



Learning Lab Series

Emerging practices:

Improving access and working conditions in digital labour platforms for refugees and host communities

ILO-UNDP



Learning Memo

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Learning Lab #4

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Mapping emerging practices

Emerging practices encourage decent and inclusive work on digital labour platforms for refugees and host communities. The ultimate goal is to provide valuable insights for governments, the private sector, and other pertinent organizations, shedding light on the potential for implementing such practices.

Digital labour platforms offer opportunities for forcibly displaced and host communities, but **several challenges must be addressed**. These include limitations in scale, persistent barriers to access, and regulatory frameworks that often lag behind on-the-ground realities.

Representatives from different organizations shared about their business models:

- ▶ **Dukkan.work** is a platform that offers services in Turkish, English, and Arabic. It was launched by UNDP Turkiye and Bangladesh with the objective of offering digital opportunities to displaced individuals, particularly Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. Young Syrians possess strong Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills, and many SMEs and clients seek services in Arabic. Dukkan.work bridges this talent gap, connecting parties for mutual benefit. Currently, there are 550+ freelancers and 150+ clients on the platform, with 30 per cent of freelancers being women.
- ▶ **Amazon Web Services (AWS)** embraced a new core value in 2021, realizing that success and scale bring broader responsibility towards the inclusion of refugees in their workforce. AWS has made a pledge to hire 5,000 refugees in the United States and an additional 5,000 refugees in the European Union over the next two years. Recognizing the unmet need for work that internal teams cannot accommodate at AWS and the availability of refugees seeking employment, Giselle Gonzales, previously a Senior Program Manager at Amazon with a focus on sustainability, initiated an outsourcing project. This endeavour links refugees in Kenya with jobs at Amazon.
- ▶ **NaTakallam** was founded in Lebanon in 2014, during the peak of the Syrian crisis, with the mission of creating employment opportunities for refugees who lacked legal access to work within the Lebanese economy. Their goal is to offer refugees a renewed sense of purpose and dignity. They achieve this by enabling refugees and members of host communities to work as online tutors, teachers, translators, and cultural exchange partners. Their coverage initially began with Arabic but was later expanded to include other languages such as Persian, French, Ukrainian, and Russian. They achieved steady growth over the years through self-generated revenues and small grants.
- ▶ **Jobtech Alliance** is an ecosystem-building initiative that collaborates with digital labour platforms on the demand side to foster their growth and job creation. One of their projects, Jobtech for

Refugees, supported by Mercy Corps and BFA Global, actively promotes the inclusion of refugees and host community members in Uganda.

- ▶ **EqualReach** is a recent endeavour, developed to broaden the work done by AWS. EqualReach was set up to expand the potential of outsourced work started at Amazon. The vision is to create a positive impact sourcing hub that simplifies access to dedicated, vetted, highly skilled refugee teams for enterprises and businesses and help other small enterprises do the same through collaboration and partnership.

Emerging practices

Facilitating access to work

These practices encompass actively recruiting both forcibly displaced persons and host community members, ensuring open and unlimited registration for workers, accepting UNHCR or national-level refugee identification, facilitating accessible payment methods, offering flexible employment classifications that consider the unique circumstances of these workers, incentivizing clients to hire from these communities, and providing start-up and ongoing financing, particularly for the acquisition of wireless-enabled devices.

Specific practices:

- ▶ **Supporting disadvantaged groups:** *Dukkan.work* actively collaborates with local NGOs to expand opportunities for disadvantaged groups on their platform, including women, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ community. There is also a strong commitment to foster an inclusive and empowering environment for all.
- ▶ **Refugee onboarding to platforms:** *AWS* onboarded refugee talent onto existing platforms through a strategic partnership with the International Trade Center. They built a vetted team of refugees in Kenya, enabling these individuals to overcome initial access barriers to platforms and then layered additional fair work criteria to the arrangement.
- ▶ **Local partnerships:** *AWS* also collaborates with local partners who possess a deep understanding of the challenges faced by refugees. These partners also have a thorough knowledge of refugee workers, assisting in ensuring that freelancers gain access to local bank accounts, for example.
- ▶ **Enhancing refugee participation:** In the realm of translation, *NaTakallam* pairs refugees, host community members, and individuals from conflict zones with certified translators, potentially from global markets. This model allowed them to expand the translation department's capacity, resulting in a substantial increase in the number of refugees gaining access to income opportunities.
- ▶ **Promoting partnerships:** *NaTakallam* has incorporated upskilled partners to their team over time, betting on long-term partnerships and prioritizing impact over scale.
- ▶ **Fostering business inclusion:** *Jobtech Alliance* encourages platforms to recognize the valuable contributions refugees can make to their business' bottom line. One example of this involves assisting Jumia, an e-commerce platform in Africa, in incorporating refugees into their offline sales agent model. This strategic move broadened Jumia's business reach to the refugee community and added value to the company.
- ▶ **Demand-driven approach:** *Jobtech Alliance* also actively supports and collaborates with digital labour platforms to enhance their scalability and impact. By engaging deeply with these platforms, they identify and address barriers that may hinder refugees' participation, such as language challenges, and measure the impact for refugees.

- ▶ **Working with refugee-led organizations:** Understanding that different refugee communities have distinct needs, challenges, and experiences, *Jobtech Alliance* partners with refugee-led organizations. These organizations have an in-depth understanding of the specific dynamics within their communities. This approach avoids a one-size-fits-all model and contributes to the effectiveness of their work.

Reducing work-related risks or costs

These practices include issuing contracts for each project, offering payment assurance through escrow services, providing insurance coverage for work-related and other tasks, mediating and resolving work-related disputes, aiding workers in compliance with tax and other relevant laws, and ensuring transparency in pay and fees.

Specific practices:

- ▶ **Exploitation prevention:** *Dukkan.work* implements an exploitation prevention system to address freelancer concerns about fair wages and low pay, using the national minimum wage as a benchmark for task compensation. Task managers review and adjust client-submitted tasks to ensure fair working conditions before making them accessible to freelancers, preventing exploitation.
- ▶ **Ensuring transparency:** *AWS* ensures that freelancers are well-informed about project details, including the amount and type of work, right from the project's outset to maintain transparency.
- ▶ **Treating freelancers as primary customers:** *AWS* chose to treat freelancers as the primary customers, in contrast to traditional models that prioritize businesses, making sure, for example, that their payments were never withheld or delayed.

Improving the quality and returns to work

These practices incorporate providing a minimum level of compensation, offering clear information regarding work demand, actively gathering and incorporating worker feedback, participating in social dialogue and collective bargaining, and having a documented policy on working conditions.

Specific practices:

- ▶ **Feedback loop:** *Dukkan.work* establishes a feedback loop between freelancers and clients, especially after task completion, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
- ▶ **Enhanced fair work standards:** *AWS* goes beyond the existing platform standards by introducing additional fair work criteria. Refugees engaged in this work earn wages that are 4 to 6 times higher than the highest-paying jobs within refugee camps, and they are able to accomplish this in significantly less time.
- ▶ **Establishing regular work schedule:** *AWS'* work schedule is carefully coordinated to align with the most suitable times for freelancers, ensuring they work during regular social hours.
- ▶ **Fostering collaboration:** *AWS* realized that, at first, freelancers competed against each other for projects, hindering collaboration. However, by actively seeking feedback from freelancers, a more equitable structure was established, fostering team-work and significantly improving accuracy rates.

Providing opportunities to build skills and expertise

These practices comprise offering training programs and certifications, providing customized entry and upskilling opportunities specifically designed for forcibly displaced and host communities, and mentorship and training delivered by digital agencies, local NGOs, and social enterprises.

Specific practices:

- ▶ **Capacity development modules:** *Dukkan.work* conducts capacity development assessments with freelancers to identify unaddressed topics and provide adequate support. The platform offers transferable skills training, including project timeline calculation, conflict resolution, Turkish law for freelancers, budgeting, and pricing, among other topics, filling a gap in training opportunities in Turkey.
- ▶ **Team-based work:** *AWS* allows refugees to work in teams with host communities. Within that team-based model, they were able to gain not only the hard skills of the work itself to become experts in that topic, but also the soft skills of project management, team management, and quality assurance.

Key resources

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intracen.org. "ITC Annual Report | ITC," May 25, 2023. <https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/corporate-documents/itc-annual-report>. (On pages 48-49 you'll find a case study featuring the team Giselle has been working with in Kenya)

NaTakallam. "NaTakallam - High-Quality Language Services and Courses Delivered by Refugees." Accessed October 26, 2023. <https://natakallam.com>

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