

A Decade In Search of Work: A review of policy commitments for Syrian refugees' livelihoods in Jordan

March 2021 Update

This document gives an overview of policy changes implemented in Jordan to expand access to economic opportunities for Syrian refugees since June 2020. It compares the current policies to the commitments that were made since 2016 at the annual “Supporting Syria and the Region” Conferences and resulting agreements¹.

The table below provides an update for the situation in Jordan compared to the analysis in IRC's latest report '[A Decade In Search of Work: A review of policy commitments for Syrian refugees' livelihoods in Jordan and Lebanon](#)' from June 2020.

Jordan's policy commitments in line with the Compact	Updates since June 2020
Allow Syrian refugees to apply for work permits . Provide up to 200,000 job opportunities for Syrian refugees by the end of 2018.	215,668 permits issued since 1 Jan 2016 (including renewals) at end of December 2020, with 38,756 permits issued during 2020. Note: It is not possible to know how many of these represent new employment, as these figures include permit renewals, and it is not clear whether having a permit actually improved the working conditions compared to their employment in those sectors without permits prior to the Compact.
Ensure that the cost of obtaining the right to work for Syrian refugees is permanently waived .	Extension of the grace period for Syrian refugees and exempting them from work permit fees until end of December 2021.
Continue easing access for Syrian refugees into the formal labour market: consider expanding the sectors and occupations open to Syrian refugees, mainly at technical level with a particular focus on women's participation, in a way that does not create competition with Jordanians.	The current sectors open to Syrian refugees to apply for work permits in (agriculture, construction, food and beverage services, manufacturing, and wholesale and retail trade) are not expanded. Within these allowed sectors, the Government of Jordan decided to allow for increased use of flexible work permits, previously only possible in agriculture and construction: “<i>A worker who has obtained a permit may work flexibly for any employer in the professions permitted for non-Jordanians within any of the sectors or economic activities, without being restricted to a specific geographical area</i>”. The new regulation was published at the end of December 2020. Implementation has not yet started.
In calculating the proportion of non-Jordanians working across multiple sectors,	No update - Syrians were previously already excluded from the maximum quota for workforce Jordanisation in the manufacturing sector.

¹ For an overview of agreements and key commitments, see the table on page 7 in [A Decade In Search of Work](#).

exempt refugees from possible reductions in the percentage of non-Jordanians.	
Promoting women's inclusion and economic empowerment, including through government reforms.	The percentage of work permits issued to women slightly increased from 5.8% in 2019 to 6.8% during 2020. The 2021 Women, Business and the Law World Bank report, measuring the laws and regulations that affect women's economic opportunities, finds that Jordan made no improvements on the indicators related to workplace opportunities – Jordan policies remain gender unequal on 100% of these indicators. Jordan did improve in two areas compared to 2020: mobility (women can apply for passports in the same way as men) and entrepreneurship (the law now prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender). Overall Jordanian policies remain gender unequal in 53% of the areas measured by the World Bank (compared to 59% in 2020).
Allow Syrian refugees (by the summer of 2016) to formalise their existing businesses and to set up new, tax-generating businesses.	No changes to current policies - Registration of home-based businesses (HBBs) permitted for non-Jordanians since December 2018, with Syrian refugees living outside the camps allowed to operate HBBs in food processing, handicrafts, and tailoring, provided that they obtain professional licenses. Capital and work permit requirements remain demanding and complex, including the need for a valid passport. During 2020, only 23 additional home-based businesses registered and licensed for Syrian refugees.
Create a clear framework for the set-up of joint ventures between Syrians and Jordanians, especially focusing on women and youth, making sure that the rights of both parties are upheld, ownership clarified and access to finance facilitated.	No changes to current policies on joint ventures, ambiguous legal requirements remain. On access to finance, the Central Bank is promoting digital financial inclusion through mobile money accounts as the solution for Syrian refugees for savings, payments and money transfers – but this industry is still underdeveloped despite recent efforts to scale up mobile money.
Any restrictions preventing small economic activities within the camps hosting Syrian refugees, and on commerce with people outside the camps, will be removed.	No changes to current policies, HBB in camps remain allowed in all sectors.
From Amended Rules of Origin agreement with EU (until 2030): The Government of Jordan should report quarterly to the EU whether 60.000 legal and active job opportunities were achieved - in particular, corresponding to the active work permits or other measurable means corresponding to legal and active employment. Once this target is reached, the requirement of having 15% Syrian workers within each facility is lifted and the overall provisions of the agreement are simplified.	No public information available on the number of 'legal and active job opportunities' or on reporting of Jordan to the EU.