

ISWG Meeting Note

August 2024



Inter-Sector
Working Group
Jordan

ISWG Meeting Note and Action Points

Date / Time / Venue	Wednesday, 04 September 2024, 10:30 - 12:00, ARDD office
Attendees	Inter-Sector Senior Coordinator, IACU officer, IA Sectors Coordinators, Sectors Leads/Co-Leads of the Shelter, WASH, Food Security Basic Needs, Education, Health, Economic Empowerment, WFP and UN Women Gender expert.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Key recommendations from way forward discussion include:

- Establish a dedicated **Advocacy Group** to spearhead a unified communication strategy, delivering clear, impactful messaging aimed at influencing key stakeholders, including the government, and donors. This group will work to elevate the voice of the sectors and drive policy change. To maximize effectiveness, the group should operate under the JOSH fostering a collaborative approach to advocacy.
- Align the efforts of various sectors toward common strategic goals and outcomes. Establish more holistic discussions across sectors to move beyond routine updates, creating a unified vision for both immediate needs and long-term solutions.
- Building on the success of the gender and protection workshops, ensure that gender and protection considerations are fully integrated into all future programming, sector planning, and initiatives.
- Advise JoSH to identify key actors to engage in high-level political discussions with the government.
- ISWG members will advocate for more transparent discussions with government officials, the Resident Coordinator, and other development actors. These dialogues are critical for clarifying next steps and aligning political will with the technical achievements at the sector level. Without this engagement, the implementation of sustainable changes will remain limited.
- Recognize the prolonged nature of the refugee crisis and the ongoing lack of political will around transitioning to development and sustainability. Create a plan that considers what can realistically be achieved, focusing on practical solutions for inclusion and service maintenance when return or transition is not an immediate option.
- Build sector capacity for collective advocacy. This will enable sectors to effectively advocate for sustained services and policy changes at higher levels. The goal is to ensure long-term solutions for pressing issues such as economic empowerment, education, and health.

Key recommendations from sectors updates include:

- **Localization Task Force:** Interested partners wishing to join the Localization Task Force are encouraged to contact JIF Coordinator Alyse Kennedy at alyse.kennedy@jordaningoforum.org
- **UNICEF Helpline:** Education Co-chair will share with ISWG members the UNICEF helpline details, which refugees can use if they face challenges related to the school fee waiver.
- **High School Scholarship Discussion:** ISWG Chair will plan a bilateral meeting with the Education Chairs/Co-chairs to discuss the issue of high school scholarships for refugees.

AGENDA:

The meeting was held with an open discussion format, allowing participants to focus on key sector priorities. The main inquiry questions were aimed at gathering feedback on participants' experiences and suggestions for future improvements. These included:

- Best experiences with the ISWG and how they positively impacted participants.
- Areas where more support or focus is desired.
- Aspects of the ISWG that should be maintained and developed.
- Suggestions for doing things differently.
- Recommendations for 2025.

OPERATIONAL UPDATES:

- **Localization Task Force:** A mapping exercise will be conducted to document best practices in localization efforts. Partners interested in contributing are encouraged to contact the JIF Coordinator.
- **Work Permits and Social Security Contributions:** No updates or changes have been reported since the last ISWG meeting regarding work permits. The Co-chairs of the Economic Empowerment sector will continue discussions with UNHCR and other relevant actors on the work permit issue, including clarifying the role of the EEWG.
- **IACU Leadership and Coordination Workshop:** A workshop was conducted on September 1, 2024, in Arabic, with 24 participants from field coordination and partner organizations.
- **JRP Update:** The Jordan Response Plan (JRP) has not yet been signed by the government.

SECTOR OPERATIONAL UPDATES:

Health Working Group (WG):

- The multi-donor account has been extended until 2028, with USAID and Denmark as key donors.
- The Health Access and Utilization Survey 2024 in Zaatari and Azraq camps showed good health access levels compatible with global standards.
- Awareness around family planning and health services privileges needs enhancement.
- Integration of refugees into the health system has been a significant success.
- A policy and guiding manual is expected to be released in 2024.
- WHO representative reported only one mild case of monkeypox in Jordan.

Food Security and Basic Needs (FSBN) WG:

- FSBN is updating the Jordan Survival/Minimum Expenditure Basket (S/MEB) with support from UNHCR, WFP, and IOM.
- UNHCR and WFP conducted refugee focus group discussions to inform future joint cash programs.
- Increasing reliance on UNHCR Basic Needs eligibility data for assistance programs, though funding remains a challenge.

WASH WG:

- Service provision in Azraq and Zaatari camps ongoing.
- Water pipelines in Azraq are being upgraded, and a new borehole is being installed.
- A behavioral change study regarding water usage and climate change will be conducted in both camps.
- Funding issues for Oxfam's solid waste management project have been resolved with support from GIZ.

Shelter WG:

- Increased calls for cash-for-rent assistance.
- Standards and guidelines for shelter interventions have been developed and shared with partners.
- UN-Habitat has completed spatial profiling for Mafraq, with plans to present the findings.
- UNHCR is working on a multi-year shelter program.

Economic Empowerment WG:

- UNHCR will share a KOBO link with JOSH members for data gathering on the impacts of policy changes.
- Plans for the next EEWG meeting to engage with the private sector at the Orange Digital Village in Amman.

Education WG:

- Annual waivers exempting Syrian and non-Syrian refugees from school fees were published by the Ministry of Education on August 8, 2024.
- SRAD, UNHCR, and the Ministry of Education celebrated top high school exam students, with discussions on limited scholarship opportunities.

OPEN DISCUSSION POINTS:

Best Experiences/achievements

- Successfully established the first cinema in Za'atari, providing a source of entertainment and cultural enrichment for refugees, supported by the French Embassy
- Initiated a partnership with the ISWG Protection Advisor in 2023, which led to a series of gender and protection mainstreaming workshops across various sectors. The positive feedback from these trainings laid the foundation for more practical, inclusive program implementations moving forward. This collaboration WILL ensure effective gender & protection lens programming.
- UNCHR Echoed the pride in collaborating with UN Women and other agencies within the ISWG framework. Additionally, UNHCR emphasized their role in driving discussions on the transformation towards sustainability in programming and the transition from humanitarian aid to development-focused approaches.
- ISGAT Project (UN Women, UNESCO, UNICEF): The ISGAT pilot project was scaled beyond its initial phase, demonstrating its success as a model for further implementation across multiple sectors.
- The Protection Working Group's successful advocacy efforts in 2024 culminated in the drafting of a legal advocacy paper that was presented at the JOSH level and shared with government counterparts. Members proposes expanding these efforts into the Economic Working Group, emphasizing the importance of collective advocacy to drive policy changes in key areas such as economic inclusion, education, and health.

Challenges:

- **Securing Key Services:** While there have been significant successes, challenges persist in maintaining essential services in education, health, and economic inclusion for refugees. Despite this year's issuance of exemption letters, a strong advocacy push is necessary to preserve these gains moving forward. A proposal has been made to establish an Advocacy Working Group, focusing on both behavioral and policy changes, with a clear advocacy strategy that delivers consistent messaging to JOSH.
- **Overcoming Political and Funding Challenges:** Although some sectors have successfully maintained services, broader challenges such as political blockages and reduced funding continue to pose major obstacles. A pragmatic and realistic strategy is essential, considering the protracted nature of the crisis. While extensive technical work has been accomplished, higher-level political engagement is crucial to address the lack of political will needed for the transition to sustainability and development.

Way forward:

Advocacy Working Group Proposal:

- A proposal to establish a dedicated Advocacy Working Group focused on policy and behavioral changes was discussed. The group would aim to maintain gains in refugee inclusion and develop common messaging for engagement with government and donors. NGOs with advocacy expertise could play a key role in supporting these efforts. The group would address emerging key issues and provide recommendations for elevation at the JOSH level.

Common Vision and Holistic Approach:

- There is a need for a collective vision that fosters holistic discussions across sectors, moving beyond routine updates. This approach should align sectors toward common strategic goals and actions.

Political Discussions:

- It was highlighted that technical achievements alone cannot drive progress without endorsement from higher-level political actors. ISWG members agreed that internal advocacy efforts should focus on pushing for honest discussions with government officials, the Resident Coordinator, and development actors to clarify the next steps. It was noted that without higher-level political endorsement, the technical working groups face limitations in implementing sustainable changes.

Realistic Planning:

- After 14 years of the refugee crisis, and over a decade of discussions around transition and sustainability, the group recognized the need for realistic assumptions in planning. There should be a focus on what can be achieved when return, inclusion, or transition is not immediately feasible. This requires pragmatic planning that aligns with the political realities on the ground.

Capacity Building for Collective Advocacy:

- For 2025, ISWG aims to continue building capacity within sectors for collective advocacy, ensuring sustained efforts on key issues such as economic empowerment, health, and education. Advocacy should be strategically targeted to maintain pressure and drive change at higher levels.

Strengthening Gender and Protection Mainstreaming:

- Build upon the successful gender and protection workshops to make gender equality and protection a core part of all sector strategies and operations, ensuring inclusive and equitable services for all refugees.

AOB:

- The next ISWG monthly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 2, 2024. Location to be determined.