

# Mapping of Host Community-Refugee Tensions in Mafraq and Ramtha, JORDAN

May 2013

## BACKGROUND

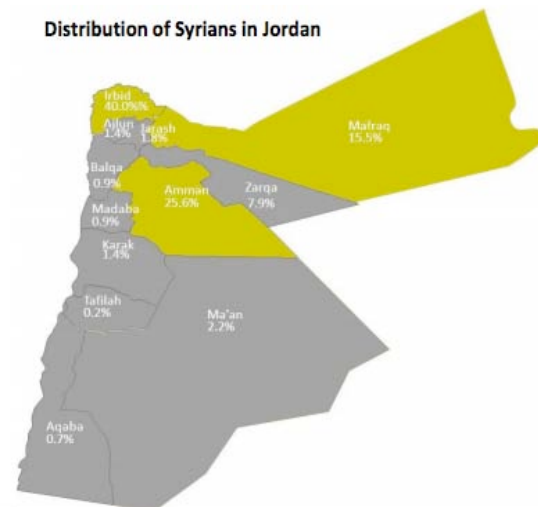
On 6 March 2013, the number of Syrian refugees officially registered with UNHCR reached 1 million<sup>1</sup>. Of them, more than 400,000 refugees have entered into Jordan seeking safety since the Syrian conflict began in March 2011. Since May 2012, the numbers have risen exponentially: from 13,938 to 448,370 refugees in Jordan who are registered and awaiting registration. In addition to this official count, UNHCR estimates 100,000 undocumented refugees who are currently living in Jordan, the majority in Mafraq and Irbid governorates. The total figure is expected to reach 1 million by the end of 2013.

In October 2012, Mercy Corps conducted a rapid assessment of the tensions that have emerged between Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees in Mafraq governorate. Mercy Corps published a report of its findings<sup>2</sup>, and highlighted increased prices of housing, competition over jobs and the uneven distribution of aid as key sources of tension. The report noted that tensions were rising but had not yet manifested in violence.

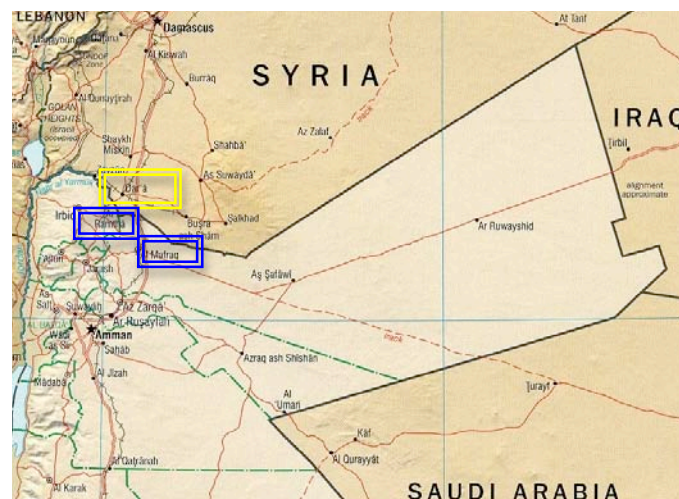
In response to this need, Mercy Corps, funded by the United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), began a 10-month project in February 2013, “*Leadership and Community Development in Jordan*”. Targeting six neighbourhoods of Mafraq and Ramtha in north Jordan, the project seeks:

- (a) to mitigate tensions between the two communities by training and mentoring 40 Syrian and Jordanian community leaders and 10 Jordanian CBO<sup>3</sup> and government representatives in conflict management skills;
- (b) to address tangible needs by implementing 12 community projects that will benefit both Syrian refugee and Jordanian host communities.

Distribution of Syrians in Jordan



Distribution of Syrians in Jordan (as of 18 Dec 2012)  
Source: UNHCR Registration Trends for Syrians in Jordan



Two areas in North Jordan where Mercy Corps is working  
- Mafraq and Ramtha, bordering Dara'a in Syria

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, N.Daoud “Number of Syrian refugees reaches 1 million mark”, 6 March 2013, [http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/flash\\_read.php?ID=115](http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/flash_read.php?ID=115), Accessed April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy Corps Jordan, Report: “Analysis of Host Community-Refugee Tensions in Mafraq, Jordan”, October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

## METHODOLOGY

From March to April 2013, Mercy Corps conducted a detailed mapping of the relationships and dynamics between Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugee communities in Mafraq and Ramtha. The assessment relied on multiple focus group discussions with members of both Jordanian and Syrian communities. More than 100 people were consulted. Focus group participants included Jordanians and Syrians, men and women, and representatives from all age groups (13-70 years), socioeconomic classes, political affiliations, religious and tribal groups. Key informant interviews were also conducted with Jordanian municipal government officials, most notably the Deputy Governor, the Director of Social Development and the Head of the Irrigation and Water Authority in Mafraq Governorate, as well as several members of the Municipality of Sahel Houran in Ramtha District. Participants were asked to share their perspective on changing demographics, community leaders and relationships of trust, sources and characteristics of inter-community tensions, the existing development aid landscape, and the perceived need and willingness for conflict management and community development within their neighbourhoods. Published reports from other organisations working in North Jordan were also reviewed.

Building on Mercy Corps' October report, this document lays out the tensions that have either persisted or since emerged between refugee and host communities in the border areas of Mafraq and Ramtha respectively. It describes several sources of tension between Syrian refugees and the host community, and why. It also details how and why the respective communities experience different kinds and levels of tension in Mafraq and Ramtha. Finally, it puts forward three implications for the future of humanitarian assistance in the area.



Mercy Corps staff member introducing our project objectives to local community leaders in Umm Al Quteen, a village in Mafraq Governorate not far from the Syrian border.  
March 2013 @ Mercy Corps Jordan



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A Syrian father with his two daughters and their belongings, shortly after arriving in Jordan through the border crossing at Shajarah. Shajarah is one of three neighbourhoods in Sahel Houran, Ramtha where Mercy Corps is currently working. [Photo by Lynsey Addario for The New York Times].<sup>4</sup>

Mercy Corps' eight-week community mapping exercise affirmed that the principal underlying cause of tensions in both Mafraq and Ramtha are the strain on local resources caused by the large and rapid influx of Syrian refugees. Of the issues that cause most tension, **housing** and **rent prices** were primary concerns. In Mafraq, competition for jobs, exploitation of Syrian labourers and aid community practices persist as central issues, and differences in culture, religiosity, marriage patterns and tribal loyalties are underlying points of friction. Such tensions are either minimal or not apparent in Sahel Houran in Ramtha, which is currently not being served by any NGOs apart from Mercy Corps. For both Mafraq and Ramtha, **municipal, water, education** and **health needs** (physical and psychosocial) have emerged as increasingly urgent needs that residents say, if not addressed, will become touchpoints for conflict especially as the summer approaches. Moreover, the tensions are twofold: between the refugees and host communities, and also between Jordanians and their local governance institutions.

While strong tribal ties in Ramtha render host residents less inclined to scapegoat Syrian refugees for their problems, the tensions over resources in Mafraq have also transformed into struggles over **identity, territory** and even **security**, and being increasingly manifested in vehement and organised riots. It is evident that open **violence** will only become more prevalent if significant effort is not made to address underlying sources of instability between the two populations.

In addition to issues over which host and refugee communities are directly fighting over, Mercy Corps identified destabilising factors that are exacerbating the situation – namely, negative perceptions disseminated by the **media**, the presence of **organised crime**, the growing population of **unemployed young men**, and the **lack of community cohesion**. To counterbalance these forces, however, there are also sources of stability that Mercy Corps identified and recommends all actors to draw upon and amplify – namely, strong family and **tribal ties** between the two communities, **trade relations** and economic strength in these areas, and persevering **positive stereotypes** of each other.

Mercy Corps offers three recommendations for programming with refugees and host communities in North Jordan. First, that assistance to Syrian refugees and Jordanians in need must directly involve, empower and coordinate with local governance institutions. Second, that organisations should design interventions to serve the most vulnerable – both those with the greatest humanitarian needs and those most susceptible to involvement in conflict. Third, programmes must be sensitive to growing tensions over identity, territory and especially security in Mafraq. In short, stakeholders should approach this delicate situation by building sources of resilience – including good relations, income-generating opportunities and hope for the future – that strengthen both Jordanians and Syrians to opt out of violence if and when events take a threatening turn.

<sup>4</sup> NYTimes.com, “Syrian Refugees Struggle at Za’atari Camp”, [3](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/05/09/world/middleeast/zaatari.html?ref=middleeast&_r=2&_t=2&_u=2&_v=2&_w=2&_x=2&_y=2&_z=2&_aa=2&_ab=2&_ac=2&_ad=2&_ae=2&_af=2&_ag=2&_ah=2&_ai=2&_aj=2&_ak=2&_al=2&_am=2&_an=2&_ao=2&_ap=2&_aq=2&_ar=2&_as=2&_at=2&_au=2&_av=2&_aw=2&_ax=2&_ay=2&_az=2&_ba=2&_bb=2&_bc=2&_bd=2&_be=2&_bf=2&_bg=2&_bh=2&_bi=2&_bj=2&_bk=2&_bl=2&_bm=2&_bn=2&_bo=2&_bp=2&_bq=2&_br=2&_bs=2&_bt=2&_bu=2&_bv=2&_bw=2&_bx=2&_by=2&_bz=2&_ca=2&_cb=2&_cc=2&_cd=2&_ce=2&_cf=2&_cg=2&_ch=2&_ci=2&_cj=2&_ck=2&_cl=2&_cm=2&_cn=2&_co=2&_cp=2&_cq=2&_cr=2&_cs=2&_ct=2&_cu=2&_cv=2&_cw=2&_cx=2&_cy=2&_cz=2&_da=2&_db=2&_dc=2&_dd=2&_de=2&_df=2&_dg=2&_dh=2&_di=2&_dj=2&_dk=2&_dl=2&_dm=2&_dn=2&_do=2&_dp=2&_dq=2&_dr=2&_ds=2&_dt=2&_du=2&_dv=2&_dw=2&_dx=2&_dy=2&_dz=2&_ea=2&_eb=2&_ec=2&_ed=2&_ee=2&_ef=2&_eg=2&_eh=2&_ei=2&_ej=2&_ek=2&_el=2&_em=2&_en=2&_eo=2&_ep=2&_eq=2&_er=2&_es=2&_et=2&_eu=2&_ev=2&_ew=2&_ex=2&_ey=2&_ez=2&_fa=2&_fb=2&_fc=2&_fd=2&_fe=2&_ff=2&_fg=2&_fh=2&_fi=2&_fj=2&_fk=2&_fl=2&_fm=2&_fn=2&_fo=2&_fp=2&_fq=2&_fr=2&_fs=2&_ft=2&_fu=2&_fv=2&_fw=2&_fx=2&_fy=2&_fz=2&_ga=2&_gb=2&_gc=2&_gd=2&_ge=2&_gf=2&_gg=2&_gh=2&_gi=2&_gj=2&_gk=2&_gl=2&_gm=2&_gn=2&_go=2&_gp=2&_gq=2&_gr=2&_gs=2&_gt=2&_gu=2&_gv=2&_gw=2&_gx=2&_gy=2&_gz=2&_ha=2&_hb=2&_hc=2&_hd=2&_he=2&_hf=2&_hg=2&_hh=2&_hi=2&_hj=2&_hk=2&_hl=2&_hm=2&_hn=2&_ho=2&_hp=2&_hq=2&_hr=2&_hs=2&_ht=2&_hu=2&_hv=2&_hw=2&_hx=2&_hy=2&_hz=2&_ia=2&_ib=2&_ic=2&_id=2&_ie=2&_if=2&_ig=2&_ih=2&_ii=2&_ij=2&_ik=2&_il=2&_im=2&_in=2&_io=2&_ip=2&_iq=2&_ir=2&_is=2&_it=2&_iu=2&_iv=2&_iw=2&_ix=2&_iy=2&_iz=2&_ja=2&_jb=2&_jc=2&_jd=2&_je=2&_jf=2&_jg=2&_jh=2&_ji=2&_jj=2&_jk=2&_jl=2&_jm=2&_jn=2&_jo=2&_jp=2&_jq=2&_jr=2&_js=2&_jt=2&_ju=2&_jv=2&_jw=2&_jx=2&_jy=2&_jz=2&_ka=2&_kb=2&_kc=2&_kd=2&_ke=2&_kf=2&_kg=2&_kh=2&_ki=2&_kj=2&_kk=2&_kl=2&_km=2&_kn=2&_ko=2&_kp=2&_kq=2&_kr=2&_ks=2&_kt=2&_ku=2&_kv=2&_kw=2&_kx=2&_ky=2&_kz=2&_la=2&_lb=2&_lc=2&_ld=2&_le=2&_lf=2&_lg=2&_lh=2&_li=2&_lj=2&_lk=2&_ll=2&_lm=2&_ln=2&_lo=2&_lp=2&_lq=2&_lr=2&_ls=2&_lt=2&_lu=2&_lv=2&_lw=2&_lx=2&_ly=2&_lz=2&_ma=2&_mb=2&_mc=2&_md=2&_me=2&_mf=2&_mg=2&_mh=2&_mi=2&_mj=2&_mk=2&_ml=2&_mm=2&_mn=2&_mo=2&_mp=2&_mq=2&_mr=2&_ms=2&_mt=2&_mu=2&_mv=2&_mw=2&_mx=2&_my=2&_mz=2&_na=2&_nb=2&_nc=2&_nd=2&_ne=2&_nf=2&_ng=2&_nh=2&_ni=2&_nj=2&_nk=2&_nl=2&_nm=2&_nn=2&_no=2&_np=2&_nq=2&_nr=2&_ns=2&_nt=2&_nu=2&_nv=2&_nw=2&_nx=2&_ny=2&_nz=2&_oa=2&_ob=2&_oc=2&_od=2&_oe=2&_of=2&_og=2&_oh=2&_oi=2&_oj=2&_ok=2&_ol=2&_om=2&_on=2&_oo=2&_op=2&_oq=2&_or=2&_os=2&_ot=2&_ou=2&_ov=2&_ow=2&_ox=2&_oy=2&_oz=2&_pa=2&_pb=2&_pc=2&_pd=2&_pe=2&_pf=2&_pg=2&_ph=2&_pi=2&_pj=2&_pk=2&_pl=2&_pm=2&_pn=2&_po=2&_pp=2&_pq=2&_pr=2&_ps=2&_pt=2&_pu=2&_pv=2&_pw=2&_px=2&_py=2&_pz=2&_qa=2&_qb=2&_qc=2&_qd=2&_qe=2&_qf=2&_qg=2&_qh=2&_qi=2&_qj=2&_qk=2&_ql=2&_qm=2&_qn=2&_qo=2&_qp=2&_qq=2&_qr=2&_qs=2&_qt=2&_qu=2&_qv=2&_qw=2&_qx=2&_qy=2&_qz=2&_ra=2&_rb=2&_rc=2&_rd=2&_re=2&_rf=2&_rg=2&_rh=2&_ri=2&_rj=2&_rk=2&_rl=2&_rm=2&_rn=2&_ro=2&_rp=2&_rq=2&_rr=2&_rs=2&_rt=2&_ru=2&_rv=2&_rw=2&_rx=2&_ry=2&_rz=2&_sa=2&_sb=2&_sc=2&_sd=2&_se=2&_sf=2&_sg=2&_sh=2&_si=2&_sj=2&_sk=2&_sl=2&_sm=2&_sn=2&_so=2&_sp=2&_sq=2&_sr=2&_ss=2&_st=2&_su=2&_sv=2&_sw=2&_sx=2&_sy=2&_sz=2&_ta=2&_tb=2&_tc=2&_td=2&_te=2&_tf=2&_tg=2&_th=2&_ti=2&_tj=2&_tk=2&_tl=2&_tm=2&_tn=2&_to=2&_tp=2&_tq=2&_tr=2&_ts=2&_tt=2&_tu=2&_tv=2&_tw=2&_tx=2&_ty=2&_tz=2&_ua=2&_ub=2&_uc=2&_ud=2&_ue=2&_uf=2&_ug=2&_uh=2&_ui=2&_uj=2&_uk=2&_ul=2&_um=2&_un=2&_uo=2&_up=2&_uq=2&_ur=2&_us=2&_ut=2&_uu=2&_uv=2&_uw=2&_ux=2&_uy=2&_uz=2&_va=2&_vb=2&_vc=2&_vd=2&_ve=2&_vf=2&_vg=2&_vh=2&_vi=2&_vj=2&_vk=2&_vl=2&_vm=2&_vn=2&_vo=2&_vp=2&_vq=2&_vr=2&_vs=2&_vt=2&_vu=2&_vv=2&_vw=2&_vx=2&_vy=2&_vz=2&_wa=2&_wb=2&_wc=2&_wd=2&_we=2&_wf=2&_wg=2&_wh=2&_wi=2&_wj=2&_wk=2&_wl=2&_wm=2&_wn=2&_wo=2&_wp=2&_wq=2&_wr=2&_ws=2&_wt=2&_wu=2&_wv=2&_ww=2&_wx=2&_wy=2&_wz=2&_xa=2&_xb=2&_xc=2&_xd=2&_xe=2&_xf=2&_xg=2&_xh=2&_xi=2&_xj=2&_xk=2&_xl=2&_xm=2&_xn=2&_xo=2&_xp=2&_xq=2&_xr=2&_xs=2&_xt=2&_xu=2&_xv=2&_xw=2&_xx=2&_xy=2&_xz=2&_ya=2&_yb=2&_yc=2&_yd=2&_ye=2&_yf=2&_yg=2&_yh=2&_yi=2&_yj=2&_yk=2&_yl=2&_ym=2&_yn=2&_yo=2&_yp=2&_yq=2&_yr=2&_ys=2&_yt=2&_yu=2&_yv=2&_yw=2&_yx=2&_yy=2&_yz=2&_za=2&_zb=2&_zc=2&_zd=2&_ze=2&_zf=2&_zg=2&_zh=2&_zi=2&_zj=2&_zk=2&_zl=2&_zm=2&_zn=2&_zo=2&_zp=2&_zq=2&_zr=2&_zs=2&_zt=2&_zu=2&_zv=2&_zw=2&_zx=2&_zy=2&_zz=2&_aa=2&_ab=2&_ac=2&_ad=2&_ae=2&_af=2&_ag=2&_ah=2&_ai=2&_aj=2&_ak=2&_al=2&_am=2&_an=2&_ao=2&_ap=2&_aq=2&_ar=2&_as=2&_at=2&_au=2&_av=2&_aw=2&_ax=2&_ay=2&_az=2&_ba=2&_bb=2&_bc=2&_bd=2&_be=2&_bf=2&_bg=2&_bh=2&_bi=2&_bj=2&_bk=2&_bl=2&_bm=2&_bn=2&_bo=2&_bp=2&_bq=2&_br=2&_bs=2&_bt=2&_bu=2&_bv=2&_bw=2&_bx=2&_by=2&_bz=2&_ca=2&_cb=2&_cc=2&_cd=2&_ce=2&_cf=2&_cg=2&_ch=2&_ci=2&_cj=2&_ck=2&_cl=2&_cm=2&_cn=2&_co=2&_cp=2&_cq=2&_cr=2&_cs=2&_ct=2&_cu=2&_cv=2&_cw=2&_cx=2&_cy=2&_cz=2&_da=2&_db=2&_dc=2&_dd=2&_de=2&_df=2&_dg=2&_dh=2&_di=2&_dj=2&_dk=2&_dl=2&_dm=2&_dn=2&_do=2&_dp=2&_dq=2&_dr=2&_ds=2&_dt=2&_du=2&_dv=2&_dw=2&_dx=2&_dy=2&_dz=2&_ea=2&_eb=2&_ec=2&_ed=2&_ee=2&_ef=2&_eg=2&_eh=2&_ei=2&_ej=2&_ek=2&_el=2&_em=2&_en=2&_eo=2&_ep=2&_eq=2&_er=2&_es=2&_et=2&_eu=2&_ev=2&_ew=2&_ex=2&_ey=2&_ez=2&_fa=2&_fb=2&_fc=2&_fd=2&_fe=2&_ff=2&_fg=2&_fh=2&_fi=2&_fj=2&_fk=2&_fl=2&_fm=2&_fn=2&_fo=2&_fp=2&_fq=2&_fr=2&_fs=2&_ft=2&_fu=2&_fv=2&_fw=2&_fx=2&_fy=2&_fz=2&_ga=2&_gb=2&_gc=2&_gd=2&_ge=2&_gf=2&_gg=2&_gh=2&_gi=2&_gj=2&_gk=2&_gl=2&_gm=2&_gn=2&_go=2&_gp=2&_gq=2&_gr=2&_gs=2&_gt=2&_gu=2&_gv=2&_gw=2&_gx=2&_gy=2&_gz=2&_ha=2&_hb=2&_hc=2&_hd=2&_he=2&_hf=2&_hg=2&_hh=2&_hi=2&_hj=2&_hk=2&_hl=2&_hm=2&_hn=2&_ho=2&_hp=2&_hq=2&_hr=2&_hs=2&_ht=2&_hu=2&_hv=2&_hw=2&_hx=2&_hy=2&_hz=2&_ia=2&_ib=2&_ic=2&_id=2&_ie=2&_if=2&_ig=2&_ih=2&_ii=2&_ij=2&_ik=2&_il=2&_im=2&_in=2&_io=2&_ip=2&_iq=2&_ir=2&_is=2&_it=2&_iu=2&_iv=2&_iw=2&_ix=2&_iy=2&_iz=2&_ja=2&_jb=2&_jc=2&_jd=2&_je=2&_jf=2&_jg=2&_jh=2&_ji=2&_jj=2&_jk=2&_jl=2&_jm=2&_jn=2&_jo=2&_jp=2&_jq=2&_jr=2&_js=2&_jt=2&_ju=2&_jv=2&_jw=2&_jx=2&_jy=2&_jz=2&_ka=2&_kb=2&_kc=2&_kd=2&_ke=2&_kf=2&_kg=2&_kh=2&_ki=2&_kj=2&_kl=2&_km=2&_kn=2&_ko=2&_kp=2&_kq=2&_kr=2&_ks=2&_kt=2&_ku=2&_kv=2&_kw=2&_kx=2&_ky=2&_kz=2&_la=2&_lb=2&_lc=2&_ld=2&_le=2&_lf=2&_lg=2&_lh=2&_li=2&_lj=2&_lk=2&_ll=2&_lm=2&_ln=2&_lo=2&_lp=2&_lq=2&_lr=2&_ls=2&_lt=2&_lu=2&_lv=2&_lw=2&_lx=2&_ly=2&_lz=2&_ma=2&_mb=2&_mc=2&_md=2&_me=2&_mf=2&_mg=2&_mh=2&_mi=2&_mj=2&_mk=2&_ml=2&_mm=2&_mn=2&_mo=2&_mp=2&_mq=2&_mr=2&_ms=2&_mt=2&_mu=2&_mv=2&_mw=2&_mx=2&_my=2&_mz=2&_na=2&_nb=2&_nc=2&_nd=2&_ne=2&_nf=2&_ng=2&_nh=2&_ni=2&_nj=2&_nk=2&_nl=2&_nm=2&_nn=2&_no=2&_np=2&_nq=2&_nr=2&_ns=2&_nt=2&_nu=2&_nv=2&_nw=2&_nx=2&_ny=2&_nz=2&_oa=2&_ob=2&_oc=2&_od=2&_oe=2&_of=2&_og=2&_oh=2&_oi=2&_oj=2&_ok=2&_ol=2&_om=2&_on=2&_oo=2&_op=2&_oq=2&_or=2&_os=2&_ot=2&_ou=2&_ov=2&_ow=2&_ox=2&_oy=2&_oz=2&_pa=2&_pb=2&_pc=2&_pd=2&_pe=2&_pf=2&_pg=2&_ph=2&_pi=2&_pj=2&_pk=2&_pl=2&_pm=2&_pn=2&_po=2&_pp=2&_pq=2&_pr=2&_ps=2&_pt=2&_pu=2&_pv=2&_pw=2&_px=2&_py=2&_pz=2&_qa=2&_qb=2&_qc=2&_qd=2&_qe=2&_qf=2&_qg=2&_qh=2&_qi=2&_qj=2&_qk=2&_ql=2&_qm=2&_qn=2&_qo=2&_qp=2&_qq=2&_qr=2&_qs=2&_qt=2&_qu=2&_qv=2&_qw=2&_qx=2&_qy=2&_qz=2&_ra=2&_rb=2&_rc=2&_rd=2&_re=2&_rf=2&_rg=2&_rh=2&_ri=2&_rj=2&_rk=2&_rl=2&_rm=2&_rn=2&_ro=2&_rp=2&_rq=2&_rr=2&_rs=2&_rt=2&_ru=2&_rv=2&_rw=2&_rx=2&_ry=2&_rz=2&_sa=2&_sb=2&_sc=2&_sd=2&_se=2&_sf=2&_sg=2&_sh=2&_si=2&_sj=2&_sk=2&_sl=2&_sm=2&_sn=2&_so=2&_sp=2&_sq=2&_sr=2&_ss=2&_st=2&_su=2&_sv=2&_sw=2&_sx=2&_sy=2&_sz=2&_ta=2&_tb=2&_tc=2&_td=2&_te=2&_tf=2&_tg=2&_th=2&_ti=2&_tj=2&_tk=2&_tl=2&_tm=2&_tn=2&_to=2&_tp=2&_tq=2&_tr=2&_ts=2&_tt=2&_tu=2&_tv=2&_tw=2&_tx=2&_ty=2&_tz=2&_ua=2&_ub=2&_uc=2&_ud=2&_ue=2&_uf=2&_ug=2&_uh=2&_ui=2&_uj=2&_uk=2&_ul=2&_um=2&_un=2&_uo=2&_up=2&_uq=2&_ur=2&_us=2&_ut=2&_uu=2&_uv=2&_uw=2&_ux=2&_uy=2&_uz=2&_va=2&_vb=2&_vc=2&_vd=2&_ve=2&_vf=2&_vg=2&_vh=2&_vi=2&_vj=2&_vk=2&_vl=2&_vm=2&_vn=2&_vo=2&_vp=2&_vq=2&_vr=2&_vs=2&_vt=2&_vu=2&_vv=2&_vw=2&_vx=2&_vy=2&_vz=2&_wa=2&_wb=2&_wc=2&_wd=2&_we=2&_wf=2&_wg=2&_wh=2&_wi=2&_wj=2&_wk=2&_wl=2&_wm=2&_wn=2&_wo=2&_wp=2&_wq=2&_wr=2&_ws=2&_wt=2&_wu=2&_wv=2&_ww=2&_wx=2&_wy=2&_wz=2&_xa=2&_xb=2&_xc=2&_xd=2&_xe=2&_xf=2&_xg=2&_xh=2&_xi=2&_xj=2&_xk=2&_xl=2&_xm=2&_xn=2&_xo=2&_xp=2&_xq=2&_xr=2&_xs=2&_xt=2&_xu=2&_xv=2&_xw=2&_xx=2&_xy=2&_xz=2&_ya=2&_yb=2&_yc=2&_yd=2&_ye=2&_yf=2&_yg=2&_yh=2&_yi=2&_yj=2&_yk=2&_yl=2&_ym=2&_yn=2&_yo=2&_yp=2&_yq=2&_yr=2&_ys=2&_yt=2&_yu=2&_yv=2&_yw=2&_yx=2&_yy=2&_yz=2&_za=2&_zb=2&_zc=2&_zd=2&_ze=2&_zf=2&_zg=2&_zh=2&_zi=2&_zj=2&_zk=2&_zl=2&_zm=2&_zn=2&_zo=2&_zp=2&_zq=2&_zr=2&_zs=2&_zt=2&_zu=2&_zv=2&_zw=2&_zx=2&_zy=2&_zz=2</p></div><div 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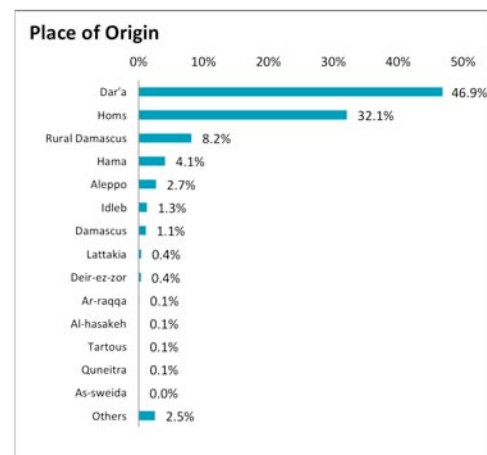
## DEMOGRAPHICS OF MAFRAQ & RAMTHA

Directly bordering southern Syria, the Governorate of Mafraq and the District of Ramtha in north Jordan have absorbed a large proportion of the Syrian refugees fleeing across the borders. Mercy Corps' mapping exercise revealed that the raw demographics of Mafraq and Ramtha have direct bearings on the nature and intensity of tensions between the Syrian refugee and Jordanian host communities. Specifically, the level of tension seems to be correlated to the extent to which refugee numbers exceed host community numbers, the economic standing of the host community prior to the crisis, and the strength of relations between Syrian and Jordanian communities that predate the Syrian conflict.

### MAFRAQ

The Governorate of Mafraq covers the second largest area in the Kingdom, but has the second smallest population density of 11.05 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. According to the Government of Jordan Department of Statistics, in 2011 there were almost 300,000 individuals living in Mafraq Governorate (178,500 rural, 115,200 urban)<sup>5</sup>. Since the Syrian conflict began, however, the population in Mafraq has almost doubled. As of 14 April 2013, UNHCR estimates that 192,193 Syrian refugees are living in Mafraq's Za'atari Refugee Camp<sup>6</sup>, with an additional 100,000 living outside the camps in Mafraq Governorate. The total figure was a 100% increase in the original population of Mafraq<sup>7</sup>.

In March, Mercy Corps interviewed Jordanian government officials who estimated the number of Syrian refugees in Mafraq City Centre to outnumber the Jordanian population (80,000 Syrians to 50,000 Jordanians). Indeed, Mercy Corps' focus group discussion participants reflected the demographics presented in the UNHCR December 2012 report [see right]<sup>8</sup> – namely, that 46.9% of Syrian refugees in Jordan originate from Dara'a, 32.1% from Homs, 8.2% from Rural Damascus and 4.1% from Hama<sup>9</sup>. 23.7% of all refugees from Homs remain in Mafraq; while 11.8% from Dara'a remain in Mafraq. Agriculture forms the central element of the economy in Mafraq Governorate. Mafraq hosts one natural gas production field in Al-Reesha run by the Jordanian National Petroleum Company, and only one university, Al-Bayt University. While host communities are trying to meet the needs of Syrians, the Jordanians in already-poor Mafraq are also struggling as their scarce resources continue to be stretched to the limit.



### RAMTHA

A district of Irbid Governorate in Jordan, Ramtha meets the southwestern border of Dara'a Governorate in Syria. According to the Government of Jordan, there were 130,780 individuals living in Ramtha District of Irbid Governorate in 2011<sup>10</sup>.

Ramtha District comprises two separate municipalities: Ramtha City (Qasabet Ramtha) and Sahel Houran. In contrast to Mafraq, which has always suffered from poverty, Ramtha City's economy relies on commerce. In fact, Ramtha's import and export trading<sup>11</sup> has historically thrived, such that its economy even exceeds that of Amman. With a local reputation for *bahara* ("pirates" or "smugglers"), Ramtha was known as the centre for goods smuggled in from Syria before the crisis began. Local residents claim produce were popular for their high quality and

<sup>5</sup> Government of Jordan, Department of Statistics, Year Book for 2011, [http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos\\_home\\_a/main/cd\\_yb2011/Page\\_details.html](http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_a/main/cd_yb2011/Page_details.html), accessed April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Syrian Regional Refugee Response – Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, Jordan > Mafraq Governorate, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/region.php?id=77&country=107>, accessed April 2013.

<sup>7</sup> By late April, however, 90,000 had left the camp, leaving 107,000. Presentation by Andrew Harper, UNHCR Jordan, Humanitarian Country Team Meeting, Amman, Jordan, 29 April 2013.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Jordan, "UNHCR Registration Trends for Syrians (March 2011 - 18 Dec 2012)", 18 December 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: As of Dec 2012: [Homs] 20.1% of Syrians who are coming from Homs remain in Irbid, 23.7% remain in Mafraq, 8.9% remain in Zarqa and 33.5% are in Amman; [Dara'a] 64.5% of Syrians originating from Dara'a remain in Irbid, 11.8% remain in Mafraq, 6.3% remain in Zarqa and 9.9% are in Amman.

<sup>10</sup> GoJ Department of Statistics. Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Al Hassan Industrial Estate houses several outsourcing companies supported by foreign shareholders with most of the products sold to American and European markets, including Wal-Mart, Hanes, Macy's, Gap and Kohl's, to name a few.

relatively low prices. This market has inevitably been affected by the ongoing insecurity in southern Syria. Nevertheless, the fact that Ramtha District hosts four of Jordan's universities<sup>12</sup> has ensured a stream of students with a steady demand for food, housing, cars, local transportation, and other services that have helped to drive the economy.



10 km away from Ramtha City Centre, Sahel Houran is an independent municipality of Ramtha district. Unlike Ramtha City, which is known as an industrial trade zone, Sahel Houran is an agricultural area and not quite as wealthy as its neighbouring municipality, but still better off than Mafraq. Ramtha is the area most directly affected by the Syrian war, as its shared border along Syria is the longest, and bombings or explosions from the Syrian conflict often spill over<sup>13</sup>. Tel Shihab has also been a main border crossing between Jordan and Syria for some time, and continues to be a main entry point for refugees. Sahel Houran's population is nearly 50,000, of which an estimated 16-20,000 are refugees. As such, Mercy Corps' Community Outreach Officers identified Sahel Houran as an area of need.

Sahel Houran in Jordan currently hosts six temporary reception centres for incoming refugees<sup>14</sup>. Referring both to a geographic area and a people located in southwestern Syria and the northwestern corner of Jordan, "Houran"<sup>15</sup> geographically extends beyond the border lines of the two country states. In other words, Sahel Houran exists in both Syria and Jordan [see right], and is separated only by natural borders. Mercy Corps staff observed that there is no official border line between this part of Ramtha and Dara'a; in some places the valley is the only border. Indeed, both Jordanian and Syrian residents consider the national border to be arbitrary and irrelevant to their tribal ties, and consider themselves to be the "same people". One man noted that "for decades now it has been the norm to see cars with Dara'a plates in this part of Ramtha". These close family ties have encouraged Jordanians in Sahel Houran to assist their Syrian family members.



"Houran" is in what is now southwestern Syria and northwestern Jordan

For this reason, Syrian refugees from Sahel Houran in Dara'a who fled through the mountains and valleys and have settled in the Jordanian part of Sahel Houran are mostly not registered. The pattern of Syrian settlement reported by focus group participants also matches the demographics reported by UNHCR in December 2012 - namely, that 64.5% of Syrians originating from Dara'a remain in Irbid<sup>16</sup>. While a number of women reported having completed their undergraduate degrees, almost none are working, as job opportunities are scarce in Sahel Houran. More conservative than most Mafraq residents, Ramtha's women also lack spaces where they can gather publicly, engage in activities, and be productive. Finally, Mercy Corps noted that the majority of Syrians in Sahel Houran are widows and single mothers, as Tel Shihab is perceived as the safest entry point for them and their young children.

<sup>12</sup> Jordan University of Science and Technology Yarmouk University Irbid Ahlia University Jadara University

<sup>13</sup> 28 April 2013: Ramtha residents reported several missiles landed in the northern village of Thneba, setting several hectares of farmland ablaze. Jordanian security sources confirmed the missile landings, saying no casualties or damage was reported. There were additional reports of heavy shelling in Shajarah. Turra is the biggest town, followed by Shajarah, Emrawa and Thneba.

<sup>14</sup> Jordanian authorities receive Syrian refugees coming through the border in buses, then host them at temporary centres, such as al-Bashabsheh, before relocating them the next morning to official refugee camps.

<sup>15</sup> Houran/Hawran is a volcanic plateau whose name derives from the Aramaic Hawran, meaning "cave land".

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR Jordan, Ibid.

Given the strength of tribal relations in Sahel Houran and the relative porousness of the national borders in this region, the experience of Syrian refugees and their relationship with the host community is thus markedly different than that of Syrian refugees who have settled in Mafraq, who are predominantly from Homs and do not share tribal ties with the host community<sup>17</sup>. Mercy Corps staff visually observed that in Mafraq, Syrian refugees are visibly distinct from Jordanians, whereas outside of Ramtha City and particularly in Sahel Houran, the two populations are almost indistinguishable to the outside eye - their clothing, bearing, behaviour and even their accent in Arabic are remarkably similar. This demographic background has had significant bearing on the nature and degree of tensions experienced in Mafraq and Ramtha, as summarized below.



Sahel Houran: The waterscape in the picture is Sad Al-Wehda or Al-Wehda Dam, which is in Syria. The valley pathway indicated of Al-Wehda is the route by which many Syrian refugees have been entering into Ramtha since the conflict in Dara'a began.  
25 April 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



## SUMMARY OF TENSIONS



A recent poll<sup>18</sup> of 1200 citizens in Jordan showed over 70 percent believe the government should stop the flow of Syrian refugees to the Kingdom. According to the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies, who conducted the poll, "over half those surveyed believed that the country is moving in the wrong direction as a result of the increasing flow of refugees". 67 percent of the national sample surveyed said that Syrian refugees reside in their neighbourhood; of these respondents, 58 percent commented that the refugees' presence caused a decline in public services provided to Jordanian citizens<sup>19</sup>.

These results are not atypical of the host community's sentiments towards the refugees. Initially sympathetic and generously hospitable, Jordanians' attitudes have grown less warm towards the Syrian refugees as they continue to flow into their country for the third consecutive year. A poll conducted in Mafraq in September 2012 reported that 80 percent of Jordanian residents now feel that the Syrians should be housed in refugee camps, segregated from the community.

The principal underlying cause of tensions in both Mafraq and Ramtha is the strain on local resources caused by the large and rapid influx of Syrian refugees. Both Syrians and Jordanians are adversely affected by the difficult circumstances that they have now experienced for much longer than expected, albeit to varying degrees. As noted in the introduction, however, refugee and host community populations differ from place to place, thus the relationships and tensions experienced in Mafraq and Ramtha are not always one and the same.

### I. EXISTING TENSIONS

**[Mafraq]** Prior to the Syrian conflict, residents of Mafraq struggled with poverty and water shortage. Already poor, Mafraq has been unable to meet the additional demands for basic goods and services placed on the community by the surge in population. Furthermore, the sight of Syrians, especially those from Za'atari refugee camp, selling NGO aid – food, household items and even UNHCR tents now being sold for 35-40 JOD on the open market – has generated resentment and the impression that Syrians in Mafraq are doing quite well, much better, in fact, than the majority of local residents. Several Jordanians interviewed in Mafraq joked about cartoons trending on

<sup>18</sup> Conducted by the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies, 4-9 April 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Jordanian Times, Khaled Neimat, "Majority of Jordanians call for end to Syrian refugee influx," 15 April 2013.

Also: Of the national sample, 75 per cent, alongside 68 per cent of the opinion leaders support the idea of creating a buffer zone within Syria to host refugees, with 38 per cent and 40 per cent respectively believing such a zone should be under United Nations jurisdiction. The same poll revealed that 67 per cent of the national sample surveyed said that there are Syrian refugees residing in their neighbourhood.

social media that depicted Jordanians moving to Za'atari refugee camp in search of better conditions and social assistance. There is minimal acknowledgement or sympathy for Syrians' precarious situation, with few social networks, dwindling savings and foreign aid, and practically non-existent *wasta*<sup>20</sup> in Jordan.

While thus far there have been few violent incidents in Mafraq, both Jordanians and Syrians acknowledge deteriorating conditions and relationships between in the communities, and have remarked that tensions are emerging more frequently in open and negative exchanges<sup>21</sup>. Jordanians and Syrians in Mafraq have become more likely to blame each other as the direct cause of their hardship, and solutions are often framed in zero-sum terms.

Of the issues that cause most tension in Mafraq: housing, competition for jobs, exploitation of Syrian labourers and the aid community persist as central issues; differences in culture, religiosity, marriage patterns and tribal loyalties are underlying points of friction; and education, health, water and municipal needs have emerged as increasingly urgent needs that residents say, if not addressed, will become touchpoints for conflict especially as the summer approaches.

**[Ramtha]** While the flow of Ramtha District's income from trade has diminished since the Syrian conflict began, its economic foundation has nevertheless served to soften relations between refugee and host communities over the last two years. In Mercy Corps' focus group discussions, both Jordanians and Syrians interviewed in Ramtha denied significant tensions between their communities, and insisted that most tensions were either "individual issues" that were not widespread, or simply tensions that any community should expect to experience if they "had to feed twice the number of people". As one woman put it, "if you have 12 eggs and 12 people to feed, everyone is happy. But if you have 12 eggs and suddenly 24 or 30 people to feed, there simply isn't enough to go around, and hungry people will fight with one another. This isn't an issue of Jordanians versus Syrians – this is just what would happen in any village that suddenly increases by 30 percent".

Of the existing tensions that Ramtha residents and refugees did identify, housing and rent prices were primary concerns. Unlike Mafraq, there is not yet a significant competition for jobs, although this is predicted to happen especially in the agricultural sector as harvest season approaches. Second, since Sahel Houran is currently not served by any other iNGOs, resentment towards the aid community that is apparent in Mafraq is nonexistent in Sahel Houran and less evident in Ramtha City. As in Mafraq, education, health, water and municipal needs have emerged as potential areas of conflict, as have shifts in marriage patterns. Unlike in Mafraq, the differences in culture, religiosity and tribal affiliations are less pronounced, and Ramtha host residents were less inclined to scapegoat Syrian refugees for their problems.

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<sup>20</sup> Arabic for social capital; influence

<sup>21</sup> See section on "Violence" in this report on pages 15-16.



## 1.1 TENSION OVER RESOURCES

### HOUSING

Increasing housing prices in both Mafraq and Ramtha persists as a core issue for refugee and host communities alike. Skyrocketing rental prices up to six times the original rates (from 40-50 JOD to 300 JOD per mth<sup>22</sup>) in both Mafraq and Ramtha have priced Jordanians out of their own housing market and taken advantage of the Syrians' circumstances. Given the exorbitant prices, Syrians are often forced to fit several families, up to 20 people in one flat. The cost of housing continues to be the refugees' single greatest anxiety, as they have no recourse to negotiate prices, and their savings are running out. This situation has persisted since the early days of the conflict. The perception among Syrians two years into their stay is that Jordanians, or at least Jordanian landlords, are profiting from their misery.

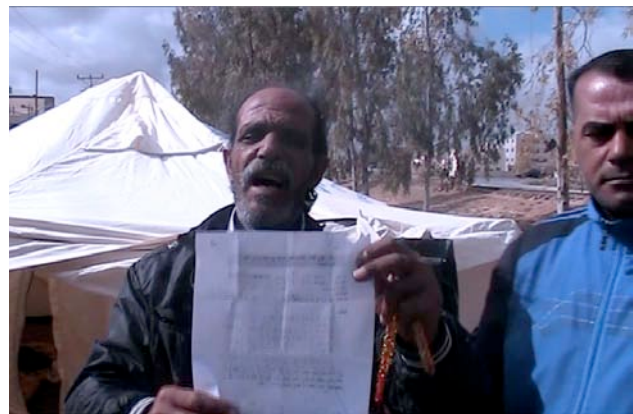


Jordanians are also affected by the increased rent, with increasingly grave repercussions. In October, Mercy Corps interviewed young men who were unable to afford new houses to get married and establish a family. This anxiety persisted in recent interviews. Since February, Jordanians have even been evicted from their homes by landlords who wish to rent out at up to six times the original rate to incoming Syrians.

[Mafraq] These evictions have caused an outcry in Mafraq. On 27-31 March 2013, a group known as Hiraq "Nashama al-Mafraq"<sup>23</sup> pitched over 20 UNHCR tents along a main street in the neighbourhood Hayy al-Janoubi for evicted Jordanians [see above right]. Tents were labelled "Mukhayyam an-Naziheen al-Urduniyyin, Raqam 1" – "Camp of the Displaced Jordanians, Number 1", [see right] as organisers promised that "this will be only the first of many".



Nashama al-Mafraq's tents were inhabited by the families of Jordanian residents who had been evicted and indignantly showed Mercy Corps their eviction notices [see right]. One man despaired, "There is no dignity, ownership or honesty left for us Jordanians!"<sup>24</sup> Another Jordanian remarked. "We are not against the Syrian people; we just want our rights", but he was quickly contradicted by others around him. Evidently, the sentiment towards Syrians is still conflicted within the Jordanian community, but scapegoating of Syrians is on the rise. This five-day protest was eventually diffused by the Jordanian authorities, who promised to provide *sekkin kareem* (literally: "generous living"), i.e. government housing projects for the evicted Jordanians. Should landlords in Mafraq persist in evicting their Jordanian tenants, however, there are concerns that similar protests will emerge and escalate tensions between the two communities.



<sup>22</sup> Rental prices have doubled from even last October, when prices had risen three times from 50 JOD to 150 JOD per month, but now the average house is 300 JD per month, at least six times what prices were prior to the Syrian conflict.

<sup>23</sup> More about Hiraq Nashama al-Mafraq can be found on page 15 of this report.

<sup>24</sup> Mercy Corps' video taken in Mafraq of the tents and their Jordanian inhabitants available for viewing upon request.

[Ramtha] Jordanian residents in Ramtha have also experienced similar evictions, but to a smaller degree. Driving through Sahel Houran, Mercy Corps staff came across three tents pitched on the side of the road, housing Jordanians who had also been evicted. Evicted Jordanian tenants had been living in the tents for a month, and had erected a sign pleading for help that read:

“God.

*The Nation. The King.*

*The Jordanian refugee camp pleads*

*His Excellency the great King and the Chief of Staff  
to solve their problems in their crisis.”*



The above sign, erected by evicted Jordanians in Sahel Houran, bears three Jordanian flags and is a plea for government assistance. 25 April 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan

Compared to the Mafraq tents, which were strategically organised, much more large-scale and vehement in their protest against the refugees themselves, the Ramtha tents were only inhabited by one Jordanian family, who primarily blamed the government and not the Syrian refugees directly.

In both Mafraq and Ramtha, both Syrians and especially Jordanians have insisted on government intervention for the housing problems. Most suggested the imposition of price caps so that Jordanian landlords will be required to charge fair rents. Many Jordanian voices also suggested that camps were the only solution. For them, keeping all refugees – both current and new – in Za’atari refugee camp or the new camps, Mrajeeb al-Fohoud in Azraq, and West Mikhazen in Zarqa, is the only way to minimise the burden and insecurity they perceive the Syrians to have brought to their neighbourhoods. In Mafraq, several Jordanian men also insisted that the Jordanian Army should replace the Gendarmerie to control Za’atari Camp, as the former were perceived as the most competent. Syrians would then remain the sole responsibility of the Jordanian government and the international community, allowing Jordanian residents of Mafraq to regain a sense of “normalcy”.



Jordanian children living in the tents pitched as “Refugee camp for Jordanians” in Sahel Houran. 25 April 2013 © Mercy Corps

## COMPETITION OVER JOBS

The competition over income-generating opportunities continues to strain relations in Mafraq and has been identified as an upcoming area of tension in Sahel Houran, Ramtha.

[Mafraq] Already scarce, employment in Mafraq has become an overt stress point between the two communities. Both sides see the other as engaging in unfair labour practices. Jordanians blame Syrian men for pricing their labour below the market rate, particularly for jobs in the agriculture, construction, sales/retail and food service sectors. With yet another foreign labour force willing to work for a fraction of the cost of employing local workers (Egyptians and Bangladeshis were listed as existing foreign workforces in Mafraq, among others), Jordanian men see themselves passed over in favour of the cheaper option.

On the other hand, Syrians feel exploited by Jordanian employers who take advantage of their desperate need for income as assistance dwindles. With no work permits, employment rights or ability to appeal in court, Syrians feel bullied and disempowered to defend their rights. Syrian focus group participants reported wages either being paid late, even less than the meagre amount agreed, or not at all. Certain refugees even reported Jordanian employers

creating conflict between Syrians by trying to replace employed individuals with Syrians who will accept even less wages, a practice that is fraying what little cohesion exists within the Syrian community in Mafraq.

[Ramtha] In Sahel Houran, most Syrian refugees seem to be widowed single mothers, and the men among them mostly farmers. Focus group participants reported that the latter are slowly beginning to replace Jordanians in the fields. This is a new dynamic in Sahel Houran where there have not been other foreign work forces to compete with their jobs until now. Jordanians and Syrians anticipate that tensions will grow as agriculture harvest season comes, and are concerned that the competition of the main sector of income generation in Sahel Houran will negatively affect family ties.

## AID COMMUNITY

Practices of international and local NGOs in Jordan continue to contribute to the divide between refugee and host communities, primarily in Mafraq and to a lesser degree in Ramtha City, but not yet in Sahel Houran, where iNGOs are not present. The overriding perception from both sides is that aid is not being managed or distributed fairly. Syrians expressed concern about the palpable dwindling of aid – e.g., most have not received rental assistance since after Ramadan last year – and also report Jordanian storeowners who refuse to honour food vouchers.

At the same time, Jordanians criticised the lack of coordination and the duplication of aid, and the majority interviewed expressed resentment towards the refugees who allegedly conduct regular tours around the different aid agencies to collect much more than they need, while poverty-stricken Jordanians are neglected and refused even one portion of assistance. Both communities acknowledged that services were more easily accessible in the camp. Jordanians and Syrians alike also accused specific local Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) of corruption and pocketing foreign aid. As such, Mercy Corps encourages all NGOs to meet host and refugee communities' needs as equitably as possible, and to act transparently and openly in all stages of programming, particularly in participant or beneficiary selection procedures.



Syrian refugees crossing into Jordan by night are loaded onto buses bound for Za'atari Camp. February 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan

## 1.2 TENSION OVER SOCIAL PRACTICES

### MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

[Mafraq] While the frequency of marriage delay due to rising housing prices remains undocumented, the perception within the Jordanian community in Mafraq is that it is occurring with greater regularity, due to unaffordable housing. Resentment revolves around the disruption of this critical social norm in Mafraq. Jordanian men are also reported to increasingly marry Syrian women because they require fewer dowries, to which many Jordanian women Mercy Corps interviewed expressed anger. One claimed, “because of the Syrian women, we are all becoming spinsters”. Syrian women see it differently. Many expressed anxiety that Jordanian men consider their women to be cheap, and do not treat them with the respect they deserve as educated individuals from good families. For those who are widowed with young children, getting married is also first and foremost a means of ensuring their survival in a country where they have no social capital or, often, means of generating income.

[Ramtha] In Ramtha, intermarriage between Jordanians and Syrians predates the conflict, and also generally occurs within tribal lines shared across Ramtha and Dara'a. As such, the tensions around such practices are significantly lower than in Mafraq. Nevertheless, spinsterhood was still reported as a concern that may fray strong family ties. Unlike in Mafraq where most Syrians and Jordanians are demographically separated due to differing tribal affiliations, the two communities are deeply integrated in Sahel Houran as many Syrians and Jordanians belong to the same extended family. The majority of the refugee population are young widowed single mothers, and for cultural reasons are mostly hosted by Jordanian members of the same tribe. Since the refugees depend on their goodwill and generosity for survival, any family conflict that might arise over marriage would threaten their security. As such, maintaining strong family ties is a priority for both communities.



## CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND RELIGIOSITY

[**Mafraq**] In Mafraq, Jordanian focus group participants reported the impression that Syrians were less religious and also expressed disapproval of Syrian women strolling in the streets late at night. On the other hand, Syrians reported feeling suffocated by the judgment towards walking around or even staying up late with the family at night. Jordanians complained that Syrians swore often and were “polluting” the religious standards of their communities with their behaviour and speech.

[**Ramtha**] In Ramtha City, the community is generally more religious than in Mafraq, and focus group participants identified religious leaders as the most respected and influential in their community. In contrast, Sahel Houran residents described themselves as being not necessarily more religious but more conservative in tradition, and identified tribal leaders as the most trustworthy and authoritative leaders. Finally, the similar levels of religiosity between host and refugee communities have rendered this not a point of tension in Sahel Houran.

## II. GROWING TENSIONS

In contrast to Mafraq, both Ramtha City and Sahel Houran residents were more reluctant to identify existing tensions or conflict. However, they were keen to identify growing needs for both refugee and host communities. Overall, municipal capacities to manage the influx of refugees, water, education and health (both physical and psychosocial) emerged as the four leading areas of need that, if not addressed, both Jordanians and Syrians foresee as becoming touchpoints of conflict.

### **II.1 TENSION OVER SERVICES**

#### **MUNICIPAL CAPACITIES**

The increase in population is stretching municipal services in Mafraq and Ramtha to their breaking point. While the Jordanian host community’s sentiment towards the Syrian refugee community differs in Mafraq and Ramtha, the Jordanians’ overall resentment towards unresponsive municipalities is on the rise everywhere and threatening to destabilise the tenuous governance structures. Residents in Mafraq complained about the accumulation of rubbish in the streets and the lack of municipal control over uneven distribution of foreign aid. This is not to mention frequent water and electricity shortages, overstretched health centres, rising food and fuel prices and other inconveniences that are exacerbating already frayed nerves. Both Syrians and Jordanians live in constant anxiety of not making ends meet in an environment of declining resources, and some have even reported discriminatory pricing that is unregulated and unfair to both sides. In fact, the Municipality of Sahel Houran openly expressed their need for help as the refugee population begins to reach almost 50% of their total population and is overwhelming their capacity to serve especially water needs. Mercy Corps is keen to empower local governance institutions, and has responded to this self-expressed need and willingness by selecting neighbourhoods in Sahel Houran for implementation of our leadership and community development project.

#### **WATER**

The lack of water is a longstanding problem in Jordan. Since the influx of refugees began two years ago, Jordanians have complained that Syrians are not attentive to Jordan’s water shortage problem. Focus group participants said Syrians’ cavalier attitude to water usage is partially responsible for the lack of water in the North. Yarmouk Water Company engineers also reported resistance from host communities when they sought to dig wells in areas where refugees are residing, as Jordanians perceived them to be “giving away” their precious water aquifers to Syrians. Mercy Corps recommends that efforts to address water shortages in any area should be paired with sensitive messaging about the objective and beneficiaries of the project, taking care to manage strong feelings of national pride around this precious natural resource.



One of the wells Mercy Corps constructed in Abu Basel, Ramtha. Mercy Corps has also constructed piping systems to increase access to water in Jaber, Mafraq, and is continuing to address water shortage in the surrounding urban communities through various projects.

April 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan

## EDUCATION

The influx of over 30,000 Syrian students in Jordan has forced many schools to switch to "double-shift" systems, rotating students in half-day sessions to ease stress on overcrowded and understaffed classrooms<sup>25</sup>. This system is being used in both Mafraq and Ramtha. Schools are overflowing with students, and Syrian families are reporting that their children are being turned away from classrooms. The result is a large, idle youth population whose lives are effectively put on hold as they wait out the end of the war. One 24-yr-old Syrian refugee who escaped with just his mother and siblings remarked that he was halfway through university and keen to complete his studies. He was deeply anxious that another two years out of school would ruin his chances to complete his degree and earn a job that paid enough to support his family in the absence of his dead father. Given the unclear prognosis of the Syrian conflict, these temporary coping strategies are becoming less and less sustainable, and Mercy Corps is concerned that multiple years of no education will leave a generation of Syrian children behind.



The lack of educational facilities is also indirectly affecting the income of Syrian families. Syrian children, especially young children who are not in school, require caretaking. In a culture where babysitting is not accepted and mothers are expected to directly care for their own children, the number of out-of-school children is directly obstructing refugee mothers' abilities to work. The obstruction of an important source of income for the household is increasing the whole family's anxiety over monthly rent. Furthermore, Jordanian interviewees in Mafraq lamented that out-of-school Syrian children who play in the streets are blocking multiple roads and transportation every day.

Schools are also becoming outlets of the conflict between the two communities, in the form of bullying or inequitable treatment. Syrian mothers in Mafraq report that those of their children who are lucky enough to be in school often experience bullying and taunting from Jordanian children, as well as verbal abuse from Jordanian families on their way to school, which discourages them from attending. As such, Syrian parents either forbid, or try to discourage their children from going out in the streets to play with Jordanian children. Meanwhile, Jordanian parents lament that the influx of refugees is compromising the quality of their children's education. Many Jordanian women did, however, admit that they were impressed by the level of education among Syrian students and the resourcefulness of their youth in finding jobs.

## HEALTH (PHYSICAL & PSYCHOSOCIAL)

The increasing need for and struggle over health services was flagged by Jordanians and Syrians as urgent. Focus group participants from both communities reported being fearful that the approaching summer heat would bring disease. They also noted that if medical supplies become a commodity to fight over, this could be a source of open conflict between the two communities, especially if diseases spread among families in close quarters and generated panic.

Second, in contrast to Mercy Corps' October assessment, psychosocial needs emerged as a salient and unaddressed need to date. Syrian refugee mothers reported both their sons and daughters experiencing depression, as did the youth themselves. In contrast to their male counterparts, women and girls have limited freedom of movement and are largely confined to their houses. In Syria, they could go to parks – public places for children to play and adults to socialize, but in Jordan there is nowhere for them to take their children, and going out is considered shameful. Mothers report that their daughters are beginning to show signs of depression as a result of the isolation and boredom, while their children are exhibiting signs of PTSD and inability to focus in school. While culturally, trauma and especially the experience of violence or sexual violence is not always spoken about openly, several focus group participants from the Syrian community broke down while speaking of Syria, their current hardships, or family members' depression. Mercy Corps staff are concerned about the unaddressed psychological well-being

<sup>25</sup> The Guardian, "Influx of Syrian refugees raises tensions in Jordan as resources are stretched", <http://bit.ly/Zc2kAZ>, 23 April 2013. Accessed 23 April 2013.

of both victims of sexual violence and young men who were involved in armed conflict back in Syria. More generally, protection mechanisms for vulnerable populations in Mafraq and Ramtha are lacking and insufficient, and neither community is experiencing much social support. This is an issue that Mercy Corps has identified as a growing need in order to diminish tensions and strengthen coping mechanisms of both Syrians and Jordanians.

## II.2 TENSION OVER IDENTITY, TERRITORY & SECURITY

The nature of the tensions between refugee and host communities in Jordan has changed since Mercy Corps' assessment in Mafraq last October. Initially centred on a lack of resources and economic opportunities, the tensions in Mafraq have now transformed into a struggle over identity, territory and even security. It is evident that open violence will only become more prevalent if significant effort is not made to address underlying sources of instability between the two populations. Such tensions are not yet apparent in Ramtha, as the majority of security concerns in that district are relevant only to the spillover of the Syrian conflict, and not brought by the Syrian refugees themselves. As such, efforts to help these two communities must sensitively acknowledge these anxieties, and work to meet both communities' needs and diffuse growing tensions.



### [Mafraq] IDENTITY

As conditions in Syria make repatriation less and less likely in the immediate future, anxieties are growing within both communities that the Syrian population will remain as permanent refugees in Jordan. This concern is motivating the host community's calls all over the Kingdom to seal the borders and repatriate the refugees, as well as the refugees' increasing intolerance of verbal abuse and squalor conditions, collectively escalating tensions. As one Jordanian youth said, "Jordan has become the Middle East's depository for all refugees – Palestinians, Iraqis, and now the Syrians. We are just one big refugee camp. Ten years from now, will we even have a Jordan left to call home?"

Indeed, at the recent tents protest in Mafraq, one man went as far to say, "I don't want my *hawiya* (ID card) any longer!" – considered a very bold statement in Jordan. When asked why, he answered, "What use is it if Jordanians are becoming refugees in their own country and have no rights?" Thus the tensions between host community and refugees at least in Mafraq have evolved from tensions over limited resources (such as housing) to a more sociopolitical struggle over Jordanian identity and national rights. As such, any programming must take extra care to manage these tensions, and take action to prevent tensions over resources from evolving into the political sphere.



## TERRITORY

On Thursday, 11 April 2013, refugees in Za'atari camp rioted, demanding that enough buses be provided to facilitate their return to Syria. Jordanian Gendarmerie forces were summoned and used tear gas to disperse crowds. Tensions bubbled over on 16 April 2013, when around 200 Syrian refugees protested the camp's living conditions and the ban on leaving the camp. The refugees threw stones at Jordanian Police<sup>26</sup> and Gendarmerie Forces, injuring more than 20 security officers and critically injuring two. In response, over 200 angry Jordanian residents from Mafraq marched to the perimeter of the camp chanting, "Go home"<sup>27</sup>.

In response, Syrians in Za'atari camp have begun to claim the camp is effectively Syrian territory, and Jordanians are not welcome. As such, Jordanian teachers did not show up to teach in the camp schools the following day. While Ramtha has not experienced this level of tensions thus far, Mercy Corps is concerned that similar tensions will eventually emerge if basic humanitarian needs of both communities' are not met equitably.

## SECURITY

In Mafraq, rumours of Syrian Regime members disguised as refugees have been unsettling the Syrian refugee community, particularly after they were substantiated. On 23 March 2013, a disguised member of Syrian intelligence [see right]<sup>28</sup> was captured in Za'atari camp after being caught with weapons and explosives. He admitted to initiating rebel actions in the camp earlier and burning down tents in the camp<sup>29</sup>. In addition to the refugees arrested, over 45,000 Syrian refugees have been repatriated upon request since July 2012<sup>30</sup>. Government Spokesperson Samih Maaytah reported that this was motivated by both deteriorating humanitarian conditions as well as security concerns in the camp<sup>31</sup>.



On 28 April 2013, Syrian missiles reportedly landed near the village of Sama Sahran outside the city of Mafraq<sup>32</sup>. Sahel Houran residents also reported heavy shelling in the villages of Shajarah, and said several missiles landed in the northern village of Thneba, setting several hectares of farmland ablaze. Jordanian security sources confirmed the missile landings, saying no casualties or damage was reported. These security events have drawn resentment from the Jordanian community that the Syrian refugees have brought the Syrian conflict within their borders. The concern with the potential militarisation of the refugees is also a concern. In the other direction, on 15 April 2013, Jordanian authorities arrested a group of alleged Jihadi Salafists near the northern village of Turra (Sahel Houran, Ramtha) attempting to cross into Syria with several weapons in their possession including semi-automatic rifles and caches of explosives. The crossing of armed young men back into Syria to (re)join the fighting is a concern for Mercy Corps, as an increase in such activity will destabilise the situation in Jordan if not addressed.

## II.3 VIOLENCE

As described above, the tensions between host and refugee communities and host and government authorities is being expressed in increasingly open and aggressive incidents of violent conflict in Mafraq.

[Mafraq] Among the instigators of conflict and violence in Mafraq, Mercy Corps identified a group, Hiraq "Nashama al-Mafraq", who have been organising increasingly vocal and vehement protests against the presence of aid to Syrian refugees. Lead by several Jordanian youth, the protests organised by Nashama al-Mafraq claims

<sup>26</sup> PSD – Public Security Directory

<sup>27</sup> This violence was condemned by Jordanian Parliament on 21 April 2013. Eight Syrian refugees<sup>27</sup> who instigated the violence were arrested and Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh announced that those responsible would be repatriated.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Picture taken from: Al Madenah News, "The arrest of members of the Syrian intelligence in possession of explosives in Za'atari", <http://bit.ly/12FKBWp>, 23 April 2013. Accessed 23 April 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Al Arabiya, "More than 45,000 Syrians return home from Jordan since July", <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/29/45-865-Syrians-return-home-from-Jordan-since-July-.html>, 29 April 2013. Accessed May 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Jordanian Times, "Syrians responsible for Zaatari riots to be repatriated", <http://jordantimes.com/article/syrians-responsible-for-zaatari-riots-to-be-repatriated>, 23 April 2013. Accessed 23 April 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Ha'aretz.com, "Syrian missiles hit Jordan as Assad forces step up air strikes against rebels" <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/syrian-missiles-hit-jordan-as-assad-forces-step-up-air-strikes-against-rebels-1.518046>, 28 April 2013. Accessed 28 April 2013.

to represent the needs of all Jordanians. (In Arabic, “*nashama*” connotes “the good people” or “heroes”, and is a well-known trademark of Jordanians locally and within the Arab world, including Syria.)

In September 2012, the group instigated an attack on several warehouses owned by the Islamic Society, a Jordanian CBO working with Syrians in Mafraq. The group has also organised street protests and tire burnings in Mafraq City Centre with increasing frequency (10 Feb 2013; 8 Mar 2013). Mercy Corps interviewed two leaders of the group’s riots, young Jordanian men in their late twenties, who threatened to continue such protests until the refugees have been “deported back to Syria”. Their main complaint was the strain that Syrians have brought on the already poor community, and the “unconscionable neglect” on all sides of Jordanian needs.



Members of “Nashama Al-Mafraq” protesting in Feb 2013 against Syrian refugees practices, pledged to “protect city”

Source: The Levant Post, 10 Feb 2013

These grievances, coupled with the tent protest Nashama al-Mafraq organised in April, point to both resentment towards the refugees and to the perceived inaction of the municipalities as well. As such, Mercy Corps recommends that any efforts to deal with these tensions must address the respective tensions with relevant strategies - to meet humanitarian needs directly; to encourage positive relations and stereotypes between host and refugee communities, and to empower local authorities.

**[Ramtha]** In July 2012, Jordanian police used teargas to disperse scores of Ramtha residents who had converged at a compound housing Syrian refugees after the residents and refugees threw stones at each other, injuring 15 refugees.<sup>33</sup> Other than this event, however, refugee versus host incidents have been limited in both Ramtha City and almost nonexistent in Sahel Houran thus far. As such, Mercy Corps is taking an approach of conflict prevention in Ramtha District, and more one of conflict mitigation in Mafraq Governorate.

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<sup>33</sup> Jordanian Times, Hani Hazalmeh, “Syrian refugees, Ramtha residents clash outside Bashabsheh complex”, <http://jordantimes.com/syrian-refugees-ramtha-residents-clash-outside-bashabsheh-complex>, 23 July 2012.

## DESTABILISING FACTORS



Mercy Corps interviewed over 100 Jordanian and Syrian refugees in March and April 2013 to map inter- and intra- community dynamics in Mafraq and Ramtha. In addition to areas of existing and growing tensions between the two communities, several cross-cutting themes stood out as factors destabilising the already precarious situation in Mafraq and increasing humanitarian needs in Ramtha. These factors are distinct from the issues outlined above as they are neither resources being fought over nor points of tension between the two communities, but are external variables that could escalate existing tensions. Organisations working in the urban communities of North Jordan should be conscious of and sensitive to these factors in designing and implementing programming.

Destabilising factors include: the media, organised crime, the growing population of unemployed young men from both communities, and the lack of community cohesion. These four destabilising factors feed into one another, and must be addressed carefully in order to mitigate tensions that threaten to flare more frequently and more violently in the coming months. Note that most of the destabilising factors pertain to Mafraq, while most of the stabilising factors pertain to Ramtha, accounting for the difference in relations and intensity of tensions between host- and refugee-communities in the respective regions of North Jordan.

### MEDIA

Over the last two months, Mercy Corps staff noted the increasing negativity and hostility of language towards Syrian refugees in the Jordanian media. The Jordanian media has a considerable voice in Jordan and plays a role in spreading both rumours and truth about the impact of the Syrian conflict on the host community, and the dynamics between them and the refugees. Whether through the radio, television, or various outlets of social media, the Jordanian media is accessible to both Jordanians and Syrian refugees, some of whom manage to have access to the Internet in addition to traditional satellite TV.

The predominantly negative reports in both the Jordanian and international media<sup>34</sup> are destabilising the situation in Jordan in three main ways – through (a) fuelling negative perceptions between host and refugee communities, (b) politicising the presence of the Syrian refugees through questioning the Jordanian government's stance towards the conflict, and (c) unsettling the Syrian community in real time with reports of the conflict back home. The overwhelming negativity of the media is destabilising relations between the communities and breeding distrust and feelings of insecurity within the Syrian community and the Jordanian community respectively.

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<sup>34</sup> Photo above taken from Yahoo! News, "UN: Syrian refugees overwhelm Jordan camp", <http://news.yahoo.com/un-syrian-refugees-overwhelm-jordan-camp-062048099.html>, 29 January 2013. Accessed April 2013.



First, the media is heavily influencing the host community's perception of refugees, even among those whose daily lives are not directly affected by their presence. For instance, even Jordanian residents of West Amman have begun to associate "the Syrians" with petty crime, prostitution, and unemployment rates, despite the lack of hard evidence or direct impact. A few Jordanians calling into the radio even went as far to blame Syrians for the recent rise in oil prices and problems with the economy, even though the influx of refugee has created a considerable and growing market for many products and services all over Jordan.



Second, the media has been politicising the presence of the Syrian refugees. On one hand, the media frequently questions where the funds coming in for the refugees is going, as they hear of the millions pledged by countries around the world but claim "Jordanians have not seen a drop of it", and Jordanians on the radio and streets complain the government has "lost control of the refugee situation" and is allowing refugees at the expense of Jordanians simply in order to draw funds, especially from the Gulf. Furthermore, the media's recent reports of increasing American military presence in Jordan<sup>35</sup> has spread rumours of war between Jordan and Syria. In response, Jordanians have expressed anger and fear that Syrians have brought war into their borders, threatening what they proudly consider the "only stable country in the Middle East".

Third, exaggeration of events in Syria have also contributed to stirring emotions or fears within the Syrian community. These reports are fuelling the desire of unemployed young men to cross back into Syria and support their brothers in fighting; indeed, several armed youth have been captured by Jordanian authorities trying to cross back into Syria. The media is also breeding distrust through provoking fear within the Syrian refugee community of the regime's intelligence among them, discouraging interaction between families.

Several Syrian youth in Mafraq commented on the lack of positive media, and expressed a desire to fill this gap through "backpack" journalism, photo- and video-journalism to highlight positive relationships between Jordanians and Syrians and the benefits that Syrians have brought to the Jordanian community businesses. These Syrian youth were hopeful that such stories could counter the force of negative media. Mercy Corps expects this idea to emerge as one of the community initiatives implemented through our project this year.

Finally, the realisation on both communities' parts that the refugee situation will be prolonged even further is a potential tipping point for conflict between the two communities. Jordanians are fearful that the Syrians will become yet another permanent refugee population, whereas Syrians continue to express going home as their top priority. The moment, therefore, that the host community perceives the Syrian refugee crisis as permanent, the more vehement they will be in rejecting their guests and demanding closed borders - indeed, this is already happening. At the same time, the moment that Syrian refugees themselves understand their situation may extend for the next few years, their tolerance for "temporary" squalor conditions and daily verbal or labour abuse will also diminish. As such, their demands for decent living conditions as they wait the war out will only increase, as will their unwillingness to continue swallowing humiliating conditions or treatment. Thus the intolerance on both sides will potentially heighten direct engagement and conflict between the two communities. The media is actively fanning this intolerance within both communities. This destabilising source should be addressed systematically through directly quashing rumours that invoke unwarranted fear and injecting a balance of positive media.

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<sup>35</sup> CNN, "U.S. military to step up presence in Jordan in light of Syria civil war", [http://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/17/world/us-jordan-troops-order/index.html?hpt=imi\\_c2](http://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/17/world/us-jordan-troops-order/index.html?hpt=imi_c2), 19 April 2013. Accessed 19 April 2013.

## LACK OF COMMUNITY COHESION



As “temporary” visitors, Syrians in Mafraq have generally found it difficult to come together as a community. Women especially noted how difficult it is to socialize with one another. They have no way to entertain and would have to borrow things from a Jordanian neighbour. Many lack friendships locally and often have few relationships with Jordanians. Naturally, Syrians report that some Jordanians are nice to them, but those who are are not remembered vividly.

Mercy Corps staff noted the reluctance of many Syrians interviewed to express their views freely in a focus group setting. Many of them seemed fearful of having their names or opinions documented by intelligence posing as refugees, as they acutely fear the consequence for themselves and every remaining member of their family if found being critical of the Regime. The suspicion and lack of trust within the Syrian community, however, is encouraging self-isolation and diminishing much-needed community support – not only in terms of material assistance and resource pooling, but especially in emotional empathy and support. As one Syrian woman commented, “we don’t get emotional support from anyone outside our own families. Almost never from the Jordanians now, and we cannot even speak openly with other Syrians unless they are family or we have known them for a long time”.

While Syrians are fully integrated into Jordanian society in Sahel Houran, community cohesion between Syrians and Jordan in Ramtha and Mafraq are lacking. Both communities complained about the lack of social/recreational spaces and events at which adults, youth, and children can meet and interact healthily, and establish better relationships with the local community and among themselves. The only places where Syrian refugees usually meet are the charity organisations that distribute weekly food and non-food items. When asked if it would be better for all refugees to live together in the same areas versus scattered within the city, the participants answered that living among Jordanians facilitates relations with them, although they would like to live closer to other Syrian families.

## ORGANISED CRIME

Rumours of Syrian intelligence disguised as refugees was substantiated on 23 March 2013 in Za'atari refugee camp. This deepened perceptions of instability within the Syrian community and between Syrians and Jordanians. Jordanian authorities have also apprehended Syrian refugees carrying arms, explosives, other ammunition, and drugs into Jordan with more frequency, although their political affiliations are not always clear. The presence of drugs in the community, especially in the hands of young men, is both dangerous and threatens to disrupt the social fabric. This destabilizing factor is largely concentrated in Mafraq and not in Ramtha so far.



While by no means a common occurrence, Syrians point to several incidents since the summer where Jordanian men have publicly accused Syrian women of being prostitutes. A conversation with the Deputy Governor of Mafraq further highlighted the extent of the problem. He stated that the current difficulties between the Jordanian and Syrian communities have led to a breakdown of respect, especially amongst the young. As the situation deteriorates further, the norms of respect, politeness, and hospitality that defined relations at the start have disintegrated even further.

## UNEMPLOYED YOUNG MEN

In October, Syrian and Jordanian adults cited tensions between young men as a growing area of concern. Young Jordanian men are quick to blame Syrian refugees for the increased hardships they and their families now face. Indeed, young men and women experience the strain in different ways.

Young men are reported as becoming angry and frustrated, and feeling a lack of purpose. Not confined to their homes as women are, they report feeling a heightened sense of hostility from Jordanians, especially from other young men, when they are out on the street. Those interviewed stated that they would rather go back to Syria and face the 'guns of Assad' than stay in Jordan where they are looked upon with contempt.

Unemployed Jordanian and Syrian young men in North Jordan have already been actively engaged in the incidents of violence that have destabilised the security of the urban community in Mafraq. As such, Mercy Corps considers them vulnerable to involvement in open conflict or violence, and encourages organisations to address their needs for both employment and psychosocial support.



Young Syrian men engage in political discussion over a basic lunch in Za'atari refugee camp. February 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan



## SOURCES OF STABILITY

Several differences stood out between Mafraq and Ramtha in terms of assets that explained the considerably more civil relationships between Jordanians and Syrians in Sahel Houran. These themes also emerged during Mercy Corps' focus group discussions as factors that contributed to positive relationships between host and refugee communities and that should be actively fostered.

### TRIBAL/FAMILY TIES

Strong tribal ties between extended family members from Ramtha and Dara'a stood out as a source of stability that is missing in Mafraq. The tribal identities in Ramtha are largely congruous with the tribal identities of incoming refugees<sup>36</sup>, whereas this is not generally the case in Mafraq, where inter-tribal tension and competition predates the arrival of the Syrians. Close family relationships predate the conflict and run deep in Sahel Houran, and have thus far ensured the loyalty and protection of refugees within certain host communities in Jordan. Strong tribal ties have served as incentive for host communities to care for refugee communities and for both to identify shared interests and engage in collaborative problem solving. Such positive relations should be encouraged and their efforts to cooperate not taken for granted.

### TRADE RELATIONS & ECONOMIC STRENGTH

Pre-existing trade relations between Ramtha and Dara'a described in detail earlier in this report also contribute to the relative stability of Ramtha thus far. However, while Ramtha traders are still able to import, they are no longer able to export into Syria, and have thus lost a significant market for their products that will begin to stress the community. As such, identifying new markets should be a priority for aid initiatives in both Mafraq and Ramtha in order to encourage opportunities for shared income generation and profit.

### POSITIVE STEREOTYPES

Relations between the border regions of Jordan and Syria have traditionally been strong and deeply connected by family and economic ties. There are no historical grievances that need to be overcome. As such, while many negative stereotypes between the two groups unfortunately prevail and are being encouraged by the media, positive stereotypes especially those predating the conflict nevertheless remain.

When asked what they thought about Jordanians before coming to Jordan as refugees, the vast majority of Syrians replied, "They are the *nashama* - the good and generous people", and many expressed gratitude for how Jordanians had welcomed and accommodated them, especially at first. Similarly, many Jordanians commented that they admired how Syrians were "educated", "polite", and "preserve Arab culture and art". These points of mutual appreciation should be highlighted to pacify differences between the community. Opportunities to build upon shared identity and values should be amplified through initiatives that benefit both communities.



Jordanian and Syrian Community Leaders bonding through Mercy Corps' first training in effective communication, teambuilding and leadership skills. April 2013 © Mercy Corps Jordan

<sup>36</sup> Ramtha: the main tribes include Al-Darabseh, Al-Zoubi, Al-Shbol, Al-Wardat, Al-Ershidat;

Mafraq: the main tribes include Bani Hassan tribes, Bani Khalid tribes, the Al-Sardeiah mountain tribes (Al-Azamat; Masaeed; Al-Shorofat and Zubaid) and Anza tribes.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

Since Mercy Corps began mapping refugee and host community dynamics and tension in North Jordan in March 2013, our staff has noted a considerable rise in tensions in Mafraq Governorate and to a smaller degree in Ramtha District. Everyday hardships have taken their toll on both communities, stressing already tenuous relationships in Mafraq and fraying historically warm relationships in Ramtha. Once united by a sense of family, hospitality, and compassion, Jordanians and Syrians have come to see each other as direct competitors. Negative stereotypes of each other have increased through a combination of unpleasant personal experiences and rumours disseminated by the media. Both communities have expressed surprise and dismay at the duration of the Syrian conflict. They have been caught off-guard at having to live together for such a long time. Many still view the situation as temporary, but those who have started to see the conflict as being prolonged further are beginning to take out their frustrations on one another. As a result, there has been little effort to create a joint sense of purpose for dealing with the refugee crisis, leading to greater division and a growing sense of animosity.

Since last October, the increase in resource competition between Jordanians and Syrian refugees has been matched with an increase in security concerns, urgent humanitarian needs, and need for municipal capacity in both areas. In Mafraq, tensions over resources and differences in culture or traditions are now layered additionally with tensions over identity and territory. These multilayered tensions flared up during the first direct clashes between refugee and host communities along the perimeter of Za'atari refugee camp in mid-April, which should be a red flag for all. Conditions are bad enough that some 45,000 refugees have voluntarily returned to Syria since August 2012.

In October 2012, Mercy Corps' rapid assessment put forth three principles to guide programme design for host and refugee communities in Mafraq. First, that assistance to Syrian refugees must also address the distress of the Jordanians. Second, that competition over resources must be dealt with directly, and through working with both Syrians and Jordanians as decision-makers to devise equitable solutions. Third, that the Syrian community must begin to act as a community in order to work with the Jordanians, and programmes should facilitate their communication and expand their local network to bolster internal support systems.

Mercy Corps' current project is built on these three principles. Our extensive mapping builds on them to present updated recommendations for host- and refugee community programming in Mafraq and Ramtha. Mercy Corps acknowledges that tensions in North Jordan are now two-fold – between host communities and refugees, and between host communities and their local governance institutions. As such, our recommendations are relevant to addressing humanitarian needs on all sides, improving perceptions and relations between both communities, and strengthening local governance mechanisms for the short- and long-term.

First, assistance to Syrian refugees and Jordanians in need must directly involve, empower and coordinate with local governance institutions. Local municipalities in North Jordan are overwhelmed with the rapid influx of refugees that have increased their populations from 50-100%, and their struggle to meet their communities' many needs has been met with frustration, criticism, and vehement calls for action. When asked to identify the locations where tensions were most likely to flare, several Syrian women stated matter-of-factly, "tensions will likely flare wherever people have to queue for limited resources", such as food distribution points, including NGO/CBO offices. Respondents identified bus stations, markets, mosques, schools and health facilities as potential locations for conflict. Mercy Corps believes that these vulnerable locations are also opportunities, which if used as practical entry points for service delivery can bolster local infrastructure to benefit both communities. Moreover, if local municipalities' capacities are strengthened, then their ability to serve the communities and their image will improve. This in turn will diminish tensions between host community and their local municipalities, and reduce scapegoating of Syrian refugees for municipalities' shortcomings.

Second, in addition to addressing pressing humanitarian needs, organisations should identify and design interventions that directly serve the most vulnerable. Doing so serves to address urgent needs and also addresses perceptions that aid is unfairly. When asked who were the most vulnerable individuals in their communities, focus group participants unanimously identified widows and young single mothers as the most vulnerable, as they have neither protection of a husband nor a means of earning income either due to having to care for out-of-school children. This vulnerable population is still being underserved, partly due to a lack of job opportunities considered culturally suitable for women, and partly because the aid community has not sufficiently identified their needs. This is the especially the case with culturally sensitive or taboo issues, such as trauma from sexual

violence, that are not easily identified by rapid assessments. As noted above, another population identified by a majority of focus group participants was unemployed men, especially young men, who are struggling to feed their families and have expressed frustration with a lack of sense of purpose. As such, Mercy Corps also encourages organisations to redefine and consider vulnerability not only in terms of humanitarian needs, but also in terms of those vulnerable to involvement in violence. Mercy Corps believes that if the most vulnerable are served, then the burden on those who are providing for them within the host community will be lifted. This will diminish resentment that assistance is being given to those who do not need it, ameliorate perceptions of the aid community, reduce scapegoating of the refugees, and improve overall stability.

Third, programmes must be sensitive not only to tensions over resources but also to growing tensions over identity, territory and especially security. Just as tension over housing and rental prices has recently escalated to the issue over one's basic rights as a Jordanian, conflict over water resources has also become a territorial struggle over national resources, and messaging of project objectives must be managed with care. Regarding security, recent events have demonstrated that tensions are high and open conflict is now an option on the table, at least for Mafraq residents. As such, any programming that involves the gathering of Syrian refugees or Jordanians who are assisting them must prioritise the safety of all participants. This is particularly necessary since Syrians' undocumented status in Jordan makes them doubly vulnerable<sup>37</sup>. Mercy Corps believes this to be a priority under Do No Harm.

Reminiscent of the circumstances in Mafraq last fall, the situation in Ramtha is increasingly tense but not at the stage where open conflict is inevitable. Local residents believe open conflict is avoidable if basic needs are met, the government can prevent Jordanians from being evicted from their homes, and the army can avert armed individuals from entering or exiting their borders. Tensions between the two communities are not a deep-rooted problem but merely a product of extreme population increase over a short time. Indeed, at least in Ramtha, the golden opportunity to build on good tribal and trade relations while the economy is still strong should not be missed, especially as it can serve as a role model for other areas experiencing similar tensions.

The multiple layers of tensions in Mafraq and Ramtha detailed in this report will potentially incite violence if not addressed thoroughly. Given the numerous destabilising factors and the generally low stability in the area, neglect of humanitarian and emerging political problems will degrade historically good relations and lead to dire consequences, especially as more refugees are predicted to flow in this summer. In addition to addressing tensions between refugee and host communities, stakeholders should approach this delicate situation by building sources of resilience – good relations, economic stability and hope for the future – that strengthen both the Jordanians and Syrians to opt out of violence if and when events take a threatening turn.



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<sup>37</sup> In situations involving security problems, violence, exploitation, or cheating, refugees seem to be disoriented about where to go for help and distrustful of official protection mechanisms. Most of the participants in Mercy Corps' programmes said that they do not want to go to the Jordanian police because they feel they would not be treated fairly