Iraqi and Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Legal Status and Identity

Shannon Reilly

Amman, Jordan Fall 2014 – Spring 2015
Agencies: Jesuit Refugee Services, Orphan Welfare Association, Danish Refugee Council
Work: ESL Tutor; Youth Advanced-Reading Program Coordinator; Donor Report Editor

Research Question: What are the effects of the Jordanian-UNHCR Refugee Status Determination Process (RSD) on Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Jordan? How does legal status impact refugee identity?

Analysis:
- Jordanian government does not have a legal RSD framework; UNHCR conducts all RSD in Jordan
  - outside of UNHCR mandate/financial capacity
  - limits UNHCR’s ability to give aid in other ways
- Iraqi and Syrian refugees granted prima facie refugee status (PFRS)
  - PFRS ill-defined in international community (often equated with “mass-influx” but better understood as lower standard of proof)
- Jordan does not turn away asylum seekers; however, perceives them as “guests,” especially Iraqis
  - legacy of Palestinian refugee crisis in Jordan

Solutions & Role for Social Work:
- Advocacy – bridging the gap between refugees and Jordanian government; advocating for aid from the West in the Middle East (overcoming the stigma)
- Capacity Building - working with Jordanian government to develop RSD practices
- Efficiently Distributing Aid – understanding where UNHCR and other NGOs should be spending their money
- Cultural Competency – understanding what “guest” status means for a refugee

Jordanian Refugee Crisis Quick Facts:
- More than 2 million Palestinian refugees reside in Jordan (+ their families make up over 50% of pop.)
- 671,963 non-Palestinian refugees have been registered by UNHCR (Jan 2015) – Syrian, Iraqi, Sudanese, Somali, & Yemeni
- Of the above stat., 621,937 are Syrian

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Photo courtesy of UNHCR Stories Blog: Crowds outside of UNHCR Office in Za’atari Camp

Artwork by Syrian artist Iyad Sabagh, part of an artist collective in Za’atari Camp, supported by IRD

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