

Syrian refugee onward migration from Jordan to Europe

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Question

What are the main drivers of onward migration of Syrian refugees from Jordan to Europe?

Contents

1. Overview
2. Limited livelihood opportunities
3. High cost of living, depleted resources and poverty
4. Aid shortfalls
5. Status issues, lack of free movement, protection and access to services
6. Limited educational opportunities
7. Tense community relations and loss of dignity
8. Loss of hope and pessimism about the future
9. Pull of Europe and experience of others
10. References

1. Overview

There has been a massive influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan since the Syrian conflict began: the official figure is over 650,000 but the actual number is likely to be much higher (ACAPS, 2016: 1). Only 21.5 per cent of registered Syrian refugees are living in camps; 78.5 per cent are in urban areas, distributed as follows: Amman (26.4 per cent), Mafraq (23.9 per cent), Irbid (20.7 per cent) and Zarqa (16.7 per cent) (ACAPS, 2016: 2).

Life in Jordan has become increasingly difficult for Syrian refugees in urban host communities: savings and opportunities for subsistence have disappeared, alongside reductions in assistance (DRC, 2016; Francis, 2015). Difficult conditions in Jordan, the prevailing sense of the protracted

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nature of the conflict in Syria, and the belief in greater opportunities and better treatment in Europe are causing many Syrians to consider the onward journey to Europe (DRC, 2016; Hartberg, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Dunmore, 2015).

In Jordan, 50 per cent of Syrian refugees surveyed by the Norwegian Refugee Council at the end of 2015 said that they were intending to leave because they saw no future, in large part due to inability to obtain legal work and insufficient assistance (Hartberg, 2016, p. 5). Despite the dangerous journey and new restrictive EU member state policies, 20 per cent of Syrian refugees who aimed to leave said they would try to make it to Europe (Ibid).

Within the population of Syrians on the move, there are distinct groups and categories (e.g. Christian Syrians, Syrian women, Syrian children, Palestinian refugees from Syria, former combatants), with varying experiences, motivations and concerns regarding onward movement to Europe. There may also be differences among Syrians from different regions of Syria (DRC, 2016).

This helpdesk report discusses the main drivers of Syrian refugee onward movement from Jordan to Europe. They include:

Limited livelihood opportunities: Syrian refugees were largely prevented from accessing Jordan's formal labour market from 2011 to 2015 (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Lack of livelihood opportunities has contributed to poverty and hardship (DRC, 2016; REACH, 2016; Edwards, 2015) – and is a key motivator for onward movement (DRC, 2016). In the absence of access to formal work, many refugees have had to resort to informal, irregular employment, where they run the risk of labour exploitation without legal recourse (ACAPS, 2016; Groth, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; REACH, 2016; Edwards, 2015; Care, 2014). Refugees caught working illegally in Jordan may also face sanctions, including fines, detention, being returned to a camp or even deported to Syria (Groth, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Edwards, 2015). The Jordanian government committed at the February 2016 donors conference in London to facilitate the access of Syrian refugees to the labour market in Jordan (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Despite this policy change, refugees continue to face barriers in accessing formal work opportunities (Ibid).

High cost of living, depleted resources and poverty: Over 80 per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the national poverty line (Groth, 2016, p. 7). Poverty is a key motivation of onward migration (Grandi, 2016). Given the high costs of living in Jordan and restricted access of refugees to legal employment, refugees are struggling to pay rent, feed their families and cover their basic needs (DRC, 2016; Habersky, 2016; Edwards, 2015). The inability of Syrian refugees in Jordan to provide for their family was the most common reason cited by people who knew someone who had left (Edwards, 2015).

Aid shortfalls: Aid programmes for Syrian refugees and the host community in Jordan have experienced chronic funding shortages, making it difficult for organisations to meet even the most basic needs (Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2015). These funding shortfalls are identified by refugees as a cause of desperation and a key driver of onward movement (Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2015). In particular, food aid cuts have been pinpointed by many refugees as the 'last straw' in their decision to leave Jordan (Edwards, 2015).

Status issues, lack of free movement, protection and access to services: Since 2014, Syrian refugees have experienced greater constraints in movement. The government has forcibly returned residents to refugee camps from urban areas (Francis, 2015), and controls over refugee

camp residents have been tightened (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Refugees who left camps unofficially have faced restrictions in the acquisition of government cards required to access services, possible relocation to camps and risk of deportation to Syria (Ibid; Francis, 2015). Residency issues are a key cause of growing desperation among refugees (Hartberg, 2016). Untreated health issues, stemming from loss of free access to healthcare services, are another motivator for onward movement to Europe (DRC, 2016).

Limited educational opportunities: It is reported that approximately 40 per cent of Syrian children in Jordan do not have access to formal education, and many of those who do face difficult classroom environments (Culbertson et al., 2016, p. 3 and 19). Limited educational opportunities are considered to be one of the main motivations for making the onward journey to Europe (DRC, 2016; Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2016). Lack of classroom space in local schools, cost of school materials and growing poverty among refugees – resulting in children being pulled out of school to work – are key factors that limit access to education (Laub and Akour, 2016; Groth, 2016; Edwards, 2015; Care, 2014). Since February 2016, the government of Jordan has committed to make room for all refugee children in its schools, but this can only be achieved if donors and international organisations fulfil their financial commitments (Laub and Akour, 2016).

Tense community relations and loss of dignity: The treatment of Syrians as ‘temporary’ visitors has undermined the coming together of a community (MercyCorps, 2012). The Jordanian government has increasingly attributed economic problems to Syrian refugees (ACAPS, 2016). While these views do not necessarily reflect the reality, they have adversely influenced host communities’ perceptions of the refugee population, damaging social cohesion (ACAPS, 2016; REACH, 2016). The greater demands placed on services by the refugee influx has also aggravated tensions between refugees and host communities (ACAPS, 2016). Some Syrian informants cited ill-treatment and lack of dignity experienced in Jordan as a motivator to leave the country (DRC, 2016; Lyngstad, 2015).

Loss of hope and pessimism about the future: Although Syrian refugees have expressed a desire to return to Syria, the ongoing conflict – without any sign of abating – is resulting in loss of hope in being able to return in the short to mid-term (DRC, 2016; Lyngstad, 2015; Edwards, 2015). Refugees do not see a prosperous future in either Syria or Jordan (Lyngstad, 2015). Syrian focus group participants and household interviewees stated that they are reluctantly choosing to move onward to Europe (DRC, 2016).

Pull of Europe and experience of others: Many Syrian refugees are turning to Europe, attracted by its reputation for respecting human rights and the rule of law and its greater levels of prosperity (Groth, 2016). A key expectation and motivation for onward migration to Europe is obtaining respect and dignity (DRC, 2016). Other expectations include: the legal right to work along with viable livelihoods; access to education and health care; security; and greater humanitarian assistance (Ibid). Refugees, whose community members have successfully arrived in Europe, expressed an increased desire for onward migration to Europe (Ibid).

2. Limited livelihood opportunities

Syrian refugees were largely prevented from accessing Jordan’s formal labour market from 2011 to 2015 (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). While they were in principle allowed to apply for work permits, high fees and often unattainable requirements (e.g. need for a valid passport) made them difficult to obtain (Ibid). Only 22,687 work permits had been issued to Syrian refugees in

Jordan as of July 2016 (ACAPS, 2016, p. 3). Camp residents were also effectively shut out of the labour market (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Unable to legally work, many refugees in Jordan spend their days seemingly without a sense of purpose (Habersky, 2016).

Focus discussion groups in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey all revealed that Syrians want the right to legally work (DRC, 2016). Lack of employment and livelihood opportunities is cited as a highly urgent challenge and contributor to poverty and hardship (DRC, 2016; REACH, 2016; Edwards, 2015). All focus group participants stated that these troubles and the hope of gaining access to livelihoods elsewhere was a key motivator for onward movement (DRC, 2016).

In the absence of access to formal work, many refugees have been forced to resort to informal, irregular employment, outside the protection of labour regulations (ACAPS, 2016; Groth, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Edwards, 2015). They work primarily in construction, agriculture, retail and sales (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Employers make take advantage of the desperate conditions of Syrian refugees and their willingness to accept substandard work situations (REACH, 2016). Refugees run the risk of labour exploitation without legal recourse: working in unsafe, 'undignified' conditions, having lower wages or payments withheld (DRC, 2016; REACH, 2016; Edwards, 2015; Care, 2014). Syrian refugees are generally paid less than Jordanian workers and tend to work longer hours (ACAPS, 2016; Care, 2014). Such informal, irregular employment is often not enough to support the average family (Habersky, 2016). Syrian men also report exposure to verbal harassment at the workplace (Care, 2014).

Refugees caught working illegally in Jordan may face sanctions, including fines, detention, being returned to a camp or even deported to Syria (Groth, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Edwards, 2015). While deportations are infrequent, the circulation of stories about people found by authorities and facing legal consequences is sufficient deterrence: many have stopped working, shifted to working at night, or sent children to work instead, who they believe will experience greater leniency (DRC, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Care, 2014). Fourteen per cent of interviewed Syrian refugee families in May 2014 relied on their children to earn income to pay the rent (Groth, 2016, p. 7).

There has been some hope since the February 2016 donors conference, where plans were made to facilitate the access of Syrian refugees to the labour market in Jordan (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). The Jordanian government has produced a three-year refugee response plan (moving from a crisis response to a resilience-based approach), which includes commitment to facilitate access to formal employment or to formalise the informal jobs in which Syrians engage (Ibid). The new policy is projected to expand work permit access to 78,000 Syrians in the short term and ultimately to thousands more (Nowrasteh, 2016).

Despite this policy change, refugees continue to face barriers in accessing formal work opportunities (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). It remains to be seen how many Syrians will be reached by the recent measures. While the number of work permits granted to Syrians has increased markedly from 5,500 annually to almost 12,000 in the beginning of July 2016, this is still a small proportion of the approximately 200,000 potentially eligible Syrians (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016, p. 125). The process may also reach a ceiling, once the 'easy cases' have been processed (Ibid). Moreover, the fulfilment of this plan requires that the international community fulfil their financial commitments to the government's plan. However, the funds have been slow to come, with only a small percentage or required funds fulfilled to date (Ignatieff et al., 2016).

For further discussion, see helpdesk report, 'Impact of Syrian refugee crisis on Jordan's economy', sections 3. Livelihood provision for Syrian refugees and 4. Jordan Compact.

3. High cost of living, depleted resources and poverty

Poverty is a key motivation for onward migration (Grandi, 2016). A recent study by the World Bank and the UNHCR in Jordan and Lebanon found that nine in ten Syrian refugees were living below the respective national poverty lines (see Grandi, 2016). In Jordan, over 80 per cent of Syrian refugees live below the national poverty line (Groth, 2016, p. 7).

Based on a household survey by Care (2014), shelter was identified as the single most pressing need, particularly for families that rented (95 per cent of Syrian households). The Jordanian housing market has experienced a marked increase in rent due to increased demand with the arrival of refugees and a deficit of supply (Nowrasteh, 2016; Care, 2014). Over half of refugees' expenditures (55 per cent) go toward accommodation (Groth, 2016, p. 7). Inability to pay rent has resulted in secondary displacement within Jordan, with a third of all households surveyed by the Norwegian Refugee Council being forced to change their place of residence (Hartberg, 2016, p. 4).

High costs of living in Jordan, particularly in Amman, have resulted in a fast rate of depletion of personal and family finances (DRC, 2016; Habersky, 2016). Combined with restricted access to legal employment, refugees are struggling to pay rent, feed their families and cover their basic needs (Edwards, 2015). While many refugee households have some kind of income from informal labour, the vast majority are forced to engage into negative coping strategies to survive, including reducing food intake, increasing levels of debt, and taking children out of school to earn income to pay rent (Groth, 2016; Hartberg, 2016). High levels of poverty also impacts on access to basic services. Many refugees with chronic medical conditions have been unable to access medicines and health services (Hartberg, 2016).

The inability of Syrian refugees in Jordan to provide for their family was the most common reason cited by people who knew someone who had left (Edwards, 2015). Participants of a Danish Refugee Council study perceived that those who are unable to meet minimum basic needs (at least rent and food) are more likely to sell off personal possessions and land in Syria to fund onward movement than those who are able to meet basic needs (DRC, 2016).

Syrian refugees and underprivileged Jordanian people also struggle from lack of access to proper financial services. Those who receive financial help from their relatives, from the government or from NGOs have no option but to rely on less reliable informal channels of money transfer (Breul, 2016).

4. Aid shortfalls

Syrian refugees in Jordan have relied heavily on humanitarian aid, as 90 percent of Syrians outside camps live in poverty with reduced food intake (see ACAPS, 2016, p. 3). However, aid programmes for Syrian refugees and the host community in Jordan have experienced chronic funding shortages, making it difficult for organisations to meet even the most basic needs (Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2015). These funding shortfalls are identified by refugees as a cause of desperation and a key driver of onward movement (Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2015). A Care (2014,

p. 55) study of Syrian households in Jordan found that two-thirds of all surveyed households stated that they were dissatisfied with assistance provision.

One of the most substantial issues for Syrian refugees in Jordan has been the deterioration of food assistance (Francis, 2015). The World Food Programme has faced multiple funding shortages, which has resulted in food cuts every few months and uncertainty over provision of food assistance (ACAPS, 2016; Habersky, 2016). Many refugees are left struggling to figure out how to provide their family with food, resorting to negative coping strategies, including begging, child labour and increased indebtedness (Habersky, 2016; Edwards, 2015). Food aid cuts have been pinpointed by many refugees as the 'last straw' in their decision to leave Jordan (Edwards, 2015). The Norwegian Refugee Council (2015) highlights that the departure of almost 4,000 Syrian refugees from Jordan in August 2015, back to Syria, coincides with a sharp cut in food assistance. It is possible that they returned to Syria to sell assets to raise funds for onward travel to Europe (ibid).

5. Status issues, lack of free movement, protection and access to services

Since 2014, Syrian refugees have been subject to a contraction of Jordanian services and reduced tolerance of refugee presence in urban areas (Francis, 2015). The government began forcibly returning Syrians to refugee camps from urban areas, restricting the movement of urban refugees, and limiting Syrian access to healthcare outside of the camps (ibid). Since April 2014, close to 14,000 Syrian refugees (almost half of whom are children) – who did not have the required documentation or who were working without a permit - have been involuntarily relocated to Zaatari and Azraq camps (Hartberg, 2016, p. 3).

Controls over refugee camp residents have been tightened, since mid-2014, with constrained freedom of movement. Prior to this, it was much easier for Syrians to enter and exit the camp system (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). In particular, Syrians who had not left the refugee camps through official channels were still able to register for urban documentation and services outside of the camps (Francis, 2015). Since mid-2014, refugees who left camps unofficially, without proper bail-out documentation (sponsorship from a Jordanian citizen and paid fee) have faced increasing restrictions in the acquisition of Ministry of Interior cards (required for access to humanitarian and state-run services outside of camps) and possible relocation to the camps (ibid). They face a significant protection gap, with heightened risks of exploitation and deportation back to Syria (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Francis, 2015). Focus group participants stated that they do not feel safe in Jordan, due to these risks of being forced into a camp or back to Syria at any time (DRC, 2016).

Many Syrian refugees see no future in the refugee camps where they are entirely reliant on humanitarian assistance and feel isolated (Groth, 2016; Hartberg, 2016). Deteriorating quality of asylum in the region - poor conditions in Azraq camp with regards to clean water and proper sanitation, as well as disrespect shown to refugees by staff at the camps were listed in focus groups as key motivations for onward movement to Europe (DRC, 2016).

It has also become increasingly difficult for Syrian refugees in Jordan to maintain updated registration, to secure valid residency visas that facilitate freedom of movement, and to access civil documentation (Hartberg, 2016). An urban verification exercise launched by authorities in February 2015 to ensure that all Syrians living outside of camps receive a new identity document

to access services has presented various challenges, including prohibitive costs for obtaining a health certificate and other bureaucratic requirements (Edwards, 2015). Agreement by the government to reduce the requirements, after negotiations with the UNHCR, has sped up the process, but still only approximately 500,000 of the purported 1.4 million Syrians have been registered (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016, p. 123).

Syrians without registration face daily difficulties accessing public health care and educational services. They also avoid travelling far from their homes for fear of being detained by authorities and sent to live in refugee camps (Hartberg, 2016). Evidence and analysis by the Norwegian Refugee Council demonstrate that residency issues – and corresponding problems - are key root causes of growing desperation among refugees (Ibid).

The decision by the government of Jordan in late November 2014 to reverse its policy of allowing Syrians to access healthcare services for free has added a tremendous financial burden to vulnerable Syrians, particularly those without access to livelihoods (Edwards, 2015; Francis, 2015). Refugees have had to pay the same rates at hospitals as uninsured Jordanians (Francis, 2015). As a consequence, close to 60 per cent of adults with chronic conditions do without medicine or health services, up from 23 per cent in 2014 (Edwards, 2015). There is also a marked decline in access to curative and preventative health care (Ibid). Untreated health issues are another motivator for onward movement to Europe. If healthcare was available, some focus group participants revealed they would feel more motivated to stay in their current countries (DRC, 2016).

Another consequence of the government's decision to reverse free health care is an increasing number of urban refugees seeking camp health services (Francis, 2015), which could result in inability to return to their urban residence, given the tightening of camp controls (see Lenner and Schmelter, 2016).

6. Limited educational opportunities

Education is highly valued among Syrians, who enjoyed free and mandatory schooling in their country prior to the war (Edwards, 2016). Limited educational opportunities were cited as a problem for Syrian refugees in Jordan and neighbouring countries – and as one of the main motivations for making the onward journey to Europe (DRC, 2016; Grandi, 2016; Edwards, 2016). Focus group participants listed this as a motivator with regard to education of children and continued adult education (DRC, 2016).

A Rand study on the Emergency Education Response programme in Jordan finds that while the programme has achieved much success, including the provision of formal, public education for 130,000 Syrian children and informal education for 35,000 children, significant challenges remain (Culbertson et al., 2016, p. vii). In particular, approximately 40 per cent of children (97,000) still do not have access to formal education, and many of those who do face difficult classroom environments (Culbertson et al., 2016, p. 3 and 19).

There are various reasons why Syrian children in Jordan are unable to attend school. This includes: lack of capacity/classroom space in local schools; the cost of school materials (books and stationery) and transportation; concerns about low-quality education; lack of school certificates from Syria; and growing poverty among refugees (Laub and Akour, 2016; Care, 2014). The worsening conditions that refugees face have a devastating impact on education of refugees in Jordan: children are increasingly being pulled out of school and sent to work or to

beg (Groth, 2016; Edwards, 2015; Care, 2014). Approximately 20 per cent of children are abandoning school in order to earn income and in some cases girls are being forced into early marriage (Edwards, 2015; see also Groth, 2016).

Jordanian authorities have attempted to increase spaces for children, including introduction of 'double-shift' schooling. However, many girls scheduled to attend the 'second (afternoon) shift' are not sent to school, as their families are afraid for them to return home after sunset (Groth, 2016).

Children who are able to attend school may experience challenging circumstances, which inhibit learning. These include: overcrowded classrooms, decreased instructional times in double-shifted schools and inadequate teacher training, all of which inhibit learning (Culbertson et al., 2016). Host communities have expressed concerns about these conditions (ACAPS, 2016). In addition, there are concerns about boys getting involved in fights and girls being exposed to verbal harassment and physical violence from peers and teachers (Care, 2014). Syrian parents have reportedly taken their children out of school due to concerns they will be harassed or attacked (see ACAPS, 2016).

Alternative, informal education programmes are considered valuable and have helped to counter lack of access to formal schooling (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Culbertson et al., 2016). However, they lack a full-time and structured curriculum, standardised quality measures and a clear pathway into formal education (Culbertson et al., 2016).

The London donor's conference in February 2016 provided hope not only in terms of improved access to livelihood opportunities but also to educational opportunities (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). The government of Jordan has committed to make room for all refugee children in its schools by adding more afternoon shifts and hiring thousands of teachers (Laub and Akour, 2016). This can only be achieved, however, if donors and international organisations fulfil their financial commitments to the country (Ibid).

7. Tense community relations and loss of dignity

The way in which Syrians have been received in Jordan is strongly connected with prior experiences with refugee populations. The Palestinian experience, in particular, has resulted in reluctance to admit a new population of refugees as anything more than temporary guests (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). The treatment of Syrians as 'temporary' visitors has undermined the coming together of a community (MercyCorps, 2012). Syrians in Mafraq, Jordan, for example, expressed difficulties in socialising with one another and often have few relationships with Jordanians (Ibid).

The presence of Syrian refugees in Jordan has resulted in varying impacts on the host country – positive (e.g. increased consumption) and negative (e.g. increases in rent). The Jordanian government has, however, increasingly attributed economic problems to Syrian refugees (ACAPS, 2016). The arrival of Syrian refugees coincided with substantial economic troubles in Jordan, rendering them an easy 'scapegoat' (Francis, 2015). The majority of sampled respondents in a REACH (2016) focus group study considered the detrimental effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on the labour market to outweigh the positive ones. A 2015 survey found 95 percent of Jordanian workers agreed Syrians were taking jobs from Jordanians (to some extent or to a great extent) (see Francis, 2015, p. 15). While these views do not necessarily reflect the reality, they have adversely influenced host communities' perceptions of the refugee population,

damaging social cohesion (ACAPS, 2016; REACH, 2016). The state of social cohesion varies based on the community: in some areas, there are few reports of negative inter-group experiences; whereas in others, large proportions of the community reported problems (Care, 2014).

The greater demands placed on services (health care, education, sanitation and water provision) by the refugee influx has, alongside perceived competition for livelihood opportunities, aggravated tensions between refugees and communities (ACAPS, 2016). In addition, humanitarian programming for Syrians has exacerbated frustration among Jordanian citizens, who perceive the distribution of financial aid and services between Syrians and the local population to be unequal (Ibid).

Syrian and Jordanian adults have both cited tensions between young men as a growing area of concern, with young Jordanian men blaming Syrian refugees for increased hardships (MercyCorps, 2012). Some Syrians report exposure to verbal harassment on the street (Care, 2014). Syrian women and girls have also reported public harassment by young Jordanian men (Ibid).

Syrians in focus group discussions identified lack of respect and dignity in Jordan and neighbouring countries as a key concern (DRC, 2016). They feel that their dignity is continually insulted, pointing to experiences of verbal abuse, denial of service by taxi drivers and mistreatment at security and medical facilities (Ibid; Lyngstad, 2015). While the local population were considered to be warm and hospitable at the start, Syrians interviewed believe that this has evolved over time to frustration and hostility (Lyngstad, 2015). The ill-treatment and lack of dignity that some informants experienced in Jordan has resulted in a desire to leave the country (Ibid).

These issues extend to children. Syrian parents, fearful that their children may fight with Jordanian children or that neighbours will verbally abuse them, forbid or try to discourage their children from playing with Jordanian children (MercyCorps, 2012). Conditions are such that some refugees have voluntarily returned to Syria (Ibid).

Resentment and alienation of Syrians in Jordan are likely to increase if current trends continue. In particular, there are concerns that tensions will rise as young people start work or university, with competition among Syrians and Jordanians for university places, jobs and public resources (Carrion, 2015).

For further discussion, see helpdesk report, 'Impact of Syrian refugee crisis on Jordan's economy', section 2: Impact of Syrian refugee crisis on Jordanian economy - Perceptions.

8. Loss of hope and pessimism about the future

Focus group discussions with Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, including Jordan, reveal that participants across all demographics resoundingly want to return to Syria (DRC, 2016). However, with the conflict in Syria continuing beyond 6 years without a solution in sight, refugees are losing hope of being able to return to Syria in the short to mid-term (DRC, 2016; Lyngstad, 2015; Edwards, 2015). A Danish Refugee Council study finds that many participants of focus group discussion and household interviews are thus reluctantly choosing to move onward to Europe (DRC, 2016). Though not all participants have set plans to move onward to Europe, the majority in Jordan expressed the belief that it was a 'good idea' to make the journey (Ibid).

Uncertainty about the future, combined with poor conditions in Jordan, fuel a sense of despair and desperation (Groth, 2016; Edwards, 2015). Refugees do not see a prosperous future in either Syria or Jordan (Lyngstad, 2015). Although the main camps in Jordan are well equipped, supplied and orderly, with basic needs for housing, medical care and education met, many refugees do not see a future in them (Groth, 2016; Hartberg, 2016). They are isolated with few meaningful activities, and refugees see few prospects (Groth, 2016). Those in urban areas suffer from the issues discussed above (limited livelihood and educational opportunities; lack of assistance and protection; loss of dignity), driving decisions for onward movement.

9. Pull of Europe and experience of others

Many Syrian refugees, faced with difficult conditions in Jordan and little prospect of returning to Syria, are turning to Europe – attracted by its reputation for respecting human rights and the rule of law and its greater levels of prosperity (Groth, 2016). Refugees have varied and sometimes idealised expectations of life in Europe, based on information received through friends, family and other community connections (DRC, 2016). A key expectation and motivation for onward migration to Europe was the search for respect and dignity – to be treated like humans – that focus group and household survey participants believed to be lacking in Jordan and other neighbouring countries (Ibid). Other expectations include: the legal right to work along with viable livelihoods; access to education and health care; security; and greater humanitarian assistance (Ibid).

The perception that the risks of journeying to Europe are ‘worth it’, given the difficulties in Jordan, is coupled with the knowledge that the overwhelming majority of Syrians reach Europe – and that once they arrive, they have a high likelihood of receiving asylum (DRC, 2016).

Decisions regarding onward movement are largely based on rumour, word-of-mouth and anecdotal experiences, shared through various social mediums. Refugees, whose community members have successfully arrived in Europe, expressed an increased desire for onward migration to Europe, in contrast to those who knew people who died or went missing on their journey (DRC, 2016). Those without access to community members who had attempted the journey relied on media reports for information to decide future plans (Ibid).

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This report is based on five days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

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