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Introduction

Jordan, since its establishment 1946, has mostly kept an open-border policy which has made it, over the years, an important safe haven for refugees inflicted by crises in neighbouring countries of the Middle East. A state with limited resources, and economic fragility that has been struggling to secure the social protection and basic rights for its own citizens has been challenged with the flows of refugees from the neighbouring countries.

Of Jordan's population that exceeds eleven million, refugees make 30 percent of the overall population. Both refugees and citizens grapple with economic stagnation, exacerbated by Covid-19-related closures, high unemployment rates in many Jordanian cities, and notably, inequality stemming from neoliberal policies. Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 convention and lacking domestic laws for refugee treatment, Jordan's refugee policies fluctuate in tandem with international aid inflows, leveraging its semi-rentier economy to manage its diverse population. While Jordan adheres to certain aspects of the convention through a Memorandum of Understanding signed with UNHCR in 1998, refugees residing in Jordan—some holding legal status registered through the Ministry of Interior, others through UNHCR or UNRWA (e.g., Gaza refugees or certain West Bankers)—often lack empirical access to rights on par with citizens during their protracted stays.

Stereotyped images represent refugees as suffering victims, recipients of aid and the cause of the consistent economic stagnation and unemployment amongst nationals (Al Kilani 2014). This research uses an intersectional approach to study the refugee agency and the ability to live in any new context seeking to reconstruct the professional and societal community to which they belong. Societies as studied by Hecks (1994) redefine and reconstitute themselves in response to "internal and external influences," and seek to re-create new patterns within the social structure they live in.

This evidence-based research targets economically active refugees in vocational skills that have been made possible and accessible for them by the tailored policies of the Jordan Compact.[1] In 2016, after the International Community's meeting of London in response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Jordan gave the permission to Syrian refugees to work in a selection of open jobs for them that are limited to certain sectors: agriculture, construction and some services.

1 https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/05/17/the-jordan-compact-a-model-for-burden-sharing-in-the-refugee-crisis/

This work seeks to widen the lense of the existing literature (Al Kilani 2014, Lenner 2020, ILO 2021) on the host state's policies towards refugees by portraying refugees and members of host communities as proactive workers navigating their circumstances despite limitations. The literature accredited the Jordan Compact for the Labour rights it gave to Syrian refugees. Yet, the rights appeared ambiguous to what has been empirically endured by the refugees at their work places. By examining the experiences of both nationals and refugees, this study seeks to contextualize individuals within broader societal frameworks, shedding light on their efforts to seize opportunities despite the challenging work conditions. Understanding individuals within their temporal and spatial contexts allows for a deeper exploration of the significance of their skills and the ways they seek to channel their strength in the right environment, whether through engaging in the labour market or working as a small community. This approach challenges the prevailing narrative that depicts refugees solely as passive recipients of aid and a burden on the host country, instead emphasizing their active participation in shaping their own destinies. Moreover, this work has used an intersectional approach where all refugees from the varied nationalities along with the Jordanians were studied as a way to shed light on professionals from diverse backgrounds and to address gaps in policy that failed to accommodate all refugee groups equally. The "social inclusion of Syrian refugees in the labour market" as per the Response Plan, has overshadowed the needs of other refugee groups such as Iraqis, Yemenis, and protracted Palestinians with provisional Jordanian passports. This work studies the diverse challenges faced by different refugee communities and prevents the prioritization of one group over others solely based on funding priorities, ensuring that the response is inclusive and equitable.

Social inclusion of Syrian refugees in the labour market with its limited opportunities and high rate of unemployment like the Jordanian one, has been a redundant statement in policy reports, and government speeches. While the concern is evident, there remains ambiguity about the precise meaning of social inclusion. Does it involve creating employment opportunities for Syrian refugees, channeling their skills to areas in need, or emphasizing their competitive skills that may impact those of Jordanians? The official discourse has overseen other refugee groups, such as Iraqis, Yemenis, and protracted Palestinians holding provisional Jordanian passports who live as well in Jordan and do represent a community of few ten thousands. In its reiterated concern, the official discourse does not explain the unemployment nor does it relate to the skills and the training needs in the jobs market.

The primary research question is articulated as follows:

How have individuals with professional skills navigated their lives and broader social circles amidst limited job opportunities?

The research sub questions to understand that sought to question

- the strategies refugees have used with traditional skills (often with obscured rights) and employed to secure income-generating employment
- the specific tactics and approaches utilized by refugees possessing traditional skills to attain employment that generates income. It aims to uncover the innovative methods and adaptations employed in response to the challenges posed by limited job opportunities.
- the employment environment in the host country, encompassing home businesses, public/private sectors, and self-employment, facilitated or hindered vocational and skilled individuals in utilizing their expertise? It sought to understand how factors such as access to different sectors, regulatory frameworks, and socio-economic conditions influence their ability to leverage their expertise.
- The generation and inherited professions, where the research sought to inquire about the historical and physical context of the professions or skills possessed by individuals, exploring whether they are inherited or acquired.

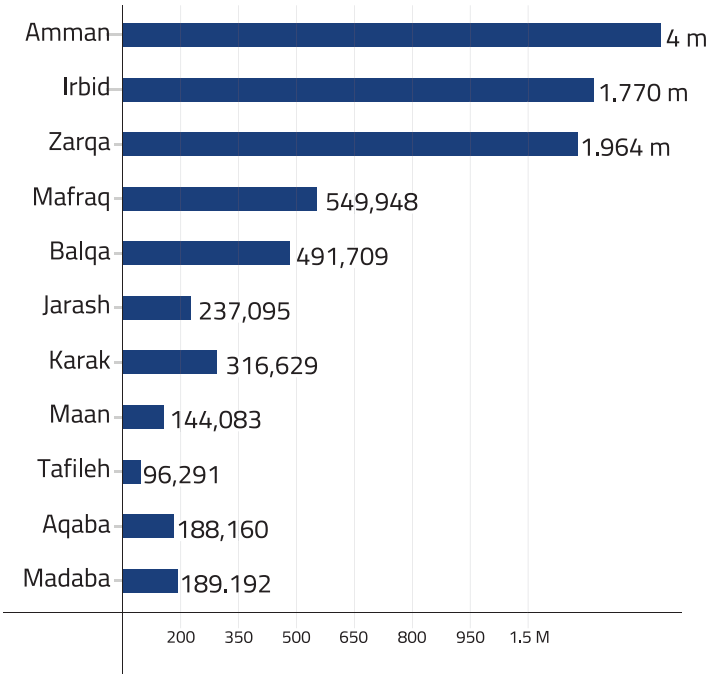
By studying the experiences of skilled refugees and citizens, the research project unpacked the social process[2] which has situated these professionals in the society and established the physical and metaphorical[3] elements of their life experiences. Social processes encompass the interactions, adaptations, and continual adjustments made by individuals and groups as they establish and refine relationships and patterns of behaviour. These dynamics are further shaped and evolved through ongoing social interactions.[4]

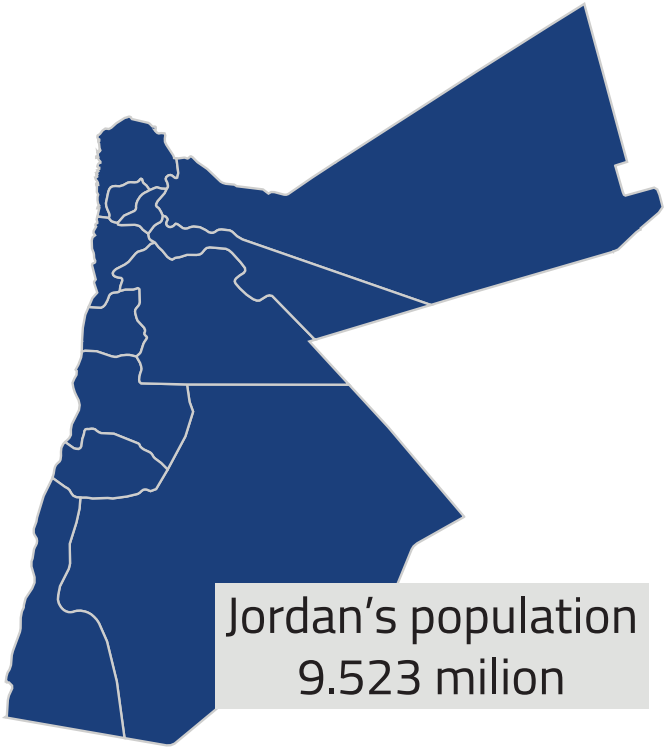
2 Mainwaring and Brigden 2016) in Crawley and Jones 2020 p.3228
3 Crawley and Jones 2015:3245
4 https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/social-processes-the-meaning-types-characteristics-of-social-processes/8545

Methodology

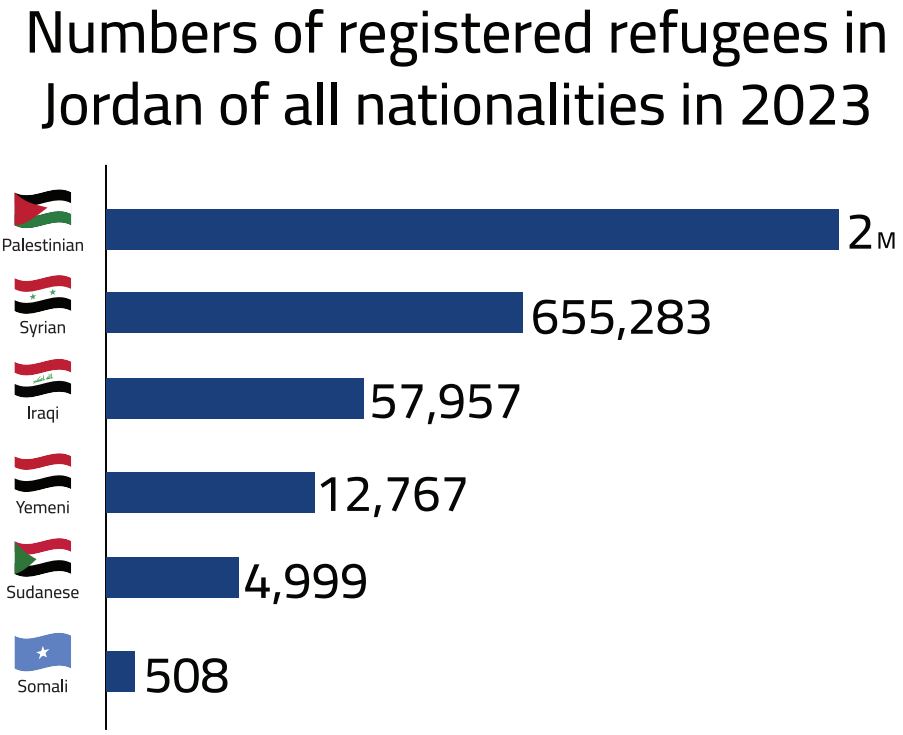
With its open borders policy, Jordan has received refugees seeking safe heaven. Palestinian refugees in 1948 refugees who arrived in Jordan since 1948. Palestinian refugees were given the nationality in 1949 and fell under the Jordanian citizenship law. Those who arrived in 1967 from Gaza strip were holders of the Egyptian travel document and fell out of the Jordanian citizenship law so were given provisional travel document. After 1988 West Bank-East Bank severance speech by Late King Hussein, some of the Palestinians who originate from the West Bank, needed to keep their legal status in Jordan through a provisional two-year passport. The number of those holders of provisional as per the census of 2015 are about 650.000. The Gulf war over periods of time pushed Iraqi refugees to Jordan who were transitting to a third country. Their number in Jordan in 2004, according to Fafo survey (2005), did reach almost half a million. By 2010, the biggest numbers of Iraqis were either made to go back to their country or got resettled. The Arab Spring revolt brought new influx of refugees from Syria and Yemen. The Syrian refugees represented the highest number of refugees since 2012, trickling to Jordan slowly, their number reached almost 1'300.000 (MOI 2023). Special status has been given to them as part of the response plan led by the international community in agreement with the Government of Jordan in order to contain them in the Middle East region and ensure their economic integration until a solution is secured for their return.

At the same time, more refugees were also entering Jordan, pushed by other conflicts in the Arab region. Few thousands of Yemeni, Sudanese and Somali refugees reside in Jordan, majority awaiting to be resettled. Some applied for work permit and are able to access some economic opportunities. Those who arrived in Jordan after 2019, could not register with UNHCR because the registration of new comers had been stopped.





The target group of this research are both Jordanian labourers and refugees (Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Sudanese, Somali, Yemini) focusing on their economic opportunities within the sectors that were made open for refugees. Participants in this research are individuals with skills or vocational professions in the agriculture, industry, construction and self-employment (including home-businesses).



This study employed a qualitative methodology to investigate individuals with skills and professions among both refugees and Jordanians across various vocational sectors in Jordan. The four sectors that were studied are: Agriculture, construction, Industrial, self-employment and home-business. The research, based on evidence, was conducted across four governorates, Aqaba, Maan, Zarqa and Mafraq, encompassing urban cities, rural towns, and both official and informal tented settlements. While existing literature and policy reports (Stave and Hillesund, 2015, Krafft, et al 2019, ILO 2021) have often focused on densely populated cities like Amman and Irbid following the influx of Syrian refugees, this research sought to engage with workers in cities, rural settings and areas with limited resources and marginalized communities. At first, the research team mapped areas where refugees frequently congregate or reside in close proximity to each other to understand the dynamics of social and community support systems. Subsequently, refugee identification was carried out by locating their workplaces within each sector and by identifying the characteristics of each governorate.

The qualitative approach was structured into two distinct phases. Firstly, face-to-face interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires, crafted to delve into individuals' past narratives and perceptions of their labour experiences. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions, aiming to solicit rich and nuanced responses regarding their past experiences at work, legal, and socioeconomic challenges. This guide underwent a one-month pilot phase to ensure clarity and effectiveness in engaging the interviewees. The sample comprised 40 interviewees, carefully chosen to reflect a diverse range of perspectives. Identification of interviewees prioritized representation from various positions within the community. With the assistance of gatekeepers in each governorate, these interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including community centers, municipalities, and the interviewees' residences, fostering open and candid discussions.

Distribution of refugees in the Jordanian provinces

Aqaba	Maan	Irbed	Zarqa	Mafraq
4.318	9.806	127.774	655.283	170.050

Secondly, focus group discussions, termed the "Dialogue of Professionals," were designed to foster intersectional engagement among participants, considering factors such as gender, nationality, and background. An average of 4 to 6 discussions were held in each governorate. These discussions brought together workers from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences, knowledge, and challenges within their respective professions and skilled groups, each with different nationalities, rights, and legal statuses, geographic distribution and backgrounds. The objective of these dialogue group meetings, led in an intersectional and participatory manner, was to illuminate gaps on policies affecting workers of the host country, compare rights with citizens, often enduring vulnerability, address their different needs, and establish a supportive network among participants for mutual assistance.

Another aspect of the approach involved engaging stakeholders and policymakers from each governorate. Representatives from labour unions, social security organizations, community centers, as well as local and international NGOs and UN bodies involved in employment-related projects were invited to participate. During the first year, moderators played a role in provoking questions and being inquisitive about the status quo inviting participation to be engaging in the discussions. The second year, then moderation was done by the research team themselves. In all the meetings, members from our partner Tamkeen were attending in order to given any needed orientations to the Dialogue meetings attendees concerning policies, regulations, any needed legal questions from the labour market.

Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality measures were rigorously enforced to protect the anonymity of all participants, including the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage protocols. Furthermore, proactive steps were taken to mitigate any potential harm or distress resulting from discussions on sensitive topics such as displacement, legal status, and work environments.

The Labour Market for Jordanians and Refugees

The absence of durable solutions for many refugees in the Middle East[5] and the failure of a political action (Jacobson 2019) on what may concern repatriation, integration or resettlement, have left the refugees stranded with an in limbo legal and socioeconomic status. The economic participation appeared to be the solution, especially in a middle-income country like Jordan.

Despite initiatives like the Jordan Compact and the limited access to employment opportunities in specific sectors, the big number of refugees has continued to pose challenges for both refugees themselves seeking security and stability in Jordan and for host country's inability to absorb the massive population inflation and the high cost which as depicted by the Jordan Response Plan report has burdened the budget with almost $3,750 per each refugee (Jordan Response Plan, 2020). The Compact, while focusing on the development agenda and affirming the humanitarian role through the participation of civil society bodies, did not achieve its goals as strategized in the yearly reports and refugees' human capital appear not to have been strategically invested in the economy (Empociello 2021, Tsourapas 2020, Mencutek and Nashwan 2019).

The response to the refugee crisis has not been adequate at several levels and continues to be insufficient. The funding was selective only to one group of refugees. Yemeni, Sudanese and Somali refugees feel out of the funding. The funding to the Syrians over the last few years has been shrinking gradually, affecting consequently the kind and quality of activities and support provided to the Syrian refugees.

"The volume of funding for Jordan's response plan to the Syrian crisis for last year amounted to 663 million US dollars out of 2.2 billion dollars, at a rate of 29.2 per cent, according to the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, which indicated that the value of the deficit in financing the plan amounted to approximately 1.612 billion dollars at a rate of 70.8 per cent."[6]

5 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/shrinking-horizons-for-hope-syrian-refugees-reflect-on their-priorities-on-durable-solutions-after-a-decade-in-displacement

6 https://jordantimes.com/news/local/syrian-refugee-crisis-worsening-due-decline-funding-%E2%80%93-experts, 29 Feb 2024

Whether it is the war on Ukraine as claimed by the officials (ibid) or the new war against Palestinians in Gaza that may also shorten more the budget, the depletion of resources to the "refugee rentier economy" of Jordan (Tsourapas 2022) has been a concern.

Moreover, one of the pillars in the Response Plan has been the promotion of social inclusion while fostering resilience. The Jordanian Ministry of Planning aspired to sustain the stability and the good economic participation by distribution the allocated funds to Jordanian services that can serve Jordanians and also cater to Syrian refugees. A balanced approach to achieve development at a national level and provide the needed humanitarian services. This was taken into account in the Jordan Compact, 2016, that gave the right to the refugees to work in certain sectors as a way to facilitate the achievement of social inclusion of refugees through labour mobility. "UNHCR commands Jordan officials for the level of self-reliance Syrian refugees have been able to achieve in Jordan Labour Market", a UNHCR highly ranked official started his speech in a local workshop on Refugee Employment. According to Easton-Calabria (2023), contemporary economic discourse places significant emphasis on refugee self-reliance, prioritizing employment, livelihoods, and reduced reliance on aid, that reflects a predominant concern with financial aspects.

In her analysis, Easton-Calabria's analysis suggests that while refugees may strive for self-reliance due to a lack of safe and formal livelihood options, they can also become utilized as neoliberal labourers through such initiatives; "the market is seen as providing opportunities and incentives for individuals to exploit fully their property (labour in the case of workers) while preventing them from exploiting advantages ownership might afford them by throwing them into competition with others similarly endowed"(Wilkinson 2007). As such, refugees are made to be involved in short-term and limited assistance while strongly encouraging them to quickly secure employment. They consequently face considerable pressure to achieve financial independence despite encountering numerous barriers to accessing the labour market. As a result, refugees themselves now increasingly factor self-reliance into their decision-making processes (Betts et al., 2015; Easton-Calabria, 2018).

On the other front, Jordan has been challenged with a relatively high unemployment rate and a labour Force Participation Rate of 39.2 % ,[7] which remain to be one of the lowest on the world. Despite the number of job opportunities being proportional to the number of newcomers to the labor market (65,000-70,000 annually), the unemployment rate is relatively high and has been 21.4 for Nov 2023.[8]

Yet, as analysed by Husseini in his policy paper,[9] one key characteristics of the Jordanian labour market, not accounted for in the employment and unemployment statistics by DOS, include the influx of low-skilled foreign workers, the influx of refugees at the age to be involved in the labour market, outward migration of experienced and skilled Jordanian workers to the Gulf, visible underemployment (secondary employment), invisible underemployment (low productivity), and informal unemployment with an informal economy reportedly covering from a fifth to a sixth of the Jordanian workforce.

The decline in economic activity rates among Jordanians stems primarily from various socio-economic structural factors. [10] Jordan's population has a predominantly youthful demographic, leading to a significant number of high school and university students who are not economically active. Additionally, a notable percentage of Jordanians have sufficient income to refrain from working, constituting 8% of the population (DOS, 2010). This is largely due to the widespread adoption of early retirement schemes among public sector employees, with retirement age set at 45 instead of the typical 60 for men and 55 for women, as well as financial support from relatives working in Gulf countries. Furthermore, a substantial portion of Jordanian women are occupied with household duties and categorized as "housewives." Statistical data also highlights marriage as a barrier to women's participation in the labour market.

The discourse on self-reliance encompasses several grounds, whether it is the opportunities in the market and the possibility to access them investing the human capital and the agency of the refugees and the citizens alike and whether it is work environment with the multi dynamics of power that affects the stability of the worker and their social protection. Identifying these grounds holds significance for comprehending the circumstances in which refugee self-reliance is encouraged or social inclusion is attained. The following subsections aim to unpack these variables in order to understand if the claimed inclusion at the social and economic levels have been attained or not.

7 https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/jordan/labour-force-participation-rate
8 ibid
9 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y7Q2EjH_UkcpQRXBMUU_RRefw3yiBbECf0vt19B9LVE/edit
10 ibid

Work Opportunities

1.1 Jordan compact

In February 2016, Jordan advocated for a comprehensive approach to address the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on its economy during the London Donor Conference. This led to the establishment of the International Compact for Jordan, co-chaired by several countries and international institutions, which pledged $700 million in grants for 2016-18 and up to $300 million in loans. In December 2016, the EU endorsed the Jordan Compact as part of the EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities. A primary focus of this agreement was to generate 200,000 job opportunities for Syrians in Jordan over a 3- to 5-year span. Jordan committed to removing regulatory barriers to refugee employment and reducing work permit fees for low-skilled jobs from 700 to 10 Jordanian dinars. The Compact outlined three overarching objectives (Tsourapas 2022):

1. Turning the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity that attracts new investments and opens up the EU market with simplified rules of origin, creating jobs for Jordanians and Syrian refugees whilst supporting the post-conflict Syrian economy;
2. Rebuilding Jordanian host communities by adequately financing through grants to the Jordan Response Plan 2016-2018, in particular the resilience of host communities; and
3. Mobilizing sufficient grants and concessionary financing to support the macroeconomic framework and address Jordan's financing needs over the next three years, as part of Jordan entering into a new Extended Fund Facility program with the IMF'(Government of Jordan, 2016).

The compact aspired to shift the economy from service provision to industrial production. In particular, as argued by Betts et al. argue,: 'By allowing refugees to work in the SEZs, Jordan hopes to attract the additional support needed to make its own national development strategy work' (Betts et al. 2017) . This was possible via tariff-free access to the European Union market for goods produced within SEZs (in Mafraq, in Aqaba and in other governorates) with a certain degree of Syrian participation (15%) and provided Jordan issues 200,000 work permits to Syrians.

The compact emphasized the economic integration of Syrian refugees through sector-specific work permits. However, in practice, the purported inclusion of Syrians in the economy seems to have fallen short. Our field research, alongside existing literature, [11] has identified two main issues:

Firstly, there is a misconception that merely possessing a work permit guarantees employment—a notion that oversimplifies the complexities of contemporary unemployment and labour force participation rates in Jordan. In reality, securing job opportunities requires proactive efforts from candidates.

Secondly, the focus on specific sectors such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing overlooks the informal nature of employment within these industries. Many Syrian refugees are reluctant to apply for the one-year work permit issued by the Ministry of Labour, as they fear it may restrict their ability to explore other job opportunities. Additionally, they fail to perceive the benefits of work permit due to the informal nature of their work, often as semi-skilled laborers.

For instance, one Syrian refugee highlighted their dilemma:

" I am specialised in maintaining the body of the cars and I have a long expertise in doing so having worked in Europe and had had a workshop in Lebanon. I have a work permit as a labourer to fix wheels. I cannot apply for a work permit with my speciality because it is not an open job as per the MOL list. I am working illegally in the skill that I excel in. I even trained two Jordanians in this area to become skilled in the Maintenance of Cars' bodies but I risk being fined by the Ministry of Labour's inspectors and I pay lots of money to the them because I am illegal. Why cannot I work in my speciality, gain the money I deserve and train local Jordanians in Maan, where there are very few in this field and pay my taxes to the State based on my gains?"

(J-MN 026 Syrian Refugee, Maan 23/07/2022)

11 https://noria-research.com/mena/the-jordan-compacts-failure-to-create-jobs-and-power-exports/

Despite being highly skilled in car maintenance, they are limited to accepting a work permit as a labourer fixing wheels due to the restrictive nature of the Ministry of Labor's job list. This forces them to work illegally in their area of expertise, risking fines and paying substantial amounts to labour inspectors. They express frustration at being unable to utilize their skills, contribute to the local economy, and train Jordanians in their field, particularly in regions like Maan where such expertise is scarce.

This case illustrates the disconnect between policy intentions and the realities faced by Syrian refugees seeking economic opportunities in Jordan. Addressing these challenges requires a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the diverse skills and aspirations of refugees while ensuring their integration into the formal economy is both feasible and beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

As such the compact established a broad and vague framework for employment, which ultimately failed to ensure decent working conditions for Syrian refugees, neglected non-Syrians, and, notably, within the limited pre-assigned sectors, it did not guarantee job stability. Instead, it was "likely to have a marginal impact on job prospects."[12]

"I am a hairdresser, I worked from 9 am until 7 pm. I did not know the Jordanian currency at first and did not realise that the clients were underpaying me. The shop owner was barely paying me the monthly pay. I was not permitted to take a leave for any reason. She would deduct 40 Jds from me and would oblige me to pay for the cup of coffee I drink. I wanted her to issue me a work permit so I work legally. She never accepted and I had to stop doing what I used to enjoy doing.

(J-MQ 002, Syrian, 4/06/2022)

As noted by Mencutek and Nashwan (2020), the Jordan Compact also created tensions regarding the employability of Syrians in municipal public works. Some local officials were hesitant to hire Syrians, expressing a preference for employing Jordanians and raising concerns about the equitable distribution of job opportunities.

12 ibid.

Moreover , the refugee compact placed significant emphasis on promoting social inclusion and fostering resilience among refugees. However, this focus primarily centered on Syrian refugees, with little consideration given to refugees from other nationalities. For instance, a Yemeni refugee residing in the Zarqa governorate faced challenges in securing employment aligned with his expertise in car mechanics.

"A Yemeni refugee, living in Zarqa governorate, specialised in car mechanics but could secure a work opportunity in his field as a Yemeni refugee. He had to work in a bakery where the main work is done in a basement that puts him away from the radar of the Ministry of Labour's inspectors."

(J-ZQ 013 Yemeni Refugee, Zarqa 12/07/2022)

This highlights the disparity in attention and the "discriminatory development aid"[13] provided to different refugee groups, with Syrians receiving more focus while other nationalities are overlooked. Consequently, both Syrian and non-Syrian refugees have been affected by the uncertainty surrounding work conditions and their ability to maintain sustainable living standards.

" I am Iraqi and do not have a work permit. I need to work to ensure a regular income. I work as a blacksmith and the workplace is too far from my abode. Transportation fees gets deducted from my income and I am not supposed to claim that money back. I work illegally and I have always had the fear from being deported out of Jordan and getting refouled in Iraq where I risk being threatened"

(J-ZA 008, Iraqi refugee, blacksmith assistant, Zarqa 4/07/2022,)

The lack of targeted support for non-Syrian refugees exacerbates their vulnerabilities and impedes their ability to integrate into the host country's economy and society. Therefore, it is imperative for refugee policies and interventions to be inclusive and address the diverse needs of all refugee populations, regardless of their nationality.

13 https://merip.org/2024/03/jordans-syrian-refugee-response-and-discriminatory-development-aid/

1.2 A contract, a professional license and social protection

"We beg Syrian refugees to apply for work permits and they refuse. They do not want to have a stable and legal status" (an official in the Government of Jordan 02/2023)

Many at the official and semi-official level, argue that the Syrian refugees are creating a chaotic situation in the labour market by hesitating to regularize their status. In our sessions with refugees, some would argue that they do not see the benefit of applying for the work permit. They have fears that getting an official work permit could jeoperdise the regular flow of aid from World Food Programme WFP. Others, argued that their seasonal work oblige them to be on the move, and a contract limits their entrepreneurial ability to be mobile seeking opportunities everywhere. They consequently turn to informal employment "as a result of constraints like legal limitations, financial obstacles where the fees are not clear what do they entails, and the failure to validate their credentials[14]", explained Khawlla Abdulla, community facilitator from Tamkeen on 20/04/2023. This characterized 'the work permit maze,' as depicted by Lenner and Turner 2020, has diverted them to the informal labour market "the process of obtaining a work permit can include reclaiming confiscated documents, applying for a Ministry of Interior (MoI) service card, a security check, obtaining a rental contract or an address statement from UNHCR, and paying fees for administration and for health certificates, fees that are applied inconsistently across labor directorates" (Lenner and Turner 2020).

Numerous labelled migrant labourers such as the Yemeni and the Sudanese and majority of Syrian refugees have been in the informal economy either lack work permits altogether or are employed in sectors different from those specified in their original permits. This type of (non-)regulation of workers in the labour market serves as a significant aspect of neoliberal governance (Lenner and Turner 2020). It enables further deregulation of labour markets and contributes to downward pressure on wages.

14 Despite the fact that International Labour Organization (ILO) has been supporting projects for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), during the fieldwork, the researchers did not come across individuals who had their experience valued as a way to establish avenues for professional growth.

To regurlarise access to opportunities, there are several means to consider:

Sector	Agriculture, Construction and menial services	Private Sector And Manufacturing factories	Self-Employment	Home Businesses
What is needed	Work Permit by the Ministry of Labour and its Directorates	Work Contract with social security registration	Permit to practice a profession issued by the municipality	Permit to have a home business issued by the municipality
For who	for non Jordanians Only for Syrian refugees the fees were waivered so the payment is less that the official rate.	For Jordanians and non Jordanians	For Jordanians	

As per the compact, the work permits for refugees are categorized into three types:

1. Yearly permits are granted based on contracts between workers and employers in specific sectors designated by the Ministry of Labour. These permits are issued annually and are contingent upon the availability of opportunity and the approval of an employer.
2. Provisional work permits are issued to non-Jordanians for labour-intensive jobs, such as construction, typically for specific projects like Cash For Work. These permits have a duration ranging from 40 days to six months.
3. Flexible work permits are specifically designed for Syrian refugees, allowing them to work throughout Jordan without geographic restrictions. These permits are issued by the General Union of Labourers and require workers to contribute 10 percent of their income to the social security department.

Work permits for Syrian workers from 2016-2022

304,303
The number of work permits in all Jordanian governorates

157624
The number of work permits in the targeted governorates

Mafraq	Zarqa	Irbd	Maan	Aqaba
10009	48110	97660	1702	143

Work permits for Syrian refugees in some sectors during January 31, 2023, according to gender

Building	Water supply and waste management	Manufacturing	Forestry and fishing
♀ 328 ♂ 1567	♀ 23 ♂ 163	♀ 232 ♂ 372	♀ 15 ♂ 475

Real estate market activities	Accommodation and catering activities	Transportation and storage	Wholesale and retail trade in vehicle repair and transportation
♀ 0 ♂ 11	♀ 0 ♂ 135	♀ 0 ♂ 32	♀ 9 ♂ 290

According to official figures, the number of work permits issued to Syrian refugees has exceeded 350,000 to date. However, many Syrian refugees, as well as Palestinian ex-Gaza refugees, Iraqis, Yemenis, and Sudanese, do not possess work permits. Consequently, they risk engaging in informal labour markets, exposing themselves to various risks. The compact, which excludes all other refugee groups, has also overlooked the potential for long-term development by failing to incorporate these refugee workers into established firms through long-term contracts. Such an approach could have enhanced their social inclusion and contributed significantly to the stability of the economy. The implementation of provisional work permits in limited sectors, purportedly as part of a strategic development approach, has proven inadequate in providing stability for refugee workers and fostering economic stability in the host country's economy within the broader aim of "turning the crisis into an opportunity" (Tsouapas 2022), "an opportunity for feeding in the rentier system dependent on international aid" (ibid).

At the refugee level, the opportunity has appeared to be momentaneous as a reaction to the crisis. In his analysis of the intersection between humanitarianism and neoliberal globalization agendas, Chimni (1998) contends that the ideology of humanitarianism has employed the language of human rights to justify security concerns within refugee discourse. This approach has resulted in the blurring of legal categories and institutional roles, emphasizing repatriation as the sole solution, and advancing a neoliberal agenda in post-conflict societies. As a consequence, this has led to the systematic undermining of the principles of protection and the rights of refugees (in Easton-Calabria 2019).

Refugees' access to socio-economic rights and opportunities, as argued by Betts (2022), matters fundamentally for three reasons – rights, welfare, and politics. The stability secured through a degree of 'visible' and 'legal' participation within the local and national markets will feed in the process of social inclusion of the refugees and a resilient outcome that benefits the market and the host community.

To bypass the constraints of the work permit, myriad of individuals the team interviewed have sought to pursue strategies (on a local level) that give them the chance to be mobile in the labour market. These opportunities are in

Sectors	Community work in Informal tented settlements or farms (agriculture)	Construction, work in groups	Manufacturing industries	Self-Employment	Home-Businesses	Cash for work
Syrians	Led by the Shaweesh	Led by Syrian worker	Modest number of Syrians in Aqaba, Zarqa, Mafraq and Maan	Artisan, mechanics and repair	Syrian women registered with local NGOs and applied for the Home Business certificate (exceptionally for Syrians)	Once a year, for 40 weeks /3 months
Jordanians	Led by the bus driver	Led by Jordanian worker	Modest Numbers	All fields	Jordanian women registered with local NGOs and applied for the Home Business certificate	Once or twice a year
Iraqi refugees	-	-	Very few	Food distributions, hospitality and services in closed parties and venues	women registered with local NGOs (Illegal)	-
Yemeni Refugees/ Migrant workers	-	-		Tailors, and Food Industry and catering		-
Sudanese Refugees/ Migrant workers				Street Vendors		
Dominant workers in the sector %	Syrians	Egyptians and Palestinian-Jordanians from refugee camps	Non -arabs/ Asia workers	Varied		

Several factors have influenced the ability of both local Jordanians and refugees to access vocational and technical labour markets:

a. Their skills acquired through training, inherited artisanal knowledge, or on-site internships at workshops.
b. Their ability to improvise and demonstrate entrepreneurial skills.
c. Social and Physical capitals: the re-created community

a. Training: skills, inherited skills

When examining the issue of skills and previous experience, a significant disparity emerges between the demand for vocational and technical skills and the prevailing labour market conditions in Jordan, extending beyond urban areas to encompass rural economies as well. The transformation of Jordan's economy into primarily service-based[15] has driven individuals to pursue education, resulting in one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the Middle East. Enrollment in academic programs is favoured amongst Jordanians, partly due to the allure of public sector employment, despite high unemployment rates among university graduates, particularly among females (80.2 percent) and males (25.4 percent) (Phenix, 2020). At the national level, efforts by Technical and Vocational Education Training to attract more youth are evident through the introduction of new subjects and well-coordinated initiatives.

" I finished my high school exams, tawjihi and got 75 which could get me into university, but I chose to join TVET with an interest in cooking and becoming a chef. The school fees were a bit costly but I took several training courses. I am now working in a Biscuit Factory for a Syrian investor and I work in my speciality"

(J-Aq 022 Jordanian , 23/06/2023-Aqaba)

15 Kandah, Ali (2024) The story of an economy and a nation's determination. https://jordantimes.com/opinion/adli-kandah/story-economy-and-nations-determination

The influx of youth from conflict-affected areas has introduced individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives on the culture of work and vocational skills. This influx has been particularly noticeable in sectors like manufacturing, where there is a clear division of labour. Jordanian workers often occupy positions in line production, while technical roles and specialized tasks are frequently filled by Syrians with previous experience and exposure to the manufacturing sector. This dynamic reflects a blending of expertise and contributions from both local and refugee populations, highlighting the complementary nature of their skill sets within the industrial landscape.

> "On the line production, the labourers are the Jordanians but the technical workers and the specialised ones are Syrians, some of them are engineers and have specialisation in machines repair at the factory"
>
> (J-MN 042 Jordanian investor, Al Rawdah Industrial City, 31/8/2022)

In Mafraq, the mayor, of Mughayer Al Sarhan, highlighted the considerable impact of Syrian refugees, noting their role in transforming both the culinary landscape and the work culture of the region. Specifically, Syrian refugees have contributed to elevating the quality of food within the community, introducing new dishes, techniques, and recipes that have enriched local cuisine. Moreover, their presence has brought about shifts in the broader work culture, infusing it with elements of resilience and adaptability. Through their diverse skill sets, work ethic, and entrepreneurial spirit, Syrian refugees have fostered a climate of innovation and productivity, inviting local Jordanians to join them at the kind of vocational work they excel in leaving a print on the economic and social fabric of Mafraq. This transformation underscores the dynamic interplay between migration, cultural exchange, and socioeconomic development within the region. "Our young Jordanians today accept to do work, they never accepted to do few years ago. A subtle culture that infiltrated all of us, through the positive input brought to us by the Syrian refugees" (MQ- meeting at the municipality, 2/11/2022).

The contribution of some sectors to the national GDP in Jordan in 2020

Agriculture sector

Industry sector

Services sector

The rural areas of Jordan, particularly in regions like Mafraq, Rumtha and Irbid, have witnessed significant transformations spurred by the influx of Syrian refugees, many of whom come from villages or the countryside. According to a Fafo study, a notable 69 percent of Syrian refugees originate from rural backgrounds. Seeking to recreate village setting and aiming to sustain their agricultural-based lifestyle, some refugees have chosen to settle in Jordanian villages, particularly in Mafraq and Irbid. Here, they have endeavoured to recreate their communities within Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) established on agricultural lands, often rented from landowners. Despite comprising only 4 percent of the refugee population in Jordan,[16] these dedicated rural communities have made tangible contributions to the agricultural sector, doubling its production from 2 percent in 2017 to 4 percent in 2023.[17] This increase can be attributed not only to the rise in population but also to the expanded supply and variety of agricultural products facilitated by the available labour force.

"I have been working in agriculture for 11 years. I worked in all farms in Qweirah/Aqaba and I did all, harvested, pick products of the season, ploughed the ground from grass . Work here has been unique and highly paid if compared to other places, 1 and half Jds."

(J-AQ 036, Syrian, Qweirah 3/7/2023)

16 https://www.jointdatacenter.org/literature_review/syrian-refugees-in-jordan-demographics-livelihoods-education-and-health/
17 https://www.statista.com/study/25945/jordan-statista-dossier/

In addition to Syrian refugees, Yemeni refugees have also made their mark on the cultural and economic landscape of Jordan, particularly in the southern city of Maan. Leveraging their expertise in tailoring and culinary traditions, Yemeni refugees have established thriving businesses, including tailoring shops that produce traditional attire like the long Tobe and restaurants that specialize in Yemeni cuisine, with a focus on rice and meat dishes. By capitalizing on their inherited skills and cultural heritage, Yemeni refugees have not only carved out a livelihood for themselves but have also contributed to the cultural diversity and economic vitality of their host communities, embodying resilience and resourcefulness in their pursuit of stability and prosperity.

b. Improvision and entrepreneurial skills

Both local Jordanians and refugees in Jordan are demonstrating remarkable entrepreneurial spirit as they navigate challenges and seek economic opportunities amidst limitations imposed by the state. This entrepreneurial drive stems from various factors, including the need for livelihoods in the face of economic constraints, the desire for autonomy and self-sufficiency, and the recognition of market demand for goods and services.

One key avenue through which local Jordanians and refugees are exercising their entrepreneurial skills is through the establishment of small businesses and shops. Despite regulatory barriers and bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the state, individuals from both communities are finding innovative ways to bypass these limitations and set up their enterprises.

" I started my own business of bakery shop in 2020 because my husband was stopped from work. I have 12 members in my family. I started with traditional bread, neutella bread and I started taking part in fairs at a national level. In 2022, I rented a shop and I started my social media pages to distribute"

(J-AQ 012 Jordanian, 14/6/2023 Aqaba).

For Jordanians to establish their own business (shop, company, LTD), they are expected to register at a ministry to establish a commercial profile (whether commerce and industry or Ministry of food), Apply for a professional license or home business at the municipality. Refugees, rights to establish their own businesses as well. The funding needed fluctuate as per the acquired license, for a shop, a company or an investor. Some refugees may choose to operate informally, leveraging informal networks and trading channels to conduct business outside of formal regulatory frameworks. Others may opt for partnerships or collaborations with established Jordanian businesses to gain access to resources, markets, and expertise that would otherwise be inaccessible to them as individual entrepreneurs.

"I do not have a work permit and If I do apply for one, a flexible one, I ll need to pay my dues for the social security and I do not have the means to do that. If I want to establish my own shop, I need to have a good capital which I do not have. I shied away from partnering with a Jordanian, because I expected problems to happen"
(J-MQ 020, Syrian 12/05/2023 Mafraq).

During our fieldwork in Zarqa, we encountered a situation that exemplifies the challenges faced by Palestinian ex-Gaza refugees seeking to establish businesses in Jordan, through partnerships. Two such refugees shared their experiences with our team, highlighting the necessity of partnering with Jordanians to navigate the complexities of the local business landscape. Despite their efforts to collaborate and pool resources with Jordanian partners, they were backstabbed and exploited. In both cases, the Palestinian refugees found themselves betrayed by their Jordanian partners, who not only failed to uphold their agreements but also threatened legal action against them. This experience underscores the vulnerability of Palestinian ex-Gaza refugees in Jordan's business environment.

Female entrepreneurs cited various reasons for initiating home-based businesses, with financial requirements emerging as the primary driving force in nearly all instances. Additionally, many women expressed immense satisfaction in their entrepreneurial endeavors, highlighting the transformation of their hobbies into viable business ventures. Some entrepreneurs pursued specific objectives, including the development of eco-friendly initiatives or the provision of essential services such as plumbing or solar panel installation. Lastly, several women emphasised the positive impact of their work on their mental well-being and self-assurance, viewing entrepreneurship as a fulfilling and empowering outlet.

Moreover, local Jordanians and refugees alike seek to upgrade their skills, talents, and cultural backgrounds to identify niche market opportunities and cater to specific consumer demands. This could involve offering specialised goods or services tailored to the preferences of their respective communities or tapping into emerging trends on social media and market gaps. For instance, refugees with expertise in traditional handicrafts may establish artisanal workshops or boutiques to showcase their craftsmanship and heritage, appealing to both local and international clientele interested in authentic, handmade products.

"I work in food industry and I prepare Syrian meals for those who order it. This is my first experience. I took the training at a vocational training centre here in Aqaba for three months on food production and I even have a certified diploma and a professional license to practice since 2018. I have been doing this for 9 years and I do not have a registration [neither with the chamber of commerce nor from the municipality because it is not permitted for it to give licences in Aqaba specifically]. I make agreements with restaurants and hotels added to orders I get from neighbours."

(J-AQ 009 Syrian 1/6/2023).

NGOs in all governorates and funded through the Jordan Response Plan offer a huge variety of free short term vocational training programmes for refugees, such as English courses, computer and online freelancing courses, entrepreneurship classes with a focus on managing micro-loans, construction and plumbing, sewing and tailoring, makeup and other beauty, car mechanics, hospitality, baking and confections, and more. Refugees, those within urban areas, use these trainings to directly pursue employment after the programmes end.

"When we were in Syria, I used to work with my kids in making Dairy products. After the displacement from Syria, I had to work to ensure an income for the household. I went back to my profession in making Dairy products. One day, I met a lady from Blue Mont organisation in an event at an orphanage. I told her about my interest to get into food production. The organisation helped me to register the project with the directorate of industry and commerce and I even got the professional license to create my project in making Kebbeh and dough products. The challenge was the location where I was cooking at home and the home owner obliged me to pay the house taxes and increased the rent having seen that I am making profit. He started to share the gains with me and stopped me from working."

(J-MN Syrian 24/7/2023 Maan)

The entrepreneurial endeavours of local Jordanians and refugees are often driven by a sense of resilience and determination to overcome adversity . Despite facing structural barriers such as limited access to financial capital, limited formal employment opportunities, and institutional support, individuals from both communities are demonstrating resourcefulness and creativity in finding alternative pathways to economic empowerment. This may involve pooling resources within their social networks, seeking out microfinance opportunities, or tapping into informal lending arrangements to finance their business ventures.

c. Social and physical capitals: the recreated community

Refugees often reconstruct their community structures in host countries to establish a sense of security, belonging, and support while seeking economic opportunities. This process involves the formation of informal social networks, cultural rituals, and economic activities adapting to their pre-existing community structures from their country of origin. These social ties, collective efficacy, and informal social control contribute to community resilience and well-being as argued by Sampson et al (2002). This re-established community has been seen in the structure of the Informal tented settlements where community originating from one area/ district/ village or even governorate would come together as one family and work together in farms. The proximity to the farms has been an advantage for them and for the land owner. This meant the workers in the farms, led by the Shaweesh, work in the morning and stop early in the afternoon. They may resume the work later in the late afternoon until early evening after they take their lunch break.

Jordanian women working in the farms, come together as the early morning working women, picked up by the bus driver who plays the role of Shaweesh in creating the community of working women of villages. While they manage to organise themselves as a social network, the proximity to the farms is a challenge. " The distance from the villages to the farms return may take 5 hours daily"
(J-MN Jordanian Sharaa/Maan 26/08/2023). The average income from these women is 160 Jds monthly.

"We are 15 women from different villages, we give the bus driver 30 Jds daily for the trip from our villages to the farms and back and for handling the account with the person in charge at the farm for our payment"
(J-MQ 032, Jordanian Mkeifteh-Mafraq 18/07/2023)

In contrast to the agricultural sector, where both Syrian refugees and Jordanian workers strategically leveraged their social and physical capitals to pursue economic opportunities, the manufacturing sector struggled to attract a comparable workforce. The Jordan Compact initially aimed to expand access to the European market and incentivize employers to hire Syrian refugees, particularly within special economic zones (SEZs). However, a crucial limitation emerged as the country's SEZs were situated far from major Syrian population centers. This geographical mismatch significantly hindered the ability of Syrian refugees to access employment opportunities within the manufacturing sector (Lyons 2018).

The eligibility criteria for accessing the EU market, including the requirement for employers to eventually scale up their Syrian workforce to 25%, posed additional challenges. Despite subsequent revisions removing these provisions, the impact of the initial restrictions had already taken its toll. Ultimately, only a small fraction of companies—seventeen in total—were able to capitalise on the export opportunities facilitated by the Jordan Compact.[18]

Refugees often rely on social networks within their own communities or with individuals from similar backgrounds to access job opportunities. These networks along with the strategized physical capital may provide stability and valuable information, support, and connections in the host country's labour market.

18 https://noria-research.com/mena/the-jordan-compacts-failure-to-create-jobs-and-power-exports/

Work Environment

During the field research across four different governorates in Jordan, the team consistently observed patterns stemming from gaps in law enforcement, entrenched power dynamics, and hierarchies that exploit labourers. Unfortunately, in many cases, social protection becomes a negotiable commodity for labourers in dire need, which they often compromise.

The study's findings uncovered various forms of exploitation faced by refugee workers in the four studied sectors in the labour market, ranging from unpaid overtime and low wages to blackmail, threats, verbal abuse, and discrimination, perpetrated by both employers and those benefiting from their services. This exploitation often restricts the workers' access to justice systems and fundamental rights such as education and healthcare, contributing to a sense of alienation from the host society. Fear of deportation amongst refugees further exacerbates the situation, leading them to often remain silent and endure exploitation rather than risk retaliation.

> " If I go to the police or dare to call for my rights against the employer, he can defame me and make me lose other opportunities with other employers, he will give a bad recommendation and Ill be rejected. I prefer to keep silent."
>
> (J-ZQ 010 Yemeni , 26/04//2022)

The delay in payment, particularly in situations where there is no formal contract between labourers and employers, exacerbates the vulnerability of workers in several ways. It creates financial instability for the labourers, who may rely on timely wages to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Without regular payment, even as a regular wage, they struggle to provide for themselves and their families, leading to increased stress and hardship.

"I worked for six months in a construction workshop. I was told by the house owner/the employer that he will pay me in portions. When I was done, he told me that I did not do what he wanted and thus he refused to pay me the rest of my dues. I will get nothing if I seek the help of policy or lawyers especially that we did not have a contract"

(J-MQ Syrian 0021 6/6/2023 Mafraq).

In a "labour market that is haunted by the widespread informal economy, reflected in loopholes in labour and business regulations such as avoiding the application of minimum wage" (DTDA 2024), the absence of a contract leaves labourers without legal recourse to enforce their right to timely payment. In such situations, employers do exploit the lack of formal agreement to withhold or delay wages arbitrarily, knowing that workers have little legal protection. This power imbalance tilts the scales further in favour of employers, leaving workers with limited options for recourse.

"The work is very tiring; we are squatting all day picking up tomatoes.Then we finish from the plants and the dangerous sulphate that is often sprayed on the plants, to take care of packaging. If I decide one day not to go to work because of my back pain and the long working hours from 6 am until 12 pm. Then from 6 pm until 10 pm, they threaten me to let me out of the ITS."

(J-MQ 019 4/6/2023 Mafaq)

Jordan's labour-related legal framework is intricate, interwoven with constitutional principles, national laws, and Islamic law (Sharia), all while bearing the imprint of tribal customs. Recent years have witnessed several legal overhauls, particularly concerning the Labor Code, the Social Security Law, and the Civil Service Law. The Labour Code of 1996 is the primary legislation governing the employment relationship.

" I was a trainer on handicrafts with one of the INGOs, where my contract was renewed every three months. My work was from 9 am until 3 pm and on the contract, because I was doing work that falls under the closed jobs, my job title was a volunteer. I was paid only for the bus transportation. I did not have a salary, nor did I have social security although I was working exactly like my other Jordanian colleagues."

(J-MQ 009 Syrian refugee, Mafraq 24/05/2023)

Throughout several reforms, the latest was in 2019 some essential grounds were improved concerning wages, overtime, paternity leave, annual leave, childcare, retirement, and disputes, enhancing women's participation in the labour market. A new labour amendments have been presented to the parliament early in 2023 including ensuring a safe working environment for women, enacting stringent laws against workplace harassment, and regulating the employment of foreign labour.

Construction and manufacturing industries are often associated with hazardous working conditions, posing significant health risks to workers. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have garnered criticism from human rights activists due to concerns about the exploitation of low-wage workers within these zones. However, there is potential for SEZs to uphold ethical labour practices if properly managed. Amongst Ex Gaza refugees, working in manufacturing industrial factories is "the most stable and sustainable." Despite some issues related to abusing their rights on holidays or on sick leaves, the work is stable since it provides the transportation, regular salary based on a signed contract that also includes social protection and clear working agenda.

In the manufacturing sector, numerous Syrian women workers expressed their difficulties in obtaining three-month contracts from employers. These short-term contracts are often used by employers to avoid paying social security fees for each worker, as they are only renewable at the discretion of the employer.

"During the inspection visit from the Ministry of Labour, the employer (the factory owner) would bring us all together, we who sign regularly three-month contracts, and put us in a small room and lock us in. One day, I was called to sign on a paper, which I thought it is the usual three month contract, it turned out that they made me sign on my resignation."

(J-MQ 033, Syrian refugee, Mafraq 16/06/2023)

In 2021, as part of legal reforms, improvements were made to regulate the agricultural sector, safeguard workers' rights, prevent discrimination, and provide legal coverage for workers under this law. Notably, agricultural workers were granted the right to file lawsuits and lodge complaints with labor inspectors for the first time, allowing them access to the courts and exemptions from work or residency permit fees. However, these reforms fell short of expectations, particularly in addressing work permits for migrant workers, who form the majority of the sector's workforce. Additionally, provisions for maternity leave, childcare, and equal health insurance for female workers in the informal economy were overlooked. Furthermore, the law does not mandate farms with three or fewer workers to enroll employees in social security (DTDA 2024).

Despite the existence of this legal framework, the reality is that a majority of refugees, along with some Jordanians, are employed in the informal sector. This exposes them to various risks and subjects them to discrimination, undermining their human dignity and their ability to secure decent working conditions. This evidently contributes to their irregular status. Refugees, refrain from obtaining work permits due to fear of losing access to humanitarian assistance. They worry that obtaining a work permit might jeopardize their eligibility for aid, especially considering the precarious nature of their employment, which could leave them without any source of income if they lose their job, creating a vicious circle of uncertainty.

a. Discrimination and Stigmatization

"When I worked at the Jordanian Hashemite Fund, I used to be asked: How is this Syrian being operated at the Jordanian Hashemite Fund!!! In the first six months, I was subjected to harassment even though the project was funded by UNHCR but the workplace was at the Jordanian Fund. This was a tough period for me, I was subjected to verbal abuse, using the word Syrian/refugee in a derogatory way. I suffered from that, it was like being stigmatized."

(J-MA 007, Syrian refugee, 29/6/2022, Maan)

Refugees have reported encounters of discrimination and stigmatization in the workplace, which plays against the JRP with its call for social inclusion but also hinders all efforts to rebuild their livelihoods. Discrimination against women in the workplace has been a concern, with reported cases highlighting instances where their needs and rights have not been adequately addressed. Women often face various forms of discrimination, including unequal pay, limited opportunities for advancement, and lack of support for balancing work and family responsibilities.

"Working women do not really take the one hour given to her for breastfeeding and is never given the 30 Jds for child care while she is at work"

(J-AQ discussion meeting 7/8/2023 Aqaba)

Additionally, gender-based harassment and bias may create hostile work environments, further hindering women's participation and success in the workforce.

"I was sick with COVID 19 and took a 14 day sick leave. Upon coming back, I learnt that they sacked me . I was given a new contract and they did not take into consideration my previous experience. They knew I am a single breadwinner and knows little about the regulations and laws. When I complaint to the labour Directorate, I could get nothing from them because they supported the foreign investor",

(J-ZA Jordanian in garment factory, 9/10/2022)

These discriminatory practices not only violate women's rights but also have detrimental effects on their overall well-being and economic empowerment. When women's needs are disregarded in the workplace, it perpetuates gender inequalities and reinforces traditional gender roles, limiting women's access to opportunities for professional growth and economic independence. The daily payment for Syrian refugees in agricultural lands is not similar to the daily payment of Jordanian women in farms. Both have to pay the commission to the Shaweesh but the net of what a Jordan gets per hour is one and half Jordanian dinar (one dollar) meanwhile the Syrian gets one Jordanian Dinar (70 cents). In the professionals Dialogue, Jordanian women expressed their concern to the bias towards Syrian refugee labourers, who have better advantages than them, the local host. They argued that Syrians live in the farm for free, and are registered with UNHCR, which enables them to receive assistance for food and daily needs. Little they know about the conditions of their living in the ITS and about the depletion of resources of the humanitarian assistance for the Syrian refugees, which increases the risk of their vulnerability.

"Illegalization and the non-enforcement of labour market regulations have benefitted employers" according to Lenner and Turner (2020). The social processes of discrimination and stigmatization can significantly obstruct the livelihood reconstruction efforts of refugees. Refugees may face prejudice and bias in the labor market, leading to limited job opportunities and unfair treatment.

" I polished a car for a Jordanian person here in Maan. Five years later, he came to threaten me to do the work again for free because I did not do it rightly. He could not ever do this to a Jordanian"

(J-MA 026, Syrian Refugee, 23/7/2022, Maan).

In understanding the complex interplay of these social processes, it becomes evident that addressing the challenges faced by refugees in reconstructing their livelihoods through work requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses social, economic, and policy dimensions

b. Power Dynamics

Economic, and social structures reflect systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized communities, including refugees. Discriminatory policies and practices, such as restrictive labour laws and limited access to essential services, exacerbate the vulnerabilities of refugees, amplifying their marginalization and disenfranchisement (Hanafi et al 2012). Structural inequality not only limits refugees' opportunities for socioeconomic advancement but also shapes power dynamics within the humanitarian sector, their capacity to address the diverse needs of their constituencies. Refugees and marginalised Jordanians are cornered between the need to work and eke out a living and the power of the employer and their ability to bypass the laws.

> "The hierarchy at the workplace is religiously observed. Each person is clinging to their position of supervision with an empowered force to belittle us as workers"
>
> (J-ZQ 8/11/2022 Zarqa Discussion session)

In the factory, the hierarchical structure is extensive, beginning with the supervisor, followed by the line supervisor, then the Human Resources office, and finally, the management. Beyond the factory premises, oversight extends to the Directorate of Labour at the governorate level. Within this rigid framework, workers are confined within limited social and geographical spaces. Their working conditions are tightly controlled, with restrictions on breaks and even monitored restroom visits. Additionally, they receive minimal holidays and are often required to work during national holidays. Workers are expected to endure verbal abuse from managers without protest and have no avenue to request a pay raise or improvements in their working conditions. This hierarchical and authoritarian system leaves little room for workers to advocate for their rights or voice their grievances.

In the agricultural sector, power dynamics manifest through a complex and hierarchical structure. At the base of this structure is the Shaweesh, responsible for assembling workers, including men, women, and children, who reside on part of the land they cultivate under an agreement with the landowner. The Shaweesh reports to the Waqeef, who supervises the work process. This role of Waqeef may be filled by a Jordanian or an Egyptian worker, the latter also overseeing tasks such as water management and handling payments for Syrian workers. The Waqeef, in turn, reports to the Wakeel, who acts on behalf of the landowner, holding considerable management authority within the hierarchy.

At the apex of this pyramid sits the landowner, wielding significant power primarily derived from financial capital. The Wakeel, meanwhile, exercises managerial control over day-to-day operations. Within this structure, workers are subject to the directives and discretion of these various levels of authority, each contributing to the overall exercise of power. The dynamics of power within this framework are not confined to a single level but rather permeate throughout the entire hierarchy, shaping the experiences and interactions of those within the agricultural sector.

c. Competition between Jordanians and Refugees

Competition between Jordanians and refugees in the labour market is a multifaceted issue influenced by various factors. Jordanians leaving their jobs often cite unsuitable working conditions and job characteristics, such as commute distance and long hours, as significant reasons for their departure. Transportation issues, particularly affecting women, further compound this trend, with 50 percent declining job opportunities due to commute challenges. Syrian women living in ITS have more advantages working in the agricultural sector with her family within a short distance away from her abode.

Contrary to some arguments suggesting that non-Jordanians are outcompeting locals for newly created positions. According to Fafo report (2020) Syrians mainly compete with migrant workers rather than Jordanian natives, and they have not substantially worsened labour market outcomes for Jordanians in areas with high refugee populations.

Host countries, including Jordan, are concerned about potential negative macroeconomic impacts of refugee labour market participation, such as increased unemployment and inflation, and strain on local resources. It is the fading role of the International Community in funding Jordan's needs that is affecting more the economy rather than the active role of the refugees.

Practical challenges in the labour market further highlight the disparities between Jordanians and refugees. For example, Syrians participating in the Cash for Work program often face limitations, such as renewing their contracts only once per year for short-term tasks in municipal parks. In contrast, Jordanians leverage social networks to access more employment opportunities throughout the year, exacerbating the gap between the two groups.

Overall, the labor market in Jordan is characterized by segmentation among Jordanians, labour migrants, and refugees, with each group accepting different wages and working conditions. In response, the government has implemented measures to regulate labour market participation, including sector-specific quotas and restrictions on certain occupations for migrants. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy approaches that balance the needs of both host communities and refugee populations while promoting inclusive economic growth.

Future and where next?

a. Between exploitation and estrangement

Refugees and other marginalised Jordanian groups find themselves in a precarious position, often sandwiched between exploitation in poor work conditions and feelings of estrangement or alienation. For refugees, the JRP along with the compact called for the social inclusion through economic opportunities. Our fieldwork reflected that refugees of all nationalities and Jordanians living in marginalised remote areas are frequently compelled to accept employment opportunities in sectors characterised by low wages, long hours, and unsafe working conditions. Although some sectors were made to be open for them yet they lacked legal protections and faced exploitation by unscrupulous employers seeking to capitalise on their vulnerable status. In these settings, both vulnerable Jordanians and refugees often endure substandard treatment, including inadequate pay, lack of job security, and limited access to healthcare or other essential benefits such as access to clean water and sewage services.

b. Long Term Integration: Against political will

The international community since 2014 pledged to share the burden of economic and financial costs with Jordan for having received refugees in the region from which they originate, providing them with the essential services they need. Over the last twelve years "the government [has had] to bear a large cost and burden as a result of the decrease in funding for Jordan's response plan to the Syrian crisis, and this is reflected in those entitled to support and assistance at the health and educational levels and the local environments hosting these refugees".[19] The funding has been gradually declining because there have become other priorities, "including the Ukraine crisis and several crises in Europe that have contributed to a significant decline in this funding".[20]

19 https://jordantimes.com/news/local/syrian-refugee-crisis-worsening-due-decline-funding-%E2%80%93-experts
20 ibid

The volume of funding for Jordan's response plan to the Syrian crisis for last year amounted to 663 million US dollars out of 2.2 billion dollars, at a rate of 29.2 per cent, according to the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, which indicated that the value of the deficit in financing the plan amounted to approximately 1.612 billion dollars at a rate of 70.8 per cent.[21]

The allocated funding, provided by organizations such as the International Rescue Committee and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others, aimed to support Syrian refugees' economic self-reliance through vocational training, microfinance initiatives, and livelihood support programs. Notably, this funding was exclusively designated for Syrian refugees and did not extend to refugees from other backgrounds.

The projects and programs implemented with this funding predominantly followed a neoliberal approach, focusing on short-term training to prepare recipients for entry into the labour market. However, these initiatives did not prioritize larger-scale projects that align with Jordan's broader economic needs, nor did they aim for the long-term integration of refugees into development projects. Despite the compact being framed as a tool for fostering resilience through development, the allocated funding primarily supported short-term projects that provided Syrian refugees with emergency resources to sustain their stay in Jordan.

The term "integration" may not accurately reflect the reality for Syrian refugees in Jordan, given the challenges they face, particularly in accessing limited sectors and navigating their uncertain legal status. Moreover, the political will in Jordan presents a significant obstacle to integration efforts. Despite international pressure and assistance, the Jordanian government has shown reluctance to fully embrace the integration of Syrian refugees. This reluctance is influenced by various factors, including concerns about resource and infrastructure strain, potential socio-economic tensions, and political considerations related to domestic and regional stability.

Furthermore, there may be broader political dynamics at play that influence the reluctance

21 Ibid.

to integrate refugees of all nationalities including ex-Gaza Palestinians. Jordan's geopolitical position in a volatile region, including its proximity to Syria, Iraq and occupied Palestine and is affected by the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. This shapes its approach to refugee management. Concerns about security, sovereignty, and stability may inform decisions regarding refugee integration.

c. Complementary pathways by the private sector: an economic solution

Complementary pathways, as proposed by various organisations such as the Durable Solutions Platform, Talent Beyond Boundaries, and others, offer a potential economic solution to address the plight of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. These pathways aim to broaden the regulated means through which refugees can achieve temporary or permanent solutions to their international protection needs. Unlike traditional resettlement programs, complementary pathways may provide immediate permanent residence and status or offer short-term solutions through temporary residence rights and various visas, which could potentially evolve into more durable solutions over time as the status becomes more secure. Effective implementation of these pathways requires clear communication of their details and implications to beneficiaries. While resettlement typically offers permanent residence and protection, admission through complementary pathways may initially provide short-term status, often linked to specific activities such as labour mobility or scholarships. Despite this, certain protection safeguards must be upheld, including protection against refoulement and a clear pathway to longer-term status, as outlined in UNHCR's Key Considerations paper for Complementary Pathways.

Countries like Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have committed to relocating refugee talent through their skilled migration programs and have pledged additional flexibility for refugee applicants to prevent unjust exclusions. Over the coming years, these countries have allocated over few thousands of visas for refugees accessing skilled migration. Each established program offers unique opportunities for refugees to contribute to their host countries' economies and societies while ensuring their protection and well-being.

The proposed solution, which currently operates on a limited scale, is applicable to only certain countries worldwide. Advocating to expand the scope of countries accepting refugees from all nationalities would enhance the livelihoods of refugees in nations equipped to leverage their human capital and educational and economic resources. If Jordan and other Arab countries participate in this complementary pathway alongside private sector engagement, it would permit Jordan to invest on smaller numbers of refugees with less expenses. Additionally, a country like Jordan, with modest resources, could optimise the human capital of a smaller number of refugees. This approach calls for international responsibility sharing among countries globally, rather than solely those in the global north to create a fund that maintains this solution.

Recommendations

To the International Community

- Invest in funding for Jordan is crucial to ensure the continuity of essential services for refugees of all nationalities. These services encompass a wide range of critical aspects, including but not limited to healthcare, education, shelter, intellectual and social development, and employment. By providing adequate funding, Jordan can maintain and enhance the infrastructure and resources necessary to support the well-being and dignity of refugees, regardless of their nationality. Sustained funding to Jordan is indispensable for upholding the rights and dignity of refugees from all nationalities, ensuring their access to essential services and promoting their well-being as they navigate the challenges of displacement.

- Enhance funding allocated to Jordan, specifically targeting big economic initiatives, with a particular emphasis on sectors like agriculture and animal husbandry, where the GDP is comparatively low. This investment should aim to leverage the human capital of refugees, who can contribute their expertise to bolster sustainable livelihoods for both refugees during their transitional period and host communities.

To Government of Jordan

- The necessity for a domestic migration law is increasingly needed in a country that has historically served as a safe haven for refugees. Establishing a dedicated unit to oversee the affairs of refugees, migrants, and Jordanian emigrants has become indispensable. This unit would play a crucial role in coordinating and managing the various aspects of migration within the country, including the influx of refugees, the integration of migrants into society, and the emigration of Jordanian citizens. It would establish clear guidelines and procedures for their admission, residence, employment, and access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. Additionally, the law could include provisions for addressing issues such as human trafficking, smuggling, and exploitation, thereby enhancing the protection of vulnerable populations.

- A labour market observatory that hosts a data base on the needs of the labour market is needed. It should be capable of capturing intersecting needs across various demographics, including rural, urban, semi-urban, female, and male populations.

To the Private Sector

- Complementary pathways, supported by the private sector, offer a means to engage qualified refugees possessing professional, technical, and vocational skills, spanning investments and projects in both urban and rural areas. Establishing a dedicated fund to facilitate the transition of refugees from the informal sector to formally recognized industries with secured rights is essential.

To regional and international partners

- Engagement with regional Stakeholders to strategise the development growth : Foster meaningful engagement with all stakeholders, explore collaboration on setting up wide scale projects that may accommodate including refugees, in the design and implementation of solutions to address challenges faced by displaced populations.

To UNHCR

- Give precedence to refugee protection by ensuring that all initiatives prioritise refugee well-being, aiming to establish an environment conducive to their self-sufficiency and empowerment.

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