



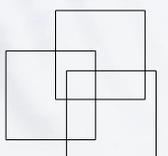
International  
Labour  
Organization

# The ILO at Work

Results 2014-2015



Arab States



ILO work in the regions

# ARAB STATES



**As widespread political instability in Arab States continued in 2014–15, the ILO's work has focused on fostering social justice through decent work opportunities by promoting sustainable enterprises, higher productivity and growth with equity. The Syrian refugee crisis has placed significant pressure on infrastructure and labour markets that are already strained, and other countries in the region have struggled with the humanitarian and economic consequences of ongoing conflict. The decline in oil prices resulted in a tightening of fiscal space in a number of oil-producing countries, including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The ILO's response to these challenges focused on integrated interventions. Regional and interregional knowledge-sharing events were a key element of its strategy for delivering on key priorities in the region and within the framework of South–South and triangular cooperation.**

*“The unique circumstances in the Middle East mean that much of our work here will focus on fragile and conflict-affected areas. Our mission is to restore and improve the livelihoods of the local communities that host these refugees, and of the refugees themselves, through a development-focused strategy. Our ultimate aim is to create social cohesion in the crisis-affected communities, through policy development, sustainable livelihoods and employment creation, as well as tackling the worst forms of child labour.”*

Ruba Jaradat, ILO Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Arab States, interview with Venture Magazine, 24 January 2016

## Addressing the youth employment and skills challenge

*“The Arab region must respond to an acute crisis of unemployment because failure to provide decent work opportunities is a potent threat to the stability of our societies. Yes, this is a global crisis, but it is most sharply felt in your countries, and especially by young people.”*

ILO Director-General Guy Ryder at the opening of the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the Arab Labour Conference, 19 April 2015

Young people account for a large percentage of the population in Arab States – eager to play an active role in shaping their own and their countries' future. Even though many women and men in the region have increased their educational qualifications, the challenge is to better match the skills of young graduates with the skills sought.

Considering the challenges women of all ages face in the Middle East and Northern African (MENA) labour market, a new report entitled “Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum in the Middle East and North Africa” was prepared by the ILO at the end of 2015. This report aims to inspire discussions in the region



## In the spotlight: New skills and jobs for Gaza fishers

30 unemployed young men from the Gaza Strip in the occupied Palestinian territory are developing technical skills and improving their chances of future employment through an ILO-organized instruction and on-the-job training scheme designed to support the vital fishing sector in the Palestinian strip. The trainees are men from families engaged in its fishing sector. They recently completed the first two phases of the scheme, which is part of the ILO's capacity-building Skills Development and Enhancement of Employability in the Fishing Sector programme, implemented in partnership with Gaza's General Syndicate of Marine Fishers. The programme works to alleviate poverty and restore livelihoods for the most vulnerable fishers in the Gaza Strip, targeting the fishers and boat owners most affected by the conflict in Gaza in the summer of 2014. The idea is to preserve the historic fishing trade in Gaza, but also to provide young people with desperately needed jobs.

Trainees receive on-site practical instruction on the repair and maintenance of boat engines and electrical generators. One of the trainees, Hussam Al Absi, said his newly acquired skills would be of great benefit to him at work:

“*I can now save myself some money and time. If a generator breaks down while I'm at sea, I no longer need to carry it ashore and back again. I can now dismantle it myself, fix it, and keep up with its regular maintenance.*”

The 30 men have now embarked on another phase of the scheme: a paid three-month, on-the-job training period. During this phase, the apprentices will apply their newly acquired skills by repairing the vessels of 20 boat owners whose boats were damaged during the events of 2014. The programme will also train 100 Gaza fishers on occupational safety and health measures and safe fish handling.



© ILO, Gaza



## Our impact, their story: Malala

Malala works 13-hour shifts six days a week in one of Jordan's many garment factories in the Al Hassan Industrial Zone in the dusty outskirts of the city of Ramtha, some 70 km north of the capital Amman. Like many other garment workers, the 25-year-old from Madagascar makes her way to the Al Hassan Industrial Zone Workers' Centre at the end of the week.

The Centre is the first of its kind in the country, serving workers in Jordan's garment sector. "I come here every Friday to dance, to use the Internet and speak to my family back home," says Malala. Around 16,000 of the zone's 25,000 workers are employed in garment factories. The large majority of these – roughly 80% – are migrants from the Asian subcontinent, mainly from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The zone is one of the 14 free-trade industrial parks branded as Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs).

Since it opened in the Al Hassan Industrial Zone in 2013, the Centre has quickly become an integral part of many migrant workers' lives. It was originally conceived by Better Work Jordan, a joint initiative between the ILO and the IFC to improve the living and working conditions of the tens of thousands of workers employed in Jordan's fast growing garment industry.

Open five evenings a week and all day on Friday, a public holiday in Jordan, workers from a number of nationalities play cricket, practise yoga, use the internet, admire art displays and meet to celebrate national and religious events. In addition to the computer room and gym, the simple, yet fully functional Centre also contains a canteen, outdoor sports facilities and classrooms offering courses in women's leadership, English and computer literacy. Thousands of workers employed in the industrial zone also have access to legal advice and trade union support at the centre.

Originally conceived as a pilot project, a sustainability plan to make the Workers' Centre self-sufficient over the next couple of years has now been developed. If successful, there are plans to replicate the model across the country.



about women and business and to motivate world of work actors to pursue equality.

In the **occupied Palestinian territory**, in partnership with the Islamic University of Gaza, the ILO's work has supported apprenticeships, updated and improved curricula and skills development on technical and business management skills for young women and men, including people with disabilities. Some 50 female sheep breeders were trained in the management of sheep farms, life skills, financial and market literacy, cooperatives and business group formation.



## Promoting fair migration

In the Middle East the proportion of migrants to local workers is among the highest in the world, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, and migration from Asia to those States is one of the world's fastest growing and most dynamic labour flows.

Sound migration policy involves much more than fighting irregular migration and tightening border controls. It entails the identification of long-term interests and labour market needs anchored in basic human rights and effective mechanisms with broad social consensus.

In 2014–15 the ILO supported the sharing of good practices between sending and receiving countries on domestic workers' rights. An interregional policy dialogue on labour flows for constituents and experts from Arab States and Asia and the Pacific led to a common strategy for a fair migration agenda between the two regions.



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## Our impact, their story: Jennifer

In July 2006 Jennifer, who wishes to withhold her family name, did not wish to renew her contract to work in Lebanon as a migrant domestic worker. She said she no longer felt safe in Lebanon. Instead of the US\$ 200 a month promised her by a Philippine recruitment agency, the family who employed her only paid her US\$ 150. In addition, her employers kept a large part, on the understanding that she would receive the full amount at the end of her two-year contract.

For many of the migrant domestic workers living and working in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region, employment, working and living conditions promised them in their home countries rarely match reality in the host country. The ILO estimates that there are 600,000 forced labour victims in the Middle East. "I just wanted to go home," Jennifer said. She decided that as soon as her contract finished early the following year, she would return home to the Philippines. When she told her employers she did not want to renew her contract, however, they insisted she had to remain.

The majority of migrant domestic workers in the Middle East are bound by the "kafala" system, which ties workers to their employers, restricting the workers' ability to move freely, terminate their employment contracts, or change employers. "I told them I would go to the Philippine Embassy," said Jennifer. Even then, they held on to her passport, a common practice in the Middle East, where the "kafeel," or sponsor, takes all the migrant domestic worker's identity documents. "I went anyway. I went out

and asked another domestic worker where I could find the embassy. She gave me directions, and I just walked and walked," said Jennifer, speaking to the ILO by telephone from her hometown of Vintar in North-Western Philippines, where she now works as a teacher.

The Philippine embassy took Jennifer in for two weeks, and arranged for her flight back home. But after many months of arduous work in Lebanon, she was forced to leave without her unpaid wages. Although this was the end of Jennifer's ordeal as a migrant domestic worker in Lebanon, it was the start of her long journey to achieve justice through the Lebanese judicial system.

Before she left Lebanon, Jennifer sought help from Caritas volunteer lawyer Antoun Hachem. She hoped he could help her recover her outstanding wages. The first time a Lebanese court ruled in favour of a migrant domestic worker was in 2005.

In 2014, seven years after speaking to Jennifer at the Philippine Embassy in Beirut, Hachem finally had some good news. Caritas had managed to get a ruling in her favour, and the wages her former employers owe her have now been transferred to her. These landmark rulings show that Lebanon is on the right track to making access to justice a reality for migrant domestic workers.



The ILO successfully launched, in 2014-15, a new migration dialogue process by convening an Interregional Experts Meeting between Asia and the Arab States, held in Nepal, and a Regional Tripartite Meeting on Challenges to Labour Migration Policy and Management in Asia, held in Indonesia, to discuss ways forward on migration governance – to garner high-level agreement on an interregional roadmap for fair migration.

Domestic workers make up the majority of registered female migrants in the GCC states, Lebanon, Jordan, and Yemen, where they earn less than half of average wages, experience long and unpredictable working hours, and remain one of the least protected groups under national labour legislation.

In **Lebanon** a new trade union has been created to represent domestic workers only, and an ILO-funded hotline – which allows migrant domestic workers to report cases of mistreatment or abuse, and receive help and counselling – was launched recently by Lebanon’s Ministry of Labour. Over the past two years, an information guide for migrant domestic workers – outlining existing rules and regulations in force in Lebanon, including the standard employment contract – has been disseminated in seven languages and benefited 60,000 people.

## Extending social protection

“Not only is social protection good for social goals – it helps us to achieve economic ones too. People who can rely on it are better placed to confront change in our economies and to adapt to it. Well educated, healthy, and well-nourished, they are productive. But we know that these positive linkages between social and economic policies need to be cultivated.

ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in his address to the Second Arab Forum on Employment & Development, Riyadh, 24 February 2014



Although all Arab countries provide some forms of social security coverage (usually pension schemes covering old age, survivors, disability, and work injury benefits), fewer than 50 per cent of women, men and their families enjoy adequate access. The ILO has supported several Arab countries in extending the range, level and coverage of social protection by promoting policies and giving assistance to countries to help expand the coverage of pensions, unemployment protection and maternity protection schemes.

In 2014–15 the ILO assisted **Iraq, Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory, Oman** and **Saudi Arabia** to develop policies that will improve social security coverage for excluded groups in particular. An ILO-convened seminar ensured regional buy-in and led, for example, to an action plan for the establishment of the new social security administration in the **occupied Palestinian territory** and the development of an unemployment

insurance scheme, currently in progress in **Oman**. The **occupied Palestinian territory's** recently adopted first social security act covering private sector workers and their families will provide coverage to 82,646 workers in 2016, with the aim of reaching 336,440 by 2030. Overall, and with the introduction of a Social Protection Floor in the occupied Palestinian territory – which forms a part of its Decent Work Country Programme – it is foreseen that some 2 million Palestinians will benefit.



# Responding to the Syrian refugee crisis



*We, together with the whole world, were taken by surprise by the Syrian problem, which resulted in the displacement of large numbers of Syrian citizens. For many of these Jordan was their first destination, which has increased pressure on our existing infrastructure and basic service provision. This pressure has led the government to invest extensively in the host communities receiving these huge numbers of refugees, in particular in the areas of education, health, water, sanitation, energy, transportation and security. Perhaps the greatest impact of this process is that we are able to evaluate what has been its impact on the informal labour market.*

H.E. Mr Abdullah Ensour, Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 103<sup>rd</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference, 9 June 2014



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Over 4.8 million women, men and their families have fled Syria five years into the country's conflict, making the refugee crisis one of the largest, most protracted, complex humanitarian emergencies of modern times. Jordan – with its population of 6.4 million – has an expanding Syrian refugee population of more than 651,000. In Lebanon refugees now account for one in four people; and Iraq is host to almost 250,000 refugees. Hundreds of thousands of unregistered refugees may have to be added to these.

The ILO targets host communities and refugees so as to maintain and reinforce the social and economic stability of the affected neighbouring countries. In **Jordan** and **Lebanon** the ILO has supported development-led and employment-driven interventions for refugees and host communities. The ILO has been actively engaged in the design and implementation of the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) 2015–16 and the national response plans in Jordan and Lebanon, which address both humanitarian and development aspects in an integrated manner. The ILO's contribution to these plans has focused, in particular, on job creation and livelihoods, working conditions, and the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

An interregional dialogue on the labour market impact of the Syrian refugee crisis in host communities, convened by the ILO in 2015, strengthened tripartite coordination between **Egypt**, **Iraq**, **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and **Turkey** to improve analysis and effective crisis responses at national and regional levels.

## In the spotlight: Using irrigation to ease the strain of the refugee crisis

Keeping crops adequately irrigated can be tough in Jordan, one of the world's most water-poor countries. It is certainly a challenge for Younes Shdeifat, a farmer in the underprivileged and agriculture-dependent Northern Governorate of Mafraq.



© ILO/IK Al-Jarmi, Jordan



But thanks to an ILO pilot employment-intensive investment programme (EIIIP) that helped him build a simple but effective rain harvesting system, he should soon be able to start growing almonds on a modest-sized plot of land that lay fallow for years due to the scarcity of water in the area, which is classified as an arid to semiarid region. Younes says he could not have started farming the land without the backing of the ILO project, which aims to improve local infrastructure, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable farmers.

“I’ve been trying to find someone to help me improve my farm’s infrastructure for a very long time,” he said. “I cannot plant trees without a water source. Instead of wasting the rainwater each year, I want to make use of it for the farm. The best way to do this is through the use of traditional water harvesting techniques like water catchments.

Through the initiative, which is being implemented with the Ministry of Agriculture and a number of

local partners, Younes now also has terracing around his farm to reduce soil erosion. But he is not the only one benefiting from this project.

The local community hosts a large number of refugees fleeing the crisis in neighbouring Syria, placing further pressure on the local labour market and public services. Local workers were employed to build the water catchment and the terracing, creating jobs and thus helping ease the strain of the refugee crisis on the local host community. These efforts are part of the ILO’s wider response to the Syrian refugee crisis in the north of Jordan, where the number of Syrians is the greatest.

The ILO hopes to expand these pilot projects to reach more areas, which have been hard hit by the influx of refugees.



© ILO/IK Al-Jarmi, Jordan



“A strict line between humanitarian and development dimensions has become increasingly difficult to maintain... Consequently, jobs and livelihoods are moving to the centre stage.

Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General

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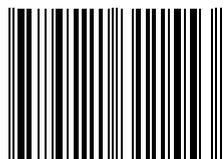
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