



Livelihoods and work Permits: a rapid assessment UNHCR Livelihoods Unit, November 2016

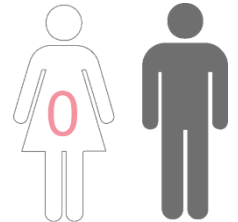
In November 2016 UNHCR conducted a rapid assessment using UNHCR Helpline to better understand access to and perceptions of work permits amongst Syrian refugees living in Jordan. A stratified random sample was created through the Bio-data (ProGres) database, based on gender and age groups above 18. A total of 1,000 names were identified; 530 persons were reached for telephone interviews, 260 women and 272 men. Of these, 182 refugees said they were “working”. A total of 53 persons had work permits - which makes it 29 % of the interviewees currently working. Phone calls were made by UNHCR helpline and livelihoods staff – after working hours and during weekends - in order not to disrupt the essential service provided by the Helpline, which focuses on urgent protection issues, updates on resettlement processing, and other types of counselling.



The rapid assessment aims to complement qualitative data collected regularly by UNHCR field staff as well as the annual Participatory Assessment, which included this year a theme on refugee livelihoods in general and on regularizing work in particular.

Results

The rapid assessment confirmed that Syrians refugees are accessing work permits. Twenty-nine percent of the interviewees who said that they are currently working have work permits. None of them were women. This reflects figures provided regularly by the Ministry of Labor and confirms the need to address the issue of women in the formal workforce and the work of women in general, whether by investing in the environments where women could work or creating/formalizing forms of self-employment including home-based businesses.



When asked “Why don’t you have a work permit?” The following answers were the most frequent:

- Because I work freelance, I do not have a steady employer
- Work permits are not given in my profession
- Because I do not want one
- Because I prefer to work on a daily/weekly basis
- I don’t know how to get one
- I asked my employer but he/she asked me to pay money
- Others believed they need a sponsor, paper work and conditions are complicated, work permit is expensive. Few of them explained that their employers do not have papers to apply for work permits on behalf of their staff.

The main reasons given for not having a work permits is that the job is not eligible for regularization. Specifically 24 percent said they are “freelance”, 9 percent said that they prefer short term/daily/seasonal jobs, and 13 percent believed that permits were not available for the occupation (closed occupation or freelance or on a short term basis). Important questions to be followed up upon with further evidence would be: do freelance and short term workers want work permits, e.g. through agriculture cooperatives or contractors associations? Most importantly, to what extent do workers prefer freelance and in short term jobs and to what extent does this pattern simply reflect the jobs that are available? There is a relatively large group of refugees who seem to prefer jobs that do not tie them down to one employer, but again, this could be because of relative easier access to precarious jobs. On the other hand, the main reason given by interviewees for not working either informally or formally where related to the difficulty of finding a job, age or medical condition, being a housewife and mother. The “fear” of losing assistance was a marginal issue.

Syrian refugees feel that work permit give protection

Forty-five percent of those who hold work permits indicate that they feel better because they cannot be sent to the camp and because their family are better protected. This finding is significant: even though the current Government policy is not punishing Syrians found without work permits, Syrians are still worried about security and are motivated to get work permits for the perceived protection it offers.

Of those who have work permits, nearly a third have permits that do not match their actual occupation. This may indicate that Syrians are beginning to get a work permit from a specific employer and then move on to other jobs; this is a practice common among Egyptians who are also known to buy work permits from brokers especially in the agriculture sector and then work in urban areas.

Of those who have work permits, nearly a quarter had to pay their employer to obtain the work permit. It is not clear from the data what amount they were asked to pay: it could be the 10 JDs processing fee or higher amounts that are frequently mentioned in focus group discussions. Further work would be useful to understand this issue.



The UNHCR SMSs are useful mechanisms for providing information to Syrians. Of those who have work permits, 39 percent found out about work permits from the UNHCR SMSs, a similar percentage from other refugees. This indicates the usefulness of sms as an effective system for outreach. By contrast, UNHCR meetings, UNHCR website, leaflets, radio and newspapers were far less important. FB was mentioned in the “other” sources of information.

Employers do not appear to be the ones initiating the work permit process. Only two percent of those who have work permits found out about work permits from their employer. Awareness raising among employers may be more useful to increasing the number of work permits at this point.

The rapid assessment resulted in 53% of the interviewees saying that women should work. 60% percent of the interviewees who said that women should work where women. The reasons given for not wanting women to work were related to the fact that “nobody else can take care of the children” and that “it is not acceptable” for a women to work.

Way forward

- ✓ Continue to support GoJ/MoL partners; what has been accomplished so far – 37 000 work permits - is important and needs to be built upon.
- ✓ Sensitize private sector employers on the importance of work permits and the importance of initiating the process with MoL /labor directorates.
- ✓ Continue to advocate for the formalization of base on different forms of work including “freelance” and independent work (self-employed) by category of occupation based on skills recognition.
- ✓ Advocate for simplified issuance of work permits “on spot” by MoL inspectors.

