

Embedding Social Justice in Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision – A Rights-Based Analysis



This policy paper is part of the project entitled “Addressing Socio-Economic Challenges in Jordan: Reflections on the Economic Modernisation Vision 2033” implemented jointly by the West Asia-North Africa Institute and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Jordan Office. The aim of the project is to examine Jordan’s Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV) implementation from fresh angles, highlighting the opportunities and necessary reforms to ensure the vision delivers on its promise for Jordan’s future.

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Abstract

Social justice principles are commonly adopted in the design and implementation of strategies and projects undertaken by humanitarian actors, including NGOs, civil society, and advocacy groups. However, they are rarely incorporated as a primary lens into economic and governmental reform strategies. This paper looks at the Economic Modernisation Vision's implementation plan and argues that incorporating social justice principles as an additional driver would accelerate the achievement of its objectives of economic growth and a better quality of life, while ensuring that Jordan has more inclusive economic growth and participation within its implementation plan. The paper offers a rights-based analysis focusing on three groups, namely women, PWDs, and refugees, to examine their rights and freedoms as protected under human rights instruments.

الملخص

تعتمد مبادئ العدالة الاجتماعية على نطاق واسع في تصميم وتنفيذ الاستراتيجيات والمشاريع التي تضطلع بها الجهات الفاعلة في العمل الإنساني، بما في ذلك المنظمات غير الحكومية، ومنظمات المجتمع المدني، وجماعات المناصرة. غير أنَّ هذه المبادئ نادراً ما تُوظَّف باعتبارها إطاراً تحليلياً ومنهجياً رئيسياً في صياغة وتنفيذ استراتيجيات الإصلاح الاقتصادي والحكومي.

تبحث هذه الورقة في خطة تنفيذ رؤية التحديث الاقتصادي، وتجاذل بأنَّ إدماج مبادئ العدالة الاجتماعية بوصفها محركاً إضافياً من شأنه أن يُسهم في تسريع تحقيق أهداف الرؤية المتعلقة بتعزيز النمو الاقتصادي وتحسين جودة الحياة، مع ضمان نمو أكثر شمولاً وعدالة، وأن تتعزز فرص المشاركة الاقتصادية ضمن إطار تنفيذ الخطة في الأردن. تقدم الورقة تحليلًا قائماً على النهج الحقوقي، يركِّز على ثلاثة فئات محددة، هي النساء، والأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة، واللاجئون، من خلال تقييم مدى تعميم حقوقهم وحرياتهم الأساسية كما تكفلها الاتفاقيات والمعاهدات الدولية لحقوق الإنسان.

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1 Introduction

Jordan has embarked on a long-term national strategy to unleash accelerated economic growth and an improved quality of life for its citizens through the Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV).¹ To achieve this vision, executive programs have been set for implementation over ten years, from 2022 to 2033, where the first implementation phase contained 183 initiatives out of a total of 380 to be implemented by 2033.²

The EMV is built around eight drivers: Invest Jordan, Smart Jordan, Future Services, Destination Jordan, High Value Industries, Sustainable Resources, Vibrant and Green Jordan, all designated to support its two main pillars of economic growth and improved quality of life. This paper argues for the adoption of social justice as an additional driver in the EMV. The paper demonstrates that incorporating social justice principles can reinforce existing drivers for achieving the EMV's goals and ensure inclusive economic growth, thereby enabling meaningful participation by all segments of society while safeguarding their rights and freedoms as protected by IHR instruments. The paper analyses the implementation of the EMV through a social justice lens by examining its 2025–2023 executive program and assessing whether it is inclusive of social justice principles.

Therefore, the central question of this paper is:

- To what extent does Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision embed social justice principles in its 2025–2022 implementation plan, and how might adopting these principles affect its ability to safeguard the rights and freedoms of its recipients?

Although there is no agreed-upon definition of social justice, theorists broadly agree on core concepts to establish a just society, including fairness, equality of opportunity and access to resources, and the recognition of differences.³ Drawing on John Rawls's and broader social justice scholarship, four main principles to be adopted in this paper are equality, equity, rights, and participation.⁴

Equity entails fair access to goods and services for all, regardless of one's own gender, race, class, or religion.⁵ Equality demands that society recognise injustices that can form barriers for certain groups and deprive them of their ability to reach their full potential.⁶ As for rights, it covers the legally protected rights provided by one's own state, and the moral rights guaranteed by adequate procedure and norms, some of which are universally accepted, like the Universal

¹ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Economic Modernisation Vision: Unleashing Potential to Build the Future (Amman: Royal Hashemite Court, January 30, 2022), <https://jordanvision.jo/img/vision-en.pdf>

² Government of Jordan. 2022. Executive Program for the Economic Modernisation Vision. Amman: Government of Jordan. https://www.jordanvision.jo/img/Executive_Program_for_the_Economic_Modernisation_Vision_-_ENGLISH.pdf

³ Mona Khechen, Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper 9 (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/social-justice-concepts-principles-tools-challenges-english.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mona Khechen, Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper 9 (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/social-justice-concepts-principles-tools-challenges-english.pdf>

⁶ Mona Khechen, Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper 9 (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/social-justice-concepts-principles-tools-challenges-english.pdf>

Declaration of Human Rights.⁷ Finally, participation entails the involvement of people in the decision-making process across the political and social spheres.⁸

A rights-based approach will be adopted to address the main question by examining the established rights arising from IHR instruments with respect to three vulnerable groups: women, people with disabilities, and refugees. The premise of this approach is to demonstrate how the ratification, domestication, and enforcement of IHR instruments into national legislation can lead to an implementation of the EMV that is more inclusive of social justice, which in turn significantly influences stronger economic growth and a better quality of life.⁹

The paper is divided into five sections, including the introduction. The following section outlines the methodology used to analyse the IHR instruments and discusses key limitations. This is followed by the findings, organised into three subsections on women, PWDs, and refugees. The fourth section sets out recommendations for relevant stakeholders, and the final section presents the conclusion.

2 Methodology

The analysis will examine the rights and freedoms of three vulnerable groups: women, PWDs, and refugees based on their relevance to the EMV implementation plans. The EMV places significant emphasis on women as both participants and beneficiaries and outlines several initiatives targeting the needs of PWDs. However, refugees are only mentioned in terms of the pressure the refugee crisis places on Jordan's resources and the need to account for this as a long-term phenomenon during EMV's implementation.

The analysis adopts a rights-based approach, which entails using human rights, as provided and protected by the state, as a benchmark for assessing the inclusion of social justice principles in the EMV's implementation. When referring to human rights, we mean the rights derived from the IHR treaties and conventions.

Consequently, the paper will examine IHR instruments which directly serve the selected vulnerable groups, which are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its optional Protocol.

The paper will explore each instrument by identifying Jordan's status, whether it's a signatory, made any reservations, domesticated IHR instruments into national legislation in legal texts, as well as the enforcement and implementation in practice, which can be deduced through implementation measures, outcomes, and statistics.

⁷ Mona Khechen, Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.9 (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013), <https://www.un-escwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/social-justice-concepts-principles-tools-challenges-english.pdf>

⁸ Mona Khechen, Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.9 (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013), <https://www.un-escwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/social-justice-concepts-principles-tools-challenges-english.pdf>

⁹ Mehmet Şahin and Elif Kaya, "Does Human Rights Enhance Economic Growth? Panel Evidence from Developing Countries" Journal of Economic Studies 12, no. 4 (2023): 77–95 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376871219_Does_Human_Rights_Enhance_Economic_Growth_Panel_Evidence_from_Developing_CountriesInsan_Haklari_Ekonominik_Buyumeyi_Artirir_mi_Gelismekte_Olan_Ulkelerden_Panel_Kanit

The paper's scope will be narrowed to three cross-cutting rights that contribute to the EMV pillars of economic growth and quality of life; accessibility to the goods and services as beneficiaries of the EMV, economic participation as participants within the EMV's initiatives, and political participation as part of the inclusion in the decision-making process for current and future executive programs of the EMV.

3 Analysis

Jordan is a signatory to multiple IHR treaties and conventions and has made considerable efforts to ratify and domesticate them in its national legislation. The mechanism of integrating IHR instruments in domestic law is not explicitly stated in the Jordanian constitution; it only showcases that if international treaties affect the rights of the Jordanians, it needs the parliament's approval.¹⁰ Yet the Jordanian court of cassation has established a legal precedence regarding the hierarchy of international treaties in relation to national legislation.¹¹ Accordingly, based on the identified IHR instruments that ensure the social justice principles, each subsection analyses how each group is included in the EMV, presents Jordan's status with respect to the relevant instrument for each group, and highlights the progress and gaps that hinder the EMV's implementation of social justice and its overall effectiveness.

3.1 Women within the EMV: Equality, Accessibility, and Representation

The Jordanian government is working toward the advancement of women's roles in society by placing special emphasis on initiatives that promote women's empowerment and economic participation.¹² Additionally, two key women-related indices have been targeted for improvement within the EMV to enhance Jordan's international standing, which are: the Global Gender Gap Index and the Women, Business and the Law Report.¹³

Jordan signed CEDAW in 1992 and demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding women's rights and freedoms by incorporating it into its national legislation in 2007.¹⁴ This process led to significant progress in reflecting the rights mentioned in CEDAW, from amendments to the penal code and labour law, to the adoption of national strategies and gender mainstreaming policies. However, this progress is not without its shortcomings in the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the convention; these processes still lag behind advances in legislative and policy adoption.

The EMV aligns with CEDAW's trajectory and demonstrates a stated commitment to women's rights and inclusion. However, Jordan's reservations to CEDAW, particularly the reservation on

¹⁰ Mahasen Mohammad Aljaghoub, "The Implementation of Human Rights Treaties by Jordanian National Courts: Practice and Prospects," in *Basic Concepts of Public International Law: Monism and Dualism* (University of Belgrade, Serbia, 2013).

¹¹ Yasar Alhunieti, Dema Matrouk Aloun, and Muhammed Abdulkarim Sharif, "The Enforcement International Treaties of Human Rights in the Jordanian Law," in *Intelligence-Driven Circular Economy: Regeneration Towards Sustainability and Social Responsibility—Volume 2* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), 601–613.

¹² Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Executive Program for the Economic Modernisation Vision. Amman: Government of Jordan, 2023. https://jordanvision.jo/img/Executive_Program_for_the_Economic_Modernisation_Vision_-_ENGLISH.pdf.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Arab Women Organization. Shadow Report 2021. Amman: Arab Women Organization, 2021. https://awo.org.jo/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Shadow-Report_2021.pdf.

article (9/2) on nationality rights, coupled with persistent weaknesses in women's economic and political participation, undermine accomplished efforts and limit the extent to which social justice principles are integrated into the EMV's Implementation plan.

Jordan, for example, did not extend nationality for children of Jordanian Women Married to Non-nationals (JWMN), as stipulated in Article (19/2) of CEDAW, which states "States shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children".¹⁵ The number of children of JWMN is unknown precisely, as there are no recent figures reported by the Jordanian government. Yet the latest number reported by the Ministry of the Interior in 2014 was more than 355,000 non-Jordanian nationals born to JWMN who live in Jordan.^{16 17} This number constitutes three percent of the Jordanian population, a group that is deprived of any national financial aid provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare, and such restrictions compound over time, creating further limitations on access to public healthcare services and enrolment in higher education.¹⁸

In 2014, the Jordanian government sought to address this issue by establishing a specialised privileges program, Mazaya, intended to compensate for rights denied. However, the program has not been fully implemented and, in any case, still restricts children of JWMN from accessing the rights and freedoms available to citizens.¹⁹

Regarding women's economic participation, Jordan has made strides in domesticating CEDAW into the labour law, including provisions for flexible hours, maternity leave, protection against workplace harassment, and the removal of gender-based job restrictions.²⁰ Significant efforts have also been made, according to the annual reports of the EMV's executive summary 2022 -2025, showing initiatives to establish e-stores for women, improve transportation, open daycares, provide soft loans, regulate women's work in the informal sector, and establish an Equity Seal for organisations that adhere to gender equality standards.^{21 22 23}

However, women's economic participation remains significantly lower than men's. The labour force participation rate among women in 2024 was 14 percent compared to 61.2 percent among males, and adult literacy rates among women remain lower than that of men.²⁴

¹⁵ United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted December 18, 1979, entered into force September 3, 1981, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

¹⁶ Lina Ahmad, "Non-Jordanian Children of Jordanian Mothers," WANA Institute Blog, July 2021, <https://wana-institute.org/ar/blog/non-jordanian-children-jordanian-mothers>.

¹⁷ Faten Tawfiq Al-Hashash, The Children of Jordanian Women: Citizens without Real Citizenship, trans. Nathaniel Moses, March 30, 2023, Amman Net, <https://ammannet.net/english/children-jordanian-women-citizens-without-real-citizenship>

¹⁸ Arab Women Organization. Shadow Report 2021. Amman: Arab Women Organization, 2021. https://awo.org.jo/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Shadow-Report_2021.pdf.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Arab Women Organization. Shadow Report 2021. Amman: Arab Women Organization, 2021. https://awo.org.jo/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Shadow-Report_2021.pdf.

²¹ Prime Ministry Delivery Unit (Jordan). General Performance Report, Q4 2023. Amman: Government of Jordan, 2023. https://pmdu.gov.jo/general_performance_reports/Q4_2023.pdf.

²² Prime Ministry Delivery Unit (Jordan). General Performance Report, Q4 2024. Amman: Government of Jordan, 2024. https://pmdu.gov.jo/general_performance_reports/Q4_2024.pdf.

²³ Prime Ministry Delivery Unit (Jordan), General Performance Report, H1 2025 Amman: Government of Jordan, 2025, https://pmdu.gov.jo/general_performance_reports/H1_2025.pdf.

²⁴ World Bank. Gender Data Portal: Jordan. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2025. Accessed November 16, 2025. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/jordan>.

What is notable about this percentage is that in 1990 the economic participation rate among women was 11.1 percent,²⁵ meaning that in nearly 35 years, it has increased by only 2.9 percent. This gap, according to the global gender gap report, is due not to the lack of legal foundation, but rather the absence of supportive frameworks to implement the legislation.²⁶

A supportive framework would entail the establishment of a safe public transport system and infrastructure, women's representation in decision-making processes through the enhancement of women's political participation, and stricter penalties for violators of existing laws and regulations meant to support women's economic participation. Within this broader framework, public transportation and infrastructure in Jordan constitute one of the main impediments to women's right to work, restricting them to close-by opportunities instead of allowing access to decent jobs further away and thereby reinforcing low-income and informal work.²⁷ Part of the EMV's initiatives is developing a Transport Sector Strategic Plan, which aims to increase access across urban and rural areas while enhancing safety; although it is still early to assess, a notion of scepticism cannot be ignored, since the problem has never been the absence of laws but rather their implementation.

Regarding women's representation in decision-making processes, political participation is vital to accelerating the implementation of CEDAW. While Jordan has made strides through reforms like the Election Law (2022) and Political Parties Law (2022), women remain underrepresented, holding only 19.5% of elected positions in the 2024 parliamentary elections.²⁸ Local councils also show a significant gender gap of 43% from the 2022 elections.²⁹ Furthermore, women encounter psychological violence, misogynistic remarks, and intimidation when engaging in political activities, particularly as candidates or elected representatives.³⁰

Limited women's economic and political participation thus undermines the ability of the EMV to embody social justice principles, since most of its initiatives targeting women will face enforcement limitations and constraints, making slow progress at best.

3.2 PWDs within the EMV: Accessibility, Participation and Representation

Jordan signed and ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007, established the Right of Persons with Disability Law No. 20 of 2017, and made amendments to the constitution in 2022, leading to the establishment of multiple national

²⁵ World Bank. Gender Data Portal: Jordan. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2025. Accessed November 16, 2025. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/jordan>.

²⁶ World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2025. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025. Accessed November 16, 2025. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf

²⁷ WANA Institute. Public Transport in Jerash. Amman: WANA Institute, 2018. Accessed November 16, 2025. <https://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Public%20Transport%20in%20Jerash.pdf>.

²⁸ UN Women Jordan. Jordan Sets Historic Record for Women in Politics: Legal Reforms and Leadership Training Drive Change. Amman: UN Women, August 2025. <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2025/08/jordan-sets-historic-record-for-women-in-politics-legal-reforms-and-leadership-training-drive-changsafeguardinge>.

²⁹ Solidarity Is Global Institute – Jordan (SIGI–Jordan). TD MN MS-21. Amman: SIGI–Jordan, 2021. <https://www.sig-jordan.org/en/article/td-mn-ms-21>.

³⁰ Arab Women Organization. Shadow Report 2021. Amman: Arab Women Organization, 2021. https://awo.org.jo/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Shadow-Report_2021.pdf.

strategies, including the National Policy to Guarantee the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2030-2020).³¹

At the level of legal and policy frameworks, Jordan has made notable efforts regarding economic participation by establishing a quota for hiring PWDs in both government and non-government sectors.³² The Jordanian Right of Persons with Disability Law requires organisations with more than 25 but less than fifty workers to hire at least one person with disability, and organisations with more than 50 workers to assign four percent of their vacancies for PWDs.³³

However, this quota is not reflected in practice. A shadow report on the implementation of CRPD reported that the employment rate for PWDs within the public sector does not exceed 1 percent and 0.5 percent within the private sector. It further explained how the misuse of “conditional on the nature of the employer’s work” provision is one of the main reasons behind limited economic participation, since it is used as a loophole not to hire PWDs, encouraged by lack of deterrent financial penalties.³⁴

This is often derived from the belief that disability equals incapacity, failing to recognise the working capabilities of many PWDs as long as the environment is inclusive and accessible.³⁵ This raises another concern related to the domestication of CRPD in regard to the enforcement of accessibility measures, which hinders PWDs’ economic participation, access to goods and services, and enjoyment of their rights.

The Jordanian National Building Law of 1993 together with the Building Requirements Code for Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 20 of 2017 establishes special provisions for public structures and facilities for both public and private sectors to meet the needs of PWDs and imposes a “fine of no less than one hundred Jordanian dinars and not exceeding three thousand Jordanian dinars” for violations of any approved building code, including the disability-related code.³⁶

However, such measures are yet to be enforced on a wide scale. According to the Greater Amman Municipality, a maximum of six percent of the facilities and structures within hotels, streets, parks and other locations have been modified to fit the needs of PWDs, with only 29 accessible streets in Amman.³⁷ And within workplaces, only a small proportion is barrier free, making the limited labour market even more competitive for PWDs.³⁸

³¹ WANA Institute, Advancing Social Justice through Constitutional Reforms: Fact Sheet (Amman: WANA Institute, 2022) https://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/fact_sheets/Advancing%20Social%20Justice%20through%20Constitutional%20Reforms-WANA.pdf.

³² Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Country Reports with a Difference: International Comparison of Accessibility. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2025. Accessed November 16, 2025. <https://www.kas.de/documents/d/guest/country-reports-with-a-difference>.

³³ The Jordanian Right of Persons with Disability Law No. 20 of 2017, Article 25/e.

³⁴ Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities and Partners, Jordan Shadow Report for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (Amman, 2017), https://haqqi.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/2017-04/JordanShadowReportforCRPD_En_2017.pdf.

³⁵ Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Good Practice in Disability-Inclusive Social Security (Amman: HCD, 2023), https://www.hcd.gov.jo/EBV4.0/Root_Storage/EN/Good_Practice_in_Disability-Inclusive_Social_Security.docx.

³⁶ Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities and Partners, Jordan Shadow Report for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (Amman, 2017), https://haqqi.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/2017-04/JordanShadowReportforCRPD_En_2017.pdf.

³⁷ Alkhatib, Enas. Overview of the Challenges Facing the Realisation of Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in Jordan. Amman: WANA Institute, 2022. https://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Overview%20of%20the%20Challenges%20Facing%20the%20Realisation%20of%20Accessibility%20for%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Jordan%20Enas%20Alkhatib_0.pdf.

³⁸ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Country Reports with a Difference. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2025. <https://www.kas.de/documents/d/guest/country-reports-with-a-difference>.

Jordan's commitment to implement the CRDP is reflected in the inclusion of PWDs through EMV initiatives centred on early intervention, childhood, and education, yet with limited efforts directed to PWDs in adulthood and their productive years.³⁹ This can also be attributed to their limited political representation and participation. For instance, within the last election cycle, less than a third of the parties addressed PWDs issues in their platforms, only six candidates out of 1,634 were PWDs during the 2024 parliamentary elections, and none won a seat in the House of Representatives, despite incentives granting parties additional state funding if a PWD candidate from their list wins.⁴⁰

Jordan's efforts are commendable, but given the weak economic participation and political representation of PWDs, Jordan's domestication of CRPD must reflect a long-term plan that could unlock their potential beyond childhood and early intervention and ensure stronger enforcement of existing legislation for the genuine domestication of the CRPD, particularly in the areas of economic and political participation, accessibility, and inclusive mobility. These measures would make the implementation of the EMV more reflective of social justice principles, by providing PWDs with the mechanism required to be part of the EMV initiatives as participants, beneficiaries on a bigger scale, and representatives for future executive programs.

3.3 Refugees within the EMV: Participation and Representation

Jordan is the second largest refugee-hosting country per capita, primarily hosting Syrians and Palestinians, but also Iraqis, Yemini, Sudanese, Libyans and Somalis.⁴¹ As such, refugees are only highlighted for their impact on Jordan despite not being direct EMV beneficiaries. The EMV's macroeconomic framework (2025–2023) notes the financial strain refugees place on Jordan's resources and recognises their presence as a long-term phenomenon in national strategy implementation⁴². This underscores the need for a strong legal foundation for refugees to support effective EMV implementation with fewer economic constraints and greater inclusion of social justice principles.

Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its Optional Protocol and has no domestic law regulating refugee rights. Instead, refugee protection is addressed through ad-hoc policies and international agreements including the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), with responsibilities delegated to international organisations, mainly UNHCR, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and UNRWA.⁴³

Yet the lack of accession to the convention creates challenges not addressed by existing frameworks. In relation to the EMV in specific, economic participation of refugees is the most important to tackle as a means of reducing the economic constraints by promoting self-reliance, reducing informal labour, and increasing refugees' contribution to the Jordanian economy.

³⁹ Prime Ministry Delivery Unit (Jordan), General Performance Report, H1 2025 Amman: Government of Jordan, 2025, https://pmdu.gov.jo/general_performance_reports/H1_2025.pdf.

⁴⁰ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Country Reports with a Difference. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2025. <https://www.kas.de/documents/d/guest/country-reports-with-a-difference>.

⁴¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Jordan Country Portal, accessed December 8, 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/jor>.

⁴² Government of Jordan. Executive Program for the Economic Modernisation Vision. Amman: Government of Jordan, 2022. https://jordanvision.jo/img/Executive_Program_for_the_Economic_Modernisation_Vision_-_ENGLISH.pdf.

⁴³ cite

While Jordan has been committed to its refugee-hosting role and hospitality towards refugees, the status quo on refugees' right to work is resembled in a complex, often lengthy process, involving sectoral restrictions, multiple approvals from different entities, costly permits and documentation that refugees may not readily have upon their settlement in a host country.

The absence of an overarching legal foundation has created different frameworks to manage Syrian and non-Syrian refugees regarding the right to work. This is due to the recency and scale of their presence, as %91.9 of Jordan's 474,807 registered refugees are Syrian.⁴⁴

For instance, non-Syrian refugees are treated as foreigners under the Residency and Foreigners Affairs Law, requiring a residence permit, and under the Labour Law must obtain a work permit approved by the Ministry of Labour, they are excluded from closed sectors reserved for Jordanians subject to whether a Jordanian worker could fill the position.⁴⁵ Such a status constrains them to fall under the same sector-based quota system set by the government allowing a pre-set number of foreign workers to be employed.⁴⁶

For Syrian refugees, the Jordan Compact 2016 and the MOU signed with UNHCR provided greater access to the labour market. They are not required to have a residence permit if they hold an MOI card, only to attain a work permit, and Jordan introduced flexible work permits, not tying them to one sponsor, and made social security a condition to attain those permits to better protect them.⁴⁷

However, Syrian refugees are still tied to the restricted list of professions, the flexible permits are highly costly with a permit fee of 425 JOD and a two-month social security subscription (113 JOD) and it's valid for one year.⁴⁸ This has led to the exclusion of refugees from highly skilled and semi-skilled employment, which leads them to informal work or unemployment.⁴⁹ A recent press release by NRC reports that 93 percent of working refugees do not have work permits.⁵⁰

A Working Group on the latest Universal Periodic Review report describes the situation of refugees and migrants in Jordan, stating that migrant workers face significant barriers to employment and legal protection. Workers endure poor conditions, long hours, low wages, exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion from social services.⁵¹

⁴⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Jordan Country Portal. Geneva: UNHCR, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/jor>.

⁴⁵ Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights. The Right to Work for Non-Syrian Refugees in Jordan. Amman: Tamkeen, December 2024. <https://tamkeen-jo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/The-right-to-work-for-non-Syrian-refugees-in-Jordan.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights. The Right to Work for Non-Syrian Refugees in Jordan. Amman: Tamkeen, December 2024. <https://tamkeen-jo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/The-right-to-work-for-non-Syrian-refugees-in-Jordan.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights. Syrian Refugees and Social Security in Jordan. Amman: Tamkeen, December 2024. <https://tamkeen-jo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/Syrian-refugees-and-Social-Security-in-Jordan.pdf>.

⁴⁸ UNHCR Jordan, "Work Permit FAQs for Syrian Refugees in Jordan," UNHCR Jordan Help. <https://help.unhcr.org/jordan/en/frequently-asked-questions-unhcr/work-permit-syrian-faqs/>.

⁴⁹ Arab Women Organization of Jordan. Shadow Report on the Status of Jordanian Women 2021. Amman: AWO, 2022. https://awo.org.jo/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Shadow-Report_2021.pdf

⁵⁰ Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). "Jordan: Syrian Refugees Face Mounting Obstacles to Return Home." Norwegian Refugee Council, September 2025. <https://www.nrc.no/news/2025/september/jordan-syrian-refugees-face-mounting-obstacles-to-return-home>.

⁵¹ United Nations Human Rights Council. National Report: Jordan, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Forty-Fifth Session. Geneva: United Nations, 2025. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/45/JOR/2>.

The Refugee Convention is considered a rights-based instrument which holds fundamental principles built on the concepts of non-discrimination, non-penalisation and non-refoulement, its provisions for economic participation and the right to work are highlighted under articles 19-17, governing the wage-earning employment, self-employment, and liberal professions.⁵²

Accessing to the Convention would establish a robust legal framework that safeguards the rights and freedoms of refugees in Jordan and applies equally to all groups. It would lessen the burden of economic strain by regulating their economic participation and turning the principle of shared responsibility into a legal obligation on the international community rather than mere cooperation. It would also improve Jordan's stance internationally as a signatory party and provide more credibility for the assistance of donor countries and the international community in general, all of which would support better, more inclusive implementation of the EMV, making refugees participants and beneficiaries rather than an impediment to its implementation.

4 Recommendations

Through the rights-based approach, the paper established that safeguarding the rights and freedoms enshrined in IHR instruments is a clear pathway to embedding social justice principles in the EMV and its implementation plan. The paper recommends the following policy recommendations for each IHR instrument.

For CEDAW:

- Withdraw Jordan's reservation on Article (2/19) of CEDAW on nationality rights, and, accordingly, amend Article (3/3) of the Jordanian nationality law to grant children of JWMN the same nationality rights as those with Jordanian fathers.
- Ensure that the children of JWMN are included as direct beneficiaries and participants in the EMV initiatives.
- Enhance women's economic and political participation by introducing a supportive framework for their inclusion, including safe and affordable public transportation, strict measures to deal with misogynistic speech and intimidation against women in politics, and introduce labour inspection units with a gender mandate to monitor compliance with women-related provisions in the Labour Law and CEDAW compliance.

For the CRPD:

- Ratify the CRPD's Optional Protocol to ensure that individuals can bring complaints of rights violations or lack of CRPD's enforcement directly to the United Nations Committee.
- Strengthen the enforcement of PWD quotas for political and economic participation by imposing stricter penalties on violators of accessibility measures for buildings.
- Include initiatives within the EMV that direct the international donor community's attention to PWD's rights and needs to accelerate progress regarding accessibility measures.
- Revise the phrase "conditional on the nature of the employer's work" from Article 25 of Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 20 of 2017, to make it more precise so that it is not used as a loophole not to hire PWDs. Effective assessment of incapacity should be included within the article to consider the broader environment of the workplace.

⁵² The 1951 Refugee convention and its protocol, articles 17,18,19.

For the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol:

- Accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol and domesticate it into an overarching national legislation which applies to all refugees and safeguards their rights and freedoms equally.
- Reassess the list of professions reserved for Jordanians and identify areas where the inclusion of refugee employment could support EMV's objectives to reduce economic strain.

5 Conclusion

In the implementation of reform strategies, social justice can be seen as a guiding framework that ensures the success of each phase by providing a holistic approach grounded in four main principles: equality, equity, participation, and human rights. These four pillars function as a magnifying lens through which any reform strategy is examined, revealing the issues that must be addressed for each phase to succeed and to realise its full potential.

Analysing the EMV through these principles showed that the social justice lens has been neglected in the implementation of the EMV, showcasing how some groups are directly affected and thus excluded, both as participants in its initiatives or as beneficiaries, particularly children of JWMN. Other Groups are constrained by accessibility barriers and a lack of representation affecting their economic participation, namely, PWDs and women. As well as groups who are strictly seen as no more than an economic constraint to the implementation of the EMV, namely, refugees.

In Conclusion, while the EMV holds great potential in achieving economic growth and a better quality of life for its citizens, conformity with IHR is essential to embed social justice principles within its implementation and safeguard the rights and freedoms of the aforementioned vulnerable groups. It will provide a higher satisfaction with quality of life, global recognition by improving Jordan's rank on many international indices, and improved prosperity by increasing economic and political participation, all of which will ensure achieving the desired objectives of EMV more effectively with a dimension of social justice implied.



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