

Field visit to Jordan and Lebanon to assess Humanitarian situation as a result of conflict in Syria



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The Humanitarian situation relating to the Syrian Refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon is as confusing and ambiguous as the political situation in Syria. Most of the information obtained about the Syrian refugees in the region is based on speculation and guesses, the same regarding plans and future possible scenarios of future humanitarian response. This is due to the sensitivity of the political situation in both countries relating to Syria and the uncertainty over how the situation in Syria is likely to develop.

Map of Syria



Purpose of field visit:

1. To assess the current humanitarian situation with regards Syrian refugees and to develop an appropriate response
2. To enhance the capacity of the field team to design short-term and possible medium term intervention
3. To meet with various stakeholders along with the country team to gather information and to highlight IRW's possible role.

Situation in Jordan

- The situation regarding the number of refugees in Jordan is fairly ambiguous. The figures vary from one organisation to another therefore it is difficult to

obtain an accurate picture of the humanitarian situation in Jordan. 3,500 Syrians have registered with UNHCR as refugees. However, it is estimated that the true figure may be up to 10,000. The larger figure is used by UNHCR for planning purposes. Most refugees are large families, relatively poor and less educated. It is estimated that 60% of the refugees are illiterate and 40% of the children have not been vaccinated.

The status of Syrian refugees is ambiguous as only Palestinian refugees are officially recognised as 'refugees' in Jordan. Furthermore, there may also be economic and medical assistance migrants entering Jordan. This will place additional pressure on the capacity of Jordan to cope with the new arrivals.

- The Government of Jordan operates an 'open door' policy towards the arrivals from Syria. Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees but has signed an MOU with UNHCR in 1997, under this MOU, if UNHCR recognises someone as a refugee; UNHCR will be allowed 6 months to settle them. In the case of Syrian Refugees, UNHCR issues them with 'Asylum Seeker' cards. In addition to Syrian refugees, there is a strong possibility that Iraqi refugees currently living in Syria may also decide to enter Jordan. However they do not recognise them as refugees but as welcome them as guest or brothers.

Syrian refugees can access medical assistance but they need to pay for it. This is in comparison with Iraqi refugees that can access medical assistance at the same rate as 'uninsured Jordanian citizens'. UNHCR is working with Jordan Aid Society in providing healthcare to refugees from Syria. Many of the refugees are suffering from complex medical conditions such as chronic diseases, renal dialysis and bullet and shrapnel wounds.

Syrian refugees have the right to access private and public education in Jordan but due to lack of space in school, many refugee children are not able to access education. Refugee children have already missed a semester of their school year. More concerning is that many children are working as their parents are sick and unable to work. Children receive an average of 2 JD per day (2.8 US\$).

- Government of Jordan's attitude toward INGOs: Government of Jordan is reluctant to allow international NGO to get involved in Humanitarian efforts directly. They prefer local NGO to take the lead under their control. It is challenging for International NGOs to work in Jordan as freedom is restricted and there is close monitoring. INGOs not fully registered have to work through National semi governmental organisation such as **Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO)**, to implement programmes. Humanitarian organisation need to work with a local NGO or register with the Ministry of Planning in Jordan, Funds for Syrian Refugees need to go through 'committee

approval' process but unlike the previous Iraq refugee process, the current process/mechanism is unclear. Having said that, there is a room for negotiation and putting pressure on the official department to allow for more freedom, especially as they have limited recourses to deal with large scale influx.

Response of international community

Despite the presence of representative of the International Humanitarian community in both countries, they are not ready to cope with large and sudden influxes of refugees.

UNHCR is working closely with Ministry of Interior in Jordan in managing the influx of refugees arriving from Syria. The Ministry has provided two guest houses to UNHCR in Ramtha and Salt each has capacity of 150 people, the second guest house is a detention centre, allocated for army deserters from Syria.

Both of these facilities are furnished by UNHCR and provided with all the essential facilities to the residents in the guest houses; the facilities are designed for short term usage. The aim is for people to stay for a couple of weeks and then move on. UNHCR are looking to increase capacity to 500 people very soon. The UNHCR prefer serving refugees in urban setting opposing camp setting due to long term issues associated with refugee camps. They welcomed Islamic Relief's current activity (amongst other things) of providing rent subsidies to 550 families from Syrian.

The British Embassy is expecting a DFID consultant to arrive next week to help plan for the Syrian refugees.

There are some other organisation also operating in Jordan but in a very small scale and ad hoc basis, for example 'one-off' distribution, distributing cash without coordination...etc. and no regular coordination meeting are held in relation to the Syrian refugees.

Response of the National organisation

Jordan: The bulk of the humanitarian assistance is carried out by local organisations with a mainly Islamic background such as Al Katab wa sunnah and Islamic centre in Jordan, working under the umbrella of Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) or the Jordanian Red Crescent. The Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) is the only organisations mandated by the government to work with Syrian Refugees / guests. The Government of Jordan with cooperation with JHCO is in preparing 3 camp sites near Al Mafraq border with capacity of about 1,000 refugees.

The current operating national NGOs are lack of experiences and management capacity, so they need an urgent capacity building and training in order to cope with any further demands.

Islamic Relief's response so far

Islamic Relief has implemented a USD\$500,000 project which involved providing house rent assistance to 550 families of Syrian refugees via kitab wa sunnah and

other local organisations in various parts of Jordan including Ramtha, Maan, Amman and Zarqa. We also provide food and non food items to the same number of families for a three months period. 9 Containers of medical items (lab tubes, bedpans, blankets, hygiene kits, toys, children's books, children clothing, wheelchairs, etc.) has been provided by IRUSA (items donated by Church of Latter Day Saints). These items are due to be distributed very soon.

Second: situation in LEBANON

- Officially 6500 Syrians refugees have registered with UNHCR. However, according to UNHCR's own representatives 2,000-3,000 people in Bekaa Valley and 1,000 in Beirut are not registered. It is feasible that true figure of refugees could be as high as 11,000 to 12,000. People don't want to register because of fear for their safety. (Registration is conducted jointly with UNHCR and HRC – Lebanon Government's High Commission for Refugees) They fear their names will be passed onto the Syrian authorities. However, this situation is unsustainable as refugees (and their hosts) may not be able to cope without assistance) UNHCR is currently looking at ways of helping refugees who are unwilling to provide their details.
- HRC is working with UNHCR in the north of Lebanon but does not have the mandate to work in Bekaa Valley due to political consideration in that area. HRC (Government's High Refugee Commission) has very limited capacity (5 staff members) and will struggle to cope with the Humanitarian situation.
- The security situation has deteriorated and Lebanese Government has been deployed the army in Wadi Khalid (North Lebanon) and there have also been some clashes in Tripoli (between rival political parties). The situation in Syria is creating instability in Lebanon. As there are divides amongst sectarian lines; generally Lebanese Sunni community support the Syrian refugees whilst other groups support the Assad regime as a result the refugees prefer to seek shelter in Sunni dominated areas in Lebanon.
- According to Save the Children, 358 children have been enrolled in remedial classes. However, the security situation has resulted in 40% decrease in attendance. There is low enrolment rate of children and a high dropout of children due to a number of reasons such as; security situation, differences in the curriculum and difficulties of Syrian children integrated in schools. Traditionally, Syrian boys drop out of schools at the age of 14-15 ages to pursue vocational training.

- Lebanon Government is covering the costs of the wounded and keeping borders open. However, they will not enter Bekaa Valley due to the sensitivities with Hizb Allah. The government has suggested moving Syrian refugees to North Lebanon however, will not prepare any sites yet in order not send any overt signals of its intentions.
- HRC (Government's High Refugee Commission) has very limited capacity (5 staff members) and will struggle to cope with the Humanitarian situation
- UNHCR, UNICEF and DRC conducted a joint assessment in Bekaa Valley. They estimate between 5,000-6,000 Syrian families in Bekaa Valley. People are arriving mainly from HOMS. Many are accommodated amongst host families (in mainly Sunni areas in Bekaa family). The local authority and local community are trying to meet the needs of the refugees. Children are not attending schools. There is an urgent need for winterisation items
- It is unlikely that there will be a massive influx of Syrian refugees if the present Syrian regime continues as it will not be in their interest to have refugees leaving Syria. Border crossing are likely to be closed and people will have difficulties leaving Syria.
- In addition to the newly arrived refugees, there are estimated 500,000-600,000 migrants workers in Lebanon. Traditionally, these are unaccompanied men who work in Lebanon and then send money home to their families in Lebanon. There is a strong possibility that the on-going conflict may force the migrant workers to call their families to Lebanon.

Response of International community

Despite the presence of representative of the International Humanitarian community in both countries, they are not ready to cope with a large and sudden influx of refugees.

UNHCR is working with HRC (High commission for Refugees) in registering refugees. However, they recognise that working with HRC is preventing some refugees registering with them for fear that their details will be handing over to the Syrian authorities. UNHCR has distributed food, winterisation items (fuel, winter clothing and blankets) and Baby Hygiene kits. A number of quick impact projects (Public Library, Agricultural tool project, Garden in Al Alaman village, Cinema club in Al Awadh) will be implemented to help the local community and refugees. UNHCR originally planned for 7,000 refugees, this figure has been reached, and UNHCR is now revising figures and funds accordingly. UNHCR is currently using 'Emergency Operation Funds' to fund current operations. Funds have been received from

Germany (500,000 Euros), ECHO (500,000 Euros), Switzerland 250,000 Swiss Francs (plus Shelter expert) and Aga Khan Foundation (£800,000)

DRC is working in Lebanon (in Bekaa Valley), supporting local government to build their capacity to help Syrian refugees. IMC, WHO and local health care centres are looking after child vaccinations (IMC received funding from Hariri Foundation). Caritas has sent 720 hygiene kits for distribution in the North of Lebanon. Qatar Red Crescent is also working in Lebanon distributing fresh food items (meat, vegetables and chicken) and hygiene kits to 500 refugee families and regularly co-ordinates their activities with Islamic Relief.

ICRC is distributing winterisation items (blankets and other NFI) via Darul Fatwa organisation and supporting the Lebanese Red Cross in activities in the Lebanon. It is ICRC's conclusion that the immediate needs of the current case loads (registered refugees) in Bekaa Valley are being met. ICRC is also looking at the end-to-end process of casualties coming out of Syria. According to their assessment, local organisation and facilities are able to provide medical assistance to casualties coming from Syria. However, the needs of the casualties at the beginning (before arriving at medical facilities) and at the end (post operative care) can be improved.

DFID has sent an official to Beirut to monitor the humanitarian situation in the region. A meeting with was held with the British Ambassador to Lebanon and the DFID expert. They were impressed by the work IR was doing assisting the Syrian refugees.

Response of the National organisation

A number of organisations and individuals are channelling aid donated by Middle Eastern donors to the refugees in ad hoc basis. Lebanese Red Cross is playing an active role supported the ICRC. We have asked ISWA (IR Partner in Lebanon and another Lebanese local NGO to prepare for the possible upsurge in Syrian refugee arrivals into Lebanon and possibly working inside Syria, when there is an improvement in access.

Islamic Relief's response

Islamic Relief was one of the first humanitarian agencies to respond to the needs of the Syrian Refugees. IR's first distribution started in May 2011. Food and non food items, baby diapers (nappies) and baby milk have been distributed in Wadi Khaled and Bekaa Valley. Islamic Relief has been dealing with the mayors directly. One Mayer in particular, Ali Badawi (Mayor of Rama in Wadi Khaled) expressed gratitude for IR's response and requested continued assistance. Upon hearing that 21 families share one washing machine in a community centre, a 'one the spot' decision was made by Moustafa Osman to provide the centre with three washing machines. This

example of a quick response to dealing with difficulties faced by refugees and host families helps to increase the acceptance of IR by the refugee population. Islamic Relief in Lebanon has just received \$50,000 to implement a project on behalf of IR Canada and a further project to the value of \$150,000 is due to be implemented soon.

Challenges & concerns

- **Economic migrant:** Between 500,000 – 600,000 economic Syrian workers are currently working in Lebanon. There is a strong possibility that the Syrian workers may bring their families over to Lebanon. The status of these new arrivals is not clear. They will also create further pressure on the Lebanon government and society. A similar situation could also occur in Jordan.
- **Conflict spill over:** Lebanon already has a quite number of Lebanese citizens that support or have affiliation with the Assad regime in Syria. Conversely, there are a number of Lebanese Sunnis who support the refugees arriving from Syria and those opposing the Assad regime. The intense rivalry between these two groups resulted in clashes and deaths in Tripoli (Lebanon). There is a potential the conflict in Syria could cause instability and conflict in Lebanon.
- **Domestic Politics:** Some Lebanese political groups openly support the Assad regime whilst others express support for the anti-Assad forces in private. This political divide may result in the reluctance of the Lebanese government offering clear support to the Syrian refugees as it may not want to be seen supporting one side against the others.