



Safe reopening of the tourism sector in Jordan

October 2020

Overview

In Jordan, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis is perhaps most visible in the tourism sector, with detrimental effects on human capital. More than 95 per cent of enterprises within this sector are small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and many employees perform more than one function. Thus, the loss of one employee can mean the loss of more than one skills set within the enterprise, amplifying the negative effect on operations. This note summarises the EBRD's intervention to weather the immediate crisis and support a fast recovery of the tourism sector in Jordan through effective and inclusive labour market measures. By end of September, the EBRD helped the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to set up the Standard Operating Procedures for enterprises in the tourism sector to resume operations in light of Covid-19 pandemic, and have trained more than 8,000 employees on relevant health and safety measures.

The tourism sector in Jordan before Covid-19

In recent years, the hospitality and tourism sector in Jordan experienced considerable growth, making it one of the main drivers of the economy. Until Q1 2020, the tourism sector was the single largest employer in Jordan and the biggest generator of foreign exchange. The sector grew rapidly over the past few years and has great potential for further growth; the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) reported 5.3 million visitors entering the country in 2019 compared to around 3.5 million in 2016. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated Jordan's tourism revenues at \$7.2 billion in 2019, equivalent to 17 per cent of GDP.

The EBRD is supporting inclusive and sustainable tourism in Jordan. The EBRD, in close collaboration with the government, in particular with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA), established the [Cultural Heritage Framework](#) for Jordan. The aim was to use investments and policy dialogue more effectively in order to exploit the immense cultural heritage resources of Jordan and contribute to the country's speedier regional development. In February 2020, the EBRD and MOTA signed a Memorandum of Understanding ([MoU](#)) to cooperate in

positioning key locations and regions in Jordan as high-quality tourism destinations within the next five years. The key areas of focus of the MoU include skills development, marketing and promotion, and greater private sector participation. Also, the [Abdali Mall Recruitment and Training Centre](#) and [Makarem Academy](#) have been founded, both with EBRD support, to focus on tackling the skills mismatch between employers' demand and the supply by the wider education system (technical and vocational education and training (TVET) providers in particular). To date, these training centres have provided access to quality skills development programmes to more than 1,200 young men and women.

The EBRD is also supporting the development of a private sector-led Tourism & Hospitality Sector Skills Council to become the voice of the industry in identifying skills needs in the market. Since 2018, the EBRD has joined forces with the [ILO](#) and [GIZ](#) in Jordan to promote the role of the private sector in designing labour market policies and setting occupational skills standards. This resulted in the passing of [Law no. 9 for the year 2019](#), which provided for the setup of private sector-led platforms (Sector Skills Councils) to

operate under the auspices of an independent entity called the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission.

The Covid-19 response

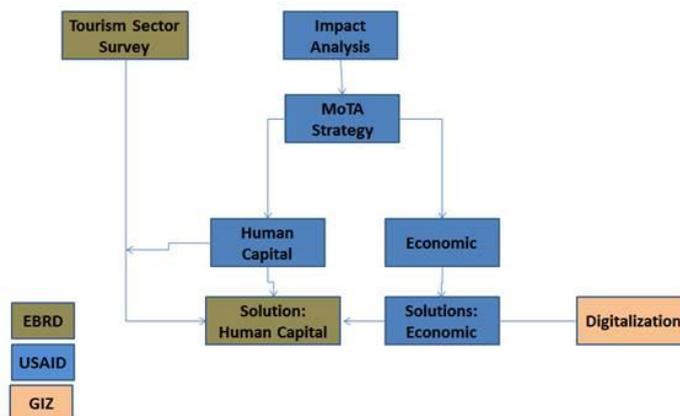
The private sector members of the Tourism & Hospitality Sector Skills Council played a leading role in preparing for the safe reopening of the sector. In order to frame the appropriate policy response and to direct its course of action, the Skills Council decided to assess the potential impact of the Covid-19 crisis on skills loss. A [Survey](#), commissioned by the EBRD and designed by the Council was circulated to all Tourism associations and sub-sectors within the tourism industry in Jordan.

The findings of the survey indicated that, across the tourism and hospitality sector, there is a strong need for skills development to respond to the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis. Important skills development needs across the sector include digital skills (including marketing and remote working), communication skills, and organizational skills to support the workforce for the coming months. Additionally, a sub-sectoral analysis revealed the skills development needs within each tourism sub-sector. For instance, the food and beverage sub-sector indicated a need to focus on skills development to comply with updated health and safety protocols, while the handicrafts sub-sector is interested in skills development on e-commerce and marketing.

Ultimately, the survey also revealed a need to support skills development in the tourism sector to support its recovery and growth in line with the 'new normal'. Based on the survey results and following its presentation to MOTTA and other relevant stakeholders, the one-year strategic plan of the Sector Skills Council was updated.

The EBRD is complementing government-led measures to support workers in the tourism sector and improve safety during Covid-19. This is a part of the wider policy response supported by other development partners as well (see Figure 1). As a first step, the EBRD supported the development of protocols – or what were later called [Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#) – for tourism enterprises in light of Covid-19. These SOPs were crosschecked by private sector members of the Skills Council, validated by the EBRD's consultant, [People 1st International](#), endorsed by the Epidemiology and Crisis Response Committee, and formally passed by virtue of a decree of the Minister of MOTTA as binding guidelines for all tourism operators. The SOPs were translated into English as well.

Figure 1: Mapping support of international development community to the tourism sector of Jordan



Source: MOTTA

Based on those SOPs, the EBRD and the Skills Council supported a three-tier approach to ensure quality operations and compliance with the standards:

1. **Training the workforce to comply with SOPs.** The Skills Council adopted the UK Work Readiness training program, developed by [World Host](#), revising and localizing its content to suit the context in Jordan, and further translating it into Arabic. The training programme was endorsed and strongly encouraged by MOTTA and is offered for free to all employees in the sector. Upon completion, trainees receive a formal certificate accredited by MOTTA, the Skills Council, World Host and the EBRD. The online training platform also allows gathering information about participants, including their occupation, sub-sector, and gender, in order to understand the

profiles of employees and occupations in demand in the post Covid-19 environment.

2. **Training focal points for the application of SOPs.** Each company working in the tourism sector was formally requested by a ministerial decree to nominate one employee to act as a focal point for the SOPs and ensure reporting to the government's Inspection Committees, established by MOTTA to inspect compliance of enterprises with the SOPs. The focal points received training from one of 24 national trainers, who underwent specialised training organized by EBRD on the application of the SOPs and best practices in coping with Covid-19.

3. **Training of government Inspection Committees.** Partnering with the UN World Tourism organization (UNWTO) within the framework of “[Covid-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package](#)”, the EBRD delivered a three-day intensive training course to government officials, including members

of Inspection Committees to improve their capacity in coping with the fallout of the pandemic on the tourism sector. Trained officials included representatives from MOTA, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health, Jordan Food and Drugs Administration, and Municipalities.

Impact of the policy response and the next steps

So far, more than 8,000 employees have been certified and accredited, 24 qualified trainers trained on the SOPs, and 80 officials trained on international best practices. Moreover, more than 150 focal points finished the training by end of August 2020. A Certification Stamp was designed and endorsed by MOTA to be stacked at a visible place at each inspected enterprise, indicating the company’s compliance with safety procedures in the times of coronavirus. Additionally, in July 2020, Jordan received the “Safe Travels” stamp from [the World Travel and Tourism Council](#) (WTTC) in recognition of the efficient safety measures that the government and its partners have implemented in the Tourism sector in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Negotiations are currently taking place with the [UN World Tourism Organization \(UNWTO\)](#) to receive a similar recognition.

The EBRD will work closely with USAID-Jordan to institutionalise the whole SOPs compliance system. The SOPs will be updated into fully-fledged “Protocols” for health safety, followed by revised training programmes. Those Protocols will be responsive and flexible to adapt to the epidemic. In addition, an online system for self-assessment against a standardised checklist per sub-

sector will be developed, complemented by a compressed process for inspection and certification.

Further efforts by the EBRD to support tourism in Jordan are in preparation, in continued partnership with the UNWTO. The support is planned along three main pillars. The first pillar consists of preparing an analytical study to measure the quantitative impact of Covid-19 on the sector, which will then be used to draft recommendations for policies which would be most efficient in spurring economic recovery. Secondly, the EBRD will assist in the development of marketing strategies to accelerate the recovery of the tourism sector, including guidelines for pricing, packaging, and promotion. Thirdly, institutional strengthening and building resilience will be aimed at further supporting government and tourism sector businesses in adapting their services in the wake of new Covid-19 health and safety guidelines, as specified in the SOPs. In line with this work stream, specific focus will be given to develop a comprehensive Tourism Database which will complement the National Tourism Satellite Accounts previously developed by MOTA, and which will host data, figures, and insights to monitor the tourism sector in Jordan.

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© European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
One Exchange Square
London EC2A 2JN
United Kingdom
www.ebrd.com

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