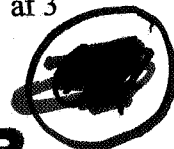


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**UNHCR**
The UN Refugee Agency**U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2002 – Jordan**

June 2002

At the end of 2001, Jordan hosted more than 1.64 million refugees in need of protection. These included 1,639,718 Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 990 refugees registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and 3,217 asylum seekers awaiting a UNHCR refugee status determination at year's end. In addition, the Jordanian government estimated that another 800,000 Palestinian "displaced persons" were residing in the country. Palestinians constitute more than half of Jordan's total population. Although an estimated 250,000 Iraqis lived in Jordan during 2001, it was unclear how many were refugees.

Developments in 2001

During the first half of June, the Jordanian government barred Palestinian residents of the West Bank with Jordanian travel documents from entering the country, reportedly out of concern about a possible mass expulsion of West Bank Palestinians by the Israeli army. However, Jordan rescinded the restriction on June 20 in response to official and popular Palestinian protest. Jordanian media reported a net influx of more than 26,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip between August 2000 and June 2001.

The Jordanian government denied charges reported in the local press in July 2001 that it had stripped thousands of Jordanians of Palestinian descent of their citizenship. However, human rights activists claimed that the government had refused to renew the passports of about 350 Jordanians of Palestinian origin who remained outside Jordan during 2001.

Palestinians

Palestinian refugees in Jordan, who represented 42 percent of all UNRWA-registered refugees in 2001, appeared the most secure economically and legally of any of the Palestinian refugees in the areas of UNRWA operation. The agency's budgetary difficulties, however, continued to result in a deterioration of health and educational services. On the positive side, hardship cases represented only 2.6 percent of the UNRWA-registered refugees in Jordan, the lowest percentage of any of the areas of UNRWA operation. Jordan also boasted the lowest percentage of Palestinian refugees living in camps. Although the government maintained ten camps that sheltered 287,951 refugees during the year, 82 percent of the registered refugees in Jordan lived outside camps.

In addition, the Jordanian government unofficially estimates that it hosts 800,000 Palestinians displaced because of the 1967 war. The government calls the 1967 arrivals "displaced persons" rather than refugees because, at that time, Jordan claimed sovereignty on both the east and west banks of the Jordan River.

Legal Status

Palestinian refugees in Jordan have a unique legal position. Unlike the other states hosting Palestinians within the UNRWA mandate area, many Palestinians in Jordan have full citizenship rights, including the right to vote. UNRWA defines Palestinian refugees as persons who resided in Palestine two years prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1948, and lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the conflict, as well as persons descended from the original refugees. UN General Assembly Resolution 194 recognizes only repatriation or compensation as permanent solutions to the Palestinian refugee problem. Citizenship in another country, therefore, does not terminate refugee status as it would for

other refugee groups covered by the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol. The UN Refugee Convention excludes Palestinians who were already under UNRWA's mandate in 1951. In effect, this means that UNHCR does not concern itself with (or count) Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, or the West Bank and Gaza Strip, although it may assist Palestinian refugees outside the UNRWA mandate area.

UNRWA does not specifically track the number of refugees in Jordan who have Jordanian citizenship, which it considers irrelevant to its mandate. In general, Palestinian refugees with Jordanian citizenship have the same rights as other Jordanian citizens. Nevertheless, Palestinians remain significantly underrepresented in the Jordanian legislature, despite their forming an outright majority of the total Jordanian population. They also continue to suffer discrimination in appointments to government and military positions, as well as in admission to universities and access to university scholarships.

Jordan does not offer citizenship to Palestinians who originated in the Gaza Strip (about 150,000 people), over which Jordan never claimed sovereignty. Instead, Jordan issues them two-year passports carrying a stamp indicating that the holder is originally from Gaza and entered Jordan in 1967. Holders of two-year passports are not allowed to vote or hold public-sector jobs. Jordan issues five-year passports to Palestinians who reside in the West Bank, although Jordan maintains that these passports are for travel purposes only and do not confer nationality.

Relief and Development

UNRWA's weakened financial state improved little in 2001, continuing to strain the agency's ability to assist refugees in Jordan during the year.

In Jordan, UNRWA's financial difficulties had the greatest impact on education and health. Although the number of students enrolled in UNRWA schools declined for the seventh straight year (by 1.7 percent during the 2000-2001 reporting year), UNRWA schools continued to suffer from overcrowding, inferior facilities, and lack of extracurricular activities for students. Almost all UNRWA schools in Jordan operated on double shifts. The decline in enrollment resulted, in part, from students transferring from UNRWA schools to Jordanian government schools, which generally had more experienced teachers, smaller student-teacher ratios, shorter school weeks, and better facilities.

UNRWA remained particularly concerned with the poor condition of many of its school buildings in Jordan in 2001. One-quarter of the agency's 190 school buildings needed to be renovated or replaced, UNRWA reported.

UNRWA health care was similarly strained. Budget constraints forced the agency to end individual subsidies for treatment at private hospitals in 1996, a measure that remained in place in 2001. UNRWA referred patients to government hospitals for secondary care during 2001, but was only able to cover a portion of the costs, leaving the remainder to be assumed by the individual refugees in need of treatment. During 2001, however, UNRWA was able to continue its funding for women with high-risk pregnancies. More generally, UNRWA's weakened financial state prevented the agency from keeping pace with the demand for refugee health services.

In part because of UNRWA's severe and prolonged budget deficit, the Jordanian government has increased its share of the costs of caring for refugees in recent years. During UNRWA's 2000-2001 reporting year, Jordan spent \$392.1 million on behalf of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, five times more than UNRWA spent on refugee services in Jordan during 2001.

Non-Palestinian Refugees

At year's end, 990 UNHCR-recognized refugees were in Jordan, 868 of whom came from Iraq. During the year, 4,605 asylum seekers filed claims with UNHCR, the overwhelming

majority, 4,095, from Iraq. Small numbers of Sudanese, Syrians, and Sri Lankans also applied for refugee status in Jordan during the year.

During 2001, UNHCR decided the cases of 3,105 refugee applicants (including appeals), granting refugee status to 703 refugees, an approval rate of 22.6 percent. Iraqi nationals – accounting for 89 percent of all decisions taken by UNHCR-Amman – had an approval rate of 24.6 percent.

Although Jordan is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, the government signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR in April 1998 concerning the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. According to the memorandum, Jordan agrees to admit asylum seekers, including undocumented entrants, and respect UNHCR's refugee status determinations. The memorandum also adopts the refugee definition contained in the UN Refugee Convention and forbids the *refoulement* – forced return – of refugees and asylum seekers.

Although no confirmed incidents of *refoulement* occurred during 2001, reports emerged that the Jordanian authorities deported hundreds of Iraqi nationals residing illegally in Jordan. It was unclear if any of the deportees were refugees or had claims pending with UNHCR.

Neither the Jordanian government nor UNHCR considers Jordan to be a permanent country of asylum. Therefore, resettlement outside the region is the only durable solution for the overwhelming majority of UNHCR-recognized refugees in Jordan. Although it normally takes 10 to 12 months to resettle refugees from the time UNHCR approves their applications, the Jordanian government limits to six months the period that refugees may legally remain in Jordan and does not renew identification documents after the first six months have elapsed. The government generally tolerates the presence of refugees after their documents lapse; however, refugees without valid identification tended to be more vulnerable to a variety of protection problems during the year. Iraqi government agents reportedly operate in Jordan, contributing to a climate of insecurity and unease for many Iraqis.

Iraqis

Estimates of the number of Iraqis living in Jordan range from 200,000 to 350,000. It is unclear how many are refugees. Many Iraqis who fear persecution in Iraq are believed to slip across the border into Jordan, where they remain without status or seek to move on to other countries. Others enter Jordan legally on Iraqi passports, which even individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution can procure if they have enough money to pay the requisite bribes. The government generally allows Iraqis, documented or not, to remain in Jordan for up to six months, after which they must either return to Iraq or depart to a third country in order to renew their visa.

While UNHCR provides modest assistance to Iraqis and others whom the agency recognizes as refugees, the broader population of Iraqis receives little to no assistance. During a November 2001 site visit to Jordan, the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) found that many Iraqis are among the poorest in Jordanian society, eking out meager existences in jobs such as street vendors while living in overcrowded and sometimes unsanitary conditions.

