

AMMAN, A WELCOMING CITY FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Haleemah Alamoush

Planning & Development Manager for the Community Development Sector, Greater Amman Municipality (GAM)

I. Jordan's long migration history

Amman is Jordan's capital and most populous city, as well as its economic, political and cultural centre. Jordan is at the centre of the Middle East region, and has a long history of migration, acting as both a vertical and horizontal corridor for migration throughout the region. This is due in no small part to the country's stability and security, which have served not only the Jordanian people, but all others who have sought a safe haven there from other countries in the region.

Since its creation, Jordan has received three major influxes of refugees. Of the Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the region, 42% live in Jordan. The 450,000 refugees in 1948, followed by 240,000 in 1967, are now dispersed across the cities and in the 13 official refugee camps served by the UNRWA. The Iraqi refugee population, driven from home since early 1990s as a result of economic and political conflicts, varied between 500,000 in 2008 and 54,586 once the fighting between civilians stopped and large numbers of Iraqis were sent back to their country in 2010. UN humanitarian relief records show that as of February 2017, 61,405 Iraqis are registered with UNHCR in Jordan.

Since 2013, Jordan has received a new wave of refugees. The ramifications of the Arab Spring brought Libyans and Yemenis to the country seeking shelter until peace returns to their home country. Small numbers of Somali and Sudanese also arrived in Jordan. The Syrian influx, however, was the most concerning because of the large numbers of people seeking safe haven. The seasonal/economic migrants from Syria who used to commute between Jordan and Syria for work opportunities could not go back home, so they remained in Jordan. Not all have registered as refugees. Large numbers of Syrians entered Jordan through official and non-official borders. The number of Syrians registered with the UNHCR has been 660,015, meanwhile in the 2015 government census registered Syrians numbered 1.265 million, making 13.2% of the total population. The difference between the UNHCR figures and those of the government of Jordan reflects the discrepancy in registration amongst the Syrian refugees. Not all Syrians living in Jordan registered with UNHCR, as a large number of them were economic migrants in Jordan before the conflict and had well-established social and professional capital in the country. This led many Syrians to attempt to

Jordan has a long history of migration and is a corridor for migrants throughout the region.

Relative to its own population, Jordan has the second-largest refugee population in the world, with refugees.

Since 2013, the population of Amman has sharply increased with the mass arrival of Syrian refugees.

secure a livelihood without seeking to register with UNHCR. In 2017, the figure rose to 1.4 million according to the updated figures.

The country has, thus, always been open to migrants and people fleeing their home countries and in need of assistance. Relative to its own population, Jordan has the second-largest refugee population in the world, with refugees representing more than 30% of the total population. Despite this fact, Jordan has not signed up to the 1951 UNHCR Refugee Convention and does not have legislation that regulates the status of refugees.

II. Amman, a welcoming city

Today, approximately 30% of Amman's 4 million inhabitants describe themselves as foreign-born. Indeed, historical and current migration patterns in the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) reflect regional and international political history over the last century, and, as such, the development of Amman has been highly influenced by migration.

The Circassians and Chechens were the first to seek haven in the city in the 19th century. In the 1950s and 1960s Amman's population more than doubled due to migration. Between 1991 and 2003, 80% of Iraqis who arrived in Jordan settled in Amman as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian wars. Since 2013, the population of Amman has sharply increased with the mass arrival of Syrian refugees, who mostly settled in the city (in 2016 alone a total of 435,000 Syrians were reported as residing in Amman). Smaller numbers of Libyans, Yemenis, Somalis and Sudanese nationals have also sought refuge in Amman in recent years.

On the whole, despite this increase, the city has responded effectively to the needs of both new and settled communities. Throughout the city, essential municipal services are provided to people regardless of their country of origin or nationality. Nevertheless, for a number of districts in Amman, the growth of refugee communities has caused increased pressure on municipal infrastructure and public services, particularly regarding education, transport, public spaces, waste management and the provision of energy and water.

The city's main challenges can be synthesized as follows:

- **Acute shocks:**
 - Economic crisis
 - Terrorism
 - Major infrastructure failure
 - Drought
 - Heatwaves
 - Flash/surface flood.
- **Chronic stresses:**
 - High energy costs
 - Water shortage
 - Lack of natural resources
 - Limited access to financial assistance
 - Major influx of refugees and/or asylum seekers
 - Changing demographics
 - Low quality services especially in health and education
 - Urbanisation
 - Unemployment
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Lack of diverse livelihood opportunities
 - Traffic congestion/lack of public transport system.

III. Social cohesion: the core of Amman's migration policy

In response to growing levels of need in Amman's districts, the Greater Amman Municipality has initiated a project that takes a social cohesion approach that aims at strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations, improving living conditions, expanding the social communication between refugees and the local community and establishing community-based activities and capacity-building opportunities. Through various micro-initiatives, the project also aims to promote social cohesion by fostering the emergence of a neighbourhood identity, common to all residents irrespective of background.

Implementation

Although composed of numerous micro-initiatives, the main objectives of the project are to provide improved access to social, economic and cultural opportunities for refugees as well as promoting initiatives that bring refugees and the host community closer together. Project activities promote universal human rights and have thus focused on the facilitation of refugee access to work and medical care. Additionally, the project aims to create spaces of encounter, where people can meet and where barriers inhibiting exchange can be collectively dismantled. Such spaces are provided through local charity bazaars; through the rehabilitation of local parks; and through the creation of social networking programmes, such as football training courses for children.

Initiative 1: Rehabilitation of GAM parks

The rise in the numbers of refugees living in the districts of Amman has increased pressure on public spaces such as parks and open/green spaces. Indeed, two local parks, Shura Park and Jordan Park, proved incapable of meeting the maintenance requirements associated with increased visitors. GAM designed a micro-project to improve park facilities and preserve these two parks as spaces for meeting. All micro-initiatives were designed in an intensive planning phase that lasted three years. The implementation phase of the rehabilitation of local parks initiative started in June 2016 and took six months to complete. The main objective of this initiative was the creation of opportunities for increased interaction and improved social cohesion between Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees. Active community participation has been a key element of the project throughout, and both Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees were actively encouraged to participate in the project's development and implementation. Furthermore, the inclusion of Syrian refugees as laborers has been promoted, providing access to capacity building and employment opportunities. Across the two parks, activities included the rehabilitation of both soft and hard landscape areas, additional planting, carpentry and playground maintenance.

Initiative 2: Training courses for young football players

A second micro-initiative supported by this multi-stakeholder cooperation is structured around the provision of football training courses for local

Through various micro-initiatives, social cohesion is promoted by fostering the emergence of a neighbourhood identity, common to all residents irrespective of background.

Active community participation has been a key element of the project throughout.

Football training programmes also worked positively towards improved social cohesion.

children aged 8–12 years. Participants in this programme come from local families, with both host and refugee communities represented. This social programme was designed to increase social cohesion and cultural inclusion in GAM districts through the development/strengthening of lines of communication between local Jordanian and Syrian children. This initiative promotes the social participation of refugee families and contributes to maintaining and enhancing a sense of social security. The project was initiated by the local community in collaboration with the Badr Nazzal district in February 2016 and ran for seven weeks. During this time, young residents received professional instruction from trainers drawn from similar social communities in spaces provided by GAM.

Results and impacts

The overall project is comprised of several short-term initiatives, each delivered with relatively modest budgets. This mode of operation encourages active community participation through the regular delivery of tangible short-term impacts.

The rehabilitation of local parks succeeded in redesigning public spaces to meet evolving local needs. The community's satisfaction with the renovation project was shown by an increase in park visitors. This, in turn, creates further opportunities for social interaction between the host community and refugees. District employees have confirmed an observable increase in park usage by members of both the refugee and host communities.

Equally importantly, the visible involvement of Syrian refugees in the implementation of project activities has had a positive impact on their wider social inclusion, mitigating the threat of social segregation and countering localised discrimination. Furthermore, it can be argued that the employment opportunities provided for many Syrian refugees during the renovation activities enabled them to build a daily routine and offered a form of psychosocial support to a frequently traumatised community. Similarly, the football training programmes also worked positively towards improved social cohesion. During the programmes, project managers observed noticeable improvements in the way participating children behaved and engaged with each other. Playing football together enabled them to cross social and cultural divides.

These are just two examples from a number of initiatives connected with social-cohesion projects in districts of the Greater Amman Municipality, although almost exclusively located in the eastern part of the city, where most of the Syrian refugees currently live.

Barriers and challenges to implementation

During its implementation phase, the rehabilitation of parks faced several obstacles. These were predominantly related to project activity timeline delays. Such delays were triggered by issues with external contractors, but also as a result of both parks remaining open to the public for the duration of the rehabilitation works.

In contrast, the implementation of the football training scheme did not experience any major challenges in terms of implementation. On the contrary, the project, which had originally been initiated by the local community, benefited from broad support from all involved parties. However, where this project can perhaps be seen as limited is in terms of its focus on a heavily gendered activity. In fact, no girls participated in the project activities.

Overall, both initiatives are limited in terms of temporal and financial scope. Whilst limited, project-specific budgets can be useful during a pilot phase, insofar as they allow innovative practices to be tested, ultimately they represent a barrier to scale and risk impeding the longevity/sustainability of overall project objectives.

Economic development projects have been designed to respond to the needs of the newcomers.

IV. Open border policies

Amman, endowed with peace and stability, has always received masses of migrants from the surrounding region, including forced migrants seeking safe haven and economic migrants seeking labour and economic opportunities in Jordan's booming economy. Until recently and due to the conflicts in neighbouring countries, migrants have been welcomed with open border policies. Since receiving Palestinian refugees, followed by Iraqis and Syrians in large numbers, and some Yemenis, Libyans, Somalis and Sudanese, the priority has been to build infrastructure to serve the human capital. Economic development projects have been designed to respond to the needs of the newcomers while ensuring the provision of basic services to every citizen. The human capital became an asset for Jordan's strategic development.

Integration, diversity and migrant rights policies

At the local level, GAM seeks to ensure social cohesion while shaping the city identity. The services of the city, including community centres, libraries, cultural centres and entertainment parks/green spaces are open to all residents of the city, regardless of their nationality. Other structural services provided by GAM such as street cleaning, environment-related activities, building permits, local markets, health inspection and maintenance of the urban infrastructure serve all residents indiscriminately.

GAM uses the spectrum of policies at its disposal to ensure the well-being of residents. These include interventions in the fields of the environment, physical space and social and cultural affairs. City officials set out to ensure the overall population is engaged in the activities devised. Consultation with local stakeholders, including interviews and a meeting of local stakeholders in April 2017 in the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM) project, led to the identification of three priorities for migrant integration policies in the city:

- Development of a resource centre on migration;
- Community services for migrants and social cohesion;
- Training for municipal employees with a focus on vulnerable communities in highly populated areas.

Municipal services are provided regardless of origin or nationality.

The project seeks to support disadvantaged Jordanians and refugees by providing them with employment opportunities in public parks.

Good practices

Municipal services are provided regardless of origin or nationality. Employees at the municipality believe that their work at environmental, physical, social and cultural levels is to sustain the wellbeing of the people and the maintenance of the city. However, GAM has also taken specific steps to tackle issues related to migrants' access to basic services and refugee livelihoods. To that end, it participates in programmes funded and run under the auspices of governmental and international aid organisations such as the European Union, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and GIZ, among others. There are currently three ongoing projects related to migrants and refugees.

The MC2CM project funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation aims to contribute to improved migration governance at city level, including migrants' access to basic services and human rights. The project takes place within a network of cities in Europe and in the southern Mediterranean region (Amman, Beirut, Lisbon, Lyon, Madrid, Tangiers, Tunis, Turin and Vienna). It has been implemented since 2015 to increase the knowledge base on urban migration and to nurture peer-to-peer dialogue to support mutual learning about specific urban challenges such as social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, employment and the provision of basic services for migrants, among others.

The Amman Resilience Strategy: "Integration towards resilience" is led by 100 Resilient Cities (100RC), the IRC, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises and the International Institute for Environment and Development. This project provides a unique opportunity to connect refugee response efforts within the city to long-term resilience goals and actions. The Greater Amman Municipality, in partnership with 100RC and the IRC, is dedicated to establishing a coordinated response to the refugee crisis in a way that contributes to the realisation of the City Resilience Strategy and the successful implementation of the Jordan Response Plan in Amman.

GIZ Green Infrastructure Projects in Jordan. The project seeks to support disadvantaged Jordanians and refugees by providing them with employment opportunities in public parks managed by the municipality: the project involves the implementation and management of public open spaces (small plazas, recreational areas, pedestrian connection, stairs and urban agriculture).

V. Conclusion

Of Jordan's total population of 9.5 million, Jordanians number around 6.6 million, while the number of non-Jordanians who reside in the country is around 2.9 million, representing 30.6% of the overall population.

GAM works towards the fulfilment of universal human rights for all residents of Amman and takes action to reduce socio-cultural tensions and mitigate the risk of segregation between host and refugee communities. The micro-initiatives discussed form part of these wider efforts and present short-term, tangible and easily accessible projects for refugees and local communities.

In many ways, they display the characteristics of “good practices”, as defined by studies on social cohesion/migrant inclusion in cities. Both initiatives, for instance, build on an awareness that the earlier migrant inclusion programmes begin, the better the chances of social cohesion. Additionally, the active involvement of refugees in the implementation of public projects (i.e. the rehabilitation of a local park) reflects an appreciation of the linkages between capacity building at an individual level and broader urban resilience.

Fundamentally, the involvement of non-native residents in neighbourhood development and recreational activities is key to enabling spaces of encounter and opportunities for dialogue. The football initiative, for instance, shows that the provision of active recreational activities is an effective means of bringing young people of different backgrounds together and providing access to a healthy lifestyle while defusing the potential for inter-cultural tensions. Some have even argued that such youth activities might also function as a bridge for enhanced parental interaction. However, such a suggestion would require validation through further research.

The football micro-initiative also suggests ways in which community initiatives, designed in direct response to self-assessed needs, have the potential to be catalysed and scaled up to district level. In theory, this local ownership creates a firm foundation for longer-term, sustainable programming. In this sense, the football initiative and the park project highlight the value of designing a range of micro-initiatives that take different entry points to promote the social integration of migrants.

However, this approach would be further strengthened if the design of pilot inclusion projects, such as those presented above, were embedded within a longer-term strategy to transform them into programmes that are adequately resourced and protected by local policy. That is why it is important that such small-scale activities are followed up, scaled up and integrated into a broader and longer-term approach to social cohesion. In this way, the comprehensive institutionalisation of participatory, inclusive processes has the potential to contribute to increased stability and local security at city level.

The earlier migrant inclusion programmes begin, the better the chances of social cohesion.

