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Emerging and key areas of intervention

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In addition to the areas covered in the thematic chapters PROSPECTS worked on a number of cross-cutting topics, including youth engagement, the digital and gig economies, and gender and disability inclusion. This chapter briefly reviews these topics, highlighting some of the measures taken to address them and noting the lessons learned in the process.

► 11.1 Youth engagement

Young people aged 15 to 24 account for 16 per cent of the world's population – the largest generation of young people in history.⁸⁴ While this demographic faces unique challenges in integrating into labour markets and transitioning from education and training to decent work, forcibly displaced young people face additional barriers in accessing basic services, employment and training. Forty per cent of all refugees are under the age of 18, while young people aged 18 to 24 account for an additional 13 per cent of all refugees. Moreover, nearly 10 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are aged between 15 and 24. Recognizing the particular challenges these young people face, and the considerable size of the demographic overall, PROSPECTS identified meaningful youth engagement as a cross-cutting and priority area for programming, at both a country and global level.⁸⁵

The thematic chapters have clearly identified how PROSPECTS countries addressed the topic of youth engagement. This occurred naturally, as young people are a significant and growing part of the target group in those countries. Whether as Job Search Club facilitators, site monitors for employment-intensive investment programmes, or members of the programme's steering committee, young people were positioned by PROSPECTS not only as recipients of services but also as partners in the design and delivery of those services. A PROSPECTS Youth Workstream, comprising focal points from the Government of the Netherlands, the ILO, UNICEF and UNHCR, acted as a joint planning, coordination and knowledge-sharing mechanism for joint agency programming on meaningful youth engagement in PROSPECTS. The Workstream developed an internal, ILO-UNHCR guidance tool TEN STEPS to Engage Young People Across PROSPECTS and Improve Self-Reliance, Inclusion and Resilience to support better and more effective youth engagement.

A special Youth Workstream dialogue platform was organized with the PROSPECTS youth focal point in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the Netherlands ambassador on Youth, Education and Work; members of the Netherlands Youth Advisory Committee (YAC⁸⁶); programme staff from all eight PROSPECTS countries and regional offices; and members of refugee youth-led networks. The platform presented the TEN STEPS guidelines and showcased good practice in terms of youth engagement.

In Ethiopia, the ILO, UNICEF and UNHCR jointly established and launched a Youth Network Committee (YNC) as a mechanism to allow young people in forced displacement contexts to be involved in programme decision-making at the country level. The 13-member YNC consisted of refugee, internally displaced and host community youth, as well as youth leaders and youth representatives from government institutions. It served as a formal advisory group that informed and guided the design, implementation and evaluation of PROSPECTS activities. The YNC members met on a quarterly basis to review the progress of PROSPECTS programme activities on youth engagement and employment, and to provide their input and feedback. The ILO, UNHCR and UNICEF put together and launched a Youth Leadership Academy to build the capacities of YNC members to carry out their role as advisers effectively and guide the implementation of programming. The Academy covered such topics as gender and disability inclusion, rights at work

84 United Nations, "Global Issues: Youth"

85 This has included a dedicated project under the Opportunity Fund – [Advancing Young People's Engagement and Meaningful Participation in the PROSPECTS Partnership](#).

86 Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Introducing the Youth Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2024–2025", 21 August 2024.

and meaningful youth engagement, while also focusing on strengthening members' soft skills, such as communication, leadership and teamwork. The Academy is another example of how the technical expertise, skills and resources of the ILO, UNHCR and UNICEF were pooled to nurture the leadership skills of young people from host and refugee communities.

The three organizations collaborated further under PROSPECTS on delivering a complementary package of training and capacity-building for young people. A total of 63 young (aspiring) leaders in Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan benefited from a six-month training programme launched by the three organizations in July 2022. The objective was to equip refugee and host community young people with knowledge and soft skills to participate effectively and lead change in their communities and beyond. The ILO led and facilitated a session on job-search techniques and skills and another on entrepreneurship, drawing on methodologies discussed in the chapters on Job Search Clubs and business development services.

Working together with the Government of the Netherlands, UNICEF and UNHCR, the PROSPECTS team used key global forums like the ECOSOC Youth Forum, Global Refugee Forum and the Summit of the Future to advocate for more investments in education, training and decent jobs for forcibly displaced youth, and greater funding for and partnerships with refugee youth-led organizations (RYLOs). This included partnership with RYLOs such as the Global Refugee Youth Network.

At the global level, the ILO spearheaded the adaptation of a training guide to build young people's capacities to both understand and defend their rights at work, while also facilitating their active participation in global forums dedicated to young people. The [Work Wise Youth: A Guide to Youth Rights at Work](#) updated and expanded on the 2015 manual [Rights @ Work 4 Youth: Decent Jobs for Young People](#). The guide shed light on young people's rights at work, including regarding wages, working time, occupational safety and health, prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work, gender equality and non-discrimination, and access to social security. The content was tailored to evolving labour market dynamics that have implications for how rights are applied and defended – driven by, among other things, political crises, technological advancements, climate change and globalization. The consultative process that informed the guide involved dialogue with more than 70 stakeholders, including youth representatives and young refugee advocates.

At the country level, the ILO convened discussions with constituents and other stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of initiatives that consider young people's rights at work in forced displacement contexts. Processes of contextualizing the global guide were led by country teams. In Iraq, extensive consultations were held with young people, ILO constituents, universities and civil society organizations. These included 177 young people representing refugees, IDPs and host communities, and 38 participants representing organizations and institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Department of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education, employers' and workers' organizations, and universities.

The *Work Wise Youth* guide has garnered further attention in Kenya and Ethiopia, where it is currently being tailored and adapted in close collaboration with the Central Organization of Trade Unions in Kenya (COTU-K) and Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. In Kenya, PROSPECTS' collaboration with COTU-K produced a workshop to support the development of a youth engagement plan for the organization's National Youth Committee. *Work Wise Youth* will be tailored and rolled out as part of this youth engagement plan, which is designed to strengthen unions' connections with their young members and help them actively expand their youth membership base.

Key takeaways

- ▶ The youth populations in PROSPECTS countries are sizeable and growing and must be adequately engaged in decisions and programmes that impact their lives. Meaningful youth engagement requires intentional effort, adequate resources and capacities, and dedicated support to ensure young people are empowered to participate as equal partners in shaping policies and programmes that affect their lives.
- ▶ PROSPECTS intentionally developed structures for young people to feed into programme design and implementation. At the global level, this included a specific Youth Workstream, convened by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. At the country level, this included a Youth Network Committee, comprising refugees, internally displaced and host community youth, as well as youth leaders and youth representatives from government institutions.
- ▶ Having young people inform the development of programme tools and methods adds value to the relevance of these tools and methods and promotes ownership of them among this key demographic. This is particularly key in the process of contextualization.
- ▶ Joint interventions and events, such as the Youth Network Committee and Leadership Academy, showcase how combining expertise and resources across organizations amplifies impact.
- ▶ Meaningful youth engagement is a global priority for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.⁸⁷ PROSPECTS provided the ILO with a valuable opportunity to expand its role considerably in this critical area by implementing innovative strategies and tools for engaging young people, especially those in displacement contexts.
- ▶ To build on progress achieved through PROSPECTS, the ILO must continue to fortify its efforts and capacities to deliver youth-inclusive and -responsive programming by, among other things:
 - ▶ strengthening knowledge, skills and capacities of staff and partners to work effectively for and with young people;
 - ▶ supporting and resourcing refugee youth-led initiatives and solutions that are driving change in their communities;
 - ▶ putting in place institutionalized mechanisms for accountability and young people's involvement in policy and programming – for example, project committees.

▶ 11.2 Gender and disability inclusion

The thematic chapters highlighted how forcibly displaced people are at a particular disadvantage in terms of access to training, employment and social protection. Within this group, there are also communities that face unique and intersecting challenges. Understanding how disability and gender overlay the experience of forced displacement was important for the development of proactive and context-specific measures that supported more equal access to employment and livelihood opportunities. With technical support and guidance from colleagues working with PROSPECTS at a global level, country teams took steps to consult with women and people with disabilities, collect information and build the capacity of representative organizations and service providers.

Consultation with women and people with disabilities was foundational for the development of relevant and meaningful support. PROSPECTS helped produce reference materials for country-level programme teams to use to engage women and people with disabilities in dialogue on the types of interventions

87 United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3. Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes*, April 2023.

that were most appropriate and needed. One tool, *10 Tips on Making Disability Inclusion a Reality in Prospects*, outlined concrete goals and simple tips to help increase the number of people with disabilities meaningfully involved in PROSPECTS. The tool incorporated a gender lens to ensure women and men with disabilities were targeted in all aspects of the work. Building on this, PROSPECTS supported the development of a training programme, *How to Consult Organizations of Persons with Disabilities*, which was then applied in Ethiopia. The programme team also helped launch a survey to identify and map the prevalence of people with disabilities, as well the needs experienced and barriers faced by them and their caregivers, to inform targeted interventions and policy development.

To meaningfully engage members of the refugee, IDP and host communities with disabilities in Ethiopia in programme planning, implementation and evaluation, a YNC in the country set up a subcommittee on gender and disability, which helped ensure that PROSPECTS incorporated gender equality and disability inclusion across its activities. Members of the subcommittee were trained in gender and disability inclusion and oversaw the continual application of inclusive measures. As an example, a technical and vocational education and training system assessment focused on the inclusiveness of institutions and apprenticeship programmes in the Somali and Tigray regions. It looked at the participation of forcibly displaced people through a gender- and disability-inclusive lens. Among its recommendations were the importance of capacity-strengthening, including equipment support to improve teaching-learning processes, as well as training in inclusive skills methodologies adapted to people with physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

In Egypt, the programme supported training of vocational instructors to increase their awareness of disability inclusion and the importance of gender-inclusive practices and policies.

In Lebanon, consultations were convened with Social Protection Network, an organization representing people with disabilities, to allow meaningful participation of people with disabilities in the social protection policy dialogue and reform process. A capacity-building session was held for organizations representing people with disabilities on social protection matters and resulted in a matrix of key advocacy messages for social protection reforms in Lebanon. This was in addition to a series of regular online meetings and webinars aimed at developing a high-level proposal for a disability allowance in the country, which was ultimately launched and implemented in 2023.

In Iraq, the ILO collaborated with the Women Empowerment Unit at the Directorate of Youth and Sports in Nineveh to rehabilitate a centre in Mosul. The design and facilities of the centre were developed in consultation with the Unit to help ensure that they met the needs of young women in the area. An EIIP approach was used to ensure specific attention was paid to increasing the participation of women in areas traditionally dominated by men, such as construction work. The physical infrastructure was also constructed to be accessible for all and included accessible walkways, entrance ramps and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. The consultation on the design and the proactive steps taken to ensure the facilities were inclusive ultimately resulted in a safe space for active participation in development and training programmes.

In Kenya, PROSPECTS joined a disability inclusion technical working group in Turkana County that was part of the Kakuma Kalobeyi Integrated Social Economic Development Plan convened by the Turkana County Government and UNHCR. The working group coordinated disability inclusion interventions in the county and built the capacity of actors to champion disability inclusion in trade, through both policy and practice. The working group prioritized conducting a survey using the Washington Group of Questions to update disability data in Turkana West and the refugee camp there.

Such work at the country level demonstrates the proactive measures taken not only to target women and people with disabilities but also to meaningfully engage with them as equal partners. Furthermore, it reflects efforts to build capacities in institutions and among service providers to better understand the unique barriers these groups can face and take action to address them.

Key takeaways⁸⁸

- ▶ Offering reasonable adjustments to everyone involved in PROSPECTS, before and during training, workshops, consultations and selection processes, can help remove or reduce disadvantages. These can be small and low-cost adjustments that help make programming more accessible for all.
- ▶ In the absence of dedicated budget, disability- and gender-inclusive measures are unlikely to be implemented. They require a proactive and standardized approach, with both human and financial resources available to enable action to be taken.
- ▶ Training staff and implementing partners from the outset in gender equality and disability is important and should continue throughout implementation. Not doing so implies the risk of leaving behind those who are underrepresented in their communities, such as women with informal care responsibilities and people with sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.
- ▶ Whenever possible, programme data should be disaggregated by disability status, as well as disability types, alongside age and gender. Doing so provides information on how the programme is doing in terms of inclusion.
- ▶ Engage organizations representing people with disabilities and the individuals themselves in programme design and implementation, including as formal implementing partners. This is one measure to help ensure programme activities are both relevant and accessible for all.
- ▶ Include women and people with disabilities in mainstream programme activities, rather than stand-alone, separate interventions. Separate services and activities can reinforce marginalization, prejudices and stereotypes and may hinder their sustainability.

▶ 11.3 The digital and gig economies

The digital economy is rapidly expanding and creating new opportunities in e-commerce, online freelancing and platform work – both online- and location-based. In PROSPECTS countries, there is growing recognition of its potential to generate jobs and economic growth. Differences in labour laws, social protection policies and employment standards shape diverse business ecosystems and working conditions, impacting how refugees and members of the host community can take part.

In forced displacement contexts, the expanding digital economy offers both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it creates new pathways for refugees and host community members to achieve self-reliance and economic inclusion. On the other hand, the rise of digital jobs has also led to significant variations in how work is structured and regulated across and within countries. Fully unlocking these opportunities requires targeted investment in five critical areas:

1. Access to information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, broadband connectivity, work tools and spaces.
2. Market-driven digital skills development.
3. Supportive legislation and policies for labour market inclusion and rights at work, including for refugees.
4. Digital financial access.
5. Cybersecurity and digital safety.

⁸⁸ These takeaways are from ILO, *Making Disability Inclusion a Reality in PROSPECTS: Concrete Goals and Simple Tips* (unpublished).



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The ILO, in partnership with UNHCR and UNICEF, explored how inclusive employment policies and supportive regulatory frameworks could facilitate a productive and inclusive digital economy in which refugees could actively participate. Efforts spanned three key areas of intervention:

1. Advocating for evidence-based policy solutions.

To respond to market needs, digital employment diagnostic guidelines were developed to measure the job creation potential of the digital economy, including for refugees. The diagnostic guidelines were piloted in Uganda, which informed the country's IV National Development Plan. In parallel, the programme supported the formulation of Uganda's National Employment Policy and Strategy, as well as the incorporation of refugees in it. These frameworks support a more competitive workforce in high-growth sectors such as ICT.

In Kenya, the ILO helped break down policy silos by supporting the establishment and operationalization of a Community of Practice on Digital Jobs and Skills, co-organized by the Ministry of Innovation and Information, Communication and Technology and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. A mapping of policy gaps in strategic priority areas informed the National Action Plan on Innovation, Enterprise Development, Digital Skills and Jobs. Recognizing the added value of this intervention model, the Community of Practice initiative was replicated in Uganda, led by the Federation of Uganda Employers. In Ethiopia, the programme supported the Ministry of Innovation and Technology in elaborating the Five-Year Digital Inclusion Strategy, which considers the specific needs of refugees and host communities.

PROSPECTS also conducted exploratory research on approaches to access social protection for gig and platform workers, particularly refugees. Often classified as self-employed or independent contractors, these workers fall outside traditional social protection systems. While initiatives by private sector actors are emerging to bridge the gap, these remain limited in scope and more sustainable mechanisms are needed to ensure coverage and access.

2. Strengthening capacities of communities and digital-economy stakeholders to improve working conditions and mitigate digital risks.

Jobs in the digital economy present new challenges for traditional trades unions, including data privacy, algorithmic management and cross-border governance of platform work. Protecting workers' voices and agency through their freedom of association and right to collective bargaining remains fundamental to meaningful participation in the digital economy, including for refugees.

To address these new realities, PROSPECTS supported peer-learning and advocacy tools to enhance understanding of the platform economy. These tools were rooted in workers' experiences and ongoing regulatory discussions in pilot countries such as Uganda and Kenya. These initiatives built the capacity of trades unions, platform workers' collectives and refugee-led and grassroots organizations to advocate for fundamental principles and rights at work.

Besides online-based digital jobs, location-based platform work, such as ride-hailing or delivery services, are also a lifeline for some refugees in countries where access to labour markets is restricted. In Lebanon, the programme conducted a survey on the working conditions of traditional and platform-based delivery workers, half of the respondents to which were Syrian refugees.

3. Testing innovative local solutions that provide access to jobs and income, building resilience and self-reliance.

Interventions linking technical and core work-skills training to paid digital jobs have been implemented in Kenya and Uganda. Designed as stepping stones to the labour market for young people in host and refugee communities, these initiatives provide pathways into the digital and gig economies, including in AI-related freelancing. Partnerships with local and global intermediaries of platform work help refugees in accessing online jobs by addressing the barriers they face, such as lack of connectivity, digital devices and access to financial services.

Additionally, training and support were provided in Kenya and Uganda through a network of national organizations, including in refugee areas, to help micro and small enterprises, aspiring freelancers and digital entrepreneurs adopt digital tools to expand market reach and improve operations. This support included making the most of social media, e-commerce platforms, online marketplaces and digital payment services, while ensuring compliance with regulations on data protection and privacy. In Egypt, *Digitalize Your Business*⁸⁹ was adapted and launched to support this process.

Key takeaways

- ▶ Social dialogue as a strategic foundation to work on digital transformation: engaging with government, social partners and other key stakeholders was a strategic starting point for meaningful policy-level work. It provided space for constituents to foster mutual understanding and define shared priorities with non-traditional partners, such as ministries of ICT, which play a key role in shaping the digital transformation agenda at the country level. This laid the groundwork for interministerial collaboration to advance policy and regulatory work and institutionalize collaboration.
- ▶ New actors emerging in the digital and gig economies: in cases where digital jobs and skills initiatives are led by ministries or agencies outside the traditional labour sector, administrative and coordination challenges can sometimes delay the provision of timely technical assistance. The digital ecosystem spans multiple sectors, including technology, finance and commerce, requiring a broader, cross-sector approach. Enhancing collaboration among stakeholders can improve support, streamline policy implementation and ensure alignment with the evolving digital economy.

⁸⁹ *Digitalize your Business* (DYB) is one of the manuals in the ILO's Start and Improve your Business (SIYB) family of training products and has been designed to help business-owners and entrepreneurs from the refugee and host communities in Egypt use digital tools and digital solutions to improve and grow their businesses.

- ▶ Engagement with digital labour platforms: local NGOs, social enterprises and development organizations are testing new ways to promote refugee inclusion and decent work on digital labour platforms. These efforts help workers access work, reduce risks and costs, improve conditions and build skills. Including refugees in the digital workforce can help businesses address labour shortages, diversify talent, expand market opportunities and appeal to clients who prioritize social responsibility.
- ▶ Social protection for gig and platform workers: extending social protection to gig and platform workers, particularly refugees, independently of their employment status, requires long-term investment. This includes adapting policy and legal frameworks, ensuring cross-border recognition of entitlements and fostering collaboration between government, the private sector, platforms and workers' and employers' organizations to overcome coverage and access barriers.
- ▶ Collaboration for integrated solutions: facilitating inclusive access to the digital economy is multidimensional and goes beyond the mandate and expertise of the ILO alone. Partnerships are essential for comprehensive interventions. In Uganda, collaboration with UNICEF enabled the acquisition of connected devices and helped encourage young people with basic digital skills to come forward for training to enhance their skills.
- ▶ Engaging the private sector: besides working with humanitarian and development actors, deeper engagement with the private sector, such as telecommunications providers and e-commerce platforms, is critical to scale up work. In the future, there is potential to tap into networks developed through other ILO workstreams. For example, the ILO-facilitated Kenya Business and Disability Network encouraged partnerships that led to skills and work placement opportunities for people with disabilities in Safaricom, one of the country's leading mobile network providers.
- ▶ Addressing legal and practical barriers to refugee employment: many refugees work in informal or unregulated sectors, owing to legal and practical barriers to formal employment. Aligning national labour policies to international standards on gig and platform work can help bridge these gaps and create more inclusive labour markets, benefiting both refugees and host communities.
- ▶ Feeding into world-of-work global governance: with discussions on decent work in the platform economy still in the early stages, the topic remains a complex and evolving area within the ILO. This influenced the scope and focus of PROSPECTS programming in this field. The project was able to strengthen constituents' understanding and dialogue on the subject, better preparing them for national and global discussions, as well as international standard-setting processes.⁹⁰
- ▶ Diverse digital economy pathways: there are different job and livelihood pathways for refugees and host communities in the digital economy, besides microwork and platform work. The lack of mappings that would identify pathways and trajectories to career progression remains a critical gap. For instance, PROSPECTS countries are increasingly looking at digital trade, including e-commerce and social commerce, to help transition businesses to the formal economy. Additionally, the rapid development of artificial intelligence highlights the need to integrate AI-related competencies into digital skills training to ensure workers remain competitive in the evolving job market.
- ▶ Expanding technical support: digital transformation is a key priority for many governments, presenting an opportunity for the ILO to expand its expertise and engagement in this area. This includes synergies across technical units, including the Cooperatives and Social Solidarity Economy Unit and the Social Finance Programme, to enhance knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

⁹⁰ In March 2023, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office decided to place on the agenda of the 113th and 114th sessions of the International Labour Conference a standard-setting item on decent work in the platform economy.

