

THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN ASYLUM ON THE JORDANIAN SOCIETY- BETWEEN REALITY AND FUTURE SOLUTIONS

The Jordan Office of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) organized in collaboration with Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development a panel discussion in Al Mafraq on the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian Society. This panel discussion is one of four other panel discussions which will be held in various governorates of Jordan.

The two-day event, held in November 08-09, 2014, brought together key experts from the media, the private sector, civil society, local communities and governmental organizations deliberating the issue of the Syrian refugee influx. Afterwards the dialogue was deepened with Syrian refugees.

Following the welcome remarks of KAS Project Manager Ms. Nidaa Al-Shraideh, and President of Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development Mr. Suliman Al Khawaldeh, Al Khawaldeh presented an overall view of the Syrian influxes into Jordan.

Jordan has always been a host country for Arab and non-Arab refugees, Al Khawaldeh said, noting Jordan's commitment to human rights and refugee laws and Jordan's membership to international conventions and body treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Al Khawaldeh highlighted the impact of Syrian refugees on the health, economic and education sectors as well as its impact on civil protection, safety, environment, infrastructure, public services, water and energy sector.

"But the impact is not all negative", stressed Al Khawaldeh, citing some positive impacts of Syrian refugees on Jordan's economy including, for example, the surplus value of Syrian presence in several industrial, service, trade and labor sectors.

Former member of Parliament and former Director of Public Security General Mazen Al Qadi discussed the Syrian refugee's repercussion on the social peace and national security. He talked in general about the Syrian refugee's influx as a threat on the region and in particular about the influx as a threat on Jordan. "Criminality has risen since the Syrian refugee influx in Jordan", Al Qadi said. He emphasized, that reasons therefore would be the different social backgrounds of the Syrian refugees. Some of them might have a criminal background or possibly could be even extremists. This is a major challenge for the Jordanian Security Forces and a threat for the national security. Other impacts he mentioned were infiltration and weapon smuggle as well as the

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presence of huge numbers of economic refugees.

In the next session Dr. Ahmad Qtitat, director of hospital management in the Ministry of Health (MoH), discussed the impact of Syrian refugees on the health and environment sector. He assured that Jordan would continue providing humanitarian aid and pointed out that the health centers and hospitals in Mafraq are highly loaded.

At the beginning of the second day of the panel discussion, the chairman of Isnaad Consulting and Economic expert, Dr. Khalid Al Wazani, talked about the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian economy and the labor market. He gave an overall view of the Jordanian economy and its challenges before and after the coming of Syrian refugees.

He also pointed out to the current pressures on the labor market, a serious problem mainly caused by the entry of competitive Syrian workers.

Al Wazani underscored the necessity of cooperation between and among all sectors to afford young Jordanians job opportunities while benefiting from the experience of their skillful Syrian counterparts. "Syrian workers should not be left unmonitored and Jordanian workers should be protected from being replaced by Syrian workers" he said.

In the next panel discussion, former Secretary General of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs Mr. Jamal Abu Obeid, talked about the impact of Syrian refugees on municipalities. "Our municipalities are under-resourced and they have lack adequate staff to address the

new situation imposed by the Syrian refugees' influxes".

"This is an additional burden that is most obvious in waste management, -transportation and -disposal." According to Abu Obeid, future solutions should include raising awareness among the population in regard to waste management and hygiene best practices, highlighting, at the same time, the necessity to train municipality employees on such issues and make them trainers of other staff.

The director of education at Al Mafraq Mr. Ahmed Bani Khaled discussed the impact of Syrian refugees on the educational sector. Bani Khalid emphasized how the education sector has been severely affected by the Syrian refugees. "The Syrian refugee crisis has severely affected our educational system, especially when it comes to the capacities of classrooms in our public schools, not to mention the resulting shortage in teaching material and staff". He said ad-hoc solutions were improvised to distribute the students in two shifts a day. Afterwards Bani Khalid suggested some possible solutions such as the construction of new schools or the creation of new classrooms through financial support by international donors, active role of the private sector in improving the educational infrastructure and the elaboration of programs for psychological support of Syrian students.

The event was marked by the active participation of Syrian refugees and Jordanians. It facilitated the exchange of ideas and solution proposals and established contact among the participants heralding a good starting point for future cooperation.

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The participants have come up with the following recommendations:

- Implementation of projects aiming at raising awareness on how the impact of Syrian refugees can be softened;
- Implementation of joint volunteer work of Syrian refugees and Jordanians to strengthen their relationship and cooperation, thus to support the communities;
- Improvement of education for Jordanian manpower to enter labor market more competitive;
- Profit from Syrian work experience, especially in the technical field;
- Better organization of receiving Syrian children, women and elderly;
- Implementation of awareness campaigns to improve cooperation between Syrian refugees and public institutions as well as security forces;
- Implementation of educational sessions about Jordanian rules and laws;
- Implementation of terms and conditions for Syrian workers