Operational context

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan continues to play an important stabilizing role in a volatile region including being a major host country for refugees. Apart from hosting 2.1 million registered Palestine refugees, it now also hosts over 600,000 refugees from Syria and other countries, who are registered with UNHCR. The influx of Syrian refugees has resulted in a significant burden being placed on the municipal infrastructures in locations where newly arrived refugees have settled. Nevertheless, the Government of Jordan (GOJ) continues to allow Syrian refugees who are in the country to remain.

The Jordanian Government made a number of political and constitutional changes in response domestic calls for reform, including protests, which were peaceful and limited in scale. As Jordan remains the most stable country in the region, outside factors, in particular the spillover effects of the Syria crisis and the political events in Egypt, have had an impact on Jordanian domestic affairs.

Jordan’s economy, like other countries in the region, has not yet recovered from the global economic downturn in 2008, and has more recently been affected by the Syria crisis. Jordan continues to be heavily dependent on foreign assistance and revenues from abroad. As per the projections of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jordan’s real GDP growth rate will hover below 4 per cent until 2016. The economic conditions set for a 2012 IMF loan agreement have prompted the GOJ to cut subsidies, increase electricity bills and fuel prices. Unemployment stands at roughly 14 per cent, with the highest rates (29.3 per cent) of unemployment recorded in the 15 – 24 age range and unemployment being significantly higher for women than for men. Jordan also has a young population with a high population growth rate of 3.86 per cent (2014). The influx of refugees from Syria is placing additional pressure on a tight labour market, due to increased competition for jobs across the country, which also impacts employment opportunities for Palestine refugees.

Jordan’s poverty rate is at 13.3 per cent. The poverty rate of Palestine refugees living inside camps is 31 per cent, while the poverty rate of Palestine refugees living outside the camps is comparable to the national average. Palestine refugees who fled Gaza in 1967 (‘ex-Gazans’) are a particularly vulnerable group among Palestine refugees living in Jordan. Unlike most Palestine refugees, they do not hold Jordanian citizenship and are thus excluded from most government services which require Jordanian nationality. This represents approximately 150,000 refugees.
The most recent peace talks triggered anxiety and uncertainty among Palestine refugees. This led many refugees in Jordan updating their records or registering with UNRWA as Palestine refugees, in anticipation of possible discussions over the final status of Palestine refugees. The uncertainty over the course of peace talks and any eventual plans also increased tensions in the camps, where sections of the refugee community were fearful that they could be forgotten in any eventual deal. There were rumours and anxiety that UNRWA would be closing its operations and that the refugees would be forgotten by the international community. Finally, feelings ran high concerning any potential compensation that Jordan should receive for having hosted the Palestine refugees and statements were made that Jordan should not be serving as a substitute homeland for the Palestinians.

Despite its generous refugee policies, Jordan declared a policy of non-admission of Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) in January 2013. By May 2014, approximately 14,000 PRS had been recorded with UNRWA in Jordan. The Agency continues to urge Jordan to uphold humanitarian principles and to consider granting temporary access to Palestinians fleeing Syria for humanitarian reasons. UNRWA remains committed to assist those fleeing conflict in their country, in coordination with the government and the humanitarian community. The lack of protection space for PRS remains the main challenge in Jordan. UNRWA has documented the forcible return of 74 individuals in 2013, and 45 individuals deported since January 2014.

**Accomplishments**

The implementation of UNRWA programmatic reforms is progressing. With respect to the education programme, School Principals and their deputies have completed three out of the four components of the Leading for the Future training programme, which is aimed at developing their capacity to lead the implementation of the education reform in UNRWA schools. The programme is due to be completed by November 2014.

The School-Based Teacher Development Programme, designed to promote more active pedagogical methods, has been rolled-out in all areas and will be completed by June 2014. The education reform will be supported and strengthened by new units that will be located in the Field Office and the Education Development Centre that are planned to be operational in September 2014. Furthermore, in line with government schools and in response to demands from the community, the staff and the students, UNRWA introduced a five-day school week in February 2014. UNRWA is closely monitoring the impact of this change, which has been met with appreciation, and allows additional time for co-curricula activities as well as staff training opportunities to be undertaken on Saturdays.

UNRWA continues the successful rollout of the Family Health Team (FHT) approach, e-Health and the appointment system in its health centres in order to improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare services. Of UNRWA’s 24 health centres in Jordan, 13 now apply the FHT approach, eight have shifted to the e-Health system and seven have implemented an electronic appointment system. These changes have been appreciated by the refugees, as the level of care has improved. Waiting times have been reduced significantly and the average number of consultations per medical officer has decreased from 96 per day in 2010 to 84 per day in March 2014.

The Social Safety Net programme of the Relief and Social Services department has evolved from a status-based to a poverty-based approach that uses analysis of individual refugee data to better identify the poor and to better determine families’ poverty levels, when compared with the abject and absolute poverty lines. Whilst it is recognized that there is a need to expand the number of people who can benefit from this programme, it is essential that currently available resources target those who are most in need. An appeals system for exceptional cases is being successfully piloted in the South Amman area and is planned to be operating throughout Jordan Field by the end of 2014.
Jordan Field is also piloting the delivery of social services in a manner that better responds to the needs of vulnerable families. An initiative, which started in 2011, is now receiving UNICEF support to develop and implement a Comprehensive Case Management system, including internal and external referral services to address these complex social problems more holistically. This new way of working with families and children who are experiencing a mix of complex family, social and economic issues, including those related to child and family protection, is being tested in Marka Camp. Partnerships with government and non-government organizations are in place for referral services, and training on the system for 70 social workers commenced in April 2014. Once the results of this pilot approach have been reviewed it is planned that it will be rolled out throughout the Kingdom.

With the focus on linkages to employment, the TVET and FESA programme continue to expand, building on the success of the parallel courses which have responded to the demand for additional places to be made available. At the same time these courses provide an opportunity to raise funds that can be reinvested to undertake activities such as improvements, maintenance and expansion of infrastructure of educational institutions and staff capacity. Palestine refugees who would not normally be provided the opportunity to study at vocational training centres now have this chance. This income-generating activity provides UNRWA an opportunity to undertake more activities and therefore leads to an improvement in services, including for example the construction of the new FESA building that will greatly enhance the services that the centre can provide.

The US government funded the Operations Support Officer (OSO) programme, similar to the programmes operating in Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon, in the Jordan Field. The programme will ensure strict adherence to humanitarian principles, including neutrality, and to better assure protection for Palestine refugees living in Jordan. The establishment of this unit will strengthen UNRWA’s efforts to mainstream protection throughout Field operations. The recruitment process for protection staff has already commenced.

The US government funded the Irbid Health Centre was completed in early 2014, and saw the merger of two old and overstretched health centres into a new centre which can provide preventive and curative services to a larger number of refugees. Savings generated by this project will allow UNRWA to re-allocate much needed resources to under-served areas. A further expansion of the Jerash health centre has also recently led to improved services being offered in the camp.

UNRWA is also looking to improve the quality of educational installations in Jordan. Construction of “green” school buildings in JabalTaj will commence in the coming months whilst Nuzha school reconstruction is ongoing. These projects will not only replace six unsuitable buildings and provide improved teaching and learning environment, it is envisaged that approximately USD 300,000 will be saved annually on staffing costs, rent and utility expenses. Further savings will be generated in electricity and water bills from the use of LED lights, rain water harvesting system, basic solar water heating system and energy efficient security lights. These savings will be re-allocated within the Field to further improve the current level of services provided.

The donor funded Camp Improvement Programme continues to work on improving the living conditions of the refugees in Husn, Talbiyeh and Jerash camps. This includes several projects and initiatives that will lead to more ownership by the community. The first phase to reconstruct shelters in Jerash camp has commenced, and is part of an EU-funded project to improve living conditions and provide housing for 80 families. Through support by KfWDevelopment Bank both the boys’ and girls’ school in Husn camp will be extended in time for the next scholastic year in these camps, while 65 shelters will be rehabilitated in Talbiyeh camp.

The environmental health conditions in Palestine refugee camps in Jordan are of concern, with a continual increase in the volumes of solid waste generated. UNRWA has identified this as a major area for review, and seven small compactors are due for delivery in July 2014 in Marka and Zarqa camps which will mechanize the garbage collection there. It is expected that this will have immediate as well as longer term benefits both in terms of cost as well as quality of service. In addition, staff freed by the
mechanisation process will be re-assigned from these two camps to other priority camps which will therefore see improvements, most notably Baq’a, the largest Palestine refugee camp in Jordan.

The Agency's Micro Finance Programme has continued to expand its outreach with a new branch in Jerash camp opened in March 2014 and another new branch in South Amman to be opened by the end of 2014.

The emergency response team, working with the programme departments has effectively provided support to Palestinian refugees fleeing from Syria who continue to rely heavily on the humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA. UNRWA provides cash assistance as well as education and health services to Palestinian refugees fleeing from Syria. Currently, UNRWA is shifting to ATM-based cash transfers to maximise aid effectiveness.

Challenges

The Agency’s financial constraints and the deteriorating economic situation in Jordan are both having a detrimental impact on Palestine refugees, who already suffer from multiple vulnerabilities. Financial support for UNRWA’s operations in Jordan has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by the growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding needs, and deepening poverty. This challenges the Agency in its efforts to roll out reforms, respond to emerging needs and maintain quality core services.

Moreover, the lack of financial resources has meant that the number of families benefiting from the Social Safety Net programme has been kept at an artificially low ceiling. It is estimated that 14,000 persons having been identified as living in abject poverty, cannot receive UNRWA assistance due to lack of resources. The costs of including the additional identified case load would be USD 1.6 million. Not only does this mean that these families cannot receive and benefit from assistance, it also undermines the entire programme, where an appeal system will confirm that the respective families are in fact eligible to receive assistance.

The GOJ's fiscal measures also had a negative impact on UNRWA’s service delivery, especially in the health sector. Negotiations regarding the rate of reimbursement for hospital visits, and access for the poorest Palestine refugees with Jordanian nationality to the National Aid Fund’s health insurance scheme, which has been restricted since 2013, are both on-going. Utility price rises following the reduction in GOJ subsidies for electricity will pose a further strain on already tight budgets. The current budget allocated for 2014 will not cover the costs of the services that are provided and reductions will have to be made before the end of 2014 if no additional funds are made available.

The issue of rented schools continues to be the key challenge that UNRWA faces in Jordan with more than 15,000 Palestinian students studying in schools that are run from buildings that were not constructed to serve as schools. Replacing rented schools with purpose-built facilities will not only lead to an improved learning environment, but would also be cost efficient for the Agency in the longer term, as there will be substantial savings in running costs. UNRWA is working closely with the GOJ to identify land that could be made available for construction of purpose-built schools.

UNRWA provides limited technical guidance and some financial resources to Community Based Organisations (CBO) which provide services to Palestine refugees. An MOU is expected to be completed in the coming months for signature with the CBO’s, which will improve and formalise the relationship between the Agency and CBOs.

The ongoing impact of the conflict in Syria means that UNRWA needs to continue to provide services to Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) who have sought temporary refuge in Jordan. With the closure of the borders with Syria in January 2013, some PRS have chosen to enter Jordan irregularly, resulting in many living in poverty with precarious legal status. This creates difficulties for civil processes, access to
services and livelihoods. Along with some 200 Syrians, 188 PRS continue to be housed in Cyber City, a government-appointed facility near Ramtha. UNRWA’s Emergency PRS Appeal has far been under-funded to respond to this situation. To date, UNRWA has received US$ 3 million towards an emergency appeal for US$ 14.6 million for Jordan. This is hampering the Agency’s ability to provide vital support in the area of cash assistance for food, shelter and emergency needs to Palestine refugees from Syria.

Opportunities

UNRWA is in the process of developing relations with local donors and the private sector in Jordan. Areas and programmes have received local donations, mostly for furniture, equipment, extensions of installations or for maintenance purposes. In general these donations, whilst being of significant importance, are relatively insufficient. However, the construction of a new boys’ school in Jerash camp and a health centre in Duleil, were entirely funded by local donors. UNRWA will shortly recruit staff to develop and maintain more effective relations with locally based donors, and support the Agency in programmatic communications with all stakeholders.

Further, UNRWA is exploring possible partnerships with the private sector and is currently engaged in discussions with several larger private enterprises to explore the possibilities and opportunities to extend and enhance services that are provided to the Palestine refugees in Jordan.

UNICEF remains a key partner to UNRWA in Jordan. A 2015-16 Palestine Programme results framework has been developed jointly between UNRWA and UNICEF. This framework aims at providing support to those more vulnerable and at risk youth in the areas of education, health and protection. UNRWA also remains engaged with other UN Agencies, especially WHO, UNHCR, OCHA and WFP.

In its attempts to further identify additional rationalization of its resources, UNRWA is developing a review of its installations. As a result of the merger of Irbid Camp and Irbid Town health centres into Irbid New Health Centre, a number of posts will be redeployed to Duleil and Sukhneh health centres, to provide and enhance health services to refugees in under-served areas. Sukhneh clinic is currently running on three days per week and providing curative and non-communicable disease care only. Once the health team is redeployed it will provide preventive and curative services at both health centres in Sukhneh and Duleil on alternate days. The co-operation of the government, through the DPA and the local Municipality, a private donor and UNRWA’s health and engineering departments will result in a new health centre being established in Duleil. The land is provided by the government, the building constructed by a local donor under UNRWA’s supervision and the centre staffed and run by UNRWA’s re-allocated resources. The methodology of this model creates a win-win scenario and is one that the Field is studying to see if it could be replicated in other under-served areas.

The possible expansion of the parallel courses within the TVET and FESA programmes is an area that UNRWA will focus on. This could not only lead to an increase in the number of refugees who would have access to higher level education, it would also increase the chances of a greater number of young refugees accessing the labour market, whilst at the same time investing funds in the centres which would improve the quality of education that is provided through better trained staff, improved equipment and infrastructure.