



مؤسسة نهر الأردن
Jordan River Foundation

Between Host and Home: Syrian Refugees' Living Conditions in Jordan and the Uncertainty of Return

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This paper presents key findings regarding the current living conditions, livelihood challenges, and return intentions of Syrian refugees. The findings aim to ensure programmatic responses and interventions are aligned with their needs and circumstances, whether they plan to remain in Jordan or intend to return to Syria.

What Is the Methodology Behind the Findings?

This fact sheet is based on a mixed-method approach, combining a survey and qualitative interviews. The survey used random sampling of 219 Syrian refugees of Jordan River Foundation Beneficiaries, across 12 governorates in Jordan. The sample targeted respondents by age (18-50 years) and gender, ensuring equal representation of males and females (50% each). The final sample achieved a close approximation of the target, with 57% female and 43% male respondents. Geographically, while all 12 governorates were targeted, the majority of the surveyed refugees reside in Amman, Irbid, and Mafraq, with 28%, 26%, and 22%, respectively, which reflects governorates with higher concentrations of refugees, while smaller percentages came from the rest of the governorates.

Where are Refugees Living and What are Their Household Conditions?

On a demographic level, 63% of the respondents are married. Nearly half live in large households comprising more than six members. Despite these larger family sizes, income generation is typically concentrated among a few individuals. Around 94% of respondents report having only one to two members employed (with 74% having one employed member and 20% having two), where they mostly work in informal and low-paid sectors. Furthermore, women and children's participation in the labor force remains limited, although concerning trends such as child labor were reported by 1% of respondents (representing 3 cases) who live in Amman and Mafraq.

What Happens When 97% Live Below the Poverty Line?

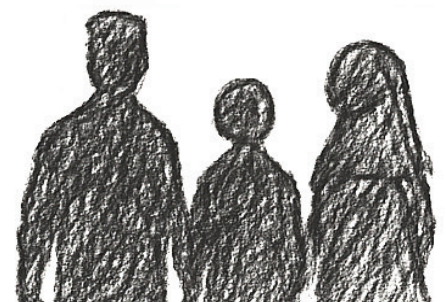
The economic vulnerability of Syrian refugees is highlighted by the household income levels, where 61% of households earned between 100 – 290 JOD per month, while 19% survive on less than 100 JOD monthly. An additional 11% reported monthly incomes between 291 and 350 JOD, and only 9% earn more than 350 JOD, with only 1% earning above 751 JOD.

The economic situation for the majority is unstable, with 97% living below the poverty line, particularly in Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa. Factors such as household size, living conditions, and monthly income were assessed against the national poverty line to better understand their levels of vulnerability.

To meet their needs, most refugees relied on multiple income sources, often combining day labor, borrowing money from family members, and humanitarian aid. The findings show that 63% rely on day labor, followed by 21% who rely on humanitarian aid like food vouchers or cash assistance, and 14% who count on monthly salaries. Others borrow money from family members, seek self-employment and/or home-based businesses (HBBs), or even depend on child labor, which contributes smaller amounts. Furthermore, Syrian refugees employ different coping mechanisms to face their financial stress; for instance, 89% take out debt or loans, and 44% reduce food consumption. At the same time, other strategies include selling assets, seeking help from charities, moving to cheaper housing, and, for a small percentage, withdrawing children from school to work.

Employment remains a high-priority challenge, with 68% of Syrian refugees currently unemployed. What contributes to this is the lack of work permits for 90% of refugees and their family members. For the 32% who are employed, the sectors vary by governorate, where construction is common in Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, Zarqa, and Ma'an, while agriculture employs many Syrians in Irbid and Mafraq. Other sectors, such as service, are found in Ajloun, Balqa, Madaba, and Ma'an, and industrial/skilled labor provides work in Amman, Aqaba, and Mafraq for Syrians.

As part of recognizing the need for better work opportunities, 30% of employed refugees identified their need for further training, whether vocational or technical, in areas like construction, food production, project and/or financial management, programming, languages, and sewing.





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Will Syrian Refugees Return?

Most Syrian refugees are originally from Daraa, Homs, and Aleppo, representing 38.4%, 21.5%, and 17.4%, respectively, with smaller proportions from Damascus, Raqqa, Hama, Hasakah, and other governorates. It was highlighted that the question of returning to Syria reveals mixed feelings and uncertainties.

Only 10% of them have definite plans to return to Syria within this or next year, motivated by perceived improvements in security, family reunion prospects, and hopes for less restrictive job opportunities. In contrast, 69% stated that they do not intend to return due to the ongoing security concerns, economic hardship, poor access to basic services, and the disruption of children's education in Jordan.

Likewise, another 21% of refugees remain unsure, indicating that their decision would depend on changing factors such as improved security, economic opportunities, health and education services, and the availability of housing in Syria. It was found that no correlation was observed between the governorate of origin and a refugees' intention to return to Syria. For that reason, return plans were found to vary widely across all governorates of origin.

What Challenges Do Refugees Face in Building a Life or Planning Their Return?

Syrian refugees face economic hardship, legal barriers to employment, and limited access to services. Many struggles without work permits, which push them into the informal sector or HBBs. While some households are sustained by women alone, others are burdened by debt and health expenses. However, many express a strong interest in building skills in cooking, aluminum, design, and small business development.



Among those planning to return, 86% do not have a clear plan for securing employment in Syria. However, 36% believe that having technical or professional skills could help their reintegration into the Syrian labor market. The desired skills and training include programming, artificial intelligence, electricity, mechanics, and administrative skills.

Nearly half of Syrians with definite plans to return consider starting their own businesses rather than seeking employment, particularly in agriculture, including hydroponics, food processing, commerce, retail,

construction, or handicrafts, which could be a key for focusing on reintegration support, access to finance, and vocational training. 11% of the total surveyed Syrian refugees currently operate businesses in Jordan, with 96% of them not holding licenses. However, regardless of whether the businesses are licensed, 71% stated that lacking a non-family member who could manage their businesses if they leave would raise questions about business sustainability after their return.

What complicates the decision to return is negative feedback from contacts already back in Syria; although 59% of the total surveyed refugees have such contacts, 82% rate their relatives' or friends' experiences in finding work upon return negatively, with only 3% describing the experience as positive, and 15% as neutral. Therefore, the negative feedback has been part of increasing their hesitation or refusal to return, reinforcing concerns about economic insecurity.

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What Deeper Fears and Social Pressures Influence Refugees' Hesitancy to Return?

In addition to these challenges, qualitative interviews conducted through case management and psychosocial support revealed deeper reflections, particularly among women.



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They reflected on the contrast between the standard of living they have experienced in Jordan's urban areas and the limited services and infrastructure awaiting them in Syria's countryside, further diminishing their willingness to return. With the absence of reliable infrastructure and services, women feel as though they are being asked to walk into a future as unclear and unmarked as a path lost in fog, which discourages them from choosing to return.

What Do Children Need to Reintegrate After Years in Jordan?

For families with children born or raised in Jordan, the decision to return is complex, as it involves concerns beyond safety and livelihood. Children's deeper reflections reveal the profound emotional challenges they face when thinking of return. Most Syrian children have developed a strong sense of belonging to their current environments in Jordan, including their friends, schools, and communities. For many, Jordan is not a place for a temporary residence, but a true home.

When asked about their types of support needed to help their children, who are of school age, reintegrate into the Syrian community, 88% mentioned the need for educational support to bridge gaps in the Syrian curriculum. Also, 76% highlighted the importance of psychosocial support to help their children adapt to the new environment, while 24% see vocational or technical training as important for preparing them for future employment. However, a smaller but still considerable group, with 21%, pointed to the need for extracurricular activities that would help their children socially integrate with peers in Syria.

