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YOUTH LABOR ASSESSMENT

Irbid Governorate

Lutheran World Federation — Jordan

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Acronyms

BEI	Business Environment Indicators
CBO	Community-Based Organization
DOS	Department of Statistics (Government of Jordan)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HBB	Home-Based Business
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
JEGP	Jordan Economic Growth Plan
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LCVD	Local Value Chain Development
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MFI	Microfinance Institution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
VTC	Vocational Training Center

Executive Summary

THE overall objective of the Youth Labor Market Assessment was to conduct an evaluation of the current labor market environment, and secondly to determine key characteristics of the operating environment for local businesses. This was conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

More specifically, the objectives included:

- Identifying and documenting current employment opportunities and services in the Irbid Governorate that would be suitable for youth (Syrian and Jordanian hosts), taking into account gender, work experience, technical skills and distance to places of work. In addition, considering the private sector, public sector and informal sector opportunities in both traditional sectors and in newly emerging sectors.
- Identifying and documenting barriers that youth (again, Syrian and Jordanian hosts) face in accessing these opportunities and recommending ways to increase youth access to them. In addition, considering appropriate opportunities for both young women and young men, in urban and rural areas and in both the public and private sectors.
- Assessing the market potential for youth-led businesses and social entrepreneurs by taking into account sectors that are particularly opportune for young entrepreneurs.

The study also provided **an understanding of labor market demands, the qualifications expected of employees and the competition or saturation of various sectors. It also provided LWF Jordan a better understanding of the challenges youth may face when trying to compete in these sectors.** Thirdly, the assessment, through interviews with local businesses, helped to identify potential placements for apprenticeships and employment. The study was conducted in the host community (i.e. in non-camp settings) and reached a total of 92 youth, of which 47 were Syrian refugees and 45 were Jordanian respondents. In addition, a total of 47 local businesses in 15 different sectors were also interviewed. Two vocational training centers located in Irbid Governorate were also consulted. The assessment allowed for the identification of a number of key trends and findings, and the

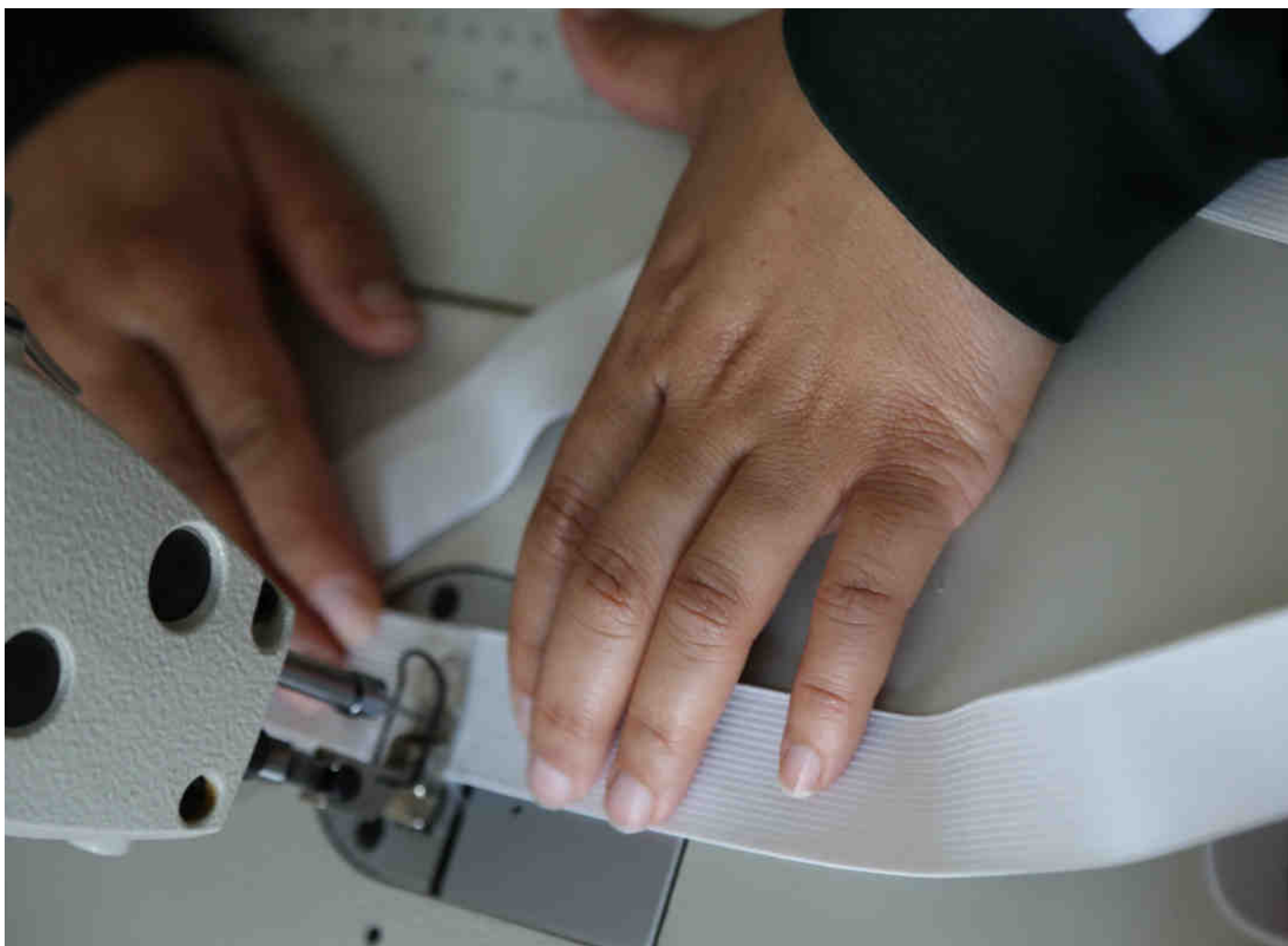
formulation of recommendations for programs aimed at improving access of vulnerable households in Irbid Governorate to income-generating opportunities. The limited participation of business owners prevents the findings from being statistically representative in relation to sector-specific trends. It should be noted that **assessment findings and recommendations are to be understood and applied within the context of Jordanian labor law** and relevant policies regulating the access of displaced populations to income-generating opportunities and employment in Jordan.

Methodology

The assessment used a three-pronged approach, which comprised a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussion. Each approach provided complimentary and qualitative information to the overall assessment. The desktop review consisted of a literature review on previous assessments and other key documents relevant for the survey. The interviews were held with youth in both Syrian and Jordanian vulnerable households. Interviews also were held with 47 tradesmen/business owners across a variety of sectors. **Key informants were interviewed to gain a broad understanding of the effect of the Syrian crisis on labor demand and supply dynamics in their particular field or expertise.**



The agriculture sector offers sizeable employment opportunities for Syrian refugee and host-community youth



Sewing is among many courses offered to Syrian refugee and host-community youth at vocational training centers in Irbid. However, the assessment found that vocational training does not have a significant impact upon employment rates for youth in the refugee community.

Key Findings and Recommendations

IN relation to current suitable employment opportunities and services in Irbid, and taking into account the private sector, public sector and informal sector opportunities in both traditional sectors and in newly emerging sectors, a number of observations were made. Construction, car maintenance and agriculture are sectors that offer sizeable employment opportunities, both formal and informal, for Syrian refugee and host-community youth. With the necessary documentation, especially in the construction and agriculture sectors, the Government of Jordan does not restrict Syrians from working; hence they are free to pursue formal, contracted employment..

Similarly, the informal sector holds various employment prospects for refugee and Jordanian youth; this sector should be regularly monitored upon program commencement to determine the types of jobs to which refugees are most likely to have access. While

the clothing industry is not a large employer, it is a growing economic contributor to Irbid's economy and can be a potential industry that should be targeted for employment opportunities for vulnerable youth. Similarly, the growing telecommunications industry does not currently present many non-technical work opportunities.

Likewise, the agricultural sector in Irbid has great potential as a livelihoods provider and is also among the government's top priorities as an area for development; however, it is important to note that agriculture is limited to the small-medium, family-operated level, so it does not currently provide enough jobs to target as an industry.

Government jobs are highly regarded among host-community youth, but their level of education and lack of connections serve as barriers to public-sector opportunities.

Based on the findings of the assessment, the following recommendations were made:

- **Provide livelihoods support on the basis of socio-economic profiling.** Match program interventions and activities with corresponding levels of livelihoods capacity (current skillset levels and prior work experience) and needs identified in both the Syrian refugee and Jordanian host-community populations, as well as the demands of the market.
- **Targeted interventions should support entrepreneurs and skilled refugees and foster the skills and experience of youth and women exposed to risks linked to a lack of formal employment opportunities.** “Graduation approaches,” which match support and program activities with an individual’s capacities and adapt as their skills and assets develop, are strongly encouraged in longer-term programming.
- **Concentrate on quality over quantity.** There are services already in the market that provide youth with short-term vocational trainings and a number of these are through the two female and male vocational training centers in Irbid Governorate. However, longer-term trainings are required to truly master a skill or trade to be able to pass technical tests often given by larger international employers as a condition of employment. Hence, instead of targeting more youth, it is recommended that fewer youth participate in a respective program, but for a longer period of time. In addition, on-the-job or apprenticeship training activities should be incorporated into the overall training program.
- **Institute implementation arrangements that include operational partnerships and increase refugee access to existing facilities and services with limited incremental project costs** (access to employment services or to training or other initiatives planned and resourced by government ministries, private-sector institutions and international and local NGOs).
- **For vocational trainings, establish partnerships with private-sector companies that will provide employment opportunities after graduation.** In addition, certificates of completion and their authorizing entities should carry weight to meet market expectations.
- **Provide capacity-building investments, preferably towards national and local service providers, whether public or private, to increase their outreach to and inclusion of refugees.** These may include skills training, entrepreneurship creation, business support services, job placement and apprenticeship schemes.
- **Avoid duplication, establishing or providing parallel services** while using advocacy and capacity-building measures to enhance refugee and host-community access to services and institutions that advance livelihoods development and self-reliance.
- **Foster social cohesion by providing support services to both host-community and Syrian refugees;** local populations should be included in activities in areas with a high concentration of refugees.
- **Focus efforts on support towards the agriculture sector, which constitutes the second-largest sector of employment among respondents, does not require high academic or technical qualifications and provides opportunities to vulnerable households from both communities.**

Barriers

The analysis also focused on barriers that hinder or prevent both refugee- and host-community youth from finding employment. These barriers inadvertently contribute to the lack of employment opportunities and make access to such opportunities very difficult. Table 1 summarizes some of the barriers and recommendations towards overcoming them.

Table 1: Barriers to Youth Employment and Recommendations to Overcome Them

Barrier	Recommendation
Current employment and/or enterprise development services are insufficient or are one-off activities, not providing a comprehensive package to vulnerable populations.	Provide a combination of employment services and small-enterprise development through a sequencing of interventions such as formal and informal technical and vocational training, and entrepreneurship training and small grants. For longer-term, development-centered programming, consider developing local value chains (LVCD), capacity building of cooperatives and job placements.
Youth lack the soft skills that the private sector values, and do not fully understand employers' needs.	Provide life and work skills trainings in all youth-focused livelihoods programming , especially on aspects of how to handle job interviews, communication, presentation, time management and basic office etiquette.
Information on livelihoods-related humanitarian and development assistance support is not sufficiently disseminated to target populations.	To raise awareness about its livelihoods interventions and reach target beneficiaries, LWF Jordan and other implementation agencies must have a clear communications plan and be proactive while engaging social networks, humanitarian assistance agencies and community leaders and other stakeholders.
Syrian refugee youth face harassment, discrimination and exploitation by private-sector employers.	Deliberately mainstream an advocacy component into livelihoods programming that would advocate for the right to work under non-discriminatory practices by providing youth training on their labor rights, minimum wage laws, etc.
Findings highlight significant disparities between genders, and between Jordanian and Syrian communities in terms of access to employment, as well as income generated from employment. Social norms, particularly for young women, generally limit them from access to work and other livelihoods opportunities.	Allow for the involvement and participation of family members in initial livelihoods program sessions so they gain appreciation and understanding of the projects. In addition, include an advocacy component to livelihoods training that adopts a rights-based approach and focuses on women's rights and economic empowerment.
Generally Syrian refugees who do not have access to networks in Irbid (family, other Syrian nationals, etc.) and other places established prior to or following arrival face a tougher integration than those who do.	Create a Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Creation space available for use by both Syrian refugee and host-community youth. Networks allow refugees to avoid some of the obstacles present when seeking services on their own, such as discrimination and reference requirements.
Youth working in the informal construction industry often do not have the proper tools and/or safety equipment.	Where possible, programs with a VTC component should provide youth participating the proper tools and safety equipment that could be utilized on the job, which could give them a competitive advantage when seeking temporary employment as day-laborers.
Access to capital to start or grow a business is a challenge for both Syrian and host-community youth.	Micro-grant schemes should be part of enterprise development initiatives. Savings and lending models should be introduced if acceptable.
Syrian youth in rural areas have less access to information on new job opportunities.	Set up rural-based information centers by possibly leveraging resources of existing CBOs.
Syrian youth, with a view that their situation is temporary and hopes to return to Syria in the near future, are less willing to pursue livelihoods options with medium- to long-term objectives.	Employment services provided to Syrian refugees should give transferable skills that can be effectively utilized upon return to Syria (keeping in mind the future employment landscape of Syria). Given the dynamic nature of Syrian refugees' lives, programming should be constantly monitored and adapted to changes as they arise; socio-economic profiles, policies and institutions need to be monitored at regular intervals.

Institutions have a direct and indirect impact on youth and employment opportunities. They can be both barriers and facilitators to livelihoods opportunities and development for both host-community and refugee youth. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the role that institutions play in livelihoods development for vulnerable youth in Irbid.

Table 2: Role Played by Institutions in Livelihoods Opportunities for Vulnerable Youth

Institution	Role in Livelihoods Opportunities for Vulnerable Youth
Government ministries (VTC)	Government ministries, through vocational training centers, provide trainings for host-community and Syrian refugee youth; however, the interest in VTC courses by the youth is dwindling. There is a general feeling that after graduation, there is a lack of follow-up services and monitoring for quality during and post-training.
Local governments and municipalities	Local governments, through their infrastructural development and rehabilitation activities, provide opportunities for youth. This is normally in partnership with INGOs through cash for work initiatives.
Humanitarian and development organizations	There are a number of NGO-supported programs, but the livelihoods services do not meet the demands, and trainings are often too short to enable youth to truly master a skill or trade. There is insufficient cooperation with the private sector, leading to programming that is not market-driven. However, NGOs provide a number of convenient and well-paid employment opportunities for the Syrian youth, but these can inadvertently dissuade youths' search for a more sustainable income flow.
Private sector (businesses, organizations, foundations)	The private sector offers the most livelihoods opportunities for youth. However, there is high competition for jobs with foreign labor, which is often more experienced and cheaper. Abuses of power, low wages and overexploitation are also widely reported. However, the private sector should be at the core of any livelihoods programming.
Labor and trade unions	While well intentioned, labor unions have limited power and are underfunded.
Markets and financial systems	Markets and financial systems do not adequately serve vulnerable target youth and are particularly inaccessible for Syrian refugees.
Academic institutions	These do not provide adequate or a market-driven education; less emphasis needs to be placed on theory and more on practical applications.

Available opportunities in Irbid and market potential for youth-managed small to medium businesses

From the assessment, it was clear that both Jordanian and Syrian youth have a very positive outlook on entrepreneurship and the prospect of setting up their own businesses. In fact, over 60 percent of the interviewees were willing to start their own businesses. As a livelihoods diversification strategy, the youth from the refugee community opted for self-employment.

This, the youth said “allowed them reasonable and steady income,”¹ and to be resilient against potential shocks and stresses. Over 70 percent of participants reported that they lack the knowledge, skills and education to establish viable market-driven microenterprises that would serve niche markets, be cost-competitive for consumers and provide a reasonable profit. Furthermore, challenges such as access to microfinance institutions (MFIs), especially for Syrian youth, were raised as major setbacks. However, grant/microfinance schemes were identified as capital

sources that would address this challenge. A few ideas raised by the youth as being marketable and promising enterprises are as follows:

- Mobile phone maintenance
- Graphic design
- Solar power installation
- Hybrid maintenance
- Babysitting/nursery
- Language and translation services

The high number and density of Syrian refugees in Irbid provide vulnerable youth with potential entrepreneurship opportunities to address any unmet consumer needs identified by this specific population. It is important to highlight that whatever the enterprise idea generated, it should be market-driven and serve niche markets.

For women, it is important to provide entrepreneurship opportunities that can truly provide a sustainable

¹ In line with the Minimum Expenditure Basket 2017 which indicates 467JD per month for a family of 5.

income while simultaneously allowing them to work from home, as culturally accepted. As discussed in a number of forums, it is important to facilitate and strengthen partnerships with private-sector companies that could incorporate services and are able to mainstream gender issues in their working conditions.

1. ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

THE objective of this assessment was to identify opportunities to promote market-based income-generation opportunities for vulnerable target populations in Irbid. This assessment sought to explore barriers to employment faced by both host and refugee communities in Irbid as well as opportunities to overcome such barriers, notably through stimulation of specific sectors that could result in increased access to employment. As such, this report seeks to answer the following key analytical questions:

1. What are the current skill and education levels of both refugees and host communities? Their employment profiles? The barriers to employment? How are they looking for jobs?
2. What are the key characteristics of the operating environment for local businesses? Interviews with local businesses in different sectors were conducted to provide an understanding of labor market demands, the qualifications expected of employees and the competition or saturation of various sectors. This provides a better understanding of challenges youth may face when trying to compete in these sectors. Secondly, these interviews with local businesses helped identify potential placements for apprenticeships and employment.

The findings and recommendations will, alongside other assessments conducted by LWF Jordan in the Irbid Governorate, be used to guide future livelihoods programming.

2. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

2.1 Survey methodology

THREE approaches were used in the assessment and consisted of a) desk review, b) key informant interviews and c) focus group discussions.

2.1.1 Desk review

The assessment used a qualitative approach through a combination of resources, questionnaires and activities to gather information on market demand and translate it into research that will guide demand-driven programming, matching youths' interests, skills and available resources to market opportunities for employment and self-employment.

To measure current information on market realities and make concrete recommendations on how to better connect youth to sustainable livelihoods, the assessment was guided by the *Labor Market analysis in humanitarian contexts: A practitioner's guide*² and previous assessment tools developed by LWF and modified for the context and objectives of the assessment at hand. A number of the tools used in the assessment relied on using a combination of desk research and interviews with key actors, with the ultimate goal of coming up with recommendations that would ensure effective and sustainable solutions for youth in vulnerable households within both the refugee and host-community settings. Table 3 provides a summary of the market assessment adopted for the study:

Table 3: Market Assessment and Information Collected

Market Assessment Tool	Information Gathered
Governorate	National and Regional Development Priorities
Local Business	Labor Market Demand, Qualifications and Constraints; Employment Linkages
Youth Focus Groups	Youth Preferences and Demands
Vocational Training Providers	Share Best Practices, Coordinate and Share Data Collection
Microfinance Institutions	Market Information, Financing Options and Linkages

The assessment relied heavily on secondary research; a thorough desk review was conducted on the following:

- The Irbid context, and specifically statistics per-

² *Labor Market analysis in humanitarian contexts: A practitioner's guide* developed by Save the Children UK with support from the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps

taining to vulnerable youth (including Syrian refugees and host-community), the labor market and entrepreneurship;

- All relevant assessments completed by other stakeholders (NGOs, government, etc.); and
- Project documents on current livelihoods programming in the Irbid Governorate.

2.1.2a Key informant interviews – Tradesmen

The livelihoods team conducted **47 key informant interviews**, which included tradesmen from across a variety of sectors. Key informants were interviewed to **gain a broad understanding of the effect of the Syrian crisis on labor demand and supply dynamics in their particular field or expertise**. The objective of these interviews was to determine key characteristics of the operating environment for local businesses. Interviews with 47 local businesses in 15 different sectors provided an understanding of labor market demands, the qualifications expected of employees and the competition or saturation of various sectors. The interviews helped illustrate the challenges youth face when trying to compete in these sectors. They also helped identify potential placements for apprenticeships and employment.

Interviews were carried out in businesses highlighted from the desk review as being opportune for youth employment. The number of businesses interviewed per sector is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The sample

of businesses contacted was not intended to produce statistically representative findings regarding whether sectors would hire Syrians or not, but rather to provide a qualitative analysis. A range of sectors were chosen to understand if there are common skills or perceptions that affect willingness or ability to hire Syrian employees. The local Chamber of Industries and Commerce was contacted, and reports and statements from each office pertaining to the Syrian crisis and unemployment in Jordan (Irbid in particular) were included in the secondary data review. Key informant interviews included questions about the following:

- Sectors and businesses in the area that generate employment (including both refugees and host communities); and
- Sectors with growth potential and barriers to growth/further employment (both urban and rural), with analysis of the barriers and needs to reach potential.

2.1.2b Key informant interviews – Youth

Key informant interviews were also administered through a questionnaire to 92 youth selected from Syrian and Jordanian vulnerable households using a PDA-based application, DHARMA. The questionnaire was designed to determine the following:

- The current skill and education levels of respondents;

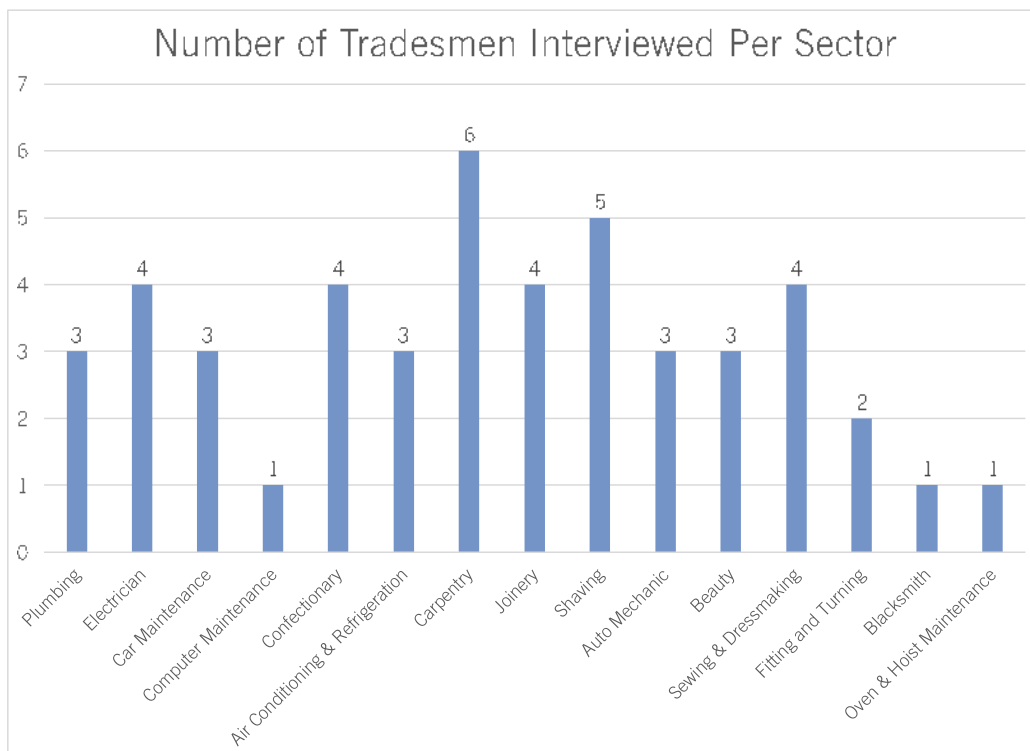


Figure 1: Number of Tradesmen Interviewed Per Sector

- The current job opportunities and working conditions, as well as barriers to employment and methods to find work; and
- Attempts and/or barriers to self-employment/micro-entrepreneurship.

The randomly selected representative sample (95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error) of Jordanian and Syrian youth came from **eight municipalities of Irbid Governorate**, namely *Almazar Aljadida, Altaibeh, Alwistyah, Great Irbid, Qasabet Irbid, Bani Kanana, Alyarmouk and Alikfarat*. The sample of targeted youth in refugee households was identified from the UNHCR database and local community-based organization (CBO) databases, which maintain details of registered refugees and vulnerable households in Irbid.

2.2 Methodology limitations

THE sample of respondent businesses is not significant enough to provide a comprehensive understanding or statistically representative analysis of the situation of businesses in specific sectors, mostly as a result of limited resource availability and challenges in identifying business respondents willing to participate in the study. Findings are based on interviews with business owners, and as such, the results of the study are primarily qualitative and based on individual perceptions. It is recommended that, for similar studies, a larger sample of businesses be contacted to provide a more statistically relevant sample for analysis. The sample Jordanian households were chosen from lists provided by community-based organizations, whereas refugee households were identi-

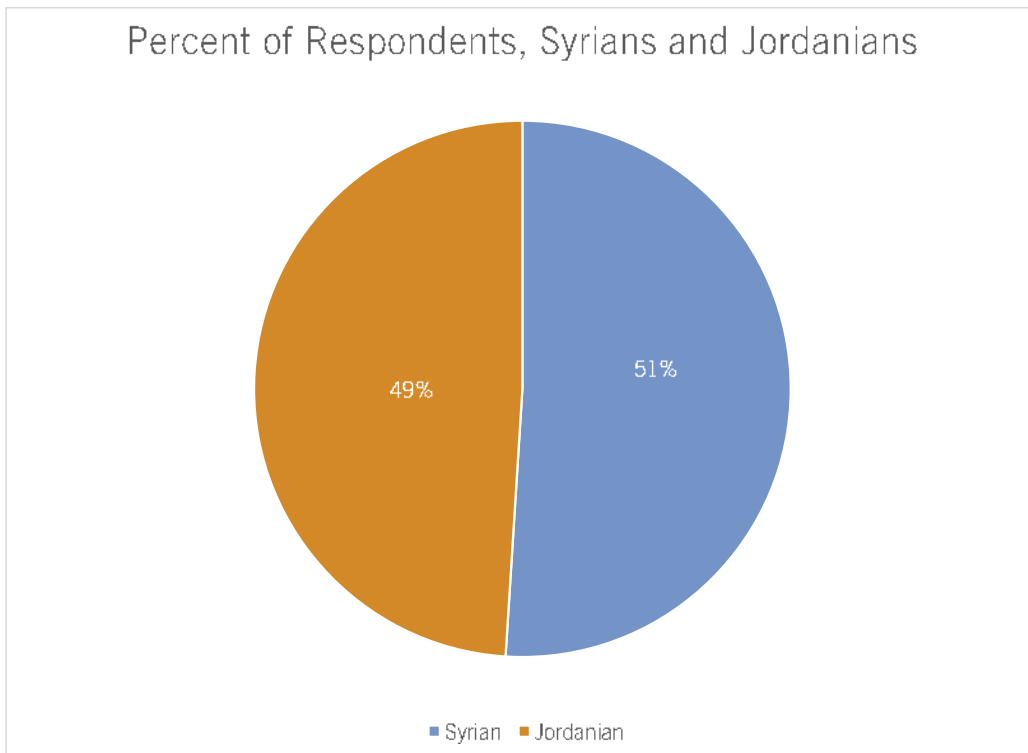


Figure 2: Ratio of Responses Between Syrian and Jordanian Interviewees

In total, 47 interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees and 45 with Jordanian respondents; 49 percent of the respondents were Jordanian and 51 percent were Syrian as illustrated in Figure 2.

Among the respondents, 62 percent were female and 38 percent were male. This is largely due to the fact that a number of the potential male interviews were absent during the times when the survey took place, which were during working hours. The age distribution of the respondents was between 18-25 as illustrated in Figure 3 on the following page.

ified from the UNHCR refugee registration database, UNHCR Cash Assistance projects database, CBO lists and the LWF database. These **different identification methods could affect findings related to the educational and economic backgrounds** of respondents. The lack of livelihoods programming in Irbid by LWF Jordan meant that there have not been all the necessary networks and connections in place, particularly for access to youth, to identify a broader sample of vulnerable youth. This was particularly the case for accessing the youth. Also, accessing employed youth to participate in FGDs proved difficult, as most of

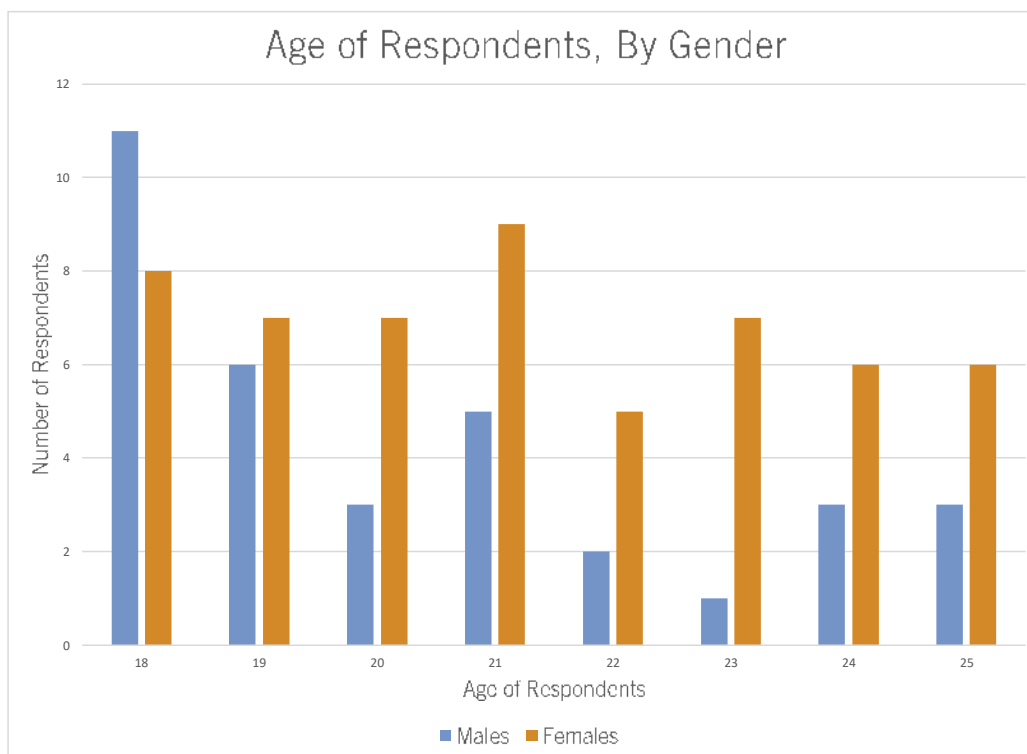


Figure 3: Age of Respondents According to Gender

them were out of their homes seeking employment or working part-time jobs.

3. BACKGROUND

AS the conflict in Syria enters its seventh year, refugees continue to live in precarious situations; savings have been depleted, social support networks have weakened and access to economic opportunities remains limited. Over 660,000 refugees from Syria are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, with 297,000 men and women of working age³.

The largest numbers of Syrian refugees are located in the northern governorates of the country. Amman, Irbid and Mafrq Governorates alone are hosting more than 76 percent of the total Syrian refugee population in Jordan⁴. Syrian refugees constitute 52 percent of the total population of Mafrq, with nearly half living in communities outside the refugee camps. Syrian refugees constitute 12 percent of the total population of Irbid, and 7 percent of the total population of Amman Governorate. There are already reports of Syrian refugees having significant impacts on the Jordanian labor market, and there are strong concerns about the effects on available job opportunities, wage levels, working conditions, access to work and other aspects

of the labor market related to Jordanians, Syrians and other immigrant workers. This is of particular concern in the northern governorates, where the share of Syrian refugees, and the pressure on the labor market, is largest.

Concerns are also based on the fact that the Jordanian labor market already had a number of challenges before the Syrian crisis started. In 2010, the national unemployment rate was 12.7 percent, and had been around that level for some time already (ILO 2012). In addition, Jordan had one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the world, and one of the lowest female participation rates, with only 14 percent of women participating in the labor force, compared with 65 percent of men. Furthermore, the national youth unemployment rate (persons aged 15- 24 years) was as high as 41.3 percent in 2012 (DOS 2012)⁵. Before and at the start of the Syrian crisis, job creation in Jordan was predominantly in low-status and low-skilled roles. This trend paved the way for a large number of low-skilled foreign workers in the country. In the beginning of the Syrian crisis, 335,000 foreign workers were officially employed in Jordan, of whom almost 90 percent were illiterate, according to 2009 statistics (ILO 2012). Seventy percent of foreign workers in Jor-

³ UNCHR updates: Refugee livelihoods: Jordan (August 2017)

⁴ Examining Barriers to Workforce Inclusion of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Better Work Discussion Paper No. 25

⁵ Estimated from UNHCR refugee statistics (June 2014) and DoS population statistics (2011)

dan in 2009 were Egyptians. More than 96 percent of foreign workers received wages of less than 199 JOD in 2009, contributing to an effective decline in real wages over time (ILO 2012).

A number of studies have already been carried out to assess the impacts of the influx of Syrians on the Jordanian economy, including impacts on the labor market. Among the most recent research dealing with impacts on the labor market is the preliminary study of impacts on the labor market conducted by ILO (ILO 2014), and the joint needs assessment review of the impact of the Syrian crisis on Jordan conducted by the Government of Jordan in collaboration with UNDP and HCSP in November 2013 (UNDP/HCSP 2013). Previous studies generally indicate that the influx of Syrian refugees could have severe implications for the Jordanian labor market in many fields.

Given the fact that the number of Syrian refugees has increased dramatically since many of these studies were conducted, it is of vital importance to obtain more, and better, information on the situation in the labor market to guide response strategies aimed at addressing challenges and priorities pertaining to the Jordanian labor market.

3.1 A brief description of Irbid Governorate

IRBID Governorate is located at the northwestern part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; it is bordered to the north by the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine to the west, Mafrq Governorate to the east and Balqa, Ajloun and Jerash Governorates to the south. The eastern regions of the governorate are considered part of Horan Plains (Ramtha), which are extended between Syria and Jordan. The governorate's northern parts overlook the Golan Plateau. On the western side, the region's geography consists of hills of medium heights, gradually descending to reach below sea-level elevation at the Jordan Ghour (Valley). The southern parts of the governorate include the astonishing landscape of Al-Mazar Al-Shamali, with its high mountains adjacent to Ajloun Mountains.

The importance of the governorate comes from its strategic location as a transit station to neighboring countries, and its historical and archeological importance. Ancient civilizations left behind multiple archeological and historical sites in Irbid Governorate, where Greek-Roman cities had been established. Irbid Governorate is considered the number one agricultural region in Jordan, especially in cultivating citrus,

olive and cereals, and producing honey. It is uniquely characterized by the availability of social, cultural and youth services, as well as construction development. It is also uniquely characterized by a tri-cultural mix of Bedouin, rural and urban. It has three industrial estates in the governorate, namely:

1. Cyber City
2. Al Maabar City, Jordan Valley
3. Al-Hassan Industrial Estates



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Sep 2013.

Figure 4: Map of Jordan

The area is host to a number of tourist attractions and is supported by good infrastructure for investments in various fields, such as local and national road networks, electrical power, transportation means, postal and communication services and sewage networks.

About 70 percent of the governorate's area is cultivable/arable land, making up 13.5 percent of the total cultivable land in Jordan, which presents huge investment and employment opportunities. Irbid Governorate is host to 27.6 percent of the total number of refugees in Jordan, of whom 135,779 are registered with UNHCR and live in the various sub-municipalities in the governorate.

Many Syrian refugees living in Irbid said in the interviews that they have chosen to live in non-camp settings for the following primary reasons:

- There are employment opportunities;
- Improved accommodation and privacy in comparison to living in the camp; and
- Better access to basic services such as healthcare and education.

It was noted that those living in urban areas have greater expenditures because of the need to pay rent and utilities; however, their access to the local community is greater, as is their access to employment opportunities and services. Some refugees indicated that being outside the camp also provided them with other opportunities and services, such as funded skills training and capacity development. Table 4 illustrates the population distribution per municipality in Irbid.

Province and Northern Shouneh Province. The inflation rate is 5.2 percent, which exceeds the Kingdom's rate of 4.77 percent. In relation to Income and Family Spending Indicators, the percentage of middle-class families in the governorate, at 28.3 percent, is lower than the national average of 41 percent. The average family size is 5.5, while the average annual family income in the governorate is 7,877 JD compared with the Kingdom's average of 8,824 JD. The annual family spending average in Irbid Governorate is 8,639 JD, which is lower than the general average of the Kingdom of 9,626 JD. Figure 5 illustrates family spending trends.

In reference to Business Environment Indicators (BEI), Irbid is the second governorate after Amman in terms of the number of economic enterprises in oper-

Table 4: Population Distribution Per Municipality in Irbid

Municipality	Population Size	Syrian Population	% of Population
Greater Irbid	520,000	120,000	23%
West Irbid	60,000	10,000	17%
New Ramtha	100,000	40,000	40%
Horan Plains	45,000	15,000	33%
New Mazar	55,000	6,000	11%
New Yarmouk	16,000	4,000	25%
Shula	18,000	4,000	22%
Al Kafarat	35,000	8,000	23%
Al Saro	15,000	4,000	27%
Khaled bin al Waleed	30,000	1,500	5%
Barqash	45,000	2,700	6%
Rabiet al Koura	18,000	2,000	11%
New Dier Abi Saeed	65,000	6,000	9%
Sharhabeen bin Hasna	40,000	5,000	13%
Muath bin Jabal	45,000	1,800	4%
Tabagat Fahel	42,000	1,250	3%
New Taibeh	7,000	4,000	57%
Wasatieh	24,950	5,450	16%

3.2 An overview of the economy of Irbid Governorate

THE poverty of the governorate, at 15 percent, exceeds the general poverty level in the Kingdom, which stands at 14.4 percent. The governorate has three poverty pockets: Koura Province, Northern Mazar

ation, with a contribution rate of up to 71 percent of the total economic enterprises in operation in the north, and a rate of about 16.7 percent Kingdom-wide. It contains the second-largest industrial city in the Kingdom in terms of the volume of investment, which is Al Hasan Industrial City, which created 40,000 job opportunities through 617 operating com-

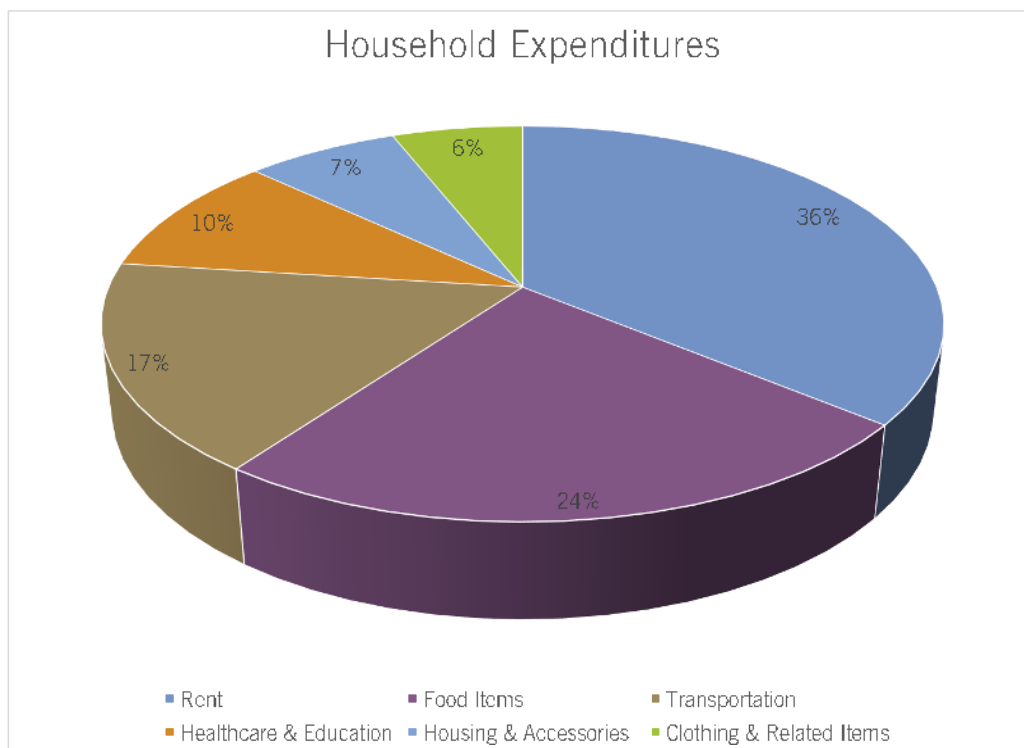


Figure 5: Analysis of Family Spending Trends

panies⁶. Irbid is richly endowed with natural resources including valleys, springs, fertile plains and a diverse climate. These natural characteristics make it one of the most important agricultural areas in Jordan in terms of the amount of cultivated land, constituting 11 percent of the total cultivated land in the country.

The area is also characterized by olive and fruit trees, representing around 20 percent of the total cultivated land in Jordan. The governorate has a number of archaeological sites, such as *Um Qais*, *Tabaqet-Fahel* and mineral baths. Irbid has no less than 1,050 square dunums of arable lands, which may be used to increase agricultural investment and provide many production inputs for the food industries sector.

The governorate leads the country in olive production, contributing 52 percent of the production of the northern governorates. This gives Irbid a relative advantage in the production of all goods that use olives or olive oil. The governorate is home to about 10 percent of the livestock in the Kingdom. According to the Municipality of Irbid, the agriculture sector has grown by 7.5 percent⁷. This presents a number of opportunities, which include the following:

- The amount of arable land in the governorate in

relation to the total number of agricultural holdings in the Kingdom qualifies it to be an important agricultural center. To achieve this, the potential of those lands must be exploited to increase agricultural investment, enhance self-sufficiency and promote food security, as well as provide production inputs for the agricultural industry.

- The governorate enjoys relative advantage in production of high-quality agricultural crops, especially olives and fruit trees, giving it a strong competitive advantage and facilitating entry into Arab and international markets for these products.
- There are a number of investment ideas that can be utilized to link agricultural or animal production to the food production sector and recycling.
- Olives are considered an important crop in the governorate, which gives it a relative advantage in the production of all goods in which olives or olive oil are used in production, thus creating a number of investment opportunities and value addition in processing and production areas, including:
 - Producing olive oil in varying containers and exporting it directly to promising mar-

⁶Irbid Governorate Development Program, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, 2013 - 2016

⁷Local Economic Development Strategy for Irbid Governorate: 2016-2018



Nursery for citrus and almond trees at a farm in Kharja, Irbid Governorate.

- kets;
 - Producing more pressed olives for the purposes of export with high-quality specifications according to the needs of the importing countries and promising markets, namely Gulf markets and some European countries;
 - Manufacturing foods that are preserved in oil for long periods of time such as *labaneh*, *maqdoos*, black olives and pickles preserved in oil;
 - Exploiting low quality oil and olive press by-products in the production of soaps, beauty products, shampoos and other products, or utilizing them as production inputs for foods or as a preservative for many products; and
 - Recycling by-products of olive pressing and using them in the production of fertilizers and fodder.
- The governorate has rich soil that enables it to produce all types of medicinal crops required by various sectors, namely the food manufacturing, pharmaceutical, beauty products and chemical industries.
 - There are a number of investment ideas that can take advantage of lower-quality products of crops to increase their value, for example dried, canned, frozen and cooked vegetables or dried or frozen fruits.
 - The governorate needs to develop marketing companies specialized in marketing agricultural products in general and olive oil in particular, to be mandated with seeking promising markets where the agricultural product can compete.
- There are strong challenges in the sector which if addressed would create employment opportunities. These include the following:
- Low levels of technology use in the post-harvesting phase, such as primary cooling operations, washing, sorting, grading, storage and transportation, which leads to a high percentage of lost wastage;
 - The governorate lacks investments in technologies used in the processes of packaging despite the importance of this process in accessing local, regional and international markets;
 - Weakness of the capacities of the central market despite its importance in enhancing the marketing and exporting of Irbid's agricultural products;

- Weaknesses in the marketing and marketing process systems related to agricultural and livestock production, as well as weaknesses in the marketing process for food industries relevant to these products, thus limiting the ability to access internal and external markets.
- Poor cooperative relationships among the farmers, who must unify their efforts, especially in marketing, promotion and accessing agricultural and livestock production inputs at the best prices and terms through private cooperatives; lack of women's participation; and need to encourage partnership-building between the private and public sectors.
- Weakness in providing specialized training programs to prepare the youth to practice agricultural professions by adopting ongoing training programs and on-job training to guarantee their continued development and their acquisition of the necessary skills in this sector;
- Absence of agricultural guidance between research centers on one hand and farmers on the other, which has led to adoption of traditional agricultural patterns that in many cases do not match the area's climate;
- Absence of sufficient information on available job opportunities in the sector and the absence of specialized guidance staff;
- Fragmentation of agricultural property and urbanization at the expense of agricultural lands; high cost of agricultural production requirements and high cost of energy;
- Deteriorating volume of the capital of registered agricultural companies over the past few years, poor financial capacity of the farmers in reclaiming their lands and difficulty in accessing low-interest loans;
- Limited water resources and inability to predict rainfall levels, especially in view of changing climate circumstances, and the escalation of the problem due to limited water harvesting machinery and techniques; and
- Increasing level of migration from agricultural villages in search of private-sector jobs in Irbid City.

In addition, the Syrian crisis created a number of new challenges in the governorate's agricultural sector,

most notably:

- High cost of transport of agricultural products, particularly since the closure of the Syrian territories;
- High cost of accessing seeds, fertilizers and other agricultural requirements that previously came from Syrian cities at low prices;
- Inflation in product prices as a result of increased demand;
- Decreased volumes of agricultural product exports to Syria by 25 percent;
- Government failure to exert sufficient effort to protect Jordanian workers from migrant workers who have taken over the majority of job opportunities in the agricultural sector.

The governorate is considered poor in terms of tourism, as it houses only 0.2 percent to 0.4 percent of tourism groups and tourist accommodations.

With the crisis in Syria entering its seventh year, the number of Syrians in Jordan rose to close to 1.4 million, including 660,000 UNHCR-registered refugees in various parts of the Kingdom. A total of 240,250 Syrian refugees are dispersed in various parts of Irbid Governorate, constituting 23.3 percent of the total refugees in the Kingdom, which is the highest percentage after the capital. (*Note that this does not include the number of Syrian refugees inside Za'atari camp or unregistered refugees.*) A large number of refugees are classified as extremely vulnerable, represented by women and children below 5 years of age.

The fulfillment of the needs of these refugees significantly impacts the general financial circumstances in the governorate, as a result of increased government spending, in addition to increased negative economic effects, including inflation, limited community resources and competition in the labor market. A study of the distribution of Syrian refugees in the municipalities of the governorate, as in the table below, reveals they are significantly centered in the municipalities of Greater Irbid, New Ramtha, Horan Plains and West Irbid, among others. On the following page, Table 5 describes the economic impact of Syrian refugees on the governorate.

Table 5: Impacts of the Syrian Crisis on the Economy of Irbid

Issue	Impact
Exports and imports	Irbid lost main trade lines due to the Syrian crisis, and exports to Syria have decreased by 43 percent during the past few months. Moreover, imports from Syria increased, which damaged the trade balance.
Poverty	The presence of refugees in the governorate constituted a challenge to the poverty levels in terms of competition for financial resources that were directed to impoverished classes through various aid mechanisms. Competition due to the Syrian issue prompted many to direct their assistance to the newcomers at the expense of the pre-existing impoverished classes in the governorate.
Financial deficit, subsidies and debt	The level of the financial deficit in municipality budgets has escalated as a result of the crisis, reaching 83 percent in Tabaqat Fahel Municipality, 82 percent in Deir Abi Saeed and 77 percent in Greater Irbid. Accordingly, municipality debt increased to 19.4 million JD in Greater Irbid Municipality, 2.5 million JD in New Ramtha Municipality and 1.8 million in Deir Abi Saeed Municipality.
Inflation	The inflation rate increased to 6.45 percent as a result of increasing demand on various goods and services. As a result of rising prices and cost of living for citizens, income levels have been eroded and standards of living have visibly decreased. Income levels decreased for 35.5 percent of families in Irbid. The crisis has led to changes in family spending trends, with spending on food items increasing from 36 percent to 50 percent and on housing and its annexes from 24 percent to 30 percent of household income.
Other	The impact on the economic climate of families becomes apparent through the increase in the value of loans and debts for families who were forced to borrow to fulfill the requirements of their daily life, particularly consumable goods. The proportion of debts in excess of 5,000 JD has doubled, and the percentages of families with debt in Ramtha increased to 35 percent, in Northern Shouneh to 8 percent and in Bani Obeid to 5 percent.

4. YOUTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT

4.1 Background

JORDAN'S population is very young, with 20 percent falling in the 15-24 age group. At the time of the assessment Jordan was experiencing one of the highest rates of unemployment as indicated in the figures above. More than half of the country's young urban males were unemployed, and at 19 percent, female participation in the workforce was even lower, according to World Bank estimates at the time.

Some level of hopelessness and restlessness can be observed in some youths. According to UNESCO, Arab countries have the highest regional youth unemployment rate in the world, reaching 23.4 percent, which is almost four times the global average; Jordan is no exception and this is exacerbated by the effects of the Syrian crisis. Seven years into the Syrian conflict and the refugee crisis, labor force participation

rates in the Jordanian host community remain practically the same as when the crisis erupted. Labor force participation among men in the Syrian refugee community has seen a slight decrease upon arrival in Jordan. Current labor force participation is therefore somewhat higher among Jordanians than among Syrian refugee workers. While labor force participation rates appear close to unaltered, current unemployment rates are substantially higher than before the crisis for both resident Jordanians and for Syrian refugees, indicating a negative impact of the influx of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labor market with respect to increased competition for work and some degree of crowding out.

In the Jordanian host community, the total unemployment rate increased from 14.5 percent to 22 percent between 2011 and March 2014. Among economically active Syrian refugees, the unemployment rate in Jordan is more than three times as high as the rate they

experienced in Syria right before the crisis. Almost one in two unemployed Jordanians have been actively looking for work for more than a year, compared to about one in four Syrian refugee workers. While long-term unemployment among Jordanians existed prior to the Syrian crisis, the conflict has exacerbated the problem. At present, economic growth in Jordan is sluggish, and the economy is not creating a sufficient number of jobs to absorb the cohort of young people entering the labor market. Recent conventional economic reforms have led to some level of macroeconomic stability but they have not necessarily led to a reduction in unemployment. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth was estimated at 2 percent in 2016, compared to 2.4 percent in 2015 and 3.1 percent in 2014. Over the same period, the overall unemployment rate among Jordanians has increased from 11.9 percent to a historical high of 15.3 percent in 2016⁸. This situation is compounded by the nature of government's investment and trade strategies, which is focused on export promotion and has particularly focused on low manufacturing sectors, such as apparel manufacturing, that offer poor working conditions, making them less attractive to domestic workers. These processes have not been particularly employment-friendly, especially for women workers.

The rural economy and the agriculture sector in particular have been growing, doubling its share of GDP from 2 percent to 4 percent in the past five years. The Jordan Economic Growth Plan (JEGP) has set a target of 5 percent annual GDP growth. The expectation is that agriculture must grow by 10 percent annually to meet this target. This would also present a potential for job creation for young people in the agricultural sector and related value chains. Despite its modest contribution to national GDP, the sector is important in Jordan due to its influence on the socio-economic fabric and its role in political stability, as well as its central role in food security, rural development and job opportunities. The major components of the agriculture sector are horticulture, the poultry industry and small-scale herding. In recent years, agricultural exports to neighboring countries have increased considerably.

Vulnerable youth in Irbid and the whole of Jordan who

are trying to gain access to economic opportunities face a number of challenges. Access to reliable statistics on youth unemployment is limited, and available statistics are highly variable. The jobless rate in Jordan increased to 18.5 percent in the third quarter of 2017 from 15.9 percent in the same quarter a year ago. The unemployment rate went up to 30 percent for women (from 25.2 percent in Q2 of 2016) and to 15.4 percent for men (from 13.8 percent in Q2 of 2016). The unemployment rate in Jordan averaged 13.29 percent from 2005 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 18.50 percent in the third quarter of 2017 and a record low of 10.80 percent in the second quarter of 2007.

Additionally, Jordan faces a host of other challenges within the employment context⁹, notably:

- The Jordanian economy's inability to create work opportunities to address the problems of poverty and unemployment in Jordan;
- The continued flow of migrant workers into the Jordanian labor market;
- The low rates of women's economic participation in the Jordanian labor market;
- The imbalance in the distribution of the labor force by sector, education and profession; and
- The incompatibility between outputs of the educational and training systems and the actual labor market needs, which leads to rising rates of unemployment.

In addition, on gender disaggregation, it is found that 65 percent of males are economically active, compared with only 15 percent of females. In comparison, the rates in the MENA region are 76 percent for males and 27 percent for females, while international averages are 77 percent for males and 51 percent for females. All this information points to a serious and concerning situation. Unemployment rates among youth are an important indicator of the economy's ability to generate economic opportunities for those entering the labor market, consequently aiding both economic growth and social stability. In order to improve the social and political participation of youth, **the best strategic solution is to create employment**

⁸ World Bank 2017

⁹ Ministry of Labor Report — 2014





opportunities; for youth, positive perceptions of employment are strongly correlated with overall levels of satisfaction, happiness and optimism.

4.2 Syrian youth and unemployment

THERE are over 27,000 Syrian refugee youths (aged 15-24) residing in Irbid Governorate¹⁰. Table 6 illustrates the breakdown according to gender and age groups.

Table 6: Syrian Refugee Youth Residing in Irbid, by Gender

Age	Female	Male
15-17	4,770	4,876
18-24	8,834	8,740
Total	13,604	13,616

Over 95 percent of Syrian refugees say they have insufficient household incomes. Accordingly, access to work is one of their top priorities and a lack of employment opportunities is a source of concern. In a rapid vulnerability assessment conducted by LWF Jordan, reliable income was the most basic need by households. As the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees are met, there is need to mainstream longer-term programming to promote and sustain livelihoods.

Despite Jordan's major policy shift towards allowing registered refugees to work, it is still difficult for Syrians to find employment outside the informal sector. In the assessment, 80 percent of refugee households reported having someone employed in the informal sector during the past six months.

It was difficult to obtain statistics about the number of youth in the refugee population, but it is clear that there is a high number and they are more vulnerable than their host-community counterparts, particularly when it comes to finding livelihoods opportunities. There are few secondary sources that offer reliable data that measure unemployment rates among Syrian refugee youth.

The following are key findings of the assessment:

- Youth ages 14-17 and 18-25 who were in school when they left Syria are now unemployed (85 per-

cent) or informally employed (20 percent).

- Thirty-two percent of respondents (of all groups) are currently unemployed, 14.3 percent are informally employed and 7 percent said that they run their own business. Those who are running their own enterprises do so as a survival strategy rather than a purely profit-driven activity. Such businesses are comprised mainly of microbusinesses, street vending, construction and maintenance work; these require low-level skills and are unlikely to generate other employment opportunities.
- Employment conditions are very poor and are a major challenge to livelihoods of families.
- Twenty percent of interviewees said they are aware of support activities for jobs through their social networks, CBOs and NGOs such as UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

In mid-2017, the Government of Jordan allowed a number of Syrian refugees to obtain work permits in the agriculture and construction sectors, giving them access to jobs. This, however, does not address the other challenges youth face, which include failure to access other services such as microfinance loans and jobs in other sectors. This will continue to push the youth into pursuing short-term employment options, which can consequently make them even more vulnerable to employers' abusing their unstable circumstances. It is, however, necessary to bear in mind that Syrian refugees possess talents that are relevant for the scarce Jordanian job market.

4.3 Female youth and unemployment

LESS than 10 percent of the female youth interviewed reported being currently or formerly employed. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), "promoting women's involvement in education and employment opportunities plays a vital role in post-crisis rehabilitation and future economic growth and social development." Women unemployment accounts for most of the total unemployment rate increase, which stood at 18.2 percent in the first quarter (Q1) of 2017¹¹. Women in the Kingdom face a number of challenges that limit them from participating fully in the formal sector; as such, a high

¹⁰ UNHCR Youth Dashboard 2017

¹¹ A report by the Department of Statistics (DoS) 2016

number can be found in the informal sector.

Factors such as stereotyping, high taxation, lack of reliable and cost-effective public transportation and familial obligations and duties were identified by participants as causes for the low participation of women in the formal sector. Consequently, some women opt for the informal sector in order to cope with the minimum living standards and to supplement household income. Traditional societal norms are still prevalent in Jordan and cast women as mothers and homemakers, preventing them from working outside the home. Working hours that might keep them out of the house after dark, or roles that require them to work with males not in their families, are barriers that contribute to females not working.

4.4 Youth and micro-businesses

In the assessment, a deliberate focus was made on microbusiness, as these are one livelihoods strategy that can be promoted to build resilience and increase self-reliance among youth from both the refugee and host communities.

It is important to mention that this can only be successful if there is an enabling environment to allow these businesses to grow and be a transformative tool in the field of youth economic development. Globally, social entrepreneurship has flourished where key institutions and economic actors are actively engaged in creating a conducive environment that supports and cultivates new, indigenous ideas and innovative practices.

Aspiring and small business owners in Jordan face the following key constraints:

- Problems accessing loans, leading most entrepreneurs to access funds through personal and social networks or by recycling funds from existing business operations.
- Lack of access to reliable infrastructure, including transportation, storage, electricity, etc.
- Lack of a competitive business culture and the negative influence on entrepreneurship of strong social or community networks.
- Corruption; there are several levels of business registration in Jordan including local, provincial and central government, as well as additional industry-specific ones. There are multiple points of public and/or private interference, creating more

opportunity for bribes.

- High interest rates offered by banks on loans, which stand in the way of financing new investments and expanding existing investments in the industrial sector.
- General stagnation, especially with regard to export markets, and the inability of craftspeople to market their products locally and regionally.
- Establishment of plants without undertaking technical and feasibility studies as well as the lack of use of modern administrative and technical methods, which leads to defaulting and in some cases bankruptcy.
- Weak demand for work in the industrial cities by Jordanian workers as a result of the low wages offered and the absence of incentives.
- Limited industrial production base in the industrial cities, and their focus on producing one product.

The governorate contains the Irbid Development Zone, one of five development zones in Jordan aimed at attracting industrial, agricultural and service investments. This is in addition to the Al Hasan Industrial City, which is the second-largest industrial city in terms of volume of investment. There are a number of advantages granted by the development zones for enterprise (such as the 5 percent exemption for income subject to tax; exemption from the tax on goods and services that the registered enterprise purchases or imports; and exemption from the tax on all materials, equipment, machinery and internal fitting in the construction and equipping of all projects established in the zone). It is also important to facilitate and support industrial production operations inside Al Hasan Industrial City, through providing basic infrastructure services including water, electricity, roads and telecommunications, as well as supporting financial, banking, customs, health and security services at competitive sale and cost prices.

There are also number of investment ideas that may be utilized, especially in the industry of recycling olive and livestock by-products and in renewable energy. Finally, entrepreneurship provides female youth a relatively flexible opportunity to work from the home, which adheres to the region's cultural norms.

5. ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY RESEARCH

KEY informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to assess vulnerable youth's access to employment and self-employment opportunities, and to find out what barriers the youth faced as they sought employment opportunities. Target youth (half female) were broken out into the following categories:

- a) Syrian refugee youth
- b) Jordanian host-community vulnerable youth

The youth participating in the FGDs were categorized into employed and unemployed. The host-community youth participants were broken out into two groups: vocational training program participants and unemployed (See Appendix B for the list of FGDs conducted and further details of each group's participants). The purpose of the FGDs was to answer the following questions:

- What channels/methods did the youth use to search for work?
- What recruitment methods were used by employers?
- What skills do employers look for in youth employees?
- Are youth interested in self-employment? In what fields? How do they pursue this?
- What 1) vocational training 2) microfinance and 3) job search services are currently available to youth? Are the services currently available to help youth access work market-relevant and sufficient?
- What barriers do youth face in accessing employment?

The following are FGD key findings:

5.1 What channels/methods do youth use to search for work?

A number of methods are used by the youth to look for jobs. Table 7 is an overview of the cited job search methods by all categories of youth.

The general approach to job searching was through asking around and responding to calls for applications shared via social networks. Both Jordanian and Syrian youth indicated that the two most common ways they search for work is through their networks (friends and other connections) and by handing out their CVs to employers. In urban Irbid, the Syrian youth said they were more likely to use the internet to do their job search and to email employers directly but this was not a common method. Reasons were attributed to lack of access to internet and sometimes not enough money to cover data bundles.

FGD results also highlighted an inclination for Syrian youth to search for voluntary jobs with humanitarian

Table 7: Job Search Methods Utilized by Youth

Search tool/Methods	Jordanian Youth	Syrian Youth
Submitting CVs to businesses	x	x
Online/direct submission to potential employers	x	
Visiting NGOs		x
Waiting for informal employment at sites	x	x
Job fairs	x	x
Newspaper/ fliers	x	x

organizations around Irbid. When asked if youth were aware of the job search-related services available to them, answers were unanimously limited. Host-community youth were aware of government-run job center facilities and online employment sites (although could only mention two sites, Akhta-boot.com and opensooq.com), but none reported having used them. This indicates that youth lack the necessary information on ways to search for work other than the traditional means of networking and handing out CVs. When youth were asked why they had not used job-search facilities that they were aware of, they noted that these were for more formal jobs in which they were not allowed to take part, hence the reason why they did not bother to open such sites. When employed youth were asked how they found their current jobs, host-community youth identified traditional means – through informal social networks (most common), by handing out their CVs and

through an organization. Similarly, Syrian youth responded through informal social networks (most popular), by handing out CVs, by receiving follow-up work after volunteering, going to relevant governmental bodies (those who had educational qualifications), and through an organization (least popular means).

Syrian refugee youth living in a new country find it more difficult to exploit personal social networks to find employment, explaining the reduced importance of “through informal social networks” as a means by which they found a job. However, this point was repeatedly contradicted, as the use of “*wasta*” or *wasata* (meaning influence, referring to people exploiting connections to find work) was very often cited by youth as a barrier to securing a job. Another barrier to employment, particularly for Syrian females, was Jordan’s more conservative environment, which finds it improper for young women to go from business to business to look for work.

Generally speaking, Syrian camp-based youth are limiting their job searches to NGOs working in the camps, and NGOs are considered more reliable employers that provide better pay and conditions. Working for NGOs allows them to avoid travel time and costs, and to work within their own community where females in particular felt more comfortable.

5.2 What recruitment methods were used by employers?

THE assessment focused on agriculture and construction, as these are the sectors in which Syrians are legally allowed to work. Reflective of wider societal norms in the Irbid, recruitment practices in the region are still heavily based around informal social networks and “word of mouth,” with preference given to family and community connections. For example, to fill vacancies in restaurants, cafés and shops, an employer might call upon friends and family, or friends and family of current employees. When this isn’t enough, as reflected in the above discussion of how youth search for work, there are enough young people going from business to business and dropping off CVs to fulfill demand. Employers noted advertising positions in their shop window. VTCs were also used as information dissemination points. NGOs were also able to reach out to the youths through job fairs.

In the services sector it was found out that:

- At the local level, there was a preference for tradi-

tional recruitment methods (word of mouth, adverts in shop windows or streets). No wide-scale recruitment methods were used. There was flexibility in employing students on a part-time basis, and a potential for upward mobility within the company even from entry-level positions.

- In national chains, there is a similar preference for traditional recruitment methods, but they also employ newspaper and radio campaigns when necessary. International chains use more structured recruitment procedures, including walk-in sessions, presence at job fairs and advertisements on international trade recruitment websites.
- Interviews with businesses in the service sector highlighted the greatest preference for the employment of female youth, particularly for customer-facing jobs in retail.

5.2.1 The construction sector

Irbid has in the last five years experienced a boom in the construction industry, which has also seen an increase in employment opportunities. Key informant interviews with owners of construction companies revealed that they preferred to work with Egyptians over Syrian and Jordanian youth due to the fact that Egyptians were skilled in construction and worked more efficiently and diligently than Jordanians or Syrians. Also, some business owners indicated that they generally had displeasure working with Syrians as they tended to abscond work without any notice. Based on insight provided through these sources, the recruitment practices within the construction sector are described in Table 8 on the following page.

It is clear from the discussions that there is a wide range of opportunities available for both skilled and unskilled laborers. For unskilled labor, no prior skills are necessarily required, and there is a preference for youth labor (considered more suited for manual tasks). Negatives of the field include the irregularity of hours and location, low pay and preference for day labor contracts, which make it a less secure job option for youth. Repeated claims of employer abuses (non-payment at end of contract or for overtime work) can serve as a disincentive to youth. Finally, there is a strong preference for foreign labor, which has driven wages down and raised employers’ expectations of longer hours for less pay. Based on findings from the FGD with casual laborers, they preferred informal opportunities to contracted work for two primary rea-

Table 8: Recruitment Processes in the Construction Sector

Available positions	Skilled and unskilled positions; general labor; skilled technicians (masonry, bricklaying, electricians, welders, etc.).
Recruitment methods	Informal/by word of mouth; most large construction firms sub-contract recruitment of general labor. For skilled positions recruitment was more formal through local newspaper adverts and other online sites. Skills tests conducted.
Syrians allowed to work?	Few did apply but tended to leave after facing conflicts with their employers. However, it was easier to employ them as they accepted low payment and were readily available.
Job satisfaction and security	Low salaries, no set safety conditions and long working hours tended to reduce morale and job satisfaction; lack of job security.
Skills and experience (Job profile)	General level of fitness; flexibility on working hours and location.
Challenges and constraints	Strong preference for foreign labor i.e. from the Egyptian community who work “harder and for less.”
Gender aspects	Male dominated, particularly for physical roles. Limited opportunities for female employment in office roles.

sons. First of all, they did not trust that employers would pay fairly at the end of the contract.

Secondly, contracted positions normally mean extended time away from home. Although respondents noted wanting to find work near their homes, vulnerable youth, particularly males, are in reality a mobile social group and so contracted work away from home should provide employment opportunities. While it is difficult to accurately gauge the number of casual day laborers employed in the construction industry in Irbid, it is considered reasonably sizeable. Employment by this means is entirely informal; hence, there are few safeguards that come with contracted employment. However, being a day laborer in the construc-



The agriculture sector has the potential to be a future source of employment in Irbid Governorate.

tion sector is a highly accessible means of employment for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and especially Syrian refugee youth, who are seeking immediate sources of income.

5.2.2 The agriculture sector

As discussed earlier, the agriculture sector presents a huge potential to be a future source of employment and income in Irbid and is at the top of the government’s priority list as an area for development. However, most farming in the governorate is currently still done at the small, family-owned farm level. Therefore, recruitment within the sector would be predominantly done through informal, social networks. The development of this sector is particularly important for addressing female youth unemployment, as a larger proportion of females are employed in the sector. While agriculture contributes only a small share to Jordan’s GDP, it is an increasingly important source of employment in rural areas, in particular for women. They generally work as subsistence farmers, paid or unpaid workers on family farms or as entrepreneurs running on- or off-farm enterprises. Moreover, the agricultural sector is of particular importance since rural areas are home to a larger share of poor and vulnerable people and because women play an important role in rural value chains¹².

¹²World Bank (2017)

5.2.3 The civil service sector

The civil service sector recruits a number of Jordanian youth via the press and the process is said to be lengthy and very competitive. There is also a perception that the process is not done in a transparent way, according to discussions with the youth.

5.3 The role of recruitment agencies

RECRUITMENT agencies have recently appeared in Irbid to serve the employment needs of the NGO sector, especially those that undertake job-matching initiatives. Some online platforms such as Akhtaboot.com, Bayt.com, and Reliefweb are available for youth to look for upcoming job opportunities.

From the discussions, the summary of requirements for jobs in the sector were generalized as follows:

All interviews with employers highlighted the preference for work experience over qualifications and certification gained.

Language and personal presentation were considered most important for jobs in the services sector.

Technical job skills were considered more important in the construction sector (for skilled roles). For un-

skilled roles, an ability to work a physical job and flexibility of work hours/ locations was deemed important.

For entry-level positions, soft skills are more important than proven technical ability; in many cases, potential is more significant than proven ability.

5.4 What are the available entrepreneurship opportunities for youth?

BASED on discussions from the FGDs with the youth, over 80 percent had a very positive outlook on self-employment through setting up microbusinesses. To them this was the only way they could have a reliable, steady and sustainable income. The females expressed high interest in entrepreneurship because this could allow them to operate freely without any traditional or cultural constraints. Traditional societal norms are still prevalent in Irbid, where women are expected to be at home taking care of the children, preventing them from working outside the home. The option of setting up a home-based business (HBB) enables female youth to freely (in certain industries) earn money from their homes. Table 9 outlines business ideas and their accompanying market viability analysis, broken out into target groups.

Table 9: Jordanian and Syrian Youths' Business Ideas and Market Viability

Target Group	Business idea
Jordanian Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, especially for the females; a valid idea to draw upon youths' skills, particularly female youth, similar to private tutoring/home teaching idea. Affords the possibility to work from home, allowing easier access for women. However, with youth not having official certification in these skills, it is unlikely that customers would pay for their services. Furniture repair shop (including re-upholstery); a valid and market-driven idea proposed by two male youth undertaking a sewing vocational course. Both had previous experience working in sofa re-upholstery and identified the potential for a small business of their own. The venture requires a workshop, and initial start-up costs for the sewing machines and materials required. Hairdressing salon; a popular idea with female youth and a service with an ever-present market. It is nevertheless an already over-saturated market. Small convenience store; such stores are found everywhere in Irbid and as such would constitute a comparatively safe option for youth entrepreneurship. However, with so many small stores existing, it is necessary to ensure that the store addresses a specific market need.
Syrian Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sewing and embroidery; a popular idea, easily accessible to female youth. It allows them to work from home and requires limited equipment to get started (a sewing machine and material). The concern is that sewing is an already over-saturated business and does not provide great opportunity for women to make money outside of their immediate family/community, where these services most likely already exist. Private tutoring/home teaching; noted particularly by female youth as an opportunity to draw upon their educational human capital (subjects suggested ranged from English and Arabic language to drama and singing). However, as unqualified teachers it is unlikely that people would pay to draw upon their services. Moreover, Syrian refugees likely do not have the disposable income to demand such services. Computer and cell-phone programming shop; an idea with a very visible but an already saturated market. Any youth-led business in this field would require specific technical skills and initial financial input for the purchase of necessary technical equipment.

The influx of Syrian refugees also provides vulnerable youth with potential entrepreneurship opportunities to address any unmet consumer needs identified by this somewhat new population. A number of specific business can be set up to meet consumer preferences in the Syrian community. Examples would include Syrian-branded foods, baby products and female cosmetic products. It is important to note that if Syrian products are made available in the market in refugees' shops or kiosks, but at a price that is comparable to larger stores, their profit margins are likely to be low. Hence, the challenge lies in identifying products that are relatively simple to procure but are not readily available in the market.

Nevertheless, among the large number of youth (80 percent) who responded that they had plans to start their own businesses, only a small number claimed to have done anything to pursue this goal. A large number of participants who responded that they did have plans to start their own business also stated that they were not aware of services available to assist them. This fact may reveal the lack of services available to help youth, but also the fact that the youth themselves may lack motivation to start up their own businesses.

A general sense of poor business plan development skills and lack of viable plans was noted during the discussion; most of the youth had very limited

knowledge on entrepreneurship. In addition, despite having these exciting entrepreneurship ideas, the Syrian youths' lack of concrete plans could be attributed to a variety of reasons, including the lack of access to financial services for entrepreneurship and the temporary nature of their situation. Even if there is an acknowledgement that they will be in Jordan for an extended period of time, starting one's own business was believed to be a considerably riskier and larger commitment than seeking employment.

5.5 Tertiary and vocational training available for the Syrian refugees in Irbid Governorate

A number of local and international NGOs provided vocational training opportunities for both male and female Syrian refugees. There are currently two vocational training centers in Irbid, namely Hakama, which instructs males, and the Female Vocational Training Center. One in Al Ramtha that accommodated both males and females is no longer functional. The courses include:

- a) Sewing
- b) Hybrid maintenance
- c) Pastry making
- d) Air-conditioning
- e) Auto-electrical



Technical training in progress at the Hakama Training Centre, Irbid.

- f) Carpentry
- g) Mobile phone maintenance
- h) Life skills
- i) Beauty and hairdressing
- j) Graphic design
- k) Plumbing

In a number of discussions that took place through a variety of platforms such as the livelihoods working group, there was a general feeling that these courses have become redundant and not relevant for job market needs and expectations except for those focused on hybrid maintenance, mobile phone maintenance, solar power technology and traditional artifact handiwork. The courses were short and intensive, as most NGOs had limited project implementation periods; hence, courses were condensed to a maximum of 300 hours, which is close to three months. On the other hand, a full course could stretch up to 18 months, and the Syrian refugees in particular would not want to be in school for that long because they had families to provide for. Of interest in the FGDs and KIs were the following issues:

- i) Relevance of training
- ii) Duration of the training
- iii) Availability and fairness of access to training
- iv) Lack of business and marketing capacity-building initiatives being integrated/mainstreamed into the overall training curriculum

On the issue regarding the relevance of training provided, based on findings from the assessment, only 30 percent of Syrian refugees had participated in some form of vocational training. None of them reported to be using the skill they acquired. In fact, 80 percent alluded to the fact that the jobs they came across or the jobs that were readily available had nothing to do with the VTC skills acquired. One can safely conclude that in reality, **vocational training does not have a significant impact upon employment rates for youth in the refugee community, at least among those surveyed.**

Vocational training courses provided are mainly short-term, ranging from one month to 12 weeks, although as mentioned earlier there are courses that stretch for as long as 18 months. The training is normally combined theory and practical, with the VTCs being fully equipped for such. However, when the youth com-



Pastry making is among the vocational training courses offered to youth in Irbid.

pleted the courses, they faced challenges in fitting in the job market. A number of NGOs have tried to alleviate this problem by introducing on-the-job training/apprenticeship programs. **Whether one month or three months, the amount of time allocated for training is not enough to fully equip youth with the required skills.** It merely provides the trainee with an introduction to a skill, but does not provide enough training to allow the youth to actively utilize that skill in employment.

Regarding the availability and fairness of access to training, it was noticeable that most youth who participated lived within the vicinity of the training center. Transport costs were a hindrance to attending training sessions, causing a disparity between those living in the urban centers and those in peri-urban/rural areas. Syrian youth also complained of the widespread presence of “wasta” (preferential treatment based on social networks/connections), hindering (or, conversely, aiding) youth access to vocational training programs. It is difficult to quantify the validity of this complaint, and vocational training providers stated that participants’ registrations were granted fairly and evenly. **It was noted from direct observation that a large number of youths were frustrated because of the**

lack of employment. This is an issue for concern as it brings on psychosocial problems such as depression, increased anger and general feelings of unworthiness both at the family and at community levels.

Although having acquired a technical skill, for those who wanted to venture into enterprises, there was a lack of knowledge in even basic business and marketing skills. After participating in their respective vocational training courses, youth do not have the basic business development knowledge to start up their own enterprises. Participants were asked whether further training in soft skills (for example, how to deal with people) and basic business skills would be beneficial and most were enthusiastic that they would. Of those not interested, it appears that their participating in the training was more of whiling

need. Although host-community vulnerable youth suffer from high unemployment, it is not normally considered a crisis in the way responding to a refugee crisis is. Vocational training services do not necessarily target the poor and the cost per course is quite high for vulnerable populations. A 250-hour course would cost 390 JD or approximately 600 USD, which is far too high for poor families. **For now, a number of students will continue to depend on financial assistance from NGOs and the question arises: Is this sustainable?**

Entrepreneurship trainings are available for both the refugee and host-community youth. These are normally through NGO initiatives, and to a lesser extent, through some primarily theoretical business training courses at VTCs.

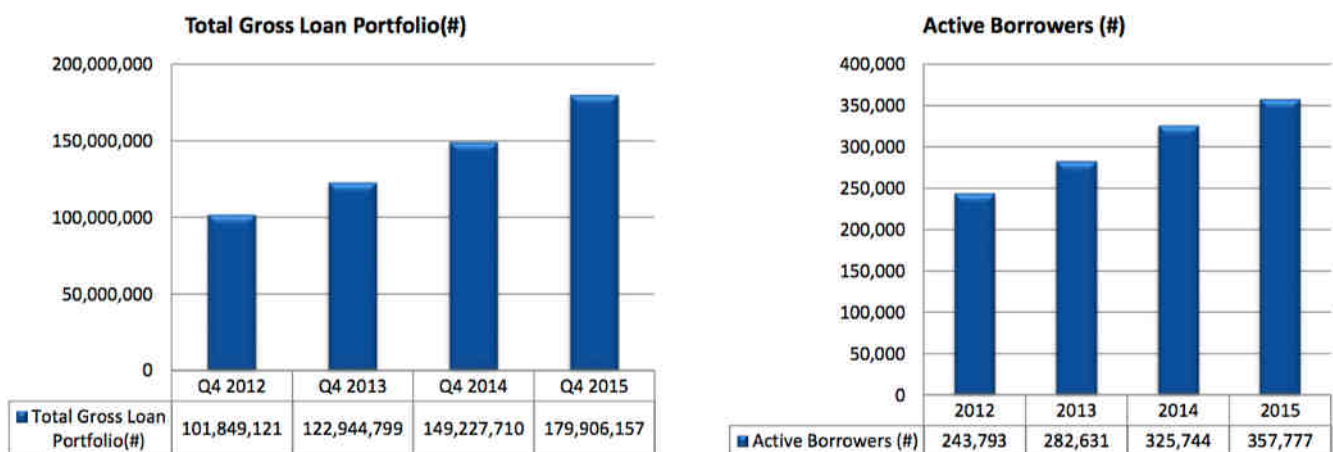


Figure 6: Growth in the Microfinance Sector (Source: Jordan Digital Financial Services Forum)

time as a means to get out of the house than truly a livelihoods development opportunity.

Vocational trainings for host-community Jordanian youth are more limited in range for a number of reasons. First of all, Syrian youth in camps have access to conventional education and on-job training services, which are expected to provide them the skills they would need for employment. There is also difficulty for providers in identifying the needs and providing vocational trainings, when compared with a refugee camp setting. **Finally, host-community youth are largely ignored by the wider NGO community, which focuses on vulnerable refugee populations, as they display a more apparent and pressing**

5.6 What microfinance services do youth have access to?

MICROFINANCE in Jordan has had an impact on the lives of beneficiaries, specifically in the development of their microenterprises and their own personal sense of security and improved living conditions, as evidenced in increased monthly revenue, business investments, level of employment and contribution to household budget. However, the impact of microfinance on household poverty levels was seen to be quite low in terms of increased quality of food, access to leisure activities and education of children, even though the perception of impact exists among clients¹³. The study revealed that products and services

¹³Jordan Microfinance Market Study, Planet Finance, May 2012

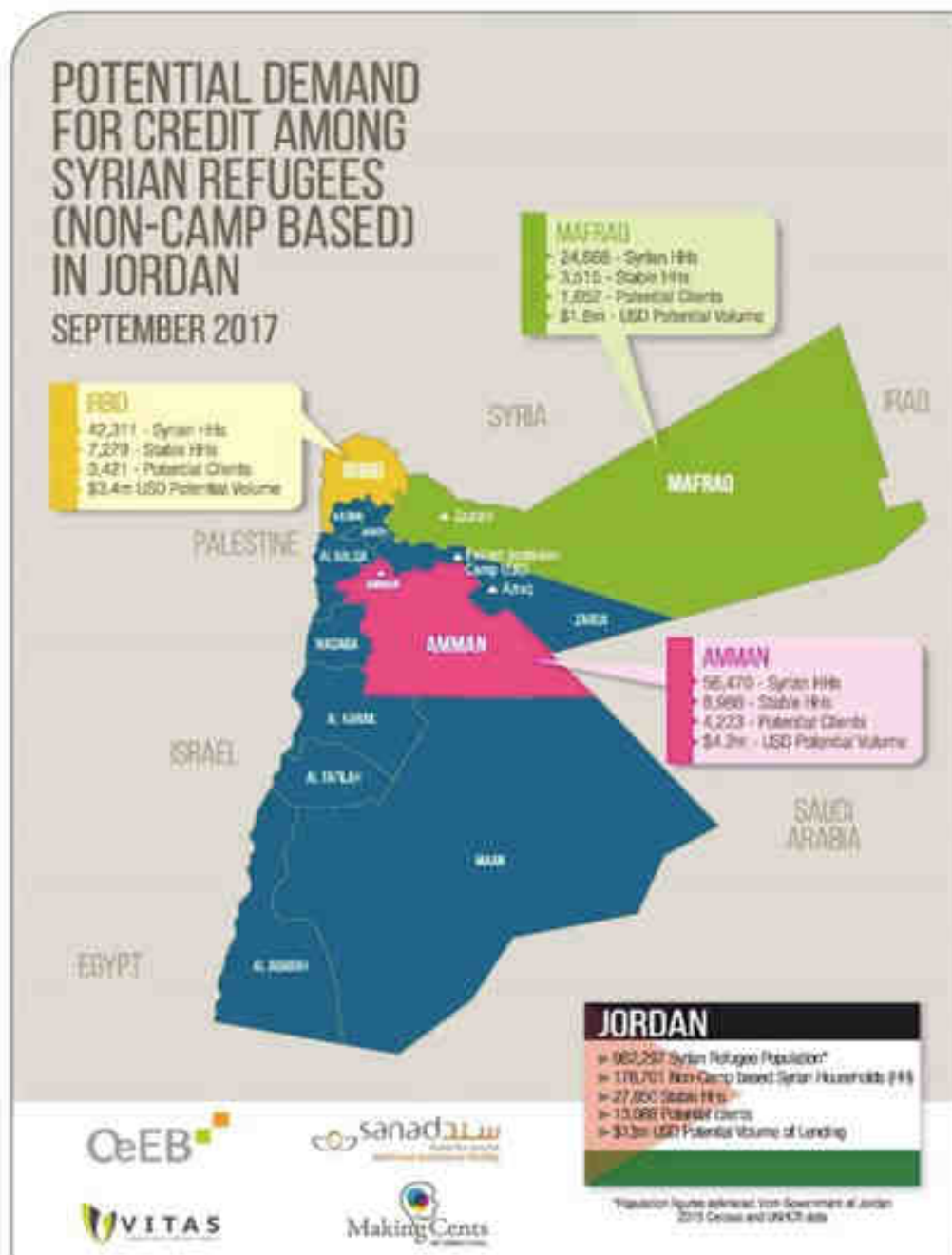


Figure 7: Potential Demand for Credit Among Syrian Refugees

needed to be diversified in order to include non-financial products that will boost the living standards and/or alleviate the burdens of punctual disbursements related to tuition fees, house maintenance, health protection and other personal expenses that are unavoidable. There are around eight registered microfinance companies in 12 governorates of Jordan¹⁴ that provide loans and business start-up to Jordanian citizens. Banks provide loans to employed persons or to people with proof of collateral security such as homes, farms, vacant stands and movable assets

depending on the type of loan.

Refugees can only access microfinance from UNRWA and this only targets Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA microfinance department provides sustainable income-generation opportunities for Palestinian refugees, as well as other poor or marginalized groups who live and work near them. It extends credit and complementary financial services to households, entrepreneurs and small-business owners. These investments create and sustain jobs, reduce poverty and

¹⁴Financial Inclusion for MSEs: Outlook for MFIs in Jordan, March 2016

empower clients, particularly women. Many of the microfinance program's clients operate small, often informal businesses on the margins of the economy. They include fishermen, garage-owners, at-home seamstresses and vegetable stall owners. UNRWA focuses its microfinance operations on the poor urban areas where refugees often live, as these tend to be centers of commercial and industrial activity. To create self-employment opportunities for youth between 18 and 30 years of age, UNRWA's microfinance program also provides start-up loans for young people looking to start their own businesses. By lending to Palestinian refugees, women, youth and other marginalized clients, the microfinance department supports UNRWA's human development goal of "A Decent Standard of Living." The department organizes its programming with the strategic objective of providing its clients with "inclusive financial services and increased access to credit and saving facilities" that can provide them with new opportunities.

Overall, the microfinance business sector is growing, seeing 46 percent growth in active borrowers since 2012, 76 percent growth in gross portfolio since 2012 and 80 percent women clients.

From observations and discussions, one can conclude that:

- While Jordanians have reasonable access to the banking infrastructure, they have limited access to loans. **Access to finance is less available to low-income people as a result of the sizes of loan amounts, which are not adapted to their needs.**
- The number of institutions that are present and the number of borrowers could be increased significantly.
- A simple review of population size and the number of poor families indicates that the Jordanian microfinance sector could triple its number of clients.
- The weak savings culture in Jordan means that MFIs can extend their outreach by developing a wider range of financial and non-financial products and services.
- MFIs should diversify their products and services offered as a means of providing products that are better adapted to a larger range of clients and as a means of providing poor populations with ac-

cess to new, unconventional types of financial products.

Irbid currently ranks fifth in terms of microfinance sector coverage of economically active Jordanians after Amman, Balqa, Zarqa and Madaba. This unfortunately does not include Syrians, mainly because of the risk linked with failure to pay and lack of collateral. There is, however, a potential to reach out to Syrian households in terms of microfinancing as illustrated in Figure 7.

There is still room to reach out to Syrian youth if NGOs are able to act as collateral security, especially when they develop potentially viable business concept ideas. Some households within the refugee community are able to repay loans as they are classified in the less vulnerable groups. Some have already started viable home-based businesses, which could enable them to pay back their loans. It also important to add that more than 50 percent of the youth surveyed from the Jordanian community were not aware of MFI services available to them.

5.7 Job search services available for youth

FGDs highlighted vulnerable youths' lack of awareness of services available to aid them in their job searches. Only after prompting from the moderator did any youth refer to searching online (via job sites) or visiting a recruitment agency as a means by which to search for work (the primary search methods being through social networks and delivering CVs direct to businesses). Youths' lack of awareness and skepticism of services available to them can be partially attributed to the limited breadth of relevant services currently available to vulnerable youth, as well as their inexperience in using such services.

Recruitment agencies are a relatively new concept in Irbid and most of these are a result of economic growth in industry, the establishment of industrial zones and job-matching opportunities from NGO-supported initiatives. Services are primarily aimed at a higher-educated demographic for positions requiring specialized, higher-level skills. However, in-depth interviews with recruitment services such as Beshar Group based in Irbid City have indicated their goal of broadening their client and user bases to include other market sectors and consequently opening up their services to recruit lower-skilled positions.

Online portals such as Akhtaboot.com, Gulftalent.com

and Bayt.com had jobs in various sectors for Irbid. At the time of this writing (October 2017) the Akhtaboot portal had 117 advertised jobs in Irbid alone. Most of the positions were in accounting/finance, engineering management sales and project management for NGOs – in other words, skilled work in professional fields. However, some advertised roles were for lower-skilled candidates: guards, watchmen, cleaners and hotel and restaurant workers. These were cited as examples of the type of roles considered appropriate for unskilled, vulnerable youth seeking employment.

The interview conducted with Beshar Group revealed challenges they faced in accessing both youth and employers. The co-manager noted having difficulty reaching a wider range of job seekers; targeting lower-skilled applicants is a challenge, as they were unlikely to view the job postings (in Arabic). Despite visiting popular sites frequented by youth (Irbid Sport Center, coffee shops, shopping malls, etc.) and handing out registration forms, the co-manager had little success in raising the profile of the organization to build a larger client base. Regarding their relationship with employers, he also noted difficulties in persuading employers to use their services, as many of them did not perceive the need for them. A number of these were not keen to employ Syrian youth because of the fact that Syrians absconded work if they found better opportunities.

In addition to online recruitment sites, Syrian refugee youth in Irbid normally participate in NGO-led job fairs where they meet a number of employers seeking workers. Local CBOs also provide information about new jobs.

6. BARRIERS TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

JORDAN has one of the highest unemployment rates in the MENA region. Young people are disproportionately affected by both un- and underemployment⁵. Almost one-third (27.2 percent) of youth are unemployed, while informal and unpaid family work is pervasive. Even though access to education has improved impressively over the last decades, an increased level of educational attainment does not

translate into higher employment opportunities. In contrast, labor market participation among high-skilled youth is particularly low; young graduates are likely to face an average labor market transition of three years. Gender disparities are persistent: Young women are especially vulnerable to unemployment; more than two-thirds are outside the labor market.

Jordan's economy is thwarted by at least three structural problems, explaining the persistence of high youth unemployment. First, the mismatch between education outputs and the skills required by the labor market causes high unemployment among university graduates. Second, both the private and public sectors are unable to absorb new labor market entrants and to create more decent jobs. Third, there is a lack of access to high-quality national programs that facilitate a smooth school-to-work transition, including vocational training and career guidance. In consequence, Jordan is negatively affected by the great extent of emigration of its educational elite, resulting in brain drain. [Table 10 on the following page illustrates the differing barriers to employment for Syrian and Jordanian youth.](#)

A lack of motivation to find work has been noted as a barrier for both Syrian refugee and Jordanian youth. For Syrian youth, this lack of motivation can partially be attributed to the young age of those questioned and the fact that they were forced to abandon their education when leaving Syria. Hence, many youths were keen to continue their education rather than search for work. Syrian youth who considered their situation in Jordan as temporary are less likely to actively engage in a job search than those who planned to stay longer-term. Key informant interviews and FGDs noted the prevalence of depression among all demographics, but among youth in particular. This feeling of despair and powerlessness to better their situations could also serve to exacerbate this lack of will to search for work.

A lack of information about available livelihoods-related services and/or how to obtain such information are large barriers to youth finding work. This can prevent some youth from furthering their capacities in new market-driven skills. Furthermore, as most youth search for work through informal methods, they may

¹⁵Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment: *Ryan Andrew Brown, Louay Constant, Peter Glick, Audra K. Grant*

Table 10: Barriers to Employment for Syrian and Jordanian Youth

Target group	Barriers to employment	
	Social/economic	Individual /personal
Syrian Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance to work and high cost of travel Legal constraints (work permits) Pervasive influence of wasta (personal and social influence) Limited availability of information about services (vocational training, placements services, MFIs, etc.) Traditional cultural norms, limiting female access to employment (type and working hours) Discrimination (based on nationality, gender and age) from employers Limited market-relevance of available vocational training courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited options for job selection Lack of work experience Lack of understanding of where and how to look for employment Unfamiliarity with labor laws and associated inability to demand rights Lack of motivation to find employment (desire to continue education, desire to return to Syria, feeling of time in Jordan as temporary); inability to make future projections Incomplete education
Jordanian Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational training options not always market-driven (particularly for women) and not sufficiently linked into other services to help youth find employment (job search and CV preparation, life skills) Pervasive influence of wasta (personal and social influence) and political affiliations Traditional cultural norms limiting female's access to certain jobs and working hours Older generations dominating positions especially in government/civil service Distended public sector serving as a disincentive to youth seeking work in private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited availability of services Lack of motivation to find employment or start entrepreneurial projects (especially as an alternative to work in the public sector) Lack of understanding on how and where to search for jobs Wage and job expectations too high Lack of work experience and/or opportunities to gain experience (through apprenticeships, for example)

miss opportunities with larger employers with more structured recruitment procedures. Discrimination on the grounds of nationality was noted among Syrian youth as being a key barrier to their finding work. Several youth noted feeling like “second-class” citizens, leading to challenges such as not receiving job offers, and, if employed, lower salaries compared to Jordanians, as well as abuses in the workplace. Discrimination was also cited on the grounds of age and gender. Regarding gender, it was noted as a barrier by both male and female youth, depending on the types of positions; males seeking work in restaurants and cafes reported a preference from employers for females, while females reported only being considered for jobs deemed appropriate for women, such as shop servers and cashiers.

The pervasive influence of wasta ranked most prominently as the greatest impediment to finding employment for the Jordanian youth. **“For [a] better job I need wasta, if I don’t know anyone I will not get a job,”** said one youth. The youth noted that wasta was linked indissolubly with the influence of political

affiliations. In this context, the youth noted that there was no apparent focus on skills in the employment process, but rather “finding a face that fits.” It should be noted that wasta can also be considered a facilitator of youth finding employment, particularly in a cultural context heavily dependent on informal social networks.

Both Jordanian and Syrian youth also appeared to have excessively high expectations compared to the type of employment for which they were qualified, especially among the Jordanian youth. When asked in FGDs what skills youth possessed, an overwhelming majority responded with English and computer skills. Youth may believe that these two skills alone are sufficient in the job market, but this also illustrates their aspirations to work in a professional environment. This misconception that English language and computing skills alone are central to gaining employment is not helping youth to draw upon other more practical skills, and/or seeking vocational trainings that would provide them with more market-driven skills. Likewise, vulnerable host-community youth’s high expectations

do not match current market conditions, and the “wealth bubble” has raised youths’ expectations.

A further misconception prevalent among both host-community and Syrian youth is their belief that vocational training certification will automatically lead to employment. To illustrate this, a number of youth in FGDs indicated their primary reason for participation was simply to get a certificate. Although clearly important, based on key informant interviews with employers, personal presentation and work experience are valued more highly, particularly for entry-level positions. However, it is impossible to quantify why an employer might reject a candidate and stating that he/she does not have the necessary certification is perhaps easier than rejection on the grounds that they would simply prefer hiring someone more experienced, older or Jordanian, among other reasons.

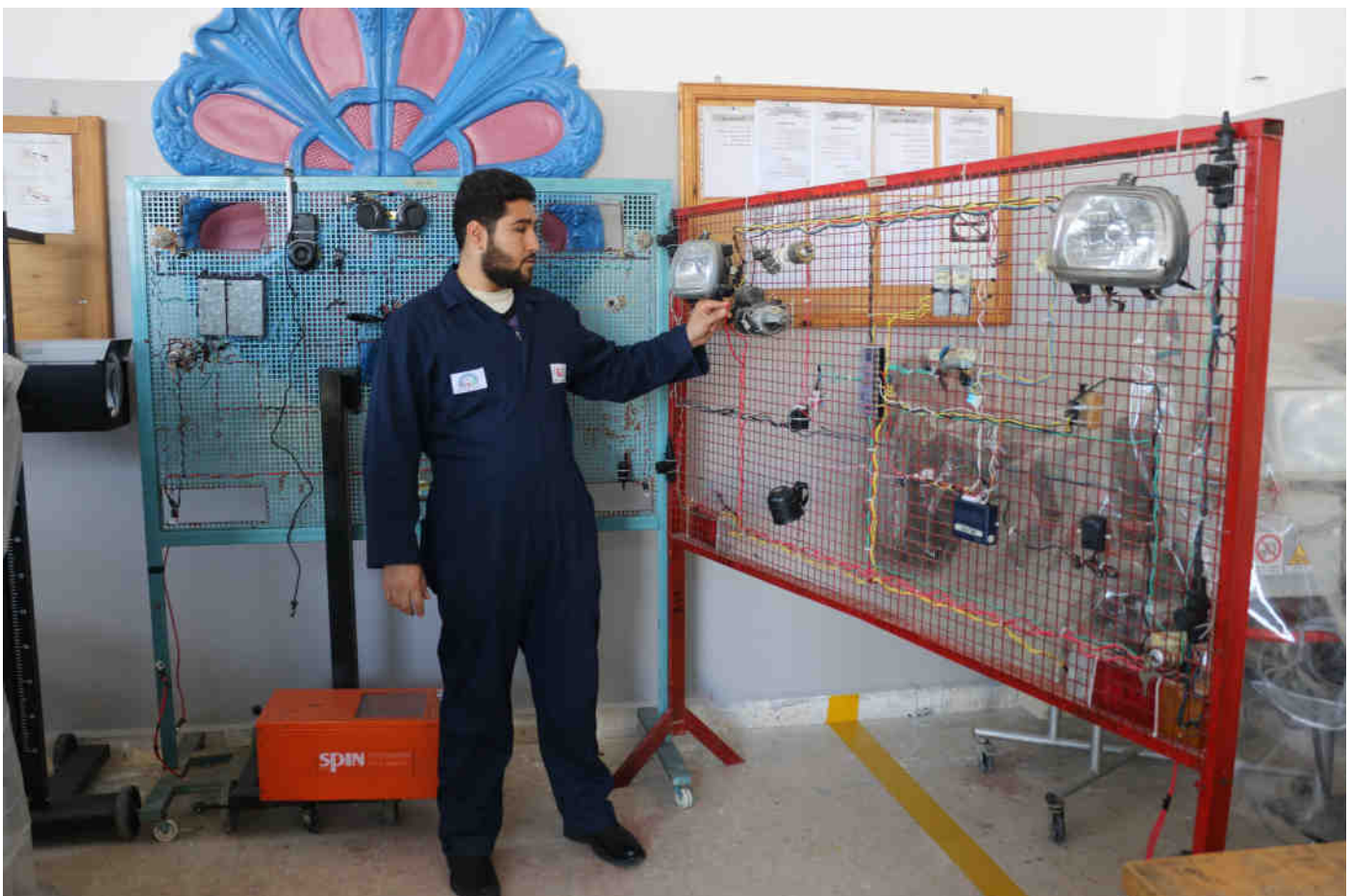
6.1. Aspirations and frustrations of youth

PREVIOUS chapters have focused on education and the labor market, both of which are important mainstays of individual life-course development. But youth also have other important concerns and life goals—including goals regarding family formation and what

might be considered more existential goals related to life satisfaction and one’s place in the world. The Middle East as a region (and Jordan specifically) is experiencing rapid changes along a wide variety of dimensions, many of which impact youths’ experiences, frustrations and expectations for the future.

6.2 Differences between female and male perceptions of employment opportunities

WHILE the national data presented above reveal very low female participation in the workforce, most of the participants in the women’s focus groups expressed an intention to work. For their part, male focus group members held a range of views toward the desirability of having a working spouse, varying from accepting it, and even considering it a desirable factor, to being completely opposed to it. On women’s access to employment opportunities, male and female perspectives also tended to diverge. Some females viewed their employment opportunities as limited, while others, both male and female, noted an upward trend in demand for female job applicants. Participants based these observations on examination of vacancies posted in the local newspaper, and they cited telecommunications, retail sales and administrative assistant po-



One misconception among youth is that vocational training certification will automatically lead to employment.

sitions as particular areas of growth in demand for female workers.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AS indicated earlier, the main objective of the Youth Labor Market Assessment was to conduct an evaluation of the current labor market environment, and secondly to determine key characteristics of the operating environment for local businesses. The specific objectives were as follows:

Identifying and documenting current employment opportunities and services in the Irbid Governorate that would be suitable for youth (Syrian and Jordanian hosts), taking into account gender, work experience, technical skills and distance to places of work. In addition, considering the private sector, public sector and informal sector opportunities in both traditional sectors and in newly emerging sectors.

Identifying and documenting barriers that the targeted youth face in accessing these opportunities and recommending ways to increase youth access to them. In addition, considering appropriate opportunities for both young women and young men, in urban and rural areas and in both the public and private sectors.

Assessing the market potential for youth-led businesses by taking into account sectors that are particularly opportune for young entrepreneurs.

As the humanitarian response shifts from emergency to developmental approaches, there is a need to focus on addressing and building self-reliance and household resilience through livelihoods programming initiatives that have a direct and short- to medium-term effect on youths' and their families' socio-economic well-being, with the goal of helping them to increase and/or diversify their sources of income and prevent negative coping strategies. As such, programming should focus on asset recovery/ protection initiatives through providing microfinance and grants to the youth. Life skills training should, with psycho-social and employment counselling, be part of the programming. The medium-term objectives are meant to build or improve youths' livelihoods assets and strategies and should include vocational and technical skills training in market-driven courses, entrepreneurship training and access to microfinance through partnerships with MFIs and grant-providing organizations for both Syrian and Jordanian youth.

Future livelihoods promotion programs should have an indirect and medium- to long-term effect on youths' socio-economic well-being with the objective of facilitating their access to the labor market and creating an enabling environment for livelihoods. These should aim towards improving youths' access to key institutions, markets and services, which ardently calls for investing in training institutions and the introduction of more market-relevant training courses. This can only be successful and sustainable if an enabling environment is created for the youth to have the right and access to work.

The livelihoods assets that contribute to one's livelihoods are human, social, physical, natural and financial capital; the combination of these five factors will allow youth to pursue different livelihoods strategies to achieve their livelihoods objectives. The assessment shows that these assets vary between groups and should be considered as the basis for future programming, as illustrated in Table 11 on the following page.

Based on the analysis, it is clear that despite being from a vulnerable background, both host-community and Syrian refugee youth have varying levels of livelihoods assets. Hence, when planning and recruiting for future livelihoods programming, **it is important to have clear beneficiary criteria and not assume that all Syrian refugee youth qualify; many can actually have higher livelihoods assets compared to their host-community counterparts.** When evaluating youths' eligibility, a household dependency ratio would better inform level of vulnerability.

In relation to current suitable employment opportunities and services in Irbid and considering the private sector, public sector and informal sector opportunities in both traditional sectors and in newly emerging sectors, a number of observations were made. Construction, car maintenance and agriculture are sectors that offer sizeable employment opportunities, both formal and informal, for Syrian refugee and host-community youth. With the necessary documentation, especially in construction and agriculture, the Government of Jordan does not restrict Syrians from working; hence they are free to pursue formal, contracted employment.

Similarly, the informal sector holds various employment prospects for refugee and Jordanian youth; this sector should be regularly monitored upon program commencement to determine the types of jobs to

Table 11: Livelihoods Assets Among Syrian and Jordanian Youth

Livelihoods asset	Syrian Youth	Jordanian (Host community) Youth
Human capital (skills, knowledge, work experience, physical ability to work and education)	These are highly variable; refugees are from a variety of backgrounds.	Low human capital, as “vulnerable” youth include school drop-outs, those who are unemployed or work in the informal sector. Youth with higher human capital would unlikely be classified as vulnerable.
Financial capital (savings, credit, insurance, remittances and other cash flows)	Financial capital is highly variable; refugees often have significant savings and remittances that allow for business start-up, while others have much less financial capital.	Low to medium. While vulnerable youth tend to have low financial capital, the cultural norm of residing with family until marriage stabilizes youths’ financial capital.
Natural capital (natural or environmental resources from which livelihoods are derived)	Low to medium for both Syrian refugees and host-community youth; little biodiversity to derive assets for production and water.	Low to medium for both Syrian refugees and host-community youth; little biodiversity to derive assets for production and water.
Physical capital (the infrastructure and physical environment that supports livelihoods and enables people to meet their basic needs and be more productive; this includes shelter, transportation, tools and equipment, etc.)	Low to medium. While refugees in Irbid have their basic needs met, those living in the rural parts may not have easily accessible and affordable transportation. However, in general they have access to secure shelter, adequate water supply, sanitation and energy.	Medium. Despite their vulnerability label, host-community youths’ family living arrangements provide access to the infrastructure and physical environment that facilitates livelihoods development.
Social capital (social resources with which youth can engage with to pursue their livelihoods objectives, including informal networks and membership into formal groups)	Highly variable. Depending on area of residence, youth can have strong networks within their respective communities, but the opposite is also true and many refugees generally have weak networks.	Medium. Because strong family ties and a dependence on informal networks are cultural norms, host-community youth tend to have at least a medium-level of social capital.

which refugees are most likely to have access. While the clothing industry is not a large employer, it is a growing economic contributor to Irbid’s economy and can be targeted for employment opportunities for vulnerable youth. Similarly, the growing telecommunications industry does not currently present many non-technical work opportunities. Likewise, the agricultural sector in Irbid has great potential as a livelihoods provider and is also among the government’s top priorities as an area for development; however, it is important to note that agriculture is limited to the small-medium, family-operated level, so it does not currently provide enough jobs to target as an industry. Government jobs are highly regarded among host-community youth, but their level of education and lack of connections serve as barriers to public-sector opportunities. Moreover, LWF Jordan should encourage market-driven employment opportunities or make use of local value chains.

Based on the findings of the assessment, the following recommendations were made:

- **Provide livelihoods support on the basis of socio-economic profiling.** Match program interven-

tions and activities with corresponding levels of livelihoods capacity (current skillset levels and prior work experience) and needs identified in both the Syrian refugee and Jordanian host-community populations, as well as the demands of the market.

- **Targeted interventions should support entrepreneurs and skilled refugees and foster the skills and experience of youth and women exposed to risks linked to a lack of formal employment opportunities.** “Graduation approaches,” which match support and program activities with an individual’s capacities and adapt as their skills and assets develop, are strongly encouraged in longer-term programming.
- **Concentrate on quality over quantity.** There are services already in the market that provide youth with short-term vocational trainings and a number of these are through the two female and male vocational training centers in Irbid Governorate. However, longer-term trainings are required to truly master a skill or trade to be able to pass technical tests often given by larger international

employers as a condition of employment. Hence, instead of targeting more youth, it is recommended that fewer youth participate in a respective program, but for a longer period of time. **In addition, on-the-job or apprenticeship training activities should be incorporated into the overall training program.**

- **Institute implementation arrangements that include operational partnerships** and increase

refugee access to existing facilities and services with limited incremental project costs (access to employment services or to training or other initiatives planned and resourced by government ministries, private sector institutions and international and local NGOs).

- **For vocational trainings, establish partnerships with private-sector companies that will provide employment opportunities after graduation.** In

Table 12: Barriers to Youth Employment and Recommendations to Overcome Them

Barrier	Recommendation
Current employment and/or enterprise development services are insufficient or are one-off activities, not providing a comprehensive package to vulnerable populations.	Provide a combination of employment services and small-enterprise development through a sequencing of interventions such as formal and informal technical and vocational training, and entrepreneurship training and small grants. For longer-term, development-centered programming, consider developing local value chains (LVCD), capacity building of cooperatives and job placements.
Youth lack the soft skills that the private sector values, and do not fully understand employers' needs.	Provide life and work skills trainings in all youth-focused livelihoods programming , especially on aspects of how to handle job interviews, communication, presentation, time management and basic office etiquette.
Information on livelihoods-related humanitarian and development assistance support is not sufficiently disseminated to target populations.	To raise awareness about its livelihoods interventions and reach target beneficiaries, LWF Jordan and other implementation agencies must have a clear communications plan and be proactive while engaging social networks, humanitarian assistance agencies and community leaders and other stakeholders.
Syrian refugee youth face harassment, discrimination and exploitation by private-sector employers.	Deliberately mainstream an advocacy component into livelihoods programming that would advocate for the right to work under non-discriminatory practices by providing youth training on their labor rights, minimum wage laws, etc.
Findings highlight significant disparities between genders, and between Jordanian and Syrian communities in terms of access to employment, as well as income generated from employment. Social norms, particularly for young women, generally limit them from access to work and other livelihoods opportunities.	Allow for the involvement and participation of family members in initial livelihoods program sessions so they gain appreciation and understanding of the projects. In addition, include an advocacy component to livelihoods training that adopts a rights-based approach and focuses on women's rights and economic empowerment.
Generally Syrian refugees who do not have access to networks in Irbid (family, other Syrian nationals, etc.) and other places established prior to or following arrival face a tougher integration than those who do.	Create a Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Creation space available for use by both Syrian refugee and host-community youth. Networks allow refugees to avoid some of the obstacles present when seeking services on their own, such as discrimination and reference requirements.
Youth working in the informal construction industry often do not have the proper tools and/or safety equipment.	Where possible, programs with a VTC component should provide youth participating the proper tools and safety equipment that could be utilized on the job, which could give them a competitive advantage when seeking temporary employment as day-laborers.
Access to capital to start or grow a business is a challenge for both Syrian and host-community youth.	Micro-grant schemes should be part of enterprise development initiatives. Savings and lending models should be introduced if acceptable.
Syrian youth in rural areas have less access to information on new job opportunities.	Set up rural-based information centers by possibly leveraging resources of existing CBOs.
Syrian youth, with a view that their situation is temporary and hopes to return to Syria in the near future, are less willing to pursue livelihoods options with medium- to long-term objectives.	Employment services provided to Syrian refugees should give transferable skills that can be effectively utilized upon return to Syria (keeping in mind the future employment landscape of Syria). Given the dynamic nature of Syrian refugees' lives, programming should be constantly monitored and adapted to changes as they arise; socio-economic profiles, policies and institutions need to be monitored at regular intervals.



Efforts should be focused on support towards the agriculture sector.

- addition, certificates of completion and their authorizing entities should carry weight to meet market expectations.
- **Provide capacity-building investments**, preferably towards national and local service providers, whether public or private, to increase their outreach to and inclusion of refugees. These may include skills training, entrepreneurship creation, business support services, job placement and apprenticeship schemes.
- **Avoid duplication, establishing or providing parallel services while using advocacy and capacity-building measures** to enhance refugee and host-community access to services and institutions that advance livelihoods development and self-reliance.
- **Foster social cohesion by providing support services to both host community and Syrian refugees**; local populations should be included in activities in areas with a high concentration of refugees.
- **Focus efforts on support towards the agriculture sector**, which constitutes the second-largest

sector of employment among respondents, does not require high academic or technical qualifications and provides opportunities to vulnerable households from both communities.

The analysis also focused on barriers that hinder or prevent both refugee and host-community youth from finding employment. These barriers contribute to lack of employment opportunities and make access to such opportunities very difficult. Table 12 summarizes of some of the barriers and recommendations towards overcoming them.

Institutions have a direct and indirect impact on youth and employment opportunities. They can be both barriers and facilitators to livelihoods opportunities and development for both host-community and refugee youth. Table 13 provides a brief overview of the role that institutions play in livelihoods development for vulnerable youth in the Irbid.

Available opportunities in Irbid and market potential for youth-managed small to medium businesses

From the assessment, it was clear that both host-community and Syrian youth have a very positive out-

Table 13: Role Played by Institutions in Livelihoods Opportunities for Vulnerable Youth

Institution	Role in Livelihoods Opportunities for Vulnerable Youth
Government ministries (VTC)	Government ministries, through vocational training centers, provide trainings for host-community and Syrian refugee youth; however, the interest in VTC courses by the youth is dwindling. There is a general feeling that after graduation, there is a lack of follow-up services and monitoring for quality during and post-training.
Local governments and municipalities	Local governments, through their infrastructural development and rehabilitation activities, provide opportunities for youth. This is normally in partnership with INGOs through cash for work initiatives.
Humanitarian and development organizations	There are a number of NGO-supported programs, but the livelihoods services do not meet the demands, and trainings are often too short to enable youth to truly master a skill or trade. There is insufficient cooperation with the private sector, leading to programming that is not market-driven. However, NGOs provide a number of convenient and well-paid employment opportunities for the Syrian youth, but these can inadvertently dissuade youths' search for a more sustainable income flow.
Private sector (businesses, organizations, foundations)	The private sector offers the most livelihoods opportunities for youth. However, there is high competition for jobs with foreign labor, which is often more experienced and cheaper. Abuses of power, low wages and overexploitation are also widely reported. However, the private sector should be at the core of any livelihoods programming.
Labor and trade unions	While well intentioned, labor unions have limited power and are underfunded.
Markets and financial systems	Markets and financial systems do not adequately serve vulnerable target youth and are particularly inaccessible for Syrian refugees.
Academic institutions	These do not provide adequate or a market-driven education; less emphasis needs to be placed on theory and more on practical applications.

look on entrepreneurship and the prospect of setting up their own businesses. In fact, over 60 percent of the interviewees were willing to start their own businesses. As a livelihoods diversification strategy, the youth from the refugee community opted for self-employment. This, they said, “allowed them reasonable and steady income¹⁵,” and to be resilient against shocks and stresses.

Over 70 percent of participants reported that they lack the knowledge, skills and education to establish viable market-driven microenterprises that would serve niche markets, be cost-competitive for consumers and provide a reasonable profit. Furthermore, challenges such as access to MFIs, especially for Syrian youth, were raised as major setbacks. However, grant schemes were identified as capital sources that would address this challenge. A few ideas raised by the youth as being marketable and promising enterprises are as follows:

- Mobile phone maintenance
- Graphic design

- Solar power installation
- Hybrid maintenance
- Babysitting/nursery
- Language and translation services

The high number and density of Syrian refugees in Irbid provides vulnerable youth with potential entrepreneurship opportunities to address any unmet consumer needs identified by this specific population. **It is important to highlight that whatever the enterprise idea generated, it should be market-driven and serve niche markets.**

For women, **it is important to provide entrepreneurship opportunities that can truly provide a sustainable income while simultaneously allowing them to work from home, as culturally accepted.** As discussed in a number of forums, it is important to facilitate and strengthen partnerships with private-sector companies that could incorporate services and are able to mainstream gender issues in their working conditions.

¹⁵ In line with the Minimum Expenditure Basket 2017 which indicates 467JD per month for a family of 5.



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