Cost of Inaction: The Impact of WFP Assistance Cuts on Refugees in Jordan

Food Security Outcome Monitoring (FSOM), Special Edition

Quarter 3 | 2025

I. CONTEXT | WHERE ASSISTANCE STANDS

Since **July 2023**, funding shortfalls have forced WFP Jordan to **scale back General Food Assistance** for refugees.

A joint WFP–UNHCR retargeting in host communities and funding shortage brought the number of WFP beneficiaries from **465,000 to 410,000** by September 2023; a further prioritization in July 2024 suspended assistance for **another 100,000 people** in the communities.

For those who were assisted, **rations fell**. From July 2023, in host communities, households were split into two tiers: Priority 1 at 15 JOD (down from 23) and Priority 2 at 10 JOD (down from 21). In January 2024, community beneficiaries were unified to 15 JOD after Food Security Outcome Monitoring (FSOM) of the following season showed households on 10 JOD were less resilient and worse off than those on 15 JOD.

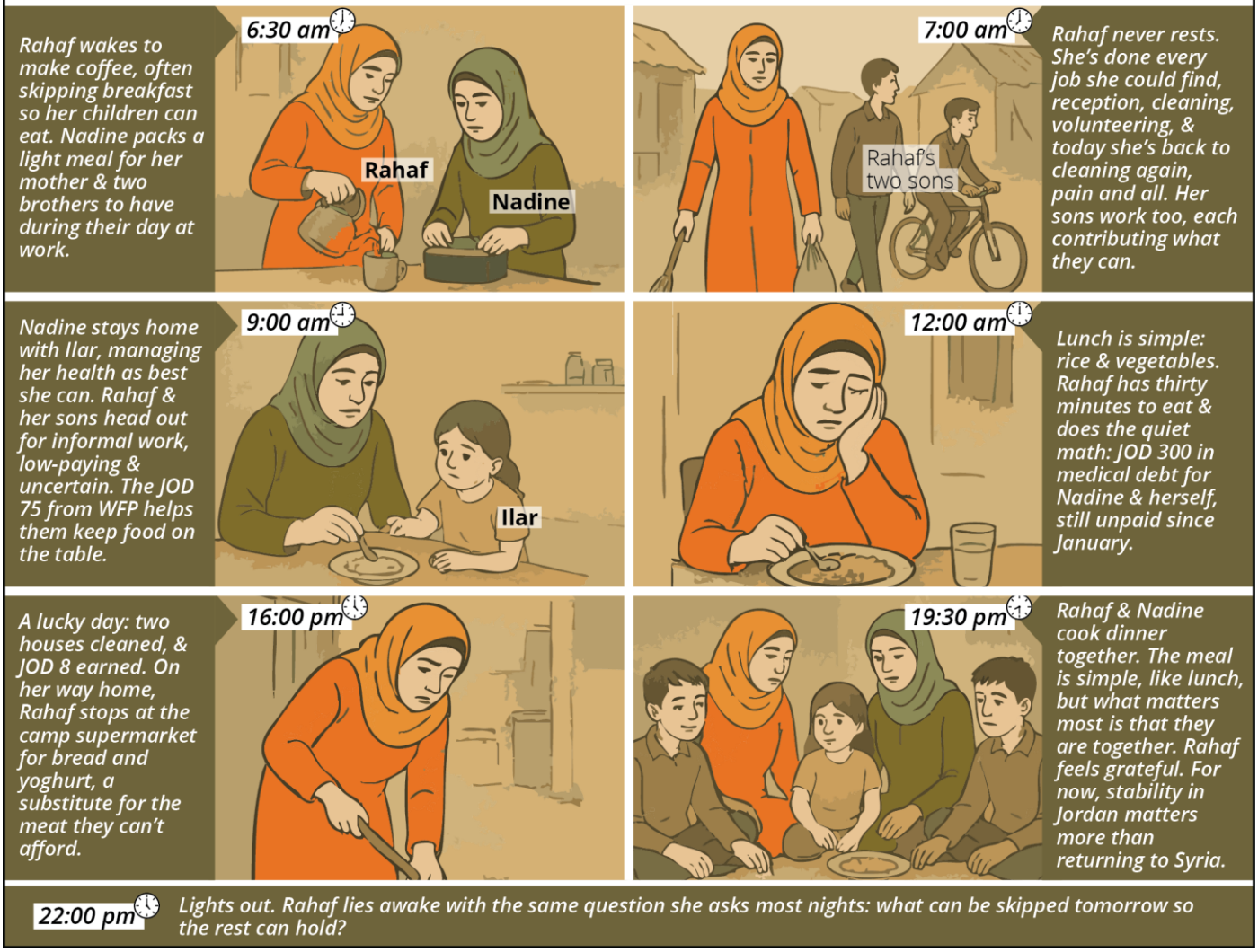
After political changes in Syria (December 2024), some refugees began to return. As of September 2025, WFP assists 123,684 beneficiaries in host communities and 89,425 in camps.

Need and coverage

The scale of WFP caseload is smaller than before—but the need is only looming. **Till September, an estimated 320,000 refugees in Jordan are food-insecure.** With the current budget, WFP can assist **only a portion** of them, leaving tens of thousands unassisted.

This brief counts the cost of doing less among households we currently assist. To see what that means, we begin with one ordinary day in a Syrian refugee household.

Rahaf, 48, is a single mother of three who has lived in Za'atari camp for 13 years. Life here is about endurance, every day brings choices between food, medicine, and debt. Her daughter Nadine, 22, is raising her little girl, Ilar, while managing a chronic kidney condition. Rahaf's two sons left school seven years ago to help support the family. Together, they rely on informal jobs and WFP's monthly food assistance to make ends meet.



"There has been illness, fear, and struggle. It is not easy. With WFP we buy bread and vegetables, at least." –Rahaf

Rahaf's day stands for one family – hundreds of thousands more live versions of it.

Outlook among the assisted

Between December 2024 and September 2025, approximately 16 percent of WFP-assisted Syrian beneficiaries have returned to Syria—well below the 25 percent return rate across the wider refugee population. Among those still assisted and living in Jordan, about half are undecided or expect to remain for at least another year. **WFP assistance in Jordan will continue to matter**—as the next section shows, first on the plate and then in the ways families cope.

II. ROUTINE OF HARD CHOICES | HOUSEHOLD REALITY

What's on the plate and what's missing

Two years after the WFP reduction**, the plate is smaller and paler.** In camps, even with WFP assistance, 22% of households still cannot afford the minimum cost of a basic food basket (the food SMEB), with an average food gap of 5 JOD/household/month[1]; in host communities the picture is harsher—69% of WFP beneficiaries cannot afford that basket, with an average 22.6 JOD/household/month gap.

To stretch the reduced assistance, **families trade down**: on average, protein and dairy show up fewer days each week—pulses 3→2 days, dairy 4→2, animal protein 3→2. Fruit vanishes (2→0) and low-cost vegetables return (0→4). Bread, sugar, and condiments never miss a day, so **meals continue—but calories crowd out nutrients**.

And the outcomes tell the same story. **In host communities,** acceptable food consumption[2] gives way to **borderline** with the share more than **doubling** (13% → 27%). In **camps**, borderline quadruples (5% → 20%). and **poor consumption emerges** where previously there was none. A household in poor consumption lives on bread seven days, pulses two, a handful of greens bought late when prices dip, and milk once a week—only if there's a young child. Households in borderline adds an extra day or two of pulses, and on a good week, a piece of chicken or beef at dinner.

A bill – double squeeze, then the debt

The difficulty of the last two years is **two pressures at once**: **WFP transfers are lower, and work is harder**. About 60% of refugee households report working—similar to pre-cut—but since the 2024 work-policy update, formal and stable jobs are scarcer, and earnings for working refugee beneficiaries are >20% lower in both camps and host areas compared to pre-cut levels. It shows up on the grocery receipt: average household food spending fell from JOD154→132/month in camps and JOD136→113 /month in host communities.

Debt follows the squeeze. New monthly borrowing rose to 208 JOD per household in host communities (from 182 JOD) and 154 JOD in camps (from 114 JOD). Not all of it is cash in hand – rent carried by landlords, unpaid electricity and water and a slice from interest-bearing informal lenders. By September 2025, the average debt stock stood at 969 JOD in host communities and 811 JOD per household in camps.

The consequence runs beyond today's meal: tomorrow's money is already spoken for, leaving little for education, health, transport, documents or rent repayment – the small steps that make self-reliance in Jordan or return to Syria possible. In short: **less assistance and weaker earnings raise the debt; the debt, in turn, keeps families from moving on.**

What survival looks like now: how refugees cope

At the table. Meal-stretching is now the norm— 77% of camp refugees and 94% of host-community beneficiaries cut portions, skip items, or buy on credit. You hear it in ordinary choices: chicken "saved for the children," fruit pushed to "next week," mothers trimming their portions so everyone else can finish. This didn't start with the cut; coping was already high. What the cut—and the absence of a remedy—has done is make that coping routine**. The impact of inaction isn't a sudden cliff—it's the hardening of a bad trend we already knew about.**

In livelihoods. The pressure now runs past the kitchen. Long before the cut, crisis tactics were already common; two years on they've settled in: 61% in camps (64% pre-cut) and 81% in host communities (74% pre-cut) rely on crisis or emergency coping.

What's changed is the texture. In the first six months after the July 2023 cut, WFP monitors logged first-time reports of begging and petty theft—rare, stigmatized choices in communities where dignity carries real weight.

Today, more adults accept exploitative or degrading jobs in both communities and camps; in host communities the share withdrawing children from school has doubled. Some leave family to work in another city; others choose to abandon the family to cut costs.

Negative coping feeds today – and charges tomorrow. It's a clinic visit postponed, a child who stops going to class, a body worn down by unsafe work, a household thinned by distance. And each choice weakens the very resilience families need to recover—**prolonging food insecurity and vulnerability longer.**

WHEN NOT ENOUGH BECOMES NONE (A projection[3])

If WFP assistance stops, the slide will be immediate and measurable. Among current beneficiaries in host communities, **poor and borderline food consumption** is projected to reach **54%,** 10 percentage points increase from the Q2-2025 level.

More alarming is where the pressure goes next: onto children: ~1,600 more households would send a child to work and ~2,500 more would withdraw a child from school, with risks peaking in winter and rising with household size (6+). Early marriage would remain rare, clustering in very large (10+) families.

To blunt the shock, families would borrow to compensate for the missing transfer—**but the room to borrow is nearly gone**. Debt sources and capacity are close to exhausted. In the host community, the model projects ~18 JOD in new debt per household per month; in camps, ~17 JOD. The rest of the gap would be paid for in thinner meals, damaging coping, and postponed bills.

Moreover, borrowing doesn't stay on the ledger; it strains the social fabric. After the 2023 cut, refugees reported neighbours withdrawing trust, shop tabs tightening, and small debts turning into quiet resentments — "**the fabric is breaking."** Deeper debt would also **further shrink refugees' planning horizon**: money that could fund documents, transport, or a first month's rent in Syria will be already exhausted.

WFP assistance is a critical lifeline of refugees in Jordan. Less support today becomes fewer options tomorrow—for families, for the societies hosting them, and for the humanitarian community.

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Annex | Methodology

Food Security Outcome Monitoring (FSOM) of WFP Jordan

WFP Jordan conducts a quarterly, stratified household-level monitoring (FSOM) to track food security outcomes among refugees in camp and host communities. Results are documented and used to steer evidence-based decision-making and learning in country operations.

Beyond serving a regular monitoring tool, WFP Jordan leverages FSOM to capture the latest vulnerability profiles, understand the dynamic factors contributing to food insecurity and monitor WFP targeting effectiveness within a rapidly evolving operational context.

A systematic quality control approach has been devised and implemented since Q3 2023. Quality assurance includes enumerator training, scripted range/logic checks in the questionnaire, field supervision, back-checks and call-backs to households identified with logical inconsistencies.

The Quarter 3 2025 was implemented between August 11 and September 17, 2025. The sampling frame comprises both WFP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Samples are stratified by setting (host communities/camps) with probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) selection at the cluster level where applicable and systematic random selection of households within clusters. Base weights reflect inverse selection probabilities and are adjusted for non-response and post-stratified to ensure representativeness of each stratum. Estimates are produced with survey weights applied.

Modelling framework for the no-assistance scenario

Using WFP's Food Outcome Monitoring (FSOM) data from 2025 Quarter 1 (winter) and Quarter 2 (spring/summer), a No-Assistance counterfactual for assisted refugees in Jordan was constructed. Current transfers of 15 JOD per person per month were set to zero, and each household's food SMEB gap was increased by the food-use share of the foregone transfer ($\alpha\_food = 0.64$ from FSOM budget shares), i.e., +9.6 JOD per person per month. For illustration, the projected gap for a size-5 household rises by ~48 JOD/month. Results were computed by household-size bucket and aggregated using the caseload household counts (N_s) (Sensitivity tests vary α_food by setting/tier.).

To reflect financing pressures, the larger gaps were translated into new borrowing using the observed share of gaps financed by debt ($\theta = 0.119$, FSOM median) and a monthly finance charge of 4%[4] (sensitivity 2–6%) to estimate the increase in debt service.

Food Consumption Scores (FCS) projections were derived by estimating, on FSOM, a logistic/ordinal model that links FCS category to log per-capita food expenditure (with controls for household size and round); the simulated no-assistance drop in food spending (equivalent to 9.6×HH size JOD/month) was then applied to predict the change in the shares of poor/borderline/acceptable FCS, aggregated by size.

High impact coping behaviours (e.g., reducing meals ≥4 days, withdrawing children from school, child work) were projected via logistic models of each coping indicator on the food SMEB gap, controlling for household size and survey round, then aggregated by household size.

Endnotes

1. *The food gap is calculated as the shortfall between the cost of the Food Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (Food SMEB) and a household's reported food expenditure in the last 30 days preceding to the survey. It persists even with 15 JOD per person per month assistance from WFP.*
2. *The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is a composite indicator based on dietary diversity, food consumption frequency, and the relative nutritional importance of eight food groups over a seven-day recall. Households are classified into food consumption groups using standard thresholds. Households are classified as "poor", "borderline" and "acceptable", indicating different levels of food access, reflecting both quantity and quality.*
3. *Modelled on WFP Jordan FSOM 2025 Quarter 1 & 2 with scenario assumptions (see more at Annex Methodology).*
4. *FSOM reports total monthly debt repayments but does not separate interest/fees from principle, so a parametric assumption is required. The 4% midpoint reflects typica short-term credit costs in refugee settings and is sense-checked by an intercept-free regression of monthly debt service on last-30-day borrowing where sample size permits. Because repayments include principal, this regression provides an upper-bound check rather than a pure interest estimate; findings are shown robust within the 2-6% band.*