



Illustration of Syrian refugees from the cover of the report "Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities", published by UNDP, ILO and WFP, 2017.

UN Volunteers offer solutions in reconstruction of Syria and livelihoods of refugees

Representatives from over 70 countries and international organisations, international and Syrian civil society, met in Brussels to discuss peace and reconstruction in Syria. The conference agreed on a comprehensive approach to the Syrian crisis. It underlined the need to continue to respond to the dire humanitarian situation by ensuring principled assistance and protection for those populations in need and support to the neighbouring countries.

UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov participated in the joint *Jobs Make the Difference* side event at the Brussels Syria Conference. He offered valuable insight on the value of UN Volunteers and online volunteering in the reconstruction of Syria and the livelihoods of refugees in the region. The full transcript of his remarks is below.

UNV is a common service to the UN system administered by UNDP. We provide volunteer solutions to a broad spectrum of UN entities: from peacekeeping missions to humanitarian and development agencies. As we speak, 300+ national UN Volunteers are working with refugees and host communities in countries neighboring Syria;

The new report ([Jobs Make the Difference](#)) offers great insights into an enabling environment that will be required for job-intensive growth. Some measures are in the policy domain, such as market access. Others are more operational, such as direct procurement to boost local businesses. We argue that just as important as direct procurement is the local talent sourcing;

National UN Volunteers are exactly about local talent sourcing. These solutions are cost effective, speedy and community oriented. Not only locally sourced but also locally owned. In this context, based on our experience in the region and globally, we believe that National UNV solutions can help solve 4 problems;

- 1. Skills development. When it will be possible to scale up in Syria, there will be a need to rollout vocational training to equip hundreds of thousands of people. Realistically, rolling out vocational training on such scale will not happen overnight. There will be a need for long hanging fruits. Such as what we do working with Syrian women refugees in Turkey (Gaziantep) who are trained by UN Volunteers on various occupational skills from catering services to computer literacy. Such volunteer solutions can help incubate market-driven vocational training in the future;*
- 2. Relations between refugees and host communities. In Lebanon, for example, local volunteers are teaching in schools for Syrian refugee skills. This is win-win for both refugees and host communities. And the volunteers have a unique way to connect which helps to strengthen social cohesion;*
- 3. Youth. There are millions of youth in the region who need jobs and, with or without TVET, they will not gain employment overnight. At least some of them can participate as volunteers in community oriented projects, livelihoods support and infrastructure. Experience shows that youth volunteers are also good in organizing themselves in the long run (into local volunteer groups, social networks, professional associations). Which is why investments in volunteerism can be investments in lasting institutional capacity and in preventing violent extremism;*
- 4. Lastly, 21st century crises require 21st century solutions. UNV has invested in an online volunteering platform. We have hundreds of Arabic speakers signed up as UN Online Volunteers, including many*

from the countries neighboring Syria. Some are already contributing their skills and time online for location-neutral tasks: data management, translating, mapping. Let us be realistic: as in other crises, on the day when people will start coming back those who already gained jobs in the host countries (esp. professionals) are unlikely to return first. Therefore, online volunteerism may help to mitigate the brain drain;

In summary, volunteer solutions are not standalone solutions, and they are not sufficient to create jobs. Yet, they can be useful and often necessary when embedded in larger agency- and donor-programmes.

Toily Kurbanov is UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Management Services. These remarks were given at the side-event [Jobs Make the Difference](#) hosted by UNDP, WFP, ILO, Denmark, and Germany; which took place at the Brussels Syria Conference on April 5th, 2017.

• Syria • refugees

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions](#)