



► Research Brief

January 2022

Note on the findings of a tracer study of RPL beneficiaries in Jordan¹

Introduction

Since it began in March 2011, the Syrian Civil War has been an ongoing crisis with impacts felt throughout the Arab States region, and beyond. Many Syrian refugees have fled the conflict to Jordan. In February 2016, as part of the global response to the Syrian Crisis, government and non-government partners met in London to pledge support for Syria and the region. A key result of the conference was the Jordan Compact, a plan to support Jordan's national Syrian refugee response plan. At the time the Compact was signed, Jordan had the second highest share of refugees globally, of which 89 per cent were Syrian. The Jordan Compact reflected a commitment of the international community to give Jordan access to concessional trade and finance, on the condition that Jordan formalise the employment of 200,000 Syrian refugees residing in the country. Implementation of the Jordan Compact began in 2016 and saw the development and application of measures to facilitate Syrian refugees' access to the Jordanian formal labour market. It included several elements, such as the easing procedures and the waiving fees for work permits in selected sectors, amongst others. This note focuses on the ILO-supported Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Scheme, which contributed to the

implementation of the Jordan Compact by allowing beneficiaries to have their skills recognised, providing access to an occupational license, and therefore becoming eligible for a work permit. The RPL scheme is open equally to both Syrian refugees and Jordanians and was made possible through the generous support from the governments of the Netherlands, Norway, and the United States of America, US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and others. Specifically, this brief will explore the impact of the scheme on Syrian beneficiaries in the construction sector who participated between 2016 and 2018.

Methodology

The results presented in this note were taken from a combination of individual interviews and questionnaires performed between the 21st and the 25th of July 2019. The target population for the study were individuals registered in the ILO Amman database as having participated in the RPL pilot process in the Jordanian construction sector between 2016-2018. This included 7,676 individuals, among whom 366 were chosen at random to participate in the survey. Of these, 352 were included in the analysis that follows.² Study participants were male³ Syrian respondents between 19 and 59 years of age, residing in 11 different

¹ This research brief was drafted by Belinda Smith and is based on the unpublished report by Ahmed Albadareen and Anas Alakhras, entitled "Impact of recognition of prior learning on workers in the construction sector in Jordan", August 2019.

² The small sample of Jordanians in the study did not allow comparing findings between Jordanians and Syrians. Therefore, the Jordanian entries were excluded from the sample to increase significance of the findings for Syrian workers. Respondents aged 60 or over have also been excluded to reflect the Jordanian retirement age.

³ In Jordan, construction is typically a male sector. Although some women have received work permits within the construction sector since the start of the RPL scheme, they were excluded from the tracer study to better capture the realities of the majority of construction sector RPL participants. In 2018 construction had the lowest share of employed female Syrians compared to other sectors (ILO Regional Office for Arab States, September 2021).

locations in Jordan. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and based on prior and informed consent.

The focus of the tracer study was on RPL scheme beneficiaries from the years 2016-2018, the gap between receiving the service and participating in the study was between three and one years. However, most participants in the tracer study were enrolled in 2017 (72.1 per cent) and thus had a two-year gap between participating in the RPL programme and the tracer study. The longest gap between the RPL process and the tracer study was for 20.5 per cent of respondents who were enrolled in 2016.⁴

Why recognition of prior learning?

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning is identified, documented, assessed and certified against standards used in formal education and training. It enables the formal recognition of prior learning and relevant experience. This is sometimes complemented by the inclusion of supplementary skills training intended to fill identified skills gaps.⁵

RPL schemes contribute not only to economic but also social policy outcomes. They seek to overcome barriers to accessing formal training experienced by many disadvantaged groups. Studies on RPL have found that these schemes can be used to make skill systems more accessible and inclusive to those traditionally locked out of formal TVET and indeed, the RPL scheme provided intensive feedback and technical support to the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) testing and occupational licensing system. RPL is also expected to contribute to the formalisation of the labour market, by providing beneficiaries with recognised qualifications leading to access to a greater range of secure employment. RPL schemes have also been recognised as highly relevant to the context of international migration, including for refugees.⁶ The recognition of prior learning has been found to contribute to “combating social exclusion of

disadvantaged individuals and those more at risk of unemployment such as migrants.”⁷ Since 2016, the RPL scheme in Jordan has been enhancing both the development and humanitarian assistance strategies that support refugees by addressing some of the challenges facing Syrian refugees when accessing the Jordanian labour market.⁸

What was involved in the Jordanian RPL process?

The RPL process implemented under the ILO-supported scheme included trade-specific and supplementary training, for those unemployed participants a job matching service was provided, as well as mentoring and work-based feedback for further training and to provide an environment for the assessment decision based on performance. Beneficiaries participated in a four-day theoretical training course provided by a recognised local institution over consecutive weekends. The focus of the theoretical course was defined after an assessment of the main knowledge gaps of the target group. In some cases, the theoretical training therefore included information on occupational health and safety and basic labour rights, in addition to trade-specific content. After the training, four days of mentoring and coaching visits occurred in the workplace with a certified trainer. These visits were designed to provide beneficiaries with technical feedback on their skills in the workplace.

After the training and mentoring, beneficiaries undertook an on-the-job assessment and written examination. Upon successful completion of this final test, the beneficiaries became entitled to a Skills Certificate that recognised their prior and updated skills and learning. Although not equivalent at the time of the pilot, the certificates have since been recognised as equivalent to two types of Occupational Certificates within the Jordanian National Qualifications Framework (NQF): Skilled Level Certificate, NQF Level 3, and Semi-Skilled Certificate, NQF Level 2.

4 Albadareen, A. and A. Alakhras, August 2019, 'Impact of Recognition of Prior Learning in construction sector works; Jordan case.' Unpublished background report, ILO, Beirut.

5 World Bank, April 2021, 'Effects of Recognition of Prior Learning on Job Market Outcomes: Impact Evaluation in Bangladesh. Policy Research Working Paper 9644. World Bank.

6 Rothboeck, S., Comyn, P. and Banerjee, P.S., 2018, 'Role of recognition of prior learning for emerging economies: learning from a four sector pilot project in India.' *Journal of Education and Work*, 31:4, pg.394-408. DOI:[10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560)

7 Leshuis, P. and L. Van den Brande, August 2020, pg.108, 'Benefits and effects of validation for individuals and organizations: A cross sectional investigation into the effects of VPL.' Ed: Duvekot, R. et. al. *Making Policy Work: Validation of Prior Learning for Education and the Labour Market. Series VPL-Biennale nr. 7*, European Centre Valuation of Prior Learning & Bertelsmann Stiftung.

8 ILO, 2021, 'Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan.' ILO, Geneva.

How has RPL promoted Syrian inclusion in the Jordanian labour market?

The Jordanian RPL programme was designed to enhance the self-reliance of both refugees and host communities and to increase their participation in formal and decent work. The facilitation of formal work permits, in addition to both trade-specific and supplementary training for the attainment of skills certificates, is a key and unique element of this scheme. Non-Jordanians, including Syrian refugees, need work permits to work legally in registered establishments in Jordan. These permits thus provide both formal and legal access to the Jordanian labour market. Without these permits, non-Jordanian workers are at a heightened risk of exploitative practices. Moreover, work without a work permit is illegal and Syrians found by labour inspectors to be working without a valid work permit are at risk of severe consequences including, for example, transfer to guarded camps.

The 2016 to 2018 period being discussed in this note represents a pilot phase for RPL in Jordan, when the systems were being closely monitored and strengthened. Following the introduction of the RPL scheme for non-Jordanians, and as part of the overarching Jordan Compact, fees for work permits were waived in April 2016. This fee exemption is still in place and was seen to have an immediate impact on the issuance of work permits to Syrian refugees, regardless of sector.⁹

Although this note focuses on the pilot phase, the RPL system has continued to evolve. The scheme has fostered dialogue with unions and the private sector.¹⁰ The inclusion of a broader coalition of stakeholders in the RPL system has contributed to the ongoing improvement of the system and support for Syrian refugees in the past few years.¹¹

Findings of the study

During the period covered by the study, over 230,000 work permits were issued to Syrian refugees, across all sectors. From 2014 to 2018 the overall Syrian refugee labour force

participation rate has increased from 28 to 33 per cent, and unemployment fell from around 60 to about 8 per cent.¹² This increased participation and employment of Syrian refugees has been particularly evident in the construction and agriculture sectors and is tied to the provision of formal work permits. In 2016, less than 5,000 work permits were issued for the construction sector, increasing to approximately 9,000 in 2017, and around 14,000 in 2018.¹³ The tracer study found 71.6 per cent of respondents gained a work permit through the RPL scheme, and all of those with work permits also received occupational licenses.



What employment type was most common amongst beneficiaries?

In 2018, just under 25 per cent of all employed Syrian refugees in Jordan were employed in the construction sector.¹⁴ The tracer study survey asked respondents whether they were in employment, to which they could respond 'yes,' 'no,' or 'I work sporadically (or freely).' Only 23.3 per cent of respondents said 'yes' compared to 30.1 per cent who responded 'no.' The most common employment response, 46.6 per cent, was temporary employment. The high occurrence of this type of employment likely reflects the fact that the Jordanian construction sector is usually seasonal and project-based. Typically, Jordanian construction companies have some permanent Jordanian employees, while project-based workers are mostly Syrians and Egyptians. Another factor contributing to the high levels of temporary employment

⁹ ILO, 2021, 'Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan.' ILO, Geneva.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ World Bank, April 2021, 'Effects of Recognition of Prior Learning on Job Market Outcomes: Impact Evaluation in Bangladesh. Policy Research Working Paper 9644. World Bank.

¹² ILO, 2021, Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan. ILO, Geneva.

¹³ Fig.4, pg.27, ILO, 2021, Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan. ILO, Geneva.

¹⁴ Ibid.

may be the reluctance of employers to commit to long-term employment in the current macroeconomic context brought about in part by the war in Syria.¹⁵

How was employment type affected by the provision of work permits?

The propensity for temporary employment seen amongst the beneficiaries at large continues when disaggregating for work permit status. Of the respondents who successfully obtained occupational licenses, and therefore legal and formal work permits, 45.6 per cent were in temporary employment. Only 23.4 per cent reported being in (full-time) employment and 31 per cent were unemployed. This closely mirrors the overall trend. Even amongst beneficiaries who did not obtain work permits, temporary employment was most common. 49 per cent reported temporary employment, compared to 23 per cent who reported being employed, and 28 per cent who were unemployed. While this implies that the successful completion of the RPL process has had little influence on employment type, in a larger World Bank RPL study in Bangladesh, there was a 13 percentage point increase in the likelihood of working at formal companies for successful RPL recipients and they also tend to work at larger companies.¹⁶ The widely recognised challenge around developing full stakeholder buy-in to the concept of RPL, particularly in terms of communicating to employers the value of RPL and hiring skilled workers, also affects the type of employment the beneficiaries gained.¹⁷

How satisfied were beneficiaries?

Part of the study survey addressed respondents' perceptions of the impact of the RPL programme at a personal level and on their current workplace and productivity. Respondents were asked to rate 11 statements about the impact of the RPL scheme on a scale of one to five: one, 'no, not at all'; two, 'not much'; three,

'neutral'; four, 'yes, to some extent', and five, 'yes, very much'. Of the 11 statements, seven targeted personal and social standing impacts and four addressed workplace and productivity. Averaging out all the responses to each impact statement provides an overall score for the scheme of 2.64.

What was the impact reported at the individual level?

The overall score given by beneficiaries for all individual level impact statements was 2.9. The majority, 58.5 per cent, were most confident about the scheme's impact on their self-esteem, compared to 38.9 per cent who were neutral¹⁸ and just 1.6 per cent who were uncertain. Given the various difficulties typically faced by Syrian refugees, this finding affirms one of the benefits of RPL schemes on self-esteem and self-perception.¹⁹ Furthermore, 57.9 per cent of respondents were confident about the positive social standing impact of the scheme on the way that their relatives and friends perceive them. Given the amount of stress and uncertainty confronting refugees, the respondents' positive response to the programme at the individual level, a year or more after the RPL process, is a noticeable outcome. Significantly, raised self-esteem and a greater appreciation of their individual skills and knowledge and empowerment to make informed decisions is also consistent with international literature on skills recognition.²⁰

¹⁵ Fig.4, pg.27, ILO, 2021, Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan. ILO, Geneva.

¹⁶ World Bank, April 2021, Effects of Recognition of Prior Learning on Job Market Outcomes: Impact Evaluation in Bangladesh. Policy Research Working Paper 9644.

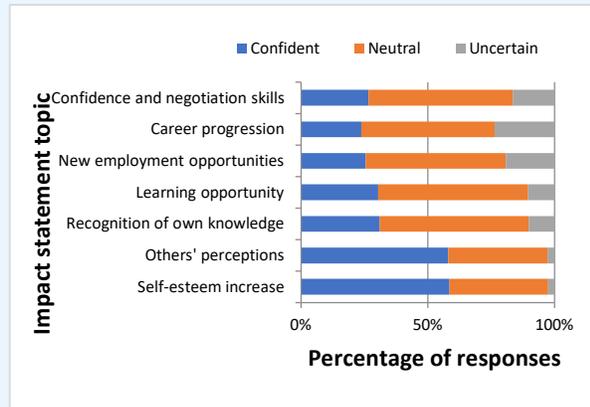
¹⁷ Sims, C., Shamash, J. and Freccero, P., 2012, 'Credit where Credit's Due: Experiences with the Recognition of Prior Learning and insights for India.' Manupal City & Guilds, New Delhi.

¹⁸ Although the 1-5 scale reflects a typical Likert scale, the wording of the options skews the typical interpretation. In this form, the scale is understood to have two positive responses (4 and 5) and two neutral responses (2 and 3), with only one negative (1).

¹⁹ Recotillet, I. and P. Werquin, 2009, 'APEL pathways: a passport to employment?' European Journal of Vocational Training, 48:3, pg.73-100. CEDEFOP, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; and World Bank, April 2021, Effects of Recognition of Prior Learning on Job Market Outcomes: Impact Evaluation in Bangladesh. Policy Research Working Paper 9644.

²⁰ Werquin, P., 2011, 'Outcomes and Benefits of the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences in the Autonomous Region of Madeira (RAM).' Final Report.

► **Figure 1: Individual and social standing impact**



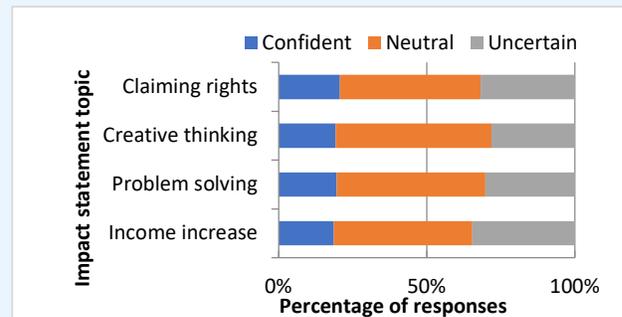
Source: Author's calculations

Impact on perceptions of workplace and productivity levels were less apparent. On average, respondents rated the workplace and productivity impact as 2.2. The most positive responses within this category were for strengthening beneficiaries' abilities to claim their full employment rights. Of the total number of respondents 20.7 per cent reported a positive impact on claiming their rights, and 47.5 per cent were neutral. The next most positive workplace and productivity topic was problem solving, receiving 20.5 per cent positive responses and 55.7 per cent neutral responses.

A possible explanation for the lower satisfaction at the workplace and productivity level overall could simply be the nascent nature of the RPL system in Jordan during the period assessed in the tracer study. As noted in Rothboeck, Comyn and Banarjee,²¹ RPL systems can benefit from a variety of quality assurance mechanisms, such as independent auditing and collaboration with employers, workers organisations and other relevant stakeholders, among other things. Additionally, awareness raising on the detail and rigor of the RPL scheme among construction sector employers could have been beneficial, however the pilot project did not have the resources for this type of awareness raising. Given that this note reports on the pilot phase of the study, it is understandable that some of these system level elements may have been either missing or unavailable during the period from 2016 to 2018. Nevertheless, as is noted in the 2021 ILO report, *Impact of*

work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan, collaboration with the stakeholder groups has increased over the duration of the scheme, resulting in, for example, the extension of social security to cover refugees and a greater uptake of work permit holders in formal employment.²²

► **Figure 2: Workplace and productivity impact**



Source: Author's calculations

Are work permit holders more satisfied with the outcomes of RPL?

Disaggregating the satisfaction scores reveals that respondents who had successfully obtained occupational licenses and work permits were more satisfied for each impact statement. This trend is not overly surprising. When also looking at employment type (employed; temporary employment; unemployed), respondents' satisfaction appears to be linked to attainment of the concrete aims of the RPL programme, i.e. formal and improved access to the Jordanian labour market. When beneficiaries had the legal right to work they were more satisfied, and when their type of employment was more secure, they were also more satisfied. Figures 3 and 4, below, highlight this relationship for satisfaction at both the individual and workplace and productivity levels.

21 Rothboeck, S., Comyn, P. and Banerjee, P.S., 2018, 'Role of recognition of prior learning for emerging economies: learning from a four sector pilot project in India.' *Journal of Education and Work*, 31:4, pg.394-408. DOI: [10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560)

22 ILO, 2021, *Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan*. ILO, Geneva.

► **Figure 3: Average individual level satisfaction**



Source: Author's calculations

► **Figure 4: Average workplace and productivity satisfaction**



Source: Author's calculations

On average, regardless of employment type, respondents with work permits and occupational licenses reported satisfaction scores 4 per cent higher than those without work permits. At the level of personal satisfaction 3.5 per cent experienced higher levels of satisfaction. While perceptions of respondents with permits and licenses, to workplace and productivity, were 9.6 per cent more satisfied, regardless of employment type. The difference between personal satisfaction levels and workplace satisfaction levels might at first glance appear divergent, however, personal satisfaction can be subject to many variables unrelated to employment, it is reasonable to assume that the RPL process has led to a greater level of satisfaction overall.

Literature on OSH and human resource development reveals a link between greater access to OSH awareness and more positive perceptions of the physical work environment.²³ The occupational safety and health training in the RPL process may account, in part, for the higher satisfaction levels in workplace and productivity responses. While workplace mentoring was provided to all RPL participants, those beneficiaries who received work permits may have internalised or valued these elements more highly due to their success in obtaining a work permit and occupational license.

RPL and formal TVET

During the design of the RPL programme, there was agreement that the RPL pilot would not result in a formal TVET qualification and would instead rely on employment support services such as job matching. The lack of formal qualifications associated with the RPL scheme may mean that those participants in temporary employment or who were unemployed perceived no real change in their ability to access formalised employment or to improve their life options by accessing formal training while continuing to seek decent work. In the ILO Indian RPL study, 60 per cent of respondents expressed interest in pursuing further skill training, and their interest in further skills training increased over the period between the two tracer surveys. The main motivators for undertaking further skills development were the possibility of higher wages and learning new technical skills, both of which could increase the likelihood of better work opportunities. The Indian RPL project identified that, in part, the positive responses were due to the RPL process facilitating job mobility of the RPL certified workforce, and that aspiring candidates become more engaged in developing their skills and learning.²⁴

Do work permits also influence income?

The 2021 ILO report *Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan* was produced following a two-year extension of the RPL programme. This report found that “holding a work permit has a positive effect on wage levels for Syrian waged workers.”²⁵ Although the 2019 tracer study did not look at wage levels specifically, it did inquire into the impact of the scheme on income and salary increases. The

23 Loughborough University, Ward, J.; Haslam, C. and Haslam, R., 2008, 'The impact of health and safety management on organisations and their staff.' Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, Leicestershire.

24 Rothboeck, S., Comyn, P. and Banerjee, P.S., 2018, 'Role of recognition of prior learning for emerging economies: learning from a four sector pilot project in India.' *Journal of Education and Work*, 31:4, pg.394-408. DOI:[10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560)

25 Ibid

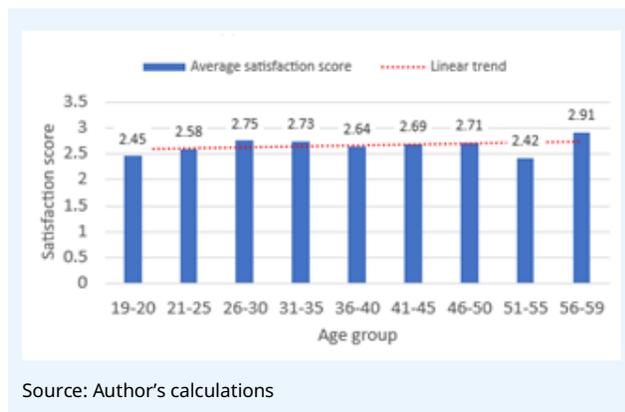
scores for the impact of the RPL on monthly income increases was 2.23 for respondents with work permits, compared to an average score of 2.04 for those without permits. This implies that those who were successful in obtaining occupational licenses and work permits through the RPL process, were more likely to see an increase in income. A study into RPL in Bangladesh²⁶ also identified comparable outcomes, with the share of workers working in formal entities increasing from 21 per cent prior to the RPL programme to 33 per cent after the programme, and as indicated in the Indian RPL study, those workers who had their skills formally recognised reported a positive impact on wages of four per cent within the first six months and 26% reported some improvement in income in either of the tracer rounds.²⁷

More generally, 18.8 per cent of all respondents in the 2019 tracer study in Jordan, regardless of work permit status, showed a positive response (4 or 5) for an increase in salary due to RPL. This is similar to the 18 per cent of Syrian refugees in the 2021 report who said that the work permit had improved their income.²⁸

Does age influence satisfaction?

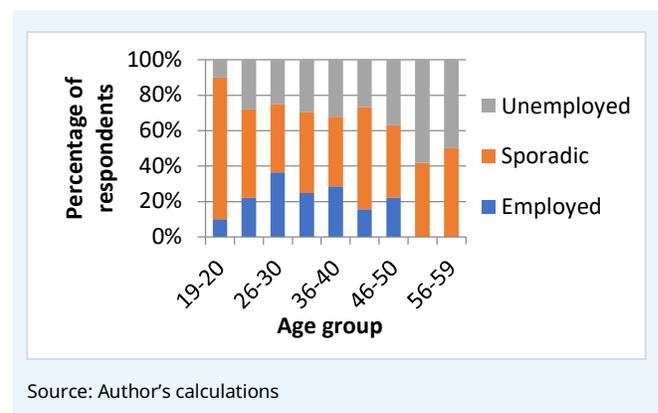
The largest age group amongst study participants was 21-25, accounting for 23.3 per cent, followed by the 31-35 age group (17.3 per cent) and 36-40 (15.6 per cent). The smallest age group was 56-59, at only 2.3 per cent, and 51-55 at 3.4 per cent.

► **Figure 5: Mean satisfaction per age group**



Amongst the respondents, the age group most satisfied with the RPL process, were those aged 56-59, followed by those aged 26-30, and the 31-35 age group (see Figure 5, above). The 56-59 age group traditionally faces more age-related discrimination in the workplace and can struggle to find employment. Their higher levels of satisfaction with the RPL programme may therefore be an indicator of the RPL programme opening more employment options for those facing age-related employment difficulties.

► **Figure 6: Employment type per age group**



Also reflecting the dynamics around age and employment, we can see in Figure 6 that the highest employment rates are in the youngest age group (90 per cent in some form of employment). However, it is the 26-30 age group that has the second highest level of satisfaction with the RPL process. This group also has the highest level of formal employment of any age group (37 per cent employed). Although with the highest employment rates, the 19-20 age group are overall less satisfied with the RPL scheme. As they are more likely to be less experienced and skilled and perhaps therefore, they may be less aware of the additional benefits to be obtained from the RPL programme than older long term construction workers.

26 World Bank, April 2021, Effects of Recognition of Prior Learning on Job Market Outcomes: Impact Evaluation in Bangladesh. Policy Research Working Paper 9644.

27 Rothboeck, S., Comyn, P. and Banerjee, P.S., 2018, 'Role of recognition of prior learning for emerging economies: learning from a four sector pilot project in India.' Journal of Education and Work, 31:4, pg.394-408. DOI:10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560

28 ILO, 2021, Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan. ILO, Geneva.

Conclusion

While the tracer study examines the early stage of the project and the survey and interviews were largely conducted two years after the beneficiaries had completed the RPL programme, there are promising findings related to both improved perceptions of personal and social standing and greater confidence amongst respondents with permits and licenses, to workplace and productivity regardless of employment type. Satisfaction levels also increase with the type of employment, and during the pilot phase of the RPL programme there was a slight positive gain in income.

These findings are encouraging given that the scheme was designed to improve recognition of Syrian refugees' skills, and to improve their access to formal work in Jordan. Although only 18.8 per cent of beneficiaries were positive about the impact of the scheme on increasing income, yet this should be understood in the broader economic context. According to the World Bank,²⁹ the overall economic impact of the Syrian conflict on Jordan was disproportionately high. Therefore, any increase in salary can be seen positively.

In addition to these findings, it must be noted that overall satisfaction levels for the pilot stage were low at only 2.64. This falls in the neutral range of satisfaction. Low satisfaction levels could be improved upon



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