Credit in the Amount of USD 300 million to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for Economic Opportunities for Jordan and Syrian Refugees. Program-for-Results, September 2016*, <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/projectdetail/P159522>

[1] Atlantic Research Council and UNDP, *Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey*, July 2020

[1] Source Ministry of Labor of Jordan, *Syrian Refugee Unit -Work Permits Progress Report December and Annual 2020*

**The construction sector employs the largest share of working Syrian refugee men in Jordan.**

**Notwithstanding the progress made, there are a number of ongoing challenges related to Syrians accessing livelihoods and economic activity. First, despite recent progress on relaxing access to work permits, the process remains a deterrent to many[70].** According to 2017-18 survey, only one-third of all employed Syrian refugees reported having a valid work permit[71]. Many refugees continue to prefer to work in Jordan's large informal economy which offers the potential for higher remuneration and greater flexibility. For many Syrian refugees and employers, the process of obtaining a work permit is lengthy and time consuming. In 2021, the Government of Jordan has moved forward with the implementation of a flexible work permits for all open sectors, freeing refugees from the need to be tied to one specific employer and offering the possibility to move quickly across different opportunities. **The Government of Jordan issued a new law in 2018 to allow Syrian refugees to register and operate home-based businesses (HBBs).** HBBs particularly provide promising avenues for women's employment and entrepreneurship[72]. Registration of HBBs is however complicated in terms of requirements and documentation, although ongoing efforts are beginning to see a positive impact on harmonization of approach across governorates[73].



**Second, Syrian refugee women's participation in labor market is much lower than the national average. Only 6 to 7 percent of Syrian women refugees are estimated to be formally employed[74].** The general reason for a relatively lower participation rates include childcare responsibilities (44 percent), lack of suitable working hours (8 percent) and lack of suitable jobs (6 percent) are some reasons expressed by women regarding their unavailability for the labor market[75]. Furthermore, discriminatory hiring practices and labor market segregation make it difficult for young women to find suitable employment beyond a small group of professions.[76].

[70] International Rescue Committee, *Solving the refugee employment problem in Jordan, A Survey of Syrian Refugees*, 2017.

[71] Tiltne, A., Zhang, H. and Pedersen, J., *The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan - Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps, Fafo-Report*, April 2019

[72] GEDI, *Global Entrepreneurship Index, 2019 - Jordan has been improving the quality of entrepreneurship and expanded its entrepreneurship ecosystem. Jordan's rank on the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index rose from 72nd in 2014 to 49th in 2019 with high growth in the technology sector, including businesses' ability to adapt to new technology and develop new products.*

[73] International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), *Refugees and Host Communities Seeking Direction from the Margin of Jordan's Labor Market: Labor Market Assessment*, Jan 2021.

[74] Overseas Development Institute, *Syrian women refugees in Jordan: Opportunity in the gig economy*, 2017.

[75] International Labor Organization (ILO), *ILOSTAT database*. Data retrieved in September 2021.

[76] International Labor Organization, *'Promoting youth employment and empowerment of young women in Jordan'*, 2017.

In addition, sectors that such as construction and agriculture that employ a large number of Syrian refugees are ones that have few employment opportunities that are socially acceptable for women. Other challenges include family environments, real and perceived risks of harassments in work environments and no female-friendly transportation services.<sup>[77]</sup>

**Third, skills mismatch presents challenges for both Jordanian and Syrian youth.** Graduates find that they are not prepared for the job market and that digital, technical and soft skills related to the key growth sectors of the economy are not covered in the traditional educational system<sup>[78]</sup>. **Transferable skills, skills that foster social innovation and career readiness skills therefore need to be improved, though for refugees, increasing training opportunities would be a first priority to increase formal work opportunities within the sectors that are accessible to them.** There is no data-driven planning for job creation or professional career counselling at vocational training institutions.<sup>[79]</sup>

**3RP Livelihoods interventions have centered on delivering sustainable livelihood opportunities to refugees and host communities. Providing business development and job training that is tailored to the needs of the local job market could help refugees access more sustainable employment opportunities.**

Other activities include emergency employment, skills exchange between Jordanians and Syrian refugees and also demand-driven TVET<sup>[80]</sup>, as well as promoting entrepreneurship among youth and women, mentoring, coaching and servicing support in terms of assisting people for formal employment, entrepreneurship and SMSE support could support short and medium livelihood access.

## ***Recommendations for Improving Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in Jordan***

**Promote Vocational Training:** Syrian refugees are aware of the TVET training programs being provided for them in Jordan and are very interested in such opportunities. An analysis<sup>[81]</sup> has already been undertaken, which identified promising vocational training courses that would enable employment of Syrians in sectors that are relevant for Syria and also sustainable. This will not only enable them to attain livelihoods in Jordan but can also help them transfer these skills back to their home countries in the longer term if they ultimately voluntarily choose to return.

**Provide targeted support to SMEs to scale up:** SMEs constitute 97 percent of Jordan's private sector, employ 60 percent of the country's labor force and contribute 24 percent to the GDP<sup>[82]</sup>.

[77] *ibid*

[78] Higgins, E., *Bridging the youth skills gap in Jordan*, UNICEF, July 2019.

[79] International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), *Refugees and Host Communities Seeking Direction from the Margin of Jordan's Labor Market: Labor Market Assessment*, Jan 2021

[80] *ibid*

[81] International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), *Refugees and Host Communities Seeking Direction from the Margin of Jordan's Labor Market: Labor Market Assessment*, Jan 2021.

[82] *Market Links, Unleashing the power of Jordan's Small and Medium Enterprises*, February 2020

They create on an average of 15 (Jordanian-owned) to 18 jobs (refugee/migrant-owned) annually<sup>[83]</sup>. It is documented that they hire more people and bring a higher percentage of unemployed individuals into Jordan's workforce compared with micro or large enterprises<sup>[84]</sup>.

Despite being an important source for job creation, many SMEs experience difficulties in accessing business support and finances to grow. Their ability to become more productive and reach new domestic, regional, and international markets are hindered, due to limited access to technical or managerial advisory services, business networks, innovation or technological infrastructure.

**Encourage start-up facilitation and establishment of Home-Based Businesses:** HBB policies can be revised to simplify the registration process and enable more women and people with disabilities to generate income for themselves. Promotion of entrepreneurship and start-ups also require easing processes to access financial capital, training and networking.

**Job matching platforms:** To improve referrals and job matching, the existing platforms namely 'Sajjil' and 'ForUs' need to be improved with mobile applications to increase the usage among job seekers and providers.<sup>[85]</sup> The platforms could provide the gateway for career counselling services, available vocational training and job vacancies.<sup>[86]</sup>

**Expansion of free and low-cost childcare services:** This would help increase women's economic participation and redistribute some of women's unpaid time spent on childcare. Taking concrete steps to challenge gender-stereotyped roles and engaging men and boys in the process is needed as much as providing culture appropriate and flexible work arrangements.



## IRAQ

**Nearly all Syrian refugees in Iraq live in the KR-I, mostly in urban and peri-urban areas. KR-I hosts 242,163 Syrian refugees, 50 percent of which reside in Erbil and another 35 percent in Dahuk.** Some 39 percent of Syrians live in nine refugee camps and 52 percent are of working age (ages 18-59) <sup>[87]</sup>. **Iraq has been reported to have one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the world, particularly for women at 12 percent and for youth at 26 percent<sup>[88]</sup>.** The unemployment rate is hence comparatively low and reported as 13 percent in total and 31 percent for women. <sup>[89]</sup> Youth unemployment is 22 percent for men and as high as 61 percent for women<sup>[90]</sup>. According to a 2018 survey, more than 20 per cent of younger adults (ages 18-34) out of workforce have lost hope in finding a job<sup>[91]</sup>.

[83] Another Side to the Story of Jordan: A Market Assessment of Refugee, Migrant and Jordanian-owned Businesses, 2019, Open society foundations and building markets

[84] *ibid*

[85] International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), *Refugees and Host Communities Seeking Direction from the Margin of Jordan's Labor Market: Labor Market Assessment*, Jan 2021.

[86] The World Bank, *Concessional Financing Facility Funds Projects to Support Refugees and Host Communities Impacted by the Syrian Crisis*, 2016.

[87] UNHCR, *Refugee Situations- Operational Portal, The Kurdish Region of Iraq*, December 2020.

[88] The World Bank and the UNHCR, *Compounding Misfortunes: Changes in Poverty since the onset of COVID-19 on Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Lebanon*, December 2020.

[89] International Labor Organization (ILO), *ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2020.*

[90] *ibid*

[91] IOM and UNHCR, *Demographic Survey: Kurdish Region of Iraq*, September 2018



According to the 2018 Demographic Survey, 87 percent of households in KR-I had a monthly income of less than 1,000,000 Iraqi Dinar (approximately 850 United States dollars) where most families enjoyed an adequate standard of living.<sup>[92]</sup>

**In terms of Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods, the KR-I has no restrictions on Syrian refugees' participation in the economy, though the legal and policy frameworks related to livelihoods and employment are unclear, particularly for displaced communities.** Syrian refugees can work in the private sector if they have official residency issued by the Ministry of Interior. **The KR-I's official policy is that Syrians registered with UNHCR, or who have a residency card, have free access to employment<sup>[93]</sup>.** There is also no official employment ratio imposed on Syrian refugees relative to Kurdish Iraqis. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs observe workplaces on an ad hoc basis and an informal warning may be issued at times when the ratio becomes too skewed<sup>[94]</sup>.

**In line with the less strict measures, the employment rate of Syrian refugee men in the KR-I is slightly higher than in Jordan and Lebanon but just like across the region, women's employment remains low.** The share of employed men in all regions of KR-I is above 50 percent, with the Sulaymaniyah city district having the highest employment rate at 82 percent<sup>[95]</sup>. According to a study conducted in mid-2018, 90 percent of Syrian men are economically active<sup>[96]</sup>.

On the other hand, Syrian women's labor force participation at 14 percent is not so different to those Iraqi or times prior to the conflict.

**Syrian refugees are predominantly engaged in agriculture (38 percent rely on an agricultural labor wage), followed by construction (24 percent having an income within the construction labor sector).** <sup>[97]</sup> Majority of Syrian men are engaged in low-skill or manual jobs, whereas prior to the conflict, they worked in many industries. Like host communities and IDPs, refugees are often hired without formal contracts and lack social security or health insurance. Wage-incomes (average IQD 350,000 before the pandemic) are reportedly reduced by 40 percent as of May 2020.<sup>[98]</sup>



[92] IOM and UNHCR, *Demographic Survey: Kurdish Region of Iraq*, September 2018.

[93] WANA (West Asia–North Africa Institute), *Refugee Labor Inclusion: Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, Amman, Jordan, 2017.

[94] *ibid.*

[95] The World Bank, *Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, 2020.

[96] *Ibid.*

[97] *ibid.*

[98] ILO and FaFo, *Rapid Assessment of the Impacts of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations and Small-Scale Enterprises in Iraq*, July 2020

**Notwithstanding the favorable environment, one main concern raised by refugees across Iraq is the inability to access livelihood opportunities as a result of current and previous movement restrictions due to COVID-19 and other measures. [99]** Most individuals live on daily wages, and the movement restrictions have significant effect on their ability to make ends meet. According to a recent World Bank report, with the onset of the pandemic, there is a 21-percentage point spike in the poverty rates of refugees in KR-I based on international poverty line, which equals to about 49,000 Syrian refugees. [100]

**In terms of 3RP support, temporary work employment initiatives, including cash for work, TVET or other professional skills training, job referral mechanisms and business support for growth were the most common forms of assistance.** Projects have also been focused specifically on refugee camps, including business development training courses related to agricultural production and small scale agro-processing based on a market and agro-value chain assessments.

## ***Recommendations for Improving Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq***

**Provision of technical, managerial and advisory support to SMEs with high growth potential is needed** to help them scale up and provide competitive services/products in new areas, which eventually can translate into creation of jobs.

**It is important that workers, households and enterprises are made aware of existing support packages available to them.** Around 90 percent of enterprises and individual workers surveyed are not aware of any support packages, including those provided to ease the impacts of the COVID-19 related economic crisis. [101]

**It may be timely to provide work schemes to support workers, households and enterprises.** Labor intensive approaches also need to revitalize public work projects to boost much-needed employment creation for vulnerable groups and to support local infrastructure development. Cash for work schemes can target those who lost livelihoods.

Food production and marketing systems need to be supported to help revive agribusinesses. In strengthening assistance for SMEs and agricultural value chains, solar solutions also need to be capitalized to enhance the electricity supply. [102]

**Expanding private sector opportunities for women is necessary to empower them to participate in the labor economy.** This can be achieved by better targeting of women for technical, life skills, financial and digital skills training initiatives alongside addressing legal, social and cultural barriers that hinder their participation in socio-economic life.

[99] Ibid.

[100] The World Bank and the UNHCR, *Compounding Misfortunes: Changes in Poverty since the onset of COVID-19 on Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Lebanon*, December 2020.

[101] ILO and FaFo, *Rapid Assessment of the Impacts of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations and Small-Scale Enterprises in Iraq*, July 2020.

[102] Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2: REFUGEE RETURN CONDITIONS AND LIVELIHOOD NEEDS, GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES – IN SYRIA

According to the findings of the sixth UNHCR return intention report, refugee decision-making around return are centered on several factors, including safety and security, livelihoods and economic opportunities, access to basic services and housing; and to a lesser degree family reunification. For those who had made a decision to return, for example, access to a livelihood opportunity inside Syria was cited as a key reason; while conversely, a lack of livelihood prospects in the country was commonly cited by those who did not intend to go back or who were unsure.

Though the survey did not go into detail on the particular aspects of livelihoods that impact the decision regarding returning, this paper identifies and analyzes **four key areas** that drive the current economic situation in Syria and thus are likely to impact on refugee decision-making: 1) changes in economic activity and employment, 2) livelihoods opportunities; 3) income sufficiency; and 4) access to finances and markets.

### 1. Changes in Economic Activity and Employment

Years of conflict have harmed Syria's economic development tremendously and positive developments are not expected in the medium term<sup>[103]</sup>. Oil GDP declined by 93 percent from 2011 to 2016, while the non-oil economy contracted by 52 percent because of the severe destruction of infrastructure in key sectors, reduced access to fuel and electricity, low business confidence, and disruption in trade<sup>[104]</sup>. Exports to all countries declined, with export income reducing more than 20 fold, falling from USD \$ 19 billion in 2010 to USD \$ 750 million in 2016 <sup>[105]</sup>. The agriculture sector experienced a major reduction in activities, mostly due to the destruction of irrigation systems, major decline in cultivated areas and reduced yields, as well as the unavailability of agricultural inputs.

In terms of employment, nearly 2.5 million jobs were lost between 2011 and 2015, with the construction and industry sectors accounting for 47 percent, followed by agriculture with 20 percent<sup>[106]</sup>. Two-thirds of Syrian households have been reported to lose one or more of their main income sources since the start of the conflict, and being forced to adopt new livelihood strategies<sup>[107]</sup>. Most households currently rely on unskilled daily labor to provide livelihoods for their families.

[103] The World Bank, *The Fallout of War: The Regional Consequences of the Conflict in Syria*, October 2020.

[104] The World Bank, *The toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria*, July 2017.

[105] The World Bank, *Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, 2020.

[106] *ibid.*

[107] NGO Joint Research Report, *Syria Solutions Analysis: An Assessment of Durable Solutions Conditions at the Whole of Syria Level*, January 2021, private document held on file.

**As of 2020, employment to population ratio (aged 15+) was estimated at 40.3 percent<sup>[108]</sup>. This ratio was as low as 11.4 percent for women<sup>[109]</sup>.** Women were more affected in the agriculture sector, where the share of female employment dropped an average of 60 percent from 2001 to 2017. According to 2020 estimates, unemployment rate among youth (ages 15-24) is at 21 percent, and the highest unemployment rate is among young women at 43.5 percent. The national estimate for unemployment rate was at 8.5 percent in 2020, compared to 8.1 percent in 2009.<sup>[110]</sup> The governorates that hosted the largest share of total employment as of 2018 included Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Damascus, followed by Idleb, Latakia and Homs<sup>[111]</sup>.

## 2. Livelihood Opportunities

Livelihood opportunities within Syria remain limited due to the contraction of economic activities and the instability of the labor market as discussed above<sup>[112]</sup>. **According to a UNDP study, when a mix of refugee and IDP returnees were asked about the availability of livelihood opportunities, some 83 percent perceived that the number of economic opportunities are not enough<sup>[113]</sup>.** Depending on the location and the level of impact of the crisis, some economic opportunities exist in sub-sectors such as construction, commerce, agriculture, manufacturing and hospitality. However, these opportunities are constrained by multiple factors, including a lack of rehabilitation and underinvestment.

**Efforts to boost job creation is also hindered because of inadequate educational, vocational and entrepreneurial skills of the labor force or limited access to capital or financial resources<sup>[114]</sup>. Only a limited number of skills development initiatives are available for youth** in sectors that could potentially boost job creation. These include skills needed for entrepreneurship, sustainable construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and livestock farming industries as well as commerce and information communication and technology (ICT) sector.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the provision of livelihoods opportunities. For example, a marked decline was experienced in private and public sector employment with a simultaneous increase in daily labor.** This meant that there was increased competition over these irregular types of work and a general increase in unemployment figures. **Many businesses, about 71 percent, are reported to have closed their operations entirely or those who remain partially open had less earnings compared to before<sup>[115]</sup>.**

[108] International Labor Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2020.

[109] The World Bank, *Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, 2020.

[110] International Labor Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2020.

[111] The World Bank, *Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, 2020.

[112] *ibid.*

[113] UNDP, *Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria*, December 2019.

[114] HNAP, *Socio-economic overview, Summer 2020 report series*.

[115] NGO Joint Research Report, *Syria Solutions Analysis: An Assessment of Durable Solutions Conditions at the Whole of Syria Level*, January 2021, private document held on file

Meanwhile, the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on food security. Although the agricultural sector is facing significant challenges in regard to infrastructure, access to arable land, as well as inputs, capital and equipment, it is still regarded as a key sector of economic activity for potential growth and for employment<sup>[116]</sup>. While there are issues linked with trading food products between different areas of control, economic sanctions also impact the level of availability of agricultural equipment as well as export opportunities<sup>[117]</sup>.

### 3. Income Sufficiency

Anecdotal evidence from various publication suggests that people in Syria need three simultaneous jobs in order to have a decent income. **The average monthly household income is estimated at 138,964 SYP (63 USD) with significantly lower earnings for refugee returnees and IDPs, 92,559 SYP, and 88,623 SYP respectively.**<sup>[118]</sup> Although the minimum wage is set at 50,000 SYP, there is evidence that rates below this threshold are paid across the country.<sup>[119]</sup> Women are more likely to be employed with regular income, however, **female headed households earn significantly less than the national average of 114,527 SYP (52 USD) per month.**<sup>[120]</sup> Furthermore, households in Syria are hit hard by the high inflation over basic goods and depreciation of Syrian pound by 27-fold against the US dollar between 2011 and 2020.<sup>[121]</sup>

According to a recent Joint Agency NGO study, almost all the interviewed **returnees cited struggling to meet basic needs due to the high cost of living having been exacerbated by fluctuations in the value of the Syrian Pound, and the COVID-19 measures limiting people's ability to work.**<sup>[122]</sup> In a UNDP study, returnees were asked what they consider as the main challenges for economic re-integration, and 66 percent of people raised that it is the lack of savings<sup>[123]</sup>. Available livelihood opportunities do not translate into adequate income to survive, hence why people do need savings when they return and when they take steps to integrate into the local economy. Other obstacles identified by returnees are destruction of infrastructure by 52 percent, lack of material/equipment by 34 percent and lack of education/skills/formal certificates by 21 percent.

[116] UNCT Syria, *Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19*, 31 August 2020.

[117] NGO Joint Research Report, *Syria Solutions Analysis: An Assessment of Durable Solutions Conditions at the Whole of Syria Level*, January 2021, private document held on file.

[118] *ibid.*

[119] HNAP, *Socio-economic overview, Summer 2020 report series.*

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] <https://middle-east-online.com/en/syria-devalues-pound>

[122] Joint Agency NGO Report, *Into the unknown: Listening to Syria's displaced in the search for durable solutions*, June 2020.

[123] UNDP, *Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria*, December 2019



The low incomes are set against steadily rising prices due to inflation and other economic factors. **Some 71 percent of Syrian households reported that their income was insufficient to meet their needs in late 2020, a 10 percent increase from the beginning of 2020. This percentage was staggeringly high for IDP households with 98 percent having hardships in late 2019.** <sup>[124]</sup> The minimum expenditure on a standard food basket (MEB) is now equivalent to 60 percent of average monthly income in Syria. In February 2020, the MEB was SYP 130,482 for a family of five. <sup>[125]</sup> The amount that a family could not cover to meet their basic needs (MEB gap) was set at SYP 96,624. By the end of 2020, the MEB gap increased to SYP 262,751, a 172 percent increase compared to February 2020.

Such socio-economic conditions have given rise to negative coping mechanisms such as selling household assets, eating less or borrowing money in order to survive. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, child labor and early marriage were common ways of households surviving. <sup>[126]</sup>



[124] NGO Joint Research Report, *Syria Solutions Analysis: An Assessment of Durable Solutions Conditions at the Whole of Syria Level*, January 2021, private document held on file.

[125] Damascus Cash Working Group, *Transfer Values for Multi-Purpose Cash*, February 2021.

[126] Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), *Early Marriage Hits High Rates in some Areas of Syria*, September 2020.

## 4. Access to financial services and markets

**In Syria, access to credit through banks and financial institutions is limited.**<sup>[127]</sup> Communities have reported low levels of access to financial services and evidence confirms that the formal banking infrastructure has collapsed. Loans from banks are more readily available in government-held areas but only a few households are able to meet the necessary collateral requirements and provide the necessary documentation. **Although informal support mechanisms are fairly common in Syria, opportunities for businesses and start-ups to access available start-up capital or finances to grow are restricted.** Beyond businesses, credit is also needed by many households to meet basic needs. **Throughout Syria, it is estimated that only a quarter of households have access to formal or informal credit, suggesting that such support mechanisms are out of reach for many.**

The widespread transfer of remittances suggests that informal money transfer systems are providing communities with reduced financial services - namely transfers - but not other services such as credit, savings, etc. Communities that rely on remittances are likely to name business and trade, stable employment as other income sources, reflecting the fact that many communities may use remittances as a supplement to other income sources.

In terms of market access, the major international markets that Syria exports to are Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Jordan. Major exports are olive oil, spice seeds, other nuts, apples and pears. Syria mainly imports from China, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia with items including wheat flours and raw sugar.<sup>[128]</sup> **While international market access is mostly with the above countries, local markets provide most of the livelihood opportunities for the relatively poor.**



[127] Ibid.

[128] Accessible at <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/syr>

## LIVELIHOODS NEEDS AND SUPPORT IN SYRIA

This chapter aims at defining the overall livelihood needs inside Syria with specific highlights to the additional challenges that refugee returnees face in accessing livelihood opportunities. While the chapter does focus on refugee returnees, some of the points raised might also apply to IDP returnees. It analyses the current livelihood support available to these communities and gaps remaining to meet their immediate and longer-term livelihood needs. In highlighting the livelihoods sector challenges that stakeholders face, this chapter aims as well at providing **recommendations for strengthening livelihood support in Syria**, taking into account the specific challenges returnees and communities hosting returnees face.

**By July 2020, an estimate number of 8.5 million people in Syria needed livelihoods and early recovery responses.[129]. The top three governorates needing livelihood assistance were Aleppo with approximately 1.6 million people, followed by rural Damascus (1.4 million) and Idlib (1.3 million).**

**Table 11 People in Need by Early Recovery and Livelihoods Sector**

GOVERNORATE	NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED	TOP 3 AREAS THAT EXPERIENCED LARGEST IDP RETURNS (2017-2020)	TOP 3 AREAS THAT EXPERIENCED LARGEST REFUGEE RETURNS (2020)
Aleppo	1,607,910		
Rural Damascus	1,411,115		
Idlib	1,270,912		
Dar'a	585,021		
Damascus	583,139		
Hama	571,529		
Homs	561,323		
Al Hasakah	433,729		
Deir-ez-Zor	427,669		
Ar-Raqqa	381,305		

[129] UNHCR, Syria Factsheet, July 2020.

GOVERNORATE	NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED	TOP 3 AREAS THAT EXPERIENCED LARGEST IDP RETURNS (2017-2020)	TOP 3 AREAS THAT EXPERIENCED LARGEST REFUGEE RETURNS (2020)
Lattakia	360,340		
Tartous	260,037		
As-Sweida	144,686		
Quneitra	58,808		
Total	8.5 M		

Source: UNHCR, Syria Factsheet, July 2020.

There are various livelihood programs currently offered within Syria, particularly in government held areas. These programs often fall under the ERL sector with the following three overarching objectives: 1- supporting the local economy 2- improving access to basic and social services and 3- community participation and engagement. **Over 2 million people were reported to have benefited from some form of early recovery and livelihood interventions in 2019, which were implemented in 204 sub-districts across the country.**<sup>[130]</sup>

The type of livelihood programs, whose implementation is highly dependent on security conditions, include multi-purpose cash assistance and cash for work initiatives, vocational training, Small and Medium sized Enterprise development support and initiatives that focus on agricultural sector and linking youth and women with markets. For example, in 2019, short-term work opportunities were created for over 21,000 people. A total of about 78,300 people were reported to have improved livelihoods as a result of access to regular employment, support received for livelihood rehabilitation, social and business entrepreneurship initiatives and vocational training. In addition, 31 schools, 21 clinics and 66 social infrastructures were rehabilitated using emergency employment schemes.

The sector, however, faces challenges in implementation. First, the general economic and security situation in Syria makes it difficult to effectively to develop programmes, particularly in certain areas of the country where the focus is on the emergency response. Second, funding remains a challenge, with the ERL sector being only funded at 11 per cent during 2019. Generally, donors direct more funds towards short term early recovery projects and less on multi-year livelihoods programmes, where investments are highly needed for sustainable social and economic integration of returnees.<sup>[131]</sup> Third, the analysis shows a number of gaps existing in priority areas, which is outlined further in the section below.

[130] OCHA, Annual Report 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan Syrian Arab Republic, October 2020.

[131] UNDP, Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria, December 2019.

## PRIORITY AREAS FOR LIVELIHOOD INTERVENTIONS



### INCREASING LABOR FORCE SKILLS

It is well established that the existing workforce and the available skills set does not meet the needs of the labor market<sup>[132]</sup>, with shortfalls in specific sectors reaching 80 percent in certain areas.<sup>[133]</sup> Currently offered TVET opportunities in Syria remain short of meeting the local market demands and there is a mismatch with labor market needs.

About two third of TVET centres were damaged or out of service in 2018.<sup>[134]</sup> There are serious deficits in modern equipment in TVET centres. Furthermore, the demand for TVET has declined dramatically with the onset of the conflict, considering that industrial and manufacturing facilities were destroyed or stopped in conflict areas, though this is improving with increasing demand for TVET graduates gradually. In addition to a small and slowly recovering manufacturing industry, a lack of accreditation also makes TVET less attractive.

Area-based skills mapping and private sector engagement are needed to establish effective TVET courses that meet local needs. The provision of pathways, establishing an accreditation system and building hybrid models of industrial apprenticeship would also help increase the demand for TVET.<sup>[135]</sup> There is also a need for innovative curriculum and quality teaching in order to respond to global trends, building on innovative approaches in the regional context. Partnerships need to be leveraged for linking successful TVET interventions for refugees in host countries to the ones offered in Syria. Immediate areas that can benefit from widening TVET opportunities include agri-tech, renewable energy, IT, and telecommunications sector as well as repair technicians for goods. Other types of training could include soft and digital skills training, financial literacy, conflict mediation and negotiation. Attention needs to be paid to extending skills building and vocational training opportunities to women, as mentioned further below.

<sup>[132]</sup> UNDP, *Context Analysis on Conditions for IDP and Refugee Return and reintegration in Syria*, December 2019.

<sup>[133]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>[134]</sup> Alhasan, N., *Comprehensive Report on Mapping of Availability, Variety and Contents of Vocational and Skills Training in Syria*, submitted to Early Recovery and Livelihoods Sector Group UNDP, December 2018, unpublished.

<sup>[135]</sup> Alhasan, N., *Comprehensive Report on Mapping of Availability, Variety and Contents of Vocational and Skills Training in Syria*, submitted to Early Recovery and Livelihoods Sector Group UNDP, December 2018, unpublished.





## **PROVIDING AREA-BASED MARKET NEEDS ASSESSMENTS**

This report highlights that available local level market assessments, which are extremely important for designing relevant livelihood interventions, are scattered, not easily accessible by the public, or of poor quality. There is also a lack of systematic and area-based assessment on the level of rehabilitation that is needed to support local livelihoods. There may be several reasons for this, such as funding, lack of technical capacity, or access challenges.

**In this context, consortium type approaches to carry out local market needs assessments may be effective to secure approvals, and also for improvements in quality and accessibility of such products as different stakeholders' technical capacities and wider networks can be capitalized on.**



## **REVIVING THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR**

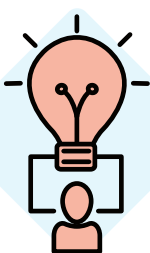
The impact of the conflict in Syria has adversely affected the agricultural sector. For example, due to destructions to the irrigation systems, farming activities cannot continue in various parts of the country. The potential of land mines in agricultural fields on the other hand is a major deterring factor in reviving agricultural activities, as well as providing access to land, including to those lacking legal documentation. The triple burdens of conflict, climate and COVID-19 pandemic impacts have had profound negative impacts. Thus, due to these and other factors, **the majority of agricultural production currently is small scale and based on rain-fed systems, which are highly weather dependent.**

**There are several main bottlenecks in the agriculture sector that needs addressing to increase the scale of agricultural livelihoods interventions.** First, in relation to agricultural input, simplifying the procedures to distribute and purchase seed cereals and cash crops is vital. Only certain organisations are legally allowed to distribute certified wheat seeds that are purchased from the Ministry with subsidized cost. Accessing these inputs at subsidized rates requires membership of a farming association, which in turn, requires legal documentation which becomes a problem for a large number of refugee returnees or IDP returnees who might lack them.

Second, there are also challenges experienced in sourcing agricultural inputs besides seeds. **Sanctions on certain organisations/businesses in Syria cause ambiguity and additional hurdles for development partners** when it comes to the procurement of other agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers or machinery.

Third, addressing issues related to decontamination of arable land, and addressing documentation issues in terms of access to land also remain critical factors.

**In light of complex challenges faced in the sector and the extent of need, more financial and longer-term commitment is needed to gear large number of vulnerable households for subsistence farming initially (targeting productivity gains and use of technology), with prospects that some will pursue agri-businesses in the medium term.**



## **STIMULATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SME GROWTH WITH CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

**Given the impact of the conflict on the main industries of Syria, and given that SMEs are the major driver for economic recovery, stimulating entrepreneurship and SMEs recovery and development growth are vital areas for further action.** There have also been attempts from the government to rehabilitate industrial zones or create new ones, but the successes were limited. This was due to a lack of consistent energy supply, damaged infrastructure, closed borders, sanctions, and an economic recession with volatile exchange rate, which dramatically declined household purchasing power, and hence led to a reduction in local demand.<sup>[136]</sup> Data around entrepreneurship in Syria is limited and many businesses are struggling to operate in the country<sup>[137]</sup>. In particular, entrepreneurs generally have little or no access to financing, since support entities are mostly unable to send money to Syria and private investors are reluctant to invest.

**Nonetheless, rebuilding Syria's economy will, in large part, be dependent on SMEs, which composed 95 percent of Syria's pre-war economy, and who need to resume their activities and re-invest capital in Syria.** Even with small investments and an improvement of security, yields positive impacts on employment and livelihood opportunities, including services brought closer to the local communities.

**Concentrated efforts are needed to nourish innovative ways to promote entrepreneurship, particularly among young people, so that the potential of generating incomes through small enterprises and other entrepreneurial initiatives can be realized in agriculture and other sectors of the economy that show potential for growth. Assistance for social entrepreneurship in particular can also help inspire communities to seek communal benefits rather than individual profit, and have a desire for assisting their families, neighbors, and extended society from poverty, which is also needed for social capital building. This is only possible if enabling incentives and investments are undertaken to improve people's access to financial capital, ICTs, and opportunities for human capital development.**

<sup>[136]</sup> Alhasan, N., *Comprehensive Report on Mapping of Availability, Variety and Contents of Vocational and Skills Training in Syria*, submitted to Early Recovery and Livelihoods Sector Group UNDP, December 2018, unpublished.

<sup>[137]</sup> Nabil, Y., *The challenges facing Syrian Entrepreneurs*, February 2020

While assisting SMEs and entrepreneurs, a cluster development strategy for job creation can be utilized for directing investments. These clusters could be 1- rural livelihoods and food security to overcome immediate food security concerns and promote climate smart agriculture; 2- health care, education, and community development to eliminate deficiencies in the basic public services and social capital development; 3- reconstruction of physical infrastructure and environment through investments in green solutions; and 4 - e-trade/commerce to take advantage of digital opportunities. There are good examples from other contexts worth considering<sup>[138],[139]</sup>.



## EMPOWERING WOMEN

Despite the increasing roles and responsibilities of women during the conflict and increased participation in civil society initiatives and organizations, **women's social status in Syria remains challenging and their participation in social space has decreased as a result of the widespread insecurity and violence-oriented powers.**<sup>[140]</sup> Social, economic, and legal gender discrimination related to returns disproportionately impacts women and girls, while men and boys are also at risk of other protection concerns. This has constrained women and girls to traditional reproductive roles, limiting their potential involvement in the socio-economic or political spheres.

Several organizations exclusively focus on supporting female headed households to redress the challenges stated above, however, livelihoods assistance is very small in scale and barriers persist, keeping women away from the not-so-traditional sectors and the right to equal pay. Also for these types of activities humanitarian actors have to balance protection needs and economic empowerment, given the widespread gender-based violence at the workplace.

**It is important that women's empowerment is achieved through various means. For example, it is important to provide and make accessible gender equitable and voluntary information on return dynamics, where it is not already done. Also, women participation needs to be strengthened in the development and formulation of refugee and return services.**<sup>[141]</sup> Providing gender-sensitive, transformative livelihoods opportunities coupled with due protection measures should be central to the livelihoods programming based on gender-sensitive socioeconomic analysis unpacking various factors that hamper women's access.

[138] Future of Work Lab, *Livelihood Opportunities for Syria*, A2i Innovate for All.

[139] UNDP Bangladesh: *e-Commerce for a Sustainable Livelihood for Displaced People Connecting Globally*

[140] OCHA, *Annual Report 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan Syrian Arab Republic*, October 2020.

[141] UNWOMEN, *Why Gender Matters in the Discussion on Returns to Syria*, July 2019.



## INTEGRATING SOCIAL COHESION INTO LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMING

It is important to acknowledge that the current economic and livelihoods situation inside Syria can also cause tension between and within communities, including related to returnees. Damage to social capital is one of the worst effects of a protracted conflict. More than 50% of Syrians have been displaced, within the country and abroad. Disruption of safety nets, social network and lack of emotional support makes it harder for Syrian refugees returning home. **Although social dynamics are highly dependent on locations, solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, and unity are more often reported than divisions and confrontation. However, larger scale return of people may not often be welcomed and/ or may contribute to a rise in tensions.**<sup>[142]</sup> Since livelihood opportunities are very limited and earnings are extremely low, there can be competition over available resources and assistance, fueling possible existing resentments.

When it comes to implementing livelihoods programs in such a context, it is important that social cohesion considerations are integrated into the design, specifically beneficiary targeting and selection. Humanitarian organizations have a duty to provide full transparency related to targeting program beneficiaries, based on vulnerabilities and need to avoid misconception about favoritism, however, this is not always feasible. **Overcoming such challenges requires a coordinated effort from ERL sector partners, local authorities, civil society, youth and faith-based organizations as well as community members to prevent creating or exacerbating social tensions and bring people together while leaving no one behind.** At the local level, conflict mediation related to livelihoods is often done by the community members themselves (including neighbors, teachers, doctors, businesspeople, Mukhtars, mayors, tribal leaders and government leaders).<sup>[143]</sup> Support extended to the above groups in the form of negotiation, conflict resolution or mediation skills capacity building as a part of livelihoods assistance would be beneficial, as it would equip communities with the tools to resolve conflict over resources, services, livelihood assistance, property rights, employment contracts, etc in a sustainable manner.

At the community level, providing the tools or foundations to create dividends of peace for the community to promote social cohesion and contribute to the reintegration of returning IDPs and refugees is vital.<sup>[144]</sup> Livelihood programs that provide a mix of humanitarian relief, economic development and community integration assistance through providing opportunities, connecting people, and addressing grievances would help returnees and other community members in need, start rebuilding their lives while taking steps towards sustainable re-integration and self-reliance, and social cohesion..

**Area-based approaches to livelihoods programming ensuring do-no-harm principles with elements of social cohesion can yield positive results, if focus is diverted to identifying and addressing the problems in specific geographical areas in an integrated, inclusive, and participatory manner, while maximizing local resources and expertise. Community driven livelihood programs can promote inclusive dialogue on economic recovery needs.**<sup>[145]</sup> This would support rebuilding the spirit for participation and solidarity.

<sup>[143]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[144]</sup> NGO Joint Research Report, *Syria Solutions Analysis: An Assessment of Durable Solutions Conditions at the Whole of Syria Level*, January 2021, private document held on file

<sup>[145]</sup> DRC and Oxfam, *Aid in Limbo: Why Syrians deserve support to rebuild their lives*, March 2019.

## CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING LIVELIHOOD ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF REFUGEE RETURN

Below are some summary recommendations relevant for Syria and host countries related to livelihoods in the context of refugee return. More in-depth recommendations for specific host countries are found in Chapter 1.

### Recommendations Relevant For Syria

#### *For Humanitarian and Development Practitioners in Host countries:*

- A shared responsibility and complementarity is needed to improve the quality and availability of conflict and risk analysis to feed into the design and implementation of livelihood programs.
- Economic services need to be made available at the local level, including market responsive vocational training and business development support and more investment in young people's career development
- Support towards SMEs through a cluster development strategy.
- The ability to gain knowledge of the needs of the market and the ability to translate that into economic feasibility studies.
- For agricultural support, it is important to provide agricultural inputs and technical assistance to households in rural areas to improve and diversify household food consumption and provide income generating opportunities in the immediate term.
- Offer accredited TVET trainings in different new and innovative areas, such as renewable energy, coding, advanced agricultural methods and more, to Syrian refugees rather than the usual saturated fields.
- Gender mainstreaming should be strengthened across all programming.



- Provide childcare services and centers to promote access by females to the labor market.
- Community driven development approach needs to be prioritized and revitalization of social capital need to be promoted through enabling communities to have the tools for mediating dialogues and solving conflict.
- There needs to be a stronger focus on involving women to participate in the development and formulation of refugee and return services, as well as the formulation of ERL assessments and planning.<sup>[146]</sup>
- For the ERL sector, strengthened coordination among stakeholders and partnerships including with the Syrian NGOs is very important.

### *For National Governments Policy Makers in Host Countries:*

- For agriculture sector revival, challenges related to decontamination, access to inputs and equipment/ access to markets and destruction of agricultural infrastructure need to be addressed.
- Syrian authorities need to reduce administrative bottlenecks around support to livelihoods interventions
- It is essential that a fair and transparent and community based dispute resolution mechanism is put in place to support the integration of returnees.

### *For Donors:*

- In order to genuinely address the livelihood needs of Syrians including refugee returnees, more donor funding is needed to scale up support beyond short term early recovery projects.
- Issues related to the impact of sanctions and bank de-risking must be addressed, so that development organizations can support women, men, and children with the most effective and dignified livelihood responses.

---

[146] UNWOMEN, *Why Gender Matters in the Discussion on Returns to Syria*, July 2019.

## RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT FOR HOST COUNTRIES

### *For Humanitarian and Development Practitioners in Host countries:*

- Supporting the growth/scaling up of Syrian owned businesses alongside the businesses owned by host country nationals is key for economic empowerment and to facilitate job creation opportunities for Syrian refugees.
- Skills building initiatives for Syrian work force is crucial to help them have a better chance of gaining sustainable livelihood opportunities in host countries and use these skills back in Syria to rebuild their lives.
- Digital work widens opportunities, markets, and networks but these opportunities need to be brought closer to refugees.
- Improved support to Syrian farmers and agribusinesses in host countries yields immediate dividends, as well as Syria's future economic development in case of voluntary return of Syrians.
- Document lessons learned from practices and experiences in the field of livelihood and development that can be developed and built upon to create more effective and efficient models.

### *For National Governments Policy Makers in Host Countries:*

- Foster a policy environment that is more conducive to Syrian's economic empowerment in host countries.
- Widening legal pathways for Syrian's engagement in formal work including expanding employment sectors and job types open to refugees are important steps to build their self-reliance, improve work conditions and reduce the risks of exploitation.

### *For Donors:*

- Improving short-medium-long term funding for livelihoods interventions in host countries and inside Syria, recognizing the impact these can have both in the immediate and in the longer term, in the context of durable solutions.
- Advocacy with key stakeholders to ensure refugees and vulnerable host communities have access to adequate social security assistance and legal status to participate in the labor market, particularly to help them cope with the recent economic shocks born by COVID-19 pandemic.

