



International
Labour
Organization

PROSPECTS



- ▶ Improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



Digital livelihoods and online work platforms

Current challenges and opportunities in the digital economy among the forcibly displaced and host communities

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► Promise versus reality in the digital platform economy

- **Major investments by national governments, international organizations and private sector initiatives – hoping that the digital (platform) economy offers an unprecedented opportunity**
 - These hopes rest on perceived qualities of the platform economy: accessibility, inclusivity, flexibility, abundance of demand, dis-embedded from constraints of local labour markets
 - The availability of money, and national strategies for the digital economy in East Africa convey enthusiasm
- **How does this promise look like from the perspective of youth, including forcibly displaced persons?**
 - Lack of access to the internet and difficulties in building skills that match demand
 - Precarity and informality characterize platform work opportunities
 - However: current evidence suggests a huge potential opportunities for future livelihood generation

► **Regional report: Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities in the digital platform economy in Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt**

Overview

- The report analyses the current reality of expanding digital labour markets with a focus on refugees and host community youth
- **We conducted** 46 interviews, extensive desk research, and a mapping of platforms and other key actors on work and e-commerce platforms, social enterprises and outsourcing initiatives, digital skill training, digital livelihoods programmes, as well as government policies and programmes
- **Main challenges we** identified include: digital divides, specifically for refugees, skills shortages and mismatch, lack of access to digital payment systems, poor working conditions, categorical exclusion of non-citizens from some government programmes and from aspects of the wider ICT ecosystem

Other insights

- The digitalization of work plays a particular role for refugees but also imposes specific new barriers
- The unequal spread of ICT infrastructure and connectivity raises questions about potential inclusivity of approach (Rural-urban divides, off-grid refugee camps, low internet penetration rates)



Selected recommendations

Multi-stakeholder recommendations and Int Development & Humanitarian sectors

- ▶ Develop new interventions that facilitate **transitions** from precarious work and informal entrepreneurship in the digital economy **towards decent, secure and formal employment** and business
- ▶ Widen the **funding** opportunities and technical assistance that is available to **social impact platforms** and enterprises that have a dedicated aim of supporting youth and refugees to earn a living in the digital economy
- ▶ Improve refugees' access to a universally accepted **legal identity** and to financial services
- ▶ Prioritize investment into the digital upskilling of youth and refugees with job-matching
- ▶ Deepen partnerships between digital platforms, governments and the international development and humanitarian sectors, to create new mechanisms that drive the inclusion and protection of marginalized groups

Governmental actors

- ▶ Extend labour rights and social protection to all platform workers, including refugees
- ▶ Expand and accelerate current investments into the improvement of ICT infrastructures, including in rural areas and in refugee settlements and camps
- ▶ Include all migrants and FDPs in national digitalization programmes and training initiatives

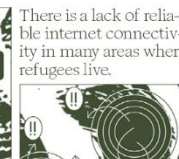
Refugees are affected by specific layers of exclusion and marginalization in the digital economy, in areas such as:

- Skills
- Connectivity
- Financial and Economic factors
- Laws and regulations
- Social and cultural factors
- Workspace

THE 6 LAYERS OF EXCLUSION



A lack of digital literacy and competitive skills undermines many refugees' ability to succeed on digital labour platforms.



There is a lack of reliable internet connectivity in many areas where refugees live.



Many refugees lack access to a suitable workspace from which to conduct their online labour.



A large number of refugees cannot open bank accounts and use traditional payment mechanisms, such as bank cards.



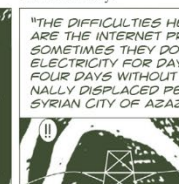
Many refugees face discrimination when bidding for jobs on labour platforms and can come under pressure to conceal their refugee status.



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"THE DIFFICULTIES HERE IN SYRIA ARE THE INTERNET PROBLEMS... SOMETIMES THEY DON'T DELIVER ELECTRICITY FOR DAYS, MAYBE FOUR DAYS WITHOUT IT." INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON IN THE SYRIAN CITY OF AZAZ



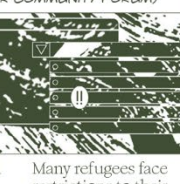
Where it is available, mobile data connectivity and internet access can be costly.



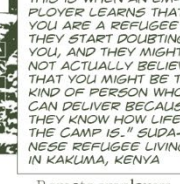
Subscription fees and other costs imposed by digital labour platforms can make it difficult to make a livelihood online.



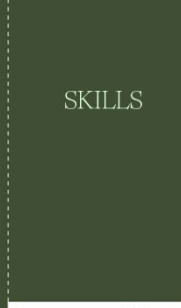
Many refugees face restrictions to their right to work in the host country. Self-employment for digital platforms is often considered a legal grey zone.



Remote employers and clients are often unwilling to hire refugees due to uncertainty around their legal status, internet connectivity, and their "cultural fit".



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Unreliable electricity supply, especially in off-grid refugee camps, rural areas, and in crisis-affected host countries affect refugees' ability to work online.



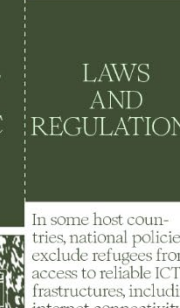
Even where refugees participate in digital skills trainings, their ability to succeed independently is often limited without additional mentoring and support.



Co-working spaces and computer labs are not readily available outside of major urban areas



Software subscription fees can be costly for refugees working in certain areas of digital labour, such as translation or graphic design.



International laws restrict certain nationalities from accessing and trading on digital platforms, in part due to international sanctions that prohibit financial dealings with certain countries or members of certain political groups.



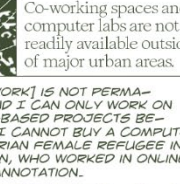
Women face specific barriers in accessing digital economies. While home-based online work can be an attractive option for refugee women with caring responsibilities, this combines taken-for-granted care work and housework with precarious digital labour.



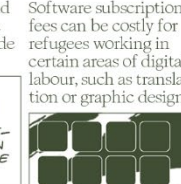
"[THIS WORK] IS NOT PERMANENT AND I CAN ONLY WORK ON PHONE-BASED PROJECTS BECAUSE I CANNOT BUY A COMPUTER." SYRIAN FEMALE REFUGEE IN LEBANON, WHO WORKED IN ONLINE IMAGE ANNOTATION.



A lack of access to adequate hardware and software represents a major obstacle for many refugees seeking to make a livelihood online.



"I AM A SINGLE MOTHER AND I LIVE HERE WITH MY TWO KIDS. I AM THE ONE WHO WORKS. I DON'T HAVE ANY FAMILY IN BULGARIA... I PREFER ONLINE WORK BECAUSE MY SON NEEDS CONSTANT CARE." AFGHAN WOMAN WHO WORKED IN IMAGE ANNOTATION



"WORKING ONLINE FROM HOME WOULD BE VERY GOOD, WE WOULD HAVE WORK, A SOURCE OF MONEY, WHILE STILL BEING ABLE TO STAY AT HOME WITH CHILDREN. WE WON'T COME BACK LATE FROM WORK." SYRIAN REFUGEE LIVING IN SIDON, LEBANON



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► Rethinking protection in the context of forced displacement

The research behind this report identified several prototypes for rethinking protection that are especially relevant for refugees and other marginalized segments of the population.

- Algorithmic fairness and distribution of work
- Social dialogue, collective bargaining and freedom of association
- Inclusive intermediation between marginalized workers and the internet economy
- Fair work principles and strong recognized norms
- Mentorship and supported job-matching
- Match-funding for digital entrepreneurship
- Business formalization pathways

► Important to acknowledge the opportunities despite the deficits

- Digital livelihoods (remote work and platform work) will likely transform the future of work for many forcibly displaced persons permanently
- Digital livelihoods are an opportunity to work towards preventing that refugees will be exiled from an increasingly digitized, internet-based, and cash-less future of work
- **But:** Programmes and initiatives that ‘cushion’ the precarity and risks of digital work in the aid sector are not the private sector. One of the main challenges will therefore be to connect refugees to the wider global struggle for fairer working conditions on platforms in the digital marketplace

Who are online workers?

Global

- ▶ Young - **Average age is 31** (workers in online web-based platforms), 36 (taxi) and 29 (delivery)
- ▶ Mostly male - **6 in 10 in online web-based; 9 in 10 in location-based** platforms
- ▶ Often highly educated – **60% of workers in online webbased platforms have an university degree**, 20% for taxi and delivery workers
- ▶ «Independent» – reluctant entrepreneurs and captive partners or fake self-employed

**Source: ILO WESO 2021*
Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

Kenya

- ▶ as at 2019 is **\$109 million** and employing a total of **36,573** gig workers.
- ▶ the online Kenyan gig economy is expected to grow by **33 percent over the next five years**, to \$345 million in 2023, employing a total of **93,875 gig workers**, representing a growth rate of 27%.
- ▶ **16% of Kenyans** who are employed have used digital services for upskilling and job search;
- ▶ **44% of self-employed people /** business owners use digital services to support their businesses; only 15–18% of them use advanced digital services for business
- ▶ **29% of Kenyans report experiencing fraud**; 35% report facing cyber harassment whilst using a digital service.

**Source: Mercy Corps 2019*

Kakuma

- ▶ About **69 percent of camp residents have a mobile phone**, as do 85 percent of those in the town
- ▶ In the camp, **63 percent of men do not have smartphones** while 88 percent of women do not
- ▶ only **86 percent in the town and 31 percent in the camp use their phone/SIM** card for mobile banking or money transfers
- ▶ **52 percent of refugees** have never heard of mobile money
- ▶ only 33 percent in town, and 19 percent in camp, connect to the internet

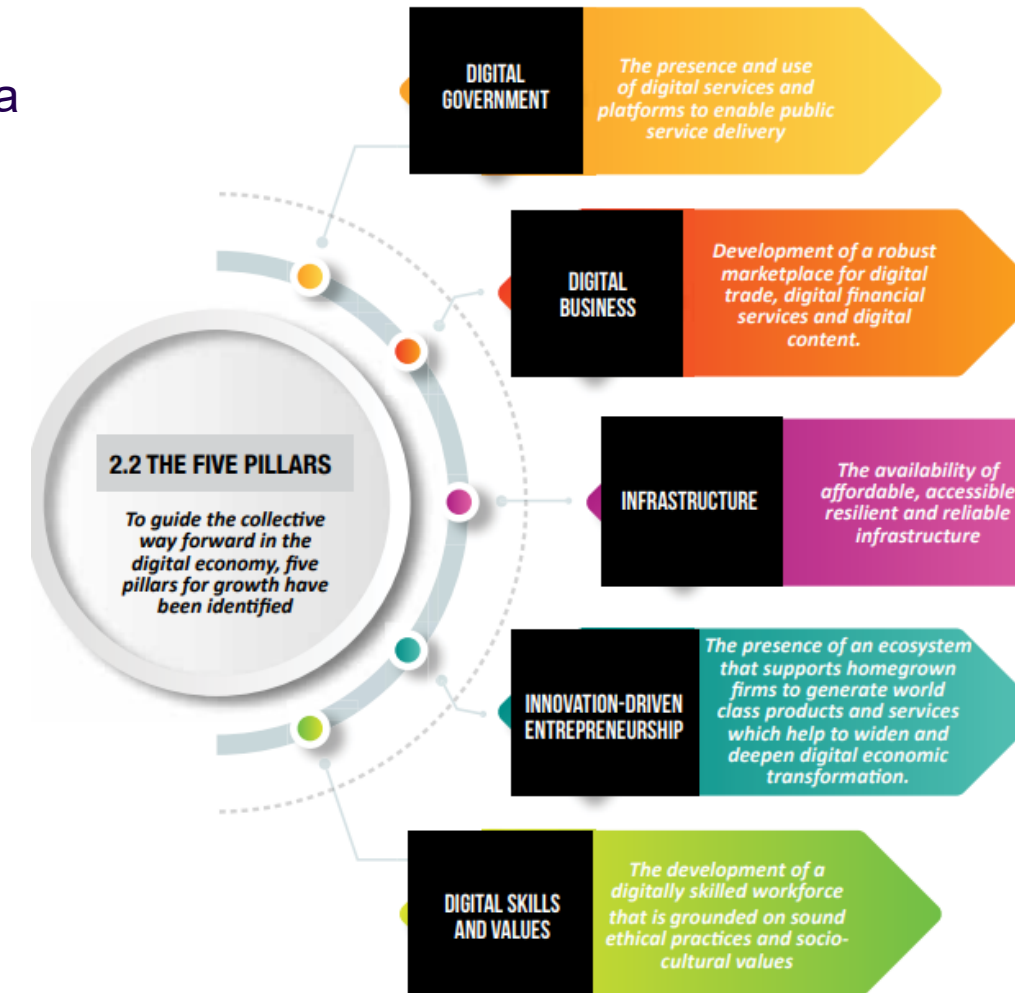
▶ ilo.org
Source: IFC Kakuma as a marketplace

Digitalization and Employment Policies: The case of Kenya

- ▶ In SSA, 28% of population with internet access, over 50% in Kenya
- ▶ 94% of the population use mobile money (m-Pesa)
- ▶ As of 2019, 37,000 digital platform workers (Mercy Corps survey)

Employment elements of ICT strategy (“Digital Economy Blueprint 2019”)

- ▶ Recognizes importance of employment policy and labour regulations
- ▶ Strong focus on skills and youth employment
- ▶ Employment agencies not mentioned as stakeholder
- ▶ Refugees as focus population

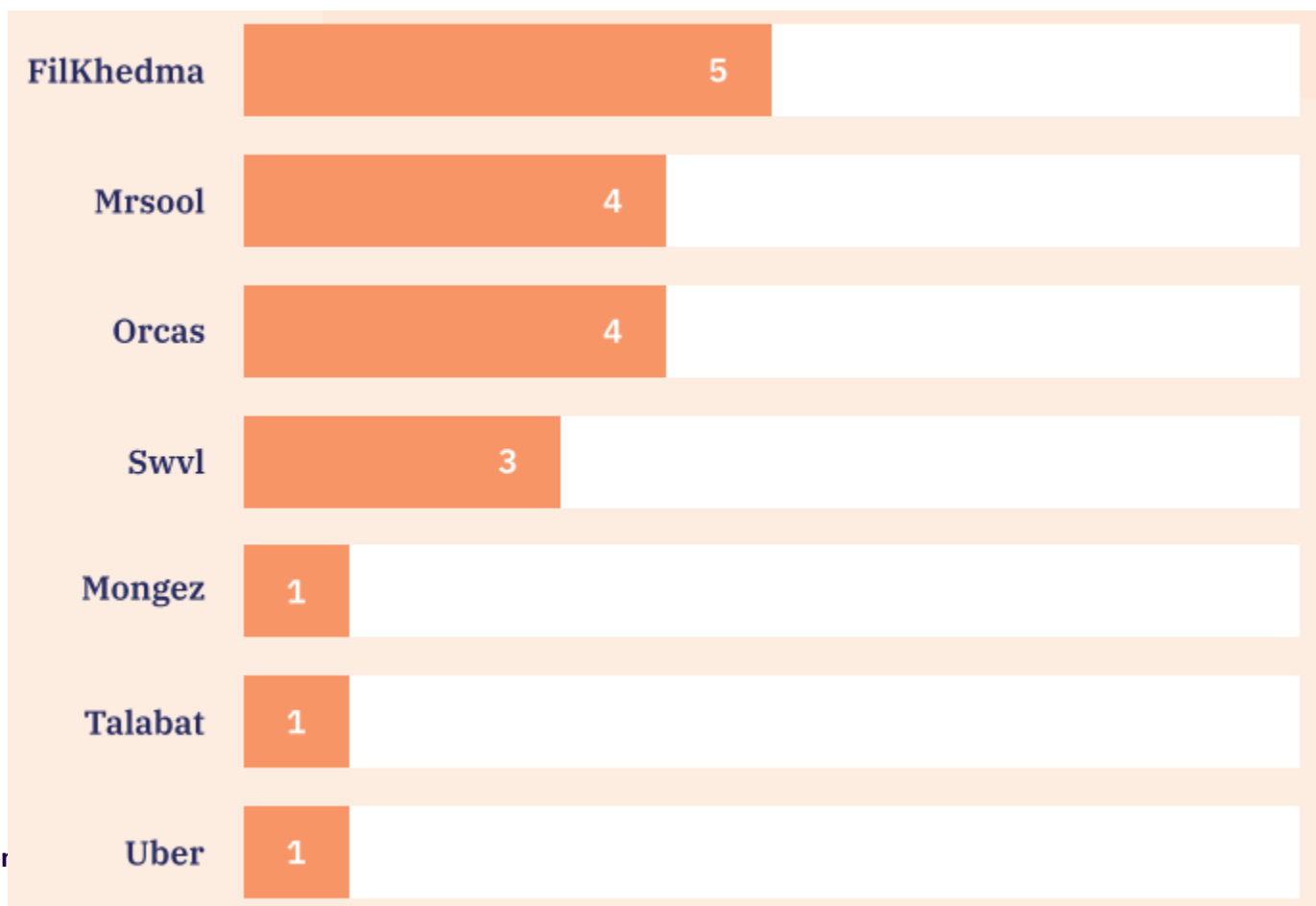


► Fairwork principles

- **Fair Pay:** Workers, irrespective of their employment classification, should earn a decent income in their home jurisdiction after taking account of work-related costs.
- **Fair Conditions:** Platforms should have policies in place to protect workers from foundational risks arising from the processes of work, and should take proactive measures to protect and promote the health and safety of workers.
- **Fair Contracts:** Terms and conditions should be accessible, readable and comprehensible. The party contracting with the worker must be subject to local law and must be identified in the contract.
- **Fair Management:** There should be a documented process through which workers can be heard, can appeal decisions affecting them, and be informed of the reasons behind those decisions. There must be a clear channel of communication to workers involving the ability to appeal management decisions or deactivation. The use of algorithms is transparent and results in equitable outcomes for workers.
- **Fair Representation:** Platforms should provide a documented process through which worker voice can be expressed. Irrespective of their employment classification, workers should have the right to organise in collective bodies, and platforms should be prepared to cooperate and negotiate with them.

Fairwork Egypt 2021 Scores

Score (out of 10)



Fairwork (2021) Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2021: Labour Standards in the Gig Economy. Cairo, Egypt; Oxford, United Kingdom

► Digital Jobs Councils

Objective: Tripartite+, policy dialogue mechanisms whose main objective is to discuss, develop and generate knowledge about decent work policies in the digital economy.

Main functions:

- Monitoring policy developments concerning digital jobs including related to national employment policies, ICT policies and collective bargaining;
- Working across sectors and public policies to expand access and infrastructure, especially internet and network connectivity for marginalized groups like refugees
- Working with employers to anticipate and estimate digital skills shortages and how to use this information to improve recruitment strategies
- Further develop data collection systems to estimate and anticipate the size and changing nature of the digital economy

Establishing DJCs: planned in Egypt and Kenya and linked to national ICT plans. Coverage at national level but could also be at local level (refugee hosting areas for example).