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Beyond digital skills training:

Translating Arab refugee women's digital skills for economic inclusion and access to labour markets

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About this briefing

Digital skills have become paramount in today's employment market. This is particularly true when it comes to job search and applications. Refugee women, in particular, lag behind in their digital skills, thus limiting their ability to successfully search for and apply for jobs online. In addition, refugee women generally have very low employment rates compared to their male counterparts. For example, in the UK refugee women had a peak employment rate of 12% after seven years of arrival in the UK between 2015 and 2023 (UK Home Office, 2025).

This briefing highlights the gaps in Arab refugee women's digital skills, with a specific focus on the women's job-specific digital skills required for them to successfully search and apply for jobs online.

The briefing provides cost-effective measures and practical recommendations to support multiple marginalised groups and improve their employability, thus reducing their dependency on aid and, consequently, the economic burden on their host country. These recommendations include specific training on online job search and application and updating school curricula, securing more funding, and raising awareness of job guides and toolkits specifically for refugee women, such as the "[Digital Toolkit for Arab Refugee Women for Online Job Search and Application](#)".

Brief Highlights

- Most of the refugee women interviewed have digital skills and use them for personal use but lack the ability to translate these skills into the professional context.
- The majority of the women do not have job-specific digital skills that would enable them to successfully search and apply for jobs online.
- Equipping these women with job-specific digital skills would not only enhance their prospects for employment but also serve as a tool to enable them to overcome cultural, social, and economic barriers to labour market access.
- Additional quantitative research is needed to assess and evaluate these women's digital skills, including the extent of their usage of these skills and an understanding of their online job search and application strategies.

The research

This briefing is based on findings from a doctoral thesis which relied on 57 qualitative interviews with Syrian and Palestinian refugee women in 12 different locations in Jordan, Lebanon and the UK (Only Syrian refugee women were interviewed in the UK).

Key findings

Finding 1: The majority of Arab refugee women interviewed mostly relied on their mobile phones as their main digital device

Over 68% of the refugee women interviewed, regardless of whether they owned a laptop or not, mostly used their mobile phones to access the internet.



Finding 2: The majority of the women did not apply for a job online and thought they were unable to do so by themselves

Figure 1 illustrates whether the Arab refugee women interviewed searched for and applied for jobs online. The figure shows that only 50% of the women searched for jobs online, and the majority (61%) had not applied for a job online.

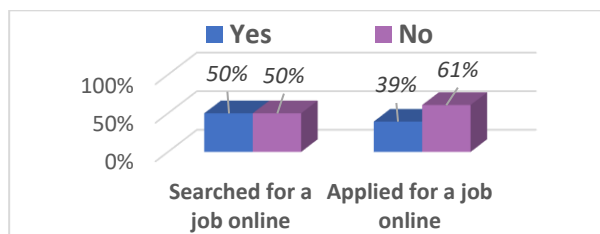


Figure 1: Arab refugee women interviewed searched and applied for jobs online

Furthermore, less than half of the women interviewed said that they were confident that they would be able to search and apply for a job online by themselves, while the majority indicated that they would need some kind of support.

Finding 3: The majority of the women interviewed had digital skills but used them for personal use only and lacked job-specific digital skills

The vast majority of the refugee women interviewed used a wide array of digital skills that are necessary for a successful online job search and application. The caveat here is that the women mostly used these skills for personal use and lacked the ability to translate these skills to those used in the professional context. In addition, these women were unaware of the significance of these skills for a successful online job search and application. Examples include creating a visually appealing CV and the ability to create and customise job-centric digital content.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

1) Training on online job search and applications:

a. Partner with existing centres that provide digital skills training and agree on a specific quota for refugee women participants: Governments and public entities should partner with existing centres or organisations within the refugee women's surroundings that provide digital skills training for jobseekers or skills for online job search and application. Within these partnerships, they could potentially agree with the centres on a quota per regular time interval. For example, 3-4

refugee women join the ongoing training for free each month. This method would also allow this training to become an ongoing process rather than a one-off training or workshop.

b. Update school and university curricula: Governments should update school and university curricula with regard to digital technology subjects to focus on how students can use their already acquired digital skills and transfer them into those needed to search and apply for jobs online. This would be done to equip students (including refugee women) with the digital skills needed to keep up with new trends in employability, job search, and application as a result of technological advancements.

c. Secure more funding focused on job-specific digital skills training for refugee women: Governments should aim to secure additional funding which focuses specifically on job-specific digital skills training for refugee women.

2) Raising awareness of well-known recruitment sites, job portals, and online jobseeker guides and toolkits:

Some of these guides and toolkits are specifically tailored to refugee women, such as the toolkit I created entitled "[Digital Toolkit for Arab Refugee Women for Online Job Search and Application](#)". Following the example of the UK government, other public organisations and governments in other countries should raise awareness and direct their website visitors to reliable, well-known, and popular job portals and recruitment sites in their country, as well as regional and global ones that operate in their country. They should make this information accessible via their online presence, both on their website and social media platforms, as well as through their press releases or newsletters that are sent out to their beneficiaries (if applicable).

Sources:

HOME-OFFICE. 2025. Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO): Employment from 2015 to 2023 [Online]. UK Home Office. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables#asylum-and-resettlement> [Accessed July 24 2026].

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