

UNHCR's cash assistance improves lives of refugees, but is not enough – new study

Evaluation shows how cash support remains critical income source for most vulnerable.



UNHCR's basic needs cash assistance helps refugees like Eman and Hassan stay warm and provide for their families © UNHCR/Markus Korenjak

UNHCR basic needs cash assistance accounted for **67 per cent** of the recipient refugee families' incomes in Jordan in 2023. This is one of the key findings of a recent external evaluation which also shows that it improves refugees' well-being but is not covering all their needs.

In 2023, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, provided over **\$68 million to more than a quarter of a million refugees** of different nationalities to help them cover rent, food, health and other basic needs. The evaluation found that **80 per cent** of recipient families rely solely on humanitarian and community assistance. For them, UNHCR cash assistance is the primary source of income.

This shows how UNHCR's assistance serves as a lifeline for many of the most vulnerable refugees. More than half of its beneficiaries are women heads of households and/or have a family member with a disability or serious medical condition. 23 per cent of them are elderly (over 60 years old) and 46 per cent are minors. Most of them are unable to work and generate income on their own so **UNHCR's cash assistance serves as a social safety net** for these vulnerable refugees.

94 per cent of refugee families responded to the evaluation team that UNHCR's assistance improved their lives.

UNHCR's cash **contributed to improving their overall well-being** because it reduced stress, decreased the financial burden on the family budget and improved their living conditions.

Yet, more needs to be done. Even with this and - in some cases - other assistance, many refugees continue to remain vulnerable. A worrying **62 per cent** of the recipients of UNHCR's cash **meet less than half of their basic needs**. [UNHCR's quarterly analysis of the socio-economic situation of refugees](#) in Jordan for the last quarter of 2023 (captured via the Vulnerability Assessment Framework, VAF) also shows that refugees are getting even more vulnerable.

Compared to the previous quarter, the average monthly income decreased for all categories of refugees: those in communities and in camps; Syrians and non-Syrians. Notably, the **income for refugees in camps decreased** significantly (23 per cent in Azraq and 35 per cent in Zaatari refugee camps, compared to a year ago) due to reduced humanitarian assistance in the camps. As their incomes have decreased, almost all refugee families (90 per cent) had **high levels of debt** with the average debt being 1,200 JOD (some \$1,690), a massive amount compared to their monthly average income of JOD 255 (Syrians) and JOD 229 (Non-Syrians), some \$360 and \$323 respectively.

Evictions are becoming an ever more likely scenario for a vulnerable refugee family that is unable to pay the rent. 25 per cent of Syrian and 33 per cent of non-Syrian refugee households report an eviction threat in the last quarter of 2023, compared to 20 per cent for Syrian and 22 per cent for non-Syrian refugees in early 2023.

These findings show that while UNHCR’s cash assistance serves as a lifeline for many vulnerable refugees, the fast-increasing needs cannot be covered sufficiently leaving many families still vulnerable. They are bearing the brunt of rapidly declining support to Jordan and the refugees it generously hosts.

Livelihoods projects for refugees help improve their family income

Impact often only short-term, new study finds.

Around **60 per cent** of Syrian refugees participating in livelihoods projects saw their **family income improve** within one year, a new study by UNHCR partner Norwegian Refugee Council shows.

Out of almost 50,000 Syrian refugees interviewed, only 4,200 (8 per cent) had participated in livelihoods projects since 2016. Some projects included cash-for-work, waged employment projects, business development projects, vocational trainings and others.

Most of the respondents interviewed about the projects shared positive feedback for all types of different livelihood projects. They were satisfied with the support received, particularly those who had participated in vocational trainings.

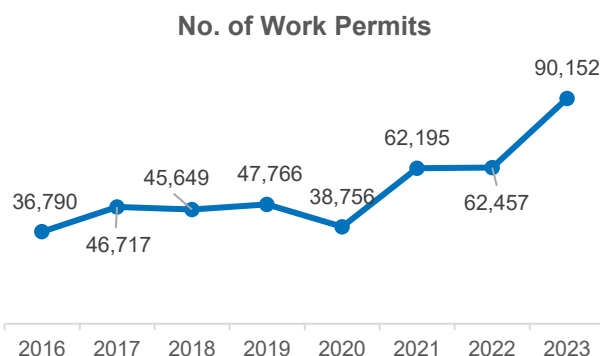
However, challenges remain as the study found **impact of most livelihood projects to be short-term**: Many participants no longer work and earn an income three months after the project ending. The findings of the study will inform humanitarian and development organizations to shape livelihood programmes towards a more lasting impact.



Salam Al Hariri, a Syrian refugee engaged in a waged employment project, has been working as a pharmacist in Amman. © UNHCR/Mohammad Hawari

OTHER NEWS

Record number of work permits issued in 2023. Since 2016, Syrian refugees have been allowed to work formally in open sectors. Since then, nearly 430,500 work permits have been issued. 2023 saw a record number of 90,000 work permits issued.



CONTACT

Roland Schönbauer,
 Senior External Relations Officer, Amman,
schoenb@unhcr.org

Yujin Chang,
 Associate External Relations Officer, Amman,
changy@unhcr.org