

**MENA CIVIL  
SOCIETY NETWORK  
FOR DISPLACEMENT**



# Unity and Inclusion:

Refugees and the Jordanian Host Community

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Research report

# Unity and Inclusion: Refugees and the Jordanian Host Community

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## 1. Background to ‘Unity and Inclusion’

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This report assesses to what extent refugees in Jordan are living in a state of ‘unity and inclusion’. *Unity* primarily concerns refugees’ ability to physically reunite with family members. *Unity* depends on legal and financial variables such as whether or not refugees are living in a country that supports family reunification or whether they are able to collect the funds to bring over family members. As for refugees already living with their family members, *unity* refers to their psycho-social unity. In other words, how do various social factors – especially pressures – affect the way family members behave towards each other? *Inclusion* concerns the extent to which refugees have been included in Jordanian society – both in terms of their legal standings as well as their daily experiences with Jordanian neighbours and colleagues.

The objective of this report is to bring to light the challenges facing refugee families in Jordan in the hopes of improving host country, third-country, and donor policies. Seeking beyond common material indicators, the report seeks to convey critical but often overlooked aspects of refugee life in Jordan.

The report draws on Jordan’s experience as a host country since the early 2000s, specifically in its reception of Iraqi, Sudanese, Somali, Syrian, and Yemeni refugees. Its findings are based on ten focus group discussions – two from each of these five communities – in July and August of 2019. 117 people participated in the discussions – 60 women and 57 men. Almost all lived in households ranging from four to eight members. The conceptual backdrop to the study is the United Nations General Assembly’s 2018 endorsement of the Global Compact on Refugees, an initiative spearheaded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Global Compact on Refugees represents the international community’s will to strengthen cooperation and solidarity with both refugees and host countries. Specifically, its objectives are to: (i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third-country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.<sup>1</sup> It represents a landmark in terms of global compacts; while the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol formulate the duties of host countries towards refugees, the Global Compact, in turn, establishes a framework for the international community’s duties towards host countries. By recognising the effects of displacement, not only on refugees, but also on the communities and states in which they have resettled, the compact affirms the principles of burden and responsibility-sharing.<sup>2</sup>

The international community’s affirmation of burden and responsibility sharing principles comes as a welcome relief to Jordan, a country long considered a dependable but overstrained destination for refugees from the region and beyond. In light of this national context, this report encourages the nexus of refugees, host countries, and the international community. The first step in fostering effective cooperation between these links is to bring to light difficult situations experienced first-hand by refugees.

## 2. Characterising the Conflicts of those Refugees Accounted for in the Study

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While each of the refugee-producing conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen differ in nature and scope, they exhibit the common trait of having developed into protracted civil wars. Since 1945, the median length of a civil war has been 9.5 years – a duration that seems to be increasing.<sup>3</sup> Longer durations have implications on host countries like Jordan, which cannot expect a speedy return of refugees to their countries of origin. Indeed, all of the 117 participants had lived in Jordan for at least a year, and some for decades. The following is a brief overview of the scope and arrival of refugees coming from these five countries of conflict.

A shared border as well as strong fraternal ties have made Jordan indispensable to displaced Iraqis for decades, especially after the Second Gulf War in 2003. However, the majority of some 67,186 Iraqis in Jordan arrived after peaks in sectarian violence in 2006 and 2014, mostly from Baghdad, Mosul, and Irbil.<sup>4</sup>

Since anti-government protests erupted in 2011, thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in Jordan, mainly from rural Damascus, Dar'aa, and other south-eastern regions. Most of them had crossed the border into Jordan by 2014. Today there are some 654,692 Syrian refugees in Jordan and they are unlikely to return in the near future despite the relative de-escalation in violence since fighting peaked in 2015 and 2016.<sup>5</sup>

Since the outbreak of war in 2015, Yemen has been plagued by fighting, airstrikes, droughts and famines which have led to a humanitarian crisis in which an estimated 1.8 million Yemeni children are severely malnourished. Some 14,774 Yemenis – mostly from the Sana'a region – are currently seeking refuge in Jordan.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1990s, civil strife has led thousands of Somalis to settle in the Arabian Peninsula, mainly in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The war in Yemen and the increasing nationalisation of employment in Saudi Arabia, however, have forced many Somalis to seek refuge beyond the Peninsula.<sup>7</sup> As a result, some Somalis have made their way to Jordan – mostly from 2004 until 2017 – where some 774 currently live.<sup>8</sup>

In Sudan, armed conflicts, political instability, and severe droughts in the southern half of the country have gradually forced millions to flee their homes since the 1980s. Since the First Gulf War and the hardships that economic sanctions placed on Sudanese living in Iraq, Sudanese refugees have sought Jordan as an increasingly popular country of asylum.<sup>9</sup> Some 6,096 Sudanese – mainly from Kordofan and Darfur – currently reside there.<sup>10</sup>

As a perpetual host to some three-quarters of a million refugees, Jordan needs international support. The Global Compact's objective of expanding access to third-country solutions will ensure that, while refugees can be expected to remain away from their countries of origin for longer durations, no single country will disproportionately bear the burden. This is critical for both the long-term welfare of refugees as well as host countries such as Jordan. As third-countries work

towards this objective, the Jordanian host community can improve its understanding of obstacles its refugees face and continue to tackle them with a neighbourly approach.

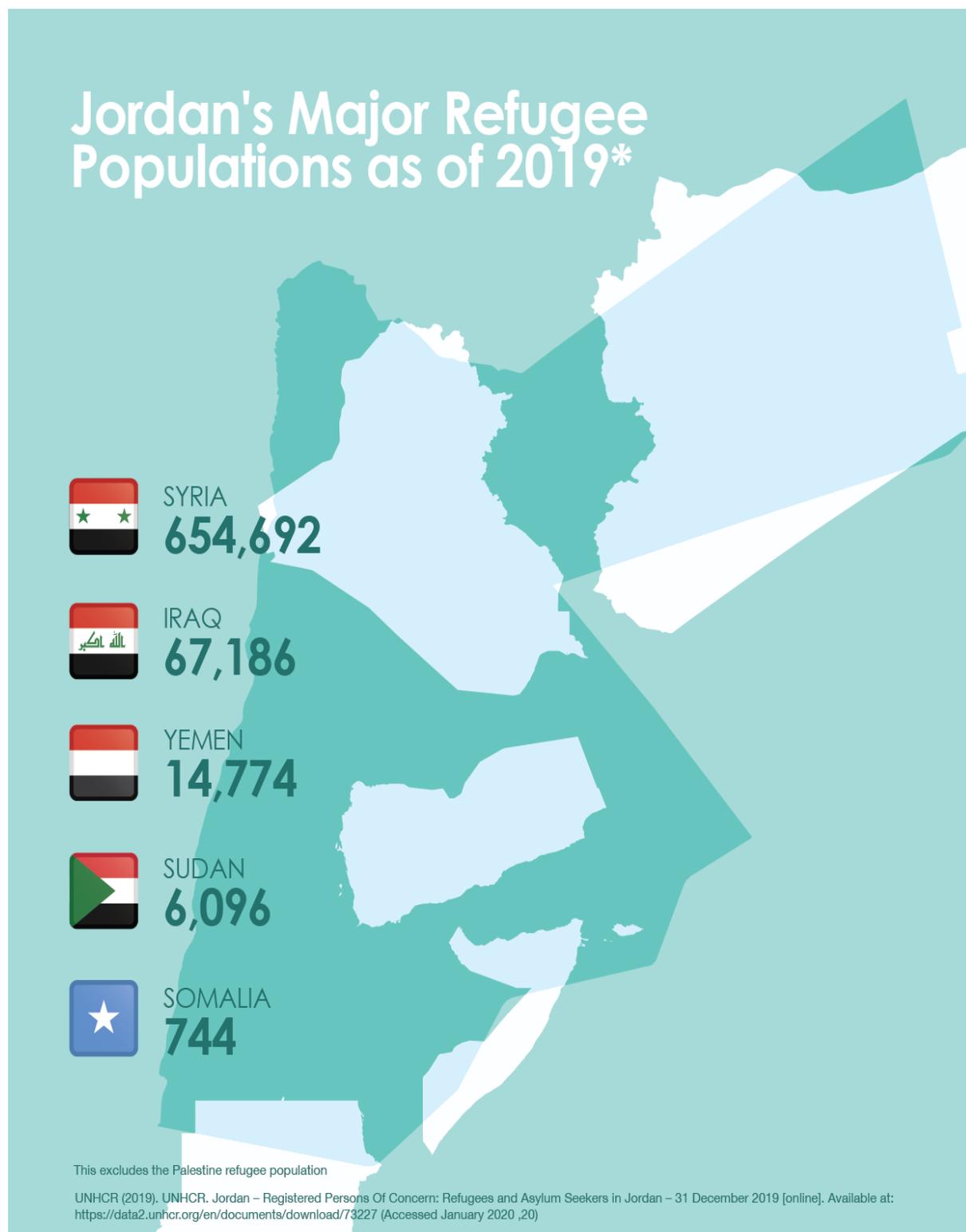


Figure 1: Refugees' Nationalities in Jordan by the Numbers

### 3. Physical Obstacles in the Way of Family Unification

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Participants sought refuge in Jordan through different legal pathways and under varying financial circumstances. Their experiences varied according to their countries of origin: the attention their conflicts received from NGOs and donors; their diplomatic standings with Jordan; and their proximity to Jordan. Where Jordan did not require entry visas – as for Syrians – it was easy for families to enter at once. Still, it was common for a family member to come to Jordan alone in the hopes of securing housing first or raising the funds to bring along family members. Where Jordan did require entry visas, some obtained visas while other family members did not. There were thus wide disparities in reunification rates among the five groups. For example, all 14 of the female Syrian participants reported living with their husbands while only one of the 14 Somali female participants reported living with her husband. Here, we will highlight the main obstacles participants shared in the way of family unification.

All participants expressed the wish to reunify with their families, namely parents, spouses and children. They mentioned that the advantages of this are both physical and emotional. Parents separated from their children commonly mentioned their longing to benefit from their children's help and support. Children separated from their parents mentioned their longing for 'warm heartedness' (especially from their mothers). They aspired to two types of reunification: (i) bringing family members from countries of origin to Jordan and (ii) moving from Jordan to third-countries where other family members already live.

The type of reunification to which participants aspired was based on their prospects of success, largely informed by the standing of their country of origin. Sudanese, Yemeni, and Somali participants were primarily concerned with reuniting in Jordan while Iraqi and Syrian participants mainly sought reunification in third-countries. Most of the third-countries that Iraqis and Syrians mentioned were further abroad – namely Sweden, Canada, Turkey, Germany, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Iraqi and Syrian access to third-countries indicates the relatively higher attention their countries of origin have received from the international community, NGOs, and donors.

Those wishing to bring their family members from Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia to Jordan faced a number of obstacles, mainly legal and administrative. Much of the difficulty refugees from those countries faced in trying to reunite with family revolved around being forced to use regular channels of migration despite their overwhelmingly humanitarian circumstances. Coming as they were from non-bordering countries to Jordan – sometimes after long stays in third-countries – they were often perceived by authorities as people who had overstayed their visas rather than refugees.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, many problems in the way of reuniting Sudanese, Yemeni, and Somali families were related to complications that arose from overstayed visas. For example, most of the Yemeni male participants came to Jordan on temporary medical visas in 2016. They came alone, planning to bring their wives and children from Yemen once they had raised the necessary travel funds. But after December 2016 – when Yemenis could no longer enter Jordan on tourist visas and medical visas were sharply curtailed – they struggled to bring their families to Jordan. At that point, most had already overstayed the extended three-month term of their temporary visas. This was a problem in light of the fact that they could only request visas for family members to join them if

they held annual residency visas, which they could only acquire through proven medical, student, or investor credentials.

In general, a common obstacle to all but the Syrian participants was overstayed visa fines, which accrued at a rate of 1.5 JOD per day. A number of reunification-related procedures like acquiring a marriage certificate or applying for an annual visa first required paying those fines. Often having overstayed their visas by years, participants noted that this financial burden was a daunting obstacle in the way of starting simple procedures. Some Iraqi participants mentioned that it was discouraging them from getting married in Jordan while others mentioned it causing them a general reluctance to seek help from authorities.

Syrians and Iraqis faced other kinds of obstacles reunifying with family members. Usually, it was parents in Jordan trying to reunify with their children, most of whom lived outside of the Middle East. Obstacles typically had to do with not matching desirable asylum-seeker profiles or meeting third-country requirements. Participants expressed age as a particularly challenging obstacle. One Syrian participant described a situation whereby his son went alone as a minor to a third-country for medical treatment. In the years that it took to process his reunification request, his son had turned 18 – thus nullifying his request on the basis of accompanying a minor child. One Syrian man mentioned that a day before his last interview at a third-country's embassy in Jordan, his 16-year old daughter had gotten married, a circumstance the embassy cited as grounds for rejection. One Iraqi woman suggested that older women who were married – as opposed to younger ones who were single – were less likely to get accepted for resettlement. The same Iraqi woman complained that the third-country she applied to rejected her on the basis that – although her city of origin might not be secure – there are other secure cities in Iraq to which she could return. A few participants complained that the grounds for rejection third-countries had provided them were insensitive to their circumstances.

### 3.1 What Unification Would Mean

Participants unanimously affirmed that family separation affected their psychological states in negative ways. Participants with family members in third-countries were focused on joining estranged relatives in a country where they thought they could have a brighter future than in Jordan. Those with family members still in their countries of origin were most concerned with bringing them to safety, even if that meant they would come to face hardships in Jordan together. This was especially so for some women whose husbands had been missing in Sudan for years. One Syrian woman said that she felt 'homeless' without her family. One Iraqi woman trying to bring her sick father to Jordan quoted him as saying, "I want to see my daughter before I die. I just want to see her and make sure that she is fine, and then die the next day". A Sudanese man believed that reunification with his family would mean happiness, a good psychological state, and peace of mind.

## 4. Psychosocial Obstacles in the Way of Family Unification

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Refugee families that were physically united in Jordan faced another set of obstacles. These mainly pertained to social stresses on family life, i.e. psychosocial obstacles in the way of partaking in healthy relationships. These were found to be common across all five participant groups and throughout all family roles (i.e. fathers/husbands, mothers/wives, and children). Pioneered by Erik Erikson in 1958, the psychosocial theory looks at stages of personality development through the tension between an individual and the demands of society.<sup>12</sup> As an approach, it looks at how an individual's psychology and behaviour is affected by social factors and to what extent he or she is able to overcome them. Through this lens, this section seeks to understand how social factors in Jordan have affected the relationships between refugee family members. It found that economic stresses and social exclusion – and for some, racism – have erected serious psychosocial barriers to family unity. While participants generally demonstrated resilience, many expressed feeling like they were near a mental breaking point.

# Stages of Psychosocial Development

AS PROPOSED BY ERIK ERIKSONS

<b>Infant</b> 0–2 Years	<b>Hope: trust vs mistrust</b> Infants develop a sense of trust in the world and the people who are supposed to care for them. Failure at this stage leads to distrust in the world and that others are not dependable.
<b>Toddler</b> 2–4 years	<b>Will: autonomy vs shame and doubt</b> Toddlers develop a sense of independence by controlling their motor abilities, and exploring their surroundings. If hindered, they may be left with feelings of doubt over their own abilities.
<b>Early Childhood</b> 5–8 years	<b>Purpose: initiative vs. guilt</b> Children develop a sense of purpose and motivation to try new things with the complexities of planning and a sense of judgment. If hindered they will lack initiative and be left with feelings of guilt.
<b>Middle Childhood</b> 9–12 years	<b>Competence: industry vs. inferiority</b> Children are eager to learn and accomplish more complex skills: reading, writing, telling time. If ridiculed or punished, they develop feelings of inferiority about their capabilities.
<b>Adolescent</b> 12–19 years	<b>Fidelity: identity vs. role confusion</b> Teenagers develop identity in beliefs, ideals, and values shaping their behavior. Through social interaction, a teen may take on challenges that can help or hinder the development of identity.
<b>Early Adult</b> 20–39 years	<b>Love: intimacy vs. isolation</b> Adults with a strong sense of identity are able to form lasting, meaningful relationships with others, or else they may have less committed relationships and may suffer emotional isolation.
<b>Middle Adult</b> 40–59 years	<b>Care: generativity vs. stagnation</b> Adults who feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community develop a sense of care. Failing to attain this skill will result in unproductivity and uninvolvement.
<b>Late Adult</b> 60+ years	<b>Wisdom: ego integrity vs. despair</b> Older adults who look back on their lives with a sense of gratitude and fulfillment feel a sense of integrity, versus feeling bitterness and despair over their past life.

Cherry, K. 2019. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development [online] Verywell. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development2795740-> (Accessed 27 Nov. 2019).

Figure 2: Stages of Psychosocial Development

#### 4.1 Social Stresses from Countries of Origin

Participants cited physical security as their top reason for coming to Jordan. Some described the insecurity and consequent trauma they experienced before arriving to Jordan. For instance, one Syrian man described the aftermath of his village being taken over in which militants would rape women while forcing male family members to watch. One Iraqi woman from a targeted minority group described living under constant fear after discovering that her neighbour of many years had become a militia leader. Another cited as her impetus for coming to Jordan being in a market and walking away from a car bomb only minutes before exploding. Three Iraqi sisters described the shock of their other sister dying on the plane that brought them to Jordan. Many participants were still unable to resolve the trauma of these experiences, and some requested the UNHCR makes available more psychological support services. But while conflict-induced trauma certainly warrants the energies of NGO and host country mental health services, local stakeholders as well as the international community also need to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of the added stresses refugees face once in their host communities. As one psychologist mentioned of Syrian refugees, many “are aware that most of their uncomfortable feelings, or negative feelings, are not related to trauma itself, but to the pressure of the stress they have here in the new community, the lack of services, lack of opportunities, lack of social support. All that makes them more stressed.”<sup>13</sup> As such, this section seeks to build on the small but growing body of research on refugees’ psychological wellbeing in their host countries.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.2 Economic Stresses on Households

The most direct stresses on family life were related to economic conditions, both in terms of how they impacted breadwinners and their dependents. These were intimately connected, as refugees’ financial strains often meant many members living in close living conditions, sometimes as many as eight. Several participants mentioned that their household had only one or even no breadwinner. For example, one Yemeni man who worked as a waiter told of being the sole provider for his wife, two daughters, mother, and mother-in-law, with whom he shared a one-bedroom apartment. For breadwinners like him, any turbulence at the workplace could spell insecurity for the entire household. As such, breadwinning participants mentioned that at times the desperation of their situation led them to acquiesce to exploitative labour conditions like delayed pay and overtime without compensation. One Syrian man expressed frustration working at a restaurant for 16 hours per day, only resting for five hours at night. One Iraqi woman mentioned that she worked in a food factory for two months, but then the factory closed and she did not get paid at all. The owners of the factory threatened to report her for working without a permit if she complained to the authorities.

Another struggle bread-winners faced was adapting to new means of livelihood. Their skills were often unmatched for the demands of the Jordanian economy. For example, one Sudanese participant said that in southern Sudan, he used to farm a small plot of land that he owned. He noted that work in the city required him to work at a faster, more intense pace than on the farm. He was usually hired for jobs where he was expected to carry heavy loads, something to which he was unaccustomed, especially at his older age. Other participants complained that they were overqualified for their current work; a number held bachelor’s degrees in fields such as engineering,

nursing, administration, and education but now worked low-entry, menial jobs. In addition to co-workers with lower levels of education, their new work environments often entailed long work hours with inconsistent pay. Most of the working participants were paid minimum wage and some were not paid on a monthly basis.

While such work conditions have led to physical exhaustion as well as resentment for being unable to change their situation, refugees nonetheless expressed reluctance to challenge workplace exploitation. This is because none of them had work permits, meaning they ultimately had no stable means of livelihood – and by extension – housing security. A leading report reaffirms the precarious link between livelihood and housing security, citing as Yemeni refugees' most common legal issue their failure to pay rent due to a lack of financial support and their inability to find employment. These failures have sometimes escalated into lawsuits with landlords and subsequent evictions.<sup>15</sup>

Still, many other participants expected to be breadwinners have been unable to find consistent work in Jordan. Several Iraqi men complained of frequent lulls whereby they would work for a day only to retire for a week or two before the next opportunity. Some Syrian men – most of whose children lived overseas – complained that being above the age of 50 or suffering from medical conditions meant that employers were unwilling to hire them. The risk of arrest has also discouraged some refugees from seeking livelihoods. One Iraqi woman who lived in Syria until 2011 mentioned that she used to work in Syria but stopped since coming to Jordan out of fear of being caught without a permit. Indeed, one Somali woman mentioned that her husband had been arrested three times for working without a permit. One Iraqi man described his fear of getting caught by police for seeking his livelihood, “When I work, I feel like a thief”.

### 4.3 Stress Between Spouses

Economic stresses had serious impacts on relationships between husbands and wives. These were closely linked to participants' reported changes in familial norms and expectations – including traditional roles – that have taken place since coming to Jordan. The most significant change has been wives taking on the role of breadwinner alongside or instead of their husbands. Several female participants explained the psychological struggles their husbands had undergone. For example, the only Somali woman living with her husband mentioned that – out of fear of getting apprehended by the authorities – her husband does not work. On the other hand, she is able to work in relatively discrete indoor settings like beauty salons, houses, and nurseries. She complained that her husband's fear has caused him to develop a ‘weak personality’. Similarly, one Sudanese woman mentioned that her husband has become very worried about the future and cannot sleep at night.

Other stresses concerned the effects of spousal inactivity. A Yemeni woman spoke for other participants when she said that when their husbands work, there are no family problems but – on the other hand – when they do not work, many occur. One Syrian woman complained, for example, that her husband spends most of his day at home because of unemployment, which leads him to constantly scrutinise her and the state of their home. Male participants acknowledged how not working has impacted relationships with their wives. They commonly noted that staying at home has led to them getting depressed, thinking too much, and developing anxiety, which

sometimes leads to them having short tempers with their families. They also noted the negative effects of inactivity on their wives. A Sudanese man mentioned that his wife was depressed because she has a bachelor's degree in work administration but cannot work. Another mentioned that his wife suffers from malnutrition as she stays home all the time taking care of their disabled child.

Some participants commented on the positive that has come from the situation. Syrian women mentioned that they did more decision-making together with their husbands and that they are now more flexible with them, allowing them to work and attend training sessions whenever possible. With their husbands often working long hours, they have also taken on chores like buying groceries and picking up the children from school – chores they did not carry out in Syria. While most women commented that their spouses have changed negatively as a result of their struggles to adapt to difficult circumstances, one Yemeni woman mentioned that being on her own with her husband in a new country had made them closer as a family. One Syrian woman positively noted that the limited household income led her husband to quit smoking. Even with such positive developments, the difficulties nonetheless seem to be overwhelming. As one Somali woman phrased it, though they may have become 'stronger' as refugees, they are 'exhausted'.

#### 4.4 Stress on Relationships Between Parents and Children

Participants remarked that settling in a new country under difficult circumstances was a highly disruptive experience for their children. With the exception of the Sudanese participants, all of the parents gave birth to at least one of their children in their countries of origin. One Syrian woman remarked that she has seen dramatic changes in her children's behaviour since coming to Jordan. She mentioned that they were school and college students who suddenly became workers responsible for supporting their families. This, she added, was in addition to the general difficulty they faced in finding job opportunities as children, something which added to their psychological pressures. The move to Jordan was especially difficult for children who came with only one parent. One Iraqi woman – a widow with seven children – mentioned that her teenage daughters had developed traits of depression and introversion since coming to Jordan. One of them developed a speech impediment out of nervousness. However, these were not always permanent conditions; one Syrian woman mentioned that she has two daughters, one of whom was depressed when she came to Jordan and the other very nervous due to their difficult circumstances. But she stated that since having made friends, they have overcome these conditions.

The main factor affecting relationships between parents and their children was employment. Participants noted that when fathers did not work, they usually had strained relationships with their children. A Syrian woman mentioned that due to the pressures of unemployment, fathers sometimes acted aggressively towards their children. One Iraqi man mentioned that financial constraints have led to a situation whereby his children are very upset and frustrated because they stay home most of the time. This is because going out will cost them money they cannot afford to spend. Another complained that he fears he is losing credibility because his children ask him for things that he says he will buy them but knows he cannot. He questioned aloud, "How many times can I say that before they stop believing me?" One Iraqi man described the level of disparity he reaches when at times he thinks about abandoning his children at the UNHCR office because he cannot pay their expenses.

Even when fathers worked, however, they often did so at hours that did not coincide with their children being at home, leading to poor communication. For example, Yemeni men complained that their jobs demanded they work at night, causing them to go days without seeing their children. Parent-child relationships were further complicated if the children worked, leading to a change in household roles and responsibilities. However, aside from a few Somali participants, the participants who lived with their children affirmed that changes in roles and responsibilities did not change children's respect towards them. One Syrian man mentioned that this was because children's overall respect towards parents ultimately depended on how they were raised.

## 5. How Refugees Have Felt Excluded from Jordanian Society

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Refugees reported experiencing different degrees of inclusion into their host society, largely according to their countries of origin. Before looking at social obstacles, we can first look at administrative obstacles to inclusion. At the onset of their arrival, most participants struggled to access basic services, among them housing and medication. Aside from the Syrian participants – who were received at the border by Jordanian authorities and soon came under UNHCR care – most of the participants described landing in Jordan and not knowing where to go once leaving the airport. Some, like the Yemeni participants, mentioned that they spent anywhere from four months to a year in Jordan before becoming aware of the services available to refugees. Even those who managed to secure services mentioned them not lasting long. A number of Iraqi participants mentioned that the cash assistance they received from churches and other NGOs ended in the first year after their arrival. Some Syrian women mentioned that they no longer received the UNHCR's monthly financial assistance (MFA) and winterisation services. Several Somali participants expressed a particularly difficult arrival experience whereby, not being able to read Arabic, they did not know where to access important medical and legal services. Fortunately, children's education was one of the most accessible services; any refugee child registered with the UNHCR or UNICEF was eligible for enrolment. However, out of fear of being reported to authorities or in avoidance of them being stigmatised as refugees, some participants had not registered their children with any refugee agency.

Beyond the network of charities and international organisations, documentation was often an impediment for refugees seeking institutional enfranchisement or travel abroad. While they all had common issues, each community had particular ones – often tied to their countries of origin. Many refugees arrived in Jordan with no documents other than their passports. This meant, for example, procedures that required marriage certificates such as presenting birth certificates became rather difficult. In turn, necessary procedures like obtaining birth certificates and renewing passports were often complicated by participants' political relationships with their countries of origin. For example, one Iraqi participant mentioned that he went to the Iraqi embassy to correct a typo in his passport. When the embassy submitted the request for approval from Baghdad, they told him he had to come in person to Iraq – a sure sign that he was wanted for security reasons. Sudanese participants mentioned that their embassy has been particularly uncooperative processing their

requests; coming from politically sensitive southern Sudan, they are often perceived by the government to be part of the opposition. Without access to a central government, many Somalis had entered Jordan on forged Sudanese and Yemeni passports – documents that those two states could identify as forged. This predicament was then complicated by the fact that Somalia has no embassy in Jordan whereby they could obtain legitimate documents. Many Syrian participants refused to request services from their embassy in fear of political reprisal.

Participants faced a number of social obstacles trying to build new lives in their host communities. They described forging networks from anew, relying overwhelmingly on help from fellow refugees. While this was largely because fellow refugees had undergone similar experiences and could help them navigate host community institutions and services, it was also necessary because of some host community aversions towards helping refugees. Some prevalent host community perceptions held that refugees were outsiders to the community whose welfare was the responsibility of humanitarian agencies or foreign governments, especially for those seeking medical treatment. One report reaffirms this perception, “...simply being labelled a refugee implies that other identifying details will be relegated to the background, both to the institutions charged with managing refugees and, consequently, for the displaced person himself as he goes about constructing normalcy in a new place.” The analysis adds that while this label may help regulate refugee affairs, it can make it more difficult for refugees to integrate into their host society.<sup>16</sup> For people reared in communities in which personal connections and relationships are critical for securing services and employment – sometimes even more so than institutions – displacement can have highly disorienting effects.<sup>17</sup>

Participants explained that their countries of origin affected general host country perceptions of them. These perceptions were shaped by both the cultural and political contexts of their countries of origin. For example, Iraqis mentioned that they enjoyed neighbourly relations with Jordanians because of the longstanding political and economic goodwill between the two countries before 2003. Many Jordanians had moreover worked or studied in Iraq. Because of their complexions, Sudanese and Somali participants complained that they stood out. As one report reaffirms, “Sudanese and Somalis both say that the perceived racial difference makes it harder for them to integrate within the Jordanian community.” Both groups reported they had very little “bridging capital,” or trusted interactions with Jordanians or other refugee communities.<sup>18</sup> While one Sudanese participant explained that the Sudanese had a ‘special situation’ whereby they could easily identify each other in the streets and thus easily network, the drawback, he explained, was that they stood out from the rest of Jordanian society. None of the Somali women reported having good relations with their neighbours while one Sudanese woman complained that people treated Sudanese ‘as if they have a virus’. Similarly, Yemenis complained that – despite their levels of education – because of their accents and national dress, people often looked down at them as ‘backwards’ relative to the rest of Jordanian society.

Moreover, in some economically depressed neighbourhoods where many of the refugees had settled, locals often perceived them as competitors and resented them for the donor assistance they received. In this light, one Syrian participant mentioned hearing comments like, “You are the reason I lost my job”, “You are the reason for the rent increases”, and “You are the reason for the price increases”. One Sudanese woman mentioned hearing people say, “Refugees made our life difficult”. In some neighbourhoods, refugees were particularly vulnerable to exploitation. One

Sudanese participant who had secured a job as a server at an embassy talked about an ongoing situation in which the doorman of his building was extorting him for half of his salary, threatening to expose him for working illegally if he did not pay him. Overall, host community apathy towards refugees was compounded by the fact that locals often shared comparable standards of living with the refugees.

One of the primary ways participants expressed a desire to be included in society was through work. The main obstacle was acquiring a work permit – the absence of which often either meant rejection or exploitative terms of employment. Male participants highlighted the importance of the work permit as an assurance that they could work without fear of arrest and challenge employers over iniquitous practices. To this obstacle, some of the participants added discriminatory factors, namely that they were not hired because they did not look Jordanian. One Sudanese participant with a bachelor's degree in hospitality met his job inquiry at a hotel with rejection on the grounds that he did not fit a certain profile. When he pressed the hotel worker for the reason, the hotel worker openly told him it was because of his colour.

Almost all of the women expressed a wish to work – and if possible – from home. Some mentioned not knowing about where to find opportunities. Others complained about low pay – the reason why some stopped seeking opportunities altogether. In this light, one Syrian woman complained that some business owners and neighbours were exploitative, in one case only paying her 1 JOD per hour for cooking. Another Syrian woman complained about her stint as a teacher, in which students mocked her accent. Aside from employment, most female participants also wished to participate in more personal growth activities. But some participants, like the Sudanese women, lamented that prized training programmes were usually only available for Syrian refugees, as per donor preferences.

Despite the struggles adult participants faced, they showed positive signs of social integration upon which they wished to build. Syrian women mentioned that since coming to Jordan, they have partaken in activities at local community-based organisations such as crochet and memorising the Qur'an – neither of which they found the opportunities to do in Syria. One Iraqi muralist whose commissions were severely curtailed during the economic sanctions said that he finds opportunities to showcase and sell his paintings at the UNHCR's summer and winter bazaars. One of the Yemeni participants who worked at a restaurant mentioned that since Yemenis have begun working as chefs and waiters, Jordanian restaurants have added Yemeni dishes to their menus. These have become a big hit with customers, encouraging Jordanian restaurants to retain Yemeni workers. All wished for the easing of work restrictions that would allow them to better realise their potential in Jordan without fear of exploitation or arrest.

## 6. Children's Social Exclusion

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Refugee children experienced social exclusion primarily by being outside of the education system. Particularly alarming was the age at which participants or their children began dropping out of school. For example, of the 14 Syrian male participants, three mentioned having children who

dropped out under the age of 15. One Iraqi woman mentioned that her 18-year old son has been out of school since coming to Jordan at the age of 12, even though he was considered an academic achiever in Iraq. In most cases, participants and their children were out of school because of schooling hardships or the need to work. In other cases, however, this was merely the continuation of an earlier social pattern, evident in the fact that many of the older participants who spent their youths in their countries of origin during times of peace had dropped out of school at early stages. In this light, one 17-year old Iraqi participant explained that he dropped out of school not because he wanted to work but because he did not like learning. This phenomenon points to broader regional attitudes towards education.

In terms of actual schooling hardships, parents were often discouraged at the enrolment stage. This was either due to misinformation or limited resources. For example, one Iraqi participant mentioned that his two sons dropped out of school at the ages of 14 and 15 because they did not have residency permits. This, however, seemed to be a common excuse that schools provided parents in order to turn away students from what were in most cases already overcrowded classrooms. Parents, however, usually could not counter this reason either because they had not registered their children with a refugee agency or because they were unaware of their rights under Jordanian law entitling registered children to attend public school. One Iraqi parent justified not re-enrolling his children in middle school as a result of losing access to subsidised school supplies from an international organisation. There were also other reasons unrelated to schooling hardships per se. Several participants mentioned that their children were out of school because they had to support their families. In this light, most of the Syrian participants' children worked – some as porters, grocers, and concrete pourers. One Iraqi woman mentioned that her son dropped out of school in the ninth grade to work in the hospitality industry. More than any other group, Somali participants mentioned that the main reasons for their youth dropping out of school was bullying and discrimination. Across all groups, non-attendance has meant that refugee youth miss out on a critical stage of peer acculturation and the opportunity to enjoy a sense of structure and normalcy in the midst of highly turbulent social displacement.

Children who did attend school nonetheless faced another set of obstacles trying to be part of Jordanian society. Many children reported to their parents suffering from discrimination, bullying, and labelling in schools, all of which negatively affected their self-esteem and academic achievement. Some Somali women complained that whenever something goes wrong between their children and a Jordanian child, people threaten to deport them to Somalia. Feeling vulnerable in social settings, this has led to many Somali children avoiding interactions with Jordanians altogether. In many cases, it appears that participant's children were too young to understand the discrimination they faced. One Sudanese man mentioned that his eighth-grade daughter was a high academic achiever and was awarded a scholarship by the Ministry of Education, but that being granted the award led to resentment from their neighbours, adults and children alike. Another mentioned that his 4-year-old daughter suffered from being called derogatory names on her way to school because of her colour. Frustrated by being perceived as different, one eight-year old child asked his father, "Isn't there any school especially for Sudanese?" Several participants moreover mentioned that their children have faced difficult, ostracising questions such as, "What are you doing in Jordan?" This has led some to try to avoid being identified as other than Jordanian. In

this light, some Syrian mothers mentioned that their children have abandoned their Syrian dialects for less conspicuous Jordanian ones. While such behaviour might in some cases be read as youths' positive will towards social inclusion, in others it might disguise deep-seated feelings of insecurity.

According to the psychosocial reading of children's development, during the school-age years of 5-18, two important tensions help shape a person's personality. From early adolescence until the age of 11, children develop between the tensions of 'industry' or 'inferiority'. Children encouraged and commended by parents and teachers develop a feeling of competence and belief in their skills. On the other hand, those who receive little or no encouragement from parents, teachers, or peers will doubt their abilities to be successful.<sup>19</sup> With most refugee children marginalised in or excluded from critical social settings such as schools and neighbourhood spaces, they are prone to feel discouraged and scorned – most severely for factors beyond their comprehension or control. Spending so much time in their households or with children having the same background and set of circumstances, their feedback from society – either 'industry' or 'inferiority' reinforcing – is bound to be concentrated and limited to a few voices.

# Psychosocial Factors in Children's Development

9 - 12 Years

## Competence

industry vs. inferiority



### Household

Through social interactions, children begin to seek praise and attention for their newly acquired skills and abilities. At earlier stages, a child's interactions revolve around caregivers and family.



### Education

Once school begins, actual performance and skill are evaluated. Grades and feedback from educators encourage kids to pay more attention to the actual quality of their work.



### Play

Play forms a vital role in building children's confidence. Through proficiency at play, children are able to develop a sense of competence and pride in their abilities.



### Friendship

By expanding their social interactions beyond their households, children start to seek recognition in their neighbourhoods and communities for their talents and skills, building their confidence.

Cherry, K. 2019. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development [online] Verywell. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psycho-social-development2795740-> (Accessed 27 Nov. 2019).

Figure 3: Psychosocial Factors in Children's Development

As for those between 12 and 18, psychosocial theory holds that youth navigate the tensions of 'identity' and 'confusion'. These are critical years in which a person's lifestyle and long-term behavioural patterns take shape. At this stage, youth who receive proper encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration will emerge with a strong sense of self and feelings of independence and control. Those who remain unsure of their beliefs and desires will feel insecure and confused about themselves and the future.<sup>20</sup> With so much personal exploration and self-understanding that takes place in a school setting – discovering intellectual interests, work habits, activities, and preferences – the fact that so many refugee youth are out of school can mean they are deprived of personal exploration in a relatively safe environment. Rather, they often undergo this process at workplaces where there is much more at stake for making mistakes – namely, getting fired or bearing the consequence of a superior losing money. While working at a young age might help a teen emerge with a strong sense of independence and control in a way that most school settings might not, there still remains the difficulty that arises when teens are unable to receive organic reinforcement from peers their own age and partake in the common socialisation so thoroughly generated by student life.

# Psychosocial Factors in Adolescents' Development

12 - 19 Years

## Fidelity

identity vs. role confusion



### Family

Parents and family members continue to exert an influence on how teens feel about themselves. A stable household provides strong grounds for a teen to build upon their identity.



### Social groups

Teens are naturally driven by social groups where they can experience encouragement, reinforcement, and a sense of belonging. Culture, heritage, ethnicity and nationality are some.



### Trends

Constantly changing trends play a role in shaping how teens feel about themselves. With fluctuations in information and media, teens may feel confused about what they want to be.



### Beliefs

Belief systems are a major pillar upon which teens' moral identities are built. Without a moral foundation, teens build apathy towards the world and others around them.

Cherry, K. 2019. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development [online] Verywell. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development2795740-> (Accessed 27 Nov. 2019).

Figure 4: Psychosocial Factors in Adolescents' Development

## 7. Recommendations

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Throughout the ten focus groups, participants reiterated a fundamental human desire to live in peace and have the opportunity to build better lives for themselves and their children. They stressed that doing so required Jordan to afford them work and residency rights – official entryways into the labour force and public institutions. Recognising the limits of Jordan as a refugee host and the intractability of conflicts in their countries of origin, the majority of participants expressed that their only hope for a secure future was in a third-country. Nevertheless, they urged Jordan and its citizens to listen to their messages and consider recommendations that would dramatically improve their lives.

Though respondents largely hoped for full access to work and residency, an Iraqi woman suggested that UNHCR and the Jordanian government work together to help refugees even through piecemeal effort. One such idea was to give temporary residency that would allow for short term work and travel between countries – especially for religious reasons such as Umrah. She also advocated for partial assistance in paying for education costs and medical services. In the final analysis, refugees conveyed the importance of having some legal recognition of their residency.

Somali, Sudanese, and Yemeni participants – refugee groups that largely considered themselves ignored – lamented unequal treatment by NGOs and a general lack of awareness of their plights. A common perception among them was that unequal access to NGO services was because of a lack of awareness about the issues they face – not only in their home countries but also in Jordan and third-countries. A Yemeni man stressed that people are not only unaware of the true suffering in Yemen but they are also oblivious to the anguish and hardships that Yemeni refugees face in host countries such as Djibouti, where a great many have sought asylum. He hoped that Jordanians would spread awareness of their suffering. Somali participants suggested that NGOs should give refugees equal access to legal and public health service regardless of their nationality. For Somalis specifically, this would include introducing language resources for those who cannot speak Arabic.

As a whole, participant messages to their host community and the international community centred on spreading recognition of their hardships and aspirations for a better future. They emphasised that they were educated and able to contribute to society if given the opportunity but that their talents were being wasted. They underscored that having access to work would be the main solution to their wellbeing. Furthermore, they felt deeply concerned about the future of their children and hoped for international support for their health and education.

It remains to be seen how long circumstances in the refugee's five countries of origin will prevent them from returning or when third-countries will accept more. While these factors are beyond the control of the Jordanian host community, there are others well within its power. One Sudanese man's message to the world was simple but encapsulated the desires of every refugee: "Treat us like human beings". He, like all participants, expressed gratitude toward host countries but hoped that people would not disregard the hardships they faced while displaced. In this light, it would help for all Jordanians to consider: If and when refugees return, how will they remember their time in Jordan? What will they say about the interactions they had with its people? Did I do my part to

make them feel welcome? It is only from such awareness and empathy that society can move towards a more complete sense of unity and inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2018). Global Compact On Refugees. Available at: [https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR\\_English.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf) (Accessed October 27, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Collier, P. (2003). Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy. World Bank Publications p. 93

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2019). UNHCR. Jordan – Registered Persons Of Concern: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Jordan – 31 December 2019 [online]. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73227> (Accessed January 20, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Balad News (2014). "Learn about 'Jordanians' of Somali Origin". [online] Available at:

<[http://www.albaladnews.net/more-101811-0-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81\\_%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86\\_%D9%85%D9%86\\_%D8%A3%D8%B5%D9%84\\_%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A](http://www.albaladnews.net/more-101811-0-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81_%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86_%D9%85%D9%86_%D8%A3%D8%B5%D9%84_%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A)

(Accessed September 16, 2019)

<sup>8</sup> See UNHCR (2019)

<sup>9</sup> Davis, R., A. Taylor, W. Todman, and E. Murphy (2016). "Sudanese and Somali Refugees in Jordan: Hierarchies of Aid in Protracted Displacement Crises." Middle East Report 279

<sup>10</sup> See UNHCR (2019)

<sup>11</sup> See Davis, R. et al. (2016), p5.

<sup>12</sup> McLeod, S. A. (2018). Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Simply Psychology. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html> (Accessed October 13, 2019)

<sup>13</sup> Wells, R., Lawsin, C., Hunt, C., Said Youssef, O., Abujado, F. and Steel, Z. (2018). An ecological model of adaptation to displacement: individual, cultural and community factors affecting psychosocial adjustment among Syrian refugees in Jordan. Global Mental Health, 5.

<sup>14</sup> See: UNHCR (2019). Impact of separation on refugee families: Syrian refugees in Jordan – Jordan. [online] ReliefWeb. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/impact-separation-refugee-families-syrian-refugees-jordan> (Accessed 31 Oct. 2019).

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-Wells et al. (2018)

<sup>15</sup> Recent Development and Main Challenges of Yemeni Refugees Situation in Jordan (Legal Paper), 8. Prepared by: Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development Legal Aid Unit August 2018.

<sup>16</sup> MacDougall, S., (2011). Refugees from Inside the System: Iraqi Divorcees in Jordan. Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees, 28(1), pp.37-48.

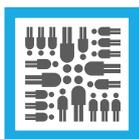
<sup>17</sup> Cazabat, C. (2018). The Ripple Effect: Economic Impacts of Internal Displacement: Multidimensional Impacts of Internal Displacement. [online] Internal-displacement.org. Available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/research-areas/economic-impacts-of-displacement> (Accessed 31 Oct. 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Calhoun, N. (2010). With a little help from our friends: a participatory assessment of social capital among refugees in Jordan.. [online] Refworld. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4fe0375e2.html> (Accessed 31 Oct. 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Cherry, K. 2019. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development [online] Verywell. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740> (Accessed 27 Nov. 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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