

Marijo J. Upshaw and Mary E. Reising, ICAN Syria Special Advisors

### *Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Promoting More Durable Solutions*

#### **Issues:**

The conflict in Syria has forced more than half of its population to flee their homes, living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Syria or as refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>2</sup> There are 4,180,631 Syrians living as refugees in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt, with 700,000 predicted for Jordan by the end of 2015.<sup>2</sup> This massive influx of refugees has caused a tremendous burden on host countries to provide for the myriad of human, health, and social service needs. The prolonged nature of the Syrian conflict and increasing number of refugees struggling to survive has left humanitarian aid organizations without durable responses for the stateless.

The majority of Syrian refugees residing in Jordan live outside of camps in some of its poorest communities. Syrian non-camp refugees are extremely economically vulnerable, with the most pressing challenges being accessing housing, food, education, and employment. Competition for scarce public and private resources has created a climate of rising social tensions between Syrian refugee populations and members of the Jordanian host community. This is particularly found in low resource areas where, prior to the Syrian crisis, there was already inadequate resource infrastructure in place to support its own citizens, and whose health, education and social services systems are now crumbling under the weight of increased demands to serve Syrian refugees.<sup>4</sup>

*Social tensions are rising as the refugee crisis has brought about increased competition for scarce resources. The major challenges for Syrian non-camp refugees in Jordan include finding food, adequate housing, education and employment.*

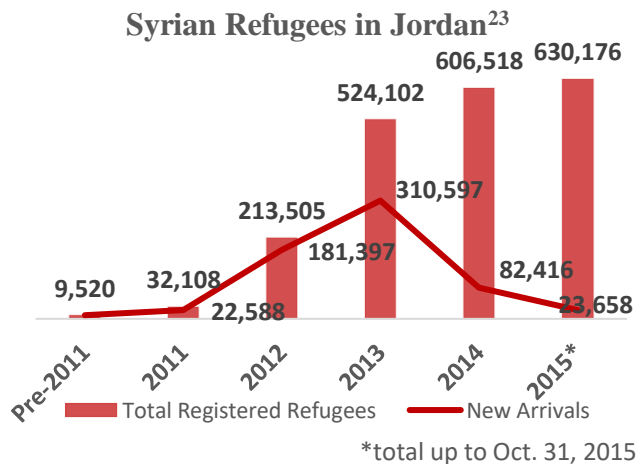
ICAN examines the most pressing issues affecting Syrian refugees residing outside of official United Nations (UN) camps in Jordan. Making good on the financial support committed by the international community and partnerships with community agencies need to be part of a comprehensive strategy by governmental and non-governmental organizations charged with providing humanitarian relief, aid, and assistance for Syrian refugee. Attention from the international community should be given to expanding proven and effective refugee relief aid programs, as well as developing more durable strategies that support development for Jordan and foster greater self-reliance for Syrian non-camp refugee communities.



## Key Issues and Finding from Research

Humanitarian concerns about meeting the basic needs of Syrian non-camp refugees in Jordan have been well-documented by international aid agencies. This report outlines research conducted by UNHCR, the International Medical Corporation (IMC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and community organizers, activists and planners working in the field in Jordan.

Jordan has taken in an unprecedented number of refugees relative to its overall population, hosting the second greatest ratio of refugees to citizens' population in the world.<sup>5</sup> There are 629,627 official registered Syrian refugees in Jordan.<sup>6</sup> The number of new Syrian refugee entrants has decreased dramatically since 2014 as Jordan tightened its border, policies and procedures in response to the Syrian crisis.<sup>1</sup>



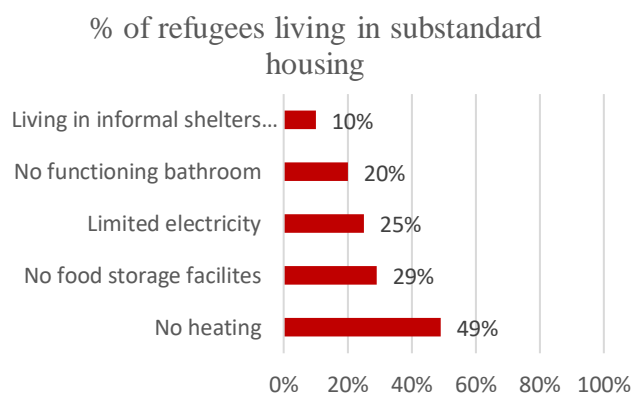
The overwhelming majority (85%) of Syrian refugees in Jordan, are non-camp refugees living throughout urban and rural areas of Jordan.<sup>7</sup> Non-camp Syrian refugees tend to live in low-resource urban neighborhoods or more rural communities in Jordan, where they can find more affordable housing. Providing protection, shelter, basic needs, health, mental health, education and other critical humanitarian and social services to Syrian non-camp refugees has been difficult due to geographical disbursement, political sensitivity of serving Syrian refugees (over struggling Jordanians in low resource communities), lack of capacity of Jordanian public

health, human services, and infrastructure challenges (e.g. inadequate water and sanitation services), and lower than pledged humanitarian aid funding from the international community.<sup>8</sup> The large influx of While the refugee crisis has brought additional aid and development funds in to Jordan, the public perception among Jordanians is that Syrian refugees are competing for jobs and resources, which has caused rising social tensions between Syrian refugee populations and members of the Jordanian host community, particularly in low-resource Jordanian neighborhoods and communities. The major challenges for Syrian non-camp refugees include finding adequate housing, food, education and employment.<sup>9</sup>

*UNHCR António Guterres called the Syrian refugee crisis “a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Food:** Food insecurity is a problem among non-camp refugees. Over half a million Syrian non-camp refugees living in Jordan receive cash assistance to use for purchasing food in the form of voucher from the World Food Program.<sup>14</sup> The price of food has increased in Jordan. Food costs comprise 40% of Syrian refugees' monthly household costs. Food vouchers that have been a critical lifeline for vulnerable Syrian non-camp refugee households have been subject to elimination and reduction because of lack of international funding. In 2014, the WFP vouchers for Syrian non-camp refugee households were reduced by two-thirds.<sup>15</sup> 70% of Syrian refugee households in Jordan report skipping meals, eating less desired foods and borrowing food to make ends meet. Food scarcity has caused negative food coping strategies among Syrian refugees including withdrawing children from school to work, marrying off girls at a young age, and taking on debt.<sup>16</sup>

**Housing:** Finding adequate and affordable housing has been one of the most difficult challenges for Syrian non-camp refugees in Jordan. Average rental prices in Jordan have tripled since the refugee crisis, due to the increase in demand and inadequate supply of housing, and has negatively impacted both marginalized Syrian refugees and low-to-moderate income Jordanians.<sup>10</sup> The majority of Syrian refugees are living in substandard housing.<sup>11</sup> Rent costs consume 57% of Syrian non-camp refugees' monthly household expenses. To cope many non-camp Syrian refugee families are sharing housing with others, which has been attributed to increase stress and anxiety, particularly among vulnerable Syrian female-headed households.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, 20% of non-camp refugees have no legal rental contract, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and legal issues.<sup>13</sup>



**Education:** Educating Syrian refugee youth represents a major crisis that can have a lasting negative effect on a generation of Syrians. The UNCHR reported that 70,000 Syrian refugee children in Jordan have no access to education.<sup>17</sup> In a large study, 47% of Syrian non-camp refugee households reported having school-age children who were not enrolled in formal education. The proportion of school-age children not enrolled increases with family size. Syrian refugee children

*“Life as Syrian refugee in Jordan is like being in quick sand, whenever I move, I sink a little bit further” Mohammad father of four children, living in Jordan.”<sup>2</sup>*

are at high risk for dropping out of school, child labor and exploitation (e.g. early marriage of girls). Almost one third of non-camp refugee families with school age children report withdrawing children from school in order to support the family, and 97% of school-aged Syrian non-camp refugee children are at risk for school non-attendance.<sup>18</sup> Barriers to school attendance include financial constraints (sending children to secure informal employment instead), lack of available schools, safety concerns for Syrian refugee children who have experienced discrimination and bullying, prohibitive costs of school materials, lack of proper documentation and lack of desire to attend school because of the displacement caused and commiserate psychosocial issues. Missing school can have lasting negative impact on Syrian refugee children. Once children have missed three years of school, they are no longer able to able to participate in school – 17% of participants in a UNHCR study of Syrian non-camp refugee households had school-age children who had missed two years of school and are at risk for exclusion.<sup>19</sup>

Registered Syrian non-camp refugee children are supposed to have access to Jordanian public schools. However, there is a critical shortage of available schools. By policy, Syrian refugee students are not being mainstreamed with Jordanian students. Rather Syrian refugee students attend school in the afternoons. Widespread discrimination of Syrian refugee children who attend public schools has been reported.<sup>20</sup> The split schedule of public schooling between Jordanian and Syrian students has exacerbated Jordanian perceptions that the refugee crisis is jeopardizing Jordanian students' educational opportunities and draining limited public funding, although experts have pointed out the crisis has brought more international attention and development dollars in to Jordan, and not had a net negative impact on their educational system.<sup>21</sup>

**Employment:** Syrians cannot legally work in Jordan without a work permit that is structurally difficult to obtain, and only 1 percent of Syrian non-camp refugee households have a family member with a work permit.<sup>22</sup> Syrian refugees caught working illegally in Jordan can face detention or deportation (termed “refoulement” for refugees, which is illegal according to international standards). Without access to earning a livelihood,

persistent economic vulnerability is one of the most pressing challenges among non-camp Syrian refugees. Two-thirds of non-camp Syrian refugee households live below the absolute Jordanian poverty line (equivalency of \$96 US dollars per month), and 94% of non-camp households rely on humanitarian assistance for survival.<sup>22</sup> Still, the pressure to work is so great for Syrian refugee households that an estimated 8% of Syrian non-camp refugee adults, mainly men, work illegally in the informal economy, primarily in construction and

agriculture.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the systematic exclusion of Syrian refugee adults from joining the formal labor market in Jordan has the unattended consequences of driving more Syrian refugee children in to the informal labor market. Reports show that 37% of Syrian non-camp refugee boys ages 15-18 are active in the informal economy. Syrian refugees working illegally have no social insurance and are routinely subject to exploitation in the job market.<sup>24</sup>

## **Recommendations for Policymakers**

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The protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis necessitates a shift towards designing strategies that promote greater self-reliance among marginalized Syrian non-camp refugees and address longstanding capacity issues. As part of comprehensive and more long-term strategy, the international community, aid agencies, and state and municipal actors should place greater emphasis on guaranteeing funding for programs that have proven to be effective and creating new programs that address gaps in current service delivery including in these four areas.

**Housing:** *Supply funding for need-based rental subsidies.* The rise in demand for rental housing has caused a steep increase in housing prices in Jordan. While price increases have benefited private sector housing suppliers including many upper and middle income Jordanians, the negative effects of rising housing prices have disproportionately hurt Syrian non-camp refugees as well as poor Jordanians. To counter the rising tension towards Syrian refugees, the international community should provide funding to state and local actors to support need-based rental subsidies for both Jordanians and Syrian refugees residing in areas most affected by price increases.

**Food:** *Restore full funding for WFP food vouchers.* The majority of Syrian non-camp refugees receive food vouchers from The World Food Program. Cuts in the WFP have caused negative food coping patterns among vulnerable non-camp Syrian refugee households. The international community should guarantee full funding of the program to restore previous levels of support. Not only do the vouchers

provide essential basic needs for vulnerable Syrian non-camp refugee households without access to livelihoods, but providing the opportunity for Syrian refugees to purchase and cook their own food restores a sense of cultural identity and family structure.

**Education:** *Create job and vocational education apprenticeship programs for Syrian refugee youth.* Research shows that Syrian refugee youth are involved in economic activity in the informal labor market at much higher rates than their Jordanian counterparts. Address significant barriers to Syrian refugee youth school non-attendance by creating paid apprenticeship programs. Paid apprenticeship program are a cost-effective way to build human, social and financial capital for Syrian refugee youth and their families. Apprenticeship programs can train students with new skills, provide modest student stipends important for the livelihood of Syrian refugee families, and improve future employment opportunities for youth.<sup>25</sup>

**Employment:** *Allow temporary work permits for Syrian refugees.* Laws prohibiting Syrian refugees from working legally contribute to exploitation, and drive more Syrian refugee youth in to the informal labor market. Additional effort needs to be made to expand Jordanian job and training opportunities in the aggregate instead of a sole focus on excluding refugees from participating in the formal economy. Where demand for services outpaces the supply of labor like in education, pilot projects allowing trained Syrian educators to teach Syrian refugee children in community-led school cooperatives could be created.

## About ICAN

The International Community Action Network (ICAN) has a notable 20 year history in advancing human, social and community development in the Middle East through training and developing community leaders in rights-based community organizing. The ICAN center situated in the eastern Ashrafeiya section of Amman, Jordan has responded to the massive influx of Syrian refugees with leading-edge programs addressing the intersection of basic needs and the dislocation, trauma, and grief experienced by these families as well as the impact on long-standing Jordanian residents in the neighborhood.

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