

THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN ASYLUM ON THE JORDANIAN SOCIETY- BETWEEN REALITY AND FUTURE SOLUTIONS

The Jordan Office of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) organized in collaboration with Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development a panel discussion in Irbid on the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian Society. This panel discussion is one of four other panel discussions which will be held in various governorates of Jordan.

The two-day event, held in November 22-23, 2014, brought together key experts from the media, the private sector, civil society, local communities and governmental organizations deliberating the issue of the Syrian refugee influx. Afterwards the dialogue was deepened with Syrian refugees.

Following the welcome remarks of KAS Project Manager Ms. Nidaa Al-Shraideh, and President of Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development Mr. Suliman Al Khawaldeh, Al Khawaldeh presented an overall view of the Syrian influxes into Jordan.

Jordan has always been a host country for Arab and non-Arab refugees, Al Khawaldeh said, noting Jordan's commitment to human rights and refugee laws and Jordan's membership to international conventions and body treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Al Khawaldeh highlighted the impact of Syrian refugees on the health, economic and education sectors as well as its impact on civil protection, safety, environment, infrastructure, public services, water and energy sector.

"But the impact is not all negative", stressed Al Khawaldeh, citing some positive impacts of Syrian refugees on Jordan's economy including, for example, the surplus value of Syrian presence in several industrial, service, trade and labor sectors.

Deputy Director General of the Public Security Directorate Mr. Ali Salameh Al Khaldi discussed the impact of Syrian refugees on social peace and national security system. He recalled the role of the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and Jordan's role in international peace and security.

Al Khaldi defined national security and social peace, warning of their vulnerability because of the Syrian refugee influxes as a tension has started to float on the surface between Jordanians and Syrian refugees mainly on grounds of competition in the labor market. The national security agencies will have to address the challenges of a possible rise in crime and disputes, which add up to the burdens lay on Jordan. Al Khaldi described the national security as threatened and also as a major challenge, particularly at the borders, due to the unnumbered inci-

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dences of infiltration and smuggling, interdicted by JAF's border security guards.

The director of the quality directorate in the Ministry of Health (MoH), Dr. Ghassan Al Fakhouri, in his panel intervention, talked about the impact of Syrian refugees on the health and environmental sectors. He summarized the services provided by the Jordanian health sector for Syrian refugees and the challenges imposed on the health sector by such an additional demand. MoE, through its hospitals and medical centers, has always been a big supporter of Syrian refugees, but the increasing numbers of Syrian patients are overwhelming the health sector. To cope with such burdens, there is a need for more staff but also more medical equipment for public hospitals, which is depleting the already over-strained national budget.

At the beginning of the second day of the panel discussion, the chairman of Isnaad Consulting and Economic expert, Dr. Khalid Al Wazani, talked about the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian economy and the labor market. He gave an overall view of the Jordanian economy and its challenges before and after the coming of Syrian refugees.

He also pointed out to the current pressures on the labor market, a serious problem mainly caused by the entry of competitive Syrian workers.

Al Wazani underscored the necessity of cooperation between and among all sectors to afford young Jordanians job opportunities while benefiting from the experience of their skillful Syrian counterparts.

"Syrian workers should not be left unmonitored and Jordanian workers should be protected from being replaced by Syrian workers" he said.

In the next panel discussion, former Secretary General of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs Mr. Jamal Abu Obeid, talked about the impact of Syrian refugees on municipalities.

"Our municipalities are under-resourced and they have lack adequate staff to address the new situation imposed by the Syrian refugees' influxes". "This is an additional burden that is most obvious in waste management, -transportation and -disposal."

According to Abu Obeid, future solutions should include raising awareness among the population in regard to waste management and hygiene best practices, highlighting, at the same time, the necessity to train municipality employees on such issues and make them trainers of other staff.

The director of education at Al Mafrag Mr. Ahmed Bani Khaled discussed the impact of Syrian refugees on the educational sector. Bani Khalid emphasized how the education sector has been severely affected by the Syrian refugees. "The Syrian refugee crisis has severely affected our educational system, especially when it comes to the capacities of classrooms in our public schools, not to mention the resulting shortage in teaching material and staff". He said ad-hoc solutions were improvised to distribute the students in two shifts a day.

Afterwards Bani Khalid suggested some possible solutions such as the construction of new schools or the crea-

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tion of new classrooms through financial support by international donors, active role of the private sector in improving the educational infrastructure and the elaboration of programs for psychological support of Syrian students.

The event was marked by the active participation of Syrian refugees and Jordanians. It facilitated the exchange of ideas and solution proposals and established contact among the participants heralding a good starting point for future cooperation.

The participants have come up with the following recommendations:

- The receiving of Syrian refugees in Jordan should be stopped. Syrian refugees should be hosted in buffer zones in the Syrian territories to host the displaced Syrians. These buffer zones should be established with the support of international organizations.
- Projects and meetings should be conducted in the field of

psychological support for Syrian students

- Similar panel discussions should be made to raise awareness
- For raising their awareness, Syrian refugees should especially be involved in volunteer work carried out by civil society organizations.
- Exchange of experience should be encouraged between Jordanians and Syrian refugees; Jordanian youth should learn from the work experience of Syrian refugees; Coordination with the Ministry of Labor, the private sector and international organizations is needed.
- The labor market must be organized to the effect that Syrian workers would take over those jobs lack in Jordanian workers' presence.
- The Media must be more active in highlighting and raising public awareness on the impact of the Syrian refugee influx to help in reducing potential problems.