

## Labour mobility as part of the solution

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**While refugee families lack access to work and struggle to survive, there are skills gaps around the world that could benefit from skilled refugees' talents. Developing a system for refugees to be able to compete for international jobs with multinational companies would provide a legal migration path for many.**

Syrian refugees have very limited options for supporting themselves. Resettlement in other countries is only available for a very small percentage of the most vulnerable refugees and there appear to be no options either for long-term integration in the neighbouring countries or for imminent return.

Many of the refugees currently living in the Middle East are professionals or other skilled workers whose talents could help fill labour gaps around the world, especially in developing nations. Engaging the private sector to take advantage of this unacknowledged pool of talent could provide a new solution for many thousands of refugee families.

There is a desperate need for alternative solutions. International work opportunities, for example, would enable refugees to find a livelihood and self-reliance. Many countries around the world legally admit labour migrants, especially those with special talents and skills, and many multinational employers globally recruit and deploy skilled workers. A survey by UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) in December 2015 found that 86% of refugees who had recently arrived in Greece had a high level of education, at secondary or university level.<sup>1</sup> There are substantial numbers of engineers, accountants, computer programmers, doctors, nurses and teachers among the Syrian refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Developing a system for refugees to be able to compete for international jobs with multinational companies would provide a legal migration path for refugees. Refugees who take jobs in other countries would be able to gain an income to support their families, maintain or increase their skills, acquire new work experience and end their dependence on limited humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, facilitating the movement of refugees for work opportunities would alleviate some of the pressure on Syria's neighbours, and on Europe, by providing refugees with safe and legal alternatives.

### Need for workers

There are shortages of trained workers in almost every nation, especially in parts of South America, Africa and central Asia where there is a need for engineers, IT professionals, nurses and other skilled employees and professionals. A recent survey of more than 41,000 hiring managers in 42 countries and territories by Manpower Group concludes that "globally, 38% of employers are having difficulty filling jobs in 2015."<sup>2</sup> Refugee employment can help solve this problem for companies by making available skilled employees for hard-to-fill job assignments.

In recent years there has been much discussion about alternatives to the three traditional durable solutions for refugees of voluntary return home, resettlement and local integration, with labour mobility being one of the ideas widely discussed. Matching skilled refugees and international work opportunities is a pathway that has not been utilised since the period following the First World War, when the International Labour Organization matched refugees with work internationally. Hundreds of thousands of refugees without legal papers were at that time issued Nansen passports that allowed them to travel for work.<sup>3</sup>

Around the world there are multinational companies currently hiring foreign talent for hard-to-fill jobs. Many countries are open to providing work visas to encourage skilled labour. Migrants, including forced migrants, can contribute to the local economies of other countries and regions, as the World

Bank's 2015/2016 Global Monitoring Report explains.<sup>4</sup> They can bring productive skills to communities and help complete essential development projects in places where those skills do not exist among the local population.

The fact that several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a focus on migration shows increased recognition that migrants contribute to international development. Labour mobility of refugees could help advance three of the SDGs directly and many more indirectly. Providing productive employment, furthering development and cooperating internationally support Goals 8, 9 and 17. Having skilled refugees engage in productive work has the potential to shift attitudes as more people see how refugees contribute to development, communities and local economies. Skilled refugees will be seen as assets, people who can make valuable contributions.

### Opportunities and challenges

Labour mobility opportunities will mean refugees having more options to decide for themselves where to work and how to support themselves. All refugees, including unskilled refugees, should be allowed the opportunity to work locally and internationally. Regrettably, this is currently far from the reality – but labour mobility for skilled refugees is a beginning.

There are a number of operational challenges, including making sure that refugees have access to accurate information, conducting language and skills verification, arranging travel documents and determining post-employment options, but none are insurmountable. Labour mobility supplements the traditional durable solutions – an additional option to address a vast problem and an opportunity to engage new partners and additional countries in a global effort.

A key to moving forward is the desire among the private sector and governments to facilitate these opportunities. Fortunately, there is interest from the private sector in contributing to solutions for forced displacement, and numerous companies have signed up to be members of the Solutions

Alliance.<sup>5</sup> The private sector is playing an important role with the response in Europe as an increasing number of companies appear to be willing to hire qualified refugees. But more companies need to consider hiring from the refugee talent pool and governments need to support inclusive business practices by providing work visas, in addition to resettlement slots, for refugees. Labour mobility will also allow the private sector – as well as countries that have not yet been part of the response to the crisis in the Middle East – the opportunity to participate while simultaneously benefitting.

The global refugee crisis needs new initiatives and solutions. Labour mobility can become a reality as it was almost 100 years ago. It can be part of the answer to the current humanitarian crisis by granting refugees a legal pathway for becoming self-reliant and building for their future. Companies and countries will have opportunities in September 2016 to pledge their support for labour mobility for refugees at the forthcoming UN and US high-level meetings on mobility and refugees.

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Talent Beyond Boundaries was founded to provide a private sector pathway for skilled refugees to find international employment.  
[www.talentbeyondboundaries.org](http://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org)

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5. [www.solutionsalliance.org](http://www.solutionsalliance.org)