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# JORDAN'S REFUGEE CRISIS

Alexandra Francis

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Publications Department  
1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
P: +1 202 483 7600  
F: +1 202 483 1840  
[CarnegieEndowment.org](http://CarnegieEndowment.org)

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## About the Author

**Alexandra Francis** was a junior fellow in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Nuclear Policy Program in 2012–2013. She received a Fulbright research grant to study Syrian refugee impacts in Jordan from 2013 to 2014. A Harry S. Truman Scholar, she holds a degree in political science from Davidson College and is currently a JD candidate at Yale Law School.

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## Summary

The Syrian refugee crisis has exacerbated endemic political, economic, and resource challenges in Jordan. As the conflict in Syria enters a protracted state and public discontent and other tensions rise, Jordan has limited its humanitarian response. Yet, the roots of the kingdom's challenges run deeper than the refugee crisis and if left unaddressed will be harbingers of instability. If Jordan is to confront its national challenges and continue to provide a safe haven for Syrian refugees, the country will depend on increased international support.

### Jordan's Many Challenges

- The Syrian refugee influx into Jordan has been massive. As of June 2015, more than 620,000 Syrians were registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency in Jordan. Eighty-four percent of these Syrians live in host communities as opposed to refugee camps.
- Syrian refugees have stressed economic and resource infrastructure in Jordan, which was already suffering from structural issues before the refugee crisis.
- The Jordanian public consistently overstates the negative impacts of the Syrian refugee influx, while the positive impacts receive far less attention, highlighting the politicized nature of the refugee crisis in Jordan. Public sentiment toward Syrian refugees has a deleterious effect on the government's ability to respond productively to the refugee influx.
- Confronted with persistently underfunded humanitarian appeals, Jordan has lost confidence in international donor support. Without additional aid and a sustainable response to the refugee crisis, Jordan will continue to restrict the protection space for Syrians. Doing so will increase the long-term risks of instability in Jordan and the region.

### Key Takeaways for Jordan and the International Community

**Prioritize the integration of development and humanitarian aid.** Jordan has historically viewed refugee influxes as opportunities to advance its national development. The international community must recognize this dynamic and prioritize the integration of national development aid and humanitarian aid in its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which will benefit both host communities and refugees.



**Maintain protection space for Syrian refugees.** As host-community tensions rise, Jordan should resist the political manipulation of protection space for refugees; it is imperative for the human security of Syrians that Jordan ensure asylum for refugees.

**Formalize access to livelihoods.** Actors responding to the Syrian crisis in Jordan must shift their policy responses from an emergency basis toward sustainable long-term approaches. With the Syrian crisis persisting, formalizing the economic sector and enabling access to livelihoods in Jordan will mitigate refugee vulnerability, strengthen the Jordanian economy, and reduce emergency humanitarian appeals.

**Empower local governance actors.** International aid should integrate capacity-building programs to strengthen the ability of Jordanian municipal actors to deliver services to their populaces and Syrian refugees.

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## Introduction

By nearly all accounts, Jordan has so far successfully weathered the Arab uprisings. Despite public protests throughout 2011, the Hashemite monarchy effectively maintained the status quo of governance and avoided making many concessions to democratize. Despite widespread public discontent with climbing prices, unemployment, and government corruption, the protests failed to mobilize massive numbers of Jordanians to the streets. In this tepid environment, King Abdullah II easily undercut the movement's popular reform platform through traditional Hashemite methods of political appeasement, and the protests dwindled in the second half of 2011.

Jordan, however, did not escape the consequences of regional instability. Chaos in Syria triggered a flood of refugees across Jordan's northern border. Initially, the government of Jordan benefited politically from the inflow of refugees. The downtrodden and war-weary Syrians served as a ubiquitous reminder of the potential consequences of revolution—further suppressing the Jordanian appetite for political change. More significantly, in this period of peak regional instability, the Syrian refugee population became a scapegoat for national challenges that predated the refugee crisis, effectively cultivating a buffer against public criticism of the government. Indeed, negative perceptions of the Syrians deflected public attention from the more insidious challenges of the Jordanian political system.

However, this delicate political balance is tipping. As prospects for a resolution to the Syrian conflict become increasingly elusive and the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan swells, public disenchantment has turned back toward the Jordanian government. The sharp population increase from the refugees' arrival revealed long-present and deepening fissures in Jordan's political, economic, and social infrastructure.

The Syrian influx presents Jordan with a political problem. Syrians are highly concentrated in Jordan's most vulnerable communities, and grievances brought to the fore by Syrian refugees have begun to mobilize marginalized Jordanians. As public frustration grows, political conflict is increasingly framed as a struggle against disenfranchisement. This stands in contrast to Jordan's historical political conflicts, which were primarily characterized as struggles between the monarchy and elite interest groups (such as Islamists and Palestinians). The rapid expansion of the Syrian refugee population has accelerated an emerging

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narrative of the marginalized in the political sphere and has the potential to threaten the stability of the current Jordanian political structure.

As massive population growth stresses host-community capacities, Syrian refugees have cast a light on some of Jordan's greatest contemporary challenges. A plethora of reports point to the Syrian refugee impact on Jordan's depleted resources, increased job competition, overburdened infrastructure, and strained social services, like healthcare and education. Notably, the challenges highlighted by the refugees all have deep roots in Jordan's social, economic, and political fabrics. Indeed, the Syrian refugee population has merely exacerbated preexisting endemic challenges that could be harbingers of future instability.

The negative public sentiment toward Syrians constrains the Jordanian government in its ability to respond to the refugee crisis. As host-community tensions rise, Jordanian citizens have called upon the government to limit competition from Syrian refugees. Since 2014, the Jordanian government has responded to increasingly vocal public frustration and growing regional security risks by narrowing its hospitality toward Syrian refugees. The once-cooperative relationship between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Hashemite Kingdom has grown tense as Jordan has restricted the number of Syrians who can enter the country, closed accessible border crossings, and attempted to confine more refugees to camps. In other words, it seems Jordanian officials have concluded that the initial political benefits of hosting Syrian refugees have diminished and that an increasing Syrian presence in the kingdom may threaten national stability, as Jordanian unrest centers on the pressures Syrian refugees place on host communities.

However, the Jordanian attempt to assuage public discontent through a restriction of protection space for Syrians is a flawed policy. Containing the Syrian refugee crisis does not address Jordan's larger structural issues that are at the heart of its challenges, denies the benefits of hosting Syrian refugees, and neglects the moral imperative to provide a safe haven for victims of one of the worst humanitarian crises of this generation. More alarmingly, a response that pushes Syrian refugees into further destitution and desperation increases the long-term risks and costs of the refugee crisis for both Jordan and the international community.

Alternatively, Jordan should continue leveraging the Syrian refugee crisis as an opportunity to address problems that predate the conflict. The influx of refugees supplies Jordan with the heightened international profile necessary to draw the attention of international donors to the kingdom's pervasive and deeply rooted national challenges. However, this requires the support of the international community. Jordan and international donors should act on the opportunities inherent in the Syrian refugee influx into the kingdom, to both enhance Jordan's national development and provide for Syrians displaced by the most devastating civil war of the last decade.

## Brief Historical Background

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a barren, resource-poor nation. Perched on an arid plateau, the country is bound to the west by a sliver of arable land along the banks of the Jordan River and to the east and south by deserts. As a testament to the inhospitable nature of its landscape, the country's only remnants of ancient civilization hug the Jordan Valley or are desolate, Roman-era defensive outposts. Not naturally endowed with the makings of a great state, Jordan's security and prosperity have relied heavily on the interests of external political players since the British first conceived its borders in 1921.

The geopolitical history of Jordan set the kingdom up for its contemporary challenges. Jordan is politically vulnerable due to its resource impoverishment, externally oriented rentier economy, limited sources of internal revenue, and extreme population growth.<sup>1</sup>

What is more, situated at the crossroads of a region in turmoil, Jordan has a long record of providing asylum to persecuted peoples. Throughout the kingdom's history, it has adroitly leveraged refugee populations to obtain greater political and economic support from patron nations. Indeed, while the scale of the Syrian refugee crisis presents a difficult challenge, the Jordanian government's response to the arrival of Syrian refugees must be understood as a continuation of its historical response to refugee inflows into the country, most notably those of Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations. Increases in international aid have previously accompanied refugee influxes into the kingdom. Jordan is a country accustomed to negotiating its survival through foreign aid, and moments of refugee influx have provided opportunities for it to capitalize on international support.

Unsurprisingly, Jordan has demonstrated the most sophisticated regional response to the Syrian refugee crisis of all the major neighboring host countries. Led by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan demonstrated its willingness to use the Syrian population as a lever to garner international development aid through the *Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis*, which is described as “the first nationally-led response of its kind, joining refugee and development responses in one comprehensive national plan.”<sup>2</sup>

Jordan has always viewed hosting refugees through a utilitarian political lens. The Syrian refugee influx has provided it with further opportunities to leverage international support to its benefit. While Jordan undoubtedly has been burdened by hosting an increasingly vulnerable Syrian refugee population, its responses to the crisis have demonstrated its understanding of the significant relationship between the hosting of refugees, increased international aid, and the opportunities provided for nation building.

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## Refugee Politics and International Law

Jordan faces an incredibly complex refugee situation, hosting the second-greatest ratio of refugees to citizens of any country in the world and the fifth-largest refugee population in absolute terms.<sup>3</sup> Since the outbreak of political violence in Syria in 2011, more than 620,000 Syrians have obtained refuge in Jordan.<sup>4</sup> Of these, nearly 84 percent live in host communities.<sup>5</sup> The impact would be like the United States welcoming over 29.4 million refugees in the span of four years. Government estimates of Syrians living in Jordan are as high as 1.4 million, which includes those who had left before the war.<sup>6</sup>

Despite hosting one of the largest refugee populations in the world, the Jordanian government has a remarkably underarticulated refugee policy. It has not signed any international conventions or protocols that govern the treat-

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**Jordan does not have a legal obligation to continue admitting refugees; thus, the human security of Syrians fleeing their war-torn country is at risk.**

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ment of refugees, including the UN's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its additional 1967 protocol. Jordan's lack of international obligations under these treaties affords the government a greater degree of agency in its policy responses to refugee influxes.

Nonetheless, Jordan has a relatively progressive stance on refugees and generally upholds international standards on their treatment. Its 1998 memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR outlines the extent of Jordan's refugee policy for non-Palestinians. Significantly, the document includes the major principles and standards of international protection for displaced persons, including the 1951 convention's definitions of refugee and asylum seeker.<sup>7</sup> The kingdom allows Syrian children access to public education and, until November 2014, facilitated Syrian access to subsidized medical care. The memorandum provides the parameters for cooperation between the UNHCR and the government; however, it does not constitute a legal obligation.

The country also has a legal obligation to respect the principle of non-refoulement, which is widely considered a component of international customary law to which all nation-states must adhere.<sup>8</sup> It is defined under terms expressed in the 1951 convention as "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."<sup>9</sup> Beyond international customary law, Jordan has explicitly committed to not return persons through its ratification of the UN's 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Notably absent from Jordan's memorandum are a variety of legal rights enjoyed by refugees in states that are signatories to the United Nations convention. These include the rights to housing, employment, public education, freedom of movement, and public relief and assistance. Moreover, Jordan has begun to restrict the protection space for Syrian refugees, terminating their healthcare

provisions and limiting their freedom of movement. Indeed, the absence of the United Nations convention's legal framework has sparked debates across the official Jordanian community and humanitarian sector about the rights of Syrians within Jordan, and the most contentious among them has been the question of the right to access livelihoods.

As a consequence of Jordan's limited obligations under international law, refugees within the country remain legally vulnerable. Jordan does not have a legal obligation to continue admitting refugees; thus, the human security of Syrians fleeing their war-torn country is at risk. The kingdom has increasingly turned Syrians away at its borders and reduced freedoms and services for refugees. The humanitarian community has also accused Jordan of repatriating refugees back to Syria, particularly unaccompanied men and Palestinians. Such actions amount to a violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

## Patience Wears Thin

As the Syrian war enters its fifth year, the Syrian refugee situation has morphed into a protracted crisis. The majority of Syrian refugees have settled into some of Jordan's poorest northern municipalities, with the governorates of Amman, Irbid, and Mafraq hosting more than 76 percent of all Syrian refugees in Jordan.<sup>10</sup> Patience and generosity in host communities have worn thin as refugees compete with Jordan's vulnerable populations for scarce resources, employment opportunities, healthcare, shelter, and education.

Though Syrians have stressed host communities, Jordan was already facing substantial challenges to its resource, economic, and social sectors before the influx. In the lead-up to the Arab uprisings, Jordan struggled with massive water scarcity, climbing youth unemployment, rural marginalization, and development deficits in sectors like healthcare and education. Syrians triggered a rapid increase in public frustration about these issues.

Syrian refugees have impacted Jordan both in positive and negative ways, but the public narrative is overwhelmingly critical of the Syrian presence. According to a report by the International Labor Organization, 85 percent of Jordanian workers believe that Syrians should not be allowed to enter Jordan freely, and 65 percent believe that all Syrians should live within refugee camps.<sup>11</sup> In a period of peak political instability in the region, this deleterious public sentiment has significantly undermined the government's willingness to host additional refugees. Decreasing confidence in international support, a destabilizing security context, and pressure on resources have only served to enhance this attitude.

The nature of negative public perceptions highlights a primary challenge facing Jordan: politically, how does the country negotiate the demands of its populace, while simultaneously accruing the benefits of hosting the Syrian refugee population?

## Governance

The Syrian refugee influx has illuminated a crisis of governance in Jordan. In particular, the government is stretched beyond its capacity to deliver essential services like healthcare, education, and waste management in the municipalities most affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. As the quality of services deteriorates, Jordanian citizens place increasing blame not just on Syrian refugees but also on the government for service delivery failures. This dynamic presents the government with a significant political challenge and constrains its range of options in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis.

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**Humanitarian programming for Syrians has increased frustration among Jordanian citizens due to perceived inequities in the distribution of aid and services.**

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To make matters worse, the advent of humanitarian programming for Syrians has increased frustration among Jordanian citizens due to perceived inequities in the distribution of aid and services. Eighty-four percent of Jordanians believe Syrians are unfairly supported financially.<sup>12</sup>

Politically, this is alarming for Jordanian officials because public perceptions of a government's inability to deliver adequate services can undermine political legitimacy.

The Syrian refugee crisis also provides an opportunity for Jordan to strengthen local institutions in cooperation with the humanitarian community. International donors and humanitarian implementers must provide targeted aid that can strengthen local systems of governance in Jordan, both enabling Jordan to respond to the refugee influx and leaving municipalities more effective in service provision than before the Syrian crisis.

## Education

As public schools became saturated with Syrian refugees, host communities expressed concern about shortened class times, overcrowded classrooms, and double-shifting.<sup>13</sup> Prior to the arrival of the Syrian refugees, Jordan was making advances in the education sector, leading to heightened public and government frustration over the recent stressors on public schools.

Over half of the Syrian refugee population in Jordan is under the age of eighteen, placing large demands on educational capacity.<sup>14</sup> Jordan has opened 98 additional double-shifted schools to alleviate pressures on classroom size.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the proportion of students attending double-shifted schools increased from 7.6 percent in 2009 to 13.4 percent in 2014.<sup>16</sup> This has significantly set back the Ministry of Education's ambition to reduce the number of double-shifted schools across the country.<sup>17</sup> In Amman and Irbid, nearly one-half of schools suffer from overcrowding and have limited capacity to absorb additional students.<sup>18</sup>

The stress on educational capacity has increased host-community tensions. A recent assessment by REACH, a joint initiative by two nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Program, found 55 percent of Syrian and Jordanian respondents reported challenges to education as “‘very’ or ‘extremely’ urgent.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the survey found 61 percent of Jordanians reported access to education caused community tensions.

## Healthcare

Recent pressures from the refugee influx threaten healthcare delivery in Jordan. Prior to the crisis, Jordan established an impressive network of primary health-care centers, supported by secondary and tertiary care facilities, to provide medical access to all citizens within 10 kilometers (about 6 miles) of their residence. With the influx of Syrian refugees, these centers face overburdened patient loads and a shortage of medicines and vaccinations, frustrating government efforts to remain on track with its health sector development goals.

The Jordanian healthcare system has come under pressure in terms of both finances and service capacity. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of Syrian outpatient visits to primary care centers increased from 68 in January 2012 to 15,975 in March 2013.<sup>20</sup> The number of Syrian refugee admissions to government hospitals also increased from 300 to 10,330 over that period.<sup>21</sup> As a result of capacity burdens, Jordanians have been increasingly directed to private centers and hospitals to receive care.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for some citizens, the influx of Syrian refugees has rendered healthcare less accessible and more expensive.

Jordan has also witnessed the reemergence of previously eradicated communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, polio, and measles. The provision of vaccinations to Syrians has simultaneously been one of the most important public health missions in Jordan and one of the costliest services provided to Syrian refugees.<sup>23</sup>

Community tensions are rising in response to pressures on the healthcare system. In another REACH survey, 64 percent of Jordanians and 56 percent of Syrians reported that access to healthcare contributed to tensions in their communities.<sup>24</sup> Of the Jordanians surveyed, 60 percent cited overcrowded healthcare centers as a principal concern.<sup>25</sup>

Stress on the healthcare system in Jordan has led to a restriction in services available to Syrian refugees. When Syrians began arriving in Jordan, the government guaranteed free access to primary and secondary healthcare centers for registered Syrians living in host communities. However, in November 2014, the government repealed free medical services for Syrian refugees, citing an overburdened health sector and budget.

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### Shelter

With over 80 percent of Syrians living outside of camps, refugees have had a major impact on the Jordanian housing market.<sup>26</sup> The Syrian refugee crisis inundated Jordan amid a chronic shortage of low-income housing. The increased demand for housing stimulated by Syrians drove up rental prices in the six northern Jordanian municipalities and further stressed availability of affordable housing. In two towns heavily settled by Syrian refugees, Mafraq and Ramtha, some rental prices rose to six times their precrisis rates, while average rental prices nearly tripled.<sup>27</sup> Stress on the housing sector displaced both poor Jordanians and Syrians from the housing market.

Jordanians indicate competition over access to shelter is a major driver of tension. The increase in rent also imposes a social cost on Jordanian host communities; Jordanians report that the inflated housing costs force young people to delay their marriages, because they cannot afford new housing, further contributing to social frustrations stemming from the influx of refugees.<sup>28</sup>

### Waste Management

Waste management presents a significant challenge in many saturated Jordanian municipalities. Solid waste management was cited by a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study as the most affected service in 33 of 36 surveyed towns.<sup>29</sup> The influx of Syrian refugees increased solid waste volume by 340 tons daily.<sup>30</sup> In Mafraq alone, refugees contributed almost an additional 60 tons of waste per day.<sup>31</sup> The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated the total fiscal cost for municipal governments originating from the Syrian refugee crisis amounted to around \$25.4 million in 2013 and \$33.0 million in 2014.<sup>32</sup>

As solid waste generation exceeds the capacity of local municipalities to collect and dispose, the increasingly visible buildup of waste in public contributes to community frustrations. In the UNDP survey, 13 percent of respondents in Irbid and 5 percent of those in Mafraq reported the influx of refugees to be the principal cause of solid waste management challenges, while 35 percent of respondents in Irbid and 22 percent of those in Mafraq blamed the municipality's lack of capacity to collect solid waste.<sup>33</sup> This provides an example of how the influx of Syrian refugees has increased local frustrations against the Jordanian government, alarming officials.

The additional waste generation has exacerbated preexisting pressures on waste management, in which service capacities in northern municipalities were already exceeded, funding already fell short of need, and collection supplies were already inefficient.

## Economics

In conversations with Jordanian citizens and government officials, references to Syrian refugees as a critical factor responsible for Jordan's economic woes are common. However, the Jordanian economy was already struggling with destabilizing elements before the Syrian crisis; indeed, much of Jordan's economic malaise does not stem from the presence of Syrian refugees but rather from preexisting economic conditions.

In fact, the influx of Syrian refugees has actually benefited Jordan in many ways: Syrians bolster consumer demand, increase foreign aid, and create jobs. These positive impacts are understated among the Jordanian public, but have contributed to the struggling Jordanian economy since 2012.

Nonetheless, the Syrian refugee crisis exacerbates Jordan's negative economic trends in three primary ways: the extension of public and social services to Syrian refugees strains government funds; increased demand inflates the prices of finite goods, like housing; and competition over jobs in the informal sector leads to the depression of wages and worsened economic situations for the poorest Jordanians.

While the negative impacts of the refugee crisis in Jordan are overstated, the economic burden of hosting the Syrians accrues mostly to vulnerable Jordanian populations. This phenomenon exacerbates the perception of the growing gap between marginalized and elite Jordanians—contributing to a shift in the political discourse within the kingdom and raising concerns about the political viability of the current economic structures.

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**The economic burden of hosting Syrian refugees accrues mostly to vulnerable Jordanian populations. This exacerbates the perception of the growing gap between marginalized and elite Jordanians.**

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### Preexisting Economic Instability

As a resource-poor country, Jordan relies on foreign assistance for economic stability, rendering its economy extremely vulnerable to exogenous economic shocks. Just before the arrival of Syrian refugees, Jordan's economy was experiencing a significant period of contraction, as the economy suffered from two such jolts. First, ripples from the global financial crisis of 2008 shook the foundations of Jordan's economy, leading to a significant reduction in foreign direct investment and private capital flows to Amman.<sup>34</sup> Second, the Arab uprisings triggered a regional economic downturn and destabilized several of Jordan's key trading partners. For example, disruptions to the flow of natural gas from Egypt sparked volatile fluctuations in the regional oil supply and prices. Declining global commodity prices, restricted exports, and reduced remittances negatively impacted Jordan's economy during this period.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, Jordan's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate shrank from 7.9 percent in 2008 to 2.3 percent in 2010.<sup>36</sup> The precipitous drop had negative implications for unemployment and rising commodity prices in Jordan. The timing of the economic crisis and arrival of Syrian refugees fueled public perceptions that Jordan's economic hardships were a result of the Syrian presence, even though regional instability was the primary culprit.

### Unemployment

Many Jordanians blame the influx of Syrian refugees for increased levels of unemployment.

The International Labor Organization reported unemployment among Jordanians grew from 14.5 percent in March 2011 to 22 percent in 2014.<sup>37</sup> Though Syrians cannot legally work in Jordan, the organization estimated 160,000 Syrians were employed in the informal job sector, particularly in agricultural, construction, and service jobs.<sup>38</sup> According to the survey published by the International Labor Organization, 96 percent of Jordanians believed Syrians were taking their jobs.<sup>39</sup> Despite the Syrian presence, it is more likely the regional and international economic crisis, along with Jordan's preexisting structural economic issues, are responsible for the rise in unemployment.

The Jordanian-government-produced *Needs Assessment Review* offered two principal alternative factors for the rise in unemployment. First, during the years 2010–2013, the working age population grew disproportionately compared with the general population, overwhelming the job market. Indeed, in 2004, over 50 percent of Jordan's population was under fifteen years old. Given the youth bulge, Jordan would have had to sustain a growth rate of 7 percent to 8 percent just to keep the unemployment rate constant.<sup>40</sup> Second, a government fiscal consolidation program dramatically reduced the number of public-sector jobs available.<sup>41</sup> Thus, young Jordanians who otherwise would have entered the public workforce became jobless just as the economy contracted and the private sector faltered.

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**Competition between Jordanian laborers and Syrians contributes to the perception that Syrian participation in the workforce has directly contributed to Jordanian job losses.**

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National data demonstrated that declines in Jordanian employment during the period of 2010–2013 took place in job markets that did not employ substantial numbers of Syrian refugees.<sup>42</sup> During these years, Jordan witnessed job losses in the formal sector, including in transport and storage, administrative services, utilities production, arts and entertainment, foreign organizations, and water supply and waste management. The majority of Syrians, however, are employed in the informal sector, such as in construction (40 percent),<sup>43</sup> wholesale and retail commerce (23 percent), manufacturing (12 percent), and accommodation and food service (8 percent).<sup>44</sup> Each of these sectors actually experienced Jordanian employment growth over the period of 2010–2013.<sup>45</sup>

The growth of the informal sector carries negative consequences. Principally, the contraction of the formal sector and increasing informal employment means more Jordanians are working low-wage, low-skilled jobs. Increased job competition in the informal market, led by the entry of both Jordanians and Syrians, has displaced laborers and worsened work conditions. Moreover, competition between displaced Jordanian laborers and Syrians contributes to the perception that Syrian participation in the workforce has directly contributed to Jordanian job losses. However, the worsening formal labor market is the principal issue.

Though the majority of informal workers in Jordan are migrants, the sector also employs Jordan's most vulnerable populations. Thus, any displacement impacting Jordanian workers within the informal sector disproportionately impacts Jordan's most marginalized, those already working for the lowest wages in low-skilled jobs in sectors like agriculture, retail trade, and commerce. For example, even though the construction sector has witnessed overall employment growth, the share of total Jordanian workers employed in construction declined from 9 percent to 7 percent between March 2011 and March 2014. Thirty percent of Jordanian workers who were employed in construction and agriculture in 2011 no longer work in these sectors in 2015.<sup>46</sup>

Reports suggest the suppression of wages in Jordan's informal economic sector represents the most tangible negative impact of the Syrian entry into the Jordanian workforce.<sup>47</sup> Downward pressure on wages in the informal employment market threatens to make the economic situation of Jordanians who rely on them untenable. The 14 percent of Jordanians living below the poverty line rely on wages from informal employment for half of their earnings.<sup>48</sup> Thus, suppressing wages not only increases labor exploitation and deteriorates work standards as job competition in the informal sector grows but also encourages negative coping mechanisms like child labor and intensifies poverty among the most vulnerable Jordanian communities. The World Bank also contends that the downward pressure on wages may be causing a decrease in the Jordanian national labor force participation rate.<sup>49</sup>

The entrance of Syrians into the informal sectors of the economy has increased marginalization in Jordan. As the country's most vulnerable populations bear the brunt of the consequences in the form of downward pressure on wages and increasing unemployment, Jordanian businesses benefit from increased Syrian demand and a larger workforce. This challenge is rooted in the high degree of informality in Jordan's economy.

### **Budget Impacts**

In addition to education, healthcare, and waste management, Syrian refugees also benefit from untargeted government subsidies for water, bread, and gas. The Jordanian government estimates the total fiscal impact of the Syrian crisis on the 2015 budget will be approximately \$2.1 billion.<sup>50</sup>

### Economics: Positive Impacts and Opportunities

Although many analysts, government officials, and Jordanian citizens focus on the negative impacts of the Syrian refugee influx, the economy has also benefited from the population increase. Propelled by the influx of Syrian refugees, increased public investment along with growth in the manufacturing, construction, transport, communication, and service sectors led the real GDP growth rate to increase by 2.7 percent in 2012, according to the World Bank.<sup>51</sup>

Private consumption continued to drive economic growth in 2013 and 2014 with increases in foreign direct investments and the relocation of Syrian business to Jordan.<sup>52</sup> Real GDP grew by 2.8 percent in 2013

and 3.1 percent in 2014.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the consumption of Syrian refugees contributed to economic growth, yet increases in Jordanian consumption also drove GDP expansion. The primary destabilizing economic factor was the deterioration of trade—an indication that economic malaise does not primarily stem from the refugee presence and that the conflicts in surrounding nations play a significant part. The reality of economic challenges in Jordan

indicates restricting the number of Syrian refugees will not fix the country's more insidious economic challenges.

Significantly, the international community has also expanded foreign aid and development grants in the wake of the crisis. Between 2012 and 2015, Jordan received an unprecedented amount of international aid contributing to an increase in public investment buoying GDP growth. In 2012, foreign grants and loans amounted to \$3.1 billion, more than four times the total received in 2011 and more than double the money received in any year since 2000.<sup>54</sup> U.S. economic aid to the Jordanian government alone reached \$700 million in both 2014 and 2015, almost double the amount provided by the United States in 2011.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly, the Syrian refugee crisis contributed to the spike in foreign funding. Indeed, the annual budgeted cost of the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan amounts to 3 percent of Jordan's GDP.<sup>56</sup> However, donor fatigue is setting in, and many government and humanitarian appeals have not been met.

### Public Perceptions Shape the Response

The fact that Syrian refugees arrived just as Jordan faced substantial economic troubles made the population an easy scapegoat for the kingdom's deteriorating economic situation. Even though the positive impacts of the Syrian refugee population in Jordan are significant, they are much less visible than the negative trends in Jordan's economy. Thus, while the Syrian refugee crisis actually supports Jordan's economy in some critical respects, it does little to ameliorate the political challenges the government faces.

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**The fact that Syrian refugees arrived just as Jordan faced substantial economic troubles made the population an easy scapegoat for the kingdom's deteriorating economic situation.**

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Jordan is broadly constrained in its ability to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis because of dominant perceptions among Jordanians that Syrians are having an extreme negative impact on the economy. A 2015 survey found 95 percent of Jordanian workers agreed Syrians were taking jobs from Jordanians, either “to some extent” or “to a great extent.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, 93 percent of Jordanians believed Syrians were suppressing Jordanian wages, and 40 percent did not believe Syrians were contributing to the country’s economy.<sup>58</sup> Even though these perceptions overstate the negative impacts on Jordan’s economy, they are of paramount political concern to the government because they contribute to the growing political narrative of marginalization in Jordan and have the potential to lead to political destabilization.

## Water

The absolute scarcity of water ranks among the most critical issues confronting Jordan. The desert country’s major water artery—the Jordan River—is nearly depleted before entering Jordanian territory. In fact, the kingdom is the third-poorest country in terms of water in the world.<sup>59</sup> Rapid population growth due to the burgeoning refugee populations, aging water infrastructure, and insufficient water planning all compound the water shortage in Jordan.

The influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan has brought renewed international attention to the country’s water crisis. In the words of Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation Hazim el-Nasser, as reported by Al Jazeera, “We live with [*sic*] a chronic water problem. And we are now at the edge of moving from a chronic water problem into a water crisis. The element that will trigger this movement is the number of Syrian refugees.”<sup>60</sup> To make matters worse, Syrian refugees in Jordan are concentrated in regions already below international and national standards regarding water supplies and sanitation infrastructure.

In response to the Syrian refugee influx, the international aid community and Jordanian government have prioritized addressing the country’s water crisis. Though the Syrian refugee population places stressors on the Jordanian water supply, enhanced focus on the development of water infrastructure and promotion of conservation practices can provide sustained benefits to the Hashemite Kingdom over time.

### Preexisting Water Crisis in Jordan

Geography, regional politics, and resource mismanagement all contributed to a severe water shortage in the country, which government officials and analysts have widely recognized since the 1970s.<sup>61</sup>

The World Bank estimates that a country possessing an annual per capita threshold of 1,000 cubic meters of water or more is “water secure”—meaning that the country has enough water to provide for drinking, sanitation, industry, and agriculture. In 1946, when Jordan became independent from the

United Kingdom, each citizen among its population of 538,000 had access to 3,600 cubic meters of freshwater.<sup>62</sup> However, by 2008, Jordanian population growth and decades of overconsumption rendered the water supply a mere 145 cubic meters per person. According to precrisis estimates, annual per capita supply would reach 90 cubic meters by 2025.<sup>63</sup>

Only 37 percent of Jordan's water supply comes from easily replenishable surface water sources, and these are diminishing rapidly.<sup>64</sup> In 2009, prior to the crisis in Syria, the Jordanian minister of water and irrigation exclaimed, "We have no surface water left, no rivers, no lakes—nothing whatsoever."<sup>65</sup> Left without surface water, the majority of Jordan's water supply comes from underground aquifers, which annual usage depletes at twice the rate the aquifers recharge.<sup>66</sup> When sourced unsustainably, aquifers can collapse or become polluted—destroying their potential for future use.

Faced with a burgeoning water demand, Jordan has very little choice other than to continue extracting water from underground aquifers. However, while Jordan rapidly exhausts its nonreplenishable water sources, approximately 50 percent of all water resources are lost due to old infrastructure, insufficient maintenance, and theft. According to Mercy Corps, an international aid agency, this amounts to at least 76 billion liters lost annually, which, if preserved, could serve 2.6 million people, more than one-third of Jordan's current population.<sup>67</sup>

Jordan also demonstrates a lack of willingness to effectively govern its water resources. Though it has strict laws against unlicensed drilling, the government rarely enforces them largely because Jordan's politically influential tribes operate the illegal wells. Wary of angering the monarchy's principal power base, the water ministry prefers to monitor the illegal wells instead of shutting them down.

Jordan's rapidly growing population—a result of both a high birthrate and refugee immigration—has contributed to its deepening water insecurity by placing extreme pressure on finite resources.<sup>68</sup> Even before the influx of Syrian refugees, Jordan's population was expected to double by 2024, while the water supply was projected to decrease by half.<sup>69</sup> Based on pre-Syrian crisis figures, analysts anticipated Jordan would deplete all of its underground freshwater resources by 2060.<sup>70</sup>

### **Water: Negative Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Jordan**

The drastic population increase in Jordan attributed to the Syrian refugee influx has brought the horizon of water exhaustion much closer. The Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation projected that the demand for water in the kingdom would rise by 16 percent in 2013 and that the water deficit would increase by almost 50 percent in part due to the influx of Syrian refugees.<sup>71</sup> In some areas of Jordan, Syrian refugees have doubled the demand for water.<sup>72</sup>

Communities hosting the largest concentrations of refugees have been hit hardest. According to Mercy Corps, among the northern municipalities, where most of the Syrian refugees live, the average daily supply of water has fallen below 30 liters per person.<sup>73</sup> A supply of 80 liters a day per person is necessary just to satisfy basic needs.<sup>74</sup> In Mafraq City, the water deficit has increased fourfold due to pressures from the Syrian influx.<sup>75</sup>

As the presence of Syrian refugees increases demand, it also discourages water conservation among Jordanians. Citizens in the north are hesitant to save water for fear that the government and humanitarian organizations will redirect unused resources to Syrian refugees. Thus, competition between Jordanians and Syrians over water has exacerbated the threat to Jordan's water supplies.<sup>76</sup>

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**Jordanians in the north are hesitant to save water for fear that the government and humanitarian organizations will redirect unused resources to Syrian refugees.**

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### Learning From Syria

Jordan should pay particular attention to the critical role that mismanagement of water resources played in the political destabilization of Syria during the Arab uprisings. From 2006 to 2010, Syria was struck by one of the most severe droughts in its history, and it caused mass internal migration and widespread malnutrition. The drought was the product not only of environmental factors but also of sustained mismanagement of Syrian natural resources over the course of fifty years.<sup>77</sup>

The failure of the Syrian government to respond appropriately to the drought fueled grievances among the poor rural class and sparked the migration of nearly 1.5 million Syrians from the northeastern agricultural regions to the southern provinces.<sup>78</sup> This internal displacement put pressure on urban areas and widened the gap between the elite and marginalized communities. In Syria, the mass population relocation followed the influx of Iraqi refugees after the outbreak of the 2003 war, which had already stressed urban areas. Notably, the first protests in Syria broke out in Daraa Province, which, as a result of the internal migration from northeastern Syria, experienced discontent in rural areas, population stress in urban areas, and an enlarging chasm between the elite and marginalized Syrian communities.

It should not be lost on Jordanian officials that the water situation in Syria just before the Arab uprisings mirrors the current situation in Jordan. Many of Jordan's practices regarding water resources are unsustainable, massive population inflows into urban areas are straining resources, and water depletion disproportionately impacts marginalized communities.

The water shortage in Jordan is rapidly becoming a threatening political problem. Increased competition over the precious finite resource has sparked host-community tensions, igniting instability in the northern municipalities. The Yarmouk Water Company reported that between 2011 and 2013,



complaints from Jordanian subscribers nearly quadrupled.<sup>79</sup> In the summer of 2012, water shortages sparked multiple protests and riots in Mafraq Governorate. In 2013, the people of Thaghret al-Jub, a small village in rural Mafraq, ran out of water and subsequently barricaded the principal highway, burning tires and demanding affordable water. The situation escalated to the point that King Abdullah II personally arrived at the protest and promised to construct additional water pipelines to the village.<sup>80</sup>

Jordan's water crisis is a complex problem, worsened by the influx of Syrian refugees but rooted in complicated political dynamics including regional water competition, domestic tribal politics, and poor water management. Jordan requires substantial investment in its water sector if the country is to achieve a sustainable practice of water consumption. The Syrian refugee crisis has amplified attention to Jordan's water crisis and led to prioritized responses to this pressing issue. In order to reduce tensions over water resources, international aid organizations have prioritized overdue rehabilitation to water systems that directly benefit Jordanians.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the refugee crisis in Jordan has the potential to contribute to the creation of an environment that incentivizes the transformation of the Jordanian water sector, reorienting the population toward greater conservation practices and environmental consciousness.

## Politics, Tribes, and Identity

### The Political Landscape

Since the Hashemite monarchy's emergence as the political authority in Jordan, its legitimacy has depended on the adept handling of competing interests. Historically, the Hashemites have sought a balance among the East Bank Jordanian tribes, West Bank Palestinians, Islamists, and nationalists. Every population influx into Jordan has impacted this delicate balance, and the Syrian refugee influx is no exception.

Tribal support of the Hashemite monarchy is a critical feature of the state's political legitimacy. During the establishment of Jordan as a contemporary state, the Hashemite family built the emerging identity of the Jordanian nation around the Bedouin tribes. Beyond representing the essential characteristics of Jordanian identity, the East Bank tribes also play a critical role in Jordan's security services, from which the Jordanian government derives its primary source of power. As a consequence, exclusivity around Jordanian identity stems in part from attempts by East Bank Jordanians to preserve their political status within the kingdom.

In recent years, the Jordanian government has experienced a crisis of declining support from tribal leaders. In part, the diminishing support stems from the monarchy's political negotiation between the East Bank tribal leaders and increasingly influential, yet politically marginalized, Palestinian elite. However,

the erosion of support is also a consequence of the marginalization of East Bank rural hinterlands over the past three decades as Jordan has urbanized.<sup>82</sup>

The dynamics introduced by the Syrian refugee crisis have exacerbated the emerging narrative of the marginalized in the political sphere. The strained economy and increased competition over services and resources have sparked frustration in Jordan about the growing chasms between Jordan's marginalized and elite citizens. Though this discourse was present in Jordan before the arrival of the Syrians (it emerged in the late 1980s among the rural East Bank tribes), the refugee population has amplified it in urban areas, further eroding the monarchy's traditional support base.<sup>83</sup>

The East Bank Jordanians are not the only force with which the Jordanian monarchy has to reckon; the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian population within Jordan were vocal in their appeals for reform in the years leading up to the Arab uprisings. The Palestinians increasingly demanded greater representation in the political structures of the country as well as political, social, and economic liberalization. The Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile, called for greater political participation for the Islamic Action Front, its political wing in Jordan.

It was in this complicated context of political juggling that the Syrian refugee crisis overwhelmed Jordan. On the one hand, the refugee crisis helped to suppress national protests and calls for reform by creating a buffer against criticism, buying the government more time to appease each competing political group. On the other hand, the monarchy has had to grapple with the ambitions of the country's key political players—the East Bank Jordanians, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Palestinians—at precisely the moment when the resources of the country are most strained.

### **Shifting Demographics and Citizenship**

Shifting demographics introduced by the Syrian, Iraqi, and Palestinian refugee populations also hold political implications for the kingdom.

Jordan built its political legitimacy around the pillars of East Jordanian national identity. From the early years of the kingdom, the idea that Jordan might become an alternative homeland for Palestinians loomed large in the nation's political psychology. Palestinians are by and large excluded from government, though they form a large percentage of the economic elite. The perceived threat of Palestinians to the East Bank's political hegemony and Jordanian identity plays out in Jordan's Syria refugee policy as the kingdom restricts the entry of Palestinian-Syrian refugees.

As a means to bolster the traditional state identity, Jordan also has restrictive nationality laws. Legally, Jordanian women do not have the right to pass their nationality on to their children. Thus, if a Jordanian woman marries a foreigner (anyone without Jordanian nationality), her husband and children are not granted citizenship rights. However, it is likely that as the percentage

of Jordanian-born noncitizens increases within the kingdom, Jordan's much-criticized patrilineal citizenship law will become less tenable.

The protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis carries further political implications for Jordan. A generation from now, Syrians who have made a life in Jordan will add to the demographic of non-Jordanian individuals, Palestinians and Iraqis among them, who live, unrepresented and as second-class citizens, within the kingdom. This shifting demographic threatens to raise future political questions about who deserves citizenship and will force the more challenging discussion of who actually is Jordanian.

## Jordanian and Humanitarian Policy Responses

Public frustrations over the impact of Syrian refugees in Jordan have proven a powerful motivator in the Jordanian government's development of policies toward Syrian refugees, often to deleterious effect for the human security of Syrians. Resource pressures, worsening economic situations for Jordan's vulnerable populations, and increasing perceptions of governance failures within host communities have alarmed officials. Since mid-2014, the vulnerability of Syrian refugees has deepened as Jordan has limited refugee inflows, violated international non-refoulement laws, and restricted services to Syrians already in the country.

### Evolution of Syrian Refugee Policy

By the time Syrian refugees arrived in Jordan, the country was already saturated with refugees and wary of accepting more. Previous experiences with Palestinian and Iraqi refugees raised concerns over the permanence of refugee populations and the dangerous implications of welcoming refugees amid regional economic, political, and security challenges. These experiences informed the development of the country's Syrian refugee policy.

Refugees began to come to northern Jordan with the outbreak of a violent regime crackdown on political demonstrations in Syria. Nearly 2,000 Syrians arrived in Jordan by the end of 2011, many believing they would soon return to their homes in Syria.<sup>84</sup> However, the following year witnessed a greater flood of refugees into Jordan.

As it became clear the influx would only accelerate, the UNHCR and the Jordanian government hastily opened Zaatari refugee camp over the course of two hot weeks in July 2012. The initial several hundred residents multiplied to 15,000 by late August.<sup>85</sup> Now in the fifth year of the Syrian civil war, Zaatari has grown into one of the most densely concentrated population centers in the region, the fourth-largest "city" in Jordan, and the second-largest refugee camp in the world.<sup>86</sup> However, many more Syrian refugees live outside of refugee camps in Jordan's urban municipalities.

Over the course of the conflict in Syria, Jordan has become increasingly wary of its growing Syrian population. As a result, it has significantly restricted protection space for Syrian refugees. The most notable restrictions in protection space have occurred since 2013, with humanitarian and human rights watchdog organizations raising the alarm as Jordan sends refugees back to Syria in violation of international law, closes border crossings, limits refugee movements, and restricts services available to Syrians like its recent repeal of access to free medical care.

The implications of Jordan's narrowing protection space are dire. The world is witnessing one of the worst deteriorations of human security in the twenty-first century. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as of June 2015, 320,000 people have been killed in the civil war.<sup>87</sup> Life expectancy in Syria has fallen by twenty years.<sup>88</sup> Over 11.6 million people have been displaced from their homes, amounting to over half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million.<sup>89</sup> As of July 2015, 4 million have fled the country for neighboring safe havens, with 1 million fleeing in the ten months prior.<sup>90</sup> These statistics illustrate the imperative need for neighboring countries to remain open and accessible to refugees.

Furthermore, the narrowing of services for refugees in Jordan has critical implications as many refugees resort to negative coping mechanisms for survival. The closing protection space, restrictions in movement, lack of access to livelihoods, and diminishing services for refugees in Jordan have convinced increasing numbers of Syrians to return to their homeland or engage in survival prostitution and child labor. Now, more than ever, Syrians need the support of the Jordanian government and humanitarian community. Instead, many refugees confront increasing barriers to basic subsistence.

### **Closed Border Crossings**

Since mid-2013, Jordan has reduced Syrian access to its territory by not admitting refugees across border crossings near southwestern Syrian population centers. At times, Jordan has completely shuttered all border crossings to Syrian refugees. Though these moves have in part been motivated by concerns over security, there are indications that Jordan has also closed its borders as a means to limit the Syrian refugee population.

At the beginning of the conflict, refugees could access Jordan through two official border crossings—Daraa and Nasib—and several informal crossings around them. Restrictions to Jordanian territory began in mid-2013 when the Jordanian government stopped admitting refugees at these crossings along the northwestern part of its border. Consequently, Syrian refugees who wish to cross into Jordan have to travel to informal border crossings in the eastern

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Sweida Province through exposed, desolate, and dangerous desert, significantly increasing the hardship of entering Jordan.

Alarmingly, indications suggest Jordan has at times unofficially closed its entire Syrian border, effectively stopping all refugee migration. Though the government of Jordan has insisted its borders have remained open, mounting evidence indicates otherwise. Despite continuing violence, Syrian arrivals into Jordan plummeted from more than 1,800 per day in early 2013 to fewer than 200 in late 2014.<sup>91</sup> From October to December 2014, the UNHCR registered only 2,900 new arrivals into Jordan, compared with almost 15,000 between July and September 2014.<sup>92</sup>

Satellite imagery along the Syrian-Jordanian border corroborates humanitarian speculation that Jordan has at times informally closed its borders. According to satellite monitoring by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, approximately 5,000 Syrians were waiting at Jordanian border areas in the eastern desert in October 2014.<sup>93</sup> This represents a 43 percent increase in internally displaced people in the border region from July 25, 2014, suggesting Syrians were prevented from crossing into Jordan at the border.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the UNHCR reported the Jordan Armed Forces prevented humanitarian agencies from reaching the area and delivering services to the Syrian asylum seekers during this period.<sup>95</sup>

Undoubtedly, reduced access to border crossings has carried significant humanitarian implications, from stranding vulnerable Syrians in informal border settlements to deterring immigration to Jordan.

### **Refoulement—A Violation of International Law**

In addition to Jordan's informal closure of its borders, human rights monitors have reported increasing rates of refugee deportation back to Syria. These deportations likely amount to a violation of the principle in international customary law that prohibits the deportation of individuals who have the right to be recognized as refugees, known as non-refoulement.

Credible reports published by human rights monitors and aid organizations have recorded instances of deportations of refugees registered with the UNHCR, among them women, children, medical workers, and injured people.<sup>96</sup> Humanitarian organizations have also released credible reports of increasing numbers of refugees turned away at official crossings.<sup>97</sup> In October 2014, aid agencies reported anywhere from 45 to 80 percent of asylum seekers who reached Jordan's borders were sent back to Syria before they had the opportunity to register with the UNHCR.<sup>98</sup>

Jordanian deportations and nonadmission of Syrians have mostly afflicted asylum seekers who possess invalid documentation or have traveled back and forth between Syria and Jordan. This reflects Jordanian anxiety over the deteriorating regional security situation, but it is also a consequence of increasing social, economic, and political tensions in Jordan.

Palestinian refugees from Syria have suffered disproportionate rates of nonadmission and refoulement, revealing an overtly political dimension to Jordan's refugee policy. As early as 2012, Jordan refused entry for Palestinian refugees from Syria, before formalizing the policy the next year.<sup>99</sup> In November 2014, the spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Chris Gunness, announced the Jordanian government had prohibited the entry of any Palestinians from Syria, and there were over 100 reported cases of involuntary repatriation of Palestinian refugees from Jordan to Syria.<sup>100</sup>

### **Restriction of Services and Movement**

In 2014, Syrian refugees witnessed a contraction of Jordanian services and a reduced tolerance of refugee presence in urban areas. The government began forcibly returning Syrians to refugee camps from urban areas, restricting the movement of urban refugees, and limiting Syrian access to healthcare outside of the camps. As a consequence, Syrian refugees are increasingly unlikely to renew or regularize their status with the government, thereby curbing their access to services in Jordan. Unregistered refugees also face heightened risks of exploitation and deportation back to Syria.

In order to access humanitarian and state-provided services outside of camps, Syrian refugees have to obtain a UNHCR asylum-seeker certificate and a Ministry of Interior service card. Until July 2014, the Jordanian government did not regularly enforce official refugee camp “bailout” policies, in which refugees are required to obtain sponsorship from a Jordanian citizen and pay a fee to leave the camps.<sup>101</sup> This effectively enabled Syrians to move between urban and camp areas with few restrictions.<sup>102</sup> During this period, Syrians who had not left the refugee camps through official channels were still able to register for urban documentation and services outside of the camps.

In the latter half of 2014, however, Jordanian authorities began enforcing official bailout regulations. Refugees who left the camps without acquiring a bailout faced increasing restrictions in the acquisition of Ministry of Interior service cards and possible relocation to the camps. Likewise, the Jordanian government asked the UNHCR not to provide asylum-seeker certificates, which enable access to humanitarian services outside of the camps, to refugees who left the camps after July 14, 2014, without officially obtaining a bailout. The decision made by the government of Jordan has effectively meant that no refugees are permitted to leave the camps legally.

In early 2015, the government of Jordan initiated an ongoing urban verification exercise to reissue service cards, return confiscated identity documents, and biometrically register Syrian refugees living in urban areas. Despite assurances by the government that camp bailout requirements would not be enforced during the verification activities,

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the humanitarian community feared the campaign could lead to further forced relocations to the camps and refoulements.<sup>103</sup> In particular, unregistered refugees or those with forged identity documents face an increasingly restricted protection space within the country. The reverification exercise has raised concerns that these individuals might face deportation back to Syria.

Furthermore, in late November 2014, the government of Jordan reversed its policy of allowing Syrians to access healthcare services for free. The government cited the extreme financial burden on Jordan as the reason for the decision. Since the decision was made, Syrian refugees have had to pay the same rates at hospitals as uninsured Jordanians. Though the rates are still highly subsidized, the additional cost puts stress on vulnerable Syrians who do not have access to livelihoods. As a consequence, humanitarian actors have witnessed increasing numbers of urban refugees seeking camp health services. Though an economically driven choice, the decision represents a significant restriction in the protection space for Syrian refugees who are legally unable to work. Notably, the Kuwaiti and Jordanian Red Crescent Societies signed a \$500 million agreement in July 2015 to provide medical services to Jordanians free of charge at the Jordan Red Crescent Hospital for one year.<sup>104</sup>

### **No Access to Livelihoods**

Access to livelihoods ranks among the principal concerns of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Five years into the war, many Syrians have sold off their valuable belongings and now rely almost solely on international aid for subsistence. Though Syrians are nominally able to acquire working permits in Jordan, the government rarely provides them. Consequently, as previously discussed, Syrians seek work in the informal sector in Jordan.

As with many other dynamics of the Syrian refugee crisis, the livelihoods issue in Jordan can largely be considered a political challenge for the Jordanian government. Even though the Jordanian government tacitly allows Syrians to work in the informal market, the public's broad perception that Syrian refugees are stealing Jordanian jobs provides the government with little incentive to offer formal opportunities for Syrian employment. It is worth mentioning that the Jordanian government is also hesitant to provide Syrians with any opportunities that might regulate their presence within Jordan, perceiving work permits as the first step toward Syrian residency in Jordan.

However, relegating Syrian refugees to the informal market has incredibly negative consequences for Jordan. In addition to suppressing wages for vulnerable Jordanian populations working in the informal sector, the policy of refusing to grant work permits to Syrian refugees has created an underclass that increasingly relies on negative coping mechanisms to subsist. As the Syrian conflict persists, over time this policy could lead to severe consequences for Jordan that are generally associated with extreme poverty, including criminal behavior and the development of black-market economies. Furthermore,

concentrating Syrian refugees in camps is not the answer either. History has demonstrated (both in Jordan and elsewhere) that long-term refugee camps come with many social and security challenges that plague host countries. Conversely, formalizing the working Syrian population would allow the Jordanian government to regulate refugee workers, ensure adequate wages for both Syrian and Jordanian populations, and prevent the cultivation of negative coping mechanisms among all vulnerable populations within Jordan.

## Restrictions in International Protection

### Deteriorations in International Funding

International humanitarian organizations were forced to restrict aid to Syrians throughout 2014 due to funding shortages. In fact, by June 2015, the international community had funded only 23 percent of the requested budget for the 2015–2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan.<sup>105</sup> In Jordan, only \$272 million of the plan's \$1.2 billion funding request had been met.<sup>106</sup>

The underfunding of the Syrian refugee response has had two impacts. First, Syrians have experienced a tangible restriction of services. Second, the Jordanian government has become increasingly critical of the international community's willingness and ability to help it provide for Syrian refugees, sparking a restriction in Jordanian protection space.

One of the most substantial impacts for Syrian refugees in Jordan has been the deterioration of food assistance. In the last quarter of 2014, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) regularly confronted funding shortages, threatening essential food assistance to Syrian refugees across the region. Though an emergency appeal enabled the WFP to reinstate food assistance by mid-December 2014, food vouchers to Syrians in Jordan were only restored to two-thirds of their previous value.<sup>107</sup> This assistance is still not guaranteed month to month, which has significant consequences for Syrian refugees in Jordan, 85 percent of whom reported they relied on WFP food assistance to meet the cost of their basic needs.<sup>108</sup> In July 2015, the WFP feared that it would be forced to cut all aid for its 440,000 Syrian beneficiaries in Jordan in August 2015 due to underfunding.<sup>109</sup> However, a U.S. donation of \$21.3 million enabled the continuation of WFP aid in Jordan at reduced levels through August. Nonetheless, if the WFP does not receive additional donations, half of all current recipients will lose access to food aid in September.<sup>110</sup> Should this happen, the UNHCR expects many urban refugees to relocate to Azraq refugee camp where the WFP will continue to provide aid.

Humanitarian funding shortages do not foster Jordanian confidence in the international community's willingness to support the country as it deals with the complexities of hosting Syrian refugees in the long term. Confronted with

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**International humanitarian organizations were forced to restrict aid to Syrians throughout 2014 due to funding shortages.**

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limited donor engagement, Jordan will continue to tighten the restrictions around Syrian admission and service provision, with dire consequences for refugees. Increased marginalization and deteriorating resources paint a bleak picture of the country's future. At this critical moment in time, Jordan requires the increased support of the international community to both encourage its continued protection of Syrian refugees and bolster the stability and prosperity of the country and host communities.

## Maintaining a Protection Space for Refugees

Syrian refugees have absorbed the crushing consequences of the increasingly restrictive protection space within Jordan and deterioration of international funding sources. Jordan has witnessed a growing number of refugees returning to Syria and refugee camps. Once Syrians return to their country, they are denied readmittance to Jordan. This renders the decision to go back devastatingly consequential. However, life in Jordan has become increasingly difficult for Syrian refugees in urban host communities, as savings and opportunities for subsistence have disappeared at the exact moment humanitarian agencies have been forced to reduce aid and the Jordanian government has restricted services.

As of mid-2015, the UNHCR is absorbing 300–350 new arrivals to Azraq refugee camp daily and expects the population to increase by 40,000 by the end of the year.<sup>111</sup> About half of these people are expected to arrive from Jordanian host communities as life there becomes untenable. If the WFP cuts food aid in September 2015, the number is likely to be much higher. As refugee-camp bailout policies are no longer in place, refugees are no longer able to return to host communities after they go back to the camps.

The international community has further failed Syrian refugees by not providing sufficient opportunities for resettlement. Thus, not only does a lack of international support risk the stability of Jordan, but it also jeopardizes the human security of Syrians seeking to flee their failing state. When refugees are forced to decide between a life without hope or dignity in refugee camps and a life under the threat of war, this represents a failure of the international protection regime.

In response to this complex humanitarian environment, the United Nations has spearheaded a new approach to humanitarian assistance that integrates development aid for communities hosting refugees with traditional humanitarian aid. In December 2014, the UNHCR and the UNDP released the Regional Refugee

and Resilience Plan, which represents an emerging paradigm of integrating humanitarian and development resources to address the needs of both displaced populations and host communities. As the Syrian crisis intensifies with no end in sight, the plan is also a bid to expand the traditional sources

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**Syrian refugees have absorbed the crushing consequences of the increasingly restrictive protection space within Jordan and deterioration of international funding sources.**

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of funding available in humanitarian emergency-response assistance to long-term development resources.

The integration of humanitarian and development aid represents the first time that United Nations development and humanitarian actors have worked so closely together in crisis response. The integration of humanitarian and development aid is an appropriate response to the complexities of the Syrian crisis, which threatens the human security of millions of Syrians and the stability of neighboring host countries. As host communities come under increased pressure, it is essential that both refugee and Jordanian communities receive support.

## Conclusion

As the war in Syria persists, actors responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan must shift their policy responses from an emergency basis to sustainable long-term approaches. This reality holds significant implications for the policies of the international community, donor nations, and the Hashemite Kingdom.

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the Syrian refugee population in Jordan provided a convenient distraction from the country's challenges. However, as the fear of a permanent Syrian presence in host communities arose, the initial benefits to the government eroded. Syrians have underscored endemic weaknesses in Jordan's political, economic, and resource infrastructure. Poor Jordanian families have borne the brunt of the impact and have lost economic traction as pressures force breadwinners to work for fewer wages, pay more in rent and for basic goods and services, and compete with Syrians for deteriorating government services like education and healthcare. This has had the associated impact of widening the gap between elite Jordanians and those existing on the economic fringe. To the alarm of officials, Jordan has witnessed the increased vocalization of a marginalized narrative among vulnerable Jordanians.

Ultimately, Jordan faces a political problem in response to the refugee crisis. Negative perceptions of Syrian refugees have constrained the official Jordanian will to respond to the refugee influx in productive ways that could ultimately lessen the negative impact of the Syrian refugee crisis, like formalizing Syrian employment. Thus far, Jordan has too frequently chosen to mitigate host-community tensions in the short term instead of instituting sound policy responses that would assuage the country's endemic challenges in the long term.

As public frustration increases, the government has negotiated rising tensions by limiting service delivery and restricting access to Jordanian territory for Syrian refugees. However, manipulating asylum policies will do little to assuage the challenges that plagued Jordan long before the arrival of the Syrian refugees, emphasizing the politicized nature of refugee politics. Further marginalizing the refugee population will push Syrians deeper into destitution and will, in fact, exacerbate Jordan's long-term problems.

Nonetheless, without the continued support of the international community, Jordan has little incentive to provide for Syrian refugees while it grapples with its own national challenges. As the international community consistently underfunds the needs stemming from the refugee influx, Syrians have witnessed a corresponding restriction of protection space in Jordan. Though Jordan has in fact seen net increases in international aid, donor fatigue triggers fears of becoming responsible for another long-term refugee population. Thus, if host-community tensions and donor fatigue increase in tandem, Jordan will likely continue to erode the protection space for Syrian refugees.

This is a critical moment in the Syrian refugee crisis. Jordan and the international community must shift toward long-term sustainable approaches to provide for both the displaced Syrian population and host communities.

Jordan requires the support of donor nations to confront its most pervasive resource, economic, and governance challenges, while simultaneously maintaining critical humanitarian protection space for Syrian refugees. The international community must work closely with Jordan to ensure both the kingdom's endemic national challenges are addressed and a continued protection space for refugees is maintained within a single framework. Just as the humanitarian community continues to encourage Jordan to keep its borders open, so too must international donors both continue to help Jordan cope with the Syrian population and provide benefits to generous Jordanian host communities.

## Notes

- 1 Yusuf Mansour, “Rentier States,” *Jordan Times*, December 22, 2014, [www.jordantimes.com/opinion/yusuf-mansur/rentier-states-0](http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/yusuf-mansur/rentier-states-0).
- 2 See the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis website: [www.jrp.org](http://www.jrp.org).
- 3 Currently, Lebanon hosts the greatest ratio of refugees to citizens. Jordan hosts the fifth-largest population in absolute terms after Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, and Turkey. United Nations Refugee Agency, *UNHCR: Mid-Year Trends 2014*, (Geneva: UNHCR, January 7, 2015), <http://unhcr.org/54aa91d89.html>.
- 4 UNHCR and UN Development Program, *3RP Regional Progress Report* (June 2015), [www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/3RP-Progress-Report.pdf](http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/3RP-Progress-Report.pdf).
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