

UNHCR Helpline

March 2018

95%

Calls resolved by helpline staff without need for referral

147,000

Average calls answered since the system upgrade Dec 2017

1.7 million

Calls responded to since helpline inception in 2008

Jordan has one of the largest refugee helplines in the world, and now answers nearly 150,000 phone calls per month. Since its inception in 2008, staff at the helpline have responded to more than 1.7 million calls, giving support and advice on a range of issues to refugees in the Kingdom. The UNHCR Jordan telephone helpline is one approach UNHCR uses for two-way communication, providing information and feedback for more than 730,000 refugees living in Jordan.



History of the helpline

Following the huge influx of refugees entering Jordan from neighboring Syria, UNHCR upgraded the helpline system in 2014 to respond to the increasing number of calls received. In 2017, UNHCR received on average 45,000 calls per month, and was able to answer around 60% of all calls; those with a wait of around four minutes were often abandoned by the caller, with the refugee then phoning again. The system underwent an additional upgrade in late 2017, with enhanced automated response features aiming to reduce the number of abandoned and unanswered calls. With the new system, nearly 150,000 calls are answered in a given month, equivalent to 70% of calls to the helpline.

What does the helpline do?

- The helpline serves as a two way communication channel to address refugees' questions, needs and concerns. It not only accepts phone calls, but also provides outgoing messaging.
- The Interactive Voice Response allows the helpline to handle phone calls through a series of automatic standard responses. Emergency or complicated calls, such as detention or protection issues, are immediately transferred to staff.
- Helpline staff use the Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) to provide a full profile of the caller, including all types of assistance that a family receives from any organization in Jordan.
- The automated system also uses RAIS. After entering the file number and a security code, the caller can have access to his or her status on issues such as home visits or appeals, for example if a decision has been made on appeals for cash assistance.
- UNHCR helpline staff are knowledgeable on a range of topics, and have access to detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on issues affecting refugees in Jordan. Each helpline staff member is therefore able to provide information on a range of issues; this allows 95% of calls answered to be resolved without the need for referral to another section. The helpline team can also provide basic counselling, with UNHCR staff available who are trained to respond to refugees in distress.
- The helpline system collects a variety data for analysis, and ongoing coaching is provided against standardized evaluation criteria, with one to one feedback given each staff on the helpline.
- The helpline is a tool for monitoring refugee protection trends on what may be affecting refugee wellbeing in Jordan; it also helps UNHCR improve its own programmes and response, by recording complaints and concerns, and is used to conduct surveys to understand refugee needs and intentions.
- Finally, the helpline acts as a public awareness tool to pass messages to refugees in urban settings through outbound calls and voice recorded messaging. This is in tandem with direct messaging through urban Community Support Committees and helpdesks located across the country, providing a wide reach to traditionally hard-to-reach populations.

Main topics of enquiry

The helpline receives calls from across Jordan, but primarily from Amman (40%), Irbid (23%) Mafraq (14%) and Zarqa (10%) Governorates. This reflects the distribution of refugees across Jordan.

The helpline accepts daily queries on a variety of topics¹. The majority of them are related to the cash assistance program. UNHCR Jordan currently provides cash assistance to nearly 27,000 families in the country. Most often, refugees contacting the helpline are following up on the results of home visits, which are an integral part of the assessment of eligibility for cash assistance. Refugees also call the helpline to appeal decisions that impact their cash assistance; the appeal process is an important element of this programme, as it allows for transparency, accountability, and the opportunity to review decisions. A small

¹ UNHCR produces a monthly dashboard of key statistics recorded by the helpline – these can be found on UNHCR data portal www.data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees

number of calls are related to technical issues around use of the ATM network, and these are important for informing the bank for troubleshooting, or addressing other complications.

About 15% of the calls to the helpline are focused on resettlement, either to enquire about eligibility or to request updates on the resettlement process, which can be lengthy. Given the importance of this durable solution, refugees are contacted directly by phone or text message when additional information on their case is available.

In addition, UNHCR helpline receives queries about other agency programmes. This includes partners of the Common Cash Facility, which are served by the UNHCR helpline, or calls for the World Food Programme (WFP) voucher programme, which are now referred to the new WFP helpline for direct assistance.

Registration questions account for approximately 5% of calls, and the recorded message advises callers to visit UNHCR registration centres, as such queries can only be addressed after physical confirmation of identity. Other calls are about health services, including questions about how to access primary or emergency healthcare.

How does it work?

The helpline is staffed by 14 UNHCR staff, and is open weekdays between 8am and 4pm. Calls to the helpline are free when using the Zain SIM card provided by UNHCR to refugees at no cost. As of February 2018, 143,000 refugee families have benefitted from the free SIM card.

The helpline uses the ©CISCO Unified Contact Centre Enterprise technology, which includes a call recording system for training and oversight purposes, and allows for detailed monitoring and statistical reporting. The system has recently been upgraded from 30 lines to 60 lines thanks to the new Interactive Voice Response platform. At capacity, 14 staff can be speaking directly to refugees, while 46 lines can provide automated information.

UNHCR helpline uses Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to increase the number of calls answered, and direct callers more quickly to the right information. When refugees ring in, they provide their unique file number and a security code. They choose their topic of information such as cash assistance, health, registration or other concerns. Their reason for phoning is linked to the RAIS system – which identifies the case and the assistance provided from different organisations. Most calls (90%) can be handled by helpline staff, but when an issue is raised that requires a referral and follow up, a 'referral ticket' is logged into RAIS, and sent to the appropriate UNHCR expert staff. Refugees are informed for non-emergency questions that they will be contacted within a one working week. Emergency calls are responded to immediately.

With the upgrade of the system, the call volume of the helpline has drastically increased to meet the information demands of refugees in Jordan. While in November 2017 the call volume was 160 calls per hour, it is now 1,000 calls per hour.

The helpline system is also able to make automated outbound calls using phone numbers stored in the UNHCR database – this is a useful tool for passing messages, and has been used to promote uptake of

free SIM cards, or to promote registration of new babies at UNHCR registration centres in person. Overall, the helpline provides one avenue of interaction as part of UNHCR's larger Communicating with Communities strategy, which also includes spreading key messages through SMS, Focus Group Discussions, social media, Community Support Committees and face to face interaction in locations such as registration centres and home visits.

Finally, the helpline is also a key tool in coordination between humanitarian partners. UNHCR's helpline in Jordan offers to serve all Common Cash Facility (CCF) partners – this involves technical troubleshooting during cash assistance withdrawals, and quarterly meetings to share information and provide feedback aimed at improving the service.

UNHCR is grateful to the following donors for their generous provision of funds for the helpline:



For more details on UNHCR's helpline services in Jordan, please contact:
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