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Increase attention on public information campaigns aimed at addressing misperceptions related to the overall impacts of Syrian refugees in Jordan to help de-escalate the existing tensions between Syrian refugees and Jordanians and promote more peaceful co-existence.

Government-led public information campaigns and awareness-raising on rights and opportunities for host community as well as for the refugee community are particularly needed within the areas of livelihood opportunities, health, education and basic social services.

The rapid assessment highlighted a lack of accurate information among participants on the services available to them, increasing levels of anger and blame towards the Syrian refugees. Awareness-raising on services available for both Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees is needed in order to avoid further tension between Jordanians and Syrians. In the majority of areas, it was clear that communities are not fully aware of the programmes and services available for the Syrian refugees, leading to increased tensions. It is also important to communicate effective information about refugee response programmes to host communities and local authorities, and offer accurate information on the impact on public services due to the Syrian humanitarian response.

The problem of increased tension is more serious within the cities than in villages. These tensions are characterized by anger and stereotyping attitudes among Jordanians and Syrians, frequently impacting mobility for women, girls and boys in both communities. Many Jordanians in the northern cities fear going to neighborhoods mostly inhabited by Syrians, and women, report that they no longer feel safe going out, which also leads to restriction in children’s mobility. Rumors that Syrian refugees are responsible for thefts, violence or even murder, foster a negative atmosphere throughout Jordanian communities. These types of rumors need to be challenged by facts through innovative programming and awareness campaigns. Particular consideration needs to be given to sensitive issues around safety and protection shared by women and girls in both communities.

Local and national authorities need to take responsible leadership in discouraging rumors and providing accurate facts and information as well as positive messaging to ensure conflict mitigation, which will benefit both communities, encourage more cohesive communities, and ensure a better environment for longer-term sustainable growth.



Photo Contribution: Aliyah Sarkar

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BEYOND THE CAMPS

Impact of the Syrian refugee influx on Jordanian Host Communities

A PERCEPTION STUDY

This advocacy note is the result of a study conducted by UN Women in partnership with the Queen Zein Al-Sharaf Institute in late 2013. The aim of the study is to identify the impact of the Syrian refugee influx on vulnerable hosting communities in Jordan. It captures perceptions of host communities in poverty pockets and the most refugee-impacted governorates and, builds on existing efforts to contribute to an evidence base for further policy and programming.

Effort has been made to specifically examine the impact from a gender perspective.

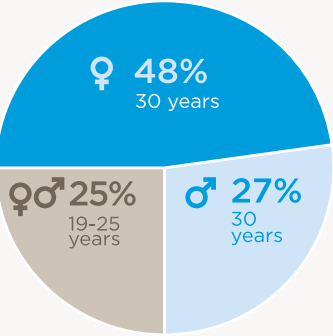


Methodology:

A qualitative approach, utilizing focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews was used, engaging a total of 360 participants.

The study identified 5 thematic issues that affected the host communities. These included livelihoods, health, education, protection & security, and infrastructure & environment.

A significant challenge during the data analysis was the difficulty many participants faced in distinguishing issues that were a direct impact of the Syrian crisis from the pre-existing economic and infrastructure challenges in these governorates, which are also referred to as Jordan’s “poverty pockets”. Targeted areas included Mafraq, Irbid, Aljoun, and Jerash.



Participants:

- 48% women above the age of 30
- 27% men above age of 30
- 25% young men and women between 19-25

Key Findings:

1 Prioritize and promote collaboration between the Jordanian Government, UN and civil society actors at the governorate levels to address localized needs and concerns, and implement social cohesion activities that address the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men from vulnerable Jordanian and Syrian refugee communities.

With a projected 80% of the Syrian refugees living outside camps by the end of 2014¹, the increasing pressure on limited resources in the ‘poverty pockets’ of northern Jordan is likely to heighten tensions between host communities and refugees if programs are not implemented to solve some of the immediate needs across sectors. One priority concern expressed by many participants in the northern regions is a dramatic increase in the cost of basic commodities such as food, rent, clothing and fuel. This is perceived as a direct consequence of the Syrian refugee crisis. Some families reported finding it difficult to provide their children with sufficient meals. For poor households already struggling to survive, these increases in the cost of living have had severe consequences, especially for different forms of female headed households.

The increased demand for housing has made prices increase drastically. In some areas rent prices alone are reported to have increased by up to 300 percent². Young men and women have been most affected, reporting that the shortage in housing has become a barrier to their ability to get married and support families.

While the Ministry of Health (MoH) facilities have, so far, been able to absorb the influx, they are showing signs of strain in the major hosting governorates, due to the higher demand presented by the Syrian refugee community. This has affected health care for both poor Jordanians and Syrian refugees. The percentage of women and children among the refugee population is high, compared to the local population and services for women and children have been more impacted than others.³ The pressure on the health care system includes shortages of medical supplies, a need for proactive steps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and increased stress on doctors and nurses.

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1 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan; pg 5
2 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, National Resilience Plan, Final Draft 2014-2016, pg 11, published by Host Community Support Platform and United Nations, 2014
3 The Syrian Crises: Tracking and Tackling Impacts on Sustainable Human Development in neighbouring Countries- Insights from Lebanon and Jordan (draft); pg 63; 2013

Respondents noted particular impact on services for pregnant women due to the increased demand on reproductive health services.

In late 2013, more than 83,000 Syrian refugee children (44% of eligible children) were enrolled in the public schools (primary education) in camp and non- camp settings⁴. The Government of Jordan has demonstrated its commitment to support vulnerable Syrian children to continue formal schooling in Jordan. This has been achieved in many cases through double shifting in schools. Respondents reported that the increasing number of Syrian children in local schools is placing enormous pressure on the quality and capacity of a public education system that was already strained due to a deteriorating economic climate. Lack of educational material, reports that teachers are working both day and night to manage the double shifts, and a tense atmosphere between Syrian and Jordanian students in the schools are among the concerns expressed by the host community. In addition, a number of refugee children have undergone severe trauma and teachers are unprepared to address the psychological needs of these boys and girls, impacting the learning environment for children from both communities. Concerns about the quality of education and fears of a hostile learning space have also been expressed by the Syrian refugees, revealing this to be an issue of concern for both communities.

The influx of refugees has had a severe strain on Jordan's already limited water resources, and has put extra pressure on electrical services. Respondents report that Syrians consume more energy than Jordanians do and they are therefore putting an excessive strain on energy resources throughout northern Jordan. One possible explanation for this could be that many Syrian households are living together, often in crowded and cramped conditions. Increased density of people may lead to more use of resources such as water and electricity per household. This is especially the case for female-headed households or where multiple families, particularly composing members with disabilities, the elderly, tend to stay together for safety, security and care purposes. Other infrastructural concerns relate to sewage systems, garbage collection and street cleanliness, traffic concerns and pressure on the public transportation, most notably around the Zaatari Refugee Camp.

Assessments with Syrian refugees in urban contexts⁵ show that both the host and Syrian refugee populations report similar challenges in accessing basic services due to the increased demands, leading to a climate of competition between them for what are perceived to be scarce resources⁴.

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2 Encourage community based, joint self-reliance projects between vulnerable Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees to address the livelihood concerns that have emerged as the main factor for increasing tensions, especially related to the needs and capacities of vulnerable populations.

There is an urgent need for the Government, in partnership with humanitarian and development actors, to facilitate community-based, self-reliance projects that enable both vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees.

Employment concerns are identified as the primary issue of concern for poor Jordanian and Syrian communities⁶, affecting their dignity and safe access to services such as education, health and infrastructure. For women and girls, access to safe livelihood opportunities is proven to be one effective gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and protection strategy. The decreasing access to livelihoods was consistently attributed by host community respondents as a direct, negative impact of Syrian refugees in Jordan, exacerbating tensions and contributing to an unsafe and insecure environment for the most vulnerable.

With Syrians entering the workforce, Jordanians perceive that fewer jobs are left for them, hence the increase in unemployment and job opportunities. This is attributed to the willingness of Syrians to work for a lower wage, and the fact that Jordanian employers are not required to provide Syrians with medical

insurance and social security. This has particularly impacted young men and women-headed households in host communities. Syrian refugees are not allowed to work; hence most of them find jobs providing

unskilled labour, settling for wages below the national minimum wage, and facing potentially exploitative conditions. These factors have made hiring Syrians attractive for some Jordanian employers, and may contribute to raising the risks of labour exploitation, including child labour. Competition for jobs has driven wages down, at the same time prices for basic necessities, fuel and rental accommodation have gone up. Both Syrians and Jordanians report facing similar challenges in accessing employment, but for different reasons. For vulnerable Jordanians, employment and livelihood conditions for a significant proportion were already dire prior to the influx of Syrian refugees, and the existing pressures have further exacerbated the situation.⁷

Respondents say that the termination of cross-border trading with Syria has caused many shops to close. Some women mentioned they have had to stop making handicrafts because they cannot get the materials they previously purchased in or from Syria .

It is critical to develop a national policy framework that addresses the existing challenges to accessing sustainable livelihood and self-sufficiency for crises effected communities, and ensure that both humanitarian and development responses take this holistic vision into account.

3 Implement gender-specific, sector-wide, areas of assessment to identify details of the vulnerabilities and risks at the local level, and better understand the gaps and challenges to an effective response.

There is an urgent need to prioritize programming aimed at recognizing the special protection needs, faced by women and girls, including systematically addressing their meaningful participation. This requires applying gender analysis to all planning processes so that specific barriers faced by women, girls, boys and men to accessing their rights are addressed at every stage.

Issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially when occurring within the private sphere, are extremely sensitive, and thus hard to document⁸. Escalating feelings of frustration and loss of esteem in men who feel incapable of protecting their family due to loss of income may contribute to increasing household violence, threatening the safety of women and children in the family. Respondents reported that the increase in pressure due to decreasing economic and household security is contributing to tensions inside the home. Women reported increasing levels of violence at home, as well their own tendency to take their frustrations out on children. Exposure to similar forms of violence, abuse and fear was shared by Syrian refugees, particularly women and girls.⁹

It is crucial that a gender-sensitive response to the crisis addresses violence, discrimination and inequality within the private sphere in order to allow women to come forward with their experiences. It is also important to reference recommendations of the 2013 Inter-Agency Assessment of Gender Based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian Refugees in Jordan and to recognize the protection vulnerabilities for both Jordanian and Syrian communities related to forced, early and temporary marriages.

A consistent protection concern expressed by women and girls in this study is the tendency of Jordanian men to marry Syrian women. This often results in anger and resentment being directed towards the Syrian women, particularly by Jordanian women. Women respondents expressed the perception that Syrian women are their competitors not only for jobs but also in marriage. Syrian women have advised that they feel shame about the way that Syrian women and girls are portrayed as victims of sexual abuse, early/forced marriage and prostitution. So while Jordanian women report feeling denigrated by the attention of Jordanian men towards Syrian females, that same attention is also unwelcome by the



Syrian females. This calls for an overall strategy that addresses issues of dignity, respect and safety for all women in Jordan, without discrimination.

The security situation is believed to be deteriorating, especially within cities surrounding Zaatari Refugee Camp. Rumors of harassment, violence and theft between Jordanians and Syrians have created an insecure atmosphere within towns. Parents talked about being more cautious about sending their girls out alone, now insisting that a male relative accompany them. While much of the actual increase in risk cannot be verified, this perception, based on anecdotes and rumors, has had an adverse impact on the mobility and autonomy of women, men, boys and girls of both the communities.

It is important to emphasize that traditional approaches to gender, and long-held conventional wisdom about the vulnerabilities with respect to gender inequalities and humanitarian environment in hosting communities need to be challenged. For example, while women and girls experience particular risks due to their social roles and expectations, especially fear of SGBV that may impact their mobility and hence overall spectrum of rights, there are also examples of them being more resilient and more willing to challenge restraining structures.



4 Continue synergy between humanitarian actions and long term development work – develop policy framework, coordinating and structural mechanisms that guide the complex humanitarian spectrum and addresses the needs, capacities and risks.

The different dimensions of the crisis require a comprehensive strategy that brings humanitarian and development programming under a common approach, integrating the strongest elements of both perspectives to facilitate a protection space for both hosting Jordanians and Syrian refugees. This synergy is reflected in the 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP6), and the task forces through the Host Community Support Platform (HCSP) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC). An ability to understand the scenario as a whole, at the same time maintaining a distinct understanding of the specific protection issues of Syrian refugees and the protection and development needs of vulnerable host communities is not simple. Yet here, as well, is an opportunity to implement a non-traditional, resilience driven, humanitarian and development approach to guide a comprehensive response that includes system-wide gender sensitivity and promotes internal capacities.

Donors need to push for a coordinated approach which continues to address critical protection needs of Syrian refugees, while at the same time ensuring needs of host communities are met, without either comprising the other. Multidisciplinary partnerships and coordination of international humanitarian actors with municipal and state actors as well as national networks, and local NGO and CBO service providers are needed to carry forward a strategy of coordinated response to the crisis.

The task of continuously monitoring the evolving relationship between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host communities, with particular attention to the trends and differential impacts that are positively and negatively affecting women, girls, boys and men, should be a priority . A community-based conflict-sensitive mapping exercise could help guide where and how to strengthen social cohesion. Given the challenges in accessing specific protection concerns of women and girls, local women's networks and NGOs will be key partners in this.

Furthermore, developing and strengthening advocacy and programming strategies that encourage dialogue on joint approaches to addressing shared concerns between Jordanian hosts and Syrian refugee communities are of immediate importance.

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4 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan; pg 9

5 CARE International in Jordan, Lives Unseen, Urban Syrian refugees and Jordanian Host Communities, Three Years into the Syria Crises, April 2014

6 CARE International in Jordan, Lives Unseen, Urban Syrian refugees and Jordanian Host Communities, Three Years into the Syria Crises, April 2014

7 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, National Resilience Plan, Final Draft 2014-2016, pg 59, published by Host Community Support Platform and United Nations, 2014

8 Inter-Agency Assessment, Gender -Based Violence And Child Protection Among Syrian refugees in Jordan , with Focus on Early Marriage, UN Women, July 2013

9 Gender Based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan with Focus on Early Marriage, Inter-agency assessment , UN Women July 2013