

UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement – 2025 Webinar Series

Examining labour market integration of migrants and refugees in the Global South

UM6P Research Chair's 2025 Webinar Series

Although most displaced people reside in the Global South,¹ research on migration and displacement remains largely shaped by the Global North,² often sidelining the complex realities and inequalities experienced in the Global South. The UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement aims to address this imbalance by generating regionally grounded insights to inform policy development. The UM6P Chair's Webinar Series brings together diverse voices from the Global North and the Global South to explore key issues related to displacement, fostering dialogue between academics, policymakers, and practitioners.

This scene-setting brief introduces the topic of the third session in the Webinar Series, titled “*Examining labour market integration of migrants and refugees in the Global South.*”

Introduction: The importance of labour market integration

Labour market access is widely acknowledged to be **essential for the socio-economic integration** of migrants and displaced persons.^{3,4} In particular, the right to work for refugees has been **recognised in various international agreements and instruments**, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees.^{5,6,7} However, having the right to work and access to the labour market is not sufficient in itself; there is a need for **access to decent work⁸ and protection for workers.**^{4,9}

If displaced persons can “work without sector or geographic limits, move freely, and enjoy robust protections both in law and in practice,”¹⁰ decent work can help to restore their dignity and life purpose, strengthen their resilience and self-reliance, and support their social integration into host communities.^{5,11,12} Various **positive effects** have also been documented for host communities, including the introduction of new skills, know-how, and entrepreneurship, increasing tax revenues, enhanced

¹ UNHCR. (2024). *Mid-year trends 2024*. <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends-report-2024>

² Achieng, M., & El Fadil, A. (2020). What is wrong with the narrative on African migration? In A. Adepoju, C. Fumagalli, & N. Nyabola (Eds.), *Africa Migration Report: Challenging the narrative* (pp. 1–14). IOM. <https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-challenging-narrative>

³ Peitz, L., Baliki, G., Ferguson, N.T.N., & Brück, T. (2023). Do work permits work? The impacts of formal labor market integration of Syrian refugees in Jordan. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 36(4), 955–982. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead064>

⁴ Slimane, M. A. A., & Al Abbadi, S. (2022). Six years after the Jordan Compact: the effect of labour market policies on Syrians' economic integration. *Forced Migration Review*, 71. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/aitalislmane-alabbadi/>

⁵ ILO. (2020). *Employment and decent work in refugee and other forced displacement contexts: Compendium of ILO's lessons learned, emerging good practices and policy guidance*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/employment-and-decent-work-refugee-and-other-forced-displacement-contexts>

⁶ Ramírez Bolívar, L., & Corredor Villamil, J. (2022). Introduction. In L. Ramírez Bolívar and J. Corredor Villamil (Eds.), *Migration and decent work: Challenges for the global South* (pp. 10–17). Dejusticia Series.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly. (2018, December 17). *Global Compact on Refugees (A/RES/73/151)*. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>

⁸ ILO defines decent work as “work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”⁹

⁹ ILO. (2025). *Decent work*. <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/decent-work#:~:text=Decent%20work%20sums%20up%20the.and%20the%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals>

¹⁰ Ginn, T., Resstack, R., Dempster, H., Arnold-Fernández, E., Miller, S., Guerrero Ble, M., & Kanyamanza, B. (2022). *2022 Global Refugee Work Rights Report*. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report>

¹¹ International Training Centre of the ILO. (2021). *Shifting perspectives around decent work for refugees*. <https://www.itcilo.org/stories/shifting-perspectives-around-decent-work-refugees>

¹² Okai, A. (2022). Foreword – Socio-economic integration: from crisis to opportunity. *Forced Migration Review*, 71. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/okai/>

security and stability, and long-term socioeconomic development.^{5,6,10,13,14}

Challenges, consequences, and promising practices in labour market integration for displaced persons in the Global South

Despite the positive effects of labour market integration for displaced persons and host communities alike, important challenges and barriers remain for economic inclusion in host labour markets in the Global South. For instance, many **host governments prohibit or restrict the right to work** of displaced persons by curtailing the freedom of movement, introducing quotas, or imposing sectoral limitations.^{10,13,14,15} Even where rights are formally granted, discrepancies between law and practice are widespread.¹⁰ **Host country communities themselves can also face significant labour market challenges**, such as weak labour institutions, large informal economies, and high levels of job insecurity, unemployment, and wage disparities, which may make it difficult to adequately support displaced persons' labour market integration.^{6,13,16} **Administrative barriers**, such as complex and lengthy bureaucratic procedures to register businesses, apply for work permits, or obtain skill accreditation, further restrict labour market integration.^{13,17,18} Displaced persons can also face **social barriers**, including discrimination and gender-specific constraints.^{4,14,18,19} Language barriers, lack of social networks, and limited access to financial capital can further impede inclusion.^{13,14,18,20}

As a result of these challenges, only a small minority of displaced persons manage to access the formal labour market and opportunities for decent work in the Global South.^{13,14,17} The **majority work in informal, unregulated or underregulated sectors**, often in low-skilled, low-status, and low-paying jobs, making them vulnerable to unequal, exploitative, and discriminatory practices, such as forced labour.^{13,14,15,21} Data from Colombia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Peru, Türkiye, and Uganda indicate that refugees are 60 per cent more likely to hold informal jobs compared to the host community.²² In other instances, displaced persons remain unemployed.^{16,17,19}

Promising practices to support the socio-economic integration of displaced persons underscore the importance of a **whole-of-community approach**, including access to work, education, housing, health, and supporting social cohesion within host communities.^{4,15} Another priority is the transition of humanitarian aid to **long-term development and inclusion**.^{5,11,12} These efforts can be strengthened by **including a wide range of actors** in decision-making and implementation, including displaced persons, host communities, civil society, the private sector, governments, and international institutions.^{12,23}

Outlining the third session in the Webinar Series

The third webinar will explore what labour market integration means in contexts of migration and forced displacement in the Global South. It will highlight challenges and initiatives that shape migrants' and refugees' access to decent work.

Ms. **Gilda Borriello**, PhD candidate in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) and Program Operations Officer at the World Bank in Jordan, participated in a **podcast**¹⁴ to introduce the webinar topic. In this conversation, Ms. Borriello explored the meaning of labour market integration in the context of displacement,

¹³ ILO. (2016a). *The access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market*. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/gb/326/addressing-labour-market-impacts-refugees-and-other-forcibly-displaced>

¹⁴ FGSES-UM6P. (2025, September 11). *Examining the labour market integration of migrants and refugees in the Global South* [Podcast]. SoundCloud. <https://soundcloud.com/fgses-um6p>

¹⁵ Gürakar Skribeland, O. (2022). Addressing challenges to integrating refugees in the Turkish labour market. *Forced Migration Review*, 71. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/skribeland/>

¹⁶ UNU-CPR. (2023). *Migration and decent work: Challenges for the Global South* (UNU-CPR Policy Brief). United Nations University. <https://unu.edu/publication/migration-and-decent-work-challenges-global-south>

¹⁷ Aysa-Lastra, M. (2011). Integration of internally displaced persons in urban labour markets: A case study of the IDP population in Soacha, Colombia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24(2), 277-303. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feq054>

¹⁸ ILO. (2016b). *Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/guiding-principles-access-refugees-and-other-forcibly-displaced-persons>

¹⁹ Prieto Rosas, V., & Zapata, G. P. (2023). Unequal origins to unequal destinations: Trends and characteristics of migrants' social and economic inclusion in South America. In H. Crawley and J.K. Teye (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of South-South Migration and Inequality* (pp. 247-270). Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰ von der Goltz, J., Schuettler, K., Bousquet, J., & Kebede, T. A. (2024). *The labor market impact of forced displacement jobs in host communities in Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Uganda*. World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/40701>

²¹ Vijayaraghavan, H. (2022). Barriers to socio-economic integration in India. *Forced Migration Review*, 71. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/vijayaraghavan/>

²² UNHCR. (2023). *Refugees' access to jobs and financial services*. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/refugees-access-jobs-and-financial-services-background-guide-challenge-3-0>

²³ Shara, L. (2022). Transforming a refugee camp into a marketplace: lessons from Kenya. *Forced Migration Review*, 71. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/shara/>

compared experiences across the Global North and Global South, and highlighted the structural, policy, and individual factors that shape access to work for migrants and refugees.

➔ Find below the invitation including more information about the third session in the Webinar Series, which will take place on Wednesday, September 17th, 2025, from 2.30pm to 4pm (GMT+1). Register using this [link](#).

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RESEARCH CHAIR ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

EXAMINING LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

📅 Wednesday, September 17th, from 2:30pm to 4pm (GMT+1)

Moderated by Myriam Cherti, IDRC Research Chair on Forced Displacement, UM6P



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Professor of Economics,
University of Southampton



SPEAKER
Gilda Borriello
PhD candidate,
University of Oxford



SPEAKER
Imane Bendra
PhD candidate,
University of Antwerp



SPEAKER
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