For beneficiary-led protection programming in Jordan

Sinead McGrath

Despite the humanitarian community’s clear focus on addressing the protection concerns of displaced Syrians, in Jordan the beneficiaries of many protection programmes have had limited influence on the shape of the protection response to date.

One example of how the protection response has failed to adequately involve beneficiaries is the focus of humanitarian actors on child marriage amongst the displaced Syrian population. Evidence suggests the practice of child marriage has not increased as a result of displacement and yet media articles focusing sensationalistically on the issue have influenced humanitarian protection actors responding to the crisis, as well as international donors.

While it is widely accepted internationally that the practice of child marriage is damaging to the well-being of the minor(s) involved, many Syrians believe this common practice is an acceptable way to secure a safe future for their female children in particular. While awareness raising on issues such as child marriage is important, humanitarian agencies need to ensure that the immediate protection response is shaped by the community’s own priorities and urgent needs and that the context and culture of the population is understood and respected by humanitarian agencies.

Notably, when consulted, female Syrian refugees said that the protection intervention they desired most was a basic literacy programme. These women felt that having the confidence and ability to read shop signs, rental contracts and identification documents related to their status in Jordan was the protection assistance they perceived as most valuable.

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If Israel accepted Syrian refugees and IDPs in the Golan Heights

Crystal Plotner

Could re-opening the Golan Heights to Syrians displaced by the conflict be a beneficial option for those fleeing the Syrian conflict and for Israel’s relations with its north-eastern neighbour?

As the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, Israel remains Syria’s only neighbour which has still not accepted displaced persons and refugees fleeing the armed conflict. International and Israeli human rights organisations are increasingly calling on Israel to open its eastern border for humanitarian reasons. Although members of the Israeli public and government invoke a moral obligation to help Syrian refugees, the government’s preferred approach is through provision of humanitarian aid to refugee camps, in particular to Jordan as Israel has tense to non-existent relations with the other neighbouring countries who are receiving Syrian refugees. While the aid is welcome, Israel – which has repeatedly cited its neutrality in the Syrian war – has the capacity to help in more direct ways.

In early 2012, the Israeli government stated it was making preparations to accept Syrian refugees in the Golan Heights as it anticipated the impending fall of the Assad regime. However, six months later, the Israeli Defence Minister asserted that any refugees attempting to cross the border into the Golan Heights would be stopped.