

ILO-UNHCR PARTNERSHIP

*Joint action for decent work and long-term solutions
for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons*



The ILO, the UN agency for the world of work, and UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, are collaborating closely to address the challenges related to large scale displacement by making access to decent work and productive employment an essential component of sustainable response strategies for host communities, refugees, and other forcibly displaced persons.

ILO and UNHCR: complementary mandates and expertise

[The International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) has engaged in the labour aspects of refugee response since its inception in 1919, reflecting its [constitutional mandate](#) to protect “the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own.” In recent years, in view of the rising scale and duration of forced displacement, response strategies have increasingly focused on ensuring access to decent work and livelihoods for both refugees and host communities. ILO’s work in this area is grounded in its International Labour Standards, including the [fundamental principles and rights at work](#) and the [ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation](#), 2017 (No. 205) as well as the Migration for Employment Convention, 1949 (No. 97) and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary provisions) Convention, 1975 (No.143), which also apply to refugees.. Its work is also informed by its [Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market](#) (2016).

[The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) takes a leading role in providing international protection and assistance to refugees and others in need of international protection, and finding durable solutions for the plight of refugees and other displaced persons. A core mandate responsibility of UNHCR is to supervise the application of [the 1951 Refugee Convention](#) and other international and regional instruments relevant to the protection of refugees and other persons in need of international protection. It is in this context that UNHCR advocates for the development of relevant legislative and policy frameworks, including on decent work. The opportunity for refugees to access decent work and participate in local economies is an intrinsic part of the international refugee protection and solutions framework and is reflected in the Global Compact for Refugees (2018).

Deepening and formalizing collaboration to promote refugee livelihoods and protection

Through their complementary mandates and expertise, ILO and UNHCR support the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to decent work while protecting their rights and supporting the countries and communities hosting them. Over the years, the two organizations have collaborated on a number of technical areas, including to improve livelihoods opportunities through enterprise development and access to finance, and extending social health protection.



In July 2016, in the context of rising forced displacement, the ILO and UNHCR signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU), accompanied by a Joint Action Plan (February 2017), deepening their commitment to working together. The implementation of the Action Plan has advanced collaboration through concrete, practical measures at global, regional and country levels aimed at three overarching goals:

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1. Improved governance of access to the labour market and decent work for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.
 2. Strengthened protection measures and decent working conditions for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons through enhancing social protection mechanisms, improving working conditions and identifying and mitigating against violations of the fundamental principles and rights at work.
 3. Increased opportunities for jobs, income and livelihoods for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, as well as for host communities.

On 14th November 2019, the Director General of the ILO and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued a joint letter reaffirming their commitment to advancing employment opportunities and decent work for refugees, other forcibly displaced persons and national workers.

Working together at global, regional and national levels

Key areas of joint work include the operationalization of global normative frameworks to guide stakeholders in ensuring inclusive and equal treatment in access to decent work and livelihoods, as well as ensuring support to local communities, and protecting the fundamental rights of those displaced through practical measures on the ground.

Collaboration towards the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)

The UNHCR is currently leading the implementation of the [GCR](#), to which ILO is contributing on a range of labour market and employment interventions, including reinforcing policy and regulatory environments, improving access to sustainable livelihoods, employment and skills training opportunities, as well as strengthening social protection and rights at work. As part of the [Global Refugee Forum](#), which will support and monitor the implementation of the GCR, the ILO is a co-sponsor of the jobs and livelihoods theme.

Social health protection: towards building an affordable healthcare system for both refugees and host communities

The ILO and UNHCR's joint work on social health protection, initiated in 2012, has resulted in the identification of opportunities for the inclusion of refugees in national social protection health systems. Work is ongoing to seek inclusion of refugees in eight countries in Africa: Mauritania, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Cameroon, Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan. The ILO and UNHCR see the integration of refugees into social health protection schemes as a first step towards overcoming barriers for their inclusion in social protection systems.

Expanding partnership towards enhanced access to decent work

With funding from the Dutch Government, under the PROSPECTS Partnership Programme on Inclusive Jobs and Education for Host Communities, Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons, UNHCR and ILO together with UNICEF, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), are collaborating to implement programs that will enhance access to decent work, education and protection for refugees and host communities in eight countries in the Horn of Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).



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Promoting rights at work and preventing child labour In Syria, the ILO has been supporting UNHCR community centre case managers, as well as local school principals through trainings aimed to help them monitor and identify cases of the worst forms of child labour among the internally displaced and host population and to offer follow-up to address these cases. At the global level, ILO and UNHCR are strongly involved in a number of initiatives addressing these issues, including Alliance 8.7, aimed at meeting Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 on eliminating unacceptable forms of work, including child labour and forced labour.



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Informing and empowering refugees to access decent work.

The ILO and UNHCR in coordination with the Government of Jordan, established [employment service centres](#) inside the Zaatari refugee camp in 2017 and Azraq refugee camp in 2018. This allowed refugees to receive counselling services on employment, to be provided with work permits and attend job fairs where they can meet

employers and gain access to formal work opportunities across Jordan. To date, thirteen employment centres have helped some 10,000 people, both Jordanians and Syrians, to access employment and training opportunities, as well as other services. In August 2018 the ILO and UNHCR signed a [Letter of Understanding](#) that led to more effective advocacy, greater synergy and increased coordination.

Promoting skills and lifelong learning for refugees and host communities. The ILO and UNHCR synergize to promote pathways of learning from primary education, to secondary, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), up to tertiary levels. The ILO contributes through its expertise in work based learning and the recognition of prior learning. The two organizations are planning to jointly produce a new guide on TVET delivery for peace and resilience.

Addressing youth unemployment among refugees and host populations

In Indonesia, the ILO and UNHCR have joined forces in a [pilot project](#) to contribute to reducing youth unemployment and improving self-reliance opportunities for refugee and local youth. The pilot offers learning opportunities on entrepreneurship, business management and soft skills through the Ready for Business entrepreneurship programme, developed in partnership with the ILO International Training Centre and the William Davidson Institute of University of Michigan.



Ashi Mashi, a new company started by two entrepreneurs, a refugee from Afghanistan and a local businesswoman following their participation in the Ready for Business (R4B) programme ran by ILO and UNHCR in Indonesia. The company sells about 400 bags of premium potato chips in recyclable packaging every month.

Strengthening capacity of regional bodies

ILO and UNHCR have supported the work of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) secretariat leading to the adoption in March 2019 of the Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region (Kampala Declaration). There is scope for ILO and UNHCR to assist IGAD Member States in ensuring coherence among national policies relating to refugees and migrants and supporting the role of social partners in promoting access to decent work for refugees and host communities.



Responding to rapidly evolving and complex displacement situations

To respond to the large-scale displacement of refugees and migrants from Venezuela to Latin American and the Caribbean, an inclusive [Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees](#) (R4V) was established through the coordination of UNHCR and IOM. The ILO is working closely with both agencies to coordinate UN interventions under the R4V Socio-Economic and Cultural Integration pillar. Working together with key national and international actors, the ILO has developed an intervention model to address the socio-economic needs of both displaced Venezuelans and host communities.



Building peace through better employment opportunities for refugees and host communities

In Mauritania, the ILO and UNHCR have been collaborating to improve the employability and market opportunities in the construction sector for refugees displaced from Northern Mali and host communities, especially youth. The project includes skills upgrading and certification components to facilitate mobility and foster durable solutions for refugees, while promoting

gender equality, social cohesion and social transformation, including through south-south cooperation and knowledge exchange with neighbouring Sahel countries.

Building knowledge and capacity. ILO and UNHCR are collaborating to improve the level of understanding of international standards relating to access to employment and decent work, and to ensure their translation into national policies. At the global level, ILO contributed to the 'Decent Work for Refugees - UNHCR Guidelines on applicable international legal standards relating to decent work for refugees' (publication forthcoming), providing a holistic overview of both the right to work and the rights of individuals at work.

The ILO and UNHCR also regularly collaborate on capacity-building courses. Since 2017, the ILO and UNHCR have offered a joint, annual one-week training course on [market-based livelihoods interventions for refugees and host communities](#) at the ITC-ILO in Turin. Starting in 2020, the ILO will offer a course on [access to decent work for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons](#) in collaboration with UNHCR, also at the ITC-ILO.

Promoting market-based livelihoods and financial inclusion for refugees and host communities

The ILO and UNHCR jointly developed the [Approach to Inclusive Market Systems \(AIMS\)](#) to equip refugees and host communities with necessary skills to seize economic and employment opportunities, while strengthening local sectors and value chains in order to create such opportunities. To date, the ILO and UNHCR have collaborated on 17 projects using AIMS to help develop livelihood interventions for refugees that are based on market dynamics and sustainable. The ILO and UNHCR plan to apply AIMS in other contexts including Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia.

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