# ECONOMIC EMPOWEREMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES AND VULNERABLE JORDANIANS IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

The AFD-funded Grow Economy project, led by a consortium of actors including Acted, Action Against Hunger (ACF), Terre des hommes (TDH), Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development, ECO Consult, The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), and National Agricultural Research Center (NARC) aims to promote sustainable and inclusive economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in the agriculture sector. The project targets vulnerable small farmers and agricultural labourers aiming to improve their livelihoods and working conditions while promoting gender inclusion.

## SKILLS MAPPING OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

As part of Specific Objective 2, the GrowEconomy Consortium aims to **enhance employability and improve year-round income opportunities for agricultural labourers** in **Ajloun, Irbid, Balqa, and Madaba**. In this project, agricultural labourers are defined as individuals working formally or informally on large and medium-sized farms or cooperatives, typically on a daily or seasonal basis. These workers often face informal working conditions, low wages, and economic instability, making them highly vulnerable to financial insecurity.

To support this objective, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), with support from Acted and Action Against Hunger (ACF), is conducting a skills mapping assessment to identify **710 agricultural labourers** with entrepreneurial potential. This assessment will help select participants who demonstrate business development capabilities in key **income-generating sectors.** The selection process will ensure **equal participation of women** and incorporate **vulnerability criteria** to prioritise individuals from female-headed households, households with persons with disabilities (PwDs), and those experiencing extreme financial hardship or high coping debts. Additionally, Acted and ACF, as geographical leads, will integrate further selection indicators to assess participants' willingness and capacity to launch an income-generating activity (IGA) based on their existing skills and entrepreneurial potential.

**Home Gardening:** focusing on companion planting, space optimisation, water conservation, organic composting, and yield maximisation for small home spaces

**Eco-Tourism:** including hospitality principles, creative branding, experiential tourism

**Food Processing:** focusing on processing techniques, food waste prevention, basics of food safety, recipe development

**Artisanal Crafts:** Including mosaic, candle wax, embroidery, soap, banana leaf basket, handcrafted packaging.

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# KEY OBJECTIVES

The skills mapping assessment aimed to address the following key objectives:

**Evaluate existing skill levels and potential for growth:** Assess the strengths, limitations, and upskilling needs of agricultural labourers working on medium / large-scale farms or in cooperatives, many of whom face informal employment, low wages, and economic insecurity.

**Inform capacity-building efforts:** Guide the development of tailored technical and financial training initiatives to improve productivity and support the economic resilience of labourers.

**Foster entrepreneurship and business development:** Identify and nurture entrepreneurial potential in key sectors such as food processing, eco-tourism, artisanal crafts, and home gardening, particularly through sustainable, agroecological approaches.

**Match workers with relevant technical training:** Use skills profiling to assign participants to two suitable vocational trainings based on their existing competencies and aspirations.

**Generate evidence to inform future policy and programming:** Offer insights into working conditions, skill gaps, recognition challenges, and capacity-building requirements, helping to shape more targeted programme designs and evidence-based policy recommendations.

**Align labourer training with market demand:** Ensure skill development programmes are tailored to meet both current and emerging market needs, thereby enhancing opportunities for long-term employment and sustainable self-employment.

# ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Four central areas guided the key questions examined in the skills mapping assessment:

**Eligibility:** The assessment examined whether labourers were both willing and able to participate in specific economic activities within home gardening, food processing, eco-tourism, and artisanal handcrafts. It explored factors such as access to necessary resources, infrastructure, and the willingness to adopt best practices in their respective fields.

**Knowledge:** Labourers were assessed based on their level of expertise and knowledge in their respective field (home gardening, food processing, eco-tourism and artisanal handcrafts), categorised as beginner, moderate, advanced, or expert. This evaluation provided insights into their familiarity with industry standards, technical know-how, and capacity for skill enhancement.

**Technical Experience:** This section assesses the labourer's hands-on capabilities and practical experience in implementing techniques relevant to their sector. It evaluates their ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings and identifies areas where additional training could enhance productivity and output quality.

**Entrepreneurial Mindset:** This section evaluates the labourers' entrepreneurial potential by measuring their innovation, proactiveness, and risk-taking attitudes. It captures their openness to new ideas, initiative, investment willingness, and business development orientation, including interest, commitment, market awareness, and collaboration with others in the value chain. Combined scores determine overall entrepreneurial potential and suitability for targeted support interventions.

# METHODOLOGY

**Selection Criteria** were jointly defined by ACF (geographical lead in Irbid) and Acted (geographical lead in Ajloun, Balqa, and Madaba) to ensure a harmonised approach across all four target governorates. Candidates must first meet basic eligibility requirements before being evaluated through a structured selection process. The final selection score is based on four key components: **Vulnerability, Entrepreneurial potential, Attitude towards business development, and Skills mapping results.**

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**Data Collection Approach and Methods:** The assessment employed a **single quantitative survey** to collect all the necessary data. The Kobo Toolbox platform was utilised to develop the digital questionnaire, allowing RSCN enumerators to conduct systematic and real-time data collection across the targeted governorates. This digital approach enhanced data accuracy, efficiency, and monitoring, streamlining the analysis process and supporting informed decision-making. Enumerators conducted direct surveys with agricultural labourers to gather detailed information on their skills, experience, market engagement, and training needs. To ensure reliability, the assessment tools were pilot-tested and internally reviewed before full implementation.

**Implementation Timeline and Coverage:** The skills mapping activity was implemented in **three rounds**, reaching a total of **2,034** agricultural labourers across the targeted governorates of **Irbid, Ajloun, Balqa, and Madaba**. Conducted over 52 days, the assessment team completed all interviews at an average pace of 39 per day. This phased and efficient approach not only ensured **comprehensive coverage and data** validation, but also enabled targeted outreach to balance the nationality and gender requirements of the research, while allowing for iterative improvements based on preliminary findings.

- **Round 1:** July – mid-August 2024
- **Round 2:** Mid-August – November 2024
- **Round 3:** December 2024 – January 2025

**Sampling Methodology and Inclusion Strategies:** The assessment employed **purposive sampling** to represent vulnerable agricultural labourers, drawing participants from farms, UNHCR lists, labourer databases from the 20D4C project (also funded by AFD), and RSCN's own records. **Orientation sessions** were conducted to introduce project objectives and facilitate skills mapping. To ensure **gender inclusivity**, female enumerators were engaged, and data collection was disaggregated by gender.

## LIMITATIONS & CHALLENGES

The skills mapping assessment faced several methodological and operational challenges that were systematically addressed throughout the implementation process, but warrant consideration when interpreting the results and planning future initiatives.

### Access and Field-Related Constraints

- **Geographical and Logistical Barriers**: The team encountered difficulties accessing workers in remote agricultural locations, adjusting to seasonal migration periods, and informal employment arrangements of many agricultural labourers further complicated outreach efforts.
- **Scheduling Conflicts**: Workers' irregular and long schedules limited their availability for interviews, requiring flexible data collection approaches (during non-peak hours) and good advance communication with farm owners and community leaders.

### Methodological Refinements

- **Assessment Tool Development**: Initial pilot testing revealed gaps in the mapping tool that necessitated slight revisions.
- **Participant Orientation**: Brief pre-interview sessions were introduced to clarify assessment objectives and expectations, improving data quality and participant engagement.

### Participant Selection and Representation

- **Verification Challenges**: Some individuals initially identified through existing agricultural labourer databases or referrals were found to be ineligible upon verification, necessitating additional screening measures. This was particularly prevalent when using external participant lists.
- **Gender Balance**: Achieving adequate female representation required targeted outreach strategies and the strategic deployment of female researchers.

# DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The skills mapping assessment successfully reached **2,034 agricultural labourers** across the governorates of Ajloun, Irbid, Madaba, and Balqa through three strategic data collection rounds.

**Regional Distribution:** The team initially concentrated efforts in Ajloun and Irbid, due to the higher concentration of agricultural labourers in these regions. As the assessment progressed, focus strategically shifted toward Madaba and Balqa to achieve more balanced regional representation while also adapting to seasonal labour migration patterns. The final distribution was: Irbid (41%), Madaba (26%), Ajloun (18%), and Balqa (15%).

**Gender and Nationality Composition**: The assessment achieved a gender distribution of 59% female and 41% male participants, ensuring strong representation of female agricultural labourers, while the respondent pool comprised 52% Syrian and 48% Jordanian participants.

The diverse and well-balanced sample provides a comprehensive view of agricultural labour trends across Jordan's key agricultural regions.
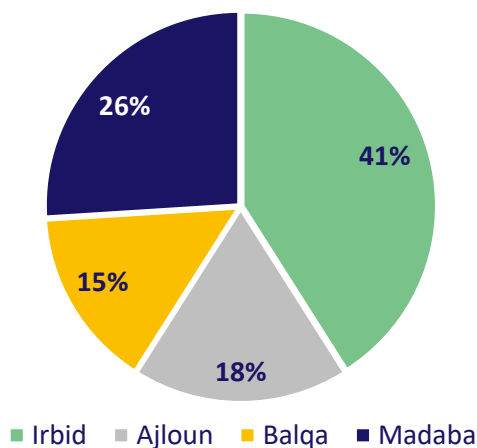
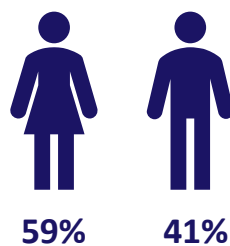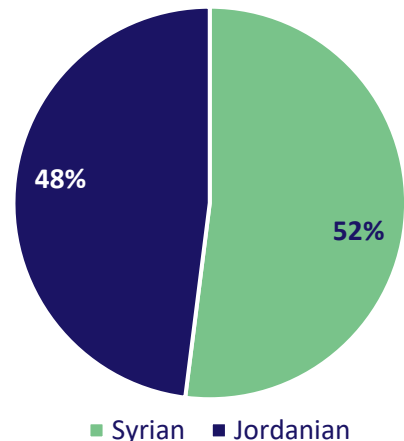Figure 1: Governorate Distribution

Figure 2: Gender Distribution

Figure 3: Nationality Distribution

26%

41%

15%

18%

■ Irbid  ■ Ajloun  ■ Balqa  ■ Madaba

59%    41%

48%

52%

■ Syrian  ■ Jordanian

# ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION

Based on the entrepreneurial questions covered by the survey, agricultural labourers demonstrated several **promising entrepreneurial traits**. A strong majority (91%) agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer trying new and unusual activities rather than sticking to familiar ones. Similarly, 89% indicated they act in anticipation of future problems rather than waiting for them to happen. When learning new things, 87% preferred trying their own unique approaches. Approximately 71% expressed willingness to invest time and money in potentially profitable ventures, and the same percentage reported feeling comfortable taking bold actions.

These findings are particularly relevant to our skills assessment as they indicate participants have the entrepreneurial mindset necessary to embrace both the technical skills training and business development components of the project, while also suggesting most agricultural labourers possess key entrepreneurial characteristics including **openness to innovation, proactive planning, and moderate risk tolerance**, providing a solid foundation for entrepreneurial training and development initiatives.
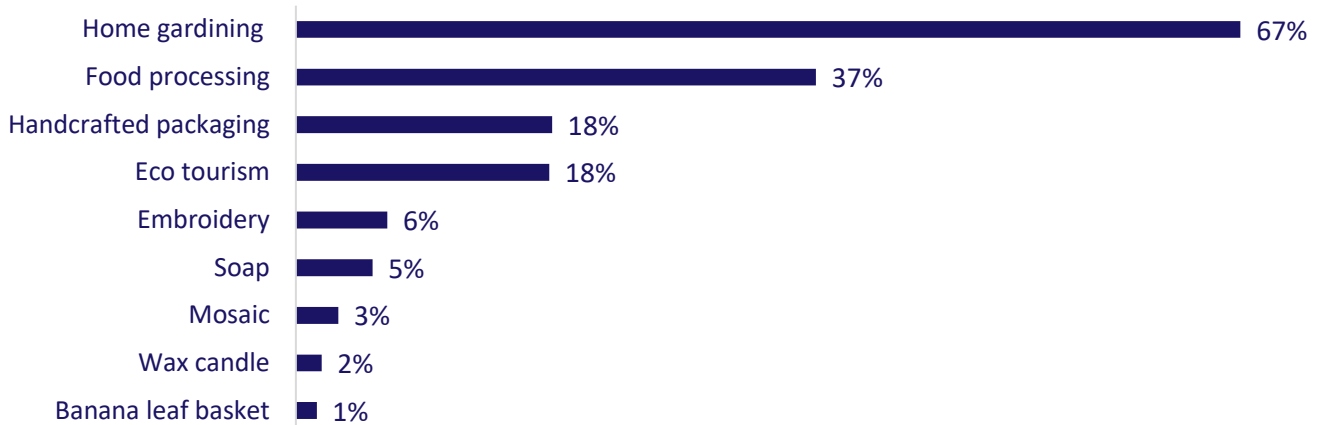
# SKILLS MAPPING FINDINGS

## SKILL TYPE DISTRIBUTION

The assessment results highlight that of the 2034 agricultural labourers assessed, a significant portion are interested, willing, and meet the requirements to engage in home gardening (67%) and food processing (37%), suggesting these are the most prevalent and accessible skills among respondents. Other skills with notable interest include eco-tourism (18%) and handcrafted packaging (18%), reflecting a growing openness to diversified income-generating activities. In contrast, skills such as banana leaf basket-making (1%), wax candle production (2%), and mosaic crafts (3%) attracted interest from only a small fraction of respondents, indicating these are more niche areas with limited appeal or perceived feasibility.

While these less common skills currently show minimal uptake, there is significant potential for growth, as artisanal markets such as mosaic, embroidery, soap making, and wax candles are expanding and emerging as entrepreneurial opportunities, driven by tourism, growing demand for handcrafted goods, and rising interest in natural, handmade products.

Figure 4: Labourer Distribution Across Skills



| Skill | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Home gardining | 67% |
| Food processing | 37% |
| Handcrafted packaging | 18% |
| Eco tourism | 18% |
| Embroidery | 6% |
| Soap | 5% |
| Mosaic | 3% |
| Wax candle | 2% |
| Banana leaf basket | 1% |

## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SKILLS PARTICIPATION

Skill preferences vary noticeably across governorates, reflecting local resources, traditions, and livelihood opportunities. In **Ajloun**, eco-tourism (26%) stands out as the leading area of interest, which aligns well with the region's rich natural landscapes and focus on sustainable tourism. Soap production (51%) and food processing (22%) are also popular, while interest in embroidery (8%) and banana leaf basketry (7%) remains limited.

In **Balqa**, packaging handcrafting (24%) and eco-tourism (17%) are the most prominent skills, with some engagement in home gardening (14%), though embroidery is less popular (5%).

**Irbid** accounts for the largest share of overall respondents (41%), so higher participation rates are expected. However, certain skills show particularly strong regional concentration: 93% of those interested in banana leaf baskets and 73% of those interested in wax candles are from Irbid, indicating a strong local inclination toward these crafts. Soap making also sees notable participation (49%), while eco-tourism (31%) is relatively lower compared to other regions.

In **Madaba**, mosaic making clearly dominates, reflecting the governorate's cultural and artistic heritage. Additionally, 44% of embroidery-interested individuals are from Madaba, highlighting the area's strength in traditional crafts. Other skills like wax candle making (11%) and packaging handcrafting (17%) show more limited engagement.

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## NATIONALITY PATTERNS

The skills mapping revealed clear patterns of engagement by nationality, with both Jordanians and Syrians participating across most skill areas, but showing distinct preferences in certain fields. Some skills show relatively **balanced interest** across both groups. **Home gardening** (49% Jordanian, 51% Syrian) and **eco-tourism** (54% Jordanian, 46% Syrian) appear to be neutral in appeal, with both nationalities engaging in sustainable practices and nature-based tourism. Similarly, **food processing** and **handcrafted packaging** demonstrate strong participation from both sides, with Jordanians making up 45% and 42% respectively, and Syrians showing slightly higher engagement at 55% and 58%. These areas suggest practical alignment with both groups' interests in food-related and value-added income opportunities.

When broken down further, distinct trends emerge. **Jordanian participants** show strong engagement in **wax candle production** (73%), **banana leaf basketry** (80%), and **soap making** (65%), indicating a tendency toward crafts that may be linked to locally available materials or traditional practices. However, they show lower involvement in embroidery (29%) and mosaic (34%), which are more artistically rooted crafts. **Syrian participants**, on the other hand, exhibit significantly higher interest in **embroidery** (71%) and **mosaic** (66%). Their engagement is lower in wax candles (27%) and banana leaf baskets (20%), possibly reflecting differences in familiarity, access to materials, or market relevance.

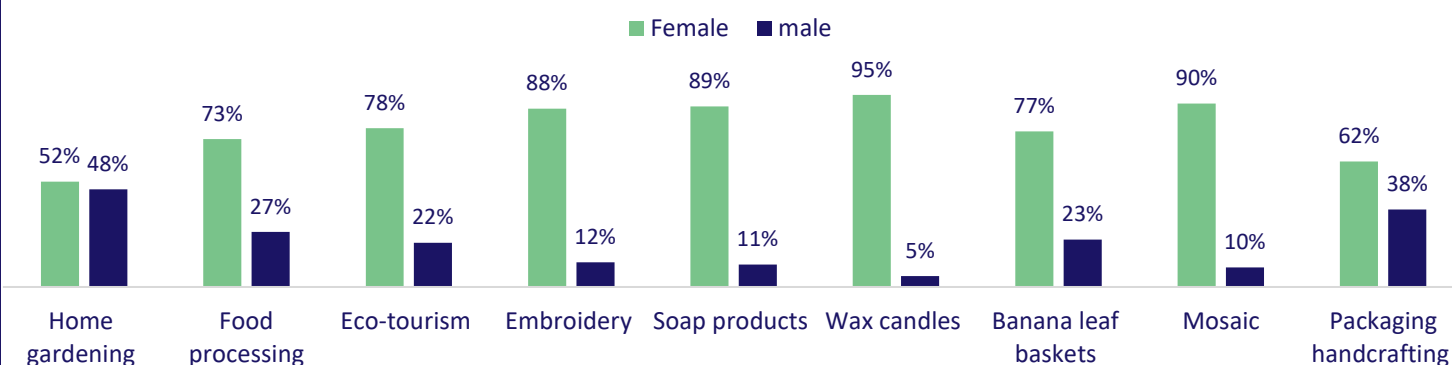Figure 5: Syrian and Jordanian Participation Across Skills
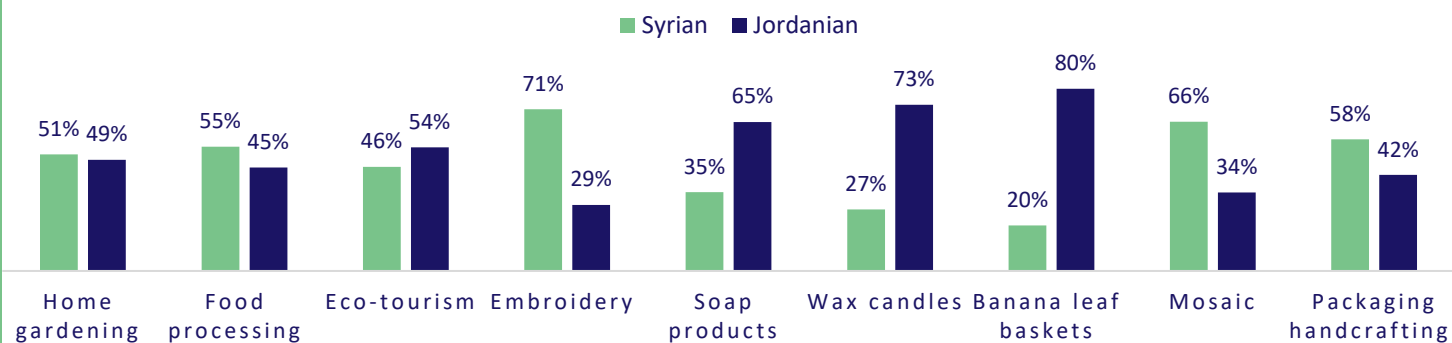


## GENDER PATTERNS

The skill mapping reveals strong female participation, particularly in artisanal and home-based activities. **Women dominate** in wax **candle making** (95%), **soap production** (89%), **embroidery** (88%), **mosaic** (90%), **eco-tourism** (78%), **food processing** (73%), and **banana leaf basketry** (77%). These skills align with traditional crafts and growing markets for natural, handmade products.

**Packaging handcrafting** (62% female, 48% male) is somewhat **more balanced**, while **home gardening** shows near-equal participation (52% female, 48% male), making it the most gender-neutral skill. Overall, the results highlight the importance of supporting female-led opportunities in artisanal sectors while designing inclusive approaches for more neutral skills.

Figure 6: Male and Female Participation Across Skills

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## SKILL PROFICIENCY: GAPS AND STRENGTHS

The assessment reveals varying levels of proficiency across different skills, highlighting opportunities for targeted upskilling and leveraging existing expertise. Skills such as **mosaic** (80% beginner) and **handcrafted packaging** (83% beginner) show a clear need for foundational training, as most participants are just starting out. Similarly, **eco-tourism, banana leaf basket-making, wax candle production, embroidery, and soap making also see high beginner-level engagement**, suggesting significant room for capacity building.

On the other hand, **home gardening** and **food processing** stand out, with many participants already at the **intermediate** (58% and 62%) and **expert levels** (36% and 33%), indicating a strong base of practical knowledge that can be further developed or tapped into for peer learning and mentorship opportunities. These insights can help tailor training efforts to address gaps and build on existing strengths.

## AGE DISTRIBUTION

The age distribution across the skills mapping is relatively balanced, with engagement from both younger and older age groups. However, certain skills show distinct age-related trends. For example, among those interested in **embroidery**, 50% are aged 18–34. Similarly, 54% of individuals interested in **wax candle** making and 58% of those drawn to **mosaic** also fall within the 18–34 age group, this highlights **strong youth interest in artisanal and creative skills.**

In contrast, other skills tend to attract **older participants**. Only 23% of individuals interested in **banana leaf basketry** are aged 18–34, while the majority (77%) are above 35 years old, including a notable 43% over the age of 45. **Soap making** shows a similar pattern, with just 30% of interested individuals in the younger age bracket. These trends suggest that while many skills appeal across age groups, some may require age-tailored outreach and training approaches.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the skills mapping results, targeted capacity-building trainings are essential to enhance the skills of labourers, address knowledge gaps, and improve employability and entrepreneurial opportunities. Trainings should focus on **technical** and **entrepreneurial skills** to equip participants for long-term success in the following sectors:

**1. Home Gardening - Advanced Techniques:** Training on hydroponics, vertical gardening, and permaculture to maximise productivity, particularly in water-scarce environments. **Sustainable Practices:** Techniques in composting, natural pest control, and organic farming. **Market Linkages:** Building connections between small-scale producers and local markets, including farm-to-table initiatives.

**2. Food Processing - Product Development:** Training on preserves, organic products, and food packaging. **Business & Marketing Skills:** Focus on branding, pricing strategies, and compliance with food safety regulations. **Scaling & Market Access:** Supporting women-led businesses and creating pathways to access larger markets.

**3. Eco-Tourism - Eco-Guiding & Hospitality:** Training on sustainable tourism practices, including eco-lodge management and nature-based experiences. **Environmental Conservation:** Building knowledge on biodiversity, protected areas, and responsible tourism. **Entrepreneurial Skills:** Training in business planning, digital marketing for eco-tourism ventures, and developing community-based tourism.

**4. Artisanal Handicrafts - Skill Enhancement:** Expanding skills in mosaic making, embroidery, handcrafted packaging, and traditional basket weaving. **Product Innovation:** Encourage fusion of traditional designs with modern aesthetics to appeal to broader markets. **E-Commerce & Market Access:** Training on online selling platforms, social media marketing, and opportunities within international fair-trade markets.

These training programs will increase employment prospects, strengthen local economies, and ensure the sustainability of these skills while empowering marginalised groups, particularly women and youth, in Jordan's growing economic landscape

**Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Encourage strategic partnerships between government entities (E.g. Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Agriculture) and the private sector, including local business incubators and cooperatives. Collaborations should focus on promoting skills development across artisanal, eco-tourism, and agricultural sectors. Aligning these efforts with national development strategies will enhance their sustainability, support rural economic growth, and ensure long-term impact at both the community and policy levels.

**Entrepreneurship and Financing Support:** Improve access to microfinance and business incubator programs to support women and youth in transitioning from skill development to sustainable business ownership. Provide targeted mentorship and training in business planning, fundraising, and market research (particularly in eco-tourism and artisanal sectors) to empower emerging entrepreneurs and enhance their chances of success.

**Awareness Campaigns:** Launch national and local awareness campaigns promoting eco-tourism and artisanal crafts as viable career paths. Use real-life success stories to inspire wider participation. Campaigns should also highlight the value of sustainable practices, helping attract eco-conscious tourists and boost demand for local goods and services.

**Market Linkages & Export Opportunities:** Facilitate the participation of artisans and eco-tourism entrepreneurs in international trade fairs and expos to strengthen networking and showcase Jordanian products. Support the development of user-friendly e-commerce platforms tailored to artisanal goods and provide practical training in digital marketing, product photography, and online sales to increase global visibility and expand market reach.

## CONCLUSION

The skills mapping assessment provided critical insights into Jordan's demographic skill landscape. Our findings reveal promising economic development opportunities in eco-tourism, artisanal crafts, home gardening, and food processing sectors.

Clear patterns emerged across nationality, age, and gender. Jordanian participants demonstrated strong engagement in wax candle production and banana leaf basketry, while Syrian participants showed higher interest in embroidery and mosaic work. Women showed greater representation in artisanal and home-based crafts, while men were more active in agricultural and eco-tourism skills. Age differences were also evident, with younger generations gravitating toward embroidery, wax candle making, and mosaic work, while older participants focused on banana leaf basketry and soap making. These patterns underscore the importance of considering cultural relevance and resource accessibility when designing skill development interventions. The strong alignment between existing skills in eco-tourism and artisanal crafts with current market demands indicates substantial economic opportunity through targeted development.

Based on these findings, the project will implement tailored training programmes addressing identified skill gaps in high-potential sectors, with special emphasis on enhancing opportunities for women and youth. These targeted interventions position the project to make meaningful contributions toward economic empowerment for both Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in the agricultural sector.