

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS

JORDAN HOME VISITS REPORT 2014

Media Summary

Syrian refugees living in urban and rural areas across Jordan are facing increasingly desperate conditions, with two thirds now living below the national poverty line, a new study by UNHCR has revealed.

The vast majority (84 percent) of Jordan's some 620,000 registered Syrian refugees live outside the country's main refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq. As the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, the situation for many refugees is increasingly dire as savings and other resources become gradually depleted.

The report is based on data gathered using questionnaires covering almost 150,000 Syrian refugees, carried out during home visits by UNHCR's partner International Relief and Development (IRD) between January and June 2014. When compared with a previous study published in March 2014, the latest results show a clear deterioration in the overall situation for Syrian refugees.

Income and expenditure for the majority of refugee households are now below the level needed to meet their most basic needs, leaving them increasingly reliant on humanitarian assistance.

Since the beginning of the crisis in 2011 the Government of Jordan has opened its doors to Syrian refugees, and together with humanitarian organisations has provided them with essential services and support. As the protracted nature of the refugee crisis is becoming more apparent, the sustainability of existing life-saving networks is under threat.

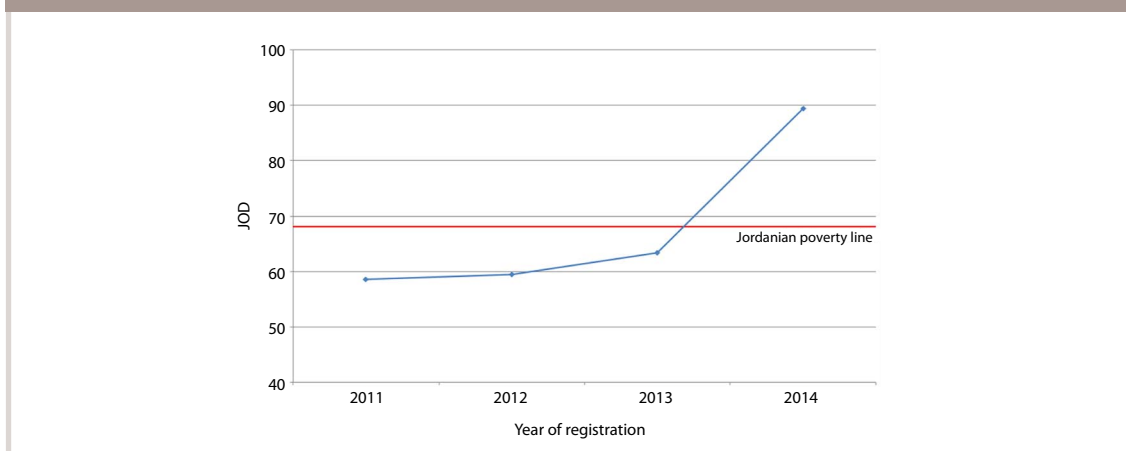
Funding is running out for the Government of Jordan to sustain free access to health services across the country, the World Food Program is finding it difficult to raise sufficient funds for food assistance, even though the vulnerability of refugees is likely to be even more severe in coming months.

Based on the findings in this report, it is clear that any reduction in the current levels of support will have immediate and serious consequences for Syrian refugees living in Jordan. The situation is particularly worrying for the most vulnerable populations, such as female-headed households with little or no means to provide for themselves, and children who risk losing out on education opportunities.

"The ability of Syrian refugees in Jordan to manage their lives is becoming increasingly perilous," says UNHCR's Representative in Jordan, Andrew Harper. "As the conflict drags on and the most vulnerable refugees seek deeper into despair it is now the time for the international community to redouble its efforts to protect those in need. Without this support refugees have limited options on how to survive".

Rising poverty

Figure 1: Average monthly expenditure per capita by year of registration



Source: UNHCR/IRD Home Visits 2014

Overall, average per capita expenditure by Syrian refugees is 67 JOD (95 USD) per month. This is just below the Jordanian absolute poverty line of 67.8 JOD (96 USD) per person per month.

In total, more than two thirds (68 percent) of refugee households were found to be living below the poverty line. By comparison, 14.4 percent of the Jordanian population was found to be below the poverty line based on data from 2010.

More worryingly, one in six refugee households were assessed as living in abject poverty, defined as those whose monthly expenditure is 28 JOD (39.6 USD) per person or less.

For female-headed households, the proportion living in abject poverty rises to one in five, indicating a higher level of economic vulnerability among families headed by women.

Another trend to emerge is that refugees who registered with UNHCR in earlier years show lower average expenditure than those who registered more recently. This seems to indicate that refugees are becoming increasingly economically vulnerable over time as their resources dwindle.

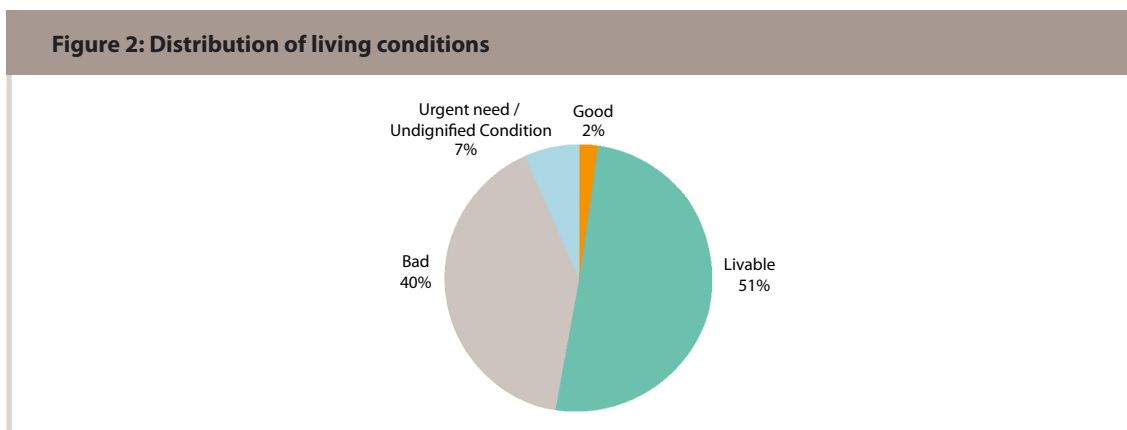
Faced with greater hardship, refugees are resorting to various negative coping strategies to meet their basic needs. The most common strategy is spending savings, reported by more than half of respondents. However, the findings show that the poorest families are also the least likely to have assets to fall back on.

Poor living conditions

With rental costs accounting for more than half of total household expenditure, families are also increasingly being forced to share accommodation with others in order to reduce costs. Nearly half of all households reported sharing their accommodation, with a higher proportion among female-headed families (58 percent) than male (41 percent).

Another finding is that refugee families by and large do not relocate to other governorates. At the same time they tend to move to peripheral areas of urban centres where rents are lower. While this can help to reduce household expenses, it can also make it harder for refugees to access education, healthcare and other essential services.

In general, living conditions¹ for almost half of all refugees were assessed as being bad or uninhabitable. A quarter of households report having unreliable electricity supplies, 46 percent have no heating, and 20 percent have no functioning latrine.



Source: UNHCR/IRD Home Visits 2014

After rent, food accounts for around a quarter of household expenditure. This figure does not include the value of food vouchers provided by the World Food Program, which four out of five surveyed households currently receive. Regardless of whether they receive vouchers, however, half of all households report reducing food quantity and 43% reducing food quality in order to meet their food needs.

Children at risk

Two further coping strategies were identified that relate specifically to children: withdrawing children from school and child labour.

School enrollment levels were one of the main positive trends identified in the survey, rising from 44 percent in 2013 to 53 percent in 2014, thanks to the efforts of the Government of Jordan, donors and humanitarian actors to ensure free access to education for Syrian refugees.

Nevertheless, among families with school-aged children almost a third reported withdrawing children from school, and 6 percent reported resorting to child labour to help support the family. In both cases, rates were highest among the poorest families, indicating a link between such negative coping strategies and economic vulnerability.

Cash assistance lifeline

As part of efforts to assist economically vulnerable refugees, 45 percent of households visited were identified to receive UNHCR cash assistance of between 50 JOD (70 USD) and 120 JOD (169 USD) per month, depending on need and family size. Approval rates were highest among households with the lowest monthly expenditure, as well as those with specific protection concerns including the elderly and female-headed households. Grants are provided upon availability of funds received from the donor community. Based on an analysis of the situation of beneficiaries before and after receiving financial aid, the cash assistance programme contributed to a 20 percent reduction in the number of households living on less than 50 JOD (70 USD) per person per month. The programme had a particularly positive impact

¹ Categorization of Living Conditions:

Good: Permanent structure with kitchen and facilities; area per capita exceeds refugee response shelter standard; good ventilation and heating; reliable electricity,

Livable/Suitable: Permanent structure; area per capita meets refugee response shelter standard, ventilation, heating as well as kitchen and facilities are available, but in dilapidated condition.

Bad: Permanent or transitional structure, area per capita does not meet refugee response shelter standard. Ventilation, heating as well as kitchen and facilities are either non-existing or broken.

Urgent/Undignified: Classification only applies to tent, scrape house, clay house, warehouse, or cave. Ventilation, heating and/or kitchen and facilities are not available and the dwelling is considered uninhabitable.

on female-headed households, with a higher proportion lifted out of poverty due to the assistance compared with male-headed households

Conclusion

The study highlights several achievements of the humanitarian support provided to Syrian refugees living outside the camps in Jordan. Access to education and public healthcare has increased, although this trend could be threatened as the Government of Jordan struggles with the cost of maintaining free access to such services.

Evidence also suggests that UNHCR's targeted cash assistance programme has helped refugees meet their basic needs and lifted some of the most vulnerable households out of poverty.

Despite this, the overall picture that emerges is of refugees becoming increasingly economically vulnerable over time as the crisis drags on and their resources are gradually depleted, with the majority living in or on the edges of poverty.

With few alternatives available, most refugees will continue to rely on humanitarian assistance and support from the Jordanian communities in which they live.

However, unless humanitarian support remains strong, the number of children out of school is likely to increase, the number of families opting to return to Syria will go up and more women will be at risk of exploitation, including survival sex.

In parallel it is important to ensure that humanitarian actors continue to take into account the needs and vulnerabilities not only of refugees but of the communities in which they live, to safeguard the support networks that have thus far assisted them to cope during their time in displacement.

Plan of Action

In response to the deteriorating situation, UNHCR is committing to a Plan of Action and calls on partners' support:

1. In light of growing challenges for Syrian refugee families in Jordan to sustain themselves outside the camps, UNHCR will further increase its cash assistance programme in 2015. The comprehensive target of 30,000 families cannot be met immediately for the lack of funds.
2. UNHCR will continue the home visit project to assess the vulnerability of refugees in Jordan. An average of 5,000 visits will be conducted on a monthly basis. This will support the monitoring of the impact of reduced health services and a reduction in food assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan in 2015. This in turn will inform the continuous review of vulnerability baselines, eligibility criteria and assistance levels.
3. UNHCR will conduct a comparative study on cash assistance and its impact on mitigating negative coping strategies. The field work will be conducted and completed within the first quarter of 2015.
4. Refugee response partners will operationalize the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) in the first half of 2015. This framework harmonizes definitions and the types of assistance to vulnerable segments of the refugee population. This will make for a more effective and more efficient refugee response.
5. In order to support refugee response partners in their efficient and effective assistance delivery, UNHCR will continue improvements of assistance tracking and referral mechanism. A full upgrade of the existing systems and new modules will be tested and released in the first half of 2015. Refugee response partners, including donors, are encouraged to reinforce their commitment to these tools and systems.

Stories



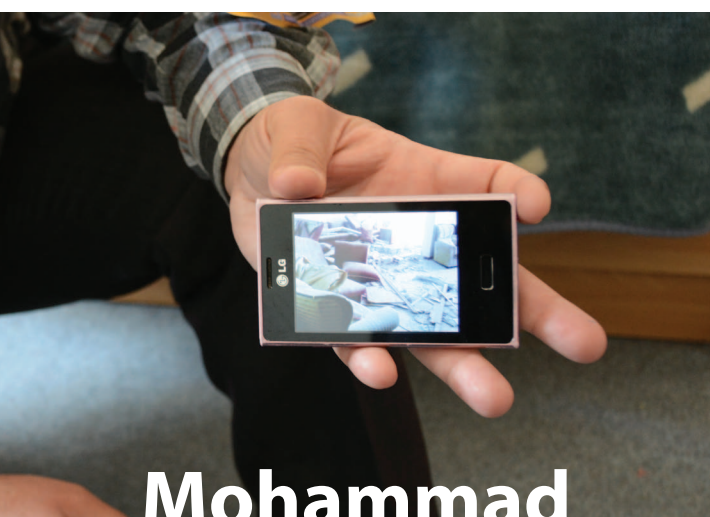
Fatima

Fatima left Aleppo with her children in August 2013 after their home was damaged by shelling. She has not heard from her husband, who remained behind in Syria to care for his elderly parents, for more than eight months.

She and her seven children currently live in a single room in the Jordanian capital Amman. There is barely enough space to lie down at night, and they have no means of heating the room.

Three months ago, Fatima began receiving cash assistance of 120 Jordanian dinars (169 USD) per month from UNHCR, which covers most of the cost of her rent. "Before that I had to borrow money to pay the rent, and I was covered in debts," she says.

The cash assistance also means that her 10-year-old son Ali no longer has to spend up to six hours a day selling clothes at a local market to make extra money. He is now attending school and dreams of becoming a doctor. ©UNHCR / M. Hawari

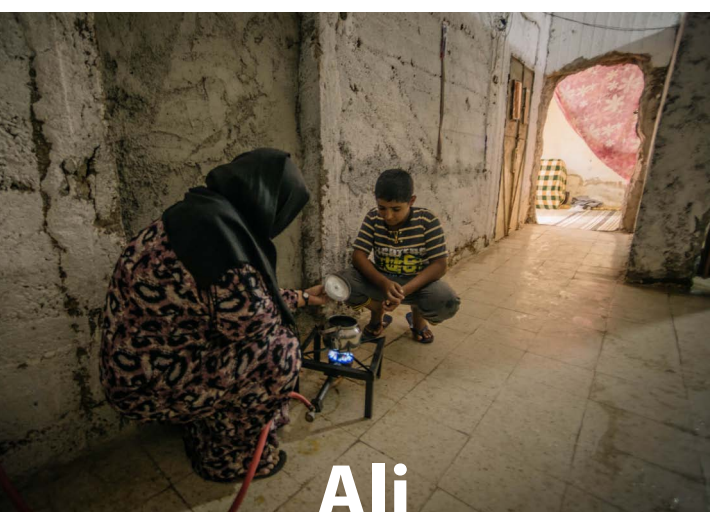


Mohammad

One week after Mohammad arrived in Jordan with his wife and four children, his home in Syria was destroyed. The family now shares an apartment with another family, spending most of their time in their own room to preserve the little privacy that they still have.

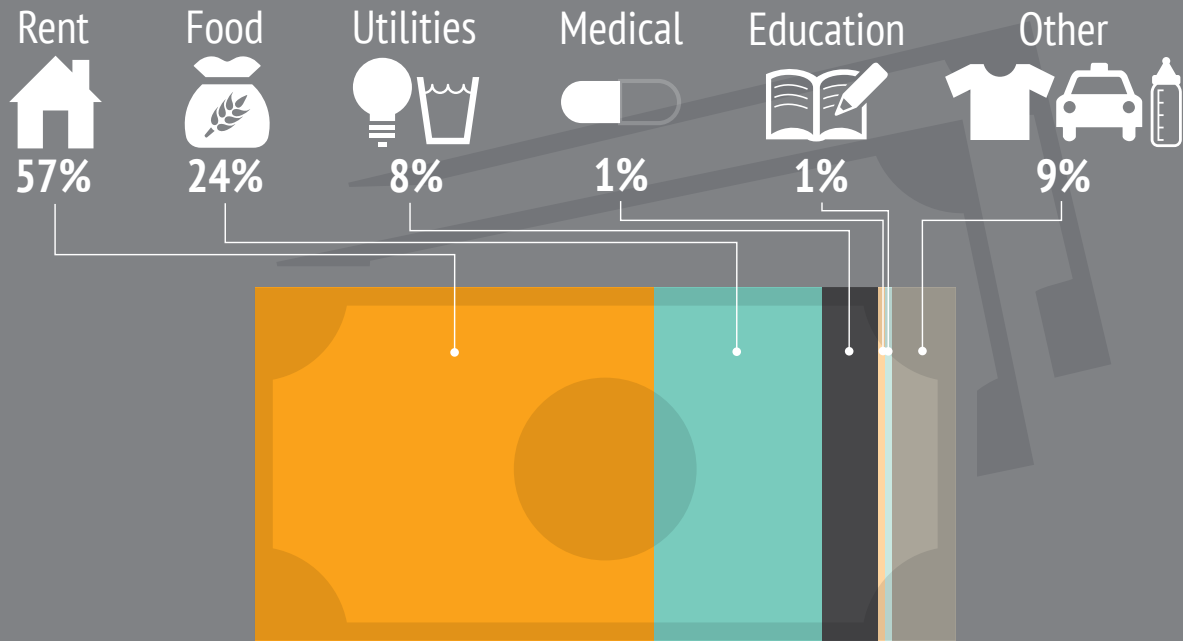
Like 99 per cent of Syrian refugees without work permits, Mohammad cannot legally work and struggles to support his family. Mohammad is trying to ensure that his children complete their education despite their psychological trauma and economic hardship, and so every day he leaves his house early in the morning, pretending to go to work so that he can present to them a positive image of a hard-working role model. He spends his time walking across the city, taking many hours to complete basic tasks, or sitting in the upstairs apartment with a neighbour.

When asked about his family back in Syria that he has managed to keep in touch with, he struggles to hold his composure. The family's medication fills a shoebox that he would not be able to afford without the generosity of a local doctor. Mohammad's family is eligible for UNHCR cash assistance. Like thousands of other families he is on a waiting list to be assisted once funding is available. ©UNHCR / M. Hawari

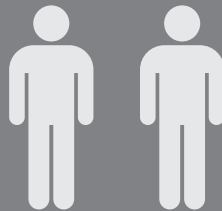


Ali

At 12 years old, Ali, a refugee boy from Aleppo, is the man of the family, struggling to support his two aunts, cousin and cousin's infant child. Ali's parents were killed in Syria as was his cousin's husband. Ali's begging from motorists is the main source of income, but he can bring in a maximum of about 50 JOD (70 USD) per month while the rent for their living space is over 70 JOD (100 USD) per month. This activity is taking him away from school. Ali crouches with his aunt in the space that they are using as a kitchen in Karak, Jordan. Formerly the building entrance way, the area where they stay has been converted to become a living space for the small family group. ©UNHCR / J. Kohler



1. BUDGET EXPENDITURE



----- Absolute poverty line in Jordan -----



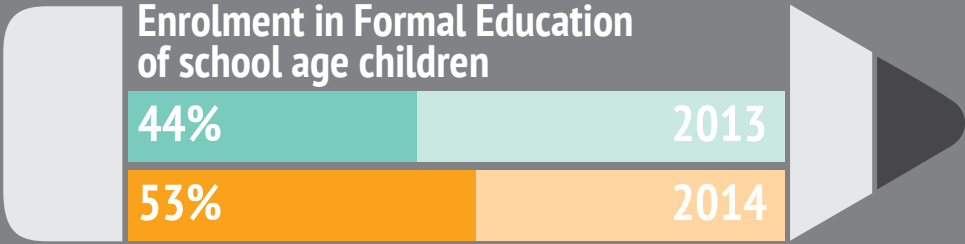
2/3 of refugees live with less than 96 USD/month

----- Abject poverty line in Jordan -----

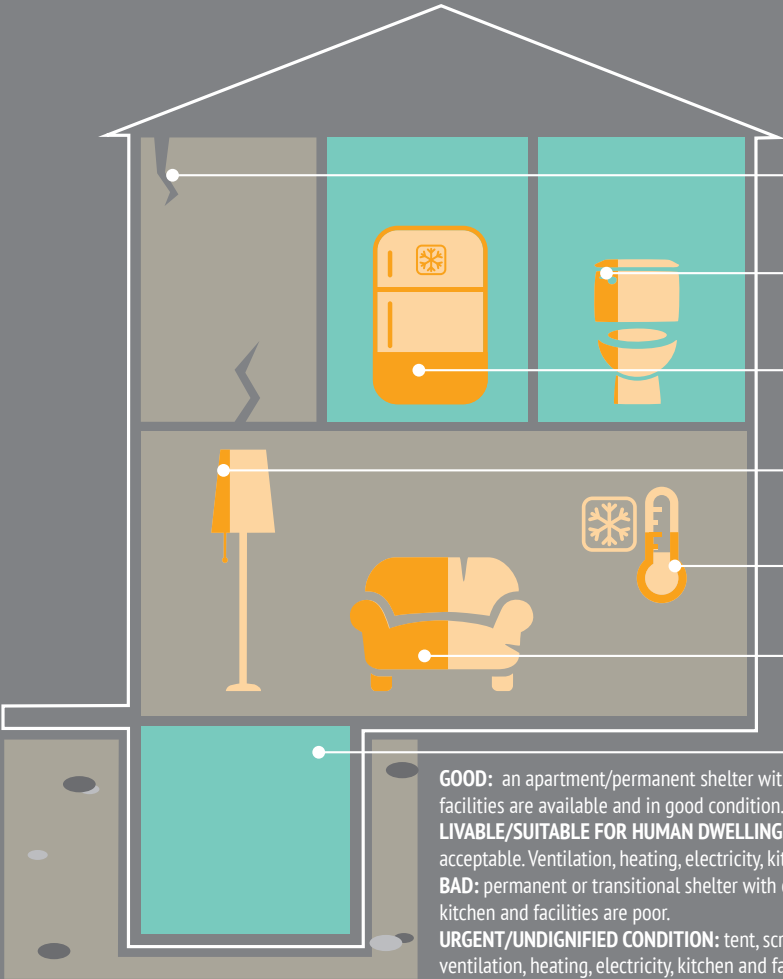


1/6 of refugees live with less than 39.6 USD/month

2. RISING POVERTY



3. SCHOOL ENROLMENT



47% of refugee households live in shelters in bad or undignified conditions

20% of refugee households have no functioning latrines

29% of refugee households have no food storage facilities

25% of refugee households have poor access to electricity

46% of refugee households have no heating

52% of refugee households have furniture in poor conditions

10% of refugee households live in informal shelters

4. LIVING CONDITIONS



1%
of refugee households resort to begging



50%
of refugee households reduce food quantity



43%
of refugee households reduce food quality



57%
of refugee households spend their savings



25%
of refugee households have sold jewellery

5. COPING MECHANISMS/ STRATEGIES



50%
of refugee households share accommodation



1/3
refugee families with school-age children have withdrawn children from school



(at least) 6%
of refugee households* resort to child labour

*with school-aged children (ie 5-17)



1/3
of refugee households get community support



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