

Enabling dignified livelihoods for Syrian and other refugees via remote employment opportunities

Project Background and Rationale

As millions of refugees have fled the conflicts in the Middle East and found sanctuary in neighboring countries, governments have struggled to keep up with changing realities. Many children do not have access to school, there is a high incidence of child labour and early marriage, and many refugees live below the poverty line. This is exasperated by a significant funding gap, meaning that host countries are unable to provide adequate services to those most in need.

Understandably, in the initial phases of the crisis, the responses and policies of neighbouring countries were based on the assumption that the situation would only be temporary, thus the right to employment for Syrians was not provided. As a result, many Syrians had sought employment in the large informal economies in host countries and large numbers depended on some sort of humanitarian assistance. As the reality that many Syrians would remain in the host communities for longer than expected, and some indefinitely, the pressure for a more sustainable solution has become urgent. By the beginning of 2016, Jordan and Turkey (but not Lebanon) had eased regulations allowing Syrians would be able to access legal employment and apply for work permits. However, these countries, for several reasons, are struggling to absorb refugees into their economies.

As international attention has now become focused on viable options for livelihood for the mass movement of people, shrinking economies and governments stretched to provide employment for native populations have complicated solutions. There is a growing interest in finding innovative and viable solutions for employment, not only for migrant and refugee populations, but also the host community.

The project

The proposed project will be an extension of the April 2017 [report](#)¹ that examines the current state of employment and employability of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey, assess related policy trends and analyses the role of the international community in bringing about and nurturing this paradigm shift. In this report, we analyzed the legal, cultural, socio-economic and political barriers to refugee employment and provided high-level recommendations for policymakers, development agencies and the private sector. We conclude that at the heart of most of these barriers is a lack of formal jobs, a problem affecting all youth in the MENA region, in both refugee and host communities.

One key recommendation from the report was that international companies explore providing employment for refugees to work remotely². A solution that is less geographically limited and takes into account the vast opportunities offered by current-day technology, the global skills gap, current education-for-employment initiatives might provide a viable solution for employment. With an increased focus on finding ‘solutions in

¹ Charles, L & van Genugten, S, “Livelihoods for Syrian Refugees: Transitioning from a Humanitarian to a Developmental Paradigm Labour Market Integration in Jordan and Turkey” Emirates Diplomatic Academy Working Paper, April 2017

² We introduce this idea in our article: “How displaced people can be provided ‘global’ opportunities” The National, 4 April 2017; <http://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/how-displaced-people-can-be-provided-global-opportunities>

the region' and the loss of appetite of European nations for refugees and economic migrants, a solution that could provide economic opportunity for refugees in their host country and where native the population also benefits, is imperative.

In this follow up research, we would like to expand the scope further towards innovative job creation in the MENA region, with an emphasis on engaging the global private sector to establish a new narrative and mechanism for employment. We will **advocate for the establishment of an online platform to facilitate remote work**. While the idea of online job search is not new, this platform would only be used for remote working opportunities and would be accessible to displaced individuals. This system, though not exclusively for refugees, would be tailored to their specific needs, such as accommodating for their lack of access to traditional financial services and other bureaucratic obstacles they may face in their host country.

The research will revolve around examination of the issues from several perspectives: political (legislative, regulatory), social (education, skills, mind-set), economic and technical. The following questions will be explored.

- An examination of the barriers and enablers for job creation in the MENA will be conducted as a rationale for the establishment of a new narrative for employment: What are the legislative and regulatory barriers in host countries to hinder individuals engaging in remote work? What, if any, are the barriers to payment for remote work? How can these barriers be overcome?
- What are the risks to this type of employment? How can these be overcome?
- How could the private sector be incentivized to provide remote employment?
- How can the various actors (governments, the private sector, NGOs and the UN) coordinate facilitate this? To date there has been a non-coordinated effort between traditional actors such as the governments, UN, NGOs and INGOs and newer actors- the private sector and philanthropists. How can the private sector, in the Middle East and globally, provide greater support for job creation and training?
- What skills and education are needed for individuals to engage in this manner of work? If these skills are not present in the target populations, how can training be provided? Whose responsibility is this?
- What criteria needs to established for the 'matching' of employer and employer?
- What is the most appropriate online system for this? What factors need to be considered in establishment of this system?
- How can the job matching be done? What is the best mechanism to host this system?
- What is the most appropriate business model?

Deliverables and output of the project

The project will have written, as well as other outputs. These will include an extensive **written report** addressing the questions above. As with our previous research, we will also publish also **op-eds** aimed at the general public, to increase awareness.

Engagement with the private sector is imperative for this project, being the key actor for employment opportunities. Thus there will be **extensive engagement and advocacy with a wide range of private sector actors** (multinational corporations and SMEs) globally. The researchers will also engage extensively with organizations to learn from implementing agencies dealing with employment. This will establish criteria that can then be used to create a **'toolkit' for the development of an online platform** for employment aimed at each stakeholder. This report and toolkit will be presented to investors to fund the development of the platform.

The research reports will also be used as a basis for **roundtable discussions** with policymakers, the private sector and development agencies. These discussions will engage relevant actors including policymakers from the region, UN agencies, NGOs, INGOs and the private sector in order to gain wide support for this system.

Research plan

Stage 1: Desk review of literature (15 days)

Stage 2: Data collection- interviews (20 days)

Stage 3: Engagement with the private sector for 'buy-in' (ongoing from the start of the project)

Stage 4: Analysis (10 days)

Stage 5: Writing report, op-eds and toolkit (20 days)

Total: 65 days

Press coverage:

"How displaced people can be provided 'global' opportunities" [The National](#)

Increasing the Economic Independence of Refugees—Can We Go Remote? [EastWest.ngo](#)

Towards Implementation

We are in discussions with an impact investment company to seek funding from the private sector for project implementation. The initial stages of implementation are expected to occur concurrent with the research, with each phase feeding into the other.