

**TOWARDS A MORE COHESIVE SOCIETY: AN EVALUATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES IN ALLEVIATING SOCIAL DISAGREEMENT IN URBAN (NON-CAMP) AREAS IN JORDAN**

**Basema Al Atom, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, Jordan University of Science and Technology

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this article is to evaluate the service delivery provided by international non-governmental and local organizations in the North of Jordan in terms of how these services have changed from the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis until the time of writing. Specifically, it will illustrate how services have changed as a result of development needs related to sustainability – for example, with refugees seeking livelihood and employability opportunities more than regulatory aid (as was the case during the immediate onset of the crisis).*

**KEYWORDS:** Sociology, Ethnography, Refugees, Syria Crisis, Social Disagreement

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Numerous international non-governmental organizations have historically been operative in Jordan. This is because Jordan has traditionally served as a hub for development practice. Moreover, this is because Jordan has opened its doors – in a manner more prevalent than its neighbors – to refugees from surrounding areas. Having said that, and within the specific context of the Syrian refugee crisis, development practice is currently undergoing a change from an *emergency* to a *development* response. Moreover, with this shift in practical aims, more emphasis is being placed on livelihoods and employability in effort to afford Syrian refugees with a sustainable manner of living so as to provide a buffer against negative coping outlets (eg, child labor at the expense of education, and early marriage). In addition, the geographical areas in which Syrian refugees first settled upon arrival are now changing. For example, Syrian refugees who had originally settled across Northern Jordan are now becoming heavily concentrated in larger governorates, such as in the Governorate of Irbid. In light of these demographic shifts and changes within development practice, this article thus explores the role of organizations in addressing disagreement between Syrian refugees and Jordanians in urban areas in Jordan.

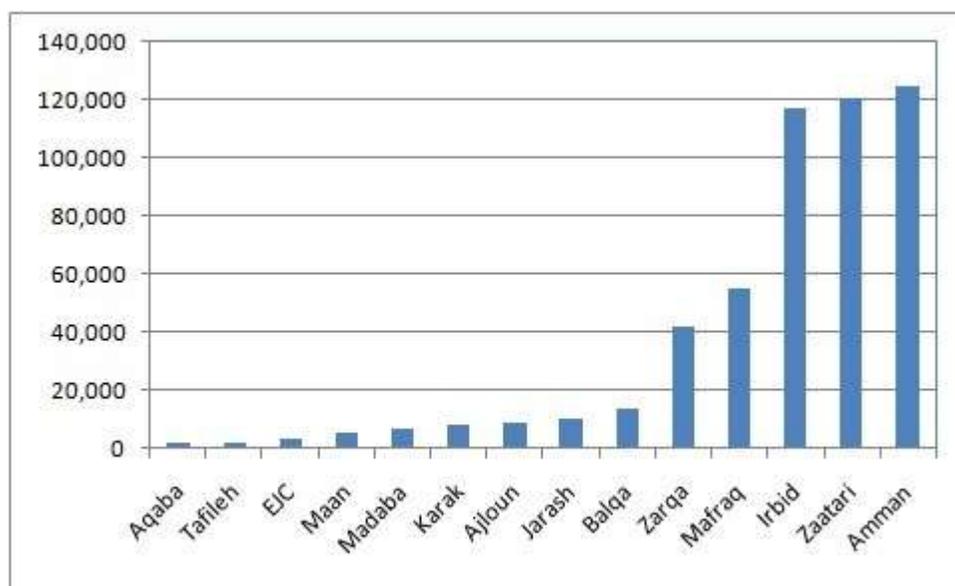
## **LITERATURE / THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

The literature review clarified the service delivery needs and forms of aid currently given. Results were then used to provide recommendations regarding the manner in which international non-governmental organizations and local non-governmental organizations could then proceed in helping to sustain the switch from emergency response to development aid. Significant reports included REACH's "Findings of the Key Informant Assessments of Syrian Householders in Host Communities (2013)," Housing and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees, Thematic Assessment Report (2014)," Livelihoods, Employment and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees, Thematic Assessment Report (2014)" and "Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities, Assessment Report (2014)."

The REACH document holds that ninety-five percent of refugees homes and eighty-seven percent of Jordanian homes claim that rental price have exacerbated social tensions in rural cities of Northern Jordan. Difficulties such as these have played out in a number of ways. For example, Jordanian residents claim to have been kicked out because of property-owner abilities to charge higher rental prices. The United Nations Development Programme claims that minimal *pro bono* organizations exist in Northern Jordan to resolve such issues. Therefore, residents and property-owners are forced to find their own resolution mechanisms. These types of disagreements are further promulgated as a result of the lack of economic opportunities for both refugees and Jordanian workers. What was already a difficult economy pre-crisis has now become even more formidable given refugees' willingness to work hard jobs for low wages.

According to REACH, ninety-five percent of Syrians and eighty-seven percent of Jordanians claim that spikes in property prices have created a dismal environment for the social fabric of rural communities. For example, some Jordanians have claimed to have been kicked out of their homes by their property-owners because the property-owner held that Syrian refugees would offer more to rent. Additionally, some refugees claim that Jordanian landlords exploit the fact that local and international development organizations financially back many of the refugees' expenses, and thus hike prices up even more. This sometimes causes Syrian refugees to trade their own personal goods to remain in their homes. Thus, almost ten percent of individuals are liable to be kicked out of their homes at any given time.

Importantly, no *pro bono* services were offered to resolve social disagreement until very recently. The problem is – however – that the organizations that do provide *pro bono* services are not readily available except for in larger cities rather than rural areas. Social disagreements are further exacerbated by the fact that Jordanian employees claim that Syrian refugees are being selected and preferred by employees as a result of their willingness to work for less pay.



**Table 1: Concentration of Syrian Refugees in Urban (Non-Camp) Areas**

## METHODOLOGY

This article's methodology consists of a literature review of existing literature on service delivery to evaluate needs and gaps, particularly as they exist in rural areas. Interviews of international non-governmental organizations will also be conducted in order to understand what has worked for them and what has failed to work, and to better gauge their perceptions of the changes that are needed in service delivery going forward. Additionally, interviews will be conducted with significant representatives of the Syrian refugee community and the host community, in order to answer similar questions. Lastly, group-think workshops will be conducted to understand more collective – as opposed to individual – perceptions of the recommended way forward.

One international non-governmental organization, one local non-governmental organization and two community representatives were interviewed for this research. In addition, one group-think workshop was held with nine individuals from within the rural communities.

Limitations of the study include the fact that program implementation demands on behalf of the international non-government and local non-governmental organizations – in addition to the pressure they were under due to their donor requirements – allowed only for a short time window to participate in scheduling the interviews. In addition, their organizational headquarters insisted that the organizations remain anonymous for confidentiality purposes.

The international non-governmental organization questionnaire sought the following information: activity themes, types of mobilization, observed changes in refugee needs, challenges in meeting these need and suggested way forward. The representative questionnaire consisted of perceived

challenges, reason for settling in particular geographical areas and perceptions of vulnerability. Group-think workshops were open-ended to allow for the greatest substance of answers as possible. The following is an overview of the types of questions asked each entity:

1. What made you decide to move to Northern Jordan as opposed to other areas of the country?
  - Why do you think others decided to move here as opposed to other areas of the country?
  - Are you / they considering transitioning to a different area?
  - What are living conditions like and what needs are being unmet as international and local non-governmental organizations undertake a switch from emergency response to development / livelihood response?
2. What needs do you feel are not being met by these organizations? And what can organizations do to better meet these needs?
3. Communal Conditions
  - a- How is the relationship between the host community and the refugee community?
  - b- How can Jordanians and Syrian refugees better work together?
  - c- What difficulties are these groups facing?

## RESULTS / FINDINGS

### INGOs

The international non-governmental organization interviews were given to allow for a better understanding of the level at which such organizations work working in Northern Jordan and what types of services were being provided. These interviews also provided geographically-informative information in terms of what types of mobilization were best for each area.

The suggestions from these organizations can be summarized as follows: mobilization efforts as opposed to waiting for refugees to approach the organizations proved to be more efficient. This is because transportation is a leading issue in traveling across Northern Jordan; inter-agency referrals were not seen as being used enough, and were cited as being an important vehicle for increasing services. Refugees are no longer seeking monetary assistance as much as they are non-monetary assistance. For example, rather than seeking rental payments for shelter, they are seeking assistance with registering their children in school.

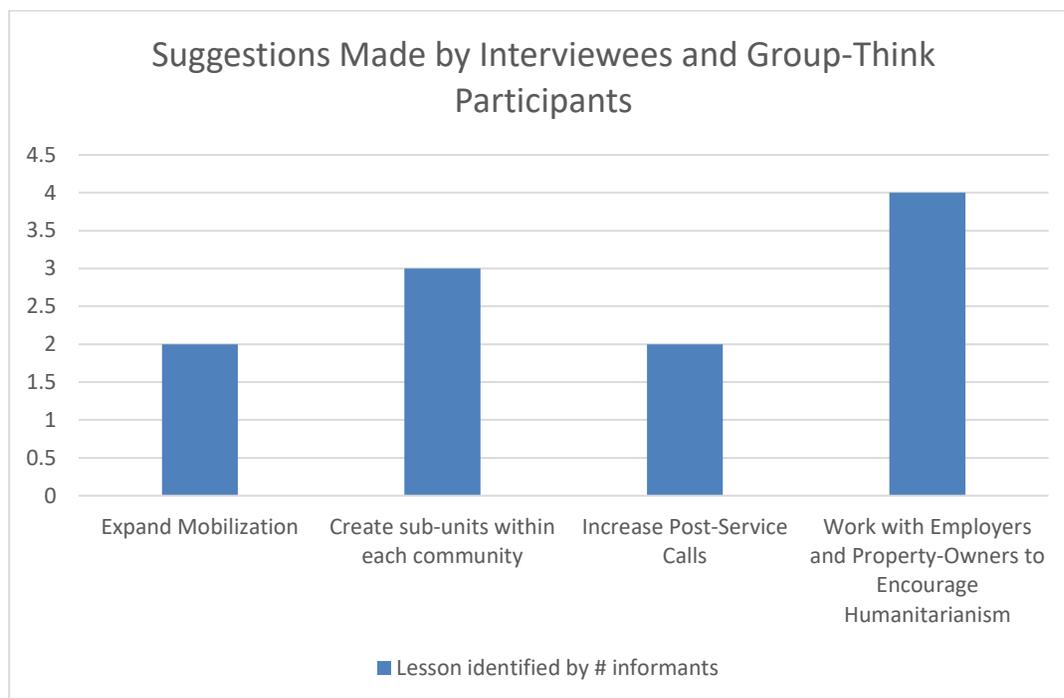
### Representatives

Representatives from the community importantly cited employer and property-owner uses of coercion as the main source of social disagreement within the community of Northern Jordan. Their main suggestions were that both parties be made more aware of the importance of employing refugees and renting properties to refugees with humanitarian principles in mind. Interestingly, the representatives also mentioned that there is a lack of service delivery in the Northern communities, and suggested that mobilization efforts be employed in order to help reach the distant pockets of residents that can otherwise not be reached. They also mentioned the need to encourage more *pro bono* work so that Syrian refugees' needs can be met.

### Group-Think Workshop

A Group-Think Workshop questionnaire was open-ended in order to gain the most unstructured answers possible from participants, as the lack of structure in such instances is often the most useful. In addition, participants were from different locations within the Northern part of Jordan, in order to provide the most diverse level of answers. A summary of their responses revealed that there is a lack of awareness among employers and property-owners regarding the need to provide their services within the principles of humanitarianism, and that failure to do so can easily lead to

situations of conflict. Accordingly, such circumstances would create additional difficulty as organizations undertook a switch from emergency response to development-oriented services.



## DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION

Across the board, the international non-governmental organizations, representatives and group-think participants seconded the fact that more awareness needs to be raised in order to encourage property-owners and employers to implement sound humanitarian practices. In addition, service providers need to find ways to reach refugees rather than wait for them to come to their organizational hubs, as doing so ends up being only more costly for an already-economically hurting segment of society. Lastly, economic opportunities need to be more in line with the talents and work experience of Syrian refugees, and governmental certification agencies should enhance its efforts in terms of certifying previous experience. It is only within this framework that development organizations in Jordan can undertake a sound transition from emergency response to development programming while at the same time preventing further social disagreement.

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