
REFUGEES AND THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Labour rights, organizing, and collective bargaining to prevent social dumping

More than 5.5 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries since the outset of the civil war according to the UN. Around 2.9 million live in Lebanon and Jordan, where they represent a major social and economic challenge to the host communities. At the same time, Syrian refugees have little opportunities to provide for their own livelihoods.

Social dumping is widespread in the region, resulting in widespread abuse of refugees. Many Syrian refugees work in the informal construction sector at a fraction of the wages for local workers and under potentially dangerous working conditions. It is for the benefit of unscrupulous subcontractors and employers and therefore leads

to many conflicts with local workers experiencing payroll.

Some refugees live in camps and have access to basic assistance and relief services, including legal aid. Large groups of Syrian refugees live outside camps and are more vulnerable. However, both groups are affected by a variety of legal and social barriers that is hindering or limiting their access to the labour market. For example, it is difficult to get a work permit.

As the war in Syria draws to an end, the governments in Lebanon and Jordan are raising demands that large groups should return home to war-torn Syria, where skilled labour will be in demand.

- How should trade unions respond to this challenge?
- How can we use workers' rights, organising, and collective bargaining to stop social dumping?
- Can trade unions help upgrade the skills of refugees so that they can contribute positively to the host country and to the reconstruction of their country when the war ends?

Regional efforts

3F and BWI share a commitment to address the Syrian refugee crisis in the region.

In 2017 at its 4th congress, the BWI adopted seven resolutions regarding solidarity actions to be undertaken by the BWI and affiliated trade unions. These include solidarity with refugees and migrant workers displaced by conflicts.

BWI works with its affiliated member unions in Lebanon and Jordan to organize and build capacities of Syrian refugees providing advice and legal aid. BWI also uses its position as a global union federation to implement activities, support statements and raise awareness on the issue of refugees.

Since 2013, 3F has been supporting BWI's work in the region.

Over the next 3 years, 3F is implementing a regional programme in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in cooperation with Danish Industry (DI) to promote the labour market inclusion of refugees in the region. 3F's support to the work of BWI is a major part of this programme.

3F particularly support the BWI Arab and Turkish Cement and Construction Network where construction unions can meet to share experiences and plan regional campaigns. Furthermore, BWI receives support to conduct dialogue and round table meetings in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey with Syrian refugees to discuss issues and challenges they are facing on the labour market as well as ways of how to solve them

Meet Wassim Rifi –BWI Middle East (MENA) project coordinator



Wassim Rifi, currently BWI MENA project Coordinator, was born and raised in Northern Lebanon. He has a teaching background but has since worked for the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, appointed as activities coordinator working with Save the Children, UNICEF and UNHCR.

In 2008, Wassim began working with the Building and Wood Workers International (BWI). He develops and coordinates projects aiming at building strong unions, building capacities of workers in a rapidly changing social and economic environment, and helping trade unions in the BWI family to organise local, migrant and refugee workers into trade unions.

BUILDING AND WOOD WORKERS INTERNATIONAL – BWI

BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors. The BWI groups together 334 trade unions, representing around 12 million members in 130 countries.

The mission of BWI is to promote the development of trade unions in these sectors throughout the world and to promote and enforce workers' rights in the context of sustainable development.



3F's International Work

3F has worked with international solidarity and development for more than 30 years in close collaboration with sister organisations, taking a point of departure in the partners own strategic plans. 3F adds experience from the Danish labour market model and also promotes south-south experience sharing across borders.

3F's programmes are implemented in South and South East Asia, southern Africa, Latin America,

the Middle East as well as Central- and Eastern Europe.

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3F, Danish Industry and the LO/FTF Council formed a Labour Market Consortium in 2017 and signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark for the promotion of well-functioning labour markets as a contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.

