



# 4

## Employment services

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Employment services play a key intermediary role in the labour market by referring job-seekers to employment opportunities that match their skills, qualifications and training, thus enhancing their employability. They also serve employers, helping them recruit talent and (re)skill existing staff. Employment services can be provided by a variety of institutions and organizations, ranging from government services to industry associations and INGOs. Public employment services (PES) ideally play the role of coordinator between service providers, if not providing services directly themselves. In countries like those in which PROSPECTS operates, employment services are challenged by weak labour markets. These are characterized by informality and structural inefficiencies that contribute to skills mismatches and poor productivity.

Refugees and other forcibly displaced people are a particular subsegment in these labour markets. They require additional support to navigate a new labour market. Refugees will have lost assets and professional networks as a result of displacement. They may also face restrictions on the types of sectors, occupations and businesses they can engage in formally, as well as onerous procedures to access employment, such as work permits and business registration. While employment services can be a valuable source of guidance and support for job-seekers and employers facing new and challenging circumstances, in PROSPECTS countries such services lacked sufficient capacity – both financial and in terms of human resources – to carry out their functions fully. Some were also restricted by law to serving nationals, rendering the service inaccessible to foreigners, including refugees.

The sectors where refugees are often found working are characterized by short-term and seasonal work opportunities, particularly the agriculture and construction sectors. In the absence of employment services, employment can be facilitated in these contexts by word of mouth or through informal networks. That fact that refugees and other forcibly displaced job-seekers don't have the same level of social capital as the host communities increases their vulnerability and disadvantages in the labour market.

PROSPECTS worked to extend the reach of employment services in refugee-hosting areas, in support of more equal employment opportunities. To ensure sustainability of the measures, the programme also provided support upstream by strengthening employment services policies, systems and structures. It built the capacities of employment service providers in refugee-hosting areas, while also providing advice on the delivery of fair and effective career guidance and job-matching services. It introduced pilot approaches and initiatives to extend services into rural areas, provide sector-specific employment services and boost employers' engagement. These measures strengthened the employment service landscape in general, to the benefit of both refugees and members of the host community.

## ► 4.1 Description and key approaches

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Based on analysis of PROSPECTS programming on employment services in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon and Uganda, various employment service delivery mechanisms were identified. These sought to build the capacity of PES by strengthening national frameworks upstream and piloting approaches tailored to refugee and host community job-seekers downstream. Other mechanisms included adapting ILO manuals for job-seekers, such as [How to Choose My Future Profession](#) and [How to Organize my Job Search](#). It also supported the development of PES infrastructure and capacity, particularly in rural and/or refugee-hosting areas. This included constructing job centres, enhancing web-based job-matching platforms and applications, and providing training on efficient management and operations. The delivery mechanisms made the most of new partnerships to develop and pilot approaches to employment services as proof of concept. These included approaches to extend and deliver services in specific sectors and to specific population groups.

### 1. Expanding the reach of PES in refugee-hosting areas

Public employment services are government-run institutions comprising a network of offices and/or representatives throughout the country and tasked with supporting efficient functioning of the labour market by matching supply and demand. Typically, their functions include job matching and job placement, providing labour market information and referring job-seekers to active labour market programmes (ALMPs).

The organization of these services varies between countries but typically falls under the purview of ministries responsible for labour and employment. The reach and efficiency of PES also varied between PROSPECTS countries. Although, ideally, there would be a nationwide network of PES offices, in reality, countries limit them to areas with viable economic activities, while using other outreach channels for more remote areas. For instance, in Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya, the capacities of the PES varied throughout the country and they did not have functioning branches in rural areas where refugee settlements were located. In Iraq, PES had limited reach in the Kurdistan region, where the majority of IDPs, refugees and returnees reside. Even where refugees were concentrated in urban areas, a general lack of adequate capacity within the PES remained an obstacle to delivering effective employment services. This was the case in Egypt.

Supporting work to strengthen the reach of PES began with building capacity upstream and at the meso level. In Iraq, PROSPECTS supported the drafting of the National Employment Policy, which served as a consensus-building exercise for national partners and decision-makers to develop an integrated employment policy framework. Labour market intermediation, including employment services, was reflected in this. Subsequently, a memorandum of understanding was signed by PROSPECTS and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), focusing on building capacity at governorate level to strengthen employment services. A four-day training workshop was convened with MOLSA staff to share international best practices in employment service delivery and prioritize areas of work. Downstream, PROSPECTS supported directorates to register and profile job-seekers, as well as conduct outreach visits to local employers in governorates with higher numbers of IDPs, returnees and refugees. PROSPECTS helped the MOLSA develop and maintain its online job-matching platform and reformat it to accept refugee IDs. The programme also helped integrate the MOLSA's online platform with the social security database to better target unemployed workers with career guidance and job-matching services.

In Kenya, PROSPECTS conducted an assessment of PES and identified gaps in the work of the National Employment Authority (NEA), a government body responsible for employment policies and programmes. Similar to the situations in Iraq and Ethiopia, the areas that were home to the largest numbers of refugees had limited NEA presence. The Authority was found to be understaffed and the majority of existing staff had limited to no understanding of employment services. Through capacity-building and infrastructure support, PROSPECTS enabled the NEA to expand into Garissa and Turkana counties and strengthen its services at national level. A tailored training manual targeted three levels of NEA staff where capacity gaps had been identified: managers and senior officers, operational staff and employment officers. This enabled them to manage PES centres, adapt tools to reflect changing labour-market needs, build partnerships and strengthen their coordination function. In terms of employment service infrastructure, PROSPECTS also funded improvements to the national Employment Information System.

In Ethiopia, support was provided under the Public Employment Service Strategy of the Ministry of Labour and Skills to establish and strengthen Employment Service Facilitation Centres (ESFCs). This was done in collaboration with the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, targeting the establishment of an ESFC in the main refugee-hosting area of Jijjiga, where PES were absent. In addition to supporting the physical construction of the centres, PROSPECTS worked to develop the services the centres would offer. It launched consultations with representatives from the Bureau of Youth and Sport to support ESFCs that would also meet the expectations of young job-seekers. A workshop in 2022 engaged Ministry of Labour and Skills staff in training sessions on mapping opportunities in local labour markets, tools to profile job-seekers and the provision of labour market information. Staff appointed by the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs participated in a series of online training sessions on managing public employment services, facilitated through the International Training Centre of the ILO. Critically, these services were developed at the request of the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs and aligned to the PES strategy, which meant they were developed with the intention of the Ministry taking ownership and running them in the long term.

PROSPECTS' work to strengthen PES in refugee-hosting areas was premised on national stakeholders seeing value in expanding their services into refugee-hosting areas. Critically, the strengthened services were valuable to both refugees and host community members, and the capacities PROSPECTS helped build extended beyond refugee settlements and camps. Many of the approaches that were introduced helped rural populations access employment services more easily, regardless of their refugee status. Other small adjustments to existing systems, such as upgrading online job-matching platforms to accept refugee IDs, made them more inclusive.

### ► Career counselling for refugee and host community students in Jordan

In light of high youth unemployment in Jordan (42 per cent among those aged 15–24), PROSPECTS collaborated with the career guidance offices within Ministry of Education public schools. The programme adapted and rolled out a career guidance manual for young people, which enabled career counsellors to provide market-driven career guidance. Since Syrian refugees were enrolled in Ministry of Education public schools, they too were able to benefit from the support provided by the trained counsellors. The aim was to help students decide what professions they were interested in and might want to pursue – either through technical and vocational education or academic pathways. An accompanying mobile application featured a game for students to explore different career opportunities independently. The application, called “My Future Career Path”, allowed young players to navigate ten different games, while helping them discover their abilities and interests in different TVET career pathways. As of mid-2024, the application had been downloaded more than 1,000 times from Google Play and was later made available in the Apple Store. ■

## 2. Working with non-governmental agencies to pilot approaches downstream

PROSPECTS worked with different non-governmental partners to pilot approaches to employment services as proof of concept. These approaches filled gaps in services in rural settings and sectors where PES were absent or lacked capacity or a mandate. For instance, in Jordan, PES did not have the mandate to serve foreigners, which meant refugees could not access them. In Uganda, the large size of refugee settlements and their distance from urban areas meant it was not feasible for PES staff to travel to them. In Lebanon, the collapse of the government had rendered PES non-operational, but even prior to the collapse, the services were only accessible for nationals. While not all contexts were amenable to extending PES to refugee populations, efforts were made to work through non-governmental partners to extend them.

In Jordan, PROSPECTS had taken a sector-specific approach to programming, focusing on agriculture, which was the main employer of refugees in the country. In the absence of regulations under the labour law and with a large supply of Syrian workers, the agriculture sector had seen the emergence of informal labour brokers. While the practices of these brokers varied, they introduced a risk of exploitation, including withholding wages. In 2021, the Kingdom finally adopted a bylaw to the Labour Law, extending the latter to agriculture workers. Prior to the bylaw, in a pilot in 2020, PROSPECTS worked with the Ministry of Labour to use mobile caravans to travel to remote areas, registering job-seekers and facilitating work-permit processes for refugees in the agriculture sector. The pilot was not ultimately taken up by the Ministry, as it was conducted prior to the adoption of the above-mentioned agriculture bylaw, so the Ministry saw reaching agriculture workers and rural groups with employment services as outside its mandate. The approach also introduced additional costs, mainly relating to vehicles, staffing and electronics, that could not be covered by the Ministry without external funding. PROSPECTS subsequently took advantage of the change in labour legislation by investing in formalizing the agriculture sector and introduced an approach to reach agriculture workers with employment services, which also served as proof of concept. PROSPECTS introduced career guidance and job-matching functions that could accommodate the needs and realities of daily and seasonal employment. It did so by partnering with agriculture cooperatives, which were already active in facilitating employment in the sector.

PROSPECTS Jordan trained cooperative representatives to serve as employment officers, with the capacity to collect the information of job-seekers, connect them to farmers offering daily, seasonal and fixed-term jobs, and refer them to training in harvest and post-harvest techniques. The team also played a role in providing information on labour rights and collecting follow-up information on the conditions of work where placements had been made. The approach moved services to the field and used employment officers from cooperatives who were already close to agricultural communities. However, while cooperatives were well positioned to respond to the sector's needs, there was still the problem of long-term affordability. Without external finance, cooperatives could not take up the employment service function, which highlights the financial challenges that localized services can face.



Similar to the case in Jordan, in Egypt, PES provided through the Ministry of Labour were not accessible to refugees, given their largely informal employment status.<sup>33</sup> PES were also largely disconnected from the needs of employers, contributing to a mismatch between skills in supply and those in demand. An analysis conducted in partnership with the Alexandria Business Association (ABA)'s Business Development Analysis Unit found a pronounced challenge among MSMEs to identify and articulate skills needs and, therefore, advertise job vacancies accurately. PROSPECTS Egypt partnered with the ABA to strengthen skills identification and recruitment using SkillLab, a tool that uses AI to compare self-reported skills data to the European Classification of Skills, Competencies, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) to generate skills profiles and identify skills gaps. By partnering with an association of employers, PROSPECTS was able to make the most of ABA members as potential employers of Syrian refugees and Egyptian host community members and strengthen its employment service function by building capacity and incorporating a digital tool into its operations.

### ► District Employment Services Forums in Uganda

A rapid assessment of public employment services in Uganda in 2020 revealed gaps in services in the main refugee-hosting districts. These districts were in rural areas and at a distance from public services. The local labour offices serviced by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MOGLSD) were found to be primarily concerned with labour disputes and lacked sufficient capacity to deliver employment services. The introduction of employment services in rural areas had the potential to make hiring practices more transparent and equal for all, services more demand-driven and better matches between employees and the jobs available. Employers would then also find better employees and build confidence in the services thereby communicating more of their employment opportunities through the publicly available services, rather than through word of mouth. PROSPECTS piloted rural employment services in the Isingiro and Arua districts, introducing District Employment Services Forums as a vehicle to translate experience and lessons learned from the pilot into the delivery of more efficient PES.

Prior to the pilot, INGOs in the Arua and Isingiro districts had set up job centres and experimented with delivering employment services targeting rural areas. The main purpose of these projects was to bring employment services to remote and rural areas, but this had not been done systematically or in coordination with PES. PROSPECTS partnered with one of the INGOs to strengthen the model for rural employment services and introduce a mechanism to engage government representatives (including PES), employers' and workers' organizations, and young people. This aspect strengthened the coordination function of the PES.

The District Employment Services Forums were strategically placed in line with district development plans, which were the main vehicles for translating national development objectives into work at the district level. The Forums comprised staff from the district governments, the MOGLSD, the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) and youth representatives from the local communities in Arua and Isingiro. They provided space for local decision-makers to convene around skills needs and employment service delivery. The FUE's main role was to engage potential employers at the district level, whereas the MOGLSD helped transfer the knowledge and outcomes of exchanges into PES practices. The Forum also helped the MOGLSD understand the specific needs of district employers and the expectations of young job-seekers. The partnering INGO and youth representatives also used information on job vacancies that were identified through the Forum to communicate with groups of young job-seekers that had registered in the pilot on rural employment services.

One indication of successful engagement through the Forums was the allocation of space by the MOGLSD to house employment services in the Isingiro and Arua districts. The district offices also earmarked budget for the continuation of services in Arua. The intervention in Uganda is an example of a pilot that made use of existing employment service infrastructure, partnered with an INGO and built networks to engage PES in the process. By engaging district staff from the MOGLSD, PROSPECTS supported strengthening capacity and ownership, while also introducing innovation in the delivery of services in rural and refugee-hosting areas. ■

In Lebanon, even prior to the economic and political collapse, PES were not accessible to refugees. Multiple and intersecting crises further weakened PES to the extent that no services were operational on the ground, even for members of the host community. Despite the absence of PES, there was still a need for labour market intermediation, particularly in guiding young people into pathways to employment. To fill this gap and respond to a need in the short to medium term, PROSPECTS integrated employment services into the structure of existing community development centres (CDCs) run by UNHCR. Partnering with more traditionally humanitarian partners allowed the ILO to introduce employment services in contexts where humanitarian types of support were more prevalent. While CDCs had traditionally provided such services as psychosocial support, incorporating more employment-driven programming enabled PROSPECTS to support young people beyond meeting emergency and basic needs. Of the 20 CDCs that UNHCR had in Lebanon, the ILO partnered with those in three of the main refugee-hosting areas to pilot employment services. It trained CDC staff in employment service delivery and rights at work. As in Egypt, PROSPECTS made use of SkillLab to profile young people and develop appropriate career pathways and referrals into training, business development and volunteer opportunities. Here, the focus was on developing employment pathways and taking advantage of local training, work-based learning and job opportunities. Contextual factors limited the number of long-term job placements that were made. The CDCs allowed employment services to be introduced in an unstable environment but encountered challenges in terms of continuity. For instance, the INGO running the CDCs changed over time and the number of job opportunities available locally was always limited.

## ► 4.2 Narrative and lessons learned

### Operational lessons learned

A great deal of insight about employment services was gathered from the country experiences presented in the previous sections.

#### Strengthening relations with local workers and employers

PROSPECTS supported the expansion of employment services into refugee-hosting areas where they had been weak or absent, thus exposing them to groups of workers and employers that had little or no previous knowledge of them. This was evident from the development of physical infrastructure in Ethiopia and Uganda, and the introduction of new approaches and associated capacity-building in all PROSPECTS countries. In areas without PES, word of mouth or informal networks had become the main sources of information about job opportunities. This was the case among MSME employers in Egypt, for example, and the informal labour brokers in Jordan's agriculture sector. While these sources met the immediate need to find job opportunities and workers, they did not contribute to efficiency or fair and equal access to opportunities.

Introducing employment services entailed investing in building relations with local workers and employers. This was a slow but necessary process to build trust and attract users to the service. Without the buy-in and active participation of local employers, there would be no supply of jobs to which job-seekers could be matched. Having a pool of job-seekers with proof of skills<sup>34</sup> added value for employers and encouraged them to engage with the service. Regular contact was maintained with both workers and employers through visits to workplaces and setting up local offices or points of contact. In Uganda, Jordan and Iraq, mobile services (using caravans) were piloted to register job-seekers and provide information about relevant training and employment opportunities. In Uganda, job centres were incorporated into two existing community centres within the Nakivale and Rhino refugee settlements, providing local spaces for job-seekers to visit.

34 Proof of skills was established via rapid skills profiling, using the SkillLab tool, or via national certification processes, like recognition of prior learning.

Using existing networks of employers through local associations, chambers and cooperative groups also proved helpful in building trust and disseminating information about job opportunities, as shown by the experiences in Uganda, Egypt and Jordan. In Jordan, the programme made use of cooperative representatives, who would go to nearby farms to identify seasonal labour needs and anticipate daily work vacancies that they could help fill. In Egypt, the programme built a partnership with a local business association to support local employers in identifying precise skills needs. It also incorporated the use of a skills-profiling tool in the association's TVET career office that helped in articulating the skills in supply. In Uganda, the FUE was represented on the District Employment Services Forums to identify skills needs and vacancies among its members. All of these efforts helped guide services that were based on genuine labour market needs and engaged employers in shaping services that were both useful and relevant.

## **Tailoring services and building capacity to meet the needs of forcibly displaced people**

Tailoring employment services to meet the needs of distinct groups can be challenging, particularly if the group is new to the country and/or labour market, as is the case with refugees. Employment service providers might not understand the situations in which refugees find themselves, nor the regulations and processes governing their access to work. In situations where refugees are working informally, PES might not see it as part of their mandate to serve them. PROSPECTS was able to help employment service providers take into consideration some of the common challenges faced by refugees and other groups of vulnerable workers and adapt career guidance and job-matching services that were relevant and efficient for refugee job-seekers and their potential employers.

Across countries, the employment terms and conditions for refugees differed from those of host community members. For example, in Lebanon, Kenya and Jordan, refugees need to obtain a work permit. Refugee job-seekers also faced restrictions on the types of employment (sector or occupation) they could legally enter. Hence, employment service officers needed to know the specific requirements and processes that applied to refugees. Because employment services are administered at district/governorate level, it was also critical for officers to have access to the latest decisions issued by the national government on access to the labour market by refugees. For example, in Jordan, frequent policy changes to the work-permit regime introduced challenges when employment service officers were not provided with the latest information. As a result, refugee job-seekers received inaccurate and outdated information and, in some instances, were told different things by different employment officers. Having clear points of information was one measure that teams adopted to help employment service providers keep abreast of policy changes that impacted their service delivery to refugees. This coordination work lent itself to partnership with UNHCR, which was a trusted outreach and communication point for registered refugees in the countries. In all instances, there was also a strong need for employment services to raise the awareness of both workers and employers on national labour legislation and international labour standards.

## **Strengthening institutional capacity to deliver market-relevant employment services**

Developing capacities to serve refugee and host community job-seekers required investments of both human and physical capital. Infrastructure improvements served to strengthen access to services not only for refugees but also for members of the host community in remote and rural areas. Instances in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya have already been noted where PROSPECTS supported the construction of employment centres in refugee-hosting areas. PROSPECTS also supported the development and upgrading of web-based employment platforms and profiling tools that could accept refugee IDs. In Uganda and Kenya, support was provided to digitalize employment services provided through the MGLSD employment service unit and the National Employment Authority, respectively. In Iraq, support was provided to upgrade and maintain the online job matching portal of the MOLSA.

Alongside the provision of physical and digital infrastructure, the associated human capital was developed. Across countries, PROSPECTS teams made use of guides for job-seekers, including *How to Choose My Future Profession* and *How to Organize My Job Search*. Both of these were delivered through employment service

providers, whether career guidance counsellors in public schools and TVET institutions, or employment officers within labour ministries. Both also entailed investment in training for staff. PROSPECTS teams were active in referring PES and relevant national partners to courses on shaping and managing effective employment services. Kenya, Uganda and Egypt all sent delegations on courses run by the ILO's International Training Centre and then followed up their participation with the development of work plans to adapt and strengthen PES for refugees and members of the host community nationally.

In this respect, capacity-building efforts included a training manual that built the capacities of Kenya's NEA staff by upgrading the knowledge and skills of existing staff and supporting the induction of newly recruited staff. In Ethiopia, staff from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs participated in online training on managing PES, as part of PROSPECTS' work to upgrade Employment Service Facilitation Centres.

## Leveraging partnerships to expand employment services

As well as PES providers, PROSPECTS teams built partnerships with local service providers to target and reach refugee and host community job-seekers. The choice of these providers reflected the local contexts where services were being adapted. For instance, the partnership with agricultural cooperatives in Jordan supported service delivery for agriculture workers. In Egypt, the partnership with the ABA helped identify and target job opportunities in Alexandria, where a large number of refugees reside.

In Lebanon, partnerships with humanitarian actors were forged to fill a gap in PES. Integrating employment services into UNHCR's CDCs helped respond to a need among young people for guidance on livelihoods pathways. Given the limited number of jobs in this context, the services tried to help young people identify relevant training and livelihood development opportunities in their localities. Similarly, in Kenya, PROSPECTS worked with UNHCR and the International Finance Corporation to introduce employment services within the Biashara Centre, located in the Kakuma refugee camp.

Academic and training institutions also played an important partnering role. In Jordan, the Ministry of Education career guidance offices were spaces that both refugee and host community students could access. In Kenya, a decree required that all institutions of higher education and training incorporate career guidance units, generating demand for support in adopting career guidance, to which PROSPECTS responded. In Iraq, partnerships with the University of Mosul and University of Dohuk helped strengthen career guidance functions and reach a diverse segment of the student population, including IDP, refugee and host community students. The aforementioned training manuals, *How to Choose My Future Profession* and *How to Organize my Job Search*, were particularly suitable for students and recent graduates.

## Operating in challenging labour markets

The labour markets in all PROSPECTS countries were challenging, with limited numbers of formal and private sector jobs available. While these challenges were not unique to PROSPECTS, the experience underlined the fact that employment services are harder to operate sustainably in areas where there are few jobs or livelihood opportunities. One telling example was a small pilot undertaken in Iraq in year one of PROSPECTS. It partnered with an INGO to establish employment services inside refugee and IDP camps, but it soon became clear that the jobs available that employers needed to fill were incompatible with the constraints faced by refugee and IDP job-seekers, namely distance to urban areas and flexibility to work early and late hours. As a result, the job referrals were to cash-for-work opportunities and some volunteer positions with NGOs within the camps. Realizing that this model was not sustainable, the programme changed focus and, instead, looked at the capacity of existing PES to determine where investments in capacity and infrastructure could be made to strengthen PES as a whole, and to target support so that the services were accessible for displaced people.

In Lebanon, the environment also introduced considerable constraints in terms of the number of jobs being offered. Refugees could only formally work in agriculture, domestic work, or construction. Alongside the legislative restrictions, there were very few jobs on offer in the main areas hosting refugees. For young people, the opportunities that were available locally in construction and agriculture



were not generally appealing and failed to provide a career path. Career guidance provided a means for these young people to identify training, enterprise and business development opportunities that would support their future employability. This included guidance on starting businesses and social initiatives.

When operating employment services in constrained labour markets, guidance should be grounded in labour market information, so as not to misguide job-seekers or raise their expectations. This was emphasized by PROSPECTS' implementing partners, making it clear that investments should be made where there is value addition.

### ► 4.3 Sustainability

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Long-term sustainability of employment services in refugee settings would require the continuous provision of labour market information and guidance to refugee job-seekers and to employers. This, in turn, would require the engagement of PES providers. Employment services that are delivered by non-governmental actors can provide useful lessons and experience to inform PES operations or fill gaps in services temporarily. Links to PES and relevant national entities should be forged, so that they may act in an advisory capacity or oversee pilot initiatives.

Anchoring employment services in national development plans and frameworks was also instrumental in maintaining their relevance to achieve national objectives on employment and ALMPs in the long term. For instance, in Kenya, the National Career Guidance Framework positions employment services as critical for addressing national unemployment. The framework also mentions ILO Recommendations and Conventions, thereby enhancing the relevance of ILO support. In Uganda, the District Employment Services Forums were based on five-year, district-level development plans that carry national backing. Supporting the delivery of rural employment services through these forums anchors them in national processes.

Where programming was not able to engage with PES nationally, there were challenges to long-term sustainability. For instance, in Lebanon, the INGO running the centres where PROSPECTS had incorporated employment services changed. This change introduced new staff and structures that PROSPECTS had to train and inform. In Jordan, while agriculture cooperatives were willing partners to extend career guidance in the agriculture sector, they were ultimately unable to maintain career guidance functions without external funding. Demonstrating approaches through cases is a good practice that can inform national practices that are backed by political will and resources.

### ► 4.4 Integration with other areas of work

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Because employment services play an intermediary role between workers and employers, they are, out of necessity, integrated within wider employment and business development support. PES play a coordination role for job matching and implementing ALMPs. This was particularly so in cases where employment service support was directly linked to skills development initiatives, enterprise development and public employment programmes, such as employment-intensive investment programmes.

Beyond referrals of job-seekers to skills training, clear links were made between skills profiling and developing the capacities of employment officers, whether through training career counsellors and employment officers in the use of profiling tools such as SkillLab, or introducing ESCO to help determine the skills needs of employers. The latter required being able to clearly identify the level and types of skills in supply, and articulate the corresponding skills needs. Understanding these was a fundamental part of effective employment service delivery.

Employment services also have a role to play in facilitating business services. For instance, in Uganda, rural employment services were run with employment and business development officers. This helped provide labour market information and guidance to refugee and host community entrepreneurs who were starting or interested in scaling up their businesses. It included referral into business training and business plan competitions.

Finally, outreach initiatives forged through employment services supported information provision and awareness-raising on labour rights and work permits. Because refugees are new to the host community labour market, and have different terms governing their access, it was important to support information sessions for both workers and employers. Employment service officers are a useful point of contact and a channel via which such information can reach workers and employers.

## ► 4.5 Challenges

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Key challenges to employment services are a product of the contexts in which they have been implemented. Several challenges were common to all the countries. The first was the availability of employment opportunities for refugee and host community job-seekers, and how to deliver services in contexts where such opportunities were limited. The second was how to target capacity-building to support institutional strengthening, and the third one on how to build links with other service providers in the space.

As already noted, in PROSPECTS countries, the labour markets are weak and, as a result, the numbers of formal sector jobs are limited. The pilot of rural employment services in Uganda targeted opportunities within MSMEs, as well as skills training and apprenticeship opportunities. While this proved to be useful in this instance, piloting employment services in extremely challenging labour markets may not be the best use of resources. The case of Iraq's work with an INGO early on in PROSPECTS illustrates how the limited number of jobs available rendered the extension of employment services ineffective. Resources were subsequently redirected to strengthening the capacity of MOLSA career guidance (see operational lessons learned on page 58), particularly its role in providing labour market information and coordination.

Another challenge identified through PROSPECTS was finding successful ways to build capacity and transfer knowledge within national institutions. An early example from Jordan saw funding provided for consultants to sit within the Ministry of Labour directorates to receive Syrian job-seekers. The theory was that Ministry career officers would also benefit from capacity-building and exchange knowledge with the consultants. However, knowledge transfer was not evident, as the extent to which public officials had time and resources to dedicate to additional work was overestimated. Ministry officers were reluctant to take on work outside of their job description (serving Jordanian job-seekers). If civil servants and national actors have no incentive and if the work is viewed as additional to their existing job, it is less likely to be well received. If capacity-building is framed as supporting functions that are already in the job descriptions of civil servants or national actors and associated with career advancement, this might make investment in capacity-building more impactful.

Moreover, when the quality of services is weak, this can perpetuate a poor image of employment services. In Iraq and Kenya, there was an overall lack of trust among private sector employers in the quality of public employment services. As a result, they were underutilized. Furthermore, several players in the job-matching sector provide more agile and responsive employment services. Many of these are online platforms that are quick to make referrals. While this is not a comprehensive approach to job matching, job-seekers and employers are sometimes more eager to get a match quickly, rather than wait for a suitable match.

- ▶ PROSPECTS countries generally face high levels of unemployment and informality, and weak public sectors, which create a challenging context for employment services.
- ▶ PES serve two main groups – employers and job-seekers – whose interests need to be balanced.
- ▶ There may be a multitude of employment service providers, some targeting specific groups like refugees, so PES should play a coordination role, if not also delivering services directly.
- ▶ If labour market opportunities are insufficient, and/or labour market information is weak, trust and confidence in employment services can be undermined.
- ▶ Refugee employers and job-seekers face additional hurdles in the form of legislative and policy conditions governing employment and business operations. It is necessary for employment service providers to understand these conditions if they are to deliver targeted guidance and support. Having such understanding also limits the risk of raising expectations among workers who are not legally able to take up certain jobs or operate businesses formally.
- ▶ Where job referrals and placements happen by word of mouth, refugees and other forcibly displaced job-seekers are at a particular disadvantage, as they lack the same level of social capital as host community job-seekers.
- ▶ PROSPECTS' work to strengthen PES in refugee-hosting areas was premised on national stakeholders seeing value in expanding their services into refugee-hosting areas. The support to strengthen services needs to be valuable to both refugees and host community members.
- ▶ Targeting job opportunities within MSMEs, as well as providing skills training and apprenticeships, can provide some opportunities in more rural areas.
- ▶ Introducing employment services entailed building relations with local workers and employers. It is advantageous to have employment officers in the field, to build trust and buy-in within local communities.
- ▶ Piloting innovative approaches to employment services is one way to demonstrate service delivery mechanisms that can be adopted to strengthen PES in refugee-hosting areas. Having this transfer of knowledge requires integrating channels for oversight and guidance from relevant national stakeholders, such as Ministries of Labour.
- ▶ Working with employers' organizations can be an effective means of engaging employers in identifying skills needs and labour market vacancies. This requires support for employers to understand and be able to articulate skills needs.
- ▶ Introducing sector-specific approaches can help provide more tailored employment services.



