

# Syrian refugees in Jordan's desert get solar power

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Officials from the IKEA Foundation, and the U.N. refugee agency tour a newly inaugurated solar energy plant, that will provide about 20,000 Syrian refugees with electricity, in the Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan, Wednesday, April 17, 2017. The foundation funded the plant which makes Azraq, run by the UN, the world's first refugee camp to be powered by renewable energy and saves \$1.5 million a year in electricity costs. (Elena Boffetta/AP Photo)

Syrian refugees in Jordan's remote desert were connected to solar power

on Wednesday, making their community the world's first refugee camp to be powered by renewable energy.

The \$4.5 million (4 million euros) plant was funded by a foundation established by Ikea, the global home furnishings retailer. In the first phase, it will serve 20,000 of 35,000 people in Azraq camp.

The plant's capacity is to be more than doubled to provide power to all residents, for an eventual cost of \$9.7 million (8.75 million euros), the U.N. [refugee](#) agency said.

The investment in sustainable energy was yet another expression of the protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Some 5 million Syrians have fled their homeland since conflict erupted there in 2011 and quickly turned into a brutal civil war.

Jordan hosts some 660,000 Syrian refugees, more than 80 percent in communities and the rest in three camps of which Azraq is the second-largest. A [solar power](#) plant is under construction in the largest camp, Zaatari, where residents only have intermittent electricity.

Azraq, run by the U.N. refugee agency, was set up in April 2014 as a cluster of several thousand prefab metal shacks. For the first two-and-a-half years, refugees only had solar lanterns, but no electricity, as they endured a harsh climate of scorching summers and cold winters.



Syrian refugees walk near the Azraq Refugee Camp where the U.N. refugee agency inaugurated a solar power plant, in Jordan's northern desert, Wednesday, May 17, 2017. The agency said the plant, funded by a foundation of the global home furnishings company Ikea, makes Azraq the world's first refugee camp powered by renewable energy and saves \$1.5 million a year in electricity costs. (Elena Boffetta/AP Photo)

In January 2017, 20,000 residents were hooked up to the electricity grid, with the remainder expected to be connected by the end of the year.

The solar plant which began operating Wednesday allows the refugee agency to save about \$1.5 million a year, money that can now be spent on other aid.

Refugee Amal Muhammed, who has lived in Azraq for the past two years, said a steady electricity supply has improved her life. "Before, it

was not safe, and it was dark," she said, adding that she was afraid at night.

Lighting up the camp allows refugees to "lead more dignified lives," said Kelly T. Clements, the agency's deputy high commissioner.

Ikea Foundation raised money for the plant with a Brighter Lives for Refugees campaign, donating 1 euro each time a customer bought LED light bulbs or lamps.



Per Heggnes, CEO of the IKEA Foundation, turns on a solar energy plant that will provide about 20,000 Syrian refugees with electricity, in the Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan, Wednesday, April 17, 2017. The foundation funded the plant which makes Azraq, run by the UN refugee agency, the world's first refugee camp to be powered by renewable energy and saves \$1.5 million a year in electricity costs. (Elena Boffetta/AP Photo)

"The world's first solar farm in a refugee camp signals a paradigm shift in how the humanitarian sector supports displaced populations," said Per Heggnes, the head of the foundation.

He said the refugee agency will save millions of dollars, while reducing carbon emissions and improving living conditions for refugees.

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