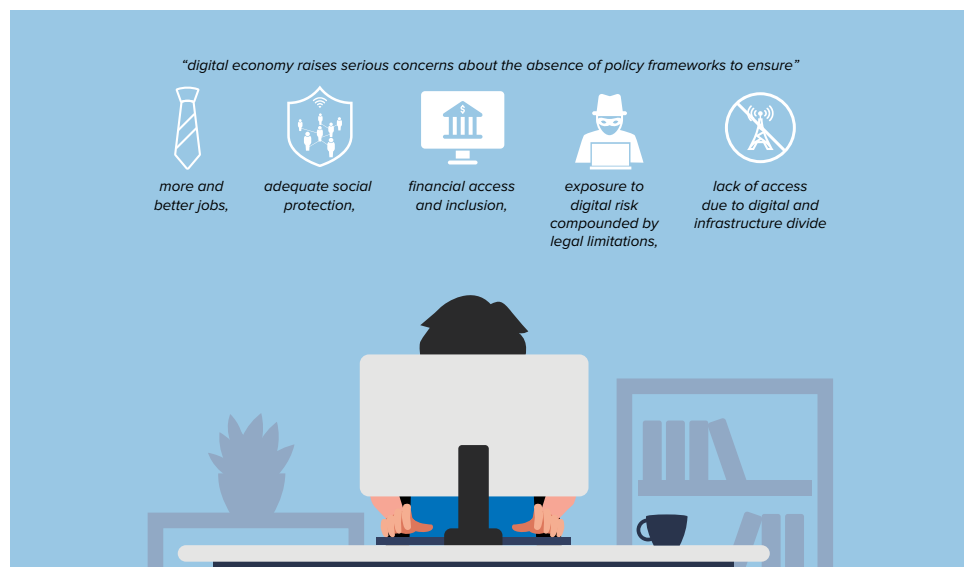# Promotion, Inclusion and Protection of Refugees in the Gig Economy

This concept note summarizes financial and technical support available for UNHCR country operations through a new Dutch-MFA-funded initiative facilitated by UNHCR Innovation Service and the Division of Resilience and Solutions. This may be of interest to each operation's focal points for Livelihood, Development, Education, Community-Based Protection or External Relations.

In an age of expanding and rapid digital transformation, technology provides vast opportunities to forcibly displaced people and their hosting communities for strengthening their self-reliance and inclusion. The scope of the potential of digital livelihoods to bring positive change to peoples' lives is clear, with internet penetration rapidly expanding and an increasing number of digital platform companies looking to the global south for labor supply and new sources of specialization.

At the same time, the current state of forcibly displaced and host community workers in the digital economy raises serious concerns about the absence of policy frameworks to ensure more and better jobs, adequate social protection, financial access/inclusion and broader exposure to digital risk compounded by legal limitations and lack of access due to digital and infrastructure divide. The way forward will require UNHCR to confront these deficits to enable forcibly displaced and host communities' safe access to a fairer digital economy and turn this promise of inclusive jobs into reality.

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About the project

To address these issues, the Innovation Service and Socio-Economic Inclusion Service (SEIS) section of the Division of Resilience and Solutions and the Regional Bureaux have developed a project, in collaboration with ILO. The project - **Promotion, Inclusion and Protection of Refugees in the Gig Economy** - is funded by the Dutch MFA through its 'PROSPECTS Opportunity Fund'. The project aims to improve the working conditions of forcibly displaced people and their hosting communities on digital labor platforms and mitigate associated digital risks, while working towards conducive and inclusive national and local employment strategies. The project has funding to implement in eight countries – **Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan** - for 18 months (1 January 2022 – 30 June 2023). There are three key outcome areas for the project that contribute to the overarching goal of providing refugees and hosting communities with safer access to digitally-enabled livelihoods:

1. **Policy:** Policy solutions developed to promote employment opportunities, improve rights at work and mitigate risks for digital workers;

2. **Capacity Building**: Enhanced capacity of employers, online work platforms, humanitarian organizations, policymakers, workers' associations, Persons of Concern (PoCs) and host communities through tool development and technical guidance;

3. **Testing new approaches**: New models for safe, secure refugee inclusive digital platform work or digital-enabled livelihoods are tested, documented and put on a pathway to scale.

What is on offer

In order to deliver the project, UNHCR and ILO seek to build out projects at country level addressing challenges covered within the project scope. Through the PROSPECTS project, UNHCR country operations will be provided with financial and technical support to explore, test and learn from innovative models for safe, secure, refugee inclusive digital livelihood solutions. These could fall under any of the three outcome areas above.

Programmatic approaches through which UNHCR operations can benefit from this support include:

1. **Direct Implementation** *(whereby the Innovation Service provides technical and financial resources for an operation to implement activities);*

2. **Project Partnership Agreements** *(set up and managed between the Innovation Service and an implementing partner or between the operation and IP charged to the Innovation Service's cost center);*

3. **Procuring goods and services from relevant companies** *(with costs charged directly to the Innovation Service);*

4. **Funding for HR costs** *(e.g., modest support for UNOPS staffing to oversee project implementation).*

The PROSPECTS project team can also provide support through global and regional level activities. For example, we intend to develop practical how-to guides and tools for advocating for improved digital risks policy, training curricula for humanitarian and development actors as well as communities (PoCs and Host Communities) on mitigating digital risks, and policy and regulatory toolkits. The team is open to supporting any ideas that country operations might have within the themes below, including those building upon and in coordination with ongoing efforts on multisectoral AAP supported by PROSPECTS in the MENA and EHAGL regions.

What do we mean by mitigating Digital Risk in the Digital Economy?

While numerous projects focus on facilitating digitally-enabled livelihoods, few focus on the quality of work, or on addressing specific risks that might come with entrance into the digital economy. The PROSPECTS project team will provide you with a concept note where you can read more about different digital risks. Below are some ideas on types of activities linked to digital risk that could be supported through this project - but note that the list is not exhaustive:

Education and Training

- **Digital literacy and skills training**, with a focus on digital awareness and online safety, taking into account the Age, Gender, and Diversity approaches, as implemented in 2021 through different initiatives such as the MENA digital AAP grant to community and grassroots organizations and UNHCR Innovation Service Digital Inclusion Call for Proposals projects;

- **Other community-facing training or capacity building programs,** such as programs to develop useful market-driven competencies for digital work amongst those who are already 'digitally literate';

- **Incorporating digital dimensions into existing livelihoods programming** linking refugees' existing skills and values to expand online with an emphasis on safety.

Infrastructure

- **Creating safe physical spaces to get online** for communities to undertake remote work, with support provided specifically for marginalized groups, such as women, the elderly and persons with disabilities;

- **Upgrading existing digital infrastructure** or projects to focus on great security and data protection to ensure suboptimal security practices in community centers.

Research and Advocacy

- **Assessments to better understand the digital economy ecosystem:** in particular, community-based assessments that seek to understand risks and opportunities from communities' own perspectives, building upon existing assessments conducted in the PROSPECTS countries to prevent duplication of efforts or assessment fatigue;

- **Campaigns addressing fraud and exploitation risks** leveraging security conscious 'tech-savvy' community members and using more engaging forms of awareness-raising (e.g. videos or social media campaigns, or over SMS channels for those without access to the Internet) to better inform communities about evolving cyber threats and risks;

- **Advocacy for the digital and financial inclusion of refugees** into national strategies to ensure refugees' protection and security in the digital sphere and enable their access to SIM registration and mobile money;

Sharing Knowledge

- **Knowledge exchanges between digital risk specialists and community organizations** to keep apace with technological developments;

- **Global/local mentorship program** between refugees and successful workers in the digital economy to provide hands-on coaching and mentoring on creating an online profile, finding work and safe ways of communicating with clients online;

Partnerships

- **Partnership with the government and private sectors** for increased effectiveness and scale, leveraging the reach of local Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to extend public awareness campaigns;

- **Liaising with different social media companies, mobile network operators and other technology companies,** to ensure vigilance and prompt removal of scams and false advertisements online and provide systematic information on how to stay safe online;

- **Working with local digital labor platform providers** for better deals for refugees and marginalized groups within the refugee community;

- **Effective complaint, feedback and referral mechanisms** for tackling intended financial fraud and exploitation in digital livelihoods and dismantling identified scams through coordinated efforts between agencies and communities.

Focal Points

The focal points of the PROSPECTS Digital Economy/Digital Risk project are based across different regional locations with a presence in the Middle East and North Africa and the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes.

For any requests/queries. please don't hesitate to get in touch with us:

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Cover image: Naima Ismail, a 29-year-old refugee from Somalia conducts online support sessions for refugee women for an online support project run by the University of New South Wales and UNHCR in Malaysia © UNHCR/Patricia Krivanek