The Mashreq Gender Facility (MFG) focuses on mechanisms to support the economic inclusion of forcibly displaced women (FDW). Highlights of lessons learned from support to on-the-ground activities include:

a. **Adopt a stakeholder-groups approach in investing:** Refugee-focused investments that identify FDW by labor market status will help to maximize impact of investments and enhance their economic inclusion.

b. **Boost entrepreneurship:** Private partners should support displaced women’s participation in businesses through targeted financing, capacity-building, and networking for female entrepreneurs.

c. **Overcome barriers of employment access:** Infrastructural, legal, cultural, skills, and family responsibility-related barriers require deliberate attention as these factors may impede displaced women’s economic inclusion.

d. **Provide tailored services and products:** To best serve displaced populations and the needs of the market, services and products designed for displaced and host communities should be adaptive, sustainable, accountable, marketable, and clearly communicated.

e. **Create an enabling environment:** Governments need to provide a legal framework for equal rights, reduce regulatory barriers, use gender-lens analysis to evaluate the success of policies, and develop programs that identify and support displaced women entrepreneurs in the long term.

f. **Generate disaggregated indicators:** Indicators used to measure results - and, ultimately, inform future policies and programs - should be sex-disaggregated and multifarious, addressing multiple aspects of economic integration.

### Background

The economic empowerment of forcibly displaced women (FDW) can contribute to greater resilience and improved livelihoods for both displaced people and host communities. Forcibly displaced persons – including both refugees and IDPs – have often lost many of their assets, suffered depleted human and social capital, and experienced traumatic events. They need economic opportunities to avoid falling into poverty or dependency, but they can face severe legal, security, or economic restrictions on their ability to work or move freely (World Bank 2017). For example, in many host countries including the Mashreq, displaced women and girls face particular challenges: they often face or are threatened by gender-based violence, may lack mechanisms for protection or recourse, are excluded from financial services, and face greater barriers to entry into local economies. As a result, FDW are less likely to be economically active (7 percent) than displaced men (59 percent) or women in host communities (16 percent), according to data from Jordan (Tiltnes et al. 2019). According to UNHCR (2021), approximately one in five refugees worldwide live in the Mashreq1

---

1 UNHCR (2021), Refugee Population Statistics Database, Refugee Data Finder, url
Beyond the intrinsic value of empowering women and girls, the economic integration of FDW is smart economics. Women refugees and IDPs can contribute to the host country’s human capital stock, stimulate trade and investment, fill in shortages in skills, increase tax revenues, and stimulate growth (OECD 2017). And better economic integration fosters a climate of trust and coexistence, leading to greater social cohesion between displaced populations and host communities (ILO 2020). As a result, there is an emerging acceptance that forcibly displaced people, and women in particular, should be allowed to seek greater self-reliance through economic integration.

Beyond the intrinsic value of empowering women and girls, the economic integration of FDW is smart economics. Women refugees and IDPs can contribute to the host country’s human capital stock, stimulate trade and investment, fill in shortages in skills, increase tax revenues, and stimulate growth (OECD 2017). And better economic integration fosters a climate of trust and coexistence, leading to greater social cohesion between displaced populations and host communities (ILO 2020). As a result, there is an emerging acceptance that forcibly displaced people, and women in particular, should be allowed to seek greater self-reliance through economic integration.

This knowledge brief provides private sector actors and their partners in government, development, and humanitarian agencies, and civil society with recommendations on how to maximize the impact of investments and business practices for FDW in the Mashreq countries of Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.

While much of the knowledge summarized in this brief was developed from work in the Mashreq countries, the principles espoused here are relevant for the economic inclusion of FDW across many contexts. The FDW label applies to both refugee women and women who have been displaced within their countries (i.e., IDPs), and the principles outlined in this brief will benefit the economic inclusion both groups. However, some principles, particularly those pertaining to legal barriers, may apply better to refugees than IDPs.

PRIORITIZING REFUGEE - AND GENDER -LENS INVESTMENT

Governments and international institutions have recently made impact investing and sustainable investing practices a key focus. This is good news in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and its core tenet of Leave No One Behind. Indeed, gender-lens and refugee-lens investing – that is, investing strategies that incorporate gender or refugee analysis into investment decisions – have been undertaken in recent years by prominent organizations and investors, including the IFC, the Refugee Investment Network, and the World Economic Forum. Given the growing interest in refugee-oriented services and products from FDW.

PRIORITIZING REFUGEE - AND GENDER -LENS INVESTMENT

Governments and international institutions have recently made impact investing and sustainable investing practices a key focus. This is good news in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and its core tenet of Leave No One Behind. Indeed, gender-lens and refugee-lens investing – that is, investing strategies that incorporate gender or refugee analysis into investment decisions – have been undertaken in recent years by prominent organizations and investors, including the IFC, the Refugee Investment Network, and the World Economic Forum. Given the growing interest in refugee-focused investments and the untapped potential of a growing population of displaced women, many of whom are heads of households, it is sensible to consider ways to nudge more investors towards making a difference in the lives of these women.

A first step for this to happen is to develop a set of criteria that will help investors make the difficult decision of where to put their capital – and do so by providing a way to measure the potential impact of investments on the wellbeing of displaced women. This knowledge brief proposes a stakeholder-groups approach, according to which an investment could be considered beneficial for displaced women if it supports one or more of the following categories:

- Displaced women as leaders. These companies and initiatives empower displaced women. They are owned by FDW, have a minimum share of displaced women on the Board of Directors or management team, or are connected to firms owned by FDW through their value chains.

- Displaced women as employees and contractors. These companies hire a high share of displaced women relative to overall employment figures in the sector, hire a high number of displaced women relative to the overall number of work permits, or ensure flexibility to address women-specific barriers to employment such as childcare, safe transport, anti-sexual harassment policies and training, flexible or part-time workhours, and legal support. They may also devise processes to allow sourcing of services and products from FDW.

- Displaced women as entrepreneurs. These firms deliver entrepreneur-oriented services to displaced women, for instance by developing self, home-based and community employment through entrepreneurship; providing training, funding, innovation, and incubation programs targeting FDW; initiating youth entrepreneurship and employment schemes with an impact on displaced women; and mobilizing talent and investments in support for FDW entrepreneurs.

- Displaced women as community stakeholders. These companies contribute to improving the integration of FDW in a broader sense. They might specifically aim...
to enhance the well-being, downstream economic opportunities, and integration of FDW, or they might support advocacy initiatives or work towards long-term global economic opportunities for women within local communities and the displaced persons they host.

- **Displaced women as consumers.** These firms provide their services and goods to FDW, for instance by providing childcare services to displaced women. This includes firms in sectors with development potential that may ultimately result in goods and services for FDW.

- **Other considerations.** Investors should also focus on companies that are:
  - Innovative – testing new approaches or instruments to enhance economic opportunities and the wellbeing of FDW.
  - Scalable – seeking to expand proven successful or promising innovative interventions.
  - Catalyzing – conducive to future investments or de-risk opportunities in support of FDW.
  - Crisis mitigating – with a special capacity to alleviate humanitarian pressures and tensions.
  - Impactful – with a greater positive impact for FDW and their families
  - Ethical – guided by the principle of do no harm.

### PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT FOR DISPLACED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

New business founded and owned by FDW carry multiple benefits for displaced and host communities, from generating decent and productive employment to filling in market gaps for services and goods demanded by displaced communities. Displaced women, however, often face severe challenges to starting their own businesses. They are hamstrung by legal barriers such as documentation and address requirements, the loss of support systems and social networks, marketplace discrimination on the basis of gender or displaced status, insufficient infrastructure, undeveloped entrepreneurial skills, and lack of access to financial services and technology. Despite these barriers, displaced women show remarkable entrepreneurial ambition, with one-third of refugee women interviewed in Uganda and one-fourth in Jordan reporting strong plans to start or develop their own businesses (FinDev Gateway 2018). Private businesses can support the entrepreneurial activities of displaced women, considering:

- **Integration.** Private sector partners should support and promote women’s participation in businesses (whether driven by hosts or refugees) to increase economic integration of women as workers and entrepreneurs.

- **Capacity building.** Firms should encourage women refugees to participate in entrepreneurship support programs inclusive of newcomer and local entrepreneurs alike (e.g., information and outreach activities) as these can help close education and skills gaps, and provide foundations for homebased businesses. The Africa Gender Lab has shown that a combination of technical business training and personal initiative training for women entrepreneurs can increase firm profits.

- **Financing.** Startups and enterprises driven by female refugees require greater access to and promotion among financial institutions as well as investors. Female refugees often face difficulties (structural or social norms...
barriers) in accessing finance, owning bank accounts, and controlling the resources needed to run a business. Stakeholders are therefore encouraged to take these challenges into account when working with female refugee entrepreneurs.

- **Networking.** Private sector actors should invite FDW entrepreneurs into networks and demonstrate the benefits of participating in such events, to facilitate business creation and can overcome barriers to economic integration and accessing markets. This includes ensuring representation of FDW speakers at practitioner conferences as well as outreach specifically targeting refugee women.

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO FORMAL EMPLOYMENT FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

One of the best ways to integrate displaced women into host economies is by providing decent employment opportunities. Displaced persons, and women particularly, often face severe challenges in staying in education, obtaining relevant skills, entering job markets, acquiring work permits, overcoming gender discrimination when jobs are scarce, securing childcare and work hours flexibility, and traveling safely to work sites. As a result, FDW often have much higher unemployment rates than host women – in Jordan, Syrian refugee women are almost twice as likely to be unemployed (46 percent) as Syrian refugee men (23 percent) or Jordanian women (28 percent) (Tiltnes et al. 2019). When FDW are forced to seek unregistered employment in the informal sector due to insufficient work permits, they are typically denied social protection and face exploitation including less pay, dangerous working conditions, and the threat of deportation. This knowledge brief identifies the following ways governments and firms can support the legal, formal, and equitable employment of displaced women:

- **Governance and internal policies.** The legal framework for employment in the host country must pay particular attention to the vulnerabilities of displaced women, not only guaranteeing their freedom of movement, civil documentation (including easing ability to get such if ID is lost during displacement), right to work and to receive training, but also to protection, safety, and childcare measures that may help them enter and stay in the labor market. Such measures may decrease their reliance on aid and help the economy of the host country tap the full potential of their skills and consumption.

- **Human resource policies.** Female refugees may need additional support from businesses and policymakers to ensure access to the labor market, including childcare, safe transport, flexible work arrangements, relevant technology, and insurance. Social barriers (e.g., social norms regarding women’s right to work), safety (e.g. from sexual harassment at work and on the way to work), and the need to also take care of the household may discourage female refugees from taking up work. Inclusive HR policies may therefore help more FDW in joining and staying in the labor market.

- **Intermediation.** Employers’ representative organizations, government agencies and the trade unions play a unique intermediary role ensuring in the economic integration of displaced women.

- **Skills.** The qualifications and skills of female refugees should be assessed, recognized, and leveled swiftly, efficiently and in an equitable manner. Female headed refugee households often demonstrate economic resilience and appear committed to education, indicating that early training and youth programs, targeting women (e.g., demand-driven soft and hard skills such as vocational training and financial literacy) could have positive benefits for their labor market inclusion.

- **Socialization.** Women refugees should be included in local programs, committees and networks, together with host communities to ensure comprehensive integration and representation of refugees.
TARGETING SERVICES AND PRODUCTS TO DISPLACED WOMEN AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Displaced women are not merely potential entrepreneurs and employees, they are also consumers of services and goods. But displaced communities are often under-served by a private sector that can take advantage of vulnerable groups to offer substandard or over-priced products. To better serve the needs of displaced women, to increase commercial activity and tax revenues, and to deepen economic ties between displaced persons and host communities, governments and private enterprises should invest in firms that offer services and products to displaced women. Best practices for firms to maximize their positive impact on displaced women and their communities include:

- **Adaptation.** Providers of services and products targeted to refugees and host communities need to follow adaptive and flexible responses, given the complexity of refugee situations and the dynamics of interactions between stakeholders. Particular sensitivity should be shown to challenges faced by women refugees, whether social, or economic.

- **Sustainability and accountability.** Services and products are encouraged to be economically and environmentally viable, ‘do no harm’ and actively seek to deliver positive social impacts to the benefit of (male and female) refugees and host communities.

- **Partnerships.** Private groups and business affiliates, non-profit organizations, development institutions, and government institutions are encouraged to partner particularly with businesses and organizations led by female refugees to create a level playing field for partnerships to deliver products and services to refugees.

- **Marketability.** Commercial viability is a pre-requisite to sustain and scale a business that provides services and products to refugees. Businesses should consider the economic capacity of women refugees to act in the marketplace to develop products and services that cater to them and their families.

- **Communication.** Services and products that target refugees should be communicated carefully by all stakeholders to minimize risks and enhance support for all, including private sector actors, governments, male and female refugees, and host communities.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

One of the national government’s crucial roles in the economic integration of FDW is to create an enabling environment in which displaced women are considered as economic actors and not just recipients of aid or assistance. The need is urgent: indeed, a survey of Jordanians and displaced entrepreneurs in Jordan found that government laws and policies were the top concern (per forthcoming WBG research).

These laws and policies might include increasing legal access to employment through targeted work permits and the restructuring of documentation requirements and reducing barriers to market entry – including both those specific to gender and those that place burdens on all market participants but may have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. An enabling environment, created and sustained by deliberate government action, is a precondition for economic integration through the other vectors identified in this knowledge brief. To maximize the impact on the economic integration of displaced women, governments could:
Develop a legal framework for equal rights. Displaced women exist at the intersection of two populations vulnerable to legal discrimination: women and displaced persons. The legal framework for economic opportunities must provide level playing field for the ownership and inheritance of assets, the opening of bank accounts and formalizing startups, and the operation of businesses. For instance, unregistered FDW need to be able to acquire some form of legal status which grants them increased agency and the confidence to engage in the labor market.

Reduce regulatory barriers to employment. Women, and in particular displaced women, face more barriers to entering the labor market and finding employment, and on average have fewer resources to overcome these barriers. By reducing the legal barriers to entry, governments can increase the economic opportunities available to FDW. One key area is by expanding the sectors legally open for displaced workers.

Ease regulatory burden on entrepreneurs. Regulatory frameworks for enterprise creation, registration and operation need to be re-designed and more inclusive (addressing needs of male and female refugees and host communities) to ensure fair competition and decent jobs for all. This includes granting equal rights to access property, trade, financial services, and equal freedom of movement.

Identify key sectors for women and gender-lens analysis. By focusing on areas where FDW predominate or play an important economic role, governments can target investments and initiatives to maximize their impact on displaced women and their communities. Additionally, governments should prioritize these sectors for labor standard compliance enforcement to prevent the exploitation of displaced women workers.

Identify and elevate women leaders. Programs to support and train leading women managers – not only business owners – through public recognition awards and productivity initiatives can encourage successful market participation by FDW and create role models and mentors for other women.

Measurement and evaluation are part of any effective economic intervention. Unfortunately, sex-disaggregated economic data on forcibly displaced persons is often incomplete or inadequate. When undertaking interventions that seek to increase the economic integration of FDW, governments and private actors alike would be well served by collecting data disaggregated by gender, sector and industry of business, size of business, and other indicators pertaining to how the business operates. To best inform responsive public policies and gender-based work programs, interested parties could gather data to create indicators and set targets that allow for the monitoring of progress towards the closing of any observed gender gaps.

The table below identifies a series of potential indicators for consideration. In addition to using indicators for surveys of affected firms and evaluations of reach and effectiveness, evaluators should use proven techniques to collect input from a broad range of women. For instance, in recognition that women are not a homogenous group and that middle-class women may not be representative of all women or displaced women, data collectors should tailor collection methods to reach women of all backgrounds, not just those accessible by phone or internet:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER GAP AREA TO MEASURE</th>
<th>PROPOSED INDICATORS</th>
<th>FURTHER DISAGGREGATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SME growth and business support</td>
<td>Number and percentage of: (1) existing; and (2) new women owned SMEs</td>
<td>(A) sector; (B) size; (C) refugee status of SME owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in number of: (1) new services offered by women’s associations; and (2) membership in existing women’s associations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of business owners reporting increase in revenue after receiving business training</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress related to women and refugee women in employment</td>
<td>Number of workers per year: (1) employed; (2) newly employed; (3) retained, and (4) trained</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of women business owners, managers, and workers</td>
<td>(A) business sector and industry; (B) size of business; (C) refugee status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salaries of workers employed in representative clusters</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status; (C) job category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress related to women and refugee women in employment</td>
<td>Number and percentage of SMEs holding an account with a financial institution</td>
<td>(A) sex; and (B) refugee status of business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of businesses receiving: (1) continuing financial loans; and (2) first financial loans</td>
<td>(A) sex of business owner; (B) refugee status of business owner; (C) business sector; (D) size of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of financing loan schemes: (1) currently offered; and (2) newly developed</td>
<td>with favorable terms for: (A) women; (B) refugee women borrowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy matters regarding women and refugee women</td>
<td>Number and percentage of business owners reporting an increased ability to advocate for economic reform</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of business owners reporting difficulty in conducting trade due to challenges with customs policies</td>
<td>(A) sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of respondents reporting ease of access to customs and trade-related information</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of businesses engaged in export owned, managed and majority-operated by: (A) women; (B) refugee women</td>
<td>(A) sex; (B) refugee status of business owner; (C) business sector; (D) size of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number and percentage of businesses engaged in export</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


