Late Registration: Problems Affecting the Access to Education for Syrian Refugees in Amman, Jordan

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### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background on Syria</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Education System</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background on Jordan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Registration</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right to Education</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordanian Education System</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks Associated with the Non-education of Refugees</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems Faced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Refugees</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Government</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. International Organizations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Needs</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Referenced</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Reasons for Not Attending School in Za’atari</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This honors thesis examines the problems affecting Syrian refugees trying to attend school in Amman, Jordan. Since the beginning of the Syrian Conflict in 2011, refugees in Amman have faced numerous problems facing registration for school. These include issues of safety, the UNHCR registration process and the inability to enroll because of their educational background. The problems associated with accessing education are not the fault of the government or the implementing organizations but are a reflection of the enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis and the lack of funds to provide services for all refugees.

The research done to write this thesis was done in Amman, Jordan in the winter of 2014. Through interviews and observation I was able to identify the difficulties that refugees, implementing organizations and the government were facing in enrolling refugees in school. With increasing destabilization in Jordan due to the influx of refugees, education is essential in creating normalcy. Access to education services in crisis situations are essential to creating a sense of constancy but without a long term commitment to providing these services by the international community this stability will not be reached.
Introduction

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has a primary school enrollment rate of 90.7% and an adult literacy rate of 95.9%.1 With indicators such as this, one could assume that for what is seen by many as a developing country, Jordan puts a high value on education. But what Jordanians also value is an open border policy to refugees from all conflicts and backgrounds. With neighboring conflicts in Palestine, Iraq and Syria since its creation in 1948, Jordan has come to see the majority of its 6.5 million-person population migrate from different countries.2 Due to various ethnic backgrounds that have settled in Jordan, different values have been placed upon education, politics and religion. None of these differences have caused major upheaval within the country because of the open-mindedness from both host communities and those who have resettled. With mass migration into Jordan occurring in 1948, 1963, 1991 and 2003, Jordan’s institutions have been set up to provide and accommodate for refugees. However, the mass exodus of Syrians because of the recent Syrian conflict has resulted in Jordan’s inability to provide for the needs of those settling in the country.3 Even with the help of international donors and implementing agencies, only the basic needs of these refugees tend to be met. For this reason, education and the ability to access different forms of education is failing.

This thesis addresses access to education for Syrian refugees living within the capital of Jordan, Amman. I argue that the problems facing Syrian refugees and their


education are directly related to a lack of knowledge, assistance and safety that are necessary to attend school.

For the past three years, refugees have streamed across the border into Jordan settling across the country or into one of the two refugee camps: Azraq and Za’atari. Each family is well aware of the reality that fleeing their country brings, especially the loss of stability and a real roof over their heads. Given that the alternative of staying in Syria is a very real fear of death, since over 140,000 people have died in the conflict, 7,000 of whom are children, the idea of leaving behind all possessions, extended family members, and essentially everything they have every worked for is only a slightly better option. 4 For most, Syria before the war offered a sense of stability, but that does not mean that Syrians did not face challenges. Most school-aged children had been in some way affected by instability before the war. Within their memories these children have seen their neighbors and communities strained to support their fellow countrymen.

For years before the war, a massive drought crippled the country forcing a massive migration into the urban areas. Many outside observers, including the United States Department of State, saw this as a warning sign of coming instability. The Syrian UN Food and Agriculture representative, Abdullah bin Yehia, requested 20.2 million USD in assistance for over 1 million people, roughly 5% of the total population, who were adversely affected by this drought. In the most rural of provinces, many families did not have the funds to relocate the entire family to an urban area in hopes of finding jobs. For this reason over 20,000 men moved to cities without their families. Those left behind did

not have any income and were left to fend for themselves; many lived in extremely impoverished conditions. As a result, children were taken out of school and forced to work to put food on the table at night. As a US State Department cable predicted:

Children would likely be pulled from school, he warned, in order to seek a source of income for families left behind. In addition the migration of 15,000 unskilled laborers would add to the social and economic pressures presently at play in major Syrian cities. A system already burdened by a large Iraqi refugee population may not be able to absorb another influx of displaced persons, Yehia explained, particularly at this time of rising costs, growing dissatisfaction of the middle class, and perceived weakening of the social fabric and security structures that Syrians have come to expect and – in some cases – rely on.5

This instability coupled with the existence of over 1 million Iraqi refugees that had just recently resettled in these urban areas, set the scene for the coming revolution. So many of those who began to protest against the government did so in desperation for improved conditions for the many who had migrated into these urban areas. Social institutions such as hospitals and schools were overcrowded and poorly managed, forcing people to seek other options, which in most cases meant providing these services themselves.

The educational standard for Syria was set by the Ba’ath Party in 1966 and was guaranteed under Article 37 of the Constitution as “free of charge at all its levels and compulsory at the primary level.”6 Before 1966 the illiteracy rate across the country was


66% and by the year 2000, the educational system cut this down to less than 18%. While this is an impressive feat, it was not widely implemented. In urban areas, the Ministry of Education set up social awareness campaigns to encourage families to enroll their children. It was the rural area or the outskirts of cities where the government did not have the resources to provide these campaigns or the schools themselves. As economic and social tensions began to rise in the mid-2000s as a result of the drought and the global recession, schools began to fall into disrepair. For those children still in school from 2006 on, dated curricula, facilities, and access all hindered their ability to learn. 

For these reasons, it is no surprise that in recent years the value placed on education for Syrians has been directly related to their ability to access suitable educational services. With the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2010, many families saw the danger associated with attending school, as well as the lack of a stable educational system, as reasons to withdraw their children from school altogether. With danger throughout the country and over 6.5 million internally displaced people, education has not been a top priority nor was enforced in regions governed by the government or rebel groups. Of the estimated 22 million people still in Syria, 2.3 million are children who are not attending school. For roughly the past decade the government, due to the preoccupancy with social and economic instability, has not enforced education within Syria. While the toll of the ongoing civil war and preceding economic hardship cannot be undermined, this paper will focus on the education of Syrians who have fled to Jordan. To focus on that, one must understand the

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7 UNESCO. *Syria Education Profile*. http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/multimedia/institut es/UIL/confintea/national_reports/Arab

8 Private Conversation with Syrians in Jordan. February 2014.

priorities and hardships that school aged children and their families have endured in the quest for education. Refugees throughout the world, both the 2.5 million registered and millions more that are estimated to be unregistered, have all gone through this same ordeal.

Jordan, a country that for years has been known for its important role of welcoming refugees from across the region, also has struggled to successfully provide for those who have resettled within their country as well as their own citizens. Thus, Jordan has become known across the world as, “perpetually unable to fund itself.”\(^\text{10}\) The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is seemingly an island of stability in the middle of one of the most conflicted areas of the world. Bordered by Iraq, the West Bank, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria; Jordan, a small nation of 6.5 million people, holds significance as an important regional ally for most of the developed world. This is not only for its location but also for their peace agreement with Israel which is seem as fundamental in keeping the region semi-stable. It is for these reasons and conditions, that Jordan receives the third highest amount of foreign aid from the United States at over $13 billion in 2013 and over £500 million from the European Union.\(^\text{11}\)

Jordan’s reliance on foreign aid has stemmed from its extreme hospitality towards those displaced from conflicts in neighboring countries. This started in the early 1940s when the creation of the state of Israel began to become a reality, and continues today where men, women, and children from Iraq and Syria are crossing the border into Jordan.

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\(^\text{10}\)Gause, Gregory. September 2013. How the Middle East’s Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring. Brookings Institute.


daily by the hundreds. In a country without natural resources (Jordan is the 3rd most water insecure country in the world) beyond manpower and no national industry, Jordan’s debt totals 72% of its GDP. Yet as of 2008, over 2 million Palestinians claimed to be living in Jordan, from 2003-2007 over 1 million Iraqis settled in Jordan, and as of February 6, 2014 there were an estimated 1.3 million Syrians. For these reasons, Jordan not only struggles to survive financially but also to provide for the basic needs of those seeking refuge in the Kingdom. The Jordanian Human Development Report, since its first publication in 2001, has emphasized “The combination of limited resources and environmental constraints coupled with a growing population and rapid urbanization have posed an enduring challenge for both policy-makers and citizens, especially the poor.” In an interview given in 2011, King Abdullah II expressed his duty to help the Syrian people,

Whoever comes across the border will be afforded whatever support Jordan can give. We’ve had lots of refugees come into Jordan historically, not that that makes [us] very comfortable, but we have to

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open our arms . . . But we have to make sure that we position Jordan in a way that could assist, whatever happens, the Syrian people.16

This continued hospitality by the Jordanian government has resulted in documented Syrian refugees making up 10% of Jordan’s population. Of these refugees, 200,000 live in the refugee camps.17 The remaining refugees are dispersed across the country with a registered 150,000 residing in the capital, Amman.18 While these numbers are officially what is released and what the development of projects is based upon, the Jordanian government estimates that there are actually 1.3 million Syrians within the country of which only 600,000 are registered. 19 The registration process of a refugee entering into Jordan is what causes this discrepancy; many Syrians entered into Jordan with the means to support themselves and saw the registration process with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as unnecessary.

The process of registration of refugees falls primarily under the umbrella of state duties. UNHCR’s mission in registering is to assume this from the state if they do not always have the means to comply with UN standards for registration. UNHCR’s registration process is meant to record, verify and update “information on persons of concern to


UNHCR with the aim of protecting and documenting them and of implementing durable solutions.” This includes cash assistance, protection of basic rights and free health and education services.\textsuperscript{20} For those refugees without the appropriate sponsor to allow them into Jordan, they are immediately funneled into one of the two refugee camps, Azraq or Zaatari, where registration occurs immediately.\textsuperscript{21} Those refugees with a sponsor must take it upon themselves to register at the UNHCR offices in Amman. This is both time consuming and almost impossible for relocating families living outside of the city. To get to Amman, there may be costly bus rides that the entire family must take. If the family was able to schedule an appointment then the entire family must be present and able to describe their needs. For those refugees unable to schedule an appointment, lines regularly go for two blocks outside the offices and the wait may be several hours. While there, many papers must be filled out and ready to present to determine refugee status.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the burden of actually registering at the UNHCR office, something that most families do not see as a priority unless they are desperate, many believe that it is dangerous to register. When surveyed by Jordanian officials about why they had chosen to not register, many of the refugees disclosed that they were afraid that the information might be leaked back into Syria. This would then make it unable for them to return or may be dangerous for their relatives that remain in Syria. Others who chose not to register did


\textsuperscript{22} Private Conversation with UNHCR Jordan employee. February 2014.
so because they did not see any advantage to doing so. Many believed that because they were well enough off on their own, there was no need to register with UNHCR. 23

With unpredictable numbers and an already strained economy, Jordan does not have the government services to provide for these refugees. It is only through UNHCR and their partnership with other non-governmental organizations combined with their collective ability to provide and support the government in the giving of free public health care and education, that allows the refugees to receive these services. With only an estimated 50% of refugees being registered, the Jordanian government is unable to estimate effectively the resources and services that are necessary to support the population24. This puts even more stress on the economy and a bigger demand on private low cost providers of these services.

For those refugees who do register with UNHCR, they primarily have two major reasons for doing so. The first is that they are extremely poor and unable to live without cash and food assistance. These refugees are generally located in the Amman area and therefore have an easier time getting to the UNHCR office. The second reason that refugees register is to apply for asylum for other countries.25 Many see Jordan as a stop on a family’s route to a more stable and secure country. By registering with UNHCR, these refugees are then able to apply for asylum in other countries across Western Europe and North


24 Ibid.

These refugees are generally better off and can afford the cost of living in their new countries. Both reasons for registering show different sides of the spectrum, those who are too poor to afford the necessities and those who can afford to again uproot their families to a safer, more stable environment. However, neither paints a comprehensive picture of the services that refugees need. Without the entire Syrian refugee community registering, it is impossible for the organizations helping to provide these services.

Whether registered or not, those who tend to be the most neglected in this process of resettlement are children. Jordan’s cost of living is estimated to be twice that of Syria. When resettling, most families neither have the savings nor the startup funds to return to their same quality of life as they had in Syria. Those fleeing to Jordan are generally the poorest of refugees, as the more affluent fled to Eastern Europe or the Americas as soon as the war broke out. Due to this, children are often forced to work to provide for their families or their needs are put second to the financial survival of their family. Many children begin to miss out on what is considered essential to their development: education.

Education for children of school going age 5-18 must be afforded the right to an education, a right guaranteed by the United Nations. Following the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s, the global human rights discourse switched to include “promoting human rights

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and individual empowerment as an integral part of development in refugee situations."\textsuperscript{29}

However, in a country that already struggles to provide basic needs to its own residents, the cost of education for refugees needs continuous financial and administrative support to be properly implemented. In crisis zones only 2.1% of humanitarian assistance is allocated for education needs.\textsuperscript{30} UNHCR’s proposed budget for education needs for Syrian refugees in Jordan for 2014 is $5,298,200.\textsuperscript{31} The proposed total budget of UNHCR’s work for 2014 (in partnership with over 30 other NGOs) within Jordan has increased by from $367.6 million in 2013 to $430.4 million in 2014 to sustain the Jordanian economy and support the massive refugee population. It is therefore safe to deduce that both the total budget and the education budget will increase, as the flow of refugees across the border has not diminished.

The right to education, while guaranteed and supported by all organizations working with refugees in Jordan, cannot be forced upon Syrians. Education, which in recent years had not even been enforced in Syria, is not and has never been the first priority for refugees across the globe. For those from Syria who have relocated in Jordan, it is no different. For many, once they have crossed into Jordan, the most urgent needs include shelter and employment. Refugees generally come across in large extended family groups and tend to resettle in urban areas where their neighbors or family from Syria have also


resettled. New neighborhoods that are created by refugees in Amman tend to be built in the cheaper outskirts of the city. These new neighborhoods are built next to neighborhoods containing Iraqi and Palestinian refugees who have and continue to go through the processes associated with being refugees, meaning limited access to employment and discrimination. Through the creation of these new neighborhoods, all three refugee groups have begun to compete for limited resources. This has led to increasing unrest and violence in these neighborhoods, which are without adequate police facilities to contain these disturbances. For those refugees who are the most qualified, many do not have the transportation, clothing or documentation that allow for them to apply to jobs in better parts of the city. Yet, it is a necessity for these people to search out any employment opportunity that they can find. This generally leads to refugees working long, odd hours at low wage jobs. For these reasons, adults spend much of their time attempting to find employment within Amman or working long hours and in many cases their children are left at home while they look for work.

Of the 1.3 million refugees within Jordan, 1.1 million are scattered across the country. The other 200,000 live in Azraq or Za'atari refugee camp. 35.8% of these refugees are children, meaning that there are 400,000 Syrian refugee children in Jordan. Through extensive research, interviews, and collaboration by different organizations in Jordan, the estimate for the amount of refugees living within Amman is around 366,000 of which 132,000 are children. The discrepancies are due to the registration process and the


stigmas behind registering. The UNHCR estimates number of children living in Amman to be about 72,000.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the number of children living in Amman, the actual enrollment number of Syrian refugee children into both private and public schools within the Amman governate (city limits) for the 2013-2014 school year was 41,920 children.\textsuperscript{35} Through the use of UNHCR official numbers, there is 58\% enrollment and by using the actual estimated number as believed by a variety of organizations and the Jordanian government of the rate of enrollment is 32\%. No matter how the percentage is used, thousands of children are still out of school. It is the lack of emphasis on education, access and funding that has made so many children not be enrolled. For the purpose of the remainder of this paper, the estimates of the international community and government (i.e. 1.3 million Syrian refugees) will be used when discussing the problems associated with access.

The Jordanian school system consists of both private and public education. There is a 98.2\% primary school enrollment rate and the country ranks number one in the Arab World in education, according to the World Bank.\textsuperscript{36} The Ministry of Education estimates that to send a child to public school for a year it costs a family around 1000 JD ($1,412) with money going towards their books, lunches, buses, etc.\textsuperscript{37} The minimum wage per

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} World Bank. 2014. World Development Indicators. http://data.worldbank.org/country/jordan#cp_wdi
\end{flushright}
month for a Jordanian is 101 JD. Therefore to send more than one child to school while living on minimum wage, a family is barely able to survive. For a private school, which tend to be funded by different religious denominations, the tuition depends on scholarship options available. Roughly 32% of school aged Jordanian children attend private school. However, throughout the global recession of the mid-2000s, the number of students transferring from private to public schools due to the inability to afford the high tuition rates increased dramatically. From 2007-2010, an estimated 31,000 students across Jordan transferred into public schools causing the student to teacher ratio to go from 25:1 to 35:1. No matter the route that is taken, for those families living right at minimum wage, sending a child to school is difficult. While it is required to attend school from ages 5-16, the Ministry of Education admits to being unable to control the enrollment of those areas far out the governmental centers. This means in the south and east of Jordan, areas that still give substantial ruling power to the local tribal authorities, formal schooling may not be enforced. Scholarships are available for students but only in private schools. This generally occurs at private schools that are run by minority religious groups within Jordan. Christian denominations tend to offer full need-based scholarships and do not discriminate based on citizenship. This is because the funding for these schools generally comes from outside of

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the country. For private Muslim schools with funding coming from the local community, there is more pressure to provide scholarships to Jordanian students. Therefore, many more refugees of minority religions tend to be able to attend private schools than Muslim students.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Risks Associated with the Non-education of Refugees:}

Education has long been established as an important tool for stability and economic growth. For those who live in or have fled conflict zones, the stability that education provides is important in creating peace. Since the start of the conflict in Syria and refugees fleeing to Jordan, crime rates have increased across the country and there have been serious classes between security forces and refugees in parts of northern Jordan. As this continues to increase, it will likely reach Amman where the majority of the country’s population resides. To provide stability for Jordan it is in the country’s best interest to try and educate as many children as possible. For every additional year that a male is in school it decreases their likelihood of joining conflict by 20%. The education of females is just as important in creating the stable environment that Jordan needs. When educated females acquire jobs, 90% of her income is reinvested into her family (compared to the 30% that males reinvest). Through these investments, families are provided with a higher quality of life leading to less of a reason for family members to participate in risky behaviors.\textsuperscript{43}

Therefore, to create a stable country, education needs to be offered. This restored sense of

\textsuperscript{42} Private conversations with Syrian families of different religious backgrounds. March 2014, in Arabic.

normalcy and the creation of safe spaces that education provides, will allow for Syrians living in Jordan to be successfully integrated into society and become active members of the communities that they have resettled in.

**PROBLEMS FACED:**

I. **Refugees**

Throughout the resettlement process there are many problems that refugees face such as finding shelter, employment and affordable basic goods. Yet once these problems are addressed and the issue of education is addressed, there are many other reasons for why children are not attending.

The education-working sector group for Za’atari and Azraq Syrian refugee camps compiled the following figure after careful research as to why children are not attending school in the camps.

Figure 1.1: Reasons for not attending school 44

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While conducting my research on this same issue but with a focus on refugees living in Amman, I would bring this figure to my interviews with various organizations. Overwhelmingly, the people in my interviews believed that these numbers from the camp also applied to children in Amman.

As identified by the chart, the two biggest reasons for not attending school are that refugees are not interested or expect to return to Syria soon. These reasons are generally tied to one another, for both families and children are preoccupied with their new life in Jordan and establishing access to food, shelter and employment. Due to the psychological trauma that many of these families have experienced it takes them longer to adjust and accept the fact that they may be in Jordan for longer than they want to be. The majority of families that have resettled in Jordan did not do so willingly and therefore it can be seen as giving up on their hopes of returning to Syria if they establish deeper roots such as enrolling their children. 45

Another reason that many are not attending schools has to do with the issue of safety. Refugees and minority groups in general, face street harassment daily while living in Jordan. People are picked on for their distinctive Syrian style of dressing and talking. With increasing unrest and economic strain being placed on the country, numerous stereotypes and personality traits have been bestowed on Syrians. In many cases, Syrians are regarded as ungrateful and greedy for their use of Jordanian resources and services that are provided to them. Unfortunately, name calling and taunting has not escaped children. Most families that were interviewed about their reasons for not sending their

children to school said that they were nervous that their children would be harassed just as the parents and older siblings are. This was a major concern for parents of young children who did not want their children to suffer any more psychological distress after escaping the war in Syria.\textsuperscript{46} Parents in poorer, majority Syrian neighborhoods were especially concerned that their children would be targeted because of the free blue UNICEF backpacks that are provided to primary school students in these areas.\textsuperscript{47} Another safety issue presents itself to all school-aged children who attend school at a shared facility with Jordanian students. With the two groups alternating the time of day in which they attend and only a 20-minute break between these shifts, violence routinely breaks out.\textsuperscript{48} The main reasons generally involve the harassment of females and then their male relatives undertake fighting the harasser. Both Syria and Jordan have a street culture that includes the catcalling and harassment of women. With already high tensions, this harassment comes head to head on the schoolyard between shifts, as both young Syrians and Jordanians, men and women, all converge at the same time. To avoid this, parents and children choose not to enroll in school.\textsuperscript{49}

Through first hand observation of classrooms in Jordan, I was able to see the divisions that are created because of the stereotypes associated with Syrians. Children as


\textsuperscript{47} Private conversations with parents of ECD classes. March 2014.


young as five split themselves up into groups within the classroom based on the country that they had originated from, Syrians with Syrians and Jordanians with Jordanians. While initially I believed that this might be because of their shared experiences that made them congregate with one another, I overheard the Jordanian children making comments about Syrians. These derogatory comments spanned all grade levels that I observed and stereotyped Syrians as being greedy and thankless. The comments did not just stop with children but I also observed them occurring in the teacher’s lounge. Teachers made comments about how they did not like to perpetuate stereotypes “but in this case they were correct.”

By witnessing these comments and the way that children interact in the classroom it was easy to see why Syrian children are feeling unwelcome in their educational pursuits.

Ten percent of Syrian children who do not attend school in Jordan do so because they are needed to make money for the family or help around the house. This means that 1 in 10 children who are not attending school are working and 70% of all child laborers in Jordan are Syrian refugees. This burden of work generally falls upon the sons of the family, especially families who have undergone physical tragedy to come to Jordan. Almost all of the families surveyed by UNICEF, whose children were working, either had lost a parent in the war or the parents were unable to work because of other emotional or physical ailments. As a result, the number of out-of-school males ages 12-18 who were

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51 Personal classroom observance. February-March 2014.

working was very disproportionate to the amount of females.\textsuperscript{53} 80\% of those staying home to help their families were males and these males generally were out in the workforce with labor-intensive jobs, while females only made up 20\% of those who said they must stay at home to help their families and they did so through traditional homemaker tasks. Within Jordan, it is estimated that 50,000 households are single parent and run by the mother with the father either being killed in Syria or still residing there and fighting.\textsuperscript{54} These families rely heavily on their children and extended families to support them and act as wage earners, thus meaning that school is one of their last priorities. Families that rely on older siblings to contribute also tend to not enroll younger siblings. This is because of the lengthy registration process that must occur and the inability for a single parent to miss work to apply for enrollment.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{II. Government}

The Jordanian Government has faced numerous problems with the influx of refugees. The primary resettlement processes have been allocated to UNHCR because the government does not have the means to do it themselves. Due to the Government’s long history of working with UNHCR, the partnership is fairly smooth and both sides are aware of the resources and services that the other can provide. Each individual ministry has made adjustments since the Syrian conflict has started to account for the influx of refugees. Three


ministries have suffered the most because of their inability to provide for the refugees: the Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of Education. Each ministry has heavily relied on outside funding and support to fulfill their duties. The Ministry of Interior has the support of foreign security forces to keep unrest down in areas of high tension with refugees. The Ministry of Health has secured donations for new healthcare facilities and training for health concerns that are common with these refugees. In contrast, the Ministry of Education has not been able to find a comprehensive approach to solve their issues of providing education to the refugee population that is out of the camps.56

Jordan’s youth population in recent years has grown to be highly disproportionate, with 70% being under the age of 30. 57 For this reason, since the mid-2000s, the country had anticipated a massive increase in the amount of students attending schools. With the global recession, the ability to provide for the estimated increase of 200,000 more new students in just the 2009 school year was extremely difficult. In Amman alone it was estimated that 400,000 new classrooms needed to be built to provide for these new students between 2009-2013. 58 Jordan has been the recipient of numerous bilateral donations to provide for their students, something that has increased their dependence on foreign aid even more. Since 2003, Jordan has received $364 million to provide for their own education flaws. These have included funds through USAID for new schools in growing


areas as well as teacher trainings and classroom supplies.\textsuperscript{59} With the need for donations such as this even before the Syrian conflict, it is no wonder that the Jordanian school system is consequently in crisis.

Since 2010 the Minister of Education, Dr. Mohammed Dhunaibat, has been extremely vocal about the need for more money and facilities to accommodate the ever growing school-aged population. It is the belief of the Minister that the more public they are about their struggles to provide for Syrians, then the more support they will get from the international community and implementing organizations within Jordan. Dr. Dhunaibat has announced as recently as April 2014 that to accommodate Syrian refugees in Amman that over $71 million would be necessary for just the 2014-2015 school year to sustain already existing schools.\textsuperscript{60} In addition to this, Amman would need to add 16 brand new schools with adequate teachers and facilities.\textsuperscript{61}

For the 41,920 Syrian students enrolled in public schools in the Amman governate, there are an insufficient number of classrooms and teachers to support this. The government, having experienced this with refugees coming from Palestine, implemented a system of double shifting starting in 2011. Double shifting is a process of splitting up the schooling hours from 8-12 and 1-5 with the beginning of the day being just Syrian students and the end of the day being Jordanian. In the previous implementation of this


\textsuperscript{60}Davis, Rochelle and Taylor, Abbie. Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon: A Snapshot from Summer 2013. \textit{CCAS Georgetown}.

arrangement, schools had to extend to a 6-day school week to comply with required number of hours that children should be in school. However, with the lack of funding, the Ministry has been unable to support double shifted schooling as a 6-day week and so within the public education system across the country, students attending double shifted schools are spending what equates to one less day in school then their full day counterparts. 62 This system, while allowing for more students to be accommodated, does not create an inclusive society. Many Palestinians who were educated this way in the Jordanian school system (as implemented by UNRWA) and continue to be educated this way, have felt a sense of exclusion with the implementation of double shifting. Since the start of this system for Syrians, Palestinians have expressed their worries of continued exclusion of the newest refugee group. 63 These double shifted schools tend to be developed in poorer areas, which have the fastest growing populations and least amount of facilities. Generally this has meant in the outskirts of Amman where refugees have settled. For Palestinians, this had a negative effect on the way they were perceived by Jordanians as a whole. With most young Jordanians never interacting with Palestinians in school and seeing the separation that the schools were enforcing, Palestinians were and never have been fully integrated into Jordanian society despite being present within it since 1948. 64 For this reason the process of double shifting, even if it is effective in accommodating more students quickly, is not a good process for social stability and cohesion. The 2013-2014


The school year had 50 double shifted schools within the Amman governate. While these schools do lower the teacher to student ratio, at the secondary stage they only allow for 35 minutes for each class which teacher have complained is inadequate.  

The Minister of Education, Dr. Dhunaibat, called for the removal of the double shift system in 2013 because he said that the system created stereotypes and instability. However, when the primary donor for educational services, UNICEF, declared that they would not be able to assist in the giving or building of any new schools because of budget constraints, the Minister had to reverse his decision. With 50 double shifted schools in place and a student teacher ratio of 35:1 that is continuously growing, the ministry has called for 145 more double shifted schools to be implemented in the 2014-2015 school year to support the refugee population. There have been considerable protests against this in more affluent areas of Amman because Syrian students would need to be bused to these schools. However, at this point there is no alternative to schooling children. In addition to the separation and stigmas attached to children attending double shifted schools, the long school days do not provide these children with extra curricular activities.

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As a result, children who attend these schools tend to miss out on numerous activities that other public schools provide for their students.  

The largest governmental challenge that exists for the enrollment of Syrian Refugees is what is known as the “3 year rule.” This rule has existed in Jordan since its founding and restricts any student who has not attended school in 3 years from reenrolling, even if these students are coming from conflict zones and are refugees. This rule does not allow for any exceptions and has been the primary problem in the enrollment of any refugee children in Jordan.  

As the Syrian conflict is quickly approaching the 4-year mark, students who have not been enrolled in school since the beginning of the conflict are no longer eligible to enroll in Jordanian schools, public or private. Even those who never had the opportunity to enroll in schooling back in Syria as a primary school student and have surpassed three years since they would have began school, are unable to join. This adversely affects all school aged refugee children who are currently residing in Jordan. For various reasons these children may not been in school for years particularly due to lack of safety back in Syria and then the uncertainty of the resettlement process. Therefore, a massive number of children are unable to even attend school after arriving in Jordan. This rule is also not universally known and in the past has only tended to be enforced during periods of refugee

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70 Private conversations with Ministry of Education employees. February 2014.

resettlement in Jordan. It is often used as a way to lessen the burden on the government to provide educational services to a smaller number of refugees. The 3-year rule will continue to hinder the ability to enroll in school as the conflict endures. Over 2.5 million children residing in Syria have stopped attending school because of the danger of leaving their homes and the increasing number of random attacks on schools. When or if the violence forces these families to flee their countries, and if they resettle in Jordan, many of these children will be unable to attend school. Since this law has been in place through numerous refugee migrations into Jordan and there is no significant pressure to remove it, this will be a continuous obstacle that refugees will encounter in their ability to access the education system within Jordan.

Another problem with the school system in accommodating Syrian refugees is the incompatibility of curricula for secondary school students. Like many Middle Eastern countries, Jordan's final two years of secondary school are spent passing an all-encompassing test called Tarjihi to attend college. Students are given two years to pass Tarjihi and their score indicates what they must study. Those in the 90th percentile have the options to become doctors and lawyers, 80th percentile allows for engineering or social sciences, and below the 75th percentile, students are only allowed to attend vocational schools. This system provides refugees with many problems as their educational preparation to this point in school may have been focused on completely different

73 Private Conversations with INGO employees working with education. February-March 2014.
curricula. This is especially problematic for students coming from Syria. The Syrian education model does not have this style of testing and students are accepted into university based upon their grades throughout secondary school. For this reason, Syrian refugees coming into Jordan after the age of fifteen feel as though it is not worth it to enroll in school when they are not prepared for the Tarjihi.

III. International Organizations

For Syrian refugees arriving in Amman, they must navigate the structure of the governmental and nongovernmental rules that have established themselves within the city to attempt to relieve the country of the economic and social burdens the refugees have created. Amman has become the center for each organization to deliver their services, generally with a satellite office in Northern Jordan at the Syrian border. All organizations are contained and organized by their duties through UNHCR. Theoretically, UNHCR gives these organizations a platform in which they can discuss and collaborate on how to deal with the many issues facing both refugees and the host communities in which they are living. This includes the organization of working sector groups. These groups establish meeting times and discuss the challenges that they face as they navigate the most cost-effective way to reach the largest number of people. For those in the education working sector group in Amman, meetings are held twice a month but also work towards awareness of education within the camps. Most organizations working within education are responsible for work in both the camps and in host communities. Due to the contained


space and better awareness of the demographics that need to be served, these organizations are better able to serve the educational needs within the camps.

When it comes to these organizations and their work in Amman, there are over 18 that have a focus or a stake in the education implementation process. First and foremost of these organizations is UNHCR itself. For with registration, refugees are granted the proper paperwork to enroll into the education system for free. However, as discussed earlier, less than 50% of these refugees have registered with UNHCR and even with the documents it can take up to three months for the paperwork to arrive for the refugees. As of May 2014, over 70,000 refugees in urban areas were waiting to initially begin the registration process and over 100,000 were still waiting for approval for their registered status.

Whether registered or not, the quickest way in which to be approved for school enrollment is through Save the Children because of their direct connection to UNHCR and the Jordanian Government. Throughout Amman, Save the Children has Help Desks set up in partner organization’s offices as well as in their own offices. These Help Desks’ sole purpose is to enroll students in school, no matter their registration status. Through a partnership with the Ministry of Education, Save the Children has been able to place students in schools that have the correct services for them. Students must provide Save the Children with a transcript of previous schooling or must undergo placement testing


78 Ibid.

approved by the Ministry to establish the appropriate grade level.\textsuperscript{80} While this is a process that has been implemented and successful in other conflict resettlement zones, including previous conflicts in Jordan, the scope of the current refugee crisis has made the implementation process complicated in an unprecedented way.

First and foremost, these international and local NGOs have struggled to gain the trust of the Syrian people. As most of the Syrian refugees plan to return to their homes in Syria when the conflict ends, most do not want their names to be on any lists that link them to fleeing the country. For this reason, organizations have had a hard time reaching out and telling refugees the importance of schooling and registering for assistance. Organizations like UNICEF and Questscope have taken it upon themselves to attempt to reach out to the predominantly Syrian neighborhoods but have encountered little success in creating awareness and getting children enrolled because of refugee’s wariness of being associated with a foreign organization.\textsuperscript{81}

**Immediate Needs**

Refugees, government agencies, and international organizations are all in desperate need of help to provide a comprehensive education to school aged children in Amman. To provide this, the solution is funding. To create the option to provide safe access to school for every child, there must be an immediate input of capital into the organizations that can supply this. With the government itself requesting over $71 million to provide education

\textsuperscript{80} Private conversation with Save the Children. February 2014.

facilities in Amman, the estimates of amounts needed to provide schooling for all refugees total in the hundreds of millions of dollars. This must be put immediately into the creation of 16 new schools in areas of high need as well as in hiring new teachers within the capital. If these funds are provided and the government of Jordan, in partnership with various international and local NGOs, can mobilize and build these quickly and in time for the 2014-2015 school year, then there is a chance that the country can provide enough classrooms for all refugees in Amman.

To correctly identify those refugees in need, there must be one registering agency that refugee groups trust. The UNHCR system, while fairly effective once registered, does not have the trust of the refugee population that it needs to provide for them. It is necessary to immediately implement an agency that registers entrants at all border crossings and entrances into the country. While this may initially create backlash from those who do not want to register, it will also provide more refugees with the information about accessing basic services. Through this, education can be emphasized and the enrollment process can begin. While again this depends on more money being utilized to create and employ the staff for these services, in the long run this will allow the government and INGOs to be better prepared and help them anticipate the continued services that a more accurate number of the refugee population will need.

A service that goes hand in hand with a single trusted registering agency is the creation of one shared education needs database. In the past other sectors have created an online database where any organization helping with the crisis can display their needs and services they have the ability to provide. At the moment, no such database exists within Jordan and the only thing similar to this are the education working groups. While they are a
good starting point they tend to lack a holistic view of the needs and services available. Once a database is created there is an ongoing platform for organizations to collaborate, which theoretically will lead to less overlap in spending and more transparency.82

For the students themselves, the lack of safe routes to schools is one of the biggest reasons that they might not attend. The solution to this can be found already implemented in the refugee camps in Amman and includes a participatory approach.83 Within the camps, where safety is also an issue, male family members volunteer to walk neighborhood children to school. This same approach can be taken in Amman, where Syrians generally live in the same neighborhood. By having adult male family members protecting these students there is less of a chance that they will be approached or harassed. To implement this solution, organizations must be willing and able to go to these majority Syrian neighborhoods and educate families about this easy and free solution. Throughout the neighborhood it is likely that there are males who have the time or can make the time for this small commitment for their children’s education. This approach has been successful within the camps and has increased the number of children that are attending school.84 There have been movements to employ this in urban settings as well, but it has not been widely successful due to the more scattered nature of the refuge population than in the

82 Private conversations with INGO employees working with education. February-March 2014.


camps. If neighbors can hold one another accountable, this may be a long lasting solution to issues of safety that children face in attending school.

Another safety concern for refugees has been the stigmatization and segregation that is caused by double shifting. Jordan has faced years of problems stemming from the separation of Palestinians and Jordanians through the double shift system and risk the same problems with Syrians if the system continues. The government, while aware of the complications associated with double shifting, does not have the means to solve the problem.\footnote{Ibid.} However, through creative solutions as well as more funds being directed to education, there are potential solutions to this problem. The first of which is the investment in education by the international community through the providing of new facilities. Since this does not seem to be possible anytime soon, there is the option to change the way in which schools are double shifted and create the separation by gender. This is used throughout the Middle East and in private schools across Jordan as well. By having females attend in the morning and males in the afternoon, there is the ability for Syrians and Jordanians to attend school together. In addition to this, extra curricular activities, since they are generally already divided by gender can still occur after school ends without conflict in sharing facilities.

**Solutions**

All solutions to the problems associated with the access to education for Syrian refugees in Amman must be long term and use participatory approaches. Without the
financial support needed to provide refugees with the facilities to accommodate all refugees living in Amman, other approaches must be identified and utilized.

Over the past three years, since the identification of the massive problems facing enrollment of refugees in schools in Amman, alternative education programs have begun to be implemented. Organizations such as Save the Children, Questscope and Jesuit Refugee Services have collectively decided that these programs may be more beneficial and accessible to the Syrian population if advertised as a non-school activity.86 This does not mean that these organizations are giving up on attempting to register children for school but instead means that they are recognizing the flaws in the enrollment process and providing an alternative that is more suitable to refugees. Programs such as the Jesuit Refugee Services’ (JRS) online schooling system provide a secular curriculum created by Catholic Universities, to be used worldwide. JRS has opened four computer centers in Syrian dominated neighborhoods across Amman that allow for students to sign up for schooling time slots that best fit their schedule. This program has allowed for older students to work and provide for their families and complete school at their convenience.87

For younger children, many organizations have set up integrated approaches to alternative education by designing programs that combine learning and play. This has included organizations such as Reclaim Childhood, which works with refugee girls ages 4-18 in developing English skills through sports. By giving these children the opportunity to forget the hardships that they have endured through sports, children should begin to adjust


87 Private Conversations with JRS employees. February-March 2014.
more quickly and are more likely to continue their schooling. In associating learning with fun, organizations are slowly breaking down the psychological issues that are linked to the educational system.  

Save the Children is the most active of the organizations in Jordan in their involvement with refugees in urban areas. They offer both Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs and Youth Development (YD) programs specifically designed for Syrian refugees in Amman. The ECD program offers training for parents on how to encourage childhood development in a safe and healthy way. The Youth Development program has partnered with local schools to provide refugees with skills based training. These programs focus on vocational skills for specific industries in Jordan that are experiencing growth.  

Save the Children’s efforts are currently focused in Amman but still face the same problems with awareness that all education endeavors have been enduring.

Participatory approaches to education are also having a major impact on children and education in Amman. Former Syrian teachers who have relocated to Amman have formed the Syrian Education Committee (SEC), which has begun to start makeshift schools in predominantly Syrians neighborhoods across the country. In Amman, these schools provide an alternative for students who are unable to register or are in the process of registering for enrollment. Teachers educate the students using the Jordanian curriculum to better prepare them for school when they get the chance to attend. Another important


attribute that these teachers possess is their experience with a similar situation in Syria. By undergoing comparable trauma and hardship, these teachers are well aware of the extra needs that Syrian children in Jordan may have which could stand as a barrier to education in a different context. These alternative schools are not certified and therefore cannot count towards a child’s educational background when it comes to enrollment. For this reason, the SEC tries to encourage students to enroll in the Jordanian school system, especially those students who may be in danger of never enrolling due to the 3 year rule. Even without the ability for certification, the structure and participation that the SEC provides — free of cost — to refugees is invaluable. Through their successes, more teachers have begun to join and the network is continuously expanding.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Syrian refugees face many obstacles to enrolling in school within Jordan. This is not the fault of the government or the organizations that help with this enrollment but is a result of the sheer magnitude of the refugee crisis itself and the lack of funds to provide services for all refugees. Without a long-term monetary and implementation commitment by the international community, the Syrian refugee crisis could lead to destabilization and unrest for years to come. The importance in providing education cannot be undermined as it is one of the major ways in which stability can be reached. Within Amman, Syrian refugees face numerous obstacles in accessing education including, safety concerns, inability to enroll, and the UNHCR registration process. With no end in sight to the Syrian

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conflict and up to a thousand refugees crossing into Jordan daily, education must become a priority for refugees, implementing organizations and the Jordanian government. By creating long-term, participatory approaches to providing education, Syrian children will have increased access to education creating a more stable environment for both Syrians and Jordanians in Amman.
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