

Emerging trends in the Jordanian Host Community: Service Delivery Gaps, Ethnographic Shifts and Social Tension: a Field Study in the Governorates of Jerash and Ajloun

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Abstract

This field research study examines the underlying causes of social tension between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community in Northern Jordan. It does so, moreover, within the framework of the current shift being undertaken by international and local non-governmental organizations from an emergency response to Syrian refugees to a development response. Specifically, such a shift brings with it an increased focus on livelihoods as a means of sustainable economic empowerment. With a focus on livelihoods, however, comes an increase in the potential for tension between employers and employees. Furthermore, this tension complements an already-existing tension that exists between landlords and tenants. Understanding the sources of these types of conflict will help mitigate against future tensions and better facilitate social cohesion amongst Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, host communities, social cohesion, social tension, dispute resolution

1. Introduction

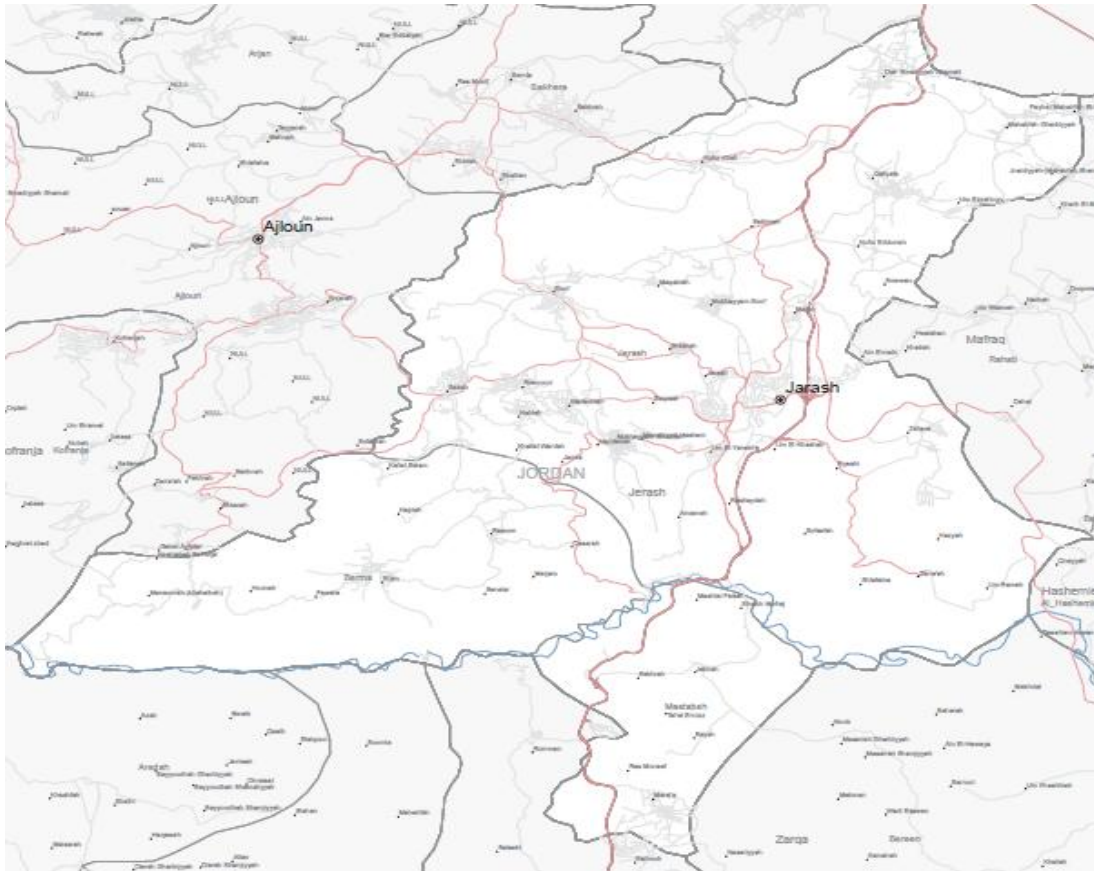
This research study provides an overview and analysis of research undertaken between February 2018 and April 2018. The purpose of this report is to examine the underlying causes of social tension between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community in Northern Jordan, and to help mitigate against future tensions and better facilitate social cohesion between these two communities. This research study is significant in that it will shed light on phenomena within a relatively untouched field in Jordan – that is, the Sociology of Development. In addition, it will allow for key insights from first-hand field research which will allow for a better understanding of the gaps in service delivery that many international and local development organizations provide. This is all the more pertinent because these gaps are arguably exacerbating social tensions between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian Host Community. Therefore, a proper understanding of these root causes can help mitigate against the resulting conflict. Moreover, understanding the gaps in service delivery from both local and international organizations will help explain why more and more Syrian refugees are abruptly moving from rural areas in which they were once very scattered, to more concentrated urban areas in larger governorates. Furthermore, the social tensions that are made present as a result of the lack of available resources for mediating disputes are becoming an area in need of targeted research even beyond the scope of this study, as such underlying tensions are manifesting themselves as the root causes of disputes between landlords and tenants, on the one hand, and employers and employees, on the other. While these are just a couple of host community / refugee relationship structures, they shed light on key areas in which oppressive and coercive tactics can sometimes be used by members of the host community in order to facilitate detention / deportation of refugees. Given that anecdotal evidence illustrates that Syrian refugees are here to stay (i.e., many will not return voluntarily, and the Government of Jordan [GoJ] has already clarified through UNHCR that they will not be forcefully relocated), such disputes must be mitigated even before they occur. Accordingly, this research will help to shed light on how such disputes can be prevented.

1.1 Background: Jerash and Ajloun Governorates Context

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The Governorate of Jerash is located north of Amman, Jordan's capital. It carries the name of its capital and largest city, Jerash City. Jerash Governorate has the smallest area of the 12 governorates of Jordan, yet it has the second highest density in Jordan after Irbid Governorate. Jerash Governorate has twenty-two towns and villages: Sakib, El-Kitté, Souf, Al-Haddadé, Balila, Kufranjé, El-Hseiniat, Deir Il-Liyat, Al-Mastaba, Nahlé, Il-Kfeir, Bani Irsheid, Raymoun, An-Nabi Houd, Burma, Al-Jazzazah, Jubbah, Mirse', Muqbila, Al-Msheirfeh, and Qafqafa. In addition, there are two Palestinian refugee camps in Jerash Governorate, Souf camp near Souf and Gaza (Jerash) camp at Al Ḥaddādah.

According to the 2015 Department of Statistics (DoS) national census, Jerash's total population is 237,059 individuals, or 46,798 households. The breakdown of the population is 167,751 Jordanians (70.76%) and 69,308 (29.24%) non-Jordanians (including 10,884 Syrians [4.59%], and 58,568 [27.7%] of different nationalities). Similarly, the Governorate of Ajloun is located north of Amman, and carries the name of its capital town, Ajloun. It has the fourth highest population density in Jordan (after Irbid, Jerash and Balqa), at 350 people / km. Ajloun Governorate is divided into two administrative departments – the Capital Department and Kofranjah Department. The Capital Department includes 50 towns and villages and includes a population of 137,820, while the Kofranjah Department includes 19 towns and villages and includes a population of 38,260. As of February 16, 2017, Ajloun Governorate has 7,760 persons of concern (UNHCR's Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal).



Refugees in Jerash and Ajloun

The number of Syrian refugees in the Jerash and Ajloun districts has gradually reduced since the conflict in Syria began. According to UNHCR's Syrian Refugee Response Portal, as of 21 January, 2017, the total persons of concern in Jerash are 9,596 and 7,760 in Ajloun (UNHCR, n.d.). This is a decrease from 2015, where there were 10,252 persons of concern in Jerash and 9,089 in Ajloun (UNHCR, n.d.). Interestingly, 2013 UNHCR data shows that refugees make up 2% of the population of both Jerash and Ajloun (UNHCR, Syrian Refugees Living Outside of Camps in Jordan, 2013). Challenges facing these refugees include:

- Lack of legal status
- Obstacles to accessing civil documentation
- Obstacles to accessing basic services
- Restrictions in freedom of movement
- Insecurity of tenure
- Tensions with the host community

2. Literature Review

A desk review was the first research activity carried out in this study. Previous literature reviewed includes REACH assessments reports and UNHCR documents / briefing notes / summaries. The desk review of the report can be found in Annex 1 of this document. Key documents identified include REACH's 2013 Report "Findings of the Household Assessments of Syrian Refugees in Host Communities", among others. While this literature review was helpful in clarifying the types of issues experienced by Syrian refugees in Jerash and Ajloun, the research team was unable to identify any research which filled the gap in knowledge on whether there were ongoing dispute resolution needs of Syrian refugees, and whether and to what extent service providers were successfully servicing Syrian refugees in these locations. The following represents a summary of the key information obtained during the desk review in relation to the issues experienced by Syrian refugees in the Governorates of Jerash / Ajloun:

- (a) *Security of Tenure*: According to the aforementioned REACH report, 95% of Syrian households and 87% of Jordanian households believe that high rent costs have increased social tensions in northern host communities. Indeed, tensions associated with property rights and security of tenure have played out on a number of fronts in Jerash. For example, in both Rashaydeh and Sakib, Jordanian renters claim to have been evicted by Jordanian landlords in favor of refugees, who the landlords presumably felt could be charged more. In Bab Amman and Ajloun, refugees claim feeling taken advantage of by Jordanian landlords in terms of rent costs. In Ajloun in particular, this has resulted in refugees resorting to negative coping mechanisms, such as offering their landlords furniture and belongings in exchange for rent. Approximately 10% of refugees in northern host communities are under immediate threat of eviction as a result of either informally sharing housing with relatives, their presence not being known to landlords, landlords wanting to raise rental costs or being behind on utility payments (REACH Initiative, 2014).
- (b) *Access to legal aid services*: According to UNDP, access to free legal aid and counseling services is both difficult and limited in the Jerash and Ajloun areas, and dispute resolution mechanisms and actors are not easily identifiable (UNDP, 2015-2018).
- (c) *Work Rights Issues*: Social tensions between refugees and the host community in Jerash are further exacerbated through competition for employment opportunities. For example, according to REACH, in Kufr-Khal, Jordanians complain that refugees illegally hired in shops and on farms result in less opportunities for Jordanians. Similarly, in Ain-Janna (Ajloun), Jordanian youth complain of having lost their jobs as a result of refugees who are willing to work for less wages. While tensions associated with access to employment have played out on this front, however, equally important for our purposes is the fact these tensions have also led to protection concerns for refugees. For example, in Kitteh, refugees have resorted to selling vouchers due to a lack of opportunity, and in Ajloun, refugees face the highest percentage of workplace discrimination (REACH Initiative, 2014). In addition, 8% of all households in Jerash claim to have one or more working family member report child employment (REACH Initiative, 2013).

3. Methodology

This research was carried out using a mixed-method approach involving four key methods: 1) A *literature review* of existing documentation on refugee needs and services provided in Jerash and Ajloun, 2) Service Provider Questionnaires (SPQs) administered to service providers (INGOs and NGOs) in order to measure the gaps in their service delivery,

3) Representative Interviews (RIs) undertaken with key leaders from both the host and Syrian communities in order to understand the underlying causes of social tension between them, in addition to the resources that are available to help solve them and 4) Group Discussions (GDs) held to allow for more open-ended answers to the questions at the core of this research study. More specifically, Discourse Analysis will be used to measure the content derived through the above-mentioned methodologies.

Specifically, information that is gathered in bulk will be systematically and thoroughly examined and analyzed so that important and relevant themes can emerge there from. Indeed, this system of thematic emergence will allow this research study to properly measure the outcomes.

4. Data

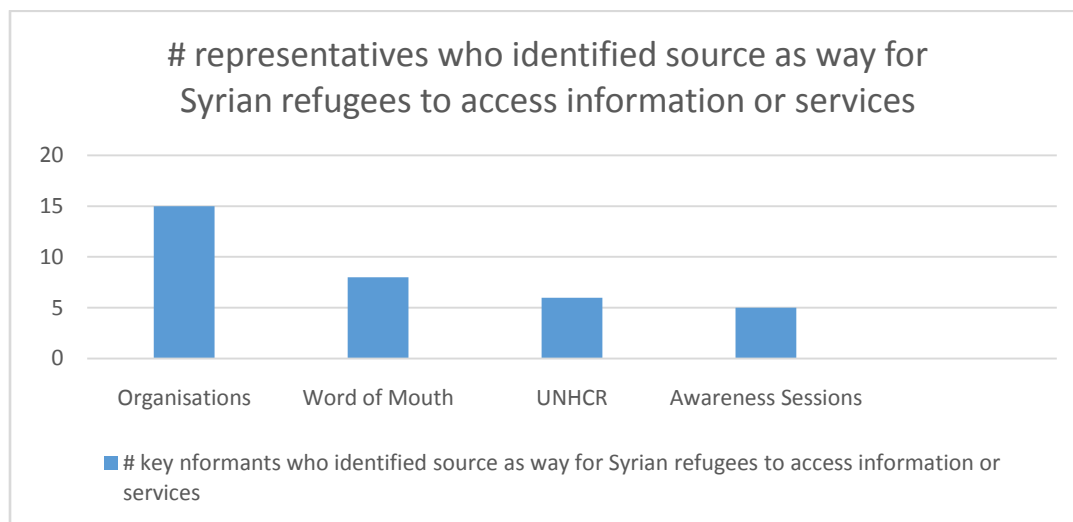
4.1 Summary of the Access to Justice Barriers, Needs and Context Facing Syrian Refugees in Jerash and Ajloun

Interestingly, when asked about why Syrian refugees chose to establish themselves in Jerash and Ajloun, low rents, family relations and the quietness of the location were the main reasons. Yet when asked why they were leaving, job opportunities and access to services were most cited. Similar to the SPQs, The representatives identified a lack of legal aid services as a significant access to justice barrier for Syrians in Jerash and Ajloun. The representatives interviewed could only identify JCLA as the legal aid provider in Jerash, or no legal aid provider at all. The unmet legal needs experienced by Syrian refugees included the spectrum of civil, criminal and family law issues, particularly divorce, custody, child labor, child abuse, early marriage, worker's rights, access to Ministry of Interior card and marriage certificates. Deportation was also raised by two community leaders (both Jordanian), with one fearing that more Syrian refugees would leave the Jerash and Ajloun areas if police continue their "deportation campaigns." While all the informants identified access to justice barriers, a consistent challenge identified was that beneficiaries had a focus and need for tangible assistance (such as shelter, etc) over the intangible legal aid service provision. Social cohesion issues, including tension in relation to tenancy, education and employment issues, were also identified by informants as significant issues faced by Syrians in Jerash and Ajloun. According to one CBO informant, there have been several vocational training programs take place but no job opportunities followed for Syrian refugees. One CBO informant noted that the 70/30 fund distribution under the Jordan Response Plan was a source of increasing tension between Syrians and Jordanians.

4.2 Summary on Successful Access Points and Services Provided in Jerash and Ajloun

Informants commonly identified that Syrian refugees were turning to organizations (INGOs, NGOs, CBOs) for information and access to services, in addition to their community / through word of mouth. The below Graph 2 outlines the main ways in which Syrian refugees are seeking out information to assist them.

Graph 2: Ways in which Syrian refugees seek out access to information and services in Jerash and Ajloun



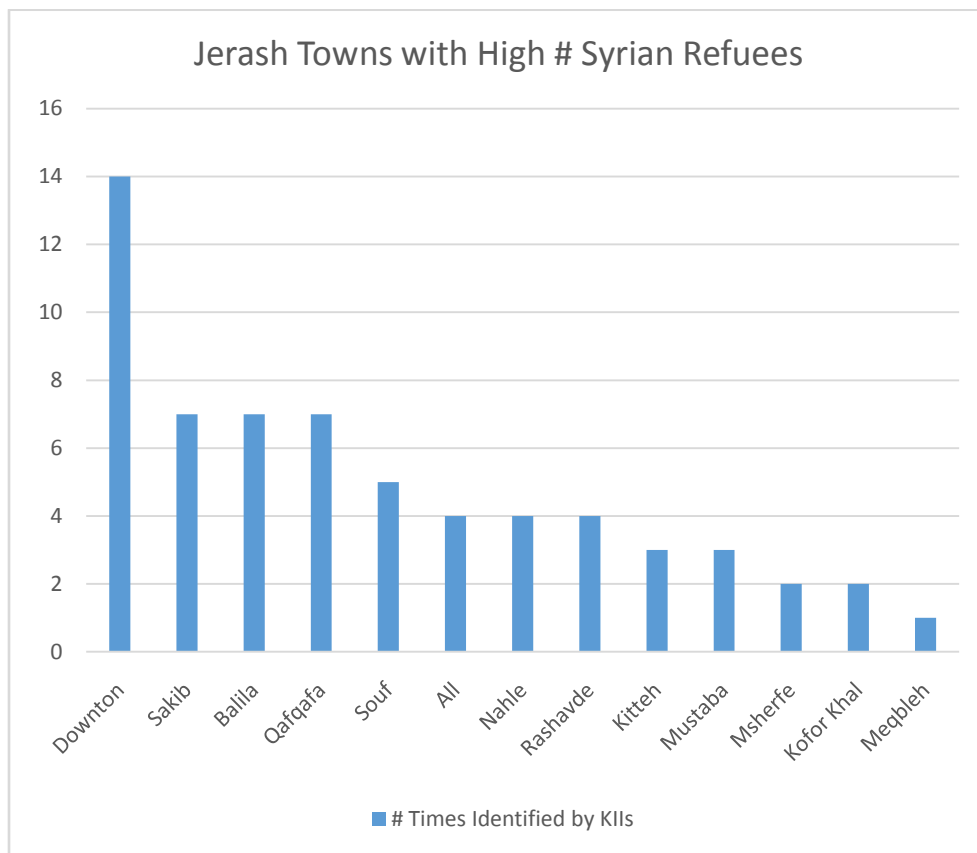
Representatives provided numerous examples of ways in which they (as an organizations) were successfully reaching out to Syrian refugees in Jordan. For example, Save the Children International noted that they utilized Syrian volunteers in their frontline service delivery, for both community mobilization and delivering awareness sessions to Syrian refugees. Save the Children and most other informants also cited working with community leaders, local community based organizations and remote helpdesks as a way of providing more vulnerable Syrian refugees with access to services. Awareness sessions, and outreach through home visits were consistently listed as effective ways to engage with the Syrian refugee community.

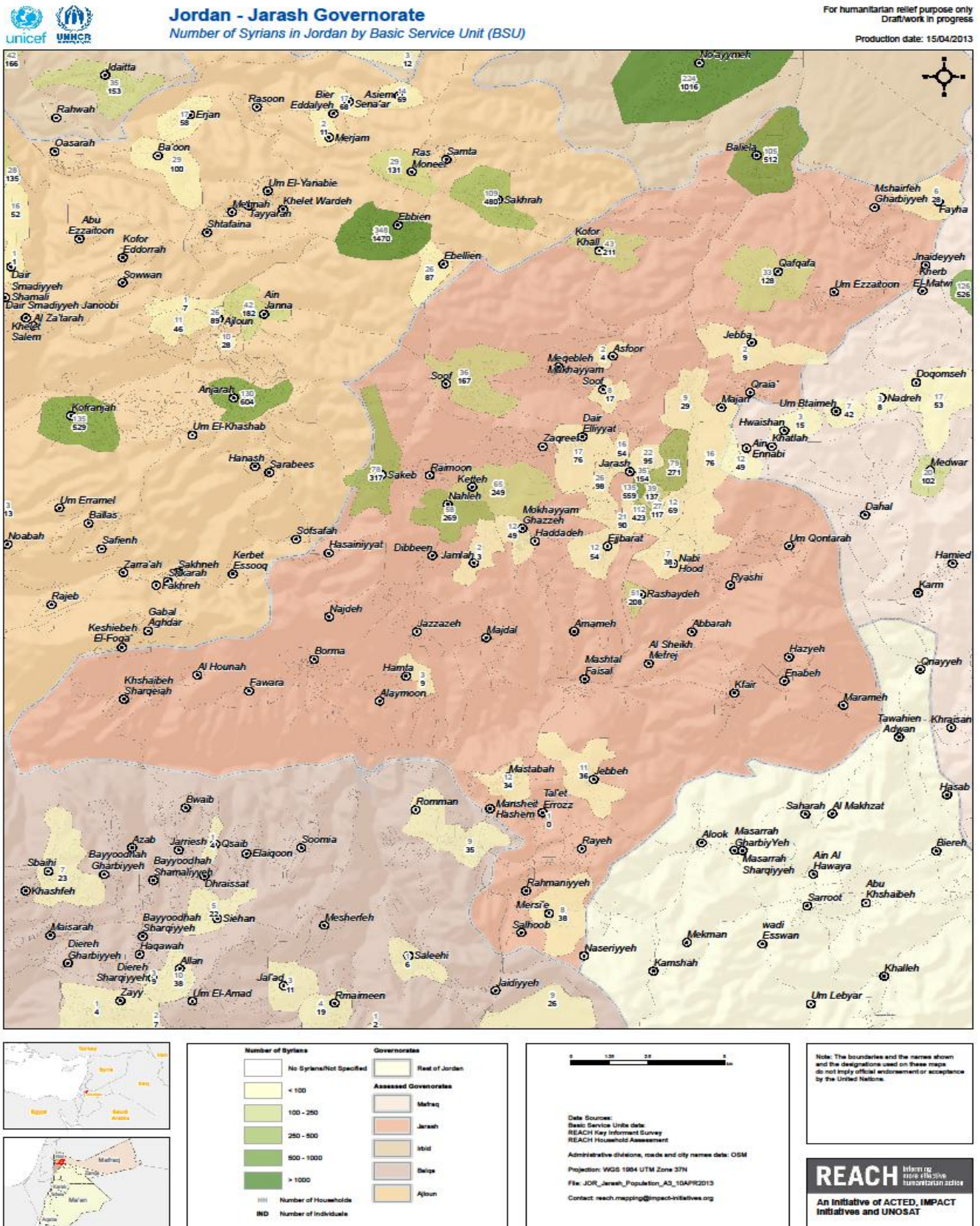
An informant from the Jordan Red Cross also suggested joint INGO/NGO activities as a way to access more beneficiaries. Of note for future community leader activities, young people (community leaders) in Sakeb have started a dispute resolution committee for people in their community. Community leaders identified social media as an effective resource for community mobilization and that the Jordan Red Crescent WhatsApp group is used by Syrian refugees in Jerash as a major source of information on service provision.

4.3 Summary of the Service Delivery Gaps Identified in Jerash and Ajloun

In follow on to the SPQ findings, many representatives identified outreach to remote communities as a significant gap in service delivery, with particularly high concentration of Syrian refugees found in Sakeb, Balila, Kufu Khal, Muqbileh, Soof, Downtown Jerash, Jabal Al-Sheikh Muslah, Jabal Al-Akhthar, Al Rashaydeh, Kiteh, Nahle, Dair Illyat, Amshayrfa, Mustaba, Bertekteen, Gaza Camp and Qafqafa. Due to limited transportation in Jerash and Ajloun, many Syrian refugees were also noted as preferring to move from Jerash to Irbid or Amman where greater amounts of service providers were located. One NGO noted that the most vulnerable refugees are those living on the outskirts of Jerash in informal settlements, including Amshayrfa and Mustaba (identified by Save the Children Jordan). Below are maps of Jerash and Ajloun, with identified areas of high concentrations of refugee populations.

Graph 1: Jerash Towns identified by representative as having a high number of Syrian refugees present





Practically, many RI noted that ineffective projects also led to gaps in service delivery, along with social cohesion issues.

Thematically, many service areas were identified as lacking in the Jerash district, particularly ‘tangible assistance’ (for example, NFIs, FIs, cash for rent), access to health services, and cash assistance. Inconsistencies around accessing work permits was also an identified service delivery issue, and perhaps of growing relevance given the distribution of work permits occurring at a faster pace within more localized entities such as cooperatives. Legal awareness/legal service delivery was only mentioned twice by informants as an issue requiring more service delivery.

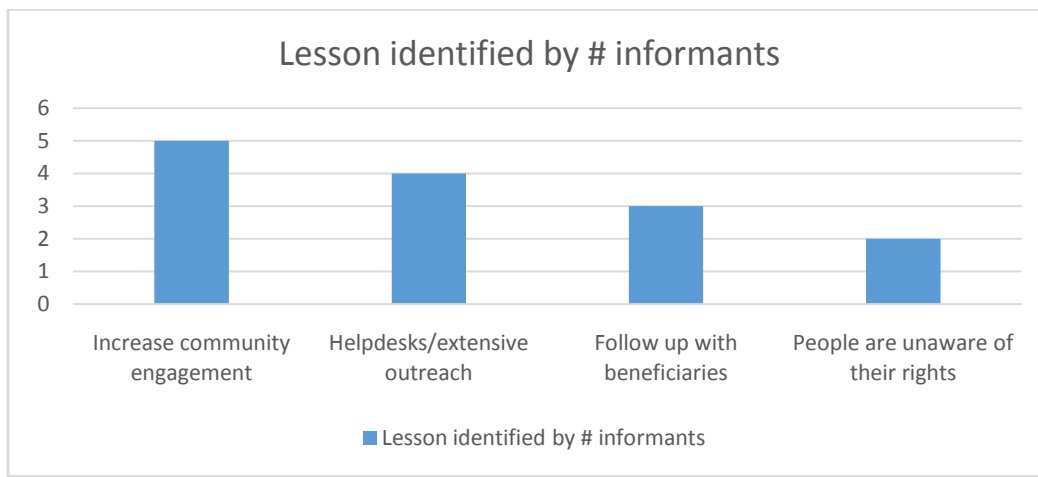
4.4 Summary of the coordination and dispute resolution mechanisms in place in Jerash and Ajloun

Many representatives across the INGO and NGO spectrum noted the lack of any formal coordination mechanisms in place between organizations in Jerash, including: the INGOs IMC, StC International and ICMC. IMC noted that in their experience some beneficiaries travel to Irbid because of referrals to Irbid service providers by Jerash organizations. For example, JHAS, who provide health services in Jerash, refer to Handicap in Irbid because Handicap does not operate in Jerash. In addition to transportation issues, inefficient referral mechanisms also encourage beneficiaries to travel to Irbid rather than receiving access to services in the Jerash district. Many informants noted that Syrian refugees would often turn to community leaders rather than the police to resolve disputes (particularly out of fear of being harassed over status issues).

4.5 Other Suggestions and recommendations by RIs

Establishing/engaging in a referral coordination mechanism between INGOs/NGOs/CBOs was also a consistent suggestion on improving access to services for Syrian refugees in Jerash. It is interesting to also note the reflection on ‘lessons learnt’ by RIs who have been engaging in service delivery in Jerash, as set out in Graph 3 below. In particular, increasing outreach through mobile helpdesks and community engagement initiatives were most commonly listed as the ways in which to effectively engage with Syrian refugees in Jerash.

Graph 3: Lessons learnt by RI on reaching out to Syrian refugees in Jerash



5. Discussion: Key Findings Analysis

Overall, the findings drawn from each research activity address the key objectives set out at the beginning of this report: to examine the underlying causes of social tension between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community in Northern Jordan, and to help mitigate against future tensions and better facilitate social cohesion between these two communities. Not only did the report demonstrate that there is a significant population of vulnerable Syrian refugees in Jerash, but it also identified the dire needs of those refugees.

5.1 There Continues to be a Significant Presence of Syrian Refugees in Jerash and Ajloun

The report identified that there is a reduced but stable population of Syrian refugees in the Jerash and Ajloun Governorates of approximately 18,000 people. The RIs were invaluable in identifying the areas in which there were high numbers of vulnerable Syrian refugees, including in Sakeb, Balila, Kufr Khal, Migebleh, Soof, Downtown Jerash, Jabal Al-Sheikh Muslah, Jabal Al-Akhthar, Al Rashaydeh, Kitteh, Nahle, Dair Illyat, Amshayrfa, Mutaba, Bertekteen, Gaza Camp and Qafqafa.

5.2 There are Ongoing Unmet Legal Aid Needs of Syrian Refugees in Jerash and Ajloun

The SPQs, RIs and GDs all identified the presence of unmet legal aid needs and access to justice barriers faced by Syrian refugees in Jerash. Whilst tangible items dominated the RI and GDs, such as shelter, food, blankets and money, legal aid services were consistently identified as an unmet need. For example, during the RIs and GDs, participants could mostly not identify any legal aid provider in Jerash, or if they did then the Justice Center for Legal Aid was most commonly identified. The legal issues identified included the spectrum of civil, criminal and family law issues, and the RIs and GDs noted the concentration of legal issues in certain geographical areas – for example early marriage was identified as a prevalent issue in Al-Kitteh. Across most locations tenancy and labor disputes were recognized as significant legal issues for Syrian refugees in Jerash, and a cause of social tension within the community. Access to education services was identified as the main source of social tension between Syrian and Jordanians in Jerash. Worryingly, deportation was raised on several occasions by FGD (Jordanian) participants, with one intimating that deportations was significant and systemic by noting that he feared more Syrian refugees would leave the Jerash area if police continued their “deportation campaign”.

5.3 There are Significant Gaps in Service Delivery by Service Providers in Jerash and Ajloun

(1) Service providers are not in accessible locations

SPQs, RIs and FGD participants variously noted that the locations of the service providers were not accessible to Syrian refugees. Most service providers are not based in any of the 18 locations identified by participants as having a high concentration of Syrian refugees. As noted by one of the FGD participants, “Service providers should move their offices from the outskirts to the center of the Jerash market, because it’s really far otherwise. People won’t come to ask questions as long as service providers are distant” – Abd Al Rahman Nassar (Jordanian Community Leader).

(2) Service providers have not been reaching out to the most vulnerable towns

Outreach to remote locations consistently identified as a significant gap in service delivery. In fact, service providers are currently only working in 4 of the 18 identified locations. One NGO noted that the most vulnerable refugees are those living on the outskirts of Jerash in informal settlements, including Amshayfra and Mustaba (identified by Save the Children Jordan). This SPQ, RI and GDs consistently indicated that service providers have not been reaching out to the most vulnerable Syrian refugee populations.

(3) There are poor coordination and referral mechanisms in place in Jerash

Most RIs, SPQs and FGD participants noted that there were few coordination mechanisms in place in Jerash, leading to duplication and lack of awareness about the activities of other agencies. Inefficient referral mechanisms also encourage beneficiaries to travel to Irbid rather than receiving access to services in Jerash. IMC noted that in their experience some beneficiaries travel to Irbid because of referrals to Irbid service providers by Jerash organizations. For example, JHAS, who provide health services in Jerash, refer to Handicap in Irbid because Handicap does not operate in Jerash. What emerged from the research was a lack of access or perceived access to essential services in Jerash. For example, during the RIs when asked why Syrians were leaving, job opportunities and access to services were the most cited reasons.

5.4 Community Engagement Activities have been the most effective methods of service delivery in Jerash and Ajloun

The RIs and GDs identified several ways in which actors are successfully engaging with Syrian refugees in the Jerash governorate. Awareness sessions and outreach through home visits were consistently listed as effective ways to engage with the Syrian refugee community. Although many service providers are conducting such awareness sessions, they have been limited to towns outside of the area where Syrian refugees are highly concentrated. Using Whatsapp groups to disseminate information and connect with other organizations was also another way in which participants were successfully engaging with Syrian refugees. The Jordanian Red Crescent, for example, noted that they have a Whatsapp group of several thousand Syrian refugees. Other actors were using Syrian volunteer and community leaders (both Jordanian and Syrian) to successfully reach out to Syrian refugees. Save the Children International identified as having a strong network of dedicated community leaders who were connected to the CBOs in Jerash. Save the Children’s program involves semi-professionalizing the role of community leaders within their organization through consistent and structured trainings and outreach activities. In Sakeb, a group of young people formed a Youth Committee which undertakes dispute resolution activities in the area.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Service Providers Should Continue Programmatic Activities in Jerash and Ajloun

Significant numbers of vulnerable Syrian refugees remain in Jerash (and Ajloun). The research activities have revealed that unmet needs continue to be a significant issue in Jerash. With limited local or international actors providing services, service providers clearly have a role to play in providing essential information and counseling services in both governorates.

6.2 Service Providers Should Relocate to More Accessible Locations

RI and FGD participants in particular acknowledged that service providers were not in convenient locations for vulnerable people to access. Given this, one key recommendation from the research is that service provider activities should be occurring on other, more accessible and visible locations. Through the SPQs, RIs and GDs, Downtown Jerash was consistently identified as being an area with a high density Syrian refugee population. Downtown Jerash is also centrally located to bus and other major transportation routes. Many of the INGO, NGO and CBOs contacted have an office in Downtown Jerash, but those who do not should move there.

With the resources required to relocate service providers, this report recommends three possible options in which service providers can base themselves in the Jerash community:

- (1) *Establishing fully equipped stand-alone Community Centers in Downtown Jerash and conducting outreach activities to the towns identified as having high concentrations of Syrian refugees.* This would involve essentially moving service providers and their functions to other locations, where the size of the new location would allow for the same activities to occur including awareness sessions and hosting external actors like JCLA and UNHCR. This option is more expensive, as it would require the identification, renting and refurbishing of entirely new office spaces. The benefits of continuing to have stand-alone service centers include increased security and stability of operational activity. The drawbacks include not necessarily take into account the correlating recommendation of engaging in outreach as a main way of accessing Syrian refugees in Jerash.
- (2) *Establishing small stand-alone Community Centers in Downtown Jerash and conducting most outreach in the community.* Under this option, the Community Centers would have small awareness rooms and space for service providers to work from, but would not continue to provide dedicated space for other service providers to undertake activities including external actors / referral partners (JCLA, UNHCR). Service providers would conduct the majority of its activities from CBOs strategically located in areas where high numbers of Syrian refugees live. This option is less expensive but riskier as operational activity will largely be based out of the premises of another organization. However, this approach also enhances service providers' ability to more directly and sustainably engage with Syrian refugees in the Jerash governorate, whilst still retaining a base from which to operate.
- (3) *Co-locating within CBOs located in several locations around Jerash and Ajloun, including the Downtown area.* This option is the least expensive and would require service providers to have a base within CBOs. While riskier in terms of the operational activity being entirely dependent on the relationship with the CBO, this approach is perhaps the strongest community engagement approach.

6.3 Service Providers' Outreach Activities Should Focus on New Identified Towns and New Methods of Engagement

As outlined above, service providers have been conducting outreach in only 4 of the 18 towns identified as having a high density Syrian refugee population. Given this, all outreach activities should refocus on these newly mapped locations, including identifying and engaging with CBOs from those locations as a priority. Informal Tent Settlements and other towns on the outskirts of Jerash and Ajloun should be given priority as they have been consistently identified as underserved areas. Service providers should also look at harnessing the successful methods adopted by other organizations, including:

- (1) Developing or utilizing existing Whatsapp Groups to disseminate information about activities
- (2) Utilizing Syrian Volunteers and Community Leaders in a Structured and Sustainable manner through developing structured training courses and regularly assigning service delivery activities to those actors. Actors that were identified to engage with include the Youth Committee established in Sakeb to undertake dispute resolution activities, and the network of community leaders established by Save the Children International. Save the Children have also formed a Committee of Community Leaders, which they utilize to help ensure their activities are informed and up to date. Other methods recommended include:

- (1) Undertaking a regular trends analysis of specific geographic locations as issues tend to vary by location. For example, in Al-Kitteh early marriage emerged as the biggest issue compared to other locations where workplace exploitation was the most prevalent.

6.4 Service Providers Should Engage through the Establishment and Enhancement of Referral and Coordination Mechanisms in Jerash and Ajloun

Limited coordination and referral mechanisms exist in Jerash and Ajloun. This has led to incorrect or inefficient referrals, and Syrian refugees having limited knowledge about the services potentially available to them in Jerash and Ajloun. Given this, service providers in Jerash and Ajloun should focus on working with key local actors to establish referral and mapping activities. JAHD have recently commenced such an activity and it is recommended that other service providers support and assist in their referral and planned mapping activities for the Jerash and Ajloun governorates.

7. Conclusion

This research study provided an overview and analysis of research undertaken between February 2018 and April 2018. The purpose of this report was to examine the underlying causes of social tension between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community in Northern Jordan, and to provide recommendations to service providers in order to help mitigate against future tensions and better facilitate social cohesion between these two communities.

This research study is significant in that it shed light on phenomena within a relatively untouched field in Jordan – that is, the Sociology of Development. In addition, it allowed for key insights from first-hand field research which will facilitate a better understanding of the gaps in service delivery that many international and local development organizations provide. Understanding the gaps in service delivery from both local and international organizations helps explain why more and more Syrian refugees are abruptly moving from rural areas in which they were once very scattered, to more concentrated urban areas in larger governorates. Suggestions for further research include targeting of the social tensions that are made present as a result of the lack of available resources for mediating disputes, because – as this research study showed – such underlying tensions are manifesting themselves as the root causes of disputes between landlords and tenants, on the one hand, and employers and employees, on the other.

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