INTERNSHIPS
CASE STUDY
DRC MENA livelihoods learning programme 2017-2019

LEBANON

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The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 1956 that works in more than 40 countries throughout the world. DRC fulfils its mandate by providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations – refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities in the conflict areas of the world and by advocating on their behalf internationally and in Denmark.

A Syrian refugee training at a hospital after receiving skills and vocational training in Zahle, Lebanon. January 2017. Photo by: DRC
Brief project description

DRC aimed to provide internships to 90 young (18-24 years old) Syrian refugees and Lebanese host community members in the Bekaa Valley, to increase their employability and provide them with access to job opportunities. Internships provided young job seekers with on-the-job training and employment experience that could lead to their retention in a longer-term position, while also supporting the possible scale-up of a small business.

The Theory of Change / Impact Chain for the internship component is briefly outlined below.

Impact Chain for the internship component

1. Job seekers among the target group are identified, registered
2. Clients receive livelihoods counselling (and are referred to either skills training, job referrals or internships with interested employers)
3. Clients complete two to three months of internship period
4. Employability and employment rates among the target group are enhanced
5. Positive effects of enhanced employment (on social and economic self-reliance among target group and social cohesion between refugees and host communities is strengthened)

Observations and findings

1. The project had to be designed with little up-to-date market information. A market study by another agency that was expected to inform this activity was delayed, accessible labour market information was outdated and no data was available from the Chamber of Commerce. There was no link to a local economic development strategy.

2. The project was well known by the target groups. A large number of potential clients appear to know this programme, many of them through the municipality’s ‘national targeting poverty programme’. Outreach strategies were governed by the overall grant size, which limited the number of clients DRC could potentially assist. The government set a ratio between refugees and host clients of 30:70. Syrian refugees can only be legally employed in the three sectors of agriculture, construction and environment (cleaning). The legality of an internship is unclear. This limited DRC’s capacity to assist Syrian refugees through internships.

3. 1200 applicants were profiled for 90 internships. 800 applicants were in the eligible age group (18-24) for training, job referrals or internships.

4. The intake, registration and counselling process is resource heavy, but case processing time has been reduced significantly. DRC has to actively look for potential employers and internship positions (and compete with other agencies doing the same). There are no registers of potential employers willing to host an intern.

5. DRC follows internships very closely to support the process and verify that interns are treated according to regulations. However, this is demanding in terms of staff hours, and turns DRC into micro-managers rather than investing resources in new projects.

6. Most interns are Lebanese citizens, in line with government regulations. It remains unclear which specific constraint is blocking Lebanese citizens from finding work and for which they turn to DRC for help. It is also unclear to what extent DRC helps its clients at the expense of other (Lebanese) job seekers.
7. It is too early to judge the impact of this project in terms of job retention. As of May 2017, only 8 internships had been completed, of which three interns were retained in their job. Project staff conservatively estimate the potential retention rate at around 30%.

8. DRC provides a subsidy of USD 200-300 per month. Hosting an intern thus gives an employer free labour in the short term, and an opportunity to test a person’s personality, skill and trustworthiness over a three-month period.

9. Not much is known as yet about the socio-economic impact of this project. Anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests that internships have a positive impact in terms of a realistic chance to make the leap into a labour market, that is perceived as difficult to access. One of the common arguments in the aid sector for assisting both refugees and host communities is that this will improve social cohesion. Anti-Syrian feeling in the project area is high, but there was little evidence that this project did in fact have a positive impact on social cohesion, or any suggestion of a mechanism by which it might do so. In fact, it could even create additional tension by giving some job seekers an advantage at the cost of others.

DAC criteria assessment

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<th>DAC CRITERIA</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
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<td>RELEVANCE</td>
<td>The goal of facilitating access to the labour market for youth, both Lebanese and Syrian, is highly relevant. There is no structure nationally of job centres for helping young Lebanese and Syrians to find jobs or placements. If DRC’s matching system results in significant job retention, or in making it easier for interns to find other jobs afterwards, then the intervention may prove relevant. (This can only be assessed in 2018.)</td>
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<td>COST-EFFICIENCY</td>
<td>No analysis of cost efficiency as yet been undertaken. Cost efficiency has certainly improved over time, as the process of outreach, registration, profiling, scoring and referral has been streamlined. Although individual outreach to employers does not appear efficient, it is hard to see the alternative on the current project model, given the lack of any existing information.</td>
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<td>EFFECTIVENESS &amp; IMPACT</td>
<td>Since few internships had been completed, little could be concluded about impact yet. Neither the political or economic climate (nationally and locally) are favourable to producing good outcomes. Expectations have to be realistic and moderate.</td>
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<td>SUSTAINABILITY</td>
<td>Too early to assess.</td>
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<td>COVERAGE</td>
<td>Coverage is limited in relation to overall caseload numbers. Scaling up would depend upon further streamlining the intake process, and more critically, on the ability to identify sufficient entrepreneurs willing to host interns.</td>
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Main take-aways

- Two areas of knowledge have been identified as important: legal information, and understanding about labour markets. It is less clear what exactly an INGO needs to know for its decision-making, particularly regarding market information. This is an area in which DRC needs to help staff achieve greater clarity.
- Explore alternative ways to a) identify internship positions, and b) streamline the 'matching process' between potential employers and eligible interns, e.g. by means of a digital platform.
- In order to understand the impact of the intervention, it will be necessary to stay in touch with interns after the internship period and the project have ended.