

Chapter IV

The Implications of the Crisis on Host Communities in Irbid and Mafrq – A Socio-Economic Perspective

With the beginning of the first quarter of 2011, Syrian refugees poured into Jordan, fleeing the instability of their country in the wake of the Arab Spring. Throughout the two years that followed, their numbers doubled and had a clear impact on the bordering governorates, namely Mafraq and Irbid, which share a border with Syria extending some 375 kilometers and which host the largest portion of refugees. Official statistics estimated that at the end of 2013 there were around 600,000 refugees, of whom 170,881 and 124,624 were hosted by the local communities of Mafraq and Irbid, respectively. This means that the two governorates are hosting around half of the UNHCR-registered refugees in Jordan.

The accompanying official financial burden on Jordan, as estimated by some international studies, stood at around US\$2.1 billion in 2013 and is expected to hit US\$3.2 billion in 2014. This chapter discusses the socio-economic impact of Syrian refugees on the host communities in both governorates. Relevant data has been derived from those studies conducted for the same purpose, in addition to field visits conducted by the research team and interviews conducted with those in charge, local community members and some refugees in these two governorates.

1. Overview of Mafraq and Irbid Governorates

It is relevant to give a brief account of the administrative structure, demographics and financial conditions of the two governorates.

Mafraq Governorate

Mafraq governorate is situated in the north-eastern part of the Kingdom and it borders Iraq (east and north), Syria (north) and Saudi Arabia (south and east). It has an area of 26,552 km² making up 29.6% of the total area of the country. The Northern Badiya region comprises the largest portion of the governorate. This makes it the second largest governorate after Ma'an. The population amounts to 287,000 with a population density of 9.5 per km². Mafraq has always maintained a strategic position as it is situated at the crossroads of international routes linking up the Kingdom of Jordan to the Republic of Iraq via the Karama entry point, located at a distance of 285 km from the governorate's center. It also has features the Jaber border crossings into the Arab Republic of Syria, located 20 km from the governorate's center.

Figure (1): Mafraq governorate and administrative divisions



Mafraq governorate is made up of four districts that are further divided into 18 municipalities, eight of which border Syria. These are:

- Al Za'tari
- Al Sarhan
- Hosha
- Um Al Jimal
- Sabha and Al Dafyana
- Prince Hussein bin Abdullah
- Deir Al Kahef
- Um Al Qateen

Table (1): Mafraq governorate's administrative divisions

Governorate	District	Municipality
Mafraq Governorate (18 Municipalities)	Al Qasaba	Al Manshiyya
		Rihab
		Bal'ama
	North-Western Badiyah	Al Za'tari
		Al Hussein bin Abdullah
		Hosha
		Bsilyah
		Al Sarhan
		Al Khalidiyyah
	Northern Badiyah	Al Salhiyyah and Nayfah
		Om Al Jimal
		Sabha and Al Dafyanah
		Om Al Qateen
		Deir Al Kahef
		Bani Hashem
		Al Sawafi
	Arruweshed	Arruweshed

Distribution of Syrian Refugees in Mafraq

Syrian refugees living in the abovementioned municipalities number around 134,000, making up 36% of the total population (Table 1). The figure, however, does not account for those who live outside the municipalities or in the camps, or for those who are unregistered. The Greater Mafraq Municipality hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees, who are equal in number to the Jordanian inhabitants (90,000). This figure shows a demographic imbalance in the city, which will eventually lead to a further demographic and economic imbalance if the situation persists. Table (2) below shows the distribution of Syrian refugees in the governorate.

Table (2): Distribution of Syrian refugees in Mafraq governorate's municipalities

Governorate	Municipality	Population	Syrians	Ratio of Syrians to Population
Mafraq (18 Municipalities)	Greater Mafraq	90,000	90,000	100
	Al Manshiyya	12,000	2,500	21
	Rihab	22,000	5,000	23
	Bal'ama	40,000	7,500	19
	Al Za'tari	15,000	3,500	23
	Al Hussein bin Abdullah	16,000	800	5
	Hosha	10,000	3,500	35
	Bsilyah	7,500	100	14
	Al Sarhan	22,000	9,000	41
	Al Khalidiyyah	30,000	3,500	12
	Al Salhiyyah and Nayfah	16,000	1,000	6
	Om Al Jimal	25,000	1,000	4
	Sabha and Al Dafyanah	20,000	3,000	15
	Om Al Qateen	15,000	850	6
	Deir Al Kahef	12,000	500	4
	Bani Hashem	6,000	1,000	17
	Al Sawafi	4,000	500	13
	Arruwshed	7,000	750	11
	Total	369,500	134,000	36

The Financial Conditions of Mafrq Governorate

Just like other governorates and municipalities in the Kingdom, Mafrq governorate relies heavily in its budgeting and projects on the funds allocated to it in the national budget. Salaries and wages in Mafrq account for around 50-75% of total expenditure, a figure proportion attributed by some to maladministration and functional inefficiency. Mafrq’s municipalities rely on the country’s treasury and hence are unable to absorb the additional burdens imposed by the Syrian refugees. Tables (2) and (3) below show the degrees to which the municipalities are independent of the General Budget; these degrees should ideally not exceed 25% of total municipality budgeting.

Figure (2): Rates of independency of Mafrq’s municipalities from the state budget (%)

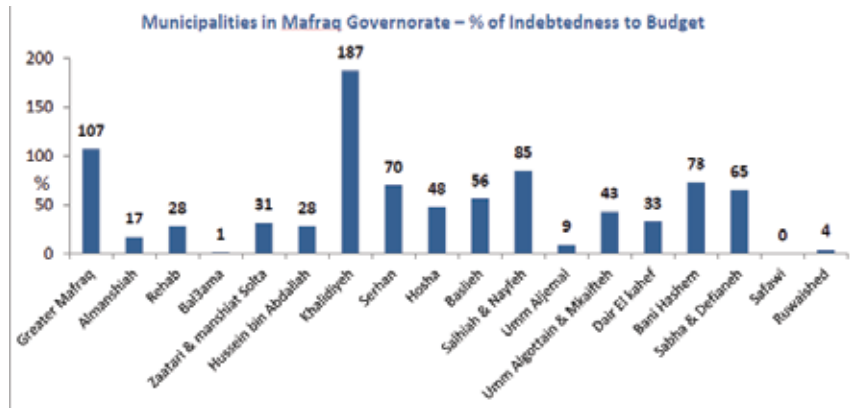
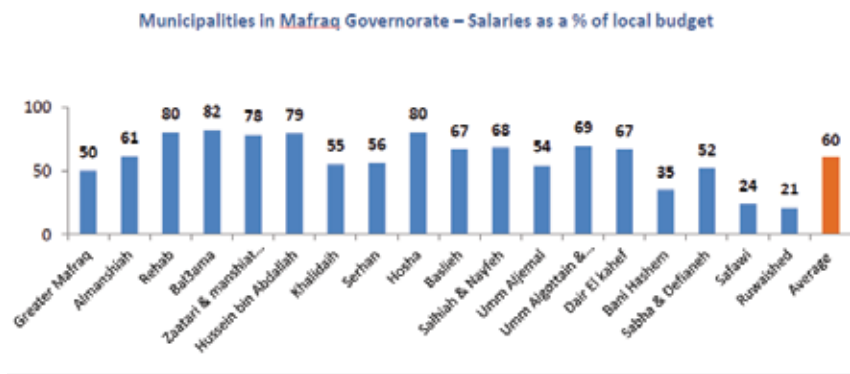


Figure (3): Ratios of salaries to municipal budgets (%)



Irbid Governorate

Irbid Governorate is located to the far north of the Kingdom. Its land extends from the Jordanian-Syrian borders to the Yarmouk River. The eastern regions of the governorate (Ramtha) are part of the Huran Plains that cross Syria and Jordan, while the northern parts overlook the Golan Heights. The western part is made up of medium-height plateau sloping gradually to below sea level in the Jordan Valley. The southern region (Al Mazar Al Shamali) has a high mountainous typography and a charming character as the region is adjacent to the Ajloun Mountains. It has around 1,112,300 inhabitants with a population density of 570 per km². It has an area of 1,621 km².

Figure (4): Irbid governorate and administrative divisions



Irbid governorate is made up of nine districts comprising 18 municipalities, six of which border Syria. They are:

- Ramtah
- Huran Plain
- Yarmouk Al Jadidah
- Al Saru
- Al Kafarat
- Al Shu'lah

Table (3): Administrative divisions of Irbid governorate

Governorate	District	Municipalities
Irbid Governorate (18 Municipalities)	Qasaba and Bani Obeid	Greater Irbid
	Qasaba	Irbid Al Gharbiyah
	Ramtha	Ramtha Al Jadidah
		Huran Plain
	Al Mazar Al Shamali	Al Mazar Al Jadeed
	Bani Kinanah	Al Yarmouk Al Jadeedah
		Al Shu'lahAl
		AlKafarat
		Al Saru
		Khalid bin Al Waleed
	Al Kura	Rabyat Al Kura
		Burqosh
		Deir Abi Sa'ed
	Northern Valley	Sharhabeel bin Hasna
		Muaz bin Jabal
		Tabaqat Fahil
	Al Tayba	Al Tayba Al Jadeedah
	Al Wasatiya	Al Wasatiya

Syrian Refugees in Irbid Governorate

According to official statistics, Syrian refugees living in Irbid governorate number around 239,750, making up 20% of the total population there. The figure, however, does not account for those who live outside the municipalities or in the camps, or those who are unregistered, suggesting that the real number is much higher. Al Tayba Al Jadeeda hosts the highest proportion of Syrians, accounting for nearly 57% of the total population there. Those figures imply a demographic imbalance, as in the case of Mafraq governorate. This heralds a future demographic and economic imbalance in both cities. Syrian refugees are distributed in Irbid's municipalities as shown in Table (4) below:

Table (4): Distribution of Syrian refugees in Irbid governorate's municipalities

Governorate	Municipality	Population	Syrians	Ratio of Syrians to Population (%)
Irbid Governorate (18 Municipalities)	Greater Irbid	520,000	120,000	23
	Irbid Al Gharbiyah	60,000	10,000	17
	Ramtha Al Jadidah	100,000	40,000	40
	Huran Plain	45,000	15,000	33
	Al Mazar Al Jadeed	55,000	6,000	11
	Al Yarmouk Al Jadeedah	16,000	4,000	25
	Al Shu'lah	18,000	4,000	22
	Al Kafarat	35,000	8,000	23
	Al Saru	15,000	4,000	27
	Khalid bin Al Waleed	30,000	1,500	5
	Rabyat Al Kura	45,000	2,000	11
	Burqosh	18,000	2,500	6
	Deir Abi Sa'ed	65,000	6,000	9
	Sharhabeel bin Hasna	40,000	5,000	13
	Muaz bin Jabal	45,000	1,500	4
	Tabaqat Fahil	42,000	1,250	3
	Al Tayba Al Jadeedah	7,000	4,000	57
	Al Wasatiya	29,450	5,000	16

The Financial Conditions of Irbid Governorate

The financial conditions of Irbid governorate and its municipalities are not very different from those of Mafraq governorate or those of other governorates and municipalities in the country. Its budget and projects rely heavily on the funds allocated to it in the national budget. Salaries and wages account for around 50- 75% of total expenditure, a figure some have attributed to maladministration and functional inefficiency. The situation is exacerbated by the additional burdens of Syrian refugees. Tables (5) and (6) below show the degrees to which the municipalities are independent from the public budget and the ratios of salaries to municipal budgets.

Figure (5): Rates of independency of Irbid's municipalities from the state budget (%)

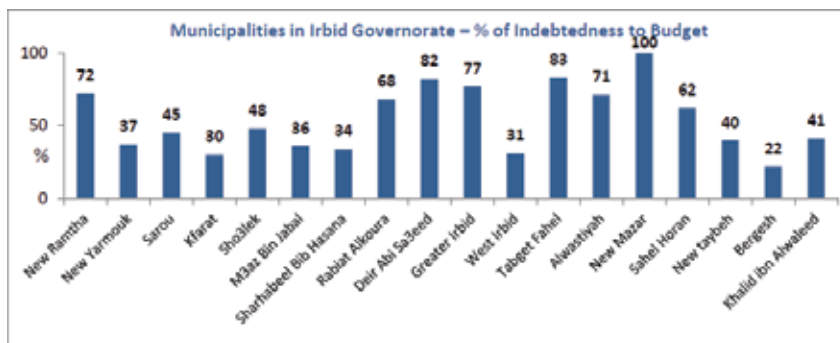
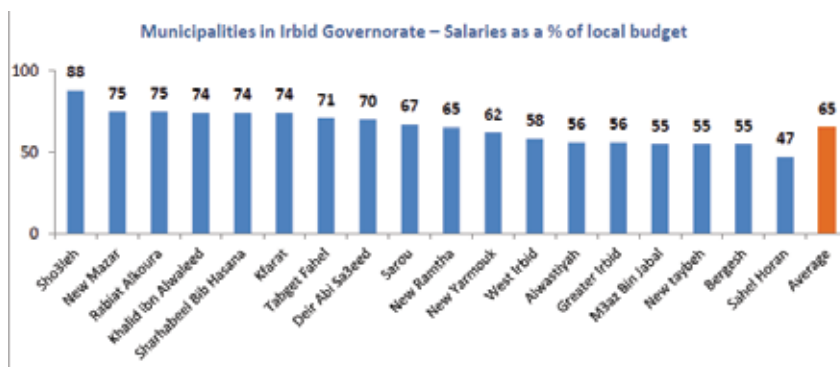


Figure (6): Ratios of salaries to municipal budgets (%)



2. Challenges Imposed by the Crisis on Host Communities in Mafraq and Irbid

The Syrian refugee issue has, no doubt, increased the challenges already faced by Mafraq and Irbid. Especially as a result of the increasing size and flow rates of refugees, the two governorates are suffering from great economic and institutional vulnerability. A direct reading of the current status shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the host municipalities are encountering abnormality, both in terms of numbers and the demographic characteristics of the newcomers. The municipalities were already unprepared to address such pressures, which overstrain the infrastructure and other public services, including health, education, transport, garbage management, sanitation, water and power. To manage such an abrupt crisis in terms of quantity and quality, there is a need for local and international institutional expertise and capacities, in addition to huge funds, which are not accessible to most municipalities; these municipalities are already short of the necessary mechanisms, expertise and funds to address humanitarian crises.

In the next part of this chapter, the study examines those challenges and highlights specific problems faced by the refugee-hosting municipalities. It then proposes a number of solutions to enable all institutions and the state to absorb as much of the impact of the refugee issue as possible.

Solid Waste management (33 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

The interviews and field visits conducted by the research team show a clear gap in waste management provision. Authorities in Mafraq report that a municipality has to dispose of around 300 tons of solid waste daily. Irbid, however, has to deal with twice as much of that figure. This is ten times as much as used to be handled in those governorates before the Syrian refugees poured in. The following problems can be identified:

- The solid waste load is on the rise with the increasing population as a result of changes in lifestyle and inflows of Syrian refugees;
- There is a shortage of garbage trucks and compressors, either because they are defective or because they are out of service;
- Garbage containers are either inadequate or defective and unusable;
- There is a shortage of staff, particularly given the fact that most staff members in the municipalities are supervisors of a limited number of Egyptian foreign workers. For example, in Mafraq, there are 300 Egyptian cleaning workers supervised by 700 administrative local employees.
- Oil and maintenance prices are on the rise;
- Pollution, infestation of insects, rodents and stray dogs are becoming an issue.

Water (23 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

The interviews and field visits conducted by the research team show a clear gap in the consumption of pumped and underground water. Statistics for Mafraq show local water consumption rising by over 4,000 cubic meters a day and by 1,800 meters an hour for underground water. Daily total water use per capita in Irbid was previously 100 meters, but has declined to 80 with the coming of refugees and the accompanying increase in water demand. In this respect, the following problems can be identified:

- Water demand is on the rise as a result of demographic growth, particularly the growing numbers of Syrians;
- The water distribution network is obsolete and worn out, leading to a high rate of leakage and rendering it unable to absorb the abnormal increase in the population;
- Surface water distribution networks are susceptible to a high degree of contamination
- Water networks need maintenance;
- More water networks need to be installed to reach new residential areas.
- Water supply is irregular as it is pumped once a week for only a few hours;
- Water supply is continuously disrupted;
- Weak water pumping necessitates the purchasing of new pumps at extra costs for the impoverished communities and also entails higher electricity costs;
- The quality of water is deteriorating as a result of the presence of salts and mud in it;
- Water intakes by schools, mosques and public facilities add to the water burdens;
- Military camps and security installations add to water scarcity;
- The water situation has worsened with the influx of Syrian refugees who habitually use water extravagantly because of the abundance of water in their country of origin.

Infrastructure (18 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

The main infrastructure problems besetting the municipalities can be summarized as overstretched main roads and secondary roads, in addition to related maintenance and services. In this respect the following problems are identified:

- Roads leading to Al Badiya Al Shamaliya and Al Badiya Al Gharbiya are in serious need of maintenance, particularly those affected by the Za'tari Camp and the international roads leading to the camp;
- New roads need to be constructed to cope with geographical expansion;
- Roads leading to some farms need maintenance and rehabilitation to energize farming.

The next key infrastructure challenge is street lighting and electricity. This manifests itself, according to authorities in the governorates in question, in other challenges, as follows:

- Street lighting needs maintenance and defective parts need to be replaced;
- Lighting is needed for those roads that have been constructed to cope with geographical expansion;
- Several municipalities are indebted to the Electricity Distribution Company (EDCO), necessitating rational consumption of electricity. Many municipalities are switching off the road lights after midnight to save power, which raises the issue of insecurity;
- Financial burdens have increased as a result of the rise in electricity prices.

Sanitation (18 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

Sanitation is a key challenge for the infrastructure as it is connected with the environmental and health aspects of life in the host governorates. More challenges arise in relation to access to optimum environmental and health conditions. In this regard, the following problems are identified:

- Increasing pressure is exerted on the available sanitation networks;
- Networks are in need of maintenance and expansion;
- With the exception of Irbid, there is no sewage system for Ramtha and Mafrqa as such projects face typographical challenges;
- Septic tankers are scarce, meaning high costs for waste disposal;
- There is a risk of sewage water contaminating potable water in many municipalities, particularly in Za'tari Camp, which is set on a water basin that feeds four governorates.

Education (26 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

The UNHCR reports that 83,232 Syrian children registered at public schools in Jordan up until the end of 2013. Several schools run evening shifts to provide schooling for these children. Despite all attempts to encourage Syrian children to go to school, however, the UNHCR says 60% of 250,000 are not registered at school. In the final analysis, the impact of Syrian refugees on education in the governorates is a key issue for the time present. But it also has implications for the future as schools compromise quality either by reducing the number of lessons or accepting huge numbers of students beyond their classroom capacities. The following problems are identified:

- Many schools need maintenance and expansion to meet the increasing numbers of students;
- The Syrian refugee issue causes schools to be crowded, though the local schools are already struggling to accommodate Jordanian students. A typical classroom in Irbid and Mafrqa holds around 50 students;
- Many schools are now running two shifts, thus reducing the lesson time from 45 to 35 minutes, at the expense of quality. In addition, several teachers complain that they have not received their overtime dues as the government suspended employment in this sector.

- A good number of teachers and school principals complain of the low educational level of Syrian students and the difference between their curricula at home and in Jordan. They also complain that those students' habits are contrary to those observed in such conservative communities as Mafrqa and Irbid.

Health (19 out of 36 Municipalities Suffer from this Issue)

The government has spent, according to the Ministry of Health's (MoH) reports, around US\$35 million on medical care for the Syrian refugees between January and April 2013, with only US\$5 million provided in direct foreign aid during that period. The field visits and interviews conducted by the research team engaged on this study show huge pressure being put on medical centers and hospitals, mainly Mafrqa's hospitals, the King Abdullah University Hospital in Ramtha and Princess Basma Hospital in Irbid. The total complex surgeries performed on a daily basis average 5-20 and relate to war injuries sustained in Syria. The number of patients visiting medical centers also increased to between 200 and 300 on average. MoH's reports further estimate that the government, for example, needs to boost its total annual health expenditure by US\$135 million in 2013. They estimate too that it needs an additional US\$180 million to expand and upgrade 10 existing medical facilities in the northern governorates to cope with the massive demands on the health care system there.⁽¹⁸⁾ The refugee issue has had a direct impact on the quality of medical services in the hosting governorates, with the following problems identified:

- Medical centers in the north, especially in remote areas, suffer a shortage of personnel, equipment and facilities;
- Many medical centers suffer from shortages of staff because of high numbers of doctors relocating. The problem has been exacerbated by the increasing numbers of Syrian refugees, compromising the quality of services offered by those centers;
- Drug shortages have worsened, particularly those used to treat elderly patients with conditions such as heart disease and diabetes;
- The waiting times increased and so did the times between follow-up visits for the Jordanian patients, particularly in remote areas that suffer from destitution and other problems making travel to medical centers difficult;
- As in the case of schools, medical centers cannot refuse to treat Syrians, especially those suffering from conditions such as jaundice, skin diseases and malnutrition;
- Many members of the conservative communities require permanent female medics and nannies;
- There are almost no ambulances in the area. Though the Civil Defense Department (CDD) offers its vehicles for transporting patients, the scattered nature of the villages necessitates the availability of additional ambulances;
- Lack of medical services may be a key contributor to tensions in those communities.

(18) See the Oxford Business Group's Report on Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan, 2013.

Labor and Investment

The cities of Mafraq and Ramtha have long been a major point of trade between Jordan and Syria. The crisis in Syria weighed heavily on the two cities, the bulk of whose commercial activities (around 80%) was dependent on this cross-border trade. That trade came to a halt after the situation deteriorated in the Syrian border cities. Against this background, Jordanian workers started to face tough competition from Syrians for jobs, especially given that there was a rise in unemployment even before the crisis broke out, especially among women, estimated at 23.3%. According to official sources, no less than 30,000 Syrian refugees are employed in many occupations; nearly half of them work in Irbid and Mafraq. The main impacts of the Syrian refugee issue on workforce and investments can be summarized as follows:

- Syrians are competing with Jordanian workers for jobs. They are accepting lower wages and have advantages over Jordanians in crafts in which they are more skilful;
- Syrians do not have a problem with lower wages. They can adapt, either because of the financial aid that they receive from UNHCR or because of the simple need to work, which is misused by some employers;
- Some Syrians open up trade enterprises and pay Jordanians well, maintaining business and investment relations with them;
- 70% of overland trade to Jordan through Syria has stopped;
- Trade has been severely affected in the northern cities of Mafraq and Irbid, particularly in the informal sectors;
- The labor and trade problems may be a major driver of social tension. In July 2013, the government lifted fuel subsidies and raised tax on telecommunications, sparking tensions between Jordanians and Syrians as the government tried to adapt to the largest wave of refugees ever seen by the country. A study prepared by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) in April 2013 shows that 71% of the study's population and 43% of the opinion leaders would refuse entry to any new waves of Syrian refugees to Jordan. In June 2013, the rate increased to 73.5% of the study population and 55% of opinion leaders wanting to refuse entry to new Syrian refugee waves to Jordan. Of these, 87% said it would be better to keep the Syrians in refugee camps and not allow them to move into the local communities, while 92% of the study population claimed the existence of Syrians in Jordan had compromised job opportunities for Jordanians.

The CSS performed a field survey in October 2013 and found that 72% of Jordanians stated that Syrians worked in commercial stores in the places they lived. That percentage rose by 11% from April in the same year. In the same context, 76% of Jordanians said the existence of Syrians in their areas has had adverse effects. Of these, 41% said the negative effect was Syrian competition for local jobs, while 30% said the effect was the rising prices. Still others said the effect was in the form of overstretched resources, such as water, transport, education and health.

In the labor market, there are some indications that the Syrian impact on Jordan's economy has not been all bad. The unemployment rates, for example, dropped from 12.9% to 12.2% in 2013, according to a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA). Despite a common perception that Syrians have taken over the job opportunities of Jordanians, the Syrians in the country injected US\$1 billion of capital into Jordan's economy, with a growth of around 3% in 2013, according to Oxford Business Group (September 18th, 2013).

The Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) also said that Syrian investments in the first nine months of 2013 accounted for 34% of total Arab investment distributed in industry (40%), trade (38%), agriculture (20%) and real estate (2.5%). In addition, 500 Syrian companies have been incorporated since early 2012 with an estimated gross capital of US\$42 million. Out of the 500 companies, 158 are industrial ones that employed around 2,157 workers.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector – which accounts for about 4% of Jordan's GDP – has been among the affected areas. Some 60% of Syrian refugees are located in small towns or villages in the governorates of Irbid, Mafrq, Balqa and Ajloun, where farming is one of the main livelihoods, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Border communities in Irbid and Mafrq that had benefitted from Syrian government-subsidized seeds, fertilizers and other materials, or had earned income by trading or smuggling Syrian agricultural materials through informal trade networks, have seen the costs of production rise significantly after the outbreak of the crisis.

Shortages in poultry and livestock products imported from Syria, the increased price of animal feed and a spike in animal-borne diseases due to strained border controls have caused the price of eggs to increase four-fold, according to the FAO. Animal feed prices rose by 22-38% between 2009 and 2012, mostly due to increased transportation costs as a result of the change in the trading route from Tartous in Syria to the new ports of Aqaba and Haifa. Meanwhile, the illegal cross-border trade in Syrian livestock has pushed the price of sheep and goats down by 50% in some border areas. Competition between Syrian refugees and Jordanians in rural areas has depressed farm wages to as little as US\$150 for a month of work.

Agricultural commodities that were once trans-shipped through the ports of Latakia or Tartous are now transported by sea through ports in Palestine, Turkey or Egypt at higher costs. The impact on Jordan has been tremendous, with some farmers in the Jordan Valley having resorted to throwing away large amounts of vegetable produce due to be exported because transport costs have skyrocketed.

Concerns about an impending crisis in Jordan's food supply are also mounting due to increased demand from refugees and a decline in Syrian food imports of at least 50%.

The FAO estimated that the government's six-month supply of strategic food reserves would be depleted within four months if the number of refugees continued to grow at the existing rate and also questioned the government's ability to maintain its food subsidy program, which costs the equivalent of 1% of GDP annually. Between 2011 and 2012, overall food prices in Jordan increased by 5%. The Jordan Food and Drug Administration reported that the Kingdom imported 87% of its food requirements in 2012 at a total annual cost of US\$3.1 billion, which represents 14% of GDP. In sum, the main challenges besetting the agricultural sector are as follows:

- Syrians are competing with Jordanians for agricultural jobs in the northern regions;
- In some cases, entire Syrian families live in tents on the farms they work at;
- Many farmers cannot access their lands in the winter because of the deterioration of roads leading there. It is recommended that those roads be maintained to revive agricultural lands there.

Housing and High Rents

Housing and rents pose the most fundamental challenge to the host communities for Syrian refugees, with the following problems identified:

- Syrians are competing with Jordanians for housing, taking into account the fact that the Syrians are entitled to a financial housing subsidy from the UNHCR and other local and international charitable organizations;
- It is not uncommon to see several Syrian families living together in homes composed of several breadwinners, so that they share the burden of high rent and water and electricity bills;
- Real estate prices soared with the coming of Syrians by up to 100%, making access to housing extremely difficult for Jordanians, especially newlywed couples.