As WFP beneficiaries, Jordanian Nadia and her Syrian husband Fadel have been receiving JD140 a month through their voucher usage for their six-member family, from various UN bodies and have found this help to be indispensable.

“As a cook and a mother I also have to manage my home. Circumstances are tough, we have bills and rent to pay, and these obligations take away from the pleasure of food and cooking,” Nadia explains.

“With this regular allowance allocated to food, we are in a better situation to feed our children a more varied and wholesome diet,” she says. Since the late 2000s the WFP food assistance system started giving families choices in what they could purchase. These cash-based transfers involved bank notes, vouchers and electronic cards to beneficiaries in order to spend directly. One by one, Nadia’s five children walk out of their bedroom after their morning nap to greet the reporter visiting on this summer morning.

Nadia continues to give examples on how her situation has changed.

“My larder is stocked well now, whereas before we could merely scrape by. Nowadays I can afford to get extra things for the children, and I am in fact able to manage my household expenditure better as a result.”

Inside Nadia’s well-kept kitchen, she starts stacking onions, sumac and an olive oil mixture onto taboun bread. She is preparing the Palestinian dish musakhan for lunch. As a final step, she embellishes the grilled chicken pieces and drenched bread with nuts. These nuts are a good example of a luxury her family could not afford to have before. Fish is another item she enjoys buying with her electronic card to cook for her children. The card/voucher system started in 2013 in both the Zaatari Refugee Camp and in the northern governorates of the Kingdom. It seeks to give the refugees more autonomy and control over the food they buy. Each family owns a card that is credited with JD20 or JD10 per month, depending on the family’s level of vulnerability. Nadia and Fadel met in Al Kiswah city in Syria in 1998. While visiting the neighbouring country, she was persuaded by her mom’s relatives to settle in Syria. Nadia obtained a secretarial job in a sackcloth factory to help her father financially and met her future husband while working there.

The two tied the knot in 2000 and later returned to live and work in Amman where they have settled ever since. Asked about her aspirations for her family, Nadia explains that despite her children being born here and despite her being Jordanian, legal procedures and paperwork are proving to be a big struggle for them. “For example, getting any legal papers done would require Fadel’s passport renewal. The cost for that amounts to $500 including medical costs.” Another struggle is being unable to obtain a driver’s licence for him as a Syrian national, which she says would help bring another source of income to the family. Despite these challenges Nadia insists she will not give up. She is keen to instill a sense of belonging in her children, always reminding them that they are rooted in Jordan, which will always remain their home.

She feels she is grateful for the help her children receive from the government, such as exemptions from tuition fees and cost of books.

Nadia also mentions the official cards that her children are issued now, identifying them as children of a Jordanian mother. This will enable them to get the university education and driver’s licences she hopes their father can get one day.

WFP assistance enabling Syrian-Jordanian families to make a life in Amman
UNESCO has launched an initiative to provide 200 Syrian refugees in Irbid, 80km north of Amman, with access to higher education, funded by Kuwait.

The initiative, “Quality universal education for Syrian students and teachers”, is being undertaken in partnership with Yarmouk University and the Queen Rania Centre for Jordanian Studies and Community Services, the UN agency said in a statement released recently.

UNESCO’s representative to Jordan Costanza Farina said that ensuring youth are equipped with the skills to contribute to and compete in the global economy is essential, but that for Syrian refugees it is “a path back to normalcy and self-sufficiency”.

The UNESCO official also praised Jordan’s commitment to hosting Syrians and generosity in ensuring refugees could access higher education and training.

“In this way, as in many other ways, Jordan is setting again the example for other countries in the world,” the statement quoted her as saying.

Plan to deliver aid to border camp ‘in final stages’ - UN

Negotiations are under way with the UN and international organisations to establish aid distribution centres inside Syria to provide aid to the refugees in Rakban camp, near Jordan’s border.

Mohammad Momani, minister of state for media affairs, told The Jordan Times that although the centres will be inside Syria, the aid could be delivered via Ramtha, north of Amman.

Once the aid is delivered to the Syrian side through Ramtha, international organisations will handle the distribution in coordination with community leaders, said the minister, who is also the government spokesperson.

UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Jordan Edward Kallon said the plan was in its final stages, although he did not specify when aid deliveries were expected to begin.

“We are in the process of finalising the implementation plan with the Jordanian Armed Forces,” Kallon told The Jordan Times. “As soon as the plan is completed, the implementation will begin.”

Jordan declared the northern and northeastern border areas a closed military zone in June in the aftermath of a terrorist attack that targeted a military post serving refugees near the border, killing seven troops and injuring 13 others.

Since then, Jordan has agreed with international relief agencies to allow a one-off aid delivery to the area in August, while global stakeholders were expected to seek alternative solutions to continue the mission.

Members of the Tribal Council of Palmyra and Badia, a Syrian rebel group in charge of running the Rakban camp’s daily affairs, told The Jordan Times that children were most affected by the difficult conditions in the camp.

Thirteen children are currently in urgent need of medical care and two died last week, council members said.

A medical committee of doctors in the camp diagnosed the children’s conditions and reports were sent to the UN and international organisations seeking assistance, they added.

Jaundice and hepatitis are among the diseases spreading in the camp, according to the activists.

Last week, international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said at least 59 war-wounded Syrians, including 11 children between the ages of 3 and 14, “have been denied medical evacuation into Jordan” over the past three months.

In a statement, the MSF said six of these 59 Syrians subsequently died. They “all required urgent medical evacuation” from Daraa in southern Syria to MSF’s emergency surgical project in Ramtha hospital in Jordan, “located less than 5km from the border”.

“With intense fighting continuing, MSF believes that the actual number of people in need of immediate medical evacuation is much higher,” the statement said. In response, Momani said Jordan admitted wounded and sick people based on field assessments and in coordination with international agencies.
Jordan has dropped three places in the UN Human Development Index (HDI), ranking 80th of 188 countries in the 2015 report issued by UNDP on Tuesday.

Jordan had taken 77th place in the previous two years in the index, which measures long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

A long and healthy life is measured by life expectancy, while access to knowledge is measured by the average number of years of education received in a lifetime by people aged 25 years and older. Standard of living is measured by the gross national income (GNI) per capita.

The HDI found that the average life expectancy in Jordan is 74, with 13.5 years of schooling and a GNI of $11,365.20 per capita. “Between 1980 and 2013, Jordan’s HDI value increased from 0.587 to 0.745, an increase of 27 per cent or an average annual increase of about 0.73 per cent,” the report said.

The report puts Jordan eighth among the 22 Arab countries, preceded by Qatar at 32, Saudi Arabia (39), the UAE (41), Bahrain (45), Kuwait (48), Oman (52), and Lebanon (67). Work itself in all of its forms will not stimulate human development unless basic requirements of employment are met, such as quality, conditions and social value, the report added.

It highlighted the Kingdom’s efforts to deal with employment issues facing young people. “Since the Arab Spring, Jordan and Tunisia have pursued comprehensive national employment strategies, broadening their focus from youth-centred active labour market policies to address many other employment challenges,” it said. Globally, Norway came in first place, followed by Australia and Switzerland, while Niger came in last place.

Mulki thanks Germany for support, aid
Published on 6 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2cWycHt

Prime Minister Hani Mulki on Wednesday voiced the Kingdom’s appreciation of Germany’s support during a meeting with German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Gerd Muller.

Germany has pledged to provide further assistance to Jordan, in light of the Kingdom’s role in hosting some 650,000 registered Syrian refugees, said Muller, according to a statement from the German embassy in Amman.

Germany on Monday approved 272.7 million euros in financial support to Jordan for 2016, and Muller said the aid would help the Kingdom cope with the challenges stemming from the refugee crisis.
Mulki said Jordan looks forward to the international community following through on pledges to support the Kingdom made at the London donor conference in February, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The most significant outcome of the conference was the deal to ease the rules of origin for Jordanian exports to Europe, said Mulki, noting that the agreement had helped to attract foreign investments.

Some of Germany’s aid, in grants and soft loans, will be directed to the water and wastewater sectors, especially since Jordan is among the poorest countries in water resources and faces increasing water demand due to the refugee influx, Muller said, according to the embassy statement. Germany will also exert more efforts in the vocational training field, he said, adding that he attended a ceremony to launch workshops in plumbing and solar heating at the Yajouz Vocational Training Institute.

Mulki said potential investments require training workers to manage and run them, stressing that Jordan hoped to learn from Germany’s experience in vocational training.

The prime minister said that through Germany’s technical support, Jordan hopes to establish a centre specialised in vocational training. He also highlighted economic challenges facing the Kingdom in light of the influx of Syrian refugees, noting that aid provided to Jordan does not cover 35 per cent of the hosting costs.

Jordan is unable to bear any additional burdens and cannot allow further refugees to enter except in “humanitarian cases”, he continued. The government’s top priorities in the upcoming period focus on development and creating job opportunities to stimulate the economy and improve Jordanians’ living conditions, Mulki explained.

For his part, Muller that Germany will continue to stand by Jordan in the face of crises.

Later on Wednesday, Public Housing Minister Sami Halaseh accompanied the German official on a visit to Bani Kinanah District in Irbid, 80km north of Amman, to check on construction work on the Ain Saeed road, Petra reported.

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<th>Japan funds Makani centre in Zaatari</th>
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A Makani centre was opened at the Zaatari Refugee Camp on Tuesday, operated by UNICEF and funded by Japan, the Japanese embassy said on Tuesday.

Japan is funding the establishment of five Makani centres in Jordan, to allow vulnerable children to access free learning support, psychosocial support and life skills training, the embassy said in a statement. At the opening ceremony, Japan’s Ambassador Shuichi Sakurai noted that some Syrian children were not enrolled in formal education due to financial constraints.

“Therefore, I believe the Makani initiative… will continue to be very important, for children to continue learning, and transition to enrolment in formal public schools,” he added. So far in 2016, Japan has extended $59 million to international aid organisations working in Jordan, including $8 million to UNICEF to assist vulnerable women and children.
Jordan signs $300m loan agreement with World Bank


Jordan signed an agreement for a $300 million soft loan with the World Bank Group (WBG) during the annual meeting of the group and the International Monetary Fund in Washington last week.

The loan’s soft financing conditions accord with the International Development Association’s (IDA) terms, which are usually reserved for very poor countries and not, in principle, available to Jordan, a ministry statement said on Wednesday.

The loan will be paid back over 35 years. Planning and International Cooperation Minister Imad Fakhoury and WBG Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa Hafez Ghanem signed the loan agreement.

Fakhoury expected the first payment to be disbursed within the next few weeks, with the remaining payments extended over a three-year period.

As for the sources of the loan, the minister said that the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development contributed $149 million, while $51 million was secured through a grant under a soft financing policy the WBG launched in response to Jordan's request in 2015 for lower interest rates on loans.

The remaining $100 million was a "very soft loan" announced by WBG President Jim Yong Kim in the London conference as an exceptional measure because Jordan is not qualified to benefit from IDA loans, Fakhoury said.

He added that the loan is aimed at covering the 2016 financial deficit, in a way that reduces the lending costs and contributes to restructuring debt burdens.

For his part, Ghanem stressed the WBG's commitment to supporting the international community's efforts to alleviate the burden Jordan is shouldering as a result of the Syrian crisis.

He also expressed the WBG's readiness to help the Kingdom in its endeavours to change this economic challenge into a development opportunity, especially by supporting priorities in the executive development programme for 2016-2018, the statement added.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines of his participation in the annual meetings, Fakhoury held talks with WBG and US officials about assistance to help Jordan deal with the repercussions of the Syrian crisis and the regional conditions.

The minister’s meetings with WBG officials tackled the 2017-2022 partnership framework, which the Bank recently endorsed and which would provide the Kingdom with a financing ceiling of $1.4 billion.

He also met with officials from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), where he called for increasing support to enhance the public-private sector partnership.

The IFC’s investment volume in the Kingdom stands at around $1.3 billion, which is the corporation’s highest investment for such an economy size and population. Separately, Fakhoury said on Wednesday that Jordan has been selected for the first time to head the councils of governors at the WBG and the IMF in 2017, the ministry added.
Jordan takes part in Lausanne meeting on Syria


Jordan on Saturday participated in an international meeting on the Syrian crisis called for by the US and Russia, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The meeting, held in Lausanne in Switzerland, was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs Nasser Judeh.

The gathering brought together countries concerned with the Syrian crisis and covered prospects of a comprehensive solution to the conflict, and in it participated Jordan, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Qatar. The US, Russia and Syria's neighbours discussed new ideas for reviving a ceasefire in the war-torn country.

Secretary of State John Kerry said lower-level officials would be in contact again as early as Monday to flesh out a new agenda, but refused to reveal details of the initiatives.

Kerry described the meeting as a "brainstorming" session and that despite tensions between the parties, it did not descend into rancour, with all agreeing on the urgency of the crisis.

“I would characterise this as exactly what we wanted,” he told reporters at the Lausanne hotel where he met Judeh and Russian, Iranian, Saudi, Turkish, Egyptian, Iraqi and Qatari envoys.

Kerry welcomed what he said was “a very candid, first time discussion, as open and free-wheeling as this, with all of the key parties at the table simultaneously”.

“There were some difficult moments, where there was obviously tension, but everybody was constructive, he said, of a meeting that included traditional foes Tehran and Riyadh,” he said.

After the Lausanne meeting, Kerry was to fly on to London on Sunday to brief his European allies on the new diplomatic path, which will focus on a smaller number of main players.

Judeh is scheduled to participate in the London meeting to discuss the situation in Syria in general and in Aleppo in particular, especially after the UN Security Council failed to reach a decisive decision on the situation in Syria.

King voices confidence in Guterres’ ability to lead UN


His Majesty King Abdullah on Friday congratulated Antonio Guterres on his appointment as UN secretary general.

In a telephone call, King Abdullah voiced his confidence in the UN’s ability, under the new secretary general, to continue its international role and achieve its goals in serving humanity and enhancing world peace and security, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Majesty expressed Jordan’s full support for the UN in finding solutions to crises in the Middle East and the world. Guterres praised the Kingdom’s role in dealing with various regional and international issues, and its efforts to achieve stability in many conflict zones around the world, the statement added.

The UN General Assembly on Thursday unanimously approved Guterres’ appointment as UN secretary general for the next five years, as of January 1, succeeding Ban Ki-moon.
The government on Saturday described UNESCO's recent decision on Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif in East Jerusalem as a political and legal victory against the Israeli occupation.

On Thursday, the UN cultural organisation adopted a resolution classified under "Occupied Palestine" at committee level that stressed the need to "safeguard the Palestinian cultural heritage and the distinctive character of East Jerusalem".

The decision called on Israel to allow the restoration of the historic status quo of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, condemning escalating Israeli aggressions against the Jerusalem Awqaf Department personnel. The decision on Jerusalem was taken during UNESCO Executive Board's 200th session meeting held in Paris, which approved all moves Jordan has taken in the interest of the holy city, especially during the past three years, according to the text of the resolution posted on UNESCO's website. Minister of State for Media Affairs and Government Spokesperson Mohammad Momani said the adoption of the decision by UNESCO's executive board underlines Jordan's determination to move forward with its legal and diplomatic options to protect and defend Islamic and Christian sites that fall under the Hashemite custodianship led by His Majesty King Abdullah.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, said that the Foreign Ministry prepared the decision and presented it to the permanent Jordanian delegation at UNESCO, in coordination with the Palestinian delegation, to approve the consideration of "Al Aqsa Mosque" and "Al Haram Al Sharif" as synonyms, in response to Israeli authorities' attempts to differentiate between the two terms and what they refer to. Momani told The Jordan Times that Jordan is proud to be the Muslim and Arab country that spearheads efforts to protect the holy shrines in Jerusalem, urging the international community to support the enforcement of international law and to put an end to Israeli occupation. The official said that Israel has to bow to international law and resolutions; meanwhile, Jordan will continue its efforts to maintain the historic status quo of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif. Under the status quo, the Jordanian Awqaf Department is entitled to exercise exclusive authority over Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, and its mandate is extended to all affairs relating to the administration of the mosque, including maintenance, restoration and regulating access. The decision reaffirmed that the "Mughrabi Gate" (Bab Al Magharbeh) is an integral and inseparable part of Al Aqsa Mosque, and called on Israel, as an occupation force, to allow the restoration of the historic status quo that prevailed until September 2000. The UNESCO decision angered the Israeli government, which on Friday suspended its cooperation with the UN agency. What angered Israeli authorities is that the decision referred to the Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif in East Jerusalem's Old City — Islam’s third holiest site — without any reference to the site also being revered by Jews as what they describe as the Temple Mount, according to Agence France Presse (AFP). In April 2015, UNESCO's executive board adopted a resolution submitted by Jordan and Palestine that reaffirmed the definition of Al Aqsa Mosque as the entire sacred complex surrounding it and since then, the term used to refer to the Muslim shrine has become Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif. In a bid to absorb the anger of the Israeli government, Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, said in a statement on Friday that Jerusalem is the sacred city of the three monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam. “It is in recognition of this exceptional diversity, and this cultural and religious coexistence, that it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list,” she added. The heritage of Jerusalem is indivisible, and each of its communities has a right to the explicit recognition of their history and relationship with the city. To deny, conceal or erase any of the Jewish, Christian or Muslim traditions undermines the integrity of the site, and runs counter to the reasons that justified its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list, Bokova said.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki slammed what he called Bokova’s “unusual and unacceptable position”, which was “an affront to the sovereignty of the Governing Body of UNESCO”. “Bokova should focus her efforts on implementing the will of member states and preserving Jerusalem from the occupying power’s systematic colonisation,” Malki said in a statement carried by AFP.
Suicide bomber kills three near Syria-Jordan border
Published on 16 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2fqLVeO

A suicide bomber believed to be from the Daesh terror group killed three people and injured at least 20 others in an attack on Sunday, on an outpost manned by a Syrian rebel group at a refugee camp on the border between Syria and Jordan, a rebel official said, according to Reuters.

The attack targeted the Jaish Al Ashair rebel group at the Rakban camp, said Saeed Saif, spokesperson for the Forces of Martyr Ahmed Al Abdo Brigades, a Free Syrian Army rebel group fighting against Daesh.

Over 75,000 displaced Syrians are stranded in the no-man’s land between the Jordanian and Syrian borders. Jordan sealed its side of the border following a terror attack in June that killed seven troops and injured 13 at an outpost dedicated to serving refugees.

Three Syrians admitted to Jordan for medical treatment

Authorities have allowed three Syrians from the Rakban settlement near Jordan’s border to enter the Kingdom for medical treatment, an official said on Monday.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not say if any new security measures are in place along the border, following a suicide attack on Sunday. A suicide bomber believed to be from the Daesh terror group killed three people and injured at least 20 others in an attack on an outpost manned by a Syrian rebel group at the Rakban camp, according to Reuters. The attack targeted the Jaish Al Ashair rebel group, said Saeed Saif, spokesperson for the Forces of Martyr Ahmed Al Abdo Brigades, a Free Syrian Army rebel group fighting against Daesh.

Over 75,000 displaced Syrians are stranded in the no-man’s-land near Jordan’s northeastern border. Jordan sealed its side of the border following a terror attack in June that killed seven troops and injured 13 at an outpost dedicated to serving refugees.

Associations laud UNESCO resolution on Jerusalem
Published on 19 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2eBUrWY

The Jordan Press Association (JPA) on Wednesday lauded UNESCO’s recent draft resolution clarifying that there are no Jewish religious connections to Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.

In a statement, the JPA said the decision was a result of joint efforts between the Jordanian and Palestinian political leaderships, with Jordan playing the biggest role in safeguarding Al Aqsa Mosque that "suffers from fierce assaults by Israeli settlers".

The association called on Arab and Muslim nations to support the Jordanian and Palestinian efforts in defending Al Aqsa, and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem and Palestine in general, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The resolution urged Israel to return to the historical status quo in Al Aqsa, which prevailed until September 2000. Also on Wednesday, the Jordanian Association of the Return and Refugees praised the UNESCO decision, which considers Al Aqsa Mosque a holy place for Muslims alone, and affirms that Jews have no connection to the mosque or the Western Wall inside the mosque's borders.

The decision affirms Muslims' full right over the historical and religious site, which Israel, throughout its occupation, unsuccessfully tried to find a connection to, according to a statement the association sent to The Jordan Times.

In addition, several political parties, professional associations, and academics commended the resolution and the joint efforts Jordan and Palestine exerted to reach it.
Jordan welcomes again UNESCO resolution on Jerusalem holy sites

Published on 19 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2foIfHW

Jordan on Tuesday renewed its stand celebrating a ‘victory’ in UNESCO, which officially adopted an Arab-sponsored resolution condemning Israel's actions at holy sites in East Jerusalem, deepening anger in Israel.

The UNESCO resolution on “Occupied Palestine” was endorsed Tuesday by the agency's executive board at its headquarters in Paris, after being approved at the committee stage last week, when Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad Momani described the resolution on Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif in East Jerusalem as a political and legal victory against the Israeli occupation. On Tuesday, he added that the final “historic” decision “underlines the international community’s awareness of the sensitivity of this serious issue,” adding that the Israeli violations to the sanctity of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif have “created an environment that supports radicalism and aggression”. Momani told The Jordan Times earlier this week that Jordan is proud to be the Muslim and Arab country that spearheads efforts to protect the holy shrines in Jerusalem, urging the international community to support the enforcement of international law and to bring an end to Israeli occupation.

The official said that Israel has to bow to international law and resolutions; meanwhile, Jordan will continue its efforts to maintain the historic status quo of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.

Referring throughout to “the occupying power”, the UNESCO decision condemns Israel for restricting Muslims’ access to Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif compound — Islam’s third holiest site — and criticises damage by Israeli forces to the site and nearby excavations. This is the latest episode in a series of rows at UNESCO, which is responsible for protecting important heritage sites and is one of few international organisations that recognises Palestine as a member state, Agence France Presse said. Israel suspended its cooperation with UNESCO last week in response to the draft resolution and its ambassador, Carmel Shama Hacohen, accused the Palestinians of playing “games” on Tuesday. “This is the wrong place to solve problems between countries or people,” he told AFP. Israel is furious that the resolution refers to the Old City site in Jerusalem by its Muslim name, Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu complained last week that saying “Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and Western Wall is like saying China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or Egypt has no connection to the pyramids”. While acknowledging the importance of the Old City to “the three monotheistic religions” — Islam, Judaism and Christianity — the resolution highlights Israeli restrictions on Muslims accessing the mosque. It also includes condemnation of Israel’s blockade of Gaza and “constant aggressions by the Israeli settlers” in the West Bank. Palestinian deputy ambassador to UNESCO, Mounir Anastas, welcomed the decision on Tuesday. “This resolution reminds Israel that they are the occupying power in East Jerusalem, and it asks them to stop all their violations, especially in the fields of competence of UNESCO such as the excavations,” he told reporters, as quoted by AFP. Since 2011, when Palestine was admitted to UNESCO, the body has been the scene of numerous diplomatic spats resulting from resolutions condemning Israel, most recently in April but also in October last year.

Unease in UNESCO

The atmosphere before the vote on Tuesday was soured further by threats received by telephone and on social media last week following a vote on the draft resolution, a UNESCO official told AFP. The text had created unease at the top of the organisation, with Michael Worbs, who chairs UNESCO’s executive board, saying he would have liked more time to work out a compromise. The resolution was voted on last Thursday at the committee stage, with 24 votes in favour, six against and 26 abstentions. There were two absentees. UNESCO chief Irina Bokova also distanced herself from the resolutions, saying in a statement that “nowhere more than in Jerusalem do Jewish, Christian and Muslim heritage and traditions share space”. Israel’s envoy to UNESCO defended Israel’s suspension of its cooperation with the organisation as a “proportional reaction” to the resolution passed on Tuesday. “I hope it will not last long,” Shama Hacohen told AFP. He also saw Mexico’s decision to change its position Tuesday from voting in favour of the resolution to abstaining as a small victory.
Kingdom seeking ‘bold, creative’ solutions to housing challenge brought on by refugee crisis - Halaseh

Published on 19 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2erC8R2

While the scale of the challenges ahead for Jordan remains immense, the Kingdom is “better equipped now than ever before” to address these challenges with creativity and coordinated action, Public Works Minister Sami Halaseh has said.

Speaking at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, which opened on Monday, Halaseh said Jordan has had no choice but to meet these challenges head on and “to be bold in” its actions.

“The Syria crisis has sparked innovation in the way in which we have gone about designing and managing refugee camps,” he added.

“A mindset of creative problem solving and prototyping has underpinned a number of innovations in partnerships with agencies such as UNHCR, including the use of Jordanian iris scan technology and smart cards, to help manage the processing of refugees and the integrity of the services provided to them,” the minister explained, according to a statement from the Public Works Ministry.

With the assistance of the World Bank, Halaseh said, the government has started to work on a new national housing strategy.

“We have also recently developed a strategy for upgrading the capability of the national engineering, construction and housing cluster to meet the housing needs of our rapidly expanding cities and towns where over 80 per cent of the Syrian refugee population now resides,” he noted.

“We do not know when but the time will come to rebuild Syria as well as significant parts of Iraq, Gaza, Yemen and Libya,” the minister added.

“The New Urban Agenda we define at this gathering in Quito should provide the principles and the standards for human settlement that guide the reconstruction of the Middle East and indeed other areas of the world ravaged by conflict and poverty.”

He stressed the need for governments around the world to partner with the private sector “to encourage the further development and use of new technologies and business models to deliver new shelter and urban living solutions”.

“Rather than rebuild what was there before, we have the opportunity to re-imagine and redesign better human settlements for the people of the Middle East,” Halaseh concluded.

The conference, which concludes on Thursday, is the third such gathering, held within a bi-decennial cycle.

Representatives of 193 countries are attending the meeting, which will conclude with the release of the Quito Declaration on urban development.
UNHCR Chief arrives in Jordan for broader regional mission
Published on 22 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2eVQkay

UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi on Saturday started his second visit to Jordan "as part of a broader mission to the region", the UN agency said in a statement.

During the three-day visit, Grandi is scheduled to meet government officials and refugees living in urban areas, as well as travel to the Azraq camp, where he will have the opportunity to meet with new arrivals, the statement added.

He is expected to hold talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh on Sunday. The UN official is scheduled to also hold a press conference in Amman on Monday.

Grandi is accompanied by Amin Awad, director of the UNHCR Middle East and North Africa Bureau and regional refugee coordinator for the Syrian and Iraqi situations. UNHCR Representative to Jordan Stefano Severe is also accompanying him.

Jordan hosts over 1.3 million Syrians, 656,400 of whom are registered with UNHCR, according to the agency's latest available figures. The majority of refugees live outside camps and among host communities, while 79,900 currently reside in Za’atari camp and 54,286 live in Azraq camp. Some 7,370 Syrian refugees currently reside in the Emirati-Jordanian Mreijeb Al Fhoud camp in Zarqa Governorate. Jordan has topped a list of 10 countries that host more than half of the world’s refugees, according to an Amnesty International report released earlier this month.

Jordan, which has taken in over 2.7 million people, was named as the top refugee-hosting country, followed by Turkey with over 2.5 million refugees, Pakistan with 1.6 million and Lebanon, which hosts over 1.5 million people, Amnesty said in a comprehensive assessment of the refugee crisis titled “Tackling the global refugee crisis: from shirking to sharing responsibility”. The 10 countries, which collectively shelter 56 per cent of the world’s 21 million refugees, account for less than 2.5 per cent of the global economy, Amnesty said, noting that many of the world’s wealthiest countries “host the fewest and do the least”.

Haqiq Initiative concludes first event with UNICEF

The Crown Prince Foundation (CPF) on Saturday announced the conclusion of the first event of the “Haqiq with UNICEF” programme, held by UNICEF-linked Alexander Bodini Award and CPF-affiliated Haqiq Initiative.

The two-day event took place in the King of Bahrain Forest in Amman, with the participation of 120 people, who received training on communication basics and various skills, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The programme also addressed basic concepts in international laws on human rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Haqiq received the Alexander Bodini Award for its work as a youth-oriented global initiative, one of only two awards presented in New York in March. The initiative’s CEO, Omar Masarweh, said the programme aims at equipping participants with skills in many fields, such as communications and human rights.

HRH Crown Prince Hussein launched Haqiq (achieve) Initiative in 2013 to help shape young men and women from an intellectual and skills perspective. It targets students in public and private schools across the Kingdom, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, graduating about 1,200 students annually.
UNHCR vows continued support for Jordan

Published on 23 October 2016 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2dPf6n7

His Majesty King Abdullah on Sunday met with UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, who is visiting Jordan as part of a broader mission to the region.

During the meeting at Al Husseiniya Palace, attended by Her Majesty Queen Rania, the two sides went over the Kingdom's efforts in hosting Syrian refugees and the challenges it is facing in this regard, a Royal Court statement said.

His Majesty expressed appreciation of the UNHCR for its support, which helps the Kingdom in dealing with the economic and developmental repercussions ensuing from the crisis.

The King stressed the importance of boosting the efforts by international actors involved in supporting the Syrian refugees and their hosts, especially Jordan, where refugees makeup 20 per cent of the total population.

Jordan is keen on more cooperation with UNHCR to mitigate the impacts of the refugee crisis on host communities across the Kingdom, His Majesty said.

For his part, the UN official commended Jordan for its contributions in this regard, renewing UNHCR’s commitment to continued support for the Kingdom.

Royal Court Chief Fayez Tarawneh and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs Nasser Judeh attended the meeting.

Also on Sunday, Prime Minister Hani Mulki, accompanied by Planning and International Cooperation Minister Imad Fakhoury and Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad Momani, met with the UNHCR high commissioner. During the meeting, Mulki said that Jordan is hosting Syrian refugees on behalf of the world. However, he said, the Kingdom is no longer capable of bearing the pressure on its infrastructure and vital sectors such as health, education and water.

Jordan seeks more cooperation with the UNHCR and other international organisations to urge the concerned countries and organisations to meet their responsibilities, Mulki added.

On the closure of the northern and northeastern borders and declaring them military zones, following a terrorist attack in June, Mulki stressed that the security of Jordan is “above all considerations”, and that its stability is a key factor for the stability of the region.

Grandi expressed the UNHCR’s understanding of the crisis and its impacts on Jordan, commending the noticeable improvement in the refugees’ conditions.
Jordan has fulfilled responsibilities to refugees - Grandi


Jordan has fulfilled its responsibilities in hosting Syrian refugees, and other countries must step up to that, a senior UN official said on Sunday.

The issue of Syrian refugees is currently the most urgent crisis, “partly because the politics around the peace process do not seem to be progressing in the direction we would like them to”, said UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi. The solution to the refugee crisis is peace in Syria, so people can return peacefully and voluntarily to their homes, he said.

“Since that will take time to happen, we will continue to support Jordan,” he added at a joint press conference with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh. Grandi started his second visit to Jordan on Saturday as part of a broader mission to the region, and met with Judeh on Sunday to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Jordan as a host country. At a press conference following the meeting, Judeh said that the Syrian crisis is not the responsibility of Syria’s neighbours alone, stressing that it is an international crisis and that the world must shoulder its responsibilities towards the displaced Syrians. Speaking of the support that Jordan is receiving, Grandi said the London donor conference in February was a turning point, although he acknowledged that its outcomes would take some time to be realised. “The London conference was a new approach to supporting host countries in particular, including Jordan and Lebanon, involving new financial instruments that were never used before in humanitarian crises,” Grandi said, adding that aid pledged in the conference takes longer to be delivered than other forms of assistance aid, which are quicker but modest and unable to fulfil some of the long-term needs, including education and jobs.

“I always say that the London conference came five years late, but it was good,” he stressed.

So far, the Kingdom has received 35 per cent of what is needed to fully provide services to Syrian refugees in the country. Jordan hosts some 1.3 million Syrians, only about half of whom are registered as refugees.

The berm

As for the Syrians stranded in the no-man’s land between the Jordanian and Syrian borders, known as the berm, both Grandi and Judeh stressed that no one is pressuring Jordan to allow them to enter the Kingdom.

Jordan declared the northern and northeastern border areas a closed military zone in June in the aftermath of a terrorist attack that targeted a military post serving refugees near the border, killing seven troops and injuring 13 others. Since then, Jordan has agreed with international relief agencies to allow a one-off aid delivery to the area in August, while global stakeholders were expected to seek alternative solutions to continue the mission.

The UN official said plans adopted by the government ensure a balance between the humanitarian imperative to give assistance to those in the berm and to fully respect the Kingdom’s security concerns.

“Nobody wants Jordan to be destabilised. It has already paid a price in human lives in terms of security and this must not happen again,” Grandi said. “My role is to tell the international community: Do not put more assistance to prepare for a disaster in Mosul at the expense of Aleppo or the expense of what is being done in Jordan,” Grandi noted. “This is what I constantly do.”

Meeting the needs of IDPs in Mosul

Speaking about the current offensive against the Daesh terror group in Iraq’s Mosul and the expected displacement, the official said most Mosul residents will be displaced within Iraq, while very small numbers will cross to Syria. “There are lots of preparations in all areas — shelters, water, medicine, food. The big challenge that we are addressing slowly is sites to put people,” he said.

The task is difficult as Iraq already has more than 3 million displaced people and they occupy a lot of areas, including parts of the land under the jurisdiction of the Kurdish Regional Government.

“There are some complexities there, but we had some progress both in Baghdad and in Erbil”, he added.

Equipment and supplies are ready, and progress has been made in site preparations, said Grandi, noting that a few thousand people had been taken to a site near Mosul. If huge numbers of people flee the Iraqi city, this will be a big challenge whose magnitude would depend on how the offensive develops, he said.
Jordan to speed up screening for Syrian refugees in Azraq - Grandi


Jordan will accelerate the security screening process for 20,000 Syrian refugees in Azraq camp who entered from the no-man's-land near the border earlier this year, a UN official said on Monday.

Before the closure of the northeastern border after a deadly terror attack in June, Jordan allowed around 300 Syrians to enter daily on the condition that the newcomers would be isolated in Azraq for security checks.

A fenced camp was set up in Azraq in late March to speed up the admission of Syrians from the border area. The strict measures aimed to prevent Daesh extremists from infiltrating the Kingdom.

At a press conference in Amman following a three-day visit to the Kingdom, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi said the screening process for the refugees in Azraq would be accelerated to allow them to leave the fenced camp into other blocks of Azraq Camp.

Meanwhile, UN agencies are discussing various options with the Jordanian government to allow aid to the 80,000 Syrians still stranded in the no-man's-land along the border, known as the berm, Grandi told reporters. The mechanism of delivering aid is complicated, Grandi said, adding that one proposal entailed moving the displaced Syrians to a different site.

“The key request of the government is that the population does not stay in that particular location. From a security point of view, it is not viable, so whatever assistance we will be able to provide, will be provided a bit further away,” the UN official explained.

The envisioned mechanism of aid delivery, Grandi said, should provide answers to questions like who will deliver the aid; how to make sure that the people who are really in need get that assistance and not people who have other intentions; how to communicate with these people and how to operate in an environment which is highly insecure. “I am confident that with the cooperation of the government and some supporting states of the UN, we will come soon to an arrangement, whereby assistance will be able to flow or be delivered to those in need of that assistance, but it will be a complex exercise.”

Speaking about the situation of Syrian refugees in the Kingdom, the UN official said the Jordan Compact had resulted in a positive change in refugees’ lives. He said that 32,000 Syrians in Jordan have received work permits in recent months and Syrian children have further access to schools, while resettlement from Jordan to third countries is expected to rise to 30,000 in 2016, from 24,000 last year.

Through investments, jobs will be created for both Jordanians and Syrians, he added.

However, as the war is not over yet, Syria’s neighbours will continue to host the refugees they already have, but with fewer resources, and further displacements could take place in Syria.

“We, as UN agencies, will continue to appeal for additional resources,” Grandi said, adding that around 53 per cent of the resources needed to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis had been received. As for donors’ pledges at the London conference in February, $4.5 billion of the $6 billion pledged has been disbursed, according to Grandi.
No huge refugee influx from Mosul ‘yet’ - UNHCR


Although the outflow of displaced people from Mosul is still low, UNHCR and other UN agencies are prepared to receive large numbers of the displaced as an operation to free the city from Daesh continues, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi said on Monday.

At a press conference in Amman that followed his regional visit to Iraq and Egypt, Grandi said that so far, there are about 7,500 displaced people that have moved from the outskirts of Mosul to other locations.

“They have been assisted and we have around 1,000 people that have crossed into northeastern Syria” and have been received in a camp in Hasakeh governorate.

Still, he noted, there is no movement from the city of Mosul itself.

“I observed preparations for possible large outflow of civilians from Mosul as a result of the offensive that is currently being conducted against those armed groups that are controlling the city of Mosul, the so-called Islamic State.”

“The preparations are proceeding well,” the UN official said, adding that UNHCR is going to have by two to three days 30,000 tents in Iraq, which are enough for 150,000 people, “and more [tents] are coming”.

He explained that the key issue in Mosul was to find enough sites to be able to accommodate the expected flow out of Mosul. “But negotiations are going on this respect with the government of Iraq and Kurdish Regional Government.”

He noted that Iraq already has a population of displaced persons of over 3 million, of whom almost one million have taken refuge in the Kurdish region. “So, it is a complex situation; a burden for the country. It is something that we also need to watch very carefully and bring enough resources to address.” Another key issue regarding Mosul, he added, will be “how the offensive, the military action will be conducted in Iraq itself... It will depend a lot on the very good commitments made by the government of Iraq and Kurdistan, to do it in a way that respects civilians and protects them”. He also expects that the Mosul events may have security repercussions that would affect the rest of the country, depending on how the military action develops. “I received many strong messages of concern from the Jordanian leadership” regarding this, and the situation in Syria as well.

Interior, planning ministers meet UNHCR chief


The government deals with all issues related to the refugee influx comprehensively and in coordination with the concerned authorities, Interior Minister Salameh Hammad said on Monday.

Hammad made his remarks during a meeting with UNHCR Chief Commissioner Filippo Grandi, during which they discussed developments in the refugee crisis and ways to minimise its effects on the Kingdom, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Grandi commended Jordan's stance in dealing with the Syrian crisis, highlighting the UN agency's efforts to support the Kingdom.

Also on Monday, Grandi met with Planning and International Cooperation Minister Imad Fakhoury, who highlighted the burdens from hosting a large number of Syrian refugees on the budget as well as the government's efforts to update the Jordan Response Plan 2017-2019.
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh on Monday discussed bilateral relations with Queen Mathilde of Belgium, highlighting Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania’s recent visit to Belgium, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Queen Mathilde, who arrived to Amman on Sunday, commended the Kingdom’s role in serving Syrian refugees and hosting them, stressing the importance of having the international community shoulder its responsibilities in supporting Jordan.

She said Jordan plays a pivotal role in dealing with the region’s issues to achieve security and stability, noting that her country supports these efforts.

For his part, Judeh said that Jordan is not only providing a safe haven to Syrian refugees, but it also contributes to raising a generation of children awaiting to do their part in rebuilding their country after the crisis.

He highlighted the burdens Jordan shoulders in the education, health, water, energy and labour sectors due to the repercussions of the refugee crisis, commending Belgium’s support to the Kingdom.

The two sides stressed the importance of following up on the outcomes of the London donor conference to support Jordan and enable it to continue its humanitarian role, in addition to supporting host communities and the Kingdom’s economy, and collecting the necessary funds to ensure providing education to more than 165,000 Syrian children.

Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Imad Fakhoury also met with Queen Mathilde and highlighted the importance of establishing connections between the private sectors in both countries in order to build two-way trade partnerships, boost investment and allow Jordanian products to enter European markets.

During the meeting, attended by Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo, Fakhoury commended Belgium’s support for the Kingdom, especially after the London donor conference, a statement from his ministry said.

The minister said that Jordan cannot shoulder any more burdens resulting from hosting Syrian refugees on behalf of the world, stressing the importance of the international community’s support for the Kingdom to enable it continue providing services to the refugees.

Also on Monday, Queen Mathilde visited the Zaatari Refugee Camp, 90km northeast of Amman, where 79,901 Syrians are currently residing, according to the UNHCR’s latest figures. During the visit, the Belgian queen and her accompanying delegation met with the camp’s director and representatives of various international organisations working there, including the UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme. They discussed conditions at the camp, Petra reported. Queen Mathilde also visited various projects and programmes being implemented in the camp to improve the refugees’ living conditions, especially with regards to education. She toured other facilities in the camp to check on the healthcare services offered to the refugees. After the visit, Queen Mathilde visited the UNICEF branch in Mafraq and observed the programmes there, joining Syrian students in a class, during which they spoke about how they crossed into Jordan and the difficulties they faced on their journey.
The UN country team in Jordan celebrated UN Day on Monday, commemorating the 71st anniversary of the ratification of the UN Charter.

The commemoration was held under the umbrella of the new UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF), which will be the roadmap for the UN’s work in the Kingdom for the period 2018-2022 and is aligned with Jordan’s national plans and programmes, according to a UN statement.

“The various international days which we observe as a global community at this time of the year, resonate with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals,” said HRH Princess Basma, addressing the ceremony in her capacity as goodwill ambassador for UN Women and UNFPA, and honorary human development ambassador for UNDP.

Such events aim to strengthen the momentum to push for tangible change, she said.

“In too many parts of such a volatile region as the Arab world, the interrelationship between poverty and conflict has become a stark reality, whereby one of the consequences of the ongoing turmoil is that the percentage of people making less than $1.25 a day has increased from 4.1 per cent to 7.4 per cent,” said the princess.

Discussing the situation of women in the region, the princess noted that early marriage is still the fate of almost three in 10 girls.

“Just imagine the ripple effect on our region if, alongside their peers — the 500 million adolescent girls living in the developing world — our girls were not only safe, healthy and educated, but empowered to draw on their inherent potential, to help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty,” she added.

In his address, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Jordan Edward Kallon said the global transformation this year “seems to match with our local transformation in Jordan”.

“In 2016, the United Nations family has been working closely with the government of Jordan to define its next partnership framework for Jordan for the years 2018 to 2022,” he said.

Kallon, whose mandate in Jordan is about to end, noted that the Kingdom will also witness a change in UN leadership by the end of the year.

As part of the UN country team’s efforts to mark UN Day and to leverage the “high” presence of youth on social media, the team launched an Instagram competition in early October to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNSDPF. Youth were asked to send innovative pictures representing their priorities, with reference to peace and dignity, peace and justice, the planet, prosperity and partnerships. Princess Basma and Kallon honoured the five winners of the competition.
ILO launches Jordan National Dialogue on future of work

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) on Tuesday launched the Jordan National Dialogue as part of the agency’s global Future of Work initiative.

The framework is being launched globally to mark the ILO’s centenary in 2019, and seeks to help the agency and its constituents enhance their understanding of the forces that are changing work.

According to the ILO, the overarching goals of the initiative are to generate a shared understanding of the forces transforming the world of work and what it means for governments, unions and employers; to provide a constructive global forum for the exchange of ideas and information.

The initiative also seeks to articulate and promote policy alternatives and good practices that can be replicated by governments, trade unions and employers’ associations to better serve their members’ needs in the future.

Speaking at the launch ceremony in Amman, Nicolas Niemtchinow, special adviser on the Future of Work, said the centenary initiative “is now the main ILO political priority”.

The Jordan National Dialogue on the Future of Work, which brings together tripartite and social partners, as well as UN agencies, academic institutions, private sector representatives and experts in respective fields, will focus on four thematic areas.

The first area is managing the demographic transition in the country, in which half of the population is under the age of 19, putting an increased focus on the need to provide jobs to a growing workforce.

The initiative will also focus on maintaining social stability in the context of massive population displacement, managing technological change for more and better jobs and managing the employment impact of climate change.

“The issue of maintaining social stability and fighting poverty with decent jobs for all, especially for the younger, is currently a key issue for Jordan,” the ILO official said.

“We all know the burden [hosting refugees] represents for your country, and the ILO is proud to help Jordan to find solutions,” Niemtchinow added.

“I want here to pay tribute to Jordan for having offered a safe harbour to Syrian refugees and for allowing them to work.”

The results and recommendations of the Jordan National Dialogue will feed into a regional conference, to be held in early 2017, to discuss the future of work in Arab states and the next programming phase of the ILO in Jordan.

JOHUD, UNHCR fund small businesses in Tafilah

The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) in cooperation with UNHCR has implemented a project to support Syrian refugees and the local community, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported on Tuesday.

JOHUD funded small businesses in Tafilah by providing JD300-500 each to 50 families in the governorate.