

## Chairs' Key Messages

This **Bonn Expert Meeting “Creating Jobs and Economic Opportunities / Access to Employment and Livelihood Activities for Refugees and in Host Communities”** hosted by UNDP and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office brought **together and followed up on important international and regional processes, exchanging collective experiences and lessons learnt. Furthermore, it provided a platform to identify and mobilize opportunities for better cooperation and coordination.** The results of this exchange will contribute to the follow-up to the US Leaders' Summit on Refugees and will serve as an input to the Global Compact on Refugees as well as the follow-up to the London and Brussels Syria Conferences.

**Access to employment and livelihood activities** for refugees and host communities is crucial for human dignity, economic sustainability, and social stability in situations of forced displacement.

The **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants** (2016) therefore calls for the expansion of refugees' opportunities to access labour markets and to make use of their skills and capacities. Economic opportunities form an essential part of the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework** (CRRF) which is the basis for the **Global Compact on Refugees** to be adopted in 2018. In that same spirit, numerous member states of the 2016 **US Leaders' Summit on Refugees** pledged to enact policy changes that will allow refugees to pursue lawful employment and livelihood activities. At the regional level, ambitious objectives regarding employment creation have been set and strong commitments have been made at the **Supporting Syria and the Region Conferences in London, Helsinki and Brussels** in 2016 and 2017, the implementation of which was discussed earlier this year at a first Expert Meeting on Jobs and Economic Opportunities in Bonn.

Consequently, **host countries and the international community have considerably intensified their support** for refugees and host communities over the last years, and have accumulated considerable practical experience in responding to protracted crisis, including the creation of livelihood and economic opportunities in protracted crises. Their policy and programming experiences are underpinned by first evaluation results and studies, as e.g. the joint UNDP/WFP/ILO multi-country Economic Opportunities Assessment “Jobs make the Difference”. There has also been a quick mobilization of additional sources of external finance and innovative instruments such as the EU Trust Fund (“Madad Fund”).

The establishment of the **Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan** (3RP) in 2015 was an important step in ensuring that international development support is aligned with national planning instruments and fully includes host communities. It remains an exemplary approach to integrate both resilience and refugee components, with a stronger emphasis on jobs and expanding economic opportunities. A more integrated response from all partners is required to meet milestones that came out of the London Conference.

In addition, with ILO's 2016 **“Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market”** and the “Recommendation No. 205 concerning employment and decent work for peace and resilience”, which has just been adopted this year, there are new global standards addressing the special needs of refugees with regards to access to the labour market. To leverage, more collaboration across UN agencies can support a more robust livelihoods response

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*What we have learned:*

- 1. Activities of the international community regarding the creation of jobs and economic opportunities are diverse and have increased considerably in the last years. However, there is a need to monitor impact, gather more data and strengthen data analysis to expand the evidence base.** In the Syria region, bilateral as well as multilateral and EU programmes are implemented, often in partnership with civil society organizations. The programmes encompass a range of community-level approaches (as e.g. cash for work), as well as measures with a longer-term perspective (as e.g. skills development, support of small business or self-employment) in support to evolving policy shifts in host countries e.g. regarding infrastructure development, private sector engagement, trade and labour market policies and the access to foreign markets. This multi-track approach is considered key to tackling the challenges of protracted crises.
- 2. There has been a stronger recognition in recent years that refugees can also have a positive impact on host societies and that refugee situations tend to be medium to long-term situations.** Governments have started to allow access to temporary economic opportunities for refugees, and include refugees in developing planning processes and instruments. Most importantly, however, a political solution to end the Syria crisis is urgently needed. This is the prerequisite for a voluntary return in safety and dignity of Syrian refugees.
- 3. Early and coordinated action by all relevant stakeholders** (host governments, political, humanitarian and development actors, including IFIs) **should become the new norm when approaching refugee situations to prevent protracted crises and ever increasing humanitarian needs, implementing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.** Important lessons can be drawn from the response to the Syria crisis, including on the importance of strengthening the resilience of individuals, communities and host countries from the onset through integrating a resilience development response in programming and planning instruments. There is now a general recognition that displacement is also a development issue.
- 4. Trust and mutual accountability are key.** It requires a three way approach to ensure access to the labour market for refugees: international community support, appropriate policy framework set by the host government and the private sector. Clear longer-term commitments of the international community to support social and economic development of host countries can give confidence to host countries to continue to expand policy space and provide access to lawful employment and livelihood activities for refugees. The Jordan Compact is a promising example of mutual commitments.
- 5. Altogether, the governance structure of international support regarding livelihood and employment generating activities is very complex** in the Syria Region, but also in other protracted crises. This makes an alignment with host governments' policies and strategies even more imperative. At the same time the potential for a closer cooperation and coordination of donors and other partners at the local, country and regional level is high, including in light of ongoing dialogue and planning for durable solutions, as well as resilience return and reintegration for refugees.
- 6. From a host government's perspective, there are a number of factors determining the potential of refugees to be granted access to the labour market, in particular:** political feasibility, the degree of social tensions, the economic situation of the host country and the

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numbers of refugees in the host country, as well as preexisting development challenges such as scarce natural resources.

*Specific considerations for job creation and economic opportunities programming*

- 7. The host governments' economic and social development strategies are essential to guide international support.** There is a strong need for a better alignment of international processes and debates with host governments' national policy frameworks and priorities, in order to achieve sustainable solutions in protracted crises. **At the same time, international processes and standards need to be translated into national policies and strategies.**
- 8. Labour-intensive programmes that strengthen infrastructure and community services (cash for work) can not only have beneficial short-term, but also positive medium- and long-term impact,** specifically in sectors with a high potential for growth (e.g. agriculture and natural resource management, road construction). It is essential to include refugees *and* host communities. In order to avoid market distortions, local economies and labour markets need to be rigorously analyzed and interventions designed carefully, considering governance, labour standards and do-no-harm policies. **The key question is how to scale up and increase long-term impact of labour-intensive programmes that strengthen infrastructure and community services (cash for work).**
- 9. There are valuable lessons learnt from countries like Germany or Canada in terms of labour market integration and skills development of refugees as well as the application of the whole of society approach.** The majority of refugees are however hosted by countries that are themselves confronted with economic and social development challenges. These countries need specific support regarding the creation of economic opportunities for refugees and host communities.
- 10. Skills development programmes in contexts of displacement need to become more effective.** In addition, right from the start, it should be considered which skills refugees might need when returning to their home countries. Skills development programmes meant to ease the access to labour markets in host countries and at the same time to prepare refugees for return and reintegration. Experience shows that they are only effective, if designed in a demand-oriented way through skills and needs-assessment, pay particular attention to the provision of language skills and include practical components such as job placements. A precondition for the integration of programmes into hosts countries' existing TVET-systems is the acknowledgement that refugees live in protracted situations. However, in countries with high unemployment and low growth rates, the main restricting factor is often not the supply but the demand side of the labour market.
- 11. A deliberate focus on the complexities of employment and livelihoods for women in the context of forced displacement is crucial** for the improvement of their extremely vulnerable situation and has the potential to considerably increase household incomes. Investing must go beyond individuals; there a need to invest in men's and women's awareness, institutional frameworks and legal reform to ensure meaningful engagement of women in the labour market. Additional female-focused cash-for-work activities have proven promising, specifically in sectors that are socially accepted for women in a particular cultural context, while being aware that conflict can also provide an opportunity to redefine traditional gender roles.

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- 12. Major constraints on labour markets in host countries lie on the demand side, i.e. lack of growth and jobs in the private sector. It is pivotal to follow a systemic approach, tackling structural deficiencies such as low productivity or low female labour market participation.** All employment and skills generating activities therefore need to be linked to, or complemented by private sector promotion, public-private sector links and policies to improve the investment climate, including to use the potential of foreign direct investment. The engagement of IFIs plays a crucial role in providing the additionality needed by host countries to achieve economic growth.
- 13. The role of the private sector in employment creation is crucial, however more support to private sector actors, particularly SMEs is needed to enable them to tap into the benefits available for employing refugees.** In this regard, Chambers of Commerce have an important role to play, enhanced exchange between Chambers of Commerce from different contexts could help them fulfill this role.

*Where we go from here*

- 14.** The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is designed to become the new global framework that can be applied in any large refugee situation. The approach is currently implemented in 12 countries. Lessons learnt from CRRF implementation and other refugee contexts such as the Syria situation will inform the Global Compact on Refugees.
- 15. The Bonn expert meeting discussions can provide valuable inputs for development of the Compact as well as to the follow-up of the London and Brussels Syria conferences.**