



Addressing Displacement in MENA: Roundtable on the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship

31 OCTOBER - 1 NOVEMBER, 2018

Addressing Displacement in MENA: Roundtable on the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship

31 October – 1 November 2018

Amman, Jordan

“A comprehensive refugee response should involve... national and local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, regional coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society partners, including faith based organizations and academia, the private sector, media and refugees themselves.”

[New York Declaration, Annex 1, para. 2]

1. Background:

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is facing a complex set of inter-related and dynamic challenges including **the biggest displacement crisis since World War II**. The region is affected by conflict, unrest and instability including in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen, with clear spillover effects impacting neighboring countries. As a result, most countries in the region remain sources of refugees, are being transited by them, or are destinations for them. Of the **68.5 million refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, 40% of forcible displacement globally is in the Middle East and North Africa region**, a region that only accounts for some 5% of the global population. Continued instability in the region has resulted not only in large-scale displacement and extensive protection needs. Essential services are overstretched in major host countries, exacerbating protection risks for refugees and posing challenges to social cohesion and peaceful co-existence with host communities.

The private sector has stepped in to play a crucial role in filling funding gaps. However, adequate attention needs to be devoted to better **frame and understand the role of the private sector in the provision of essential services, beyond fundraising, for refugees and host communities**. Influential women entrepreneurs in the region have demonstrated that the private sector has the knowledge and expertise to make a significant impact and play a bigger role in displacement response.

As social entrepreneurs develop the market with a social purpose, they also have a significant part to play in the promotion of livelihood opportunities for both refugees and host communities. Strategic partnerships must be enhanced to emphasize innovation, policy development, and sharing of best practices and align private sector partnerships with the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the **private sector's contributions to peace-building and conflict prevention through more systematic, institutionalized partnerships** can contribute to operationalizing the prevention agenda MENA. Specifically, this can be in terms of the framing of environments where employment opportunities and vocational training are more accessible, as well the amplification of protection concerns and advocacy for durable solutions.

In line with the September 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), including the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the voice of the private sector remains critical. A central component will increasingly be a comprehensive refugee response that involves a multi-stakeholder, **“whole-of-society”** approach including civil society and the business world.

As stressed within the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda, women's full participation is critical to achieving and sustaining peace and stability within a community. A gender-sensitive approach to these partnerships recognizes the role women as central to the success and sustainability of working towards durable solutions for displaced persons, and towards contributing to changing



discriminatory norms or legal frameworks which prevent women from reaching their full potential. Given that the MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement (CSND) aims to address the calls to strengthen the role of civil society in responding to the crisis and to strengthen and amplify their voices and actions in favor of the protection and assistance of displaced persons, in support of host communities, the establishment of strategic partnerships with regional women entrepreneurs is in line with the Networks key objectives.

2. Discussion overview:

The purpose of this roundtable was to **provide a platform for women entrepreneurs to frame their role in issues related to displacement in the MENA region**. There have been a number of examples of successful practices which can be sustained and expanded to chart a course for their contributions. The following objectives were envisaged:

1. To **advocate for refugees**, through removing impediments to refugees such as financial participation or through encouraging the rest of the private sector to follow their lead;
2. To help **empower refugees by providing employment**, either by hiring them or by providing support to refugee-owned businesses;
3. To **invest in refugee owned businesses**, social enterprises, NGOs and government organizations which work on the inclusion of refugees and providing employment;
4. To **increase visionary philanthropy**, in which the funds can be used to improve living standards and stimulate self-reliance;
5. To **develop a strategic way-forward** that allows UNHCR to work beyond program-based interventions and foster collaborations with the private sector that move past traditional donor relations;
6. To **envison effective ways to analyze potential for more flexible partnerships** with start-ups and SME's.

The roundtable was a unique opportunity for regional dialogue and action, forming a bridge between the private sector, more traditional sectors in interventions, UNHCR, and refugees in order to identify innovative strategies livelihood opportunities for refugee women through women's empowerment and economic participation. It was attended by 40 business women from across MENA and refugees from 5 nationalities and urban community centers.

“We want to bridge with new actors who are not traditionally connected to the work that UNHCR does. We are opening new doors, expanding our horizons, deepening our connections, and widening our scope.” – Shaden Khallaf, UNHCR Senior Policy Advisor

The roundtable reflected a strategic priority for the MENA Bureau: working towards broadening the scope of innovative partnerships across the MENA region with a wide range of stakeholders at the national, sub-regional and regional levels to enhance the delivery of protection and assistance to persons of concern to UNHCR including refugees and host communities, with the ultimate objective of more sustainable, comprehensive and predictable responses. With reflections on the “whole-of-society” approach, the roundtable opened with remarks from the UNHCR MENA Senior Policy Advisor on the urgent need for increased engagement with the private sector in addressing issues of displacement through advocacy, capacity building and employment opportunities. The Private Sector Partnerships MENA team highlighted the significant progress to date in this regard, stressing UNHCR's commitment to developing long-term partnerships with individuals and corporations from the private sector. The main themes framing the roundtable's discussions were **advocacy, capacity building, livelihood/employment opportunities, sponsorship, service provision, fundraising and peace-building**.



As shared by private sector actors, some of the main challenges regarding the private sector’s engagement with refugee situations include legal restrictions on the employment of refugees, as well as social and cultural biases affecting women in particular. A whole of society approach, expanding such partnerships, can go beyond sustaining service provision and can effectively stress the protection of the dignity of displaced communities.

Refugee women from urban community centers across Jordan voiced the importance of community support which enables them to utilize their existing talents and skills such as the design of hand-made products including soap, perfume, baskets, and cooking among others. Stressing the centrality of women’s empowerment, refugees shared the importance of their participation in community center supported activities, highlighting the elements which contribute to social cohesion among refugee communities, and with the host community. The discussion continued with an exchange of inspirational stories from their personal and professional experiences, allowing participants to appreciate the uniqueness of each other’s experiences while simultaneously establishing a common ground through the many hopes and goals that they shared.

“When I came to Jordan I had a dream to learn English. After finishing my English studies, I was awarded a scholarship to study business administration in Jordan where I am today. I faced many challenges as a refugee but saw an opportunity to overcome those challenges by studying and working very hard to achieve my dream of becoming an entrepreneur in the future.” – Syrian Refugee

3. Innovative collaborations with a meaningful impact on the ground:

Participants worked together to take stock of existing initiatives that support refugees across MENA. Within working groups, discussions took place between entrepreneurs, refugees, and UNHCR representatives regarding the potential for innovative collaborations to contribute to durable solutions. Taking into consideration major challenges relating to role of the private sector in refugee women’s economic empowerment, ultimately, the groups produced ready-for-implementation commitments relating to women’s economic participation in host communities, which were developed into a matrix of ongoing and planned initiatives engaging the private in responding to displacement.

Participants highlighted the significance of capitalizing on e-commerce as a response to legal constraints, suggesting the utilization of online employment as a means of empowerment. Further, challenges related to legal frameworks, such as obtaining legal working permits/licensing were discussed in most of the groups. Specifically, the prevalence of informal employment for refugees as a way to avoid legal constraints on employment in host countries. This is in line with UNESCWA’s recent publication on *Fostering Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises in the Arab Region* which states: “The large share of informal employment, the absence of unemployment compensation schemes and large variations in the labor force owing to accelerated



rural-urban migration and to the use of a foreign labor force make the use of the unemployment rate as a variable questionable for Arab countries.”¹

Group action plans:

After analyzing the challenges and available resources relating to the economic empowerment of refugees, action plan ideation took place, which addressed the concerns of refugees while utilizing the resources of entrepreneurs.

Group	Idea	Goals/Objectives
A	<p>1. Corporate Idea: A platform to help between the corporate sector and refugees who can benefit from the support of start-ups. This project will be a social enterprise, making profits after building partnerships to make sure it is a sustainable project. The main idea is to have a network between those who have products and those who want to order.</p> <p>2. Village of Peace: To have a place where people can have an exhibition that can be licensed for one year as a fixed exhibition to display products. This could help people who have difficulty obtaining working permits and licenses.</p> <p>3. Maktabe Baite: an online employment project with the main goal of the employment of refugees. Translation, graphic design, social media, communications, these and other skills can be created on this platform.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the capacity of startups by building partnerships • Identify partners to see who is invested and who is capable of investing • Sustainability • Support the economic empowerment of women refugees • Employment
B	Using online platforms to employ refugees. One example is a language app that will allow for an exchange of languages for a fee. This can act as an interactive tool where all service providers can promote their services effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating enabling environments for refugees’ employment opportunities • Transition from ‘employees’ to ‘self-employment’
C	Healthy Kitchens – to create proposals for healthy kitchens to employ women. This would be created in reaction to the laws prohibiting receiving permits for home-based businesses in the MENA region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Opportunities • Women’s Empowerment
D	Hands of Hope: a website with the theme of ‘a thousand miles start with one step.’ This website will be for anyone who has an already existing project that they wish to share. Due to lack of licensing and funds, this will act as a sustainable platform for individuals interested in finding employment options more easily. It will include the publishing of products/details of businesses on the website, which can then become accessible to buyers. This is an all-inclusive platform for women of all categories and backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Opportunities • Develop a virtual cultural center • Economic Empowerment of all categories of women • Marketing of start-up businesses and home-based businesses

¹ UNESCWA. *Fostering Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises in the Arab Region*. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2018, www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/study-innovation-small-business-arab-region-english_0.pdf.

4. In conversation with our partners:



In an effort to consolidate the day’s valuable points and interventions, the first day of discussions culminated in a conversation between the UNHCR MENA Senior Policy Advisor, the co-founder of Landmark Amman Hotel, and the founder of the company TwentyTwo11. As a response to the challenge of restrictive regulatory frameworks, the conversation emphasized the readiness of the private sector to support refugees in various capacities. This includes the empowerment of the private sector to play a more active role in

advocating for increased economic participation for refugees. Participants suggested that further exploration of freelance and online employment may be useful response to legal challenges.

The conversation also underlined the need for more diverse and informed capacity building initiatives that involve refugees in both their planning and implementation. This discussion concluded with an important acknowledgement that each person is an agent of change, regardless of their circumstances. Such dialogues can better inform policy makers and UN Agencies of the realities on the ground, related challenges and how we can work around these to ensure that we are addressing are most immediate needs.

“Yesterday was such an amazing experience to have someone to care and listen to us as equals – this was a great experience for us.” – Yasmeen, a Somalian Refugee

A second conversation was held with a Syrian refugee based in Jordan and a host community representative on how the platform can better contribute to women’s empowerment in the region, highlighting the importance of sustainability. The roundtable provided a sense of hope that, with the support of the women entrepreneurs and humanitarian agencies the needs and ambitions of refugees in the region will be properly supported. One of the main takeaways, as stressed throughout the roundtable, was that national governments, NGOs, UN Agencies, private sector actors, civil society, and academia must work more closely in order to effectively develop mechanisms for responsibility-sharing and solidarity.

5. Next Steps and Recommendations

1. **Matrix of initiatives:** In order to identify country-specific, more localized opportunities and challenges for refugees’ economic empowerment, there is an ongoing stock-taking and analysis of existing initiatives relating to economic empowerment for refugees in partnership with the private sector;
2. **Mentorship Scheme:** Connect refugee entrepreneurs with experienced mentors to build-



upon existing skills to meet quality-assurance at the same level as the market through matching refugee women with businesswomen from the region;

3. **Market-needs assessment:** Need to address refugees' needs, before creating initiatives towards employment. Gaps to be addressed with training and development;
4. **Follow-up with private sector partners in MENA:** to further contribute to finding durable solutions by taking part in international discourse on refugees, specifically in terms of developing private sector linkages and being inclusive to refugees within entrepreneurship ecosystems;
5. **Establishing parameters:** Through better understanding of entrepreneurship culture, achieving clarity on regulations and local inclusion schemes, and capitalizing on rich culture of entrepreneurship across MENA to include refugee women.
6. **Engagement:** Through ensuring a 'whole-of-society' approach in creating effective partnerships across disciplines, in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework;
7. **Strengthen synergies:** In order to enhance entrepreneurial skills development, connections will continue to be made between existing programmes of entrepreneurial capacity development for refugees and the facilitation of economic opportunities. This will specifically include the scaling-up of projects and initiatives discussed at this roundtable in an effort to ensure sustainability and employment opportunities within refugee and host communities

I. Annex I: Addressing Displacement in MENA: Roundtable on the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship Agenda

Addressing Displacement in MENA: Roundtable on the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship Amman <u>Day 1 - 31 October 2018</u>		
9:00-9:15	Registration and Welcome Coffee	
9:15-10:00	<p>SESSION 1 Introduction, Workshop Objectives and Regional Overview/Update</p> <p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Objectives and Overview by: Ms. Shaden Khallaf, Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR MENA</p> <p>Private Sector Expert: Mr. Rami Shishan, Private Sector Partnerships Officer - MENA</p>	<p><u>Reference questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the construction of ongoing refugee crises shaped the response? • What and who has influenced the varying levels of global attention and resources received by different refugee crises? • What is the value of entrepreneurship in the context of responding to displacement? • What are legal frameworks for the employment and economic empowerment of displaced persons and how can they be influenced? <p><u>Outcome:</u> Common understanding of global trends and the regional situation on refugee and displacement issues</p>

10:00-10:30	<p>SESSION 2</p> <p>Towards a global compact on refugees: Partnerships and the ‘Whole of Society’ approach in MENA</p>	<p><u>Reference questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the New York Declaration and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and why is it important? • What has been done in the region to support its practical implementation • How can the private sector in the region contribute to the development of the global compact on refugees? • What is the MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement (MENA CSND) and how can it engage with local NGOs • What lessons can be drawn from applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response Frameworks (CRRF) in practice?
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00-12:00	<p>SESSION 3</p> <p><u>Inspiration station:</u></p> <p>Input from participants on existing support mechanisms for refugees and host communities</p>	<p><u>Reference questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges and/or opportunities have you personally encountered in terms of economic empowerment? • How are you currently engaged in economic empowerment initiatives and the response to refugee crises in the region? <p><u>Themes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy, Capacity Building, Livelihood/Employment Opportunities, Sponsorship, Service Provision, Fundraising, Peace-building
12:00-13:00	<p>SESSION 4</p> <p><u>Part 1:</u></p> <p><u>Working Groups :</u></p> <p>How can women entrepreneurs form innovative collaborations with a meaningful impact on the ground?</p> <p>Participants will be split into pre-selected groups and asked to answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role can women entrepreneurs play and how can they be better supported in responding to displacement crises? 2. How can innovative collaborations lead to durable solutions? 	<p><u>Reference questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the major gaps and challenges? • What role can the private sector play in addressing durable solutions in the region? • What possible collaborations that between the private sector and other actors can take place in the coming year, and what would their impact be? <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and identification of the role of women in business and more generally the private sector in finding durable solutions • Analysis of the impact of innovative collaborations and a more inclusive approach toward partnerships

	Each group will be asked to identify 3 SMART objectives for the next year that condense their discussions into concrete commitments.	
13:00-14:00	Lunch	
	<p>SESSION 5</p> <p>Part 2:</p> <p>Working Groups :</p> <p>How can women entrepreneurs form innovative collaborations with a meaningful impact on the ground?</p> <p>As a continuation of the group work on Day 1, the same groups will be asked to draft action plans for the 3 SMART objectives/commitments that were previously identified.</p> <p>The action plans should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic Partners 2. Timeline 3. Quarterly Milestones <p>Main outputs</p>	<p>Reference questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you offer for this action plan? • What are the areas that you require support? What kind of support? • Is this action plans going to contribute to durable solutions for displaced persons? <p>Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set of ready-for-implementation commitments.
16:00-16:30	SESSION 6 Day 1 Wrap-up: Conversation with Landmark and Twentytwo11 Company	
20:00	Dinner	Location TBC

Addressing Displacement in MENA: Roundtable on the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship Amman Day 2 - 01 November 2018		
09:00-9:30	Welcome Coffee	
9:30-10:00	<p>SESSION 1 Day 1 Reflections</p>	<p>Reference questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the major outputs of the day? • How can we ensure an efficient way forward?

10:00-11:30	<p>SESSION 2 Presentations of group commitments and action plans</p>	<p>Each group will be asked to appoint a rapporteur to present the overall framework of their action plans, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic Partners 2. Timeline 3. Quarterly Milestones 4. Main outputs
11:30-12:00	<p>SESSION 3: Concluding Session Way Forward: In conversation: Women from refugee and host communities</p>	

II - Annex II: List of Participants

No.	Name	Country	Organization
1.	Salma el Sayeh	Egypt	Ahead of the Curve
2.	Khawlah Majeed Azeez	Iraq	Safari Exports LLC
3.	Ebtesam Isamil Jeyad	Iraq	Anbar women handicrafts
4.	Rania Abdulla Amaash	Iraq	ALMAJI
5.	Mary Nazzal Batayneh	Jordan	Landmark Amman Hotel
6.	Layla Al-Qasim	Jordan	Landmark Amman Hotel
7.	Dina Saoudi	Jordan	Seven Circles - Seven's World
8.	Reem Abassi	Jordan	Jordan River Foundation
9.	Nisreen Pharaon	Jordan	Featherlight Jewelry
10.	Dana Madouh	Kuwait	Twentytwo11
11.	Areej Al Kharafi	Kuwait	Fortune Cookie
12.	Alia Farhat	Lebanon	Al-Majmoua
13.	Louise Doumet	Lebanon	Lebelik
14.	Dounia Taarji	Morocco	General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco
15.	Maria Bukier	Yemen	Fada Alatfal (Kids Space)
16.	Mona Saleh	Yemen	Nuzha CSC
17.	Ghada Hammed	Iraq	Nuzha CSC
18.	Sanaa Bashouri	Syria	Nuzha CSC
19.	Maha Al-Alami	Sudan	Sudanese CSC, Ras El Ain
20.	Rasha Al-Masri	Syria	Sahab CSC
21.	Yasmeen Al-Natoor	Syria	Sahab CSC
22.	Abeer Khrisha	Jordan	Madaba CSC

23.	Fotoon Al-Shaiek	Syria	Zarqa CSC
24.	Ala'a Al-Haj Saleh	Syria	Salt CSC
25.	Yasmeen Abdullah Abukar	Somalia	Somali Community Rep
26.	Wfa`a Janser		Jordan River Foundation
27.	Asma`a Baker		Jordan River Foundation
28.	Fatmah Abu Al Shear		Jordan River Foundation

UNHCR Participants:

No.	Name	Title	Duty Station	Email
1.	Shaden Khallaf	Senior Policy Advisor	MENA Bureau	khallafs@unhcr.org
2.	Annalaura Sacco	Senior Regional Protection Coordinator	MENA Bureau	sacco@unhcr.org
3.	Ruba Ahmad	Reporting Assistant, Policy Unit	MENA Bureau	ahmadru@unhcr.org
4.	Nadine Matar	Outreach Assistant, Policy Unit	MENA Bureau	matar@unhcr.org
5.	Ali Kawash	Assistant Research Officer	MENA Bureau	kawash@unhcr.org
6.	Alanna Pasco	MENA Policy Unit, Intern	MENA Bureau	pasco@unhcr.org
7.	Rania Bakeer	Senior Livelihoods Assistant	BO Amman	bakeerr@unhcr.org
8.	Rami Shishan	PSP Officer	UAE	shishan@unhcr.org

For photos and videos please visit:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XiEeb8bRrm-arxNeO5WKydYbeFISrTwk>