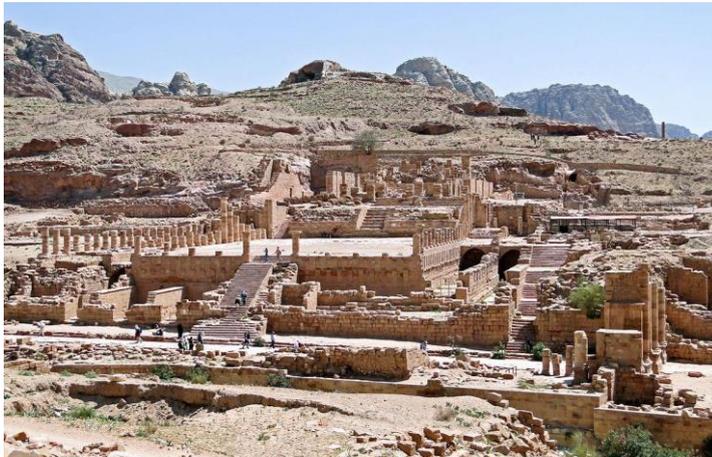


Country profile Jordan March 2021

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(Source: <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/jordan.htm>)

History/ Geographics

Jordan covers an area of 89,342 km¹ and sits at a strategic point in the Middle East: It borders Syria to the north, Iraq to the northeast, Saudi Arabia to the east and Israel and the Palestinian West Bank to the west. Most of Jordan is in the Arabian Desert except a small outlet in the south of the country bordering the Red Sea and the Jordan River on the western border.²

Since its independence from Britain in 1946, Jordan was ruled by King Hussein (1953-1999), who gradually allowed political liberalisation and signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. After Hussein died in 1999, his son King Abdallah ascended the throne.³ Formally, Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with a patriarchal style of governance dominated by the king as a head of state who exercises executive control through the Prime minister.⁴



(Source: <https://teachmideast.org/country-profiles/jordan/>)

¹ UNFPA Jordan, 'About Jordan' <<https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/about-jordan>>.

² Ibid.

³ Nation Online, 'Jordan' <<https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/jordan.htm>>.

⁴ BBC News, 'Jordan country profile' <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14631981>>.

Population

Although the demographic data in Jordan is not exact, its population is estimated to be around 10 million, of which 1.5 million live in the capital Amman. Arabic is the official language in Jordan, and the majority of its population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni (92%).⁵ Christians, who make 2.2% of the total population, constitute the largest religious minorities in Jordan.⁶

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Jordan has “the largest number of Palestinian refugees” globally.⁷ Palestinians who fled the Arab - Israeli war in 1948 represent the main minority group. According to registration figures by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), there are 2.2 million Palestinians in the country.⁸ Yet, human rights organisations claim that until today, they remain discriminated against in Jordan. They still are denied fundamental rights and services; they are underrepresented in the government and widely excluded from many employment sectors.⁹ Other minority groups are Bedouins of Jordanian origin, Circassians, Armenians and Bani Murra.¹⁰

Jordan is the country with the second-highest number of refugees in the world in comparison to its population.¹¹ Next to the abovementioned large population of Palestinians, the country has also faced a high influx of Syrian refugees in the past years. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 660,000 Syrians are currently seeking refuge in Jordan following the Syrian civil war.¹² As a consequence, three refugee camps were built to manage the large migration flows.¹³ Located in northern Jordan, the Za’atari refugee camp is the world’s largest Syrian refugee camp. Since Jordan is a major player in the region’s stability, it receives high levels of international aid in order to meet humanitarian needs.¹⁴

Human Rights violations

Several human rights violations have been reported in Jordan in recent years. The most significant ones include discrimination against refugees, migrants, women, political suspects, and journalists.

Refugees

Human rights organisations have repeatedly pointed out the fact that Jordan merely hosts a high number of refugees. The country continues its years-long policy of not permitting Syrians to seek asylum and banned UNHCR in January 2019 from registering asylum seekers individually to receive benefits and protection.¹⁵ As a result, many non-recognized refugees are left without UNHCR documentation or

⁵ Minority Rights Group International, ‘State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010’ (Jordan, 1 July 2010).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ International Labour Organisation, ‘Access to Work for Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Discussion Paper on Labour and Refugee Laws and Policies’ (11. December 2015).

⁸ UNRWA, ‘Protection in Jordan’ <<https://www.unrwa.org/activity/protection-jordan>>.

⁹ Amnesty International, ‘Jordan 2019’

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/#_ftn1>.

¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹¹ UNHCR, ‘Refugee Registration and Profiling Jordan’ (February 2020) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/refugee-registration-and-profiling-jordan-february-2020>>.

¹² UNHCR, ‘Syria emergency’ <<https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>>.

¹³ (Zaatari camp, The Mrjajeb Al Fhood, Azraq) UNHCR, ‘Jordan’ <<https://www.unhcr.org/51b0a6469.pdf>>.

¹⁴ Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the European Union has channelled roughly €3.2 billion to Jordan through humanitarian, development and macro-financial assistance. European Commission, ‘European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - Jordan’ <https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/jordan_en>.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘Jordan Events of 2020’ (2020)

access to services.¹⁶ According to Amnesty International, at least 10,000 Syrian refugees remain in unorganised camps, which are not ‘official’ camps and are located in the desert along the Jordanian Syrian border. At the beginning of the pandemic, Jordan started to prevent aid deliveries to those places due to COVID-19 concerns, thereby aggravating the already dire humanitarian situation in place.¹⁷

Migrant workers

Jordan hosted approximately 70,000 migrant workers in 2020 based on the Kafala sponsorship system. This system ties the legal status of the worker to the employment contract. Thus, it allows migrant workers to work only for one sponsoring employer and requires him/her to leave the country as soon as the contract finishes. It is a system that is known to foster forced labour and coercion. Abuses include non-payment of wages, unsafe working conditions, document confiscation, violence, and sexual abuse. Those risks exacerbated during the pandemic lockdown, particularly for female domestic migrant workers.¹⁹ However, the Ministry of Labour announced it would review the Kafala system and address violations by employers. Moreover, the ILO has made numerous recommendations and Jordan has already seen minor reforms over the years. For instance, domestic migrant workers were allowed to return to their home countries without paying a fine. Nevertheless, many workers remain at risk and continue to be inadequately protected from abuse.²⁰

Torture and other ill-treatment

Following the 2005 bombings in Amman by the terrorist group ‘Al Qaeda in Iraq’, King Abdullah restricted democratic procedures considerably. In 2006, he passed a new counter-terrorism law for the detention of suspects which has led to many incidents of torture used to extract confessions from detained terror suspects.¹⁸ Torture and other ill-treatment of political detainees is a problem that has taken place for a long time in Jordan, according to the Amman Center for Human Rights. Torture is illegal under international law and under Jordanian domestic law where it is banned in the Jordanian Constitution.¹⁹ Yet, despite the available evidence, no effective action has been taken by Jordanian authorities in order to stop torture from taking place.²⁰

Restrictions to freedom of expression and assembly

Jordan was originally unique in the Middle East in that it allowed opposition movements and protests while attempting to engage in dialogue with them. As a result, the Jordanian regime was often defined as “pragmatic, centrist, non-violent”.²¹ Yet, in recent years freedom of expression and peaceful assembly were increasingly curtailed.²² Journalists and activists commonly face harassment or even detention if

<<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/jordan>>.

¹⁶ UNHCR, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (Compilation Report - Universal Periodic Review JORDAN)

¹⁷ Amnesty International, ‘Jordan 2020’ (2020) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/>>.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, ‘United Kingdom/Jordan: National Security suspect’ facing the prospect of torture in Jordan’ [February 2007] EUR 45/002/2007; Amnesty International, ‘Jordan - "Your Confessions are Ready for You to Sign" Detention and Torture of Political Suspects’ [July 2006] MDE 16/005/2006.

¹⁹ The prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is protected by the ICCPR under Art. 7. Jordan is also a Member State of the 1987 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Art. 8 of the Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1 January 1952)

²⁰ Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (In Special consultative status with U.N. ECOSOC), ‘The negative effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms: The case of Jordan’ <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/AdvisoryCom/Terrorism/AmmanCenterHumanRightsStudies.pdf>>.

²¹ The United Nations University Press, ‘Democratization in the Middle East’ (2003) <<https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:2433/nLib9280810855.pdf>>.

²² Amnesty International, ‘Jordan 2020’ (2020) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/>>.

they criticise the government or King Abdullah.²³ In 2017, an evaluation by Democracy Index concluded that Jordan could be considered an “authoritarian regime”.³ Particularly, in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic the government started criminalising spreading news in the media that risk causing panic about the pandemic with a sentence of up to three years in prison.²⁴ According to Human Rights Watch, two media executives, a foreign journalist and an MoP faced detention between March and May 2020 in response to their public criticism of pandemic policies.²⁵ In another incident reported in July 2020, the police arrested 13 board member of the Teachers Syndicate headquarters and forcibly closed it on “dubious legal grounds”. People who protested against the closure in the next few days were arrested as well. Authorities banned all public protests and publishing any news about them.²⁶ When protests take place nonetheless, security forces often use tear gas against protesters. In August 2020, a prominent Jordanian cartoonist was arrested under the abovementioned broad counter-terrorism law.²⁷

Discrimination against women

Jordan’s domestic law remains discriminatory towards women. According to Jordanian national law, women need the permission of their male guardian to marry and cannot travel abroad with their children, as men can, without the consent of their child’s father/male guardian or a judge.²⁸ Moreover, human rights organisations repeatedly reported a high number of domestic violence over the past years.²⁹ Especially, during the COVID-19 lockdown women’s rights groups witnessed an immense increase in domestic violence.³⁰ What is more, judges often continue to impose mitigated sentences if the family members of the victim did not support the prosecution of their male family member (Art. 99 Penal Code).³¹ As a consequence, concerns remain about the lack of prosecutions initiated in response to the threat of violence against women by family members.³² Nevertheless, some advancements have been made. For example, a section in the penal code that had allowed rapists to evade punishment by marrying their victims has been abolished, along with mitigated sentences for perpetrators of crimes against women.³³

Debt imprisonment

Jordan is one of only a few countries in the world that allows imprisonment because of debt. The failure of repaying a debt is a crime that is penalised with up to 90 days in prison. According to Human Rights Watch, courts routinely sentence people without holding a hearing, and the law does not see any exception for lack of income or other factors preventing a person from repaying the debt. An estimated number of around 16% of Jordan's prison population is imprisoned for non-payment of debts in 2019.³⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, ‘Jordan Events of 2020’ <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/jordan>>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ UNHCR, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (Compilation Report - Universal Periodic Review JORDAN).

²⁷ UNHCR, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (Compilation Report - Universal Periodic Review JORDAN)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, ‘Women in Jordan - Continuing Violence and Absent Protection’ (August 2020) <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/jordanwomenen.pdf>>.

³⁰ Amnesty International, ‘Jordan 2020’ (2020) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/>>.

³¹ UNHCR, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (Compilation Report - Universal Periodic Review JORDAN).

³² Amnesty International, ‘Imprisoned women, stolen children: Policing sex, marriage and pregnancy in Jordan’ [2020] MDE 16/0831/2019).

³³ Minority Rights Group International, ‘State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010’ (Jordan, 1 July 2010).

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, ‘We lost everything’ - debt imprisonment in Jordan’ (16 March 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/16/we-lost-everything/debt-imprisonment-jordan>>.

Conclusions

Human rights organizations have repeatedly stressed the importance of the Jordanian government's commitment to human rights as fundamental values. In particular, since the enactment of the anti-terrorism law, torture and ill-treatment, as well as restrictions of freedom of expression and assembly, have dramatically increased. Yet, despite the state of emergency in times of pandemic, Jordanian authorities should ensure that international human rights standards are respected at all times. Effective measures should be taken to prevent abuses and hold those responsible accountable.