

Community development of Palestinian refugee camps:

Analytical support to Jordan's preparations for the June 2004 Geneva conference on the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees

The Material and Social Infrastructure, and Environmental Conditions of Refugee Camps in Jordan

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Introduction

Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs, being chair of Working group II at the June Geneva conference on the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees, has asked Fafo for assistance in its preparation. This paper provides a summary of the housing, material and social infrastructure, and environmental conditions found in the refugee camps in Jordan. Fafo's support to the Geneva conference is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There are a total of 10 official and three unofficial refugee camps in Jordan. There is an estimated 1.5 million Palestinian refugees residing in Jordan (Pedersen 2002). Refugee camps are concentrated in certain regions and 95 percent of camp residents live in urban areas. In this paper we discuss *only* the conditions found for refugees living in the refugee camps.

The refugee camps in Jordan are comparable in terms of community housing and infrastructure to other areas in Jordan. The Jordanian government, through its Community Infrastructure Programme (CIP), has included development of refugee camps in implementing community development programs throughout the Kingdom. In addition, good coverage of UNRWA services in the camps ensures that refugee communities have adequate access to vital community services. However, there are certain aspects of housing and infrastructure that are problematic in camps especially. These, similar to the situation in refugee camps elsewhere, include first, crowded living conditions and the symptoms of crowding reflected in the environmental conditions, and second, poor reliability in the supply of various resources such as electricity and drinking water.

This paper shall present some aspects of housing, infrastructure amenities and environmental conditions of the camps through the use of statistics. The main text is followed by tables in Annex 1. However, at the outset we shall give a short introduction to Fafo's research on Palestinian refugees and the studies on which this paper for the most part builds.

Fafo and the Study of Palestinian Refugees

Fafo Institute for Applied International studies is a Norwegian not-for-profit research organisation that has carried out statistical and other studies on Palestinian refugees for more than a decade. The bulk of activities have been financed by grants from the Norwegian Government. Other donors such as the governments of Canada, Sweden, the US and Switzerland, along with UN agencies such as UNICEF and United Nations Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East (UNSCO) have also contributed. Fafo cooperates with Palestinian and host country partners, and in addition to implementing data collection and analysis does its utmost to ensure transfer of competences to local partners.

Over the past few years, Fafo has carried out a number of household living conditions surveys: in Jordan's refugee camps in 1999 (in cooperation with Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs and Yarmouk University); in refugee camps and non-camp localities of Lebanon in 1999 (with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus) and in Syria in 2001 (also with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus). Together with Jordan's Department of Statistics (DOS), Fafo conducted a national living conditions survey in Jordan (1996), which also identified Palestinian refugees and allowed comprehensive statistical analysis on them. A similar household survey was fielded late 2003, again together with DOS, and analysis of this material is now under way. Fafo carried out the first-ever comprehensive household surveys in the West Bank and Gaza in 1990 and 1993. Since then Fafo has cooperated with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, on a Demographic survey, and implemented qualitative research on the effects of Israel's closure policies during the second *intifada* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in cooperation with UNSCO in 2001 and 2002. The said fieldworks and studies have resulted in a number of publications, which are listed in Annex 2.

This paper mainly draws on data from the survey of Palestinian refugee camps (1999). While positive developments with regard to the physical infrastructure of Jordan's camps have taken place since these data were gathered, we believe they are largely representative of the situation. When the paper makes comparisons between

Palestinian refugees residing in the camps and those living outside them, or contrasts the living conditions of camp refugees with those of the Jordanian non-camp and non-refugee population, information is based on the Jordan Living Conditions Survey (1996), the only available source of national statistics on Palestinian refugees.¹

Housing and Material Infrastructure

Similar to the situation in Palestinian refugee camps in other countries, in Jordan camps refugees are housed in dwellings that are meant, in material terms, to be permanent structures. That is, there are very few camp refugees living in make-shift housing such as tents or barracks. However, there are some areas and populations in which make-shift housing is relatively more common than others. Rural camp residents over three times more often live in make-shift or otherwise unsafe housing, but this is marked primarily among the non-camp refugee population rather than camp refugee households. For example, among non-camp refugee households in Jordan nine percent live in this type of housing compared to between one and two percent of the urban non-camp refugee households. Regional concentrations also exist in Jordan with those in camps in northern Jordan (versus Amman) more often living in such makeshift or unsafe housing – but this is closely related to the rural nature of this region.

Crowding and poor indoor environment effects many refugee households

Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan are characterised by having dense living spaces according to many indicators. Most roadways are narrow, in the range of two to six meters wide, residential areas are densely constructed and there is widespread crowding within the dwellings themselves. Some 34 percent of camp households live in housing with 3 or more persons per room, a typical measure of a “crowded” dwelling. In the camps, there is not a large difference among types of households (according to income and other characteristics) and the incidence of crowded dwellings. That is, wealthier households have larger housing, but they are nearly just as often crowded as

¹ The 1994 Population Census collected statistics on Palestinian refugees, but such data have never been released.

among lower income households. The reason for this is the family life cycle (older persons live alone and have lower incomes than others; higher-income households typically have a higher number of income earners and are larger) and the restrictions on space in the camps for growing families.

Poor indoor environment reported to be much more of a problem for camp refugee households than for others in Jordan

Given the compact nature of construction in the refugee camps, it is not surprising that environmental conditions, both within and outside of the dwelling are problematic. Seven in 10 refugee camp households in Jordan report multiple indoor environmental problems in their dwelling (two out of three problems including: difficulty in regulating temperature, poor ventilation and dampness).

Looking at the three types of indoor environment problems individually, camp households in Jordan more often report they have each of the problems than others (non-camp refugees and/or non-refugees?). Humidity, cold rooms in winter and hot rooms in summer are common complaints for camp refugees, with over one-half of these households reporting each of these problems. Ventilation is less of a problem than humidity and temperature control for all groups, with roughly 40 percent reporting poor ventilation, but markedly more of an issue in camps than elsewhere. In Jordan, nearly twice as many camp refugees complain of hot rooms in summer than non-camp refugees (65 percent compared to roughly 35 percent). Ventilation is also much more of a problem with 45 percent of camp households compared to 22 percent of non-camp refugee households reporting poor ventilation.

Very poor stability in the supply of drinking water in refugee camps

Although nearly all camp refugees in Jordan have drinking water piped into the residence. However, some 60 percent experience at least weekly cut-offs. This lack of stability is rather uniform across socio-economic and urban/ rural groups, with the exception that more rural households report daily as opposed to weekly problems (10 percent compared to two percent). Camps in the rural north have particularly poor stability, with 70 percent of households reporting unstable drinking water supply.

Inadequate electricity supply for two out of 10 refugee camp households

All households report to be connected to electricity, but some 20 percent of camp refugees have poor electricity stability compared to less than five percent of others in Jordan. Among camp refugees, lack of stable electricity is more common among poor and rural households. Nearly twice the proportion of low-income camp households (25 percent) has poor electric stability than high income (14 percent). Some 35 percent of rural and 16 percent of urban camp households have poor stability of electricity.

Almost half of camp refugee households do not have a bath or shower in their residence

Having a bath or shower in the residence is also less common among camp refugees; with only 45 percent of households have this amenity. As with electricity stability, the rural north region is particularly less well off, with 60 percent of camp refugees not having a bath or shower within the dwelling.

Some one-quarter of camp residents are not connected to a sewerage system and existing septic tanks are reported to be inadequate.

More camp households lack access to an adequate sewer system than others, and discussions with camp residents point to problems with existing sewer systems. Although a household has a septic tank, camp residents report these are frequently improperly constructed causing leakages which flow into open rainwater drainage systems.

Many camp households are dissatisfied with their housing, but stay due to lower costs in the camps

In Jordan refugee camps, four in 10 households are dissatisfied with general housing conditions – twice the proportion than among non-camp refugees. Moreover, camp households are less satisfied with every individual housing conditions than others. Roughly 35 percent of camp refugees are dissatisfied with each space, noise, indoor environment, outdoor pollution, safety for children, and general housing conditions. One-quarter is dissatisfied with housing cost. One in five households are dissatisfied

with privacy and traffic. Higher income households are most dissatisfied with space, noise and outdoor pollution (48 percent compared to 33 percent on average). The family life cycle also plays a role with established families with younger children being most dissatisfied with space and privacy (43 percent) (because they objectively speaking are bigger families and have less space per capita).

Despite dissatisfaction, low housing cost keeps camp residents where they are – especially low-income households. Some 15 percent of camp households report that they plan to move. Out of these households, 14 percent plan to move within the camp and 86 percent outside the camp. Planning to move is more common in higher income groups, as 30 percent of upper and upper-middle income groups compared to 12 percent of lower income groups plan to move. Housing cost is reported as the second most commonly reported reason (next to family, friends and neighbours) that households decide to stay where they are despite dissatisfaction. The main reason camp refugees plan to move is dissatisfaction with general housing conditions.

Environment

Poor sanitation systems raise obvious environmental concerns. Camp residents report ill health effects among children including skin diseases. Outdoor environmental problems in refugee camps are numerous and include noise pollution and other types of pollution.

Noise pollution a major problem in the refugee camps

Given the high living density in the camps, it is not surprising that many camp residents are bothered by noise pollution. About 25 percent of households found the outdoor noise pollution to be so disruptive that it frequently made it difficult to have normal conversations within the dwelling. Another 15 percent report that disturbing noise occurred occasionally.

Three in 10 camp households are dissatisfied with the level of pollution in the camps.

In addition to noise pollution, other types of pollution are apparent in the refugee camps. Over 30 percent of households report that they are dissatisfied with the level of pollution.

Social Infrastructure

From a community service perspective, the refugee camp residents are generally satisfied with health, education, transportation and commercial services in their camps, but other types of services are lacking.

Many households are unhappy with the cultural activities available

About 30 percent of households report that they are dissatisfied with cultural institutions in their camp. This is typical of camps elsewhere in the region, where we find a lack of cultural institutions such as theatres and libraries.

The largest complaint among camp refugees is the lack of work and business opportunities in the camps.

Close to 70 percent of camp households say that they are not satisfied with the employment and business opportunities in their community. Regional variations exist, with those in Amman being relatively more satisfied with work and business opportunities in their camp than those in other areas.

Annex 1: Tables

Table 1: Household Crowding by Region (percent of households)

	Amman	West	North	Total
3 or more persons per room	32	35	33	34
Less than 3 persons per room	68	65	67	66
<i>N</i>	392	541	934	1867
<i>uwn</i>	764	488	1291	2543

Table 2: Infrastructure Amenities by Urban/Rural Location (percent of households)

	Urban	Rural	Total
Independent kitchen	98	95	97
Private bath/shower	47	41	45
Toilet inside living quarters	84	56	77
Sewage network/septic tank	100	93	98
Garbage collected	88	88	88
Drinking water piped into residence	94	83	92
Stable drinking water supply	42	33	40
Connected to electricity network	100	100	100
Stable electricity supply	84	66	80
Room heating	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	1433	434	1867
<i>uwn</i>	1707	836	2543

Table 3: Dissatisfaction with Indoor and Outdoor Environment (percent of households)

	Urban	Rural	Total
Unsatisfied with noise	38	25	35
Unsatisfied with indoor environment	35	31	34
Unsatisfied with outdoor pollution	34	43	36
<i>n</i>	1457	437	1884
<i>uwn</i>	1745	844	2589

Table 4: Dissatisfaction with Housing and Neighbourhood (percent of Households)

	Urban	Rural	Total
Unsatisfied with space/size	33	33	33
Unsatisfied with privacy	18	20	18
Unsatisfied with safety for children	35	27	33
Unsatisfied with traffic	22	19	21
Unsatisfied with water supply	27	34	28
Unsatisfied with water quality	20	20	20
<i>n</i>	1457	437	1894
<i>uwn</i>	1745	844	2589

Table 5: Dissatisfaction with Community Services (percent of households)

	Amman	West	North	Total
Unsatisfied with schools	6	10	10	9
Unsatisfied with health services	8	12	10	10
Unsatisfied with public transportation	6	12	10	10
Unsatisfied with shops and commerce	2	6	5	4
Unsatisfied with cultural institutions	30	36	35	34
Unsatisfied with work, bus opportunities	58	72	68	67
<i>N</i>	392	541	934	1867
<i>uwn</i>	764	488	1291	2543

Annex 2: Fafo Publications on Palestinian Refugees

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- Sletten, Pål and Pedersen, Jon 2003. *Coping with Conflict: Palestinian Communities Two Years Into the Intifada*, Fafo-report 408, Oslo: Fafo.
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