UNDP Training Workshop Concluded

UNDP concluded a training workshop which was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment under the title “Scenario Planning”, in Al Azraq Wetland Reserve. This workshop is a project activity which aims to develop institutional capacities, ministerial technical capacities and development and environmental organizations in Jordan. The workshop targeted technical employees in the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and a number of employees in NGOs. Participants chose three national priorities based on the positive impact they could have on the Environmental structure in Jordan as follows: increase national preparedness in drought management, increase in natural habitat wetlands in Al Azraq Reserve, and implementation of the RIO agreement in Jordan.

Syrian government still holding up food aid for besieged Daraya - UN

The United Nations is still waiting for Syrian government agreement for an aid convoy to enter the besieged town of Daraya, UN officials said on Tuesday.

“The blockage of aid is a political issue,” UN spokesman Ahmad Fawzi told a regular UN briefing in Geneva. “Daraya is 12 km from Damascus, so it can be done but we need the political go-ahead from the government.”

Last week Syria’s government, under pressure from its ally Russia and other countries belonging to the International Syria Support Group overseeing the peace process, allowed the first UN aid convoy into Daraya since late 2012. It brought baby milk and medical supplies to support an estimated 4,000 civilians, just in time for Syria to meet a Thursday deadline to improve aid access or face having aid deliveries imposed by air drops.

But the convoy took no food to Daraya, where the UN has said malnourished children will die without outside help. UN officials had hoped food would arrive in a second convoy on Friday, but that was delayed with no government approval. Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said the government had later given partial approval for the food convoy. “That is not good enough,” he said. “We are reverting to the government.”

Syria’s opposition says the government approved the first convoy in a cynical ploy to alleviate international pressure. Bouthaina Shaaban, a top adviser to President Bashar Assad, said last week that “nobody is starving in Daraya”, which was “producing peas and beans and food and wild berries that is enough for the entire Syria”.

Determined to change the image of her fellow Syrians in the Zaatari Refugee Camp as “uneducated and unskilled”, one woman decided to deliver a message to the world through her paintings.

Israa Al Fadhel, who lives in Zaatari camp, 80km northeast of Amman, is a professional painter who used to draw for joy before leaving her Syrian hometown of Daraa to seek refuge in Jordan in 2012.

“When my husband was diagnosed with the disease, I became responsible for the family, and I did not want them to feel that anything was missing in their lives,” she told The Jordan Times in a recent interview.

So, she developed her hobby, and even though it was difficult in the beginning to afford the equipment to paint, she started selling some of her work.

Several of her artworks were sold at an exhibition, “Colours from Zaatari”, that was shown in Amman and Dubai.

But for Fadhel, art is not only a way to make a living. She also uses painting to help alleviate the suffering of traumatised children.

In 2013, Fadhel started volunteering at one of the humanitarian organisations in Zaatari camp and she noticed that children were drawing paintings that reflected the impact of conflict and war on them. Seeing this, Fadhel started to use drawing “to provide psychological support for the children to get over their trauma”, she says.

“When I used to ask children to draw what was in their minds, they started drawing war, destruction and conflict,” she explained.

“So, I wanted to help them.”

Instead of drawing missiles and tanks, “I helped them draw the real image of Syria, and the beauty of Syria … to have hope in a better future... houses, flowers, their future career and what they dream to become,” Fadhel said. With her help, the children’s paintings started to change.

“Even their choice of colours changed, they started using light colours instead of dark ones…. Instead of tears they started drawing smiles.”

At the artist’s “Colours from Zaatari” exhibition, she also displayed paintings by the children she trained, some of which also were sold.

“The message I wanted to deliver then was that Zaatari camp is not only for simple people. There are doctors, engineers and artists in the camp,” Fadhel said. “We are creative people…. Wherever we are, even in the desert, we can create something.”
UNICEF commends Jordan’s open-door policy to Syrian students. Calls to facilitate their integration in schools

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UNICEF report commended Jordan’s open-door policy towards Syrian students stating: “these children were able to enroll in the public education system and follow the official curriculum”. However, the report noted that “there still remains a significant declination in the percentages of Syrian children enrolled in public schools”.

According to the “Curriculum, accreditation and certification courses for Syrian children” report, which addresses the situation of Syrian students in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, up to the end of 2014, the number of Syrian children in Jordan was 209 thousand at school age (5-17 years old), out of which only 57% were enrolled in general education whether in camps or in host communities.

Moreover, the report indicated that the arrival of Syrian children to the public schools and those established for Syrian refugees is not a problem in Jordan. In contrast to other host countries. However “there are significant other barriers which constitute as obstacles to the enrollment of the children, including issues related to the need to be in possession of registration documents, school documents, and the date of the entry level test which is held once at the beginning of the year”.

Water services for one refugee cost Jordan JD500 every year

Published on 11 June 2016 in the Jordan Times in English: http://bit.ly/29HLh77

One refugee costs Jordan JD500 every year for water and wastewater services, Water Minister Hazem Nasser said on Saturday. Nasser made these remarks at a meeting with UNICEF Representative to Jordan Robert Jenkins to announce a JD2 million UNICEF grant to finance projects in the Northern Badia and Ajloun areas to improve water provision, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Around 1.3 million Syrians currently live in Jordan, according to the 2015 population census. Of these, some 655,217 are registered as refugees with the UNHCR, according to the agency's website. With the majority of refugees living outside camps, demand on water in the entire Kingdom has risen by 22 per cent, the minister said. In the northern region, where the majority of refugees are present, demand on water has risen by 40 per cent, according to Nasser. These factors have pushed the ministry to cooperate and follow up with UNICEF to enhance water services in the northern regions and in areas near the Jordanian-Syrian border, as well as Ajloun, said Nasser.

He added that these projects have to be implemented immediately, including drilling a new well in Ruweished with a capacity of 80 cubic metres per hour at a cost of some JD106,000, in addition to rehabilitating Ruweished 2 Well, which has a capacity of 20 cubic metres, at a cost of JD21,000, Petra reported. The projects will be funded by UNICEF. Nasser said that despite all regional circumstances, Jordan has adopted strategic solutions to address water challenges, noting that work is under way to embark on water projects with permanent solutions to water scarcity in the Kingdom. For his part, Jenkins praised the Jordanian efforts in hosting Syrian refugees, expressing the international community's and UNICEF's appreciation of the government's work to serve refugees, stressing the organisation's readiness to assist Jordan in its efforts to develop the water sector.
WFP says financial situation better this year to serve refugees


The World Food Programme (WFP) said on Tuesday that its financial status this year is better than previous years, thanks to the response of donors in the London conference, especially Germany, which donated $623 million.

Shaza Moghraby, the WFP spokesperson in Jordan, told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that donations would enable the programme to continue assisting Syrian refugees until the end of 2016, noting that the WFP provides food to some 525,000 Syrians living inside and outside camps in Jordan.

As for the “ShareTheMeal” smartphone application, the spokesperson told Petra that since the launch of the English version of the application last year, more than 500,000 people donated 5.6 million meals for the most vulnerable and hungry people around the world.

Cabinet exempts JD27.9m UNICEF grant from taxes, customs


The Cabinet on Sunday approved the cooperation protocol between the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the Education Ministry and UNICEF through a JD27.9 million grant, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The protocol is an implementation of the Jordan Response Plan to the Syrian refugee crisis in the education sector, as it seeks to help the Education Ministry offer high quality educational services to children affected by the Syrian crisis. Under the protocol, the Council of Ministers also approved exempting the UNICEF grant from customs duties and taxes.

Moreover, the Cabinet approved transferring the shares of several government companies to the recently established Government Shareholding’s Management Company as part of efforts to “boost transparency” in the way the companies are managed.
Jordan asks world to find alternatives to aid delivery as border with Syria closed


Jordan on Tuesday told envoys of world powers and representatives of international organisations that the Kingdom has to seal off the part of the border where a terrorist attack killed six army and security personnel.

“Jordan has always warned from the increase in Syrians' numbers at the borders, especially since it has amounted to 100,000 people, most of whom are from northern and northeastern Syria where Daesh members are located,” said Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh.

He made the remarks to the ambassadors of the Permanent Five (P5) of the UN Security Council and the European Union, in addition to representatives of the UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Interior Minister Salameh Hammad and Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad Momani also attended the meeting.

Judeh said the terrorist attack is a solid proof of the existence of terrorist elements among the crowds at the borders. In light of the incident, and to protect Jordan’s security, this particular border area must be closed, especially for individuals and vehicles, considering it a sealed military zone.

Thus, an agreement with international organisations must be made to find alternative means to deliver humanitarian aid to the displaced, Judeh said.

“Jordan has borne a heavy burden that no country in the world has experienced in relation to the waves of refugees. The world must shoulder its responsibilities and respect Jordan’s decisions, especially the ones related to its security,” Judeh stressed.

For his part, Hammad said that the security of Jordan and its residents is a top priority, noting that the area that witnessed the attack has members of Daesh, smugglers and other dangerous elements that are a threat not only to Jordanians but to aid organisations working in the area as well.

Momani said that Jordanians stand in unity against such attacks, stressing the government’s measures to preserve Jordan’s security and safety.

For their part, the ambassadors of the P5 of the UN Security Council, the EU and UN organisations working in Jordan, condemned the attack, stressing their solidarity with the Kingdom as it rises to face terrorism.
Syrians outside camps required to re-register with Jordanian authorities


The government has urged all Syrians living outside camps in Jordan to register and confirm their personal details in order to be issued with a document that will preserve their legal status and enable them to receive services.

In an announcement, issued by the government in cooperation with the UNHCR’s Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate and published in Arabic dailies, the government stressed that all Syrians in the Kingdom residing outside camps must obtain the document, except diplomats, UN employees and Syrian women who have received the Jordanian nationality through marriage.

The new document will allow Syrians to obtain free work permits before July 4, 2016, according to the announcement, which noted the procedures to confirm place of residence as well as the cost of medical certificates have changed.

To receive the new document, Syrians should bring the necessary papers to the nearest police station in order to re-register and confirm their information.

The required papers include an active UNHCR document, original Syrian IDs and certificates (which if not found can be ordered at the UNHCR), and the documents of any children born in the Kingdom.

Syrians who do not possess documents for their children born in the Kingdom should check with the UN agency to resolve the issue in coordination with the Jordanian authorities, the government said in the announcement.

Syrians can confirm their address by bringing a signed copy of a tenancy agreement, stamped by the municipality, or by bringing their landlord to testify in person.

Syrian refugees registered at the UNHCR can visit any registration center affiliated with the agency in Khalda in Amman, in Irbid or in Mafraq to obtain papers confirming their address.

To receive the new document, Syrians will also need to present the security cards issued for free by Jordanian authorities and a medical certificate for each family member above 12 years, which now costs JD5.

Medical certificates are issued at 30 accredited health centers across the Kingdom, seven of which are in Amman, five in Irbid and five in Zarqa.

Those requiring further information can contact the UNHCR’s help line on 06400800 or visit http://help.unhcr.jo
‘Child labour tripled in Jordan over past decade’
Published on 11 June 2016 in the Jordan Times in English: http://bit.ly/2a9XjKD

The government must implement laws and policies to counter child labour, which has tripled in Jordan over the last decade, organisations said on Saturday.

In a paper to mark the annual “World Day against Child Labour”, annually observed on June 12, the Phenix Centre for Economic and Informatics Studies said poverty is the key driver of child labour, and noted that poverty rates have risen in Jordan in recent years. Some 100,000 children work in Jordan, the centre said, citing figures from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

There are internal and external reasons that contributed to the rise in child labour, but one of the main reasons is poverty and dropping out of school, the centre said. The poverty rate in Jordan increased from 13.3 per cent in 2008 to 14.4 per cent in 2010, and to almost 20 per cent in 2014.

The Labour Ministry said the rise in child employment was linked to the influx of Syrian refugees into the Kingdom. In a statement sent to The Jordan Times, the ministry said employers caught employing children are fined JD500, and the fine is doubled for repeat offenders. The legal age of employment in Jordan is 16. As for the employment of Syrian children, a recent study found that Syrian children are being exploited by farmers and companies in Jordan.

Tamkeen Fields for Aid, a legal aid organisation based in Amman, reported that its investigators discovered children as young as three working alongside their parents and siblings on farms in Jordan.

The study estimated that approximately 46 per cent of Syrian refugee boys and 14 per cent of girls aged 14 and above work more than 44 hours a week.

Care International also issued a statement to observe the day, focusing on the need to help Syrian children attend school and to protect them from the potential risks of working at a young age.

“Many Syrian refugee children, in Jordan and in the region, are missing their education as they are forced to be the sole breadwinners for their families,” says Salam Kanaan, the country director of CARE International in Jordan. “About one-third of Syrian refugee families in Jordan are female-headed. Refugee women often feel vulnerable and struggle to find safe income sources, which forces them to send their children to work instead of school,” Kanaan added.

Around 90,000 Syrian refugee children in Jordan are not going to school, according to the ILO. According to the UNHCR, 35 per cent of school-aged Syrian children are not receiving education in Jordan, with many compelled to work informally. Meanwhile, the estimate of Syrian refugees living outside of camps under the poverty line has risen to 90 per cent, the agency added.
11,500 Syrians issued work permits - ministry
Published on 18 June 2016 in the Jordan Times in English: http://bit.ly/1tCIIlt

A total of 11,500 work permits have been issued to Syrians since April, when the Cabinet agreed to give Syrian workers free permits, the Labour Ministry said on Saturday. Syrian workers and their employers were given a three-month grace period to obtain work permits in April, after Jordan pledged to integrate Syrians into the labour market at the London donor conference in February.

“We estimate that there are 90,000 Syrians in the job market, and having 11,500 come to us for work permits means that things are moving to the right direction,” ministry spokesperson, Mohammad Khatib, told The Jordan Times. He noted that the Cabinet’s decision to exempt Syrians and their employers from work-permit fee has encouraged more and more to seek to rectify their situation.

“We will see more Syrians legalising their status in the coming months,” said the spokesperson, who added that the grace period will end on July 5. Khatib highlighted that licences to employ Syrians were mostly given in sectors related to agriculture, manufacturing and food production. “Syrian workers are complementary labour. They are very skilled in crafts and agriculture, which can be very beneficial to Jordanians who can learn from them,” the spokesperson said.

In April, the UNHCR said that the government measures towards the employment of Syrian refugees would help them become more self-sufficient and would significantly ease the way for them to work legally in Jordan. There are some 1.3 million Syrians in Jordan, according to government figures. Over 640,000 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, more than 85 per cent of whom are living outside camps. A recent study found that nine out of ten Syrians living outside camps live below the Jordanian poverty line of JD68 ($87) per capita per month, according to UNHCR. The agency said since the beginning of March, Jordanian authorities have also allowed Syrian refugees to use UNHCR-issued asylum-seeker cards and Jordanian Ministry of Interior identity cards to obtain work permits. Previously, the only way to obtain work permits was by using passport and proof of legal entry to the country. As most Syrian refugees lack passports and proof of legal entry status, many were precluded from working legally. Authorities have now removed that requirement, paving the way for thousands of Syrians to be legally employed.

Judeh meets diplomats, UN, and EU Officials to discuss Rukban attack
Published on 21 June 2016 in Al Ghad newspaper in English: http://bit.ly/2a5n788

Deputy Premier and Minister of Exterior, Nasser Judeh, met with ambassadors of the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council, EU envoys to Jordan, and Representatives of the UNHCR, in the presence of the Minister of Interior, Salameh Hammad, and State Minister for Media Affairs, Mohammad Momani, to discuss the Rukban terrorist attack earlier today, Tuesday, leading to 6 deaths and 14 injuries, among military, security, and civil defence personnel.

During the meeting, Judeh underscored that the number of Syrians along the Jordan-Syria borderline has reached 102 thousand people, most of whom come from north and north eastern Syria, where ISIS dominate, adding that the attack today only definitely proves the presence of terrorists in their midst; something of which Jordan has repetitively warned about, and that this comprises a threat not only to Jordan, but to international organisations operating in proximity.
Ban Ki-moon conveys condolences and stands in solidarity with Jordan

Published on 22 June 2016 in Al Rai newspaper in Arabic: http://bit.ly/2a5n788

The UN Secretary-General condemned the terrorist attack which took place yesterday in Al Rukban area at the Syrian borders, which resulted in the death of a number of border guards.

In a statement issued last night, Ki-moon conveyed his condolences to the families of the victims and reiterated his solidarity with the Government and people of Jordan. He particularly expressed concern that the attack took place opposite an encampment where Syrian asylum seekers await entry into Jordan. In this context he commended Jordan for its continued commitment and efforts to uphold humanitarian principles. The Secretary-General called on all Governments to strengthen their efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism and violence extremism, and support the Government of Jordan in this context.
EU earmarks 21m euros for Syrian refugees response in Jordan

Published on 24 June 2016 in Jordan Times newspaper in English: http://bit.ly/29QB1ub

The EU on Wednesday announced it would finance new projects worth nearly 200 million euros to support Syrian refugees and “overstretched” host communities in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon.

Jordan’s share of the new aid package is around 21 million euros (around JD17 million) in urgent support for a 140-million-euro programme financed together with EU member states to rehabilitate the overstretched water networks in northern Jordan, where most Syrian refugees reside, the European Commission said in a statement on its website. A total of 165 million euros will be extended for projects in Turkey to support education, said the statement.

Some 15 million euros was allocated for Lebanon to allow UNRWA to provide urgent education services and cash assistance to thousands of Palestinian refugees from Syria.

The commission said that the financial assistance to be extended by the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis would support around 1 million Syrian refugees in the three countries. The commission said the package of projects was adopted at the fourth board meeting of the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis, which brought together the European Commission, EU Member States, representatives of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as international financial institutions. Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn was quoted by the statement as saying that the fund allows the delivery of rapid and effective support to those in need, adding that in just over one year, it has mobilised more than 730 million euros.

“The funding focuses on the millions of out-of-camp refugees living in towns and cities in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. We want to bring all refugee children across the region into schools by next year. We will also invest in livelihoods, urgent municipal services and social cohesion for refugees and host communities,” Hahn said.

At the “Supporting Syria and the Region” conference held in February of this year in London, the EU pledged over 3 billion euros in 2016 to assist the Syrian people and neighbouring countries affected by the refugee crisis.

Czech Republic pledges $2million to support refugees across border


Czech Ambassador to Jordan Petr Hladik said his country will commit around $2 million to support the refugee settlements near the northern border between Jordan and Syria. “Our government pledged to provide $2 million to contribute in helping UNHCR in building infrastructure in the berm and to provide medical care for the Syrian refugees there,” Hladik told The Jordan Times on Monday evening.

The berm refers to an area on the Syrian-Jordan border where tens of thousands of Syrians are encamped. He made his remarks on the eve of a terrorist attack on a forward post that killed six troops and injured 14, prompting Jordan to close the area and ask the international community to find alternatives to deliver aid to displaced Syrians across the border. The ambassador said the Czech Republic seeks to help people on the ground in the berm “because we respect Jordan’s efforts in dealing with the refugees”. “Once we get the plans from the UNHCR and the process goes through with the Czech government, we will be providing the money in the receiving area where the medical checks are posted,” Hladik explained.
Child marriage on the rise among Syrian refugees


Salma, a 13-year-old Syrian refugee, was playing with friends outside her tent when her step-mother asked her to come inside and told her to prepare to get married in two days.

Salma, who fled her home in Syria’s Daraa with her step-mother and two sisters and lived in Zaatari camp, was shocked and thought her step-mother was joking.

“When I entered the tent, she was sitting with a few women and a man in his early 30s. She took me to the side, asked me to wear a red dress and said ‘Congratulations, this man is your husband now. I approved your marriage’,” Salma, not here real name, told The Jordan Times in a phone interview.

Shocked and in tears, Salma told her step-mother she did not want to marry as she was still a young girl. “My step-mother slapped me and told me she had already given them her word and that I would disgrace the family’s honour if I refused. She forced me to get married and I could not do anything about it as my father was still in Syria at that time,” Salma added.

For the teenager, marriage was only the start of her problems.

“I lived with this man in his tent outside the Zaatari camp in Mafraq. A few days after our wedding night, my husband’s cousin came to my tent in the morning and raped me. My husband knew about it but did not do anything,” Salma said. “I told my mother-in-law and she managed to stop the cousin from raping at times, but he used to wait for her to leave the tent and then come and do it again. My husband was silent the whole time. He knew,” the teenager explained. She continued: “I did not know what to do or where to go. This only ended when one day I suffered from severe bleeding and they took me to a hospital, where I explained what happened to me and how much I suffered.”

Her husband and his cousin were arrested and imprisoned and Salma was divorced and sent back to her step-mother’s mobile home in the camp mid-2014.

Her suffering was not over. “My step-mother did not know that I suffered bleeding and was stitched. She would have killed me. She just told me I was stupid for not being a good, abiding wife and she thought I was divorced because of that,” Salma said, adding that by then, her father had joined them in Zaatari.

Salma said her father was angry about her divorce and insisted that she remarry to avoid disgracing the family. “He did not know what happened to me and I never told him. I had to accept getting married again,” she said. The teenager was married again in late 2014 to a 36-year-old man. Now 16, she has a 9-month-old baby and is pregnant with twins.

“Even this man is not good to me at all,” Salma said, referring to her new husband. Salma tried to commit suicide several times and she received psychiatric counselling, a case protection manager who dealt with Salma’s case told The Jordan Times.
“Salma’s situation was very severe. We thought that after she had the first baby, she would stop thinking of committing suicide and take care of the baby, but that was not the case. However, she improved after the sessions,” the case manager said.

Salma is only one of many girls forced to marry early in Zaatari camp. Figures from the Chief Islamic Justice Department show that early marriages represent about 35 per cent of all marriages of Syrian refugees in 2015, up from 18 per cent in 2012. Of around 500 Syrian females who marry each month, 170 are under the age of 18, according to the figures.

“Unfortunately, early marriage is on rise among Syrian refugees both inside and outside the camp,” the case manager said. Early marriage among Syrian refugees is much more common than that among Jordanians, for whom around 13 per cent of marriages involve minors.

‘Radical social changes needed’

Hussein Khuzai, a sociology professor at Al Balqa Applied University, said women and children suffered most at times of conflict.

“We live in a patriarchal society, where women are not usually listened to, unfortunately,” Khuzai told the Jordan Times in a recent interview.

“Early marriage is on the rise among Syrians and parents seem to be okay with it as they believe when their daughters get married they will have fewer financial problems and burdens,” said Khuzai. “There is a need for greater awareness and radical social change to put an end to this practice. Those young girls who get married do not have a say and will not have a future because of their parents’ decisions,” the professor said.

“These child-mothers face tremendous psychological pressure from their families and society, and are left with heavy responsibilities that they cannot deal with. They are still children,” he added.

Nida Yassin, a spokesperson at UNHCR Jordan, said the UNHCR and other international agencies working with Syrian refugees focus heavily on this issue.

“Because early marriage is evident among Syrian refugees, we hold several awareness programmes for parents and for girls themselves on the consequences of early marriages and problems they might face,” Yassin told The Jordan Times.

Young girls like Salma are deprived of their childhoods and the better future that they fled their country for, her case manager said.

Salma, who is due to give birth in four months, said: “What I miss the most is my mother who left us when we were in Syria, my school and my classmates.” “If I have two baby girls, I will do the impossible to let them study, become very well-educated, have a job and a better life. I want them to have enough time to play and enjoy life before they get married and suffer from marriage. I do not want them to end up like me living a miserable life at an early age,” Salma said.

“I miss playing with my friends and I do not have the time to do that. I am not even allowed to do that because I spend my whole day trying to take care of my child and as my baby gets older, I will not even have time to watch TV. What a life!” Salma said through tears.