



Governing Body

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The global refugee crisis and its labour market implications

Note for discussion

1. The forced displacement of people through crises, conflict or disasters has reached critical levels. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that at the end of 2014 there were 60 million people in the world who had been forcibly displaced, 86 per cent of whom were hosted in developing countries. Spurred by conflict, persecution, poverty or environmental disasters, refugees and other vulnerable populations are fleeing in their millions across borders in search of safety, assistance and access to livelihoods.
2. This global phenomenon is not new. Ultimately the quest for refugees and host countries alike is largely for lives of security and dignity, with and through decent work.
3. The ILO has a major role to play in the response to such crises, through addressing the labour market implications and assisting in the design of policies for countries of origin, transit and destination. Recent developments underscore that urgent action is imperative.

The ILO context and some milestones

4. The ILO is invested in addressing refugee crises:
 - The ILO Constitution calls for the “protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own”.
 - The Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), promotes and protects the rights of migrant workers and their access to employment, and specifically references refugees and displaced persons.
 - The Prime Minister of Jordan addressed the International Labour Conference in 2014 on the Syrian refugee crisis.

- The high-level side event on migration at the 2015 session of the Conference elicited widespread support for ILO action in situations of crisis migration.
 - The ILO Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR is being revised in the light of the growing refugee emergencies, with a focus on livelihoods and social protection.
 - The law and practice report *Employment and decent work for peace and resilience: Revision of the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71)*, will be the subject of discussion at the 2016 session of the Conference.
 - The International Labour Conference adopted labour migration as an outcome of the Programme and Budget for 2016–17.
 - “Jobs for Peace and Resilience” has been designated as an ILO flagship programme.
5. The ILO has translated its mandate into practical action, not only for refugees but also for internally displaced populations. It has also done so as part of the United Nations family and drawing on the directions currently being discussed in the Global Migration Group on crisis responses.
6. Work on the ground has included:
- an Employment-Intensive Investment Programme to improve agricultural roads and water catchment cisterns in northern governorates of Jordan, while helping to create short-term employment for Syrian refugees and host communities;
 - a joint ILO/UNHCR project providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to Somali refugees and host communities in the Dolo Ado area in Ethiopia;
 - execution of value chain analyses with the support of the UNHCR to identify sectors that could absorb labour demands of refugees, forced migrants and vulnerable host communities in Costa Rica, Egypt and Zambia;
 - development of train-the-trainer guides and methodologies for the UNHCR to build field capacity on livelihoods, employment creation, access to microfinance and venture capital development;
 - assessment of nearly 600 companies in Şanlıurfa, Turkey – an area with a high Syrian refugee population – on employers’ and workers’ attitudes towards employment of refugees and employment potential across different sectors in the area.
7. The present Governing Body discussion will guide the future action of the ILO, including its interaction with other UN agencies.

Proposed points for discussion

8. Beyond the immediate humanitarian imperative to save lives and to assure refugees a degree of safety and security, longer term development-oriented action is required to ensure that the impact on the host community and its needs are integrated from the outset. The evidence shows that refugee crises can result in the growth of informal employment, with long-term negative consequences for economic productivity and for working conditions in host countries. Phenomena such as child labour and forced labour may emerge or intensify, and the incidence of smuggling and human trafficking may also rise as safe access routes are closed in light of increased onward movement of refugees. At the

same time, if adequate action is taken, host countries can benefit from the skills and talents of refugees.

- (a) What practical short- and longer term responses should the ILO pursue? (Possible areas could include data collection, education and training, employment promotion for host and refugee communities, skills development, social protection, education and enterprise development.)
 - (b) Could the ILO contribute more to realizing the potential of refugees to contribute to economic growth in their host economies, by taking action to better align their skills and talents to meet labour market shortages?
9. While the world of work is central to sustainable responses, the labour market dimension has yet to be fully incorporated into global or regional crisis responses. Similarly, the role of the tripartite partners and the private sector is underestimated or often simply ignored.
 - (a) How can the ILO promote a whole-of-government approach which also incorporates the contribution of the social partners?
 - (b) How best can the ILO facilitate tripartite dialogue and cooperation among ILO member States towards longer term development-oriented solutions for labour mobility for refugees?
 - (c) What are the specific capacity-building needs of governments and social partners?
 - (d) Could the ILO help to foster and support bilateral, regional and interregional dialogue to identify more legal pathways for migration that mitigate root causes of forced migration?
10. In terms of raising awareness and sharing knowledge on the labour market dimensions of the refugee crisis:
 - (a) Could the ILO do more to promote awareness of good practices in member States and the role of the world of work in emergency and crisis response?
 - (b) How can collective experience and good practices best be shared?