



مؤسسة عبدالله الغرير للتعليم
Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education



EMPLOYMENT TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES IN JORDAN

2019



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ABOUT THE ABDULLA AL GHURAIR FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION

The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, founded in 2015 and based in Dubai, is the largest privately funded foundation in the Arab world focused exclusively on education. It aims to improve access to quality education for high-achieving, underserved Emirati and Arab youth. Abdulla Al Ghurair pledged one third of his wealth to the Foundation and set out a target of reaching 15,000 youth over the next 10 years via secondary and higher education programs and scholarships valued at over US\$1 billion.

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jordan is home to several refugee populations from the region, including Syrians, Palestinians and Iraqis. Some estimates suggest that the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is close to 1.4 million¹ and over 2 million Palestinians, among whom around 600,000 have not been naturalized by the Jordanian government.² With a total population of approximately 9.5 million, refugees now account for 20%³ of Jordan's population⁴, straining an already fragile economy where unemployment rates have been rising throughout the past years, from 13.1% in 2007 to more than 18.7% in 2018.⁵

Employment restrictions coupled with key challenges to accessing quality education and training have resulted in over 57% of Syrian refugees over the age of 15 working in the informal sector⁶. Refugee children and youth⁷, in particular, are the most impacted by conflict and displacement, due to interruptions in their education and training opportunities.

The purpose of this report is to explore the employment regulations, trends, and prospects for refugees in Jordan, with a specific focus on Syrians and Palestinians. This study finds that these opportunities lie at the intersection between the legal and economic contexts within which refugees are able to work and where the labor market is growing, as well as the educational pathways refugees can access, and the skills employers are looking for.

Finally, the study identifies four opportunities for action that will support refugee youth in finding long-term, meaningful livelihood opportunities in and beyond Jordan. These include:

1 Formalizing the work status of refugees with previous work experience in in-demand occupations in the informal sector.

Many refugees already have the requisite skills for specific industries but may be hamstrung by employers that either are unaware of the process of applying for work permits or are unable to afford the time and money to complete it. Resources should be invested in creating a robust system of information to help refugees understand their options and assist employers looking to apply for work permits for refugee workers.

3 Exploring legal opportunities for alternative forms of employment.

Beyond the scope of work permits, additional employment opportunities in the fields of entrepreneurship, consultancies and remote work have been identified, deserving further exploration.

2 Highlighting the growing occupations within the formal work permit process.

Within the formally-issued work permitting process, two industries, food and hospitality and craftsmanship, show promise for all refugees, regardless of whether they have work experience or if they are entering the labor market.

4 Investing in necessary support structures for refugees.

This includes, among others, partnering with employers offering on-the-job training or apprenticeships, supporting longer vocational training programs, aligning education and training with labor market expectations or providing more scholarships and funding.

1 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan Response Platform, and United Nations, n.d.

2 UNRWA, n.d.

3 20% only refers to non-naturalized refugees, with restrictions on work opportunities. When including naturalized Palestinian refugees, this number is closer to 32%

4 Dorai, 2018

5 CEIC Data, 2018

6 Fallah et al., 2018

7 Defined here as between 18 - 30 years old

INTRODUCTION

There are currently 25 million registered refugees⁸ in the world⁹, and the number of refugee youth¹⁰ seeking to access education and subsequent job opportunities is overwhelming international resources. Over 6 million refugees have fled the conflict from Syria alone, making it one of the largest refugee-producing countries in the world. While there are over 655,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, certain humanitarian groups and the government of Jordan estimate the true number of refugees in Jordan as closer to 1.4 million.¹¹ Additionally, there are over 2 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, including more than 600,000 Palestinian refugees who have not been naturalized by the Jordanian government.¹² The total population of Jordan is approximately 9.5 million people; refugees now account for 20%¹³ of this total population, placing enormous strains on the already limited Jordanian social services and resources.

The deeply protracted conflicts in both Syria and Palestine leave uncertain futures for these displaced populations in Jordan. Disruptions to education and livelihoods are creating discontinuities that would prove difficult to overcome, even with well appropriated resources. Refugees located both within refugee camps and those integrated into host communities face distinct challenges in accessing education, housing, and jobs. Addressing the vulnerabilities of the refugee youth located in Jordan requires understanding the complex educational and legal system within Jordan and pinpointing where resources will be most able to effect change for the Jordanian society as a whole.

In 2018, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education (AGFE) supported graduate students from the New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service to conduct a study on the employment regulations, trends, and prospects of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan. The findings for this report are presented below and serve to inform AGFE's Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund, the mission of which is to support refugees in Jordan and Lebanon access secondary, vocational and tertiary education, with a pathway to livelihood opportunities.

This report begins with a methodology section and a brief background of the refugee influx in Jordan. This is followed by the findings consisting of two axes. The first involves an examination of the legal context and its repercussions on refugee employment, and the second explores the education-to-employment transition for refugees in Jordan with a focus on the education, training and skills demanded by employers. The report also discusses the indirect challenges that impact refugees' ability to access employment opportunities. Finally, the report concludes by proposing a set of opportunities for action.

8 This number only includes those registered through UNHCR, actual numbers, inclusive of those that are qualified to apply for refugee status, are much higher

9 UNHCR, 2019

10 Defined here as between 18 – 30 years old

11 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan Response Platform, and United Nations, n.d

12 UNRWA, n.d

13 Dorai, 2018

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this research was qualitative in nature. Preliminary background research began in May 2018 at the Wagner home institution, culminating in field research and 15 on-site interviews in Jordan with four different types of organizations: refugee-serving organizations, refugee communities (in the form of focus groups), governmental agencies, and private sector companies (see Appendix A). Additional follow-up communications, remote interviews, and research was conducted upon return to the home institution in August 2018.

Limitations

While this report aims to be as thorough and accurate as possible, the researchers acknowledge that there may be some limitations. First, the information presented here represents a point in time, and specific legal and political contexts will likely shift in the coming months and years. Second, with the exception of the focus groups, the researchers were limited to interviewing English-speaking subjects only. While many Jordanian people and workers in the international sector speak English, this may have influenced direct access as well as the information that was provided. This was counteracted by verifying the information provided through supporting documentation and outside validation.



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BACKGROUND OF REFUGEE INFLUX TO JORDAN

With the Syrian crisis beginning in late 2012, Jordan now holds the second highest share of refugees in the world.¹⁴ While the largest number of refugees from Syria came into Jordan in 2013, the steady flow of Syrians into Jordan over the past five years has culminated in an estimate of 1.4 million Syrian refugees living in Jordan in 2018. There are slightly over 125,000 registered refugees living in camps, roughly 550,000 registered refugees living in host communities, and an estimated range of 600,000 to 800,000 unregistered refugees residing in Jordan.¹⁵ This large influx of Syrian refugees led the Jordanian government to regulate the labor force for both refugees and Jordanians.

In addition to the Syrian crisis, previous long-standing conflicts have led to massive refugee surges in the region, including major influxes of Palestinians, and, to a lesser degree, Iraqis since the 2000s.¹⁶ Different groups of Palestinian refugees in Jordan are regulated by various policies concerning their citizenship, further restricting and affecting their labor participation. Palestinians that fled between 1946 and 1955, also known as “Westbankers,” were granted Jordanian nationality¹⁷ and as such, are not affected by any employment restrictions.

Those who migrated from the West Bank to Gaza in 1967 then to Jordan, also known as “ex-Gazans”¹⁸ have not been granted the Jordanian citizenship. Among the multiple challenges they face, they are particularly affected by labor regulations, which will be discussed at a later stage of this report. Out of the 2.2 million Palestine refugees residing in Jordan, there are around 158,000 ex-Gazan refugees living in host communities or among the ten Palestinian refugee camps. It is difficult to track the number of ex-Gazans living outside of camps since there is a lack of sufficient data on those who are and are not naturalized out of the estimated 1.8 million Palestine refugees residing in host communities. Figure 1. below illustrates the distribution of Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in camps and host communities.

Figure 1. Distribution of Refugees Living in Camps and in Host Communities, by Nationality

	Syrians	Palestinians
Living in Refugee Camps	125,854	370,000
Living in Host Communities	547,560 (registered) ~ 600,000-800,000 (unregistered)	~1,830,000

14 UNHCR, 2018

15 UNHCR, 2019

16 While Iraqis are an influential proportion of refugees in Jordan this report primarily focuses on Syrian and Palestinian refugees

17 El-Abed, n.d.

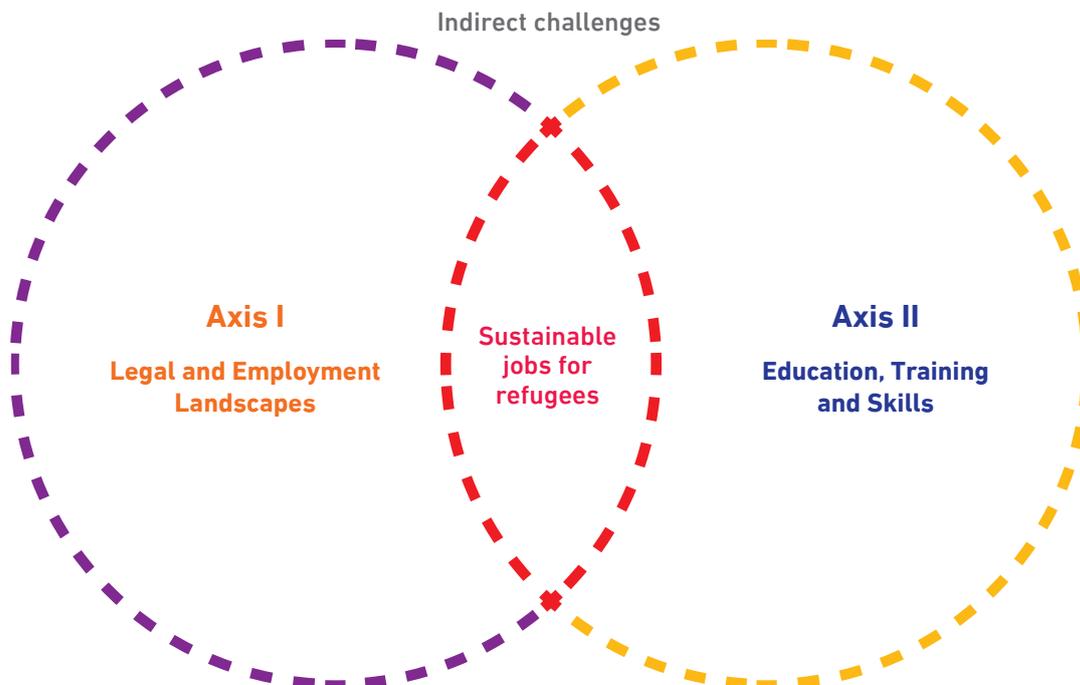
18 Ibid

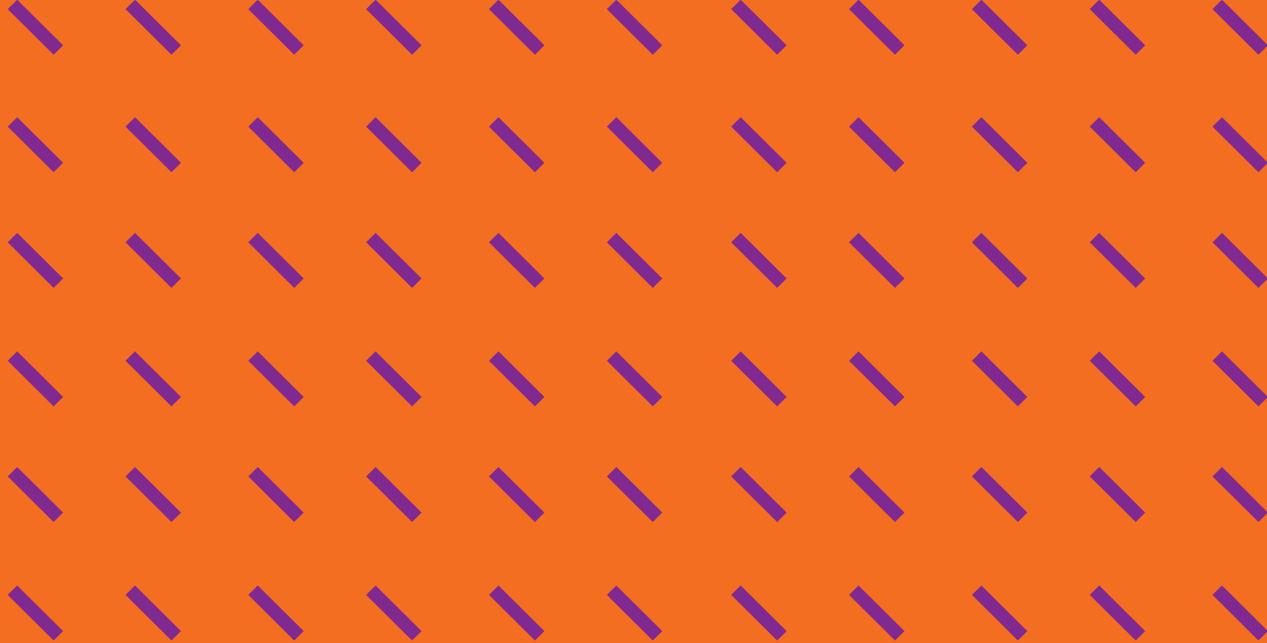
KEY FINDINGS

There are many critical social and economic components that must be understood in order to identify the complex conditions and opportunities of refugee employment and livelihoods in Jordan. This study finds that these opportunities lie at the intersection between the legal context within which refugees are able to work and where the labor market is growing (Axis I) as well as the educational pathways refugees can access, and the skills employers are looking for (Axis II), as illustrated in Figure 2. below.

These opportunities are also mediated by a set of indirect challenges that affect the broader context within which refugees access or seek employment.

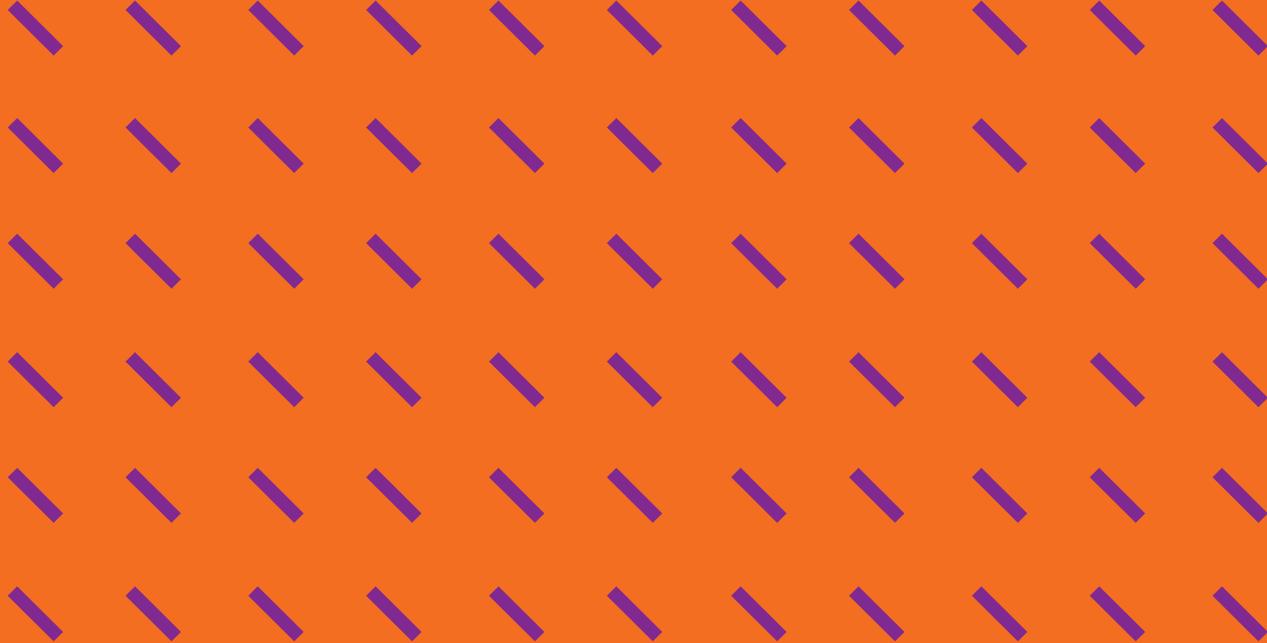
Figure 2. Strategic Analysis





Axis I

The Legal Context and its Repercussions
on Refugee Employment



Axis I revolves around the legal restrictions affecting refugees, which in turn impact their access to the job market, as well as the employment landscape which determines the demand for different work opportunities. The former includes an identified number of occupations that non-Jordanians are prohibited from legally working in, and the lengthy and bureaucratic process that refugees must undertake to obtain a work permit. The first section of this report describes how these processes hinder refugees' access to sustainable employment.

Bound by the legal landscape, the job market differs depending on context. For example, the job market trends differ for different groups of Palestinian refugees in comparison to Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the trends reflected in the camps, where there are less labor constraints, differ from the trends in host communities, where there are more constraints around refugee workers' labor mobility.

The Legal Landscape

The most fundamental labor regulation in the current legal context that impacts refugees is the Jordan Compact,¹⁹ announced in 2016 by the Jordanian government in collaboration with the European Union (EU). It aimed to promote investment and economic growth in Jordan as a response to the Syrian crisis. The Compact reformed the work permit and business formalization process, expanded access to the EU market, and opened economic activity in refugee camps. Furthermore, the Jordanian government committed to formalizing Syrian workers and securing 200,000 jobs for Syrians, with specific conditions. Yet, because of the long and tedious process of issuing a work permit, only about 125,000 work permits have been issued since then, including permits that were renewed.²⁰ Additional restrictive employment conditions include a quota system on the number of refugees that can be hired for specific occupations.

Work Permits

All non-Jordanians are required to obtain a work permit to be able to work in Jordan. A typical work permit process requires documentation and information such as work contracts, valid vocational licenses, a valid passport, proof of social security from the company, an identity card issued by the Ministry of Interior, and the application form itself. The multiple layers of paperwork that employers need to collect on behalf of the applicants, coupled with the costs (USD 240-522), discourage many employers from applying for them.

The legal context within which refugees are able to work differs between those working in refugee camps and those in host communities. In both Za'atari and Azraq camps, refugees do not require a work permit. Employment centers have been recently established in the camps for refugees who are interested in applying for work outside of camps, and some employers and agencies also offer to pay for work permit processes and fees. The work permits for refugees living within the camps are also used as an exit permit, allowing workers to leave camps for a period of up to 30 days. However, this exit permit is only applicable to the worker, forcing many to leave and return on a daily basis in order to stay with their families.

Refugees living in and outside the camps are not keen to apply for a work permit for two reasons. First, according to UNHCR, there is a common misconception that they will lose their aid if they apply for work permits. Second, permits to work outside the camps are valid for one year only and need to be renewed on a regular basis, which is a time-consuming and costly process.

For ex-Gazans, the situation is slightly different than for other refugees. They face similar challenges in obtaining a work permit. However, in contrast to Syrians, they are granted a temporary passport upon arrival and the renewal of this document is left to the discretion of the state.²¹ The temporary passport also serves as a residency permit. This constant process of having to renew their passport can affect their ability to provide documentation for the work permit application, which can become challenging for long-term employment, taking into consideration the additional obstacles for the work permit process.

19 IRC, 2017

20 Ministry of Labor, 2018

21 El-Abed, 2006

Policies around Occupations for Refugees

The Jordan Compact primarily affects those who wish to work outside of the camps, mainly through regulations like closed occupations and the quota system. According to the Ministry of Labor (MoL)²², a special committee consisting of the MoL, labor unions, and private sector collaboratively identified the occupations which would be reserved for Jordanians. This was an official government response to the surging unemployment rate of Jordanians, which rose from 13.1% in 2007 to 19.7% in 2018.²³ However, the list of closed occupations for refugees, which primarily consists of highly skilled professions with higher salaries, has repeatedly changed since its implementation. For example, professions such as engineering, health, and teaching, among others, are reserved to Jordanians (see Appendix B for complete list of closed occupations).

Formally, potential job growth opportunities are limited to the opportunities and sectors that are open to refugees. However, interviews with different stakeholders revealed that there are tactics to move around obligations. One interesting trend is that some companies have hired refugees for closed occupations by simply adjusting the job title. For example, Syrians are prohibited from working in Information and Computer Technology but are allowed to work in maintenance. Thus, by changing a job title from Computer Specialist to Computer Maintenance, employers are able to hire Syrians in what is supposed to be a closed occupation. In these cases, it is considered formal employment, but the worker technically has responsibilities that fall under a closed occupation. Yet this practice brings into concern a potential salary gap since closed occupations are primarily professions that require a higher educational degree with a higher wage.

The government also introduced flexible work permits. Their objective is to increase mobility and access to benefits for refugee workers in specific sectors, particularly for contracted and freelance work.²⁴ Flexible work permits, which decouple refugee workers from a specific employer, are currently available for the agriculture and construction sectors.²⁵ According to the MoL Syrian Refugee Unit's Monthly Progress report²⁶, around 19,184 flexible work permits were issued in the construction sector and 43,740 in the agriculture sector since implementation.

For the agricultural sector, job availability and production change depending on the season. Therefore, flexible work permits allow refugees to work for different employers based on seasonal impact and availability. For the construction sector, workers are considered the employers themselves and job availability and conditions are adjusted depending on the needs of the project. Thus, workers (as their own employers) are able to accept jobs from different companies. Currently, ILO and UNHCR are advocating for the expansion of flexible work permits to the manufacturing and services sectors to increase mobility in these sectors.

Regulations around work permits limit refugees' employment opportunities in general and opportunities in the sectors they are trained in. According to the MoL, over 125,392 work permits were issued between January 2016 and November 2018, inclusive of the work permits for workers within the refugee camps, flexible work permits, and those simply undergoing permit renewal. In other words, the number of Syrians participating in formal employment, excluding those whose permits that were renewed, is around 100,000 people. This number is relatively low considering that more than 300,000 people are registered Syrians of working age in Jordan.²⁷

Quota System

In addition to the closed sector regulations, there is also a quota system in place to limit competition for Jordanian workers. Employers are allowed to hire up to a certain percentage of non-Jordanian and Jordanian workers, however similar to the discussion around closed occupations, the quotas are regularly amended based on sector demands. For example, in a restaurant establishment, employers are able to hire up to 50% non-Jordanian workers, with 50% of the positions reserved for Jordanians.²⁸ In the garment sector, employers are able to hire up to 75% non-Jordanians. This quota system can be disputed when employers provide proof that there is an insufficient number of qualified Jordanian applicants to fulfill the quota and employers can request an exception to hire non-Jordanians that exceed the quota.

22 Authors' interview with MoL

23 CEIC data, 2018

24 Ibáñez Prieto, 2018

25 Ibid. 16,000 flexible construction work permits were issued for Syrian refugees in 2017

26 Ministry of Labor, 2018

27 ILO, 2017

28 Authors' interview with MoL

Legal Consequences

Interviews with the MoL and a leading INGO attorney highlighted that different attorneys and agency officials can have different interpretations of the same regulation. Additionally, employers can manipulate employment regulations by disputing various interpretations. This affects the legal repercussions employees and employers face when violating work permit regulations and the influence it plays in the labor market.

The difficulty to access work permits, age restrictions, sector restrictions, and registration requirements can at times cause workers and employers to opt for the informal sector. Some workers prefer it because there are no syndicates, unions, or entities that protect employees' individual healthcare and rights. Therefore, workers may prefer to work informally rather than for an employer who may not guarantee a sufficient salary, transportation, or job security.

The legal repercussions faced by those who violate the work permit regulations vary on a case by case basis. They range from a fine of USD 300-700 for the employer, in addition to a requirement of obtaining legal work permits for all unauthorized workers, to returning refugees working without a permit to the camps in the worst of cases. However, UNHCR has emphasized that this outcome is rare and, in most cases, workers are only required to sign a legal document indicating their commitment to legalize their situation as soon as possible. Based on these repercussions, there is often more pressure on the employer rather than the employee when workers are found working without a permit. However, helping employers avoid these repercussions can serve as an incentive in formalizing informal employment.

The complexity of the Jordan Compact and the labor regulations surrounding refugee work is reflected in the frequent erratic amendments to the list of closed occupations, quota system, sectors that are open to flexible work permits, policy interpretations, and loopholes. Recommendations in this report, within and beyond the scope of work permits, are presented with these complexities in mind. However, it is difficult to provide concrete recommendations for refugee youth for pathways to sustainable livelihoods solely based on the complicated legal landscape in Jordan. Therefore, further analysis on the economic reality, while recognizing the interconnections between the job market and the legal landscape in Jordan, is required.

The Employment Landscape

Formal employment trends in host communities are reflected in the sectors with the highest number of work permits issued, which are construction and agriculture. Out of the 125,000 work permits that were issued, 30.4% were in the construction sector and 44.4% in agriculture.²⁹ These sectors have seen an increase in work permits since the implementation of the Compact, likely caused by the recent shift to flexible work permits in the sectors. However, despite the total amount of work permits issued, a report from the International Rescue Committee (IRC)³⁰ indicates that only an estimated 40,000 permits are in active use.

According to UNHCR, there are more than 300,000 Syrians of working age out of the more than 600,000 total registered population. Although the number of unregistered Syrians of working age is not available, it is assumed that the number is likely equal to or greater than the number of Syrians of working age who are registered. In 2016, Syrians represented only 9% of the formally employed population in Jordan.³¹ Less than 100,000 of the 300,000 registered Syrians of working age applied for a work permit, which may indicate that the overwhelming majority of them are actually working in the informal sector. This does not include unregistered Syrians of working age since being officially registered is a condition to apply for a work permit. In addition, there is a substantial number of unregistered Syrians that are also likely to be in informal employment. Overall, nearly 57% of Syrian refugees over the age of 15 are working in the informal sector in Jordan³², as shown in Figure 3.

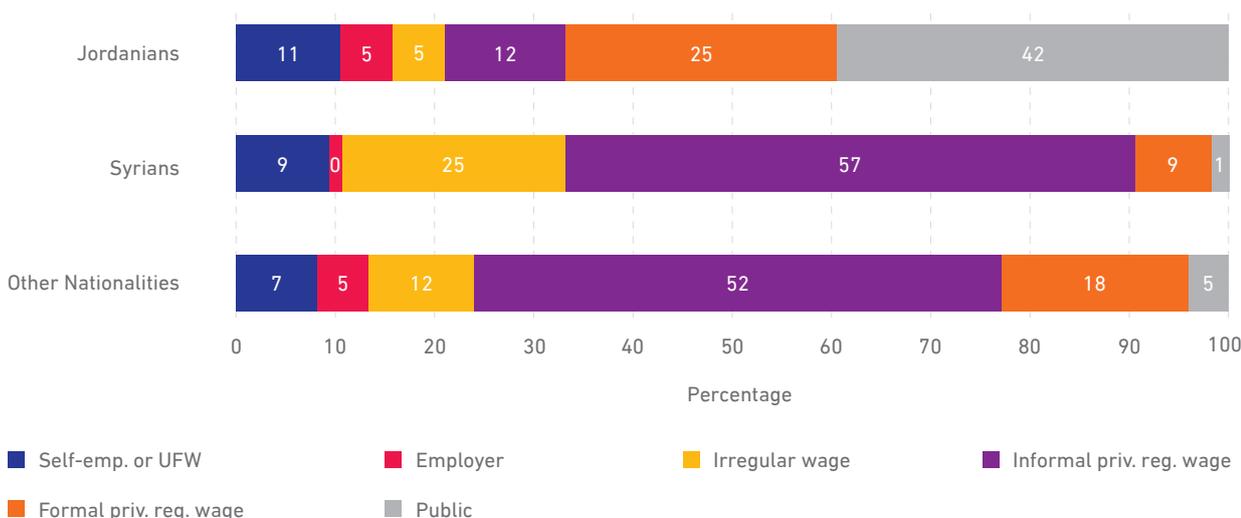
29 Ministry of Labor, 2018

30 IRC, 2018

31 Wahba, 2018

32 Fallah et al., 2018

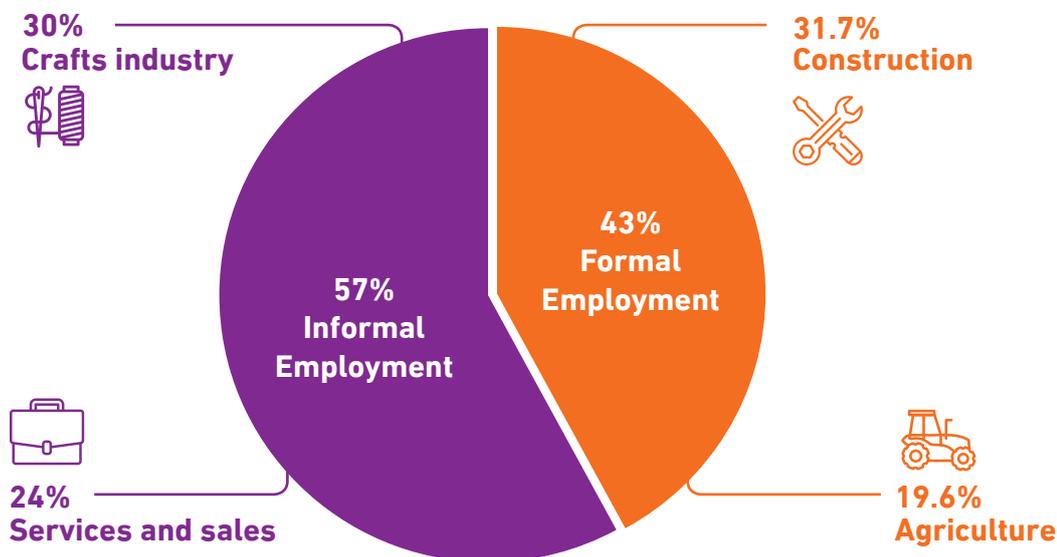
Figure 3. Employment status (percentage) of Jordanians, Syrians, and other nationalities, workers aged 15-64, in 2016



Source: Fallah, Krafft, Wahba (2018)

According to UNHCR³³, informal employment in the private sector mainly revolves around economic activities like crafts and services and sales. As shown in Figure 4, 30% are in the crafts industry and 24% are in services and sales. It is likely that the Syrians in informal employment are participating in these two industries.

Figure 4. Employment among Syrian refugees in Jordan



As far as Palestinian refugees are concerned, in addition to their barred access to the public sector and certain professions like other refugee groups, Palestinians cannot access any of the 200,000 jobs promised to Syrian refugees in response to the refugee crisis. According to UNRWA, there are around 158,000 ex-Gazan refugees in Jordan.³⁴ The labor force participation rate of the Palestinian refugee population outside and inside camps is at 36%.³⁵ This means that only over one-third of working age ex-Gazans are participating in the labor force. Just like their other refugee counterparts, they are also barred from higher level professions. However, if employed through UNRWA, ex-Gazans can work in an occupation that would be otherwise prohibited in Jordan.³⁶

In terms of employment opportunities for ex-Gazans, the distribution across occupations inside and outside the camps do not greatly vary. As of 2012³⁷, 47% of employed female ex-Gazans are working in the education, health and social services sector and 16% are in the services industry. Women inside the camps reflect a similar composition, with 49% in the education, health and social services sector and 18% in the manufacturing industry. As for males, on average around 26% of employed ex-Gazan males in and outside the camps work in the trade and vehicle repair sector and 17% are in the manufacturing industry.³⁸ These statistics indicate that service industries and crafts are also sustainable opportunities for Palestinian refugees. There is also future potential for manufacturing, with male Palestinian refugees participating in it.

33 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Economic and Social Council and United Nation Development Program, and Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, 2012

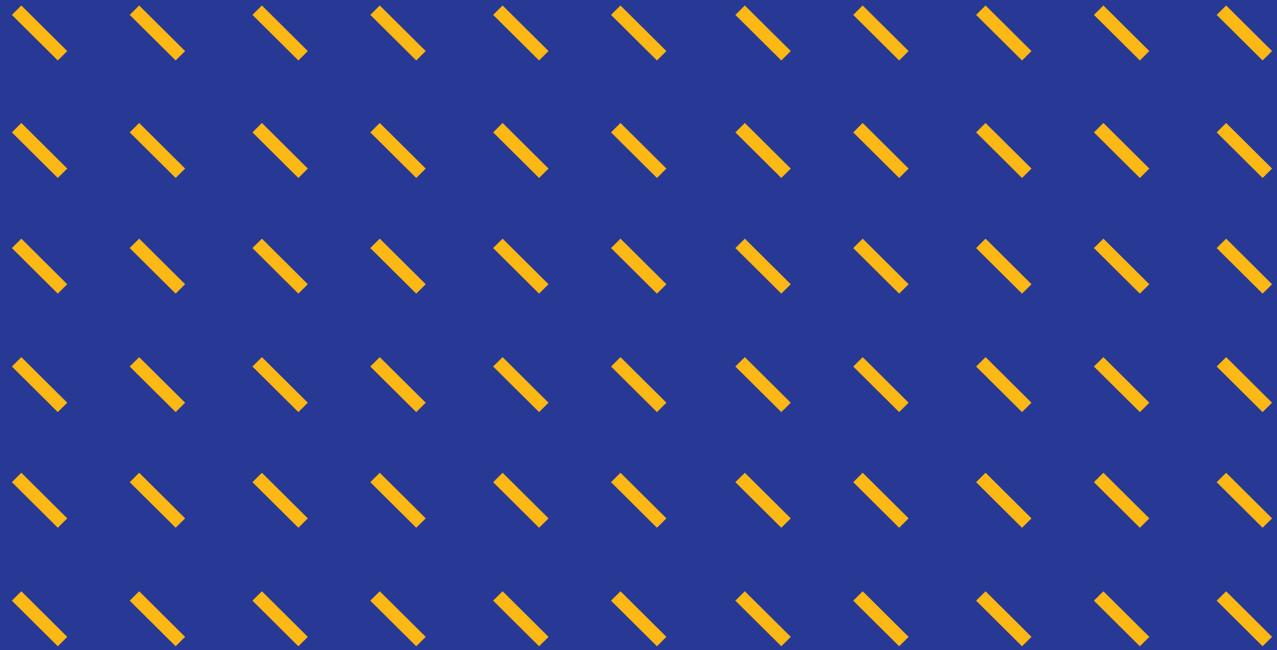
34 UNRWA, 2018

35 Tiltne & Zhang, 2013

36 Recent developments suggest that amendments to the legal context affecting Ex-Gazan employment in Jordan was recently implemented. Gaza refugees seem to be no longer restricted by the same policies as Syrians. Yet, little information is available about how it is impacting their life on the ground (Ammon News, 2019)

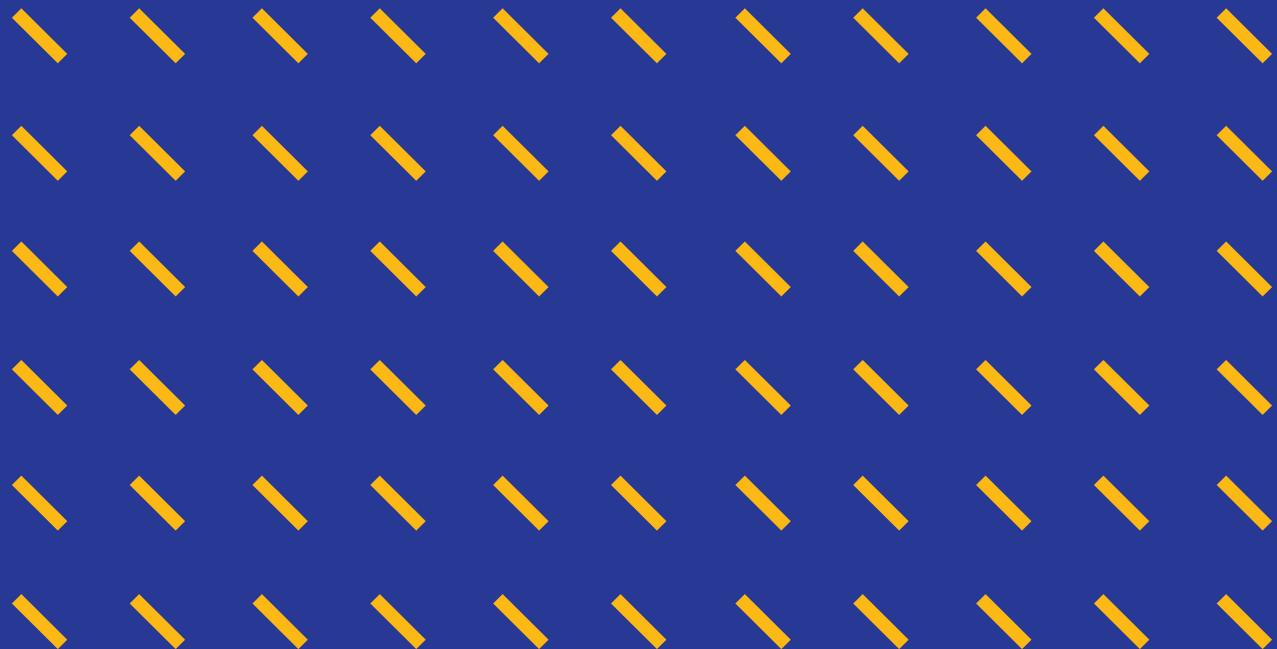
37 Tiltne & Zhang, 2013

38 Ibid



Axis II

Education, Training and Skills



Identifying pathways for sustainable employment for refugees also requires analyzing the education and training opportunities they have access to, in particular at the vocational and tertiary levels. It also requires understanding what employers in the current labor market in Jordan are concretely looking for in terms of skills.

The Educational Trajectory of Refugees in Jordan

Refugees face tremendous challenges to access and complete formal education in Jordan. Analyzing the educational trajectory of refugees in Jordan is necessary to better understand the challenges and opportunities that youth face in developing skills they need for the labor market.

Refugee children can access primary education through Jordanian public schools. Due to the large influx of students, schools are suffering from a lack of space and resources. For this reason, the Jordanian government established the double shift system in public schools, where classes are split into two shorter sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Nearly 70% of Syrian children are enrolled in a double shift school. These shortened and condensed classes compromise the quantity and quality of the education that both refugee and Jordanian children receive. Palestinian refugee children typically attend one of the 174 UNRWA primary schools.³⁹ However, at the secondary level, these students have to transfer into public or other school.

Secondary Education

Secondary education is offered through two tracks: an academic track or an applied vocational track as shown in Figure 5 below. The academic focus culminates in the secondary education exam (Tawjihi), which qualifies those who are successful for entrance to university. Students who are not successful often either enter into a vocational training program, join the workforce, or prepare to take the Tawjihi again. The fees and associated costs with taking the Tawjihi alone can be a major barrier for Syrian students.

The secondary education vocational track bypasses the Tawjihi and allows for immediate exposure to vocational opportunities. However, this only accounts for approximately 13% of the students in secondary education. While refugee children are allowed to access this vocational secondary education track, these schools are in limited locations. If there is not a school within close distance of a refugee's home, the likelihood of the refugee attending school is extremely low. Additionally, not all secondary education vocational tracks (e.g Hotel Business, Home Economics, Agriculture, and Industry) are available at all secondary education schools, further limiting options for students, particularly females. While refugee children are allowed to pursue this applied vocational track, less than one percent actually pursue this pathway.⁴⁰

In Jordan, the enrolment rate of Syrian refugees at the secondary level was below 5% in the academic year 2017/18.⁴¹ A number of institutional, legislative, financial and societal reasons prevent refugees from completing their secondary education, including school related costs, the need to earn an income, early marriage, bullying and more.⁴² For example, 60% of Syrian families in host communities rely on supplemental income earned by children and 97% of school-aged Syrian children are at risk of non-attendance at school because of their families' financial hardship.⁴³ Even accessing the Tawjihi can prove to be challenging as students pay approximately \$25 per semester, and often much more, for two to three semesters in preparation for the exam.

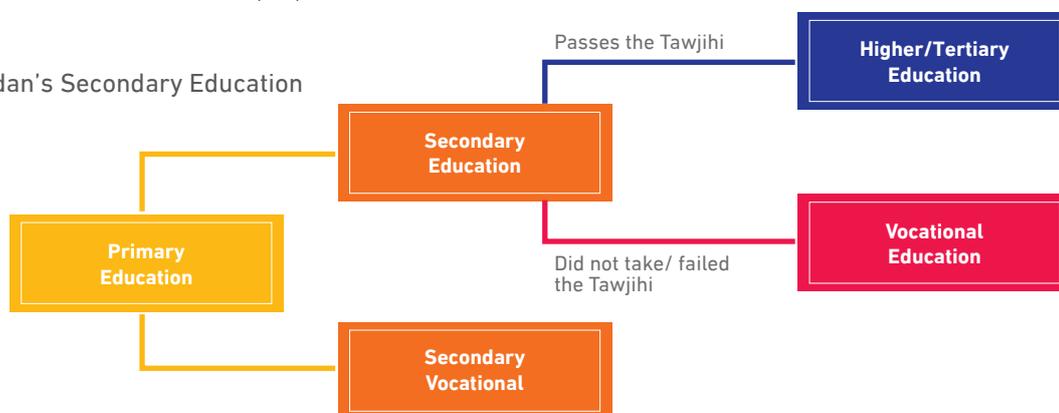


Figure 5. Jordan's Secondary Education

39 UNRWA, 2017

40 UNESCO, 2018

41 El-Ghali et al., 2018

42 Ibid. For more information on the challenges facing refugees to access and complete their education <http://www.alghurairfoundation.org/en/content/pathways-and-beyond-education-jordan-and-lebanon>

43 Yassin, 2018

Vocational Training

For those students that do succeed in completing their secondary education, through either academic or vocational tracks, one option they have is pursuing vocational training. Vocational training centers, which are post-secondary institutions, provide opportunities for both Jordanians and non-Jordanians to pursue occupational specialties that do not require university-level educational attainment. There are three main types of vocational training centers in Jordan: public Vocational Training Corporations (VTCs), financed and administered through the Ministry of Labor; private centers, financed and administered through non-profit organizations and private entities; and vocational training centers located within refugee camps themselves, namely Zaatari and Azraq camps. All three, which vary widely in their approach to training, are described below.

- **Public Vocational Training Corporations (VTCs)**

There are 16 different training programs administered by 38 VTCs located throughout three regional directorates in Jordan. As affirmed in many of the interviews conducted, there is a general public aversion to the VTCs, and it is considered a second-class route for students who failed the Tawjihi. Additionally, because they are publicly run and managed, there is a common perception that many of the training programs and equipment used in instruction are outdated and slow to innovate or evolve with changing industries.

- **Non-Profit and Privately Managed Vocational Training Centers**

These centers are more difficult to quantify with absolute certainty, both in terms of raw number of facilities and successful outcomes, as they are not managed by a singular umbrella organization like the public VTCs under the Ministry of Labor. As a result, the programs – even within the same industry – can approach trainings in different ways, focusing conversely on soft skills or hard skills without fully considering employer needs.

Many privately managed programs are certified by the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) under the Ministry of Labor to measure their program's learning objectives against industry standards. However, some privately managed programs, like ReBootKamp, instead rely on the success of their graduates to indicate value. These programs must typically target a significant portion of their resources to develop relationships with employers, in an effort to alleviate concerns due to lack of certification from CAQA. Certain training institutes with no CAQA accreditation or lack of industry-recognized certification face wariness by employers that their graduates are capable of performing up to their employment standards.

- **Vocational Training in Zaatari and Azraq Refugee Camps**

There are additional vocational training opportunities available within refugee camps themselves, mainly administered through four training centers by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and UNICEF. These training centers focus mainly on women and youth with disabilities. Completion of these trainings links participants to the Cash for Work program and connects them to volunteering opportunities within the camps or employment opportunities outside the camps. There remain logistical issues with connecting graduates to employment, mainly due to requirements surrounding work permits and the ability of refugees to physically leave the camps. Thus far, only 15% of those completing the program have successfully found paid employment.

Tertiary Education

Jordan currently has 10 public universities, 19 private universities, and 51 community colleges (not including the Vocational Training Centers). University-level education is typically the most desired route for both Jordanians and refugees. However, accessing higher education proves exceptionally difficult for refugees, with the financial implications of studying at a university. If a refugee is fortunate enough to both have their family's financial support during preparation for the Tawjihi, and actually pass the Tawjihi, their time studying at university still prevents them from providing an additional income for their family. Prior to the current conflict in Syria, the percentage of 18–24 year-old Syrians participating in higher education was 20%; that number is now less than 5%.⁴⁴ The inability to access quality education, the lack of financial and supportive resources, and removal of crucial family income all contribute to this low participation rate in higher education. The lack of treatment for trauma and other mental health issues experienced by some refugee youth only exacerbates this situation.

Additionally, accessing higher education may present refugees with degrees and skills in occupations that they are not allowed to work in. Caution must be taken with ensuring next steps, opportunities, and connections to employment, without simultaneously limiting the future aspirations and opportunities of refugee youth. With potential future resolutions of conflicts within their home countries, refugees may have access to certain future occupations that are not currently open to them in Jordan. Yet, there are a few scholarships and opportunities for refugee students, especially Syrians, in countries outside of Jordan that may lead to long-term, sustainable employment, either within Jordan or elsewhere. Ex-Gazans, however, are less likely to benefit from these opportunities because of their difficulty to obtain travel visas.

44 El-Ghali et al., 2017

A note of caution must also be raised regarding cultural sensitivity surrounding vocational training versus tertiary education as there tends to be a stigma against people without a university degree and only vocational training. Nearly all 17 participants within the vocational training focus groups indicated their desire to go back and receive a university degree, regardless of status or employment opportunities post-training.⁴⁵ This dichotomy is addressed in the recommendations section.

Demand for Hard Versus Soft Skills

Understanding the skills necessary to be successful in the labor market is necessary to identify pathways for sustainable employment opportunities. The hard skills and soft skills demanded by employers in Jordan vary, naturally, by industry and occupation. Hard skills refer to trade specific, measurable skills that are typically certified. Certain examples include graphic design certification, plumbing certifications, and driving licensure. Soft skills refer to interpersonal, professional, and communication skills, and can include punctuality, interoffice conflict management, and proactiveness. Soft skills are typically much more difficult to quantify and measure, but also more difficult to learn and internalize.

A recent market research study by UNICEF on relevant skillsets for employment shows that private sector employers in Jordan have a preference for soft skills and that they believe that university graduates often lack these skills.⁴⁶ The study also highlighted that vocational training is widely perceived as inferior to university education by youth and their families. Interviews with UNICEF Jordan⁴⁷ further indicated that the soft skills including professional communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving can increase an applicant's employability in the private sector. Employers are often looking for applicants who are equipped with these skills, along with the necessary technical and vocational skills. In some cases, employers may prefer an applicant with these soft skills and provide on-the-job training for the needed technical and vocational skills.

Focus groups with refugee youth highlighted that certain training centers overly concentrate on soft skills without properly teaching them the hard skills necessary to be successful in their jobs, revealing conflicting perceptions, by employers, refugee youth, or both, of the skills needed for employability. It is likely that there is a need for both soft and hard skills, and any educational or vocational training center cannot sacrifice one skill set for the other.

⁴⁵ Focus groups 1 and 2

⁴⁶ UNICEF, 2017

⁴⁷ Authors' interview with UNICEF Jordan

Indirect Challenges to Accessing Employment Opportunities

In addition to the labor regulations restricting the employment of refugees, there are other challenges hindering their access both to education, skills, and training facilities as well as the job market. These indirect challenges, although not central to the question of accessing employment, were raised during interviews as potentially being a hindrance. They include transportation, early marriage and resistance within the family.

Transportation is an ongoing problem for all residents in Jordan. The only available public transportation in Jordan is a bus system with severely limited routes and time schedules. For non-Jordanians who are not legally allowed to own a car, the only alternatives are taxis, private car companies or renting a car, all of which can accumulate large expenses. Low salaries are typically insufficient to cover transportation expenses. Even when employers cover transportation expenses or provide transportation for their employees the drop-off and pick-up points may not be within walking distance for the workers. Women in particular are faced with cultural constraints that restrict their travel to bigger cities for employment. Students, especially females, are also heavily impacted by this problem when commuting to vocational or educational facilities, leading many to drop out as raised by multiple interviewees. Due to the limited transportation infrastructure, those who are able to participate in the job market and the extent of their participation is limited to those who are able to afford alternative services or those living within close proximity to facilities.

Early marriage and childcare challenges also affect all female students and workers. As a response to extreme economic circumstances and conflicts⁴⁸, early marriages are more prevalent among Syrian refugee women. Statistics show that 35% of refugee marriages in Jordan involve Syrian girls younger than the age of 18.⁴⁹ In addition to all the potential health risks of early marriage and early pregnancy, it significantly affects the ability of some women to pursue higher education or professional careers due to familial responsibilities and childcare.

Furthermore, many families refuse to have their female family members join the labor force because of perceived safety concerns or cultural norms. For example, many households are opposed to their female family member working late shifts because of safety concerns as well as the common cultural perception that most of those professions are more within a man's domain.

All of the above challenges emphasize the need for a more comprehensive and sustainable solution to support refugee youth in obtaining sustainable employment opportunities. Supporting institutions should consider addressing these challenges by incorporating appropriate programmatic features and financial support.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION



Based on discussions with various stakeholders in Jordan, as well as a review of the legal context, the education skills, and training context and an examination of the indirect challenges for refugees to access sustainable employment, this study identifies four key opportunities to support refugee youth find long-term, meaningful livelihood opportunities in and beyond Jordan.

1 Formalizing the work status of refugees with previous work experience in in-demand occupations in the informal sector

As part of creating pathways to formal employment for refugees, it is important to find solutions to formalize the work status of refugees currently working in the informal sector, despite working in occupations that allow work permits for non-Jordanians. Many of these refugees already have the requisite skills for specific industries but may be hamstrung by employers that either are unaware of the process of applying for work permits or are unable to afford the time and money to complete it. Formal training programs or additional education may not be the most useful option for this sub-group, who simply need a better pathway to formalizing their work. However, there is need to educate them on their rights and benefits as many mistakenly believe that they will jeopardize their aid and benefits by formalizing their work status. By investing in a more robust system of information and resource navigation for refugees, it can allay some of these fears. Some amount of resources should also be focused on assisting employers looking to apply for work permits for refugee workers.

2 Highlighting the growing occupations within the formal work permit process

Within the formally-issued work permitting process, there are two industries that show promise for all refugees, regardless of whether they have work experience or if they are currently preparing to enter the labor market:

- **Food and hospitality:** As the fastest growing industry within Jordan, this industry has a high demand for workers.⁵⁰ While there are some limitations – refugees are typically barred from working in 4- or 5-star hotels due to the stringent security clearance requirements⁵¹ – this is an in-demand industry with opportunity for growth. There is a distinct possibility of flexible work permits in the near future⁵², indicating an even greater level of autonomy for refugees working in this industry. Additionally, there are a number of vocational training programs that feature complementary hard- and soft-skill trainings, like chef, pastry chef, customer service, and housekeeping, to support the certification process for refugees.

- **Craftsmanship:** This industry maintains some international interest in both professional training and development programs, including strong export opportunities of crafts on an international market. In multiple organizations, including the Jordan River Foundation and Turquoise Mountain, trainings are conducted with refugees on how to create crafts that are following trends in the industry and will sell on the international market. Additionally, these organizations have, or are in the process of creating, export agreements for crafts that are specifically created by refugees.

Due to the labor market demand for these two occupations, on both a national and international scale, it is unlikely that additional restrictions will affect these opportunities for refugees in the near future. While construction, food and agriculture are the sectors currently with the largest number of work permits issued, only half of these work permits are actually active, with the employee working and earning a wage.⁵³ This indicates that work permits within these sectors do not equate to actual job opportunities, defeating the current purpose of the work permits. In that respect, more efforts are needed to raise awareness about such job opportunities and to provide suitable training for refugees who would be interested in working in these occupations.

50 ILO, 2017

51 Ibid

52 Ibáñez Prieto, 2018

53 IRC, 2018

3 Exploring legal opportunities for alternative forms of employment

Beyond the scope of work permits through the Ministry of Labor, there are additional employment opportunities for refugees in Jordan and beyond that address some of the key challenges previously outlined:

- **Entrepreneurship:** there are funding opportunities and capacity-building programs through the International Labour Organization, the Ministry of Labor, Oasis500⁵⁴, and the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GiZ), among others, that provide openings for aspiring entrepreneurs. While a refugee entrepreneur must file a business license with a Jordanian as 50% co-owner, these programs provide opportunities to meet and create synergies among Syrians, Palestinians, and Jordanians. These training programs typically include basic business plan development, market research, and connections to funding opportunities. Most importantly, refugee entrepreneurs do not need to apply for a work permit. Depending on the location and type of business, entrepreneurship may address transportation and childcare challenges as well.
- **Consultancies:** many Information and Computer Technology-based businesses and international NGOs will allow refugees to work on a consultancy basis, typically considered voluntary work, but paid on a stipend basis. While these consultancies are typically short-term in length and do not guarantee long-term employment, there is often an opportunity to “jump” from consultancy to consultancy until a long-term employment solution can be found. Using this as a tactic for connecting to higher skilled positions and opportunities for refugees may be prudent. There are therefore opportunities for refugees to legally work without needing to apply for a work permit. Additionally, consultancies may provide opportunities for some highly-skilled refugees to work within their desired occupation. UNRWA⁵⁵ has a preference policy for vulnerable Palestinians in their hiring policy. They employ more than 7,000 people and the workforce demographic is primarily comprised of Palestinians, with ex-Gazans representing around 18% of their workforce.
- **Remote work:** depending on the physical location of the company and where the work product will be delivered, remote work may also be an opportunity for refugees to legally work without necessitating the filing of a work permit. Many occupations, like call center operators, data analysis, and graphic design, do not necessarily require in-person management. As long as the employer is not physically located in Jordan and at least 75% of the work produced is also exported (i.e., the majority of the use and users for the product is outside of Jordan), refugees can legally work and are not required to file a work permit.⁵⁶ Remote work and similar types of job opportunities address several of the barriers identified above, including transportation, childcare, and the need to apply for a work permit.

With the above opportunities (except for entrepreneurship), it is important to note that there is likely no social safety net attached with the employment. By not filing an official work permit, and therefore not paying into the social security framework in Jordan, refugees may not be entitled to retirement or health insurance policies in the same manner as those that have a formal work permit. While this should not discount these employment opportunities, as refugees may earn enough to offset these costs, it should still be acknowledged when evaluating the cost-benefit analysis of specific occupations.

4 Investing in necessary support structures for refugees

Due to a relatively weak infrastructure, there are still persistent challenges in supporting refugee youth’s access to educational and training institutions that can be addressed by:

- **Partnering with employers offering on-the-job training or apprenticeships:** based on focus group discussion and interviews with NGOs, both employers and workers prefer on-the-job training since it provides practical skills as opposed to theoretical skills that are often offered in VTCs. However, employers that actually engage in this practice are relatively uncommon. Priority should be placed on programs that connect students to on-the-job training or apprenticeships, including programs that work with employers to systematize the practice and incorporate it into their general hiring process.

⁵⁴ Oasis500 is an early stage incubator for startup companies in Jordan.

⁵⁵ Authors’ interview with UNRWA

⁵⁶ Authors’ interview with Ibrahim Aqel, Saed Karajah and Partners

• **Supporting longer vocational training programs:** any vocational training program should be long enough so that students are able to fully engage with both hard and soft skill components. Most students that participated in the focus groups agreed that a 3-month training program is often not long enough to fully grasp both the theoretical and practical concepts from instruction. Shorter programs, commonly provided and funded by NGOs and INGOs, tend to focus on the soft skills necessary for employment, like job search, resume creation, and interview practice within the specified sector. Longer vocational programs, which are less common and more difficult to access, tend to have a more in-depth, hard skills training approach. Presuming that scholarships or funding are available during training to assist with a lack of income, priority should be focused on longer training programs that can properly cover the needed hard and soft skills.

• **Aligning education and training with labor market expectations:** both vocational and university level education should adequately teach both the hard and soft skills outlined above. This includes utilizing instructional equipment and materials that are aligned with industry trends and standards, and a consistent updated strategy to ensure that the curriculum adequately prepares students for the workforce. Additionally, vocational trainings in particular should not simply focus on shaping programs toward the related and relevant skills pertaining to the job market findings alone. A balanced curriculum is needed around the hard skills related to crafts, services and sales, and manufacturing as well as the soft skills needed to best prepare students for employment.

• **Ensuring transportation costs are covered:** as stated under the indirect challenges section, the lack of a public transportation system is a significant burden for both students and workers, particularly women. Direct transportation or vouchers for transportation should be included in any refugee programs to overcome this barrier.

• **Exploring ways to provide childcare opportunities:** the lack of childcare places a major strain on the ability of women to both successfully complete education and retain employment. This is particularly burdensome for female refugees, who bear the majority of child-rearing duties. Programs should find ways to offset this, potentially through on-site daycare or through the provision of resources for joint childcare opportunities.

• **Providing more scholarships or additional funding:** as stated under the education section, many refugees do not complete secondary education due to the need to earn supplemental income for their family. Providing scholarships or additional funding for students will incentivize completion of their education or training, particularly considering the necessary length of time spent in the programs. Additionally, focusing scholarships on employment outcomes, not just completion outcomes, may also incentivize students and training or education centers to strategically focus on additional offerings like apprenticeships or on-the-job training.

• **Conducting information campaigns:** helping refugees understand what, if anything, affects their ability to access benefits is a major compounding factor in their decision to apply for work permits. Many refugees mistakenly believe that they will jeopardize their aid and benefits by formalizing their work status. While there may be some adjustments made to benefits received if a work permit is secured, it is exceptionally difficult to navigate and many refugees assume that the effect will severely and negatively affect them. Initiatives that could help refugees navigate their benefits would prove beneficial in transitioning them from the informal to the formal sector.

CONCLUSION

The conflicts in both Syria and Palestine have left a large number of refugees displaced in Jordan. The large influx of refugees has placed immense strain on Jordan's economy, and this economic burden, compounded by the high unemployment rate of Jordanians, has pressured the Jordanian government to amend labor regulations to address this issue. There is a need to support and aid vulnerable refugees that are restricted from participating freely in the labor market while concurrently supporting the overall Jordanian economy.

Any potential long-term solutions must provide support for refugee youth and vulnerable Jordanians that will lead to sustainable livelihoods. This report highlights the intersection of the opportunities that refugee workers are allowed to work in and the occupations that have the most promising job growth that deserve greater attention and alignment with the focus of refugee serving organizations, including education and training institutions, and employers. Greater coordination to ensure a larger number of youth can smoothly transition from education to employment will better serve all communities involved.

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APPENDIX A

Findings are based off of in-country field research conducted in Jordan between July 13, 2018 and August 3, 2018, as well as subsequent interviews conducted remotely. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals and organizations, listed in chronological order of interview conducted:

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Education Division, Australian Stand-By Partner
- UNHCR – Livelihoods Division, Najwan Aldorgham, Field Associate, and Rania Bakeer, Livelihood Assistant
- Turquoise Mountain – Sarra Ghazi, Country Director
- Oroub El-Abed, researcher and former professor, University of Jordan
- Saed Karajah and partners – Ibrahim Akel, partner
- ReBootKamp – Hugh Bosely, Founder
- Jordan River Foundation – Fairouz Taqieddin, Director of Strategic Partners and Development
- Save the Children Jordan
- International Labour Organisation
- Ministry of Labor – Dina Hammad, Head of Employment & Career Counseling, and Majdi Saan, Head of Labor Market Information
- Luminus – Omar Nimri, Director of Entrepreneurship and Employment Program
- Focus Group #1 – Students from Luminus Education (11 students)
- Focus Group #2 – Recent Graduates from Luminus Education (6 recent graduates)
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA)
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
- Sharqi Shop – Saleem Najja

APPENDIX B

List of sectors where work by a non-Jordanian is prohibited

1. Medical professions
2. Engineering professions
3. Administrative and accounting professions
4. Clerical work including typing and secretarial work
5. Switchboards, telephones and connections works
6. Warehouses works
7. Sales works, including all groups
8. Haircutting works (coiffeur)
9. Decoration works
10. Teaching professions, including all specialties except for the rare ones when there is no Jordanian available
11. Fuel selling in main cities
12. Electricity professions
13. Mechanical and car repair professions
14. Drivers
15. Guards and servants
16. Buildings servants
17. Government

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