



Conference

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Question of Society & Media

Dead Sea – Jordan
8 – 10 of December 2014

Concept Paper

Background

The problem of Syrian refugees crossing international borders is one of the most visible of the repercussions of the Syrian crisis, which has been raging since early 2011. Over the past three years, this problem was exacerbated and its effects multiplied on the refugees themselves and the countries and communities hosting them, as well as on the international community.

Nowadays (mid-2014), some 2.3 million Syrians are seeking refuge outside their homeland, mainly in the neighboring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt), as well as other parts of the world. Because of the sheer magnitude of the numbers, the refugee problem seems to be having its deepest impact, more so than on other host countries, on Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which already suffer from difficult economic conditions and exacting burdens on infrastructures and facilities.

While prospects for an early solution to the Syrian crisis and the return of refugees to their homeland are dim, the situation is more likely to deteriorate as a result of new and sudden waves of refugees. Parallel assessments of the situation indicate that the sojourn of refugees outside their homes will be protracted, the impacts and repercussions of their ordeal will be prolonged and their needs will multiply.

In light of these facts, the importance of providing information and managing multi-lateral dialogues about the realities and effects of this crisis will emerge, indicating a need to listen to the voices of not only politicians, but also experts, academics, and public opinion and social leaders.



The Crisis of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

A) The Jordanian Experience

Over the last six decades, Jordan has witnessed endless waves of refugees. Taking into account the size of the Kingdom's population, this makes Jordan the largest refugee-hosting country in the World since the end of the Second World War. This has earned Jordan the reputation for being "a country historically grappling with refugee emergencies", which have not ceased since the early waves of refugees from Palestine in 1948. In 1967, Jordan was shocked by a wider wave that followed Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Refugee emergencies were not caused by acts of violence related only to the Palestinian issue: in 1974, when the Lebanese Civil War broke out, Jordan received large numbers of Lebanese refugees and other arrivals and in the early 1990s, the Kingdom saw a huge wave of refugees, when more than 300,000 Jordanian and Palestinian residents of Kuwait converged on the Kingdom following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990.

Furthermore, the situation in Iraq in the 1990s initiated several waves of Iraqi refugees, which peaked during America's war against, and consequently occupation of Iraq in 2003. The number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan is now estimated at around 750,000.

When the impact of the recent waves of Syrian refugees is added to the political, economic and social consequences of past waves, a large portion of the State's, as well as the Society's vitality and political, economic and social energies in Jordan will be squandered in the management of refugee affairs and in addressing the challenges posed by the conditions.

While Jordan has not yet signed the 1951 United Nations Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, yet the Kingdom, to the extent of its experience in dealing with refugee affairs, has been one of the world's leading countries that are committed to international principles and covenants relating to the rights of refugees. In 1967, Jordan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by virtue of which a mechanism was set for handling the numbers of refugees.



The MoU stipulated that Jordan would host a refugee for a maximum of six months, after which time the UNHCR would return him/her to his/her homeland or transfer him/her to another country.

B) The Crisis on Jordanian Territory

Since mid-1911, Jordan has been facing the consequences of the Syrian crisis, which has created large waves of refugees. The number of UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees is estimated at 620,000, but the Kingdom also hosts around 750,000 Syrians, who have crossed the borders but have not been registered, and who are now scattered in the different Jordanian cities and governorates.

Quantitatively speaking, the Syrian refugees crisis has increased Jordan's population by around 22% — a sudden, rapid and forced increase for a country suffering from difficult economic conditions and poor infrastructures that are not qualified for absorbing such large waves of refugees, particularly against the backdrop of limited essential resources, e.g., water and energy. This has placed a political, administrative and humanitarian burden in terms of managing these refugee waves and meeting the minimum human rights guarantees in terms of shelter, food and security. While the economic and social consequences of the refugee crisis have deeply impacted the efficiency of the Jordanian society and its institutions, the Jordanian economy, under the brunt of this crisis, has witnessed more complications, including a 16% increase in the country's indebtedness during the first three years of the crisis, as well as an aggravating deficit gap in the trade account (the difference between exports and imports). The effect on the labor market is evidently depicted in an increase of two percentage points in the unemployment rate over the first two years of the crisis.

In the basic services sector, the number of Syrian students in Jordanian schools is now estimated at 120,000, mostly in public schools. These students constitute a forced increase of up to 11% of the overall number of Jordanian students. At the same time, the number of Syrian students enrolled in educational institutions represents only one third of the individuals in the school-age group of Syrian refugees in and outside the camps.

In the health sector, Jordan shoulders a huge burden in terms of providing primary health care to refugees; the annual cost of a Syrian refugee is around JD 270. The additional



burdens and costs of hosting refugees in the water and electricity sectors are rapidly increasing and the Jordanian economy is facing chronic challenges in these two sectors.

The international community, as well as international and regional organizations, have contributed generously to supporting Jordan's capacities in confronting the challenges imposed by the Syrian crisis. Yet, there have been continuous complaints that this support is not sufficient to offset Jordan's commitments, thus necessitating evaluating and reviewing international plans for responding to the crisis.

Syrian refugee communities in Jordan and the neighboring countries need to be better understood from a human rights perspective, i.e., understanding the psycho-cultural impact on the refugees' identity, quality of life, the way new generations of Syrians are growing up in the camps and slum areas in Jordanian towns and villages, and the impact of all of that on lifestyles, behaviors, political life and identification of choices.

Objectives of the Conference

1. To build and make available to the media and researchers a data and research base on the state of Syrian refugees in Jordan in particular and the neighboring countries in general;
2. To create opportunities for networking relations between the media and the various organizations involved in the affairs of Syrian refugees;
3. To allow the development of a better, more objective understanding of the situation of Syrian refugees and the challenges confronting them;
4. To develop a better, more objective understanding of conditions in the host countries, particularly Jordan, as well as the challenges confronting these countries in terms of sustainability of services provided to refugees and meeting commitments related thereto;
5. To review the experience of the media in covering the affairs of Syrian refugees;
6. To propose future scenarios about developments in the refugee crisis and evaluate the roles of host countries, international, regional and local donor organizations, as well as available countries for refuge and the roles of the media.



Components of the Conference

First: Characteristics of Syrian refugees in Jordan

- Demographic structure;
- Education;
- Vocational conditions;
- Economic conditions;

Second: The situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan

- Deployment and housing;
- Conditions in camps;
- Refugees outside the camps;
- Employment and sources of income;
- Social struggles inside refugee camps and communities;
- The situation of children and women;
- Security of refugees.

Third: Economic impact of the refugee crisis on Jordan

- Macro-economic effects;
- Effects on the education sector;
- Effects on the health sector;
- Effects on the water sector;
- Effects on the infrastructural and services sector;
- Effects on the municipal services sector.

Fourth: Social effects

- Poverty and unemployment;
- Social and cultural effects.

Fifth: Aid and humanitarian work

- Evaluating local aid efforts;
- Evaluating United Nations, regional and international efforts;
- The experience of aid organizations.



Sixth: Media discourse on the Syrian refugee crisis

Seventh: Experience of the media in covering the Syrian refugee crisis

Eighth: Challenges for the media

- Access to information on refugees;
- The rights of refugees to access the media.

Ninth: Events and activities parallel to the conference

- Training workshop: Media coverage of refugee affairs;
- Workshop: Voices from camps.

Deliverables (Syrian refugees and the media)

1. Attendance by around 250 participants;
2. Participation of around 20 regional and international news organizations in presenting experience and testimonials;
3. Issuance of an Arab “honor charter” or “code of ethics” for covering refugee affairs;
4. Establishment of a website specialized in covering refugee affairs where the conference’s working papers and results will be posted;
5. Publishing the conference’s working papers in book form.