

Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon

A Snapshot from Summer 2013



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Graphic: Imranovi]]

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This report is available in both English and Arabic.

The countries hosting Syrian refugees have played the major role in averting a much larger humanitarian crises, but the crisis can only be solved by ending the fighting in Syria. In the interim, the past and present lives of those displaced, the scale of their upheaval, and their concerns for their homeland [cannot be ignored in the scramble to provide rapid solutions in a time of crisis](#). Nor can their voices be neglected from the discussions of Syria's future. In the words of an engineer from rural Damascus currently residing in Lebanon as he describes the current situation: ["Syria is like a piece of meat in the hands of many butchers who are mincing it with sharp knives."](#)

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1. SUMMARY

- The generosity of Jordan and Lebanon, their cultures of hospitality, and provision of aid to those fleeing violence and political instability must be recognized and commended. This is not to say that there is not room for improvement; rather, it is to emphasize that neighboring countries have prevented a wider scale humanitarian disaster by keeping their borders open, which has come at considerable cost to their own populations and budgets. Both Jordan and Lebanon have long histories of hosting refugees and responding to crises. In Lebanon, Syrians are living in almost every town, village, and city neighborhood. In Jordan they are largely concentrated in the northern towns and cities, in addition to Za'atari refugee camp, and two other smaller camps that continue to expand in order to shelter new arrivals.
- In both Jordan and Lebanon, local/national NGOs, along with municipalities in the case of Lebanon, are providing significant levels of assistance, often in concert with and through funding from international NGOs and donors. Both refugees and host communities would benefit from more aid moneys being directed at the local level, thereby helping build infrastructures and capacities which would continue to serve the host populations after the refugee crisis is over, as well as alleviating local resentment of refugees being given resources over locals.
- Both Jordan and Syria have opened their education and health care systems to refugees, supported by generous aid from the international community. However, absorbing hundreds of thousands of students and patients puts an incredible strain on the system, medical supplies, classroom space, infrastructures, and the professionals who work in these fields. As the crisis extends, these issues must continue to be prioritized by governments, valued by refugees themselves, and the financial burden offset by donors.
- The Syrian refugee population has grown from 200,000 in September 2012 to over two million in September 2013, overwhelming those tasked with crafting responses. Unfortunately, the leadership of the humanitarian aid regime has reacted to this crisis with insufficient creativity and innovation. While there is more information than ever before about the locations and demographics of refugees and details of specific projects, the approach to assistance has shown little change from previous crises. Agencies continue to utilize many of the innovative tools developed in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis in 2005. Yet, the majority of humanitarian assistance remains anchored in the capital cities while many Syrian refugees are elsewhere, experiencing limited access to services and unnecessary hardship. Various agencies continue to use outdated and inappropriate ways of dealing with refugees from a lower middle income country, such as food vouchers with restrictions on products, systems causing refugees to wait for hours or days in residential neighborhoods to register, months of delays in receiving cash assistance,

- and facilities located far outside of the city centers requiring refugees to take taxis.
- Given that there are proportionally high levels of young men and men of fighting age as refugees, in part due to fear of military conscription and recruitment into armed groups, they should be considered an at-risk and vulnerable population. Currently there are no aid or programs aimed at this demographic and they face extremely limited opportunities for employment, leaving them with little alternative but to return to Syria or resort to negative coping capacities in order to survive.
 - Recognition of the need for refugees to return requires systematic preparation and will be an important task for aid givers and service providers. In addition, acknowledging the history, culture, social structures, and emotions of refugees can help proud people swallow the sometimes bitter pill of dependency. Projects that recognize and engage all aspects of refugees' lives have much higher chances of success. They are more than mouths to feed and bodies to care for, and recognition of their humanity, creativity, and resilience is required even in the midst of difficult times.

2. BACKGROUND

Current estimates cite [more than 100,000 casualties](#) from war in Syria, with some 5,000 deaths reported each month since the violence escalated in the summer of 2012. At the time of writing, there are between four and six million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and [almost seven million people in need of humanitarian assistance](#) inside Syria, including 400,000 Palestinian refugees. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of September 2013, the [total number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries is over 2 million](#), of whom around 1.9 million are currently registered with the agency. On average, [6,000 people](#) continue to leave Syria every day.

Unlike the Iraqi refugee population, which was largely of urban origin, the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are from large towns, villages, and rural areas. Consequently, many organizations providing aid to refugees have observed this means Syrians are used to being self-sufficient, have strong connections to family and community, have lower levels of education, and likely have much less experience with bureaucratic measures. This report points out a number of salient issues that should be further addressed by those concerned with Syrian refugees and their impact on neighboring host countries.

Our two-person research team from the Institute for the Study of International Migration and the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University spent three weeks in Jordan and one week in Lebanon in May and June 2013. Our goal was to understand the issues facing refugees, the results in

these countries from the ongoing crisis in Syria, and refugees' impact on the host communities.

The research was designed to be ethnographic, with an emphasis on living outside the capital cities. Thus, half of our time was spent in Irbid, Mafrq, Ramtha, Sur (Tyre), and the other half in Amman and Beirut. We held meetings with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local governmental offices, and UN agencies, and visited health clinics, schools, local businesses, religious charities, and community-based initiatives. Our in-depth knowledge of Jordan, our connections to knowledgeable people in Lebanon and from Syria, and our previous research with [Iraqi and Palestinian refugees](#) in Jordan and Syria, inform our findings. As fluent Arabic speakers, we benefited from continuous conversations with people, formal and informal. As part of the research, we worked with 26 volunteer researchers from local and refugee populations who conducted 130 interviews with relatives, friends and neighbors in Jordan and Lebanon. We do not publish names of institutions or individuals to protect people's identities and positions, and are grateful for their assistance, candidness, and commitment.

A comprehensive survey of the literature shows that the many reports and assessments from humanitarian organizations (some of which appear as hyperlinks throughout this document) demonstrate their considerable knowledge and expertise in identifying and meeting the basic needs of Syrians living inside and outside camps. Thus, we focus our research on two obvious, but often overlooked human elements of the crisis: the impact of the Syrian presence on the host populations of Jordan and Lebanon, and refugees' perceptions of their future, the prospect of return, and the future of their country. We did not conduct research in [Za'atari refugee camp](#), which houses over 120,000 Syrians, but is a distinctly different situation from that faced by the majority of Syrian refugees living among the local population.

In producing this report, we expect readers will recognize the underlying parallels with other refugee crises in the region, including among Palestinians and Iraqis. The issue of Return for these populations is, in many instances, considered to be impossible due to political factors; that fate is one that no Syrian we encountered wished to contemplate.

3. END THE FIGHTING IN SYRIA

It cannot be overstated that ***the solution to the displacement issue requires a political solution to end to the violence and insecurity in Syria.*** [The UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator underscored this central message in May 2013](#), the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights repeated it in September 2013](#) as the US contemplated military action. Since the outset of the uprising in Syria, the reaction from the

humanitarian community has been to assist refugees with short-term humanitarian solutions to what are unresolved political problems. In particular, the lack of respect for civilians and [repeated violations of international humanitarian law by both government and rebels](#) ensure that even more people will flee across borders to find safety for their families, as well as food and access to basic services such as medical care facilities that are not targeted in the fighting. [The humanitarian consequences of the continued violence ripple both inside and across Syria's borders and have strained capacities to their limits.](#) The funding shortfalls and limited access to affected populations over the last two years continues to place refugees, [IDPs](#), other vulnerable populations inside Syria, and host communities in increasingly tenuous positions.



“Stop the Killing. We want to build a country for all Syrians”
April 2012, Artist unknown.

4. HOST COUNTRY ISSUES

The extensive efforts of the countries neighboring Syria -- all of which, with the exception of Israel, host Syrian refugees -- must be emphasized and commended. Without their cooperation, including the generosity and organizational efforts of their citizens, and the essential support and expertise from international governmental agencies and national and international NGOs, the scale of human suffering and loss of life would be far worse.

- ***The open-door hospitality displayed by Jordan and Lebanon (as well as Turkey and Iraq) must not be taken for granted, particularly given the serious challenges such measures pose to each country's internal stability and commitments to their citizens.*** These countries should be provided with incentives [to ensure the lengths of their borders with Syria are kept open to all those fleeing the country.](#)

Lebanon and Jordan have each allowed Syrians to cross its borders and remain inside the country, regardless of whether or not they entered the country legally. As of September 2013, the humanitarian aid appeals for both Jordan and Lebanon have met less than 50 percent of their funding requirements. Lebanon in particular, which is still rebuilding from the 2006 Israeli attacks and has a great deal of internal instability and cronyism, has been unable to find donors and may be forced to accept [loans in the form of credit fund management from the World Bank to fund refugee needs.](#)

[Jordan's Za'atari Camp](#) is now Jordan's fifth largest city with over 120,000 people, and yet the majority of Syrians in Jordan, both registered and awaiting registration, live among the local population in the north and central part of the country. At the beginning of September 2013, UNHCR's total number for persons of concern in Jordan was 519,676, with 492,526 registered as refugees. This means that Jordanian villages, towns and cities have absorbed at least 400,000 people, close to 10 percent of Jordan's total population. In Lebanon, the number of Syrian refugees is around 731,650 according to UNHCR at the beginning of September 2013, although many other estimates place the figure at over one million refugees. In the past eight months, the number of refugees has increased some 200 percent, and [by the end of 2013, it is predicted that Syrians could comprise 20 percent of the Lebanese population.](#)

It is also worth noting that the conflict in Syria has substantially impacted local economies, affecting border towns in Jordan and Lebanon. Goods, including fresh fruits and vegetables that used to come daily from Syria, are no longer coming, [raising prices for these goods in Jordanian markets because they now must come from elsewhere.](#) Gray market trading, and smuggled gasoline and cigarettes, and other unregulated trade, has been halted due to the wars in Syria and Iraq, and stricter Saudi border crossing regulations (especially regarding gasoline). Thus, those in border towns -- which are relatively prosperous -- are feeling both the impact of the war on their sources of income as well as the impact of the deluge of refugees, at least some of whom are relatives in need. In addition, the economic opportunities that have arisen due to the presence of the refugee provision regime in Jordan – transportation, supplies, construction, etc. – have fallen under the control of strong actors (both for legal and gray market transactions).

We did not conduct research in Egypt, but the contrast between Lebanon and Jordan's 'open borders to Syrians' policy and what has happened in Egypt following the June 30th military coup should also be mentioned. For the last two years in Egypt, Syrians could enter, live legally, and study at university, resulting in over 100,000 finding refuge there. However, as of July 2013, "[Syrians who want to come to Egypt to flee the devastation in their country must now gain security authorization before doing so.](#)" Syrians already in Egypt are quietly being rounded up at army checkpoints and detained — even individuals registered with the United Nations." More recent accounts suggest that [this suspicion of Syrians has extended into the Egyptian population](#) and can be detected in how Egyptian society responds to the Syrians living there.

Country Population and Statistics September 2013

Country	Est. Population ¹	Number of Syrian Refugees ²	Number of Palestinian Refugees	Number of Iraqi Refugees ³
Lebanon	4,131,483	627,202	436,154 ⁴	8,130
Jordan	6,482,081	492,526	1,979,580 ⁵	450,500
Turkey	80,694,485	450,584	n/a	2,570
Iraq	31,858,481	158,461	11,740 ⁶	80,000*
Egypt	85,294,388	99,712	up to 50,000 ⁷	8,000
Syria	22,457,336	n/a	486,946	480,000

¹ CIA World Factbook, July 2013 estimates. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

² All from Syria Regional Refugee Response figures, last updated 03 September 2013.

<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

³ 2013 UNHCR country operations profile, country-specific pages. Figures from January 2013.

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02db416.html>

⁴ UNRWA: Lebanon. Figure from 01 January 2012. <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=65>

*This figure denotes Iraqi refugees returning to Iraq.

⁵ UNRWA: Jordan. Figure from 01 January 2012. <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=66>

⁶ UNHCR country operations profile–Iraq. January 2013. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html>

⁷ MIDDLE EAST: Palestinian refugee numbers/whereabouts. IRIN. Published June 2010.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report/89571/middle-east-palestinian-refugee-numbers-whereabouts>

- ***Both Jordan and Lebanon allow free or heavily subsidized access to public education and health care for Syrian refugees.*** The generous refugee health and education policies of these countries and the crucial financial and logistical support provided by UN agencies and NGOs warrants additional compensation. Recent agreements to widen access to already overstretched public services require tangible support. These services work well to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, and treat the physical and psychological traumas that the refugees bring with them. Access to educational services also helps avert the ‘lost generation’, where an entire cohort of children and youth — who are the hope for the future of Syria — drop out of formal education. In the words of a Syrian woman who fled to Jordan after her family home and business was bombed, “...the country needs youth who are well-educated...my children will contribute in the rebuilding of Syria.”

Education:

Just over fifty percent of Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon are [under 18 years of age](#). In Jordan, those Syrian refugee children whose families are in possession of both a UNHCR registration certificate and a white card that indicates their registration with the Jordanian authorities are granted

free access to public schools. Incidentally, the possession of the white registration card is a requirement that was added at the beginning of 2013 by the Government of Jordan, in preparation for the coming academic year. The entry of Syrians plays out in numerous ways, either through integration into Jordanian classrooms, or a second shift in the afternoons or evenings for Syrian students taught by temporary Jordanian teachers. In both cases, the Syrians are taught the Jordanian curriculum. Students we spoke with felt able to learn in the new curriculum, although English, which is introduced earlier in Jordan, presented a real challenge. Jordanian teachers we met with were also very positive about their experiences teaching Syrian children, whom they described as polite, respectful and eager to learn anything that might help them in the future.

However, according to UNICEF, [most Syrian children in Jordan are not in school](#). Over 42,000 were registered in public schools in April 2013, reflecting around 20-25 percent of school-aged refugees. Given the sudden influx, it is unlikely that local school systems could absorb the over 250,000 Syrian refugee children that are now in the country. Indeed, according to [UNHCR](#), “a crisis in refugee education looms across the region”. Among those Syrians who are attending school, the overwhelming majority are enrolled in the primary level. Because Syrian refugees have to present the Jordanian registration card and the UNHCR registration card to enroll their children, the months-long delays in registration in the north of Jordan has restricted many from getting their children in schools sooner, in addition to other factors, including lack of awareness of parents, the distance from their homes to schools accepting refugees, and the strain on the government education system.

In Lebanon, even fewer children were thought to be enrolled in public and private schools in the past academic year, although [UNICEF and UNHCR predict there will be 300,000 school-age registered Syrian children in the coming academic year](#). Like Jordan, Lebanese schools have begun to operate in two shifts subsidized by UNHCR to accommodate increased numbers of school-age children. However, as in Jordan, the belief among families that they will return soon, the need for children to supplement the family income, overcrowding and a lack of school supplies, limited access to nearby schools, and language difficulties in the Lebanese curriculum in particular, also dampen enrollment levels. While younger children at the early stages of their education might be able to adapt more easily to these changes, for those students in middle school and high school, the thought of having to learn a new language and navigate a new curriculum in preparation for an increasingly uncertain future is daunting, to say the least.

One issue that we witnessed and heard accounts of, but which is difficult to quantify, deals with the “emotional reserves” or support required of parents who send their children to school in a different curriculum and place. When a child faces difficulties, either with social integration or with comprehension, the parents must find a way to support them, all the while negotiating the refugee

bureaucracy, finding a way to feed the family, worrying about people back in Syria, etc. That parents are unable to either get their children into school or provide them with the emotional support to keep them there may be another contributing factor to low enrollment.

[Older students, especially those who had commenced university studies in Syria have no alternative solution](#) but to pay for their education as foreign students, which the majority cannot afford. The Iraqi refugee situation provides us with lessons as to how this situation will likely play out: many Iraqi refugee students dropped out before or during secondary school as they felt little incentive to take the very difficult final exams to get their secondary school degrees. The case regarding Iraqi refugee education (which mirrored what was going on inside Iraq during the war to a certain extent) created an unusual condition in the modern Arab world: a generation with lower education attainment than that of their parents. Syrian refugees (and perhaps even more so those still residing within Syria) will be on a similar path if they are unable to return home soon. In the words of a 21-year-old journalism student who was forced to leave Syria with his family toward the end of 2012:

“Honestly, I don’t know how I am still living because life has become without purpose or meaning...I am living, eating, drinking, using the internet without thinking about where life has gone. The days are flying by quickly and I have been here in Jordan for one year – a whole year of my life has been lost. I feel as though all of my future was lost, all of my life was lost in the moment I left Syria.”

Health:

In Jordan, building on the model developed to assist Iraqi refugees, the system for refugee health care is quite comprehensive, with registered Syrian refugees eligible to receive free primary health services in public health care facilities. Those with secondary and tertiary health needs can also receive treatment in public facilities, subsidized by UNHCR. Syrians who are unregistered or awaiting registration also have free access to primary, secondary and tertiary health services from international and national NGO providers, as well as international and local charitable organizations. It is worth noting that [other refugee populations in Jordan](#) have enjoyed less access to public health care than the Syrians, and even Jordanian citizens are expected to pay nominal fees for access to secondary and tertiary care. As of July 2013, NGOs in Jordan have seen access for Iraqi refugees diminish, and they no longer appear to be eligible for free primary health care in public health centers.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees are also granted access to primary healthcare facilities, subsidized by UNHCR. Due to weaker health infrastructure in Lebanon, there is high demand for health services by private healthcare providers and local and international NGOs and charitable groups. At the end of July 2013, [the Lebanese Ministry of Health and the Iraqi Red Crescent](#) announced they would

begin providing medical services and incur the costs for Syrian refugees with chronic diseases, in spite of not yet receiving adequate international aid and compensation. In both Jordan and Lebanon, the high cost and shortage of medicines is a serious problem, particularly for these secondary and tertiary health needs for both locals and refugees. According to one international NGO healthcare provider in Jordan, *“There is simply not enough medicine, equipment or health personnel in public health centers. Moreover, Jordanian families are coming to these health centers for routine medicines or vaccinations and they find that the pharmacy has run out.”* These sentiments were echoed by local and refugee populations alike during our visits to public and private health clinics.

It bears repeating that Syrians are fleeing from a country whose [health system has been decimated by the conflict](#). Thus, Jordan and Lebanon are tasked with immunizing large numbers of refugee children and preventing the spread of the resulting communicable diseases such as measles, tuberculosis, all types of hepatitis, and scabies that have not been seen in recent years among their own populations, in addition to treating non-communicable diseases and the traumatic injuries caused by war and violence. Acts of goodwill from host countries must continue to be met with increased action from donors, or else the health infrastructure relied upon by both host and refugee populations will reach breaking point.

- ***Labor rights and access remain essential in enabling refugees to provide for themselves.*** Lebanon should be supported in its decision to continue to allow Syrians to work, and Jordan should be assisted in providing similar legal channels and creative solutions that would protect its own population while aiding refugees to utilize existing skills, allowing them to be financially independent, and not pose a “welfare burden” for host countries and the international community.



“Welcome to the Syrian refugees and workers in Lebanon, with apologies in advance for what the racists among us might do.” (Sign by Mursad Organisation)

The Lebanese authorities continue to allow Syrians with a valid work permit to work legally in Lebanon, and plenty of Syrians work in unregulated labor without valid permits. The Government of Jordan no longer issues work permits for Syrians and has adopted increasingly stringent ‘policies’ that include penalties, business closures, worksite raids, and deportations to Za’atari Camp, aimed at preventing Syrians from competing for already limited

employment opportunities. In part due to local gossip and rumors within communities that are fed by alarmist local and national media reports, Jordanian citizens express an overwhelming fear that Syrians are taking jobs away from

them because Syrians work for cheaper wages, longer hours, and are particularly skilled in trades and service work.

In our fieldwork we found the following generalizable trends. Small business owners that are connected to their workers via family ties or long histories of work relationships are unlikely to fire Jordanians in order to hire a Syrian for less. Instead, we found that large chain stores with impersonal business structures had hired Syrians, in addition to new businesses that could hire Syrians at a lower cost than Jordanians. Egyptian migrants who have long served as low cost labor in the Jordanian agriculture and construction industries are also being affected, due to the influx of Syrians willing and able to take on such jobs for equal or lower wages and Syrians' reputation for higher quality work. [Despite the fears of the population, Jordan's unemployment rate has actually fallen slightly, from 12.9 percent to 12.2 percent.](#)

- **Service Provision and Coordination:** A ['real-time evaluation' of UNHCR's response to the Syrian refugee emergency](#) alludes to concerns over a lack of inter-agency coordination that were aggravated by "...a widespread perception that UNHCR did not provide effective coordination in the earlier stages of the emergency, although many interlocutors agree that the organization's performance in this respect has improved significantly in the last six months." Certainly, our research confirmed that UNHCR has scaled-up its response and averted a much larger refugee crisis. However, in terms of registration, the insufficient capacity to register the majority of refugees living outside of Amman and Beirut can increase obstacles for refugees in host countries. This is an area where improvement is possible, particularly as UNHCR registration is necessary for refugees to become eligible for cash assistance and public services in Lebanon, and documentation from both UNHCR and the government is required to access public health and educational services in Jordan.

Although it was clear from our time in Jordan that UNHCR was making an effort to reach out to local service providers and community leaders throughout Jordan, more could be done to understand and coordinate with local organizations that fall outside of the Refugees Assistance Information System (RAIS), either because they are unaware of the system or they choose not to join. These organizations and religious charities (often located in areas in which UNHCR has less access), provide much-needed assistance including health services in some cases, particularly vulnerable individuals and newly-arrived refugees who have not yet registered, and thus could be welcome partners in order to avoid overlap, and to ensure that distribution of aid and services is equitable.

- ***More low-cost and quick-impact local initiatives with visible benefits for both refugee and host communities are needed to develop relations and reduce tensions at the local level.***

Moreover, host country governments should realize and emphasize the importance of local and international investment in bolstering existing infrastructure such as school buildings, recreational spaces and water-sanitation where possible, particularly for those areas outside of the capital cities that have seen less investment and have less experience in hosting refugees. In Jordan, it seemed clear that the weakness of the municipal mayors played a factor, due to a merger of the municipalities and then [a one-year postponement of the municipal elections](#). The perception among locals, and the visible evidence everywhere, was that towns were overwhelmed with refugees, garbage, traffic, and locals also reported feeling less safe in their homes and public places. The election of new mayors in late August 2013 should assist local municipalities in dealing with basic services to residents and in putting more responsive officials at the helm.

Economical and innovative projects, including ones such as house renovations and landlord incentives, construction of children's playgrounds and soccer fields, building of transportation shelters, establishing clothing drives, and designing and building community spaces, seem to connect refugee and local populations. These projects are particularly effective when they harness the goodwill and generosity present at the local level, and refugee and host communities' work together in planning, development and maintenance. While we heard about these initiatives from our discussions with service-providers in Amman, [our time in northern Jordan revealed the need for many more of these projects](#) to be implemented in Mafraq, Irbid, Ajloun, and Ramtha, in addition to the nearby villages. In Mafraq in particular, there was also [a grave need to increase water distribution](#), which was recently done, and garbage removal, in order to alleviate concerns among host populations over water scarcity and the spread of disease. In Lebanon, it is the reverse of Jordan, given the much weaker national government. There, local municipalities and charities provide much of the support, along with NGOs, to refugees. However, this also takes away from local communities, and more support for municipalities, local charities, and international and national NGOs will go far to aid the refugees in Lebanon. Attention to the existing infrastructure can also alleviate fears among host country governments and municipalities of being left with little more than a depleted infrastructure, if and when the crisis in Syria abates and the development community turns its attention to Syria.

- *The Jordanian and Lebanese governments could also do more to **stabilize and put limits on housing rents** in order to avoid the exploitation of refugee and host populations by landlords.*

“Before I returned to Syria to be with the revolutionaries, my family and I faced big problems acclimatizing to the new environment [in Jordan]. Even in finding somewhere to live, we encountered a lot of exploitation from landlords trying to get more money from us, as if we are tourists and not

people living as refugees, living without anything, having lost our finances and our lives.”

(50 year-old man from Dara'a)

Property owners stand to benefit from the presence of the refugees, as rents for apartments in both Jordan and Lebanon double and triple in as little as one year, making it hard on refugees as well as, in particular, newlywed Jordanians and Lebanese looking for apartments. A new Jordanian Landlord and Tenant law has yet to be conclusively debated by Parliament, but might offer some regulation. There are, of course, many who do not exploit the housing crisis, particularly in rural villages such as those we visited in southern Lebanon.

- **Safety and security.** Refugees from Syria reported feeling extremely safe and secure in Jordan, and in our interviews repeatedly expressed their gratitude to the government and people for hosting them. While other refugees also expressed the same feelings of safety and security, refugees who have dark skin – regardless of their nationality, but particularly those from Sudan and Somalia -- reported high levels of harassment, unfair treatment, and name-calling. A 16 year old Somali girl living in Amman told us, *“Somalis in Jordan are treated as outcasts... There are people getting abused and living in the desert in tents, streets, without shelter. Their lives are pretty sad.”*

5. REFUGEE ISSUES

Making sense of demographics, geographies and life histories of Syrian refugees and their host communities is crucial to understanding how best to assist them during displacement, and to allow them to prepare for themselves for the future and return. People knowledgeable about Syria should work with refugee service providers to create programming that fits needs, expectations, and experiences. For starters, most Syrians have only been exposed to Arabic, with a very small percentage possessing English or French skills. They also represent the class divides in Syria, with well-educated Syrians not registered as refugees in part, as one told us, “to make sure that there is enough for those poorer than themselves.” On the flip side, we found that Jordanian aid workers were surprised by the low levels of education they found among the Syrians they were dealing with, by how reluctant they were to believe written material, by their approach to ask multiple people the same question to try and make sure they have an agreed upon answer, and by Syrians’ using connections (*wasta*) to access services. Our interviews with Syrians revealed that this use of *wasta* was one of their main complaints about Syria under the Assad regime before the uprising, as nothing could be done without it. According to one Syrian man from Dara’a, 24 years old and studying agricultural engineering:

“In terms of the wastas and bribes and patrimonialism, these things happened in our daily lives – it was something natural like eating and drinking and breathing. Unfortunately, we got used to it and we didn’t ever question it.”

Syrians bring with them habits, skills, and ways of doing things that either need to be adapted to, or need to be addressed so that they can adapt to a different way of life in the host countries.

What follows are observations from multiple accounts told to us by refugees about some of the major issues of concern:

- ***The need for cash assistance over food aid or vouchers for refugees in towns and cities.*** Refugees express repeatedly [the need for cash assistance rather than food handouts or vouchers](#). It is worth noting that [the cash assistance program set up by UNHCR for Iraqis was a success](#), lowering program costs significantly and enabling refugees to decide what is best for them and their families. UNHCR has continued the program for vulnerable Syrians, while WFP administers the voucher system. For the refugees, cash assistance provides them with the ability to buy what they need and want, avoid the stigma of receiving refugee handouts, and participate in the local community and economies. For the local community, all merchants feel the increased buying power of refugees with cash, and not just the few stores that are allowed to participate in the voucher system.

While the World Food Program (WFP) argues that providing food directly or via a voucher system increases refugee nutritional intake over cash assistance, [impact evaluations](#) commissioned by WFP recognize other context-specific alternatives. In Jordan and Lebanon, countries that have well-developed markets, giving refugees food or vouchers suggests that they are not capable of making decisions about their families’ well-being and that they will spend the cash on non-essentials. Our discussions with refugees and local business people in Jordanian towns and [reports from Lebanon](#) also revealed problems with price-fixing, poor-quality products, and restrictions on certain items such as hygiene and cleaning products. These problems are felt most by those not living in the refugee camps, at least some of whom either sell the vouchers for cash (at around 80% of its value), or sell the food obtained with the vouchers for cash.

There is no doubt that the current WFP voucher programs allows Syrians registered with UNHCR to survive, and that these vouchers are the only aid that some refugees are currently receiving. According to WFP Jordan, “During the month of June 2013 [WFP provided food assistance](#) to over 351,000 Syrian refugees; 124,634 beneficiaries through dry rations (in Za’atari camp), welcome meals, daily bread and school feeding in Za’atari camp and 227,171 beneficiaries [98% of UNHCR-registered refugees] through value-based food vouchers in Jordanian communities.” However, particularly for those living outside camps, in

the Jordanian and Lebanese communities, WFP can improve efficiency by transitioning to cash assistance as quickly as possible.

- **Communication with home** is also extremely important for Syrians, for keeping in touch with family and friends who have remained in Syria, including in order to check on property and assets. Whereas most Syrians interviewed had some [access to the internet](#) or a mobile phone to communicate with loved ones in Syria, others reported that they had been unable to keep in contact with families due to damaged phone and internet connections in Syria, and multiple displacement of relatives inside Syria. On another level, [this communication is about maintaining a lifeline with a country that has undergone a devastating transformation over two years](#), and preserving their stake in its future. Being able to keep in touch via the internet or via phone cards requires cash – another reason why cash assistance is preferable.
- **Educational levels among Syrians** should be considered when formulating policy and providing service provision. For the most part, those refugees most in need of assistance come from rural areas in Syria (which is the opposite of refugees from Iraq). They have surprisingly low levels of education given the reports and rhetoric of the Baath regime of their comprehensive educational system, which should be considered when formulating information and awareness campaigns aimed at refugees. During our time in Jordan and Lebanon, it was clear that word-of-mouth was the preferred means of communication for Syrians. Regardless of literacy levels, many Syrians demand face-to-face contact for credibility, versus free-phone hotlines or brochures. Radio and online broadcasts were also being piloted as a means of circulating information, particularly among younger audiences.
- **Syrian refugees are skilled in the craft trades and service industry. Many are entrepreneurial and will work in black market labor.** Given the rural nature of their origin and the recent history of labor migration out of Syrian villages to work in tourism and service sectors, the male population brings many skills with them that they are utilizing in the diaspora. In Jordan, they work in restaurants, shops, bakeries, and construction. In Lebanon, they work in these fields also, in addition to agriculture and taxi driving, among others. If stopped from maintaining a livelihood, their skills, self-worth and desire to be self-sustaining will suffer, forcing them to become even more dependent on aid and locals. For this reason, development actors must step in sooner rather than later and work with host governments to find ways in which refugees can earn a living, for their benefit and also the benefit of the host country. In the past, programs have been developed and funded to provide vocational training and re-training for Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in what NGOs deemed employable professions, such as hairdressing, electronics repair, along with computer and office skills classes. While the Government of Lebanon continues to allow NGOs to provide [youth centers, vocational training and other psychosocial activities](#), the Government of Jordan appears increasingly reluctant to approve any such

projects other than basic relief. This stance is understandable after years of hosting refugees in protracted displacement and reacting to recurring crises. However, allowing a parallel economy dominated by emergency aid is also detrimental to Jordan's development and its infrastructure, and shuts out small-scale merchants, local officials, and the average citizens who also feel squeezed by hosting refugees in their communities.

“The biggest problem I am facing here [Jordan], me and my siblings, is how to find a job. One of my siblings found a job in a supermarket in the area in which we are living and the other in a Syrian restaurant. I worked for two weeks in a lawyer’s office. Then I had a fight with the lawyer over why I am watching the news on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Aside from this harassment, we are not used to sitting without working. Without the help of some friends, some are Syrian and some are Jordanian, we couldn’t live here anymore.”

(28 year-old man from Damascus)

- **Well-established connections between the refugee and host communities** should be utilized and built upon in the planning and implementation of projects designed to assist them.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, geographical proximity, kinship and intermarriage, mercantile trade and labor ties, as well as connections that grew out of prior conflicts and wars, contribute to the decision of Syrians to travel to Lebanon and Jordan, as well as in the decision of Lebanese and Jordanians to host ever daunting numbers of refugees fleeing Syria. Syria's southern border and Jordan's northern border divides a region known as the Hauran (Houran) which has for centuries connected people on both sides of a border, and who continue patterns of cross border labor, trade, family, marriage, and other relations through the present. Thus, refugees from southern Syria and in Dara'a in particular, have relied on relatives and acquaintances in northern Jordan for housing and other help. In Lebanon and Jordan, both of which hosted a few hundred thousand Syrian migrant workers before the conflict began, many of those Syrians fleeing there have worked there as laborers in the past. In the case of one home we visited in southern Lebanon, the Syrian family living there had sheltered their current Lebanese hosts at their home in Homs when the Lebanese family had fled temporarily from their village during the Israeli bombing of Lebanon in 2006.

- When formulating policies and implementing projects, **there is a need to look beyond current conceptions of vulnerability and resilience**, so as not to encourage harmful stereotypes of female refugees in the host communities, or neglect other 'non-traditional' at-risk populations, such as young men who have fled the fighting in Syria.

Women and Girls:

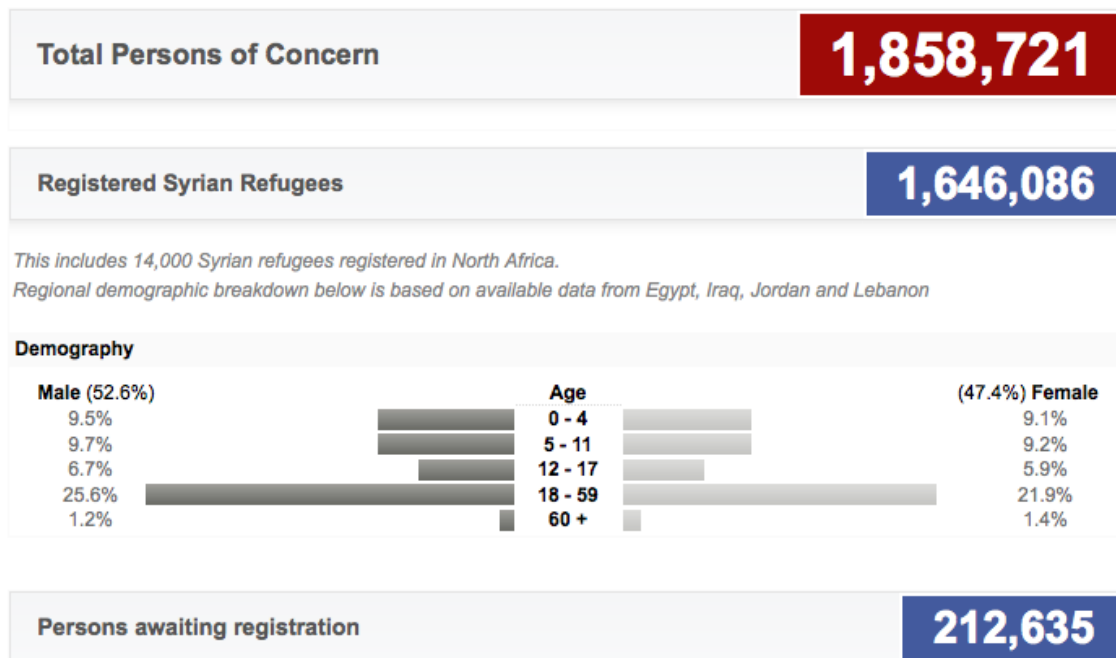
Humanitarian actors are well aware of the need to provide protection for children, female-headed households and women and girls at risk of sex trafficking and prostitution. As a result, there are more programs and funding sources dedicated to these groups. While such vigilance and intervention is required on the part of aid organizations and local law enforcement actors, there is also a need for responsible reporting within the local and international media and culturally sensitive framing of these issues among humanitarian actors. In Jordan, since the Syria refugee crisis began, there have been reports of individuals who have engaged in prostitution. We received multiple reports of harassment and marginalization from Syrian women, who were assumed to be 'available' for transactional sex because of widespread stereotypes in the media. This may also have caused Jordanian women to alter their behavior, i.e. heightened reluctance to leave their homes unaccompanied because of rumors of harassment and aggressive behavior. The outcome is that women, whether Syrian or Jordanian, are being stigmatized or victimized. Like other stereotypes that have arisen surrounding refugees because of a disproportionate focus on isolated cases, op-eds aimed at addressing such issues of prostitution and crime, training for journalists and the appearance of host government officials on television and radio addressing these stigmas and encouraging men to change their behavior could dispel some of these rumors, and prevent tensions from arising within towns and cities hosting refugees.

[One issue that is harder to address are early marriages for girls under 18, some as young as 14 years old.](#) Many of these occur despite the existence of laws that prescribe the minimum age for marriage at 18, and thus are not officially registered as marriages. Some seek and are granted an exception by the religious judge that a party be at least 18 years old. According to [statistics available for the year 2011 in Jordan](#) (n.b. latest statistics available do not include refugee Syrians), 12 percent of marriages that took place in Jordan involved a woman under the age of 18 (8,093 of 64,256 marriages). Among Syrians, it is not uncommon in the rural areas for people to be married under the age of 18 (as evident among the refugee population where a twenty-year old woman might have two or three children). In addition, in the cases of war and migration, many families feel it safer to marry their girls younger so that they have the protection of a husband and they are not objects of unwanted attentions. While those working with refugees expressed concern over what was deemed by one Jordanian medical professional as 'inappropriate marriages', it is difficult to know if, when and how to intervene in these situations.

Young Men:

No one has commented or addressed the issue of why at certain times there are more male refugees registered with UNHCR than female refugees – an anomaly compared with other refugee crises. In the last spring and early summer of 2013, the number of registered male refugees was almost 4 percent more than females.

Figure: UNHCR Registration data, July 27, 2013 – [Regional Overview](#)



And while the numbers in September 2013 are even, hovering near 50 percent for each, the fact that the majority of those fighting are male (as well as the majority of those killed) would suggest there should be more far female refugees. That the number between male and female refugees is so close suggests that men continue to see leaving the country as one of the only ways to remove themselves from the fighting.

“I had to leave my country so that I wasn’t enlisted in the military. I live in Amman by myself...My life here is routine. I go to work and then return home – that’s it. The main problem is that there are few job opportunities and the salaries are little and they use us (as Syrians) in the workplace...No one is helping me here. My country must become stable, but this is going to take a long time. I don’t know the solution, things are complicated and it’s getting worse...Regarding military service, I do not want to involve myself in murdering by any means; I have to stay away from these problems.”

(24 year-old man from Damascus)

Given that there are proportionally high levels of young men and men of fighting age as refugees, they should be seen also as a potentially vulnerable population. Currently there are no aid or programs aimed at this group. But, these young men are the first to be targeted by armies and militias for recruitment, and are the ones most likely to be given or to pick up arms. They are also seen as the

demographic most likely to pose a threat to host countries, regardless of whether or not they have perpetrated a criminal act. During our time in Jordan, we encountered several men in their twenties, many of whom had been forced to flee Syria, abandoning jobs or leaving university before completing their university degrees. Some were alone, while others were living with their families who were determined to remove them from the fighting. Many of these men experienced feelings of inadequacy at not being able to generate income for themselves or their families; and without work or aid or an opportunity to make something of themselves, some were contemplating a return home. In the words of one NGO representative in Jordan, "Youth have to present their problems -- and silence them -- in a certain way, in order to fit the 'refugee' mold. Yet, as people, they are just in need of tools to help themselves." If the international community's commitment is to stop the fighting in Syria, they must devise programs for young men of fighting age to ensure safe places and means of survival outside Syria.

- ***Iraqi and Palestinian Refugees from Syria, as repeated displaced refugees, must not be neglected or discriminated against in terms of protection and assistance by host countries and the international community.*** Palestinian refugees cannot register with UNHCR or avail themselves of any services under its auspices because they fall under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (est. 1950). In late August, there were reported to be [92,000](#) Palestinian refugees from Syria residing in Lebanon, adding to the 455,000 Palestinians who have lived there for decades, often in overcrowded conditions. [Lebanon remains open to Palestinian refugees from Syria](#), although they face additional entry fees (\$17 per individual) and more obstacles to 'staying legal' once inside the country. This is adding visible strain to the already limited infrastructure of these camps, which have become increasingly overcrowded. Residents we spoke with in [Burj al-Barajneh camp in Beirut](#), the majority of whom are officially unemployed, felt as though there was no extra aid or service provision to support the increase in those living in the camps.

Unlike in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria have been denied entry into Jordan since January 2013. Before then, policies toward Palestinians entering from Syria were unclear, and [some were detained in designated camps](#). As of May 2013, there were just over 6,600 Palestinian refugees from Syria registered with UNRWA in Jordan, although the actual number is thought to be slightly higher due to a reluctance to make themselves known to UNRWA and the Jordanian authorities. Of this 6,600 figure, UNRWA calculates that 57.7% of individuals have Jordanian nationality, 22.7% have Syrian travel documents for Palestinians, 18.8% have Syrian nationality, and 0.8% are designated as 'Other'.

Iraqi refugees from Syria are also unable to enter Jordan at the Syrian border, and must return to Iraq to enter from the Iraqi border, which is subject to intermittent closures. Still, Iraqis crossed the border into Jordan [at an average of 300 per month](#) in the first half of 2013. With July proving [the deadliest month in](#)

[Iraq in five years](#), the need for protection and assistance among Iraqis looks set to continue. Those Iraqis who have remained inside Jordan face diminishing access to remittances, humanitarian aid, and programming due to decreased attention and funding. Some of the Iraqis have been there for seven years or more, while others have just arrived, and all are unable to work due to the same legal constraints as those faced by Syrian refugees. At times, tensions within the Iraqi community and between Iraqis and Jordanians, [such as the disturbances in May following an incident at the Iraqi embassy in Amman](#), result in heightened insecurity and feelings of uncertainty for Iraqis in Jordan.

Little is known of smaller refugee populations inside Syria, including [Afghan, Somali and Sudanese refugees](#), many of whom are thought to be trapped inside the country due to a lack of travel documents or the inability to go anywhere else as they do not have visas to other countries.

- ***Syrians' visions for the future, their ideas about return and their role in rebuilding their country.***

Conversations about the past and present among Syrians are crucial in beginning to come to terms with the unfathomable loss and upheaval they have endured. Equally, discussions of the future, among both younger and older generations of Syrians - including the nuts and bolts of their return and rehabilitation - must be encouraged and heard by those who claim to be working toward solutions for Syria, both inside and outside of the country.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of Syrian refugees interviewed by us and local researchers expressed that their biggest hope for the future was to return and rebuild their homes, their everyday lives, livelihoods, family and friends in Syria. Their biggest fear, meanwhile, was being unable to return to their country and forced to live a future of uncertainty in an alternative homeland (*watan badeel*) as refugees for the rest of their lives. Our forthcoming publications will focus more on Syrians' perceptions toward the future and their return, but here we include excerpts from four interviews with Syrian men and women now residing in Jordan.

"I am going back to build my homeland. I know that I will find destruction everywhere and nothing will be like it was, but our homeland remains like a warm embrace. A homeland is like a mother; it also needs its children so they can be there with all the powers they have to defend it and to contribute to rebuilding it through working and studying. For our lives [now], we have seen a significant change in that we used to own the houses we lived in, but now [in Jordan] we are renting houses. Before we were also employers, having our own businesses, but now we are working for people who are controlling us and using us. Before we were able to live

among our family and friends, but now we are living among people we don't know..."

(Syrian woman, 53 years old from Homs)



"Syrians in exile: You will return to a country that does not resemble the old one. That's a promise." Sign carried in a demonstration in Yabroud, October 2012.

"My hope is that I will return to my country and my family and live in peace and comfort so we can get on with our lives, for our future and our children, and that we will make up for the torture we have seen and our taste of exile. My biggest fear is that safety won't return and that the war will continue on after the fall of the regime or that the regime will stay to carry out the aims of the president, to destroy us, our lives and our stability."

(Syrian man, 37 years old, from Rural Damascus)

"I should have returned already. If the situation calms down, I will return to my house, where I have beautiful memories. There must be security and stability – no problems, no bombings, no airstrikes. Our kids should be able to go out in the street without us worrying about them and our normal life should return to how it used to be, when I could go out at night or during the day, without anyone bothering me...My hope is that I will return to Syria with my children and Syria will be fine again. Some people say it will take us a long time to come up with a solution for Syria, and some people say it will end by 2014. God knows."

(Syrian woman, 46 years old, from Homs)

"Certainly, certainly, I must return to Syria. I don't need to return to the same place I was living, but I must return to see this place. Of course, I won't encounter the same place, the same neighborhood, the same people, because many people have died in our neighborhood and others like it. I have to return – I don't know how or when, but I know I must

return...Here, I have got to know some friends. Our similar circumstances have brought us together. We think about how we must return, how we must return to Syria and how we must plan for our futures. From the outset, we have spoken about how we want to return to our normal lives. We wonder how our futures have been lost from day until night. We talk about the positive and negative impacts of the revolution and how we must contribute to correcting some of the mistakes of the revolution – what we must do now and in the future.”

(Syrian man, 21 years old, from Dara'a)

6. A PROTRACTED STATE OF EMERGENCY

A ‘protracted state of emergency’ best characterizes the situation in Jordan and Lebanon. As the conflict in Syria and subsequent displacement of Syrians to Jordan and Lebanon continues into its third year, the policies and practices directed toward Syrian refugees living in host communities continue to function within the paradigm of emergency relief. In the words of one director of a Jordanian NGO: **“this mood for saving lives must now be accompanied by the mood for rebuilding lives”**

Locally-crafted and sustainable solutions must be formulated, initiated by refugees and their host communities, with support from humanitarian and development actors and the international community, in order to transition Syrian refugees from 29 months of emergency aid to coping mechanisms that provide income generation and prepare for their return to Syria. After all, [as refugees have repeatedly shown](#), they are not simply ‘mouths to feed’, but people whose lives continue in defiance of war. Indeed, one way to build up people’s resilience is to allow for people to return to a semblance of normality in their own lives in the present. This will reduce frustrations among host populations, and allow refugees to begin reconciling with the past and begin preparing for the future. With such programming, Lebanon and Jordan can embark on sustainable development to infrastructure that will not be abandoned entirely when the refugees return home and donors turn their attention to inside Syria.

The truth is, however, **that the only lasting solution is to take steps to end the fighting and insecurity in Syria and support people to return and rebuild their lives and their country.**

In the meantime, host countries and the international community are stuck trying to find a balance between providing more assistance to refugees than they do to local populations, and making sure the refugees have enough food and adequate housing. There is also fear that too much aid to refugees encourages more Syrians to leave Syria and thus adds to the strains on the host governments’ resources and within the host communities. Jordanians are seasoned hosts of

refugee populations after decades of experience with Palestinians, Iraqis and now Syrians. Similarly, people in Lebanon have experienced firsthand years of war, political instability and displacement, and as refugee hosts. While long-time connections between refugees and host communities exist, and thus make Jordan and Lebanon suitable hosts and distinct in their understanding, empathy and tolerance toward refugees, the legacy of political instability and displacement is also a reason why these hosts cannot continue to endure scarce resources, overstretched public infrastructure, rising prices, falling wages, and lingering unemployment.

Many of our interim observations and recommendations are based on Syrians having some access to cash to pay for rents and other needs, on UNHCR being able to distribute cash assistance to refugees, and for the local authorities to have money to spend on infrastructure development rather than just emergency aid. **If more donor aid does not come through, the international community should not be surprised if the governments change their generous policies toward Syrian refugees as the conflict continues.**