



International
Labour
Organization



International
Partnerships
Austria

Markets for Inclusion (M4I)

Catalysing inclusive growth and job creation for refugees and vulnerable groups



Countries of implementation

Lebanon and Kenya



Development partner

Austrian Development Agency (ADA)



Duration

December 2025 – December 2028



Implementer

International Labour Organization

The global forced displacement crisis is one of the defining development challenges of our time. With over 123 million people forcibly displaced worldwide and 76% in protracted situations lasting five years or more, the scale and persistence of displacement demand responses that go beyond humanitarian assistance. The vast majority of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries already grappling with high unemployment, economic fragility, and limited social protection. In these contexts, refugee inclusion is not only a protection imperative: it is an economic and development challenge that requires systemic, market-based solutions.

Since 2014, the ILO's Approach to Inclusive Market Systems (AIMS) has been at the forefront of developing precisely such solutions. AIMS applies market systems development (MSD), a methodology focused on strengthening the rules, institutions, and relationships that determine how markets work, to fragile and displacement-affected contexts. Building on identified labour market demand, it works to increase incomes and job opportunities for those who have been systematically excluded. Over a decade of implementation across more than 20 countries has established AIMS as the leading international framework at the nexus of market development and forced displacement.

The Austrian Development Agency's (ADA) contribution to the global AIMS programme deepens and scales this work in two priority countries - Lebanon and Kenya, while converting field experience into guidance, tools, and evidence that strengthen practice and policy across the humanitarian-development nexus. Both countries were selected because they combine urgent need with established operational foundations and strong potential for demonstrable, globally relevant impact. Gender equality and decent work are embedded throughout as core criteria for what a good job looks like and who the programme is designed to reach.

► Programme objective

To create inclusive economic growth and job creation for forcibly displaced persons and other vulnerable groups — by scaling market systems development approaches in Lebanon and Kenya, and strengthening the global knowledge base on how to apply these approaches in fragile and displacement-affected contexts.

► Three interconnected components

The Markets for Inclusion (M4I) programme operates across three mutually reinforcing components. The two country components generate tangible results on the ground; the global component converts those results into knowledge and advocacy that strengthens the wider field.

Component 1: Lebanon

Business process outsourcing (BPO) sector

Lebanon's economic collapse since 2019, compounded by war and recurring crises, has driven poverty above 44%, pushed youth unemployment to 48%, and both Lebanese and displaced workers have been pushed further from formal employment. What the country urgently needs is a sector that can generate quality jobs at scale, retain skilled talent, and create opportunities accessible to women and vulnerable groups.

The BPO sector fits this need precisely. Lebanon has a multilingual, university-educated workforce with a proven track record in outsourcing services, and global demand for exactly these skills continues to grow. Yet the sector remains well below its potential. Lebanon is not yet recognised internationally as a BPO destination, firms operate in isolation without a collective voice, and quality standards are inconsistent. Meanwhile, women, youth, and vulnerable workers remain largely excluded from the formal jobs the sector could create.



~5,000

people currently employed
in Lebanon's BPO sector



60%

of BPO workers are
women globally

Programme response

The programme addresses these barriers across three areas:

- Boosting Lebanon's international visibility and attracting new clients through targeted marketing, matchmaking with international buyers, and reputation-building initiatives.
- Strengthening the BPO ecosystem through support to sector association formation, quality certification, and public-private dialogue with relevant ministries.
- Promoting inclusive employment, and opening pathways to BPO and linked sector jobs for women, youth, and vulnerable groups.



Fatma Cankara / © ILO

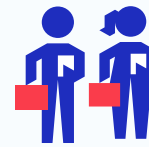
Component 2: Kenya

Beauty and construction sectors

Kenya hosts over 770,000 registered refugees, many in urban areas. Urban refugees frequently possess strong technical skills but remain trapped in informal, low-income markets due to legal, social, and geographic barriers.

The beauty and construction sectors offer a viable pathway to change this. Both are among the fastest-growing sectors in Kenya's urban economy, driven by rising middle-class demand. Job matching services operating in these sectors have demonstrated a commercially sound model: connecting skilled workers to higher-value clients while providing access to inputs at preferential rates, structured training, business advisory support, and pre-financing.

For refugees and other vulnerable workers, inclusion in these services represents a meaningful step toward decent, more stable employment. Yet most services have yet to meaningfully integrate refugees into their workforce, held back by digital onboarding and verification processes that exclude workers without national identification, limited outreach into refugee-dense neighbourhoods, and weak links to social protection mechanisms.



770K+

registered refugees in Kenya (majority in urban areas)



Nearly 2x

the minimum wage earned by beauty workers on job matching platforms in Kenya

Programme response

The programme addresses these barriers across three areas:

- Supporting job matching services to adapt their systems and processes to integrate refugee and vulnerable workers, targeting specific high-growth market niches where refugees' skills are competitive, and demonstrating that doing so is commercially sound as they expand to new cities and client bases
- Strengthening workforce readiness through upgrading and business management training, supporting both employment and self-employment pathways for refugees and vulnerable workers
- Improving the enabling environment by working with government and social partners, and connecting workers to social protection schemes.

Component 3 – Global learning and policy advocacy

The global component captures market-driven lessons from Lebanon, Kenya, and other AIMS countries and translates them into practical guidance, case studies, and training that benefit the entire community of practice. It engages MSD practitioner networks, supports humanitarian actors to adopt more market-based approaches, and advocates at policy forums for enabling frameworks for refugee economic inclusion.

Programme response

The programme addresses these barriers across three areas:

- Enriching the global exchange on MSD in displacement contexts
- Guiding humanitarian actors toward more market-based approaches
- Advocating for more enabling framework conditions for refugees globally



Adam Walusimbi / © ILO

► Expected Results

By addressing root causes of market underperformance, the programme will generate sustainable improvements in enterprise performance, market access, and employment for refugees and host communities in Lebanon and Kenya, and stronger global evidence and tools for the broader field.



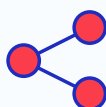
More and better jobs

Formal employment across BPO, beauty, construction, and linked sectors driven by business growth and market demand. A deliberate focus on women, youth, and refugees.



Improved business performance

More competitive firms: higher productivity, stronger international market linkages, and quality and labour standards that attract better clients and create more stable jobs.



Stronger market systems

Better coordination among firms and institutions. Effective sector governance. Business support services that outlast the programme and continue serving vulnerable groups.



Global knowledge and policy

Practical guidance for the MSD practitioner community. A stronger global consensus on what makes markets work for refugees and marginalized communities.



Marcel Crozet / © ILO



Licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) © International Labour Organization 2026

ILO. *Markets for Inclusion (M4I): The ADA-ILO global partnership*, Programme brief, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2026. © ILO. <https://doi.org/10.54394/00034746>

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

ILO Approach to Inclusive Market Systems (AIMS)
Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) Branch
ENTERPRISES

E ayalal@ilo.org
W: ilo.org/aims