

Refugees who receive cash assistance are significantly less threatened with eviction

Impact: Evaluation shows lower debt level among recipients of UN cash support

A recent analysis by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency of cash assistance from UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP), shows that debt levels and eviction threat rates increased significantly for all refugees over years. However, recipients of cash assistance have much less debt (720 Jordanian Dinar/JOD, some US\$ 1,020) than those who do not receive it (1,250 JOD, some US\$ 1,770). They also faced fewer eviction threats (eleven per cent) than the non-recipients (19 per cent) as they were in a better position to pay rent.

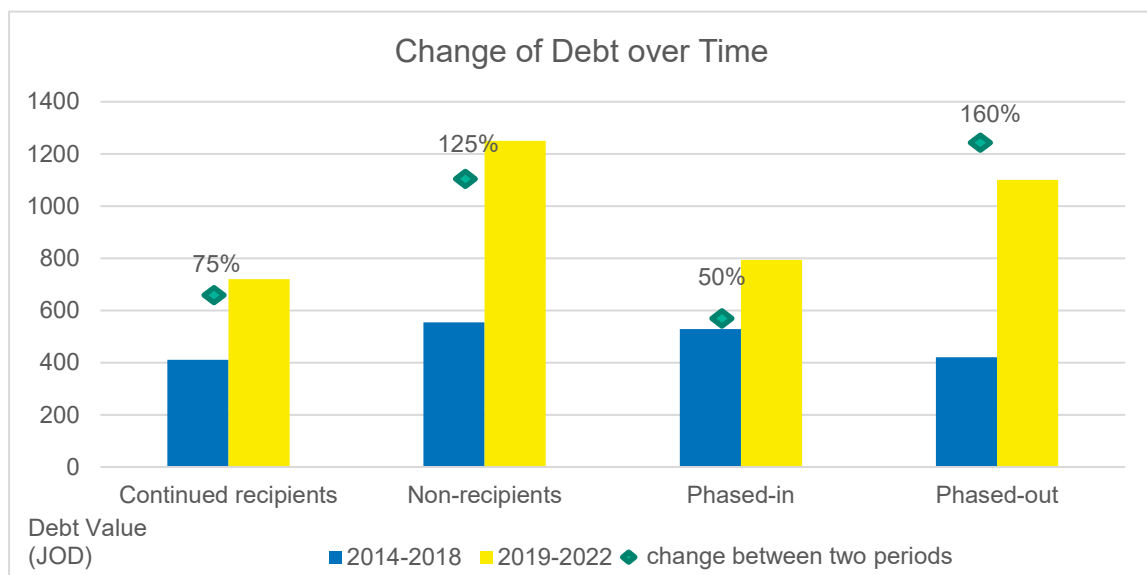
Revisiting over 70,000 refugee households in host communities at two different time periods – 2014-2018 and 2019-2022 - showed a change in the situation of the households. Four groups were analyzed – refugees continuously receiving assistance, those not receiving any assistance, households newly receiving assistance and those phased out of assistance.

For households that were phased out of assistance at the time, the percentage with eviction threats tripled to 21 per cent. Those households also saw the highest increase in average debt from 420 JOD (some US\$ 590) to 1,100 JOD (US\$ 1,550). This group, in their struggle to get by, also sold more household assets (e.g. furniture, electronics, etc) than all other groups. On the contrary, the debt of

those included for assistance grew at a slower pace as shown in the table below.

Continued cash assistance reaches the most vulnerable refugees. Most cash assistance recipients are vulnerable individuals, including the elderly, children, women and people with disabilities. This is notable in the financial situation of the households who continued to receive said assistance. They have the lowest level of work income and the fewest household members able to work, with four out of five members being either elderly or children. This attests to the high accuracy of the targeting of the assistance. Consistent and predictable cash support enables the most vulnerable population to live with less fear of being evicted and sustain their lives with less debt.

Onset of funding crisis The positive impact of cash assistance may be jeopardized by decreasing humanitarian funding. Needs of vulnerable refugees are already surpassing the support UNHCR's cash programme is able to provide (see p.2). WFP had to reduce the transfer value of its assistance by nearly 30 per cent recently in July 2023. The reduced support will put additional pressure on refugee women, men and children who already suffered from previous economic shocks, including the cost-of-living crisis and the effects of the pandemic.



New analysis of World Bank & UNHCR data shows external shocks have impacted refugees in Jordan

A new paper released by UNHCR and the World Bank found that the shocks occurring outside of Jordan such as COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have taken a toll on the socio-economic situations of people living in Jordan including refugees.

The study found that while COVID-19 led both Syrian refugees and Jordanians to lose jobs, Syrian refugees regained employment at a slower pace than the Jordanian population, potentially due to restrictions on sectors that they can work in. Syrian refugees were slightly less likely to be food insecure than Jordanian households mostly due to additional humanitarian assistance the refugees received in response to COVID-19.

The study compares the situation between Syrian refugees and host communities. It also provides a comparison between refugees in camps and outside. Refugees living in communities outside camps are more likely to have poor economic sentiments due to high debt and income loss. The inability to repay debt (debt-to-income ratio) increased during 2022, as refugees were spending more than they earned. For non-Syrian refugees, debt was on average eight times higher than income. These difficult situations often drive refugees to choose between paying off their debt and meeting their basic needs. The study can be found here: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101132>

UNHCR expands cash assistance based on better targeting model

New system boosts number of vulnerable refugees, particularly children, that receive UNHCR cash – For the first time, UNHCR and WFP use the same model.

Cash assistance experts worked on this for months. The objective for WFP and UNHCR staff was clear: General food and basic needs assistance should reach the most vulnerable refugees in Jordan. The partners decided to use the state-of-the-art poverty assessment tool developed by the World Bank, also known as PMT (proxy means test), and adapt it to the situation. This would help prioritise the most vulnerable, allow for adaptations if socio-economic conditions changed, and harmonize the targeting model with Jordan's main social safety net, the National Aid Fund, and the national poverty level.

But how do UN agencies find those most in need? They combined the PMT with filters that would ensure particular groups of refugees would not be left behind. The PMT is a statistical model that predicts poverty based on indicators such as assets owned, shelter conditions, and



This phone can connect vulnerable refugees with cash assistance as their mobile wallet becomes a lifeline. An improved targeting model benefits families with many children compared to previous cash distribution. @UNHCR

demographics when information on income is unavailable. Additional filters ensured refugees with vulnerabilities related to gender, age, and disability, but also to malnutrition and protection would be included.

Apart from large data sets, the two agencies also consulted refugee communities of different nationalities in Jordan and developed a joint communications strategy to explain the new targeting system both in person and online, e.g. through UNHCR's Facebook page in Jordan, the largest such page for refugees in the Middle East.

It turned out that the change in the targeting model would affect several thousand households. While many did not fulfil the criteria for previously received assistance anymore, e.g. because their children had grown up and could potentially earn an income, many others were newly included after waiting for years.

As the new system is rolled out, the number of UNHCR cash beneficiaries will rise to 150,000 in September, up from 118,000 in June as larger families, hence more refugee girls and boys, benefit at a time of worrying levels of school drop-out and child begging.

While this change does not mean that UNHCR is cutting assistance, it can be a massive change for those delisted. As a matter of accountability to the community, WFP and UNHCR have therefore established a joint appeals system. Decisions on appeals are expected to help fine-tune the system in September.

UNHCR's cash assistance programme in Jordan never managed to support all vulnerable refugees at the same time. Its scope is based on funding projections, and it will continue to have a wait list of families who will join when others stop receiving basic needs cash.

OTHER NEWS

Economic opportunities in refugee camps are missed - study on Azraq and Zaatari

Policies and restrictions such as limiting sectors in which refugees can work make the economies of the refugee camps Azraq and Zaatari miss opportunities both on the labour and the capital markets. This is one of the findings of an analysis of their micro- and macroeconomic levels undertaken by the Norwegian Refugee Council.

In addition, high transaction costs due to the isolated locations of the camps, mostly Azraq, and permit system limit economic activities in the camps. The study also points out the high level of dependency on humanitarian assistance with the volume of the assistance amounting to over 40 per cent of the economies of both camps.

The study highlights **the need to reduce and reform existing barriers to economic activity and livelihood opportunities in camps.**



There are about 1,000 shops in the market street, so-called "Champs-Élysées" of Zaatari @UNHCR/Christopher Herwig

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