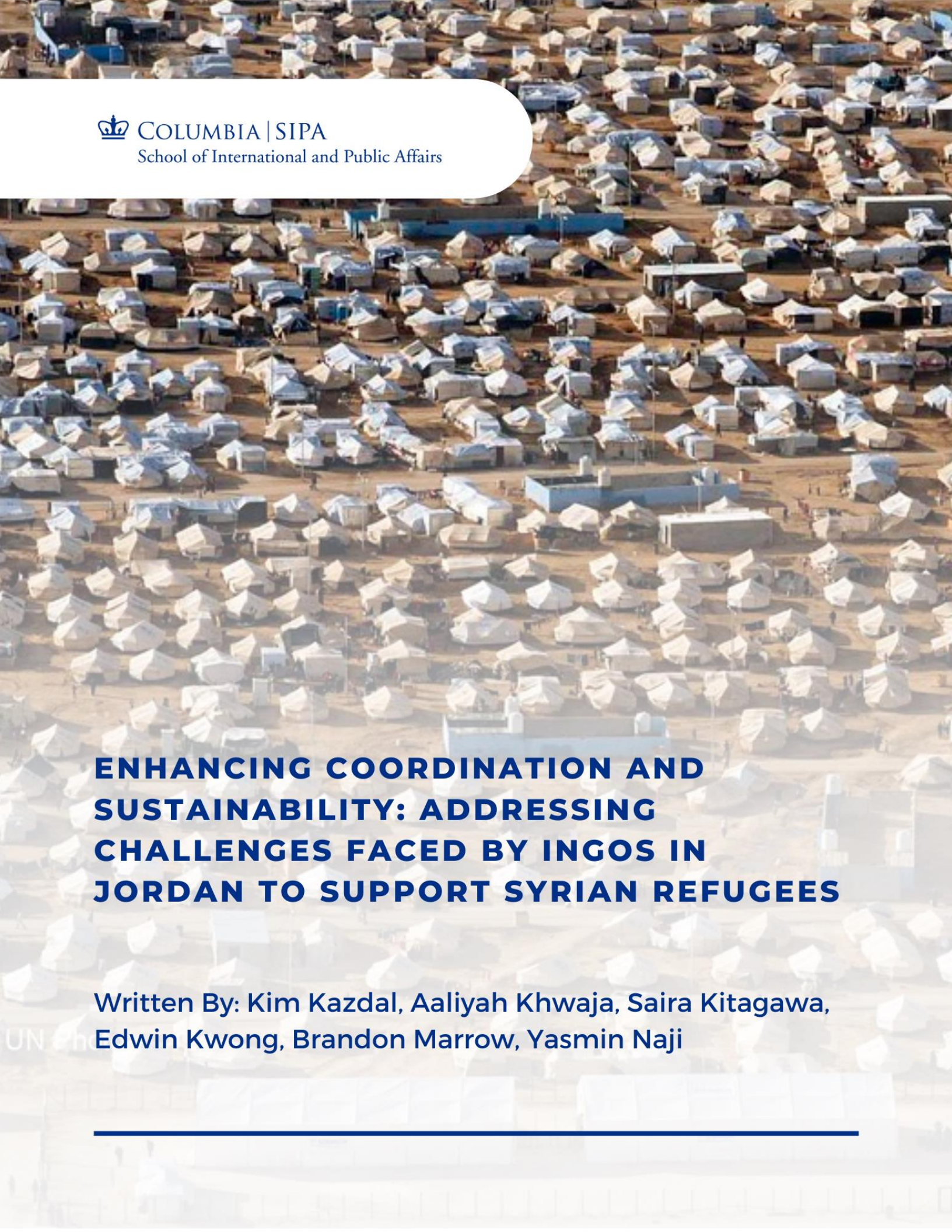

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ENHANCING COORDINATION AND SUSTAINABILITY: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES FACED BY INGOS IN JORDAN TO SUPPORT SYRIAN REFUGEES

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1. Executive Summary

This report focuses on enhancing coordination and sustainability among humanitarian actors supporting Syrian refugees in Jordan. Our research occurs amidst significant changes, with the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 coinciding with years of diminishing international aid, now severely compounded by the Trump administration's dramatic reduction in U.S. funding commitments. Through desk research and interviews with humanitarian actors, we identify four critical coordination challenges affecting refugee support.

First, tensions exist between UN agencies—primarily the UN High Commissioner's Office for Refugees (UNHCR)—and NGOs due to UNHCR's dual coordinator-implementer role, competition for funding, and inconsistent needs assessment methodologies that create siloed information environments. Second, collaboration with the Government of Jordan (GoJ) suffers from strategic misalignment, limited government participation in coordination forums, and regulatory obstacles restricting NGO operations. Third, INGO country offices across different nations struggle with communication barriers and knowledge sharing, hindering the development of cross-border mechanisms needed for returnee support. Finally, NGOs face internal coordination challenges due to funding constraints, duplicate mandates, and bureaucratic obstacles preventing them from flexibly filling service gaps when other organizations' funding is cut.

These conditions lead refugees to consider returns due to necessity rather than choice. Return decisions remain complex, influenced by access to housing, education, employment opportunities, and legal status considerations. We recommend diversifying funding sources, advocating for flexible long-term support, formalizing coordination mechanisms, improving data sharing practices, strengthening partnerships with the Jordanian government, and leveraging media engagement to drive donor attention. These measures aim to ensure continued support for Syrian refugees, whether they choose to return or remain in Jordan.

2. Introduction and Methodology

The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the twenty-first century's most complex and urgent humanitarian challenges. According to UNHCR, “an estimated 16.7 million people need humanitarian assistance and more than half of the population remains displaced from their homes—including more than 6 million refugees living in neighboring countries and more than 7.4 million internally displaced inside Syria.”[1] As of April 30, 2025, UNHCR recorded 546,298 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan.[2] Although the Jordanian response to the Syrian refugee crisis is held up as a model among actors in the region, the prolonged period of refugee displacement continues to present political and economic challenges for the Hashemite regime. The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 heightened tension between the protection mandate of the refugee response and renewed pressure for facilitating refugee returns. Despite this pressure, return rates have slowed in the region after an initial uptick in December 2024.[3] Many refugees express an interest in returning within a couple of years, and some say they will never return. This report

explores how improvements in the humanitarian coordination architecture in Jordan can meet the needs of all groups by identifying barriers to return and barriers to continued integration.

This report was prepared at the request of Alyse Kennedy, the Representative of the Jordan INGO Forum (JIF). JIF requested a thorough evaluation of the role of humanitarian coordination and funding challenges in the Syrian refugee response in Jordan and their implications for Syrian refugee returns. Primary and secondary research was conducted between November 2024 and April 2025.

The primary research consisted of eight in-person interviews conducted in Amman, Jordan, in January 2025 with representatives from INGOs and UN agencies. These were followed by fifteen interviews in March 2025 in Amman with similar stakeholders and Syrian refugee volunteers working with UNHCR. Additionally, a handful of virtual interviews were conducted between January and April 2025, bringing the total to twenty-eight interviews. The report also draws on policy documents, reports, funding data provided by JIF and its forum members, and academic and grey literature from publicly available sources. While this research offers critical insights, it is important to note certain limitations, including restricted access to data, time constraints, and the representation of diverse stakeholder perspectives. The study focused on the key areas of the impact of declining funding on refugee services; coordination gaps between INGOs, UN agencies, and the GoJ; and internal coordination issues among INGOs, particularly between country offices in Syria and Jordan.

3. Overview of Humanitarian Coordination System

This section provides a general overview of the key stakeholders as it pertains to Syrian refugee assistance inside Jordan.

3.1 Governments: Jordan, Syria, the International Community, and Donors

Government ministries are responsible for setting national policies on refugee management and economic integration through a planning framework known as the Jordan Response Plan to the Syria Crisis (JRP).[4] The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) coordinates the work of international actors within the JRP. MOPIC is responsible for assessing the alignment of UN agency and NGO programming with the priorities of the JRP before the disbursement of project funds.[5] The Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD), in collaboration with UNHCR, ensures the execution of government policies and is responsible for managing voluntary returns.[6]

The Government of Syria (GoS) plays a critical role in shaping policies around refugee repatriation, reconstruction, and regional security. Jordan's King Abdullah and Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa held a meeting on border security in February of 2025, discussing the continued presence of militias in the South of Syria.[7] Given that the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan are from the south of Syria, the prospect of their return is contingent on significant

improvements in the security situation in areas like Daraa and the rural Damascus region.[8] Within Jordan, the Syrian embassy is responsible for facilitating the administrative side of returns by issuing temporary travel documents.[9] With donors at the Brussels Conference signaling greater direct support to Syria, Jordan may face new challenges in securing continued international funding for its Syrian refugee programs.[10]

International donors, like the United States (U.S.) and European Union (EU), fund the Syrian refugee response through a variety of mechanisms. Gulf countries represent a significant, but smaller, source of aid.[11] They fund projects that aim to align with JRP priorities, provide direct bilateral assistance to the GoJ, and also provide funding for INGO operations. Certain NGOs also have established relationships in their country of international registration, which enables them to receive core funding. Historically, donor capacity and interest in funding the refugee response have been influenced by an interest in reducing migration flows. Although the U.S. remains a prominent donor to humanitarian actors, the EU elevated its relationship with Jordan in January 2025, committing €3 billion of financial assistance, most of which will be provided to the GoJ.[12] The dwindling funding from all actors will have a drastic impact on NGOs and UN agencies' ability to continue supporting Syrian Refugees.

3.2 International Organizations

The coordination framework for the Syrian refugee response in Jordan was formalized in 2013 under the leadership of the GoJ, with UNHCR designated to coordinate the inter-agency response. GoJ and its "line" ministries set national policies on refugee management and economic integration, which are formalized in the JRP, led by MOPIC.[13] MOPIC regulates and tracks the funding of the JRP by ensuring project applications from all service providers align with the priorities of the JRP before project approval and the disbursement of funds.

The JRP establishes twelve Task Forces led by line ministries working in collaboration with UN agencies, NGOs, and donors.[14] Within the JRP framework, UNHCR coordinates the Syrian refugee response in Jordan through its Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) instead of a cluster approach.[15] UNHCR's implementation of the RCM is aligned with the approach of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which is co-led by UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). 3RP works to balance the humanitarian and protection needs of Syrian refugees with the development goals of the Jordanian state.[16] The initiative also aims to minimize duplication, ensure appropriate information sharing, and convene high-level actors to discuss Syrian Refugee returns and integration.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is not involved in coordinating the work of UN agencies with Syrian refugees in Jordan, as is the case in many countries where humanitarian crises are ongoing but where there is not a strong refugee dimension.[17] Instead, UNHCR chairs both the Jordan Strategic Advisory Group (JoSH), a steering committee, and the Inter-Sector Working Group (ISWG), which provides technical support.[18] UN International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women, UNDP, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), and International Organization for Migration (IOM) serve as

sectoral co-chairs oftentimes alongside co-chairs either from international or national NGOs who play a representative role.[19]

3.3 International and National Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs coordinate in the Syrian refugee response through different mechanisms that all aim to share information across organizations based on reports from the field. JIF serves to organize the work of INGOs in the refugee response and liaises with government line ministries, UN agencies, and the representatives of donor countries.[20] The Jordan National NGO Forum (JONAF) represents national NGO members and advocates for the localisation of aid efforts in the response.[21]

4. Situation of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

4.1 The Current Refugee Population and Vulnerabilities

Jordan hosts one of the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the world, with the latest available government figures as of 2023 indicating around 1.3 million Syrians residing in the country.[22] UNHCR's April 30, 2025 report indicates that 600,809 registered refugees and asylum-seekers are currently in Jordan, and 90% are originally from Syria.[23] The remainder includes refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and other countries.

Among the registered Syrian population, 21.3% reside in camps, with the Zaatari camp hosting the largest share (11.5%), followed by the Azraq camp (6.7%). In contrast, the majority, 78.7%, live in urban areas within host communities, primarily in Amman (27.2%), Irbid (17.3%), and Al Mafraq (11.9%).[24] Refugees living in camps and host communities face overlapping but distinct challenges. In camps, refugees have limited employment opportunities, primarily seasonal agricultural work or incentive-based volunteering with humanitarian agencies, alongside high dependence on aid, overcrowded shelters, and aging infrastructure in need of repair.[25] Interviews and reports indicate that they also rely on inadequate water and energy systems within the camps.[26] Conversely, urban refugees are grappling with declining income due to reduced cash assistance and are increasingly dependent on work. Many adopt severe coping strategies, such as taking loans or sending their children to work.[27] While debt levels are rising among all refugee households, many living in host communities are being forced to relocate to cheaper housing due to declining incomes.[28]

Integration efforts in Jordan have been largely donor-driven and supported by INGOs to reduce the long-term costs of the refugee response. However, interviewees indicated the GoJ has consistently resisted a full integration policy, citing concerns that offering pathways to citizenship for refugees could alter the country's sensitive demographic balance, and that full integration might lead to a withdrawal of donor support, leaving Jordan to bear the costs alone. As a result, the GoJ has focused on securing direct financial support from donors to provide refugees with essential services, while avoiding measures that would facilitate full integration.

While these efforts have expanded refugees' access to national systems, such as primary and secondary healthcare and free public education, interviews reveal that high medication costs burden households, and a notable portion of refugee children still struggle with basic literacy, highlighting gaps in learning outcomes.[29] Additionally, access to the employment sector remains limited. Between 2016 and 2022, over 340,000 work permits were issued to Syrian refugees, yet only about 8% were granted to women, highlighting persistent gender disparities and barriers to entering the labor market.[30]

Certain populations are especially vulnerable. Amongst the UNHCR-registered Syrian populations, 49.1% are children.[31] According to multiple interviewees, children face a range of risks, such as early marriage, bullying, child abuse, child labor, and domestic violence. Refugee women and girls are also vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV). "While legislation for prosecution of perpetrators exists, implementation often fails," highlighting the inadequate protection and access to justice for survivors.[32] Furthermore, 23.4% of Syrian refugees are individuals requiring additional support, such as serious medical conditions and disabilities.[33] According to one interviewee, when funding shortfalls occur, "persons with disabilities fall off the radar," highlighting the especially urgent needs of these populations, including access to rehabilitation centers and necessary equipment.

Additionally, the geographical location of refugees plays a role in the level of support they receive. For example, Zaatari camp has attracted substantial global media attention due to its proximity to major cities and the involvement of researchers and celebrities, with publications even focusing on the food culture of refugees.[34] In contrast, interviewees indicate that in areas such as the southern regions of Jordan, there is reluctance to engage with Syrian refugees, as they are considered "less attractive" due to the need for higher human resource fees, transportation costs, and more logistics for setting up operations. This highlights the need to leverage media attention to ensure the diverse vulnerabilities and needs of refugees across different regions are recognized and addressed appropriately.

4.2 Syrian Refugee Returns: A Complex Landscape

As of April 2025, UNHCR counted 443,227 Syrian refugees and more than 1 million IDPs within Syria who have returned since the fall of the Assad regime.[35] This represents only about 10% of the over 14 million Syrians who have been forced to flee their homes since 2011.[36] Only around 13% (approximately 58,000) of these refugee returnees have come from Jordan.[37]

Interviews and reports from NGOs in Jordan reveal mixed return intentions among Syrian refugees. According to an IRC survey conducted in December 2024, up to 30% of Syrian refugees stated they have no intention of returning to Syria.[38] In a UNHCR report published in February 2025, around 25% said they plan to return within the next 12 months, more than half said they intend to return within the next five years, and over 60% emphasized the importance of conducting a "go-and-see" visit before making a final decision.[39] "Go-and-see" visits typically involve a male family member, often the father or eldest brother, traveling to Syria while leaving the rest of the family behind in Jordan (or their current host country). The purpose of these visits is to scout the region, attempt to secure housing and employment, and assess the conditions before bringing the

rest of the family back. However, those who wish to return face significant legal and financial obstacles. For example, two Syrian refugees explained in interviews that a "go-and-see" visit to Syria could result in the loss of their legal refugee status in Jordan and a ban on reentry for at least five years. To mitigate this risk, some families designate a single member to make the trip, allowing them to assess conditions in Syria without jeopardizing the entire family's legal status in the host country.

Debt is another significant obstacle for Syrian refugees, with some humanitarian partners reporting that 90% of refugees struggle with debt. Public debts, such as healthcare debt and back payments for work permits, are particularly common among the refugee population and could potentially be waived by the GoJ. However, private debts, such as overdue rent payments, present a more complex challenge, especially when litigation is involved. Interviews reveal that if refugees have public debts, they cannot leave Jordan unless they negotiate a settlement and agree to the five-year non-return condition. On the other hand, private debts create difficult social dynamics, often straining relationships with neighbors, friends, and even family members. These tensions can complicate the return process, as the social and financial repercussions of unpaid debts could impact both the refugees and their families upon their return.

Those hesitant or unwilling to return have cited access to housing, education for their children, and employment opportunities as key factors influencing their decision.[40] In dialogue with NGO partners, many Syrian families with children have indicated that they plan to return to Syria after the school year in Jordan ends in July 2025. For those who do not wish to return, access to education was also cited as a key reason. Many emphasized the importance of ensuring their children receive a quality education and expressed concern that Syria's education system is not as well-equipped as Jordan's. According to the Crisis Analysis Syria report, the education sector in Syria currently remains severely underdeveloped. Schools officially reopened in mid-March 2025 with very low attendance rates, and some continue to serve as temporary shelters for displaced families.[41] Interviews also indicated that the Syrian system suffers from teacher shortages, unstable contracts, and recent curriculum revisions that have raised concerns over the increasing politicization of education.

Returning to Syria from Jordan is a complex and deeply personal decision. In an interview with a Syrian refugee, he shared that he was opposed to returning to Syria, even if conditions become more stable. He and his family have built a life in Jordan for nearly ten years after their arrival. His children have grown up immersed in Jordanian culture and now consider themselves Jordanian, even though they do not hold citizenship and are unable to become naturalized due to their status as Syrians. His eldest children have graduated from college, are married with children of their own, and are employed in Jordan. This highlights the deeply personal nature of the return decision, particularly for those refugees who have established lives in their host countries. In addition, non-refugee Syrians do not have a pathway to citizenship in Jordan, leaving them in a prolonged state of uncertainty, and many face significant barriers in obtaining work permits or accessing stable employment.[42] At the same time, interviews indicate that the growing scarcity of essential services, exacerbated by funding cuts, is making it more difficult for refugees to access healthcare, education, and employment.

Several factors motivate Syrian refugees to consider returning. One of the main reasons is a deep desire to return to their homeland, seen by many as the ultimate goal, despite prolonged uncertainty.[43] These insights underscore that return decisions are shaped not only by physical safety, but also a complex web of legal, economic, social, and emotional factors that differ widely amongst individuals. In the following findings section, the report describes the factors in the current landscape that are complicating several issues for Syrian refugees in Jordan, including integration as well as the decision to return to their homeland.

5. Findings

5.1 Decrease in Funding for INGOs and International Organizations

A severe contraction in international humanitarian funding, led by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), has critically impacted support for Syrian refugees in Jordan. This downturn in funding, which has steadily worsened over recent years with reduced contributions from the U.S. and European donors including the U.K., France, Germany, and the Netherlands, reached a critical point with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs seeing an 83% reduction and BPRM currently restricting support to strictly "life-saving assistance."[44] Programs considered "non-life-saving" include cash vouchers to women with high-risk pregnancies and social work for victims of GBV.[45] During field research, almost every organization mentioned that the decrease in funding would severely impede their operations and result in staff reductions with direct negative consequences for Syrian refugees' ability to access essential services. Even some of the programs that are allowed to continue operations are having trouble doing so because they must adhere to a reimbursement policy, a very meticulous and demanding process; this is limiting some organizations' programming for the most basic services to Syrian refugees.

The speed with which programs were shut down proves to be a wake-up call for NGOs to diversify funding streams. Though the 90-day pause in foreign assistance implemented in late January has been extended a month, INGOs that were heavily reliant on U.S. funding were forced to shut down major multi-year programs and lay off hundreds of staff members. Given their overdependence on one donor, organizations are seeking new partnerships with private donors and with the Gulf countries. Humanitarian partners noted that Gulf countries have not been a significant source of funding, as their contributions have typically been directed to the Syrian government rather than humanitarian actors. As a result, the Gulf countries would likely offer small amounts of funding at first, increasing competition among NGOs. There is also growing interest in partnerships with China, although engagement with China as a humanitarian donor remains a relatively new initiative.

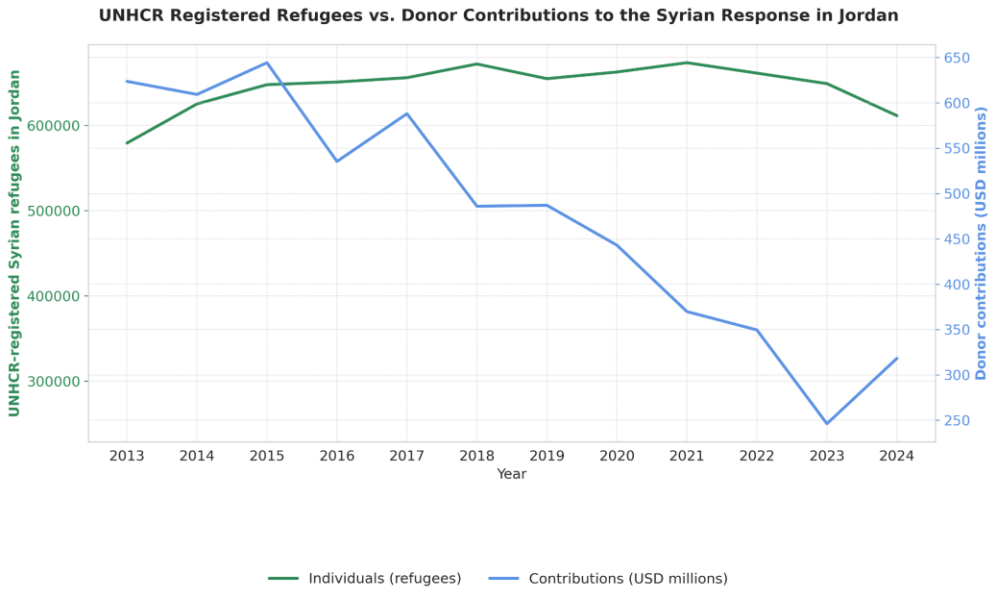

Figure 1: Total population of UNHCR registered Syrian refugees vs. total donor contributions to the refugee response in Jordan.[46]

To deal with the changing landscape, organizations seek flexible funding with less earmarked funds to survive. According to interviewees, pushing for flexible funding is a major cultural shift in how the humanitarian sector has traditionally worked; NGOs typically have restricted earmarked constraints compared to the flexibility that UN agencies possess. UNHCR particularly receives funding through "a global appeal" by BPRM, where they can move the funding from one project to another. Less reporting is required under this structure, unlike NGOs, which have strict reporting structures. Yet, the discussions in U.S. government circles surrounding alleged corruption and fraud in the humanitarian arena seem to be perpetuating a landscape leaning towards increasing earmarking of assistance. The underlying ideology is that countries must be accountable for taxpayer dollars and ensure that funds are not being "wasted."

Funding cuts are currently affecting all sectors, such as health, protection, and education. In particular, the terminations in the health sector are devastating. According to interviews, program cuts have reduced access to health services for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Multiple humanitarian partners recounted a recent case involving a Syrian refugee whose family could no longer afford the 70 JD per month required for medication after funding was withdrawn. Similarly, partners discussed how reductions in funding have limited access to prosthetics and other critical medical technologies, directly affecting refugees' physical mobility and their ability to work and support their families. Clinical mental health programs were also cut despite their critical role. For instance, mental health services, including access to medication for serious conditions such as schizophrenia, are no longer consistently prioritized.

Education initiatives are also not spared from the cuts. Several far-reaching NGOs' programs related to education and early childhood development (ECD) have also been suspended. A humanitarian partner working in the ECD space estimates that only about 15% of children in need of ECD services in Jordan receive them, and over 450,000 children were expected to benefit

from a single paused program. In education, systemic barriers continue to isolate Syrian refugee children. Jordanian children typically attend school in the morning, which is mostly funded by the GoJ; refugee children attend school during the "second shift" in the afternoon, which is funded mostly through international donors. In interviews, it was noted that the second shift was hit the hardest by the funding cuts, which can potentially lead to refugee children without proper access to education.

In addition to health and education, gender-focused programs were also targeted. GBV programs funded by the U.S. government have been universally cancelled in Jordan. According to interviews, this disrupted over 3,000 active cases in which NGOs were supporting high-risk individuals experiencing violence through case management, including protection, legal aid, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). These services were halted, and additional education and community engagement initiatives were suspended, with some exemptions. Another example recounted that a high-impact women's empowerment initiative valued at around $30 million was terminated in February 2025. Similarly, a $70 million program supporting micro and small enterprises remains active but has not received further communication from donors, creating significant uncertainty about its future.

With respect to limited funding for UN agencies, the energy supply in refugee camps is also at risk. According to interviews, electricity access in both Zaatari and Azraq camps is limited to a maximum of 8 hours per day—a longstanding issue now worsened by the current situation.[47] The infrastructure is aging, and there is no funding to replace or maintain it. Refugees rely on informal and unsafe solar installations, which have been linked to fires and injuries. Similar to the NGOs, UNHCR programs have been suspended, paused, and are undergoing modifications to align with the current U.S. administration's priorities. Consequently, financial pressures are being transferred to NGOs, which are being asked to reduce budgets and, by extension, services with little lead time.

The funding landscape for INGOs and UN agencies in Jordan has recently changed dramatically. As of May 2025, there is still no clarity on how grants still standing will continue operations under such uncertainty. Without urgent donor recommitment, the expansion of alternative funding avenues, or participation from the Jordanian private sector, many of Jordan's most vulnerable populations—including Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Sudanese, and Somali refugees, as well as poor Jordanians—face a growing gap in humanitarian and development support. According to interviews, viable voluntary returns may ease pressure on the national systems, which might soften the current political position on refugee integration.

5.2 UN-INGO/NGO Coordination

As mentioned in the stakeholder section, the UNHCR-led inter-agency response coordinates among UN agencies and INGOs through the ISWG. The ISWG currently coordinates efforts across seven key sectors: Education, Food Security and Basic Needs, Health, Economic Empowerment, Shelter, Protection, and WASH, along with relevant sub-sectors like GBV and Child Protection.[48] Crucially, these sector working groups do not overlap with the Task Forces led by GoJ line ministries, creating concerns about the UNHCR-led response's ability to reflect the national priorities outlined in the JRP. Sector working groups are ideally led by a combination of

UN agencies and an INGO/NGO partner, coordinating their activities with the relevant government line ministry. However, in some cases, sectors do not have active NGO or UN leadership.

The RCM model leverages UNHCR's mandate and knowledge of refugee protection and legal assistance. However, a recurring challenge highlighted by partners relates to UNHCR's dual function as both the lead coordinator and a significant implementing agency delivering assistance and protection programs. Concerns have been raised by partners regarding the potential for UNHCR's own programmatic priorities to unduly influence strategic direction and resource allocation across the broader multi-sector response. Furthermore, the fact that UNHCR competes for funding alongside the very partners it coordinates can create tensions and perceptions of unequal footing. Given the current funding crisis, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher has called for a shift from direct programming to efforts to "build the capacity of local governments, local organizations, and civil society to protect the most vulnerable."[49]

Some of these concerns have been allayed by UN-INGO cooperation at the sectoral working group level, but a perception of top-down decision-making remains, especially where UNHCR is the sole leader in the sector. This tension has been present in the protection sector, where there has been significant disagreement on communications surrounding returns to Syria. INGO partners have voiced their concerns that the response needs to focus equally on those wanting to return immediately, those wanting to return eventually, and those who may never return. Others worry that INGO partners have a conflict of interest between maintaining their own programs and seriously considering refugee returns.

Another challenge is that UNHCR lacks the system and standards of the OCHA cluster system for carrying out multi-sector needs assessments. The lack of standardization makes it difficult to synthesize the findings of implementing partners into a shared and cohesive outlook. This has been a persistent problem throughout the response. Previous reports have highlighted the importance of "joint analysis of results at a sector working group level," the timely distribution of information, and the development of a multi-sectoral and countrywide picture of needs.[50] The persistence of disjointed and at times overlapping needs assessments creates mistrust among implementing partners. Partners also voiced concern over biased and unrepresentative surveys and assessments published by the 3RP and UNHCR. This, in turn, creates a negative cycle where partners fail to share information with UNHCR. The result is a siloed information environment where critical data is behind each partner's firewall. Despite these challenges, partners expressed hope that the need for increased coordination with organizations working inside Syria will incentivize more open information sharing.

Further complicating coordination efforts is the perception among some partners that coordination meetings themselves lack effectiveness or incentive for participation. Partners voiced a preference for meetings that focus on substantive coordination and the delegation of responsibilities rather than those that are purely informational. Previous discussions of this so-called "task force disease" have highlighted the need for buy-in from all parties and the attendance of senior staff to ensure the effectiveness of these meetings. This dynamic risks vesting too much decision-making power in larger organizations.[51] The lack of attendance of all implementing partners raises further concerns about duplicate madnates.

Efforts to advance localisation within the coordination framework have yielded some progress, but still fail to support long-term financial viability for local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs). L/NNGOs, particularly through forums like JONAF, have taken concrete steps towards co-leadership within the JoSH and sector working groups, with national partners appointed as co-chairs in sectors including Food Security and Basic Needs, Protection, and Economic Empowerment.[52] However, UN Women and JIF's 2024 Localization Baseline Report has raised concerns that national NGOs are often relegated to data-collection or subcontractor roles and lack meaningful decision-making power or influence in program design.[53] Furthermore, L/NNGOs face substantial barriers in accessing direct and quality funding; in 2021, they received only 7% of total humanitarian funding, with just 13% of that awarded directly.[54] Additionally, coordination structures themselves can be inaccessible to L/NNGOs due to the use of complex jargon, the prevalence of English as the working language, and a potential disconnect from the perceived priorities and needs of national actors.[55]

5.3 Increased Partnership Between the GoJ and NGOs

Findings also indicate that there is a great opportunity to increase engagement and partnership between the GoJ and NGOs to streamline collaboration across NGO streams of work that align with government priorities. Currently, multiple stakeholders mentioned that systemic and relational challenges act as roadblocks to partnership. This is not a new issue in Jordan. Scholars have studied the relationship between NGOs and the GoJ, finding that there is a need for increased trust between both sectors.[56] The requirement that MOPIC approve all NGO projects can delay programming, and the process may look different from organization to organization. Furthermore, an assessment of Jordanian NGOs found disparate programming restrictions among the three types of NGOs and nonprofit organizations recognized by the GoJ: Royal NGOs, quasi-governmental organizations, and NGOs. The report argues that: "Coupled with the external funding requirements from donor organizations, Jordanian legal restrictions limit freedom of assembly through NGOs by implicitly favoring organizations with more ties to the monarchy."[57]

Moreover, there is limited strategic alignment or prioritization process between the implementation of NGO programs and the government's programs. In the long term, this can dilute the impact of the programs and prevent their integration into the Jordanian system. This partially stems from the limited participation of the GoJ in UN-led coordination meetings and sometimes from an unwillingness on behalf of NGOs to engage with the government, indicating a strained relationship and a missed opportunity. In some cases, some NGOs note they feel competition with the government for funding, fighting over scarce resources from international donors to put forth projects. This competition can erode collaborative spirit and distract from the core issue of providing services to beneficiaries.

Both NGOs and UN agencies noted the importance of strengthening government partnerships, scaling from informal to formal spaces. Organizations lead by example, building relationships with counterparts at key ministries and making efforts to align project design with government priorities. By proactively engaging with MOPIC and line ministries, NGOs seek to build those relationships and prove they can be assets to the government's agenda. Most nonprofits were in favor of this idea and would benefit from supportive infrastructure. In a moment dictated

by scarce funding, improved NGO-government relations are key for ensuring the continuity of services for the most vulnerable. Absent better coordination, program duplication and needless competition for funding will continue to inhibit service provision. Partners expressed hope that increased strategic alignment and more leadership from the GoJ between both actors could alleviate this issue.

5.4 Lack of Coordination Between Country Offices

One of the key structural challenges facing INGOs is the fragmentation and lack of alignment among their various country offices. Some humanitarian organizations are actively addressing the issue. While some have established crisis analysis teams to collect and analyze fragmented data within Syria, enhancing coordination with their offices in Jordan, others have formed dedicated task forces to strengthen regional collaboration to support Syrian refugees across neighboring nations.[58]

Despite these efforts, internal challenges persist, particularly in the areas of communication and knowledge sharing. During interviews, humanitarian partners expressed concerns about the limited availability of information on Syria's labor market and the challenges in transferring economic skills acquired by refugees in Jordan back to Syria. Other partners highlighted the severe crisis in the health sector in Syria; hospitals have been targeted during the conflict, and even relatively stable areas face a severe brain drain, limited access to essential medical supplies, and the near collapse of the domestic pharmaceutical industry. These up-to-date insights must be shared across country offices. Additionally, partners emphasized the need for cross-border mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of medical records, discharge notes, and medication supplies, ensuring continuity of care for patients returning to Syria.

In the economic sphere, tariff reductions have increased Turkish imports, impacting the local market.[59] Syria continues to grapple with high poverty and unemployment rates, which force many families to rely heavily on humanitarian aid.[60] Meanwhile, partners indicated that Syria's banking system remains largely disconnected from global financial networks, leading to a heavy dependence on informal capital flows and networks. These challenges directly affect the ability of returnees to access basic services and rebuild their lives in Syria, underscoring the urgent need for harmonized, cross-border planning across the region.

Finally, internal coordination within Syria poses significant challenges for INGOs. Humanitarian partners have highlighted that communication restrictions, such as firewalls prominent during the Assad regime, have severely limited knowledge sharing and operational capacity within offices in Syria. Furthermore, gaps in policy alignment between headquarters and country/field offices continue to hinder cohesive, effective responses. Strengthening coordination, both within Syria and across borders, is critical to ensure more coherent and responsive programming.

5.5 Promoting Increased Collaboration Amongst NGOs

NGO collaboration is severely limited by the fact that programming is ultimately

determined by the decisions of the government, UN agencies, and donor countries. As discussed previously, partners find that this has resulted in a surplus of NGOs with duplicate mandates. Another consequence is that INGOs struggle to fill in the gaps of other INGOs if their funding is cut. For example, one primary healthcare provider in the Zaatari camp had to terminate its services, and Islamic Relief was willing to replace these services. However, Islamic Relief could not receive a permit to work in the Zaatari camp: this obstacle reflects how INGOs may not be able to assist others in continuing specific services where duplication of efforts once existed. It also demonstrates the bureaucratic obstacles that prevent NGOs from having the flexibility to enable true coordination.

The evolution of INGO-LNGO relationships shows promising potential despite persistent challenges. JIF and UN Women's Localisation Baseline Report of 2024 documented that while most local organizations (56%) found value in international partnerships, a substantial portion (43%) viewed these collaborations as formalities driven by regulatory requirements rather than mutual benefit.[61] With international humanitarian funding on a downward trajectory and programming priorities shifting toward development, effective partnership models have never been more critical. Partners indicated that the humanitarian community's ability to sustain refugee services with diminishing resources will depend significantly on transforming these relationships from compliance exercises into genuine collaborative frameworks that leverage both international expertise and local implementation capacity.

6. Recommendations

6.1 For Donors and NGOs: Funding Diversification and New Pooled Funding Structure

- **To strengthen financial sustainability, INGOs could diversify funding sources and adopt more cost-effective approaches.**
  - INGOs could establish corporate partnerships (e.g., CSR initiatives), explore impact investing, and seek direct support from philanthropic foundations and national governments;
  - Implement cost-sharing models and efficiency-driven strategies;
  - Continue advocating for systemic reforms that prioritize local ownership, sustainability, and accountability.
  - Advocate for diverse sectors in Jordan to work together; the Jordanian private sector can continue creating opportunities for Syrian refugees, as well as investing in Syria will create opportunities for both countries.
- **To strengthen INGO sustainability, donors could prioritize flexible, multi-year funding, while INGOs could advocate for stronger independent funding streams.**
  - INGOs might engage in joint advocacy for flexible funding agreements and propose adaptive fund management models;

    - They could also make the case for direct donor support to civil society actors, emphasizing their unique community-based access and contextual knowledge.
- **To ensure service continuity and support gradual transitions to national leadership, INGOs could:**
    - Negotiate with host governments to align essential services, such as education records and medical documentation, with national priorities;
    - Design resilient funding mechanisms, such as pooled emergency reserves;
    - Collaborate with donors to establish multi-donor accounts within ministries;
    - Provide capacity-building and technical support to strengthen government systems and ease the transition.
- **INGO forums could adopt elements of the UN coordination model where appropriate, acting as interim coordination bodies in transitional contexts.**
    - They could take on technical advisory roles, co-manage pooled donor funds, and work closely with local partners to embed accountability and prepare for national leadership.

6.2 For UNHCR and INGOs: Strengthening Coordination

Coordination System:

- Conduct a 360 review of the coordination system. The review should be co-led by delegates from UN Agencies, INGOs, and NNGOs.
- Ensure every sector is co-led by a UN agency and an INGO/NGO.
- Shift focus from vulnerability to multi-sectoral needs.

Needs Assessments:

- Create a centralized, transparent repository of multisectoral needs assessment data. The ISWG should agree on best practices for data collection and standardize these practices on a sectoral basis.
- Assess the needs of refugees hoping to return immediately and eventually, as well as those wishing to return.
- Coordinate the timing of needs assessments to ensure comparability of the assessments and to facilitate agreement on priority needs.
- Consider aligning needs assessment strategies with actors in the regional response to facilitate voluntary returns.

Working Group Meetings:

- Focus working group meetings on coordination issues rather than information sharing.
- Make working group meetings decision-oriented to create incentives for partner organizations, as well as for the GoJ to send their decision-makers to the meetings.

6.3 For GoJ and INGOs: Strengthening Coordination Between Governments and NGOs

- As interviews have indicated, the operational environment is shifting from humanitarian response to long-term development, and strengthening coordination mechanisms between INGOs and government entities becomes increasingly necessary.

Sectoral Working Groups

- Sectoral working groups should include at least one INGO rather than unilaterally being chaired by UNHCR.
  - Findings in research have shown that some INGOs have better relationships with certain ministries depending on their areas of work.
  - Increasing these forums provides an opportunity for INGOs to share policy feedback and data trends while allowing government representatives to clarify regulations and identify partnership opportunities.

Coordinating Advocacy Efforts

- INGOs should invest in coordinated advocacy efforts to promote clearer and more flexible regulatory frameworks.
  - Advocacy efforts should also highlight the value that INGOs bring to national systems, including resource mobilization and service delivery in remote communities.
- Pursue changes to existing restrictions like permit requirements and the use of certain language in programming, which pose lots of operational challenges.

Other Country Cases

- The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan or the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approaches used in Sudan can offer valuable insights into strengthening coordination in hybrid humanitarian-development settings.[62]
  - Government-INGO collaboration can be institutionalized through joint planning documents, co-leadership of sectoral working groups, and transparent frameworks for operational approvals.
  - By adapting such models to the Jordanian context, INGOs and the government can form more resilient and adaptive systems for coordinated service delivery.

6.4 For NGOS: Enhancing Coordination Between Country Offices

- **Standardizing Internal Communications Protocols with Headquarters Coordination**
  - To promote alignment across countries, implementing standardized internal

communications protocols is key.
    - Build an internal communications strategy that allows country offices to adapt global guidance to their specific cultural and staffing needs while keeping a standard baseline.
    - Adopting a clear and consistent communications framework by streamlining information flows, reducing triangulation and duplication, and ensuring alignment across teams to achieve strategic goals.
    - To train staff, headquarters can implement workshops, share example models, and provide clear guidance, fact sheets, and question-and-answer documents.
    - Set clear responsibilities and roles within communication structures to enhance accountability and provide clarity across offices.

- **Enhance Communication and Coordination Norms**
    - Creating uniform reporting formats with adaptability possibilities.
    - Share organizational and programmatic calendars to enhance transparency.
    - Conduct regular cross-office coordination calls with counterparts across regions and countries.
    - Establish which technological tools best support specific office needs, especially keeping in mind different contexts.
    - Keep in mind your different situations. Certain NGOs shared that staff within Syria could not directly communicate with one another due to safety concerns surrounding opposition groups controlling different areas of the country.

6.5 For All Stakeholders: Leverage Media Attention to Drive Donations

- Encourage the GoJ to integrate both local and international media into national humanitarian communication strategies to amplify refugee issues, enhance donor visibility, and sustain global attention.
- Urge donors to increase direct assistance for public interest media and adopt more funding flexibility.
    - Donors often focus on funding solely on content fees and need to include operational costs, such as transportation, visual design, and multimedia production fees, to support the quality and operational costs of stories.
- Enhance the capacity of media professionals through digital and journalism training to support the production of diverse, data-driven, and solution-based content.
    - Equip media professionals with digital tools and visual literacy to understand audience engagement across multiple platforms, including social media, to enable more accurate, engaging, and contextualized reporting.
    - Media content needs to include diverse voices, such as women, children, people with disabilities, marginalized minorities, and affected Jordanians.

    - Media content needs to move beyond basic fact-based reporting to embrace solution-oriented journalism that provides policy-relevant recommendations and data-driven analysis to deepen public understanding.
- Foster greater coordination among stakeholders, such as the media, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, government entities, academia, community members, and the private sector to develop a holistic media strategy for the refugee response.
    - Recognizing media engagement as part of a broader interconnected ecosystem.
    - While safeguarding media independence and integrity of the editorial firewall, foster dialogue around joint communication strategies that clarify the roles and contributions of each actor (e.g., co-producing events, hosting panel discussions, and building storytelling platforms to strengthen outreach, etc.).
    - Media professionals can further support other stakeholders by offering lectures or workshops on crafting effective press releases and advising on strategies for effective public communication.

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