



# UNPACKING GENDERED REALITIES IN DISPLACEMENT: The status of Syrian refugee women in Jordan



### **About this study**

This study was commissioned by the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States, with research undertaken in late 2017 and early 2018.

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RESEARCH PAPER

# UNPACKING GENDERED REALITIES IN DISPLACEMENT:

## The status of Syrian refugee women in Jordan



**REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ARAB STATES  
UN WOMEN**

Cairo, November 2018



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Syria crisis has resulted in the forcible displacement of hundreds of thousands of people across the region, many of whom are seeking protection in neighboring countries, including the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jordan continues to support one of the largest Syrian refugee populations in the world, nearly 700,000 of which are formally registered with UNHCR. Eighty-six percent (86%) of Syrian refugees live below the Jordanian poverty line and three quarters (75%) are considered severely or highly shelter vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> For the nearly half of Syrian refugees that are women and girls, which this report is focused on, the risks encountered in displacement are heightened by gender discrimination and inequalities.

This study, commissioned by UN Women and undertaken by Ipsos, seeks to better understand the changing nature of gender dynamics, women's roles and responsibilities in displacement, their experiences of and access to humanitarian aid, and experiences of violence. It consists of 39 qualitative in-depth interviews with Syrian refugee women living in urban and rural host communities in Amman, Mafraq, and Irbid that took place in January 2018.

In both Syria and in displacement in Jordan, conservative gender roles have kept many women and girls from participating equitably in the public sphere, a notion that is directly challenged by the need for Syrian refugee women in Jordan to provide for their families. Unsurprisingly, the women who participated in this study cited a lack of financial resources as their primary concern. Women discussed the limited options available to them to deal with these shortages. For some, these options included illegally moving away from refugee camps, where work opportunities were limited, to find better work, or taking jobs that they would not have otherwise taken. For almost all, this meant making sacrifices: some women chose to eat poorly or significantly less to ensure food for their families, while others chose to borrow money from shops, family, or neighbors.

For those that were able to access humanitarian aid, it was cited as insufficient and inconsistent. Many

women reported not completely understanding the aid system, including where to apply for, and access such aid. Women expressed a general distrust in the humanitarian aid system, and the sentiment that they would be better off if they were able to work and provide for their families themselves, rather than be dependent on aid. In addition to general confusion and distrust, a few women reported hearing of incidents where service providers had propositioned female heads of household, offering them additional aid.

Consistent with prior UN Women research on livelihoods in Jordan<sup>2</sup>, many women reported wanting to be able to contribute to household income, but expressed difficulties finding work. Issues ranged from the inability to obtain a work permit to a lack of available jobs that were considered appropriate for women. This led women to accept informal employment: tailoring, cleaning houses, tutoring, and cooking for neighbors and family. Informal, home based employment, was accepted by many as the only option available to them, rather than as their preferred modality for engagement in the labor market. While some women saw this work as shameful or demeaning, they did report feeling grateful that they were able to help their families survive.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 40.

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, (2017), Jordanian And Syrian Refugee Women's Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Towards Employment (Report). <http://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/3/jordanian-and-syrian-refugee-womens-labour-force-participation-and-attitudes-towards-employment>

This is unsurprising given the importance that women in this study placed on ensuring the welfare of their children. For some, limited financial resources meant withdrawing children from school to save money and so that children could contribute to household income as well. More often, women spoke about the poor quality of available education for Syrian refugees, saying that their children were often bullied and harassed by teachers and students, and that transportation to and from school was either expensive or risky, especially for young girls traveling alone.

Traveling to and from school was cited as just one place where female Syrian refugees are at risk of violence. Women that participated in this study spoke frequently about violence against women and girls (VAW) as both a contributing factor to, and a result of the precarious livelihoods of Syrian refugees in displacement in Jordan. For many, VAW occurred both in the public and private spheres in displacement in Jordan. For those that spoke about VAW in the private sphere, or in the household, many said that while it was an occurrence prior to the Syria crisis, it has been exacerbated since, whether because of the additional financial stress, household tensions, or other reasons. For many of those that spoke about VAW in the public sphere, phenomena like verbal harassment had become so commonplace that women no longer considered them to be disruptive, or a form of violence, at all.

Women spoke to community tensions. While some dealt with increased tensions by avoiding the public sphere all together, others spoke about their experiences and those of their friends and neighbors, many of whom had experienced incidents that they would characterize as VAW. Typically, women chose not to report incidents of violence out of fear of the consequences or in order to protect their families from retribution or even deportation.

The information gathered from this study, supported by a comprehensive literature review, highlights the specific risks and challenges female Syrian refugees face in displacement in Jordan. In response to these findings, the report has made the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that the **approach to gender mainstreaming in humanitarian and resilience programming is one that prioritizes both women's access to services and women's empowerment**; by ensuring that programs address issues of women's access (equal access of services), while also tackling gender discrimination and inequalities, combining service delivery with support to women's leadership, and including efforts to broker meaningful dialogue around gender inequalities, violence prevention and advocacy to promote gender equal legal reform;
2. Increase **access to employment services and financial resources for female Syrian refugees, actively targeting female refugees – and in particular female headed households - for livelihoods programming**. Ensuring that at least 30% of livelihoods opportunities go to women and girls is the minimal threshold to demonstrate commitment and support women's empowerment and recovery;

In order to avoid the socio-cultural constraints that affects women's employability in the formal sector, it's recommended that the Government of Jordan amend the closed occupation for non-Jordanians, allowing women to apply for a work permit in sectors that fits women's preferences, including part time work opportunities. Childcare facilities and safe and affordable transportation to the work place are crucial components to enhance the sustainability of the livelihoods opportunities provided by the private sector, UN Agencies and NGOs;

3. Continue to **support interactive, safe spaces for female Syrian refugees to meet, network and socialize**, not only as a strategy for empowerment, but also to enhance awareness and reporting of gender-based violence, and use of GBV services. Within these spaces, target adolescent girls to provide alternatives to child marriage, increase the availability and quality of psychosocial support services and day care facilities to ensure women participation;
4. Raise awareness on the importance of the registration and regularization process and the consequences of informal marriage in Jordan

emphasizing its link with birth certificates. Lack of documentation has a special impact on female head of households (separated, widows, divorced) and their children, who need to prove their status in order to have access to services and benefits;

5. Continue to ensure **information sharing and awareness raising on available services**, pairing approaches that utilize technology with those that are based on word of mouth;
6. Promote **accountability for violence against women**, supporting the judicial system to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women within the refugee community; ensuring access to justice by providing legal support services, and informing about the PSEA referral mechanism in place;
7. Recognize the positive correlation between the strength of women's movements and organizations and gender-equal societies, and **invest in women led organizations (Syrian and Jordanian)** as a key driver of short-term and long-term social equality and cohesion.

# OVERVIEW OF THE SYRIA CRISIS IN JORDAN

According to the latest census, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosts 1.4 million Syrians, including refugees and those that arrived prior to the Syria crisis. Latest UNHCR estimates put the number of registered refugees at about half of this total: 659,063,<sup>3</sup> with an unknown number of Syrian refugees currently living in Jordan without formal registration. Of registered refugees, 50% are female, and 25% are females under the age of 18.<sup>4</sup>

While the Government of Jordan has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, in 1998 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with UNHCR, which acts as the legal framework for the treatment of refugees. All Syrian refugees that enter Jordan are required to register in a refugee camp. Until 2015, Syrian refugees could leave camps and move into host communities through the bailout process.<sup>5</sup> In 2015 the bailout process was informally suspended. Today, roughly 140,000 refugees live in camp settings, including Za'atari (80,000<sup>6</sup>), and Azraq (50,000, with plans to expand to 100,000<sup>7</sup>). The vast majority (78.5%<sup>8</sup>) live outside of camps. Of the approximately 500,000 refugees living in hosting communities in Jordan, most reside in Amman, followed by Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa,<sup>9</sup> all

areas relatively proximate to the Syrian Arab Republic. Estimates put the number of Syrian refugees that have left camps without going through the bailout process at up to 175,000.<sup>10</sup>

As the Syria conflict continues, the pressures of displacement on the Government of Jordan, Jordanian hosting communities, and refugees themselves increase. The Government of Jordan provides free access to basic services, including education, to Syrian refugees.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the crisis, core inflation increased from 3.4% in 2013 to 4.6% in 2014, primarily driven by rising rents.<sup>12</sup> Public debt has grown by 53%

3 Jordan census data available at [http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos\\_home\\_e/main/population/census2015/index.htm](http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/population/census2015/index.htm).

4 UNHCR, Syria Refugee Regional Response, Inter-agency Sharing Portal: Jordan, April 2018, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>.

5 This obliged refugees to meet a number of requirements including having a Jordanian sponsor outside of the camps who was over the age of 35 and a direct relative. International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "Securing Status: Syrian refugees and the documentation of legal status, identity, and family relationships in Jordan," November 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/securing-status-syrian-refugees-and-documentation-legal-status-identity-and-family>, 11.

6 UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response: Jordan.

7 UNHCR, "Azraq Camp Fact Sheet," April 2017, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=251&country=107>.

8 UNHCR, "External Statistical Report on UNHCR Registered Syrians as of 15 September 2017."

9 TAK Al-Qdah and M Lacroix, "Syrian Refugees In Jordan: Social Workers Use a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) Methodology For Needs Assessment, Human Rights and

Community Development," *International Social Work*, 2016;60(3): 620.

10 IHRC and NRC, "Securing Status," 8.

11 Healthcare in public facilities was free for Syrian refugees from the beginning of the crisis until 2014, when a cost-sharing system was implemented, with Syrians paying fees equal to those of uninsured Jordanians. As of February 2018, all subsidized healthcare for Syrian refugees has ceased, which leads to delays in seeking treatment. This is particularly concerning when considering that 41% of Syrians are part of families with severe health vulnerability. S Doocy et al., "Health Service Access and Utilization among Syrian Refugees in Jordan," *International Journal for Equity in Health*, July 14, 2016: 108, doi:10.1186/s12939-016-0399-4; A Su, "Syrian refugee baby gets life-saving surgery, others wait," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/syrian-refugee-baby-gets-life-saving-surgery-others-wait/2018/03/14/53311092-274f-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.08feec80bac5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-refugee-baby-gets-life-saving-surgery-others-wait/2018/03/14/53311092-274f-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc_story.html?utm_term=.08feec80bac5); UNICEF in Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 90.

12 International Monetary Fund, "The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa," September 2016, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1608.pdf>, 9.

and now represents 80% of GDP.<sup>13</sup> Municipalities lack sufficient capacity to deliver and maintain services, and the population increase has created a need for new roads and expanded electricity infrastructure,<sup>14</sup> water shortages are more frequent, waste collection systems are strained, and health and education facilities become increasingly overburdened.<sup>15,16</sup>

The major influx of school-aged refugees has inundated the already cash-strapped and overcrowded educational infrastructure in Jordan. To cope with an overwhelmed school system, Jordanian schools have two sessions: one in the morning, typically for Jordanians students, and one in the afternoon to accommodate Syrian refugee students. While this shift system reduces the cost of providing education for all, it means fewer hours of quality instruction for both Jordanian and Syrian students.<sup>17</sup>

With the population increase in Jordan – estimated to be 8% as a result of the crisis<sup>18</sup> – unemployment and underemployment is increasing, and Jordanian nationals find themselves in direct competition with Syrian refugees for jobs.<sup>19</sup> The ILO reports that between 2011 and 2014, Jordanian unemployment increased from 14.5% to 22.1%,<sup>20</sup> at least in part driven

by the fact that Syrian workers accept lower wages and harsher working conditions.

For the majority of Syrian refugees, life is characterized by growing vulnerability, as it relates to financial security, food security, and legal status. The majority (86%) of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the Jordanian poverty line of 68 JOD per person a month (approximately 2.25 USD per day), and 10% live in abject poverty, at less than 28 JOD per person each month (approximately 1.32 USD per day).<sup>21</sup> Vulnerable families are more likely to live in urban centers, although there are higher concentrations of vulnerability in rural areas.<sup>22</sup> Four-fifths (80%) use emergency coping strategies, and almost all (92%) of individuals are considered highly or severely vulnerable in terms of basic needs.<sup>23</sup> In both refugees and host communities, female-headed households (40% of all Syrian refugee household in Jordan)<sup>24</sup> are among the most vulnerable to food insecurity and more likely to rely on assistance programs.<sup>25</sup>

Securing adequate shelter is a primary concern for Syrian refugees living outside of the camps, with 75% of Syrian refugees severely or highly shelter-vulnerable.<sup>26</sup> Syrian refugees often borrow to afford high rents, even

13 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. "The Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2017-2019, (Full Plan)." 2016. <http://www.jrpsc.org/>, 14.

14 D Carrion, "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Difficult Truths," Middle East and North Africa Programme. Chatham House, 2015.

15 Z Zaatar, "Unpacking Gender: The Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan." New York: Women's Refugee Commission, March 2014. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UnpackingGender-WRC.pdf>.

16 REACH, "Thematic Assessment Report: Access to Water and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees," 2014, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/access-water-and-tensions-jordanian-communities-hosting-syrian-refugees-thematic>.

17 Bill Van Esveld, "'We're Afraid for Their Future': Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan," Human Rights Watch, 2016, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/jordano816web\\_o.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/jordano816web_o.pdf), 6-7, 20.

18 Carrion, 2.

19 Carrion, 2.

20 SE Stave and S Hillesund, "Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market," International Labor Organization, 2015, <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/>

[public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_364162.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_364162.pdf).

21 UNHCR Jordan, Jordan Refugee Response, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework: Baseline Survey," 14.

22 UNHCR Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 15.

23 UNHCR Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 80, 30.

24 Care International, "Six Years Into Exile: The challenges and coping strategies of non-camp Syrian refugees in Jordan and their host communities," 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2016AssessmentoftheSituationofUrbanSyrianRefugees%26VulnerableJordanians-FullReport.pdf>, 36.

25 World Food Programme (WFP), "Comprehensive Food Security Monitoring Exercise (CFSME): Registered Syrian Refugees in Jordan," 2016, [http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp291175.pdf?\\_ga=2.149505398.1341597863.1504976096-1750603342.1502915762](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp291175.pdf?_ga=2.149505398.1341597863.1504976096-1750603342.1502915762); World Food Programme, "Assistance to Vulnerable Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey," 2016, <http://www1.wfp.org/operations/200987-assistance-vulnerable-syrian-refugees-and-host-communities-egypt-iraq-jordan>.

26 UNHCR Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 40.

to live in substandard or dangerous dwellings, which are sometimes overcrowded, possibly promoting the spread of communicable diseases.<sup>27</sup> In cities, refugees and Jordanians compete for adequate and affordable housing. Average rents in Mafraq increased 68% and in Amman increased 6% between 2012 and 2014.<sup>28</sup>

Syrian families face a number of additional barriers to ensuring their children are able to enroll and remain in school, including distance and transport to school, availability of places in a school, missed education due to the Syria crisis, etc. Despite these conditions, 79% of school-aged Syrian children attend school. However, 97% of Syrian school-aged children are at high risk for nonattendance at school, largely because of financial resources,<sup>29</sup> and an estimated 100,000 children are not accessing formal education at all.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, whereas quality of education was a key factor leading to a lack of regular attendance from enrolled boys, the majority (38%) of enrolled girls cited lack of transportation to school as the primary barrier to regular attendance.<sup>31</sup>

Low family incomes and the high costs of food and shelter have forced 60% of Jordanian families to depend at least partially on income from children, which contributes to low enrollment for boys in particular, although in some families, girls are also sent to work. Sixteen percent (16%) of families cited child

engagement or marriage as the reason for no school attendance, particularly those with adolescent girls.

Lack of documentation is also a key concern for Syrian refugees, as many are no longer in possession of their Syrian identification or civil documents (including marriage certificates, birth certificates, and family books<sup>32</sup>). This concern relates to their ability to register children and access services, though of equal concern is research indicates linkages between gender-based violence and lack of documentation in Jordan.<sup>33</sup> Research cites examples of husbands withholding their wives' documentation, and women who married before legal marrying age (18) not being able to obtain legal documentation for themselves or their children.

While the processes to obtain and maintain refugee status documents have changed over time,<sup>34</sup> the requirement that all Syrian refugees in Jordan register with the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and hold a valid MOI Service Card<sup>35</sup> has remained since the start of the Syria crisis. The MOI Service Card enables refugee access to public services such as health and education.<sup>36</sup> It is estimated that as of December 2017, over half of Syrian refugees living outside of camps (approximately 403,332) have updated MOI cards, leaving 110,331 presently unregistered.<sup>37</sup> Syrian refugees in possession of a valid and updated MOI card are able

27 Mercy Corps, "Quick Facts."

28 International Monetary Fund, "The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa," September 2016, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1608.pdf>, 9.

29 UNHCR Jordan, "Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey," 32.

30 Van Esveld; K Van Rossum, R Altaher, and L Adawiya, "Running on Empty II: A Longitudinal Welfare Study of Syrian Refugee Children Residing in Jordan's Host Communities," UNICEF Jordan, Amman, Jordan, 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RUNningOnEmptyII\\_UNICEFJordanSep2017.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RUNningOnEmptyII_UNICEFJordanSep2017.pdf), 21.

31 Van Esveld 4, 69, 81; WFP, "CFSME," 57; K Van Rossum, 21.

32 Family books, issued by the Government of Syria, are a record of all family members, including marital status and parental identity. This is often used in place of a Syrian national ID. Source: Norwegian Refugee Council, "Syrian refugees right to legal identity: implications for return," Briefing note, January 2017, <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/icla/final-syrian-refugees-civil-documentation-briefing-note-21-12-2016.pdf>.

33 International Catholic Migration Commission, "UNDOCUMENTED, UNSEEN, AND AT RISK: The Situation Of Syrian Refugees; Lacking Civil and Legal Documentation in Jordan," September 2017, <https://www.icmc.net/sites/default/files/documents/resources/jordan-syrian-refugees-legal-documentation-final.pdf>.

34 Obtaining an MOI Service Card currently requires an Asylum Seeker Card (ASC), health certificate, proof of identify, and proof of address for everyone over the age of 12. For Syrian refugees, existing identification documents such as a Syrian birth certificate or passport are also required. International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "Registering Rights: Syrian refugees and the documentation of births, marriages, and deaths in Jordan," October 2015, <http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Registering-rights-report-NRC-IHRC-October20151.pdf>, 10.

35 UNHCR, Jordan Refugee Response: Vulnerability Assessment Framework, 22.

36 I Saliba, "Refugee Law and Policy: Jordan," Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/jordan.php>.

37 Jordan INGO Forum, "From Promise to Practice: Following through on commitments to support the future of Syria and the region," March 2018, [http://testsite.jordaningoforum.org/wp-content/uploads/Promise-to-Practice\\_Online.pdf](http://testsite.jordaningoforum.org/wp-content/uploads/Promise-to-Practice_Online.pdf), 11.

to travel freely throughout Jordan, obtain driver's licenses, and apply for work permits.<sup>38</sup> Work permits are a particularly critical issue for Syrian refugees in Jordan, as it allows them to find legal work to support themselves and meet the basic needs of themselves and their families.

In February 2016 at the London Syria Conference, Jordan presented its commitment to provide 200,000 work permits to Syrian refugees by the end of 2019 (Jordan Compact).<sup>39</sup> In 2017, as a result of policy reforms, the Government issued 46,717 work permits, of which 5% were issued to women. This takes the total number of work permits issued as of April 2018 to 99,433, of which 45,850 are currently active (April 2018).<sup>40</sup>

Despite this positive development, there are still many regulations in place that restrict widespread uptake of work permits, such as occupation field restrictions. Professions that are closed to non-Jordanian workers include: administration and accounting, sales, electricity, engineering, teaching, and medical professions.<sup>41</sup> For the sectors in which Syrians are allowed to work, government policy requires employers to hire a certain proportion of Jordanian workers as part of their overall work force,<sup>42</sup> with significant penalties or delays in obtaining work permits for Syrian workers if businesses fail to comply.<sup>43</sup>

While the Government of Jordan has demonstrated its commitment to women's employment, many of the areas in which Syrian refugees are able to work are seen as socially unacceptable for women, which further restricts their access to legal paid employment. As a result, many Syrian women (and men) choose to take their chances in the informal economy, where they are able to work in the field of their expertise, rather than going through the process of obtaining a formal work permit for a job in which they lack knowledge, experience, or interest.<sup>44</sup> This is despite the fact that Syrian women express an interest in working in the paid economy, outside of the home. A previous UN Women study reported that while 57% of Syrian and Jordanian women who were not currently working said they would want to work if they had the opportunity, despite the fact that only 6% of Syrian women in the study said they were currently employed.<sup>45</sup>

In lieu of access to employment, the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan rely on the services available to them, whether from the Government of Jordan or the humanitarian aid system, to survive. The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that it has served nearly 500,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan with nutrition assistance,<sup>46</sup> and UNHCR provided multipurpose cash assistance to over 160,000 individuals in 2017.<sup>47</sup> In addition to food and cash-based assistance targeted at Syrian refugees, Syrian refugees in Jordan also often access healthcare, transportation, and municipal services provided by the Government of Jordan. A 2016 UN Women study of Syrian refugees in Irbid and Zarqa governorates found that women consistently

38 UNHCR, "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Registration and Documentation (MOI cards) for Syrian Refugees in Host Communities," March 2016.

39 Government of Jordan, "The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis," *ReliefWeb*, February 8, 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-compact-new-holistic-approach-between-hashemite-kingdom-jordan-and>.

40 Government of Jordan, EU, and UN, "Supporting the future of Syria and the Region: Jordan partnership paper (conference document)," Brussels II Conference, 24-25 April 2018, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34144/jordan-partnership-paper.pdf>.

41 The complete list of professions inaccessible to Syrians in Jordan can be found at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=12986>.

42 International Labor Organization, United Nations Development Programme, and the World Food Programme, "Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities," *ReliefWeb*, April 5, 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/jobs-make-difference-expanding-economic-opportunities-syrian-refugees>.

43 Creative Associates International, "Employer Perspective on the Jordanian Labor Force," March 3, 2014, <http://www.amcham.jo/Portal1/Upload/Block/Image/Creative%20Associates%20International%20Report.pdf>.

44 Howden, Patchett, Alfred, "The Compact Experiment."

45 UN Women and REACH, "Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women's Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Toward Employment," 2017, <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20jordan/attachments/publications/jordanian%20and%20syrian%20refugee.pdf?la=en&vs=1300,28,35>.

46 WFP, "WFP Jordan Country Brief," January 2018, [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/788b342281fc434d8688c9148d4659e4/download/?\\_ga=2.234167518.1758295949.1522766952-1952215060.1522766952](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/788b342281fc434d8688c9148d4659e4/download/?_ga=2.234167518.1758295949.1522766952-1952215060.1522766952).

47 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017-2018 In Response to the Syria Crisis, 2017 Progress Report, October 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60340,35>.

expressed more difficulty accessing services than men, and that overall the most pressing barriers to access of services were physical access or reachability as well as issues related specifically to distance or transportation, particularly among women.<sup>48</sup>

Structural gender inequalities negatively affect both Jordanian and Syrian women. For female Syrian refugees, this deeply entrenched discrimination is compounded by their refugee status and the precariousness of displacement. For example, in a recent study by UNICEF and UNHCR, 51% of Syrian women interviewed in Jordan said they were prohibited from leaving the house without accompaniment.<sup>49</sup> This is both because gender norms in Syria and Jordan tend to limit women's access to public space and due to protection fears cited by family members because of perceived tensions between refugees and host communities. In previous research conducted in Jordan, some women expressed even greater concerns for their safety than they did at home in Syria during the conflict, mainly due to their lack of familiarity with their surroundings and not having close friend and family networks nearby.<sup>50</sup>

Studies of humanitarian crises around the world show that women are uniquely vulnerable to safety issues.<sup>51</sup> In the Jordan context, these include reports of child/forced marriage, intimate partner violence, and coercive sex.<sup>52,53</sup> UNICEF data finds that 6% of Syrian refugee girls in Jordan dropped out of formal education because they were either married or getting married soon.<sup>54</sup> In another study around one-third of respondents said that they thought the average age of

marriage had decreased since coming to Jordan, and those that thought this were three times more likely to say that the marrying age of female had decreased compared to males.<sup>55</sup> Among these respondents, displacement was the most commonly cited reason for the decrease.

The GBVIMS Task Force Sub-Group in Jordan, led by UNHCR and UNFPA, reported in 2015 that 36% of reported incidents of SGBV were related to child marriage - the type of gender-based violence most reported by women and girls - with an additional 28% of women reporting emotional and psychological abuse, and 27% reporting physical abuse.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it was documented in 2017 that one third of refugee women in Jordan have experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and that 52% have experienced emotional abuse, with husbands the most common perpetrators.<sup>57</sup>

Considering these factors, resources for survivors of and those at risk of violence against women (VAW) are of paramount importance. However, documented knowledge of VAW services among Syrian refugee women in Jordan is low. In 2014, 83% of women reported being unaware of any services provided related to VAW,<sup>58</sup> and there are high rates of referral decline: more than two-thirds (68%) of survivors living outside of camps declined referrals to legal assistance services and 81% declined referrals to protection and security assistance services. In Za'atari camp these numbers drop slightly, with 45% of women declining referrals to legal assistance services and 77% of women declining referrals to protection and security assistance services.<sup>59</sup>

48 UN Women and REACH, "Women's Access to Basic Services in Irbid and Zarqa."

49 ODI, UNICEF, and UNHCR, "A Promise of Tomorrow: The effects of UNHCR and UNICEF cash assistance on Syrian refugees in Jordan," October 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ODIUNICEFUNHCRCTreportfinalHR71117.pdf>, 94.

50 WHS, "Community Consultations."

51 Women's Refugee Commission, "Gender-Based Violence," <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/gbv>.

52 Al-Shdayfat (1), 238-239.

53 UN Women, "Restoring Dignity and Building Resilience: Monitoring Report on UN Women's Programming in Za'atari Refugee Camp, June-October 2015," Amman, Jordan, 2016:8-9.

54 Van Rossum K, Altaher R, and Adawiya R. "Running On Empty II: A Longitudinal Welfare Study of Syrian Refugee Children Residing in Jordan's Host Communities." UNICEF Jordan. Amman, Jordan, 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/RunninOnEmptyII-UNICEFJordanSept2017.pdf>.

55 UN Women. "Gender-based Violence And Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees In Jordan, With A Focus On Early Marriage." New York. 2013.

56 Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, "Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) Mid-Year Report 2015 SGBV Sub-Working Group Jordan."

57 "Physical Abuse Among Syrian Refugee Women In Jordan," Middle East J Nurs, 2017;11(1):3-7 and N Al-Shdayfat, "Emotional Abuse Among Syrian Refugee Women In Jordan," Global Journal of Health Science, 2017;9(3): 237-247.

58 Zaatari, 13.

59 "Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) Mid-Year Report 2015 SGBV Sub-Working Group Jordan."

# OVERVIEW OF WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

Similar to the study in Iraq and Lebanon, the Jordan study examined female refugees' experiences in displacement. However, the research in Jordan consisted of qualitative in-depth interviews rather than quantitative surveys.

The study consisted of thirty-nine (39) in-depth interviews with women in Amman, Irbid, and Mafraq, three of the four main areas where Syrian refugees have settled in Jordan. The women interviewed represented a range in terms of marital status, educational attainment, household size, status in household, and experiences with violence in their lives in Jordan, whether domestic violence or violence outside the home. Demographic details are included below, and further information can be found in the Methodological Appendix.

## Of the 39 female participants in the study:

- Twenty-six (26) came from urban locations around Amman, Mafraq, and Irbid, and 13 came from rural areas surrounding these cities.
- Twenty-five (25) were married, six were divorced or separated, five were widowed, and three were single.
- Nine (9) said they lived in a female-headed household, mostly the woman herself (8), though in one case it was the woman's mother. The other 30 said their head of household was a man, either their husband (24), son (4), brother (1), or father (1).
- Thirty-one (31) women described themselves as housewives, five said they were employed, and two said they were unemployed.
- Households ranged in size between two and 11 people. In addition to children, women typically lived with at least one other person, and almost all (36) lived with at least one child.
- All but five of the women reported school-aged children residing in their households. Generally, women had around three children in the household. However, some had as many as six. Note that these numbers do not include additional children living outside the household.
- Six women had completed college, university, or other higher education, nine had completed high school, 23 had completed primary or middle school, and one reported that she was illiterate/uneducated.
- Twenty-five (25) participants reported a household income of 250 JD or less per month. Only two participants reported a household income of 500 JD or more per month. The remainder reported household incomes between 251 JD and 499 JD per month. The minimum monthly household income was approximately 40 JD, and the maximum was 600 JD.
- Two of the women came to Jordan in 2011, 10 came in 2012, 21 came in 2013, two each in 2014 and 2015, and one in 2016.

# RIGHTS AND LEGAL STATUS IN JORDAN

The discussion in this study around rights and legal status was focused around registration with UNHCR, since participants perceived this as the key to obtaining legal status in Jordan. It was clear from the conversations that there is a widespread lack of understanding of the broader civil status of Syrian refugees in Jordan, which has led some women to be fearful that they may lose their rights and be deported, either back to refugee camps, or to Syria.

Not all of the women who participated in this study had current UNHCR ID cards. The majority of women who were not registered with UNHCR had a household income of less than 250 JD per month, and indicated that cost is a barrier to obtaining a UNHCR ID, and that not having UNHCR registration affects household income due to the need to produce proof of refugee status to access many types of humanitarian assistance and subsidized work permits.

Those that did not have UNHCR IDs generally reported that this was because they left refugee camps illegally because of the poor conditions or because they wanted to live with their family members who were elsewhere. However, this often meant they lived in fear of being caught and forced to return to the refugee camp, or worse, to Syria. This fear severely impacted their freedom of movement, with many saying that they didn't leave their house unless they had to.

**“If the officials caught me, they could deport me back to the camp. I’m not worried or scared of them, I just want my rights as a refugee. It doesn’t make sense to me to be cut off from aid for refugees just because I fled from a really bad situation in the camps.” (Manal, 40, widowed, urban Amman)**

Where women had problems with their identification, typically these were passed onto their children, either because their documents were surrendered or because they were born in Jordan outside of formal hospitals. Syrian refugee children in Jordan without proper identification are unable to register for any

services, including education. In addition, without registration or official documents, there is a strong possibility that these children will become stateless.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, confusion about the registration process persists, and communication and knowledge barriers such as this compound existing challenges for registration and documentation, making it even more difficult for refugees to obtain legal status.

**“We have no identification papers, we left them in Al Azraq. My daughter is two years old now and she doesn’t have a birth certificate and we don’t have a marriage contract.” (Hekmat, 20, married, rural Mafraq)**

In addition, several women expressed frustration that authorities did not accept their documents showing marriage, divorce, or death, because they were from Syria. This meant that legal changes that took place in Syria (such as marriage, divorce, or death) were not recognized in Jordan.<sup>61</sup> Typically, women sought these documents to show that they were divorced or widowed and the head of their household, in order to demonstrate the absence of a male breadwinner and the need for additional aid.

**“I am separated, and in order to get priority from aid organizations, they ask me for proof that my husband is not here, and I have nothing.” (Ramya, 43, separated, urban Amman)**

60 IHCR and NRC, “Registering Rights,” 5.

61 IHCR and NRC, “Securing Status,” 26.

# REFUGEE ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

Almost all of the women in the study had received some sort of assistance or support from local, national, or international organizations within the last two years. Of those that had not received support or assistance, they stated that this was because they had no identification and had not registered with UNHCR, which had made it harder to make ends meet.

**“I don’t know any services available here except UNHCR who gives us food coupons. That’s it.” (Hadeel, 33, married, urban Mafraq)**

While aid was consistently reported as insufficient and inconsistent, women that had received some sort of aid seemed to have more stability than those that didn’t. This is validated in existing literature by data showing higher levels of food security among those who receive assistance compared to non-recipients.<sup>62</sup> In addition, those that had received aid previously, but no longer received anything, said that they struggled less when they had received assistance.

**“We have nothing here, just the mattress we sleep on. One day we eat rice and lentils, one day we eat soup or open a can of cheese. But if I did not have the food coupons and UNHCR aid, it would be a disaster.” (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

Similar to the confusion around registration and legal status, one of the strongest themes around refugee assistance and support was the overall lack of information and knowledge about resources and services offered to Syrian refugees. This has led some to become frustrated and disillusioned with the aid process overall. Among the women who had received refugee assistance or support, the most common resources offered were cash assistance and food coupons.<sup>63</sup>

62 WFP, “CFSME,” 2016, 32.

63 A Karim and MJ Altman, “10 Facts about the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan” World Food Programme, September 2016, <https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/10-facts-about-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-in-jordan/>.

Women expressed confusion and frustration regarding the distribution of aid to refugees. This is consistent with previous research conducted with Syrian refugees in Jordan with regard to access to services<sup>64</sup> Some women said that they had received money consistently for several months and then the aid ceased without explanation. Others reported that they received a one-time distribution, or that they had registered and been promised assistance that they had never received. Women who currently received assistance said that it was unreliable and they were unsure how long it would continue.

**“I’ve applied for aid from UNHCR for five years now, but have not received anything yet. I know refugees who applied recently and got aid. Agents from UNHCR come to my area every week, and I go to ask them about it, and they tell me to wait for my turn.” (Ghosoun, 54, widowed, urban Irbid)**

Adding to this frustration is a perceived unfairness of the aid process. Many women gave examples of neighbors or acquaintances who they knew were receiving aid, despite appearing to be more financially secure. There was a general perception that aid allocations were based on perceptions of need and poverty, rather than actual need. This created a sense of disillusionment among those who said that they approach the aid process honestly and are unable to get anything. Exacerbating this sentiment were reports from interviewees of male aid workers soliciting unmarried women in exchange for more aid and

64 WHS, “Community Consultations.”

assistance, though no women said they knew of cases where a woman had taken them up on it.

Frustrations have led some to feel a lack of credibility and trust in the institutions tasked with providing aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan. Though some women expressed understanding that there was a broader process at work which organizations had little control over, few women had confidence that they would receive aid in the future. This had not stopped any of the women in the study from registering with aid organizations, though they did not often follow up.

**“They will help and then they stop. I don’t get messages anymore, people say that UNHCR has been shut down, they say there’s no more support from foreign countries. You can’t rely on this support, we have to work to afford food and water.” (Jamilah, 37, married, rural Amman)**

Lack of follow-up is perhaps driven by the other major barrier to accessing refugee assistance and support: cost. Particularly where distribution occurred at service points or registration at a central location was required, women said that they were unable to afford the high transportation costs to travel there. Finding childcare, or having to pay to transport their children as well, was also restricting. Where women had borne the burden of this cost and had not received assistance, they were particularly disillusioned with the process.

# ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Interviews with women around services for Syrian refugees tended to focus on access to education for their children. Their children continuing education was a primary concern among mothers, and where children had proper documentation, they were typically enrolled in school.<sup>65</sup> Many women spoke about issues with quality of education and bullying at schools that were overwhelmed with students. Where possible, women chose to enroll their children in private school to avoid this, however this was a financial burden few could afford.

Where children lacked documentation, women reported being unable to get them into any schools (public or private). Several women said that because they couldn't provide paperwork from schools in Syria, their children were not placed into the correct grades in Jordan. When this happened, children typically refused to go to school, choosing instead to wait to continue their education in Syria.

Women whose children had proper documentation were able to access education with relative ease, though they described major issues with the education their children were receiving. This generally focused on the poor quality of education for Syrian children that attended the "second shift" or "evening shift" at school.<sup>66</sup> Women reported overworked and frustrated teachers, and that they felt their children weren't getting the attention they needed or deserved.<sup>67</sup>

**"The education for Syrian refugees who attend the evening shift is really bad. Teachers don't pay enough attention for students. Syrian refugees are supposed to go to school on Saturdays too but the teachers tell them not to come. In my daughter's class there are 66 students." (Farida, 47, separated, urban Mafraq)**

Additionally, the financial burden of education was an issue even where children were not attending private schools. Women said that just the costs of notebooks or other school-mandated requirements were more than their household could afford.

The cost of transportation was also an issue for children's education. Many women reported that they

were unable to afford the bus to take their children to and from school, so their children had to walk, sometimes long distances, and even during the evening if they attended the second shift. Women universally reported concerns about their children's safety where this was the case, particularly for daughters.

**"I feel worried about my daughter because there are always guys wandering next to her school. If my daughter was sexually abused, perhaps because she is a refugee, she will not be able to sue the criminal." (Hayat, 33, married, rural Amman)**

Bullying at school was noted as a serious safety concern. Women reported that Syrian children were frequently bullied physically and verbally at school, often between shifts when morning students were leaving school and afternoon students were arriving. The women that discussed this said their children often returned from school upset, adding to the emotional and psychological toll the crisis had taken on them. This issue is addressed in more detail in the Safety and Security section below.

Several women, mainly in Mafraq and Amman, said that their children were also bullied by teachers and staff. They suggested that Syrian-only schools that employ qualified Syrian refugees as teachers should be created to better deal with the overwhelmed education system and help eliminate tensions and claims of discrimination.

In addition to the challenges expressed around children's access to education, younger women also expressed both their aspirations to learn and their frustration with the inability to continue their own higher education in Jordan. While scholarships may be available, they had not received them, which made accessing higher education cost-prohibitive for them and their families.

<sup>65</sup> Van Esveld; K Van Rossum, R Altaher, and L Adawiya, 21.

<sup>66</sup> To cope with an overwhelmed school system, Jordanian school have two sessions. One in the morning, typically for Jordanians students, and one in the afternoon to accommodate Syrian refugee students.

<sup>67</sup> Van Esveld, 20, 81.

# ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Women reported healthcare being widely available, as long as they had proper documentation to live in Jordan.<sup>68</sup> However, despite availability, women reported difficulties in accessing healthcare, mainly because of issues related to cost and physical access.

**“I suffer from chronic diseases but I can’t buy medical pills every month because I can’t afford them, so I treat myself with herbs.” (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

Many women reported that the cost of healthcare, as well as the cost of transportation to and from medical services, was too high for them to seek assistance,<sup>69</sup> even in cases where they or their family members were in dire need of treatment. Where emergency assistance was needed, women reported selling assets such as jewelry to meet medical costs.

**“The problem remains that if I need to go out, or go to a clinic or something, I can’t afford the transportation.” (Samaher, 40, widowed, urban Amman)**

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68 WHS, “Community Consultations.”

69 Su, “Syrian refugee baby gets life-saving surgery, others wait,” *Washington Post*.

# EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC SECURITY, AND LIVELIHOODS

Economic security was difficult to achieve for nearly all the women that participated in this study, and few were able to ensure their households' livelihood. Women discussed struggling to make ends meet and wishing they were able to better provide for their families, though where households received aid they seemed to be a bit better off. Consistent work was hard to come by, and many women expressed a wish to be able to work to support their families. In lieu of income, all women said they had to use negative coping mechanisms to meet basic needs. Reports of what this looked like varied, from eating less to taking their children out of school.

None of the women interviewed had a valid work permit and few had a household member with a valid work permit. Where women did have a household member with a current work permit, they were more likely to be issued to a male household member, and most were living in Amman or Irbid. However, many more women said that they or a male household member currently earns income, aligning with the general impression that an inability to obtain work permits has forced many Syrian refugees to work illegally.<sup>70</sup>

Men generally worked as unskilled day laborers, with women reporting that a few were able to find more consistent and skilled employment, for example as an accountant, a car mechanic, an assistant pharmacist, or as a metalsmith. Where men worked as unskilled day laborers, more typically in Mafraq and Irbid, their income was sparse and inconsistent, often subject to uncontrollable variables such as the weather.

70 A recent study found that 6% of Syrian women are currently working, and that 2% of women have a legal work permit. UN Women and REACH, "Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women's Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Toward Employment," 2017, <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20jordan/attachments/publications/Jordanian%20and%20syrian%20refugee.pdf?la=en&vs=1300,28,35>.

**"Our income depends on my husband's earning, but he hasn't worked in a month because of the rains" (Ablah, 27, married, rural Irbid)**

Few women reported formally working; most said they worked informally cleaning houses, mending clothes, watching or tutoring children, and cooking whenever neighbors or friends needed it. One woman helped a local company with their books. While many of these roles represent the type of typically female-domain jobs, many women expressed immense satisfaction that they were able to find ways to contribute to household income despite having household responsibilities, no work permits, and safety concerns outside of the house.

**"It's not work as such, I give private lessons during the exams and tests. I gather the children from our building and help them study. Math, Arabic, English, whatever they need." (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

However, many women – while wanting to work – believed that the jobs available to them and their husbands were beneath them, diminishing their dignity and self-worth. In particular, women that were educated or whose husbands had a profession expressed

frustration with their inability to work. A few women suggested that they, or other Syrian refugee women, could fill roles to help serve others in the Syrian refugee community, such as teaching at overcrowded schools.

In a few cases, women were ashamed of having to work. This was typically because of cultural perceptions that women should only be responsible for the home life and that work by women in any capacity was dishonorable or inappropriate. This caused a few women to go so far as hiding their jobs and income from family members.

**“There is something that I don’t want anyone to hear. If we are short on rent I go and ask my neighbors if they need help with anything. I never used to do this back home, and there is no shame in it, but I never let anyone know, especially my daughters.” (Yasmine, 48, married, urban Mafraq)**

None of the jobs reported, whether men or women or both were working, generated sufficient income for the household to meet their basic needs. Overall, reported monthly household was higher in Amman (200 JD to 600 JD) and Irbid (40 JD to 445 JD) than in Mafraq (80 JD to 300 JD).<sup>71</sup>

In general, women reported that without the ability to work and without consistent or livable levels of cash assistance, they were largely unable to provide for the basic needs of their families. In particular, rent was a major challenge. Women said that paying rent was a new phenomenon for them, as they lived in family homes in Syria. Exacerbating this, rents have been driven upwards as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan.

**“I just wish to live a normal life. Tell me, does it make sense that I cannot work here? I am passionate and hardworking and I have a huge desire to work. How am I supposed to take care of my family if I am worried about my illegal situation? What is the sense in being allowed to come here if we cannot provide for**

**ourselves and the services and agencies barely help us.” (Fayrouz, 24, single, urban Amman)**

Women who received assistance (whether in the form of cash assistance or food vouchers) tended to be able to meet at least the most basic needs of their household, such as paying rent and buying basic food. However, all families had been forced to prioritize, focusing their spending on only the items that they need to survive and forgoing “luxuries.” Oftentimes, it was these needs that led women to work when they hadn’t worked before – so that they could provide “extras” such as money for transportation or clothes for their children.

The precarious financial situation that nearly all women in the study described has led to an increase in stress for themselves and their family members. Without reliable income or the ability to save, women spoke about living in fear of “shocks” or even normal lifecycle events such as the cost of pregnancy or a new mouth to feed. These stresses are even greater for women who are not registered with UNHCR.

To cope with financial insecurity, many women describe resorting to things that they would not normally do, or that they had not done in Syria before the crisis. Borrowing was the most common coping mechanism mentioned. Woman said they often borrowed money from friends and family, turning to the charity of Jordanian friends and neighbors. However, many women also reported that landlords or shop clerks have allowed them to postpone payment for rent or purchase food on credit. For other women, who still have or were able to bring with them assets, they mentioned selling their gold or other jewelry in order to pay for necessary expenses.

**“I have lots of debt. I borrowed money when we first came, but I have other debts too for the pharmacy, and vegetable store.” (Eman, 38, married, urban Mafraq)**

Women also mentioned making other sacrifices because of their financial situation, such as sending their children to public school, or not continuing with the tutors that they need. Where women said that they had withdrawn their children from school, it was typically young children who they would

71 As of 2016, the national minimum wage in Jordan is 190 JD per month. Source: US Social Security Administration, “Social Security Programs Throughout The World: Jordan 2016-2017,” <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2016-2017/asia/jordan.pdf>.

prefer to educate at home until they are old enough for primary school.

Women also reported young men withdrawing from school, generally around the age of 16, in order to work. This was particularly the case where there was no adult male income earner present. While there were no cases of relying on young women to work, some women mentioned they had heard of young women being married off, whether temporarily or otherwise.<sup>72</sup> One woman expressed anger that her daughters refused to marry, as she could no longer afford to keep them in the household.

**“The priorities are rent, electricity, water. We get a coupon for 70 JDs, and with this we buy the cooking essentials, the things that I can’t do without, which are rice and sugar and oil.” (Heba, 38, married urban Irbid)**

Another way in which women coped with the inability to meet basic needs was to make sacrifices with food and nutrition. Many women reported buying only the most basic foods such as rice, sugar, and oil; meat or vegetables were considered a luxury. In general, women reported making sacrifices themselves to ensure their families had enough: a few women said they didn’t eat in order to ensure that their children were able to, while others said they eat smaller or less frequent meals. Others said they had enough to eat, but the diversity and quality of food they could afford was much worse than in Syria before the crisis.

Women often repeated that their greatest need was to be able to work legally in Jordan so that they could provide for their families and feel dignified.

**“I am forced to do work that I would not normally do, I feel inhuman. It’s not the country’s fault, the problem is with the injustice. We are living in a country that is hosting refugees, and the help and assistance is for everyone. If they were fair, and they gave aid to everyone in all fairness, no one would need anything. And no one would be forced to beg.” (Ramya, 43, separated, urban Amman)**

72 Van Esveld 4, 69, 81; WFP, “CFSME,” 57; K Van Rossum, R Altaher, and L Adawiya, 21.

## Role of Women in the Household and in the Community

While women reported varying roles in both the household and the community, the theme of change since the start of the Syria crisis was pervasive through most interviews. For some women, this meant taking on a larger role and more responsibility in their household, venturing into the community more, or even starting a business. For others fear of the unknown and for their safety meant that they now have far less interaction with the outside world.

The majority of women lived in households that were headed by their husband or another male relative, typically their father or their son. In these households, reports varied on women’s role in household decision-making. Some women said that their husband was in charge and they preferred it to be this way to avoid the stress that being involved in decisions may cause them. However, generally, married women said that they approach both family and financial decisions together with their husbands.

A few women reported that they were the head of household; none of these women were married or living with their partner.<sup>73</sup> These women said that they made all decisions for the household, including both financial and non-financial decisions. In some cases, they felt that this had placed a large burden on them and that affected their psychological well-being.

**“The only thing that bothers me is the bigger responsibility I was forced to bear after my husband left me. I’m responsible for everything and that causes me a huge mental stress. Cutting off the aid made things even worse.” (Asma, 25, married, urban Mafraq)**

Almost all women said there had been major changes in their responsibility in their household compared to before the Syria conflict. Typically, prior to the conflict, women did not engage in financial decisions or any affairs outside the home. What they needed was provided for them by the male head of household.

73 Care International, “Six Years Into Exile,” 36.

**“I was a spoiled girl, my only concern in Syria was my studying. After we came here, I needed to work to help and support my family. My mother’s health condition has also got worse so I had to help her more in the house. My dad passed away in the war so it’s me and my brother now supporting the family.” (Fayrouz, 24, single, urban Amman)**

As a result of the Syria crisis, most women said that they have larger responsibility and decision-making roles in their households. This was reported both by women who did not have a male head of household present and those that did, and typically related to an inability to adequately provide for the family. Women felt that they are relied on more by their households since the crisis.

**“Almost everything has changed. In Syria, I wasn’t responsible for my kids and their needs alone. My family and relatives were around me. Now, I’m responsible for everything, I’m the main provider for my kids. This causes me huge mental stress.” (Masa’da, 47, divorced, urban Mafraq)**

Though women generally reported that these responsibilities were stressful for them, it has led them to become more engaged in their households, and more active in life outside of the home than ever before. Many women embraced this new role: a widow in Amman mentioned that she has gone to several lectures and events specifically for women since coming to Jordan, which she never did in Syria. Women in Irbid and Mafraq also mentioned that there are lectures, group meetings, and training courses women can attend.

**“Here in Jordan we found that the role of the woman is like the role of the man. In most of the houses the man and woman work together. This was rarely seen in Syria.” (Amal, 41, married, urban Amman)**

Faced with increased stress brought on by a lack of financial resources, many women have become entrepreneurial, as noted in the Employment, Economic Security, and Livelihoods section. They reported working as cooks, cleaners, or tutors, as well as seeing other Syrian women at markets selling food or handicrafts.

One woman had attended a skills-based training in ice cream making at a local institute.

**“Women now have a much bigger role. I know many women whose husbands are not working because the opportunities for men here are very, very limited, so women are obliged to learn a profession, or they already have a profession, and are the ones who work.” (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

Women’s business activities were typically based in their homes, largely because of their dual responsibilities to their family and children. However, their jobs still required them to participate in the public sphere including by finding clients or delivering goods.

Despite this, several women said that their husbands or other male family members had prohibited them from working or leaving the house, so their role remained much the same as it was in Syria.<sup>74</sup> When this happened, it was typically due to safety concerns or conservative social norms among women from smaller or more rural communities in Syria, and seemed to be the case more for women living in Mafraq and Irbid.

**“Women are more constrained. Men can move freely anytime and anywhere without asking for permission. Women have to tell their husbands or sons where they want to go and they can’t stay late.” (Ghosoun, 54, widowed, urban Irbid)**

Additionally, women living in rural areas in particular mentioned the high cost of transportation not only as a barrier to accessing services, but also as an impediment to routine tasks like grocery shopping or getting their children to school, which caused them to be further isolated from their communities.

For about a quarter of women interviewed, mostly those that were married, there were fewer freedoms in Jordan than they had experienced in Syria. In Jordan, due to safety concerns or general discomfort with their surroundings, they tended to stay in the house, only leaving if absolutely necessary. Those that said this tended

74 ODI, UNICEF, and UNHCR, “A Promise of Tomorrow,” 94.

to describe estrangement in Jordan and felt the loss of their network of family and friends in Syria very heavily.

**“My husband is dominant. Even visiting the neighbors is forbidden, I would like to go out, and I keep telling him I want to go out I feel suffocated. Most of our problems are because of this issue! We never go out, I am worried about my 18-year-old daughter, I would prefer to find her a husband than for her to continue to live in this prison.” (Eman, 38, married, urban Mafraq)**

A few women, in particular those that were older, perhaps demonstrating an inter-generational divide, expressed concern about Syrian women’s expanded role outside of the household. These women focused on the reputation of Syrian women, suggesting that life outside of the house was a man’s role and people would think poorly or dishonorably about families whose female members were frequently seen in public.

As mentioned in previous sections, the high cost of transportation presents a significant practical barrier to women’s movement and their access to services,<sup>75</sup> as using scarce resources to pay for their transportation isn’t prioritized.

**“There are not restrictions on the Syrian woman, there’s not. You can go anywhere you want to. But from the financial side, you can’t move freely, for example from place to place for how much will it cost? And if you go out and sat into a cafe or restaurant or something how much money do you need?” (Jamilah, 37, married, rural Amman)**

Women were split on the role they could play in community decisions or community-level leadership. Some, mostly those in urban areas, said that they believed that given Syrian women’s expanded role since the Syria crisis, they are now well equipped to step into community life, including leadership positions. They specifically mentioned increased responsibilities and necessary cultural shifts as a result of the crisis as the reason why this

may be possible. Despite this, few women could point to an instance or example of Syrian women participating in community leadership in Jordan.

Others maintained that a woman’s role is in the household only. Similar to before, this perspective was often based on fear of the unknown in a foreign country, safety concerns, or cultural values. Some women with less education were less confident that they or other women could take on leadership roles, citing illiteracy and other practical barriers such as the inability to move freely.

**“Women can’t be leaders here in Jordan because we are refugees, all of us were forced to leave our country and come here. Women can’t do much because we aren’t free to move anywhere without our husband’s permission. So men have more power and ability to be leaders.” (Manal, 49, married, rural Mafraq)**

When asked whether men would be accepting of women leaders, women tended to say that it depended on the man himself, how he was raised, and what his values were. Several women felt that men had become more accepting of expanded roles for women compared to before the Syria crisis, although this was typically at the individual, rather than the collective, level. At the collective level, women were less confident that men could embrace women leaders.

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75 UN Women and REACH, “Women’s Access to Basic Services in Irbid and Zarqa.”

# SAFETY AND SECURITY

The general impression among women was that while the majority knew of safety-related incidents affecting themselves or other Syrian refugees, they did not have major safety concerns in Jordan. Whether this is because of them minimizing security-related incidents as normal, compared to life in Syria during the crisis, or because Jordan has provided them with an objectively safe environment is harder to determine.<sup>78</sup>

Women in the study were evenly split among those who had personal experience of some sort with violence while living in Jordan, those who had heard about violence but had no direct experience themselves, and those who had neither experience nor knowledge. Women that lived in Irbid had less direct experience and less knowledge of violence than women living in Mafraq and Amman.

Reports of violence included both verbal and physical harassment. While verbal harassment happened often, typically perpetrated by neighbors, cab drivers, market vendors, or other people that they interact with often but don't know personally, women generally felt that it wasn't very disruptive. The comments that constituted verbal harassment were mostly unpleasant stereotypes or comments about Syrians generally, not the woman herself. Many said that they thought women were more likely to experience verbal abuse than men, mainly because they would do nothing about it.

**“At first when we got here taxi drivers would say things to us like ‘you Syrians ruined the country’ but we cannot say anything, we just stay silent. But it bothered me, a million percent, when you hear someone humiliating you, you feel bothered but you cannot show.” (Ana’am, 42, married, rural Irbid)**

Reports of physical violence were much more varied. A small number of women had experienced robberies, either at their home or in the street where they lived, perpetrated by both Jordanians and Syrians. A few others said they knew people, mostly men, that had been beaten. This type of violence was typically perpetrated by the Jordanian host community, but it was not felt to be something that happened frequently. In all cases,

incidents of physical violence, though rarer and not often directly involving the women themselves, contributed to feelings of insecurity in Jordan much more so than verbal abuse.

In addition to general safety and security issues, about a third of women talked specifically about experience of or knowledge of violence against women (VAW). Though not many women interviewed said that they had direct experience with something they would categorize as VAW, most had heard about instances of VAW in the Syrian refugee community.<sup>77</sup>

Similar to the findings in general safety and security, there were no reports of direct VAW in Irbid, and few had knowledge of it. Experiences of VAW were split between Mafraq and Amman, with some women who had moved to Mafraq mentioning that issues relating to VAW were worse there. Women in urban areas also tended to speak more about VAW than those in rural areas, both in terms of personal experience and knowledge.

In general, discussions about VAW fell into two broad categories: domestic violence in the home and sexual harassment or abuse in public.<sup>78</sup> For women who had experienced domestic violence, the perpetrator was generally their husband. A few women said that the tensions and stress of the Syria crisis and living in Jordan had caused their husband to be frustrated or angry and lash out at them physically. Another reason cited for domestic violence was tight living quarters, which made it difficult for anyone to have personal space and exacerbated family tensions.

76 WHS, “Community Consultations.”

77 Al-Shdayfat, “Physical Abuse,” and N Al-Shdayfat, “Emotional Abuse.”

78 GBVIMS, “GBVIMS Mid-Year Report 2015.”

**“Our society is not fair towards women. And if you do complain then that means you are wrecking your home. I told you I went through this with my husband. I often think back, and wish that I did not complain to my parents.” (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

Women that had experienced VAW did not generally blame their husbands for the abuse. Instead they attributed it to the poor conditions that surrounded them.<sup>79</sup> None of the women who had experienced VAW or spoke generally about this type of VAW said that VAW was reported.<sup>80</sup> Domestic violence was treated as something women must endure, or that is shameful and that must be kept private.<sup>81</sup> Women generally attributed this thinking to Syrian culture. However, there was a very strong sense among women that, in Jordan, the law is on the woman’s side in cases where she wanted to report domestic violence, significantly more so than in Syria.

**“The good thing here in Jordan is that the law supports the woman, in Syria it doesn’t! I suffered a lot in Syria, my husband used to beat me until my nose bled.” (Eman, 38, married, urban Mafraq)**

Sexual harassment and abuse were mostly spoken about as incidents that other women had experienced, but a few of the women in the study had experienced it themselves. Several discussions focused around a recent news story of a young Syrian woman who had been raped, while others included specific incidents that they themselves or people they knew personally had experienced.

The incidents experienced were typically verbal harassment or propositioning that were inappropriate and made the women feel uncomfortable. A few women had met with service providers who later called them and propositioned them sexually in return for more aid or assistance. In one case, a woman had heard about a sheikh taking advantage of a woman in his community in front of her young son. No women

mentioned that these incidents had been reported to service providers, as with other safety-related incidents they were generally ignored or avoided.

**“I don’t know the name of the sheikh or the charity group but a group of women were talking between themselves and then he kicked them all out except for one and he told her he wanted to register her. She has a young child that’s 6 years old so he gave the boy**

## SAFETY AND SECURITY IN SCHOOLS

While women generally characterize relations with the Jordanian host community as positive, it seems a major place where tensions are manifesting is between children.

**There’s bullying against the Syrian students from Jordanians. For example, my neighbor’s son got hit by a stick on the back of his head, he was seriously injured. I know another boy who was beaten up and left with a broken nose. Just because they are Syrian. (Hayat, 33, married, rural Amman)**

Women spoke about their children experiencing harassment and bullying from other children at school. They reported that children were teased, bullied, and sometimes physically hit by Jordanian children, usually during the shift change. There were instances where women said that their children had been abused or treated unfairly by Jordanian teachers or other employees of the school.

Where conflict occurred between children at school, a few women reported this to the school teachers or principals, with varying results. In one case, the teacher helped to resolve the issue. However, in other instances, they, at best, said there was nothing they could do and, at worst, blamed the Syrian students for the abuse they received.

**“I went to the principal, but the same thing kept happening, so I told my daughter to look the other way.” (Jamilah, 37, married, rural Amman)**

79 Al-Shdayfat, “Physical Abuse”; UN Women, “Restoring Dignity and Building Resilience,” 8-9; and UN Women, “Gender-based Violence And Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees In Jordan, With A Focus On Early Marriage,” New York, 2013.

80 Zaatari, 13.

81 GBVIMS, “GBVIMS Mid-Year Report 2015.”

**something to distract him and came close to kiss the woman.” (Nawal, 43, married, rural Amman)**

A few women also spoke about young men who came to Jordan for short periods of time looking for temporary wives,<sup>82</sup> mentioning that people had asked them if their daughters would be interested in such an arrangement. A number of women said that their daughters had been followed and harassed by Jordanian men.

Some blamed women for these incidents. They felt that the women were targeted because they were walking, talking, or smiling in a certain way, or because they went out in public without someone to accompany them. These women typically were not involved in the incidents themselves. Those that were expressed frustration, disappointment, and outrage that men would try to take advantage of their situation in such a way.

**“If a woman was sexually abused at work, she can simply leave her job. The traditions and norms in our societies always blame women in such cases, so she is better to keep silent so her reputation isn’t ruined. I was always against the idea of victims’ silence in these issues, but with time, I’ve learned that victims can avoid a lot of trouble by staying silent.” (Fayrouz, 24, single, urban Amman)**

Typically, women said that safety issues, regardless of the nature, were not reported to the authorities. Where harassment was verbal, this was mainly because they did not think it was disruptive or serious enough to report. Where the harassment was physical, most women said it was because the issue wasn’t serious enough, or in cases of domestic violence it was not appropriate to share outside the household, however, there was also a pervasive concern about the effect reporting could have on women’s legal status in Jordan.

<sup>82</sup> This phenomenon is sometimes known as “summer marriage” where men, typically from countries in the Arabic Gulf, come on vacation to countries in other parts of the Arab world and marry young women in order to engage in sex within the confines of their religion. Women accept these proposals, oftentimes because of the sums of money associated with them, only to find themselves divorced and on their own when the man returns to his country of origin.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Though no interviews were conducted inside refugee camps, many women who had previously lived in refugee camps spoke about the VAW that occurred there. There were several reports of young girls in Za’atari Camp being forced to marry as their families could not afford to keep them, and there was also a report of widowed women being forced into prostitution to support their families.

**“I left the camp because they were going to rape my daughters. My husband never let us go to the bathrooms alone. There were lots of young men in the camp without their parents. When we left our tent they would all send their sisters to propose to my daughters, though I told them they are still young.” (Eman, 38, married, urban Mafraq)**

One woman, who had spent many years in Za’atari, said that she never let her daughters go anywhere in the camp alone. On the couple of occasions where her daughters went to school by themselves, young men followed and harassed them, forcing her to withdraw her daughters from school entirely.

However, another woman mentioned that though she doesn’t live in a camp anymore, her daughters are there, and they’ve never experienced any issues or feared for their safety. One of the women that had spent a few years in Za’atari mentioned specifically a family protection unit there to help women in cases of violence.

**“We as refugees will always hesitate to report incidents, because we don’t want to be deported back to Syria. I always tell my kids to avoid fights or problems since we are refugees in Jordan who merely seek peace and security.” (Samaher, 40, widowed, urban Amman)**

Fear of being blamed for the incident, and then deported was a major driver of not reporting situations where the women in this study or people they knew thought safety issues were serious enough to report. Throughout the discussion of VAW there was

a pervasive theme of women being silenced, whether by social norms, fear of deportation, or other means.

Where women experienced “serious” safety issues, or thought there was a safety threat in their immediate environment, they typically avoided these by moving. This was mentioned by women as both a potential way to avoid threatening situations and as a technique they had used, and was driven by the wish to avoid any trouble that may cause them or their families to be sent back to Syria. Furthermore, in response to verbal and physical harassment and other safety concerns, a couple of women took steps to try and blend in more with the host community, such as tying their headscarves in a different way, or speaking with a Jordanian accent.

**“I just worry about my daughter. Sometimes I ask her not to speak in a Syrian accent so others don’t recognize her nationality and assume she’s weak and exploit her in a bad way.” (Hayat, 33, married, rural Amman)**

In instances where women or their family members did report instances of physical harassment, there were no cases where perpetrators were apprehended or punished. Women said that the reporting process only led to high costs, both in terms of money and time on behalf of the Syrian refugees reporting the issue, leading them to wish they had not reported anything at all. Therefore, reports were typically only made to friends or family members, with women sometimes engaging their husbands when they felt a physical threat.

**“But my brother-in-law said, ‘I do not want any problems... we are refugees here, and we have no rights.’**

**But the Sheikh encouraged him to report. He went and complained, but it was useless... he was sent back and forth to the court, and paid to file the case, while the other guy was sitting at home, and nothing came out of it. And all the while the man who broke his arm would pass by, and whenever he saw my brother-in-law, he would say to him ‘You are worth nothing more than a bullet!’” (Mona, 50, divorced, urban Amman)**

While many women emphasized that the law is on the women’s side in Jordan, particularly when it comes to domestic violence, women who spoke about not reporting VAW incidents said that they either didn’t want to cause trouble or that there was no point as perpetrators would go unpunished.

Overall, experience of specific safety incidents did not generally change women’s behavior or freedom of movement. While there were women that said they did not feel comfortable leaving the house, this was typically regardless of safety issues that happened to them or people they knew and more related to their personal level of comfort in Jordan or their cultural norms. Similarly, women that said they felt safe and free to move around said so despite any safety issues they may have experienced.

Women stated that VAW had gotten worse or stayed about the same since the start of the Syria conflict, and there were few reports of it improving.

**“Here, the violence rates have even increased towards us. People think Syrian women are in need and they may do anything to get help.” (Ghosoun, 54, widowed, urban Irbid)**

# HOST COMMUNITY RELATIONS

As discussed above in the Safety and Security section, some women had firsthand experience of tension between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host communities that occasionally resulted in violence. Women that characterized relations with Jordanians as negative were equally likely to live in urban and rural locations. However, there were also women who spoke of positive relations with their Jordanians friends and neighbors, who sometimes helped them financially, and who they considered to be similar to themselves both culturally and religiously.

When women talked about tensions between Syrians and Jordanians, their opinions were mostly based on things that they overheard Jordanians saying about them, or about Syrians in general. These sentiments, similar to the verbal harassment women reported, were typically related to the situation in Jordan since Syrian refugees had arrived, or about how Syrian refugees are poor, unclean, or disrespectful.

Women expressed frustration at this, and also reported that they faced discrimination as Syrian refugees, such as being charged higher fares for transportation, or more rent. Those who said the relationship between Syrians and Jordanians was negative spoke about a lack of respect Jordanians show for Syrian refugees, saying that their situation is already poor and adding disrespect makes it almost too much to bear.

**“It happened to us once while in the market with a vendor and later we heard him cursing Syrians with really bad words. We were shocked because we literally did nothing wrong. On the other hand, that was the only negative experience we had with Jordanians people through five years of living here, most of them treat us very kindly and friendly. Some Syrian refugees do some bad things that make us feel ashamed of ourselves.” (Fayrouz, 24, single, urban Amman)**

When asked about drivers of tensions between the communities, the conversation was focused around competition for resources, particularly jobs and

apartments.<sup>83</sup> Women mentioned that Syrians were often willing to work for far less than their Jordanian counterparts because they did not have work permits, pushing Jordanians out of the same jobs, or lowering the salaries. The case was similar for apartments: an influx of Syrian refugees had increased demand and allowed landlords to charge higher rents.

A few women mentioned competition for men. They said that Jordanian women had told them that they were stealing their husbands, and that there was jealousy because of this. The women also said this was driven by the fact that Syrian women are the best cooks and make the best wives, and so men were choosing them over their Jordanian counterparts.

However, when speaking about negative experiences with Jordanians, women often said that these few people can't be generalized to the entire population, as they have also interacted positively with the Jordanian host community. Similarly, many women characterized relations between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community as positive, saying that they had received a lot of support and assistance from their Jordanian neighbors or friends.

**“I know some Jordanians who are very friendly and kind, like the owner of our house. His family is very good to us. I also know other people in the village and we visit each other, we are like a family. We have been living in this village for five years now. I feel**

83 E Carey, “Access to Housing,” 7.

**like everyone is like a family here.” (Rasha, 42, married, rural Irbid)**

Where this was the case, Jordanians typically had lent them money or asked that they perform jobs around the house (such as cooking, cleaning, or helping with the children) in exchange for money. Several women also said their landlords had allowed them to pay rent late, or only when they were able to. Because of this assistance, these women said that the Jordanian host community had a bigger impact on their survival in Jordan than the humanitarian organizations or assistance.

Where women described positive relationships between Syrians and Jordanians, they tended to speak about the similarities between Jordan and Syria culturally and religiously, and noted that their friends or family members that had sought refuge in other countries did not have a similar experience.

**“I feel 100% safe and comfortable. The Jordanian people are good hosts for Syrians; we are so alike in culture and way of living that it makes us very comfortable. There is nowhere for refugees like Jordan when it comes to this.” (Amal, 35, single, rural Mafraq)**

Women who talked about a change in relations between the Jordanian host community and Syrian refugees generally said they thought relations were getting better now that everyone had adjusted and the flow of refugees had slowed. Many women also noted that as they themselves grew more comfortable in Jordan they were able to get to know their Jordanian neighbors and relations became more positive.

# CONCLUSION

The report presented seeks to provide nuance and depth to our understanding of the lives of women and girls living in displacement in Jordan. It highlights the ways in which structural gender discrimination interplays with poverty and instability, heightening women's risks to violence and their physical isolation, and the interplay between these things: how the threat of violence results in many male family members further restricting women and girls' mobility.

Violence against women and girls in refugee camps was cited as one of the reasons that many families chose to avoid living in the camps when possible. Many women reported knowledge of young women and girls being harassed outside of schools; on their way back from the bathrooms; and of the exploitation of women and girls by service providers. A lack of employment opportunities further aggravates these risks, causing women to rely on the informal economy and on borrowing from neighbors and local shops, putting them at even greater threat of exploitation. Despite international and national efforts, this violence continues to go unpunished. Women stated that they do not report due to a fear of backlash; that reporting brings trouble both for themselves and for their families.

A number of women stated a desire to work outside the home, but acknowledged that increased responsibilities within the household put them at a higher risk of verbal, physical, and sexual violence. Women and girls that are providers, decision-makers, and mobile are often seen as a direct threat to normative masculinities, which can lead not only to sexual and physical violence, but to economic and legal violence that severely restricts mobility and personal agency.

For the Syrian refugees interviewed, better livelihoods, access to formal work, and comprehensive support for both themselves and their families were articulated as the foundations for empowerment and equality. In the absence of this, women and girls will continue to be forced to make decisions and compromises that put themselves at risk and compromises the range of choices and opportunities available to them, and their ability to harness these.

**“All the people here are good but some of them do not feel what we’ve been through. There is no place like home, I didn’t know what home felt like until I was forced to leave it.” (Nadia, 45, divorced, urban Irbid)**

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