

Article

Syrian Refugees' Integration Policies in Jordanian Labor Market

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Abstract: The Government of Jordan declared that there are more than one million Syrian refugees in Jordan while UNHCR statistics show that the number is about 700,000. Nonetheless, it is still a large problem for Jordan, especially since there is no real solution that seems to be looming on the horizon for the Syrian crisis. Consequently, that means that those refugees' stay in Jordan is indefinite. This fact requires Jordan to work towards solutions to avoid the warehousing of those refugees in camps and to integrate them in Jordanian community to ease their stay in Jordan. To achieve that integration, Jordan must facilitate the Syrians' access to the Jordanian labor market so they can achieve self-reliance. In February 2016, donors gathered in London for the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference, known as the London Conference, to mobilize funding for the needs of the people affected by the Syrian crisis. In that conference, Jordan pledged to facilitate Syrian refugees' access to the labor market. This paper will study the process of Syrian integration in Jordanian society by discussing the policies and the procedures that Jordan has developed to facilitate the Syrians' access to the labor market. The event study method combined with interviews and desk research were used to evaluate the new policies and procedures developed to facilitate this access. It was found that Jordan succeeded in creating a legal and procedural environment that facilitates Syrians' access to formal jobs, and the Syrians went a long way toward integration in Jordan. Nonetheless, they are still not fully integrated.



Citation: AlShwawra, A. Syrian Refugees' Integration Policies in Jordanian Labor Market. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 7234. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13137234>

Academic Editor: Nick Drydakos

Received: 4 May 2021
Accepted: 24 June 2021
Published: 28 June 2021

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Keywords: integration; Syrian refugees; Syrian crisis; Jordan; warehousing; self-reliance; labor market

1. Introduction

Years have passed since the first spark of the Syrian revolution was triggered in Dara'a. The social fabric of the Syrian society was dismantled into sectarian fault lines with millions of fatalities, injuries, and refugees. With no real solution looming on the horizon, the suffering of Syrians is growing, especially those who were forced to leave their homes seeking shelter. Historical evidence shows that such bloody, protracted, and long conflicts keep refugees in limbo, and without any durable solution, those refugees find themselves with no future but being "warehoused" in refugee camps for ever (for example, Kakuma and Ifo refugee camps).

The US Committee for Refugees first applied the term "warehousing" to refugees in its World Refugee Survey in 2004 [1] and they defined it as "the practice of keeping refugees in protracted situations of restricted mobility, enforced idleness, and dependency—their lives on indefinite hold—in violation of their basic rights under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention" [2]. This term sets off alarm bells for the international community regarding the world status of refugees. In all production management systems such as Kaizen, six Sigma, lean production, etc., warehoused inventory is considered a waste that must be minimized in order to maximize the profits. In warehouses, money loss accumulates on the shelves in terms of booking the capital prices for this item out of the production cycle, the cost of the space, employees and services required to store this item safely, the risk of losing the item through time, and the risk that this item can attract other infections and risks such as rats, fire, etc.

The above is more serious in case of refugees; keeping refugees to languish in refugee camps where they only depend on humanitarian organizations and NGOs to provide

them with assistance and food aids with limited or no opportunity for self-reliance or local integration could be disastrous for both host country and refugees. This includes the losses accumulating from keeping the refugees out of the developing wheel of the host country, the cost of space, services and employees required to provide the basic livelihoods for them, the risk of refugees' conversion into passive and unqualified members over time, and the great risk of directing refugees to illegal activities that could risk national security.

Thus, the international community, led by the UNHCR, views that any refugee has a right to a safe and permanent solution to end his refugee status through one of three means: voluntary repatriation to the country of origin in safety and dignity; local integration in the country of asylum; or resettlement to a third country [3]. Even the UNHCR claims that "there is no hierarchy of durable solutions", voluntary repatriation is "the most preferred solution" as indicated by UNHCR executive committee in conclusion 79 of 1996 [4]. This precedence over resettlement and local integration has grown over the years due to the reluctance of host states to accommodate large numbers of refugees because of the negative economic, environmental, social, and security impacts associated with the increasingly restrictive asylum climate, especially among the prosperous members of the international community.

However, in conflicts with a protracted nature, it can be a long time before voluntary repatriation takes place [5]. In the Syrian conflict, it might take more time due to the sectarian nature which emerged throughout the conflict years, and the increasing tendency for vengeance with only a little space for forgiveness and remission. This can be seen in the statement of Syrian military leader Issam Zaherelden who publicly threatened any Syrian refugees thinking of returning to their homes in Syria with death [6].

Resettlement to a third country was only considered for a small portion of refugees on a selective basis [7]. Much evidence shows that this option is more like a symbol of solidarity than willingness to accept large number of refugees. Usually, the international community prefers to provide money to support the refugees in the country of asylum than taking the refugees crisis to their backyard [8]. This makes the only available options for the refugee crisis either local integration or "warehousing" refugees in camps for an unknown period.

Immigrant integration has received increased attention in recent years. This study aims to answer the question of what impact the policies and procedures adopted by the Jordanian government have had on the Syrian refugees' access to the Jordanian labor market. To do so, the paper starts by reviewing the different definitions of refugees' integration in literature and in practice in order to reach to the definition adopted for the purpose of this paper. Then, further statistics about the Syrians in Jordan are presented to give a better understanding of their current situation in Jordan. After that, the results of an event study method used to analyze the policies adopted by the Government of Jordan to facilitate the Syrians' integration into Jordanian society are presented. Lastly, face-to-face interviews and desk research are presented to interpret some of this paper's findings, in addition to comparing those findings with the findings of other reports and studies.

2. Methodology

Standard event study methodology is an analytical tool that is frequently used in literature due to its simplicity [9]. It has been used in refugee studies [10–12]. Event study assesses whether there are any statistically significant changes accompanying specific events [13]. The event in this work is defined as any governmental intervention in the labor market by changing policies or procedures. The changes are sought in the variations of the number of work permits issued to Syrian refugees per month extracted from the Jordanian Ministry of Labor reports. Therefore, the objective of this methodology in this research is to see if the implementation of a particular policy or procedure by the Jordanian government has resulted in some statistically significant changes in the number of work permits issued to Syrians after it was put in place. The period of interest is between January 2016 and August 2017.

After that, face-to-face interviews were held with both Syrian refugee workers and Jordanian employers to investigate the willingness of Syrian refugee workers to join social security. The interviewees were chosen based on non-probability sampling techniques, which are more useful for qualitative research [14]. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to obtain the required sample size. An initial list of desired interviewees was determined to cover different working sectors. Then, snowball sampling, in which the initial list of interviewees nominated another interviewee, and the later nominee another and so on, was carried out. The chosen sample was intended to cover different working sectors, different ages, both genders, and both employers and workers. Based on that, the interviewee had to be either a Syrian refugee that works in Jordan or an employer that provides a job for a Syrian refugee. It is worth mentioning that it is possible for the Syrian refugee worker to either be an employee or self-employed.

The interviewees participated in this study on voluntary basis. The research objective was explained for each interviewee before the interview and it was clear for them that the collected data would be exclusively used for this research work. Each interviewee has the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, he/she had the right to reject answering any question or reject using certain information for the research. It was assured for each interviewee that his/her identity will remain anonymous and a coding system was used to ensure that. An interview consent form was given to each one of them and they had the right to ask any question about the research, the interview, and the consent form. Verbal consent (for anonymity) was taken from each interviewee twice before and after the interview. Furthermore, he/she was asked at the end of interview if he/she did not want to use any information for the research.

During the interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire was used by modifying the questions in accordance with the respondents' qualification, working sector, and position. The interview questions focused on three main aspects, which were work status, social security, and future plans. The work status aspect was designed to collect data about the interviewees such as their salaries and working hours, if they had a valid work permits, and if they had joined the social security. The social security aspect was designed to investigate the Syrian refugee workers' willingness to join social security and their reasons for that. Lastly, the future plans aspect was designed to give more explanation about their answers in the previous two aspects by knowing their level of satisfaction over their current residing and work status and their perspective for the future. Further details about the interviews are given in the 'Joining the Social Security System' section.

In the meantime, the pandemic presents new challenges for the Syrian refugees to access to the Jordanian labor market. This is the case as a consequence of the major lockdowns and economic difficulties that Jordan witnessed during 2020. In light of this, this study briefly touched upon it at the end of the paper. Due to the flight restriction in Jordan, only phone interviews with two Jordanian activists in the field of refugees were done. Those two activists have daily contact with Syrian refugees in East Amman and they are aware about the refugees' up-to-date life, work status, and challenges. While a full discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 is beyond the scope of this study, these updates increase the significance of the puzzles explored regarding the integration of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labor market.

3. Definition of Integration

The concept of integration is highly contested. There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory, or model of immigrant and refugee integration [15]. Robinson stated that "integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most"; he added that there is little chance to unify the definition since that concept is individualized, contested, and contextual [16]. Crisp defined local integration as "a process which leads to a durable solution for refugees"; however, he admitted that there is a lot of mixing between the concept of integration and other concepts such as "local settlement" and "assimilation" [17]. Kuhlman sees that refugees' integration indicates that refugees

become a part of the host society where the host population and refugees can live together in acceptable way, yet refugees maintain their own identity [18].

Ager and Strang tried to explore whether an operational definition of the concept, reflecting commonalities in perceptions of what constitutes “successful” integration in a range of relevant stakeholders, is possible [19]. They developed a framework that suggests ten core domains reflecting normative understandings of integration and provides a potential structure for the analysis of relevant outcomes. The domains varied from basic integration domains that include employment, housing, education, and health to the more advanced one in the form of citizenship, as shown in Figure 1.

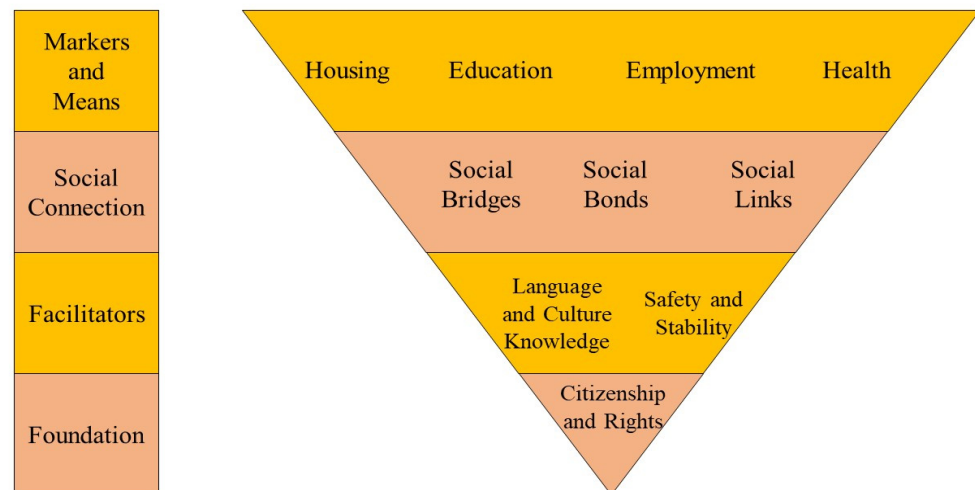


Figure 1. Core domains of integration. Adapted from ref. [19].

The UNHCR defined integration as “a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and ongoing process” that required a refugee’s preparedness to adapt to the host society life style without losing his/her own culture, and the creation of a welcoming environment that supports refugees to achieve long-term economic stability and social adjustment by the host society [20]. This makes integration a “two-way street” process involving insiders and outsiders [21]. For successful integration, policies may focus on both improving the people’s attitude towards refugees and preparing the refugees for integration [22].

It is a multi-dimensional process in terms that requires the actual participation of the refugee in the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political life of the new society [23].

For this paper, integration is defined as **legal, economic, and social processes that allow refugees to achieve self-reliance**. Self-reliance means “the economic and social ability of an individual, household or community to meet essential needs in a sustainable manner and with dignity” [24]. By this definition, social integration does not necessarily mean that refugees must gain the citizenship of the host country; rather, it focuses on granting them a wide range of rights and entitlements to become entirely self-reliant and to develop close social ties with the host community. Therefore, for this definition, free access to the labor market is the main pillar for local integration, which agrees with the literature [22]. Based on that, for this paper, the level of integration was measured by the ease of refugee access to the labor market, and the policies that were studied were the ones put in place to facilitate this access in reference to Syrians in Jordan.

By this definition, local integration gives the refugees a chance to develop their human potential to make a positive contribution to the economy and the society of the host country, decreases the possibilities that refugees, especially young males, engage in illicit and anti-social activities, and gives them the skills and motivation required to reintegrate in their country of origin if it is possible for them to return.

It is worth mentioning that the integration of refugees in the labor market is more difficult than the integration of economic immigrants [25–28]. This happens due to the different characteristics of the two groups. On one hand, economic immigrants are prepared

to go to the host country, and usually they are males of working age [25,28,29]. On the other hand, refugees were forced to leave their country of origin and they represent wider age ranges and gender distribution. Other factors that differentiate between the two groups include language, education, health, and the neighborhood. These differences lead to a variation in the labor market outcomes between the economic immigrants and refugees. This variation in the labor market outcomes is usually referred to as the “refugee gap”.

Recent studies show that this refugee gap diminishes over time and sometimes the refugees’ labor market outcomes exceed those for economic immigrants in the following years [25,27,28]. This can be attributed to the increase in the refugees’ language skills, education level, knowledge of the host country, and familiarity with new culture and norms. Another important aspect is that refugees are less likely to go back to their country of origin. This motivates them to engage more in the labor market and to invest more in the host country’s human capital [25,28,30]. Since Jordan and Syria have a lot of commonalities in term of language, culture, and norms, one can assume that this makes the integration of the Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labor market easier than the Syrians’ integration in Western countries’ labor markets. However, the legislation and policies followed by the Jordanian government are a crucial factor in facilitating this integration, so it is important to analyze those policies and that legislation.

Another important aspect in labor market integration is the mental health of the refugees. Richmond suggested that refugees often suffer from traumatic experiences that may hinder their participation in economic activities [31], whereas Bernard discussed that economic immigrants can also be susceptible to the effect of cultural shock and homesickness. He suggested that both economic immigrants and refugees can be hurt psychologically but the differences between refugees’ wounds and those of economic immigrants “appear to be those of degree rather than type” [29]. Ruiz and Vargas-Silva’s analysis showed that the types of health problems experienced by refugees and other immigrant groups to UK are mostly the same. However, the main difference is that refugees are more likely to report mental health problems compared to non-refugees [28]. The length of the waiting period until the refugee’s asylum application is processed also has an important role in their mental health. The lengthy asylum procedures may worsen the mental health problems and sufficient mental health care in this period is required [27,28,32,33]. This means that keeping the refugees waiting or warehousing them in camps will subsequently lead to more mental health problems. Therefore, integrating refugees in the host country and facilitating their access to the labor market can help them overcome some of their “nightmares”.

4. Syrians in Jordan

Starting from 2011, hundreds of thousands of Syrians fled to Jordan looking for shelter. Formal statistics show that about 1.3 million Syrians live in Jordan currently [34], only half of them registered with the UNHCR as refugees. About 80% of Syrians live in urban areas [35], Figure 2, which exerts extra pressure on the infrastructure [36,37]. In some cities, the number of Syrians exceeds the number of Jordanians. Figure 3 shows the percentage of Syrian population in some Jordanian provinces [34].

Statistics show that 45% of the Syrian refugees are between 18 and 59 years of age, which is considered the working age [35], Figure 4. Before 2016, it was prohibited to hire refugees in Jordan and the refugees were not entitled to work permits from the Jordanian Ministry of Labor (MOL). Due to poverty, the high living cost in Jordan, and the need to find a job, refugees developed more contacts and relationships with employers in the host communities in Jordan and made their progress in the informal economy [38]. A report issued in 2013 by the International Labor Organization indicates that there were approximately 160,000 Syrians working illegally in Jordan for low wages [39]. More than half of them were in the three main Jordanian cities (Amman: 41426, Zarqa: 14063, and Irbid: 35690) [40].

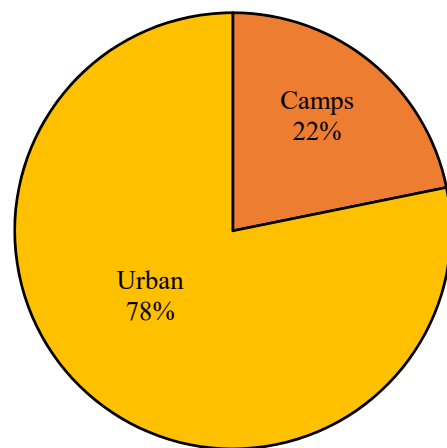


Figure 2. Registered Syrian refugees’ distribution in camps and urban areas. Data Source: [35].

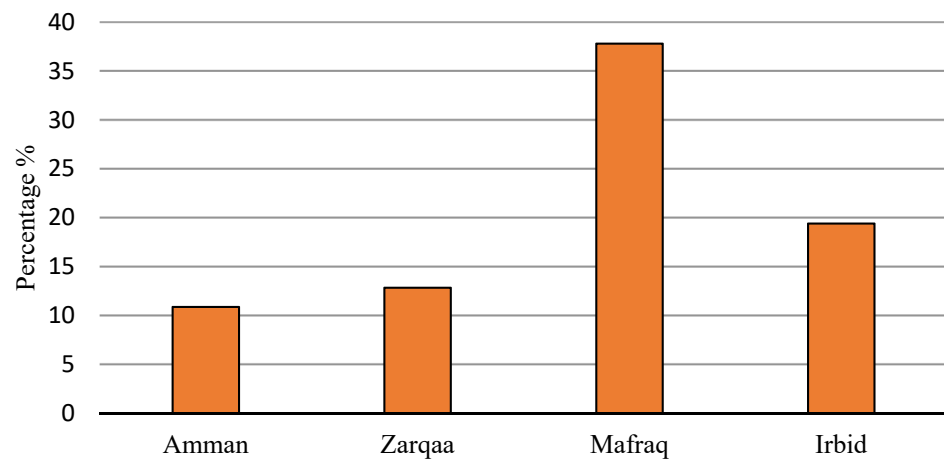


Figure 3. Percentage of Syrian population in some Jordanian governorates. Data source: [35].

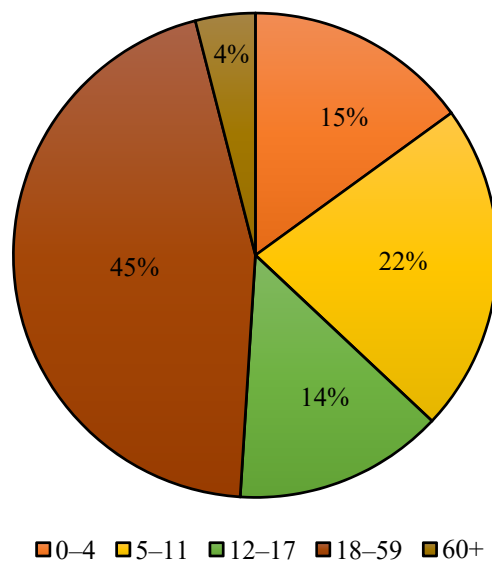


Figure 4. Age distribution for Syrian refugees registered with the UNHCR in Jordan. Data source: [35].

It is estimated that about 200,000 Syrians are working in Jordan [41]. However, the Jordanian Ministry of Labor annual report shows that fewer than 550 Syrians held formal work permits by the end of 2015 [42]. This means that the majority of those Syrian work

forces contributed to expanding the informal economy, which is considered a big problem for Jordan.

5. Jordan's Response

Jordan has a plan to convert the Syrian refugee crisis into an opportunity for development. In its 2016 refugee response plan, Jordan focused on livelihood for both Syrian refugees and Jordanians in host communities. The plan was updated in 2017 and the livelihood is considered as a separated sector with a specified overall objective "to ensure dignified, sustainable livelihoods and create economic opportunities for both Jordanians in host communities and Syrian refugees, as well as strengthening institutional capacity" [43].

In February 2016, a conference of Syrian donors was held in London, known as the London conference. In that conference, Jordan secured USD 1.7 billion in grants and grant equivalents for its Syrian refugee response plan against Jordan's pledge to secure 200,000 job opportunities for Syrians [44]. Based on that, the European Union and Jordan adopted a compact, known as the Jordan Compact, annexed to the EU/Jordan Partnership Priorities document [45]. The objectives for this compact were to improve the living conditions for Syrian refugees and Jordanians in the host communities, to improve the socioeconomic prospects, security, and stability of Jordan, and to ease the temporary stay for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

In the compact, Jordan pledged again to create 200,000 job opportunities for Syrians measured by issued work permits, while the EU pledged to provide hundreds of millions to Jordan in the form of grants and soft loans. In addition, the EU pledged to relax the rules of origin for Jordanian products exported to the EU from the Jordanian Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ) if the produced factory employed a minimum quota of 15% of Syrians [45]. It is worth saying that this number of work permits is not measured on a cumulative basis and expired work permits do not count, which means that there had to be 200,000 Syrians who hold a valid Jordanian work permit by the end of 2018.

To achieve the above target, Jordan, starting from 2016, replaced the condition for showing a valid passport for a Syrian worker when applying for work permits, by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Security Card issued for Syrian refugees. Later in April of that year, the Jordanian Government temporarily waived the work permit fees for Syrian refugees, which is on average about USD 700. In May, The Government of Jordan allowed cooperatives to apply for work permits on behalf of Syrian refugee workers in agriculture. A cooperative enterprise is a type of non-governmental organization in Jordan that is established to provide subsidies and services for its members. This freed those workers from being bound only to one employer and eased their movement to do their jobs. When a cooperative applies for a work permits on behalf of a Syrian refugee, the cooperative has no legal responsibilities as employer and the agriculture sector is mentioned as employer on the work permit card.

Furthermore, in June 2016, the Government of Jordan waived the condition of submitting proof that the employer registered the worker in social security at the time of applying for the work permit. However, it is still obligatory for the employer to register his/her worker in the social security according to the active laws. Additionally, later in September 2016, the Government of Jordan waived the medical examination requirements for Syrian refugees and accepted the medical examination results required to get the MOI Security Card. By the end of 2016, the number of work permits issued to Syrian refugees exceeded 33,000 permits [46].

6. New Policy Evaluation

In order to evaluate the impact of policy change on facilitating the Syrian refugees' access to the Jordanian labor market, the number of work permits issued per month in 2016, Figure 5, were studied to visualize the effect of each policy change on the increase or decrease in the number of work permits issued in the following month.

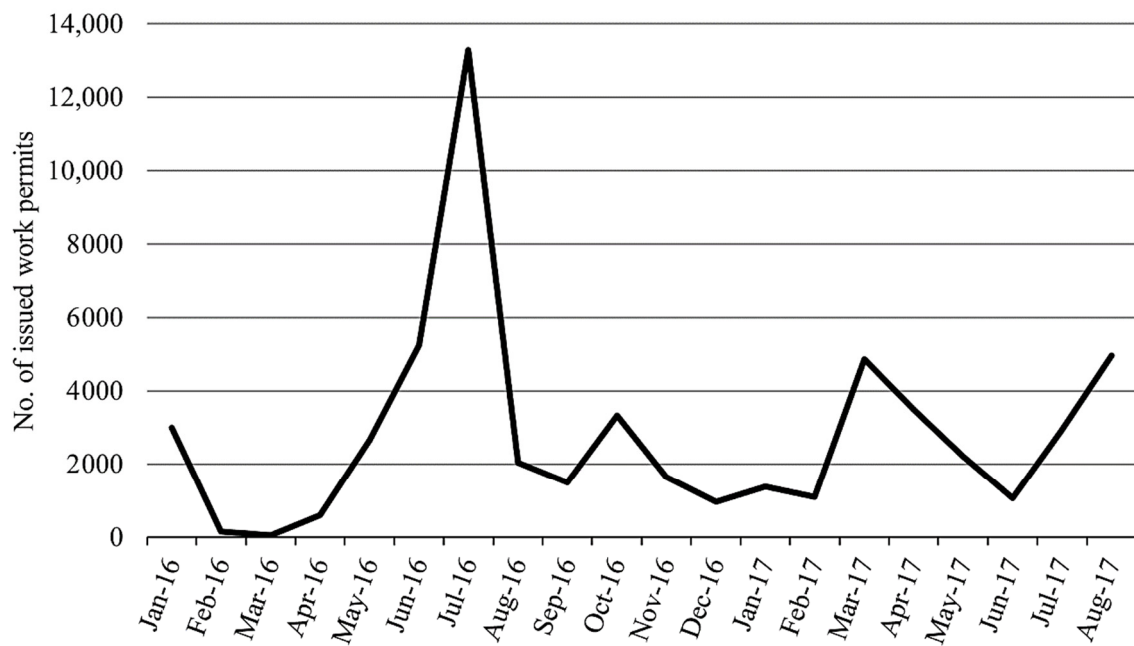


Figure 5. Number of work permits issued per month for Syrians. Data source: [47,48].

As it can be seen in the above figure, the number of work permits issued to Syrians increased by 2068 permits from April to May after the intervention of the government temporarily waiving the work permit fees for Syrians. Again, the number of issued work permits increased by 97% from May to June, especially in the agriculture sector. This can be explained by the decision of the government to allow cooperatives to apply for work permits on behalf of Syrian workers in the agriculture sector, which gave more mobility to the workers. Mobility is essential in the agricultural sector due to the seasonal nature of the agriculture work.

The sharpest increase took place between June and July; the number of work permits issued to Syrians in July increased by 153% from the previous month. This happened after the Government of Jordan waived the social security registration condition in the submission stage. One can ask questions about the Syrians' intention to integrate in Jordanian society as they do not want to be a part of the social security. This issue will be discussed later in this paper. In October, the number of issued work permits increased by 122% from the previous month in response to the decision of the Government of Jordan of waiving the condition of a medical examination and replacing it by the same medical examination result required for the MOI card. The other two peaks took place just prior to the end of the temporary fee-waiving period, or a new fee-waiving period being about to start.

As it can be seen from the figure above, the intervention of the Jordanian Government in the market by relaxing the demands of issuing work permits for Syrians facilitated their access to the labor market. With each intervention, there was an increase in the number of issued work permits. However, the main challenge for the Government was to convince the Syrians of the benefits of issuing a valid work permit and renewing their permits on a yearly basis, since the Jordan Compact required that 200,000 Syrians held valid work permits by the end of 2018 [45].

One may argue that Jordan is not creating new jobs for Syrian refugees but is regulating the current labor market. In fact, it is obvious that the regulation share in those issued work permits is dominant. According to the Ministry of Labor statistics, the new jobs created and occupied by Syrians in 2016 and 2017 were 1010 and 1795, respectively [49], while the total number of the work permits issued for Syrians until the end of 2017 was 87,141 permits [50]. This means that the creation of new jobs represented less than 5% of the total issued work permits and the main portion of those work permits was related to

the regulation part. However, regulating the market has a lot of benefits for both Syrians and Jordanians since it moves Syrians into the formal economy and reduces the size of the informal economy.

It is difficult to measure the size of the informal economy. Different organizations and researchers present different ways to measure it. However, the available numbers about the size of the informal economy in Jordan show that the Syrian refugee waves were associated with an increase in the size of the informal economy, regardless of the way of measuring [51,52]. Many experts explained this increase by the Jordanian government's decision to block the Syrian refugees' access to the Jordanian formal economy [52,53]. At the same time, the Jordanian government turned a blind eye to Syrian refugees working in the informal economy since that benefits both Syrians and employers.

The informal economy provides more work opportunities for low-skilled labor with less bureaucratic procedure. It may lead to a reduction in the price of some services since the service provider avoids paying the taxes and the governmental fees. However, a dramatic increase in the informal economy leads to a decrease in the governmental tax revenues, which leads to a reduction in governmental expenditure on public goods and services [54]. In order to improve revenue to maintain the expenditure on the public goods and services, governments often increase tax rates [55]. Moreover, governments try to increase the indirect taxes that are paid by everyone (for example, a sales tax). That directly increases the commodities and services prices and makes it more difficult for medium- and low-income people to get some basic commodities and services. The Jordanian Government attempts to improve its revenue were clear in the years associated with and following the waves of Syrian refugees. Examples of these include the Government's termination of the subsidies for some basic commodities like bread and the increase in the taxes and fees for some basic services like electricity [56].

Another negative impact for increasing the size of the informal economy with the additional supply of informal Syrian refugees labor is deepening the wedge between formal and informal employment and increasing the gap between formal and informal sector earnings [57]. Many reports and studies (e.g., [58,59]) show that the increased Syrian labor market activity has created a downward pressure on wages in the informal economy instigated by the employers, particularly in low skill jobs. This will have a negative impact on the vulnerable Jordanian employed population, specifically the poor population who will be susceptible to having the degree of their poverty intensified due to this downward pressure on wages [59].

In numbers, the average daily wage in the bottom half of the private sector occupations (lowest skill) for Jordanian was USD 14 in 2011 [60], while the daily wages for unskilled and semi-skilled Syrians started from USD 5.5 for adults and less than USD 3 for children [59]. Unlike Jordanians, Syrians have no problem working for such low wages since they receive additional support from the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations. The 2013 Jordan economic monitor issued by the World Bank concluded that the Syrian refugee crises has "a negative and significant impact on the labour force participation rate" [61]. That is represented by the Jordanians' lack of motivation to find jobs caused by the Syrian informal laborers bid down on the wages, much lower than their reservation wage. Eventually, this may send Jordanians out of some sectors in the labor market, and present catastrophic future outcomes, especially if the Syrians decide to go home.

Operating in the informal economy makes it difficult for Syrian employees to take advantage of the possible access to the legal system to report any violation of the labor laws and regulations [54]. This makes Syrian refugees more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. A study done by Stave and Hillesund in 2015 showed that 25% of the surveyed Syrian workers were often subjected to salaries below minimum wage, longer working hours without overtime, and a lack of health and safety measures [53]. Based on the above, regulating the market and moving the Syrian labor from informal into formal status would be beneficial for both Syrians and Jordanians, especially for long-term plans and outcomes.

In parallel, Jordan's Government has been actively trying to create new jobs for Syrian refugees in the formal economy. This can be seen in the establishment of new employment offices in both the Al Zatari refugee camp and the AlAzraq refugee camp. In October 2017, more than 50 national and international companies from across Jordan were presented in AlZatari camp in an unprecedented job fair organized by the International Labor Organization in collaboration with the EU, UNHCR, Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Government's Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate. The companies offered over 1600 job opportunities in different sectors [62]. Moreover, Jordan has given the refugees who reside in camps permits to leave the camps during the day for work since 2015.

7. Joining the Social Security System

Returning to the largest increment in the number of work permits issued per month, this took place after the Government of Jordan waived the condition of Syrians' registration in social security at the time of the submission. The social security system in Jordan requires the employee to pay a share of 7.5% of his/her monthly salary to social security per month, while the employer has to pay a share of 14.25% of his/her employee's monthly salary per month for his/her employee's social security. The regulation in Jordan accepts that a foreigner worker may retrieve the deductions for social security subscription paid by them and their employer (21.75% of their monthly salary) if their work permit is cancelled. To investigate the willingness of Syrian refugee workers to join the social security which provides protection for them, a number of face-to-face interviews were held with both Syrian refugee workers and Jordanian employers.

The interviews took place in the provinces of Amman and Madaba in the center of Jordan in the period between September and December 2017. It covered employers and Syrian refugee workers from the construction sector, agriculture sector, restaurants, retail shops, textile industry, and cleaning services. The sample included eight Jordanian employers and fifty-four Syrian laborers. The Syrian laborers sample consisted of forty-four male workers with an age range of 16 to 47 years and working in construction, agriculture, restaurants, retail shops, and the textile industry. Three of the interviewed male workers had a bachelor's degree but did not work in the same field as their study, ten of them went to technical colleges in Syria, whereas the education level of the remaining participants did not exceed school level. It also contained ten female workers with an age range of 19 to 38 and working in cleaning services and retail shops. All the interviewed female workers had school educational level, either elementary or high school. Four workers in this sample were self-employed: two male workers in the construction sector and two female workers in the cleaning services sector. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the sample over the working sectors. The Jordanian employers' sample was comprised of two in the restaurant sector, two in the retail shops sector, and one employer in each of the remaining sectors.

Table 1 summarizes some of the work status parameters for the interviewed sample in each sector. Nine of the interviewed workers did not have a valid work permit, which are the four self-employed participants, two of those in the construction field, and three retail shop workers. In the construction field, all the workers said that the work permits would restrict their work mobility since they should be connected to one employer. (Later, the Government waived this condition for workers in the construction field and allowed them to apply for the work permit through the Jordanian contractor association.) They said that they are usually working inside closed buildings, so it is less likely to be caught by the Government's work inspectors. The interviewed employer in the construction field said that: "Syrians present a tough competition for the Egyptian labor in the construction field. Currently, Syrians request about half of the wages of the Egyptians". However, he added that it is risky to hire them without work permits since the employer will be fined.

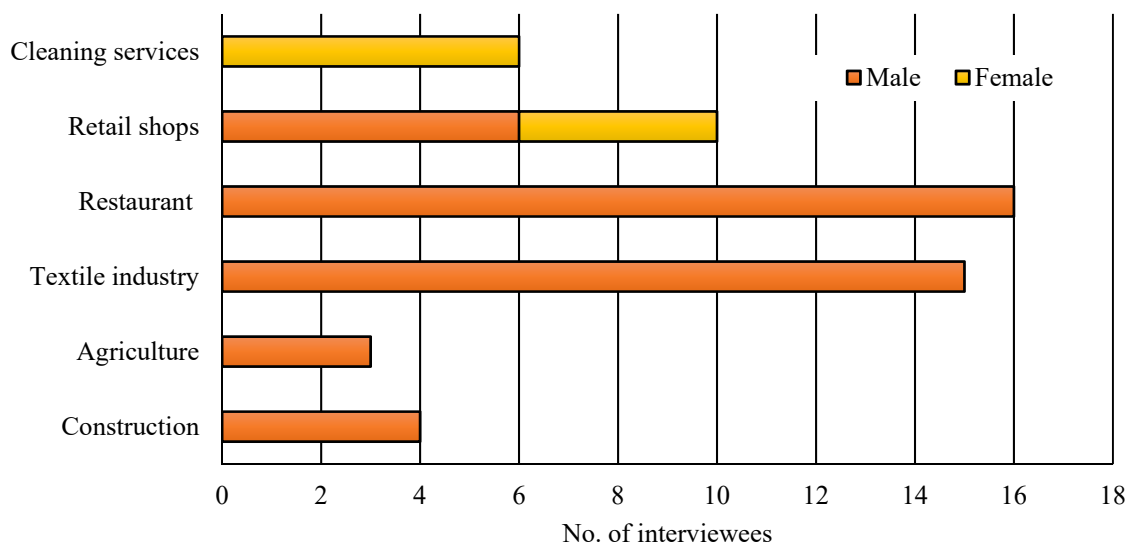


Figure 6. The distribution of the interviewed Syrian refugee workers in the working sectors.

Table 1. Selected parameters for the interviewed sample by working sector.

Section	Age Range (Year)	Salary Range (JD)	Percentage Hold Valid Work Permit	Percentage Registered in Social Security
Construction	16–41	10–25/day	0%	0%
Agriculture	29–35	350–450/month	100%	0%
Textile industry	20–47	150–220/month	100%	80%
Restaurant	20–42	220–600/month	100%	50%
Retail shops	19–37	150–300/month	70%	10%
Cleaning services	32–38	8–30/day	67%	33%

1 JD = 1.41 USD.

In the social security aspect, the interviews showed that Syrian employees do not want to be a part of the social security system. They see no benefit for joining the social security system since they do not have any plans to spend too much time in Jordan due to the high living cost in Jordan compared with the salaries, as will be discussed in the future plans aspect. One of the interviewees in the textile industry said that “the social security is good for the Jordanians since it provides them with salaries after retirement, but for us, we do not want to stay here until retirement. Hopefully, the war will eventually end and we will go back to Syria”. They think that even though the regulations state that they can get their money back at the time of leaving Jordan, they may not be able to do so. One of the interviewees in the cleaning services sector said: “I hope that they do not take this 14 JD (USD 20) from my salary” and when the interviewer explained to her that she can get her money back, she added: “Yes, but no one knows what will happen”.

On the other hand, the employers were very happy with their Syrian employees’ decision not to join the social security system since they save the 14.25% share that they have to pay on monthly basis. They only registered them in the social security if they had to. For example, the employer in the cleaning services industry indicated that “my Syrian employees ask me not to register them in the social security system. However, I can do that only for those who are providing services for private sector companies. Of course this is good for both of us”. Sometimes, the employers hire the Syrians as non-regular employees if he wants to avoid registration in the social security system. Both Syrians and Jordanian said that even though inspectors from the Ministry of Labor visited their firms in the last year, the inspectors focus more on the status of the work permits, rather than

the registration in the social security for the Syrian refugees. One can speculate that this is motivated by Jordan's commitment to the 200,000 active working permits.

Regarding the future plans aspect, all the Syrian interviewees agreed that it was not difficult for them to communicate with Jordanians. They emphasized that Syrians and Jordanians share many commonalities in terms of norms and language. On the other hand, all of them agreed that the living cost in Jordan is expensive and their salaries are not sufficient to provide them with the same lifestyle they had in Syria. All of the interviewed employers think that Syrians look to Jordan as a temporary stage, as they plan to either go back to Syria or to resettle in a Western country. According to literature, refugees' integration in the labor market is enhanced if the refugees accede to long-term residence in the host country [25,28,30]. Based on that, the low satisfaction level for Syrians over their residence in Jordan and their persistent hope of leaving it will delay their integration.

Since the number of face-to-face interviews done was relatively low and could not be considered representative for all Syrian refugees in Jordan, the main finding of those interviews were benchmarked against the finding of a study found in the International Labor Organization report in 2017. The ILO conducted a study in the governorates of Amman, Zarqa, and Mafraq to analyze the work situation of Syrian refugees in Jordanian agricultural, services, and construction labor markets [63]. It should be noted that the adopted methodology in the ILO report was a combination of questionnaires and focus group discussions, while in this study, we used face-to-face interviews during fieldwork. The governorate of Madaba and the industrial sector which were covered in this fieldwork were not covered in the ILO study [63]. It was found that there is an agreement regarding the unwillingness of Syrians to join the social security system in Jordan in both studies.

This finding indicates that even though there are many commonalities between Syrians and Jordanians in terms of culture, history, and language, Syrians still need more time to integrate in Jordan. This can be concluded since the sustainability in meeting the essential needs of the refugee cannot be achieved without the social protection provided by the social security system. This sustainability is a condition for the "self-reliance" targeted by the definition of integration mentioned above. Therefore, according to the definition suggested by this paper, Syrians have gone a long way towards the integration in Jordan, but they are still not fully integrated. One of the main issues that hinders this integration is Syrian refugees' view of their stay in Jordan as a short stage rather than a long-term one.

8. Year 2020 Developments and Updates

To check how the situation changed in 2020, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, phone interviews with two Jordanian activists in the field of refugees were done. The two activists have daily direct contact with Syrian refugees in East Amman. The questions of the interviews focused on the work status development for Syrian refugees in the last three years. Both activists emphasized that the work situation for Syrian refugees was better at the beginning of 2020 compared with 2016. However, it remains difficult to get employed in high-skill jobs like engineer, medical doctor, pharmacist, teacher, etc., since most of these jobs are more or less formally closed for Jordanians. Activist #1 gave an example for a worker in the construction field, saying "they now gain 25–35 JD (USD 35–50) per day which is equal to the other workers in the field", since they can get a work permit without their employer through Jordan contactor association. Furthermore, more of them started their own businesses and started to get small construction contracts. Both activists said that female workers remain more vulnerable to exploitation than male workers. Activist #2 emphasized that "their salaries are much lower and could reach half of the male workers in the same job".

Nevertheless, the whole situation has become worse over the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them lost their jobs and others were subjected to reductions in their salaries. The government ended the waiving of the work permit fees for Syrian refugees and they have to pay the renewal fees for their work permits. The social security became obligatory again during the application phase and all workers, even in small retail shops or those who have

their own businesses, must join social security. These reasons decreased the motivation of Syrian workers to renew their work permits, especially those who have to pay the renewal fees by themselves with no help from their employers. This could potentially lead to an inverse migration for Syrian refugees back to the informal economy, where they could be subjected again to exploitation.

Further investigation will be performed in the following years to study the detailed impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work status of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

9. Conclusions

This paper studies the process of Syrian integration in Jordan. Integration is defined as a legal, economic, and social process which allows refugees to achieve self-reliance. By this definition, integration is presented as a solution for the refugee warehousing problem rather than giving them an alternative homeland. Jordan tries to convert the Syrian refugee crisis into an opportunity of development. To achieve that, Jordan made some legal and procedural changes in 2016 targeting the facilitation of Syrians' access to the labor market to help them achieve the self-reliance required for integration.

Figures show that the Government of Jordan's intervention in the labor market has been facilitating Syrians' access to it. The number of work permits issued to Syrians clearly increased each time the government intervened with a policy or procedural change. The majority of the issued work permits were related to regulating the existing jobs rather than the creation of new ones. This regulation will benefit both Syrian refugees and Jordanians in host communities, especially in low-skill jobs. Furthermore, Jordan has been trying to create new jobs for Syrian refugees through establishing employment offices and organizing job fairs in refugee camps.

A total of 62 face-to-face interviews were done at the end of 2017 with Jordanian employers and Syrian laborers in different sectors. The interviews showed that Syrians are not interested in being a part of the Jordanian social security system. This lack of interest pleased their employers since they save money by avoiding the payment of their monthly contribution to the social security. Without the social protection provided by the social security system, the sustainability of the refugee in meeting their essential needs is questioned. This means that the "self-reliance" targeted in the definition of integration adopted by this paper is not fully achieved. Therefore, despite many commonalities between Syrians and Jordanians in terms of culture, history, and language, Syrians in Jordan are still not fully integrated. The low satisfaction level for Syrians over their residence in Jordan and their persistent hope of leaving it delay their integration.

Additional phone interviews with two Jordanian activists in the field of refugees were carried out in August 2020. The activists emphasized that the work situation for Syrian refugees was better at the beginning of 2020 compared with 2016. However, many of Syrians lost their jobs and others have been subjected to reductions in their salaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation worsened with the end of the governmental waiving of work permits fees and enforcing the joining of the social security system for the Syrian laborers. This decreased the Syrian workers' motivation to renew their work permits and led to an inverse migration for Syrian refugees back to the informal economy, where they can be subjected again to exploitation.

Funding: The publication of this article was funded by the Open Access Fund of the Leibniz Universität Hannover.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank Ziyad Masoud and Enas Al Dabbas for their logistic help, Ahmad Almuhtady for improving the use of English in this manuscript, and Raheel Qudisat for sharing her field experience.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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