



## Stateless: A Refugee Success Story



West Asia-North Africa Institute, August 2021



This policy brief highlights the social, procedural, and financial difficulties facing refugees, especially Gazans in Jordan, through the story of the entrepreneur Mohammad. He is a Palestinian refugee living in the Gaza Camp who is directly affected by the lack of documentation.

The WANA Institute envisions that the research could lead to governance and policymaking recommendations on the national level for Jordan as well as on the regional and international levels.

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Published by: The WANA Institute, Royal Scientific Society, PO Box 1438 Amman 11941 – Jordan

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## 1 Executive Summary

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Jordan is currently the largest host of Palestinian refugees, with more than 2 million residing between host communities and official camps<sup>1</sup>. Located in the north of Jordan, Jerash or “Gaza” Camp is the most impoverished of all camps<sup>2</sup>. Its residents face a number of different social and economic challenges, since refugees originating from Gaza are not permitted to acquire a national number according to the Jordanian nationality law<sup>3</sup>. Officially stateless, they are granted a temporary passport without a national number for the sole purpose of travel.

This policy brief highlights the social, procedural, and financial difficulties facing refugees, especially Gazans in Jordan, through the story of the entrepreneur Mohammad. He is a Palestinian refugee living in the Gaza Camp who is directly affected by the lack of documentation. Nevertheless, his passion and ambition were the main drivers of his success. Furthermore, the brief provides recommendations that would facilitate the creation of an enabling environment for refugee entrepreneurs through their inclusion into labour markets and professional associations, easing of the governmental bureaucratic procedures for refugees, and facilitating camp accessibility for delegations visiting the camp.

## 2 Introduction

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Following the 1948 Israeli occupation of Palestine, between 750,000-900,000 Palestinians fled their homes into the neighbouring host regions of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan<sup>4</sup>. Following the 1967 war, around 355,000 Palestinian refugees made their way to Jordan.<sup>6</sup> As of 2019, Jordan has hosted more than 2 million Palestinian refugees – 20 per cent of the total population - making Jordan the largest host of Palestinian refugees in the region<sup>7</sup>.

In 1949, the United Nations General Assembly established United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) as a commitment to contribute to the welfare and human development of Palestinian refugees. While 82 per cent of the refugees reside in host communities, the remaining 18 per cent reside in 10 official camps distributed between the central and northern parts of Jordan. UNRWA has been providing services to refugees in the camps and administering camp infrastructure. Established as an emergency camp after the 1968 conflict, Jerash Camp, locally known as the Gaza Camp, is the poorest among all ten camps, where 52.7 per cent of refugees have an income below the absolute national poverty line of 814 per capita per

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan. UNRWA. (n.d.). <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>.

<sup>2</sup> *Insights into the socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees in Jordan*. UNRWA. (2013, December 20). <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/insights-socio-economic-conditions-palestinian-refugees-jordan>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Law No. 6 of 1954 on Nationality (Last Amended 1987).” Refworld, n.d. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4ea13.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ababsa, M., & Al Hussein, J. (2013). In *Atlas of Jordan* (pp. 230–245). essay, Institut français du Proche-Orient.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “The State of the World’s Refugees 2006, Chapter 5: PROTRACTED REFUGEE Situations: The Search for Practical Solutions (2007 ATCR Agenda Item 4a).” UNHCR, n.d.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Chronology for Palestinians in Jordan.” Refworld, n.d. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38aa1e.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Jordan. UNRWA. (n.d.). <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>.

year, according to a Fafo Foundation report in 2013<sup>8</sup>. Surrounded by farmland, camp residents commonly depend on agriculture-related and other manual occupations.

Most of the Palestinian refugees residing in Jordan hold Jordanian citizenship,<sup>9</sup> but not Palestinians who originate from the Gaza Strip. This is due to article 3 of the nationality law that states that a Jordanian national is “any person who, not being Jewish, possessed Palestinian nationality before 15 May 1948 and was a regular resident in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan between 20 December 1949 and 16 February 1954.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Palestinians in both the East and the West Bank were granted Jordanian citizenship easily, whereas Gazans were not due to the fact that at that time, Gaza was under the Egyptian administration. To this day, this situation deprives them of a number of educational and healthcare services and membership to professional associations, as well as a host of property-owning rights such as diesel cars. Instead, Gazans - many of whom who have lived in Jordan for over fifty years - are granted temporary passports for travel and identification.

The absence of a Jordanian national number - which is a main requirement for basic services and most governmental procedures - has limited Gazan refugees’ economic and social contribution to the country and has limited possible opportunities available to them. It has also meant that, as employees, they are more vulnerable to exploitative conditions. Therefore, entrepreneurship acts as a springboard for their creativity, to come up with new start-up ideas to launch their own businesses, offering a win-win situation for both host countries and for the refugees alike.

### 3 Context

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This brief is a compilation of secondary and primary data. It follows the life journey of Mohammad, a Gazan refugee currently residing in the Jerash Camp, it depicts his insights, the challenges he faced, and his main recipes to success.

Mohammad had graduated with a nursing degree in 2012 and was hoping to start a career as a nurse, until he was faced with the harsh reality that refugees were not allowed to practice nursing except with a work permit, as per article 7 of the Jordan Nursing Council for Registered Nurses and Midwives Law<sup>11</sup>. A work permit is granted when a graduate nurse joins the nursing association and follows the association’s procedures. This is the first obstacle refugees face, as membership requires a national number, which they lack. Failing to register for the association automatically disqualifies them from practicing nursing in Jordan, excluding them from landing job opportunities related to their academic qualifications.

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<sup>8</sup>*Insights into the socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees in Jordan*. UNRWA. (2013, December 20). <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/insights-socio-economic-conditions-palestinian-refugees-jordan>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> “Decades of Resilience Stateless Gazan Refugees in Jordan.” Decades of Resilience, Stateless Gazan Refugees in Jordan, n.d. <https://prc.org.uk/en/post/3857/decades-of-resilience-stateless-gazan-refugees-in-jordan>.

<sup>11</sup> “Jordan Nurses & Midwives Council Laws and Regulations,” n.d. <http://jnmc.jo/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/JNMC-Laws-Regulations.pdf>.

Then, Mohammad went on to obtain a second degree to explore new opportunities, until he was informed by different employers that administrative careers are among the 28 jobs that the Ministry of Labour has listed as only available to Jordanians<sup>12</sup>. The list of jobs ranges from administrative and accounting professions to teaching professions to physically intensive occupations and other various fields<sup>13</sup>. The Ministry made this decision to steer foreign workers to specific jobs which Jordanians do not usually approach, in hopes of reducing unemployment among Jordanian youth.

Mohammad was lucky to stumble on the concept of a hydroponic system in the camp through a friend of his. Hydroponics is an efficient method of agriculture that does not use soil but uses another medium and requires less water. Mohammad participated in a business incubator that accelerated the development of his idea where he was given various training and multiple consultations regarding developing his business model. Later, he was able to secure funding to expand his idea into ten more hydroponic units that provided 20 job opportunities within his community, especially women.

His journey was not easy. Funding approval by a business incubator in Jordan was delayed due to governmental permits and bureaucratic procedures that required to have entry permits to the camp. Mohammad went through strenuous procedures with authorities to take permission for the visiting committees, and eventually he succeeded and received the funds.

Once his hydroponic project took off, Mohammad initiated a business incubator “*Sennara*” (fishing rod in Arabic) implying that the incubator will be providing his fellow refugees a “rod” to fish for themselves. *“You give a poor man a fish and you feed him for a day. You teach him how to fish and you give him an occupation that will feed him for a lifetime”*.

To launch his business incubator, he had to register his idea at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, which required security clearance. His security clearance was rejected twice before being finally accepted six months later. During that time, one of the funding entities granted him a 10-month grant, six of which were wasted due to his business not being officially registered. Eventually, Mohammad was able to complete his paperwork and he successfully registered his business incubator and started accepting project applications submitted by other refugees in the camp, which paved the way for different start-ups to initiate and thrive. It was a triumphant moment for Mohammad and other refugees as a way to showcase their potential within the community.

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Labour: Closed Professions in Jordan for Migrant Workers. UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). (n.d.). <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/59816>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

## 4 Approach and Results

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Mohammad, among many Gazans, is affected by the limitations as a result of not having documents. Nevertheless, his ambition and passion were the main drivers for his success. After not being eligible to practice any profession with both of his degrees, he did not lose hope and was determined to improve his living conditions.

Due to the strict supervision of entries to the camp imposed by authorities, Mohammad faced some difficulties organising regular visits to the camp for the funding parties to review his hydroponic prototype and opted for creating another system outside the camp as a way around these access restrictions. Commitment to success and belief in his project were key ingredients for his persistence and helped him to secure funding that further expanded his project.

After being rejected twice trying to register at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Mohammad had the choice to partner with Jordanian citizens to facilitate the process. However, he chose not to partner, wanting to prove to his community that with determination he could achieve his goal the way he envisioned it.

## 5 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

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To create economic opportunities for Palestinians living in the Gaza camp, Jordanian policies need to provide fertile ground for innovative refugee entrepreneurs, by addressing the lack of educational and financial services as well as strict governmental security regulations that hinder the progress. The policies need to ensure that refugees use their skills and abilities to improve their lives while contributing to the Jordanian economy. Some recommendations could be outlined as follows:

1. **Economic inclusion of refugees through facilitating access to labour markets.** Although the Ministry of Labour has restricted the accessibility of jobs for refugees, a sector-based market assessment would provide a comprehensive look at the market and provide all relevant information per sector. This will allow the Ministry to find suitable vacancies for the refugees to be included in the market to utilise their skills. Therefore, the list of jobs issued by the Ministry would ensure a fair division between Jordanians and non-Jordanians in the market.
2. **The social inclusion of refugees in professional associations.** Most Gazan refugees choose to look for opportunities beyond the scope of their education due to the complexity of registering with their respective professional associations. Therefore, facilitating the process of inclusion in professional associations would be an efficient utilisation of the refugees' skills and education in the market.
3. **Ease the governmental bureaucratic procedure for refugees.** The government could facilitate official procedures for refugees such as the security clearance in Mohammad's example. The uncertainty of approvals jeopardises new projects that have the potential to

flourish. This would require a joint effort from different governmental entities to work together to achieve a clear framework for all refugees.

4. **Simplifying the procedures for visitors to enter the camp.** Facilitating the accessibility for visiting committees into the camp would encourage entrepreneurs to seek funding opportunities and partnership with national or foreign parties.

Refugees are an integral part of the society, but with an underutilised potential. An effective integration of refugees into the community would pave the way for a win-win situation for both the host and the refugees themselves. Investing in entrepreneurs would introduce new outside-the-box concepts that could be fostered and developed aiding in the development of Jordan.





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