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Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development



مركز النهضة الاستراتيجي
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Social Protection and Access to Justice in the Jordanian Labour Market

A Policy Analysis of Legal Aid Data
Related to Social Security (2024–2025)



Towards a more inclusive
and just social protection system

Executive Summary

Access to social protection is a fundamental human right and plays a central role in ensuring dignity at work, income security, and social justice. However, millions of workers worldwide remain partially or entirely excluded from national social protection systems or are unable to benefit from them adequately due to legal restrictions, administrative barriers, difficulties in transferring benefits when moving between jobs, weak oversight mechanisms, and the widespread prevalence of informal forms of employment.

This situation also affects workers in Jordan, who may experience recurring interruptions in employment or unstable work arrangements, as well as migrant workers employed in vital sectors such as construction, services, and agriculture, in addition to refugees participating in the labour market. The diversity of these groups makes the protection of rights and the achievement of full access to social protection a complex policy challenge, particularly given variations in working conditions, wage levels, and individuals' ability to participate fully in social security systems.

Gender inequalities further compound these challenges. Women workers, whether Jordanian, migrant, or refugee, are disproportionately affected by the absence of legal safeguards, discriminatory practices, and difficulties in accessing fragmented services. This increases the economic and social risks they face and limits opportunities to achieve social justice.

Introduction

The social security system is one of the most important tools used by states to achieve social protection and promote economic stability for individuals and communities. In Jordan, the social security system has developed gradually since the establishment of the Social Security Corporation in 1978, becoming one of the most prominent social protection institutions in the region and covering a broad segment of workers and employees.

However, the economic and demographic changes Jordan has experienced over the past two decades, including refugee influxes and the expansion of the informal economy—which accounts for approximately 54% of the labour force and is estimated to have a financial value of around JOD 30 billion—have generated new challenges concerning the system's ability to provide broad social insurance coverage and ensure that all groups, including Jordanian workers, migrants, and refugees, can access their rights and social protection.

This paper draws on an analysis of labour and social security-related cases handled by the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) through its Legal Aid Department during 2024 and 2025. The dataset comprises 1,156 labour cases distributed across 28 locations and involving 10 different nationalities, providing a comprehensive picture of the obstacles workers face in accessing their rights and social protection.

The Legal and Institutional Framework for Social Protection and Access to Justice in Jordan

Social protection constitutes a fundamental pillar for achieving social justice and economic stability by ensuring an adequate standard of living, income security, and support for individuals throughout their lives, with particular attention to those most vulnerable to poverty and marginalisation. This aligns with International Labour Organization Convention No. 102 on Social Security (Minimum Standards), which Jordan ratified in 2014.

Jordan has made progress in developing its social protection system. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed new challenges, most notably limited social security coverage and the expansion of informal employment, which includes approximately 1.207 million workers according to the International Labour Organization. This highlights the need to strengthen the legal and institutional framework to ensure inclusive social protection and improve access to justice within the labour market.

The most vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, refugees, and women, face significant challenges in accessing their economic and social rights. Many refugees and migrant workers are tied to employers through unequal legal relationships in which their ability to enter or leave the country or change employment depends on employer approval. This situation increases the likelihood of exploitation, irregular employment, and difficulties accessing social protection, including health insurance and social security benefits.

Jordanian workers in the informal sector also experience weak insurance coverage and limited access to social protection services. They often lack health insurance and pension entitlements and face difficulties enforcing their legal rights when labour disputes arise. The shortage of labour inspectors further constrains enforcement efforts and limits the prevention of violations. Jordan currently has approximately 160 labour inspectors, including inspectors and department heads responsible for labour, occupational safety, and health, distributed across labour directorates throughout the Kingdom. This number is insufficient compared to international standards, the size of the labour market, and the scope of responsibilities required, thereby deepening gaps in social and legal protection and limiting workers' ability to claim their rights.

Strengthening access to justice in Jordan's labour market, therefore, requires a comprehensive approach that includes updating policies and legislation to expand social security coverage for all groups, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, increasing awareness of workers' rights, and developing tailored programmes and services for different categories of workers, whether Jordanian, migrant, or refugee. This legal and institutional framework is essential to achieving social justice, safeguarding the economic and social rights of all workers in Jordan, reducing exploitation, and enabling full participation in the social protection system.

The Role of Legal Aid in Enhancing Access to Justice and Protecting Workers

Legal aid plays a pivotal role in enhancing access to justice in the Jordanian labour market, particularly in light of challenges associated with limited social protection coverage, the expansion of informal

employment, and the presence of large numbers of migrant workers and refugees. These services enable workers to understand and claim their legal rights and overcome procedural and administrative barriers that hinder access to justice, transforming legal rights from theoretical provisions into practical realities.

Legal aid provides practical tools for addressing labour disputes, raising awareness, and promoting legal empowerment through legal consultations, legal representation, and mediation with employers. These services help reduce violations and improve compliance with labour legislation. Legal aid also plays a critical role in supporting the most vulnerable groups, including workers in the informal sector, women, and refugees, who face additional barriers in accessing their rights.

The analysis of labour cases handled by the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) during 2024 and 2025 covered 1,156 labour cases distributed across 28 locations and involving 10 different nationalities. This reflects both the diversity of beneficiaries accessing legal aid services and the breadth of challenges they face.

The data show that the largest share of cases involved labour claims such as unpaid wages and end-of-service benefits (64%), followed by cases related to work permits and social security rights (24%). Cases involving non-enrolment in social security accounted for 8%, while occupational injuries and child labour each represented 2% of the total caseload.

These findings indicate that weak compliance with labour legislation and limited awareness of workers' rights are among the primary drivers of labour disputes. They also reveal significant gaps in social insurance coverage within the social protection system, particularly among workers in the informal sectors and refugees. These challenges are compounded by limited legal awareness, restricted access to legal aid services, and lengthy and complex procedures, all of which prolong disputes and reduce the effectiveness of rights enforcement.

In this context, labour market data illustrate the realities faced by non-Jordanian workers and their implications for access to justice. In 2024, approximately 313,000 non-Jordanian workers held valid work permits. Egyptian workers represented the largest share among Arab workers at 49.4%, followed by Syrian workers at 5.2%. Among non-Arab workers, Bangladeshi workers accounted for 12.8%, Ethiopian workers 9.5%, Indian workers 5.4%, and Filipino workers 4.1%, while other nationalities collectively represented 3.6%. This diversity reflects the wide range of challenges associated with accessing rights, including language barriers, legal status issues, and differing working conditions.

A decline has also been observed in the proportion of Syrian workers holding work permits. This is linked to the Jordanian Ministry of Labour's decision to end the exemption from work permit fees previously granted to Syrian workers, which had been in place since 2016 following commitments made at the London Syria Donor Conference. This shift reflects a reduction in international support associated with hosting refugees, despite the continued presence of large refugee populations in Jordan. The number of Syrian refugees is estimated at **380,990**, with **196,846 refugees having voluntarily returned** as of **30 May 2026**.

Funding data further indicate a substantial gap in support for refugee response efforts. The available funding amounted to approximately **USD 65 million**, representing only **23.2% of the total funding required for the current year**, leaving a **funding gap of approximately USD 215 million (76%)**.

. This decline in funding directly affects social protection programs and access to services, including legal aid, thereby increasing refugees' vulnerability and limiting their access to justice.

Accordingly, legal aid should be promoted through a comprehensive approach that expands these services both geographically and sectorally and integrates them into broader social protection policies. This should be accompanied by efforts to raise legal awareness among workers and strengthen coordination between government institutions and civil society organizations. These findings also underscore the importance of sustained international support to Jordan in managing the responsibilities associated with hosting refugees, as well as continued support for civil society organizations working in this field. Such organizations play a vital role in addressing gaps in social protection and legal aid services, empowering vulnerable groups to access justice, and strengthening compliance with legal rights.

Challenges, Policy Considerations, and Recommendations for Strengthening Access to Justice and Social Protection

The findings and analysis presented in this paper reveal a range of structural challenges affecting the effectiveness of Jordan's social protection system and its ability to guarantee equitable access to rights. Key challenges include limited social insurance coverage, the expansion of informal employment, weak compliance with labour legislation, and issues related to migrant and refugee workers, whose mobility and access to services are often constrained by legal and administrative restrictions. Additional concerns include low levels of legal awareness, limited access to legal aid services, the absence of up-to-date data, and funding challenges that affect the sustainability of social protection programs.

In this context, the paper highlights the critical role of civil society organizations in providing support services and legal aid to vulnerable groups, addressing existing gaps in access to justice, strengthening the protection of rights in practice, reducing legal disputes, providing legal protection to vulnerable populations, and enhancing legal certainty for both workers and employers.

The findings indicate that addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that combines legislative reform, stronger governance, expanded services, and improved implementation mechanisms to ensure that rights move from a theoretical framework into tangible practice.

Recommendations

Strengthening International Support and Ensuring Sustainable Responses to Refugee Hosting Responsibilities

The paper emphasizes the need for the international community and donor agencies to provide sufficient and sustainable support to Jordan in managing the responsibilities associated with hosting refugees. This includes supporting the Government of Jordan and strengthening support to Jordanian

civil society organizations to ensure the continuity of programs and services, including legal aid initiatives, particularly in light of increasing pressures on the social protection system and growing demand for assistance.

Expanding Social Protection Coverage

Policies and procedures should be developed to facilitate workers' enrolment in social security schemes, particularly within informal sectors. Administrative procedures should be simplified, and incentives should be introduced to encourage both employers and workers to participate in the social security system, thereby reducing coverage gaps.

Strengthening the Legal and Legislative Framework

Labor market and social security legislation should be reviewed to ensure the protection of all categories of workers without discrimination, while taking into account the specific circumstances of migrant workers and refugees. National legislation should also be aligned with relevant international human rights and labor standards.

Enhancing Access to Justice and Legal Aid Services

Legal aid services should be expanded geographically and across sectors. Institutions and organisations providing these services should receive greater support, and stronger integration should be established between legal aid providers and government agencies to ensure effective access to legal assistance for the most vulnerable groups.

Raising Legal Awareness Among Workers and Employers

Sustainable awareness programmes should be implemented targeting various categories of workers, particularly those in informal sectors, migrant workers, and refugees. At the same time, employers' awareness of their legal obligations should be strengthened to reduce disputes and improve compliance.

Strengthening Enforcement and Oversight Mechanisms

The capacities of labour inspectors should be enhanced, labour inspections expanded, and monitoring and follow-up mechanisms improved to ensure effective enforcement of labour legislation and reduce violations. Efforts should also address the imbalance between the size of the labour market and the number of labour inspectors. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour's Hemayah (Protection) platform should be strengthened, expanded geographically, and promoted through awareness campaigns highlighting its role in receiving and addressing complaints.

Strengthening Institutional Coordination and Partnerships

Effective partnerships should be developed among government institutions, civil society organisations, and international actors to improve policy responses to social protection challenges and promote complementary roles among stakeholders.

Improving Data Quality and Transparency

Data collection systems should be strengthened and updated regularly, while transparency in publishing labour market and social protection information should be enhanced. This would support evidence-based policymaking, facilitate the identification of gaps, and improve policy evaluation.

Strengthening Functional Integration Between Social Protection Systems and Legal Aid Services

Given the clear link identified between limited social security coverage and increasing labor disputes, the paper recommends adopting an integrated approach that incorporates legal aid services into social protection systems as an enabling mechanism rather than a post-dispute response.

This approach should include:

- Integrating legal guidance and legal aid services into social security service points and labour market institutions.
- Developing formal referral mechanisms between government entities, such as the Social Security Corporation and the Ministry of Labour, and legal aid service providers.
- Recognising legal aid as a component of preventive social protection packages, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.
- Using legal aid data as an analytical resource to inform public policies and identify legislative and implementation gaps.

Such integration would facilitate a shift from a model focused on dispute resolution to one centred on the prevention of rights violations, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of social protection systems and ensuring more equitable and sustainable access to rights.

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SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN THE JORDANIAN LABOUR MARKET

Policy Analysis of Legal Aid Data Related to Social Security (2024–2025)

1. INFORMAL ECONOMY



54%

of Jordan's labour force works in the informal economy



30

billion JOD

Estimated size of the informal economy

2. MOST COMMON LEGAL ISSUES



64% Labour claims (wages, end-of-service benefits)



24% Work permits and social security rights



8% Non-enrolment in social security



2% Work injuries



2% Child labour



1,156

LABOUR CASES



28

Areas



10

Nationalities

3. PROTECTION & OVERSIGHT GAPS



160

Labour inspectors only across the Kingdom

Key challenges:



Expanding labour market



Widening informal economy



Weak compliance with regulations



Limited access to justice

STRATEGIC MESSAGE



Weak coverage in social security



Expanding informal economy



Limited oversight and enforcement



More labour disputes and weaker access to justice

KEY RECOMMENDATION



Expanding access to rights



Strengthening compliance with laws and regulations



Preventing violations and protecting workers



Protecting the most vulnerable groups



Supporting evidence-based policy making

Integrate legal aid services within the social protection system by:

