

Refugee livelihoods: Jordan

September 2017

As the conflict in Syria enters its seventh year, refugees continue to live in precarious situations; savings have been depleted, social support networks have weakened and access to economic opportunities remains limited. Over 660,000 refugees from Syria are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, with 297,000 men and women of working age. The majority of male Syrian refugees in Jordan with employment work in agriculture as farm hands, work as mechanics or in construction. Female Syrian refugees have a preference for home based activities in food processing and catering¹. Providing avenues to work and earn is vital to ensuring refugees have dignified and normal lives despite being in exile.

Syrians now form an important demographic in the labour market, comprising one fifth of the total non-Jordanian workforce. They have entrepreneurial spirit and valuable skills in specific occupations. They differ however from other migrant workers in several key aspects: they are in the country largely with their families and the majority of their resources are spent inside Jordan.

The Government of Jordan has taken an unprecedented step amongst refugee hosting countries by employing an ambitious approach to respond to the protracted refugee crisis. This journey had its beginnings in London in February 2016 during the “Supporting Syria and the Region” conference, where the Government of Jordan announced the *Jordan Compact*, a courageous shift in direction. With economic growth, trade and stability at its heart, the *Compact* called for investments in Jordan that would create jobs and economic opportunities, promote better trade conditions and support programmes that link humanitarian action to development, thus benefitting Jordanians and refugees alike. As noted in the *Compact*, “Cumulatively these measures could in the coming years provide about 200,000 job opportunities for Syrian refugees while they remain in the country, contributing to the Jordanian economy without competing with Jordanians for jobs.” Following the conference, the Government undertook the necessary administrative changes to allow Syrian refugees to have work permits: the Ministry of

Labour (MoL) began issuing one year renewable work permits in certain occupations open to non-Jordanians, while many administrative requirements were eased.

Employment projects and research began in early 2016 as the livelihoods sector developed, and more agencies and NGOs started to make plans and think strategically on how to support the *Compact*. UNHCR tested the work permit system with a pilot project in the garment sector in collaboration with Better Work



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¹ *A Challenging Market Becomes More Challenging: Jordanian workers, migrant workers and refugees in the Jordanian labour market ILO (June 2017)*

Jordan/International Labour Organisation (ILO). Key lessons were learnt on the importance of gender, cultural attitudes towards the sector, childcare and need for transportation to reach the workplace. UNHCR, together with other partners, continues to encourage women's participation in the labour market, while also promoting access to economic opportunities in areas refugee women have better skills and greater interest in.

Since the issuance of work permits began, a number of additional steps have contributed to more Syrian refugees working formally. Agricultural cooperatives are allowed to facilitate access to work permits in the sector, work permits for Syrians remain free of charge, and a dedicated unit within the MoL ensures procedures are followed and continuously improved. A recent decision of the MoL has also opened the way for refugees in camps to work formally in cities across Jordan; in Zaatari and Azraq camps, refugees with a valid work permit can leave the camp for up to one month and access available jobs throughout the country. This increased mobility is very important to camp refugees and will also help in meeting work permits benchmarks.

Work Permits issued	January - August 2017
Male	24,345
Female	1,600
Total	25,945

In June 2017, further instructions from the MoL adjusted the type of skilled occupations open to foreigners in manufacturing, while "freelance" work permits in construction were facilitated by the ILO through the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, supporting job mobility. By the end of July 2017, the MoL had cumulatively issued and renewed 60,000 work permits. Some 28,117 refugees currently hold a valid work permit.

Partnerships in livelihoods

- The Ministry of Labour (MoL): UNHCR provides direct support to the MoL, where a specific Syrian Refugee Unit has been set up within the Directorate of Policies and International Cooperation.
- The Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD), UNHCR's traditional Government partner, is now directly involved in the work permit initiative by facilitating mobility out of camps.
- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is the main UN Agency working on labour issues, and has also recently adopted the *Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market* thus becoming a key player in the realisation of the *Compact*. The close relationship between UNHCR and the ILO allows for synergies, increased coordination and more effective advocacy.
- UNHCR has direct partnerships with the Danish Refugee Council and the Jordan River Foundation for a livelihoods project that is inspired by graduation out of poverty ideas (a model developed by the Child Poverty Action Group) and looks at alternative pathways of cash to support refugees in employment, self-employment and training.
- In Jordan, UNHCR works closely with the World Bank (WB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); strategic discussions, monitoring and data collection, as well as providing outreach and access to refugees for specific employment and training projects are at the centre of this collaboration.
- UNHCR co-ordinates the Livelihoods Working Group as part of the inter sector coordination for the refugee response; with more than 150 members from UN agencies funds and programmes, NGOs, donor countries and the private sector representatives, the group is a lively forum for exchange and knowledge.

Actions in the livelihood sector: examples

UNHCR job matching: dialogue with the private sector and outreach through community-based job fairs

UNHCR uses its database to pinpoint Syrian refugees of working age and their previous skills. UNHCR then uses its SMS system and helpline to inform refugees about job openings relevant to their profiles. A network of 24 Community Support Committees (CSCs) across the country mobilizes refugees in urban areas, and is an important platform to bring refugees together with employers. Individual employers call UNHCR when they need workforce, and relationships have been developed with some companies which are committed to include refugees as part of their labour force. In August, UNHCR, ACTED and the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) organized a large job fair in Sahab, with Jordanian and refugee job seekers invited from Amman, Madaba and Sahab to meet with over 50 employers.

Danish Refugee Council and the Jordan River Foundation Opportunity Project

The Opportunity Project will support 500 Syrian refugees to find positions with employers, set up their own small businesses, and/or take part in training and apprenticeships. Support through small start-up grants and financial literacy will be provided, with the aim of refugee families becoming less dependent on cash assistance and strengthening their assets to successfully graduate towards increased self-reliance.



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Work permit periodic analysis

To better understand refugees' perceptions and the reasons that challenge formalization of work, UNHCR, the World Bank and the ILO in coordination with Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the MoL have set up a periodic analysis of working Syrians. They will survey a sample of 1,000 refugees with or without work permits, as well as employers, twice a year to better understand trends and motivations. The first data collection was undertaken in August through the UNHCR helpline and UNHCR volunteers. Results show a small minority (11 percent) of working Syrians who do not want a work permit, as well as pointing out that obstacles are found with employers, who are not always willing to obtain a work permit for them. While refugees were said to be concerned about losing assistance if they applied for a work permit, the survey found that just five percent of refugees think obtaining a work permit means they will lose their cash assistance or the opportunity to be resettled to a third country.

Financial inclusion project

UNHCR promotes financial inclusion of refugees: collaborating with existing Financial Services providers so that they can offer their services to refugee clients; advocating for greater financial inclusion of refugees; and ensuring that existing documentation expands access to banking and other financial services with adequate protection safeguards. Greater financial inclusion aims at strengthening livelihoods, self-reliance and resilience of refugees especially when they run or set up their own businesses.

Camp employment centres: increased mobility and support to ILO

The Zaatari Employment Office (“ZOE”), officially inaugurated on 22 August 2017, is a unique UNHCR and ILO initiative to increase mobility of camp residents and to provide employment information: it will allow refugees to receive counselling services, advice and information from the ILO experts present daily in the office and will facilitate job fairs where employers can meet and recruit refugees. A specific database programmed by UNHCR will record the work permits and facilitate the movement of the workers in and out of the camps, helping them make the most of their new jobs through this increased mobility.

Support to artisanal work

A small group of Syrian refugee women with experience in sewing and tailoring are trained by SEP Jordan, a fashion business, in Jerash Palestinian Camp. The pilot project objective is to introduce the trainees into the SEP workforce as freelancers, and encourage interaction with Palestinian refugees who have been settled in Jordan for 50 years as well as facilitating economic empowerment.



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Cash for work

The cash for work scheme (also called Incentive Based Volunteering) is an important tool for short term employment in the camps and an important cash injection in the camps’ economy. In addition, it helps refugees to gain work experience in selected sectors. Each month 6,500 refugees in Zataari camp and over 1,700 in Azraq camp have a temporary occupation; they are recruited as volunteers by many humanitarian organisations with an active presence in the camps.

Communication with refugees, outreach and helpline referrals

Communicating with communities on a daily basis in the field, UNHCR can help partners involved in livelihoods programming to reach out to refugees in targeting and explaining their projects, and ensuring that actions and policies, for example in terms of legality and formalization of work, are understood by all. UNHCR partners with the ILO, EBRD/People First, Jordan Education for Employment (JEFE), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Better Work Jordan, Caritas and many other NGOs in reaching out to refugees through focus group discussions, town hall meetings, SMS and leaflets. UNHCR helpline now also “tickets” refugee requests for information and counselling on jobs and trainings opportunities, coaching in business and right to work/legal issues. Refugees are put in touch with livelihoods staff and referred to services.

Research and evidence

In 2017 UNHCR Jordan supported the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with a targeting study on refugees working in agriculture. The study was conducted in four governorates of Jordan: Amman, Madaba, Irbid and Mafraq. The analysis was carried out to ensure better targeting and to identify main wealth groups and livelihoods strategies. UNHCR contributes regularly in many studies conducted by academic institutions, independent researchers and humanitarian/development actors aiming at improving the livelihoods framework for refugees in Jordan.

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