International Labour Organization

Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan

Svein Erik Stave, Tewodros Aragie Kebede and Maha Kattaa

September, 2021

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First published 2021

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Title: Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan

ISBN: **9789220356197** (Print)
ISBN: **9789220356203** (Web PDF)

This research has been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation in MENA.

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Preface

The report 'Impact of work permits on decent work for Syrians in Jordan' was produced under the framework of the ILO project entitled "Towards improved knowledge on labour market and employment conditions of Syrian Refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon", which is funded by the Ford Foundation.

Additional support for data collection was provided by Employment Services Centres which are supported by various ILO projects and development partners.

The project was led by Dr. Maha Kattaa, ILO Regional Resilience and Crisis Response Specialist. Further support was provided by the ILO team, including Anas Alakhras, Nisreen Bathish and Ahmad Albadareen.

The report was co-authored by Svein Erik Stave and Tewodros Aragie Kebede, Senior Researchers at Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research in Oslo, Norway along with Dr. Maha Kattaa from the ILO.

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2016, the Government of Jordan, in partnership with the international community, committed to improving the living conditions, prospects and resilience of both Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities. Through these efforts, the Jordan Compact was born. The Compact is a commitment from the international community not only to support Jordan in providing a regional and global public good by hosting refugees as best as it can, but also to support Jordanian citizens and the economy as a whole. As part of the Compact, the international community agreed to make concessional trade and finance available to Jordan, on the condition that they formalise employment for 200,000 Syrian refugees. While decent work deficits remain a challenge in many of the sectors employing Syrian workers, work permits have provided a legal pathway for many to access and enjoy their rights.

Since the signing of the Jordan Compact, more than 230,000 work permits have been issued to Syrian refugees in Jordan. This report explores the impact of work permit regulations on decent work outcomes for Syrians in Jordan through analysing several data sets gathered by ILO and Fafo since 2014.

General conclusion

The findings from the analyses show clear positive impacts of the work permit scheme with respect to improving decent work for Syrian workers in Jordan. The report has analysed a wide selection of decent work indicators, and most of these indicators show that Syrians holding a valid work permit experience more decent work than their counterparts without valid work permits. The analyses also show that in many areas of decent work, Syrian workers have come closer to the standards of the Jordanian workers over time, indicating a steady assimilation of Syrians into the Jordanian labour market, partly caused by the introduction of the work permit scheme. However, decent work for Jordanians is still considerably more prevalent compared to Syrians in most areas, and improvements should be made through more innovative work permits schemes.

Main findings

Impact on labour force participation rate and employment

Labour force participation and employment rates among Syrians has increased substantially since 2014. For all Syrians in Jordan, the labour force participation rate has increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2018. Although attribution of this increase to work permit is not direct, the overall effect of work permits in incentivizing and providing the legal framework for Syrians' access to work is quite apparent. While labour market participation rates for Syrians increased over the past years, unemployment rates have also fallen from about 60 per cent to about 8 percent in 2018.
The construction and agriculture sectors have experienced increased participation and employment of Syrians in Jordan though the provision of work permits that have seen relatively flexible developments since their introduction in 2016.

Impact on Wages

The general impression from analyses of the impact of work permits on wages is that holding a work permit has a positive effect on wages levels for Syrian wageworkers. While about 37 per cent of employed Syrians without a valid work permit earn less than 150 JOD per month, about 20 per cent of employed Syrians with valid work permits earn such low wages. The same trend can be seen for those Syrians earning less than 300 JOD per month. Compared to Jordanians, employed Syrians with

work permits still earn substantially less, while the Syrians with work permits currently are at the same wage levels as Egyptians in Jordan. In 2014, employed Syrians earned far less than Egyptian workers. While 18 per cent of the Egyptians earned less than 200 JOD per month, as many as 39 per cent of the Syrians did the same.

Impact on stability of work

Analyses of working hours and the length and stability of work arrangements among Syrian and Jordanian workers show that Syrians with work permits do have more stability of employment compared to those without work permits. In 2020, Syrian workers without work permits were more often temporarily out of work compared to permit holders, and the ones who were working worked more hours than the permit holders. This might indicate that holding a work permit leads to more stability of work and that not holding a work permit leads to more excessive hours of work. However, compared to the situation in 2018it seems that the prevalence of excessive hours has decreased for both workers without work permits and for permit holders in particular.

With respect to working days per month, more work permit holders are within the "normal" range of 20-26 working days compared to those without work permits. If we use the workdays pattern of Jordanian workers as a benchmark for the "normal" situation in the Jordanian labour market, we see that Syrians holding work permits are closer to that "normal" compared to those without work permits. Syrians work significantly fewer months of the year compared to both Jordanians and Egyptians. However, more Syrians with work permits work all months of the year compared to those without permits, who also work fewer months of the year in average.

While 48 per cent of Jordanian workers, and nearly 70 per cent of Egyptian workers, were in permanent work arrangements, only around 15 per cent of the Syrian workers were in permanent employment in 2020. However, the results also show that slightly more Syrians with work permits were in permanent employment (17 per cent) compared to Syrians without work permits (15 per cent). On the other end of the work regularity scale, More than 50 per cent of Syrian works without work permits were in irregular types of employment, including working as day labourers, while about 41 per cent of Syrians with work permits were in these types of employment.

Impact on formality of employment

Formality of employment refers to whether workers obtain the benefits embedded in the rules, regulations and standards for employment. This includes having a clear contract with their employer, being covered by social security schemes and health insurance, and having access to paid annual leave, maternity leave, and other social benefits.

About 13 per cent of Syrian workers in Jordan had written contracts with their employer in 2020. However, the data also showed that 25 per cent of the Syrians holding a valid work permit had written contracts, compared to only 9 per cent of the Syrians without a valid work permit. With respect to social security coverage (typically insurance for work injuries, access to retirement pension, right to maternity leave, and insurance against unemployment), we find a similar gap between Syrian work permit holders and those without work permits. While 18 per cent of Syrians with a valid work permit were covered by social security in 2020, only 9 per cent of those without a valid work permit were covered.

In 2020, only 3 per cent of Syrian workers had access to health insurance through their job, 5 per cent had access to paid annual leave, while 7 per cent had access to paid sick leave. In addition, there is a relatively large gap between work permit holders and those without work permits. While less than 3.5 per cent of Syrians without work permits have access to these benefits, between 11 and 18 per cent the work permit holders have access to such benefits.

Impact on social cohesion

Almost 70 per cent of Syrian work permit holders state that holding a work permit makes them feel safe in public spaces, while 23 per cent state that it keeps them safe from being deported from the country. These expressions reflect that many Syrians without work permits live in fear for being caught for illegal employment or stay in Jordan, and that obtaining a work permit promotes social cohesion and increases the wellbeing for Syrians in general.

Data reflecting social cohesion of Syrians in Jordan, also show that Jordanian workers' trust in Syrians, and vice-versa, has increased significantly from 2014 to 2018. The same positive trend can be seen for Jordanians' perceptions on how Syrians influence the wage levels in the labour market.

The status of Syrian workers when it comes to being hard working and reliable in the Jordanian labour market also seems to have turned more positive since 2014. In 2014, Jordanian workers perceived Egyptian workers to be the most hardworking group of workers, while only 14 per cent of Jordanians perceived Syrians to be the most hardworking. In 2020, the status of Egyptians decreased and the status of Syrians increased in the eyes of Jordanian workers. About 20 per cent of Jordanian workers perceived Syrians to be the most hardworking in 2020. The same trends can be seen for Jordanians' perception of the most reliable groups in the labour market. The status of Egyptians has decreased, while the status of Syrians has increased.

Impact on women in the labour markets

Female labour force participation remains generally low particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region. While participation rates remain relatively low, they have however seen a steady increase in the past few years particularly for Syrian women in Jordan. For instance, the participation rate in 2014 was about 4 per cent while it reached about 9 per cent in 2018.

The general reasons for the relatively lower female labour force participation rates include family responsibility (44 per cent), inconvenient working hours (8 per cent) and lack of suitable jobs (6 per cent). Despite these challenges, our findings indicate that women labour market participation can potentially be increased through various incentives such as provision of jobs with closer proximity, free transportation, safe working environment and childcare services.

While incentives can be instrumental, addressing prevailing norms and attitudes are essential to tackle the social barriers. For instance, attitudes towards what occupations are suitable for women are prevalent in that any programmes intended to create jobs for women should consider what is generally acceptable.

Finally, from a policy perspective geared towards refugees, work permits play an important role not only in providing formal mechanisms for access to labour markets but also in addressing ther constraints that Syrians face when living in Jordan. While work permits provide a legal framework for work, they also have an added value of facilitating other constraints such as mobility and increasing a sense of safety for women at work.

Recommendations

The report has confirmed that easing access to the labour market for Syrians has positive effects on their income, stability of employment, and other decent work outcomes. To further increase the number of refugees who have access to decent work from work permits, the study recommends the following:

In the short term:

- Streamline the procedures in a one-stop shop to ease the uptake of work permit. Using digital solutions that help to decrease the complexity and delays.
- Disseminate widely the information on the new changes of work permits regulations related to the new open occupations as well as the social security coverage regulation through different channels, especially social media targeting workers and employers.
- Utilise the MOL/ILO employment centres to help disseminate information and help increase compliance with work permit procedures.
- Take proactive steps to increase the uptake of work permits by women, including by:

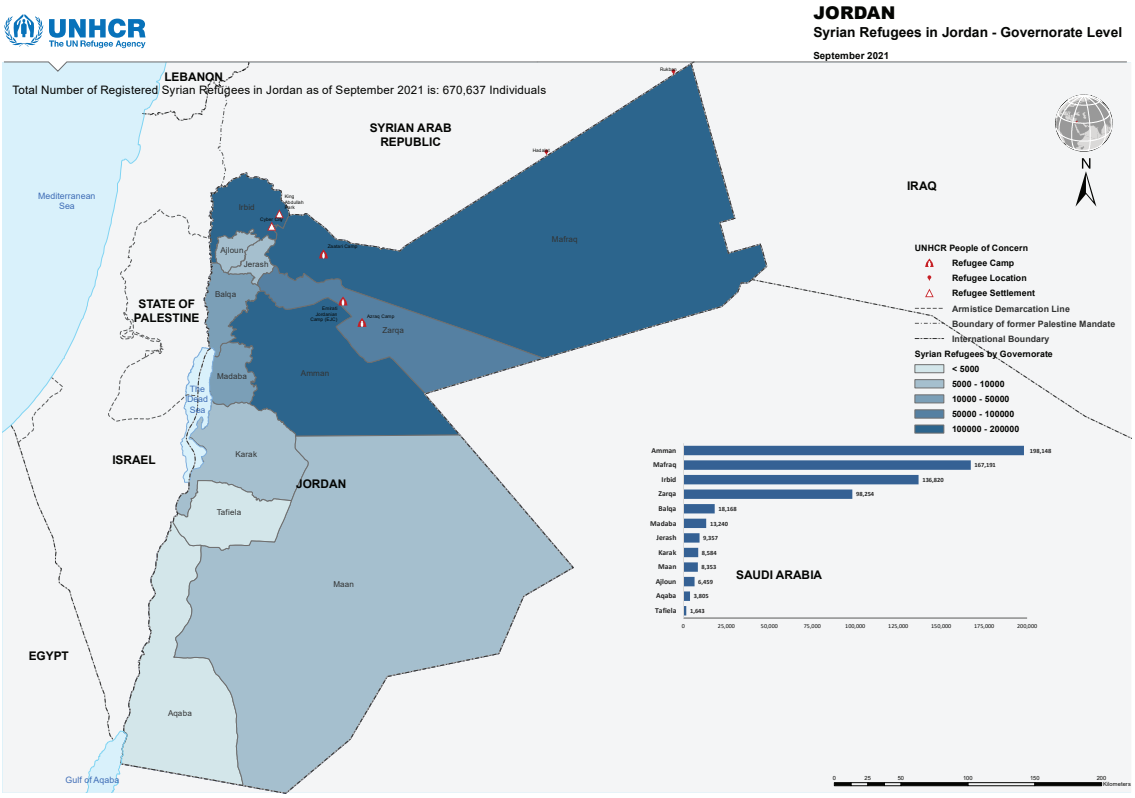
  a) developing a campaign targeting women to encourage them and their employers to apply for work permits;
  b) developing and implementing an induction training programme for new women entrants on the labour market; and
  c) paying and subscribing for social security.

In the medium and long term

- In the light of the absence of a political solution in Syria in the near future, the young generations of Syrian refugees who started graduating from universities need additional opportunities beyond the traditional sectors and beyond the worker status that include more professional occupations, such as engineers, teachers, doctors, nurses, etc.
- Promoting one refugee approach by supporting the government of Jordan to expand the work permits scheme applicable for Syrian to other non- Jordanians workers from refugees backgrounds, including Palestinians from Syria, Yemenis, Sudanese and others.

1 Introduction

According to UNHCR, there are at present more than 660,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, while according to the Jordanian Ministry of Interior (MoI), there are nearly 1.4 million Syrians in Jordan, of which only 130,000 live inside camps[1]. About 52 per cent of the Syrian population in Jordan are between 15 and 65 years old[2], implying that the Syrian working age population in Jordan might be around 700,000 persons if we use the MoI population figure as a basis. Out of these, 32 per cent participate in the labour market, while the remaining are inactive[3]. Only 7 per cent of Syrian women participate in the labour market compared to 16 per cent of Jordanian women. Out of these, 46 per cent of Syrian women are unemployed, compared to 28 per cent of the Jordanian women[4].



Source: UNHCR

Up until the beginning of 2016, access to the labour market for non-Jordanians, including refugees, was highly restricted. According to the Jordanian labour law at the time, migrant workers could only obtain jobs if they had competence that was not available in Jordan or in occupations where the demand for labour was higher than the existing supply in the country. To be able to obtain such jobs, work permits had to be applied for by employers and the employees were tied to a single employer for the whole validity period of the permit. In addition, the process of obtaining work permits was relatively expensive as well as bureaucratic, for both the employer and the employee. Only about 3,000 work permits were issued annually to Syrians prior to 2016[5]. Practically all Syrians working in Jordan prior to 2016 were engaged in informal employment[6] generally associated with low wages, long working days, and bad working conditions.

1 https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36
2 Fafo 2018
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Victoria Kelberer (2017): The Work Permit Initiative for Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Implications for Policy and Practice, The Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies.
6 Fafo-ILO 2015

In March 2016 at London conference, the labour market access for Syrian refugees in Jordan changed significantly when the International community and Jordan adopted an agreement referred to as the Jordan Compact. The basic concept of the compact is that the development partners including EU, USA and the World Bank provide Jordan major grants and concessional loans, in addition to exemption from EU trade barriers to stimulate investments and jobs, in exchange for Jordan providing 200,000 jobs for Syrian refugees.

To provide this number of jobs to Syrian refugees, the Jordanian government enables Syrians, to obtain work permits in certain sectors. Open sectors include manufacturing, construction, and agriculture, while closed sectors include some sales, education, hairdressing and most professional jobs. The sectors that are open to refugees are governed by the migrant worker sector-based quota system, which also regulates the maximum number of foreign workers in the sectors.

In the beginning of the Jordan Compact era, the issuance of work permits to Syrians was slow. This led the government of Jordan to waive registration fees for the first time in April 2016, and later to remove other practical barriers to obtaining permits for refugees. To further accelerate the issuing of work permits, and in an attempt to formalize the work of Syrian refugees in Jordan, the government opened up for bulk issuing of permits in the agricultural sector through cooperatives in the end of 2016, and subsequently in the construction sector in 2017. Currently, the refugees can apply for work permits without being accompanied or sponsored by an employer, and they can move freely between jobs and work for different employers within the sector for which the permit is issued.

As stated, the aim of these policies has been to formalize the work of Syrian refugees in Jordan, and to contribute to an overall formalization of the Jordanian labour market. This should lead to higher security for the employees by having work contracts, regulated wages and working hours, as well as better working conditions. However, some studies and reports have indicated that improved access to work permits is only a first step towards better conditions for Syrian workers[7]. In fact, it seems that there are relatively small differences in wages, working hours and working conditions between those with and without work permits, implying that policies must also improve conditions in the formal sector. This study aims to shed light on these questions.

Overview of existing literature

Labour market participation in the context of a refugee situations is increasingly being explored from the perspective of longer-term development and not only through the framework of 'humanitarian interventions', particularly for protracted displacement situations. Understanding the effect of granting work permits, even temporarily as suggested by Lokshin and Ravallion (2019) [8], gives key insights on refugees coping mechanisms, and improving cohabitation between refugees and hosts has been linked to better outcomes for the current and next generations (Becker et al., 2020)[9].

Schuttler and Caron (2020) [10] gathered evidence related to "law and labour market" in the context of internally displaced persons (IDPs). They label these types of interventions as "changing the legal framework for refugees" and found about 25 articles that focus on this topic. Adequate laws authorizing refugees to work have proven beneficial for refugees' economic outcomes and well-being; and being granted work permits drive labour market outcomes. Notably, using a geographical variation (refugees being often randomly distributed across areas in OECD countries, and in particular for this paper, labour laws varying across Swiss cantons), Slotwinski et al. (2019) [11] found that inclusive labour market regulations had a positive and significant effect on refugees in Switzerland. The opposite has

7 ILO 2017
8 Lokshin, M., & Ravallion, M. (2019). A Market for Work Permits (No. w26590). National Bureau of Economic Research.
9 Becker, S. O., Grosfeld, I., Grosjean, P., Voigtländer, N., & Zhuravskaya, E. (2020). Forced migration and human capital: evidence from post-WWII population transfers. American Economic Review, 63-1430 ,(5)110.
10 Schuettler, K., & Caron, L. (2020). Jobs Interventions for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.
11 Slotwinski, M., Stutzer, A., & Uhlig, R. (2019). ‚Are asylum seekers more likely to work with more inclusive labour market access regulations?'. Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics, 17 ,(1)155.

also been found to be the case, a narrower access to the labour market for refugees is associated with more insecurities and exploitations (since refugees have to work in the informal sector) (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016[12]). Among the papers reviewed by Schuttler and Caron there are none that focus exclusively on work permits and refugees in lower and middle-income countries. As such, there is a need for empirical contributions that help shape policies related to labour market integration and legal frameworks for refugees as well as migrants in the broader sense.

Aspects of social and economic integration need more exploration. Research on peace-building programs and employment programs in developing countries, such as labour-intensive public works or community driven programs, have proved to support poor people escaping from poverty. Peace-building projects often focus on re-building cognitive skills and reconnecting people after long periods of conflicts. Paolo Verme (2017)[13] discusses whether the economics of forced displacement is different from neoclassical economics. He claims that refugees maximize utilities as other people, but that the metrics used to measure utility, the timespan of the utility maximization process and the degree of information under which this process takes place, may differ in forced displacement contexts. De Vroom and Van Tubergen (2010)[14], using multivariate regression analysis, find that the economic integration of refugees can be partly explained by host country education, work experience, language proficiency, and contact with natives (positively correlated with the chance of employment and occupational status) and health problems, integration courses, and the time spent in refugee reception centres.

Providing refugees with basic livelihood opportunities, i.e., work permits, means that they get the legal right to work outside the camps and to access the host countries' public education and health services. It will contribute to their ability to forecast and plan, things that would not be possible without work permits. Janzen et al (2017)[15] explain notably the role of expectations and aspirations in the context of conflict. The authors find that aspirations are positively linked with investment in the future (future-oriented economic behaviour). They conclude by saying that aspirations can stimulate development if properly directed. The degree of social, economic, and labour market integration will determine how refugees thrive in host countries, eventually providing benefits for both the hosts and refugees. A similar idea has been developed earlier on the integration of refugees and economic migrants in the US (Cortes, 2004).

Study objectives

The study presented in this report seeks to analyse the impact of the changes in the work permit regime introduced in Jordan in 2016, and whether the changes have implied more decent work for Syrian refugees. The study focuses on the most recent changes, i.e., the introduction of work permit models that decouple migrant workers and refugees from single employers. The direct and indirect impacts of these measures are particularly important to help understand how Syrian workers and their employers can secure productive and decent work. In order to assess the overall impact of the changes in the work permit regime on the Jordanian labour market, the study also looks at what implications these measures have had on non-Syrian workers.

The overarching objective of the study is to contribute to and advance the evidence base on the impact of work permit regulations and procedures governing Syrians' access to the labour market, and, hence, informing policymaking towards advancing decent work under the Jordan Compact.

More specifically, the study examines how recent changes introduced to the work permit regime and

12 Zetter, Roger, and Héloïse Ruaudel. 2016. 'Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labour Markets', KNOMAD Working Paper and Study Series (September).

13 Verme, P. (2017). The economics of forced displacement: An introduction. The World Bank.

14 De Vroome, T., & Van Tubergen, F. (2010). The employment experience of refugees in the Netherlands. International Migration Review, 403-376 ,(2)44.

15 Janzen, S. A., Magnan, N., Sharma, S., & Thompson, W. M. (2017). Aspirations failure and formation in rural Nepal. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 25-1 ,139.

different types of permits impact decent work outcomes for Syrian refugees in Jordan. It focuses on sectors where large number of refugees work, i.e., in manufacturing, agriculture and construction. The study investigates how work permits affect the employment of Syrian workers and analyses gender-specific outcomes. It likewise explores if work permits have a bearing on wider labour market challenges in Jordan, including labour market segmentation, low labour force participation, and weak job creation.

In particular, the study aims to shed light on the following research questions:

- To what extent do work permit regulations and procedures facilitate access to decent work and contribute to the formalization of work?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having work permits for Syrian workers?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of work permits to Syrians for employers?
- To what extent do work permit regulations directly and indirectly affect the non-Syrian work force?
- Does the recognition of refugees through work permits contribute to further segmentation of the labour market?
- To what extent do work permits support and enhance labour rights?
- Is the legal formalization of refugee employment preventing deterioration of working conditions for refugees, nationals, and migrants?

2 Methodology

This chapter describes the decent work concepts that have been employed as an analytical framework, and it outlines the data sources and the analytical approaches used in the study.

A decent work framework

According to the ILO, decent work involves opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men[16]. The main principles of decent work are:

- Job creation - no one should be barred from their desired work due to lack of employment opportunities
- Rights at work, including minimum wage - Workers rights include, for e.g., the right to just and favourable conditions, days off, maximum 8-hour working days, non-discrimination, and a living wage
- Social protection - all workers should have safe working conditions, adequate free time and rest, access to benefits like healthcare, pension, and parental leave, among many others
- Social dialogue - workers should be able to exercise workplace democracy through their unions and negotiate their workplace conditions as well as national and international labour and development policies

The principles of decent work can be operationalized through a set of decent work elements and indicators. For the purpose of this study, we identify the main outcome indicators as indicated in Table 1 below.

▶ **Table 1. Selected decent work indicators**

Elements of Decent Work	Indicators
Employment opportunities	Unemployment rates Labour force participation rates
Adequate earnings and productive work	Average wage levels Wage levels below minimum standards
Decent working time	Excessive hours of work
Combining work, family, and personal life	Temporality and irregularity of work
Stability and security of work	Excessive hours of work Insufficient hours of work
Equal opportunity and treatment in employment	Occupational segregation by nationality and gender
Safe work environment	Work related injuries Protective measures
Social security	Paid maternity leave Occupational injury coverage Pension coverage

16 https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm

Data sets

The analyses carried out in this study are primarily based on five sets of data, collected by Fafo in collaboration with ILO and the Department of Statistics (DoS) through surveys conducted in 2014, 2018, 2020 (two surveys) and 2021, respectively.

The **Fafo/ILO 2014 dataset** comprises the earliest extensive survey data on Syrian refugees. It covered a total of 3,800 households in the governorates of Amman, Irbid and Mafraq, including the Zaatari refugee camp.

The **Fafo/DoS 2018 data** was collected through a national household survey lasting from November 2017 to January 2018 and it has data from 7,632 Syrian refugee households, including those residing in camps.

The **Fafo/ILO 2020 Pre-COVID19 data** was collected in February to March 2020 and was designed for the purpose of this study, covering topics that help explore the impact of work permit regulations on Syrian refugees and migrant groups. The survey was conducted just before the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Jordan and covered only a limited number of areas as the survey operations were interrupted by restrictions related to the pandemic. Despite this, the data contain information from 620 households and 1,238 adult persons from these households. While the data are not representative at the national level, they help shed light on various topics of interest.

The **Fafo/ILO 2020 Phone Survey** was designed to supplement the Fafo/ILO 2020 dataset to compensate for the interrupted face-to-face survey. The survey covered a total 1,658 individuals selected from databases maintained by the ILO. While the sample is not representative at the national level and biased to those that have received some form of support from the ILO, or approached ILO to receive support, the data is valuable and has been used to explore interactions and mechanisms on access, constraints and benefits of work permits.

The **Fafo 2021 Phone Survey dataset** was generated through a phone survey designed to assess female labour force participation in Jordan. It covered 1,860 individuals, both nationals and refugees, selected from databases maintained by the ILO. While this sample has the same caveats as the 2021 phone survey, the dataset helps us explore the constraints and challenges associated with women's employment.

Analytical approach

The datasets described above contain two key features that help us analyse the effects of granting work permits to Syrians on decent work outcomes. Most importantly, the datasets contain variables on the respondents' work permit status, i.e., whether they have a work permit – or not, and what type of work permit. Moreover, although none of the datasets, except from the 2018 dataset on Syrians, are representative at the national scale, they do cover representative samples of both Syrians and Jordanians within the same labour market environments. Hence, this makes them comparable over time by looking at changes in the divergence between the two populations with respect to various labour market indicators.

These features allow us to make two simple, but effective, comparisons to shed light on whether work permits lead to more decent work for Syrians in Jordan. First, we can compare decent work outcomes (see the decent work framework outlined above) for Syrians who are in possession of work permits and those without permits. In addition to the bilateral comparison of permit holders with those without permits in the individual datasets (representing one particular point in time), we can also analyse whether holding work permits have become more useful over time with respect to securing decent work.

Furthermore, we can compare decent work outcomes for different population groups over time. For example, we can investigate whether differences in e.g., employment rates, wage levels and formality of employment have decreased between Syrian refugee populations and Jordanian host populations, which may indicate that Syrian refugees have become more equal with "the average worker" in the Jordanian labour market. One important element of comparing relative differences between populations within the same labour market contexts is that we can use this measure (ratio) to reveal development over time, despite the fact that the various datasets cover different sample sizes (not being representative at the national scale) and locations (mainly covering areas with high densities of Syrians).

3 Work permits

In Jordan, work permits are the primary mechanism by which non-Jordanian workers can access the formal labour market. With a valid work permit, workers are covered under the labour law, which stipulates the minimum wage, maximum working hours, social protection coverage and other labour rights. Non-Jordanian workers that encounter rights violations on the job have the right to report their grievances and seek remedies. Without a permit, non-Jordanian workers are at heightened risk of exploitation, including non-payment, underpayment, and unsafe working conditions. Without formal recognition of their worker status in Jordan, they are not recognized in the court system. Obtaining a valid work permit is, therefore, the first step for non-Jordanian workers to secure decent work.

The basic laws and goals of Jordan's immigration and work permit system are/have been to control and monitor the size and activities of the non-Jordanian workforce. Two fundamental principles underlie the system. First, employers act as sponsors for migrant workers including recruitment before workers enter Jordan; they pay round-trip transportation, work permit fees and other costs of recruitment. Second, workers are employed full-time for a single employer-sponsor on the basis of a one-year contract.

Over time, however, two disconnects have emerged between the regulations surrounding the law and the reality on the ground. First, the restricted mobility within the labour market is increasingly inconsistent with employers' needs. In many sectors, employers are unable to offer one-year contracts with full-time employment. The need for short-term or seasonal work is common in agriculture and construction and many workers shift between sectors depending on availability of work. In the domestic work sector, demand for part-time workers is prevalent as well. Furthermore, across the board, employers are afraid to commit to long-term employment and high social security contributions, especially in the current macroeconomic context. The second disconnect is the fact that many non-Jordanians are already working informally in the country. This includes Syrians, who entered Jordan as refugees rather than as workers or job seekers, as well as large numbers of migrant workers[17].

In 2016, the Government of Jordan, in partnership with the international community, committed to tackling the challenge of improving the living conditions, prospects and resilience of both Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities. Thus, the Jordan Compact was born. It is a commitment from the international community not only to support Jordan in providing a regional and global public good by hosting refugees as best as it can, but also to support Jordanian citizens and the economy as a whole. As part of the compact, the international community agreed to make concessional trade and finance available to Jordan, on the condition that they formalize employment for 200,000 Syrian refugees. While decent work deficits remain a challenge in many of the sectors employing Syrian workers, work permits provide a legal pathway for many to access and enjoy their rights.

The Program for Results for the "Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees" was designed by the World Bank and the Government of Jordan, in close cooperation with the ILO and the UNHCR, but also with a set of development partners involved in Jordan. Since 2016, this program has supported Syrian refugees' formal access to the Jordanian labour market to enable them to be self-reliant and contributors to the Jordanian economy. This access is at the heart of the development approach to the refugee crisis, which complements the humanitarian approach[18].

17 A challenging market becomes more challenging: Jordanian workers, migrant workers and refugees in the Jordanian labour market / International Labour Organization - Beirut: ILO, 2017 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_556931.pdf

18 Meriem Ait Ali Slimane, Fiona Allen, Maha Kattaa (2020) New economic opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian refugees, The World Bank, 2020 https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/new-economic-opportunities-jordanians-and-syrian-refugees

This $300 million four-year program just benefitted (in June 2020) from a two-year extension and an additional financing of $100 million. This extension will support the Government of Jordan in providing Syrians with more flexible work permits to reduce informality and ensure they are covered under the labour law. Only a third of Syrian workers hold a work permit, and one fourth of them benefit from social security coverage. Moreover, work permits will be issued to Syrians when they renew their ID cards or where they work through mobile work permit stations organized with the support of the ILO. Outreach through UNHCR and ILO will be key, including through the two active employment centres in the refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq and the 11 employment centres outside of camps[19].

Refugees right to work and change in work permit regulations 2016-2021

The 1954 Constitution spells out most clearly that the right to work in Jordan is reserved exclusively for Jordanian citizens. Labour Law No. 8 of 1996 defines the rights, protections and responsibilities for all workers and employers, except for those in the domestic and agricultural sectors (who are covered under separate laws). The Labour Law does not contain any references to 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers'.

Non-Jordanian workers access to labour market must be approved by the Minister of Labour, which generally requires that they will fill needs that Jordanian workers cannot. There is an additional provision that notes the priority of Arab workers who have particular expertise or technical skills. The new social security legislation does not make any distinctions based on nationality. The 1973 Residence and Foreigners' Affairs Law instructs Jordanian nationals and companies not to employ foreigners without a valid residence permit .

Providing Syrians with right to work and access to jobs was a main perquisite given to the Jordanian government before signing the Jordan Compact in February 2016. Since then, and in order to meet this perquisite, the government has made a number of changes to regulations that restricted Syrians' and other immigrants' access to the Jordanian labour market prior to 2016. The main changes are shown in Table 2 below.

Historically, and before the Syrian war started in 2011, Syrians moved quite freely across the Jordanian borders and the northern parts of Jordan. Especially Irbid and Mafraq, and the southern parts of Syria, such as Dar`a, were integrated markets and communities with a relatively free flow of goods and people. In general, Syrians were reputed for their skills in plastering, painting, and decorating and easily found legal employment in these fields in Jordan. This changed after the Syrian crisis, when larger number of Syrian refugees started to cross the borders into Jordan. While Syrians with legal documentation still could obtain work permits as before, the majority of the new Syrians entering the country lacked such documentation and were denied work permits[21].

A result of this situation was that many Syrian refugees worked illegally in Jordan, engaging themselves in informal and unregulated forms of employment. In 2014, almost 30 per cent of all Syrians in Jordan[22] participated in the labour market, while as many of 60 per cent of these were unemployed. Ninety-nine per cent of the working Syrians were engaged in informal employment in 2014.[23]

Since 2016, the Government of Jordan requires all refugees to have a valid Ministry of Interior (MOI) card from the area where they are living. Holding a valid MOI card is mandatory for access to Government public services, in particular Health and Education services in addition to access to work permits.[21]

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19 Ibid

20 Maha Kattaa, Social protection and employment for Syrian refugees in Jordan https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/43835

21 Tobin, Sarah and Maisam Alahmed (2019): Beyond the work permit quotas: Corruption and other barriers to labour integration for Syrian refugees in Jordan, U4 Issue 2019:4, Chr. Michelsen Institute. https://www.u4.no/publications/beyond-the-work-permit-quotas

22 According to UNHCR, there were about 620.000 Syrian refugees in Jordan at the time, while government estimates were higher.

23 Stave, Svein Erik and Solveig Hillesund (2015): Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market, International Labour Organization (ILO) and Fafo, ILO, Geneva.

▸ **Table 2. The development of work permit regulations, 2016-2021. Chronology of main changes.**

February 2016	Signing of the Jordan Compact at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London
April 2016	Exemption of work permit fees for Syrian refugees (still valid)
October 2016	Flexible work permits (not tied to one employer) issued for the agricultural sector by agricultural cooperatives
June 2017	Flexible work permits issued for the construction sector by the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU)
August 2017	Establishment of the Zaatari Office for Employment (ZOE); refugees in Zaatari refugee camp allowed to obtain work permits and to work outside the camp
October 2017	The Ministry of Labour (MOL) waived the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certificate requirement for obtaining work permits through the GFJTU for the construction sector
February 2018	The Azraq Centre for Employment (ACE) officially launched (but few work permits issued to refugees in Azraq so far)
October 2018	Refugees with work permits allowed to move freely between industrial sectors
November 2018	Syrian refugees living outside the camps allowed to register and operate home-based businesses and small businesses in three sectors: food processing, handicrafts, and tailoring
January 2019	Work permits held by Syrians to be automatically renewed
September 2019	Issuing fines on non-Jordanian workers for the non-renewal of the work permit
	Issuance of two new types of work permits for Non-Jordanian workers: the flexible work permit in the agricultural sector, the construction sector, and logistics enterprises; and work permits for workers with special skills.
September 2020	Imposing fines on Syrian workers for the non-renewal of the work permit
December 2020	Publishing the regulations related to issuing work permits for Syrian refugees in the Public Gazette [24]
	MoL announced the list of open occupations for Syrians
	Legislation for covering the self-employed with flexible work permits (regardless of nationality)
March 2021	New by-law that extended the coverage of the labour law to agriculture workers
June 2021	Updated list of open occupations according to ISCO (International Standard Classifications of Occupations) which allowed refugees to move between different occupations and sectors in the same occupational group
July 2021	Extension of social security to Syrian refugees holding flexible work permit

24 MOL Website

Based on the demand for and availability of qualified Jordanian labour, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) determines which occupations are open to foreign labour. As of 2016, there were 17 professions closed to foreign workers. These include administrative and accounting professions, clerical professions, telecommunication jobs, jobs in sales, most technical professions, including mechanical and car repair, engineering, education and some professions in hospitality. There are no set criteria for the government to define these closed occupations. Employers who are found recruiting or hiring foreign workers in closed professions are issued fines ranging from 200 to 500 Jordanian Dinars (about $US 280- 700) per worker found in violation. A foreign worker is liable for deportation at the expense of the employer and may be banned from working in Jordan for a three-year period if found in repeated violation.

In 2016, the Jordanian government began facilitating Syrian labour force participation in a formal and regularized manner by relaxing some of the requirements for the issuing of work permits. At the time, one the main barriers for obtaining work permits were the high fees. Although they varied across professions, the fees prevented many employers from hiring Syrians. Hence, a waiving of these fees was an explicit condition of the World Bank loan to Jordan provided as part of the Jordan Compact. Consequently, in April 2016, the Ministry of Labour exempted Syrians from paying the fees when applying for work permits in the next six months. Since then, the exemption has been extended ten times and the regulation is still active today.

Another challenge for Syrians living in Jordan in accessing the broader labour market in Jordan was that work permits were tied to one single employer, and that workers could not change positions or employers by holding the same work permit. This was particularly challenging with respect to jobs in the agricultural and construction sectors, where jobs are typically seasonal and temporary. To deal with this restriction, agricultural cooperatives were given authority to issue non-employer specific (flexible) work permits for agricultural workers in the end of 2016. This meant that Syrian workers in agriculture no longer were tied to a single employer but free to work for any of the agricultural companies in the cooperative, and to travel freely in Jordan in search of job opportunities. To obtain a flexible work permit in agriculture, a Syrian has to pay a fee 13 JOD for processing[25].

In June 2017, the same arrangement was introduced for obtaining work permits for the construction sector. Syrians could now apply for one-year flexible work permits in construction through the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), which were mandated by the Ministry of Labour to issue the permits. While Social Security subscription is mandatory with the exception of household helpers and unskilled agricultural workers, Syrian workers obtaining flexible work permits through the JFGTU are exempted from the subscription. Instead, they are required to subscribe to private insurances.

Another way of ensuring formality in the construction sector, workers applying for work permits in construction through the GFJTU were initially required to submit a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certificate, which is a training programme provided through the Jordanian Construction Contractors Association (JCCA) and certified through the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) in Jordan. These courses were provided to both Jordanians and Syrians. However, just a few months later, in October 2017, the MOL waived the RPL certificate requirement, as it was considered too resource demanding and bureaucratic.

In August 2017, the Ministry of Labour issued a new decree allowing Syrians residing in refugee camps obtaining work permits for jobs outside the camps. At the same time, the Zaatari Office for Employment (ZOE) was established in the Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq. The office issues work permits on the same basis as the agricultural cooperatives and the GFJTU, and the Syrians get permissions to leave the camp for up to one month at a time to work. In February 2018, another employment centre was established in Azraq refugee camp (AEC), giving the same opportunities to Syrian refugees in this

25 Tobin and Alahmed (2019): Ibid.

camp. However, due to the stricter security concerns around Azraq refugee camp, few Syrians have yet been cleared to take up work outside the camp[26].

Although, flexible work permits obtained through the agricultural cooperatives and the GFJTU opened up for Syrians to switch between different employers within the same sector, the permits did not allow workers to move between industrial sectors. This changed in October 2018, when the government issued a decree allowing refugees holding any work permit to move freely between jobs in all sectors; however, they were obliged to obtain a new work permit reflecting the new sector/occupation they would work in. Later the same year, Syrian refugees living outside the camps were also allowed to register and operate home-based and small businesses within the sectors of food processing, handicrafts, and tailoring.

In the last quarter of 2020, the Ministry of Labour began requesting from employers to pay 50 per cent of the fine to obtain work permits for workers who did not renew their work permits for more than three months. According to MOL, the regulations of the work permit fee and its amendments do not exclude employers hiring Syrians from fines in case they fail to renew their work permits. While these instructions were issued in September 2019, the MOL only began enforcing them with regards to Syrian workers in September 2020. A few weeks later, the MOL exempted Syrians and their employers from paying these fines.

Based on the provisions of paragraph (b) of Article (7) and Article (15) of the instructions for the terms and procedures for hiring non-Jordanian workers of Syrian nationality for the year 2020, the MOL published in June 2021 the list of open occupations for Syrians as shown in Table 3.

▶ Table 3. Number of open occupations for Syrians as of June 2021

Economic activities	No. of occupations	Code
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	16	Code 1
Mining	3	Code 2
Transformative industries	59	Code 3
Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supplies	2	Code 4
Water supply, sewage treatment, and waste management	2	Code 5
Construction	11	Code 6
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	13	Code 7
Accommodation and food services activities	17	Code 9
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1	Code 18
Other services	2	Code 19
Total	**126**	

In July 2021, the MOL published the procedural guide for the flexible work permits for Syrian refugees. Syrian workers can approach the GFJTU, with the exception of agriculture occupations, which remain with the cooperatives to issue flexible work permits in a modified list of occupations.

MOL re-arranged the occupations based on the Disbursement Linked Indicators of the Programme for Results (PfR) Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian refugees (Table 5), where flexible work permits are issued for an occupational group (ISCO) across economic activities (ISIC Sections). According to the PfR project document: "Flexible Work Permits" means work permits authorized

26 Tobin and Alahmed (2019): Ibid

pursuant to a directive or an instruction published in the Official Gazette, issued directly to a Syrian refugee: (a) without restriction of working for a specific employer; (b) free of charge; and (c) allowing the permit holder to work in any occupation open to foreign workers: (i) in one ISIC Section from July 2020 to June 2021, and (ii) within one of the ISCO Major Groups of occupations across all 21 ISIC Sections starting from July 2021 onward.

▸ **Table 4. Economic sectors and occupations**

Economic activities	No. of occupations	Code
Wholesale and retail trade	17	Code 5
Agriculture	16	Code 6
Professionals	55	Code 7
Factories and machines	19	Code 8
Primary occupations	14	Code 9
Total	**121**	

Extension of social security coverage to Syrian refugees holding flexible work permits

Extending social security to informal workers in Jordan, including refugees and migrant workers, is key to ensuring income security for all, reducing poverty and inequalities, achieving decent working conditions, reducing vulnerabilities and social exclusion. It contributes to promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development as globally acknowledged in numerous fora and reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In Jordan, a key area of concern is the extension of social security to categories of workers that fall outside of existing social protection systems, including non-nationals, the self-employed and agriculture workers. With a reduction in donor funded social assistance, and the lack of access non-Jordanians have to national social assistance programmes, social security provides a sustainable source of protection for workers, based on pooled worker and employer contributions. While the Social Security Law does not discriminate based on nationality or status, certain articles of the law limit its application to all workers, including a clause that excuses mandatory registration for workers employed for less than 16 days per month with the same employer. Provisions under the Labour Law, which excluded some workers in the absence of bylaws clarifying their coverage, also limited the application of social security in sectors where many vulnerable workers are found.

Flexible work permits provide greater mobility and income opportunities in sectors characterized by seasonal and project-based demand. However, they do introduce questions about the employment relationship and responsibility for labour protections, including social security. Syrian workers holding flexible work permits, especially in agriculture and construction, are largely excluded from social security, for which the lack of clarity regarding the employer-employee relationship might be a contributing factor.

Because this group of workers includes daily wage-workers and the self-employed, many of whom live below the national poverty line, regular contribution rates are unaffordable. On the other hand, these workers are poor, but not poor enough to be amongst the most vulnerable, who are eligible for social assistance. Hence, this group is referred to as "the missing middle." According to DoS' Labour Force Survey data of 2018, the share of Syrians among all employees is 11 per cent; however, only 4 per cent of Syrian employees are covered by social security[27].

27 Opportunities for extending social security coverage in Jordan, ILO, 2021 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_806055.pdf

A legislation for covering the self-employed with flexible work permits (regardless of nationality) had been issued in 2020 and effectively implemented in July 2021.

According to Social Security Corporation (SSC) Modified Regulation No 108 of 2020, the self-employed pay a reduced contribution rate, totalling 5.25 per cent of the monthly wage for short-term benefits and can select between five contribution levels for long-term pension contributions. In the context of the current policies and procedures applied to non-Jordanian workers, in principle all non-Jordanian self-employed workers are flexible work permit holders.

Before receiving or renewing a work permit, all non-Jordanian self-employed workers with flexible work permits should register through the SSC e-services or in branches. MOL will not issue or renew a work permit without this. However, not all workers know how to use e-services, so third-party intermediaries who are responsible for work permit facilitation (cooperatives, GFJTU), have reportedly helped register workers, and also collected upfront contributions.

Upon registration with the SSC, self-employed Syrians pay two months of contributions up front, (approximately 31 to 100 JOD depending on pension levels), while self-employed migrant workers of other nationalities pay a full year's contribution upon registration (approximately 190 to 600 JOD). During months where payments are not made, and in the case the self-employed worker needs to access benefits, he or she can submit a claim, but would need to repay all missed contributions (at 5.25 per cent of monthly wage, plus the chosen pension level).

The self-employed worker is still eligible for benefits for 10 months after the last contribution was made, however, to claim the benefit they must repay all missed contributions (see above). Upgrading or reducing the level of old-age contributions can be done in January of each year. Self-employed coverage is suspended in any of the following cases:

- Declaration of the Jordanian worker that he/she is out of work.
- Cancellation of the flexible work permit for the non-Jordanian worker.
- The worker withdraws their early retirement pension.
- The worker reaches the retirement age (60 for male; 55 for female), without the wish to continue making active contributions.
- The workers› status changes to that of an employer and the like.
- Recognition by medical authorities, that the worker is disabled.
- In the event of death.

Social security coverage in agriculture holdings

A second group of workers that have been addressed by specific social security regulations (the Prime Minister Circular 41), includes employees in agriculture holdings. Agriculture holdings are described by the agriculture bylaw issued in March 2021 as a unit of agricultural production that is subject to a single administration either completely or partially and covering horticulture and livestock. The 'holding' is considered to be a firm for the purpose of work permit issuance, but it is not clear how they would be responsible for social security registration, nor payment. It is also not clear how farms that rent agriculture land from the registered holding, would be treated (a holding or an establishment).

To be eligible for the temporary waived contributions, the establishment must be registered with the Ministry of Agriculture as a holding. To date, no agriculture lands are registered as holdings. Because holdings are considered as firms/enterprise, non-Jordanian workers would be employed under non-flexible permits (regular permits with the procedures normally applied to migrant and Syrian agriculture workers).

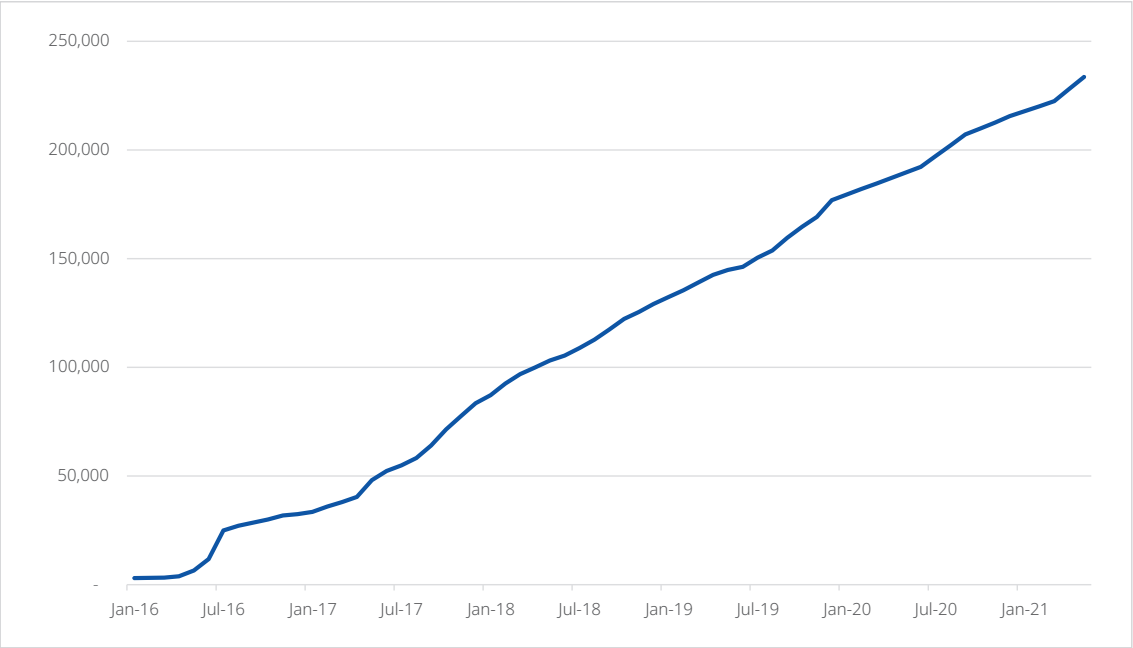
Circular 41 issued in July 2021 applies to all agriculture workers employed in agriculture holdings and allows for the suspension of contributions to old age pension, death and disability, maternity leave, and unemployment until Jan-2023. The employer (registered «agriculture holders») will pay 2 per cent contributions per month to cover work injuries only. From January 2023, workers and employers in agriculture holdings would have to pay at a normal social security contribution rate.

The dual approach for social security registration according to the type of work permit is creating confusion and perception of non-fairness among workers and employers and needs to be clarified and closely monitored.

Work permit issuances

Since the signing of the Jordan Compact in early 2016, a total of 233,699 work permits have been issued to refugees in Jordan (Figure 1). [28] Out of these, around 90 per cent have been issued to Syrian refugees.

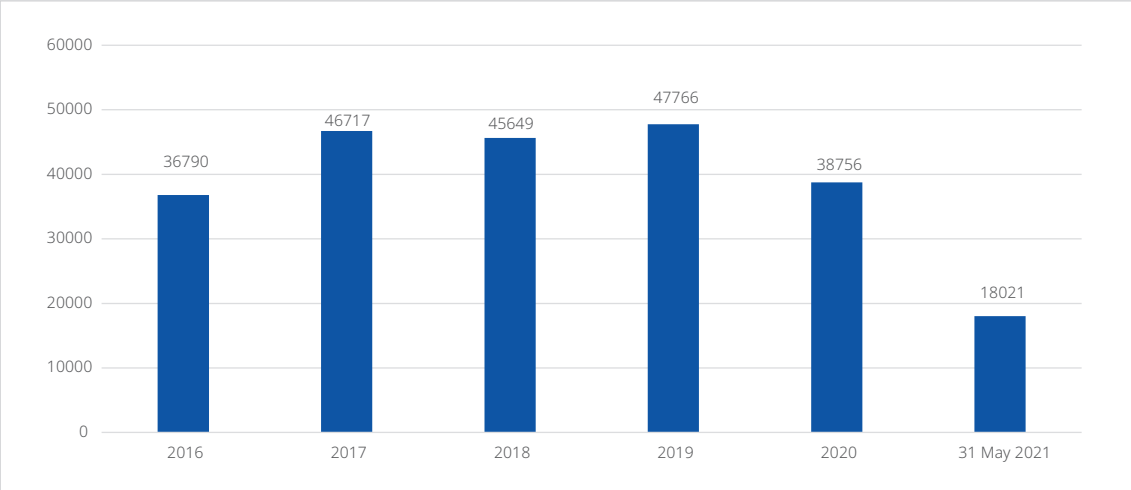
▶ **Figure 1. Cumulative number of work permits issued from January 2016 to May 2021**



The annual number of issued work permits has been quite stable since the beginning but declined from about 48,000 in 2019 to about 39,000 in 2020 (Figure 2). This occurred in spite of efforts taken to enhance the access to work permits for Syrian refugees, including the January 2019 decision to automatically renew expired work permits. The COVID-19 pandemic and the drop in work opportunities that followed in its wake might be an important factor behind the decline.

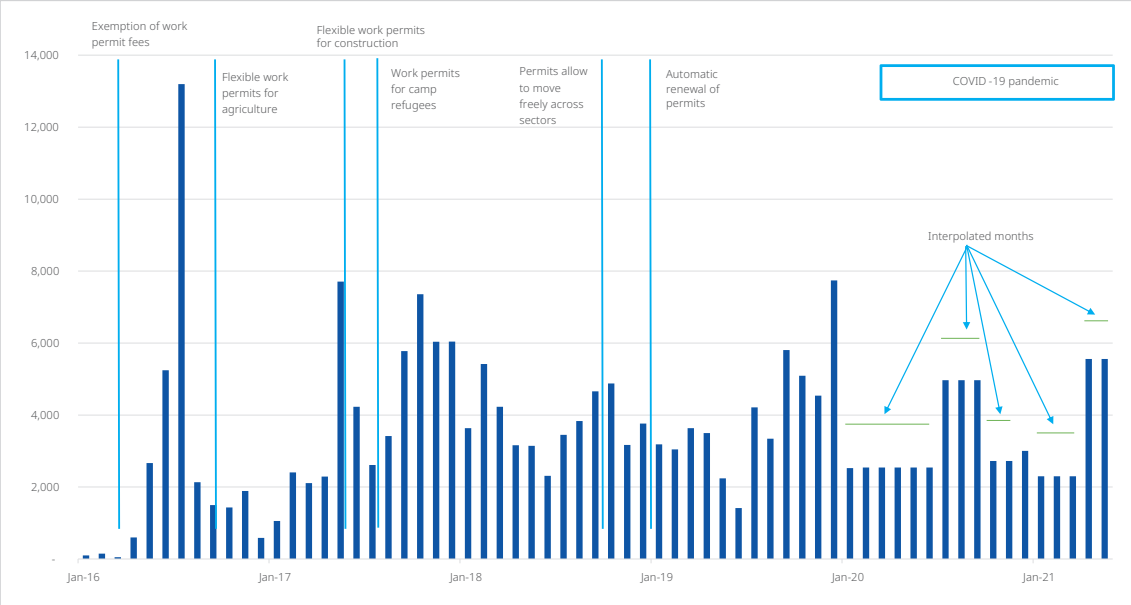
28 Up to May 2021 31 (as reported by the MoL)

▶ **Figure 2. Total number of yearly work permit issuances, January 2016 to May 2021.**



When considering monthly issuances of work permits against the changes in regulations presented in Table 2, it becomes obvious that the exemption of work permit fees for refugees, introduced in April 2016, had an immediate effect (Figure 3). While the direct effects from introducing flexible work permits for agriculture and construction are not that visible, there is a marked effect from allowing camp refugees to take up work outside the refugee camps from mid-2017. However, it is most likely that increases in work permit issuances are the cumulative effect of regulation changes, and that administrative and other aspects also play their roles in explaining fluctuations.

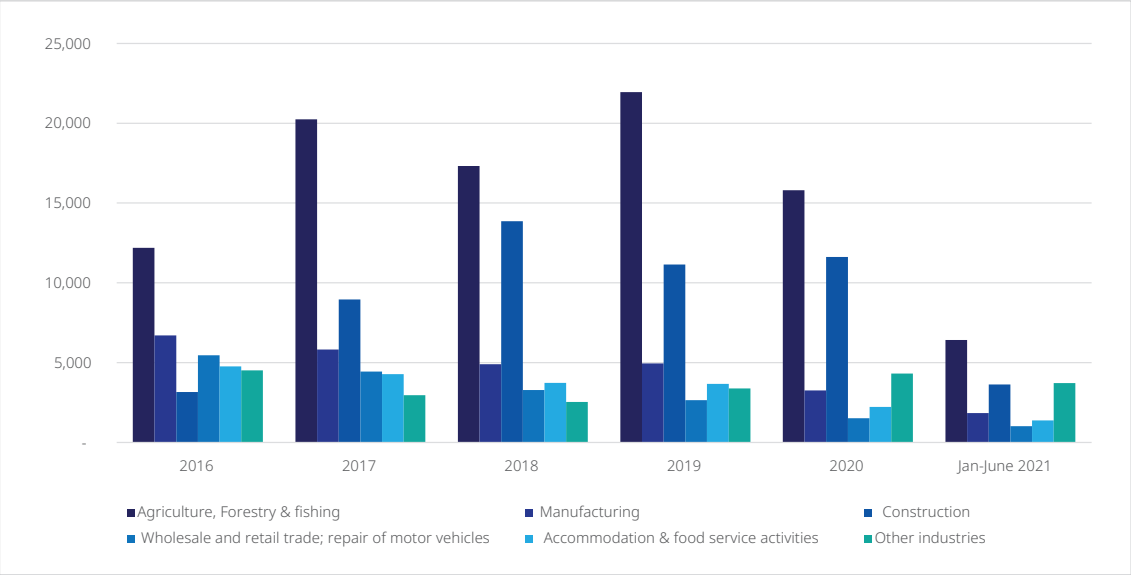
▶ **Figure 3. Number of work permits issued per month, and dates of main changes in work permit regulations, from January 2016 to May 2021.**



When looking at the number of work permit issuances by sectors (Figure 4), it becomes more visible that the introduction of flexible work permits in agriculture and construction have had clear effects on the number of permit issuances for these two sectors. The number of issuances for the agricultural sector almost doubled from 2016 to 2017, going from around 12,000 issuances in 2016 to around 20,000 in 2017, and the number of issuances has kept at a high level since then. The same effect can be seen for construction, where the number of issuances increased from around 9,000 in 2017 to around 14,000 in 2018.

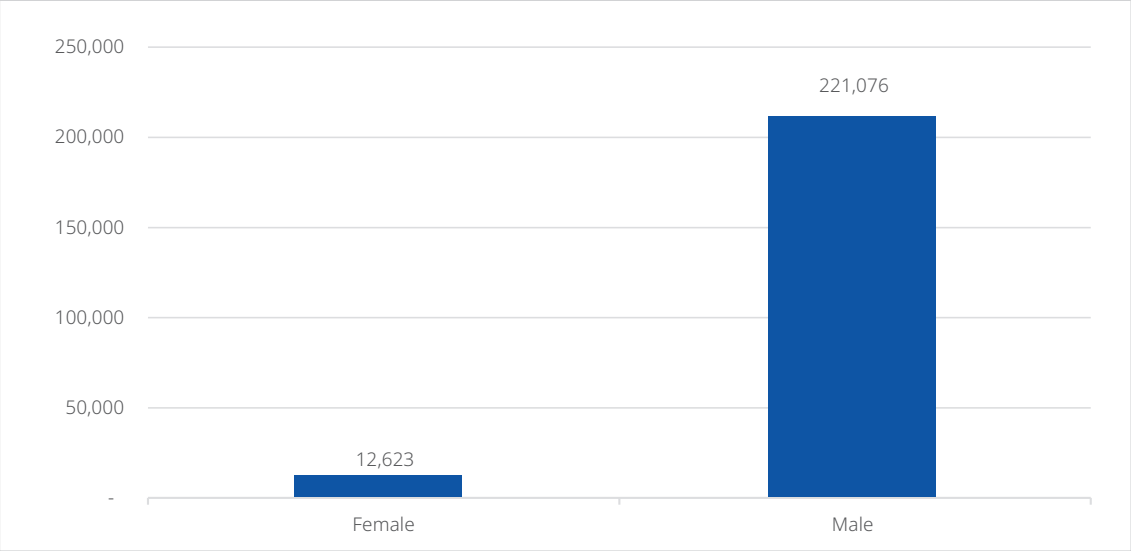
A key ambition with the Jordan Compact was to develop the manufacturing industry in Jordan to increase export earnings to the country, and refugees were expected to play a central role in this process. In that respect, it is somewhat disappointing to see that work permit issuances for the manufacturing sector have been relative low compared to issuances for the agricultural and construction sectors, and that it has been declining steadily since 2016.

▶ **Figure 4. Total number of annual work permits by sector, from January 2016 to May 2021.**



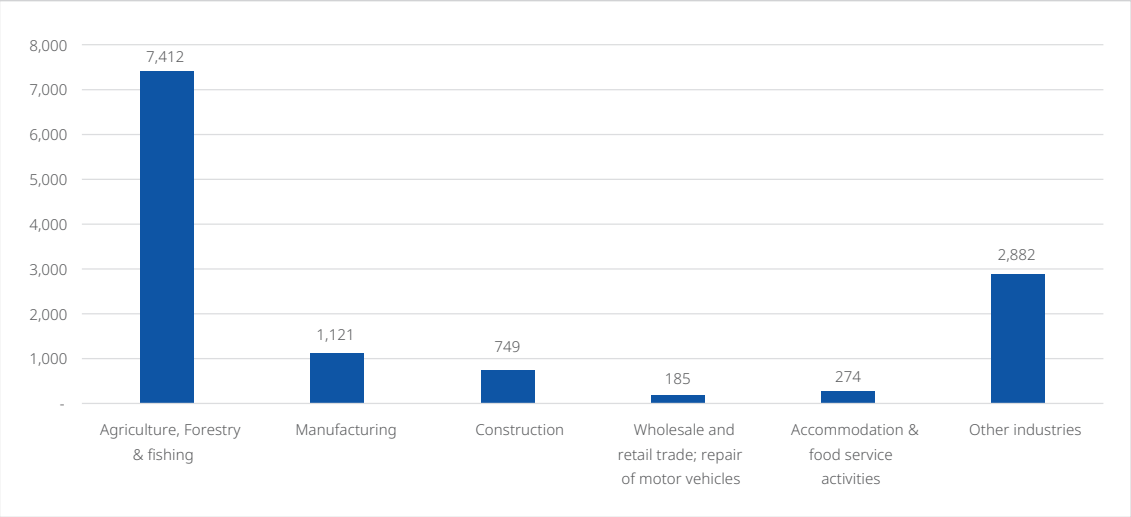
Given the low labour force participation rate of Syrian women in Jordan, it is not particularly surprising that most work permits issued to refugees since the beginning of 2016 (95 per cent), have been issued to men (Figure 5).

▶ **Figure 5. Total number workers who have obtained work permits from January 2016 to June 2021 by gender**



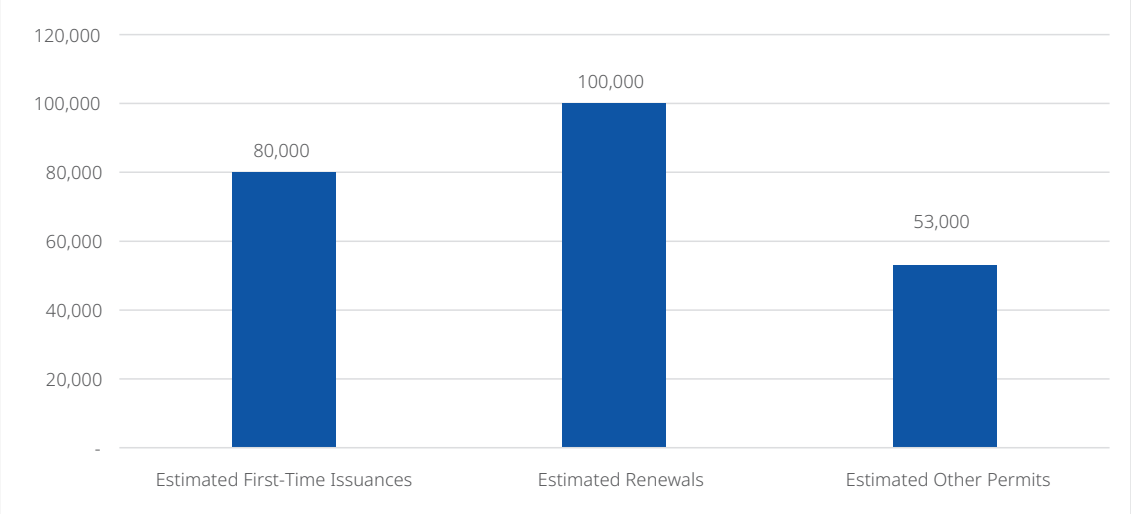
Out of the relatively few women that have obtained work permits, the majority (about 60 per cent) received permits for the agricultural sector, while 9 per cent obtained permits for manufacturing and 6 per cent for the construction sector. Almost one-fourth of the women received work permits for "other industries", such as public administration and other types of services (Figure 6).

▶ Figure 6. Total number of female workers who have obtained work permits by sector from January 2016 to June 2021



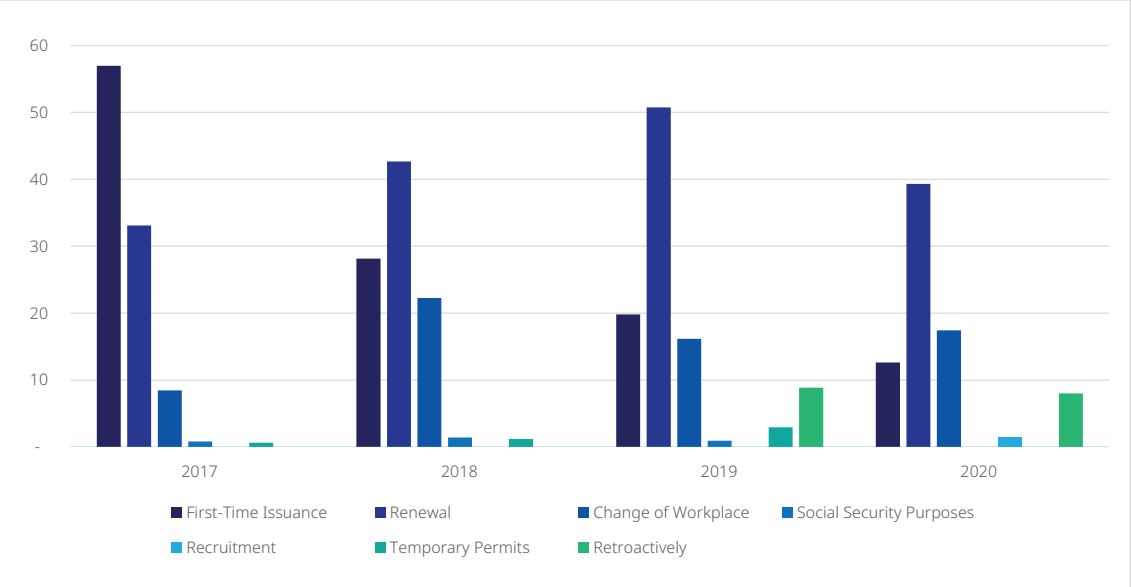
The total number of work permit issuance include different types of work permits. This also include the flexible work permits issued by the agricultural cooperatives, the GFJTU, and the camp centres. Up to April 2021, cooperatives had issued a total of 86,818 flexible work permits for the agricultural sector, while the GFJTU had issued 40,468 flexible permits for the construction sector. This means that the two institutions together had issued 57 per cent of all work permits issued to refugees in Jordan between January 2016 and April 2021.

▶ Figure 7. Estimated share of various types of permits issued from January 2016 to June 2021



Out of all the 233,699 permits issued to refugees since January 2016, around 37 per cent were first-time issuances, 40 per cent were renewals, and 15 per cent were for changing workplaces and other types of permits (Figure 7). As can be seen from the annual issuances of the various types, first-time issuances have been declining steadily since 2016, while renewals have increased between 2017 and 2019, and have constituted the largest share of permits issued (Figure 8).[29]

▸ **Figure 8. Share of work permits by type issued annually from January 2017 to December 2020**



Survey findings on access to work permits

All figures and graphs on work permit issuances presented in the previous section are derived from official statistics generated by MoL. In this section, we look at the prevalence of work permits among the sample populations covered in the various survey data sets used in this study.

2014

In the 2014-survey, about 10 per cent of all employed Syrians had obtained work permits. While 18 per cent of all Syrian workers outside camps had applied for permits, only four in ten of these had succeeded in obtaining one. Thirty-two per cent had applied for a permit within construction, 30 per cent in services, 17 per cent in the café and restaurant sector, another 17 per cent had applied for a permit to work in manufacturing, and four per cent for a permit in the agriculture sector. Four in five Syrian workers applied for permits in a sector in which they had competence or experience in, whilst one in five applied for the cheapest permit (due to the high cost associated with applying for permits at the time), or the one that they assumed were the easiest to obtain. Since a large share of the permits were obtained by circumventing rules, many Syrians and their employers lived in fear for inspections that could lead to fines and deportation (Stave and Hillesund 2014).

2018

In the 2018-survey, about one-third of all Syrian workers had a valid work permit, while an additional seven per cent had been in possession of a permit that had expired (Tiltnes, Zhang and Pedersen, 2018). Syrian workers in possession of permits were quite evenly distributed across all industrial sectors.

29 Estimated shares based on figures for 34 months between January 2016 and June 2021 (source of figures: MoL)

2020 household survey

In the 2020 pre-Covid-19 household survey, 23 per cent of all employed Syrians were in possession of a valid work permit, while nearly as many as 18 per cent had been in possession of permits that had expired. In addition, about five per cent of Syrians that were unemployed or outside the labour force (inactive) were in possession of valid permits, while 11 per cent of the unemployed or inactive had been in possession of an expired permit.

Compared to Egyptians, the share of Syrian workers with work permits was low. Seventy-five per cent of all employed Egyptians were in possession of valid work permits, while an additional six per cent had been in possession of a work permit that had expired. Furthermore, 25 per cent of all unemployed Egyptians were in possession of a valid permit.

2020 phone survey

In the 2020 phone survey carried out during the pandemic, about 20 per cent of all surveyed Syrians, irrespective of employment status, were in possession of a valid work permit. However, as many as 57 per cent of the employed Syrians, 45 per cent of those unemployed, and 34 per cent of those outside the labour market, had been in possession of work permits sometime in the past (Total 77 per cent). All Egyptian workers, whether employed or unemployed, were or had been in possession of a work permit. Eighty-three per cent of the employed Egyptians, and 33 per cent of the unemployed, were in possession of a valid work permit in late 2020. All Egyptians we interviewed were working in agriculture.

4 Employment opportunities

Labour force participation and employment rates among Syrians have increased substantially since 2014. For all Syrians in Jordan, labour force participation rate has increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2018 (Table 5). Using the 2020 data, the rate of labour force participation is about 46 percent indicating the general increase in participation rates, although the figures are not necessarily comparable as the 2020 data is not nationally representative. Although the role of work permits related to this increase is hard to quantify, there is little doubt that the issuance of work permits to Syrians since 2016 has played a significant role. This assumption is also supported by the increasing trend in labour force participation among Syrians. Furthermore, the labour force participation of both Syrian men and women exhibits an increasing trend.

▸ **Table 5. Labour force participation rates during 2020-2014 (%)**

	2014	2018	2020 [30]
Syrians, total	28	33	46
Syrians, male	52	60	75
Syrians, female	4	9	23
Syrians, lowest education	27	25	52
Syrians, highest education	67	53	62

Unemployment rates for Syrians in Jordan has fallen from about 60 per cent in 2014 to about 17 per cent in 2020. Similar to the increase in labour force participation rates for Syrians, unemployment rates have fallen substantially for both Syrian men and women since 2014. (Table 6).

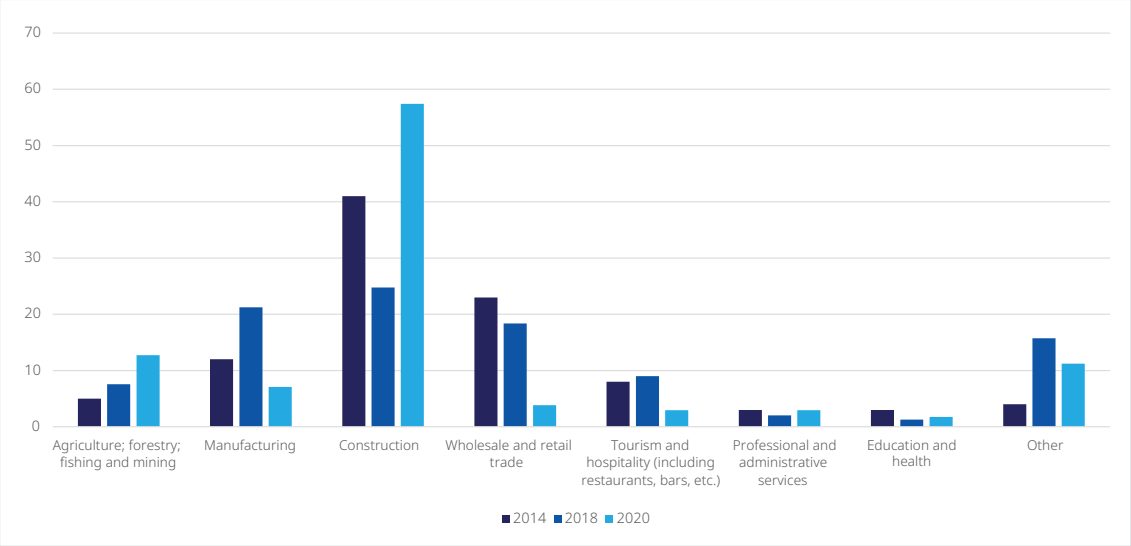
▸ **Table 6. Unemployment rates during 2014-2020**

	2014	2018	2020 [31]
Syrians, total	60	8	17
Syrians, male	58	13	16
Syrians, female	80	3	18
Syrians, lowest education	64	6	20
Syrians, highest education	56	13	27

As could be expected from the high issuances of work permits for the construction and the agricultural sector in the last couple of years, these two sectors have also seen the highest increase in Syrian workers since 2014. In the 2020-survey sample, almost 60 per cent of all employed Syrians worked in the construction sector. However, the 2020-figures should be read with caution due to the employment effects of Covid-19, particularly on hard hit sectors such as tourism and hospitality (including restaurants, bars, etc.) wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing.

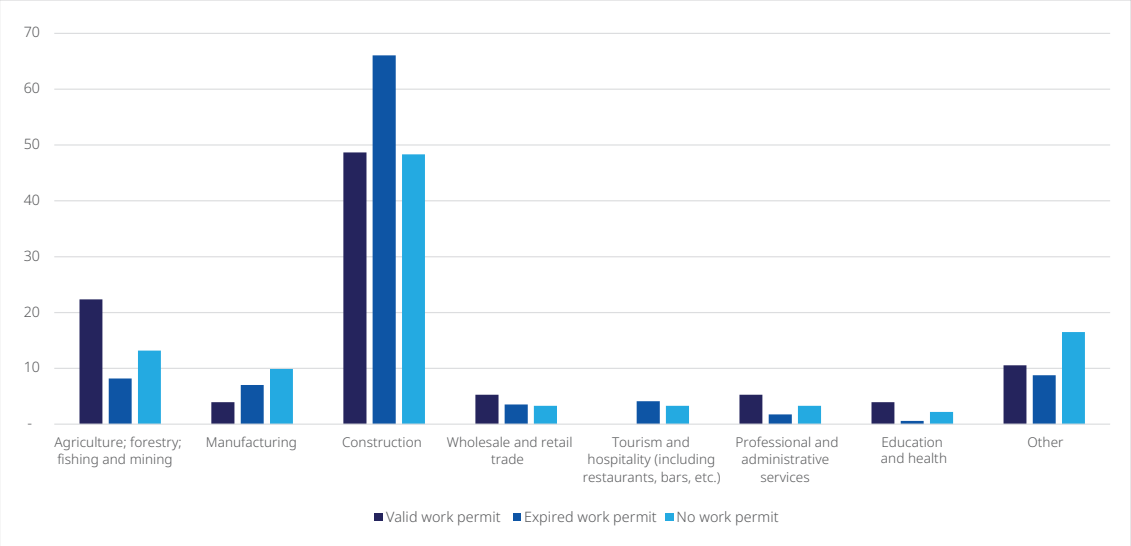
30 Note the 2020 data is not nationally representative and hence direct comparisons are not suitable.
31 Note the 2020 data is not nationally representative and hence direct comparisons are not suitable.

▶ **Figure 9. Share of employed Syrians by industrial sector, 2014, 2018 and 2020 (post Covid-19)**



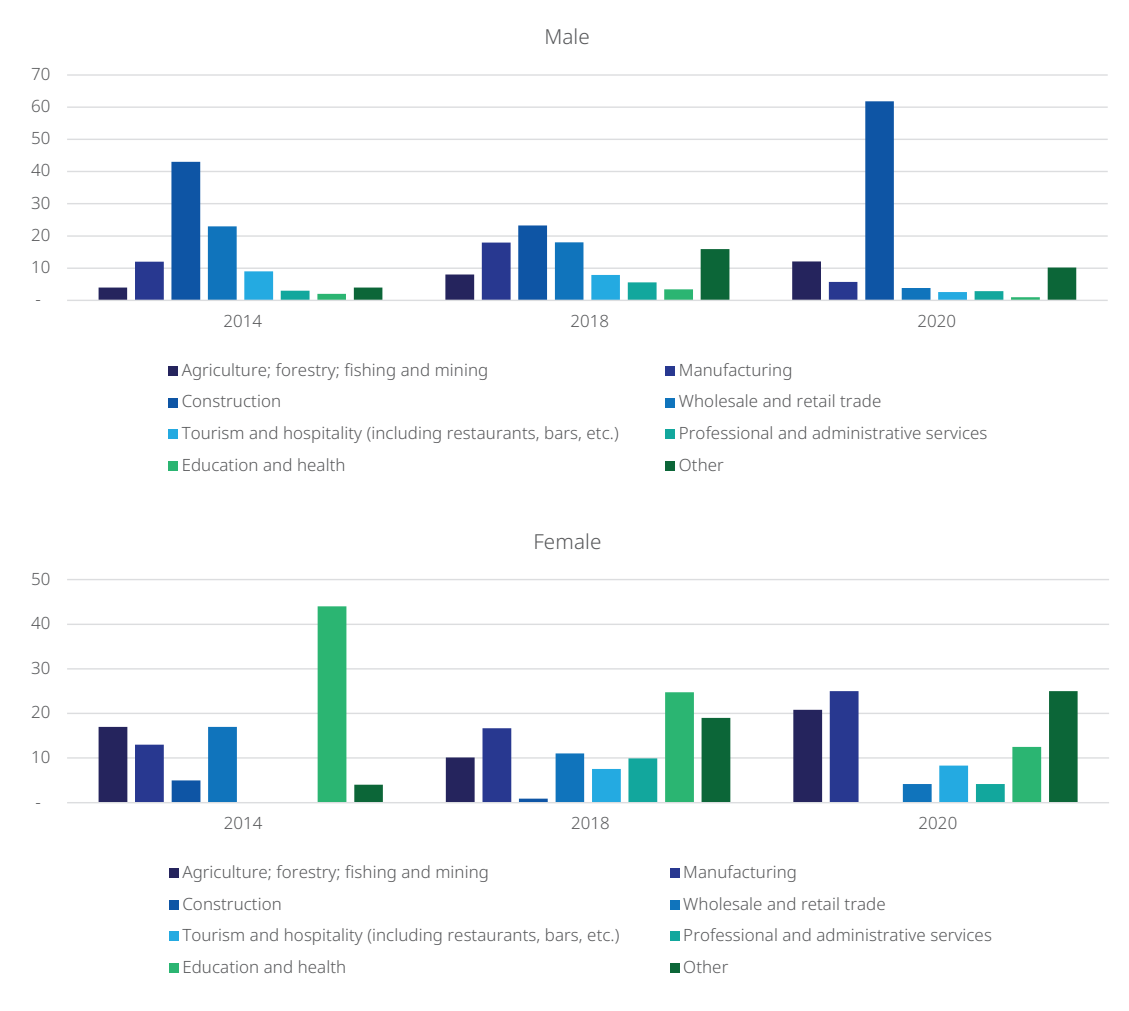
As expected from the work permit issuance pattern in recent years, most of the Syrians have valid work permits found in construction and agriculture. However, these two sector also provide work for the largest shares of Syrians without work permits. For the construction sector, there is a perfect match between the share of employed Syrians who have obtained work permits (which are valid or have expired) for that sector with the share that actually works in the sector (57 per cent). For the agricultural sector, the share that has obtained work permits for that particular sector is somewhat smaller than the actual share that works in the sector (Figure 9 and Figure 10). This might indicate that work permits in the agricultural sector is seen as easily accessible compared to other types of work permits, but it might also just reflect that agricultural work is seasonal and unstable and that Syrians with agricultural work permits take jobs in other sectors in periods.

▶ **Figure 10. Share of employed Syrians by work permit status and industrial sector, 2020 (post Covid-19)**



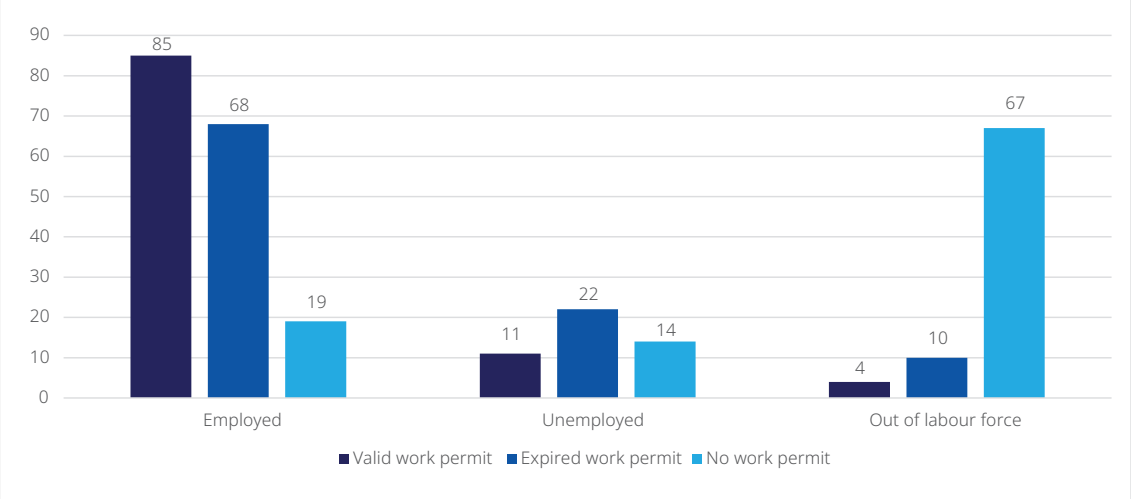
With respect to gender distribution of Syrians across different industrial sectors, most men have found work in the construction sector since the Syrian refugees started entering Jordan in 2011. In 2014, 43 per cent of all Syrian men employed in Jordan were working in construction. In 2018, this figure was 23 per cent, while in 2020; more than 60 per cent of all the surveyed Syrian men in employment worked in construction. While the by far largest share of Syrian women who were employed in 2014 were working in the health and education sectors, most employed Syrian women are now working in manufacturing and agriculture (Figure 11).

▸ Figure 11. Share of employed male (a) and female (b) Syrians by industrial sector, 2014, 2018 and 2020 (post Covid-19)



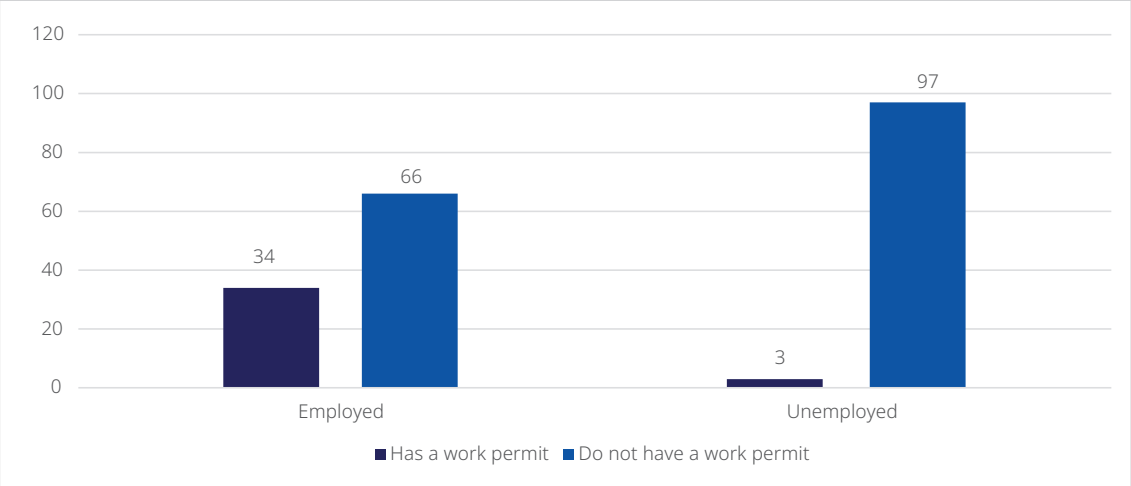
An indication that holding a work permit increases the chances for Syrians to obtain jobs in Jordan, is the fact that 85 per cent of all employed Syrians surveyed in the 2020-survey had a valid work permit, while only 19 per cent of the employed Syrians were working without ever having had a work permit (Figure 12). Moreover, large shares of the employed Syrians have been in possession of work permits that have expired, indicating that having had a work permit had helped them to obtain jobs.

▶ **Figure 12. Status of employment by work permit status, Percentage of Syrian population in 2020 (pre Covid-19)**



Data from the large and nationally representative 2018-survey do also verify this pattern, showing that only three per cent of the unemployed Syrians in 2018 were in possession of work permits, while the remaining 97 per cent of the unemployed Syrians were lacking work permits (Figure 13).

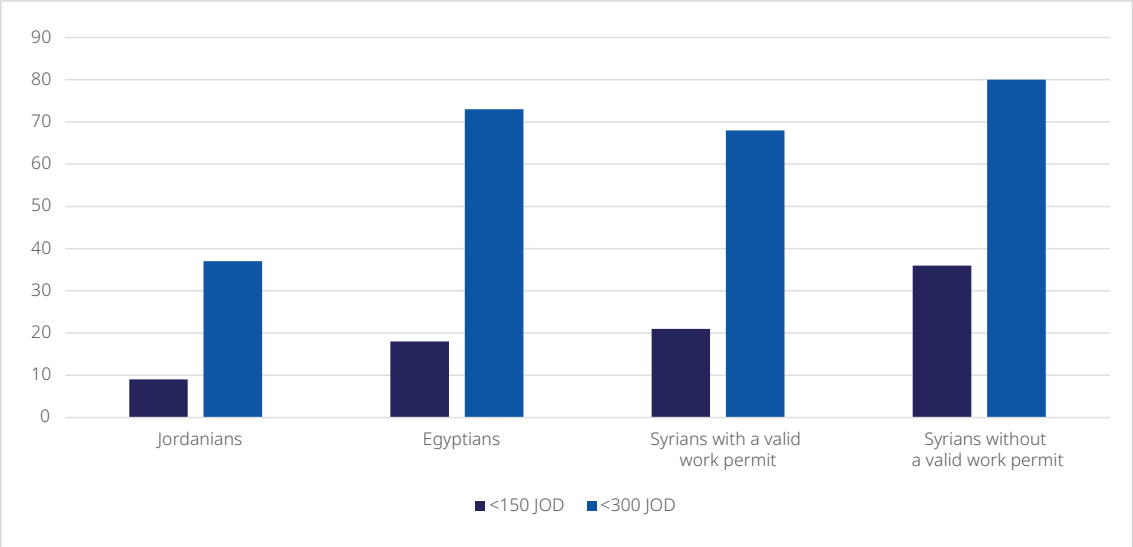
▶ **Figure 13. Status of employment by work permit status (2018 Survey data)**



5 Wages

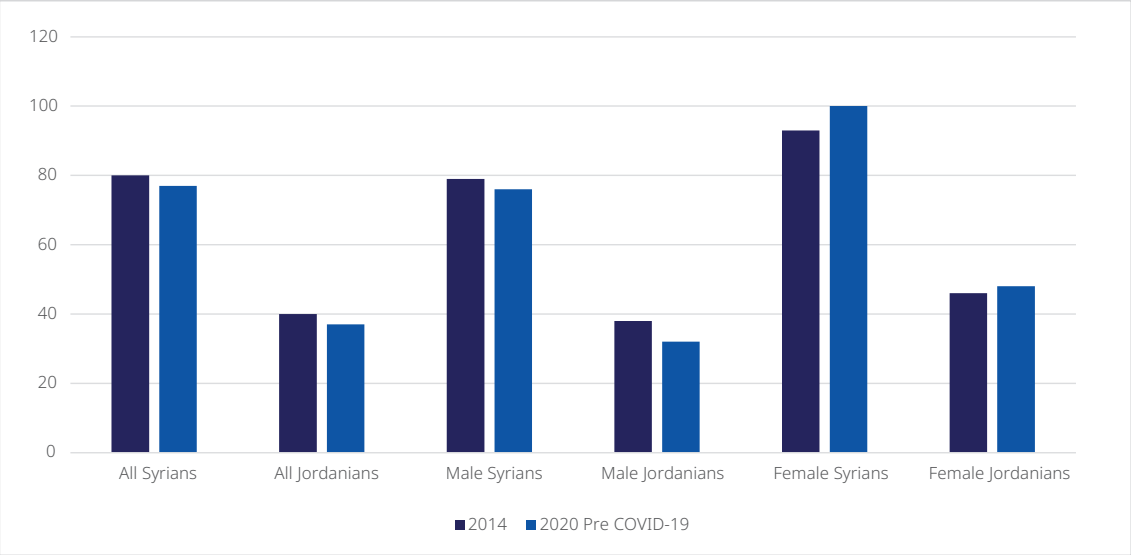
The general impression from analyses of the impact of work permits on wages is that holding a work permit has a positive effect on wages levels for Syrian wage workers. While about 37 per cent of employed Syrians without a valid work permit earn less than 150 JOD per month, about 20 per cent of employed Syrians with valid work permits have so low wages. The same trend can be seen for those Syrians earning less than 300 JOD per month. Compared to Jordanians, employed Syrians with work permits still earn substantially less, while the Syrians with work permits currently are at the same wage levels as Egyptians in Jordan (Figure 14). In 2014, employed Syrians earned far less than Egyptian workers. While 18 per cent of the Egyptians earned less than 200 JOD per month, as many as 39 per cent of the Syrians did the same (Stave and Kattaa 2015). However, attributing this change to work permits alone is difficult, as immigrant populations also tend to level out their wages with other groups over time, when they have become more familiar with the new country and the labour market. As a reference, it should be mentioned that the minimum wage level in Jordan was 220 JOD until the end of 2020, while at present it is 260 JOD for all sectors.

▸ Figure 14. Share of populations that earned less than 150 JOD and less than 300 JOD from their main work during the month of January 2020 (pre-COVID 19)



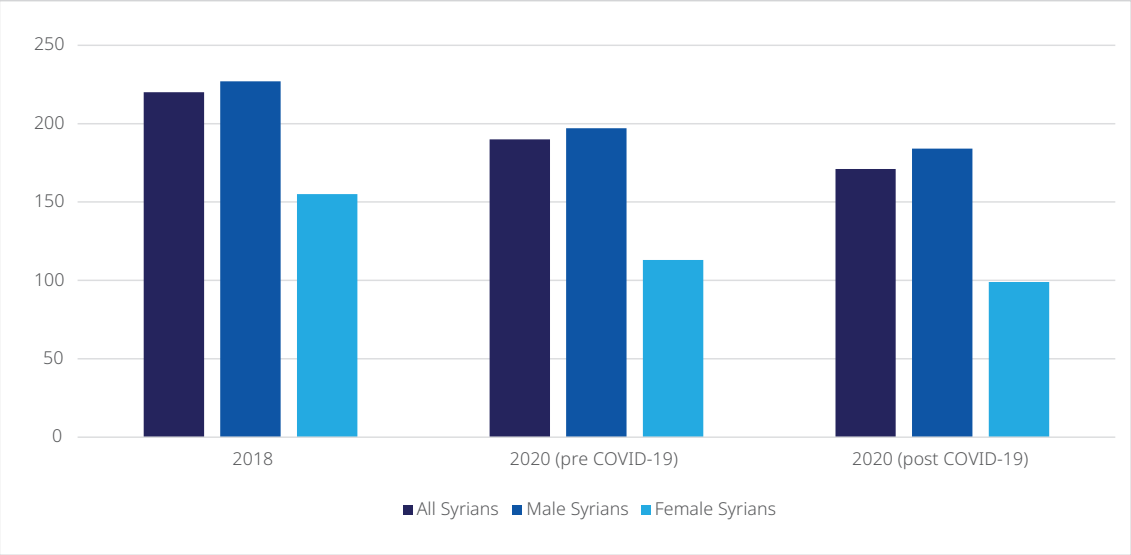
However, since 2014 the change in wage levels have been moderate for all population in the labour market. Wage levels seem to have increased only slightly for both Syrians and Jordanians between 2014 and 2020. While 80 per cent of employed Syrians earned less than 300 JOD per month in 2014, 78 per cent earned that little in 2020. In 2014, 40 per cent of employed Jordanians earned less than 300 JOD per month. The corresponding figure in 2020 was 38 per cent. While Syrian men has become slightly better off with respect to wages, Syrian women has become slightly worse off. The same trend can be seen for Jordanians. Figure 15

▶ **Figure 15. Share of Syrians and Jordanians earning less than 300 JOD per month in 2014 and in 2020 (pre COVID-19), by gender**



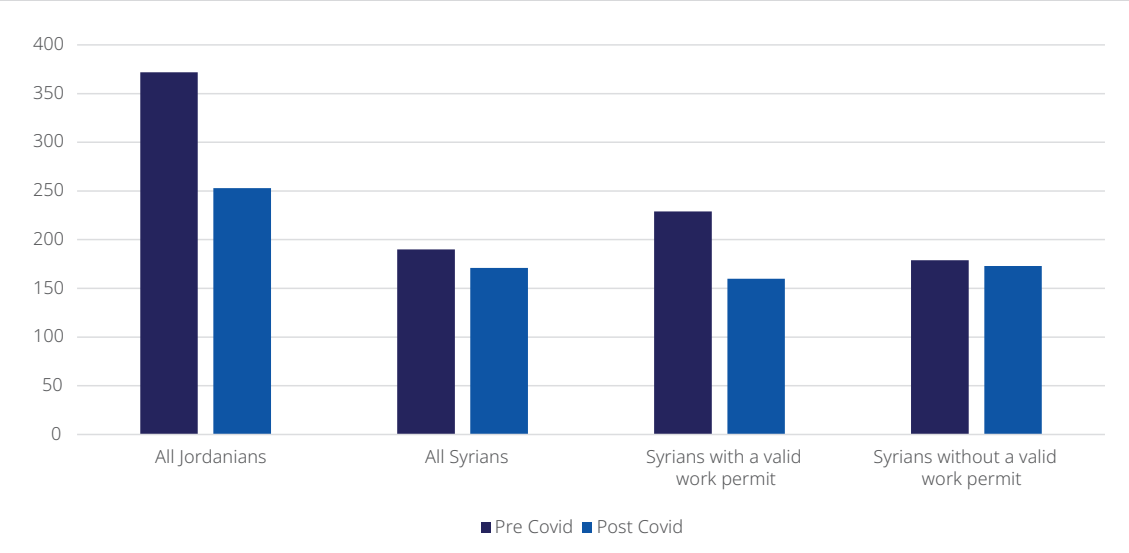
Average wages for Syrians seem to have decreased slightly between 2018 and 2020. While the average wage level for employed Syrians in 2018 was about 220 JOD per month, the level in the beginning of 2020 (pre Covid-19) was about 185 JOD per month. Later in 2020, the level had decreased to about 170 JOD per month. However, this trend is more likely to have been caused by the general economic situation in Jordan since 2018, and the economic effects of Covid-19 in 2020, than by the work permit regime. Figure 16

▶ **Figure 16. Average wages (JOD per month) for Syrians in 2018 and 2020 (pre COVID-19)**



The effects of Covid-19 on wage levels can be seen by a general decrease in average wages for both Syrians and Jordanians between the times of the two 2020-surveys (pre and post Covid-19). Interestingly, work Syrian permit holders have decreased their wages more than those not holding work permits. One explanation may be that workers with work permits are employed in more formal types of employment compared to workers without work permits, and that these work places have closed down their operations to a larger degree than more informal businesses. Figure 17

▸ Figure 17. Average wages (JOD per month) for Syrians and Jordanians before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic



However, reports by Syrian and Egyptian workers on the income effects of Covid-19 shows that about the same shares of work permit holders and workers without work permits have decreased their income during the pandemic. However, Egyptians seem to have been less affected compared to Syrians. A likely explanation is that the Egyptians predominantly work in the agricultural sector, which have been producing also during the pandemic (Table 7).

▸ Table 7. Income situation in October 2020 compared to the situation before the COVID-19 pandemic (FAFO/ILO 2020 Phone Survey Data)

		Decreased	Remained the same	Increased	Total	
					Total	Sample size
Valid work permit	Syrians	74	23	3	100	61
	Egyptians	33	64	3	100	33
Expired work permit	Syrians	84	14	3	100	154
	Egyptians	50	50	-	100	8
No work permit	Syrians	71	27	2	100	56
	Egyptians	-	-	-	-	-

The main reason for decreases in incomes during the pandemic is reduction in work hours (Table 8). Hence, the reduction in incomes does not say much about impact on wages levels as such, and even less about any effects of work permits. However, how the pandemic has affected work permit holders versus workers without work permits in general may say something about whether work permits make jobs more secure and stable for the former group. The data from this study does not show any significant difference between work permits holder and workers without work permits in this respect.

▸ **Table 8. Reason for income decline during the pandemic (FAFO/ILO 2020 Phone Survey Data)**

		Employer reduced my wage/ salary level due to corona virus	Less hours/ days worked due to Corona virus measures	Other, specify	Total	
					Total	Sample size
Valid work permit	Syrians	4	78	18	100	45
	Egyptians	27	73	-	100	11
Expired work permit	Syrians	3	78	19	100	129
	Egyptians	25	50	25	100	4
No work permit	Syrians	8	85	8	100	40
	Egyptians	-	-	-	-	-

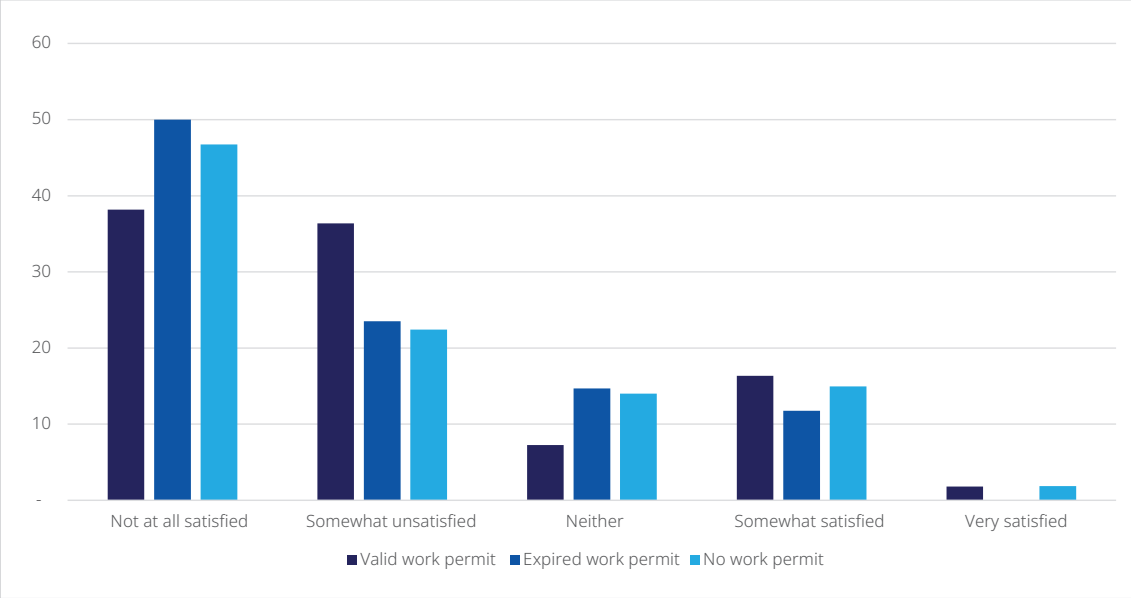
A self-assessment by Syrian and Egyptian workers with respect to the effects of work permits on wage levels shows that holding a work permit slightly improves the wage levels. While about 20 per cent of the employed Syrians and Egyptians report improved wage levels as an effect of holding work permits, about 80 per cent report no change in wages. A small and insignificant number of workers report a decrease in wage levels as an effect of holding a work permit (Table 9).

▸ **Table 9. Income change after obtaining work permit (FAFO/ILO 2020 Phone Survey Data)**

		Improved	Remained the same	Worsened	Total	
					Total	Sample size
Total		19	80	2	100	665
Gender	Male	19	79	2	100	640
	Female	8	92	-	100	25
Nationality	Syrians	18	80	2	100	616
	Egyptians	24	76	-	100	49

A modest positive effect on wages by holding a work permit is also indicated by Syrian workers' satisfaction with their wages. Fewer work permit holders are very dissatisfied with their wage levels compared to workers without work permits, while a few more work permit holders are satisfied with the levels compared to workers without work permits (Figure 18). However, the differences between the two groups are very small.

▸ Figure 18. Share of employed Syrians by work permit status and satisfaction with their current wage levels, 2020



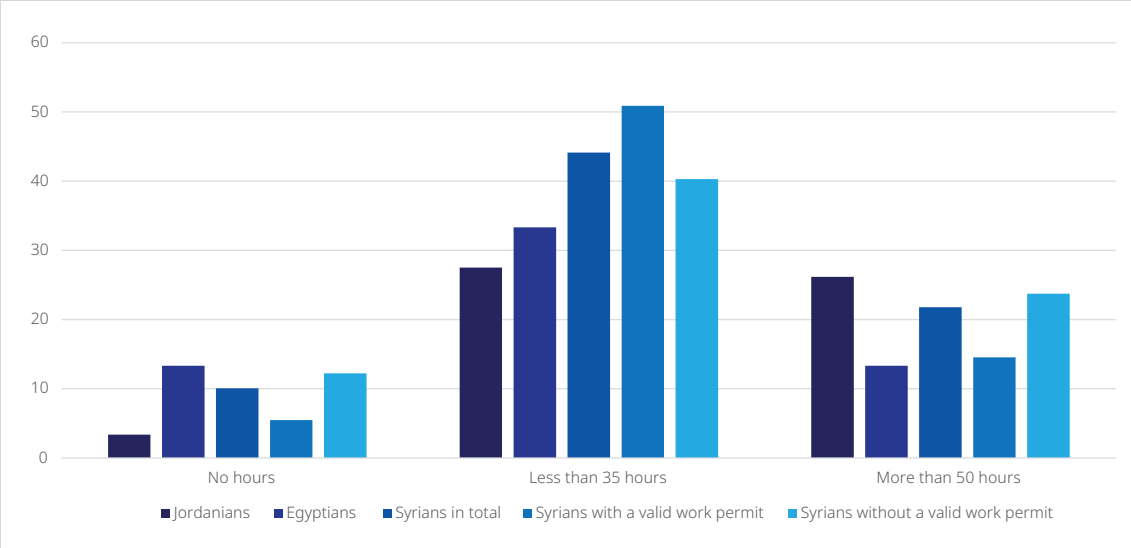
6 Working hours and stability of work

Time spent on work, as well as the stability – and predictability – of the working time, are important elements of decent work. Too little time spent on work might lead to insufficient income for workers and households, while excessive hours of work – and inconvenient working hours - might go on the expense of a decent family- and social life. Stability of working hours over time is important for some of the same reasons: to ensure a stable income for worker and their households, and to ensure sufficient and predictable time for family and social life. This chapter looks at whether holding work permits contribute to decent amounts of working hours and stability of work over time, by analysing indicators of: hours, days and months worked; employment contracts; and regularity of employment, in addition to subjective measures of workers' satisfaction related to working hours and stability of work.

Comparing hours worked in the week prior to the 2020 household survey by Syrians holding work permits and those without work permits, show that more non-permit holders where temporarily out of work (working no hours that week) and that the ones that were working worked more hours than the permit holder (Figure 19). This might indicate that holding a work permit lead to more stability of work and that not holding a work permit lead to more excessive hours of work. However, figures from the 2018 survey (on Syrians only) show that 32 per cent of work permit holders and 26 per cent of workers without work permits worked more than 60 hours during the week prior to the survey, indicating high prevalence of excessive work among Syrians in general. The 2020 household survey figures indicate that excessive work among work permit holders, in particular, has decreased since 2018, although the results from two surveys are not directly comparable due to very different sample sizes.

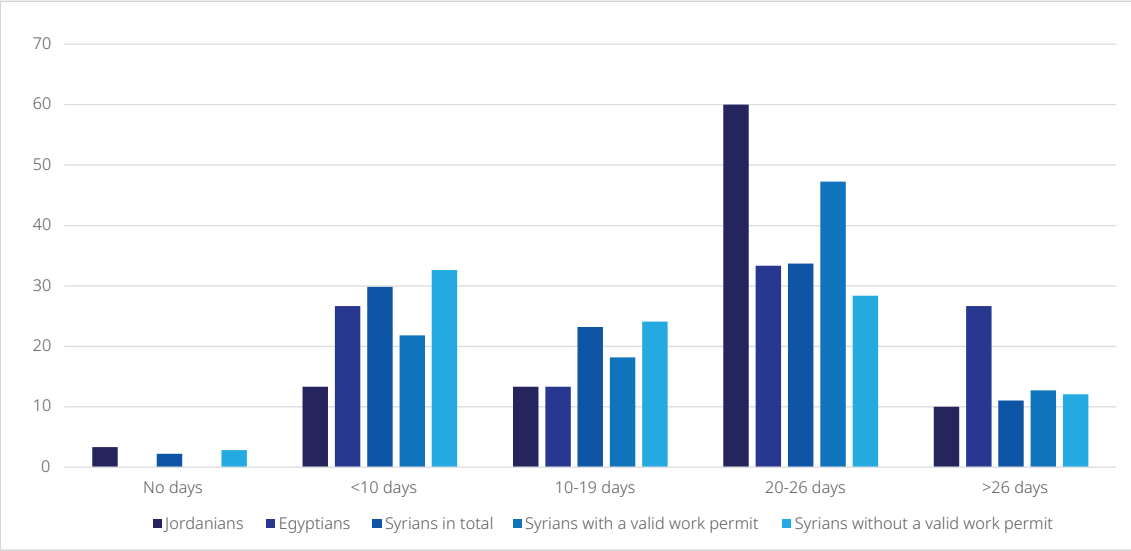
Compared to Jordanian workers, Syrians work less hours per week in general. While 51 per cent of Syrians without work permits and 40 per cent of the work permit holders work less than 35 hours per week, only 28 per cent Jordanian workers do so (Figure 19). Moreover, while 27 per cent of Jordanians work more than 5o hours per week, 24 per cent of Syrians without work permits and 14 per cent of the work permit holders do so. Fewer Jordanian workers were also temporarily out of work during the week prior to the 2020 household survey compared to both Syrian work permit holders and those without work permits. If we use the working hours pattern of Jordanian workers as a benchmark for the "normal" work pattern in Jordanian labour markets, the 2020 household survey results might indicate a slight underemployment among Syrian workers with respect to working hours.

▶ Figure 19. Hours worked during the week prior to the 2020 household survey by population groups (per cent)



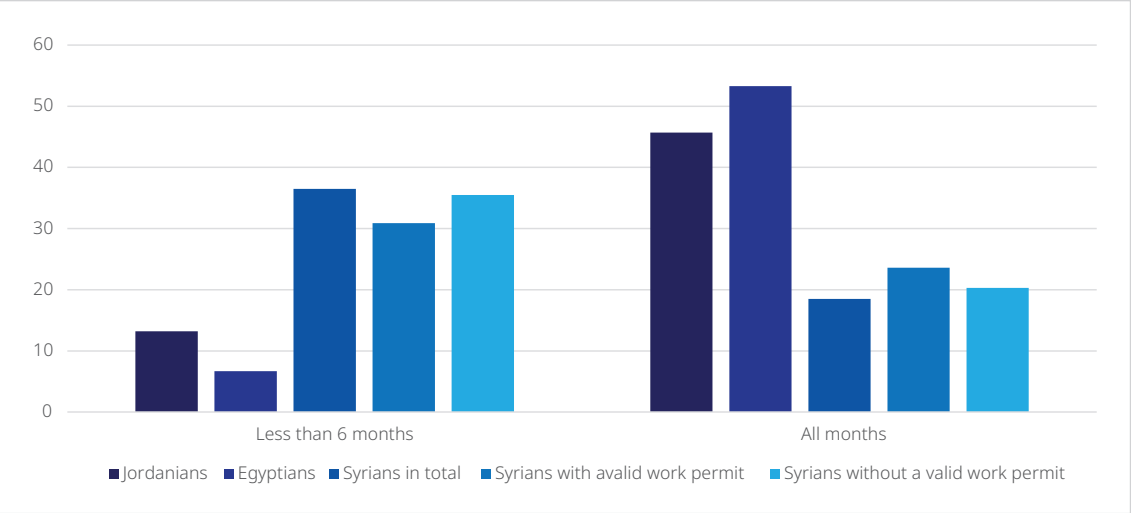
When looking at the number of days per month that various groups of workers are working, the general picture is that Syrians without work permits work less days than those holding work permits, and that more work permit holders are within the "normal" range of working days per month (20-26 days) compared to those without work permits (Figure 20). Again, if we use the workdays pattern of Jordanian workers as a benchmark for the "normal" situation in the Jordanian labour market, we see that Syrians holding work permits are closer to that "normal" compared to those without work permits. While 60 per cent of Jordanians and 47 per cent of Syrians with work permits work 20-26 days per month, only 28 per cent of Syrians without work permits do so. Furthermore, while only 14 per cent of Jordanians and 22 per cent of Syrians with work permits work less than 10 days per month, one-third of the Syrians without work permits do so. Interestingly, almost 30 per cent of the Egyptians in our sample work more than 26 days per month, compared to only about 10 per cent of the other population groups, verifying the common assumption that most Egyptians work as much as possible during the time they spend in Jordan.

▶ Figure 20. Days worked during the month prior to the 2020 household survey by population groups (per cent)



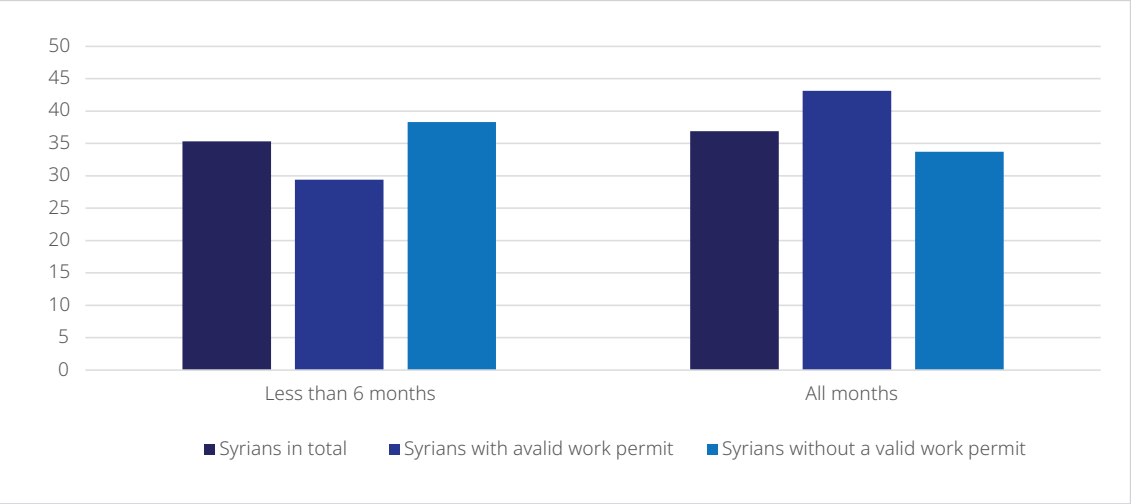
Looking at how many months of the year workers work it is clear that Syrians work significantly less than Jordanians, as well as Egyptians (Figure 21). While 47 per cent of Syrians work less than six months per year, only 12 per cent of Jordanians and only 7 per cent of Egyptians do so. However, we see that a slightly larger share of Syrians without work permits (36 per cent) work less than six months par year compared to their permit-holding counterparts (30 per cent). Similarly, while as many as 47 per cent of Jordanians and 53 per cent of Egyptians are in employment during all months of the year, only 18 per cent of Syrians are employed during all twelve months. Also here we can see that a slightly larger share of Syrians with work permits 23 per cent) are employed during all months of the year compared to Syrians without work permits (20 per cent)

▶ **Figure 21. Months worked during the last year prior to the 2020 household survey by population groups (per cent)**



Comparing the results from the 2020 household survey with the results from the national representative 2018 survey (on Syrians only) reveal the same general picture for the Syrian population (Figure 22). The share of Syrians with and without work permits, respectively, working less than six months of the year is almost exactly the same in 2018 as in 2020. The relative difference between Syrian work permit holders and those without work permits working all months of the year is also similar in 2018 and in 2020, although the total shares are higher in 2018. However, this difference in total shares might be explained by the fact that in the 2018 survey the respondents were asked if they had worked 11 months or more, while in the 2020 household survey, the respondents were asked if they had worked all 12 months of the year.

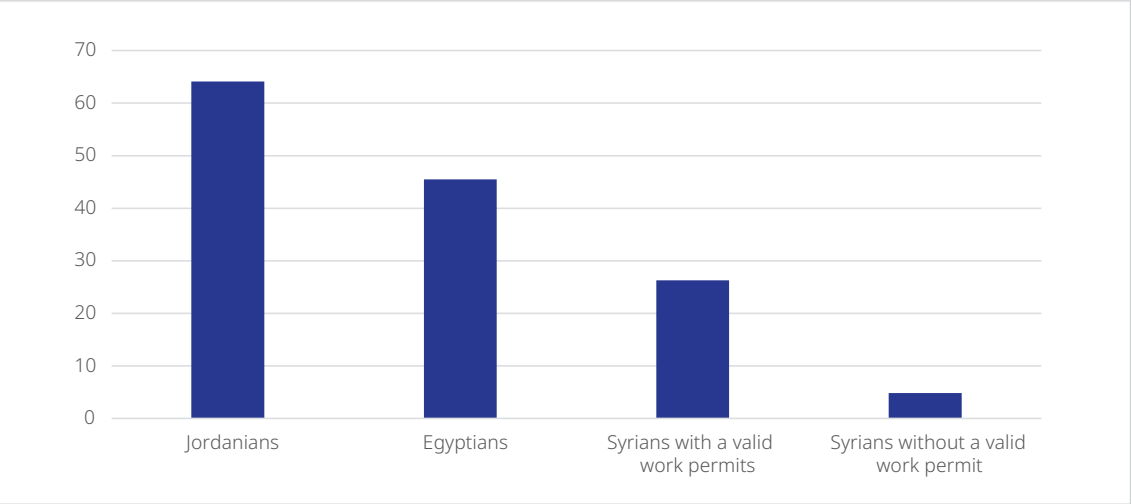
▶ **Figure 22. Months worked by Syrians during the last year prior to the 2018 national survey, by work permit status (per cent)**



In addition to serving as an indicator of the formality of employment (see next chapter), whether workers have a written contract with their employers or not can be an indication of the stability of work, i.e. having a written contract indicates more stability of work. In the beginning of 2020 (household survey), a significantly larger share of the surveyed Syrian wage workers with valid work permits were in possession of written contracts with their employers compared to Syrians without work permits (Figure 23). While 27 per cent of the work permit holders were in possession of written contracts, only 5 per cent of the Syrian wageworkers without work permits had written work contracts. However,

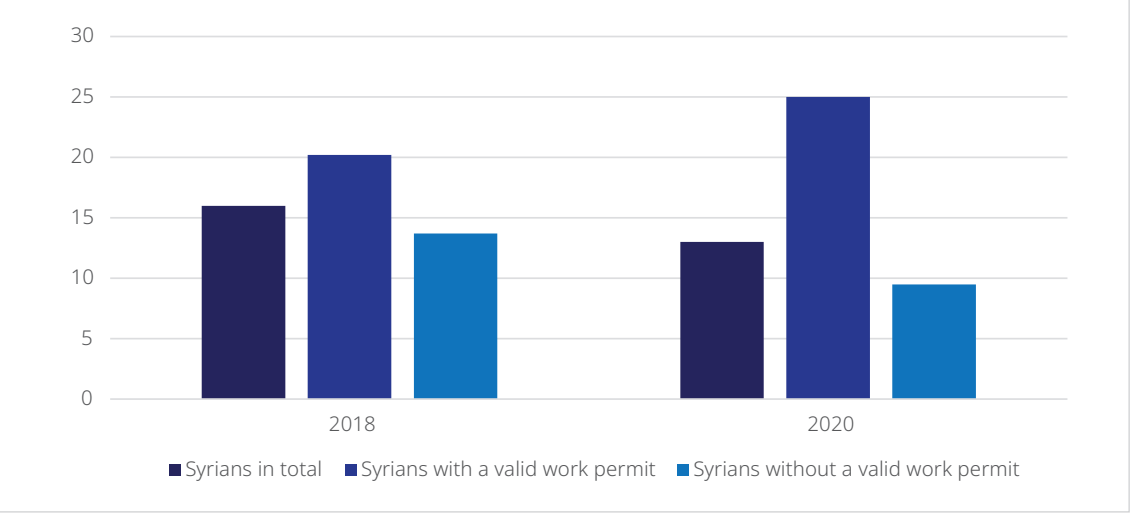
compared to Jordanian wageworkers (63 per cent), as well as Egyptian (46 per cent), the share of Syrian workers in possession of written work contracts was small.

▶ Figure 23. Share of wageworkers holding a written work contract with the employer, by population group (per cent of total wageworkers) Source: 2020 household survey [32]



Comparing the 2020 phone survey results (and the 2020 household survey results, which gave nearly the same results) with the results from the 2018 national survey, show a small decline in the total share of Syrian wageworkers who hold a written contract with their employers (down from 16 per cent in 2028 to 13 per cent in 2020). However, the comparison also shows that the gap between work permit holders and those without work permits has increased. While 20 per cent of Syrian wageworkers had written employment contracts in 2018, 25 per cent had written contracts in 2020. Similarly, while 14 per cent of the Syrian wageworkers had written contracts in 2028, only 9 per cent had written contacts in 2020. This widened gap might indicate that holding a valid work permit has become more valuable in the past couple of years with respect to securing a written employment contract, and a possible improvement in obtaining decent work for work permit holders as compared to those without work permits.

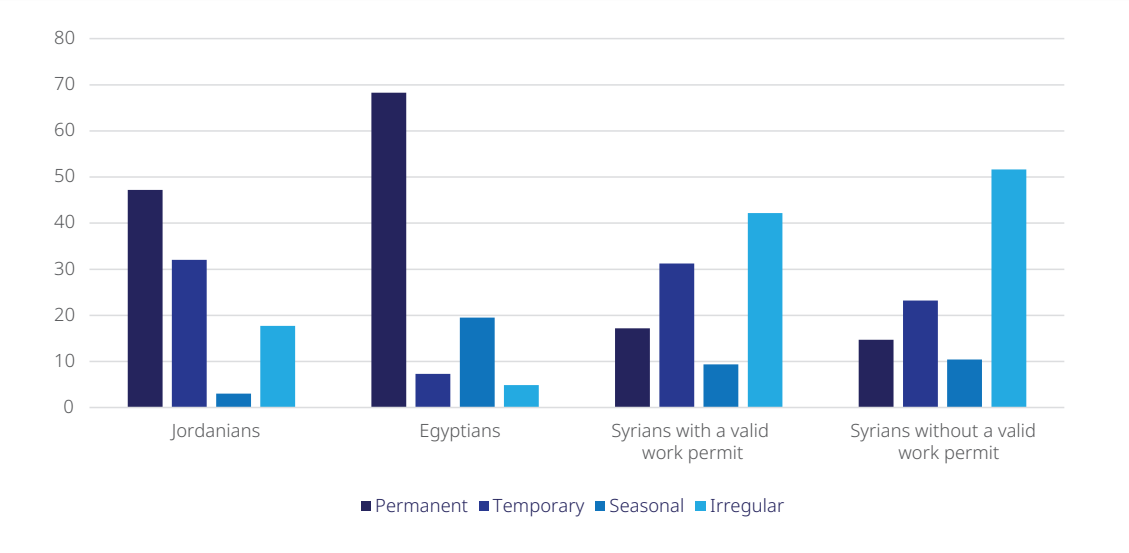
▶ Figure 24. Share of Syrian wageworkers holding a written work contract with their employer, by work permit status, 2018 and 2020 (household survey)



32 Even though the results from the 2020 household survey is based on a relatively small sample, the reliability of the data are considered to be high given the fact that the subsequent phone survey carried out the same year gave very similar results.

Regularity of employment is another indicator of the stability of work. In 2020, there were large differences between the surveyed population groups with respect to the types of work arrangement they had (Figure 25). While 48 per cent of Jordanian workers, and nearly 70 per cent of Egyptian workers, were in permanent work arrangements, only around 15 per cent of the Syrian workers were in permanent employment. However, the results also show that slightly more Syrians with work permits were in permanent employment (17 per cent) compared to Syrians without work permits (15 per cent). On the other end of the work regularity scale, More than 50 per cent of Syrian works without work permits were in irregular types of employment, including working as day labourers, while about 41 per cent of Syrians with work permits were in these types of employment.

▶ Figure 25. Share of wageworkers by regularity of employment and population group (source: 2020 phone survey)



Comparing the 2020 household survey data with the results from the 2014 and the 2018 surveys, indicates that permanent and partly semi-permanent (temporary and seasonal arrangements) types of employment has declined in general over time, for both Jordanian and Syrian workers in Jordan (Table 10). According to the 2014 ILO/Fafo survey, 85 per cent of Jordanian workers were in permanent employment arrangements in 2024, while the corresponding share in 2020 was 47 per cent. For Syrians, the decline in per cent has been about the same as for Jordanians (about 50 per cent), but less in terms of shares of the population group (from 31 per cent in 2014 to 15 per cent in 2010).

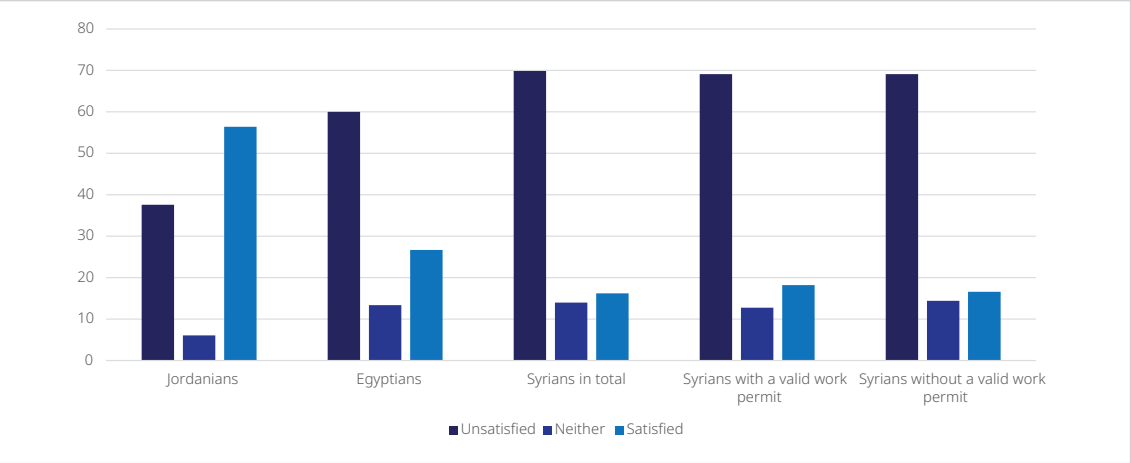
While the share of Syrian workers in temporary work arrangements has been halved between 2014 and 2020 (from 51 to 25 per cent), the share of Jordanians in temporary employment has increased from 12 to 32 per cent. Seasonal employment among Syrians has increased from nearly no workers in 2014 to 6 per cent in 2018 and 9 per cent in 2020. This increase is most likely attributed to opening-up of the agricultural sector for Syrian workers, attracting both workers with and without work permits. The decline in permanent work arrangements since 2014 has been followed by an increase in irregular employment, including day labour. According to the 2014-survey, only 2 per cent of Jordanian workers were in irregular work arrangements, while this figure has increased to 18 per cent 2020. The share of Syrian workers in irregular types of employment increased from 17 per cent in 2014 to 42 per cent in 2018, and further to 49 per cent in 2020. The relative increase has been about the same for Syrian workers with and without work permits, although the share of Syrian workers without work permits in irregular types of employment were slightly higher than for Syrians with work permits in 2020.

▶ **Table 10. Share of wage workers by regularity of employment and population group, 2014, 2018 and 2020 (household survey), per cent**

Regularity	Population group	2014	2018	2020
Permanent employment	Jordanians	85	ND	47
	Syrians in total	31	28	15
	Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	36	17
	Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	24	15
Temporary employment	Jordanians	12	ND	32
	Syrians in total	51	44	25
	Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	41	31
	Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	45	23
Seasonal employment	Jordanians	2	ND	3
	Syrians in total	1	6	10
	Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	5	9
	Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	6	10
Irregular employment	Jordanians	2	ND	18
	Syrians in total	17	42	49
	Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	18	42
	Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	25	52

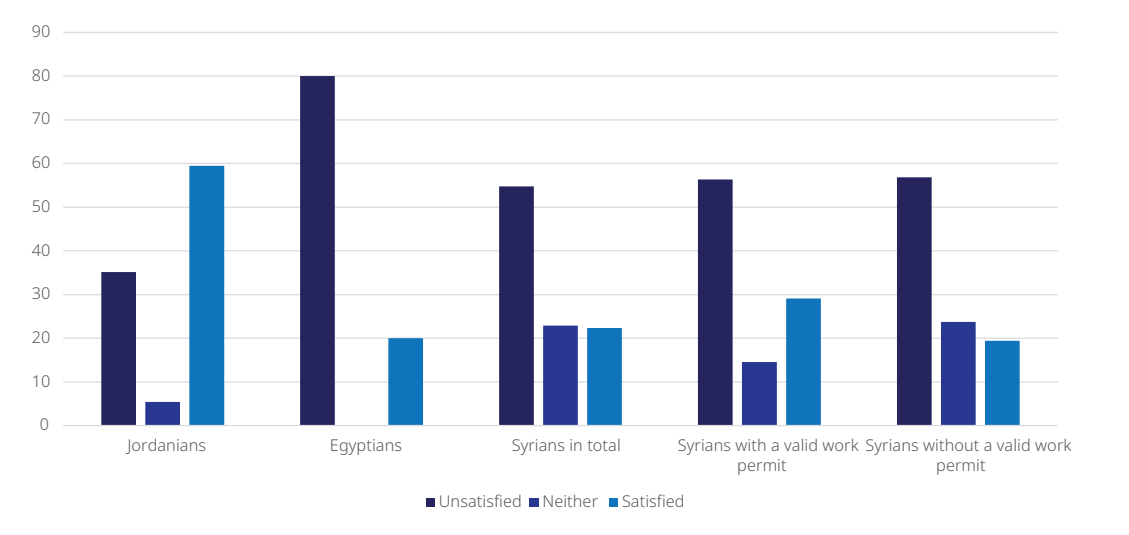
Turning to subjective data on workers satisfaction with working hours and stability of work, gives a less clear picture of the benefits of holding a work permit compared to the objective data presented so far in this chapter. Syrians are most dissatisfied with respect to stability of their work compared to Jordanians and Egyptians (Figure 26). There is also very little difference in satisfaction levels between Syrians with and without work permits, although a slightly higher share of the work permit holders express that they are satisfied compared to Syrians without work permits. However, subjective expressions of satisfaction levels are as much a measure of the workers expectations as of the objective stability of their work. Hence, the insignificant difference in satisfaction levels between Syrians with and without work permits compared to the objective measures presented earlier, might be explained by work permit holders having higher expectations to their work than workers without work permits have.

▶ **Figure 26. Share of workers by population groups and satisfaction with the stability of work, 2020 household survey (per cent)**



Syrians are also more dissatisfied with the convenience of their working hours compared to Jordanian workers, but they are less dissatisfied than Egyptian workers, which might be explained by the fact that Egyptians are the population group that work most hours among the survey populations, including hours at inconvenient times and days. However, there is a significant difference between Syrians with and without work permits whit respect to being satisfied with the convenience of work hours. While about 30 per of workers with work permits are satisfied with the convenience of wok hours, only about 20 per cent of the workers without work permits express that they are satisfied with the convenience of their work hours.

▶ Figure 27. Share of workers by population groups and satisfaction with the convenience of working hours, 2020 household survey (per cent)



7 Formality of employment and social cohesion

In 2014, when the ILO and Fafo carried out one of the first larger surveys on the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market[33], literally all Syrian workers in the country were engaged in informal employment. Given that few Syrians were able to obtain work permits at that time, this might not be a surprise. However, formal employment is different from being employed in the informal sector, and even in 2014 a relatively large share of Syrians were employed in Jordanian enterprises, including through the legally recognized channels of obtaining one-year renewable work permits and having a Jordanian sponsor. In this chapter, we look at how the formality of employment among Syrians has developed since 2014, and whether having a work permits influences the formality of employment among them. The chapter also looks at whether having a work permit influences social cohesion among Syri-an and Jordanian workers.

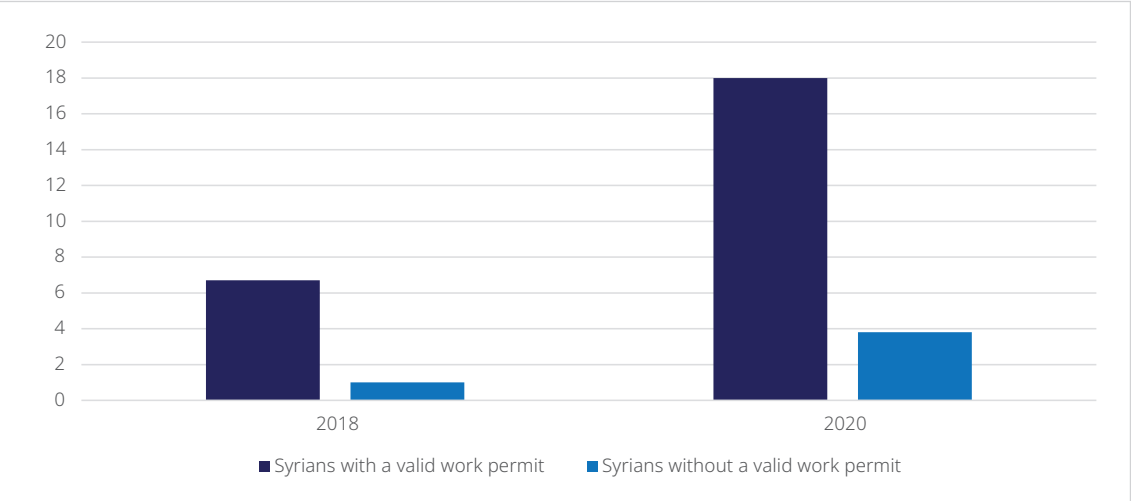
Formality of employment

Formality of employment refers to whether workers obtain the benefits embedded in the rules, regulations and standards for employment. This includes having a clear contract with their employer, being covered by social security schemes and health insurance, and having access to paid annual leave, maternity leave, and other social benefits.

In the previous chapter, it was shown that about 13 per cent of Syrian workers in Jordan had written contracts with their employer in 2020 (figure 6.6). However, the data also showed that 25 per cent of the Syrians holding a valid work permit had written contracts, compared to only 9 per cent of the Syrians without a valid work permit.

With respect to social security coverage (typically insurance for work injuries, access to retirement pension, right to maternity leave, and insurance against unemployment), we see a similar gap between Syrian work permit holders and those without work permits (figure 7.1). While 18 per cent of Syrians with a valid work permit were covered by social security in 2020, only 9 per cent of those without a valid work permit were covered.

▶ Figure 28. Social security coverage for Syrian workers, by work permit status, 2018 and 2020 (2020 Phone survey)



33 Stave, Svein Erik; Hillesund, Solveig (2015): Impact of the influx of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market - findings from the governorates of Amman, Irbid and Mafraq. International Labour Office and Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Geneva: ILO.

However, only 7 per cent of Syrian workers in total were covered by social security in 2020, compared to 67 per cent of Jordanian workers (Table 10). Despite this low figure among Syrians, the total share of Syrian workers being covered by social security in 2018 was significantly lower, at 3 per cent.

▸ Table 11. Social coverage for workers, by nationality and work permit status, 2014, 2018 and 2020 (2020 Phone survey)

	2014	2018	2020
Jordanians	48.0	ND	67.0
Syrians in total	4.0	2.9	7.0
Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	6.7	18.0
Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	1.0	3.8

In 2020, only 3 per cent of Syrian workers had access to health insurance through their job, 5 per cent had access to paid annual leave, while 7 per cent had access to paid sick leave. In addition, on these indicators of formal employment, there is a relatively large gap between work permit holders and those without work permits. Less than 3.5 per cent of Syrians without work permits have access to these benefits, compared to 11 to 18 per cent of Syrians who have work permits. Although the total share of Syrians having access to health insurance, paid annual leve and paid sick leave in 2018 seems to have been slightly higher, the gaps between work perimt holders and those without work permits seem to have increased significantly in favour of the work permit holders (Table 12).

▸ Table 12. Other social benefits for workers, by nationality and work permit status, 2014, 2018 and 2020 (2020 Phone survey)

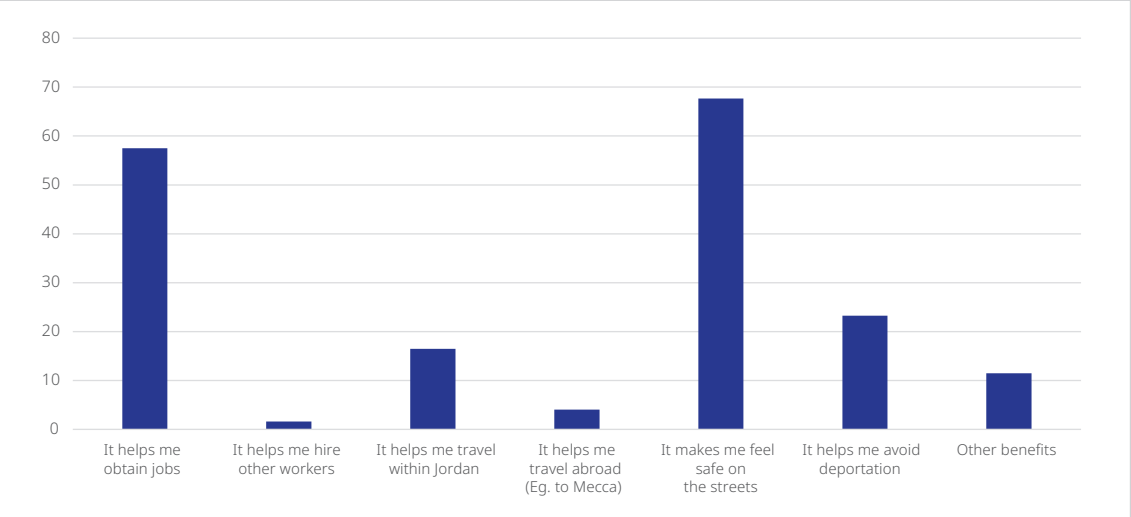
		Health insurance	Paid annual leave	Paid sick leave
2014	Jordanians	39.0	52.0	63.0
	Syrians in total	7.0	7.0	11.0
	Syrians with a valid work permit	ND	ND	ND
	Syrians without a valid work permit	ND	ND	ND
2018	Jordanians	12 ND	ND	ND
	Syrians in total	9.0	7.5	5.0
	Syrians with a valid work permit	7.0	9.5	8.9
	Syrians without a valid work permit	9.0	6.5	3.0
2020	Jordanians	30.0	49.0	55.0
	Syrians in total	3.0	5.0	10
	Syrians with a valid work permit	11.0	17.0	18.2
	Syrians without a valid work permit	1.0	1.4	3.4

Social Integration

Social integration is not directly attributable to work permits, but changes in Jordanians' perceptions towards Syrian workers over time is still interesting indications of the effects of letting Syrians into the Jordanian labour market. However, from the Syrian work permit holders' point of view, it becomes obvious that holding a work permit contributes to better integration into Jordanian society (Figure 29 Social integration benefits from having a work permit expressed by Syrian workers, per cent of all workers, 2020 Phone survey). Almost 70 per cent of Syrian work permit holders state that holding a

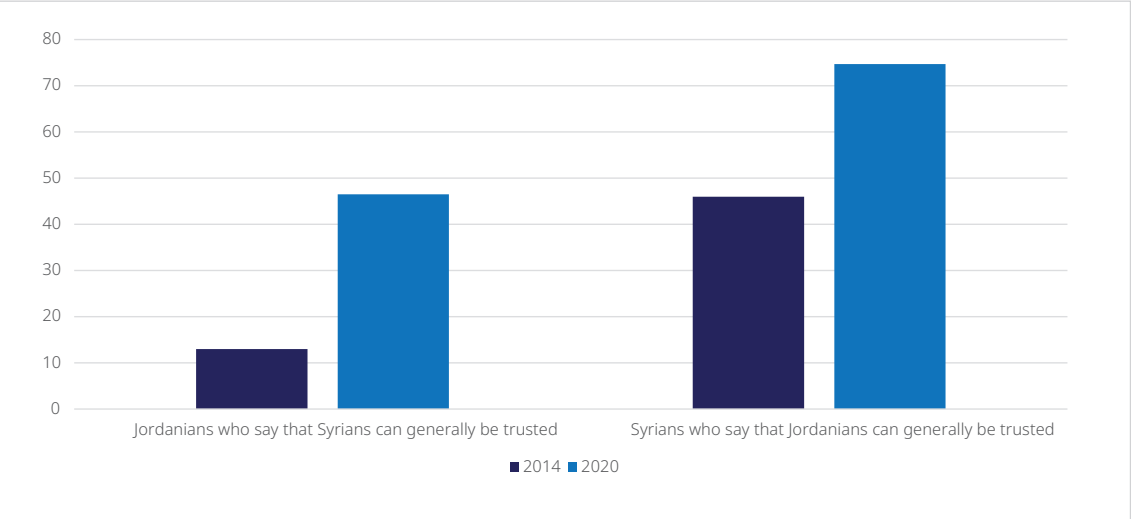
work permit makes them feel safe in public spaces, while 23 per cent state that it keeps them safe from being deported from the country. These two expressions reflect that many Syrians without work permits live in fear for being caught for illegal employment or stay in Jordan.

▸ Figure 29. Social integration benefits from having a work permit expressed by Syrian workers, Per cent of all workers, 2020 Phone survey



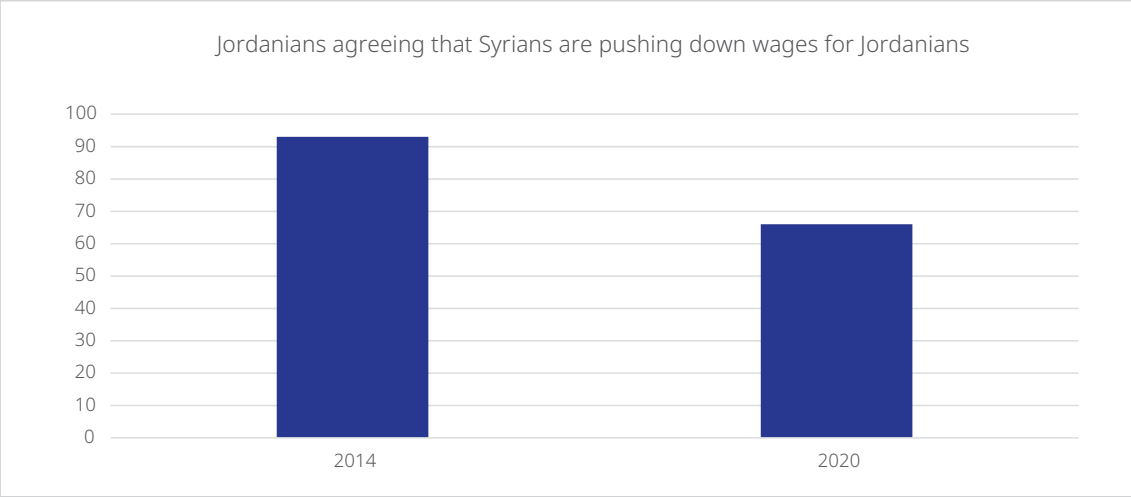
Interestingly, its seems that Jordanian workers' trust in Syrians, and vice-versa, has increased significantly from 2014 to 2018 (Figure 30). While only 12 per cent of Jordanians expressed that they trusted Syrians in general in 2014, 48 per cent did so in 2020.

▸ Figure 30. Expressed trust in other nationalities, 2014 and 2020 (2020 Household survey)



The same positive trend can be seen for Jordanians' perceptions on how Syrians influence the wage levels in the labour market (Figure 31). While more than 90 per cent of Jordanian workers expressed that they thought Syrians were pushing down wage levels in 2014, about 65 per cent did so in 2020.

▶ Figure 31. Share of Jordanians agreeing that Syrians are pushing down wages, 2024 and 2020 (2020 Household survey)

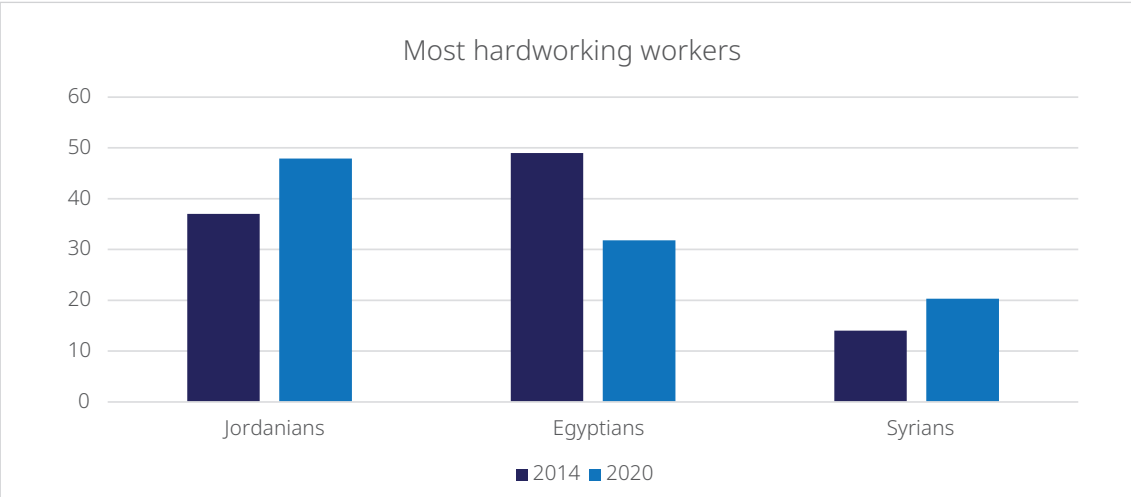


The status of Syrian workers when it comes to being hard working and reliable in the Jordanian labour market also seems to have turned more positive since 2014 (Figure 32). In 2014, Jordanian workers perceived Egyptian workers to be the most hardworking group of workers, while only 14 per cent of Jordanians perceived Syrians to be the most hardworking. In 2020, Jordanians consider themselves to be the most hardworking, while the status of Egyptians has decreased, and the status of Syrians has increased. About 20 per cent of Jordanian workers perceived Syrians to be the most hardworking in 2020 (Figure 32a).

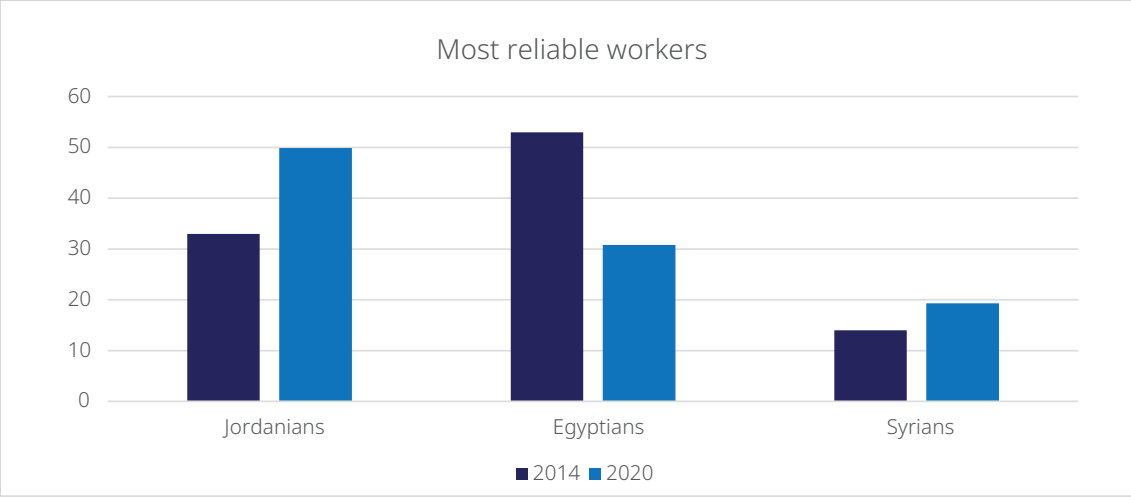
The same trends can be seen for Jordanians' perception of the most reliable groups in the labour market. The status of Egyptians has decreased, while the status of Syrians has increased from 14 per cent of Jordanians stating that Syrians were the most reliable in 2014 to 20 per cent in 2020 (Figure 32b).

▶ Figure 32. Jordanians ranking of the most hardworking (a) and reliable (b) workers in the Jordanian labour market, 2014 and 2020 (2020 Household survey)

a)

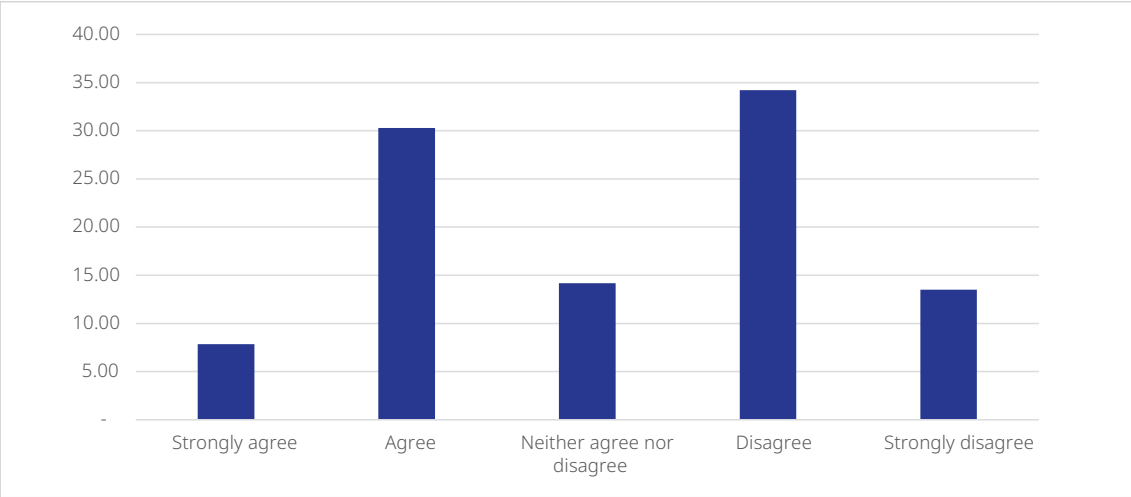


b)



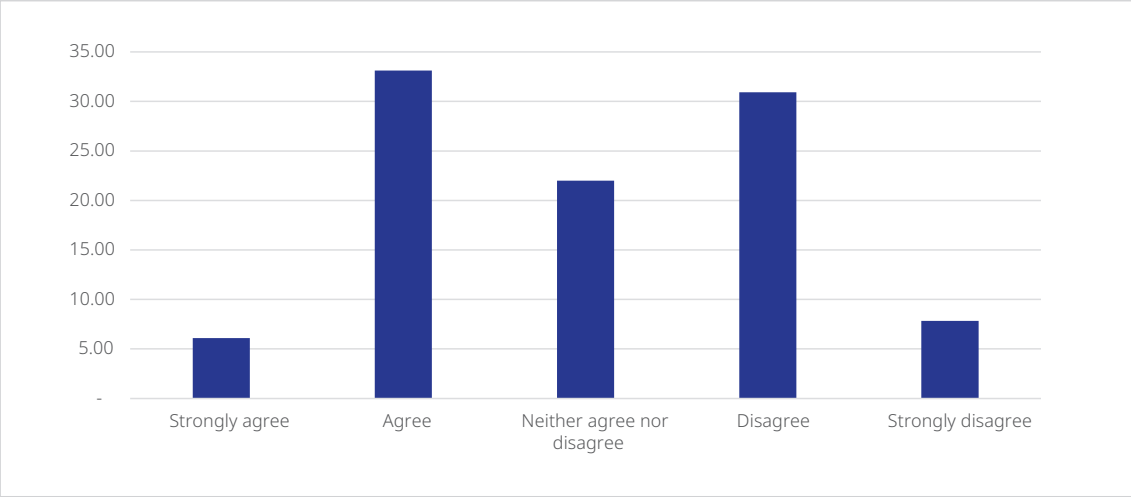
Jordanian workers have a varied view on whether Syrians should be granted full access to all sectors of the Jordanian labour market. A slightly larger share of the Jordanian workers is negative to this idea, compared to those in favour (Figure 33).

▶ Figure 33. Jordanian workers' view on whether Syrians should be granted full access to the Jordanian labour market, per cent of Jordanian workers, 2020 Household survey



The same pattern emerges when Jordanian workers are asked whether Syrians have had a positive influence on Jordanian society in general (Figure 34), although on this matter, Jordanians are divided in equal shares in terms of agreeing and disagreeing.

▶ Figure 34. Jordanian workers' view on whether Syrians have a positive influence on the Jordanian society, per cent of Jordanian workers, 2020 Household survey



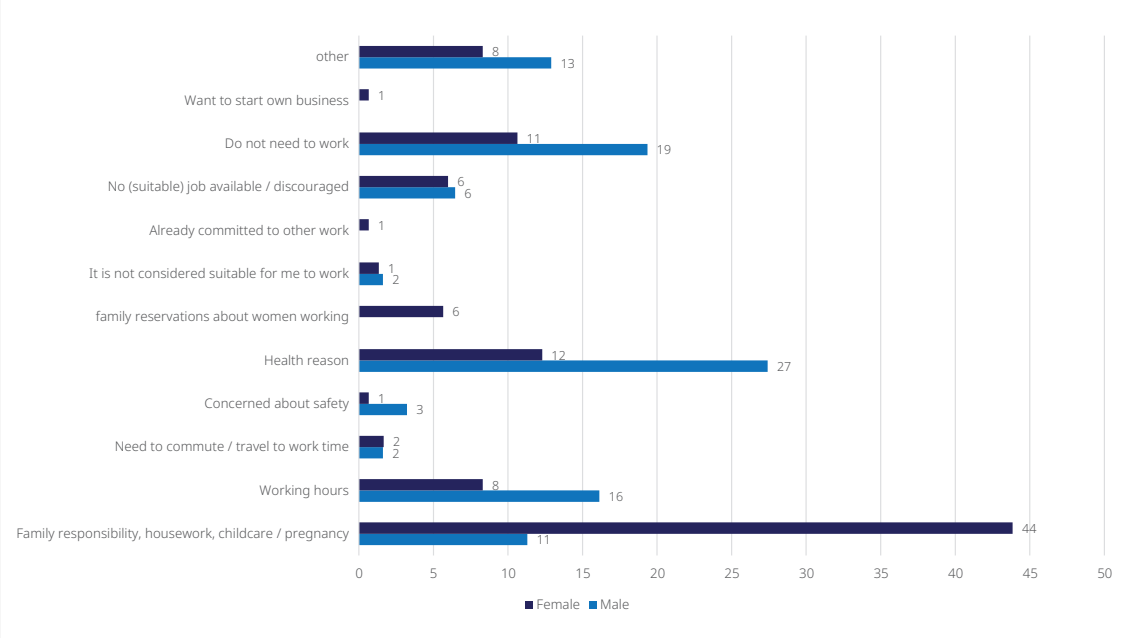
8 Women and labour markets in Jordan

This part of the report sheds light on challenges and drivers of women's participation in the labour market and examines perceptions and attitudes towards the participation of women in the labour market.

Female labour force participation remains generally low, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region. In Jordan, the overall female labour force participation rate was about 15 per cent in 2020 [34]. Furthermore, participation of Syrian women in the labour market was lower than the national level. While participation rates remain relatively low, they have however seen a steady increase in the past few years, particularly for Syrian women in Jordan. For instance, the participation rate in 2014 was about 4 per cent, while it reached about 9 per cent [35] in 2018.

The general reasons for the relatively lower female labour force participation rates include childcare responsibilities, lack of jobs in the proximity, lack of experience and discouragement from earlier experiences (Figure 35). The Fafo 2021 survey conducted among recipients of various ILO services indicated that family responsibility (44 per cent), inconvenient working hours (8 per cent) and lack of suitable jobs (6 per cent) are some of the reasons expressed by the female respondents regarding their unavailability for the labour market. These include both Syrians and Jordanian female respondents.

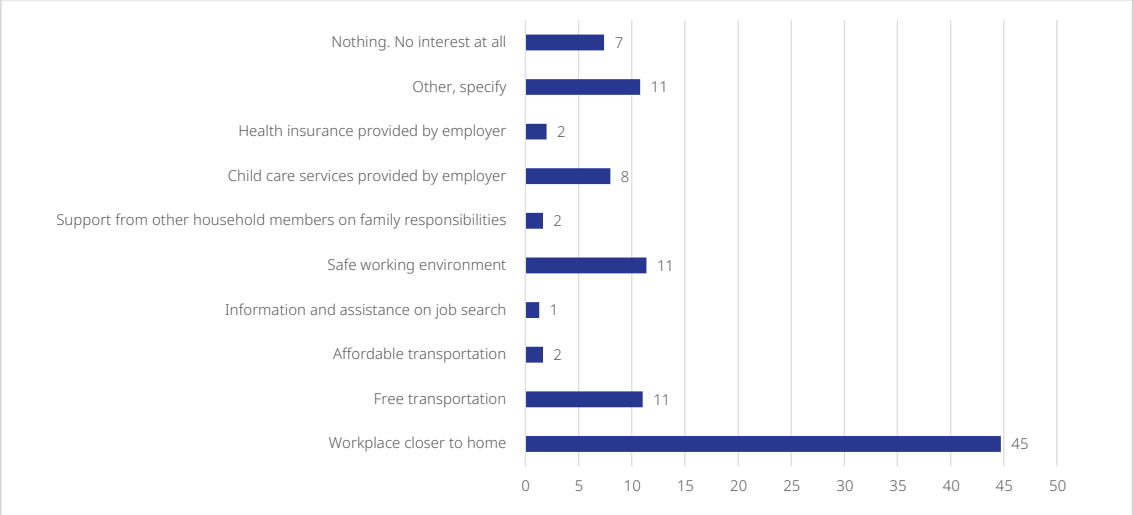
▶ Figure 35. Reasons for out of labour force persons, FAFO 2021 Phone Survey Data disaggregated by gender (Per centages. Sample size=363)



Despite these challenges, we explored what incentives would be most relevant for women to enable them to participate in the labour market. Most female respondents expressed that they would be interested to work if workplaces are closer to home (45 per cent), while other incentives include free transportation (11 per cent), safe working environment (11 per cent) and childcare service provision by employer (8 per cent) (Figure 36). While some of these are structural, they point towards practical mechanisms that are useful for policies and programmes intended to incentivizing women towards work.

34 Department of Statistics, Jordan: Jordanian Women Statistics, 2020: http://jorinfo.dos.gov.jo
35 Comparison using Fafo 2014 and 2018 data.

▶ **Figure 36. Most relevant incentive for work, FAFO 2021 Phone Survey Data (Per centages. Sample size=852)**

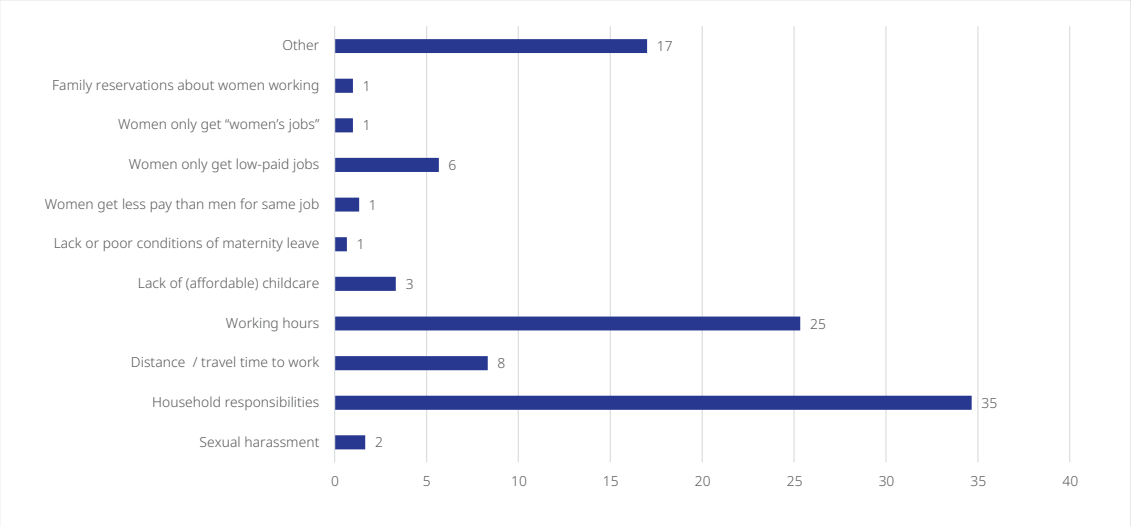


The earlier findings indicate that female labour market participation can potentially be increased though various incentive structures. On the other hand, addressing prevailing norms and values become essential as well. To this end, we explored the general perceptions about women in the labour market, including occupational choices. Most of the respondents have favourable attitudes toward women engagement as expressed in their agreement on various attitudinal statements. For instance, the majority of them strongly agree with the statement that "women should be able to work if they wish to," with 86 per cent of them expressing their agreement. On the other hand, there seems to be prevailing preferences to specific occupations deemed suitable for women. About 57 per cent of the respondents disagree with the statement "women should be able to work in any type of occupation" (Figure 37). As such, programmes intended for incentivizing women into the labour market should consider generally held attitudes while promoting and crafting job creation intended for women.

▶ **Figure 37. Attitudes towards women in the labour market, FAFO 2021 Phone Survey Data (Per centages. Sample size=1844)**

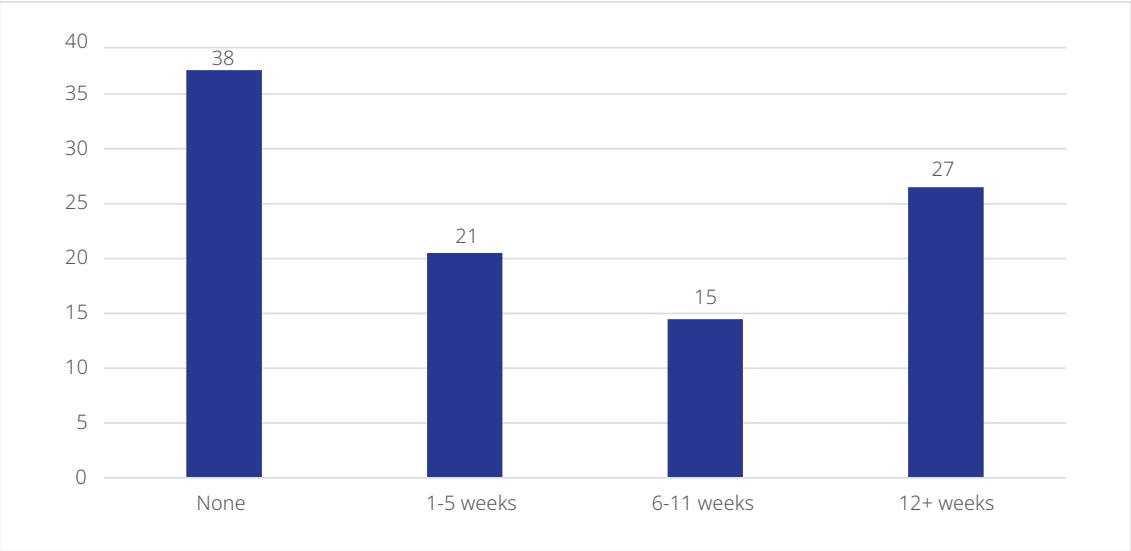
While various constraints limiting the extent of female participation exist in general, female respondents expressed their opinion on the main challenges for working women (Figure 38). These include household responsibilities (38 per cent), working hours (25 per cent), distance/travel time to work (8 per cent) and low-paid jobs (6 per cent). This indicates that while barriers remain for participation, some of the same reasons that held back women from the labour market continue to pose challenges for women at work.

▶ **Figure 38. Challenges faced by working women, FAFO 2021 Phone Survey Data (Per centages. Sample size=300)**



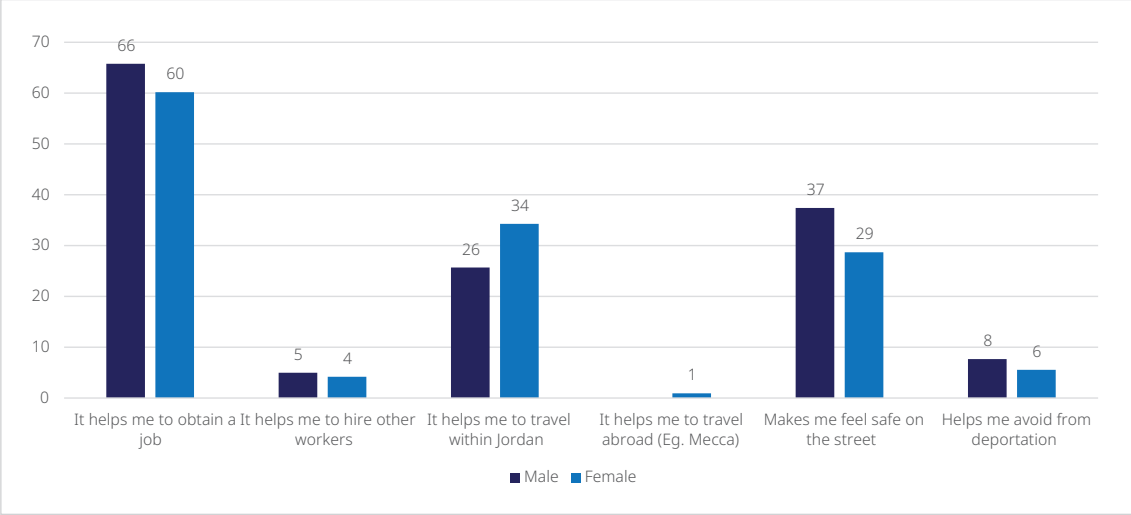
Women were asked in the pre-covid survey 2020 about the number of weeks' maternity leave at work entitled to. The majority of surveyed women (38 per cent) were not entitled to maternity leave at work, while about one-fourth of surveyed women had 12 weeks or more as a maternity leave. Such variation might be explained by the level of decent working conditions at the workplace and their work permit status, which in particular may negatively affect the share of women involved effectively in the labour market.

▶ **Figure 39. Number of weeks maternity leave woman at work entitled to, Pre-covid data 2020**



From a policy perspective geared towards refugees, work permits play an important role not only in providing formal mechanisms for access to labour markets but also in addressing other constraints that Syrians face when living in Jordan. Many of both men and women respondents in the recent survey stated that work permits helped them in obtaining a job (66 percent for men and 60 per cent for women) (Figure 40). For women, work permits provide an additional benefit of facilitating travel within Jordan (34 per cent), as well as making them feel safe on the streets (29 per cent). These results indicated the importance of work permits for refugees (women in particular) to access job opportunities in the labour market in host countries with added advantages of ensuring their legal standing in the country as they navigate in their day-to-day activities.

▶ Figure 40. Benefits of having work permits (FAFO 2021 Phone Survey Data) disaggregated by gender (Per centages. Sample size=438)



9 Summary and conclusion

This report has explored the impact of work permit regulations on decent work outcomes for Syrians in Jordan, through analysing several data sets gathered by ILO and Fafo since 2014. The findings show clear positive impacts of the work permit scheme with respect to improving decent work for Syrian workers in the country. The report has analysed a wide selection of decent work indicators, and most of these indicators show that Syrians holding a valid work permit experience more decent work than their counterparts without valid work permits. The analyses also show that in many areas of decent work, Syrian workers have come closer to the standards of the Jordanian workers over time, indicating a steady assimilation of Syrians into the Jordanian labour market, partly caused by introduction of the work permit scheme. However, decent work for Jordanians is still considerably more prevalent compared to Syrians in most areas and improvements are expected through more flexible work permits schemes.

Impact on labour force participation rate and employment

Labour force participation and employment rates among Syrians has increased substantially since 2014. For all Syrians in Jordan, the labour force participation rate has increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2018. Although attribution of this increase to work permit is not direct, the overall effect of work permits in incentivizing and providing the legal framework for Syrian's access to work is quite apparent. While labour market participation rates for Syrians increased over the past years, unemployment rates have also fallen from about 60 per cent to about 8 percent in 2018.

The construction and agriculture sectors have experienced increased participation and employment of Syrians in Jordan though the provision of work permits that have seen relatively flexible developments since their introduction in 2016.

Impact on Wages

The general impression from analyses of the impact of work permits on wages is that holding a work permit has a positive effect on wages levels for Syrian wageworkers. While about 37 per cent of employed Syrians without a valid work permit earn less than 150 JOD per month, a relatively smaller percentage of Syrians with valid work permits earn about wages less than 150 JOD per month. The same trend can be seen for those Syrians earning less than 300 JOD per month. Compared to Jordanians, employed Syrians with work permits still earn substantially less, while the Syrians with work permits currently are at the same wage levels as Egyptians in Jordan. In 2014, employed Syrians earned far less than Egyptian workers. While 18 per cent of the Egyptians earned less than 200 JOD per month, as many as 39 per cent of the Syrians did the same.

Impact on stability of work

Analyses of working hours and the length and stability of work arrangements among Syrian and Jordanian workers show that Syrians with work permits do have more stability of employment compared to those without work permits. In 2020, Syrian workers without work permits where more often temporarily out of work compared to permit holders, and the ones who were working worked more hours than the permit holders. This might indicate that holding a work permit leads to more stability of work and that not holding a work permit leads to more excessive hours of work. However, compared to the situation in 2028 it seems that the prevalence of excessive hours has decreased for both workers without work permits and for permit holders, in particular.

With respect to working days per month, more work permit holders are within the "normal" range of 20-26 working days compared to those without work permits. If we use the workdays pattern of Jordanian workers as a benchmark for the "normal" situation in the Jordanian labour market, we see that Syrians holding work permits are closer to that "normal" compared to those without work permits. Syrians work significantly fewer months during the year compared to both Jordanians and Egyptians. However, more Syrians with work permits work all months of the year compared to those without permits, who also work fewer months of the year in average.

While 48 per cent of Jordanian workers, and nearly 70 per cent of Egyptian workers being in permanent work arrangements, only around 15 per cent of the Syrian workers were in permanent employment in 2020. However, the results also show that slightly more Syrians with work permits were in permanent employment (17 per cent), compared to Syrians without work permits (15 per cent). On the other end of the work regularity scale, more than 50 per cent of Syrian works without work permits were in irregular types of employment, including working as day labourers, while about 41 per cent of Syrians with work permits were in these types of employment.

Impact on formality of employment

Formality of employment refers to whether workers obtain the benefits embedded in rules, regulations and standards for employment. This includes having a clear contract with their employer, being covered by social security schemes and health insurance, and having access to paid annual leave, maternity leave, and other social benefits.

About 13 per cent of Syrian workers in Jordan had written contracts with their employer in 2020. However, the data also showed that 25 per cent of the Syrians holding a valid work permit had written contracts, compared to only 9 per cent of the Syrians without a valid work permit. With respect to social security coverage (typically insurance for work injuries, access to retirement pension, right to maternity leave, and insurance against unemployment), we find a similar gap between Syrian work permit holders and those without work permits. While 18 per cent of Syrians with a valid work permit were covered by social security in 2020, only 9 per cent of those without a valid work permit were covered.

In 2020, only 3 per cent of Syrian workers had access to health insurance through their job, 5 per cent had access to paid annual leave, while 7 per cent had access to paid sick leave. Also on these indicators of formal employment, there is a relatively large gap between work permit holders and those without work permits. While less than 3.5 per cent of Syrians without work permits have access to these benefits, between 11 and 18 per cent the work permit holders have access.

Impact on social cohesion

Almost 70 per cent of Syrian work permit holders state that holding a work permit makes them feel safe in public spaces, while 23 per cent state that it keeps them safe from being deported from the country. These expressions reflect that many Syrians without work permits live in fear for being caught for illegal employment or stay in Jordan, and that obtaining a work permit promotes social integration and increased wellbeing among Syrians in general.

Data reflecting social cohesion of Syrians in Jordan, also shows that Jordanian workers' trust in Syrians, and vice-versa, has increased significantly from 2014 to 2018. The same positive trend can be seen for Jordanians' perceptions on how Syrians influence the wage levels in the labour market.

The status of Syrian workers, when it comes to being hard working and reliable in the Jordanian labour market, also seems to have turned more positive since 2014. In 2014, Jordanian workers perceived Egyptian workers to be the most hardworking group of workers, while only 14 per cent of Jordanians perceived Syrians to be the most hardworking. In 2020, the status of Egyptians have decreased and the status of Syrians has increased in the eyes of Jordanian workers. About 20 per cent of Jordanian workers perceive Syrians to be the most hardworking in 2020. The same trends can be seen for Jordanians' perception of the most reliable groups in the labour market. The status of Egyptians has decreased, while the status of Syrians has increased.

Impact on women in the labour markets

Female labour force participation remains generally low, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region. While participation rates remain relatively low, they have however seen a steady increase in the past few years, particularly among Syrian women in Jordan. For instance, the participation rate in 2014 was about 4 per cent, while it reached about 9 per cent in 2018.

The general reasons for the relatively lower female labour force participation rates include family responsibility (44 per cent), inconvenient working hours (8 per cent) and lack of suitable jobs (6 per cent). Despite these challenges, our findings indicate that women labour market participation can potentially be increased through various incentives, such as the provision of jobs with closer proximity, free transportation, safe working environment and childcare services.

While incentives can be instrumental, addressing prevailing norms and attitudes are essential to tackle other social barriers. For instance, attitudes towards what occupations are suitable for women are prevalent in that any programmes intended to create jobs for women should consider what is generally acceptable.

Finally, from a policy perspectives geared towards refugees, work permits play an important role not only in providing formal mechanisms for access to labour markets but also in facilitating other constraints that Syrians face when living in Jordan. While work permits provide a legal framework for work, they also have an added value of addressing other constraints, such as mobility and an increase in the a sense of safety for women at work.

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