

# TRAF'G

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

## Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Jordan

Empirical findings and reflections on  
protracted displacement and translocal  
connections of Syrian refugees

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## SUMMARY

This *working paper* is based on the empirical research on translocal figurations of displacement of Syrians in Jordan. It contains methodological discussions, central findings and reflections on these findings. Drawing on the conceptual framework of the TRAFIG project, this *paper* explores the central research question of TRAFIG, namely “how are protractedness, dependency, and vulnerability related to the factors of local and translocal connectivity and mobility, and in turn, how can connectivity and mobility be utilized to enhance the self-reliance and strengthen the resilience of displaced people?” The *paper* presents findings from Jordan, where Syrian refugees have sought refuge in host communities.

Syrian refugees’ stay in Jordan has become increasingly protracted, with the durable solutions of return in safety and dignity, local integration and resettlement remaining out of reach for most. In this *paper*, we argue that Syrians are de facto integrated in Jordanian host communities due to shared language, religion and socio-cultural ties as a pragmatic strategy for dealing with uncertainty and protracted displacement. We found that family- and kin networks have proven vital in facilitating and protecting mobility out of Syria and within Jordan, even as these networks are strained due to physical and geographic distance, reliant upon aid and financial support and socio-economic stress in the local labour market. We see that Syrians experience uncertain futures in which their mobility aspirations are unrealised, economic prospects are reliant upon and highly competitive with others, and connectivity with the host community is strained and can be improved.

### KEYWORDS

Protracted displacement, Syrian refugees, connectivity, mobility, refugee-host relations, local integration, agency, self-reliance, networks, Jordan

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## Introduction

*No one has forced us to stay here in Ramtha [Jordan], but we stay because it's cheaper than other places. And the culture and lifestyle are more similar to Dara(a), Syria. I prefer this to Irbid [Jordan] because the local Jordanians are more understanding and flexible. For example, the landlord can accept not getting rent for two months. In Irbid, they would go to court to get the rent. It's too hard in Jordan, and it's really expensive. I have some distant family members who have returned to Syria who regretted it. They remind me to stay in Jordan because it's better for us and safer here. And if we return to Syria, the boys will be taken by the army. I talk on the phone with my family in Syria sometimes, but the police there are always listening. Once I was foolish enough to ask them about returning to Syria, and my sister said, 'Shut up! Don't talk about this!' If the regime knows we are coming back, they will take my sons immediately. The war has split my family and I more than ever. Everyone is thinking of themselves. The war has made us crude. My neighbours are respectful, but we aren't close. No one supports me. I have no one to complain to, I only can say 'Al-Hamdulillah' (praise God) Umm-Bahaa (SsInt-YU-RF-001-JOR).*

This *working paper* describes and analyses empirical data that have been collected in Jordan as part of the “Transnational Figurations of Displacement” (TRAFIG) project, funded by the European Union and coordinated by BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion). The overall objective of TRAFIG is “to contribute to the development of alternative solutions to protracted displacement that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement” (Etzold et al., 2019). The main question that our research aims to answer is: How are protractedness, dependency and vulnerability related to the factors of local and translocal connectivity and mobility, and, in turn, how can connectivity and mobility be utilised to enhance the self-reliance and strengthen the resilience of displaced people?

Theoretically, our research is grounded in figural sociology (Elias, 1978), which means that we pay attention to the networks and interdependencies of displaced people. Through a process-oriented approach, we analyse these networks in time and space. By paying attention to people's social connections and their mobility, we aim to better understand how dynamic translocal figurations of displacement matter in their everyday lives.

The focus of this *working paper* is on findings from Jordan. Since 2011, around one million Syrians have been displaced to Jordan, who have settled mainly in the northern urban areas (UNHCR, 2020b). The situation for these Syrians is yet to be decided: They are generally unable and unwilling to return to Syria because of danger, instability and political threats; unable—and, in a few instances, unwilling—to resettle in third countries and are granted a series of residency permits from the Jordanian government intended to help provide for short-term and mid-range livelihoods in work and school, rather than permanent local integration and nationality. UNHCR and other aid organisations step in to provide some aid and protection. The assistance offered has significant gaps, which leaves many Syrians challenged to secure their livelihoods. With Syrian displacement into Jordan developing into a decade-long protracted displacement situation, our research question above is key.

The Syrian displacement crisis is entering its tenth year. Yet numerous key issues are still facing this large refugee population of Syrians in Jordan. The Jordanian government estimates that over one million Syrians have settled in Jordan, which at least some analysts believe to be an overestimation (Baylouny, 2020). Over half of these estimated refugees are registered as such with UNHCR (approximately 650,000). Around 120,000 of the registered refugees live in camp settings (19%). The overwhelming majority of registered and non-registered refugees live in non-camp settings in urban areas, with a smaller number in rural areas (Ledwith, 2014; UNHCR, 2020b). The two largest refugee camps are Zaatari and Azraq, which can house up to 100,000 refugees at any given time each and currently operate at 60-80 per cent capacity (UNHCR, 2020c). While much attention has been given to the camps, 81 per cent of the Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban and semi-urban areas (UNHCR, 2020b). Many initially left Zaatari camp under the *kafala*, or “sponsorship” system, which is discussed in detail in Section 3.3. To be allowed to leave the camp, a Syrian refugee had to provide a Jordanian national acting as legal guardian or sponsor (*kafil*).

The *kafala* system was applied to Syrian refugees but was gradually dismantled and finally scrapped in 2015 (Alahmed, 2015). A small number of Syrians (approximately 34,000) have returned to Syria from Jordan voluntarily (Edwards & Al-Hourani, 2019).

The estimated 525,000 Syrians living in urban areas concentrate mainly in four governorates (Amman, 29.5%; Mafraq; 24.8%; Irbid; 20.6%; Zarqa, 14.6%). An additional eight governorates house the remaining urban refugees (UNHCR, 2020b).

The case of Umm-Bahaa in the opening vignette captures many of our key findings, which we explore in detail in the *paper*. Most Syrians we interviewed found themselves in a position of betwixt-and-between multiple national and transnational locations, with competing family- and kin-based ties and livelihood concerns in the context of an unevenly supportive host community. Further, they reported uncertainty in connections to both family and the host community, which prompts tensions and strains. Syrians forge new relationships in conditions of precarity and inequality; long-standing relationships, they indicated, may falter under the same forces.

The *paper* is divided into four sections:

**Chapter 1** provides more detail on the empirical design of the study, its limitations and some background on how the data collection process unfolded in practice, including the challenges we encountered.

**Chapter 2** provides an overview of the displacement figurations in Jordan.

**Chapter 3** consists of the main body of our *paper*, and it presents and analyses the empirical data in reference to the five main themes of TRAFIG:

*Section 3.1* looks at the first TRAFIG theme, “Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum” as they apply in Jordan, and ways in which displaced Syrians in Jordan navigate these regimes, both to seek safety and protection and for their daily survival.

*Section 3.2* investigates the second TRAFIG theme, “Living in Limbo,” and explores Syrians’ lives under uncertain futures; how they sustain their livelihoods and also to what extent they are able and aspire to escape from these conditions with their social networks.

*Section 3.3* discusses Theme 3, “Following the Networks” and looks into ways in which Syrians’ connections help them to be mobile: to move out of refugee camps in Jordan and into and within urban areas, and imagine the prospects for returning to Syria or going “elsewhere.”

*Section 3.4* examines Theme 4, “Building alliances,” and looks into how Syrians in Jordan build alliances and become “de facto” locally integrated. Because local integration is highly relational, we look into the relations between displaced Syrians and the Jordanian host communities under this theme.

*Section 3.5* looks at the fifth theme of TRAFIG, “Seizing Opportunities.” It explores the economic opportunities and impact of Syrians in the Jordanian context.

**Chapter 4** provides a discussion of some cross-cutting findings and other emerging themes that came out of our research.

The **Conclusions** give a short summary of our main findings concerning the translocal figuration of Syrian displacement in Jordan and implications for the research.

# 1. Empirical design and limitations of the study

This *working paper* draws partly from a report that was written at the end of the qualitative field research (Tobin et al., 2020) and is based on empirical findings from data collected from Syrian refugees in Jordan. In this chapter, we provide more detail on the research team, the selection of research sites, sampling, planning, our approach to data analysis and the challenges we faced during the study. The *paper* relies on qualitative data primarily with support from our quantitative data. (For an overview of the different methods that have been used, see p. 8.)

## 1.1 Research team and location

The Jordan research team is led by Drs Sarah A Tobin (Chr. Michelsen Institute–CMI), Are John Knudsen (CMI), Fawwaz A. (Momani, Yarmouk University–YU), Rasheed Al-Jarrah (YU) and Tamara Al Yakoub (YU). The field researchers are all based out of Yarmouk University and include Dr Tamara Al Yakoub, Dr Rasha Jadaan Husban, Ahmad Ghanem Shdefat, Wurud Abdelrazak Alawad, Khalid Hassan Momani and Rola Fares Saleem AlMassad.

We selected three field sites for our research in Jordan. The field sites include the two largest urban and semi-urban areas for Syrian refugees, northern Jordan (Irbid, Mafraq) and Zaatari, Jordan's largest refugee camp for Syrians.

The greater Irbid area is the first research site. Before the influx of Syrian refugees, Irbid city was the second-largest urban area in the country (after the capital city of Amman) and was well-known for its high population density and a large number of institutions for higher education (UNHCR, 2016). In 2016, about 30 per cent of the country's urban Syrian refugees lived in the greater Irbid area (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pederson, 2019; UNHCR, 2016), including the semi-urban area of Ajloun, where we also conducted research.

In the greater Mafraq area, the second field site, the city of Mafraq is approximately 15 km from the Syrian border (Backhaus, 2019). Pre-Syrian crisis, Mafraq city was a small border town of 90,000 people that one could stop in while en-route to the Syrian border and onwards to Damascus or beyond. Mafraq was one of the earliest sites for Syrian refugees to congregate in Jordan, given its proximity to southern Syria, where the anti-Assad regime demonstrations were quickly and violently repressed. The greater Mafraq area, including the city of Ramtha, where we also conducted research, is now home to over 200,000

people, many or most of whom are Syrians, and the area is known for its high population density (Tiltnes, Zhang & Pederson, 2019). In the Mafraq area, the average annual income for Syrians is approximately 30 per cent lower than in Irbid at 2,100 Jordanian dinars (JOD) (US \$3,000) (ibid.). Mafraq governate is considered the poorest in the country (Al Sharafat, 2019).

The last field site is Zaatari camp, which is about 15 km from Mafraq city and shares the Mafraq governorate's challenges of poverty and out-of-camp work opportunities. The camp opened in 2012. It was once home to about 100,000 people (Sullivan & Tobin, 2014) but now has about 76,500 residents (UNHCR, 2020c). This makes the refugee camp one of the largest in the world and the fourth-largest "city" in Jordan. Most Zaatari refugees are from the nearby southern Syrian region of Dara(a) (Ar. *Dar'a*), where the Syrian uprising began in 2011. Beyond the sheer number of people, more than 80 per cent of Zaatari residents could be classified as "vulnerable:" More than 50 per cent of camp residents are children (boys and girls under 17), and 25 per cent are adult women; up to 15 babies are born each day in the camp, and 30 per cent are female-headed households (Sullivan & Tobin, 2014; UNHCR 2020f). Combined with the governorate's greater challenges of poverty and lack of work opportunities, residents of Zaatari experience marginalisation at multiple and compounded levels. The camp is run jointly by UNHCR and the Jordanian government, with a large number of international and national NGOs assisting.

Robert Forster, a PhD student at the University of Bergen, Norway, conducted research for this project in Tripoli, Lebanon, in February and March 2020 before the COVID-19 lockdowns. The data collected include qualitative interviews of 15 households in the neighbourhoods of al-Qubbeh and Abu Samra. These are peripheral suburban and semi-urban neighbourhoods that have large Syrian populations of up to 70 per cent. Gender distribution was four women and eleven men, most between 30 and 40 and married with children. Having family connections in Jordan was a criterion for selection to analyse larger impacts of transnational figurations. The interviews focused on Theme 3 "Following the Networks". The data from this extension of the Jordan study is currently being analysed through a theoretical and empirical framework on "the economy of favours," an informal social contract invoked among Syrians in Tripoli, with interesting implications for transnational figurations. The paper will be available later in 2021.

## 1.2 Sampling and data collection

Data were collected over 18 months during 2019/2020. The researchers employed snowball sampling to collect the data in the selected field sites (see figure on p. 8). They began by completing semi-structured interviews first, followed by biographic/life histories and participatory methods, then by focus groups. The quantitative survey was the last method employed, though it was completed before the participatory methods and focus group discussions due to COVID-19 prevention restrictions.

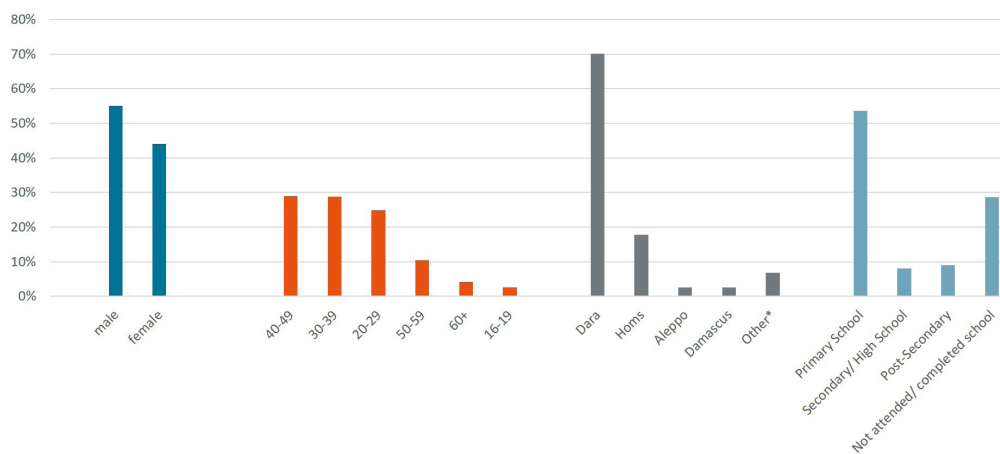
Each researcher focussed on one of the different TRAFIG themes, except for the sole researcher responsible for field site number three (Zaatari camp), who collected data on all themes concurrently. The researchers organised a WhatsApp group to share connections, overlaps and common themes, and the team in Jordan met regularly to discuss these as well (within the guidelines of COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, discussed below). Informed consent was obtained from participants

before each research encounter. Some of the interviews were audio-recorded. However, the Syrian respondents were overwhelmingly reluctant to agree to video recording, which is attributable to the security concerns discussed later in this *paper*.

### Research participants' profiles

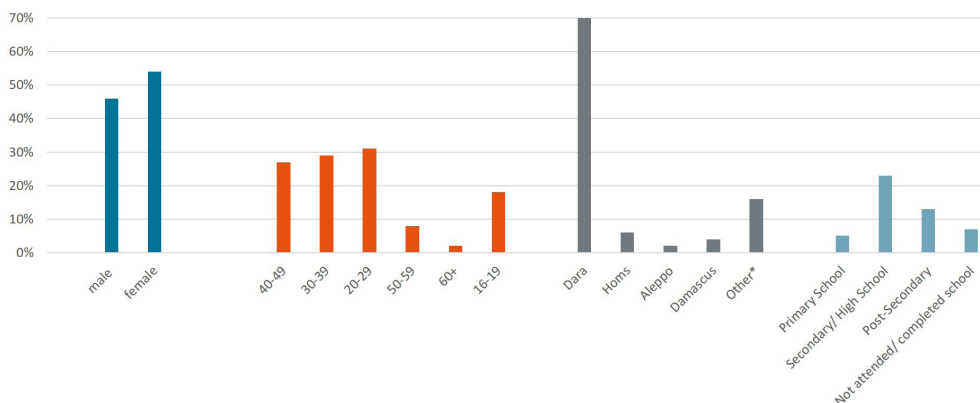
According to UNHCR (2020b), most Syrian refugees in Jordan (nearly 50%) are between 18 and 59 years old. One-third are children under the age of 11. The remainder are teens between ages 12 and 17 (14%), and those over age 60 (4%). There are slightly more males than females (50.6%:49.4%). Nearly half of Syrian refugees in Jordan originate from Daraa (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). The other major Syrian governorates of origin are Homs (19%), Aleppo (10%), rural Damascus (9%) and Damascus (8%) (ibid.). Half have started or completed primary education, and 15 per cent of adults older than 20 have achieved a secondary or post-secondary degree (ibid.). Most live outside camps (81%; UNHCR,2020b).

Figure 1: Demographic breakdown of TRAFIG respondents



Source: TRAFIG survey data, n=305; Note: in per cent; \*Other: rural Damascus, Idlib, Hamah, Quneitra, Raqqah

Figure 2: Demographic breakdown of TRAFIG respondents in semi-structured interviews



Source: TRAFIG data, n=100; Note: in per cent; \*Other: rural Damascus, Idlib, Hamah, Quneitra, Raqqah

Similarly to the Syrians in Jordan more generally, 80 per cent of the TRAFIG survey respondents live outside Zaatari camp, and 20 per cent live inside.

With our quantitative survey, we are able to see that most of our respondents are registered with the national Jordanian government (85%) and UNHCR (76%). Most have only applied for asylum or another protection status in Jordan (90.1%). Half of our quantitative survey respondents reported that their economic situation in Jordan is “much worse” than it was in Syria (50.2%). These important trends are discussed in detail throughout this *working paper*.

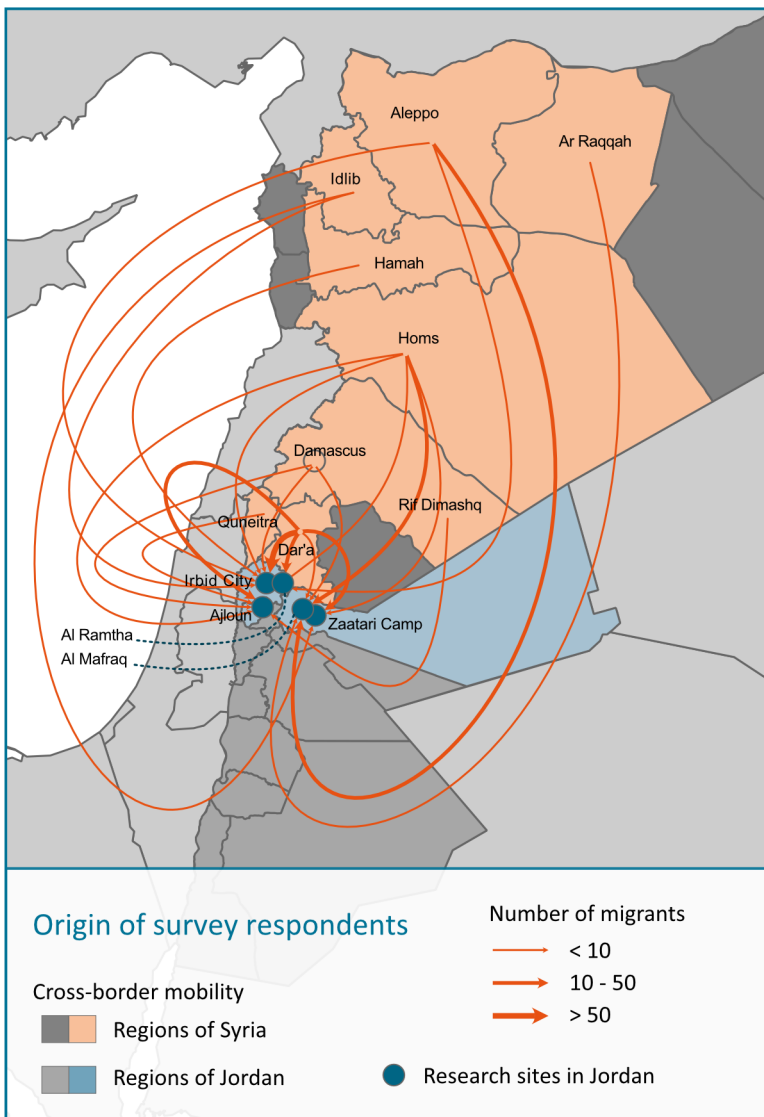
Our research participants generally reflect the larger demographic trends of Syrians in Jordan, but not perfectly. (For the demographic breakdown of our TRAFIG respondents, see Figures 1 and 2.)

### 1.3 Fieldwork challenges

There have been two key challenges to the study. First, the field researchers raised the issue that many of our Syrian interviewees were unwilling to provide detailed personal information because of security concerns. For example, many Syrians were vague about the locations of family members or close friends, indicating that they were “in Jordan” only. The researchers worked hard to build a good rapport with interviewees to alleviate the concerns as necessary. We do not believe our data are inaccurate or missing key information, though elaboration of locations of family members and close friends would have been useful in the sampling for additional interviews and in our figurational analyses. More importantly, though, security concerns, which are discussed throughout the *paper*, played important roles in the mobility and vulnerability experienced by Syrians.

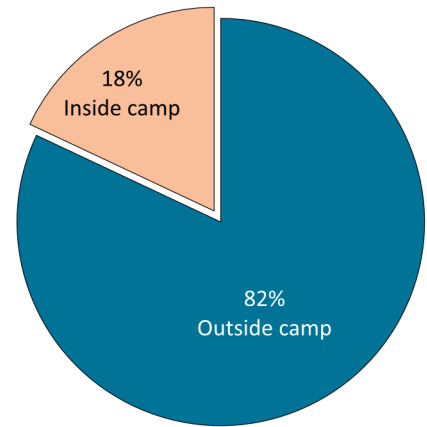
Second, COVID-19 prevention restrictions meant that our researchers had a difficult time completing the focus groups discussions. This was because of the limitations on and restrictions against gatherings of more than four or five people from different households proscribed by the Jordanian government. The researchers responded by conducting focus group discussions with extended family units rather than a mix of unrelated Syrians. This also facilitated further, in-depth discussions within the family revealing important social and cultural forms of support, challenges and decisions regarding mobility.

## TRAF'G research: Jordan

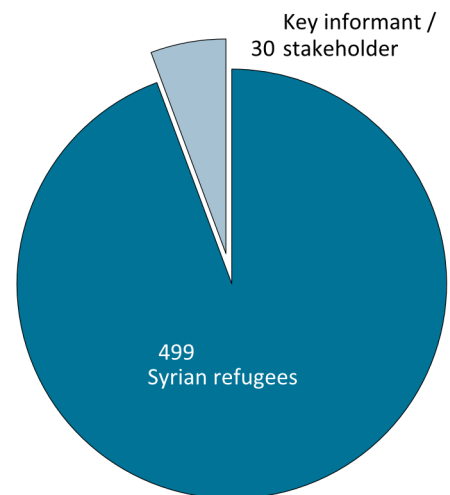


Time of empirical research: 08/2019 - 10/2020

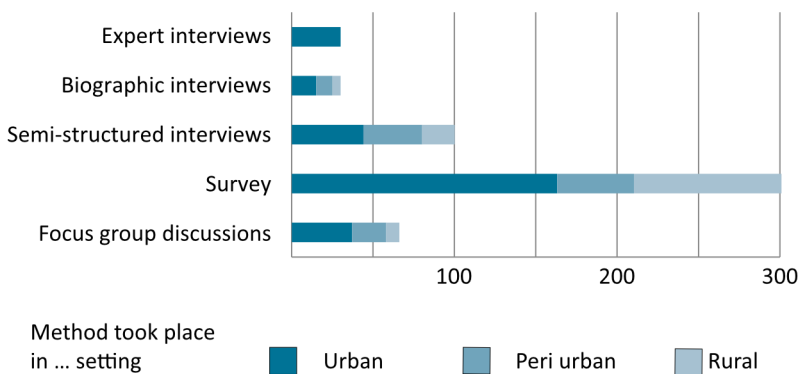
Share of respondents living inside/outside camps



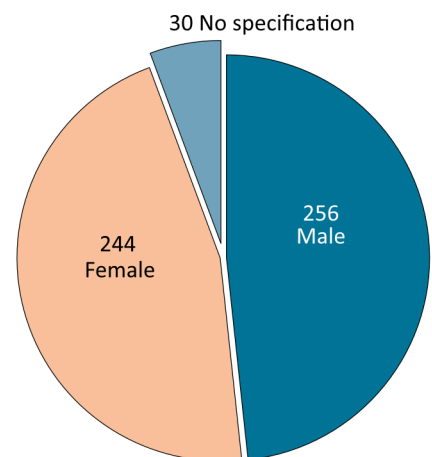
Type of respondent



Number of participants per method



Sex of respondent



Source: FAO 2020, BICC 2021; Layout: Vincent Glasow, BICC, March 2021

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.



## 2. Protracted displacement in Jordan

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, around 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from their homes in the area, becoming recognised as Palestinian refugees through what is known as the 1948 Palestinian exodus, or “catastrophe” (Ar. *nakba*). Many of them crossed Jordan’s western border into, what had by then become established as The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs erupted again in 1967, generating a new wave of Palestinian refugees to flee or be expelled from their homes. In both cases, Jordan had the lion’s share of Palestinians fleeing the wars (Kumaraswamy et al., 2019; Nuwar, 2006; Dana, 2000).

On Jordan’s eastern border, the Gulf War erupted in 1991 after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, causing a new wave of incoming Palestinians. According to estimates, “Palestinians were the second largest group uprooted by the Gulf war, and around 300,000 resettled in Jordan” (Galbraith, 2003). The United States led a new war on Iraq in March 2003. The toppling of Saddam Hussein caused sectarian violence, thus driving Iraqis to flee to neighbouring countries, including Jordan. The intensification of the civil war in Iraq and the rise of terrorist organisations’ activities in the country increased the number of people fleeing. Jordan accepted the largest portions (Kumaraswamy et al., 2019; Nuwar, 2006; Dana, 2000).

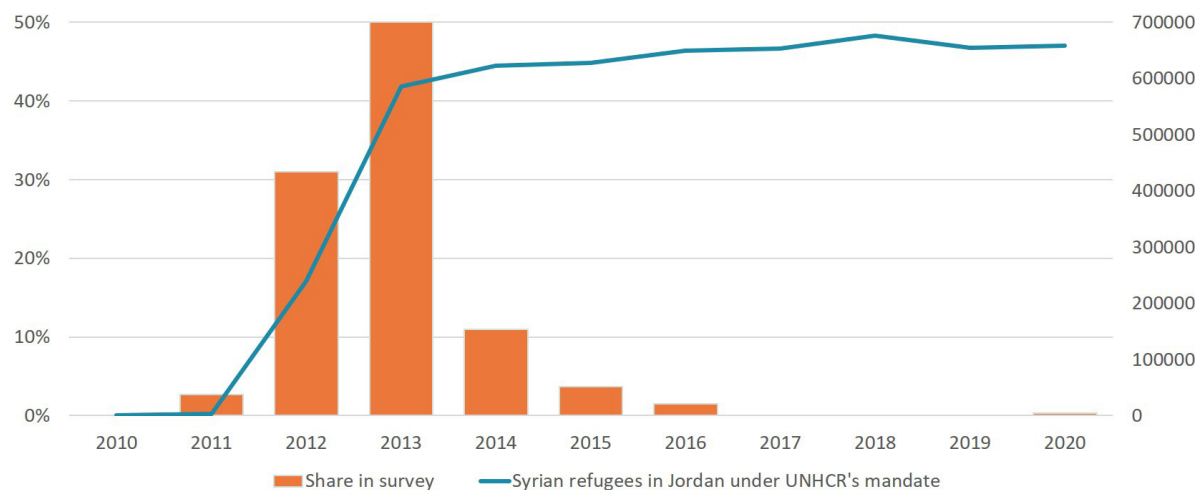
On Jordan’s northern border, the Arab Spring started in Syria in March 2011. In the following months, anti-government demonstrations began in Daraa, the first Syrian city to witness protest against Assad’s regime, before they spread to major cities such as Aleppo and the capital Damascus (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012). As regional and international mediation efforts, short-lived truces and UN-observer missions failed, the conflict escalated into a full-fledged civil war in mid-2012. The turning point was the Syrian Army’s ground assault on Homs in March 2012 (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The first major displacements in the north were recorded in June 2012, when about 150,000 villagers fled two Sunni villages in the Idlib governate, fearing retaliation by the Syrian Army. In mid-August, the first Palestinian refugees were displaced, when 10,000 fled the army’s shelling of the al-Ramel camp in Latakia. From the start of 2013, nearly 50,000 people were fleeing Syria every week. By mid-2013, the UN casualty figure was more than 100,000 dead; estimates for 2015 reached 240,000. The Syrian crisis led to large scale displacement to neighbouring countries, with Jordan a major destination for Syrian refugees.

Beyond Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians, Jordan has also demonstrated hospitality to thousands of Yemenis, Sudanese, Somalis and Libyans who have sought asylum in Jordan to escape instability and violence in their respective countries (Davis et al, 2016).

Jordan is neither party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention nor to the 1967 Protocol. The country does not have specific domestic legislation targeting refugees but instead offers protection and asylum to political refugees and UN-approved foreigners (Ferreira, 2020; Residency and Foreigners’ Affairs Department, 1973). The legal framework governing the treatment of refugees in Jordan is the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding signed between Jordan and UNHCR (Saliba, 2016). This memorandum obligates the Jordanian government to provide protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, giving them the right to reside for six months or until a lasting solution to their problems is found (UNHCR, 2015). The implementation of refugee policies in Jordan relies heavily on the interventions of UNHCR through which registered refugees are entitled to humanitarian relief. In collaboration with the Jordanian government, UNHCR issued a protection document that provides legal safeguards and prevents detention practices for refugees on Jordanian soil. Refugees must obtain proof of residence in Jordan. Jordan also signed the Anti-Trafficking Act in 2009.

From the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Syrians entered Jordan through a mix of formal and informal border crossings. Syrian refugees who entered regularly (legally) were required to present their Syrian passports at a regular port of entry (formal crossing) under the legal regulations in existence before the Syrian crisis (Norwegian Research Council, 2018). Those who entered irregularly (illegally), if found by the Jordanian officials, were transported to a refugee camp for registration and processing. Most of the refugees crossed the border at informal entry points near Daraa (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In September 2012, one of the major informal crossings was closed, and by mid-2013, Jordan closed all the informal border crossings, except to those who required medical care. The main formal crossing in this area, the Jaber–Nassib border crossing, closed in mid-2015. By 2016, all border crossings—both formal and informal—had been shut down, and Syrians wanting to enter Jordan were required to obtain a visa prior to arrival.

**Figure 3: Year of arrival to Jordan by survey respondents**



Source: UNHCR, 2000; TRAFIG survey data, n=303; Note: share in per cent

While only a few of our respondents arrived in Jordan in 2011 (3%), the majority came in 2012 (31%) and 2013 (50%). In subsequent years the number of arrivals dropped sharply, consistent with the overall trends among Syrians in Jordan, where the largest portion (41.4%) arrived in 2013 (UNHCR, 2020b).

In our interviews and surveys, we did not inquire whether the respondents had entered Jordan regularly or irregularly; thus we do not know how many of our respondents fell into each category. However, many of those we interviewed volunteered such information, which was not considered particularly sensitive. This is because, in March 2018, the Jordanian government and UNHCR launched a comprehensive campaign to regularise all Syrians within the country’s borders (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The “amnesty” was extended to those who had entered Jordan irregularly (illegally) and those who had left refugee camps without obtaining the required permissions. The regularisation of Syrian refugees gave upwards of 50,000 refugees access to UNHCR aid and assistance, access to education for children, as well as legal residency in Jordan (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Before refugees were offered amnesty, Syrians caught without proper documentation (i.e. a UNHCR registration card) were subject to arrest, involuntary settlement in a refugee camp and deportation to Syria. The regularisation programme was considered a major step towards protecting Syrians in Jordan, reducing stigma, ensuring safety and security for Syrians outside their homes and improving the relations between host communities and Syrian refugees (Norwegian Research Council, 2018). The positive impact of the regularisation campaign was evident in the response from our respondents: 98 per cent of the total sample are registered with municipal authorities and 76 per cent with UNHCR.

From the start of their displacement to Jordan, Syrians’ general movement was either out of or avoiding refugee camps and into the urban and peri-urban areas. As mentioned above, less than 20 per cent of the Syrian refugees in Jordan live in camps (UNHCR, 2019a). The shift towards urban and peri-urban areas led to localised overcrowding, cramped living conditions and strained the local infrastructure that was inadequate to cope with the influx of new residents (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pederson, 2019).

As a country with one of the smallest economies in the Middle East and without international assistance, Jordan struggled to care for all refugees’ immediate needs. The lack of natural resources and the repeated influx of regional refugees have strained national infrastructure and, at least according to some analysts, hampered the economic growth of the country (Achilli, 2015). The impact of Syrian refugees on the labour market is contested (Fakih & Ibrahim, 2016; Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019), but some studies indicate an increase in the competition for scarce jobs, especially in the informal sector (Fakih & Ibrahim, 2016). As one of the world’s poorest countries in terms of water resources (Hadadin et al., 2010), Jordan was not well-positioned to cater for the numerous refugees (Baylouny & Klingseis, 2018; Farishta, 2014). The influx of Syrian refugees has enabled Jordan to access international aid for its national economy as a “refugee rentier state” (Tsourapas, 2019).

An important policy instrument for managing the influx of Syrian refugees is the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), a multi-year framework for steering and coordinating the aid response to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, 2017). UNHCR coordinates the refugee response under the leadership of the government of Jordan, in a collaborative effort between the donor

community, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), refugees and host communities (UNHCR, 2019b). Currently, eight sectors provide support within the Jordan refugee response, where UNHCR co-chairs several sectors and their thematic working groups. UNHCR also supports the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD), the Jordanian governmental agency that manages and coordinates assistance to Syrian refugees. UNHCR has also implemented a self-renewal method for refugee registration procedures. It is the first operation globally where “persons of concern” are able to register, renew and access personal data on their own (UNHCR, 2019b).

As for refugees’ employment in the local labour market, the Jordanian Ministry of Labour has issued work permits for Syrian refugees to work in some professions. In 2016, the government of Jordan and the international community signed the Jordan Compact, an agreement combining labour market access for refugees with favourable terms of trade with the European Union (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019). The agreement is financed by the World Bank and the European Union, and aid disbursement (US \$300 million) is measured against implementing 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees. The agreement reflects an increased emphasis at the international level on supporting development opportunities in refugee–host country states as a “win-win” solution in protracted crises (Betts & Collier 2017). (For a critical reflection on the Jordan Compact, see Grawert, 2019.)

The agreement legalises the refugees’ access to certain formal work with the aims of enhancing self-reliance, reducing onward migration and protecting refugees from exploitation (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019). Syrians can now apply for work in specific open sectors and low-skilled professions approved for foreign workers, including agriculture, construction, textiles/garment manufacturing and food service. The Ministry of Labour exempted the Syrians from the work permit fees; they only pay a symbolic administrative fee of 10 JOD (US \$14) (UNHCR, 2019a). Of the almost 160,000 work permits issued to date, only one-fourth are believed to be in active use (Durable Solutions Platform, 2020). Work permits and employment are discussed in detail in Section 3.5.

Jordan has been working with the international community to provide public services, including housing, schooling, and medical care to the refugees. Although refugees have access to basic public services, some of which are foreseen in the Jordan Response Plan, the Jordanian government continues to experience difficulties maintaining these services and affording better ones. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

These patchwork approaches are a general problem in protracted refugee situations, which are often characterised by such ad-hoc policy instruments, temporary adjustments to labour market access and domestic attempts to smooth over a potentially disruptive demographic shift hoping that a durable solution will be realised soon, which it most often is not.

### 3. Key dimensions of figurations of displacement in Jordan

This chapter addresses the main questions of TRAFIG by analysing its five main themes.

#### 3.1 Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum

This section looks into Theme 1 of TRAFIG: “Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum.” The main question this section aims to address is: *How do displaced people gain access to, make use of and are governed by policies and programs in the fields of humanitarian aid, development, and protection?* We first explore the various aid regimes that exist in Jordan. We then examine the sourcing of knowledge of aid regimes, focussing on health care and education. We conclude with a discussion about insecurity and concerns about surveillance. In particular, this section argues that navigating aid regimes requires information, accessibility and eligibility, which Syrians struggle to attain.

#### Aid regimes

Syrian refugees are highly vulnerable and differ from the Jordanian host population: They are younger, have more dependents, less formal education and are more often from rural areas (Higher Population Council, 2018). Syrians in Jordan live in precarious circumstances, where at least 70 per cent are below the poverty line (Verme et al., 2016). Current aid modalities and systems such as the Syrian Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) are underfunded and face coordination gaps (World Bank, 2017). Despite cash and in-kind assistance to more than two-thirds of the Syrian refugees, nine out of ten are food insecure, with cash expenditures reduced amidst rising house rents (Majewski et al., 2018). The limitations of formal support mechanisms, being too small and inadequate, reflect larger studies confirming the increasing poverty and vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Jordan (Verme et al., 2016). Such programmes are not sustainable in the long run (ibid.), and there is growing consensus that international aid should be reoriented and strategically employed to expand job creation, income-generation and self-sufficiency. This holds particularly for easing restrictions on camp-based populations that are largely dependent on aid (Lenner & Turner, 2019).

Registering as a refugee with UNHCR is the most common way to access aid. It entitles refugees to receive cash support from UNHCR and support from the World Food Programme (WFP) (Majewski et al., 2018). The cash-aid benefit varies depending on family size and aims to supply 80 per cent of a family’s needs. A typical cash-aid benefit for a family of four (two adults and two children) is 125 JOD per month (US \$176). Urban

refugees are eligible for rental support and winterisation kits (SSInt-YU-RH-003-JOR, SSInt-YU-RH-004-JOR). In-kind aid or food stamps/food coupons are often not considered when referencing “aid” in interviews, reflecting that “aid” has become synonymous with “cash-in-hand” payments to refugees.

Registering as a refugee grants access to primary and secondary schooling in public schools as well as basic health services in government clinics and hospitals. Those who live in official, UNHCR-sponsored refugee camps are also entitled to housing, electricity and water. Syrian refugees are entitled to work permits under the Jordan Compact, as mentioned above (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019; Grawert, 2019). In addition to formal support from UNHCR, refugees can access a range of specialised needs-based services and grants offered by INGOs and NGOs related to health, medical aid, psycho-social counseling as well as legal aid. These are important additions to aiding refugees but often offered only to the most vulnerable.

To receive benefits, refugees must know of their existence (information), be able to access them (accessibility) and be eligible for support (eligibility). Our interviews point to all three as inadequate: Syrian refugees may lack accurate information, cannot access the service provider and/or are not eligible for support.

Families typically reported pooling benefits from several sources to remain viable (SSInt-YU-RH-004-JOR): “*We’ve received rental support from one organisation for six months. Another helped me in receiving physical therapy. A third one helped me financially (...) as did UNHCR.*” Even then, some of those interviewed indicated that they lack sufficient aid for basic needs and suffer from food insecurity: “*I am not satisfied with it [the support I get] because the food aid [coupons] is not sufficient, and does not meet our basic needs. I swear to God that there are many days I leave food on the table, just to let my children have enough to eat*” (SSInt-YU-RH-011-JOR). Interviewees from areas outside of Mafraq and Zaatari camp especially complained about the lack of aid assistance to them and even its retraction (e.g FGD-YU-RF-001-JOR; BInt-YU-TA-001-JO)

As shown in Table 1, the respondents received a range of support over the past year from sources other than UNHCR, with about two-thirds having received some form of aid, with food aid and medical and health care the most common (60%; 53%), followed by cash transfers and in kind-support to about one-third of respondents. The results indicate that many are unaided, and support systems are insufficient to provide for their needs.

**Table 1: Support from government, INGOs and NGOs during the past 12 months**

Type of support	in %
Support received (from any source)	63
Food aid and vouchers (INGOs)	60
Medical and health care	53
Cash transfers (INGOs)	37
Other (skills training, courses)	30
In-kind support	28
Shelter and accommodation	17

Source: TRAFIG survey data, n=305

## Sourcing aid: Information, health care and education

The most important source of information about aid is one's own family, relatives and friends. One reason why information is sourced from family and friends is that needing help and support may be considered embarrassing or shameful and, therefore, is not disclosed outside of the immediate family. As one Syrian said (SSInt-YU-RH-002-JOR): *"I get some information from my relatives and family members. I do not get information from friends or acquaintances because I do not mix much with people."* Facebook and social media have become important sources of information for refugees but are still not universally used or accessed. *"I had no idea that there are WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts that provide information about aid"* (SSInt-YU-RH-011-JOR). Aid agencies use digital and social media such as WhatsApp and SMS messages to disseminate information and contact refugees directly. They also post information in user groups for Syrian refugees (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019).

The respondents can access a range of free or low-cost health services, both governmental and international. The quantitative study found that 84.1 per cent of respondents had access to a hospital or other health services the last time they needed it. Of those who did not have access to a hospital or other health service the last time they needed it, 100 per cent were outside of Zaatari. International organisations provided for 22.4 per cent of services, state-run facilities accounted for 20 per cent, and national NGOs for 11.2 per cent. The figures testify to the importance of INGO/NGOs in complementing the government's health provision, especially for those living outside of camps.

Not every medical expense is covered, and costs for some diagnostics and treatments are high. For example, laboratory tests and medicine must be paid in full, and most need financial support from several NGOs to do so. One respondent, a middle-aged woman, receives financial assistance from international NGOs, yet struggles to pay for her costly lab test: *"I have a kidney problem, and therefore I need to have frequent medical tests that cost 30-40 JOD. The [name of INGO] help me pay for the medicine and my monthly medical tests"* (SSInt-YU-

RH-002-JOR). Typically, the respondents access health services from a range of providers, especially if needing specialist care, as shown in this quote from an interview from a woman using: *"government hospitals, such as the [name of hospital], as well as the gynaecology and obstetrics [ward] in Mafraq and [hospital] at the expense of UNHCR. Sometimes we get the treatment [covered] by the Chamber of Commerce, but I must buy the medicine on my own"* (SSInt-YU-ahmad-004-JOR).

In Jordan, school-age enrollment is 56 per cent for Syrian refugees but 90 per cent for Jordanian nationals (UNHCR & World Bank, 2019). This means that almost half of the Syrian school-aged cohort is not attending formal education. Further, adults' and parents' educational levels are also low: Only about half (53.7%) of our survey respondents had completed primary education, and about one-third (28.7%) had not attended school at all or did not complete primary education. The inability to access or complete education is likely due to displacement disrupting their education in Syria, then being unable to resume their schooling in Jordan due to care duties for family members (SSInt-YU-RH-006-JOR). Remedial classes and back-to-school options exist but are limited (SSInt-YU-RH-002-JOR). A few men have special marketable skills (e.g. language skills), while others have been able to pass entry exams to Jordan's universities and are now studying medicine and pharmacy, both high-status professions with strict entry requirements (SSInt-YU-WA-004-JOR).

All the families interviewed who had children at home were concerned with the quality of education. In Jordan, Syrian refugees can access private schools that charge a tuition fee and public schools that are free of cost. The latter are crowded with two shifts, a morning shift for Jordanians and an afternoon shift for Syrians. Private schools may provide additional services such as busses to school and meals for the children. Therefore, those who can afford it send their children to private schools (SSInt-YU-WA-001-JOR; SSInt-YU-WA-001-JOR; SSInt-YU-WA-011-JOR). School enrolment reflects socio-economic stratification between poor rural (Daraa) and affluent urban (Damascus) refugees (SSInt-YU-WA-020-JOR). Some of the respondents stated they depend on child labour to pay family expenses and cannot afford to send their children to school, thus having to resort to what is termed "negative coping mechanisms" (Gustavsson, 2015). Others are considering returning to Syria to help their children access secondary schooling there. Some also send children to Islamic schools (SSInt-YU-RH-002-JOR). About seven out of ten (71.9%) of our survey respondents had members of their households currently enrolled in educational activities in Jordan. Interestingly, of those enrolled in educational activities in Jordan, the majority (67%) live in Zaatari camp. This underscores the need to address the distinct educational vulnerabilities that exist between in-camp and out-of-camp refugees.

Only about one in ten survey respondents have completed tertiary education at university, college, or polytechnics. It is challenging for Syrians to attain a tertiary education in Jordan because public universities are prohibitively expensive. Syrians are charged an international student rate rather than the cheaper Jordanian national rate. Moreover, Syrians have to pay the tuition fees in one lump sum. This is why Jordanian public universities are out of reach for most Syrians unless an NGO helps them to pay their tuition. In rare instances, students have been able to pursue university education on a scholarship (SsInt-YU-WA-007-JOR). These instances are atypical.

## Insecurity and surveillance

The respondents in this study, especially those in Zaatari camp, describe conditions of insecurity, reflected in their relations with other refugees and the camp and government authorities. Yet, security arrangements in Jordan's refugee camps are strict (Hoffmann, 2017). In the words of one Zaatari resident:

*As a refugee, you never know whether you can stay another day [in Zaatari], be transferred to the Azraq camp or deported to Syria. Because of this, we live in constant fear. For no fault of our own, we can also be punished for a crime committed by someone else, whether a relative or non-relative (BInt-YU-ahmad-003-JOR).*

Other interviewees confirmed the feeling of insecurity (e.g. SsInt-YU-ahmad-010-JOR). Some were unwilling to answer questions about the information they receive from others or share with others, or whether they have applied for asylum or details of their refugee status (SsInt-YU-ahmad-004-JOR). One respondent threatened to withdraw from the interview if required to answer questions related to his contact with national, international and UN agencies, personal contacts and sources (SsInt-YU-ahmad-001-JOR). This indicates that camp residents in particular are reticent about disclosing information that could jeopardise their refugee status or come under the scrutiny of authorities or security agencies. While it is not possible to independently verify the level of surveillance in camps, refugees' deportation and detention have been documented in Jordan even though this violates the non-refoulement principle in Jordan's agreement with UNHCR (Molnar, 2020). Involuntary returns as a governance strategy are discussed below in Section 3.3.

## Concluding remarks

The large majority of our respondents are registered with UNHCR, which entitles them to access to a range of general and specialised forms of aid, including cash-aid from UNHCR, some state services (health and education) and (I)NGO-sector support. There are still many protection gaps since accessing support requires information, accessibility and eligibility. Many of these aid provisions either reach too few or are inadequate for their needs. The refugees seek out support from local and international sources and combine aid and resources from several sources to remain viable yet experience gradual impoverishment. Widespread unemployment and underemployment coincide with a dependency on humanitarian aid. Education options are undersupplied and underutilised. Camp-based refugees especially suffer from insecurity.

### Key findings

- *Humanitarian aid is not sufficient to offset widespread poverty.*
- *Basic health services are free or low-cost, yet insufficient without NGO-sector support.*
- *Refugees often struggle with obtaining sufficient information, access and being eligible for aid.*
- *Access to quality schooling is a major concern, and school uptake is low.*
- *Syrian refugees, especially those in Zaatari, suffer from insecurity and fear of being detained or deported.*

### 3.2 Living in limbo: Livelihoods, (in)security and precarity in local settings

This section looks into Theme 2 of TRAFIG: “Living in Limbo: Livelihoods, (in)security, and precarity in local settings.” The main question this chapter aims to address is: “*Why and how do displaced people live in situations of ‘limbo?’ How do they sustain their livelihoods in Jordan?*” “Living in limbo” could be defined as life courses and livelihoods that are difficult to change or improve for structural and systemic reasons that stem from conditions of protracted displacement. Syrians face many difficulties as refugees in Jordan.

#### Shelter and social protection: Camp and non-camp

While some Syrians moved directly to urban areas when they arrived in Jordan, others stayed in refugee camps for shorter or longer periods before resettling in urban centres (SsInt-YU-WA-003-JOR). For many, the camps were only temporary measures in the early phase of displacement, with families leaving voluntarily for urban areas and cities, mainly Irbid and Mafraq, when conditions allowed and regulations permitted. A few of the families and young couples in the sample continue to live in camps and urban areas (SsInt-YU-WA-006-JOR), with dual residence reflecting familial strategies and new unions after being displaced (SsInt-YU-ahmad-007-JOR). Those who remain in the camps are offered benefits, including housing, water and electricity (AlHamoud 2015). However, Jordan’s Syrian refugee camps are associated with lower social status and poorer conditions as well as high levels of surveillance, which can help explain why many leave and move to urban areas.

Living in refugee camps may mean greater aid benefits but fewer opportunities and having to endure living conditions with limited individual freedoms that many find stressful. In Zaatari, tribal councils have been set up to mediate relations between refugees and camp authorities (SsInt-YU-ahmad-011-JOR; Sullivan & Tobin, 2014). Refugees in Zaatari live in “caravans,” which are mobile homes. Residents complain of the unfair distribution of caravans and the residents’ inability to repair and improve living quarters due to favouritism and corruption and needing help from gatekeepers to access them (ibid.). Two of the biggest problems for camp-based refugees in Zaatari are the strict security measures and chronic uncertainty. These are some of the reasons why some (12 per cent of Zaatari respondents according to our survey) do not see a future for themselves in Jordan and contemplate returning to Syria.

#### Connections and social networks

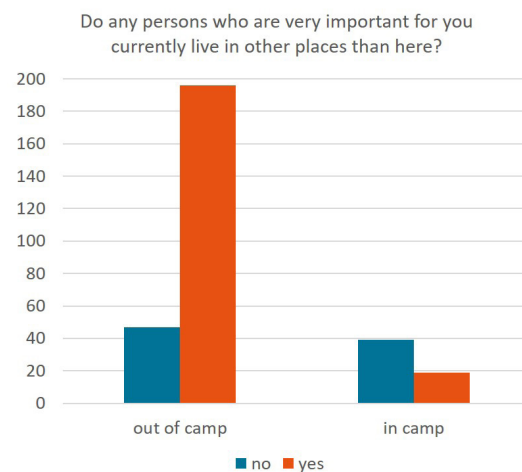
Social networks are strongly correlated with employment and well-being, and more generally, integration outcomes. Displacement impacts social relations and social organisation, dividing

extended families and increasing family fragmentation. A recent case study of social networks among displaced Syrians in Irbid found that social networks have collapsed (Stevens, 2016).

Our data show that, overall, social networks have not collapsed but have developed important local, translocal, and transnational characteristics. Most of our survey respondents (73.9%) reported that between four and eight persons live in their household. Locally, most regularly spend their time with a family member (60.7%), while less than one-third spend time with persons from their home community (31.4%). Of course, families are separated translocally and transnationally in displacement: 71.0 per cent of respondents reported being separated from a very important family member, especially siblings (32.7%).

We find significant differences between our camp-based and non-camp survey respondents on this point. Our non-camp-based respondents are far better connected than those in Zaatari: 73 per cent of non-camp-based respondents indicated that they have translocal and transnational networks. In comparison, only 26 per cent of camp-based respondents (N=58) indicated the same. Figure 4 depicts the differences between out-of-camp and in-camp networks when it comes to having very important persons that live in other places.

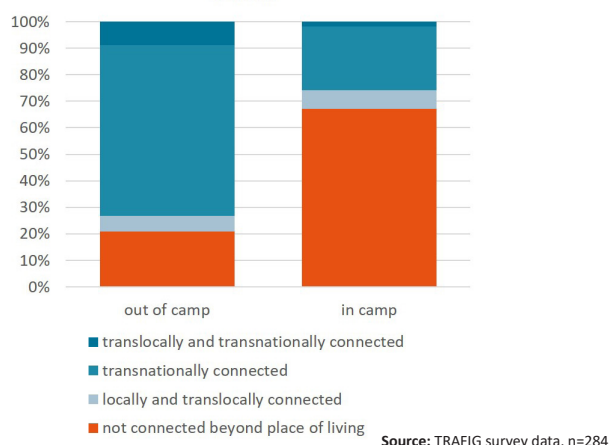
**Figure 4: Connections beyond place of living**



**Source:** TRAFIG survey data, n=303 (243 respondents living out-of-camps, 58 inside Zaatari camp)

Figure 5 below demonstrates the contours and differences between in-camp and out-of-camp translocal and transnational networks. While the lion’s share of survey respondents who are not connected beyond their place of living are found in Zaatari, the better part of respondents who are connected transnationally can be found outside of camps. In fact, those outside the camp are mostly connected transnationally. We will explore the implications for these differing connections in the next section.

**Figure 5: Spatial expansion of respondents' personal network**



Despite the physical separation and differences in connection types, overall one-fifth receive financial support from the important family member (20.1%), and more than half receive emotional support (68.6%). This demonstrates that connections of all kinds are vital for social networks.

### Family disunity and divorce

Family and household arrangements that do not protect privacy or may compromise gender dynamics, often forced by the poverty of displacement, can cause friction and rupture. As one interviewee, a middle-aged woman with four sons, said:

*Initially, we stayed in my brother's house for a week, but you know how life with brothers and sisters is like. (...) You know my sons are grown-ups. My brother's wife was almost the same age as my sons. I looked for a house to live in, but I couldn't find one. So we had to live in an underground shelter for six months until I could move into a house. My brother never helped! He used to bring us some food packages when we first arrived, but that didn't last for long (SsInt-YU-RF-002-JOR).*

While the majority of respondents in the interview sample are married (71%), there are several examples of divorce: Some were divorced before leaving Syria, and others divorced after arriving in Jordan as the husband marries again, leaving ex-wives destitute. Some husbands left Jordan preventing ex-wives from reclaiming their divorce settlement (*nafaqah*), as told by this woman in her forties with four children:

*When I got divorced from my ex-husband, I immediately consulted the authorities to ask for the nafaqah. But unfortunately, the authorities made it clear to me that they could not help me because my husband was living abroad. I also tried to apply for housing for a divorced woman, but I could not get that either. We lived without electricity for two months because we could not pay the bills. I had to borrow some money to pay them (BInt-YU-WA-005-JOR).*

Additionally, according to our respondents' information, divorce rates have increased both before leaving Syria and after settling in Jordan. This could reflect a slight sample bias towards female respondents (54.5% of sample). It may also reflect that the Syrian crisis and ensuing displacement has strained marriages and family- and kin networks. Additional research is needed to clarify this point.

The quantitative survey finds that the highest number of respondents reporting transnational connections are widowed (86%) and separated or divorced (75%). In comparison, 65 per cent of married respondents and 39 per cent of single/never married respondents reported having transnational connections. One possible explanation is that when marriages end due to separation, divorce or death, the spouse invests in or grows transnational connections in response. However, further research would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis.

In addition to the often-reported associations of men with security concerns, many of the women expressed feeling vulnerable when leaving the house. They believed and told us that the challenges they experienced were due to the lack of personal and social connections, as well as financial resources. This indicates that divorce may increase families' vulnerabilities in their immediate vicinity, even more so with female-headed refugee households (BInt-YU-WA-005-JOR; cf. McNatt et al., 2018).

### Concluding remarks

Social networks and connections are vital for living in and through precarity in protracted displacement. Such connections influence residential practices, but not entirely. Camp-based refugees face distinctive hardships under more surveillance and insecurity than urban refugees but have more access to aid providers. Urban refugees are self-settled but suffer from gaps in aid provision. In-camp respondents are far less likely to be connected outside of their place of living, while out-of-camp respondents are most likely to have transnational connections out of Jordan. Remittances are important for some families with family members abroad, and emotional support even more so. These conditions add stress on families and couples, which may lead to family division and divorce.

#### Key findings

- Residential patterns and preferences are influenced by family networks and other factors.
- Camp-based refugees have fewer connections beyond their place of living.
- Out-of-camp refugees are more likely to have transnational connections.
- Family units and networks are separated and vulnerable, which can lead to family disunity and divorce.



### 3.3 Following the networks—Connectivity and mobility in the context of protracted displacement

This section looks into Theme 3 of TRAFIG: “Connectivity and mobility in the context of protracted displacement.” The main question of this section is, “*How do translocal and transnational networks shape refugees’ mobility experiences, trajectories and aspirations, and how do specific legal frameworks and policies enable or inhibit this mobility?*” In this section, we first look at the familial and non-family connections Syrians mobilised to leave Syria and enter Jordan. Second, we look at the family- and kin networks that Syrians mobilised to move within Jordan. Finally, we consider onward aspirations, more than the actual plans, of our Syrian respondents while considering the role of family- and kin figurations. We also draw out important distinctions between those who live in urban areas and those who live in camps..

#### Mobilising connections to leave Syria and enter Jordan

Nearly all of our respondents (94.1%) reported that the most important reasons for leaving Syria were insecurity, war and violence. When asked about the reasons for fleeing from Syria, the answer was so self-evident that one respondent answered, “*Sorry – your question is weird! It’s the war, the destruction! People are dying and are being slaughtered and you’re asking why I moved from there?!*” (BInt-YU-WA-005-JOR).

The most compelling factors for movement into Jordan are 1) geographic proximity (82.8% of our quantitative sample cited this reason); 2) pre-existing ties, including economic/work ties, cultural/linguistic/religious (57.8%); and 3) family networks of Jordanians and Syrians who had already moved to Jordan (15.2%).

The majority of our respondents (72.9%) indicated that they received some non-family support en route to Jordan, and 11.9 per cent paid smugglers for this assistance. Opposition groups in Syria played a significant role in securing safe passage to the Jordanian border (SsInt-YU-ahmad-003-JOR, SsInt-YU-ahmad-001-JOR; BInt-YU-TA-001-JOR). One person reported that the opposition groups used to keep a list of names of people who wanted to go to Jordan (SsInt-YU-ahmad-001-JOR). One interviewee did not name the opposition groups as such, but he said a “group of like-minded people” assisted him, his wife, and their only son in their passage to Jordan (SsInt-YU-ahmad-003-JOR). He reported that the group gave them free transportation, food and drink, and safely presented them to the Jordanian military for refugee processing. He said: “*This group of people has permissions to travel to the border areas,*”

which is how they were able to facilitate their passage. Others reported that opposition groups in Syria would bring a large bus that could transfer 40 to 50 people and demand that the Syrians leave, driving them to Jordan. The families in a household and neighbourhood would quickly organise themselves into large groups and travel on the busses together (SsInt-YU-RF-014-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-017-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-018-JOR). This demonstrates that non-family networks may ‘fill in a gap’ of knowledge or trust when needed, but our qualitative interviews reveal that they cannot be relied upon in the same way as family- and kin networks can.

Most of our respondents (85.1%) reported that they departed from their home in Syria with close family members (spouse, parents, children, siblings; see also Betts & Collier, 2017 on forced migration as familial decision), while 12.5 per cent departed alone. During the journey out of Syria, only a small amount of our respondents (6.6%) were involuntarily separated from family members on their journeys while the remainder were able to choose to stay together or voluntarily separate. Thus, we argue that mobility patterns and family- and kin networks are importantly interlinked.

#### Mobilising connections to leave Zaatari refugee camp

Most of our interviewees who had entered Jordan irregularly were sent to Zaatari refugee camp by the Jordanian authorities who patrolled the border areas. All those we interviewed who came through Zaatari described hating the camp. Some even said that upon seeing and experiencing Zaatari, they would have been better off if they had died in Syria (SsInt-YU-RF-016-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-020-JOR).

Our research suggests that mobility out of Zaatari and kin networks were highly intertwined. Roughly, there were two groups of Syrians in Zaatari: Those with extended family in Jordan and those without. For group two, their only means of leaving Zaatari was to “skip out” and leave without formal permission, knowing that they were jeopardising their legal status in Jordan and their ability to receive UNHCR assistance (before the regularisation discussed above).

Members of group one were able to leave Zaatari under the *kafala*, or “sponsorship” system. All of our interviewees arrived in Jordan before the suspension of *kafala*, and many reported that their extended family networks in Jordan were a key element in their mobility out of Zaatari. One woman we interviewed (SsInt-YU-RF-016-JOR) stated that *kafala* had strengthened her family networks to such a degree that she

sought to bring more family members from Syria to Jordan, through and out of the camp via the *kafala* system. However, she was unable to do so: By that time, in mid-2013, the border had closed. The quantitative survey supports this as well, with the most significant portion of respondents (38%) indicating that they received support from family or friends in Jordan to move to their current place of living.

According to our quantitative survey, 71 per cent of the respondents have network connections beyond their place of living, and 60 per cent are embedded in transnational networks beyond Jordan. However, the reporting of transnational networks varies tremendously by place of residence: While 90 per cent of Mafraq city respondents indicated that they have transnational networks, only 16 per cent of Zaatari respondents stated the same. The low percentage of refugees reporting transnational networks currently in Zaatari confirms that those with more networks were better able to be mobile out of the camp.

Of the Syrian families we interviewed, many, if not most, had extended family- and kin networks in Ramtha, which facilitated their movement there. Some interviewees such as Umm-Bahaa (BInt-YU-RF-001-JOR) in the introduction to this *working paper* stated that Ramtha has become a highly desired location for urban Syrian refugees in Jordan. In fact, so many Syrians from the Daraa region have now moved to Ramtha that one interviewee (SsInt-YU-RF-005-JOR) said: “*Ramtha even looks like Daraa.*” Two Syrian women we interviewed (BInt-YU-RF-003-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-010-JOR) described having multiple family- and kin networks that facilitated their and their families’ movements out of Zaatari and to Ramtha. Both their husbands’ families were in Irbid, so both sets of families thought they could get help from the family- and kin networks in Irbid. Then each moved to Irbid to join their husband’s families’ networks but ended up returning to Ramtha, preferring it to Irbid. This suggests that familial networks are selectively utilised to support settlement and integration processes (see Tobin et al. 2021 for a detailed discussion of this).

In another example, one woman we interviewed (BInt-YU-RF-005-JOR) had previously worked in the United Arab Emirates. She had a secure financial status and lifestyle there. She had visited Syria a few weeks before the crisis because she was preparing for her son’s wedding to a locally-residing Syrian woman. She stayed with her two sons while her husband returned to the Emirates. When the refugee crisis began, she was stuck in Syria and unable to return. She fled irregularly to Jordan with her three sons, brothers and parents. They were immediately placed in Zaatari camp, but were later able to use *kafala* with local family members to leave. After some time, her two eldest sons went on to Turkey and fled illegally overseas

and onwards to the United Kingdom. Her parents utilised extended family networks to move to Doha, Qatar. She is now in Jordan with her youngest son, who goes to school. She feels like she has lost everything: She lost a well-paid job in the United Arab Emirates and, because her family members used the multiple family- and kin networks for onward migration, she is also now alone with one son in Jordan with family members as far-flung as the Gulf and Europe. This case suggests that kin networks are ambiguous: While they can facilitate transnational migration and domestic mobility, they can also result in some family members moving on and leaving others behind.

## Return to Syria

According to our survey data, the vast majority (83 per cent) of Syrian refugees does not intend to return to Syria within the next two years. Of those living in camps, only 12 per cent have intentions to return to Syria for good. Return rates from Jordan are very low (<35,000 overall; Edwards & Al-Hourani, 2019; UNHCR, 2018). Some of our interview respondents reported living in fear of involuntary return as a form of punishment or banishment for breaching host country laws or forfeiting the conditions regulating their refugee status, such as working without a legal permit. Such fears are well-founded: International organisations concur that hundreds of Syrian refugees, including children, have been forcibly returned to Syria (Achilli, 2015; Molnar, 2020). Due to the strict security conditions in refugee camps, the threat of involuntary return is a governance strategy addressing camp-based refugees who fear being deported to Syria if found in breach of regulations.

The decision to stay in Jordan is not always an easy one and is often fraught with trauma and post-traumatic stress caused by events in Syria, even as life in Jordan presents new challenges. A few women we interviewed said that they would not go back to Syria in the near future because of traumatic war memories. One woman (SsInt-YU-RF-019-JOR) recounted how her mother was shot in front of the house and the family buried her body outside the house. She said, “*I will return home someday and remember my mother outside that window.*” In this case, we see the aversion to and desire for mobility intimately intertwined with family networks.

## Resettlement and asylum

Recent literature on transnational migration has emphasised social actors' ability to be mobile (Black & King, 2004; Jeffery & Murison, 2011; Piper, 2009). However, Syrian resettlement rates are very low, with only 176,000 having been resettled worldwide (UNHCR, 2019a). In 2019, only 5,500 Syrians in Jordan were granted asylum by UNHCR to a third country (UNHCR 2019d).

While onward migration to the Gulf countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) is generally unrealistic, many still consider it a desirable outcome. Overwhelmingly, the Gulf countries have not accepted Syrians with refugee status; instead they prefer to send resources to other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan to house and aid refugees there (Hitmas, 2019). Yet, up to 1.5 million Syrian have been admitted to the Gulf countries, however, not as refugees but rather as migrant working “brothers” to live, work and study (Nowrasteh, 2019). Working as a migrant in the Gulf countries is often associated with high-income (mainly professional) jobs, daily life in an Arabic-speaking and Muslim majority country and family visas for those whose income passes the threshold. Obtaining mobility to the Gulf has required work contracts and visas, which some extended family members have been able to achieve. This is also discussed in Section 3.5.

Most Syrians in our study had not registered an application for resettlement. The low number of asylum applications (16%) may be because most of our sample is legally secure in Jordan, at least for the time being. 76 per cent are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, and nearly all are registered locally with the authorities (98.3%). Among those who have applied for asylum with UNHCR (16.8%), the most common countries they want to go to are the United States (34), Canada (20), the United Kingdom (12), with smaller numbers in various European countries, Sweden, Norway and Australia.

Among those we interviewed who had been offered resettlement, one had turned it down due to safety concerns and the adverse living conditions:

*(...) they called me to go to Spain, but I refused because we know some people who went there, they told us that life there is not good; they said that refugees there are not satisfied because they live in private rooms, where the kitchens and bathrooms are shared by all the families (SSInt-YU-RH-011-JOR).*

Some of the female Syrians interviewed expressed reservations about resettling in European countries due to perceived cultural differences, dress code and religious beliefs. A married woman in her forties explained that she did not apply for resettlement because she did not want to live in a Western country:

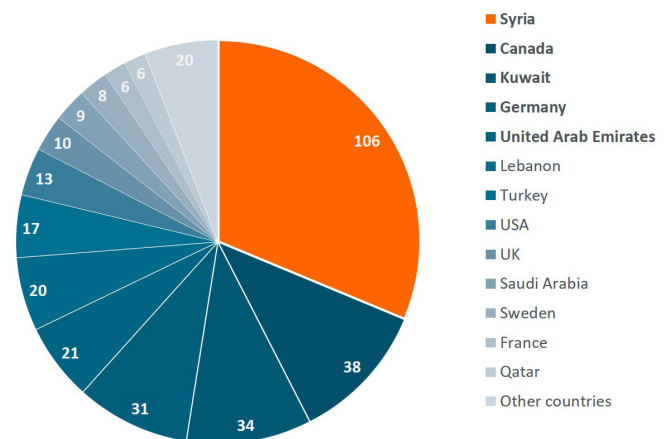
*I have no intention to leave Jordan; although my husband would like to travel to Canada so he could be relieved from work, but I refused to leave. I want to stay here (...). I have been approached by a young man and a woman from UNHCR (mofawadia), to apply for resettlement in a Western country, but I refused because I'm very comfortable living in Jordan; especially because I lived in Jordan for a while before the crisis. Additionally, here we have the same tradition, culture and dress, but there [the West] it is not like this. I can't live in a non-Arab country (SSInt-YU-RH-001-JOR).*

## Transnational networks and mobility aspirations

Some families are now split because some members returned to Syria while others stayed in Jordan, and some family members moved even further away. As a result of Syrian translocal family networks, most of those we interviewed on this theme (90%) expressed some desire to travel outside Jordan to rekindle and protect family- and kin networks (some interviews with extended discussions include SsInt-YU-RF-012-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-013-JOR; SsInt-YU-RF-014-JOR).

As demonstrated in Figure 6, most of our respondents maintain connections in Syria (31%). Beyond Syria, transnational connections include North America and Europe (32%), Gulf countries (21%) and other Middle Eastern countries (11%).

**Figure 6: Transnational connections of Syrian refugees in Jordan**



**Source:** TRAFIG survey data, n=167; **Note:** Only those who have connections beyond Jordan; 88 persons have no connections beyond their place of living

Qualitatively, our interviewees told us that the United Kingdom was their preferred choice of resettlement. This is despite the fact that since 2015, the United Kingdom has admitted less than 20,000 Syrians (Armbruster, 2019), thereby making these Syrians' prospects to be granted resettlement there nearly zero. While the number of reported transnational connections to the United Kingdom is smaller than those to many other countries, accounts by family members who had settled there were reportedly more positive.

In the face of restricted onward mobility, compounded with severe challenges to building an economically viable and secure livelihood in Jordan, Syrian refugees often find themselves contemplating, imagining and dreaming of better lives elsewhere, yet lack realistic pathways to realise these aspirations (Kvittingen et al., 2019). Migration aspirations are not necessarily good predictors of Syrians' ability to migrate because legal and political constraints prevent them from leaving Jordan (Caron, 2020; Carling, 2002; Docquier, Peri, & Ruysen, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018).

## Concluding remarks

Translocal and transnational networks shape Syrian refugees' mobility out of Syria, into Jordan, within Jordan and in aspirations beyond Jordan. Family networks, combined with challenging conditions and limited prospects, can also prompt some Syrians to consider return to Syria. Family networks are, at times, ambiguous and can facilitate transnational migration or domestic mobility and leave others behind. Most respondents maintain connections to Syria, North America and Europe, the Gulf countries and other Middle Eastern countries.

### Key findings

- *Most Syrians in Jordan experience mobility as typically voluntary and limited to 1) out of Zaatari camp and/or 2) within Jordan's northern cities and semi-urban areas.*
- *Opposition political groups and family/kin networks in Syria played a critical role in helping people leave Syria for Jordan.*
- *Multiple family- and kin networks operate simultaneously within Jordan, which makes pathways of mobility dynamic and sometimes unpredictable.*
- *Divided family- and kin networks between Syria, Jordan and beyond influence how Syrians envision and aspire onward mobility, compounded by the limited scope for third-country resettlement.*

### 3.4 Building alliances—Displaced people’s integration and intergroup relations with hosts

This section looks into Theme 4 of TRAFIG, “Building alliances—Displaced people’s integration and intergroup relations with hosts.” The main question this chapter aims to address is: Which processes structure inter-group relations between refugees and hosts and displaces people’s pathways of local integration?” The previous section examined the role of family networks in processes of mobility, and this section examines how refugees build new contacts in the host community, either through family networks or place-based encounters and their experiences. These connections can help meet livelihood needs and reinforce family- and kin networks, and they provide a basis for what we call “de facto integration.” To introduce the findings for this Theme, we present the case of Umm-Omar.

#### Box 1: The Case of Umm-Omar (SSInt-YU-KM-013-JOR)

*Umm-Omar is a 49-year-old Syrian from Daraa. She is married with four children. Even though she only had primary education (fifth grade), she used to have a job in Syria. At the time of the interview, she was not working outside the home. She lives in Ajloun and describes visiting relatives and friends in Irbid regularly. Umm-Omar indicated that her relationship with the Jordanian neighbours was “superficial but affectionate” (“sathat wa leken hanoon”) and that they exchanged visits from time to time. This is similar to 45 per cent of our survey respondents who indicated that they felt “somewhat” accepted by the people in the place where they live. Her relationships with Jordanians in places of worship were good, she said. However, her relationships with employers (when she gets the opportunity to work), with the landlord, and with the school staff was often hostile, and as she says, “racist.” Though her daily life is without conflict with the host community in her neighbourhood and vicinity in general, her family has had a difficult time feeling genuinely integrated into Jordanian society. She says:*

*We have become friends; we became companions. We deal with each other in a good way, respectful and well-intended. As for me, I love meeting with Jordanian women (...). In Ramadan, you find Syrians and Jordanians together, and they met in the mosque, and some Jordanians would like to interact with Syrians, and there are some NGOs that conduct joint activities. We are all Muslims, and we are brothers in Islam. Honestly, when we brought our children from Syria to Jordan, our lives changed. In Syria, my sons were exposed to and witnessed truly terrible things. Now they do not know joy or fun feelings after what they were*

*exposed to previously. So my son had a conflict with a Jordanian friend, and they were about to fight. The Jordanian friend said to him: ‘You’re a refugee.’ And the Jordanian boy burned him with a cigarette. I was afraid for him to leave the house. My son was afraid to leave the house. So he stayed inside. And now it has been three years, and he still hasn’t returned to school. He dropped out. It has become normal. My son works now. Sometimes people do not pay him the entire wages (...). He’s afraid. So he avoids being exposed to a situation in which he will not be paid fully for his effort. He sometimes avoids going out to avoid potential fights with others. He started his life in Syria in fear and still lives in fear here in Jordan. He won’t even go to weddings, which is where you can really mix with people. Sometimes my sons have told me they want to return to Syria, but they feel afraid of the situation there, and they are not comfortable here either. My sons are mostly not social with others. We were in a very difficult situation, and it has caused psychological stress to my boys and me (...). I feel like we are being exposed to a kind of ‘racism.’*

#### De facto integration

The case of Umm-Omar demonstrates that there is a “de facto integration” for Syrian in Jordan. Syrians often referenced shared language, culture (including food, wedding practices, forms of socialising, market practices, etc.), and religion as initial facilitators of local integration into the host society. 56.9 per cent of our survey respondents fled to Jordan because the “language, traditions, and customs are similar to home.” As one said:

*Here, life is not very different from life in Syria. But I guess life here is a bit better. The traditions and customs are very much alike. The price of food is basically the same. Everything is available (...). Here, life is much safer (SSInt-YU-RH-003-JOR),*

In the absence of durable solutions of resettlement or return, and in the presence of a protracted uncertainty about Syrians’ futures in Jordan, refugees and host communities must find ways to co-exist and co-habit. Thus, the often referenced similarities between Syrians and Jordanians make de facto integration a feasible strategy.

“Good relations,” such as those articulated by Umm-Omar, were often defined as without active conflict and neighbourly, but not necessarily friendly or close. Nearly all of the respondents on this theme (90% of interviewees; SsInt-YU-KM-001-JOR through SsInt-YU-KM-020-JOR) said that they were able to engage in daily life in a relatively pleasant way with at least some interaction with their neighbours, market sellers, landlords, or other contacts. Daily interactions were most often defined by mutual respect, greetings and salutations. Some of our respondents’ Jordanian contacts are superficial and distant but respectful, such as a relationship with one’s landlord or in the mosque (SsInt-YU-KM-018-JOR), while others, less frequently, are disrespectful, such as the case of Umm-Omar above.

One often-reported reason for the distant relations between the Jordanian hosts and the Syrian refugees is that many Syrians feared being a burden on the economy and society in Jordan’s impoverished parts. Phrases such as “Jordanians can hardly meet their own needs, let alone help us to meet ours” (SsInt-YU-KM-019-JOR) were repeated regularly. Syrians also noticed the rising prices of consumer goods for Jordanians. One interviewee (SsInt-YU-KM-001-JOR) said that she believed the distance between the two groups was attributable to the negative economic impact of the arrival of large numbers of Syrians on the local economy, causing the cost of living to rise sharply: “The children of Jordan – this is their land, their money and their livelihood.” Another said: “Jordanians are tired. They can’t accept others anymore” (SsInt-YU-KM-004-JOR). Yet another said: “We are a burden on them” (SsInt-YU-KM-006-JOR). This demonstrates that perceived and real changes to local economies have enhanced the distance between Syrians and Jordanians.

### Place-based interactions—From chance to cooperation

Some found that superficial relations have turned into something more substantial, such as neighbours becoming friends (SsInt-YU-KM-004-JOR). The degree of affection or deepening of friendship was often based on relations of “helping” or “need.” For example, Syrians often spoke more highly of their relations when they were with someone who was helping them or when speaking of the notion that one could “call in” a favour. Some relations have developed because of the ability to purchase goods on credit ((SsInt-YU-KM-001,008,017,010,006-JOR). Several said that they had developed close relationships with their landlords, who let them pay rent when they could and often also lent money when they were in need (SsInt-YU-KM-004, 017-JOR).

Many attributed the lack of stronger relationships to a lack of programmes, initiatives or activities that would foster greater community harmony (SsInt-YU-KM-018-JOR). One interviewee said,

*I haven’t participated, but I heard from Syrian women that there are courses available through Mercy Corps. They have programmes for young children and Jordanian and Syrian youth to teach them about photography and drawing. There are religious centres too, for example, the Qur’an memorisation centre. They can sit together and get to know each other. But these programmes are rare (SsInt-YU-KM-001-JOR).*

Another source (SsInt-YU-KM-003-JOR) cited an agricultural programme that he had participated in with other Syrians and Jordanians and enjoyed very much. However, he—and most others—found the projects few and far between and hoped there would be more in the future (SsInt-YU-KM-004, 005, 006-JOR). One had participated in a Qur’an memorisation course with Jordanian women and “loved it”; she attributed her increased interconnections with Jordanian women to the course (SsInt-YU-KM-005-JOR).

### Intergroup conflicts

Conflicts were, thus, most frequently attributed to competition over scarce resources and few jobs (SsInt-YU-KM-007, 010, 011, 017, 018, 019, 020-JOR). Syrians also attributed negative encounters to racism (SsInt-YU-KM-002, 004, 005, 011, 013, 019-JOR) or ignorance (SsInt-YU-KM-017-JOR) by Jordanians. However, one study reported that 96.7 per cent of Jordanians considered Syrian refugees in Jordan as brothers and neighbours (Athamneh & Momani, 2016). Further, Baylouny (2020) indicates that while Jordanians blame Syrians for the country’s problems, they ultimately hold the government responsible for fixing those problems, and they criticised the government rather than the Syrians for not offering solutions.

Many Syrians also blamed children for the majority of the conflicts (SsInt-YU-KM-005, 009, 016-JOR). It was not only Umm-Omar who reported that her children had dropped out of school due to bullying. A 20-year-old Syrian male said:

*Oh, my Jordanian teacher? He hated it [teaching]. He wanted nothing to do with me. He had another job after he was done teaching anyway, and so he would leave early. So there were no lessons. I left school when there was a problem among students—Jordanians vs. Syrians (...). These are the problems between Jordanian and Syrian children. They insult each other and begin hating each other—he insults me, the Jordanian insults his father, and the Syrian says it back (SsInt-YU-KM-019-JOR).*

This example illustrates how education is negatively affected by contested relations within schools—a problem confirmed by other respondents (e.g. SsInt-YU-KM-004-JOR).

*Resolving conflicts was another means by which relations could be deepened. In a case from Zaatari, one interviewee said: Wherever I go, I feel I'm welcomed. Our community in the camp is very conscious and aware of the importance of building relationships. I still remember an incident that happened here in Zaatari. A car driven by a Jordanian hit the son of a neighbour. The car occupants didn't leave the boy. They put him in a special hospital and took his family [and some neighbours] to the hospital in special cars. We reached the hospital, and by God, the hospital was full of [the driver's] relatives. After that, the Jordanians and the neighbours came to the camp, begging the boy's family to drop their right [to pursue charges] and forgive the Jordanian driver. They did. I mean, this is an example that tells how we are accepted by the Jordanians (SsInt-YU-ahmad-011-JOR)*

Here, the respondent indicates that this shows goodwill by the Jordanians that he reported would deepen relations.

## Prospects for the future

Some said that the relations would deteriorate (SsInt-YU-KM-010-JOR) or weaken (SsInt-YU-KM-016-JOR; SsInt-YU-KM-018-JOR). Some even believed that they would “collapse” in the future (SsInt-YU-KM-019-JOR; SsInt-YU-KM-020-JOR). Others were more optimistic: One indicated that intermarriage would result in closer ties between Jordanians and Syrians in the future (SsInt-YU-KM-017-JOR)

Onward migration aspirations were tied tightly to refugees' experiences and expectations for refugee–host relations (SsInt-YU-KM-008-JOR). For example, the decision to stay put and not to move is also a calculation against future uncertainties tied to relations with the host community. As one woman said:

*I have not thought about going somewhere else because here [in Ramtha] you might find people who would help out. If I move to Irbid, for example, I might not be able to pay the rent of the house there. Here, even if I do not pay on time, the landlord may postpone the rent payment for two more months. If I do not have enough money to pay on time, I might bargain with the house owner before I get evicted. I may also be able to pay by instalments instead of just one payment (SsInt-YU-RF-002-JOR).*

## Concluding remarks

Overall, Syrians have been able to achieve de facto integration in the host society. One of the most important assets for Syrian refugees has been their rapid settlement in the host society, which has provided them with a relatively safe and accessible environment where, according to many, they are treated with courtesy and respect. Nonetheless, conflictual relations with Jordanian hosts persist for at least some, despite a common language, religious and cultural ties that have otherwise eased their swift movement into Jordan society. The refugees' relations with the host populations are amicable but distant; often, the relations grow stronger through trust-based economic ties and conflict resolution. Everyday safety is not a primary concern, but bullying among school-aged children has had significant adverse effects for some.

### Key findings

- *Syrians experience de facto integration in Jordan due to shared language, religious, and socio-cultural ties.*
- *Some Syrians reported distancing from Jordanians as they felt and feared burdening host communities.*
- *Syrians forge new ties with the host community through trust-based relations, including housing rentals, conflict resolution and NGO-facilitated engagements.*
- *Conflicts are common among school-aged children and adversely affect educational prospects.*

### 3.5 Seizing opportunities—Development incentives and new economic interactions

This section looks into Theme 5 of TRAFIG, “Seizing Opportunities—Development incentives and new economic interactions.” The main overarching question for this theme is: “What are the economic impacts of protracted displacement situations and transnational figurations in the medium and long-term, and how can policies contribute to maximising development effects?”

By the end of 2019, nearly 300,000 registered Syrian refugees were of working age, and approximately half of them were issued a work permit (UNHCR, 2019c). However, estimates of the number of Syrians working without a work permit in Jordan are disputed and range from 85,000 to 330,829 (Razzaz, 2017). Many Syrian acknowledge that work permits are available to them but do not know how to access them or get a job with them (International Labour Organization, 2017; Higher Population Council, 2018; Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019; Stave & Hillesund, 2015). Work permits are also underutilised because of the fear that employers might not want to take on the necessary time and costs to complete the processes for a permit, especially if the job is a short-term or temporary one (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019). With the likely chance of being detected and, if found violating regulations, Syrians can be sanctioned or deported, which adds to security concerns (Molnar, 2020).

Among our survey respondents, 47.2 per cent had worked for pay during the previous 30 days, but only about half had work permits (26%). This indicates that at least some of our respondents are working without a permit. Among those who worked, the majority reported their pay came from formal employment with a contract (45%), while 35 per cent reported working without a contract and informally.

Overwhelmingly, those who worked without a contract and informally were from out-of-camp peri-urban and urban areas (93%). By contrast, among those who reported formal employment with a regular contract, 84.6 per cent were from Zaatari. This is yet another area where the in-camp/out-of-camp differences emerge: Out-of-camp survey respondents more frequently reported employment precarity than those living in Zaatari.

Various economic interactions and development incentives include Syrians in Jordan and have an impact on Syrians’ abilities to secure their livelihoods. We focus on six key areas:

1. Migrant labour and remittances;
2. Vocational training;
3. Near-camp employment and Cash-for-Work in Zaatari;
4. Urban employment;
5. Competition with other labour groups;
6. Transforming local markets and trade linkages.

#### Migrant labour and remittances

Some Syrians report receiving remittances from families or relatives abroad. Exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, but it is believed that up to 30 per cent of Syrian households receive informal money transfers, both domestically and internationally (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pederson, 2019). Among our survey respondents, 16 per cent indicated that transnational remittances were a primary or secondary source of income. Gulf countries are the main source of funds for Syrians in Jordan (50%) followed by funds from Syrians in Syria to Syrians in Jordan (17%).

Families we interviewed are pursuing a mixed strategy of local support, regional employment, and international migration. To this end, those who have been able to take advantage of job openings in Gulf countries support their families by sending remittances. An example of this is a family with five children where the husband works in the Gulf:

*My husband works in Kuwait. He supports us. We do not receive support from any other source. I have two brothers here in Jordan. Two of my husband’s sisters are here in Jordan, one in Irbid and the other in Ramtha (SsInt-YU-WA-002-JOR).*

In this case, the remittances are sufficient to support the family, in other cases, remittances help pay house rents (SsInt-YU-WA-004-JOR), yet both cases underline the importance of employment abroad and remittances for household viability. Remittances can offset familial poverty and improve livelihoods.

#### Vocational training

UNHCR and others offer a range of vocational training courses and options to refugees (SSInt-YU-RH-001-JOR). In some cases, NGOs provide the training and transport for free, making it easier for more women to take part (Durable Solutions Platform, 2020). When transportation costs are not covered, it makes it all the more challenging for Syrians to attend, and many lack foreknowledge of the transportation benefit. Notwithstanding transportation costs, many women cannot attend because of childcare needs.

Syrians indicated that the main problem is finding work after graduation (SSInt-YU-RH-002-JOR) and the training is not directly associated with work opportunities (FGD-YU-RF-001-JOR). Some men complain of not being able to afford to enrol in vocational training because they need to work and earn money (SsInt-YU-WA-017-JOR ).



## Near-camp employment and Cash-for-Work Programme

The refugees who live in Zaatari report challenges in finding work and complain about the unfair distribution of jobs within the camp (SsInt-YU-ahmad-014-JOR). Some of the residents can find work in the fields surrounding the camp, which technically requires a valid work permit. However, there are also informal work-for-pay schemes in farming projects outside the camp for a daily wage of five JOD (approx. US \$7). Almost one-quarter (23%) indicated that they work (with and without a permit) in agriculture projects as a primary or secondary source of income.

The employment options within the camp are scarce and come primarily from the Cash-for-Work Programme (Tobin & Otis Campbell, 2016). In the Cash-for-Work Programme, camp residents who “volunteer” for NGOs receive a standard stipend that is determined by whether the work is deemed highly skilled (2 JOD/hr), skilled (1.50 JOD/hr) or unskilled (1 JOD/hr). Each “volunteer” may work for six hours per day. A few Zaatari residents complained that favouritism and *wasta* (“connections”) play a major role in awarding the Cash-for-Work positions (SsInt-YU-ahmad-014-JOR). In the words of one resident:

*I applied for a job as a guard more than once, but there is cronyism in recruitment within the camp. (...) I filed a complaint with the commission, but they did not take any action. Only God can help me (SsInt-YU-ahmad-007-JOR).*

Camp residents also complain of being qualified but neither being selected nor offered Cash-for-Work employment. Most Cash-for-Work contracts are limited to three and six months to allow for available work to be rotated among residents (Tobin & Otis Campbell, 2016).

The same complaint emerged on the issue of work permits both inside and outside of the camp, a procedure that involves getting security clearance for those who live in Zaatari:

*Here, we are governed by security reports and work permits. By God, even the work permits are issued through cronyism (wasta). (...) Getting a work permit is totally dependent on having wasta. There are many people in the camp who have wasta outside the camp, with influential people in the local community, and they ask for labour for a specific job outside the camp.” The scarcity of jobs also reflects the common complaint that most of the available jobs in the Mafraq governorate are picked up by outsiders from Amman or Irbid (SsInt-YU-ahmad-013-JOR).*

## Urban employment

Many male urban refugees have found employment in low-paid and low-skilled (service sector) professions in the informal sector (FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR; International Labour Organization, 2017; Simpson & Abo Zayed, 2019). The same applies to young boys and school dropouts who are working as helping hands in supermarkets and grocery shops. Almost none of the urban refugees reported being employed through government and NGO programmes or on-the-job training schemes.

Some reported that being formally registered as a worker will prevent you from receiving assistance from UNHCR and (I)NGOs, which is a regularly occurring fear that prevents at least some Syrians from applying for work permits (International Labour Organization, 2017). One respondent (BInt-YU-TA-001-JOR) indicated that once he mentioned that he had an irregular part-time job, he was marked as unqualified for aid support even though he has six children. He then became worried that this would also affect his asylum application. With an unemployment rate of 60 per cent among Syrians in Jordan (Tiltne, Zhan, & Pederson, 2019), the lack of viable work options and pervasive job market exclusion and concerns push many Syrians to the informal sector.

A quote from a married woman in her forties illustrates that the lack of labour market access limits work options for women, particularly married women:

*I have no job. I looked for a job, but I haven't been able to find one so far. I'm still looking for one. I have some skills as a coiffeur, so I can work in a beauty shop if I were given the chance. I also have some skills as a tailor. I can also teach and be a tutor. I have no health problems that prevent me from working (SsInt-YU-WA-005-JOR).*

Options for employment are scarce. This is seconded by a young female student in her 20s (SsInt-YU-WA-004-JOR): “The options for legal employment are very rare here. Only illegal employment is possible. And the salaries are very low.” Another problem for women’s employment is that jobs may require working long hours for low pay and involves commuting with little net benefit:

*I once got an offer through a friend of mine ( ...). We were paid only six JOD a day. I had to pay most of the amount I receive from work for commuting. I could only save one JOD a day! (SsInt-YU-WA-016-JOR).*

For others, work options outside of the home may be circumscribed by cultural proscriptions. This is reflected in this quote from a married woman in her mid-thirties: “It is shameful in my family for a woman to work outside the home” (SsInt-YU-WA-020-JOR).

Some mentioned that business owners prefer Syrian labour because they are more flexible, work under pressure and have good communication skills in dealing with customers (SsInt-YU-TA-011-JOR). Jordanian businesses also profited from the surplus Syrian labourers who will typically accept lower wages and longer working hours than their Jordanian peers (SsInt-YU-TA-001-JOR; SsInt-YU-TA-004-JOR; FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR; BInt-YU-TA-001-JOR). Some Syrians described this as “exploitation” (FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR). As one respondent described it:

*(...). The problem is that when I was searching for a job, the business owners offered me the minimum wages with 12 working hours per day (...) even though it is not enough to live off (SsInt-YU-TA-002-JOR).*

## Competition with other groups

Our data supports studies that show that Syrian labour more often creates competition with other foreign workers (mainly Egyptians) than with local Jordanians (BInt-YU-TA-001-JOR; FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR; SsInt-YU-TA-006-JOR; see also Razzaz, 2017). Jordanian labour may even increase due to the “hiring quotas” in the Jordan Compact that guarantee employment rates among Jordanians (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019). Some respondents mentioned that Syrians work informally in some professions that are closed to them (such as hairdressing) and that they tend to charge their customers competitive prices (SsInt-YU-TA-002-JOR). Others work in restricted sectors such as mobile phone shops, but they do it in partnership with Jordanians to obtain the required license. In this case, the Jordanian partner may benefit from this partnership with no material input (SsInt-YU-TA-002-JOR). However, joint business ventures can be risky and prone to fraud and exploitation with limited options for seeking redress (SsInt-YU-TA-004-JOR).

## Transforming local markets and trade linkages

The respondents reported that the Syrians brought new ideas to certain sectors, including the food industry, service and hospitality sectors and the construction sector in the interior decoration of buildings and apartments (FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR).

One area in which Syrian economic activity has increased is the food and hospitality sector. Some interviewees indicated that there had been many “Syrian chefs” before the Syrian Crisis. These Syrian chefs were locally known for mastering skills in Middle Eastern cooking, and they earned a good income in general. As a result of the Syrian crisis, many Syrians now work in the food and hospitality industry either with current and new businesses and in restaurants (SsInt-YU-TA-001-JOR; FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR). Some commented on the general improvement this brought to the food and hospitality sector in Jordan:

*(...) the Syrians have a positive impact, look around you, in each corner in this area you will see a shop, restaurant owned or operated by Syrians, and they improve its quality. For example, if you know ‘Al-Sunbula Bakery’ how [bad] it was before and how [good] it became after it was owned and operated by Syrians (...) (SsInt-YU-TA-005-JOR).*

According to our Syrian respondents, Syrians' influx led to a rise in rent for local apartments, benefitting Jordanian landlords but burdening the tenants (FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR; BInt-YU-TA-001-JOR; SsInt-YU-TA-001-JOR). Others pointed out that housing-related expenses, such as cooking gas, had become costly for Jordanian and Syrians alike (SsInt-YU-TA-006-JOR).

Another issue raised in focus groups was that the Syrian refugees had created well-paying jobs for the Jordanians who are working with the international aid agencies and NGO's who provide health services and other supported services. However, the Syrians themselves are not benefiting from these opportunities to the same degree as the Jordanians. One potential cause is that according to the Jordanian labour laws, some managerial positions are restricted to Jordanian nationality holders (e.g. FGD-YU-TA-001-JOR).

## Concluding remarks

This section argues that the impact of Syrian refugees on the economy is multifaceted for the Syrians themselves and the local Jordanians. Formal labour with valid work permits is difficult to obtain, especially for those in urban areas. A general lack of job opportunities, combined with restricted access and cultural proscriptions, pushes many out of the labour market, especially women, or into informal labour in restricted sectors, which carries additional risks. Finding labour for Zaatari residents is extremely challenging because of limited contracts offered to a select few. As a result, Syrian refugees in Jordan also rely upon remittances and migrant labour as a supportive source of necessary income.

### Key findings

- *Economic growth and opportunities were felt most in the food and hospitality, housing, and the international aid and NGO sectors.*
- *Syrians are challenged to access the labour market in legal, dignified and meaningful ways, often competing with other migrant laborers or even with Jordanians.*
- *The long history of economic ties between Syria and Jordan has helped Syrians and Jordanians establish collaborative trade and labour relations.*
- *Camp-based refugees have the fewest job opportunities and economic interactions with the host society.*

## 4. Cross-cutting findings and emerging trends

In Chapter 3, we discussed the five main themes of TRAFIG research. Clearly, the themes are closely interconnected. Here we examine some of the cross-cutting findings and emerging trends that we discerned in the case of Syrians in Jordan. Please note that these findings have not been at the focus of our research but have emerged from our data analysis and merit follow-up research.

### 4.1 Defining “culture” in assessing mobility

The cultural, religious and linguistic ties between the host- and sending countries has contributed to ambivalent mobility aspirations. “Cultural similarity” is often glossed as the same language, religion, family- and kin relations and political and historical backgrounds, which Syrians share with Jordanians. Refugees themselves often express desires to stay in places where they share these aspects of their everyday dealings with the host community. However, when questions about culture are expanded to include larger perceptions of “the good life”, including longevity and health care, access to and equity in merit-based systems for economic activity and livelihoods, rights to religious practice and freedoms of speech, etc., refugees prefer onward mobility. Despite the similarities between Syrians and Jordanians, many Syrian refugees expressed a desire to move to European, North American, or Gulf countries, searching for the, sometimes idealised, “good life”. Thus, future research that challenges simplified explanations of “culture” and approaches mobility aspirations holistically can reveal much about the Syrian case..

### 4.2 The mobility–integration nexus

In the absence of durable solutions for Syrians in Jordan, and in the midst of their protracted stay, Syrians have become de facto integrated into Jordanian society. Many of the respondents indicated that they had superficial but affectionate relations with the host community, though they are not very deep. A cross-cutting question that emerges is: “To what degree does integration impede or facilitate mobility?” In other words, are those less integrated more likely to be mobile? And are those more integrated less likely to be mobile?

Our preliminary analyses indicate that those who moved out of Zaatari, for example, did so because they had family connections who sponsored them (*kafala*). However, once outside the camp, mobility patterns changed, and it was no longer that straightforward to follow family-based trajectories. Especially

considering the strain and fragmentation of family networks, mobility trajectories within Jordan were not necessarily predictable. Family networks were influenced and even supplanted by economic need and reception by the host society, which impacted mobility. As a result, once a Syrian family had found a reliable landlord or neighbourhood, they would be less willing to “risk” a bad one, even if it meant being farther away from family- and kin networks.

Female heads of households merit a closer examination. Their lived experiences influence their future aspirations, connections with family networks and make them consider their sons’ distinctive security needs (e.g. that return to Syria would result in their forced conscription). In Mafraq, Jordanian–Syrian relations are deep-rooted by decades of intermarriage relations and commerce. With relevance to mobility, our findings indicate that female Syrian refugees there were less inclined to resettle within Jordan or emigrate abroad than women interviewed in other governorates in Jordan. We believe that this is due to the familiarity of Mafraq given their own backgrounds. The interviewed women’s main goal is to secure a better education and improved living conditions for their families, and many women in female-headed households believed that this could be best achieved in Mafraq.

### 4.3 Trust-based interactions

Our research has shown that trust-based interactions were one of the first forms of non-familial solidarity engendered within new groups of Syrians, for example as they left Syria and entered Jordan. Trust-based interactions extend to relations between Syrians and Jordanians, as demonstrated in mobility patterns, social interactions, economic cooperation and market-based interactions. These trust-based interactions of non-familial solidarity may well expand into larger networks of support for Syrians and Jordanians alike.

The challenge is that many of these relations begin on an unequal footing: Jordanians are often in positions of power as the lessors, creditors, and owners. Syrians, as the borrowers and renters, are in less powerful positions. Yet, these relationships can yield enhanced and deeper interactions between Syrians and Jordanians because they are based on trust. An examination of trust-based relationships in more detail and in different contexts would reveal much about the integration processes, of creating new connections and growing social networks. Doing so with an eye to the power differentials is also warranted as a means to demonstrate the longer-term impacts on Syrians and their future lives in Jordan.

#### 4.4 The role of NGOs in experiencing integration

In Theme 4, we were surprised to find that NGO-facilitated gatherings of Syrians and Jordanians were so well-received as a strategy for introductions and prompting interconnections. Respondents referred several times to religious classes and Qur'an memorisation courses. Syrian respondents also mentioned additional classes in building soft skills, vocational training, and even casual gatherings of various kinds as conducive to facilitating introductions and engendering support for integration. We suspect that these classes are important as they alter the terms for integration experiences from needs-based forms of dependency and support to that of equal status in a shared-learning environment. Future research into processes of integration would benefit from a deeper investigation of these forms.

#### 4.5 Gendered experiences of protracted displacement

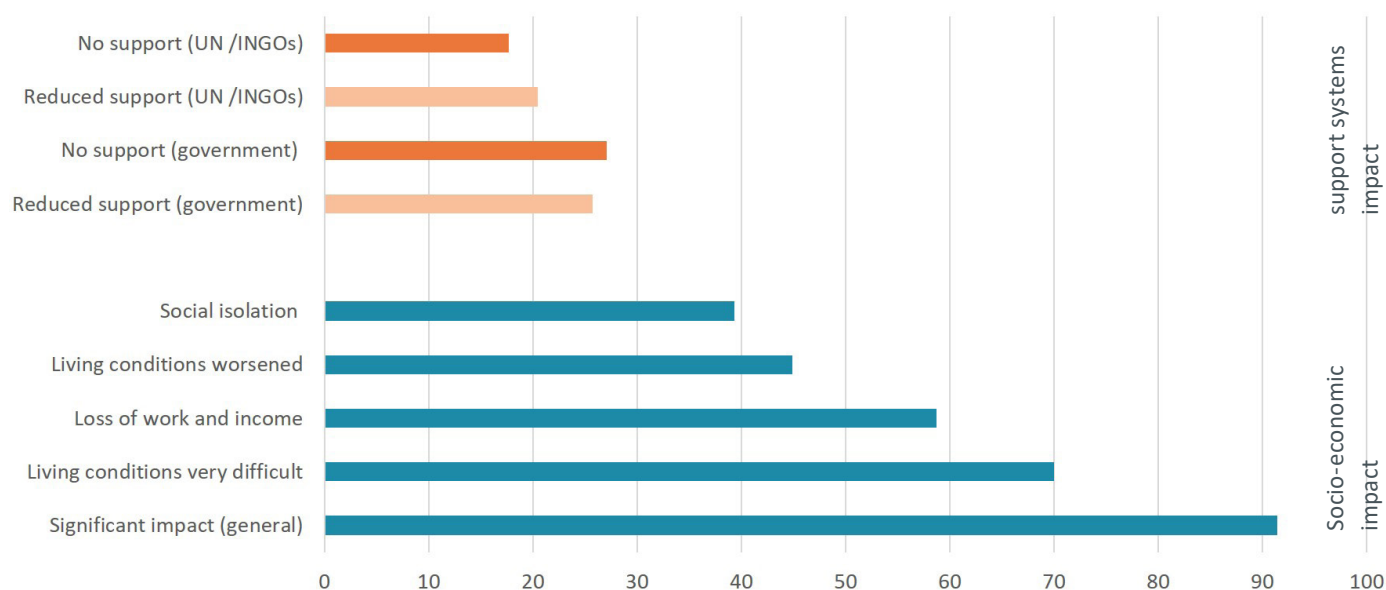
In our qualitative and quantitative samples, women are slightly better represented than men are (55:45). Beyond discussing women's vulnerabilities as heads-of-households, personal concerns for safety and their roles and responsibilities as mothers and caretakers of the home, our analyses have thus far not focussed on the distinctly gendered experiences of women. A more gendered perspective would enrich our understanding of women's experiences of protracted displacement.

#### 4.6 Vulnerability and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a new and uncharted factor that has an impact on Syrian refugees in Jordan. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Jordanian government enacted some of the world's strictest lockdown and quarantine measures. They included country-wide curfews, prohibiting the movement outside of one's own home, including bans on driving or even taking out one's waste, and systematic government distribution of food and medicine to the entire country. Over the months to follow, these measures were lifted and instead implemented in targeted hotspots. However, fears of widespread outbreaks that could overwhelm the underserved health care service have persisted. While the extreme lockdown measures were received quite well domestically, they proved unsustainable for the longer-term livelihoods of the 750,000 Syrian refugees in the country, resulting in adverse outcomes for the Syrians.

Our survey data show the economic impacts of the Jordanian government's prevention measures on Syrian refugees. In Figure 7, we see that nearly all respondents were affected socio-economically (91%), with many experiencing a reduction in support systems (26%). Further studies will shed light on these important impacts.

Figure 7: Livelihood impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: TRAFIG survey data, n=305; Note: in per cent

## Conclusions and outlook

The main research question of the TRAFIG research is: “How are protractedness, dependency and vulnerability related to the factor of local and translocal connectivity and mobility, and in turn, how can connectivity and mobility be utilised to enhance self-reliance and strengthen the resilience of displaced people? (Etzold et al., 2019). The hypothesis underlying this question is that “the more connected and mobile refugees, IDPs, and other migrants are, the less likely they are to experience protracted displacement. Conversely, the less connected and the more immobilised displaced persons are, the greater the risk that they are vulnerable, dependent, and become stuck in precarity.” How then can this question be answered by turning to the case of Syrians in Jordan?

### Durable solutions remain out of reach, but refugees are de facto integrated

Syrian refugees are unable to return home because of danger, instability and political threats. They are unable—and, at times, unwilling—to resettle in third countries and are, instead, granted residency permits from the Jordanian government that grant access to work in certain sectors, health and schooling. Additionally, UNHCR and aid organisations provide (government-sanctioned) emergency aid and protection for refugees. The assistance offered has significant gaps, leaving many Syrians challenged to secure their livelihoods now in the context of an uncertain future. Despite these limitations, the Syrian refugees experience a de facto integration in Jordanian society and host communities. Pre-war trade relations and post-displacement economic ties have eased economic integration, with camp-based refugees the least integrated.

### Better connected families tend to fare better

Family- and kin networks play a mixed role vis-à-vis connectivity and mobility within this context of future uncertainty. Generally, those with pre-existing (pre-Syrian crisis) relationships and experiences (work, family or leisure) in Jordan and with Jordanians fared better in terms of connecting and integrating with the host population. Those who live in the Zaatari refugee camp had less contact with the host population and relied more on close family networks with whom they actively co-habit and congregate. Among urban Syrians, by contrast, immediate family members were more often dispersed across Jordan and transnationally, reflecting their greater mobility and transnational linkages. Family networks proved vital in security provision during displacement from Syria and into Jordan and during resettlement from refugee camps to the urban areas. However, family networks alone have not resolved the need for durable solutions to protracted displacement.

### Transnational links improve livelihoods and household viability

The study has demonstrated that transnational linkages are common in the sample and influence both migration aspirations (where to go), timing (when to go) and the cost–benefit of seeking asylum in third countries (whether to go). Families with members who are employed abroad benefit from remittances that assist them as they secure their livelihoods. However, there are indications that divorce rates may increase following displacement. Transnational linkages are familial but may also be commercial and professional, as demonstrated by the role of pre-conflict trade links between Jordanians and Syrians and post-conflict joint ventures. Enabling transnational relations may increase potential income streams, mobility- and asylum options that, in the longer term, could offset a reduction in aid to Syrian refugees and ease the strain on host countries such as Jordan.

### Differences between Zaatari and out-of-camp

The study shows that there are distinctive differences between Zaatari-based refugees and those outside the camp. Work opportunities are scarce and often precarious and temporary for those in Zaatari. Zaatari-based refugees are the least translocally and transnationally connected and compare unfavourably with Syrians in urban areas who are better connected and integrated with the host population. Zaatari-based refugees suffer from security concerns and distinctive uncertainties about their futures. The hardships of Zaatari camp make them more likely to consider return to Syria than those living outside camps. In few cases, families’ translocal strategies—dual residence in camp and city—help overcome the challenges of residency in Zaatari while maximising benefits. In more general terms, the findings support UNHCR’s “Alternatives to Camp” policy, which seeks to replace camp-based responses with bolstered support for non-camp refugees (2014).

### Job openings are scarce and should be expanded

There are limited job opportunities, especially for women, which makes Jordan’s labour market very challenging. Although Jordanian nationals, migrant workers and Syrian refugees each have unique skills, characteristics and traditional work domains, the semi-skilled and unskilled workers compete for limited job opportunities. Skilled or professional workers often do not compete because Jordanian labour law has protected those sectors, keeping them closed to non-nationals.

The problem of unemployment among Syrians is exacerbated by Jordan's high unemployment rate and, more generally, low wages and long working hours and commutes. This has long-term livelihood implications for the Syrians' protracted displacement in Jordan and underscores the importance of expanding job creation for refugees under the Jordan Compact.

### **Education is desired but not accessed by all**

This study has demonstrated the importance refugee families place on accessing quality education. The majority of Syrian refugee families hail from rural areas and are semi-skilled or unskilled workers with a modest educational background. However, most value education and desire to enrol their children in primary schools. Public schools are free for Syrians in Jordan, but their low quality and conflicts with the host community children make private schools a preferred alternative for the minority that can afford it. The low returns on education, combined with economic hardships and bullying, increase drop-out rates and child-labour. Only very few are enrolled in tertiary education supported by scholarships. Even though many have completed vocational training courses, they do not necessarily help to obtain jobs after completion.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>3RP</b>	Syrian Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan
<b>BICC</b>	Bonn International Center for Conversion
<b>CBOs</b>	Community-based organisations
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>TRAFIG</b>	Transnational Figurations of Displacement (EU-funded research project)
<b>JOD</b>	Jordanian Dinar
<b>JRP</b>	Jordan Response Plan
<b>SRAD</b>	Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>US</b>	United States

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TRAFIG provides academic evidence on refugee movements and protracted displacement; analyses which conditions could help to improve displaced people's everyday lives and informs policymakers on how to develop solutions to protracted displacement.

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