

Timeline of major policies influencing the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Jordan

Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, the Government of Jordan (GoJ) has introduced various policies, regulations and instructions that directly impact the participation of Syrian refugees in the country's labor market. For the most part, these are restrictive, especially when it comes to higher-skilled professions, and tend to push refugees into Jordan's already large informal economy. The adoption of the Jordan Compact (2016) resulted in the steady increase of Syrian refugee participation in the formal economy. By January 2020, 179,455 work permits had been issued to Syrian refugees, nevertheless, a reported 60% of Syrian refugees' workers in Jordan continue to work informally.

Persisting challenges:

1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 35% of Syrian refugees' workers participating in a survey conducted between April-June 2020 reporting being permanently laid off, and 95% reporting a reduction in household income as a result of the pandemic.
2. Misconceptions among refugees that formal employment will result in losing humanitarian aid.
3. Majority of jobs offered are for low-skilled professions and offer low wages.
4. Closed and restricted employment occupation lists which limit opportunities for highly skilled or highly educated refugees.
5. Demanding and time-consuming requirements for issuing a work permit that may deter employers from going through the process.
6. Labor restrictions also affect refugee women, who face additional challenges related to cultural and societal norms, and lack of childcare support.

2011

GoJ adopts an open-door policy regarding the entry of Syrian refugees into Jordan, but shifts to a more restrictive management of the border over time, and thus controls the number and profile of new entries into the country.

2014

JULY GoJ enforces the official refugee camp "bailout" policies, which require refugees to obtain sponsorship from a Jordanian citizen and pay a fee to leave the camps.

2015

GoJ suspends the "bailout" policy and initiates an ongoing urban verification exercise to reissue new Ministry of Interior (MoI) service cards, return confiscated identity documents, and biometrically register Syrian refugees living in urban areas. The MoI service card is a legal residency card that regularizes Syrian refugees' status and provides access to basic services and humanitarian and development assistance.

APRIL Ministry of Labor, General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, Jordan Chamber of Industry, and the Social Security Corporation endorse a national framework for regulating the informal economy. The document sets out the necessary steps for transitioning to a formal economy and decent work conditions through supporting both informal enterprises and informal workers.

2016

FEB GoJ and European Union adopt a compact agreement at the high-level London conference, aiming to improve access to education and legal employment opportunities for Syrian refugees in the country, including agreeing to issue 200,000 work permits. Other commitments include the introduction of grace periods for refugees working without a work permit, waiver of fees to obtain a work permit in selected sectors, simplification of document requirements for employment, delinking of work permit from employers in the agricultural sector, and the introduction of special economic zones (SEZ) and accompanying relaxed Rule of Origin for companies in these zones.

NOV Council of Ministers introduces the home-based businesses (HBB) policy to allow Syrians to register and operate HBBs. Syrian refugees inside camps are allowed to operate HBBs in all sectors (including closed sectors), while those outside camps are only allowed to operate business in key sectors (food processing, tailoring and handicrafts), although they had to obtain a professional license to do so. As per the policy, a refugee can maintain a 100% ownership share in the HBB, and the 50,000 Jordanian Dinar cash deposit requirement is waived. Nevertheless, very few refugees manage to register their HBB due to the need for a valid passport – which the majority do not have. There still remain limitations to starting businesses outside the home, including the need to enter into a joint venture with a Jordanian partner.

2018

DEC European Union commits to extending the Rule of Origin access to qualifying companies outside of special economic zones (throughout Jordan) once Jordan has granted 60,000 active work permits to Syrian refugees. This is in response to previous shortcomings in the Jordan Compact (previous SEZs were far from where most Syrian refugees are located and offered working conditions and wages that were often unsatisfactory), and incentivizes Syrian refugee employment by opening new job opportunities for Syrians in places closer to where they live and in working environments which better match their preferences.

GoJ commits to permanently extending the free work permits for Syrian refugees but the policy indicates that the grace period for Syrian refugees is extended until the end of 2020 only. The policy gives Syrian refugees time to rectify their violations, and exempts them from the medical examination requirements until a permit is issued.

FEB Jordan establishes a new partnership with the international community, the "Jordan Taskforce", chaired by the United Kingdom and Jordan, to monitor progress on the country's economic transformation and growth.

2019

AUG Municipality of Amman makes amendments regarding issuing licenses for home-based professions for Syrian refugees, with the reported aim of supporting those working informally to formalize their businesses. The number of allowed professions is raised to 71 professions from 47 professions. The amendments also facilitate current licensing procedures, decrease the basic fees for obtaining a license from 30-200 Jordanian dinars as a basic fee to between 20-50 Jordanian dinars, and allow home-based professionals to employ only one employee.

OCT GoJ increases the sectors in which non-Jordanians are prohibited from working. New list of 15 closed categories and 13 restricted categories is issued, including office work, sales, hairdressing, drivers and guards.

Sources

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