

This essay is a submission to the 2021 Essay- and Photo Competition “100 Years of Jordan”, jointly organized by KAS Jordan and WANA Institute. The information and views in the text are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of these institutions.

By Riyam Nashwan Nashwan

100 Years of Jordan, 100 Years of Hospitality

“Today’s unprecedented global refugee crisis remains a humanitarian disaster and it is proving to be an increasing threat to global security, development, and economic growth. This is a collective responsibility and we need to raise the level of global engagement without delay. Creative ideas are needed. I thank my co-host nations and all who are participating with us today” — His Majesty King Abdullah II at the UN General Assembly’s 71st convention, 2016

Jordan has been hosting refugees for a long period of time, having become the second largest country hosting refugees after Lebanon per capita. The majority of Jordanians are sympathetic to the people who were forced to flee their country and the challenges they still face, and a study conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees revealed that 94 per cent of the Jordanian people view refugees positively. In October 1920 Jordan received groups of Chechens and Circassians, most of whom found home in Zarqa, and they worked in the armed forces. More than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees live in Jordan. The majority of Palestinian refugees in Jordan have full citizenship, many of whom arrived to Jordan in 1948 and 1967.

In 2011, Jordan hosted Syrian refugees who fled from their country because of war. Jordan provided them with homes, jobs, and educational opportunities.

There are two international organisations responsible of refugees’ affairs in Jordan: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The UNHCR is for Syrian and other refugees and UNRWA is for Palestinian refugees.

Jordan does not only take care of refugees themselves but their issues as well. Jordan supports researchers from all around the world to come to Jordan and conduct research on their diverse social, political, and economic issues as refugees, such as livelihood, employment, protection, and education.

Jordan believes that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,” as Nelson Mandela once said. Jordan’s higher education institutions – including governmental and private universities and colleges – received more than 18,000 students since the Syrian crisis began. These universities not only provided them with education, but also with the resources that are needed to ensure their engagement and social participation by establishing specialised units for this purpose such as the R-SOS units at Yarmouk University, Zaytoonah

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University, and Zarqa University. These units were initiated in these universities with support of the EU.

Primary, secondary, and some tertiary health care services are available to all registered refugees from all nationalities at the non-insured Jordanian rate at public health centres and Governmental hospitals. When it comes to health services, governmental health services are available through public healthcare centres and Governmental hospitals that cover all governorates. All refugee patients must present a valid UNHCR Asylum Seeker Certificate and the service card issued by the Ministry of Interior in order to receive services at the non-insured Jordanian rate.

Jordan’s support for refugees is well established in our country. While 2020 was a challenging year for people around the world, Jordan continued to serve the most vulnerable communities, seeking to provide relief to those who have been severely impacted by the pandemic and enable them to cover their basic needs with dignity.

As part of the Jordanian national COVID-19 vaccination plan which started in the second week of January 2021, anyone living on Jordanian land, including refugees and asylum seekers, is entitled to receive the vaccine free of charge. According to UNHCR, Jordan has become one of the world’s first countries to start vaccinations for UNHCR-registered refugees. Jordan’s Ministry of Health is administering the vaccinations. Over the coming months, it aims to vaccinate 20 per cent of its population against the virus and has currently procured three million doses of the vaccine to enable this to happen. Vaccinations of refugees from Zaatari Camp also started on January 14th 2021, with 43 refugees from the camp travelling to the Department of Chest Infection health clinic in Mafraq to receive it. From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees have been generously included by the Government of Jordan within the national response plan, able to access health care and medical treatment as any Jordanian citizens can. Refugees living in urban areas – who represent 80 per cent of the refugee population in Jordan – will be able to receive the vaccine at their local health clinic.

These efforts from our country toward refugees were highly appreciated by the international community. As noted by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi during his visit to Jordan in September, UNHCR is “grateful to Jordan as a major refugee host country for its continued hospitality and efforts to include refugees in the national health system and coronavirus response plan.”