



Syrian refugees in Jordan

Standard Note: SNIA 6943

Last updated: 18 July 2014

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Section International Affairs and Defence Section

Enormous numbers of Syrians have taken refuge in Jordan, putting strain on the small country's resources. The House of Commons International Development Committee visited recently and voiced concern about Jordan's political stability.

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Zaatari refugee camp. Source: [BBC News Online](#)

1 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Jordan

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there are more than 600,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan and a growing number of Iraqis. That is about one for every ten Jordanians, the equivalent of the UK hosting over six million refugees. More are likely to have arrived since the UN's estimates were made, particularly since the success of the extremist group ISIS in capturing large areas of Syrian and Iraqi territory.¹

The refugees are largely concentrated in the Mafraq, Irbid and Amman governorates. According to reports, there were more than 100,000 refugees in Zaatari refugee camp in April.² The continued influx of refugees is causing severe strain on Jordan's national systems and infrastructure. Jordan grants refugees access to services such as health and education.

More than 80% of refugees are in urban areas rather than in camps.³

1.1 Funding

The UNHCR says that it needs \$305.4 million for its operations in Jordan, including \$273.9 million to help Syrian refugees and \$31.5 million to help Iraqis and other nationalities.⁴ Over \$176 million of that remains to be funded.

The following are supporting the UNHCR in Jordan and in the region:

Australia, Canada, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Netherlands Norway, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Republic of Korea, Spain, Switzerland, UAE, UK, USA and private donors.⁵

¹ [2014 UNHCR country operations profile - Jordan](#)

² 'Syria crisis: Deadly clash in Jordan's Zaatari camp', *BBC News Online*, 6 April 2014

³ [UNHCR Jordan Overview \(As of end of June 2014\)](#)

⁴ [UNHCR Jordan Overview \(As of end of June 2014\)](#)

DFID has allocated £119 million for spending in Jordan since the beginning of the Syria crisis, which amounts to £199.22 per refugee.⁶

2 Zaatari refugee camp

Zaatari camp is reportedly the world's second largest refugee camp and has become the fourth largest city in Jordan, housing around 100,000 refugees, many of them children.⁷ The population of the camp has declined somewhat recently, as other camps have been built to relieve the pressure on Zaatari. The Jordanian authorities, along with others in the region, are not keen on the establishment of large camps because of the threat that these may become permanent settlements and lead to political destabilisation.

At Zaatari, there have been several disturbances, including one in April, when Jordanian authorities used tear gas against stone-throwing residents who had set fire to tents and vehicles. One person was killed and a number were injured. Refugees were protesting about conditions at the camp and claimed that a child had been run over.

It costs about £320,000 per day to run the camp, with half a million pieces of bread and 4.2 million litres of water distributed every day.⁸

Sarah Teather MP visited the camp in November 2013 and described the conditions there in a recent debate:

During my visit to Zaatari camp, I met Doctors of the World and Save the Children to see their work supporting refugees. I pay tribute to their work, and I place on the record my admiration for the many people who support those very vulnerable people—they are usually separated from their own family and friends, living a long way away. Despite the hard work of many, conditions in the camp are extremely difficult due to the lack of privacy, the cold of living in a tent and the shared toilet facilities, which have provoked persistent allegations of sexual harassment. That makes it a difficult life for anyone to bear.

Overall, it is the children who stay most in my mind. I was shown some of the provision in the camp, including a football pitch built with funding from South Korea, a playground with swings and a slide, and a project run by Save the Children that does excellent work giving the camp's children space to learn, play and speak about their traumas, but that is not what stays most in my mind. What stays most in my mind is the sight of children working, as I saw most children doing.

Refugees are not allowed to work in Jordan, yet many are desperate to supplement the small levels of support they receive, so their children work. Children digging are a common sight in the camp, and it took me a minute to notice what they were doing, as at first sight I thought they were playing. When I looked a bit closer and talked to staff in the camp, I realised that they were actually making cement. The Jordanian authorities have banned cement from being brought into Zaatari, so instead the residents of the camp make their own.

Groups of children dig through sand and dirt for many hours in the sun to get at the finer material needed to make cement.

⁵ [UNHCR Jordan Overview \(As of end of June 2014\)](#)

⁶ House of Commons International Development Committee, *UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East*, HC 248 2013–14, 2 July 2014, p13

⁷ House of Commons International Development Committee, *UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East*, HC 248 2013–14, 2 July 2014, p14

⁸ 'Syria crisis: Deadly clash in Jordan's Zaatari camp', *BBC News Online*, 6 April 2014

Conditions in the camp are so difficult that many choose to leave and take their chances living in neighbouring villages or, if they are lucky, Amman, where they may have friends and relatives. They get more privacy that way, but the conditions for those living outside the camp are also terrible, and it requires raising further funds to support housing costs. That means that child labour is endemic. In Jordan's capital, Amman, I visited a team from the Jesuit Refugee Service, which goes out to visit families that are almost invariably living in cold, damp and unfurnished apartments.

None of the children from those families is in school. Instead, many of them are out working to pay the rent for the property in which they live, including a 10-year-old boy I met called Bashir. He is the sole bread winner for his family of six, whose lives are particularly difficult because two of the children have severe disabilities. Bashir sells vegetables on the streets from 8 am until 10 pm. He has no time for school or play, and he is not the only child I saw on that street doing exactly the same thing. That is the reality for refugees in Jordan, and it is a reality mirrored in Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.⁹

The UNHCR provides a map of the camp with notes on events in July [here](#).

3 UK action

The UK has committed over £600 million to help those affected by the Syrian conflict. It is the UK's largest ever response to a humanitarian crisis.¹⁰ This money helps Syrian refugees in the region. The UK has also committed to take a certain number of highly vulnerable refugees in the UK itself.¹¹

UK aid in Jordan goes towards feeding people, providing educational kits, helping with medical care, cash, blankets and clothing. Some of this aid has gone through inter-governmental organisations such as Unicef, some through NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council.

The House of Commons International Development Committee visited Jordan in spring 2014 to assess the effectiveness of UK aid in response to the Syrian crisis. In its report, the committee expressed its concern about the stability of Jordan and called for longer-term development assistance as well as humanitarian relief:

With reference to Jordan in particular, it is imperative to ensure that stability is maintained: we therefore recommend that the UK launch a medium-term development programme in addition to its humanitarian work. The UK should also encourage the Government of Jordan to allow Syrian refugees to work: whilst we fully understand their present reluctance, we believe that allowing refugees to work, and hence generate tax revenues, would be of great benefit to Jordan.¹²

Most Syrians being housed in urban areas in Jordan rather than refugee camps, the committee called on the government to direct more aid towards those living in towns rather than concentrate on the camps. The DFID said that it is already moving in this direction.

⁹ [HC Deb 16 July 2014, c290WH](#)

¹⁰ 'Syria crisis: Latest updates on UK aid', DFID/FCO press release, 16 July 2014

¹¹ For more on the scheme, see [Syrian refugees and the UK](#) - Commons Library Standard Note, 25 June 2014

¹² House of Commons International Development Committee, [UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East](#), HC 248 2013–14, 2 July 2014

4 Outlook

Many more refugees may be heading out of Syria and Iraq in the coming months as the conflict continues in both countries and, particularly, since the takeover by the extremist group ISIS of large areas. ISIS is in control of vital stretches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and has already exploited that control to put pressure on the Iraqi government.¹³ Although the group's progress towards Baghdad appears to have slowed, analysts do not foresee a quick resolution to the crisis and predict further massive disruption in both countries. Jordan is therefore likely to see more refugees.

¹³ For more on this, see [Worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria and Iraq](#) - Commons Library Standard Note, 8 July 2014