

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy for Sustainable Job Creation in a Changing World of Work

Maria Teresa Gutierrez Santayana

AT A GLANCE

- The integration of refugees, particularly women, into the labour market requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses social, economic, and cultural barriers. Using the Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme in Jordan as a reference, this paper focuses on the care economy.
 - Unpaid care work is a shared challenge for refugee and local women in host countries. It is a particularly significant obstacle to inclusion for refugee women. Participatory planning improves the effectiveness of care infrastructure investments.
 - Skills development and recognition are critical for labour market entry.
 - Female entrepreneurship and services provision in the construction/infrastructure sector are economic niches to be explored and developed at municipality level.
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INTRODUCTION

Germany has supported Syrian refugees through international and national initiatives. Starting in 2012, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Development Bank (KfW) helped Germany become the second-largest bilateral donor to Syria, contributing more than half a billion euros annually. During the 2015 crisis, Germany took in a large influx of Syrians; according to the German Office of Statistics, around 973,000 were living in Germany by the end of 2023. A total of 712,000 were granted refugee status, 41 % of them being women.

The current impulse focuses on the mechanisms developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for job creation through public investment (JCPI) and implemented in partnership with the Federal Government of Germany as donor. The aim is to

facilitate equal access to labour markets and promote the social and economic integration of Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Germany as host countries. The document seeks to contribute to DIFIS social policy research Field 2, which calls for inclusive strategies for a sustainable transition through social policies that mitigate the effects of the changing world of work.

THE EMPLOYMENT INTENSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME (EIIP) IN JORDAN

Background

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, along with the Guiding Principles on Refugees' Labour Market Access and Recommendation No. 205 on Employment and Decent

Work for Peace and Resilience, provides a strong foundation for protecting the labour rights of vulnerable groups, such as refugees and women.

The ILO's JCPI, as a technical programme, uses a local resource-based approach to optimise local labour, skills, materials, and equipment, while promoting the development of social, productive, and environmental infrastructure. It also fosters women's participation as workers and contractors, challenging stereotypes about traditional gender roles and social norms.

In 2016, the Jordan Compact agreement eased legal employment barriers for refugees, increased aid and enhanced access to the European product market. Studies found that 48 % of Syrian refugees are under the age of 15, and that 22 % of households are headed by women facing livelihood challenges. Regarding women's participation, 60 % of Syrian refugee workers and 80 % of Jordanian workers **support women's employment if childcare is available**, highlighting the need for supportive policies¹

The project

In July 2016, with German support, the ILO launched the Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme (EIIP) in Jordan. The initiative provided job opportunities for vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees, while improving green infrastructure and public spaces. It set participation targets of 50 % for Jordanians and Syrians, with 10 % being women and 5 % persons with disabilities to promote decent work opportunities and reduce inequalities (EIIP 2018).

The endurance of the programme allowed the EIIP project team to develop a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) strategy throughout the project cycle to promote equitable opportunities and inclusion for women and persons with disabilities². **Measures were implemented enabling women** access to paid work and business training. Other measures promoted employment in public infrastructure and services, empowering women and making them visible.

By 2022, the entire German-funded EIIP project had created jobs for 22,552 people, with 20 % of these being women, upgraded skills for 19,000 people through various training programmes, and provided work permits in the construction sector. The **women's entrepreneurship initiative trained and certified 124 women on the "Women Do Business"** programme, beyond the target of 100 women³.

The box gives an overview of GESI⁴ policy development by identifying mechanisms, policies and strategies, as well as their correspondence with German mechanisms and institutions, to enable feasible implementation at different levels.

GESI as a comprehensive Policy tool

Identification of:

- public investments and sectors addressing care infrastructure and services at district and municipal levels
- national policies for social integration and access to labour market.
(Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales)
- strategies for employment creation (direct /indirect). As workers, contractors, service providers. *Stadt and district governments.*
- national/sectoral policies for gender equality and social inclusion. *Gender Equality Policy. (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend)*
- Transfer local resource-based approach to optimize local labour and skills, materials, and equipment. ILO's International Training Centre.

GERMAN POLICIES FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND LABOUR MARKET ACCESS

In 2015, Germany's open-door policy granted protection to many refugees, including 320,000 Syrians. Policies and integration mechanisms were established, encompassing migration counselling, administrative integration, and labour market measures. The Federal Labour Agency oversees labour market-related policies, which include the Basic Income Support (SGB II) and Unemployment Insurance (SGB III) schemes. Local job centres and employment agencies help with integration courses, occupational German training, and support for the recognition of qualifications⁵. These mechanisms help ensure the employability of migrants and refugees and their access to the labour market.

The author discussed these national policies with the Coordination Agency for Migration and Participation and the Equal Opportunities and Integration Officer in the Heidekreis district of Lower Saxony. The agency presented local strategies and mechanisms to assist migrants and Syrian refugees, particularly women facing greater challenges, in accessing the German labour market⁶. The discussions highlighted the role of

voluntary work and networking in overcoming integration barriers, as well as the importance of (care) infrastructure, **especially for female refugees. The discussions also raised the lack of sufficient childcare infrastructure for children under 3 years old (Krippenplätze) and public transport, which restrict the ability of female refugees to access training and jobs.**

Digital tools and mechanisms developed exclusively for immigrants in the Heidekreis District are:

- **INTEGREAT⁷**: An application providing accurate information to local residents and migrants in 12 different languages, including sign language and transcripts, making it an inclusive tool for guiding users step by step in their settlement process and integration. It covers fundamental rights, asylum processes, language and education, and mechanisms for accessing the labour market.
- **LINA**: Long-term integration and sustainable job support, particularly within SMEs, for migrants and refugees through personal counselling, financed by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)⁸.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CARE WORK

Following the results of the studies and the local information provided by the Heidekreis officials, the provision of care services and infrastructure to support women's unpaid care work and employability is the key factor to address under the current Policy strategy.

The German Gender Equality Policy defines measures to achieve equal rights and income opportunities for women and men in all phases of life. One of its main pillars is the integration of care work into economic policies, ensuring equal opportunities for women and refugees in the workforce, and addressing systemic barriers to their social and economic inclusion. A study at national level reveals that unpaid care work constitutes a critical issue. In 2024, the gender care gap was 44.3 %, reflecting the disproportionate burden on women⁹. The study recommends the implementation of **essential care infrastructure, which includes childcare services, reliable transport, and digital connectivity, to reduce unpaid care responsibilities and promote gender equality.**

Care Work Strategies in Germany and Jordan

In Jordan, the ILO's EIIP project addressed care work by integrating gender-sensitive approaches in community-based projects providing transportation to

workplaces and childcare facilities. The project promoted the integration of host and refugee women into participatory planning processes to identify care needs in the provision of local infrastructure. This created opportunities for female professionals as contractors and service providers in the infrastructure sector. In Germany, the focus includes improving essential care infrastructure and aligning work schedules with family responsibilities. In Germany, short-term public employment programmes are not feasible, but public-private partnerships may be suitable for smaller-scale infrastructure projects or maintenance activities. Assessing women's transportation needs to enhance their access to workplaces or training opportunities, as well as identifying relevant skills and qualifications required in the infrastructure and construction sectors, could create new opportunities for promoting women's entrepreneurship and support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Germany.

KEY FINDINGS

As can be seen, the integration of refugees, particularly women, into the German labour market requires an intersectoral approach that addresses social, economic, and cultural barriers.

Key findings include:

- Unpaid care work is a shared challenge for refugee and local women in host countries. It is a particularly significant obstacle to the inclusion of refugee women.
- Skills development and prior learning recognition are critical for labour market entry. Participatory planning improves the effectiveness of care infrastructure investments.
- Female entrepreneurship and services provision in the construction/infrastructure sector is an economic niche to be explored and developed at municipality level.

GOOD PRACTICES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- The Heidekreis Inclusion and Integration Unit supports female refugees through monthly meetings.
- Walsrode operates a mini bus service with volunteer drivers to assist with transport.
- Walsrode and Schneverdingen have been awarded the "FaMi Seal for Companies in Northeast Lower Saxony" for promoting the compatibility of family and career.
- Flexible working hours are actively communicated, allowing employees to agree on individual working time models.
- INTEGREAT; digital service that lowers barriers to access relevant information.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of Jordan and Germany highlight both innovative strategies and shared challenges in integrating Syrian refugees, particularly women. By leveraging international, national, and local frameworks, both countries demonstrate the importance of gender equality and social inclusion in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The areas identified to transfer to DIFIS, balancing work and childcare, are participatory planning access, entrepreneurship development, targeting female contractors and professionals, strengthening public-private association and the contracting system with emphasis on unpaid care work.

The following strategies can enhance integration efforts:

- Decentralized investment in care infrastructure and services through public-private partnerships.
- Gender-responsive procurement to promote and/or support female entrepreneurs and workers.
- Entrepreneurship initiatives like "Women Do Business," which empower women through training and support.

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