



UNHCR consultations with refugees – The Jordan Compact, one year later

Understanding main challenges, analysis of the group discussions

5-19 January-2017, Amman, Aqaba, Irbid

The consultations with refugee leaders and active members of the CSCs (Community Support Committees) were organized by UNHCR Amman to discuss education and livelihoods over the last year, priorities in the Jordan compact. Over 80 refugees from 12 Governorates participated in the discussions with UNHCR representative, UNHCR sector specialists in community services, livelihoods and public information as well as field staff. The consultations complement the information collected through the participatory assessment (October-November 2016), the rapid phone survey on work permits (November 2016) and UNHCR's counselling and regular exchanges with refugee communities.

What prevents Syrian children from going and staying in school?

The difficult economic situation of families was mentioned by all groups as main obstacle to school attendance; the distance of school and lack of transport.

Syrian students finish late in the afternoon: this is difficult for girls especially, therefore parents keep girls home.

Refugee parents in rural areas do not send children to schools that are far away; families who work in agriculture change residence often and keep children out of the regular school system.

Teachers in the afternoon shift are new graduates, are not committed; they are not positively engaged, are not sufficiently guided and do not understand the difficulties refugee children have. Psychosocial support is not available or very limited in the public school system.

University is too costly; lack of future prospects prevents many to continue education also at lower levels.

Lack of documentation prevents access to school: In the absence of a Mol card (because of having left the camp irregularly) children are not registered in school.

What does the work permit mean to Syrian refugees? What are the concerns?

Work permits are important because they make work legal, provide for freedom of movement, guarantee rights and protection, as well as stability and fixed income. However, while **assistance is not sufficient to live on and work is necessary**, there is a concern that formal, regularized work and the issuance of a work permit document will eventually result in reduction of assistance. **No family can live on either one or the other, if the salary is low.**

Refugee community leaders discussed the lack of information about available jobs. There are no opportunities for well-educated refugees, nor possibility to regularize jobs in higher professions (doctors and other professionals).

The fact that work permits are attached to a job/contract is not conducive for daily/seasonal jobs (in which many refugees are engaged) and discourages formalization; minimum salary jobs (190 JDs) and long working are not attractive as it does not leave time for **occasional (daily or seasonal) jobs**. In addition, it is difficult to change job, especially for those who work in factories, as a new job requires to start the work permit procedure all over again.

There is **no support for investments in (small) business**. Women prefer to work from home because of their responsibilities, but they have no capital to start up.

The work permit does not always **protect from abuse**: employer use their networks (wasta) when they want to accuse an employee of wrongdoing; at times, asking for work permit can be followed by a request for money, or threats by the employers. Promises of benefits are not kept (free meal and insurance are not always provided or are inadequate). **at keeps a high number of refugees in informal work relations?**

The **system of professions closed to foreigners** does not allow Syrian refugees to do what they really are in a better position based on their skills, ability and background.

In addition a number of obstacles came up repeatedly during the consultations:

Employers themselves do not have the required papers for the business, they might have overdue tax or expired licences, and therefore they do not want to approach the Ministry of Labour.

Concerns about losing assistance and resettlement opportunities exist, especially as jobs are not perceived as being secured enough; the possible cost of renewal is a concern. Daily work - though hard, not secured and unskilled - has advantages (20JD/day, working hours are not too long).

Employed Syrians, do not feel empowered to denounce employers who ask for money for the work permit, or who do not pay overtime or other benefits. There is a lack of knowledge about the rights workers have.

When the work relationship is informal, all is negotiated/negotiable.

Lack of documentation prevents access to work permit: Refugees who left the camp without bailout can only work informally. Families who live in tents with no fixed address (ITS) do not have a Mol card.

What are the preferred and most advantageous occupations for Syrian refugees?

The groups discussed the occupations in which Syrian refugees have capacities in terms of skills and background and in which they could more easily make a living and be productive in the Jordanian society. These include: working in hotels, cooking and working in restaurants, establishing small businesses, working in decoration, tiling and construction, working as electricians, in maintenance and in electronics (ICT), farming, driving, teaching, hairdressing and cosmetic, and working in the professions they used to have before including in law and in health professions.

How can we work together on solutions?

In livelihoods:

All groups asked for **flexible solutions that would give more opportunities to work** – rather than limiting opportunities for regularized work - **both in terms of types of occupation as well as in terms of allowing freelance, self-employed work**. Work permits should not be tied to an employer but rather to the person, based on certifiable skills.

In addition Syrian community leaders proposed these solutions to be considered:

- ✓ a grace period for free work permits for 3 years;
- ✓ More information on job opportunities made available to refugees (through the MoL or other credible sources); more awareness sessions about the importance of women working
- ✓ The public and the Government to better understand the conditions Syrians work and live in;
- ✓ Women and men should have the possibility to set up small businesses and have opportunities for training.

- ✓ **Messages on social security were less uniform:** some refugees think that awareness on the importance of social security should be increased; others feel that payments should be optional as they are not sure they will ever get it back and should rather have more cash in hand.

In education

- ✓ Support families to have better jobs/income;
- ✓ Build new schools where Syrians can go in the morning; employ teachers only for one shift. Ensure teachers are well-trained, with experience in teaching, monitored. Allow Syrian teachers to work.
- ✓ Let Syrian and Jordanian children go to school together
- ✓ Coordinate with Syrian authorities for the transfer of school certificates
- ✓ Simplify MoE rules for admission and rebuild the trust between refugee and the government
- ✓ Strengthen awareness for families about the importance of education
- ✓ Provide psychological support and help children with special needs
- ✓ Provide extra lessons to strengthen children with difficult subjects (ex: math-physics-English)
- ✓ Vocational training as an alternative for those too old to be in school

On documentation

Resolving problems of documentation both for education and for regularizing work is of utmost importance to all refugees but they strongly feel that “the problem is with the rules that are too strict not with the refugees”; suggestions on documentation included:

- ✓ Allow children don't have legal papers or MoI cards to go to school;
- ✓ Announce a grace period to do all needed papers and find sponsors - these could be Syrian relatives or Jordanians - rather than “punish” with return to camp;
- ✓ Organize more helpdesks and UNHCR offices.

On access to information and on communication

1. Refugees from Syria met suggested a number of mobile/internet-based media for improved communication: Arabic Facebook, What's up, SMSs, as well as direct contact through Focus group discussions and debates with community leaders.
2. On the other hand, brochures, posters, radio, small videos, TV programs were considered less useful.

Information to **match Syrian refugees to existing jobs** was considered crucial: GoJ, UNHCR and partners should organize factory visits, use social networks, do more awareness sessions about work permits and sensitize women on the importance of work, organize job fairs to allow refugee to talk directly with the company owners.