The Syrian Civil War has displaced about 12 million people, with Syrians both displaced internally inside Syria and having fled across Syria’s borders as refugees. The largest number of refugees are living in three neighboring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. While host countries have generously received the Syrians, and many Syrians are working, their sheer numbers have strained local labor markets, public services, and social harmony.

Syrian refugees in these countries need more than just ongoing humanitarian assistance. They need the self-sufficiency, dignity, opportunities, and hope that come from jobs. RAND researchers conducted six surveys with Syrians and local firms and 36 focus groups of displaced Syrians and host communities to pinpoint which policies might help create new economic opportunities, both for the refugees and for host-nation workers.
Syrian Refugees Have Been Working and Contributing . . . but They Need Better Opportunities and Training

Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan have all made considerable efforts and sacrifices to accommodate the Syrian refugees. Many Syrians are working and finding ways to get by, and large majorities report that they are treated fairly by employers and coworkers. However, unemployment among refugees is high. Most work in low-skill, low-wage, and informal jobs. Provisions to allow them to work legally are not functioning as planned. Many would-be workers do not live in cities where the jobs are. Failure to enforce minimum wage laws for Syrians puts pressure on host-nation workers.

“The work uninsured, and their wages are so low.”
— Turkish woman

TOP OBSTACLES TO FINDING WORK VARY BY COUNTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Wages</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Speak Turkish</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enough Jobs Available</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to Get Work Permit</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to Get Legal Residency</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“You are allowed to hire, then you are not allowed to hire, [and] you have to let them go. A Jordanian would be less costly.”
— Manufacturer in Jordan

Calculations based on data from RAND survey: 602 survey respondents in Turkey sample, 600 in Jordan sample, and 600 in Lebanon sample were asked to choose the top three obstacles to employment.

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR HAS DISPLACED 60 PERCENT OF SYRIA’S POPULATION OF 23 MILLION

1 MILLION in Europe
0.1 MILLION living elsewhere
6.5 MILLION displaced inside Syria

5.6 MILLION in neighboring Middle East countries as refugees

Registered Syrian Refugees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>3.6 MILLION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1 MILLION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>0.66 MILLION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>0.25 MILLION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>0.13 MILLION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT’S GOING RIGHT

**HARD WORK**
Employers find Syrians to be hardworking and willing to do work that locals do not want. Host-country economies are also benefiting from the Syrians’ labor.

**GOODWILL**
Policymakers think that host countries are providing a “public good” for the world by hosting the Syrian refugees and think that donor investments in large infrastructure projects will help host-country economies and Syrians alike.

**ENTREPRENEURS**
Syrians have been active entrepreneurs in Turkey, starting more than 10,000 registered businesses. Still, barriers to growth remain.

**WOMEN**
More Syrian women are working in their host countries than in Syria before the war. Men and women alike find this socially acceptable, necessary, and respectable.

**COMPASSION**
None of the three countries has significant social unrest because of the arrival of large numbers of displaced Syrians. While there is widespread resentment of Syrians in the labor market and in public services, there is also genuine concern for their plight.

**EMPLOYER DEMAND**
Sizable proportions of the employers surveyed reported having recruited Syrians. There are opportunities for job growth in semiskilled jobs in manufacturing in particular zones or regions.

SURVEY SYNTHESIS ACROSS THREE COUNTRIES

**WORKING OR WILLING TO WORK**
Percentage of Syrians who are working or willing to work.

- **85%** MEN
- **25%** WOMEN

**IN TURKEY**

- **93%** MEN
- **54%** WOMEN

**IN JORDAN**

- **92%** MEN
- **30%** WOMEN

**IN LEBANON**

**PERMIT AND RESIDENCY FEES**
Percentage who agree with the statement “Syrians cannot pay work permit or residency fees.”

- **IN TURKEY** 80%
- **IN JORDAN** 54%
- **IN LEBANON** 86%

**DISCRIMINATION**
Percentage of Syrians who feel regularly discriminated against or treated unfairly by an employer.

- **IN TURKEY** 24%
- **IN JORDAN** 14%
- **IN LEBANON** 22%

**RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE**
Percentage who agree with the statement “My coworkers treat me with respect in the workplace.”

- **IN TURKEY** 61%
- **IN JORDAN** 74%
- **IN LEBANON** 71%

**TROUBLE WITH GOVERNMENT**
Percentage who agree with the statement “Many Syrians are afraid they will get into trouble with the government or police if they work.”

- **IN TURKEY** 39%
- **IN JORDAN** 80%
- **IN LEBANON** 81%

**TURKISH LANGUAGE TRAINING**
11% of refugees (Arabic speakers) report receiving Turkish language training on arriving in Turkey.

“Women are capable of earning their own money and being financially independent. . . . Women can depend on themselves.”
— Syrian woman in Beirut

BARRIERS TO WOMEN WORKING

- Lower pay than Syrian men
- Lack of safe transportation to workplace
- Lack of child care or help with other household responsibilities
- Sexual harassment

About this research

This RAND research, funded by the Qatar Fund for Development, builds on and complements existing work conducted by the governments of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon; the United Nations; and other donor governments. This research was based on in-depth interviews with refugees conducted in Istanbul, Ankara, and Şanlıurfa in Turkey; Beirut, Lebanon; and Amman, Jordan, as well as surveys of Syrian households, surveys of firms that have hired or might be likely to hire Syrians, and focus groups with host-nation citizens. The figures shown represent the authors’ calculations based on survey data.
**Recommendations**

The prosperity and stability of the Middle East depends on creating mutually beneficial economic opportunities for displaced Syrians and host countries’ workers. A successful strategy would help both groups.

**FOR TURKEY**

1. Expand Turkish-language training and capacity.
2. Link Syrians and Turks to jobs in secondary cities with employment demand, offering training.
3. Expand access to work permits.
4. Expedite recognition of Syrian degrees and credentials in Turkey.
5. Provide transportation for women to jobs.

**FOR JORDAN**

1. Offer short vocational training courses on needed skills to both Syrians and Jordanians.
2. Identify and scale up proven training programs and improve matching of employers and workers.
3. Improve environment for doing business.
4. Simplify and streamline the process for issuing work permits.
5. Explore enforcing minimum wage laws and minimum working condition laws for both Syrians and Jordanians.

**FOR LEBANON**

1. Offer short vocational training courses on needed skills to both Syrians and Lebanese.
2. Decrease restrictions on sectors where Syrians can work.
3. Facilitate obtaining work permits.
4. Increase governance capacity, including municipal, to facilitate foreign investment.
5. Improve matching of employees and employers.

This brief describes research conducted in RAND Education and Labor and documented in *Opportunities for All: Mutually Beneficial Opportunities for Syrians and Host Countries in Middle Eastern Labor Markets*, by Krishna B. Kumar, Shelly Culbertson, Louay Constant, Shanithi Nataraj, Fatih Unlu, Kathryn E. Bouskill, Joy S. Moini, Katherine Costello, Gurserf Rafig oglu Aliyev, and Fadia Afashe, RR-2653-QFFD, 2018 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR2653). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RB10042.

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