

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-Zarqa 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 29-30, 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.

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 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 Mafrqa are highly loaded.

At the beginning of the second day of the 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.

Deputy Director General of the Public Security Directorate Mr. Ali Salameh Al Khaldi discussed the impact of Syrian refugees on social peace and national security system. He recalled the role of the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and Jordan’s role in international peace and security.

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Al Khaldi defined national security and social peace, warning of their vulnerability because of the Syrian refugee influxes as a tension has started to float on the surface between Jordanians and Syrian refugees mainly on grounds of competition in the labor market. The national security agencies will have to address the challenges of a possible rise in crime and disputes, which add up to the burdens lay on Jordan. Al Khaldi described the national security as threatened and also as a major challenge, particularly at the borders, due to the unnumbered incidences of infiltration and smuggling, interdicted by JAF's border security guards.

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.

The participants have come up with the following recommendations:

- Stricter selection of certain groups of the Syrian refugees, that should be received by Jordan;
- Al Zarqa should receive more support, as it is one of the governorates that is most influenced by the Syrian refugee crisis;
- Dialogue and awareness sessions should take place for Syrian refugees to train them on rules and laws. This could contribute to security and social peace.
- Syrian refugees should be employed by training Jordanian youth, using their skills and experience;
- Labor market should be organized according to the needs of Syrians and Jordanians;
- Syrians refugees as well as the local community should participate in volunteer work to serve the communities that are affected by the refugee influx.