The Near East Foundation (NEF) works with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Lebanon and Jordan to strengthen the livelihoods of refugees and members of their host communities. NEF and its CSO partners offer livelihood services through community hubs, known as Siraj Centers, which operate under the Siraj Center “brand”. By providing trainings, resources and referrals, NEF is supporting community-driven opportunities for safe and productive income generation. Photo: Participants in NEF’s Business Development Training at a Siraj Center in Taanayel, Lebanon.

Overview
The Near East Foundation’s Siraj Centers serve as one-stop shops to help vulnerable people start home-based income generating activities or find employment in communities that host large numbers of displaced people. They function to help vulnerable people build their economic resilience and achieve self-reliance through training, access to resources, and peer networking.

Using the Siraj model, NEF partners with local Community-based Organizations (CBOs) to provide the CBOs with a standardized set of operating procedures, branded information products, training, and ongoing support. NEF trains and certifies key members of their staff to become master trainers in entrepreneurship.

Through the Siraj Centers, NEF partners to support refugees and vulnerable local citizens learn how to create and manage small enterprises, develop work skills tailored to the labor market, access financial resources to start income-generating activities, and gain skills and information to cope with displacement.

The success and sustainability of the Centers is founded on strong relationships with local communities. The Siraj Centers use a micro-franchise model, supporting existing CBOs to adopt standardized training curricula, information products, and operating procedures and quality standards. The microfranchise model builds Siraj as a brand – with connotations of refuge, a beacon of hope and rebuilding the future – and facilitates replication in new communities.

Results
NEF has created seven Siraj Centers in Jordan and Lebanon. Since 2016, NEF has worked with community partners to support the launch of 2,562 businesses and to provide business development, financial literacy, life skills, and vocational training to over 4,500 people. Revenues from new businesses have increased household incomes by one-third and overall participants reported a substantial decrease in debt and increased feelings of self-confidence and agency.
Services

The centers are open to the community and offer safe access to training, information, and referrals while also fostering interaction, sharing, and social cohesion. These services include:

1. **Information** on demand-driven employment opportunities, the work permit process, refugee rights, business formalization, and potential risks and protection strategies in informal work.

2. **Training** in financial literacy and life skills related to livelihood activities and economic empowerment. Trainings include savings and resource management, negotiation, management skills, career guidance etc. When needed, vocational training is provided to help improve participants skills to maximize the success of their chosen business.

3. **Entrepreneurship and employment support** that is market-based, results-driven, and innovative. This support readies participants to create viable business plans and to start micro and small businesses or to find traditional employment.

4. **Resources** and materials on business planning and management, employment opportunities and job readiness, and a platform for matching service providers with opportunities. The business development curriculum includes methods in developing a business plan, determining profit/loss, marketing and branding.

5. **Business acceleration services** that help clients expand existing businesses. Services include mentorships, network building, small-group coaching, job growth, market access, and product and service upgrades. This component not only helps with business sustainability, but also encourages opportunities for participants to partner with each other.

6. **Referrals** to other service providers, vocational training programs, education programs/schools, and NGO programs in other sectors (e.g. winterization, education, microfinance resources).

7. **Support for youth** through awareness raising about issues associated with poverty, such as child marriage, the negative impact of leaving school, and youth workers’ rights. The Centers also provide training on social empowerment and financial resource management and engage youth in savings activities; older youth can access vocational training and career counseling.

Value Added

By addressing life skills, career counseling, and business planning in safe environments, the Siraj Centers present an integrated approach that is expected to yield improved long-term economic and social well-being for both displaced populations and their host communities. The Siraj Centers offer a model that is:

1. **Replicable**: a community-managed, low-cost model.

2. **Responsive**: delivers sustainable support that is responsive to needs prioritized by local communities.

3. **Results-driven**: integrates proven methods and tools developed by NEF and its partners.

4. **Transferable**: develops skills that are portable and can be used to support livelihoods in Jordan, Lebanon, other resettlement countries, or upon return to Syria.

5. **Inclusive**: supports men, women, and adolescents with a focus on those considered most vulnerable.