



JORDAN
INGO
FORUM



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2023

Walk the talk

Beyond the Compact

From reciprocal to transactional: Reassessing Our Commitment to the Jordan Compact

I. INTRODUCTION

When first adopted in February 2016, the Jordan Compact introduced a new paradigm for responsibility-sharing that was based on a series of mutual commitments between Jordan as a refugee-hosting country and the international community. Such an arrangement promoted economic development and social opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians to cope with the displacement crisis. Its anchoring at subsequent Brussels Conferences 'Supporting the future of Syria and Region' hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the United Nations gave visibility to the more than 100 reciprocal policy and financial actions and established an important framework for monitoring progress.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, however, Jordan's economy has come under additional pressure, with public funds and resources redirected initially to address the immediate public health concerns of all who resided in the country. Global and domestic shocks slowed Jordan's economy, deepened pre-existing inequalities, and generated new vulnerabilities that continue to be felt, especially by refugees, migrant workers, and particular subsets of the population including youth, women and the elderly. This has significantly eroded access to livelihoods for refugee and host communities, extending for some their dependence on humanitarian aid. Most recently, the crisis in Ukraine has driven up food prices in Jordan, which relies heavily on imports. All of this has come at the expense of Jordan's progress against many of its Compact commitments, slowing momentum in many sectors and reversing previously celebrated gains in others.

The international community continues to support Jordan by funding initiatives, providing technical assistance, and expanding macro-economic support measures to help Jordan weather these cascading crises. Yet seven years since its development, the Compact's track record of improving the living conditions of refugee communities and their hosts warrants critical reflection. The prolonged nature of the Syria crisis and significant changes in the domestic context since the Compact's inception are reason alone to revisit the collective objectives and intended outcomes agreed in 2016, and to even revisit the effectiveness of a Compact model in such an environment. Donors, their implementing partners, and the host government must consider how to better align the country's aid architecture and national plans and strategies to address the pressing needs of the most vulnerable whilst simultaneously advancing self-reliance of the wider population over the longer-term. This paper reflects on the progress and shortcomings of efforts undertaken by the government of Jordan (GoJ) and the international community under the Jordan Compact ahead of the seventh Brussels Conference. Together, the Jordan INGO Forum (JIF), Jordanian National NGOs Forum (JONAF), and the Coordination Committee for Civil Society Organizations (HIMAM) identify opportunities and entry points for the GoJ and the international community to recalibrate and reorient their investments in support of a more effective and accountable response today and well into the future.



II. CONTEXT

Jordan has been a generous and crucial provider of refuge and safety to those fleeing Syria's war, hosting the second highest number of Syrian refugees per capita globally. Since the start of the conflict, over 5.3 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries, 12.4% of whom to Jordan. With the assistance of international donors, Jordan continues to host approximately 1.3 million Syrians, 660,646 of whom are registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Around one-fifth (135,123) of these reside in camps, while the majority are living among host communities in urban and rural areas, primarily in the northern governorates of Mafraq and Irbid and in the capital, Amman. Children and youth constitute nearly half of the total refugee population. Some 19% of the Syrian population has been identified as having a specific need, such as serious medical conditions or legal or physical protection gaps. The Kingdom also affords refuge to an estimated 87,391 refugees and asylum seekers from Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere.

Twelve years into the Syria crisis and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, Jordan's society, economy, and infrastructure are facing immense strain in all areas of life including in relation to labor, education, health, housing, and municipal services. Hosting a large refugee caseload has laid bare many long-standing challenges in the country such as natural resource scarcity, fiscal deficit, unemployment, and gender inequality. In some cases, patience in host communities has worn thin and relations have frayed as refugees are perceived to compete with Jordanians for services and opportunities, this further stoked by the media. Refugees face growing vulnerability linked to difficulties in accessing health, shelter, food and employment, deepening their reliance on negative coping mechanisms. For instance, debt to cover essential needs is on the rise (growing 25% in 2022 in comparison with 2018), mainly to pay rent (32%) followed by buying food (26%) and utilities (18%). 93% of the population in Jordan has access to a safely managed water source and 86% to a piped network. Water is normally available once a week urban areas, and less than once every two weeks in rural parts; only 77.3% of existing sanitation systems are safely managed and only a third of schools have basic sanitation services. Shelter remains an area of concern given significant gaps in out-of-camp settings; over half of households live in sub-standard or inadequate shelters characterized by leaking roofs or insufficient ventilation. Recent studies indicate that 51%



of households are unable to pay rent due to rising prices and a lack of stable income.

Whilst recent years have seen reduced levels of violence across Syria and the strengthening of diplomatic, economic and social ties between Syria and Jordan and the wider region, Syria remains unsafe for the large-scale, organized return of refugees. This underscores the need for the continued leadership of the Kingdom, with the support of the international community, to adopt a longer-term mindset that enables durable solutions for refugees, reflected in contemporary strategies and systems for service delivery. Against a backdrop of global economic crisis and competing priorities on the international stage, the commitment to meeting these needs risks fading, giving all the more reason for more thoughtful consideration of the nature of the support that is committed by donors and the manner by which it is channeled in order for it to be most effective. There is likewise value in looking beyond the Compact at the constellations of actions (bilateral, multilateral) taking place in the wider development response given the protracted nature of the displacement crisis and its blending with other crises in Jordan. This has the potential to enable further harmonization and coherence of responses to the multi-sectoral, interconnected needs of specific groups and more accountable use of the international community's support in turn. This also necessitates renewed leadership by host authorities to facilitate and enable the work of aid agencies towards these goals.

III. EVOLUTION OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: SECTOR BASED PROGRESS

EDUCATION

As the Compact outlines, the Government of Jordan and the international community committed to enabling access to learning and to boosting the quality of education, thus preparing a generation of young people to contribute to Syria's future peace and prosperity. With the support of the international community, Jordan agreed to expand access to quality educational opportunities, including by improving the physical, material and legal safety of the learning environment itself. The Government also committed to enrolling 130,000 Syrian children in formal education and to enhancing inclusion for children with disabilities in both the public and private school systems. Reciprocally, donor governments pledged to provide predictable, multi-year funding and technical assistance to reinforce the Ministry of Education's leadership in these critical areas.

Year after year, Jordan has consistently met its enrollment targets. Nonetheless, refugee children are far less likely to access schooling than Jordanian children. An estimated one third of Syrian children remain out of school, with drop-out rates among Syrian and Jordanian children on the rise, as much as 26% in 2021. As youth advance in age, competing priorities and negative coping mechanisms at the household level, including early marriage and child labor, erode enrolment further. Financial barriers have only grown since the pandemic, with the cost of transport or school fees posing difficulties for boys and girls. The GoJ has continued to waive documentation requirements for Syrian school-aged children to enter the public system, further facilitating access to learning for those lacking asylum seeker certificates.

Although significant effort was made to ease access to and sustain learning for students of all ages prior to and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, commensurate investment in the quality of such opportunities has fallen alarmingly short of what is required, affecting learning and developmental outcomes in camps and in host communities. For example, a 2022 survey of students in Zaatari and Azraq camps revealed that three-quarters of children in grades 5 and 6 could not read or comprehend a grade 3 text. Insufficient

attention has been paid to early childhood education, reducing drop-out rates and ensuring that no student is left behind through age-appropriate interventions. Refugee children continue to be more likely to be behind in school relative to their Jordanian peers, with only 48% of Syrian students in the education level appropriate for their age group, compared with 90% of Jordanians. Once-promising innovations in standardized testing and reforms to pedagogy and curriculum have stalled, while entry points for secondary and higher education for refugees remain elusive. Prohibitions on working formally in professional occupations coupled with reduced teaching hours and lower quality teaching in second shift and camp-based schools affect the longer-term potential of Syrian children, disincentivizing personal ambition and the pursuit of tertiary education. Syrian youth still maintain big dreams for the future, seeking to continue education, graduate from university, live a dignified life in displacement, and eventually reunite with family when conditions allow.

WASH

Addressing the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs of vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees can only be read in the context of the population's ability to be safe and resilient to existing resource shortage and the effects of climate change. The severity of Jordan's water crisis is existential, posing the greatest barrier to the country's economic growth and development. As the second most water poor country in the world with only 97 m³ per capita per year, available water is well below the absolute water scarcity threshold. Use and demand for water far outpaces the country's renewable water supply which currently meets an estimated two-thirds of the population's water demands. Over-pumping has deteriorated groundwater quality and affected renewable and non-renewable water levels.

This leads to WASH-related risks throughout the country. Water supply is intermittent and based on a rationing system, meaning that about half of Jordanians have access to water for 24 hours per week or less. More than 90% of low income households in Jordan are expected to face critical water vulnerability by 2100. Existing water infrastructure such as



wastewater treatment facilities and water pumping stations require urgent repairs and maintenance. Water leakage and water theft are of particular concern, affecting humanitarian and development responses in and out of camps. In addition, Syrian refugees in urban settings report challenges in paying for the rising costs of safe, clean water. Such poor infrastructure and lack of reliable basic services further challenges the capacities of these communities to implement climate risk mitigation and coping strategies. Poor hygiene and sanitation conditions result in heightened risks of disease transmission and other public health concerns, particularly among vulnerable communities including Syrian refugees. In recent decades, the Kingdom has experienced recurring droughts, flash floods, and landslides. Climate change-induced increases in temperature, a drop in precipitation and heightened desertification will continue to affect water supply and further exacerbate water scarcity in the future, posing a substantial risk to the country's people, natural resources and economy, in turn undermining nutrition, health, food security and livelihoods outcomes. In Amman, for instance, over 50% of households at risk of flood hazards are considered vulnerable.

The inclusion of WASH in national policies and strategies, including in the Jordan Response Plan 2020-2022, the Green Growth National Action Plan 2021-2025, and the National Water Strategy 2023-2040 reflect a growing concern for mitigating the strain on scarce resources and an encouragement of more sustainable practices, by ensuring safe and equitable access to WASH services and by strengthening the infrastructure and delivery capacity of existing systems. Jordan has made demonstrable progress towards the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), with 94.6% of the population using safely managed drinking water services and 88.5% using safely managed sanitation services. Efforts to continue to ensure safe WASH access for refugees in camps and other settlements are critical, including through investments in climate related interventions that support sustainable use of scarce resources and enhance resilience. Dedicated efforts of humanitarian responders to strengthen awareness of environmental health and climate risks is an important step towards the behavior change required to support water conservation and other coping strategies.

HEALTH

The Compact and related Conference commitments focus on facilitating equitable and affordable access to and quality of healthcare provision in an effort to boost health outcomes for all, including Syrian refugees. The Jordanian government agreed to enable universal and affordable access to healthcare and to expand the reach of primary and secondary healthcare services.

Health assistance remains a top protection concern for refugees, and especially for vulnerable groups including older people and those with disabilities. The reduction in the rates for non-Syrian refugee healthcare from the foreigner to the non-Jordanian, subsidized rate in 2020 has been much welcomed. The cost of routine procedures such as a pregnancy, for instance, fell from JOD 220 to JOD 60. While some barriers to the national healthcare system have been reduced, including through concerted inclusion efforts across the COVID-19 pandemic response, refugees continue to face challenges in accessing and affording the care that they require, with 47% of refugees having reported a rise in the cost of healthcare in Jordan. Granting refugees universal access to the national COVID-19 health response and vaccination program was an important step. Efforts to raise awareness and support access to vaccination continued throughout 2022, including among refugee populations in camp and host communities.

Limited and reduced specialist camp-based health services (such as a lack of dental and ophthalmology care) raise concerns about health outcomes for camp-based populations, especially with regard to specialized needs. Mental health and wellbeing, as measured by an index of reported negative emotions (anger, apathy, fear, hopelessness) deteriorated between 2021 and 2022 (albeit improving overall since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020), with anxieties linked to economic pressures and climate change especially common. An absence of awareness of available mental health services coupled with widespread stigma in the community are reported to be the major barriers to effective access to mental health services. The psychological effects of quarantine and social distancing, isolation, loss of income and fear due to the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing mental

health conditions, especially among women, children and those exposed to violence. Although Jordan has a well-established system for the surveillance of communicable diseases, refugees are still imperiled by emerging and re-emerging diseases, vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, tuberculosis and parasitic infections, especially in camp settings.

The pandemic also revealed opportunities to reinforce the quality and comprehensiveness of the public healthcare system, and the potential for streamlining processes and introducing technological innovations with the support of the private sector. The dedicated support of international donors has been crucial to keeping healthcare affordable for Syrians. At the same time, the absence of transparent and regular monitoring of investments in the sector impede opportunities for enhanced collaboration between humanitarian health responses to complement the national system and avoid leaving the most vulnerable behind.

PROTECTION

Preserving asylum space in Jordan whilst simultaneously unlocking durable solutions for refugees remains a cornerstone of the response. In the absence of peace conditions in Syria and, therefore, of the elements of safe, voluntary and dignified return, cooperation on protection issues is crucial. The Compact calls for the provision of legal protection through the re-opening of refugee registration and regularization of status processes, as well as the issuance of legal civil documentation. Over time, a collective commitment has been made to ensure that any refugee returns be consistent with International Law and the principle of non-refoulement in particular. The GoJ and the international community have also agreed to facilitate resettlement and complementary pathways to third countries, contributions to which have tapered off dramatically in recent years.

The registration of new asylum seekers (whether Syrian or other nationalities) has been paused since the GoJ ceased registration of new arrivals in early 2019. Although the GoJ had adopted a range of measures aimed at improving access to birth registration granting every refugee a birth certificate serving as proof of identity, parentage, and nationality, gaps in securing the evidentiary documentation to enable these processes



persist. Despite investment in and expansion of specialized protection services, including with regard to gender-based violence and mental health and psychosocial support services, mental health and wellbeing continues to deteriorate, especially among refugee populations who face severe economic pressure. The mental health crisis is resulting in rising violence of all types. This situation has also translated into an increase in the levels of violence against children and women; 28% of Syrian refugee women experience psychological abuse and 29% physical assault. Early marriages accounted for 32 percent of marriages among Syrians in Jordan, which is twice as high as levels in Syria prior to 2011. Child protection risks are also on the rise with 8.2% of all refugee children in Jordan considered at risk of child abuse, violence, neglect, child marriage, and child labor. Legal aid continues to serve as an important tool for enabling respect for and protection of rights for vulnerable Jordanians and refugees, preventing exploitation and abuse, improving living conditions (e.g. shelter, employment) and guaranteeing a dignified life.

Dialogue and progress on sensitive policy issues such as detention in Azraq's Village Five, deportation of asylum seekers, service provision in informal tented settlements, and access to vulnerable groups in Rukban Camp has been frustrated. A steady stream of approximately 200-400 people has spontaneously returned to Syria each month since the international border reopened in November 2020, despite conditions being deemed unsafe by UNHCR. Despite new arrivals reported regularly, Syrian refugees remain indefinitely confined in Village Five of Azraq Camp. The lack of due process inhibits them from enjoying equal access to services, rights, and opportunities. Likewise, there has been no progress to restore humanitarian access to the Syrian population living in Rukban Camp, which has been excluded from the provision of basic humanitarian assistance since mid-March 2020.

LIVELIHOODS AND INCOME GENERATION

A core component of the Jordan Compact is the acceptance that inclusion of Syrians in the formal labor market can stimulate overall economic growth, employment and wellbeing. The GoJ and international community made several commitments including reforms of the labor market to expand Syrians' access to opportunities. These include facilitating access to work in providing 200,000 work permits to Syrian refugees and reforms to remove, where possible, barriers to work for Syrians whilst avoiding competition with Jordanians. It also included support for livelihoods and employment creation and skills matching programs and the promotion of decent work standards for Jordanians and Syrians.

Implementation of the December 2020 flexible work permit instruction and progress towards the target of 70,000 work permits has consistently lagged behind schedule. Despite the positive steps by the GoJ to afford work permits to Syrian refugees in specific 'open' sectors and to change the legal framework to enable Syrian-owned home-based businesses, the unemployment rate continues to increase. Such challenges further reinforce the harsh reality that work permits do not directly translate to employment and decent work outcomes, with the cost of securing a work permit itself an impediment in many sectors. Prior to the pandemic, 35% of working age Syrian refugees in Jordan were employed; this fell to 27% in 2022. This

disproportionately impacts women and youth and those working in the informal sector and/or in poor working conditions. Of the Syrian refugees engaged in work, more than 90% are in temporary jobs. Inequalities persist in economic participation, economic opportunity, and political empowerment for women, despite several legislative initiatives to make the workplace fairer and more accessible for women. Women receive only 6% of all work permits issued to refugees, largely due to social attitudes and limited access to childcare. A substantial segment of the economy remains in the informal sector, meaning that more than half of active Syrian workers are participating in the informal sector, in the fields of agriculture and construction in particular. These jobs are prone to risks such as unpredictable and longer hours, fewer protections, lower wages, and sub-standard working conditions.

The most recent setback in this sector has been the introduction of new regulations to restrict labor market participation in specific occupations further, having adverse effects on Syrian refugees in particular. These conditions continue to fuel serious protection concerns and lead to high levels of marginalization and vulnerability, especially among refugees. Poverty levels are high, and the long-term resilience of the refugee community is eroding as the refugee household income has fallen to a monthly average of JOD 240. These challenges must be considered in the context of ongoing support to strengthen existing social protection systems in Jordan for vulnerable Jordanians, including the value of looking beyond simply aligning cash assistance programs for refugees to enabling their inclusion in existing national programs.



IV. EVOLUTION OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: THE BIGGER PICTURE

Reflecting the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Compact outlines a shared commitment to strengthening the quality and effectiveness of development cooperation given the increasingly protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis affecting the region, and its impact on neighboring host countries in particular. Much attention has been paid to the levels and predictability of funding pledged by donor governments to support the GoJ in addressing needs and withstanding subsequent shocks. Yet as the sector-based response suggests, the ability of the response to meet specific needs and prevent the exacerbation of vulnerabilities among certain subsets of the population including those of women and youth faces significant limitations. Women, girls and youth continue to face emerging and deepening needs such as limited employment opportunities, workplace discrimination and harassment, gender-based violence, weak learning outcomes and access to education, and early marriage and child labor.

The Jordan Response Plan once served as a central instrument for resource mobilization and prioritization, its relevance waning in recent years. Responding to the needs of refugees under the Compact cannot be dissociated from addressing the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the sustainable development challenges that will affect Jordan well into the future. Concern over a possible reduction in the level of funding available to support the humanitarian response presents an opportunity to fast-track contributions to the social and economic inclusion of refugees as part of wider efforts to align the refugee response to development efforts in Jordan. Despite momentum around building humanitarian-development coherence in Jordan, concrete efforts to support economic and social inclusion of refugees face obstacles. Brussels Conference pledges continue to reflect

a willingness of international donors to support a greater shift from humanitarian to development funding, but the reality is that support to longer-term programming is heavily shaped by donor government priorities.

Bridging the gaps and aligning humanitarian and development actions are a natural extension of the Jordan Compact and the Brussels Commitments. However, progress relies on a number of conditions, including the preservation of civic space for ongoing humanitarian action, human rights advocacy and other efforts. The aid response in Jordan has been threatened by a series of legislative measures which have the potential to undermine and further constrain the space for national and international organizations to respond to the needs of Syrian refugees and Jordanians. This includes powers expanded during the state of emergency declared amidst the Coronavirus pandemic. Another critical component of this is the strengthening of national capacities and the manner by which localization of the response is advanced. This includes reducing barriers to the participation and leadership of local actors in the response, allocating resources to support their longevity, and strengthening capacity for such efforts. Although progress has been made in adapting existing coordination structures to some of these challenges, whether through the establishment of new structures or inclusion of national NGOs in their leadership, the international community must look beyond coordination to how leadership and the balance of power is addressed more widely. This is of particular concern as some international NGOs consider their positionality in Jordan and seek to transition their work in a manner that allows for the continuity of services and reinforcement of national capacities.

As highlighted in this report, the GoJ and international community initiated several important steps to advance the nexus approach. Efforts to link up development responses to parallel efforts to meet shorter-term needs for longer-term impact must become the primary way of working for the international community and the government. Steps to expand the National Aid Fund to include Palestinian refugees, the development of the Accelerating Access Initiative and its second phase, and operationalization of the GoJ's COVID-19 National Preparedness and Response Plan all reflect such an intent. Looking ahead, longer-term planning is required to address the needs of populations in Jordan's refugee camps, where cycles of dependency on humanitarian aid place the burden of sustaining short-term activities on donors at a moment when a longer-term perspective is required to boost self-reliance. Another example of where this can be pursued is with regard to the Kingdom's climate risk adaptation and resilience approaches, especially in managing acute water resource scarcity. By recognizing that the right to safe, clean water affects all populations resident in Jordan, national planning processes and responses can reflect this universal need and orient solutions which benefit all groups in society. Efforts to tackle waste management and strengthen other municipal services can simultaneously enable access to all residents, support climate risk adaptation and mitigation, and generate new employment opportunities. In their investments in economic recovery and sustainable growth, contributions of donor countries and international financial institutions should be grounded in conditions of economic inclusion of refugees, including support to Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision – a national roadmap to grow Jordan's economy and generate one million jobs over 10 years.



V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The absence of progress across many key dimensions of the response in Jordan is not solely a practical matter – it is an acutely ethical one. For JIF, HIMAM and JONAF, it raises the following key question: to what degree can current responders from across the humanitarian and development continuum, national and international, meet the needs of the full spectrum of vulnerable groups in Jordan if the framework of the response itself is no longer fit-for-purpose? Seven years since the Jordan Compact was agreed, the country is facing overlapping and compounding crises that are testing the very systems, approaches, and ways of working on which much of our work has relied.

To begin to answer this question, we must start by reframing the collective objectives and intended outcomes of the response around a goal of self-reliance for all populations and the enabling of durable solutions for the displaced. This is especially the case with regard to laying the groundwork for future safe, voluntary return and to facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways. Only then can we formulate the appropriate framework for our work and align the right incentives to respond to the wide-ranging needs that we have identified.

A political solution in Syria is urgently needed. In the meantime, we recommend that the international community and the GoJ undertake the following steps to support Jordan's growth through this crisis:

In order to undertake a shift in approach:

Reformulate the intended outcomes of the Compact for the coming five to 10 years and set new qualitative and quantitative measures that build on previous

- commitments and address their shortcomings, including commitments to improving the quality of education and honoring refugee resettlement and complementary pathway quotas.

Introduce new, complementary commitments that have a longer-term orientation and boost self-reliance,

- particularly with regard to income-generation and labor market participation.

- Conduct a nation-wide survey assessing the quantitative and qualitative impact of Syrian refugees, migrant workers, and other refugee populations to economic conditions in the Kingdom as the basis for reforms.
- Identify a list of sectors that are exclusively open to Jordanian nationals' employment as a means of safeguarding Jordanian comparative advantage in the formal labor market whilst stimulating participation of refugees in support of their own agency and capacity.
- Grant Syrians living in camps greater freedom to leave the camps permanently if they so choose and to legally reside in host communities, with access to essential services and employment.
- Enshrine decent work standards as a component of Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision and affirm their implementation in the work permit process.

- Ensure the needs and preferences of refugees and other vulnerable populations are reflected in national response plans,
- compensation schemes, and economic recovery packages as well as social protection schemes supported by international financial institutions and that such commitments translate into inclusion in service provision.
 - Mitigate against any adverse effects of national-level reforms on refugees and other vulnerable groups including through dedicated policy provisions and carveouts.
 - Ease requirements for the registration of vital life events as a means of laying the groundwork for access to assistance and services as well as durable solutions.

- Undertake longer-term response planning jointly with the GoJ for each refugee camp to balance aid effectiveness with access to quality services, including by reinforcing ties and opportunities with neighboring host communities.
- Conduct scenario planning that anticipates potential shifts in the funding, policy and physical environment and reflects a commitment to a minimum level of service delivery.
- Initiate a new high-level dialogue between donor governments and the GoJ on the protection policy environment to resolve long-standing protection issues which impede progress towards durable solutions, including un- or under-documented refugees, Village Five and Rukban.

