

Urban programming case study: Jordan

Middle East Refugee Crisis Initiative (MERCİ)

Model Intervention: Pathways to Permanence Urban Crisis

Country Overview of Urban Housing

Jordan, with a population of 11 million, grapples with severe urban housing challenges, intensified by its role as a major refugee host nation. One-third of the population consists of refugees, primarily Syrian and Palestinian, putting immense strain on public services and housing. Affordability remains a critical issue, with 30% of Jordanians and 48% of Syrian refugees unable to access affordable housing, leaving 1.99 million Jordanians and Syrian refugees without suitable housing and 1.36 million living in substandard conditions. Rising rental costs exacerbate vulnerabilities, leading to inadequate shelter and social tensions. Jordan's status as the third most water-scarce country and severe energy resource limitations further complicate the situation, with increased job competition and overburdened infrastructure amplifying the crisis. Despite considerable international humanitarian efforts, funding remains critically insufficient.

Detailed Overview of Project Area/Problem

Eastern Amman, notably the Marka district, is home to over 43,000 Syrian refugees and has become a hub for displaced populations from Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. Due to limited land, vertical expansion on unstable foundations has led to unauthorized multi-storied buildings, resulting in congestion and overcrowding.

This uncontrolled expansion, often without coordination with local municipalities, exacerbates problems such as inadequate access to essential services and emergency response challenges. Unauthorized constructions occupy street space, creating narrow alleys that restrict vehicle access. The outdated water and electricity systems, originally designed for single-story buildings, are strained by the increased demand from multiple floors, posing significant fire hazards and causing frequent water shortages. Poor ventilation in closely packed homes traps heat, moisture, and pollution, leading to unhealthy living conditions that adversely impact residents' health.

Effect on Target Groups/Communities

The urban housing challenges in Palestinian refugee camps and Eastern Amman profoundly affect residents' quality of life, impacting health, safety, education, economic opportunities, and overall comfort. The limited land space has forced residents to build upwards, adding makeshift floors to their homes in a desperate attempt to create more space. This has resulted in a maze of narrow alleys and towering structures, so densely packed that even cars struggle to navigate the camp. These vertically expanding homes still operate on the original water and electricity systems, designed only for the initial single-story buildings. The increased demand from multiple floors strains these outdated systems, creating significant fire hazards. Additionally, the water supply is insufficient for the growing population, leading many families to experience frequent water shortages, further compounding their daily struggles. The lack of space has also led to poor ventilation. Homes are crowded together, separated by thin walls, which trap heat, moisture, and air pollution, creating unhealthy living conditions that impact the residents' health.

Project Intervention

Since 2018, the Middle East Refugee Crisis Initiative (MERCİ) has supported home rehabilitations and public facility improvements for vulnerable Syrian refugees and Jordanian families through 16 grants, benefiting over 300,000

individuals. The MERCI program focuses on enhancing housing access and community resilience by implementing Disaster Risk Reduction measures. It provides housing rehabilitation, green home interventions, and improves public facilities. Key components include: (1) Household Level: Home improvements that prioritize safety, health, privacy, and accessibility, such as enhanced insulation and repaired water connections, benefiting particularly vulnerable groups like PWDs and female-headed households. (2) Community Level: Upgrading infrastructure and public facilities with a sustainability plan to ensure continued service delivery, including shelters, medical centers, and vocational training providers. The program also fosters community partnerships and provides capacity-building to enhance local capabilities.

Project Innovation

Habitat for Humanity Jordan's (HFHJ) project addresses urban development challenges in Palestinian refugee camps and Eastern Amman with a comprehensive approach, focusing on three pillars: Homes & Families, Communities & Neighborhoods, and Sector & Society.

The project rehabilitates substandard homes for low-income and vulnerable residents, including refugees, female-headed households, the elderly, and PWDs. This improves living conditions by addressing issues such as inadequate insulation and unsafe structures. Our extensive community engagement ensures interventions meet specific needs, while practical training in maintenance and livelihood opportunities empowers beneficiaries and fosters self-reliance.

The planning of initial socio-economic assessments and technical evaluations ensures that interventions are personalized to each household's needs, maximizing impact and effectiveness. By addressing these multifaceted challenges through strategic, inclusive methods, the project not only improves individual homes but also contributes to community resilience and sustainability.

Global relevance of community-level impact

Our interventions in Palestinian refugee camps and Eastern Amman have significantly addressed critical urban development issues, aligning with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and generating global relevance at the community level.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being: By rehabilitating substandard homes, we have mitigated health hazards such as mold, dampness, and inadequate sanitation, which were major contributors to respiratory problems and other illnesses.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation: Our project includes the integration of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, providing clean water access and proper sanitation to households.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities: The project's focus on affordable and adequate housing directly supports the creation of inclusive, safe, and resilient communities. By addressing the housing needs of low-income residents and refugees, we have improved living conditions and social cohesion, making urban areas more sustainable and livable.

SDG 13: Climate Action: By using sustainable building materials and techniques, we have enhanced the climate resilience of homes. Energy-efficient designs and renewable energy installations have reduced the carbon footprint of households, contributing to climate action efforts.

SDG 1: No Poverty: The project's livelihood opportunities for skilled laborers from beneficiary families have provided economic empowerment, reduced poverty levels and fostered financial independence within the community.

Moving Forward

In 2025, we plan to implement solar energy solutions to address energy and water conservation. The project aims to improve energy efficiency, reduce household energy expenses, and enhance climate resilience.

Project Objectives: Install solar energy units to reduce electricity costs for vulnerable families. Introduce sustainable energy solutions to lessen reliance on traditional electricity sources. Work with the private sector to ensure affordable solar energy technology access for marginalized communities.

Key Interventions: Implement solar-powered water heating systems to lower energy consumption and costs, freeing up resources for basic needs. Reduced energy expenses will improve financial stability and quality of life. Collaborate with private entities to offer solar heaters at reduced costs, creating a sustainable supply chain.

Visual Documentation

