

## **The Enabling and Blocking Factors which Affect the Engagement of the Refugees in the Labour Market in the Hosting Countries**

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**Abstract.** Counting refugees mathematically as an extra cost and just a burden for the hosting country creates a situation where the country is growing up an issue, instead of capitalizing on the opportunity that exist in refugees' influx as a human resource, new blood, different thinking and as well opportunity for cultural integration. Engaging refugees in the hosting community is faced with different challenges including government regulations, policies, and scarcity of resources. Therefore, overcoming such issues require deploying innovative enablers which focus mainly on converting refugees to a productive human without interrupting the labour market ability to create opportunities for local citizens. The most prominent enabler for refugees is to develop their entrepreneurial skills and direct them to add value to the local economy through enterprises that create jobs in the long run.

**Keywords:** *refugees, empowerment, entrepreneurship, immigrants, innovation*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Forced displacement of people due to war, political instability, natural force majeure, and the need to engage such type of refugees in the hosting communities and offering them the opportunity to work is a challenging issue. Refugees usually are hosted in camps in the hosting countries, camps where usually prepared to provide the very minimum needs to the refugees such as the shelters, basic food, and primary health care. Therefore, keeping refugees within a camp on the long-run will negatively affect their development in the future as it keeps the feeling of non-commitment, non-integration with the local community, and the creation of desperate sense about the future of the refugees and their children.

The past experience in the countries that historically have been marked to be migrant communities such as the United State of America (USA), indicates that migrants can be a valuable human capital once managed in the right way and engaged gradually in the local community. Refugees add new knowledge, new experience and culture to the hosting community, which boost the local community

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for a list of abbreviations.

productivity and innovation through exposure to new ideas and different thinking methodology (Shields et al., 2016). The literature shows that considering the value of the human resources of refugees has a significant impact on economic development (Oesch, 2017; Gennaioli et al., 2011). The impact of immigrants on economic development was explained through the endogenous growth theory, which undertakes that innovation and technological progress are the main engines of long-run economic growth (Romer, 1989). Squicciarini and Voigtländer (2014) assumed that high-skilled immigrant brings advanced knowledge to the host country, where they can have a tremendous impact on technology diffusion and productivity growth.

In reality, immigrants and refugees are human resources that should be capitalized in order to be usefully utilized in the local communities and give the return to the hosting countries. Such an approach would face a certain resistance and obstacles, and at the same time, it needs a certain enablers to be successful. This article explores the obstacles and enabling factors that affect the engagement of the refugees in the labour market of the hosting countries and try to highlight how such obstacles and enablers are differing from one country to another according to the degree of economic development in these countries. This article anticipates that offering the refugees the opportunity to innovate and create entrepreneurial opportunities for them, would cater for their engagement and fulfil their needs and build their skills power; thus, that would lead to integrate them in the labour market. Also, it will focus exclusively on Jordan, but it seems reasonable to assume that some of the points made could be carried over other countries.

## **Literature Review**

The phenomenon of forced displacement has led historically to core changes in the world shape. For example, the forced displacement of Jewish from European Union (EU) to America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century has shaped the community structure and culture in the American content, and the forced displacement of European in the second world war, to countries like USA and Russia, shaped the creativity and invention culture in these countries in the following decades (United Nations, 2003).

According to Akcigit and Grigsby (2017), in the USA, immigrants accounted for 19.6% of all inventors between 1880 and 1940. Immigrant inventors were

prevalent in the medical inventions accounted for the largest share of immigrants. Immigrants were also active in chemicals and electricity; these sectors are having a high impact on the US economy in general, and their impact in these sectors accounting for 13.9% and 12.6% of all US patents. Overall, immigrants accounted for at least 16% of patents in every area.

Imrak (2018) stated that the needs of the refugees should be investigated following Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The Maslow's hierarchy starts basically with the essential need for food, water, and develop over time to other needs such as fulfilment needs. The same applies to refugees, and consideration for their needs beyond emergent needs for home, food and security, and that should be considered through developing policies and strategies that focus on fulfilling such needs. The response to such needs through the right setup of regulations is part of the core enablers for the refugees' community.

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at Global Trends in Forced Displacement report in (2019), today 1 out of every 108 people in the world is displaced, the number of forcibly displaced people both within countries and across borders as a result of persecution, conflict, or generalized violence has grown by over 50% in the last 10 years, there were 43.3 million forcibly displaced people in 2009, and the figure was 70.8 million by the end of 2018. The statistics of the UNHCR shows that two thirds (67%) of refugees in 2018 came from five countries, namely Syria, Afghanistan, South Soudan, Myanmar, Somalia. Of the around 70.8 million forcibly displaced within countries and across borders, 13.6 million people were newly displaced in 2018, of which 10.8 million individuals were displaced within the borders of their own countries and 2.8 million were newly displaced refugees and new asylum-seekers.

According to Diaconu (2015), the humanitarian challenges are the short-term outcomes of receiving refugees, but there should be a perception of the long-term effect of refugees on host countries and recognize the contribution they can make to the local economies by considering them as a human capital and deploying their skills portfolio to the economic development process, and through spurring consumption and market demand. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in (2017) addressed that there is a critical need to connect short-term humanitarian needs to long-term planning that focus on the engagement of refugees in the economic development plans. Such action would require policymakers to understand the value of refugees as a human resource and put in

place long-term plans that allow for their integration in the local community, and their conversion to productive resources.

UNHCR focuses on the composition of the forcibly displaced refugees and the need to consider the life cycle and fast development of a new generation of refugees as a result of the birth rate. The new generation has challenging needs of involvement, motivation, and aspiration that develop within the refugees' community over time (UNHCR, 2006). The UNHCR is emphasizing the need for long-term planning of refugees' capitalization of resources and integration in the local community as a tool to avoid unfavourable consequences of stagnation of a certain status and to avoid an increase of their burden over time with the increase in their number as a result of a natural growth.

The Economist assumed that the first step in establishing long-term plans for integrating the refugees in the community is to look at them as new blood to revolutionize how things are done and to change the mindset of the locals who are embedded and possibly limited by the status quo (The Economist, 2018). According to Sengupta and Blessinger (2018) economies tend to narrow or stagnate over time and struggle for innovation. Ideas, paradigms and techniques of measurement from outside, whether new or old, can impact as revitalizing forces. Of course, some people tend not to hear of all the immigrants' ideas that found no traction. For an immigrant to bring useful knowledge they must normally possess a significant social capital. In other words, economists and regulators turn to be reactive if they are stuck with finding solutions to a struggling economy instead of being proactive and capable of thinking innovatively and bringing bright solutions through creating a different way to do things. Sengupta and Blessinger (2018) stated that it is essential to look to the background of the forced refugees and study the economic practices in their original countries to understand their value and how they can be capitalized within the local economies.

Birch (2016) argued that integrating the refugees within the local economies would require a focus on entrepreneurship and innovation mix, as a path for creating job opportunities, and offering the required ground for refugees to showcase their skills and innovative ideas in the market. Currently, the development in the international economies that arose through innovation in the social economies, which enabled through the modern Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are opening the door to thinking about innovative solutions to engage refugees in labour markets. He also discussed that most developing countries could

host more immigrants and refugees because of the creation of innovation and entrepreneurship mix, that surge the economic growth and job creation. Such economies have higher efficiency in integrating refugees in the local communities and provide them with a convenient opportunity to work and develop.

Akar and Erdoğdu (2019) argued that innovation is the seed for successful entrepreneurship, but unless there was a political, economic and social environment that supports entrepreneurship. Innovation would have a limited effect on the economy and would be retained as useless ideas. They suggested that governments must understand the structure, skills, and capabilities of the refugees, and how such capabilities can be capitalized in the local market.

Betts *et al.* (2015) mentioned that empowering innovation through entrepreneurship would be a starting point to create opportunities for refugees to be successful entrepreneurs that contribute positively to the local economic growth and sustainability. They agreed to the importance of organizing the flow of refugees into the regular economic cycle, and the step by step engagement in the economic sectors. Empowerment of innovation is very critical for the flourish of ideas, and a key motivator to create a community that is keen to support the innovation culture within its new generation through adopting innovation in the raising and education of children to create a generation that considers innovation the first choice of living instead of going to the traditional employment choice. Kulke (2011) supports this idea by discussing that individual innovation leads to healthy growth and diversification in economic activities, and the accumulated individual innovations that are turn to be enterprises lead to changes in the way the community is responding to integration and involvement issues of refugees as it offers an opportunity for integration of skills and offers job opportunities for local citizens, which in turn offer the opportunity for citizens and refugees to work together hand by hand, and to exchange culture.

Alshoubaki and Harris (2018) argued that government bodies in developing countries are unable to take responsibility and drive the integration process of refugees by themselves. They added that there is a different limitation to the capacity in terms of resources, experience, and regulatory framework of the local government agencies in those countries to cope with the refugees' integration and development challenges. That is why the role of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is of growing importance in these countries.

## ***Empowerment Theory***

In general, the term empowerment started to be applied by academics since the 1970s in the field of social services, social psychology, public health, adult literacy and community development (Simon, 1994). After the year 1987, the use of the term increased in expressing the need for achieving women's rights in the political and economic domain (Sen and Grown, 1987). The use of this term has widened today to include every aspect of life, including political, business and other aspects. Recently the term empowerment entered into the terminology used by international development organizations, with focus on using the term as one of the tools or methodologies of poverty reduction. The concept of empowerment was broadened to be included in community and civil society development terminology.

To a broad extent, integrating refugees within local communities would require a level of empowerment of the social and economic levels to enable the refugees to gain the rights that facilitate their living and development needs. According to Sengupta and Blessinger (2018), empowerment involves having a sense of purpose, so people can explore their skills and talents and at the same time feel belonging to a community. So, part of the empowerment is to realize self-confidence, and the other part is related to social belonging. In this domain, the empowerment theory focuses on creating a link between individual well-being needs, and the social, political and economic environment where individuals settled (Ritzer, 2011).

According to Almeida and Cavalieri (2018) the empowerment process is a collective social process of creating a community, achieving better control over the environment, and decision making in which groups, organizations or communities participate. This comes in line with the heart of the empowerment theory where it suggests the creation of clear integration at different levels in the community that leads to harmony of empowerment at the individual, society, and professional levels with consideration to the key elements of empowerment being the social, economic, political and cultural elements.

Refugees' resettlement in a third country would require extending support of welfare facilities from the hosting countries. However, most of the hosting countries fail to introduce programs that convert resettled refugees to self-dependent community members, which lead to an increase in the burden on welfare programs in these countries. Higgins (1999) and Kadri (2009) highlighted in their

studies that issue, and indicated that after many years of resettlement in a third country, refugees still find themselves dependent on state welfare benefits, which negatively affect the community at the social and economic levels, since it creates a sort of hidden unemployment, lower the opportunity for refugees to engage in the community, create isolated generations on the long-term, and to lose the opportunity to benefit from the power involved in such human sources.

Connecting innovation to the inherited skills of Syrian, which focus on the need for individuals to be self-dependent and to try always to find a source of living even through micro-projects, that could lead to the conclusion that inspiring innovation within the Syrian refugees community, and providing the required enablers for these refugees to develop their own Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), which would lead to situation where Syrians would be responsible to create their own projects, and drive such project to be successful SMEs that sustain their living. On the other hand, the economy in Jordan, which to a high extent is dependent on the SMEs sector as a driver of economic growth, would benefit from increasing attrition of new ventures and add-up to the capability of the SMEs sector to generate business opportunities and new jobs that allow for both citizens and refugees to benefit from such socio-economic development.

The engagement of the Syrian refugees in the labor market would require having different enablers to be on the ground to activate such action. These enablers according to Errighi and Griese (2016) include; the development of a comprehensive national development strategy that counts for the refugees as a human resource, development of policies and regulations that govern the engagement process and incorporate a public decision-making process that put such regulations into action. On the other hand, there is a need to empower Syrian refugees and encourage the innovation skills among them in order to lead them toward enterprises that are needed in the economic context of the country, organize their activities, and provide support for such entrepreneurship activities. Activating such enablers would require long-term planning that would provide a framework of cooperation between the government of Jordan, International NGOs, and the local NGOs in order to deliver harmonized actions on the ground and grasp long-term benefits.

The challenge remains in creating joint plants and joint efforts for the official bodies and NGOs that would be able to provide successful action on the ground and introduce harmonized productive effort that gives returns to the local economy and the Syrian refugees at the same time.

## **Capacity Building**

Capacity building is one of the tools NGOs are using to leverage the skills and increase integration and empowerment of refugees in the local community. Capacity building is a widespread term and a common reference in developing contexts. The term is indicating to the human attributes within the context of a system that could create value for development, specifically, those attributes allowing a human system to create value for development (Morgan, 2006).

Some scholars define capacity building as the overall ability of a system to perform and sustain itself in the long run through a coherent combination of competencies and capabilities (Zinke, 2006; Alaerts and Kaspersma, 2009). Such definition indicates that capacity building could be realized through collective abilities including (according to Krishnaveni and Sujatha (2012) the use of knowledge to solve problems, and manage resources effectively, and maintaining momentum in the performance that allows for gradual independence and skip of external support. Other scholars refer to capacity as a combination of attributes, capabilities, and relationships that enable a system to exist, adapt and perform (European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2008). Such definition would require the deployment of core capabilities such as belonging, commitment, adaptation, self-development as a fundamental to gain capacity (Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010).

A UN study in 2013 assumes that individuals have certain capacities, which are the outcome of previous learning, self-development, culture and gained skills. Such capabilities need focus and development to be turned to a productive accumulated attribute, and such capabilities need development under the group development context, which indicates to capacity building (United Nations, 2013). LaFond and Brown (2003) indicate that capacity building is a crucial term that is linking capacity indicators to performance indicators, and therefore, they point out that measurement for capacity building and expected outcomes in terms of performance should be gradual and split into stages to grasp the real benefits of capacity building.

Capacity building has been adopted as a mechanism of developing the capabilities of the Syrian refugees by the NGOs operating in the country such as International Labour Organization ILO, UNITED Nations (UN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UNICEF. Such an approach allowed for a positive impact on the level of engagement, involvement, self-confidence, and self-



dependence in addition to leverage of entrepreneurship spirit in the refugees' community. Chowdhury and Willmot (2019) highlight that the work of the NGOs lack real immersing in circumstances of the supported marginalised communities. This reflects shortcomings in terms of action in the development context which differs from what they are reflecting through their researches and textbooks. In other words, there is a concern applies to the situation of NGOs in Jordan, as the general observations indicate that these NGOs are lacking efficiency in reaching to the root of refugees' challenges, and their programs miss integration and sustainability due to diversity of stakeholders, and absence of integrated planning, which could be, in part, a result of low immersing within the refugee community. Therefore, more effort is needed to realize indicative results of the capacity building programs at the national economic level.

Despite that argument, capacity building is still offering the opportunity for refugees to explore their talents pool, give them the motivation to innovate, and the confidence to turn into entrepreneurs.

## **Research Methodology**

This research paper is touching base with a social issue, that requires the adoption of qualitative research method, focus on gathering and analyzing the social aspects of the issue more than the statistical aspects. Therefore, in order to meet the research objectives and obtain acceptable results, an empirical research approach was designed and implemented. This research approach focuses on applying the qualitative research methods that were utilized to collect primary data and conduct an analysis of such data. This approach led to more rationale and relevant outcomes that enrich, examine, and explain those issues raised by the researcher.

The topic of the research is considered a new one in terms of its scope and objectives; this is considered a challenge in choosing an effective methodology that serves the objectives of the research. Therefore, this research conducted by applying a qualitative method to collect primary data through conducting a specific type of interviews, usually, depending on the research objectives. Therefore, the semi-structural interviews are the proper data collection method which was adopted in this research to give a better understanding and explore the research subject's opinions, behaviour, and experiences. Moreover, the researcher conducted a

thorough review of existing research, including secondary and tertiary resources, to develop a thorough understanding of the subject. The research also evaluated relevant books, articles, research papers and reports published by credible resources. The framework recommended by Saunders *et al.* (2015) was used to assess the age of the source, its validity, context, popularity, biasness, methodological omissions and precision.

The research was based on the case of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The researcher sake to strengthen the research through in-depth literature review, and then use primary resources through conducting interviews to a selective sample of Syrian refugees in Jordan and a group of workers in the government and international bodies that offer different types of services to the Syrian refugees in Jordan. The interview includes questions that touch all the aspects related to the research subject and objectives. That enabled the researcher to gather a large amount of data that is representative of the Syrian refugees' status and future potential, also provide the researcher with the ability to identify critical factors that would act as enablers or barriers to engaging Syrians in the local labour market.

The collected data from interviews in addition to the information built up about the subject through literature review and secondary resources were tabulated, and in-depth analysis and correlation aspects of the data conducted in order to build the reach to the conclusion that would shape the framework model development. The collected data from interviews and the information built up about the subject through literature review and secondary resources were formulated. The analysis was conducted taking into consideration applying the theoretical framework and building correlation between different data sources in order to reach the conclusion that would shape the framework model development.

Finally, based on the findings, the researcher would formalize the recommendations. The sample was designed to reflect the population included or in direct relation with the management of the Syrian refugees in Al Zaatari Camp in Jordan. Two samples are set to be the subject of interviews for this research. The second sample was structured from workers of the government organizations and international bodies (NGOs) that are providing different types of services to the Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The analysis conducted by finding out the interrelation between data items and apply the theoretical framework to the data and then present a logical, analytical argument to conclude the findings and recommendations of this study.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

Refugees resettlement in a third country would require extending support of welfare facilities from the hosting countries. However, most of the hosting countries fail to introduce programs that convert resettled refugees to self-dependent community members, which leads to an increase in the burden on welfare programs in these countries. Higgins (1999) and Kadri (2009) highlighted in their studies that issue and indicating that after many years of resettlement in a third country, refugees still find themselves still dependent on state welfare benefits, which negatively affect the community at the social and economic levels, since it creates a sort of hidden unemployment, lower the opportunity for refugees to engage in the community, create isolated generations on the long-term, and to lose the opportunity to benefit from the power involved in such human sources.

According to the interviews conducted with different NGOs representatives in Jordan such as the EU, UNDP, UNICEF, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and ILO; these NGOs and others in Jordan are introducing a wide range of products and services to the Syrian refugees. This support of services and products are either direct or indirect support. The direct support includes; health, safety, access to medical services in addition to basic needs such as clean water, food, and energy, whereas, the indirect support is directed to the development of infrastructure, service centres, business incubators and medical centres. The programs that support innovation and innovation culture among refugees are limited and lack sustainability.

This status was supported by the refugees' answers to the question of the support type they are getting, their responses indicated that their education level and skills are low, since only 0.15% of the sample holding a bachelor's degree, while the rest have completed a school grade, mostly below the secondary grade. At the same time, 80% of the sample are having some soft skills in communication and dealing with others. It was apparent that some of these skills were gained through a hard time of settling down in the camp, and the need for cooperation and communication between people to facilitate their life needs. This created a good level of interpersonal skills. 20% of the interviewees are having technical skills like computer skills, construction, and cooking.

Most of the refugees in the sample were not able to access any kind of skills development or capacity building programs since they mentioned that their skills

development is dependent on whether they got a job or not, and on their effort to develop their communication and interpersonal skills. Overall, the interviewee showed enthusiasm and need for skills development, but at the same time, they showed pessimism toward being able to get the opportunity to work.

A discussion paper published by the EU Commission indicates that innovation is an inspiring tool for refugees that allow them to direct their thinking about productive ideas, which could generate an independent work, consequently, independent income if it was deployed within the context of entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Errighi and Griesse, 2016). Connecting innovation to the inherited skills of refugees, which focus on the need for individuals to be self-dependent and to try always to find a source of living through micro-projects that could lead to the conclusion that inspiring innovation within the refugees' community, and providing the required enablers for these refugees to develop their own Micro-Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), would lead to a situation where refugees would be responsible to create their own projects and drive such project to be successful MSMEs that sustain their living. On the other hand, the economy in the less developed countries, which is to a high extent dependent on the MSMEs sector as a driver of economic growth, would benefit from increasing attrition of new ventures and add-up to the capability of the MSMEs sector to generate business opportunities and new jobs that allow for both citizens and refugees to benefit from such socio-economic development.

Therefore, the engagement of the refugees in the labour market would require having different enablers to be on the ground to activate such action. These enablers according to Errighi and Griesse (2016) are including the development of a comprehensive national development strategy that counts for the refugees as a human resource, development of policies and regulations that govern the engagement process and incorporate a public decision-making process that put such regulations into action. On the other hand, there is a need to empower refugees and aspire the innovation skills among them in order to lead them toward enterprises that are needed in the economic context of the country, organize their activities, and provide support for such entrepreneurship activities. Activating such enablers would require long-term planning that would provide a framework of cooperation between the governmental bodies in the hosting countries, international NGOs, and the local NGOs in order to deliver harmonized actions on the ground and grasp long-term benefits.

In Jordan, for example, the lack of coordination and harmonization between the local NGOs and the international NGOs limit the scope of influence and efficiency of programs targeting refugees' development and integration. This situation is apparent especially in cities other than the capital Amman. On the other hand, the official bodies interaction and response to support, facilitate and integrate with the NGOs program is usually slow and does not provide the required momentum for the success of these programs. This situation due mainly to the bureaucratic management style in the government bodies that are restricted by regulations and instructions that keep the efficiency level of such programs.

Overall, the challenge remains in creating joint plans and joint efforts for the official bodies and NGOs, that would be able to provide successful action on the ground and introduce harmonised productive effort that gives returns to the local economy and the refugees' community at the same time.

## **Conclusion**

The Syrian refugees are actually trying to innovate their own solutions, so they developed a market within the camp, and they developed their own supply and logistics chains as well. Some of them have developed their own freelance jobs in the domain of website development, maintenance services, and home care services. Some of the home-based businesses also have been developed, such as cooking and preparation of salads, sweets, etc.

Refugees are a human capital, and despite of the burden they represent for the hosting countries, considering the value of their skills, culture and inherited abilities would benefit the hosting communities in terms of engaging a new method of thinking, and different scale of experience. Such engagement facing different obstacles including the regulations framework, and the local cultural resistance for the refugees' integration. On the other hand, to overcome the issues that could arise from maintaining a situation of refugee in the community, there is a need for certain enablers that convert the refugee into a productive human that add value for the hosting community. These enablers include building the capacity, offering the opportunity for learning and training, and entrepreneurship culture within the refugees' community that could serve in inspiring the MSME sector, and participate in creating jobs and more diversity in the sector. This needs special planning and effort from the hosting community, and different set of thinking. Such enablers can

be part of the stabilization process which helps to offer the refugees the ability to settle down, get a source for living, get the opportunity to learn, and the most important is to get a job and start to engage in the community.



**Figure.1: Barbershop store inside the camp (by researcher)**

Refugees to the development plans in Jordan is critical to define the opportunities and value of such integration and to direct such integration toward supporting the SMEs economy through entrepreneurship, since SMEs represent the vital economic sector that has the potential to drive Jordan development and growth plans. Furthermore, it worth to mention that the NGOs-SMEs' relationship is a vital one for community development. Therefore, future research could consider this subject as an essential method in developing communities.

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### Appendix 1: List of abbreviations

Abbreviations	
EU	European Union
USA & US	United State of America
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ICTs	Information and Communications Technologies
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN	United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
UNICEF	The United Nations International Children's Fund is a United Nations
MSMEs	Micro-Small & Medium Enterprises