Economic Empowerment Working Group (EEWG)

Jordan

NOTE FROM MEETING

28 July 2024

Agenda

- Welcome to new people.
- Operational Updates - JoSH, and WP/SSC (15 min).
- Mercy Corps presentation and discussion on AMAZE and IQLAA project (20-30 min).
- UNHCR presentation and discussion on Ecorama Hub project (20-25 min).
- AOB.

Attachments support this Note:

Supplementary documents referenced in this paper are attached to the accompanying e-mail and will be uploaded to the Economic Empowerment Sector weblink, https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/49

- Mercy Corps presentation on IQLAA.
- UNHCR presentation on Ecorama Hub & Project Concept Note.
- Ministry of Labor Letter with the Official Announcement of the Work Permit changes.

UPDATES FROM THE LEADERSHIP

JoSH meeting

The Jordan Strategic Humanitarian (JoSH) – the senior level strategic team chaired by UNHCR – was chaired for the first time by the new UNHCR Jordan Representative, Ms. Maria Stavropoulou. Ms. Stavropolou took office in July 2024, taking over from Mr. Dominik Bartsch. Among other positions, Ms. Maria Stavropoulou has served as UNHCR's Deputy Representative in Syria, UNHCR's Representative in Mauritania, and as Deputy Director of the UNHCR Liaison Bureau in New York.

In her introductory speech, Ms. Maria highlighted the prolonged nature of the Syrian refugee crisis, which poses a threat to the sustainability of the operation. Also, she stated that the security conditions for refugees to voluntarily return Syria are not met and therefore, are not a viable option. In this regard, it should be noted that the Government of Syria has expressed its intent to support returns.

Additionally, it was shared that UNHCR and UNDP regional offices are organizing a two-day planning workshop in September to strategise the future of the Syrian refugee operation. Please note *(author's comment)*: this is a regular and annual workshop that brings together approximately 150+ of the operational leadership and senior officials from the UN agencies, international and national NGOs

from Jordan, Türkiye, Lebanon, Egypt (and maybe Iraq, although Iraq has pulled out of the regional 3RP framework, so their participation is to be confirmed).

At the JoSH meeting also two presentations were provided:

1. UNHCR's 2024 Vulnerability Assessment Framework in Host Communities and Refugee Camps
   - **NOTE:** UNHCR VAF Unit was invited to the EEWG meeting last June 2024 to present the relevant economic empowerment data from VAF, but unfortunately time did not permit the presentation. UNHCR will be invited back to the next meeting (August) to conduct such presentation.

2. **Update on the Work Permit and Social Security Contributions:** The UNHCR-World Bank-led Task Force, which includes members from ILO, EU, and Embassies of the Netherlands, UK, and Norway, recently presented their research finding on the economic impact that could be expected from the cost changes that will be applied to work permits and social security charges. Their findings indicated that the modifications would not significantly affect government revenue but would have a substantial impact on individuals (particularly, Syrian refugees) who cannot afford the cost increases.

   The Ambassadors of the Kingdoms of the Netherlands and Norway presented the research findings and advocacy efforts to the Cabinet for their consideration. The presentation indicated that there has been no response from the Cabinet regarding the possibility of a further waiver[1].It is believed that the issue is currently with the Royal Court.

   - **NOTE :** A letter from the Ministry of Labour on the 14th July 2024 indicated that "*the [continuation of the] fee exemption is limited to workers of Syrian nationality…in professions…..and factories indicated in the letter of His Excellency the Minister of Industry and Trade [referencing the rule of origin clause]*" and "*the exemption of other workers of Syrian nationality is suspended as of 01/07/2024*". (Attached)

   Regardless of the Cabinet's / Royal Court's decision, there is a consensus that the international community must consider continuity planning and contingency measures. It has been suggested that the Economic Empowerment Working Group (EEWG) could be the most relevant forum to continue this conversation.

   - **ACTION POINT:** The co-chairs of the Economic Empowerment sector will follow up with UNHCR and other relevant actors to discuss how this conversation can continue and determine the role the EEWG could play.

MERCY CORPS PRESENTATION ON AMAZE AND IQLAA PROJECTS

Ms. Maisa Asmar, Program Manager at Mercy Corps, presented the Informal Livelihoods Advancement Activity (IQLAA), a USAID-funded initiative whose main goal is to support home-based businesses and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs') in Jordan to grow, transform, and become resilient to future challenges.

IQLAA, a consortium led by Mercy Corps, aims to **1)** enhance public private dialogue**, 2)** improve MSEs' access to business opportunities, and **3)** enhance MSEs' access to appropriate financial services and products. The project targets women, youth, persons with disabilities, and refugees. It is implemented across Jordan and focuses on the agricultural, touristic, services and manufacturing economic sectors.

[1] An initial waive of the cost increases was granted for six months earlier this year The waiver period came to an end at the end of June 2024.

The presentation catalysed significant discussion and raised numerous questions. The EEWG will discuss further with Mercy Corps and engage with the rest of the EEWG if there is a desire for a dedicated online session. If there is the desire, the EEWG will set it up.

Some key information points from the presentation included:

- 98% of Jordan's businesses are micro and small enterprises; and MSEs employ around 60% of the country's private sector.
- MSEs contribute around 50% of the country's GDP.
- Many MSEs are 'survival entrepreneurs i.e. people that are simply looking to make ends meet.
- Over 60% of the MSE workforce is 'informal' and represents a declining rate of business formalisation.
- Private sector led; direct support to enterprises; continuous support from recovery, resilience, growth.
- Supports access to markets; access to finance; capacity building (marketing particularly); strengthen financial skills, managerial and technical capacities.
    - **NOTE 1:** IQLAA presentation is attached to this meeting note. The presentation provides more information. For further feedback/suggestions, please feel free to contact Ms. Maisa Asmar at masmar@mercycorps.org or Jo-Iqlaa@mercycorps.org.
    - **NOTE 2:** The presentation triggered substantial discussion and the opportunity to have a separate and dedicated session to exchange information on initiatives and learn from different organisations working on similar projects.
        - **ACTION:** EEWG co-chairs to follow up with Mercy Corps and the group.
    - **NOTE 3:** Mercy Corps was invited to have two project presentations: IQLAA and AMAZE. Due to a time constraint, we did not have the chance to listen to its second presentation on the AMAZE initiative. Therefore, Mercy Corps will be invited to the next EEWG meeting to do such a presentation.

UNCHR PRESENTATION ON ECORAMA PROJECT

Mr. Omar Alomari, UNHCR colleague at Irbid Office, presented (and called for support) for the UNHCR **Eco**nomic Empowerment Pano**rama** Hub (Ecorama Hub). Implemented in the northern city of Irbid, this project aims to **1)** provide information on livelihoods projects and services in a 'one-stop-shop to all stakeholders, **2)** create a marketing and networking platform for graduates of training programmes and to help them find employment (supporting sustainability of the project and graduates), **3)** establish a digital hub for skills development and job application, and **4)** offer career development counselling. In order to do so, the interventions will be focus on visibility and showcasing, job matching and talent hunting, creating a digital hub…

UNCHR is calling EEWG partners to support with financial contributions; technical support; or providing information about their projects so the hub has a good understanding about the local economic environment and the opportunities that are available. The project is looking to provide a service similar to the UK's 'Job Centres'. Although probably a bit lighter and less comprehensive

- **NOTE 1:** Ecorama Hub presentation is attached to this meeting note. For further feedback/suggestions or to collaborate with them, please feel free to contact Mr. Omar Al Omari at alomari@unhcr.org o Mr. Malik Al Ali at alalim@unhcr.org

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