

# MOBILISATION OF SYRIAN INVESTORS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR to boost local economic development in refugee hosting municipalities

John Speakman, *World Bank*  
Janette Uhlmann, *Center for Mediterranean Integration*  
Gilda Borriello, *Center for Mediterranean Integration*

Only in recent times have development actors thought in a systematic way about how the private sector can play a role in improving the lives of refugees and of those living in the hosting environment (municipalities, camp and peri-camp settings and rural areas). However, this question is not new: over the course of human history, the forcibly displaced have often gravitated around cities and have been absorbed informally, placing strains on the economic and social fabrics of their hosts. The question that has emerged now can rather be formulated as follows: can a more systematic approach be adopted for private sector-led growth in hosting contexts?

### Box 1: The Refugee Challenge in the Southeast Mediterranean

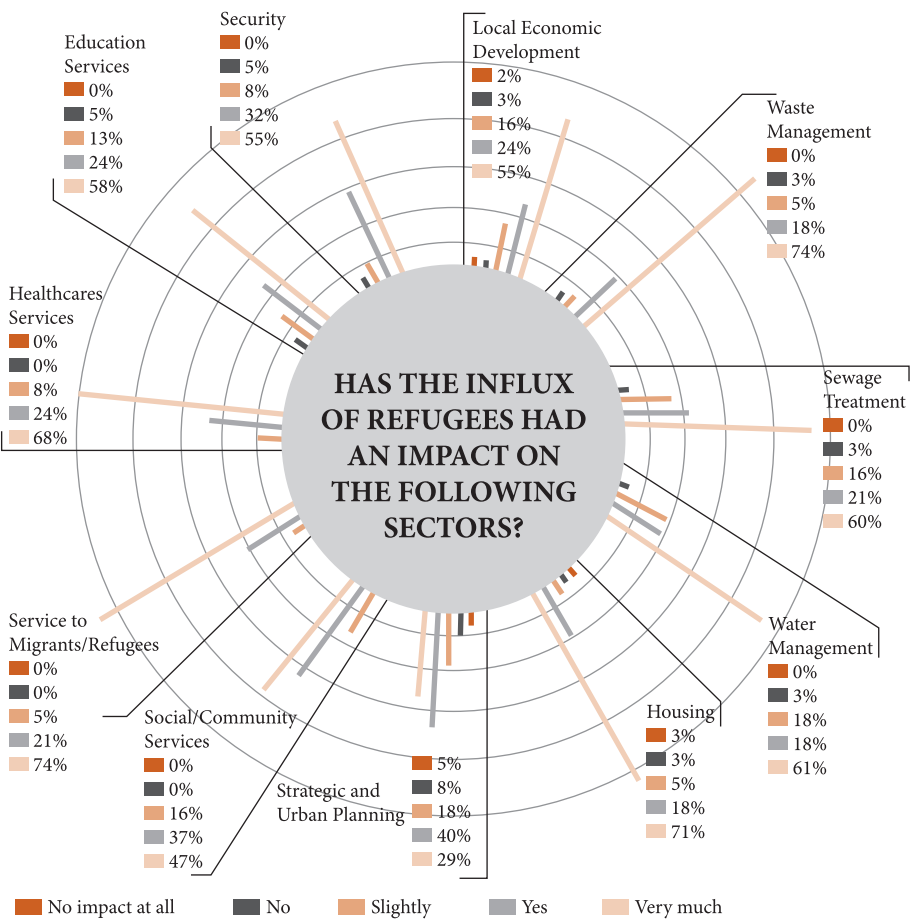
The scale of the refugee challenge is huge with the biggest burden in southeastern Mediterranean states, which are currently hosting a total of 5.5 million Syrian refugees. This can be compared with the approximately 1 million Syrians seeking asylum in EU states. While Turkey is hosting the highest number of refugees in the world (3.5 million Syrians), Lebanon has now the highest share of refugees in its total population, 92% of them living in urban and peri-urban areas.

The Syrian refugee crisis is on top of an existing base of displaced in the Mediterranean region, such as Libyans (217 thousand internally displaced (IDPs) and 278 thousand returnees), Iraqis (over 2.9 million IDPs and over 1.4 million refugees), Palestinians (over 5 million) and Yemenis (more than 2 million), while some countries, such as Libya, are hosting significant populations of sub-Saharan refugees.

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mediterranean Situation portal* (<http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>), and *Syrian Regional Situation portal* (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#>).

In 2015, the World Bank and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) began to look into this question. Municipalities in Syria’s neighbouring countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) were reporting overwhelming numbers of refugees – in some cases more than doubling the original population. In addition to issues of a humanitarian nature around solving basic needs of service delivery, the question of how to generate jobs in host communities quickly emerged. A first survey on needs and priorities of host local governments undertaken by the CMI in 2016 showed this quite significantly (Graph 1).

**Graph 1 - First survey of the CMI Host Municipalities Learning Network**



Source: CMI (2017).

This assessment has led to the creation of the CMI Host Municipalities Learning Network (HMLN), a series of technical learning and capacity building activities, and the establishment of an online knowledge-sharing platform. In parallel, the World Bank launched a number of projects and analytical work to meet the needs of these

municipalities, particularly in Jordan. This led to the development of two projects: *Economic Opportunities for Jordanian and Syrian Refugees*<sup>1</sup> and *Municipal Services and Social Resilience*<sup>2</sup>. In both projects, efforts were made to encourage economic opportunities.

This chapter focuses on local economies in municipalities facing large influxes of refugees, and attempts to answer the question of what role can the private sector play in forced displacement contexts.

### Box 2: The Host Municipalities Learning Network: experience sharing and learning for better strategic planning

As local governments feel the biggest burden of the refugee crisis, in 2016, the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) created the Host Municipalities Learning Network (HMLN) to support local authorities with evidence-based knowledge and peer-learning to improve their capacity in priority sectors.

The HMLN is now composed of more than 80 local governments from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey, and will soon be expanded to countries hosting forcibly displaced persons in other regions of the world given the similarities in the challenges they face. It is based on an online platform and offers a privileged space for local governments hosting IDPs to exchange and learn from each other's experiences. The HMLN provides a series of face-to-face technical workshops, webinars, field visits, and knowledge products for municipal practitioners in priority sectors identified each year by members: solid waste management, social cohesion, local economic development, strategic planning have been selected priority topics of past years.

Starting from 2018 and to meet the demand of members, the learning activities and offer of the HMLN are focused on local economic development and private sector mobilisation in forced displacement contexts.

More on the HMLN and information on how to join: <http://cmimarseille.org/highlights/mediterranean-host-municipalities-learning-network>

## The importance of economic development at the local-municipal level

Given the concentration of refugees not in camps but rather in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, municipalities who have significant refugee populations in the South-east Mediterranean are the most motivated to support economic opportunities for the displaced. Otherwise, the displaced could create additional economic and social pressure on them. A focus on economic development is the only way forward.

The Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) carried out several surveys to assess the main bottlenecks and priorities faced by local governments experiencing a very high influx of refugees. These surveys (2016, 2017, and 2018) showed a high impact on priority service delivery (e.g. solid waste management, water management, health,

1 - *Economic Opportunities for Jordanian and Syrian Refugees* (<http://projects.worldbank.org/P159522?lang=en>).

2 - *Municipal Services and Social Resilience* (<http://projects.worldbank.org/P161982?lang=en>).

etc.), housing, and local economic development (Graph 1). The need to create jobs has become imperative since refugees fled and the population grew suddenly. As the surveys show, most of the southeastern Mediterranean countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey predominantly offer jobs in the public, agricultural and construction sectors, although some towns also have a concentration of retail shops and home-based businesses. Given this context, there is an even higher need to involve the private sector to create more jobs and diversify the economic sectors.

Municipalities and local governments have a great advantage in attracting investors: they know their specific local economic situation and the strengths and weaknesses of their economic sectors. They can create local employment opportunities that match the existing (changing) demand and skills composition. They can, for instance, encourage Syrian investors who usually come with their families and children to invest in a good quality of life and education, but also in land and other available assets. In this respect, data gathering and analysis is important as a first step to inform on the best direction to take.

As assessed by the 2018 CMI survey on the Local Economic Development situation of refugee-hosting municipalities<sup>3</sup>, the main impact brought by Syrian refugees is the increased unemployment and livelihood competition<sup>4</sup>. However, some of the municipalities also recognised the new available skills and revived economic sectors thanks to the presence of refugees. The perception of increased unemployment and competition over livelihoods is stronger among Jordanian and Lebanese municipalities, while Turkish municipalities seem to more strongly feel increased tensions on housing and livelihood competition. A great amount of Jordanian and Turkish municipalities also reported to have new available skills on the labour market, and half of the interviewed Turkish municipal representatives acknowledged the revival of some economic sectors thanks to the presence of refugees.

The importance of the local level also relates to how closer local policymakers are to the issue in comparison to those working at the aggregate country level. Especially when dealing with refugee influx, some municipalities host many more refugees than others in the same country do: in Turkey, Syrians make up between 10 and 15% of Gaziantep's population, but less than 5% of Sancaktepe and Urla, which are located far away from the border with Syria. Likewise, other border cities in Turkey have populations of Syrians exceeding 50% of total population. Similarly, in Jordan, most of the northern municipalities host a share of refugees that is higher than 30% of their population, while other towns, including the capital city of Amman, host lower numbers of Syrians compared to their population. Each municipality has its specificities and must consider its own problems and needs to successfully come up with a strategy to attract investors.

3 - This survey consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire handled to local government staff and elected representatives from 34 municipalities in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey.

4 - "Livelihoods are activities that allow people to secure their basic necessities of life, such as food, water, shelter and clothing. [...] Livelihoods activities are usually carried out repeatedly with an income stream such as agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, employment within a market sector, or as an entrepreneur" (UNHCR, 2014, p. 1).

In addition, the lack of social cohesion between host and refugee communities can lead to tensions, fostering negative feelings of locals toward refugees, including the host communities' perception of them as competitors in the labour market. Although little research has been conducted on the impact of Syrian refugees in host local labour markets (Del Carpio and Wagner 2015, Fakih and Ibrahim, 2016, Tumen, 2016, Ceritoğlu *et al.*, 2017, Akgündüz *et al.*, 2018) and no unique conclusion has been reached, the common perception of refugees as competitors adds one more challenge to promoting economic opportunities for them. Ideally, hosts should realise that there are advantages in identifying economic opportunities for refugees in a social cohesion context<sup>5</sup>.

In this context, a Local Economic Development (LED) approach will help municipalities understand their strengths and needs by analysing their specific comparative advantages deriving from their local environment. A localised focus on economic inclusion is more likely to: (1) account for all vulnerable groups including, for example, women, youth, disadvantaged people of the host community, and (2) minimise social conflicts. In developing a win-win approach, solutions could come from considering the benefits generated by the refugee influx, such as the presence of skills that are complementary to those held by the local host population, the existence of potential investors and entrepreneurs, and the contributions to value chains and new markets.

## Some key definitions

We will first discuss some important definitions before addressing the issues refugees face in generating economic opportunities, at firm and individual levels. Finally, we will draw up an approach that maximises economic opportunities.

What do we mean by “refugees”? In addressing this topic, a broad definition of refugees has been adopted. In the midst of a crisis, municipalities do not consider the legal status of refugees, as they are often overwhelmed. On the other hand, refugees do not behave differently than other types of migrants when living outside camps, and have the same needs as other categories of the population, including locals: they need a place where to live, work, to get education for their children, health care, etc. The longer refugees stay in the host country, the more they behave like economic migrants, look for a job in the host labour market, and try to secure their livelihood. Despite the reason why they flee, refugees also need to access economic opportunities as well integrate in the host country.

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5 - UNDP, ILO and WFP (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Exec-Summary-Jobs%20Make%20the%20Difference.pdf>), UN WOMEN ([www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/4/speech-ded-glemarec-brussels-conference-on-syria](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/4/speech-ded-glemarec-brussels-conference-on-syria)), World Bank (<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/785071506105322669/Refugee-crisis-in-MENA-meeting-the-development-challenge>).

### Box 3: A broad definition of refugees

According to international terminology, refugees and migrants can be distinguished through their different motivations of mobility. According to the legal definition, a refugee is a person “who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution”. On the other hand, international migrants or “voluntary migrants” are not compelled by immediate events to leave and have more time to choose where and how they will reach their desired destination.

*Source: UN (1998); KNOMAD (2017).*

What do we mean by “economic opportunities”? This concept covers entrepreneurship, self-employment, formal employment and livelihoods. Under each of these headings there is a wide range of possibilities. Entrepreneurship refers to a range going from small start-ups to quite large well-established firms. Self-employment refers to professional work undertaken by individuals e.g. (doctors, engineers, etc.), traders of goods and services (plumbers, electricians, taxi drivers, etc.), farmers, etc. Typically, there is formal recognition of the activity through a license or certificate. Formal employment can be fulltime or part time, and means the individual is recognised (usually by paying income taxes) and there is a legal right to work – this could be a work or residency type permit. Livelihood refers to all kinds of informal, often part time activity carried out by an individual or a firm.

What roles can the private sector play in forced displacement contexts? There are two aspects to this question. The first aspect is endogenous – what kind of private sector exists or can develop based on the capabilities of the forced displaced population in question? The second aspect is exogenous – in what ways can a broadly defined private sector help?

Any forcibly displaced population is composed of the following categories of people actively seeking economic opportunities:

- High capability and willingness to deploy risk capital: people who are often experienced and successful in business who have been able to protect most of their capital abroad and are willing to invest it.
- High capability and little willingness or ability to deploy risk capital: people whose businesses were destroyed (who may retain strong commercial networks or brands) or people from professional jobs.
- Medium capability and no risk capital: people who tend to be skilled tradesmen, with reasonable education, and are employable. This cohort also includes some entrepreneurs with no capital to invest.
- Low capability and no capital: they are low-skilled workers who can be hired as day-labourers or access other types of opportunities (construction, agriculture, municipal services).

In addition, the gender dimension also counts in the southeastern Mediterranean region where women may be excluded from economic opportunities for cultural and pragmatic reasons.

There is a wide variety of external roles that the private sector can play. These range from purely commercial ones as investors, trading partners, etc. to philanthropic roles through foundations such as the IKEA and Tent Foundations. The role of the diaspora is particularly important. For example, the Syrian diaspora is a particularly powerful group and has an investable capital of many billions of dollars. They are often the group that is willing to be the first movers and make investments.

#### Box 4: Examples from the Syrian Diaspora: the Syrian International Business Association (SIBA)

Since the Syrian conflict broke out in 2011, members of the diaspora have been working to create opportunities for their fellow Syrians now refugees in the countries hosting them, by reinvesting in these countries and their businesses there. They have done so in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, as well as in the Gulf and in Europe.

This diaspora began to develop at the turn of the twentieth century during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Estimated at more than 10 million, this group moved primarily to the “new world” and in particular to Latin America. This diaspora includes former Presidents of Argentina and Brazil, famous entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs and Carlos Slim, and the actress Selma Hayek. More recently most well established Syrian businessmen have sought and obtained dual nationality and now reside with their families in the southern Mediterranean area, the GCC, Europe and North America.

In 2017, the CMI brought together a group of businessmen and women from the Syrian diaspora, who met in Marseille to set up the Syrian Diaspora Business Association. Focusing on the following five priorities, SIBA's actions revolve around expanding its network:

- 1) Regulatory barriers (investment climate, mobility, trade and labour laws);
- 2) Youth empowerment, gender equality, and education (social inclusion, primary/intermediate education, professional training, gender programmes);
- 3) Opportunities for investment and matchmaking (identify sectors, markets);
- 4) Solutions to financial sector challenges (access to finance, money exchange and movement);
- 5) Making the strong links between business and philanthropy more systematic.

Source: SIBA ([www.http://siba.world](http://siba.world)), CMI (<http://cmimarseille.com/highlights/first-forum-syrian-international-business-association-siba>), World Bank ([www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/04/07/despite-the-war-the-syrian-diaspora-begins-to-organize-reinvestment](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/04/07/despite-the-war-the-syrian-diaspora-begins-to-organize-reinvestment)).

## Syrian Diaspora in business

The Syrian's role in business is remarkable when compared with other refugee groups. This is because Syria as a country had both a long and substantial history of commercial and industrial activity, and developed a substantial diaspora group

over the last century, many of whom have turned to business in host countries. This business dimension is important to consider for the following reasons:

- Whether members of the diaspora or arrived more recently, Syrians have a high propensity to employ their fellow Syrians;
- They often have well developed trading relationships that can form the basis for investment. Many of the early business men benefiting from the EU Association Agreement with Jordan benefiting from preferential access to the EU market, are connected with the Syrian diaspora;
- In general, refugees are willing to innovate – most of them are not part of the elite: they cannot rely on existing *wastas*<sup>6</sup> and networks for favourable treatment, and must be competitive to survive. Many displaced Syrians have industrial skills and are well educated (Betts and Collier, 2015) and Syrian businesses outside Syria are more innovative than Syrian businesses were in Syria (Huang, 2017).

There are three basic categories of the potential Syrians have in business:

- Entrepreneurs (including those with a social capital orientation) with capital and a viable firm.
- Potential investors with capital but not presently operating a business.
- Investors who may have had a business but have very little capital and, if operative, are doing so in a very constrained manner.

So far, most of the action has been under the first category. There have been some very modest efforts under the last category, and no more than talk under the second category.

## Entrepreneurs with capital and viable firms

In Egypt, Jordan and Turkey there are many examples of firms based in Syria that have relocated to pre-existing markets with the capital they have been able to preserve through monetary or physical means. In Turkey it is estimated there are 10,000 such firms (Building Markets, 2017). A significant number of Syrians took their machinery and equipment with them.

### Box 5: Syrian firms in Turkey: Some key findings - A survey and analysis by Building Markets

- There are 10,000 (formal and informal) firms;
- In terms of the number of firms launched – Syrian investors have been first among foreign investors (2011-2016);
- In terms of size, 74% are micro firms with less than 10 employees and 26% have more, the clear majority being within the range of 10-50 employees;
- Most of these firms are a mix of traders (retail and wholesale), manufacturers and hospitality providers;
- These firms are dynamic with 55% of them planning to increase their workforce;
- There is a strong export orientation, with 39% of firms reporting regional trade as the primary market for the firm;

6 - Translator's note: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wasta>

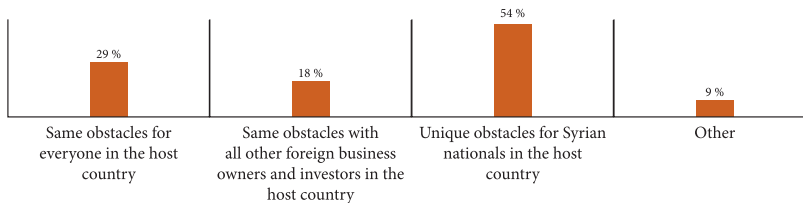


– From a host perspective, 76% of firms plan on keeping their businesses in Turkey as well as expanding in Syria.

Source: Building Markets (2017)

In 2017, the World Bank carried out a survey on the Syrian diaspora business community<sup>7</sup> asking them what were the major challenges they faced. Only 29% of those interviewed felt they were treated the same as host country firms.

**Graph 2 - What is your perception on the nature of the challenges you face as a Syrian refugee?**

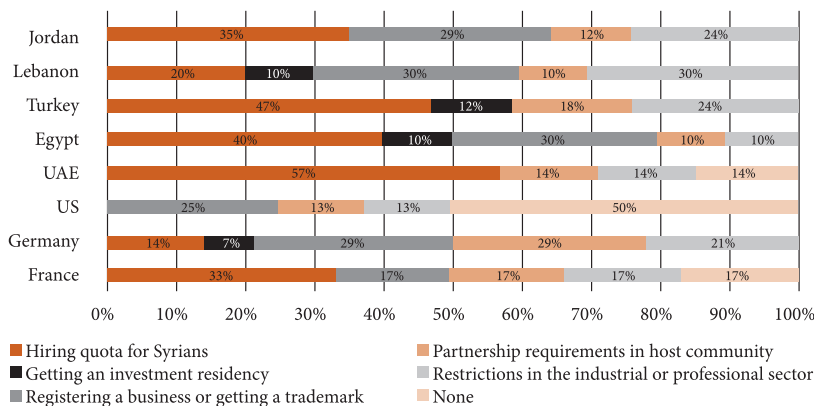


Source: World Bank.

*Findings: This question aimed to assess the perception of Syrian refugees on the challenges they face. A significant number of the respondents believe that the challenges that Syrian refugees face regarding livelihood, doing business and trading generally, were unique to Syrian refugees.*

Levelling the regulatory playing field was one important area they identified. These issues range from getting a business license to getting a driver's license and they vary very much across countries.

**Graph 3 - What are the doing business obstacles you face in host countries?**



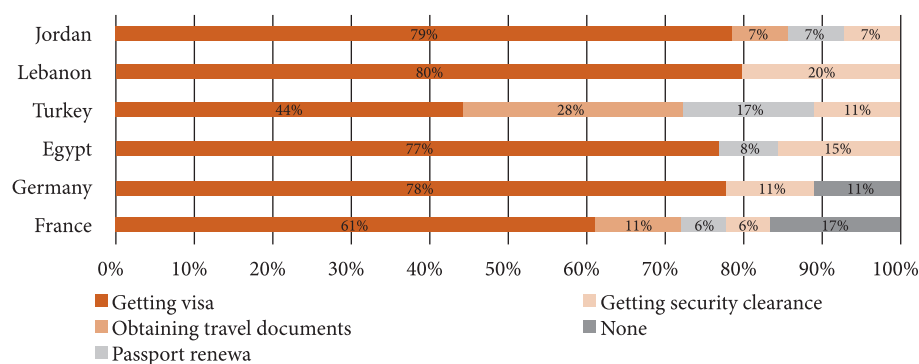
Source: World Bank.

7 - Competitive Industries and Innovation Program ([www.theciip.org/content/jordan](http://www.theciip.org/content/jordan)).

*Findings: The goal of this question was to disaggregate the identified doing business challenges by the host country in order to assess the perception by country. In several locations, hiring quota for Syrians as well as registering a business and getting a trademark were identified as top obstacles.*

Mobility issues are also important – for example, it is important to get a visa to be able to attend a trade show abroad and return.

**Graph 4 - What are the challenges to mobility?**



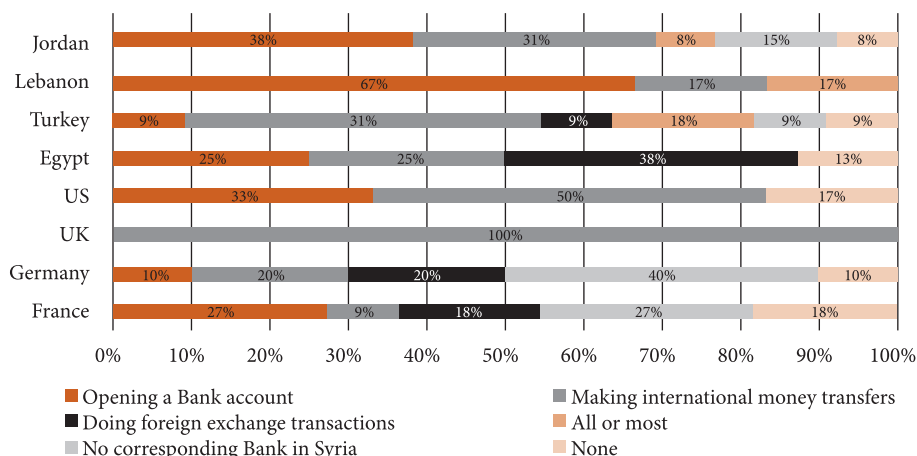
Source: World Bank.

*Findings: The goal of this question was to first disaggregate by host country to determine the mobility challenges Syrians face especially when doing business. In several locations, respondents believe that getting visas is the biggest challenge they face regarding mobility.*

The financial sector support also counts. The displaced are often affected by a complex web of financial rules and regulations designed to prevent money laundering and anti-terrorist financing. Banks are required to “know their customer”. While these rules and regulations are needed, in some cases they result in limits to business creation as the displaced find it hard to comply with these requirements. This puts an additional barrier for them to open bank accounts, make international payments for goods, obtain trade financing or any other form of credit (Graph 5).

This survey clearly reveals that there is a significant opportunity to increase investment, with a more “red carpet” type approach. Moving from *red tape* (OECD, 2017) – bureaucratic obstacles to enterprise creation, administrative burden, barriers to trade, investments and entrepreneurship – to *red carpet* would facilitate the creation of jobs for both Syrians and hosts. A red carpet approach would provide economic and non-economic incentives to investments, reduce firm entry costs, and welcome foreign investors, including Syrians.

What is important is that policy makers at national and municipal levels develop: (1) measures to identify and monitor these issues, (2) public private dialogue processes to discuss and develop pragmatic solutions to the problems identified, and (3) institutional mechanisms to ensure that agreed actions are implemented.

**Graph 5 - Obstacles to Banking?**

Source: World Bank.

*Findings: The goal of this question was to first disaggregate by host country to determine the banking obstacles Syrians face. In several locations, respondents believe that opening bank accounts and making international money transfers are the top obstacles to banking.*

## Entrepreneurs that had to abandon viable firms and were not able to retrieve their assets

The core question here is – in what situations should policy makers support these kinds of entrepreneurs? In some cases, it is simply not possible to transplant one business model to another country. Nevertheless, there are at least three situations where this support may be justified. These are where the firm in question has one or more of the following attributes:

- It has an export market that it can viably compete in;
- It can substitute for a product or service that is currently imported;
- It was already exporting to the host country.

The next question is what kind of support should be provided? The support should be based on the following principles:

- Incubatory in nature. In Jordan, the Ma'an Special Economic Zone (SEZ) provided some factory space to a Syrian refugee. In Syria, he had a good business exporting leather sandals to the GCC but his capital was destroyed. Starting with just 3 people in this incubatory space, he now employs 30 after three years.
- Encourage private sector partnership. In Lebanon, a Syrian business and their craftsmen were absorbed by a Lebanese firm, which allowed the continuation of a business manufacturing parts for vintage cars.

– Require a contribution from the entrepreneur. Experience in other fragile and conflict settings shows that firms that could be viable are willing to match as best they can any financial support to get up and running again. This may require significant effort “work inputs”.

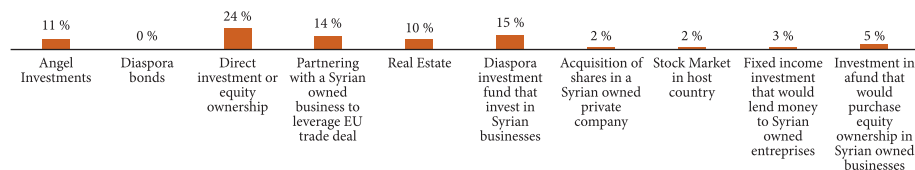
Policy makers could set up incubation and matchmaking as a systematic type of support. Incubation can give an opportunity to Syrian investors with no capital to continue the business they had in Syria. Also, it can generate a virtuous circle where Syrian entrepreneurs hire both other Syrians and locals, increase employment and prepare for a possible return of their enterprises to Syria after the conflict (Betts and Collier, 2015).

### Graph 6 - Investment Appetite

**Are you a current or potential investor?**

Yes: 61,1% – No: 35,3% – Other: 3,6%

**Investment opportunities of interest?**



Source: World Bank.

*Findings: The first question aimed to gauge the fraction of respondents who are open to investments generally and over 61% were (either current or potential investors). There was a strong interest for direct investments, partnership opportunities that would leverage the EU trade deal, diaspora investments in funds that invest in Syrian businesses, as well as angel investment opportunities.*

## Economic opportunities for refugees

### Entrepreneurship

Simply put, entrepreneurship is willingness to invest risk capital to innovate, and employ labour to deliver. This could be a new firm, a new product, a new production technique or a new market. Given the limited employment options they have, refugees have a higher propensity than hosts to engage in entrepreneurship. In Jordan, the first firms to take advantage of a new trade preference with the EU were all owned by refugees. A recent article in the *Entrepreneur* magazine explains this well: “In Canada, Australia and Germany – to name a few places – immigrants and refugees have had a higher rate of successful entrepreneurial endeavours than the native population. But the courage that brought them out of conflict-ridden countries, the risk-taking that brought them across dangerous borders, the determination that led them to start a new life and the resilience that keeps them going

so far from everything they know are all of the traits that make for successful business owners<sup>8</sup>.”

To date, policy makers have done little to support entrepreneurship and in many cases, they rather create obstacles. Allowing refugees access to the many entrepreneurship programmes that exist throughout the hosting countries of the MENA region, such as incubation programmes or early stage financing, should be a policy priority.

Moreover, entrepreneurship is very attractive to refugees, it provides a strong sense of self-worth, it can be lucrative and allows them to be philanthropic. Virtually, every Syrian entrepreneur we have met is engaged in philanthropy towards his or her fellow Syrians.

#### Box 6: Entrepreneurship and the local business environment: an example from Yerevan, Armenia

A challenge faced by refugee entrepreneurs is the lack of information on regulations and practices of doing business in the host country. Approaches targeting the enabling environment for refugees' or migrants' business can help local growth and create a virtuous circle.

Since the escalation of the war in Syria, Armenia started receiving Syrians mainly in the capital city of Yerevan. As Syrians lacked information on the different Armenian business climate and regulations, the Armenian Government and Yerevan Municipality established training programmes targeting Syrian entrepreneurs, and allocated an area to serve as an industrial zone for Syrian businesses. This gave Syrian entrepreneurs a great support in getting to know the host community's way of doing business, and made it possible for them to bring their business into Armenia or start a new one. In turn, this brought new investments to Yerevan resulting in a win-win situation: donors announced the funding of an administrative office and an information hub inside the industrial zone to provide legal services, accounting, marketing, business registration, and other assistance programmes.

*Source: CMI (2018), based on information provided by the Government of Armenia.*

## Formal employment

There are two challenges to the formal employment of refugees: converting informal jobs into formal ones; developing new formal jobs that refugees can participate in. The World Bank's Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees Project implemented in Jordan was aimed at tackling these two challenges. Addressing the first challenge has been relatively more successful.

One of the factors that distinguishes refugees in the southeastern Mediterranean region is that, except for Palestinians, most refugees do not live in camps. In Jordan, only 10% of the estimated number of Syrian refugees live in camps. This means that most refugees are not provided with housing and basic services like those living in

8 - John Pilmer, "We Should Welcome Refugees. They Are Often Great Entrepreneurs", *Entrepreneur*, 20 June 2016 ([www.entrepreneur.com/article/276559](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/276559)).

camps and therefore have learnt to cope, which in turn makes it more probable for them to find employment to sustain their living. Typically, the Syrians have found informal employment opportunities in areas like agriculture, construction, retail and hospitality. Gradually converting these opportunities into formal sector jobs has been successful in Jordan, as the Jordan Compact allowed Syrians to find low-skilled employment opportunities in Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

#### Box 7: Syrian Economic Forum: formalising informal Syrian businesses

The city of Gaziantep, Turkey, hosts about 325,000 Syrian refugees. Most of them work to secure their livelihoods, and some of them have created their own businesses.

According to a survey conducted by the Syrian Economic Forum, the vast majority of Syrian-owned businesses in Gaziantep are unregistered and operate in the informal market. Syrian business owners lack funding and procedural knowledge to formalise: for instance, the cost of registering a small shop in Gaziantep is more than 3,000 dollars, which is beyond the capital availability of many owners. Furthermore, difficulties in understanding regulations and procedures due to language barriers make these businesses face many obstacles to their growth. Their informal nature is also reflected in a higher vulnerability in the Turkish society and legal system: as unregistered businesses live above the regulation and tax system and are vulnerable and limited to grow, the existence of many unregistered businesses translates in less revenues for the host local government.

The Syrian Economic Forum helped licensing and formalising 217 unregistered Syrian businesses (accounting for 20% of licensed businesses in Gaziantep). This led to the issuance of 96 work permits for Syrians who were working informally, and ensured economic stability for 331 employees and their families working in the licensed Syrian businesses. Monitored results showed that 96% of Syrian businesses increased their capital turnover after being licensed, 50% plan to increase their number of employees during the coming year, and 72% have seen an increase in their number of customers after licensing.

This led to a win-win situation as the local administrations improved their revenues through taxes paid by Syrian businesses. The formalised working conditions of Syrians helped protect their legal rights, and licensing resulted in an improved local business and economic environment.

*Source: CMI (2018) and Building Markets (2017).*

In general, developing new jobs in the formal sector has not been as straightforward. In Jordan, the big idea was to obtain a trade preference from the EU for firms that employed 10% of Syrian refugees. In some ways, this emulated an approach pioneered by the USA, which, fifteen years ago, gave preferential export market access to firms located in SEZs. While today this effort seems successful in terms of GDP growth, it took a long while – at least five years – before it started to develop. Jordan hosts a very high amount of manufacturing exporting industries in its SEZs, however there are quotas and restrictions for Syrians to do certain kinds of jobs. Now, the Jordan Compact allows refugees to work in some of these sectors, such as construction works. After two years of effort, there are some early indications that these markets are developing but it will take a few more years before anything meaningful develops.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a promising area. In many contemporary forced displaced situations, a significant number of well-educated youth have strong ICT skills. In some countries there have been efforts to encourage refugees to participate in IT activities ranging from call centres to software development. For instance, the Science and Technology Department of the University of Jordan sponsored Syrian youth to continue their education. An important issue in this sector and related knowledge-intensive sectors is the desire to protect these kinds of jobs for nationals of the host country. This area is a real conundrum for policy-makers and should be guided by principles of additionality. If for example a major international software provider wanted to support refugees to enter the ICT space thus creating additional jobs, then a relaxation of employment restrictions, which would allow both hosts and refugees to work, makes obvious sense. The big question is what can be done to provide refugees with legal rights to work within the confines of what is politically possible. The scale of some of these challenges is mind numbing: in Lebanon, one-third of the population are refugees and it is challenging to accommodate their needs to find economic opportunities.

## Professional certification

One of the most challenging areas is how to deal with refugees who have professional qualifications in areas like medicine, law, accounting and engineering. To protect their own nationals, it is quite common that the hosts choose not to recognise these qualifications and not allow refugees to work on these areas. There is often an outright ban or the individual must requalify him or herself.

A huge number of Syrian health workers who left the country after the conflict started seeking jobs in host countries. An estimated 30,000 Syrian physicians left Syria over the past 30 years and went to eastern Mediterranean countries and to Europe, and in a smaller number moved to the U.S. and Canada. Meanwhile, due to the lack of health workers, some receiving countries are incentivising the integration of Syrians in the health workforce. At the same time, international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and Syrian NGOs like the Syrian American Medical Society are joining forces to integrate Syrian health workers in the labour markets of host countries.<sup>9</sup>

### Box 8: Syrian health workers in host countries

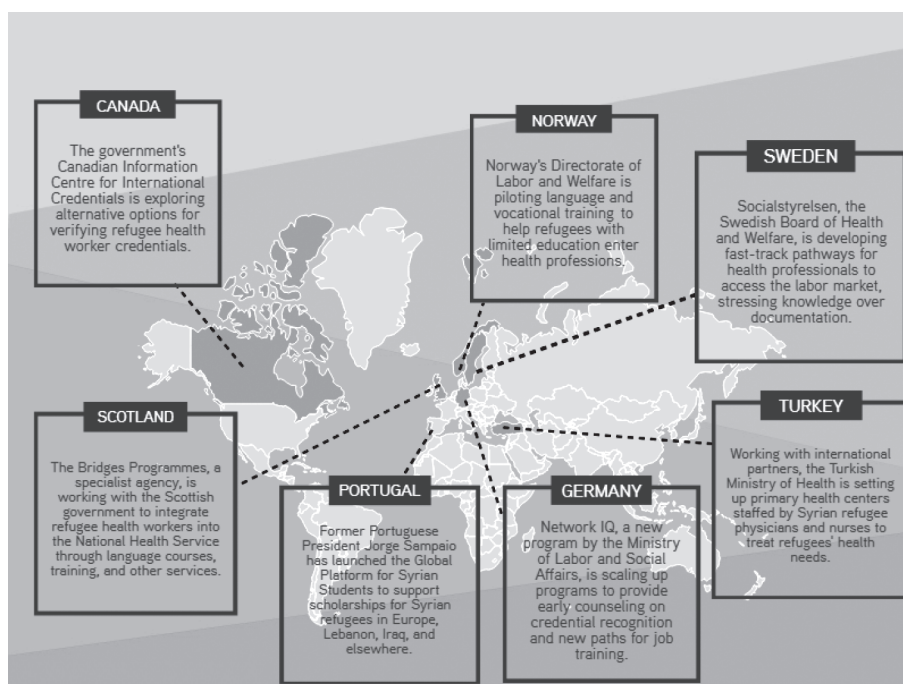
Facilitating the integration of these professions in host labour force is also beneficial for business creation and increased entrepreneurship, which can in turn create more economic opportunities for the hosting community. Dr. Fadi Al Halabi, Syrian neurosurgeon, founded MAPs (Multi Aid Programs), an NGO working with the Syrian community in Lebanon. He leads a team of more than 350 trained and qualified Syrian personnel to deliver programmes in education, healthcare and other areas of

9 - Kent Garber, "Amid Growing Need, Refugee Health Workers Could Fill Key Gaps", World Bank blog, 4 October 2017 (<http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/nasikiliza/amid-growing-need-refugee-health-workers-could-fill-key-gaps>); Health Systems Global, "The Syrian Health Workforce in Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities", 27 November 2017 ([www.healthsystemsglobal.org/blog/242/The-Syrian-health-workforce-in-crisis-challenges-and-opportunities.html](http://www.healthsystemsglobal.org/blog/242/The-Syrian-health-workforce-in-crisis-challenges-and-opportunities.html)).

humanitarian relief. Besides providing Syrian refugees with needed humanitarian aid, Dr. Fadi also allowed Syrian health workers to continue their training and profession in the host country.

Source: Multi Aid Programs (<http://multiaidprograms.org/>), Arab Conference at Harvard (<http://arabconferenceharvard.com/speaker/dr-fadi-al-halabi/>).

### Map 1 - Integrating Refugee Health Workers into Host Health Systems: innovative examples



Source: CMI, OECD, World Bank Workshop, 30-31 March 2017.

To better identify opportunities to help refugee health workers and their host communities, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) organised a global workshop on the Integration of Syrian Health Workers in Host Countries Labour Force in 2017.<sup>10</sup> The workshop highlighted many of the key challenges faced by these individuals, including passing mandatory language examinations, obtaining (and in some cases repeating) on-the-job training, and completing credentialing and licensing requirements as documents are often lost during their arduous journey from home to host country. Together, these challenges can be quite overwhelming.

<sup>10</sup> - CMI, OECD and World Bank Workshop, "Strengthening Human Resources for Health: Integration of Refugees into Host Community Health Systems", Marseille, 30-31 March 2017 ([www.cmimarseille.org/highlights/strengthening-human-resources-health-integration-refugees-host-community-health-systems](http://www.cmimarseille.org/highlights/strengthening-human-resources-health-integration-refugees-host-community-health-systems)).



Yet, participants cited examples of progress made by governments and civil society actors. These included integrating language teaching into practical training; creating pathways for refugee health workers to demonstrate competency through fast-track training programmes when documents are not available; and developing partnerships between government and civil society to help guide refugees through the employment process.

## Livelihoods

Livelihood type opportunities are linked to low-skilled jobs and tend to aim at the “bottom of the pyramid” – those with little skills or financial capacity. These opportunities are often portfolio type of activities, where an individual may work on several different activities. This could be arts and crafts, small-scale agriculture, and household level enterprises (e.g. food processing). NGOs and foundations are often very actively engaged in supporting livelihoods.

Policy makers can do several things to support the livelihood agenda including:

- Removing restrictions on the ability of NGOs or foundations to support livelihood initiatives for refugees. In Jordan for instance, there are prohibitions on NGOs engaging with refugees. In the least, there should be an exception for livelihood efforts – microfinance, technical assistance and grants.
- Encouraging the development of markets internally and externally for products and services developed by refugees, for instance through the work of foundations, or development actors to encourage trade organisations (Huang, 2017). The IKEA Foundation, for instance, is working on these types of efforts in order to support Syrian livelihoods through new markets.
- Many livelihood opportunities can be found in the agricultural area – from basic farming (beekeeping, crops, livestock etc.) to food processing to using animal fibres. For this reason, access to arable land is critical. In countries with constrained resources providing these kinds of opportunities may not be possible or only possible in a very restricted way.
- Home-based work is particularly important for women in MENA. For cultural reasons women may be restricted in their movements. Removing or limiting restrictions on home-based-work can help both hosts and the refugees.

### Box 9: Improving livelihoods of refugees: local governments in the frontline

In some countries, like Lebanon and Jordan for instance, a very high influx of refugees occurred during a tough economic period. After years of refugee presence, local governments are the most stressed with the demand for job creation for both locals and refugees. In this context, livelihood-type opportunities are the most common among refugees, often offered through collaborations among local NGOs, international organisations, and other local stakeholders.

The Al Buhaira Union of Municipalities in Lebanon gave low-income disadvantaged Lebanese and Syrian women the opportunity to attend cooking and sewing classes to start small domestic businesses, and improved a touristic facility near Lake Qaroun recruiting Syrian and Lebanese workforce. The municipality of New Balama

in Jordan established a sewing factory in partnership with the private sector to give jobs to Jordanian and Syrian women. Finally, the municipality of Sultanbeyli in Turkey offers vocational training courses and skills-job matching services, and the municipality of Zarqa in Jordan helped low-income women to open food processing home-based businesses to increase their livelihoods and find a solution to the end of foodstuff imports from Syria.

*Source: CMI (2017 and 2018, forthcoming).*

Policy makers can do more than promote this agenda. They can encourage the formation of new markets, make land available, develop business areas for women to work and create more jobs. In order to meet these objectives in a concrete way, policy makers can also mobilise efforts in the following areas:

- Build an economic opportunities strategy for the integration of the needs of displaced persons in consistency with the country's overall economic strategy and with city development strategies.
- Encourage more investment from traditional and non-traditional sources as displaced situations are viewed by the international donor and corporate communities as global public goods. Social impact investors may also be particularly attracted.
- Target the displaced diaspora that can be an important source of additional investment.
- Engage at multiple levels – from national level to subnational level.
- Support the displaced by encouraging trade and private sector procurement<sup>11</sup>.
- Strong stakeholder engagement is necessary to manage the underlying political economy.

## **Economic opportunities strategy in line with the economic development strategy at local and national levels**

An economic opportunities strategy for refugees cannot be designed in isolation of a country's overall economic development strategy. Ideally, the two strategies will be mutually supportive. For example, the displaced may bring with them new capabilities and markets that did not exist previously. This has been observed throughout the Middle East and North African region. In Jordan, there are many examples of Syrians who brought new markets and brands with them. A Syrian confectioner brought his confectionary market to the Dominican Republic. A Syrian detergent maker asked why does Jordan imports detergents when they could be produced locally? Another strong food manufacturing brand brought expanded its production line and brand across the border. Similar stories can be also found in Egypt and Turkey<sup>12</sup>.

At municipal level, the strategy not only needs to be consistent with the overall national strategy, but also with various inter-governmental levels. Typically, these include a high-level master plan or city development strategy. This can also include a Local Economic Development (LED) strategy at subsidiary level.

11 - As an example, IKEA is buying refugee-produced furniture in Jordan.

12 - John Speakman, "Getting Syrians Back to Work – A Win-Win for Host Countries and the Refugees", World Bank Blog, 2 December, 2016, and "Preparing for the Future: Coordinating Syrian Refugees and the Diaspora" World Bank Blog, 28 September, 2016.

**Box 10: Strategies for Local Economic Development**

Local Economic Development (LED) is an approach to economic development that enhances and incentivises collaboration among local actors and stakeholders to overcome constraints that can be locally solved. LED is a comprehensive approach and does not limit its focus on a single industry or sector, but rather on a specific territory. Especially in changing environments such as the local level, LED helps to operate with a bottom-up approach.

Local strategies are at the core of enhancing or limiting refugee economic participation, including their entrepreneurship. Especially in the ever-changing contexts of forced displacement, a local strategy needs to have a good understanding of its local available assets and constraints, as well as of the real needs of all stakeholders, refugees and original residence, from all sectors.

The Municipality of Bethlehem in Palestine developed a comprehensive Strategic Development Investment Plan (SDIP), which also includes a pillar on LED. Bethlehem's SDIC is integrated in and consistent with the Palestinian National Development Plan and the Bethlehem Governorate Strategic Development Plan at the upper level, and the Bethlehem Municipality Institutional Plan at the lower level. Before building the SDIP, in 2008 the municipality created a consultative advisory council including stakeholders from the public and private sectors, and civil society. The scope of this Council is to support and advise the municipality on its strategic goals for LED, namely to enhance the competitiveness of local products, women economic participation, and youth leadership.

Accordingly, given the very high influx of refugees received by the municipality of Sahab, Jordan, a LED strategic plan was developed building on the economic and industrial strength of Sahab to find a solution to the already struggling infrastructure and service provision, and to overcome a poverty rate reaching up to 54% in some local communities. Among the planned projects to enhance LED, a shopping mall will be built to also serve the needs of Syrian craftsmen integrated in the local economy.

*Sources: World Bank (2003), Rodriguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2005), CMI – World Bank – GIZ – UN-Habitat, Training Workshop on Strategic Planning for LED, Amman, Jordan, March 2018, and CMI, Webinar on Stakeholder Mobilization for Successful LE Planning, April 2018.*

A helpful way of reflecting upon the relationship between national level and municipal level challenges is to use the concept of the *mayor's wedge*. The idea is that municipalities have a lot of power but that power is magnified when it is consistent and coordinated with national efforts: "Given that the ingredients for city competitiveness are distributed between various tiers of government and between various entities, competitive cities will need to know how to complement their own wedge in economic development by leveraging other tiers of government and private sector partners to generate outcomes that are more than the sum of their parts" (World Bank, 2015).

In relation to this notion, sometimes policy or regulatory challenges cannot be dealt with at national level. Land allocation and management, for instance, are a common challenge. At municipal level all manner of "work-arounds" may be considered using land owned by the municipality. Some cities have been very creative in this area, such as the construction of a corniche in partnership with the private sector in Kuwait City. In return for building social assets, like corniches and markets, the private sector receives commercial space.

Table 1 – The Mayors' Wedge

	Institutions & Regulations	Infrastructure	Skills & Innovation	Enterprise Support & Finance
National government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Macroeconomic management</li> <li>– National investment and trade policy</li> <li>– Legal framework &amp; property protection</li> <li>– Industry-specific taxes and regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Highways, roads airports, ports</li> <li>– Power grid</li> <li>– Regulations for infrastructure provision, e.g. PPP laws</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Public education system</li> <li>– Immigration policies to attract talent</li> <li>– R&amp;D funding, support schemes</li> <li>– Healthcare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Export and trade facilitation</li> <li>– Access to finance support schemes</li> </ul>
MAYOR'S WEDGE City government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Municipal taxes &amp; incentives</li> <li>– Zoning and land use policies</li> <li>– Construction permits, business licenses</li> <li>– Public safety &amp; law enforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– City roads and public transport</li> <li>– Water and sanitation</li> <li>– Public safety</li> <li>– Housing/slum upgrading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Talent attraction programs</li> <li>– Cluster development support</li> <li>– Linking firms with academia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Business support services</li> <li>– Investments policies, promotion and aftercare</li> <li>– Facilitation of seed, catalyst, and/or risk capital</li> </ul>
Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Standards and certification associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Additional infrastructure and shared services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Vocational training programs</li> <li>– R&amp;D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Business associations and support networks</li> <li>– Market intelligence and business information</li> <li>– Equity and debt</li> </ul>

Source: World Bank (2015).

### Box 11: The use of municipal land assets to incentivise private businesses

Taking advantage of land availability and the presence of Syrian investors, the municipality of Sarhan, Jordan, is changing its local economic environment. A clothing factory was established with the help of a World Bank project. Later on, the municipality sold land to a Syrian investor who dislocated the business he had in Syria bringing his equipment and market to Sarhan. These factories led to the creation of direct and indirect jobs for Jordanians and Syrians and improved the local economic situation. Drawing lessons from this positive experience, the municipality of Sarhan is now using its land assets to build a craft area for Jordanian and Syrian small entrepreneurs, and a vocational training centre for the youth of Sarhan.

This helped create a diversified local economy, which was earlier based on agriculture and public sector jobs only. In the future, the craft area will attract more private investment providing more job opportunities.

Source: CMI (2018), and CMI ([www.cmimarseille.org/blog/photo-story-jobs-changing-lives-refugees-and-locals-sarhan-jordan](http://www.cmimarseille.org/blog/photo-story-jobs-changing-lives-refugees-and-locals-sarhan-jordan)).

## Using international goodwill to encourage investment

The issue of forced displacement has attracted a lot of international goodwill. The Tent Foundation led by Hamdi Ulukaya of Chobani, for example, has actively promoted large corporate level involvement in supporting economic opportunities for refugees in Ethiopia and Jordan<sup>13</sup>. They have coordinated CEO visits to different countries with the aim of encouraging the following kinds of relationships:

- Investments in firms related to their core business that will employ refugees.
- Generating demand – where the firms agree to buy or market products from firms employing refugees or directly from refugees. The Dangote Foundation has done this in Nigeria with the displaced.
- Investments in livelihood related activities – for example irrigating land that refugees can farm. The IKEA Foundation has done this in Ethiopia.
- Provision of private equity or credit lines to support existing investors that are employing refugees. Both the Soros and the Asfari Foundations have plans in this area.
- Technology transfer – particularly those that are supportive of the general digital transformation that is underway around the world (the internet-of-things, block-chain and fintech).

Together with these efforts, skills and human capital development for refugees can help develop new markets. This is a new area where policymakers can take action.

<sup>13</sup> There are examples of initiatives led by the IKEA, the Asfari and the Soros Foundations – particularly targeting Syrians.

## Creating markets

The potential to create market opportunities accessible to the forcibly displaced: by involving the displaced in the deployment of humanitarian assistance; through procurement preferences, by establishing trade preferences, or by the simple creation of offtake arrangements (in collaboration with the private sector) that could have refugee branding associated with it.

In the field of refugees, there are two main areas where procurement preferences could help: procurement associated with humanitarian assistance and preferences that governments could give as part of their bilateral aid programme.

The idea of creating Special Economic Zones as places where a focused effort for the displaced can be made emerged during discussions on economic opportunities in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. However, as SEZs are linked to a country's industrial strategy, this is not always viable. There are two conditions needed for this model to work:

- The zone itself needs to be viable. This means that it needs to be consistent with the overall country industrial strategy. In order to deal with the challenge of developing serviced industrial land and dealing with regulatory challenges, there must be a strong likelihood of demand and the location itself must make sense.
- The zone needs to be relevant for the displaced, in terms of how they are presently situated, the local political economy, the fit in terms of jobs being developed and the capability and willingness of the displaced to work.

## Strong stakeholder engagement

Meaningful stakeholder engagement involving refugees, hosts, government and development partners is essential. Through a public private dialogue approach, this engagement needs to “own” and monitor the implementation of any plan. In addition to the dialogue, a strategic communications programme is needed to communicate the plan and implementation progress. Problems need to be acknowledged, discussed and acted upon. Successes need to be measured, disseminated, and celebrated also to counter xenophobia against the progresses of refugees.

## Conclusion

After threading one's way through these questions it becomes possible to start delineating a strategy aimed at an efficient engagement of refugee-led enterprises in host countries. A strategy that is mindful of local community concerns and the need to be expansive in notion. A core idea is that there needs to be a win-win formulation. It is essential to frame the dialogue about economic opportunities in an expansionary context. Giving refugees the jobs of hosts is not an option. There are tense public opinions, and this will simply not be accepted by host communities.

Here are some critical lessons:

1) Each displacement situation is different. Every country treats Syrian refugees differently in terms of access to economic opportunities. Refugee groups may also be treated differently depending on their origin and economic circumstances. Iraqi refugees who typically brought substantial wealth with them to Jordan were welcomed. For cultural similarity reasons Syrians are comparatively more welcomed in the south eastern Mediterranean region than African refugees for example. The ability to generate economic opportunities also varies between countries and is closely linked to the underlying dynamics of the concerned economy. The stronger the economy the greater the possibility of generating economic opportunities.

2) In the Southeast Mediterranean, the existence of dual labour markets in many countries provides an opportunity to generate economic opportunities that do not conflict with host community job seekers. A dual labour market is composed by a primary sector including high-skilled and managerial jobs with higher salaries, and a secondary sector composed of low-skilled and temporary jobs where usually disadvantaged social groups (such as, ethnic minorities, immigrants – and refugees) take over those jobs that the local population refuses to take (Piore, 1980, 1986). Hence, secondary sectors can also take the form of informal labour markets. For instance, in Jordan, Lebanon and the Gulf Countries there are many jobs that nationals from the host country are not willing to do, and are quite open to the idea that refugees fulfil these jobs (construction, agriculture, municipal services, personal services and hospitality).

3) The capabilities of the displaced themselves are also relevant. Opportunities need to match capabilities. In the MENA region, refugees tend to be relatively less well educated than refugees that have sought asylum in Europe. While in Jordan only 12% of Syrian refugees have completed high school, in Germany 80% of Syrian refugees are completing their education or have secondary education or more (Maastricht University, 2017; Barbelet and Wake, 2017). Paradoxically, it is harder to find opportunities for the most skilled because they are often in competition with locals, and there are simply a smaller number of jobs available.

4) Can new technologies be introduced? Can approaches (government controlled TVET systems for example) be improved? ICT enabled opportunities in particular could help refugees (particularly women and youth), in that it doesn't matter where they are located and allows for mobility.

For the policymaker interested in pursuing the idea of economic opportunities for the displaced, there is potentially a very substantial agenda. Not all things will be possible. The circumstances on the ground vary from country to country and even within countries. To create this win-win situation, here is a short list of recommendations:

1) Leadership at municipal level can incentivise local economic development and mobilise the private sector including enterprises managed by the refugee community.

This will require additional support to local governments to attract investments directed at inclusive growth at local level.

2) Countries need to establish some principles of engagement in this field. These principles need to be grounded in the political economy of the country as well as in the idea of additionality. These principles include: relationship with the hosts – to ensure fairness; and the scope of the strategy.

3) There needs to be a laser-like focus on youth and gender because they are more vulnerable. For instance, the sectors where refugees work the most, such as agriculture and construction, do not always include women.

4) It is essential to look at the influx of refugees as an opportunity. The capabilities, the energy and often the strong entrepreneurial spirit they bring with them. In addition, with the right policies and proactive investment promotion, there are substantial opportunities that can be secured.

5) A comprehensive economic opportunities strategy needs to target each potential segment of private sector engagement. It also needs to ensure alignment and coordination with all actors supporting refugees including the different government agencies, donors, NGO and private sector actors. Where possible, humanitarian actions need to be coordinated with development actions.

6) A process of public private refugee dialogue grounded on facts is essential to enable the implementation of a reform agenda. This can work at both the central level and at municipal governorate levels. Accompanying communications is essential.

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