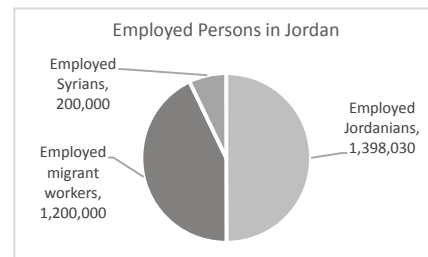


## A CHALLENGING MARKET BECOMES MORE CHALLENGING Jordanian workers, migrant workers and refugees in the Jordanian labour market ILO (June 2017)

### Jordan's labour market – an overview

Jordan's rapidly growing population reached 9.6 million in 2016 – a figure which includes a significant number of Syrian refugees and migrant workers. There are now three distinct groups of workers in the kingdom: Jordanians, migrant workers and Syrian refugees. It is estimated that around 1.4 million Jordanians are currently working in Jordan, with another 210,000 unemployed. Although precise numbers are not available, recent estimates suggest that there may be as many non-Jordanians working in the kingdom as there are Jordanians. Jordan recently committed itself to incorporating 200,000 Syrians into work in return for improved access to the European market, increased investment and soft loans. Nevertheless, the entry of Syrians has exacerbated an already challenging situation. Because all three groups are present in significant numbers, it is inevitable that the groups impact each other. For this reason, the challenges of any group – including Jordanians – must be addressed within the context of the labour market as a whole.

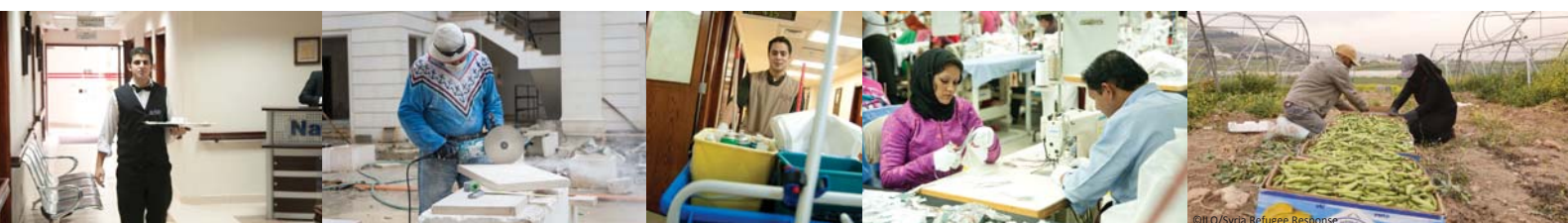


### ILO research project

Financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the ILO has conducted a study which aims to provide practical solutions to three potentially conflicting policy aims in Jordan's labour market: boosting Jordanian employment, ensuring decent working conditions for all including migrant workers, and incorporating Syrian refugees into the workforce.

Entitled ***"A Challenging Market Becomes More Challenging: Jordanian Workers, Migrant Workers and Refugees in the Jordanian Labour Market"***, the report examines five specific sectors: agriculture, construction, domestic work, manufacturing and tourism. Its findings and recommendations are based on thorough literature review and comprehensive primary data gathering among nearly 1,000 informants, including employers, Jordanian and foreign workers, government officials and other key actors.

It is hoped that these evidence-based recommendations will be used to advance policy dialogue in addressing Jordan's complex labour market challenges, and that they offer food for thought for other countries facing mixed migration challenges on their respective labour markets, and more broadly for the deliberations concerning the Global Compacts on migrants and refugees.



## Report findings

- Far from having an immutable “culture of shame,” Jordanians are open to all sectors and occupations if working conditions are decent. Jordanian workers articulate specific factors that impact their willingness and eagerness to work, whatever the sector or occupation. These include: on-time payment of wages, reimbursement for overtime, working hours that are predictable and sustainable, production methods that emphasise skill rather than manual labour, and recognition of effort. In particular, Jordanian workers emphasised their desire for a job that uses and builds skills, and in which effort is rewarded through career advancement, wage increases and acknowledgement of a job well done. For their part, employers want workers who are dedicated to their jobs. Although they express it differently, both sides want the same thing: a long-term commitment and a focus on productivity that results in both higher profits and higher wages.

*“Youth going into any job have expectations to progress up a career ladder. Jordanian youth will be willing to work if they can feel that there is a chance they will be promoted if they keep improving their skills and experience.”*

*(Head of Better Work Jordan, manufacturing)*

- The working conditions prevalent among migrant workers and Syrian refugees makes it difficult for Jordanian workers to compete for jobs with non-Jordanians. Late-payment, non-payment for overtime, long and unpredictable working hours, and heavy reliance on low-productivity, physically demanding methods are common challenges faced by non-Jordanian workers. In agriculture and domestic work, payment delays of several months are common. While payment for overtime is well-enforced in parts of the manufacturing sector, workers in tourism and other sectors are often not compensated. In all sectors, migrant workers reported the difficulties they face with heavy manual labour, which becomes increasingly unsustainable as they age. Despite the efforts of inspectors, enforcement of working conditions is a challenge, especially given resource constraints and the current focus on migration status of non-Jordanian workers.

*“I work 12 or 13 hours a day, 7 days a week. I often have to stay up all night and I am always on call. I wish I was paid by the hour and could get my salary at the end of the month, not the end of the season.”*

*(Egyptian, agriculture worker)*

*“We try to follow up on all aspects of the law, including Occupational Safety and Health. One of the problems is that we don't have enough time or even vehicles to do it all. Sometimes you can only get access to a vehicle for inspections when it is a joint visit with the police intended to check on work permits.”*

*(Labour Inspector)*

- Although the laws governing the migration and work permit system are sensible, a disconnect has emerged between the regulations surrounding the law and the reality on the ground. Increasingly, the private sector is looking for short-term and part-time employment arrangements. Moreover, the high costs of formalisation means that many workers remain outside of the system.

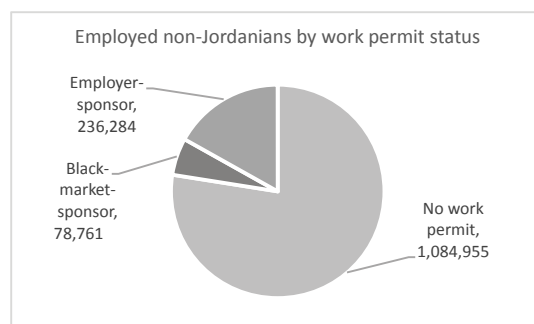
*“We need to find a mechanism where the worker can easily move from one employer to the other. Currently the kafeel controls the worker. If the worker is independent, this offers flexibility to the contractors who can hire workers on a short-term basis from a pool of legal migrant workers without the obligation of one year employment.”*

*(Construction contractor)*

Many migrant workers and refugees do not hold work permits for a number of reasons. Among those who hold work permits, a significant share rely on black market work permits, purchased from Jordanian sponsors without having a true employment relationship.



- Despite the fact that the sponsor controls the work permit process, non-Jordanians are aware that they themselves are held accountable and they see the primary benefit of work permits as protection from deportation. Although some individuals see work permits as a means to improve working conditions, many others believe that work permits affect working conditions negatively because sponsors control the worker's mobility and are able to engage in extortion. As a result of the disconnects between the principles of the system and today's economic reality, the Government's ability to monitor the non-Jordanian workforce is constrained; there are shortages of workers in some areas but excess supply in others; Jordanian workers feel that working conditions are not effectively enforced; and migrant workers feel vulnerable vis-à-vis deportation and exploitation.



- Although comprising only a fifth of the total number of non-Jordanians workers, the presence of Syrians has introduced a new dynamic in the labour market. Challenges have emerged. Unlike migrant workers, Syrians have their families with them and are unable to work under some of the conditions feasible for migrant workers who come to Jordan alone. Also, social tensions have emerged as the increased

*"We pay a thousand dinars to the kafeel. I know the government takes around 300 dinars and the middleman and the kafeel – which in many cases we never meet – split the profit amongst themselves. We understand how they work and they are making a lot of profit off of us, but we have no other choice."*  
(Egyptian, manufacturing worker)

*"I am willing to work in anything. But I cannot leave this city if the job I get does not enable me to rent a place and sustain my family. Here I am living without any expenses because I have relatives, so I can get by."*  
(Syrian, unemployed)

because Syrians are already in the country. Third, despite generally low levels of education, many Syrians have strong entrepreneurial skills as well as skills in trades. Fourth, Syrians living in camps are available to work, including in nearby manufacturing zones.

labour supply appears to have suppressed wages. Yet, despite these challenges, new opportunities have emerged. First, whereas migrant workers send the bulk of their wages back home as remittances, Syrian wages are spent inside Jordan. Second, recruitment costs can be dramatically reduced

*"Syrians should not be competing with Jordanians. But they certainly deserve priority over people from other countries. Syrians aren't going anywhere and they just want to live and work. The problem, though, is that Syrians are bringing down wages."*  
(Jordanian, unemployed)

## Report recommendations

### **Enable Jordanians to compete for work by ensuring a clear and harmonised set of working conditions for all jobs. This can be achieved through:**

- Enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Labour to deliver on its core mandate of advocating and enforcing working conditions, including through social dialogue with workers and employers, and effective labour inspection.
- Adopting a mechanism to address late payments through electronic payment systems.
- Revising and enforcing payment of overtime wages to rebalance the incentives of workers and employers.
- Increasing attention to Occupational Safety and Health.
- Expanding programmes that link qualified workers with employers including for part-time and short-term employment.
- Raising awareness among employers and workers to reduce unintentional violations and to promote labour dispute resolution.
- Building on the existing common ground between employers and workers regarding career paths through workplace committees, training and assessments.

### ***Develop programmes aimed at increasing employment of Jordanians. This can be achieved through:***

- Continuing the reform of vocational education and training, including exposure to career options and counseling at schools.
- Developing alternatives to traditional full-time permanent employment, including any necessary adaptations to social security.
- Providing affordable and reliable transportation to address concerns about cost and time spent commuting.
- Support female employment by encouraging safe and convenient workplaces as well as opportunities to work from home.

### ***Consider modifications of the regulations governing migration and work permits to provide private sector access to a formal part-time and short-term workforce and to protect both workers and employers.***

- For refugees and migrant workers already in the country the work permit process can be the responsibility of the worker, rather than the employer. This can be accomplished most efficiently by direct interaction between the worker and the Ministry of Labour or through a competent third party organization such as cooperatives.
- Recruitment of additional migrant workers from outside the country should be carefully considered in light of the large existing workforce and with measures taken to protect employers from loss of recruitment fees and workers from exploitation.

### ***Address the specific situation of refugees, as distinct from migrant workers. This can be achieved through:***

- Providing a simple mechanism for self-employed Syrians to formalise their status.
- Expanding training, certification and job matching programmes that help Syrians refine their skills to suit Jordanian production methods and to establish themselves in the labour market.
- Developing a mechanism that encourages work while providing social protection in case of job loss.
- Reducing misinformation-fueled social tension by raising awareness of existing policies and programmes.
- Enhancing opportunities for refugee camp residents to work outside the camp, including in nearby industrial zones.
- Streamlining security clearance to enable Syrians to engage in a wider range of open occupations.

### ***Address sector-specific labour market challenges through:***

- Developing a regulatory framework for agriculture.
- Encouraging the adoption of techniques that increase labour productivity in order to make tasks more acceptable to Jordanians and to shift toward a high-value economy.
- Addressing the unique challenges of the domestic work sector, including through alternatives to home-based inspections.
- Supporting alternatives to the live-in model of domestic work, including childcare centers that can provide employment for Jordanian and Syrian workers.
- Reviewing and reconsidering quotas and closed occupations through social dialogue to ensure regulations support employment policy and economic growth.

**The Government of Jordan has an essential role to play in articulating the type of economy Jordan aspires to have, and in aligning incentives of employers and workers with that vision. The international community should play its role: contributing to the long-term welfare of Syrian refugees, supporting Jordanians cope with macroeconomic shocks that resulted from regional crises, and promoting decent work for all and inclusive economic growth.**



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra



International  
Labour  
Organization