

OUT OF REACH

LEGAL WORK STILL INACCESSIBLE TO REFUGEES
IN JORDAN

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Cover Photo: A Syrian refugee is training to be a plumber at a vocational school in Jordan.
(Thomas Imo/Photothek via Getty Images)

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INTRODUCTION

Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the Syrian crisis, now in its eighth year. A country of fewer than 10 million, Jordan hosts more than 750,000 registered refugees.¹ The vast majority are from Syria, but Jordan also hosts tens of thousands of refugees from other countries, including Iraq, Yemen, and Sudan, and many more who are not registered.

In February 2016, the government of Jordan, the European Union (EU), and the World Bank agreed on a compact designed to turn the challenges of hosting a large number of Syrian refugees into an economic opportunity. One of its aims is to improve the lives of both Jordanians and the Syrian refugee population by giving them greater access to the labor market.

During a June 2018 research mission to Jordan, Refugees International (RI) found that the situation for refugees in the country is bleak and in many ways worsening. Underfunded United Nations (U.N.) agencies have reduced financial and food assistance; refugees are struggling to make ends meet, given the high cost of living; and few have legal employment. The vast majority – close to 85 percent – of Jordan’s refugee population lives outside of refugee camps.² Rents outside of the camps are high and public transportation is poor, pushing many families into debt. In addition, in early 2018, the Jordanian government suddenly cut health subsidies to Syrians from 80 percent to 20 percent, and the increased costs of medical care and medication present a huge additional burden for them.

Although the Jordan Compact has somewhat improved refugee access to labor markets, the fact remains that in Jordan most professions are closed to non-Jordanians, including refugees. Open sectors include agriculture, construction, and manufacturing. According to official figures as of June 2018, the government had issued 104,000 work permits to Syrians. However, that number includes renewals of existing permits. Therefore, the actual number of Syrians legally employed in Jordan is likely to be much lower. In reality, the majority of refugees who work do so in the informal sector, where wages are low and conditions are often difficult and physically taxing. To make ends meet, many families send their children to work instead of school.

Women and girls represent more than 49 percent of Jordan’s registered refugee population.³ Many refugee women shoulder the responsibility of providing for their families, yet they face particular challenges in accessing employment. One-third of Syrian households in Jordan are headed by females.⁴ Women whose husbands are not able to find work because they are too old or unfit for manual labor have also had to step in and find work if they can. It is common for Syrian women in Jordan to sell food they prepare at home or handicrafts they make.

However, in early 2018, the Jordanian government issued instructions that have made it almost impossible for Syrians to register these home-based businesses.

1. UNHCR Jordan Fact Sheet, June 2018 <<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20June%202018.pdf>>.

2. *Ibid.*

3. UNHCR Refugee Statistics for Jordan as of May 31, 2018 <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63934>>.

4. Factsheet: Care Jordan – Syrian Refugee, Other Minority Refugee, and Jordanian Host Households, June 2017 <<https://www.care.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-CARE-Jordan-Syrian-refugees-Fact-Sheet-final-web-15062017.pdf>>.



Syrian refugee Fawaz al-Jasem pulls weeds on a tomato farm in Ramtha, Jordan. He's among thousands of displaced Syrians who recently obtained work permits as part of the Jordan Compact. (AP Photo/Raad Adayleh)

Registering a business means working legally and being able to advertise and market products freely without fear of being caught and punished. The obstacles to registration of home-based businesses have a major impact on women, many of whom prefer to work from their homes due to a lack of child care and transportation, as well as social and cultural norms that oppose women's work outside the home. Only 4 percent of the work permits issued by the Jordanian government to Syrians have been obtained by women. The Jordan Compact's failure to deliver meaningful results for women is one of its greatest failures.

Although the vast majority of refugees in Jordan are Syrian, tens of thousands of refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and other countries live in a difficult environment but are left out of most humanitarian assistance programs aimed at Syrians. Refugees from sub-Saharan Africa face racism and discrimination because of their skin color and are more easily identifiable when working informally than Syrian refugees.

Even though Jordan's economy faces many challenges, the commitments made by the Jordanian government and the international community in the Jordan Compact provide an opportunity to improve the lives of both refugees and their host communities, and set an example for other countries facing similar challenges. Key stakeholders need to take steps to improve refugees' access to legal work and better livelihoods to make the compact a success. These steps would make a huge difference in the abilities of refugee women and men to support themselves and live in dignity in Jordan, and allow their host communities to benefit from the skills and experience they bring. Opening up opportunities for refugees to work legally and establish formal businesses would also help the government and the international community deliver on their commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from RI's mission to Jordan in June 2018 and the analysis in this report, RI offers the following recommendations to the government of Jordan, U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations operating in Jordan, the United States government, the EU and EU member states, the parties to the Jordan Compact, and the private sector in Jordan.

To the Government of Jordan:

- To improve refugees' access to legal employment in Jordan, expand the job sectors in which they can obtain work permits.
- Continue the current practice of waiving work permit fees for Syrian refugees and extend the waiver to refugees of other nationalities.
- Extend to other sectors the flexible work permits in place for agriculture and construction.
- Repeal the requirement for Syrians registering home-based businesses to have a Jordanian partner. This change would facilitate self-reliance and the participation of refugees, particularly women, in the formal labor market.
- Reverse the decision to reduce health care subsidies for Syrians from 80 percent to 20 percent.

To U.N. Agencies and Humanitarian Organizations Operating in Jordan:

- Commission a survey of the skills and qualifications of the refugee population in Jordan, disaggregated by gender and nationality, to better identify job opportunities for refugee men and women.
- Increase livelihoods projects and funding for programs that support refugee women in establishing their own businesses and working as employees, and provide them with training and mentoring throughout the process.
- Include non-Syrian refugees in all livelihoods programs and humanitarian assistance, including food vouchers, both by opening eligibility criteria to non-Syrian refugee beneficiaries and conducting outreach to ensure they benefit in practice.

To the United States Government, the EU, and EU Member States:

- Especially in light of the considerable responsibilities the government of Jordan has assumed in providing for its refugee population, significantly increase funding for U.N. agencies giving assistance to refugees in Jordan, prioritizing food, health care, transportation subsidies, and shelter support – specifically, cash assistance for rent.
- Greatly increase the resettlement of Syrian and non-Syrian refugees from Jordan.

To the Parties to the Jordan Compact:

- Include refugee women's effective access to livelihoods as an indicator of the compact's success.

To the Private Sector in Jordan:

- Work with the government of Jordan and U.N. agencies and nongovernmental organizations to create new job opportunities for refugees and Jordanians alike.
- Provide transportation support and on-site child care to increase the rate of refugee women's access to employment and retention.
- Work with U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations operating in Jordan to establish vocational training for refugees that are better tailored to the needs of the country's labor market.

BACKGROUND

Jordan, a country of fewer than 10 million inhabitants, hosts more than 750,000 registered refugees, of whom upward of 660,000 are from Syria.⁵ Tens of thousands of refugees from other countries – mainly Iraq, Yemen, and Sudan – also live in Jordan, as well as more than 2 million Palestinian refugees, most of whom have acquired Jordanian citizenship.⁶ Jordan has a long history of welcoming refugees, and it has the second highest number of refugees per capita in the world.⁷

With the conflict in Syria now in its eighth year, it is not safe for Syrians to return home; under these circumstances, no one should be forced to return to Syria. Because of the enormous uncertainty about the future and the magnitude of Jordan's Syrian refugee population, the question of how to provide sustainable assistance that allows refugees to be self-reliant remains a pressing one, both for Jordan and the international community.

Jordan and its people have shown generosity toward Syrian refugees and assumed a great deal of the responsibility and cost of hosting such a large number of people, even though the country's economy faces many challenges. The unemployment rate is 18.4 percent.⁸ The country is located in the center of an unstable and volatile region, and two of its most important trade partners – Iraq and Syria – remain plagued by conflict. In June 2018, a wave of protests against government

plans to raise taxes led to the resignation of Jordan's prime minister and his cabinet.

To help Jordan turn the challenge of hosting this large refugee population into an economic opportunity, in February 2016, the EU, the World Bank, and the Jordanian government agreed to a set of measures that constitute the Jordan Compact.⁹ This innovative approach includes commitments by the government of Jordan to ease certain restrictions on refugees' access to legal employment and allow Syrians to register existing businesses and establish new ones. The World Bank committed to providing Jordan with grants and concessionary loans, and the EU promised to open its markets to Jordanian exports under preferential conditions.

The compact set several ambitious goals. Its establishment reflects a significant political will to improve the livelihoods of refugees and Jordanians. The refugees themselves did not have a real voice in setting its terms and conditions, however. Two years on, the failure to consider their views has led to disappointing results on the ground. In fact, the humanitarian situation for refugees is worsening: UNHCR, facing funding gaps, does not have the necessary funds to provide cash assistance to Syrian and non-Syrian refugees as of November, the government has drastically reduced its health subsidies to Syrians, and the cost of living is rising. Close to 85 percent of Jordan's Syrian refugee population live in urban areas, where they face high rents and very limited public transportation. More than 80 percent of Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line.¹⁰

5. UNHCR Jordan Fact Sheet. June 2018 <<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20June%202018.pdf>>.

6. Where We Work. Jordan, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), December 2016 <<https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>>.

7. UNHCR Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2017, p. 2 <<http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>>.

8. 18.4% Unemployment Rate during the first Quarter of 2018. First quarter 2018, Department of Statistics, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. 4 June 2018 <http://dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/archive/Unemp/2018/Emp_Q1_2018.pdf>.

9. The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis. February 2016 <<https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-compact-new-holistic-approach-between-hashemite-kingdom-jordan-and>>.

10. UNHCR. Jordan Fact Sheet. February 2018 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FactSheetJordanFebru>>.



Amman, Jordan. June 2018.

Given the ongoing conflict and insecurity in Syria, no refugee should be forced to return, and resettlement options are very limited, particularly to the United States. The vast majority of Jordan's refugee population is there to stay for the foreseeable future, making the issue of their livelihoods all the more pressing.

WORSENING LIVING CONDITIONS FOR REFUGEES IN JORDAN

In June 2018, RI traveled to Jordan and interviewed dozens of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia in the cities of Amman, Jerash, and Irbid. Over the course of those interviews, it became clear that a series of ongoing factors, recent developments,

and new policies are together leading to a worsening of overall conditions for the refugees in Jordan. These issues include the high cost of rent, lack of public transport, massive cuts in their health care subsidies, insufficient food vouchers and cash assistance, and the psychological impact of their protracted displacement.

Interviewees told RI that to make ends meet, they borrow money from people they know, get loans from stores, or – if their landlord allows it – pay their rent in portions. Members of one Syrian family who work on a farm near Jerash told RI that they borrow from local stores. “In one store, we have a debt of 500JOD [Jordanian Dinars]. Every month we try to pay him 25JOD.” They said that if they could, they would like to supplement their income by making cheese and pickles, and sewing.

“The hardest thing is how expensive [life in Jordan] is, even if you work hard. If one of the

children is sick, I need to take money from something else,” Siham, a Syrian refugee living in Amman, told RI.

High cost of rent

In interviews, the biggest concern refugees cited was the cost of rent. The vast majority of Jordan’s refugee population lives in urban areas outside of the refugee camps, where rents are very high in comparison to families’ earning potential. The monthly minimum wage for foreign workers in Jordan is 150JOD (US\$4211.5),¹¹ significantly less than the 220JOD minimum wage for Jordanians.¹² Most refugees interviewed by RI said their monthly rent was between 100JOD and 250JOD; many said they feared being forced out of their homes because they could not pay the rent, including some who had been evicted from previous homes for that very reason.

“We’ve been kicked out of a house because we couldn’t pay the rent,” Manal, a Syrian refugee living in Jerash, told RI.¹³ “We prioritize paying the rent over food,” she said.

“We prioritize paying the rent over food.”

-MANAL, A SYRIAN REFUGEE LIVING IN JERASH

Lack of public transport

The lack of adequate public transportation results in high costs for refugees, forcing many

to spend a large portion of their income on traveling to and from work. Mariam, a Syrian woman who works in a Syrian business in Amman, told RI that out of a household of seven people, she and her oldest son are the only ones working. She said that to get to his job at a factory, her son leaves home at 5:30 in the morning and returns at 8:30 in the evening. He earns 300JOD per month, of which he spends 100JOD on taxis to and from his place of work. Mariam herself earns 250JOD (the cost of their monthly rent) per month and spends at least 70JD on transportation.

“We’re always in debt,” Mariam said. “It keeps getting bigger.”

Massive cuts to health care subsidies

To make matters worse, in February 2018, the Jordanian government abruptly cut the health subsidies for Syrian refugees from 80 percent to 20 percent of their costs. Previously, the government had granted registered Syrians – though not refugees from other countries – access to its public health care system at the same cost as uninsured Jordanian citizens. As a result of the cuts, however, medical expenses skyrocketed for Syrian refugees, placing a huge additional burden on them.¹⁴ In response, some refugees told RI that due to the higher fees, they now avoid going to the doctor. Instead, they self-medicate or take their medication infrequently to make it last longer.

“My father has a heart problem,” Marwa, a Syrian woman in Amman, told RI. “He used to go to the doctor but now it is 6JOD. His medicine used to be 10JOD and now it is 65JOD.”

11. Based on the exchange rate on August 28, 2018: 1 JOD equals US\$1.411.

12. ILO Regional Office for Arab States. *Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan – Towards Formalising the Work of Syrian Refugees*. June 2017, p. 62 <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_559151/lang--en/index.htm>.

13. To protect the identity of refugees interviewed, Refugees International has changed their names throughout the report.

14. “Matter of Life and Death: Healthcare Costs Skyrocket for Syrian Refugees in Jordan.” *The Globe Post*. June 2018 <<https://theglobepost.com/2018/06/13/jordan-refugees-healthcare/>>.

Ilham, a Syrian woman with diabetes who lives in Jerash, told RI that she is supposed to take pills each morning and evening. She said that since the cuts, she has not been able to continue taking them twice per day. “I take one per day, or I take the pills some days and other days I don’t.” She said that although she is supposed to get tests every six months to check her sugar levels, she only goes when she has the money.

Suad, a 62-year-old Syrian woman also living in Jerash, told RI that she treats her diabetes with garlic as a natural remedy. “They cut the medical insurance and now we’re all in debt,” Kareema, a Syrian woman living in Irbid, told RI. After her husband fell from the third floor in a building where he was working informally, he spent 20 days in the hospital. He was told by his doctor that it would be two years before he would be able to work again. Kareema told RI that she owed the hospital 2,280JOD for the cost of her husband’s stay, and the hospital kept her identity card to ensure she paid.

U.N. food vouchers and cash assistance

Some 500,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan living inside and outside of camps receive monthly food vouchers and cash assistance from the World Food Program (WFP). In July 2015, due to a lack of funds, WFP reduced the amount beneficiaries receive by half.¹⁵ In April 2018, following government decisions to increase the sales tax and end bread subsidies, WFP increased the monthly amount for those living outside the camps from 10JOD per month per individual to 15JOD for vul-

nerable Syrians, and from 20JOD to 23JOD for extremely vulnerable Syrians.¹⁶ Although the marginal increase in food assistance is a welcome help, several Syrian refugees told RI that the amount was not enough to cover their needs. “The 184JOD we get in food vouchers is not enough,” Ala and Naseem, a Syrian couple living with their six children in Jerash, told RI. “We finished it 10 days ago.” It was particularly challenging for them because Ala had an accident at work that injured his hip, preventing him from working.

Only a small portion of Jordan’s refugee population receives cash assistance – one of the most efficient forms of aid. That assistance targets the most vulnerable refugees. As of June 2018, UNHCR was providing cash assistance to 140,000 people, of which 132,000 were Syrians.¹⁷ According to UNHCR, around one-third of Syrian households that receive cash assistance include at least one family member with a disability.¹⁸ Over the course of 2017, the waiting list for UNHCR cash assistance “ballooned” to more than 75,000 individuals (more than 16,000 families).¹⁹ As of early September 2018, UNHCR lacked funding for its cash assistance program to Syrian and non-Syrian refugees, as well as for winterization cash support for November and December 2018.

Psychological impact of protracted displacement

Several refugees described to RI how the lack of job opportunities, financial pressure, the length of time they have spent in Jordan, and the news of deaths and destruction from

15. “WFP Forced to Cut Food Aid for Syrian Refugees by Half.” *Reuters*. 31 July 2015 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mid-east-crisis-syria-aid/wfp-forced-to-cut-food-aid-for-syrian-refugees-by-half-idUKKCN0Q522K20150731>>.

16. “WFP Increases Stipends for Refugees after Subsidies Lifted, April 2018.” *The Jordan Times*. <<http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/wfp-increases-stipends-refugees-after-subsidies-lifted>>.

17. UNHCR Jordan. *Cash Assistance Dashboard*. June 2018 <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64825>>.

18. UNHCR. *Poorest Syrian Refugees Facing Ruin Due to Underfunding*. May 2018 <<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2018/5/5b0ff1034/poorest-syrian-refugees-facing-ruin-due-underfunding.html>>.

19. UNHCR Jordan. “Cash Assistance: Protecting the Most Fragile and Supporting Resilience.” *Post Distribution Monitoring Report 2017*. June 2018 <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63975>>.

CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-SYRIAN REFUGEES

“From the color of our skin, we suffer. There’s no respect,” Amina, a refugee from Darfur and mother of two young children, whose husband was deported from Jordan to Sudan in December 2015, told RI.

In addition to its Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations, Jordan hosts refugees from Iraq (66,000), Yemen (11,000), Sudan – most of them from Darfur (4,000), Somalia (800), and more than 1,600 refugees from other countries. Most humanitarian assistance

programs in Jordan target Syrian refugees; refugees from these other countries are largely left to fend for themselves. In December 2015, about 800 Sudanese men, women, and children were deported from Jordan to Sudan after Sudanese refugees staged a protest against their dire living conditions and marginalization in front of the UNHCR office in Amman.¹ Non-Syrian refugees do not receive food vouchers from WFP. Some receive monthly cash assistance from UNHCR: of the 140,382 people receiving cash assistance as of June 2018, 6,399 were Iraqi and 1,799 (corresponding to 590 families) were of other nationalities.²

According to a humanitarian organization that works with non-Syrian refugees in Jordan, the main difficulties these refugees face are the cost of rent, the lack of medical insurance, and the lack of financial assistance. “Their



A Sudanese refugee from Darfur walks past tents during an open-ended sit-in outside the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Amman, Jordan on December 12, 2015, demanding better treatment and acceleration of their relocation. (Khalil Mazraawi/AFP/Getty Images)

1. Human Rights Watch. *Jordan: Deporting Sudanese Asylum Seekers*. 16 December 2015 <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/16/jordan-deporting-sudanese-asylum-seekers>>

2. UNHCR Jordan. *Cash Assistance Dashboard*. June 2018 <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64825>>.



Every week, refugees from Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine come to participate in free lessons at the 7Hills skate park in Amman, Jordan. (Khalil Mazraawi/AFP/Getty Images)

mental health is deteriorating, and there are very few resettlements for everyone, Syrian and non-Syrian,” said a representative in Amman. “When they come here, they do jobs like cleaning, carrying things. It affects their health a lot.”

Refugees from sub-Saharan Africa are more identifiable as being non-Jordanian because of their skin color; they are therefore at higher risk of being stopped by the police. Racism and bullying of Sudanese children at school has also been raised as a serious concern by organizations assisting Sudanese and other non-Syrian refugees in Jordan.³

“It’s a very miserable situation in Jordan,” Ahmad, a journalist from Darfur who lives in Amman with his wife and two young children, told RI. “It’s hard to live in dignity. (...) There is no work permit, and if you find a job, the employer exploits you and treats you like you’re

a servant.” Speaking of his children, Ahmad told RI that “we can’t provide them with basic food.” Ahmad said that “There is a lot of racism because of ignorance,” adding that his neighbors throw trash outside of his family’s home, “like you’re not a person.”

“There are no opportunities to work or to study for Sudanese refugees, because you need a work permit and Sudanese people aren’t allowed to work,” Aisha, a refugee from Darfur living in Amman with her husband, told RI. She said all that is available to Sudanese refugees is daily labor, but “the work doesn’t provide dignity and there is fear of the police because Sudanese people aren’t allowed to work.” For Aisha, what is most important are opportunities for legal work and for studies. “All opportunities go to Syrians,” she said.

3. See Baslan, Dina, Anna Kvittingen, and Maya Perlmann. “Sheltering in Amman – Sudanese Experiences and Practices in a Challenging Urban Environment.” *Mixed Migration Platform*. November 2017 <http://mixedmigrationplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/20171129_MMPGuestArticle_ShelteringInAmman-1.pdf>.

Syria have all collectively taken a toll on them and their families psychologically. “My husband doesn’t have friends,” Mariam, a Syrian refugee in Amman who works to support her family, told RI. “He just stays at home. He just gets water and food and comes home. In Syria he had a factory, a car. Psychologically and physically, he’s suffering. His mental health has affected his physical health.”

“In two days, if I don’t pay the rent, they [the landlords] will kick us out. Where will I go? There is no income for this home. It makes you cry.”

**-ZIAD, A 65-YEAR-OLD SYRIAN MAN
LIVING IN IRBID**

Together, all of these factors conspire to impose severe hardships on the most vulnerable families. Ziad, a 65-year-old Syrian man living in Irbid, described how no one in the household of seven, including a daughter with a disability, was working. Ziad said they were not receiving cash assistance. His three sons had been killed in the war in Syria. “They were the ones who could have helped me,” he said. He had just learned that his house in Daraa, in southwest Syria, had been destroyed during the recent government offensive. “When we came, we thought it would be for one or two months. We had some money, some gold. We have spent everything. It has been seven years.” Ziad told RI it had been four months since he had paid the rent. “In two days, if I don’t pay the rent, they [the landlords] will kick us out. Where will I go?” he asked. “There is no income for this home,” he said. “It makes you cry.”

LIMITED ACCESS TO LEGAL WORK

Restricted access to legal employment

Although Jordan has taken some important steps to improve Syrian refugees’ access to the labor market, its legal and policy frameworks remain restrictive for non-Jordanians who wish, or indeed need, to work.

Jordan has a long list of professions that are closed to non-citizens, including medicine, engineering, teaching, administrative posts, accounting, hairdressing, and decorating, as well as jobs as an electrician or car mechanic. In some cases, positions in closed sectors can be filled by non-Jordanians if the employer can prove that no Jordanian is qualified, available, or willing to take on the position.²⁰ The fact that so many sectors are closed to non-Jordanians remains a serious challenge for many refugees seeking employment. Those with qualifications and experience in such sectors work informally in closed sectors, in jobs in which they have little or no experience, or do not work at all.

Under the Jordan Compact, the government committed to providing Syrian refugees with 200,000 job opportunities, facilitating the process of their hiring, and allowing Syrians to formalize existing businesses and open new ones that would generate taxes for Jordan. According to government figures, as of January 2018 more than half of the 104,000 work permits issued were in the construction sector. About one-quarter had been issued in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors.²¹

20. International Labour Organization Regional Office for Arab States. *Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan*. 2017, p. 24 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WORKPERMITSANDEMPLOYMENTOF.pdf>>.

21. Ministry of Labour Syrian Refugee Unit. *Monthly Progress Report*. January 2018 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/>>

The official Jordanian government figure of the number of work permits issued to Syrians does not accurately reflect the number of refugees actually employed because the figure 104,000 includes renewals of existing work permits; therefore, the number of refugees at work legally is likely to be much lower. According to UNHCR, as of June 2018, fewer than 50,000 refugees had active work permits.²² A U.N. official told RI that “the number of work permits don’t [sic] say much. The number of documents being issued, they’re supporting mobility and protection, they don’t support work opportunities.”

“The number of work permits don’t [sic] say much. The number of documents being issued, they’re supporting mobility and protection, they don’t support work opportunities.”

-U.N. OFFICIAL

The government has opened opportunities for Syrians to work in factories in Jordan’s Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Under the compact, the EU committed to easing its Rules of Origin policy to open up the EU market to exports from companies in SEZs that employ at least 15 percent Syrian refugees. Few Syrians have been hired in manufacturing jobs, however; indeed, only 5 percent of

work permits for refugees have been issued in manufacturing.²³ Only four factories have qualified for exports to the EU under the aforementioned preferential conditions.²⁴

One reason for this trend is that SEZs are far from the urban areas where most refugees live and are thus difficult to access in the absence of adequate public transportation, as noted above. In addition, wages are relatively low for those who live outside of refugee camps and must pay for housing.²⁵ The factories in the SEZs typically employ migrant workers who live on site, whereas the majority of Syrian refugees live with their families in urban centers and have to pay for rent and transportation.

In a positive development, Jordan has introduced flexible work permits for Syrians to work in the agricultural and construction sectors. Unlike normal work permits, these flexible permits can be transferred from one employer to another within the sector – an important step in sectors where individual jobs are highly transitory. However, as described below, recent government regulations on home-based businesses, which are particularly attractive to women, have made it extremely difficult for refugees to formalize such businesses or open new ones.

Two years after the Jordan Compact was adopted, refugees’ access to legal employment remains disappointing, and it is clear from the compact’s failure to address the key obstacles to refugees’ employment – including transportation and the closed sectors – that the voices and needs of refugees have not

[files/resources/MonthlyreportJan2018.pdf](#)>.

22. UNHCR. Jordan Fact Sheet. June 2018 <<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20June%202018.pdf>>.

23. Ministry of Labour Syrian Refugee Unit. Monthly Progress Report. January 2018 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MonthlyreportJan2018.pdf>>.

24. International Rescue Committee. Still in Search of Work, Creating Jobs for Syrian Refugees: An Update on the Jordan Compact. April 2018, p. 9 <<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/2686/stillinsearchofworkjordancompactupdatebriefapril2018.pdf>>.

25. Howden, Daniel, Hannah Patchett, and Charlotte Alfred. “The Compact Experiment – Push for Refugee Jobs Confronts Reality of Jordan and Lebanon.” *Refugees Deeply*. December 2017 <<http://issues.newsdeeply.com/the-compact-experiment>>.

been considered sufficiently.²⁶ Yet refugees in Jordan and elsewhere bring with them a range of skills and experience that, if allowed to work, can benefit their host community and its economy.

“Refugees in Jordan and elsewhere bring with them a range of skills and experience that, if allowed to work, can benefit their host community and its economy.”

Working in the informal sector

Jordan has a large informal job market, involving as much as half of its labor force.²⁷ As a result of the continued barriers to gainful legal employment, most refugees who work in Jordan do so in the informal sector, usually in manual jobs involving low wages and difficult conditions.

“Our son was doing building work, or whatever he could find. He got 3JOD for a day’s work, and his fingers were bleeding. Now it’s 5JOD. But what can we do? We need to eat,” Iman, whose son has been working in Jordan since he was 17 – the only one able to support the family – told RI.

Several refugees told RI they were afraid of working without a work permit because they feared being stopped by the police

and either detained, sent to a refugee camp, or deported to their country of origin. The penalty for employing a foreigner in a closed profession is a fine of between 200JOD and 500JOD, and possible deportation, though the latter penalty has been lifted for Syrians.²⁸ Nonetheless, deportations of refugees to Syria by the Jordanian authorities have been documented, with little transparency and no due process.²⁹

“There’s a fear of inspections, a fear of being returned [to Syria],” Sana, a Syrian refugee living with her family in Amman, told RI. “On all levels, it’s better to have a work permit. My son, they took him from his work in a supermarket. They took him to the police station. They said ‘It’s the first time but you mustn’t work again. If you do it again we’ll send you to Daraa.’ He was 17 at the time.”

Salah, a refugee from Somalia, told RI that he was stopped by police once when he was working in a coffee shop without a work permit. “The police came and took me to the office of labor,” where he said he was held in a cell with dozens of Egyptians who had been found working without work permits. He said that thanks to the coffee shop owner’s connections, he was released the same day, but he had had to sign a document saying that he would not work again. “Verbally, they said, ‘if you work again, you will get deported.’”

26. Buffoni, Laura. “The Jordan Compact Would Work Better if We Listened to Refugees.” *Refugees Deeply*. July 2018 <<https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2018/07/09/the-jordan-compact-would-work-better-if-we-listened-to-refugees>>.

27. Errighi, Lorenza, and Jorn Griesse. The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Labour Market Implications in Jordan and Lebanon. European Commission. 29 May 2016, p. 18 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/dp029_en.pdf>.

28. International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Arab States. *Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan – Towards Formalising the Work of Syrian Refugees*. 2017 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WORKPERMITSANDEMPLOYMENTOF.pdf>>.

29. Human Rights Watch. “I Have No Idea Why They Sent Us Back,” Jordanian Deportations and Expulsions of Syrian Refugees. October 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/jordan1017_web.pdf>.



RI Senior Advocate Izza Leghtas speaks with a Syrian woman who makes handmade soaps in Amman, Jordan. June 2018.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN

In Jordan, the participation of Jordanian women in the labor market is one of the lowest in the world,³⁰ with an unemployment rate higher for its female population (27.8 percent) than for males (16 percent). Even in the context of these figures, the number of Syrian refugee women with legal employment in Jordan remains shockingly low. Although women and girls constitute half of Jordan's registered refugee population, only 4 percent of work permits issued for Syrians have gone to women.³¹ Furthermore, recent government

policies have made legal employment for refugee women even more difficult by making it almost impossible for Syrians to register home-based businesses, which are especially attractive to women. This change prevents them from establishing a business legally and being able to advertise and market their products without fear of punishment by the authorities.

Despite these obstacles, many refugee women in Jordan must and do work. Nearly one-third of refugee households in Jordan are headed by females.³² Many women who have husbands in Jordan also seek work, often because their husbands cannot find a job. Many men cannot find legal employment because their age or physical condition precludes them from taking available jobs

30. The World Bank. *Labor Force, Female (% of Total Labor Force)*. November 2017 <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?end=2017&start=1990&type=shaded&view=chart>>.

31. Ministry of Labour Syrian Refugee Department. *WPs [Work Permits] Monthly Progress Report*. January 2018 <<https://relief-web.int/report/jordan/syrian-refugee-unit-work-permit-progress-report-january-2018>>.

32. Care Jordan. *Syrian Refugee, Other Minority Refugee, Other and Jordanian Host Households*. June 2017 <<https://www.care.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-CARE-Jordan-Syrian-refugees-Fact-Sheet-final-web-15062017.pdf>>.

involving manual labor. In addition, interviewees told RI that it is safer for women to work in the informal sector because the Jordanian police are more likely to stop men and send them to a camp or back to Syria. As a result, women are stepping up to find work where they can.

The odds are stacked against them, however. Refugee women must contend with a series of additional challenges above and beyond those faced by their male counterparts. First, child care is a key concern for women seeking employment, particularly if they have young children. The lack thereof, given that the responsibility for child care and domestic work generally falls on women, often prevents them from working. Second, the dearth of affordable, safe, and reliable transportation in Jordan's urban centers is a key obstacle to refugee women's employment outside the home. Third, many Syrian women in Jordan also face social and cultural norms that oppose work outside the home, especially in an unfamiliar environment.

Some women have managed to overcome social and cultural obstacles. In their International Labor Organization (ILO)-supported baking and cooking business in the northern city of Irbid, Syrian and Jordanian women described to RI the resistance some of them had faced from their husbands and families. This opposition included resistance to their working outside the home and staying long hours at the workplace. One of the women took the lead in talking to her coworkers' husbands to convince them of the value of the business. The business was a success, and the women managed to gain the acceptance and support of their families and communities. "If [the woman] gets an income, the man will be quiet," she said. "One of the positive

aspects of the war is that we've broken the tradition of shame, that you couldn't go alone somewhere." Now, she added, "we feel alive."

INACCESSIBILITY OF HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

Many refugee women RI interviewed said their preferred way to earn a living would be to set up a home-based business. Doing so would address their concerns around child care and transportation, and enable them to use their skills. The World Bank has identified facilitating home based-businesses as a central avenue for providing Jordanian and Syrian women with livelihood opportunities.³³ However, Jordan has instituted a series of policies that have made the registration of home-based businesses by Syrian refugees practically impossible.

In early 2018, government instructions required Syrians living outside of refugee camps who wished to register a home-based business to have a Jordanian business partner. The government also informed humanitarian agencies that they were allowed to provide grants and support to home-based businesses only if they were set up jointly by Jordanians and Syrians.³⁴ In practice, this joint venture requirement is extremely difficult to fulfill. Most Syrians do not have Jordanian contacts with whom they can partner. Syrian refugee women also told RI that they are reluctant to partner with a Jordanian because the latter would have all the power during a dispute.

33. The World Bank. *Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees Program-For-Results*. Report No. 108201-JO. September 2016. Annex 1, para 21, <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/802781476219833115/pdf/Jordan-PforR-PAD-P159522-FINAL-DISCLOSURE-10052016.pdf>>.

34. Buffoni, Laura. "The Jordan Compact Would Work Better if We Listened to Refugees." *Refugees Deeply*. July 2018 <<https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2018/07/09/the-jordan-compact-would-work-better-if-we-listened-to-refugees>>.



RI Senior Advocate Izza Leghtas interviews Syrian and Jordanian women in the kitchen where they operate their International Labor Organization (ILO)-supported business in Irbid, Jordan. June 2018.

Lara Shaheen, a Syrian entrepreneur in Amman, told RI that “some Jordanians are afraid to do it because [of their fear that] the Syrian [partner] will go to another country, or be sent back to Syria, and leave the Jordanian with the business. Some people ask for money to do it. And there are also Jordanians who took everything and left.” This happened to Shaheen. A few years ago, she opened a business selling Syrian soaps and handicrafts with a Jordanian partner. That partner then left Amman. “I had no documents. Nothing was in my name,” she said.

Manal, a Syrian refugee living in Amman, told RI that she had an opportunity to receive a loan from a Dutch organization to start a project. However, she could not comply with the requirement of a Jordanian partner. “If I’d had funding from the Dutch organization, I would cook because I know how to do it. My friends and I also thought of making wedding dress-

es, but we’d have to put it under the name of a Jordanian and we don’t know anyone. And if there’s a problem, it’s under his name.”

As a result, access to this sector is largely cut off to Syrian refugee women. As a humanitarian worker in Amman observed, “Taking away HBBs [home-based businesses] has really reduced the ability for refugees to be economically active. There are very few cases of organic joint ventures.” One U.N. official told RI that “Home based-businesses are extremely important to women ... They do work from home, they have skills for that work. It’s a huge setback.” Research by RI and others has found that many Syrian refugee women have a preference for home-based work because it addresses their concerns about child care and household responsibilities in a context in which they have limited support from family networks.³⁵ Although enabling refugee women from Syria and other coun

35. UN Women. *Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women’s Labor Force Participation and Attitudes Towards Employment*. 2017, p. 26 <<http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20jordan/attachments/publications/jordanian%20and%20syrian%20refugee.pdf?la=en&vs=1300>>.

“Taking away HBBs [home-based businesses] has really reduced the ability for refugees to be economically active.”

-A HUMANITARIAN WORKER IN AMMAN

tries to set up home-based businesses as a way to support themselves and their families should be a priority, such efforts should be implemented alongside measures to facilitate refugee women’s access to work outside the home. These measures include tackling the obstacles they face, such as cultural and societal pressures, child care alternatives, and affordable and safe transportation, as well as providing training opportunities and mentoring.

THE NEED FOR BETTER VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Several interviewees – both refugees and humanitarian workers – expressed to RI their frustration that many trainings provided to refugees do not actually help them get jobs. They note that most trainings are not tailored to the needs of the job market and do not include follow-up. In addition, trainings meant to help refugees establish a business often fail to include a business plan or equip the beneficiaries with all the tools they need.

“There are lots of free trainings, but there is no follow-up to ensure [the trainees] remember their training,” Syrian entrepreneur Lara Shaheen told RI. “There is a lot of money spent on trainings, and then they [the beneficiaries] stay at home. When I train women, I guarantee that they’ll work with me

... Those who organize trainings should ask employers what skills they need.”

Maha Kattaa of the ILO told RI that there is a need for demand-driven vocational training. “In focus groups we find Syrians who are going from training to training,” she said. As Syrian and Jordanian women working in an ILO-supported project in Irbid told RI, there is a need for training that is followed by a job opportunity. “You mustn’t train [people] and leave them,” one of the women said.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Jordan faces many challenges in hosting large numbers of refugees and also providing for its own citizens. Eight years into an ongoing conflict in Syria, the strain on Jordan’s resources, economy, and infrastructure has been substantial. However, with cuts to the already modest humanitarian assistance they receive, the high cost of living in Jordan, and shrinking opportunities for being resettled in another country, those suffering most are the refugees. The international community must do more to ensure that refugees from Syria, Sudan, and other countries are able to access food and shelter, and provide their children with an education in Jordan.

More than two years after the launch of the Jordan Compact, there is momentum and political will to address the issue of refugees’ livelihoods in Jordan, and progress has been made. Much more needs to be done, however. Specifically, women have largely been left out. The government of Jordan has not helped matters with recent policies that restrict the ability of all refugees to establish and regularize home-based businesses.

Refugees do not just have needs. They bring with them skills, experience, and a desire to work to support themselves and their families. Much more must be done to make legal

employment and self-reliance for refugees a reality. As a beginning, the voices of refugee men and women must inform the initiatives and policies that affect them. The Jordanian government should ease restrictions that prevent refugees from accessing legal work, and the international community must do its part to support Jordan. Enabling more refugee men and women to work legally would not only improve their economic situation and resilience, but also increase their contributions to Jordan's economy and growth.

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ABOUT REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We are an independent organization and do not accept any government or UN funding.



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