Migration crisis in Europe: exchange of experience with Jordanian and Lebanese social workers

WEBINAR SUMMARY
02 Dec 2015

I. Experts:

A. Ibrahim Youssef, Terre des hommes Jordan representatives

B. Aurelie Peter Contesse

C. Nivine Bdeiwi, UNICEF Lebanon

II. Introduction about the Syrian crisis and the current refugee situation in neighboring countries

Mr. Joseph started by explaining that the webinar will address the issue of child protection for Syrian children in Jordan and how the country is responding to the crisis in general.

He continued by highlighting the fact that the current Syrian crisis started in March 2011, when the demonstration against the Assad-regime turned violent. The consequences have been drastic, ranging from infrastructure destruction and lack of safety, failure to provide for people’s basic needs, high rate of criminality and internally displaced people.

In the cities close to the border, UNHCR has confirmed that over four million refugees fled to and registered in neighboring countries. In February 2016, the official statistics for the number of Syrians in neighboring countries was over two million in Turkey, more than one million in Lebanon, over than 600,000 in Jordan, 100,000 in Egypt and 25,000 in Libya.

As can be seen, Mr. Joseph stressed that Jordan is one of the key receiving countries, providing the refugees two different kinds of accommodation: living in 4-5 main camps or in host communities and normal villages. All refugees are prevented to work and have difficulty in finding work permits. There is also no possibility to obtain citizenship in the country, which explains why many refugees are deciding to head to Europe, where they can benefit from services, rights and citizenship and have a more increased access to employment.

Two major new phenomena include child marriage due to migration and drug dealing to obtain income, as a result of not being allowed to work. Additionally, another new approach has been to send children to travel from Jordan to Europe, in the hope that this would make family reunification easier for the families.

After five years in Jordan, many of the Syrians have become weary of their unstable situation and are looking for long-term solutions, through asylum in Europe or resettlement to third countries, including the US and Canada.

II. Child Protection Issues in Jordan and Terre des hommes’ Intervention
In Jordan, Mr. Joseph highlighted that Terre des Hommes has been providing for the past three years services to refugees and host communities regarding:

1. Psycho-social Issues: displacement, new life conditions, memories linking them with their original countries;
2. Legal concerns among their parents, such as lost documents;
3. Child Labor: children are sent to the labor market, as their work is less controlled, so they can help their parents covering the rent;
4. School violence between Jordanians and Syrian children, due to integration issues;
5. Early marriage among Syrian refugees: marrying below 18 is considered in the benefit of the children;
6. Domestic Violence: no hope for the future and daily pressure due to lack of work start to negatively reflect on parents’ behavior toward their children;
7. Unaccompanied child/separated children: identifying those cases and referring them to actors who can provide for them;
8. Victims of torture from the Syrian regime: make referral for needed services.

Some of the main activities that Terre des hommes organizes include:

1. Child-friendly spaces with comprehensive package of activities for children aged 5-18:
   A. Psycho-social support, restoring children’s well-being;
   B. providing life-skills (12-18): confidence-building and ownership skills as well as community integration;
   C. Out-of-school children: identify and provide them courses: English, maths, science and Arabic to enroll the children in school and increasingly linking them to schools throughout the intervention;

2. Support-group sessions for children aged 5-18 to help them cope with past memories, and their current situation;

3. Awareness-raising sessions, using the peer to peer approach, in order to strengthen the protection environment, by informing the children and those surrounding them directly regarding key topics facing them;

4. Child Protection Committees: promote intervention when needed;

5. Capacity-building: training volunteers, community members and partners to ensure the long-term impact and intervention in the community.

When intervening, Mr. Joseph stressed that Terre des hommes applies several key protection criteria, including a close look at the family’s composition, the psychological, physical and mental health of children, the living conditions, employment and legal status, and children’s school enrollment. He explained that one of the reasons why they provide psycho-social activities, which promote a combination of mental/emotional, physical and coordination skills, for children is because parents are often not able to provide entertainment activities, as they lack financial resources. At the same time, these activities are important, due to the low level of integration between Syrians and Jordanians, and because refugee families face plenty difficulties, which take their toll on the children as well.
Mr. Joseph stressed that the key objectives for these activities are:

A. Helping children better express their emotions and obtain social skills needed for integrating in their communities;
B. Assisting children in identifying their problems, as denial is high among refugees, as well as showing how to solve them;
C. Strengthening parent-children relations: parents and children are invited for activities and family play is encouraged.

He subsequently advised that, when interacting with the refugees, one should dress modestly and bring a positive attitude, avoid political/ideological discussions and learn a few common Arabic expressions. It is also best to respect some of the gender rules and demand for consent when taking photos.

III. Current Refugee Situation in Lebanon

A representative from UNICEF Lebanon briefly presented the situation in her country. She explained that many Syrians have become frustrated with their status in the country and want to go to Germany or other Western European countries. The work permit in Jordan is not allowed for individuals registered with UNHCR, which has an impact on how many individuals choose to register.

When leaving for Western Europe, many families are splitting up their departures, with some of the members being left behind, though hoping for family reunification.

The expert stressed that, just like in Jordan, there is substantial financial pressure and impact on children, who are often sent to work, with nobody to protect and accompany them. They usually have to drop out of school, in order to do so.

When asked about maintaining connections between travellers, the UNICEF expert emphasized that people remaining behind follow television and radio news, keeping connected on the phone and through mobile apps, in order to make sure that their families are safe, while checking if they can join them as well.

On their travel to Europe, many of the refugees prefer to leave behind their legal documents, if they possess them, because they believe that it makes the process of obtaining residency quicker.