



Summary Report

The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan

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1 Introduction

More than 4.8 million refugees¹ have fled Syria, most to neighbouring countries including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. With 90% of Syrian refugees² currently residing outside of camps, host governments and aid agencies have had to rethink the more conventional refugee assistance programmes designed for camp-based responses. For many refugees, help has had to come from their own initiative and existing family, tribal and social networks. While Syrians continue to cross borders as the conflict rages on, an increasing number of refugees have been displaced for over five years, with little prospect of a durable solution. With no resolution to the conflict in sight, such long-term displacement calls for long-term, sustainable programmes to support refugees' livelihoods.

1.1 The study

This summary report is based on a longer study on the lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan.³ The study tackles some of the challenges of large-scale refugee movement, protracted displacement and the increasingly urban nature of displacement. It does so by exploring the lives and livelihoods of refugees in two distinct phases. The first phase of research recreates with refugees their displacement story to understand how their aims, strategies, actions and livelihoods have changed during displacement. The second phase explores the networks and institutions refugees have engaged with (including host communities, government and local and international organisations) and the factors that shape this interaction and its outcomes for refugee livelihoods.

The study considers the priorities and strategies of refugees in the course of protracted displacement; how these priorities and strategies may change

during displacement and in response to shocks; the opportunities refugees see for their social and economic integration; and openings to better support refugees through a richer understanding of their perspectives, and the roles and perspectives of the people, networks and institutions that shape their lives.

The first phase of research consisted of interviews with urban refugees in Istanbul, Turkey and Zarqa, Jordan, in May 2016. Over 100 refugees were interviewed in the two locations (56 in Turkey and 50 in Jordan). The interviews set out to map refugees' displacement history from the moment they became refugees – that is, from the time they crossed the Syrian border to the time of the interview. Rather than simply documenting refugees' movements and life circumstances, the interviews aimed to understand their motivations, perceptions and strategies – why they sought asylum in the country they did, if and how they managed to meet basic subsistence needs, what their hopes and goals were and how they tried to achieve them. Interviews also set out to uncover the many organisations and institutions, including informal institutions such as networks, that shaped refugees' lives during displacement.

The second phase of research was undertaken in July and August 2016. It involved interviews with employers of Syrian refugees, academics, community-based organisations, philanthropic organisations, Turkish, Jordanian and Syrian organisations, international NGOs and organisations, government officials and UN agencies. The interviews set out to map the roles and functions of these entities, their views and perspectives on Syrian refugees and their interactions with refugees, as well as with each other.

1.2 The context

Successive Regional Response Plans (RRPs) launched by the UN have set strategic objectives and funding appeals for the refugee response, both in Syria and the region. By 2016, the request stood at \$5.78 billion, to support 4.7m refugees and four million individuals in host communities, and entities supporting the response: host governments, the UN, international and

1 Estimate from December 2016 (UNHCR, 2016a).

2 UNHCR estimates that 492,880 Syrian refugees were residing in camps in September 2016 (UNHCR, 2016a).

3 The study is part of a larger programme of research, which includes studies on Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

national NGOs (3RP, 2016). According to the UN, 2015 appeals for the crisis were 56% funded (OCHA, 2016), marking a slight decline from the previous year and a significant drop-off from the first two years (2012 and 2013), when the appeal was funded at 70% and 72% respectively. As a consequence, Syrians seeking asylum in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have faced a drastic reduction in assistance.

Although the great majority of refugees are hosted in the region, hundreds of thousands have also made the gruelling and dangerous journey to Europe. The arrival of such large numbers into the heart of Europe – and the consequent political responses to the influx – has stimulated efforts to encourage regional governments to contain refugee flows within the region. The Jordan Compact announced at the ‘Supporting Syria and the Region Conference’ in London in February 2016 called for ‘a new paradigm ... promoting economic development and opportunities in Jordan to the benefit of Jordanians and Syrian refugees’ (Government of Jordan,

2016). The Jordanian government has agreed to ease restrictions on Syrian refugees’ access to work permits in selected sectors and roles, and introduced a temporary fee waiver on applications. The Compact also includes budget support and access to funds from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as technical assistance. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC), the central government agency responsible for authorising NGO projects, has also loosened an unofficial ban on livelihoods programming for Syrians. For its part, Turkey has concluded a controversial agreement with the European Union (EU) providing for the repatriation of migrants and refugees back to Turkey. In return, Turkey has requested the liberalisation of visas to Europe for its nationals, accelerated talks regarding Ankara’s admission to the EU, an increase in the resettlement of refugees residing in Turkey and increased financial support to the refugee response. Turkey has also adapted its labour laws to offer work permits to Syrian refugees, and has announced plans to provide citizenship and residency to 300,000 skilled Syrians.

2 Refugee lives and livelihoods: the perspectives of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan

2.1 The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Istanbul

There are almost 400,00 Syrian refugees across Istanbul. Refugees move to the city motivated by their need for safety, cultural familiarity and the perception that Istanbul offers the best opportunity for employment and education for their children. While some of the refugees we interviewed were financially secure, most worked in low-paying, insecure jobs. Help from municipalities is ad hoc and humanitarian organisations are struggling to provide assistance.

According to the refugees we interviewed, the main livelihood challenges are uncertainty regarding their status as refugees (notably work permits and citizenship), poor working conditions (low pay, informal, insecure jobs and harassment, particularly of women), and discrimination. Refugees with no support from pre-existing networks were more susceptible to predatory practices at the hands of landlords and bosses. Most refugees believed that assistance was insufficient, and had not heard of NGO support in Istanbul, had tried unsuccessfully to obtain assistance or felt that NGO support was located too far from their household to be reachable.

Through analysis of their goals, strategies and livelihoods outcomes, the study identified three broad categorisations of refugees in Istanbul: those focused on integration, those who were struggling and those focused on survival.

Refugees in the integration category are more comfortable financially, with decent living conditions and less anxiety about the future. The general aim of refugees in this category is to gain respect, engage with the wider Syrian and Turkish communities, strengthen networks and increase employment opportunities.

Refugees in this category represented a minority of the refugees interviewed, and the study believes a minority in the overall refugee population in Istanbul. Numerous factors seem to be important in supporting successful livelihoods outcomes, including political connections and cultural networks. Most refugees said that they received financial and other forms of support from family and friends in Turkey, Europe and the Gulf.

Refugees in the struggling category enjoy at least some stability – for example, one or more members of the family has a job, albeit a low-paying one. Families usually live in a small apartment or share an apartment with other families, or single men live together. This group represented the large majority of the refugees interviewed, and may reflect the experience and status of most Syrian refugees in Istanbul. Refugees in this category aimed to achieve more stable employment with decent pay, using existing skills, as well as some form of legal status or protection. However, finding work, paying rent and investing in education was a continuous struggle; without employment protection or higher wages, refugees interviewed made inevitable trade-offs regarding their main priorities (paying rent, living expenses, schooling). Most refugees in this category worked in textiles or the service industry (restaurants, bakeries, stores), while a minority had other professional and artisan jobs (accountants, carpenters, painters). Most refugees found work through Syrians and to a lesser extent Turkish friends, or by approaching businesses in person. All were confronted with low pay and poor working conditions (long hours, physically demanding working conditions, non-payment and harassment).

For extremely poor refugees with little access to support networks or assistance, daily survival to meet basic subsistence needs is the goal. This often entails daily labour or some form of hand-to-mouth existence. Refugees within this group typically move frequently

or stay with acquaintances or family, or in some cases groups of single men live together. Refugees in the survival category relied on short-term strategies designed to reduce their living costs and provide them with immediate cash. These refugees often shared crowded accommodation or lived at their place of work. With no savings or direct support through existing networks of friends or family, daily labour was their main source of income.

2.1.1 Documentation and legal status

Refugees in Istanbul found it difficult to obtain the legal documents (the *kimlik*, a national identify document) they needed to access assistance, the Turkish medical system and the work permit scheme. Procedures to obtain such documents were unclear and required risky and expensive steps (returning to the Turkish city where they initially registered), and refugees reported varied experiences with delivery times and pressure to pay bribes to the police and local authorities. Similar uncertainty linked to the new work permit arrangements left Syrian refugees feeling that they personally did not stand to benefit from changes in labour law.

2.1.2 Migration to Europe and integration

When asked about whether they planned to make the trip to Europe, interviewees responded with an emphatic 'no' or 'yes'. Factors shaping refugees' views included how satisfied they were with the opportunities available to them in Istanbul, the cost of the journey and the dangers involved in going by sea, differences in cultural and religious norms between Syria and Europe and feedback from family and friends who had already made the journey. There were also mixed views about integration into Turkish society. Some Syrians had taken a practical approach, learning the language and making connections, while others were resistant to integration for fear that it would diminish their connection to Syria. This reluctance led some refugees to stay within their own communities, not learning Turkish or sending their children to Syrian schools.

2.2 The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Zarqa

The Jordanian government's stance towards Syrian refugees has undergone significant shifts since the outbreak of the conflict, from initially refusing an encampment policy to establishing six camps; from a liberal employment policy for Syrians to a strict one;

and from permeable to virtually closed borders. The Syrian refugees interviewed for this study in Zarqa, an industrial city near Amman, struggled to adapt their livelihood strategies in this fluid policy environment.

2.2.1 Fragile livelihood outcomes: assistance and employment

Until recent policy changes following the London Conference in 2016, it was difficult and dangerous for Syrians to work, and impossible for aid agencies to do meaningful livelihoods support as the government rejected any attempts to make the population self-sufficient. Many refugees worked illegally in the service industry, construction, skilled fields like carpentry and textile production and skilled and unskilled agricultural work. Cash assistance has been crucial in helping to sustain Syrians in displacement. In 2015, over \$53m in cash was distributed to 30,000 Syrian refugee households (UNHCR, 2016c). Syrians also have access to basic services such as health and education.

2.2.2 Refugees' goals and aspirations

While most refugees said that they had come to Jordan in the footsteps of relatives or neighbours, or simply because it was the closest open border, many emphasised that safety and family unity had been their main goal. When considering remaining in Jordan in the medium and long term, refugees often said that they felt trapped in aid dependence and unable to better their lives or those of their families. Concerns were particularly high regarding the future of their children. While parents felt that they could probably accept a life of menial labour, they wanted more for their children, but believed that a better future was unattainable given the limited educational and livelihoods prospects available in Jordan.

Most refugees interviewed for this study had initially arrived at Zaatari Camp, but few stayed there very long because the lack of privacy, fears about the safety of children and women, poor sanitation and health services and generally rudimentary conditions made life in the camp untenable. For refugees in illegal work, deportation to camps, and in some cases back to Syria, is a constant concern. While only a few families interviewed had directly experienced or witnessed deportation, all refugees working outside the home felt the risk acutely.

2.2.3 Livelihood strategies

The predominant strategy among Syrian refugee men in Zarqa is to work illegally outside the home. Black

market jobs can be full-time, such as working as sales assistants in retail stores or as shelf stackers in supermarkets, or on-demand work in maintenance, construction and bakeries. In some cases refugees had gone stall to stall and shop to shop asking for work, though it was more common to find unadvertised jobs through Syrian or, for the more well-connected, Jordanian social networks.

The lack of work protection and means to address grievances in the black market mean that informal sector workers are often subject to exploitation, including working long hours, denial of leave or pay and low wages. Syrians without work permits – like all foreign black market workers – must work covertly at night or at weekends, when there are fewer Ministry of Labour patrols. Few women interviewed for the study had attempted to find formal employment, and most considered working outside the home to be either culturally unacceptable or impractical given their childcare responsibilities.

2.2.4 Work permits and entrepreneurship

Despite optimism amongst aid actors about the recent changes in Jordan's policy on the right to work, the Syrian refugees we interviewed did not see work permits as a panacea for the livelihood challenges they faced. Although some skilled workers have found employers who will apply for work permits, most refugees could not transfer their skills because of the legal constraints on employment. For the majority, working in the informal sector, work permits felt a distant possibility, and most did not believe that their employers would agree to formalise their jobs. Many refugees had multiple employers who called on them for ad hoc jobs, and thus could not see themselves being tied to one employer for a year, as the work permit scheme requires. Consequently, most refugees continued to see their main livelihoods option through informal and illegal work and thus no relief from their fear of deportation back to camps. Refugees with more social and economic capital have entered into business partnerships. These partnerships are often with relatives, as the lack of legal protection for Syrian refugees requires a greater degree of trust within the business partnership.

2.2.5 Relations with the host community

Several reports have highlighted significant tensions between Syrians and Jordanians, particularly in northern cities (REACH, 2014; REACH, 2015; Mercy Corps, 2012). Some refugees said that they had encountered discrimination and verbal abuse, and that their children

had been bullied at school, but by far the most frequent and bitter complaint was about exploitation at work. Others told the study that Jordanians shaped their lives positively: some women said they had strong social networks that spanned Syrian and Jordanian communities, their children had made Jordanian friends and they had benefited from charitable acts and assistance from neighbours. Few refugees characterised their experience as wholly negative or wholly positive; the statement of one young woman aptly characterised the experience of many refugees that 'some people give you things for half price because you are a refugee, and some people charge you double'.

2.2.6 Integration, return and resettlement

When considering remaining in Jordan in the medium and long term, refugees often commented that they felt trapped and unable to better their lives or those of their families, increasing their desire either to go home or to consider moving to countries that were deemed to be culturally alien. Some said they would go back to Syria if the situation in Jordan got more difficult, while others expressed the conviction that it would be possible, hopefully in the near future. Many were reluctant to pursue resettlement out of fear that doing so would split up their family.

2.3 Conclusion: the perspectives of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan

Syrians who have sought refuge in Istanbul and Zarqa have been met with very different policy responses. The starkest policy difference relates to assistance. In Zarqa, refugees are provided with – and are heavily reliant on – assistance, whereas in Istanbul most urban refugees receive little or nothing, and must find ways to support themselves. In both countries the majority of refugees interviewed struggled to make ends meet and saw few opportunities to improve their lives. Most were confined to low-paid jobs in the informal sector.

In Istanbul, most refugees work irregular jobs while authorities turn a blind eye, allowing some degree of autonomy and freedom. Although Turkey has recently allowed refugees to apply for work permits, most cannot overcome the financial and bureaucratic hurdles associated with acquiring a permit, and are unsure whether their employers will want to obtain work permits for them because doing so would

increase the costs of employing refugees (as employers must pay pensions and other social contributions). Refugees' main frustration in Turkey is that the only available work is low-paid and unskilled, and leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Most salaries are not sufficient to meet all subsistence needs, so refugees must make trade-offs between priorities such as food, accommodation and education. The diverse profiles and circumstances of refugees in Istanbul highlight their wide range of priorities, goals and aspirations. Providing tailored support to meet these varied needs – particularly for refugees with added vulnerabilities – will be a key programmatic challenge moving forward, as will promoting decent work and social cohesion between refugees and host populations.

The situation for refugees in Zarqa is very different than it is for refugees in the urban sprawl of Istanbul. Syrian refugees in Jordan receive comparatively high levels of assistance, enabling most to meet their essential needs. While most refugees interviewed wanted to work, doing so is illegal without a permit. The authorities are vigilant in catching those working illegally and refugees in illegal work are at higher risk of exploitation and often have to do low-paying jobs. While a large number of work permits have recently been designated for refugees (and the application fee has been temporarily waived) and steps are being taken by the government and its partners to resolve some of the challenges highlighted by refugees, refugees do not believe that permits are likely to benefit them personally, and are concerned about the long-term implications of the permit scheme, including being tied to one employer and having to pay an application fee when their permit needs renewal. Refugees in Zarqa therefore make employment decisions by evaluating perceived risks, benefits and trade-offs associated with working illegally, trying to attain a work permit, or relying on assistance and not working at all.

While Istanbul and Zarqa are, in many ways, very different – including in the capacity of the national economy to absorb additional people into the workforce – parallels can be drawn between the situations of Syrian refugees in both locations. While there are undoubtedly limitations and barriers, Syrians in both cities have reasonable access to healthcare and basic education. They have had negative and positive experiences with locals, and ultimately few envisaged remaining in Turkey or Jordan as their desired long-term solution – most hoped to return to Syria when it was safe to do so. Far from seeing policy changes

as a stabilising force or panacea, refugees viewed the frequent policy changes in both countries (such as those related to assistance or work permits) with caution and scepticism, and the status quo as unstable. Refugees in both cities perceived their livelihoods as fragile – in Turkey because most are unable to work lawfully and are at risk of exploitation, and in Jordan because the introduction of work permits has caused some to fear losing the assistance on which they rely.

Beyond the structural constraints Syrian refugees face in Turkey and Jordan, some of their reluctance to settle can be understood as a means of avoiding confronting the reality of protracted displacement, as well as a response to the loss of material resources, socio-economic status, livelihoods and culture associated with the war. Resettlement was a desirable solution for some refugees, but it was also rejected by many, particularly in Jordan, due to issues related to family unity and a desire to stay in a country culturally and geographically close to Syria. While refugees in Turkey were well aware of the financial risks and physical dangers associated with irregular movement to Europe, this was considered an option by some who saw it as their only way out of an untenable situation.

While refugees' perceptions of their institutional landscapes in Istanbul and Zarqa differ, they nonetheless share similar goals and aspirations. Refugees in both contexts want safety, family reunification and to be able to meet their basic needs in a dignified manner. They want quality education for their children and healthcare for their families, as well as constructive engagement with and respect from members of the host environment. They want support to be available for vulnerable refugees who need it most, and they believe that policies should be developed and assistance delivered in a way that is equitable and transparent. They want a basis for their hope that they will not be consigned to living in instability and limbo for years to come.

There was a strong sense during the study that adult Syrians in Turkey and Jordan had begun to resign themselves to the difficulties and indignities that come from being a refugee in protracted displacement, but they could not accept that for their children, and were motivated to improve their situation for the sake of their children and their children's future. As this is at the heart of what concerns and motivates many refugees, it is a key potential area from which

to explore policy and programmatic interventions. While refugees did what they could in their individual capacity (whether by working low-paying, exploitative jobs, or starting small home-based income-generating projects), these efforts were at times strongly helped

or hindered by both state policy and international humanitarian efforts. The following section provides complementary analysis, considering these policies and the institutional landscape from the perspective of non-refugee stakeholders in Turkey and Jordan.

3 The institutional environment for Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan

3.1 The institutional environment for Syrian refugees' lives and livelihoods in Turkey

Refugees in Turkey face considerable challenges. Yet while certain aspects of Turkey's response to refugees could be improved, it should be recognised that the country is hosting more refugees than any other, and in a global context in which many governments are restricting the access and rights of refugees. As such, key elements of Turkey's response (particularly access to healthcare, freedom of movement and registration) have been remarkable. The following micro-level analysis of the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Istanbul is framed within these positive aspects of Turkey's macro-level response to the influx of 2.7m people.

The livelihood challenges of Syrian refugees in Istanbul are three-fold: employment conditions; increasing prejudice against Syrian refugees; and major challenges in accessing assistance and services, particularly for the most vulnerable refugees. The institutions that support refugees are struggling to meet these challenges, overwhelmed by the scale of need, a dearth of information on refugees' socio-economic profiles and a lack of effective leadership and coordination, especially from the government. The failure of the Turkish government to clearly articulate a vision and detailed plans on refugee-related issues, through public dialogue and strong engagement with the private sector, refugees and civil society, has contributed to growing tensions.⁴

The Turkish government plays an extensive role in managing what has become a non-camp, government-

financed approach atypical of most refugee responses (World Bank, 2015). Another distinctive characteristic of the government's approach is the marginal role of international humanitarian organisations,⁵ particularly in Istanbul, with a strong operational role for the Turkish Red Crescent and national NGOs. While managing the provision of services (primary healthcare and education) for Syrian refugees, the government is also passing new laws and procedures on refugee employment. Meanwhile, under a controversial deal with the EU Europe is providing economic and political incentives to Turkey in an effort to keep Syrians within its borders.

3.1.1 The labour market, economy and work permit schemes

The structural challenges within the Turkish labour market and economy have affected employment opportunities and the quality of jobs for refugees (World Bank Group, 2015; OECD, 2016). Turkey has welcomed cheap labour in specific sectors, enabling refugees to work and providing them with a form of self-reliance, but this has left refugees vulnerable to exploitation and confined to poorly paid jobs. The informal labour market is not specifically a Syrian refugee issue: Turkish nationals work in the informal sector, as do migrants and refugees of other nationalities (albeit under a different legal framework to Syrian refugees).

Legalising work and allowing work permits for Syrian refugees may have little impact in the sectors where they are largely employed. This may explain the slow uptake of work permits, with only 5,500 issued to Syrians between January and July 2016. Formal, legal employment through the new scheme is also

⁴ The second phase of research in Istanbul was finalised on the day of the attempted coup on 15 July 2016. The longer report reflects on the potential consequences of the aftermath of the coup. For more, see Barbelet, 2016.

⁵ This may change as the World Food Programme (WFP) announced its involvement in a large-scale cash programme in September 2016.

hampered by lack of outreach by the government to potential employers and refugees, the lack of incentives for employers to hire Syrians legally and lack of enforcement measures against illegal employment. As the scheme is relatively new (the legislation was only passed in January 2016), a period of familiarisation is to be expected. However, competing information has created confusion and impeded implementation of the scheme, leaving companies and aid agencies without accurate and up-to-date information. Interviews with employers revealed that the costs of paying monthly social benefits for Syrian refugees, as required under the permit scheme, was more of a disincentive than the application fee. While there is a consensus around the need for more unskilled labour in the current market, the costs of hiring Syrians are the same as hiring Turkish nationals, so there is no incentive for employers to choose Syrians over local workers.

3.1.2 The host community

Turkish public opinion on Syrian refugees appears deeply divided. While there is some sympathy for their situation (Erdogan, 2014), relations between Syrian refugees and the host community do on the whole appear to be deteriorating, in part because of the government's failure to explain changes in policy to the Turkish population. Similar to previous statements, the government's announcement on Syrian refugee citizenship in July 2016 was apparently made without consultation with ministries or the public, and without details on implementation, for example on the criteria for eligibility. In addition to better communication, there is also scope for more concerted efforts to build 'social bridges' via sustained public engagement, particularly for refugees in the 'survival' and 'struggling' categories, to deepen social integration and increase livelihoods opportunities.

3.1.3 Livelihoods interventions

As in other refugee crises, livelihoods interventions are under-funded and receive significantly less funding than food assistance. By June 2016, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan had received \$30m for livelihoods interventions against a \$461m appeal. Coordination is also a problem: there is competition within the government over areas of responsibility, mandates and budgets, and numerous aid and development actors are implementing small-scale projects that either duplicate efforts or make no difference (short-term vocational training that is not certifiable, for instance), rather than strategically investing what resources are available in providing comprehensive support.

The development of effective, refugee-sensitive macroeconomic policies that encourage better livelihoods outcomes for Syrian refugees is a work in progress. Our research highlighted a number of studies and initiatives by the government and international organisations (such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO)) looking at the demands of the labour market and mapping the skillsets of refugees. There has also been a shift in the response, with development partners such as the World Bank seeking to open up livelihood interventions to more macro-level work and addressing problems in the labour market.

3.1.4 Humanitarian support and assistance

NGOs and community multi-service centres in Istanbul have supported refugees with counselling, legal aid and occasionally in-kind assistance, helping them with issues relating to employment, living conditions and schooling. However, there were reportedly only three centres in Istanbul catering for 400,000 Syrian refugees. In addition to extending the reach and capacity of multi-service centres to support Syrian refugees in the informal sector, some form of assistance not based on employment will continue to be needed for the most vulnerable (such as those with specific disabilities and protection concerns). The provision of assistance and services (with the exception of healthcare) was inconsistent, with limited support, primarily through municipalities and multiservice centres.

3.2 The institutional environment for Syrian refugees' lives and livelihoods in Jordan

Most actors involved with refugees – including community-based organisations (CBOs), NGOs, UN agencies, government ministries and employers – held surprisingly similar views on the nature of the environment in which refugees establish their livelihoods, and the dilemmas facing refugees, the host community and the Jordanian government. Yet it has taken five years to align international and host state positions on encouraging refugees' self-sufficiency.

3.2.1 The government

The institutional environment is characterised by a high degree of government control and centralisation. The government leads the discourse surrounding refugees, and its policy decisions affect stakeholders

at every level. It leads the drafting of the national plan as part of the 3RP and heads the national coordination system for the refugee response and the resilience component⁶ of the national plan. While the broad strategic objectives of the national plan are discussed and agreed with all actors involved in the refugee response, programmes require individual approval by the government through its line ministries and the MOPIC. Aid actors highlighted the lack of coherence in government processes, which meant that organisations had to invest time and resources in navigating through the approval process, often based on unwritten policies and rapid changes in the government's position.

The government frames its response in terms of its historic role as a refugee-hosting state. It emphasises that Syrian refugees have been received on the basis of solidarity, hospitality and indigenous norms, but also insists that Jordan cannot be expected to be a perpetual and ever-receptive host. This explains the evolution of Jordan's refugee policy framework, at times giving (i.e. work permits) and at times taking away (i.e. closing the border, leaving tens of thousands of refugees stranded). Jordan contrasts its position with Western governments, which have pressed for the expansion of refugee rights in the Middle East and for borders to remain open to refugees, while restricting their own asylum policies to stem migration flows to Europe (Hargrave et al., 2016). Jordan has been skilled at leveraging aid from the international humanitarian system in ways that suit its domestic priorities, rather than simply accepting the terms on which the UN and INGOs would like to operate in the country (Seeley, 2010; Seeley, 2013).

The government's main concern with allowing Syrians to work has been the impact, real or perceived, that this would have on its own people's prospects of employment (ILO, 2015). Syrians have settled in areas of the country where poverty rates are highest. The influx has also drastically worsened a housing shortage and led to spikes in rental prices. The government's reluctance to let Syrians work is also linked to concerns over facilitating local integration, which is not a 'solution' that the government openly entertains.

6 The resilience approach to the Syrian refugee crisis was spearheaded by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) (see Bailey and Barbelet, 2014). However, it has been interpreted and implemented in Jordan as that part of the response dedicated to host communities.

3.2.2 Sub-national institutions and local authorities

Our research found that institutions at the local level could play an important role in the refugee response, but are in practice very constrained. Local government's role in dealing with the impact of the refugee influx on service provision and civic life more generally has been limited by the intense centralisation of decision-making in Jordan, limited authority and extreme funding constraints. Municipalities report to a central ministry and have very limited scope to make independent decisions or craft local policies to suit local needs. Municipalities are not authorised to raise their own revenues, and while the law grants them some independence, in practice no funds can be spent without central government approval.

3.2.3 Local aid actors

Likewise, CBOs and NGOs are constrained in the role that they can play in refugees' lives. While Jordan has thousands of NGOs, many of them several decades old, it does not have a strong civil society. Many prominent NGOs are directly linked to the royal family and merely act as intermediaries between the international aid system and the state. Others have a genuine presence in poor communities, but do not have an activist, advocacy or lobbying function (Ababsa, 2011). Islamic and women's organisations are amongst the more organised and political.

3.2.4 The host community

At a local level, perhaps the most discussed, most important and at the same time most ambiguous 'institution' is the host community. On an individual level, members of the host community are landlords, employers, teachers and neighbours of refugees, with the power to open or close off opportunities for a home, jobs, to learn and operate businesses. At a group level, the host community can reinforce within itself a feeling of generosity or animosity to refugees that may be at odds with individual interactions.

While refugees in our study mentioned few negative experiences with Jordanians in Zarqa, several Jordanian respondents confirmed that there was resentment around the impact refugees have had on the labour and housing markets. However, it was difficult, if not impossible, to characterise the relationship between host and refugee with any finality. Attitudes vary over time, and are influenced by official pronouncements as well as other cues. Some Jordanian respondents felt that conflict had at times

been exaggerated to bolster claims for more attention or funds for the refugee response, by both Jordanian and international actors. While the government appears, from its rhetoric, to be attuned to local grievances, Jordanians may have limited resources to make their perspectives known. Host–refugee relations are complex, and it is unhelpful to reduce the dynamic to clichés about ‘rising tensions’.

For their part, INGOs felt that their scope to engage with host communities was limited by the government. Government policy requires all projects to include 30% in cash grants or goods to Jordanian nationals. To fulfil this quota, INGOs are presented with lists of Jordanian beneficiaries taken from the government’s poverty targeting system. This in itself does not present a problem, except that, in the process, ministries communicate directly with the beneficiaries and prevent INGO outreach. This limits INGOs’ entry points for introducing the organisation’s work, engaging with host community beneficiaries and creating spaces and bridges between host communities and the refugees they support.

3.2.5 International humanitarian and development actors

The range of international entities involved in the Syrian refugee response in Jordan spans INGOs with a longstanding presence in the country, actors which have set up or returned solely for the Syrian refugee crisis and a large variety of donors.

For the first five years, the international response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan was primarily humanitarian (which meant assistance was designed to be short-term and focused on basic needs), while the UN sought greater regional coordination and involvement of host states. INGOs operated primarily within refugee camps, even after it became clear that most refugees were self-settled. When it came to devising livelihoods strategies, agencies had to work out how to support the development needs of refugees in protracted displacement without generating local resentment and within strict policy constraints on livelihoods programming. Humanitarian advocacy around livelihoods was predominantly focused on securing the legal right to work for refugees.

More recently, multilateral development organisations such as the World Bank and the ILO have become heavily involved in the response. This reflects a shift away from the view that protracted crises are the

responsibility of humanitarian agencies towards an understanding of them as ‘development issues with humanitarian elements’ (Harild, 2016). The involvement of these players has brokered policy shifts and programmes addressing the development needs of both Syrian refugees and host countries. While development actors have long been present and involved in research and policy work around refugee crises, as well as running development projects for the host community, they have now become primary players in shaping policies and providing funding for refugees (World Bank, 2016).

While the Jordan Compact marks a substantial policy shift, it is too early to assess the medium- to long-term impact it will have for the stakeholders involved, foremost among them Syrian refugees. What is clear is that the government has an ongoing role to play in clarifying and streamlining a complex regulatory environment. Increasing the uptake of work permits will also remain a challenge, and ongoing support will be needed to encourage job creation. Lastly, there will be a minority of refugees who are unable to make use of or benefit from these new employment opportunities, and who will remain in need of assistance. Pressing humanitarian issues and protection concerns will persist for refugees with specific vulnerabilities, and those who do not have correct documentation and are at risk of deportation to camps and even back to Syria.

3.3 Conclusion: the institutional environment for Syrian refugees’ lives and livelihoods in Turkey and Jordan

The institutional environment for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey – as well as for organisations aiming to support them during their displacement – is characterised in both countries by strong government involvement. In Turkey, the government leads the coordination and implementation of refugee support, with the more limited involvement of international actors. In Jordan, the government has positioned itself as a coordinator rather than an implementer of the refugee response, with a strong vision of what it wants from the international community.

The challenges refugees face in both Turkey and Jordan are linked to chronic issues in these countries’ economies and labour markets, in particular

exploitation, low pay and harassment in the informal sector. These risks also confront nationals in both countries, and as such addressing these issues will potentially benefit refugees and support their livelihoods, as well as the livelihoods of locals. At the same time, however, other investment is required to address refugee-specific challenges. Changes in policies, even if beneficial, especially in the long term, have left refugees confused and with a heightened feeling of uncertainty. Aid actors should focus on clarifying policies with the governments in Turkey (over citizenship and residency), and in Jordan, developing coordinated messaging for all those supporting refugees, and dissemination to refugees themselves.

Supporting livelihoods is not just a technical exercise, and supporting refugees to build their social capital and social bridges with the host community remains

a critical element of integration. In Turkey, refugees best able to manage have relied on existing networks to support themselves during their displacement. Developing a dynamic community among refugees and across refugees and host communities requires facilitation, especially when both communities are struggling to make a living.

Finally, changes in labour laws will continue to open up opportunities for Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan. However, ensuring that the skills of refugees are utilised and their aspirations fulfilled requires going beyond current policies. Rather, it calls for a combination of advocacy with governments and labour unions on opening up other sectors of activity to work permits, as well as creative solutions as a basis to negotiate with the government around reducing restrictions on Syrian refugees' right to work.

4 Conclusion

The crisis in Syria has changed the approach to responding to refugee crises, perhaps temporarily, perhaps permanently. The response was designed regionally, based on national country plans, and since 2015 it has included an additional resilience element. The crisis has also seen the increasing involvement of development actors in support of refugees and host states. The scale of the crisis has prompted new thinking and innovative approaches. Aid agencies have refined vulnerability assessments to improve targeting, and multi-service centres in urban settings and mobile outreach teams have supported the delivery of assistance and services. The extensive use of cash assistance has also created new opportunities to support refugees' lives and livelihoods in urban settings. Changes in national policy frameworks and government responses have opened up new avenues to support refugees' aspirations and goals by allowing them access to the labour market, while a number of studies and initiatives by the government and international organisations have tried to explore the demands of the labour market and map the skillsets of refugees against them.

At the same time, however, Syrians have faced a great deal of uncertainty. Even when positive, rapidly changing policies and national frameworks mean that they are unsure of what policies entail, how they apply to them and whether positive steps will be reversed. As a result of this lack of clarity and certainty, refugees have found it harder to make decisions and calculate the costs, benefits and risks of different livelihoods strategies. In Turkey, announcements on refugees' right to work and citizenship were made without consultation within the government or with relevant actors, and as a result took time to implement and translate into policy action – leaving both refugees and aid actors in limbo. In Jordan, policies have changed frequently and suddenly, rules and regulations are often unclear and inconsistently applied and international organisations have struggled to predict which programming would get government approval.

One key area of policy change has been around work permits. Refugees interviewed for this study reported many issues with permits: being attached to one employer, uncertainty over renewing permits

and limitations on the employment sectors the permits apply to. Work permits are not the same as offering refugees the right to work on an equal basis as nationals. The work permit system continues to limit and restrict refugees' engagement in the labour market and the economy, and has opened up myriad implementation issues in both countries. In Turkey, further discussions on the possibility of extending citizenship, as well as certification in the medical and educational sectors, offer some answers to current limitations with the work permit system. In Jordan, while refugees are eager to develop small enterprises and INGOs are keen to run programmes to support them, ambiguous restrictions on business ownership for Syrian refugees appear to prevent such entrepreneurialism. With creative problem-solving, such as the ILO's use of agricultural cooperatives, some of these implementation issues can be worked around, but others are likely to remain intractable.

One significant limitation of the work permit system is its reliance on willing employers and available jobs for refugees. Unless the incentives for hiring Syrians change, employers will remain reluctant to take on the expense and hassle of offering them formal jobs. Indeed, interviews with employers highlighted the lack of incentives for them to favour Syrians over other potential employees. The lack of enforcement around illegal employment in Turkey was a further disincentive for employers to legalise work for Syrian refugees. Focusing on work permits and legal employment also risks failing to recognise and address the significant proportion of the Syrian refugee population who are currently working in informal and low-paid jobs. The opening up of work permits may address parts of the problem, but realistically this will not do much to help the majority of refugees, for whom employment in the informal sector is unavoidable because their skills lie in sectors which are currently closed to foreigners, foreigner quotas are already full or because the work on offer is ad hoc and unsuited to formalisation.

With high unemployment and structural challenges in economies with large informal sectors, creating enough jobs to support Syrian refugees will require large macro-economic interventions. Alongside the ILO, the

World Bank is becoming a more significant player in refugee livelihoods through supporting macro-level reforms. This is a welcome shift in a sector where refugee livelihoods have most often been addressed through micro-level household asset transfers and training funded through short-term humanitarian budgets. Advocacy on legal access to full or majority business ownership, as well as ensuring protection for owners of home businesses, would help support job creation through refugee entrepreneurship. Opening up routes for labour migration to the Gulf for Syrian refugees is another interesting and unexplored idea within the discussion, despite the key role such migration has played in the fortunes of many groups in the Middle East.

Tackling the distinct but chronic issues facing Turkey and Jordan's labour markets, as well as the livelihoods challenges confronting nationals, through a longer-term development approach (rather than emergency aid or humanitarian assistance) will help create a better environment, both for host communities and for Syrian refugees. However, while the protracted nature of displacement means that more developmental approaches are required to support Syrian refugees, assistance or some form of social protection will also be needed for households that cannot secure good working conditions, for the elderly and for those physically unable to work or who cannot draw on family support. Alongside development support to refugee livelihoods and social protection, humanitarian advocacy remains essential to ensure that the rights of refugees are considered holistically in the context of rapidly evolving donor and host state policies. Making more jobs available is also unlikely to alter the cultural expectations that compel women to take on the majority of childcare and domestic responsibilities, and which discourage them from working outside the home. In an ideal world, a longer-term, sustainable approach to supporting those who cannot work would include integrating Syrian refugees into existing social protection systems, but this is a very sensitive issue for governments.

The host community is an influential 'institution' for refugees: as friendly neighbours, exploitative or encouraging employers, landlords, support networks, teachers. Many factors shape relations between host communities and refugees in Turkey and Jordan, making it difficult to characterise the nature of the relationship. The study confirmed the changing

nature of the relationship over time and in different locations, making any description both very localised and time-bound. Even so, addressing the concerns of the host community and programming in a way that is sensitive to their needs should be standard practice, not something agencies are forced to do by national governments. Integrating the creation of social bridges and promoting togetherness rather than division through programming that is sensitive to host community concerns – especially around livelihoods and employment – is critical, regardless of the state of the host-refugee relationship. Listening to – and trying to address – the grievances of local populations is crucial. In Jordan, for instance, complaints from host communities around rental costs and house prices inflated by the influx of refugees seem to have fuelled tensions with refugees, yet have been left unaddressed both by the government and by aid actors.

The findings of the two case studies highlight how different each context is for Syrian refugees. It would be difficult to generalise the findings to other parts of Jordan or Turkey, let alone to other countries in the region. In particular, varying levels of assistance and access to services in different localities means that refugees will develop different strategies to sustain themselves. However, in broad terms there may be common themes and issues to look for, including how refugees react to policy changes and the uncertainty this creates; the diversity of socio-economic status among the refugee population and the implications this has for livelihoods support; and the issue of host community-refugee relations. Rather than assuming that these findings will be replicated in other contexts where refugees – even specifically Syrian refugees – live, these findings can help establish lines of inquiry to identify the factors that shape refugee livelihoods.

The perspective of refugees is a valuable and important input into programme design, monitoring and evaluation, and helps identify the obstacles faced by refugees acting on their own initiative. Ensuring the full integration of refugee perspectives should allow for less supply-driven programming and more refugee-oriented support. One focus area will be to continue monitoring the reactions and attitudes of refugees regarding work permit schemes and the impact work permits have on livelihoods outcomes. Fully integrating the refugee perspective on work legislation will also require more analysis of how refugees perceive their rights and the environment for home-based businesses and entrepreneurship. Investing in

aid agencies' capacity to navigate the maze of national laws on businesses would support their advocacy on behalf of refugees, and guide them in the initiatives they take. This legal capacity would also help aid agencies navigate refugees through the uncertainty of fast-changing policies.

While working in the informal sector does not necessarily imply exploitation and low pay, it does increase the risk of both. Staff and resources should be dedicated to reaching out to those working in the informal sector (not simply waiting for them to ask for help, but actively seeking to support refugees working in the informal sector) jointly with other organisations already advocating for and supporting interventions to safeguard workers' rights. Activities should include joint advocacy as well as providing legal aid and psychosocial support to refugees facing exploitation.

As development partners increasingly join the response (the World Bank, the ILO, UNDP), supporting coherent concurrent development and humanitarian work, especially monitoring and evaluating interventions based on how they have affected refugees at the micro level, including through gathering refugees' perspectives, will require investments in collaborative programming. Similarly, while progress is being made by governments and aid actors to better support the livelihoods of refugees in Turkey and Jordan, the resettlement of Syrian refugees in other regions, including Europe, should be expanded. European countries should contribute further to ensure the protection of Syrian refugees, including facilitating legal and safer routes to asylum. While the international community has been vocal on how Jordan and Turkey should respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, more should be done to improve the protection environment and living conditions of Syrian refugees in Europe.

This study was conducted in the context of larger, longer and more urban forced displacement. It also took place at a time when the international community is dedicating more energy to rethinking humanitarian assistance and addressing the challenges posed by

refugee flows and migration. The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016 aimed to generate commitments to reduce suffering and deliver better for people affected by crises, and multi-year funding – part of the Grand Bargain that emerged from the summit – will provide a better mechanism for responding to protracted displacement. However, the summit produced only modest outcomes in terms of addressing the global refugee crisis. Likewise, the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held in New York in September 2016, produced a commitment to greater responsibility-sharing and working towards a Global Compact on refugees by 2018, as well as a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. However, the framework simply reiterates existing approaches to addressing the challenges of forced displacement, including an emphasis on whole-of-society engagement and activities to support self-reliance.

The New York summit is testament to the extent to which the Syria crisis has forced a reaction among practitioners, policy-makers and decision-makers. The long-term policy implications of how the crisis has been handled at the local, national and international level will provide a wealth of lessons in the near future and, if these lessons are learned, may inform better responses to urban refugee displacement as well as out-of-camp protracted displacement. As policies in donor capitals and host states evolve, critical engagement by the humanitarian community will be essential in ensuring that the interests of refugees are placed at the centre of the discussion, and that success is defined by positive outcomes for refugees (rather than positive outcomes for host and donor states). Host governments have used the political and economic interests of donors and powerful countries to support their own political and economic goals. Evidence from this study suggests that this approach has not necessarily led to better outcomes for refugees. Humanitarian organisations must navigate these political and economic interests with strong humanitarian advocacy to ensure that they offer opportunities for refugees to fulfil their aspirations and livelihoods goals.

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