

The One Refugee Approach (ORA) in Jordan

A close-up photograph of a person's dark-skinned hand holding four leaves of different colors: a large red leaf, a yellow leaf, a smaller red leaf, and a green leaf. The hand is positioned palm-up, and the leaves are arranged in a row across the palm. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.





The context

As of 30 November 2025, Jordan is host to some 2.8 million registered refugees, the majority of which are Palestinians registered with UNRWA (2.39 million). Of the 458,246 registered with UNHCR, 427,351 are Syrian, 18,463 are Iraqi, 7,442 are Yemeni, 4,271 are Sudanese, and 323 are Somali and the remaining 396 are of various other nationalities.

The ORAWG

The ORA Working Group (ORA WG) was established to advocate for the recognition and inclusion of minority refugee groups in Jordan, particularly within national policy frameworks and assistance programs. As a coordinating body within the JIF, the ORA WG promotes equitable access to humanitarian services based on vulnerability rather than nationality. It facilitates multi-sectoral and Inter-Agency efforts aimed at narrowing gaps in service provision, funding, and advocacy for underserved refugee populations. ORA WG members work collaboratively with humanitarian actors, donors, researchers, and the government to promote inclusive, culturally sensitive, and rights-based programming that reflects the diverse lived experiences of all refugees in Jordan.





Protection and status

In 2019, at the instruction of the Government of Jordan, the UNHCR has been restricted from performing refugee status determination processes. The decision particularly targeted those that arrived for medical, tourism or educational purposes and then apply for asylum – particularly targeting Sudanese, Yemeni and Somali asylum seekers. Non-registered refugees thus face heightened risks of arbitrary arrest, detention, and deportation due to their lack of legal documentation. Their exclusion from legal protections and essential services exacerbates poverty and social isolation, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability.



Livelihoods



Status duality for non-Syrian refugees is de facto restricted in Jordan; non-Syrian refugees are unable to apply for work permits without first surrendering asylum seeker status. While some opt for this, this indeed bears protection risks particularly if the applicant's work permit is denied, employment is terminated or offer of work is refused the following year. Among those that are unregistered, one unrepresentative survey of non-registered refugees found that just 9 % managed to regularize status, through marriage or formal work permits. The lack of legal opportunities leads to reliance on negative coping mechanisms, including engagement in risky and exploitative labor.



Health access



Refugee community leaders report challenges in accessing healthcare services. While non-Syrian refugees were included in a multi-donor account for subsidized health services in 2021, practical challenges in accessing these subsidized rates emerge particularly at public clinics, where employees are often unaware of what rates are applicable to minority refugee groups. Even with subsidized rates however, challenges in accessing legal income prevent non-Syrian refugees from paying for treatments, particularly for costly treatments that require frequent follow-up.



Shelter



Non-Syrian refugees have little capacity to access legal labor opportunities, therefore limiting incomes. In turn, the highest risk factor for evictions is non-payment of rent by refugees, as they are highly reliant on shrinking cash assistance from the UNHCR to cover such costs. One 2023 NRC survey of 349 non-Syrian refugee beneficiaries found that 81 % of respondents did not receive any assistance in the 12 months prior. 51 % of respondents reported that rental costs were the primary barrier in finding suitable housing; 78 % reported being behind on rent and utility bills.



Discrimination



Non-Syrian refugees in Jordan are subject to discrimination and disproportional targeting by authorities, employers and landlords. Sudanese, Somali and Yemeni refugees are often subject to anti-Black and colorist discrimination, subjecting them to targeting by authorities demanding status papers. Children in school also report racist harassment and bullying, contributing to negative coping mechanisms in the form of school drop-outs.





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