

**Economic Empowerment:**  
**A Study on Women in War-Torn Regions**

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## Introduction

This study examines economic empowerment of women and how learning valuable life-skills can create a sustainable lifestyle for women in war-torn, or poverty-stricken regions. The purpose of this Research Report is to give details about the organizations through interviews, and to discuss how economic opportunity has improved the lives of refugees and local women living in Jordan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. By offering training in areas like sewing, marketing, Information Technology, soap creation, cooking, hospitality, and more, these organizations are giving these women a sense of empowerment by enabling them to produce a product or skill in which allows them to earn their own income. Economic opportunity allows for these women to create a life-style of their own, purchase goods for themselves and their families that they may not have otherwise purchased, and also gives them independence to make their own monetary choices without consulting their husbands or other family members.

As the Partnership Manager for Peace by Piece International (PbPI), the opportunity to travel to Amman, Jordan to interview leaders of NGOs, social enterprises, and companies who work with refugees and local, low- or no-income women was presented. While working towards conducting independent research, there was also the mission to find potential partnerships for PbPI. These organizations were chosen mostly through networking and from the suggestions of individuals and organizations who already work with PbPI, or by researching organizations that match with the objective of economically empowering women. The organizations that were interviewed are: The Jordan Forum for Business & Professional Women (JFBPW), HOPE Workshop- Collateral Repair Project, Sitti Soap, and the Jordan River Foundation

(JRF). Interviews were conducted with 3 Syrian refugee women who work for the Jordan River Foundation. Aside from traveling to Jordan, there was also the opportunity to virtually meet organizations who are working with refugees and low- or no-income locals within Afghanistan, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and other major cities within Iraq. These organizations are: Jasmine Initiative (Jasmine), Women for Women International (WfWI), Preemptive Love Coalition (PLC), and the Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF). The leaders of these organizations provided details discussing the impact that their programs have had on these women. The posed questions and responses will be discussed throughout this report.

## **Jasmine Initiative**

Jasmine was established in 2015 due the war in Syria, with the hopes to empower Syrian women economically, and was named after the city of Damascus. It was founded by Lara Shahin, a young Syrian woman who now lives in Jordan and works with her business partner, Maya. It originally started with 5 women, but now it is composed of more than 30 women who can make unique products. Jasmine offers training in 2 categories: sewing, crocheting, embroidery, and pottery, and the other is molding traditional Syrian soaps.

During the interview with Lara, a variety of questions concerning quality and consistency, prospective partnerships, and challenges that Jasmine faces were posed. Jasmine serves 90% of women who are Syrian, and the other 10% are Palestinian, Jordanian, and Iraqi, and due to the fact that a majority of the women have children and other responsibilities, 80% of them work from home, with the other 20% working at the Jasmine facility. Lara's goal of founding Jasmine was to "create a small Syria in Jordan by creating fully Syrian products and employing mostly Syrian women." Quality and consistency are ensured by Maya, their control

manager, and they are always open to new partnerships and have the ability to create custom packaging that represents both Jasmine and their partners. While Jasmine is still a small organization, they are gaining popularity. They now have partnerships with organizations in Turkey, Europe, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan.

While Jasmine implements training for different categories of products, they are most proud of the individual impact that they have made on these women. When asked about the empowerment of these women, Lara responded with, “I see the difference, they now have gained a new skill, they feel invincible. Before, they never felt this way. Syrian refugee women are not aware that they have rights, or can get an education. They are told that they must stay home to take care of the home and the children. But now, with Jasmine, they are aware of their rights and feel more empowered because they are creating products and earning an income.”

Jasmine is a small, yet impactful organization with high-quality products. They would make a great partner for PbPI, especially with their embroidery products and custom Syrian-based soaps. Jasmine does not have a website, yet, but several articles about Lara’s work can be found online. By providing skills training in two different categories, Jasmine offers women the ability to create products and earn an income, thus giving them a sense of economic empowerment.

## **The Jordan Forum for Business & Professional Women**

The JFBPW was established in 1976, and was the first all-women association in Jordan. It started out as an office where Jordanian women who had their own small-businesses could go and utilize cubicles which provided them with their own computer, printer, fax machine, and telephone -- everything a business needed in order to flourish. This method worked for a

couple of years, however, many businesses expanded out of their cubicles and the JFBPW decided to encourage women to join the local workforce by creating skills courses. The JFBPW serves both refugee women and also local Jordanian women who desire to learn new professional skills. Most of the women are divorced or widowed, have children, and are the Head of Household. Currently, there are nearly sixty women in training.

Tamara Haddad, the CEO of the JFBPW stated that the main objective of this forum is to “rehabilitate women with a range of professional skills in order to empower them to join the workforce and create products that match the needs of the local market”. The JFBPW offers six skills-training courses for the women, working with the skills in which the women desire to learn. These courses range from marketing, elderly care, sewing, event management, cooking, and cosmetic creation. When the women complete the training course, they are taught “visibility projects”, where they create small projects that help them to start their own business. The JFBPW wants these women to know how to work independently and to know how to build their businesses from the ground up. Therefore, they are taught how to write business plans and also taught how to market their own business.

The JFBPW creates committees that supports the visions and desires of women who want to create their own business, and with the others, the JFBPW helps them with networking in order to acquire a job within the local market. To help these women further flourish by owning a business, the JFBPW has signed six different agreements with six different municipalities in Jordan in order for these women to run their business out of their homes. Tamara also made the statement that “most of these women are frightened that by running a business out of their homes, they will be charged high taxes, therefore, the JFBPW gives

knowledge to these women on how to facilitate procedures between their business and the government.” Since marketing and packaging are such important aspects to every business, the JFBPW helps these women obtain materials that they need in order to create their products. The JFBPW is a Forum that was formed to help teach women professional skills in order to allow them to feel a sense of economic empowerment. By helping these women step-by-step to either obtain a job, or to start their own business, the JFBPW is creating a future full of powerful, female entrepreneurs. <http://www.bpwa.org.io/>

## **HOPE Workshop- Collateral Repair Project**

HOPE Workshop is a women’s craft collective, made up of 46 to 50 women, who are then separated into four groups -- gnomes, embroidery, sewing, and calendars. It is a side-project of Collateral Repair Project, an NGO. During this interview with Eliza Davis, the Women’s Programs Manager for HOPE Workshop, she stated that, “HOPE Workshop started in 2011, but it has evolved a lot.” HOPE Workshop started as a small crocheting project that was just for fun. Now, HOPE Workshop has set designs in four different categories. Some of the designs came from the women, and others from an American who previously worked for HOPE Workshop. HOPE Workshop currently serves Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and low- or no-income Jordanian women. All of these women have different backgrounds and have experienced their own tragedies. HOPE Workshop is viewed as a safe-space for these women to go, to create a product, and to make some money for their work.

HOPE Workshop prides itself on the idea of social integration and to build a community of diverse women who are all working towards creating hand-made products and gaining some sense of empowerment through creation and, in-turn, earning a bit of money. HOPE Workshop

puts 90% of its earnings back into the women, and the other 10% goes to administrative costs. Usually these women would be sitting at home, but with HOPE Workshop, they are out of the house, earning an income. The women visit HOPE Workshop for six hours per day, Monday through Thursday; Eliza even said that one of the women's husbands claims that she is always "so busy", but HOPE Workshop is important to these women, that is why they continue to show up daily.

While HOPE Workshop works towards helping these women feel a sense of economic empowerment due to the fact that they are earning an individual income for creating a product, the main objective of HOPE Workshop is not to earn a life-changing wage, it is to integrate these women and to create a safe space. Eliza reflected upon a story of a woman who was very shy when she first started at HOPE Workshop. She felt unwanted by the other women and had social anxiety, but once she started to create products, and earn a wage, she began to feel empowered, and in turn, felt more confident and accepted by her fellow-coworkers. HOPE Workshop makes sure that these women are able to continue work regardless of hurdles they may encounter; Collateral Repair Project even has a daycare where the women's child(ren) can be dropped off while they are attending HOPE Workshop. This shows how HOPE Workshop genuinely wants to help these women, therefore, they are provided with resources that may otherwise prevent them from getting work.

Eliza spoke about materials for their products, and she stated that the materials are purchased from downtown, and that the most difficult material to find is embroidery thread. All other products are relatively easy to find. HOPE Workshop sells their products at their local facility, bazaars, and their calendars can be found on Etsy (the only product that they sell



directly to the U.S.). These products are all unique -- the gnomes are themed from traditional Jordanian clothing, and also are holiday specific (Easter, Christmas, etc.). The calendars are based off of Ramadan and Christmas, and the embroidered products are themed from Jordanian wildflowers. HOPE Workshop creates products with quality control, and fast production. Also, the fact that this organization puts 90% back into the women, they would be a very impactful partnership for us, and relate closely with our moto of supporting marginalized communities by sustainable gifting. This would be a great partner for PbPI, especially with their variety of unique products.

Since refugees are often relocated, HOPE Workshop prides itself in its ability to be flexible; Eliza stated that the relocations never effect production, and that they are always able to look at the notes of the women who are relocated. The ability for these women to have a safe-space where they can create a product and earn an income, enables them to feel not only a sense of ownership over the product that they hand-created, but also a sense of individual economic empowerment. <https://www.collateralrepairproject.org/overview/>

## **Sitti Soap**

“Sitti Soap”, meaning “Grandmother Soap” in Arabic, is a project that began in 2014 as an idea to help provide funds to the Palestinian refugee women living in the “Gaza” Refugee Camp in Jerash, Jordan. According to Safiya Ali, Sitti Soap’s Operational Manager, and Sitti Soap’s website, it was founded by Noora Sharrab and Jacqueline Sofia with hopes to “educate, employ and empower the community’s women and girls.” HOPES for Women, the Mother organization (NGO) of Sitti Soap (Social Enterprise), was looking for sustainable projects to help the women, and also ways to finance the project. The idea of the Sitti Soap project came from

the fact that the women were already making soap within the camp, just without structure. Sitti Soap is now an enterprise that makes soaps, but also a variety of skincare and home good items.

Since 2014, the organization has grown from two founding individuals, to being funded with ten scholarships for ten women. Four of the women work at the facility and are considered full-time. The other six work from home and are called in to the facility when large orders are placed. During this interview with Safiya Ali, she stated that “our hope for the future is that we want Sitti Soap to be able to employ 50 women, and we want a factory, not just a room.” Sitti Soap not only helps these women who are living inside of the camp, but also helps the agriculture industry around the camp because they buy the olive oil from surrounding farms. This allows for indirect support to the women. Sitti Soap also works with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) rehabilitation center, that employs Hassan, a deaf carpenter, who is the lead carpenter that produces Sitti Soap’s wooden soap dishes. Therefore, the impact that Sitti Soap is making within the camp reaches beyond the women, yet still gives most of its focus to employing and empowering these women.

As previously mentioned, Sitti Soap has been in operation since 2014, but up until 2018, it has been based on small-scale personal orders. Now, Sitti Soap is selling to large corporations like Wholefoods and Amazon, and to two different companies in Jordan. And even more recently, with the help of this research, Sitti Soap is in a partnership with PbPI. Sitti Soap is PbPI’s first Palestinian refugee contact. Since they have the ability to create high-quality sustainable soaps, and meet the needs of PbPI’s packaging and cost requests, they are excited for the opportunity to partner with Sitti Soap.

Sitti Soap creates beautiful packaging unique to each company. Quality and consistency are measured and controlled by using set silicone mold trays for the soap. All soap is measured to ensure exact weight (which uses the highest quality olive oil on the market), and also, ingredients are listed on each box. The largest order that Sitti Soap ever received from a company was for 10,000 soaps. With 1,000 soaps already pre-made, it took the employees another month to create the remaining 9,000 soaps. The longest part of the process is waiting 30 days for the soap to dry. Usually, the women work for four hours per day, but with this large order, they worked from 8am to 6pm. Completing this large order showed just how capable Sitti Soap is as a company, and also showed the determination of each individual employee.

During the interview, Safiya spoke on how Sitti Soap measures the impact that they are making on the lives of the women who work for them, this was her response: “We do not have a structured system on how we measure impact, but I can tell you stories of women who have been able to provide for their families from earning money for their work at Sitti Soap. Ekrom, one of the women who works for Sitti Soap, has a husband with Hepatitis C, he is very ill. They previously did not have the funds to afford his medications, and this was becoming a burden on the family, but now, Ekrom is able to purchase medications for her husband to make him feel more comfortable. Another woman, Hannan, has a husband with an injury and a daughter with diabetes. The income that she receives from Sitti Soap allows for her to buy the expensive medication that her daughter needs, and to provide aid to her husband. Another, Seham, had open heart surgery, and her husband does not work due to his old age. Sitti Soap was able to provide her family with enough monetary support to make ends meet.” Safiya stated that by empowering these women with individual compensation for the work that they provide, the

women have a significant rise in their self-image, and they feel more empowered by the fact that they can monetarily provide for their families. These women are now also able to buy new clothing, or take their child(ren) out for a day of fun, whereas before, they were unable to do so due to their economic situations. One woman was able to save 1,000 Jordanian Dinars over the course of a year and married her son off, which is a cultural tradition in Jordan and was a very noble achievement for this woman. By providing jobs to these women who live inside of one of the poorest Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Sitti Soap is giving them a sense of economic empowerment and the ability to learn a new skill. <http://sittisoap.com/>

## **Jordan River Foundation**

While in Jordan, it was a pleasure to interview the Operations Manager, Shadi Salah, for JRF's Al Karma Embroidery Center (AKEC). He explained that JRF was founded in 1995 by the Queen -- Her Majesty Rania Al Abdullah -- and is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, focusing on child safety and community empowerment, with an emphasis on women and youth. JRF has four programs: Empowering Communities, Protecting Children, Training to Success, and Building Social Enterprises. The impact that JRF has made from 2015 to 2017 is astonishing: 35,654 professionals and community members have received specialized training, 3,589 have been beneficiaries of community empowerment programs, and 82,059 children, families, and women have received protection and parenting support.<sup>1</sup>

The AKEC falls under the "Building Social Enterprises" program, and is part of Jordan River Designs. The AKEC was established in 1996 to employ local Jordanian women seeking to

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<sup>1</sup> "Our Impact," Jordan River Foundation.

earn an extra income, and now also employs four Syrian refugee women working at the center. The other Syrians work from home. The AKEC uses only textiles and creates products for their local showroom, as well as for IKEA. The production for IKEA began at the end of 2017, and the first dispatch was shipped to the EU, Brooklyn, and to some of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf in October of 2018. The AKEC just completed the second batch of IKEA products in June of this year, and started on the third batch at the beginning of this month – there was also the opportunity to be the first non-employee to see the new 2020 IKEA line for Jordan products. By 2020, the AKEC will produce their products in mass, now they just produce products once. Shadi exclaimed that by 2022, they expect to have 400 women working explicitly on items for IKEA. Currently, the Center has 52 women working at the AKEC, and 40 working from their homes.

The AKEC ensures the highest quality and consistency of their products due to them being partnered with IKEA. The Center has internal and external inspectors and engineers, and inspection machines. Each product is also checked manually by employees, and by the IKEA team. The AKEC also has health and safety inspections of the factory, therefore, the products are of the highest quality and so is the factory environment. All in all, this center produces high quality products, and also provides a safe environment for their employees. Due to the high quality of JRF's products, their safe factory environment, and their ability to create products quickly, JRF would make an ideal partner for PbPI.

Interviewing Shadi about the products was quite an amazing experience, but the most honorable interview that was conducted during this experience was with three Syrian refugee

women who are working at the Center. For their protection, they will be referred to with the initials of: F.T., Z.R., and S.H.

A variety of questions concerning economic empowerment of these women, daily challenges as Syrian woman living in Jordan, and what these women wish for their futures were all questions that were explored; each woman responded to the questions that they felt they could best answer, no questions were posed individually. Each question was posed to the group of three Syrian women and one translator; the translator directly translated the questions, gave the women time to respond, then translated their responses. The questions and translated responses are below:

- What challenges do you face as a Syrian refugee woman living and working in Jordan?
  - F.T.: “Many challenges. The style of living is completely different in Jordan than in Syria. The economy here is different. In Syria, I owned my home, here in Jordan, I do not. It’s just different – I feel as though I am carrying around a heavy weight. The people are even different, I feel different. But the style is nice and so is the culture. Overall, I just want to be seen as ordinary.”
  - S.H.: “The main challenge for me is getting to work. I travel 6 hours per day to get here. But the Center is the only place that would hire me.”
  - Z.R.: “Working here, it took a year for us to be accepted by the Jordanian women. But, now, we live as sisters and brothers. Even the managers treat us as Jordanians now, we feel respected.”
- How has JRF helped improve your life? Would you say that JRF has given you a sense of empowerment?
  - F.T., S.H., Z.R.: “Working at the Center helps to give us an ordinary life. Nothing extravagant, but we are able to survive.”
  - Z.R.: “No other place would accept us for work since we are Syrian. Working here is a good thing.”
- How do you think your life would be different without JRF?
  - F.T.: “Life would be so difficult for us – there are no opportunities for Syrians. Before I started working, I participated in many programs. I even made a club for Syrian refugee children. Back in Syria, I took many courses for Child Psychology at University. I did this for the children, not for money. Now, I just do not have the time or support to continue. I am always working.”

- Z.R.: “I tried to make many products in my home before working for JRF, but I failed. I just didn’t feel important or proud of my work, but now, since working for JRF, I feel prouder of my work.”
- Since working for JRF, have you changed the way in which you raise your child(ren)?
  - F.T.: “No, not the style of how I raise them. I’m raising my children the same way that I did in Syria. I try to do everything to help them live the same lives they were living in Syria. I don’t want them to feel affected by the change. My children are the most important things in my life.”
  - Z.R.: “The only aspect that has changed regarding raising my children is that they now have a working mother. I’m more absent from their lives now. I work 8-9 hours per day, so, my children have to get used to that.”
- Do you feel more financially secure in making decisions independent of your husband or other family members now that you work for JRF?
  - F.T.: “We all had independence before. I can just live more ordinary now that I have a job.”
  - S.H.: “Of course I feel more independent to make my own choices—I’m divorced now!”
- What do you wish for your future? After working for JRF?
  - Z.R.: “I hope that I can train the girls here at JRF. I trained others while in Syria. I feel like I’m in a better place. I do have more ambitions than to just work for JRF, though. I want to eventually work independent from JRF. I want to improve myself in other ways—not just stitching like I do here.”
  - F.T.: “I want to increase my experience here at JRF so that I can better myself and teach children back in Syria. I do appreciate my current self, I just want to improve. I am eager for any opportunity to improve myself—even this interview will help me improve and give me new perspectives.”
- Do you feel proud that you are producing a product by your hands for JRF?
  - F.T.: “Certainly. We make new products every day. I am proud to work for an organization that was founded by Her Majesty.”
- What are your dreams?
  - S.H.: “I want to design clothing as a fashion designer. I hope that someday, I will have the economic empowerment to help me create my own clothing line.”
  - F.T.: “If I had no children, I would go back to University. I previously studied Child Psychology. But, really, I want any opportunity that will give me the ability to grow. Every situation gives you new knowledge.”
  - Z.R.: “I want to be a social worker for women. I am an expert in many fields like stitching, cooking, and nursing—I just love to help people.”

The opportunity to interview these women was an exhilarating experience. Despite being forced out of their homes due to war, they are able to look on the bright side of life and continue to work towards improving themselves and their lives. Overall, their opportunity to work for JRF has given them the ability to earn an income to support their families and it has empowered them to move forward with their lives as Syrian refugee women living in Jordan.

<https://www.jordanriver.io/en>

## **Women for Women International**

According to their website, WfWI is an organization that provides a “year- long social and economic empowerment program to help a group of 25 marginalized women to come together to build support networks, share experiences, and to learn critical skills, and to access new resources.” WfWI operates in 9 areas of the world: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. During this interview with Brita Schmidt, the Executive Director at WfWI UK, a variety of questions regarding the economic empowerment programs that WfWI provides were posed to Brita.

Brita spoke on the impact of the economic empowerment programs that WfWI offers and said that they take a holistic approach, meaning they think about the “big picture”, which is directly linked with their social empowerment work. If the women are not confident, then they are less likely to be successful economically. With their social empowerment work and their holistic approach to rehabilitating these women, their greatest achievement is their savings program. Reports from their website for 2016 in Nigeria show that the women’s cash savings goes from 9% to 28% to 44%. Over the course of the year-long program, WfWI monitors these



women's daily income, gives them a monthly stipend of \$10, sets up savings accounts, teaches budgeting, and provides skills training based on the needs of the local market. WfWI has even measured the impact of these women's choices and how their lives might be different without WfWI. Since WfWI takes a holistic approach, the results are transformational, about 15% of the women run for office in their local government after completing the program that WfWI offers. They even have "agents of change". These are women who feel empowered by WfWI's teachings and are "passionate about advocating for other women and their communities." WfWI also integrates a "Men's engagement program" for men who hold authority within the local community; WfWI hopes to educate these men to change the community attitude as a whole and to bring about awareness. The women that WfWI enrolls in their programs have experienced conflict, and come from extreme poverty. WfWI treats these women as WOMEN, also knowing that they have health concerns. Some women enter the program thinking that they are suffering from AIDS, when in reality, they have Malaria and need a round of medications that will heal them, and access to mosquito nets to prevent future encounters. Some women are also not even aware that they have rights. They are often brought up by customary laws and traditions, and unaware of their country's laws. WfWI not only makes an impact on the basic needs of these women, but also teaches them valuable skills that will help them earn income, thus leading them to feel a sense of empowerment.

Due to the interest of Terrorism Studies, questions regarding terrorism and the programs that WfWI implements were posed. "Are there women in certain regions that are approached differently due to the fact that major terrorist activity occurs in their countries?" Brita claimed that WfWI has standard curriculum, but the subject of terrorism does get

mentioned in some countries, like Afghanistan, but the curriculum is still standard. There is an awareness of terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan, especially since a lot of the terrorism is against women, the sole subjects of WfWI's programs. Security measures are taken to protect the staff and the women. Since the work that WfWI conducts is "country led—led by afghans for afghans", WfWI works closely with the community. If a terrorist organization is in the area and seen as a threat, they will cancel class for the appropriate amount of time and work from home. The WfWI buildings are unmarked, and the staff take different routes to work every single day to avoid exposure from terrorist organizations. During this part of the interview, Brita stated, "there is no peace without development, there is no development without peace, they go hand in hand." Brita believes that the way to fighting terrorism is through development and addressing poverty. Brita also spoke on her experience with the Yezidi women of the KRI, who have been victims of ISIS. These women have been previously held as sex slaves, have had their children killed, and are forced to give birth to the children that are results of rape. The children are not adapted to the communities since they are often shunned. They are viewed as "Children of the Devil" within the local communities. WfWI has worked with the Free Yezidi Foundation on rehabilitating these children and integrating them into the local communities by providing school, skills programs, safe-spaces, and English learning programs. WfWI is also working with the Free Yezidi Foundation to raise funds to support the women in Sinjar and Dahuk, the KRI regions of Iraq. Also, WfWI is a sponsoring organization of PbPI, therefore, they are able to support PbPI in their mission to helping marginalized communities through sustainable gifting. Through the programs that WfWI implements for women within war-torn countries, they are able to support these women by teaching them valuable life skills, like

implementing savings programs for the women, and in-turn, giving them a sense of economic empowerment so that they may prosper within their communities.

<http://womenforwomen.org/>

## **Preemptive Love Coalition**

Preemptive Love Coalition's moto is: "we're a coalition stretching across Iraq, Syria, the United States, and beyond, working together to unmake violence and create the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible." During the interview with Anna Wozniak, the WorkWell Iraq Program Manager, a variety of questions regarding the work that she does in Iraq involving education and empowerment of Iraqis and Syrians within the WorkWell program were explored. In 2018, the WorkWell program commenced with the goal to change communities and help Syrian men and women become master's within the IT world in order to gain employment. Interestingly enough, the UN fact sheet states that 68% of women in Iraq have an education, yet they are unemployed. The WorkWell program is for men and women ages 18-35, who are not currently enrolled in University, to learn technology skills to help them gain employment. They often work with women who are widowed and Heads of Household. The program is composed of nearly 1,000 individuals with 60% being women and the other 40% being men. Many of the individuals are able to work remotely; even the Syrian refugees have 2g-3g coverage of service and are able to reach international clients and companies. The monetary impact that the WorkWell program has made is phenomenal— 96 of the employees are earning \$28,000 US dollars, which is a long way from \$0.

The WorkWell program has no barrier and are as inclusive as possible—they serve Syrians, internally displaced Iraqis, Kurds, Yezidi's, previous ISIS captives, and people with

disabilities. This comes with a variety of different cultural backgrounds, languages, and experience. Due to the varying backgrounds, the WorkWell program starts at 8 weeks of intensive English courses. Then moves on to 8 weeks of basic computer technology learning, like Google Docs and Excel, and then on to more complex technology like QuickBooks and WordPress. The final 8 weeks teaches the employees how to compose themselves as professionals, and how to conduct freelance work and independent contract work.

The WorkWell program is created to select individuals who are the most enthusiastic about learning IT skills, but it also focuses on vulnerability, like families with chronic illness or who face significant debt. Employees also must be able to read and write, and they are also given a small assessment which includes basic math, English, and logic skills. There is also a personal interview stage. Many of the employees are from different refugee camps, and are provided transportation. Therefore, they must be within somewhat of a close range in order to attend the WorkWell program.

The greatest challenge that Anna mentioned that the WorkWell program faces is apathy—if the individuals are not enthusiastic about working or if they do not care about the program, then it is harder to address their needs — “attitude is everything.” Another issue is instability and conflict. Since they are located in Iraq, conflict may cause them to close down their operations, but it depends on the severity of the conflict. The threat from ISIS has previously been problematic due to them taking over cities. The influence that ISIS has over some local areas can be problematic. Some young men feel as though they have no other options than to join the movement for monetary gain, that is why WorkWell aims to serve and provide training to those who desire to earn an income. There are hopes that with a job and

stability, less individuals will join terrorist organizations. Through the training that the WorkWell program provides, many men and women are given the opportunity to learn a very valuable professional skill, and they are also able to earn an income that empowers them to succeed in life, thus dissuading them from joining terrorist organizations like ISIS.

<http://preemptivelove.org/>

## Free Yezidi Foundation

The Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF) was founded in 2014 by Ms. Pari Ibrahim, a young Yezidi woman who desires to do more for her community. The FYF is a “politically independent non-profit organization to help Yezidis in need. It was founded shortly after terrorists attempted to eradicate the Yezidi people in August of 2014.”<sup>2</sup> The FYF implements projects for Yezidi men, women, and children who have experienced trauma due to the Islamic State’s invasions of their communities. The FYF has four categories of projects: The Justice Project, International Advocacy, Women’s Centers, and Children’s Centers. During the interview with Pari, the opportunity to dig deeper into the roots of the FYF Women’s Centers to find out what their current operations are within the Xanke Camp was presented. This camp is located in the Duhok province of the KRI, and houses more than 16,000 people.<sup>3</sup> In November of 2015, the Women’s Center began to serve women who have been captives of the Islamic State, and also those who were never held captive, yet still experienced trauma due to the Islamic State.<sup>4</sup> Pari stated that many of the women have been victims of violent rape, and have lost their mothers,

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<sup>2</sup> “About Us,” The Free Yezidi Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> “Women’s Centers,” The Free Yezidi Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> “Women’s Centers,” The Free Yezidi Foundation.

fathers, siblings, and even children at the hands of the Islamic State. At the Women's Center, the FYF does a lot on empowering women, mentally, monetarily, and educationally. Pari believes that healing the person from within is the first step, then further empowerment can be addressed. It is important to get these women in a more stable psychological place. Therefore, the FYF has trauma specialists who work several months on rehabilitating the women from the violent acts of the Islamic State.

Pari explained a success story of a woman named Zhiyan Rashid (who has been re-named for her protection). Zhiyan was found by the FYF team, living in an unfinished building, contemplating life due to the violence and loss that she experienced from the Islamic State. She had been a captive of the Islamic State, and escaped. She had been violently raped by members, and had family members murdered. She was questioning her life and felt that she could not move on from the devastation that she had experienced. But, with the help of the FYF, Zhiyan hesitantly visited the Women's Center -- initially only to learn basic English. Once she was at the Center, she was able to eventually get 6 month's worth of intensive therapy with the FYF's trauma specialists, and began to make friends and start laughing again. The experience changed her immensely. After Zhiyan became mentally stable again, the FYF wanted to empower her in other ways. While the FYF offers courses in sewing, knitting, and IT, she was able to get training in psychological aid and yoga. Now, she teaches a yoga class that helps other victims by showing them breathing exercises and teaching coping skills to battle nightmares and panic attacks. She makes a well enough income to now afford an apartment instead of living in an unfinished building. And recently, Zhiyan received word that she is able to resettle in Germany to restart her life.

Pari also claimed that a lot of organizations and governments are focused on “building buildings”, but the FYF is focused on “building the person”. With the help of 26 Yezidi, female-staff, the FYF dispatches into the local communities to educate women on their rights and to give mental support. The FYF also educates men in the community on women’s rights. While their teachings are very “modern”, the FYF is conducting critical work in order to change the path of these communities and to empower women. Pari said that people within the camp and the surrounding community have respect for the FYF; these people are now able to obtain jobs, able to read and write, and are able to speak basic English. Many women go freely to the FYF centers for therapy, education, and skills-training, but the FYF also goes out to seek the most vulnerable individuals with hopes to rehabilitate them and empower them to recognize their greatness even though they have experienced violent tragedy. Many women gain jobs at the FYF, but also throughout the community or they start their own business. With the work that the FYF is conducting within the KRI, many women are able to rise to greatness again in order to cope with their past trauma. Many are becoming empowered enough to laugh again, make friends again, and earn an income again. <http://freeyezidi.org/>

## **Recommendations**

The main theme of this research report was how the previously mentioned organizations help aid women in war-torn countries by providing them with a range of professional and life-sustaining skills in order for them to create products and to earn an income, thus improving their quality of life. The objective that was aimed for throughout these interviews was to find out more information on how these organizations specifically help these women, some through IT training, some through sewing classes, some through teaching

marketing, and more. More focus on different methods to measure impact would be a great way for these organizations to further accomplish themselves. While all of these organizations are focused on rehabilitating women in various ways, a set-system of how to measure impact should be adapted. Measuring impact of all program attendees is important in order to understand the change that the organization is making, and to monitor the organization's activities/programs. This measurement is important when programs are completed and recording the attendee's success and failures within the implemented programs. Good intentions can only go so far—appropriate metrics are needed.

## **Conclusion**

All of the organizations that were interviewed and discussed throughout this report work towards empowering women in war-torn regions by teaching them to produce a product or skill in which allows them to earn their own income. The rehabilitation of refugee women, and local low- or no-income women allows for these women to recognize their self-worth again after experiencing grave tragedy. Economic opportunity allows for these women to create a life-style of their own, purchase goods for themselves and their families, and also gives them the independence to make their own monetary choices.

Though all of these organizations focus on empowering women, there are three specific organizations that are recommended for PbPI partner with: Jasmine Initiative, HOPE workshop, and Jordan River Foundation. All of these organizations have the ability to produce high quality products, measure consistency, produce in bulk, and relate with PbPI's mission of helping marginalized communities through sustainable gifting. Due to the research and networking of

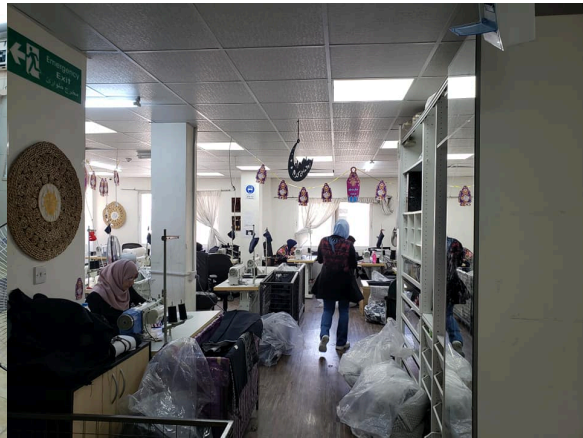
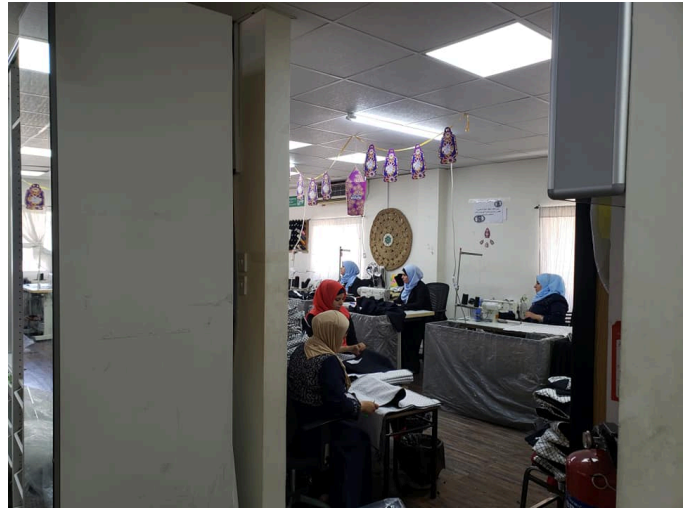


this project, PbPI has become partners with Sitti Soap as a result and is looking forward to growing their partnerships within the refugee community.

The research and interviews that has been conducted has allowed for a better understanding of these women and organizations more in depth. Many organizations are doing their best to empower women who otherwise would not have a support system. By teaching them professional skills or creational skills, these women are able to generate their own incomes, thus leading to a sense of economic empowerment, and most importantly, self-empowerment. With help from the organizations that I have discussed throughout this report, and others performing similar work, we can create a future for women who have been victims of war and poverty.

# Photos

Jordan River Foundation- The Al Karma Embroidery Center, Amman, Jordan.



HOPE Workshop- Collateral Repair Project, Amman, Jordan.



Jasmine- Amman, Jordan.



Sitti Soap- Gaza Refugee Camp, Jerash, Jordan.



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Face-to-Face Interview: Eliza Davis- HOPE Workshop, Amman, Jordan., 19 June 2019.

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Face-to-Face Interview: Lara Shahin- Jasmine Initiative, Amman, Jordan., 20 June 2019.

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Face-to-Face Interview: 3 Syrian Refugees- Jordan River Foundation, Amman, Jordan., 20 June

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Face-to-Face Interview: Tamara Haddad- Jordan Forum for Business & Professional Women

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Face-to-Face Interview: Safiya Ali- Sitti Soap, Amman, Jordan., 22 June 2019.

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Skype Video Interview: Brita Schmidt- Women for Women International UK, 03 July 2019.

<http://womenforwomen.org/>.

Zoom Video Interview: Anna Wozniak- Preemptive Love Coalition Iraq, 03 July 2019.

<http://preemptivelove.org/>.

Skype Voice Interview: Pari Ibrahim- Free Yezidi Foundation, 12 July 2019.

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## Appendix

- A variety of questions were posed to the businesses, while a separate field of questions were posed to the three Syrian women from JRF. These questions were brainstormed with the help of Lauri Pastrone of PbPI, and Shalini Gopalkrishnan and Baleigh Morgan of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. The businesses and individuals were not obligated to respond to every single question, therefore, within the report, some organizations/individuals go more into detail on certain questions than others.
- **Questions for Leaders of NGOs/Charities**
  - Describe their work. How did they get started? Where do they envision it going?
  - How to you insure quality and consistency?
  - How many women served at one time?
  - Where are the women from?
  - Any work with men?
  - Are clients able to bring their children with them to work?
  - What are the greatest challenges they face?
  - Ask if they have seen evidence that economic empowerment can influence decision making relative to life decisions.
  - What is the achievement that they are most proud of?
- **Questions for Prospective PbPI Partners**
  - Describe their work. How did they get started? Where do they envision it going?
  - What is the structure of the enterprise? NGO? Charity? Social Enterprise?
  - How long have you operated / sold products for export?
  - How many clients served? Others in the US?
  - In what ways do you measure the impact you are making on the lives of your artisans/clients?
  - How to you ensure quality and consistency?
  - Willing to try new designs?
  - Do they brand their products with any kind of labeling? Embossing?
  - Have they done large orders in the past? Is that something they feel capable of doing? Please describe some of the larger orders they have done.
- **Questions for the 3 Syrian Refugees from JRF**
  - What challenges do you face as a Syrian refugee woman living and working in Jordan?
  - How has JRF helped improve your life? Would you say that JRF has given you a sense of empowerment?
  - How do you think your life would be different without JRF?
  - Since working for JRF, have you changed the way in which you raise your child(ren)?
  - Do you feel more financially secure in making decisions independent of your husband or other family members now that you work for JRF?
  - What do you wish for your future? After working for JRF?
  - Do you feel proud that you are producing a product by your hands for JRF?
  - What are your dreams?