



Syrian Refugee Women and the Workforce in 2017



West Asia-North Africa Institute, April 2018



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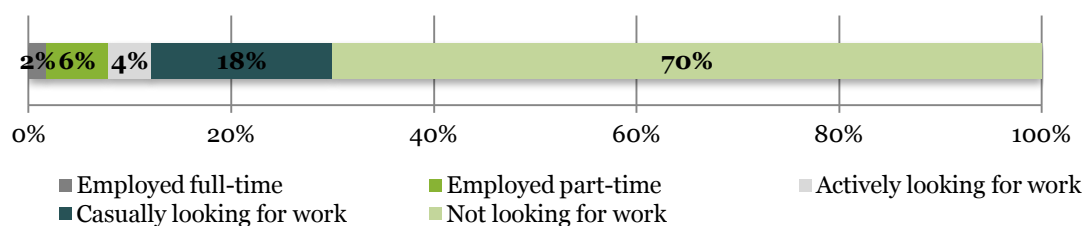
The employment of refugee women is a recurrent concern for international organisations and NGOs whose programmes provide protection and basic needs. Refugee women are commonly viewed as more vulnerable and at greater risk of poverty than their male counterparts. In the current context, many have sought refuge in Jordan without their husbands, and many serve as the head of household.¹ Their participation in the labour market is a growing point of interest for stakeholders seeking to make livelihoods more accessible to Syrian refugees.

Box 1: Key Statistics on Syrian Refugee Employment in Jordan

- In August 2017, 501 Syrian refugees across Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa were surveyed. Approximately 55.9% of respondents — **280 individuals** — were women.
- Survey data suggests that **30% of the Syrian refugee women population in Jordan is active in the labour force** (‘active in the labour force’ defined as employed full-time, employed part-time or looking for work).
- Survey data suggests that **19% of Syrian refugee women** in Jordan were employed in Syria prior to displacement.

WANA Institute data from 2017 indicates that approximately 8 per cent of surveyed Syrian women are employed outside of the home and the overwhelming majority (approximately 92 per cent) of female Syrian refugees in Jordan are not employed outside of the home. An additional 22 per cent of surveyed women indicate that they are looking for work either actively or casually. Seventy per cent of Syrian females indicate that they are not looking for work. All of this suggests a labour force participation rate of approximately 30 per cent (see Figure 1).²

Figure 1: Employment Rates of Syrian Females in Jordan, 2017



Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

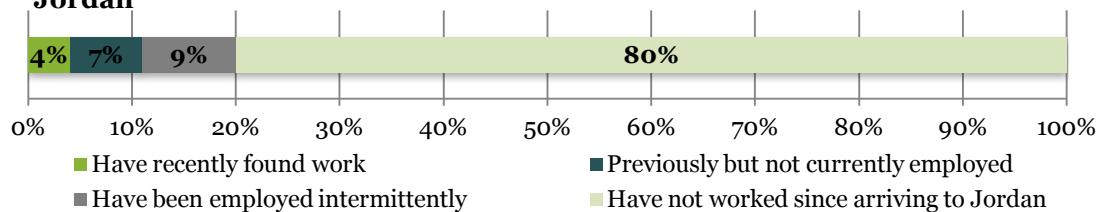
¹ CARE International, ‘7 Years into Exile: How urban Syrian refugees, vulnerable Jordanians, and other refugees in Jordan are being impacted by the Syria crisis,’ June 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2017%20CARE%20Jordan%20Syrian%20refugees%20Summary%20final%20web%20%28revised%29%2016062017.pdf>

² The labour force participation rate, or activity rate, is defined as the total number of individuals who are either employed or in search of employment.

As with the overall population of Syrian refugees, work arrangements appear to be sporadic and short-term in nature: only 2 per cent of female Syrian refugees are employed full-time, and 6 per cent are employed part-time.

Work history since arriving in Jordan also appears to be lacklustre: 80 per cent of Syrian refugee women participating in the survey have not worked since arriving in Jordan; 7 per cent indicate having been previously (but not currently) employed; 9 per cent have been employed intermittently, and 4 per cent have recently found work (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Syrian refugee women work history since arriving in Jordan

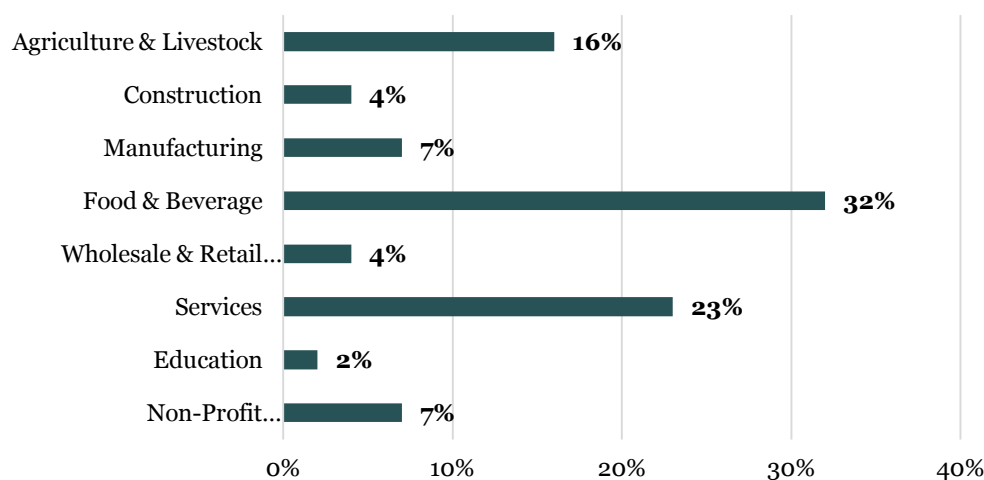


Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

Sector Distribution

Unlike with the male cohort, for female Syrian refugees the construction and manufacturing sectors account for a relatively small proportion of employment.³ The food and beverage sector accounts for the largest share of female employment (32 per cent), followed by the services sector (23 per cent), and the agriculture and livestock sector (16 per cent). A full breakdown of female Syrian refugee employment by sector may be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Female Syrian refugee employment by sector, 2017



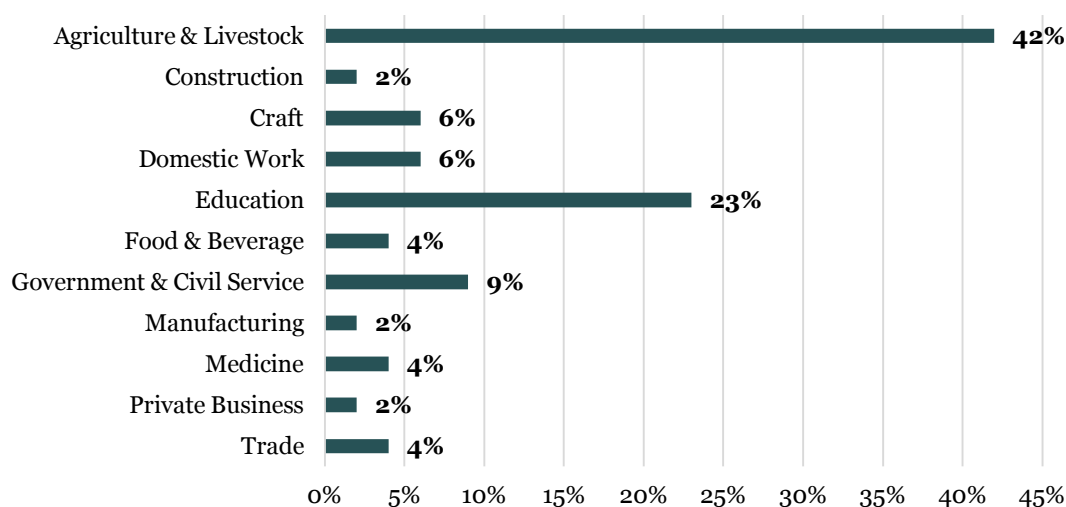
Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

³ According to this dataset, for the overall Syrian refugee population in Jordan, the construction sector accounts for 36 per cent employment, the manufacturing sector 10 per cent, and the wholesale and retail trade sector 9.7 per cent.

Employment Prior to Displacement

A smaller share of Syrian women is currently employed in Jordan than was employed in Syria. Approximately 19 per cent of surveyed females indicated having been employed in Syria prior to displacement;⁴ 8 per cent Syrian refugee women in Jordan reported employment at the time of the study, and 20 per cent reported being currently or previously employed in Jordan. Agriculture and livestock account for the largest proportion of previous work experience (42 per cent), followed by education (23 per cent), and government (9 per cent) (Figure 2 provides a full breakdown of previous employment by sector). A large proportion of employed women appear to have shifted from the agriculture sector to the food and beverage and service sectors.

Figure 4: Prior employment of Syrian refugee women

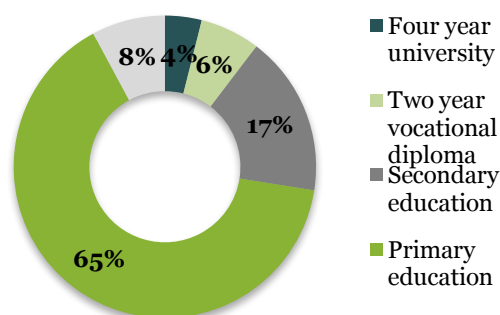


Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

Education Levels

The majority of Syrian refugee women (approximately 65 per cent) report having completed primary school. A smaller proportion — approximately 17 per cent — report having completed secondary school, while approximately 10 per cent report having completed a post-secondary degree (four-year university or two-year vocational diploma). Eight per cent of surveyed Syrian refugee women indicate having received no formal education.

Figure 5: Syrian refugee women education levels



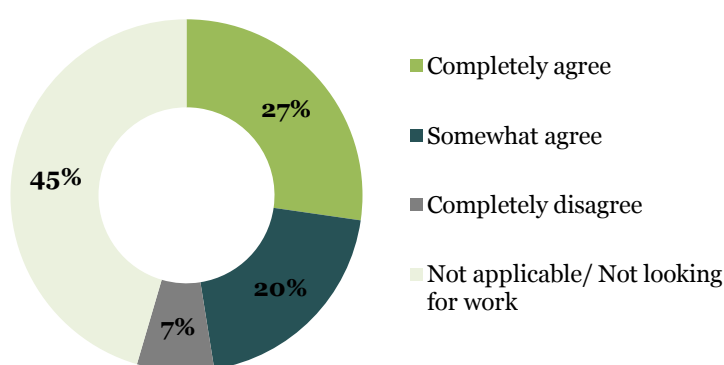
Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

⁴ It is worth noting that some of the sample would have been too young to work at the time of displacement. When excluding the youngest age group (18-24), which excludes 74 individuals, this number increases to 52 employed out of 155 women, an employment rate of 34 per cent.

Motivations & Intentions

A section of the survey explored the question of motivation to find work. The questions asked here sought to measure motivation beyond the technical definition of labour force participation. Responses therefore reflect a broader measure of motivation, where being ‘somewhat motivated’ does not necessarily imply searching for work. Overall, female Syrian refugees’ motivation to find work appears to be limited, with only 27 per cent of survey participants expressing a strong motivation to find work, an additional 20 per cent indicating some motivation to find work, and approximately 52 per cent indicating that they were either not looking for work or extremely uninterested in finding work (see Figure 6).

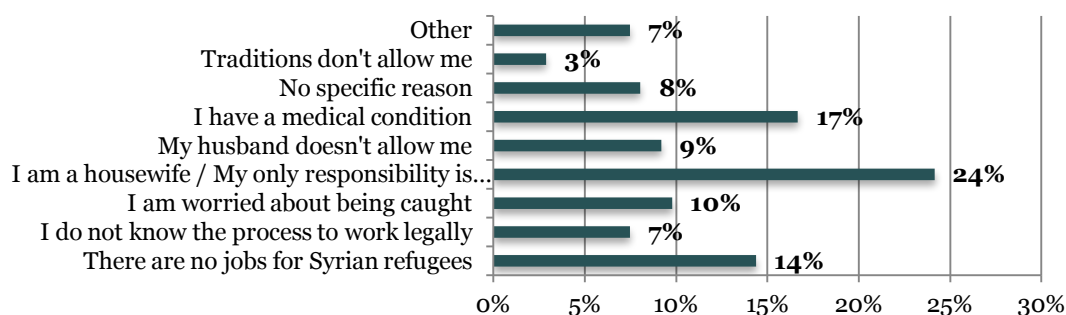
Figure 6: Motivation to find work: 'I am motivated to find work'



Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

When asked to explain their reasons for not seeking work, 24 per cent of women cite household responsibilities; 17 per cent cite medical conditions; 14 per cent claim that there are no jobs for Syrian refugees, and 9 per cent assert that their husband would not allow them to work. A small proportion of respondents reference the formalisation process: 10 per cent cite concerns of being caught, and 7 per cent cite lack of knowledge of the process for obtaining a work permit. Eight per cent of respondents cite no specific reason (see Figure 7).⁵

Figure 7: Factors deterring employment: 'My main reason for not working is.'



Source: WANA Institute survey, August 2017

⁵ The category ‘Other’ includes ‘I am studying,’ ‘I work sometimes,’ ‘I don’t have time,’ ‘I Can’t find an appropriate job,’ and ‘My age is inappropriate.’

Intention to Work in Post-Conflict Syria

Overall, respondents' intentions to work in a post-conflict Syria vary slightly in comparison to their intention to work in Jordan. A slightly larger proportion of women indicated that they would not work in a post-conflict Syria (32 per cent). For those who demonstrate an intention to work, preferences related to location appear to be less important: 8 per cent indicated they would take any job regardless of the sector or location. Eighteen per cent of respondents expressed a preference to work in their sector.

Comparison with 2016 UN Women-REACH Study

The research findings relating to female Syrian refugee employment in Jordan that are described in the previous section come on the back of a wide range of initiatives that seek to understand the factors deterring women's participation in the labour market in Jordan. Women's participation in the workforce in Jordan is perilously lacking; according to the World Bank, the labour force participation rate for females was measured at 14 per cent in 2017 — well below the world average of 49 per cent.⁶

Box 2: Figures from REACH-UN Women Report

- According to research conducted by UN Women in 2016, **20% of Jordanian women and 6% of Syrian women were employed in 2016.**
- **77% of Jordanian women and 60% of Syrian women report dissatisfaction with employment opportunities.**

In 2016, the NGO REACH in conjunction with UN Women conducted a study of 609 women — 306 of which were Jordanian and 303 were Syrian refugees. According to this research 20 per cent of surveyed Jordanian women and 6 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugee women reported being employed at the time of the survey. For those women who indicated that they were not working, childcare and household responsibilities emerged as the primary factors deterring employment. Other major

limitations cited include lack of job opportunities in the respondent's geographic area and lack of opportunities compatible with the respondent's educational and professional profile.

Overall, a large proportion of women — 76 per cent — indicated dissatisfaction with female employment opportunities is high. REACH highlighted some of the obstacles behind this dissatisfaction to be cultural, societal, familial or religious pressures (43 per cent), a lack of job opportunities that match women's skills/education/training (42 per cent), unacceptable pay for women (36 per cent), childcare (35 per cent), and household responsibilities (32 per cent).⁷ Despite a higher unemployment rate, fewer Syrian women (60 per cent) express dissatisfaction with the employment opportunities available to them than Jordanian women (77 per cent).

⁶ The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

⁷ REACH and UN Women, 'Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women's Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Towards Employment,' 2017.

Themes and Recommendations

Women's Participation in the Labour Market Remains Disparagingly Low

The data collected by the WANA Institute in 2017 falls in line with the findings of the UN Women-REACH 2016 study. Based on WANA's findings, it appears that a slightly larger proportion of Syrian refugee women (8 per cent) were employed in 2017 than were employed during the previous year (6 per cent).⁸

More Syrian Women Express Interest in Employment than Are Engaged in the Job Search Process

The UN Women-REACH report also highlighted the fact that a large proportion — approximately 57 per cent — of Syrian and Jordanian women who were not working at the time of the survey would prefer to work if they had the opportunity. This figure is broadly consistent with the 47 per cent of Syrian refugee women who express broad motivation to find work in the WANA Institute's 2017 study (see Figure 6) but far exceeds the 22 per cent who reported searching for work (some actively, some casually). This difference is notable but most likely reflects the fact that the question on desire to work that was posed to non-working women in the UN Women-REACH survey was designed to capture medium-term interests and aspirations rather than short-term intentions. Strategies should be developed to draw those women who express interest in working but who are not actively seeking work into the labour force.

Short-Term and Part-Time Work Arrangements

As is predominant for the entire Syrian refugee population, it appears that for refugee women working arrangements are often short-term or part-time in nature: 6 per cent of Syrian women participating in the WANA Institute's 2017 survey reported part-time employment, and when asked to describe their employment history in Jordan 9 per cent reported intermittent employment. Stakeholders should accept this reality and encourage policies that provide legislation to regulate and promote part-time work.

A Need for Programmes Supporting Women Who Have Shifted Sectors

As noted previously a far greater proportion of employed Syrian refugee women work in the food and beverage and broader services sectors than worked in these sectors in pre-conflict Syria: prior to displacement only 4 per cent of women reporting previous employment worked in the food and beverage sector compared in 32 per cent in Jordan. Similarly, very few (2 per cent) of the relatively large sub-section of previously employed Syrian refugee women who were employed in the education sector (23 per cent) have continued to be employed in this sector. These large-scale shifts deserve the attention of NGO and international organisation stakeholders who support livelihoods programming. Such entities could provide assistance to aid

⁸ It should be noted that small sample size of the 2017 WANA Institute survey was a relatively small 280 women. Conclusions based on this study that are applied to the general population should be taken as informative but not wholly conclusive.

the transition and within the realm of education develop programmes that take advantage of untapped skillsets.

The Emphasis on Home-Based Businesses is Well-Founded

The recurrent theme of household responsibilities in both the WANA Institute study and the UN Women-REACH study underscores the need for continued efforts support to home-based businesses. It is worth noting that in UN Women-REACH study, 58 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugee women indicated a preference for home-based work, compared to 28 per cent of surveyed Jordanian women. The 33 per cent of Syrian refugee women who referenced household responsibilities and family obligations as the primary factor deterring their employment (see Figure 7) might have better chances of entering the labour force if the regulatory environment supported the possibility of a viable home-based business.



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