

The Situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR THE SYRIAN REFUGEE INFLUX TO GERMANY

The conflict in Syria is in its fifth year and no political or diplomatic breakthrough seems to be in sight. More than 4.086.760 people have already fled the country and with the war further escalating, more and more are pushed to seek refuge - mainly in the countries neighboring Syria. Globally one in five refugees is Syrian¹ and until a durable peace settlement has been negotiated, the numbers of Syrian refugees worldwide will further rise. Jordan, which had adopted a very generous stance concerning the acceptance of refugees from Syria, has now taken steps to curtail the influx. It has limited the flow of Syrians, not least by practically closing its borders.

The United Nations Agencies aid programs for Syrian refugees in Jordan are highly underfunded and it lacks donations everywhere. As humanitarian aid is shrinking and further cuts in food assistance are announced, food security in Jordan is increasingly at risk. Together with the lack of perspectives, the aid cuts are leading to hopelessness being prevalent among refugees. These factors push a rising number of Syrian refugees, who do not longer see a future in the Jordan for, to make drastic decisions. Particularly those

among the refugees, who have been categorized as extremely vulnerable by UN agencies, are starting to return to their homes in Syria despite the situation being far from secure. For those with some resources left or who can borrow money from relatives or friends, the aid cuts could also act as the last pushing factor in order to risk the dangerous journey to Europe.

Europe and especially Germany is perceived by many as safe haven and chance for a better life in dignity. In this context the pictures, reports and the fact that Germany stated that it expects to receive 800.000 refugees (real numbers will probably be much higher as recent registration trends show) has given hope to asylum seekers that there is a reasonable chance that they can make it. Another pull factor is the big Syrian community in Germany but also rumors about alleged welcome money and more benefits which are believed to await those who can reach the country.

¹ Lehne et al., "The Roots of Europe's Refugee Crisis", Carnegie Europe, 10/01/15,
<http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/10/01/roots-of-europe-s-refugee-crisis/iie3>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

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DR. OTMAR OEHRING

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By the end of September 2015 629.034 Syrian refugees had been registered with UNHCR in Jordan of which 82,5% live in urban areas and 17,5 % in camps.² Numbers as high as these would already be challenging in a country with a strong economy such as Germany, but in a country as small as Jordan and with a rather difficult economic situation, the number of refugees exceeds the country's capacity to respond.

Therefore, Jordan heavily depends on the money it receives from international donors. However, the funding situation is far from being secured and the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan sliding into extreme poverty is constantly rising. Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour warned at a meeting of the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis, that "chronic aid shortages have prevented the implementation of critical programmes for refugees and host communities".³ The camps are overcrowded and the number of informal tented settlements (ITS) which spread through the country is growing – often lacking basic water, food, health and education services.⁴ A recent survey of 40,000 Syrian families in Jordan's urban areas found that two-thirds were living below the absolute poverty line.⁵

Lack of Funding

The United Nations Agencies are lacking urgently needed funds: By September UNHCR had only received 41% of the required \$1.191.392.175 for Jordan in 2015 and UNHCR Cash Assistance Programme, providing

cash to vulnerable refugee families living away from the safety nets of the camps, is currently funded at 73 % of the needs at USD 24 million.⁶

Due to the lack of funding the World Food Programme had to radically cut its food assistance in Jordan. Since the beginning of the year the agency reduced the number of food vouchers in regional host countries from 2.1 million to around 1.4 million and sharply reduced the value of the vouchers.⁷ While 35 JOD per person and month would be needed in order to cover an adequate food supply, refugees were only receiving 20 JOD in order to cover the recommended minimum provision of calories. In April 2015, WFP cut food vouchers for vulnerable beneficiaries to 10 JOD and, due to ongoing funding shortfalls, it was forced to also cut the food assistance for extremely vulnerable people from 20 JOD to 15 JOD in May and June.⁸

From September 2015, 229.000 refugees identified as vulnerable no longer receive any food assistance while another 211.000 refugees classified as extremely vulnerable have had the value of their food assistance further reduced during September, only receiving 10 JOD (\$14.1) per person for the month.⁹

To continue its food assistance and food vouchers through November, World Food Programme needs \$236 million immediately.¹⁰

² UNHCR, "External Statistical Report on UNHCR registered Syrians in Jordan", 09/30/15.

³ Abdullah Ensour cited in Al Emam, "Jordan demands steady international funding for refugee response plan", 10/20/15, The Jordan Times.

⁴ Achilli, "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: a Reality Check", Migration Policy Centre EUI, 2015/02, http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/34904/MPC_2015-02_PB.pdf?sequence=1, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

⁵ UNHCR, "UNHCR warns of bleaker future for refugees as Syrian conflict enters 5th year", 03/12/15, <http://www.unhcr.org/55016fff6.html>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

⁶ UNHCR, "UNHCR Operational Update", 2015/08.

⁷ UNHCR, "UNHCR Operational Update", 2015/08.

⁸ WFP, "WFP Jordan Brief", (01 April – 30 June 2015), <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp274960.pdf>, (Accessed on: 10/19/2015).

⁹ Interview with Jonathan Campbell, World Food Programme, 10/06/15.

¹⁰ Goldberg, "UN text messages over 200.000 Syrian refugees: Food aid to be cut off. How you can help", The Huffington Post, 09/04/15, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/un-notifies-over-200000-syrian-refugees-via-text-that-food-aids-getting-cut-completely_55e9f7bae4b002d5c07609df, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

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The funding shortfall has severe repercussions for the Syrian refugees and an increasingly large number is sliding into abject poverty. As the majority of the refugees have already been displaced for years, many have no saving lefts and sold all their assets by now. They have lost access to their support networks and are dependent on external aid. Now being cut off food assistance programs, forces them to resort to drastic measures. In order to survive refugees are reducing food intake, take their children out of school - so that they can work - and take huge debts. There are women who are forced to prostitute themselves in order to feed their family and others are driven by poverty to agree to early marriages of their teenage daughters.¹¹

The Social, Cultural and Economic Impacts of the Syrian Refugee Influx on Jordan

The local population has observed the influx of Syrians in an astonishingly neutral way. However, this can also be related to the circumstance that a great number of those who are coming have family ties to Jordanian citizens in the North.

The great number of refugees in the country stretches infrastructure and public services to the limits. Schools are overcrowded and many are now running classes in two shifts, one for the Jordanians and one for the Syrians, reducing lesson time, at the expense of quality. Also medical centers are overrun by high numbers of patients, compromising the quality of services, increasing waiting time and time between follow-up visits for Jordanian patients. Furthermore, real estate prices have risen by up to 100%, making access to housing extremely difficult for Jordanians.¹²

¹¹ World Food Programme, "WFP Executive Director implores global community to continue support for Syrian refugees", 08/13/15, <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-executive-director-implores-global-community-continue-support-syrian-refugee-0>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

¹² Khaled Wazani, "The Socio-Economic Implications of Syrian Refugees on Jordan. A Cost-Benefit Framework.", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Issnaad Consulting, 2014,

In some towns the percentage of Syrians has by now exceeded the number of Jordanians: For instance in Ma'raq, in northern Jordan, the size of the population has grown from originally around 80.000 inhabitants to approximately 160.000 citizens. Positive experiences of cooperation and good neighborhood between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian population have been observed. In the Jordanian governorate of Ma'an those have been examined by a KAS study on the social, cultural and economic impacts of Syrian refugees. Visits were exchanged between Syrians and their Jordanian neighbors and solidarity was expressed towards the refugees.¹³

Jordan did not ratify the Geneva Convention on Refugees and no work permits are issued to Syrian refugees. However, between 160.000 and 200.000 Syrians work illegally in the country¹⁴. This raises tensions between the local population and the new arrivals, as Jordanians are repeatedly arguing that they are betrayed over job opportunities by Syrians, who accept to work for lower wages, due to the simple need to work. However, the majority of the Syrians is working in the agriculture and service sector, where they mainly compete with Egyptian or Asian foreign workers. Also despite the common perception that refugees have taken over the jobs of Jordanians, Syrians have injected \$1 billion of capital into Jordan's economy.¹⁵

http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37808-544-2-30.pdf?140522145513, (Accessed on: 10/19/15).

¹³ KAS in cooperation with Al Hussein University, "The Social, Cultural and Economic Impacts of Syrian Refugees on the Governorate of Ma'an. An Analytical Field Study.", 2015, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_41387-1522-2-30.pdf?150521123139, (Accessed on: 10/19/15).

¹⁴ The Jordan Times, "Around 200.000 Syrians illegally work in Jordan - ministry", 20/06/15, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/around-200000-syrians-illegally-work-jordan-%E2%80%94-ministry>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

¹⁵ Khaled Wazani, "The Socio-Economic Implications of Syrian Refugees on Jordan. A Cost-Benefit Framework.", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Issnaad Consulting, 2014, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37808-544-2-30.pdf?140522145513, (Accessed on: 10/19/15).

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Change concerning the residential status of Syrian refugees in the country cannot be expected, it would have strong implications on the, already delicate, demographic balance in the country. Jordanians have once become a minority in the country – through the influx of Palestinians in the last 67 years – and will not risk that again. Refugees are treated as “wafidin”, guests, and are expected to go back to Syria as soon as the war ends. However, concerning access to the job market for Syrians an offer to cancel part of Jordanian debts at World Bank or International Monetary Fund in exchange for guaranteeing refugees access to the job market, could be successful. Such a strategy would also be worth to think through in other first host countries and could, for instance, apply the ratio of the cancellation of 1,5% of Jordan's debts per 10.000 refugees gaining access to the job market.

**Pushed to the Edge: Aid Cuts Force
Refugees to Risk All**

Having no legal opportunity to work and having witnessed the radical reduction of humanitarian aid, Syrian refugees are now facing the difficult decision whether to stay in Jordan, even though quality of live is constantly decreasing and there are no long-term perspectives for them in the country, or to leave again. Either to Europe, if possessing the resources or back to their Syrian homes despite strong security concerns.

Over recent months UNHCR has witnessed an increase in returns to Syria with a daily rate of return of 160 persons in October 2015, of those 74 % have been categorized by UN agencies as highly or extremely vulnerable, and are therefore those who suffer the most under the cuts of humanitarian aid.¹⁶ A strong rise in return numbers had also already been registered when there were strong aid cuts between July and August 2015 and the situation in Jordan had become so severe that it seemed to have outweighed the security risks which await

¹⁶ Interview with Jonathan Campbell, World Food Programme, 10/06/15.

returners back in Syria. At this time the number of refugees voluntarily returning to their home country doubled from 1.934 at the end of July to 3.853 in August.¹⁷ Zataari camp reports that approximately 120.000 of the 430.000 refugees who have passed through the camp returned to Syria, predominately to the South-Syrian Governorate of Dara'a.

Main reasons for the return into warzone are reunion with family members, increasing vulnerability, a lack of livelihood opportunities, a desire to continue education, and a perceived improvement of the security situation.¹⁸ An example for this is Adnan Ghanoum who lives with his 19 relatives in Amman. After having received World Food Program's text message that all food assistance for the family is ending and they have been eating flour and onions for a week he is thinking of returning to warzone, saying that “It's better to go back to Syria to die there”.¹⁹

Even though the majority of refugees leaving Jordan are returning to their homes in the Southern provinces of Syria, also the number of people making their way to Europe is rising. As the situation becomes increasingly difficult in Jordan and humanitarian aid is shrinking people are losing hope and are driven to onward movement. Even though the journey is dangerous and expensive (this year alone 2.500 migrants and refugees have died trying to get to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, according to UNHCR²⁰), more and more families take the risk as they see no future in Jordan. Anecdotal evidence tells of increasing numbers of families selling their property in Syria,

¹⁷ UNHCR, “UNHCR Operational Update”, 2015/08.

¹⁸ UNHCR, “Zaatari Refugee Camp Factsheet”, 2015/07.

¹⁹ Guerin, “Aid cuts driving Jordan's Syrian refugees to risk all”, BBC, 09/11/15, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34196629>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

²⁰ Goldberg, “UN text messages over 200.000 Syrian refugees: Food aid to be cut off. How you can help”, The Huffington Post, 09/04/15, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/un-notifies-over-200000-syrian-refugees-via-text-that-food-aids-getting-cut-completely_55e9f7bae4b002d5c07609df, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

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mostly in the region of Dara'a and Damascus, in order to finance their migration.²¹ Pushed to the edge a fresh start in Europe is the only hope they still have. As one Syrian refugee, who is currently living in Amman and who has been informed by text message that UN aid for his family of nine would be ending, explains "It's better to die fast on the journey, than die slowly, watching your kids starve". No longer being able to pay food and medicine bills, he is planning to be smuggled to the Turkish coast and then on to Europe.²²

Consequences for Europe

Even though the number of Syrian Asylum Applications in Europe is still relatively low, with less than 10% of Syrians who have fled the conflict have sought safety in Europe, the number continues to rise.²³ Aid cuts due to underfunding and donor fatigue are likely to push more people to the shores of Europe. Evidence from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) already suggests that many of those now fleeing Syria are increasingly aware of the situation in Lebanon and Jordan and are attempting to reach Europe instead.²⁴ To help prevent more people from Syria fleeing into Europe, the UN refugee agency has repeated calls to increase and improve essential support in the countries of first asylum, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey which are now home to more than four million refugees. UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres warns that "Further abandoning host countries to manage the situation on their

own could result in serious regional destabilisation".²⁵

Over the winter the number of refugees trying to make their way to Europe is likely to decrease but as long as the situation does not improve and people are not able to feed themselves and do not see any perspectives in Jordan, in spring, the next wave of Syrians will make their way to Europe. It is therefore essential that UN agencies are provided with the essential funds to feed the starving people in Jordan and that long-term solution are developed which help refugees to keep their hope and dignity.

Preferred Destination: Germany

Living in poverty and despair, Germany represents for many refugees the chance for a better life in dignity and an opportunity to restart again. Chancellor Angela Merkel's announcement in early September that Germany will allow asylum applicants to remain in the country while their claim is assessed — rather than returning them to await a ruling in the first EU country they entered has attracted many of them. Regarding this decision the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees announced new procedures in order to suspend the Dublin law for Syrian nationals²⁶ - as they usually fulfill the conditions in order to obtain refugee status.²⁷ In order to guarantee a timely recognition as a refugee, an accelerated procedure has been put in place that determines refugee status concerning § 3 of the Asylum Procedure Law which refers back to the Geneva Convention on Refugees.²⁸

²¹ Interview with Jonathan Campbell, World Food Programme, 10/06/15.

²² Guerin, "Aid cuts driving Jordan's Syrian refugees to risk all", BBC, 09/11/15, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34196629>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

²³ UNHCR, "Europe: Syrian Asylum Applications", 2015/09, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/asylum.php>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

²⁴ Jones and Shaheen, "Destitute Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon may return to warzone", The Guardian, 09/11/15, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/sep/11/destitute-syrian-refugees-jordan-lebanon-may-return-to-warzone>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

²⁵ Guterres in UNHCR, "UNHCR warns of bleaker future for refugees as Syrian conflict enters 5th year", 03/12/15, <http://www.unhcr.org/55016fff6.html>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

²⁶ BAMF, Referat 411, Az.: 411 – 93605/Syrien/2015.

²⁷ The same applies to Eritrean nationals as well as Christians, Mandaeans and Yezids from Iraq.

²⁸ BAMF, „Beschleunigtes Asylverfahren“, 07/21/15, <http://www.bamf.de/DE/Migration/AsylFluechtlinge/Asylverfahren/BesondereVerfahren/SyrienIrakEritrea/syrien-irak-eritrea.html?nn=1363268>, (Accessed on: 10/25/15).

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Also Interior Ministry forecasts that as many as 800.000 refugees and migrants may arrive in Germany until the end of the year – the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir even spoke of alleged 1,5 million refugees - have raised hope. To this adds the enthusiasm which recent pictures and reports of the warm welcome in Germany have created. However, also rumors about German ships picking up Syrian refugees in Aqaba and welcome money – according to As-Safir, 1000 Euros per refugee – are spreading quickly through social media and contribute to Germany becoming the preferred destination among Syrian refugees.

It has also been reported that flights from Amman to Istanbul are overbooked due to refugees trying to leave Jordan in order to make their way to Europe over Turkey. However, there is no reliable data on this observation, especially, as the route is always very well booked. Nevertheless, Turkish Airlines recently exchanged its Airbus A321 for an Airbus 330-200 - which allows around 60 extra seating - on one of its daily connections from Amman to Istanbul.

Another pull factor for a life in Germany is that it already has a large Syrian community and many already have relatives or friends in the country.

However, with the volume of people leaving Syria showing no signs of ebbing, second thoughts are made in Germany and people begin to be concerned about the number of new arrivals. In the latest "Deutschland-trend" survey commissioned by public broadcaster ARD and published on 2nd of October, 51 percent of people said they were afraid because of the large numbers of refugees arriving compared with the previous poll, just three weeks ago, when the same number was at 38 percent.²⁹

In response to the arrival of tens of thousands of Syrian refugees Germany has temporarily suspended the Schengen Agree-

ment and reintroduced border controls.³⁰ However, instead of discussing border controls and fences the factors which push refugees to risk all, either on their way to Europe or by returning to active warzone in Syria, should be in the spotlight. As Dina El-Kassaby of World Food Program puts it "If people were receiving enough assistance and were able to have a somewhat stable life, where they are, they would not make that decision".³¹

Funding requirements

An increased support of frontline nations is needed and 1 billion Euros additionally for UNHCR and WFP to support first host countries of Syrian refugees, which were recently approved by European leaders,³² does not even come close to the amount of funding which is needed, considering that UNHCR in Jordan alone requires more than \$1 billion to meet the needs of Syrian refugees in the country. A detailed analysis of the costs for the Syrian presence in Jordan can be found in the KAS study "The Socio-Economic Implications of Syrian Refugees on Jordan. A Cost-Benefit Framework."³³

WFP would currently need approximately \$15 million per month (\$180 million per year) to fund its food assistance for Syrian refugees in Jordan.³⁴ Assuming that WFP

³⁰ Spiegel-Online, "Grenze zu Österreich: Deutschland führt Grenzkontrollen ein - das müssen Sie wissen", 09/14/15, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/grenzkontrollen-an-grenze-zu-oesterreich-das-wichtigste-im-ueberblick-a-1052744.html>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

³¹ El-Kassaby in Guerin, "Aid cuts driving Jordan's Syrian refugees to risk all", BBC, 09/11/15, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34196629>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

³² Zeit, "EU gibt eine Milliarde Euro zusätzlich für Flüchtlinge", 09/24/15, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-09/eu-gipfel-milliarde-fluechtlinge>, (Accessed on: 10/14/15).

³³ Khaled Wazani, "The Socio-Economic Implications of Syrian Refugees on Jordan. A Cost-Benefit Framework.", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Issnaad Consulting, 2014, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37808-544-2-30.pdf?140522145513, (Accessed on: 10/19/15).

³⁴ Interview with Jonathan Campbell, World Food Programme, 10/06/15.

²⁹ The Local, "Majority of Germans worried about refugees", 10/02/15, <http://www.thelocal.de/20151002/majority-of-germans-worried-about-refugees>, (Accessed on: 10/12/15).

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requires about the same amount per refugee in the other first host states Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq, the 1 billion Euros of the European Union would roughly be enough to fund WFP food assistance for one year in Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan. Lebanon would require over \$300 million, Turkey around \$600 million and Egypt further \$38 million³⁵, together with Jordan the required funding for the four countries sums up to approximately \$1.12 billion per year, only for WFP food assistance. In order to fund food assistance in Iraq another \$71 million would be needed. It should be noted that with this calculation WFP can only guarantee the recommend minimum provision of calories and not adequate food supply. Additionally, UNHCR and other organizations providing help to refugees as well as healthcare, education, psychological care and social assistance services need to be funded.

Currently, the United States are the biggest donor in the region, having provided 43% of the total UNHCR funding both for the region and for Jordan alone. Compared to this the European Union has so far only contributed to 4% of UNHCR funding level in Jordan and 10% to regional UNHCR funding, while Germany contributed \$22.152.306 (3%) to the funding level.³⁶ Also regarding the budget of WFP the United States is the biggest contributor.

Policy Recommendations

If refugees are to be convinced to stay in Jordan, they need to be provided with food, healthcare and some realistic prospects for employment and education. UNHCR Zaatari Camp Manager Hovig Etyemezian therefore gives the following recommendations:

1) We need to fully fund the basic needs of refugees in asylum countries (Food, Water, Electricity, Shelter, Nonfood items, etc).

2) We need to provide education opportunities to Syrians in primary, secondary, higher education and vocational training institutions. This can only be done by supporting ministries of education and higher education through building more schools, funding salaries of teachers, funding scholarships, creating online opportunities and building partnerships between Jordanian and German (or other) educational institutions.

3) We need to increase access to livelihoods for Syrian refugees in Jordan. The private sector should invest in Jordan in order to create more jobs for Syrians and Jordanians alike.

4) We need to increase the number of resettlement slots in Europe so that the most vulnerable refugees are able to be hosted in countries where they can receive the required attention.³⁷

³⁵ Data from UNHCR, "Syria Regional Refugee Response", 09/30/15, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, (Accessed on: 10/14/15).

³⁶ Data from UNHCR, "Syria Situation 2015: 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan", 10/06/15.

³⁷ Interview with Hovig Etyemezian, UNHCR, 10/05/15.