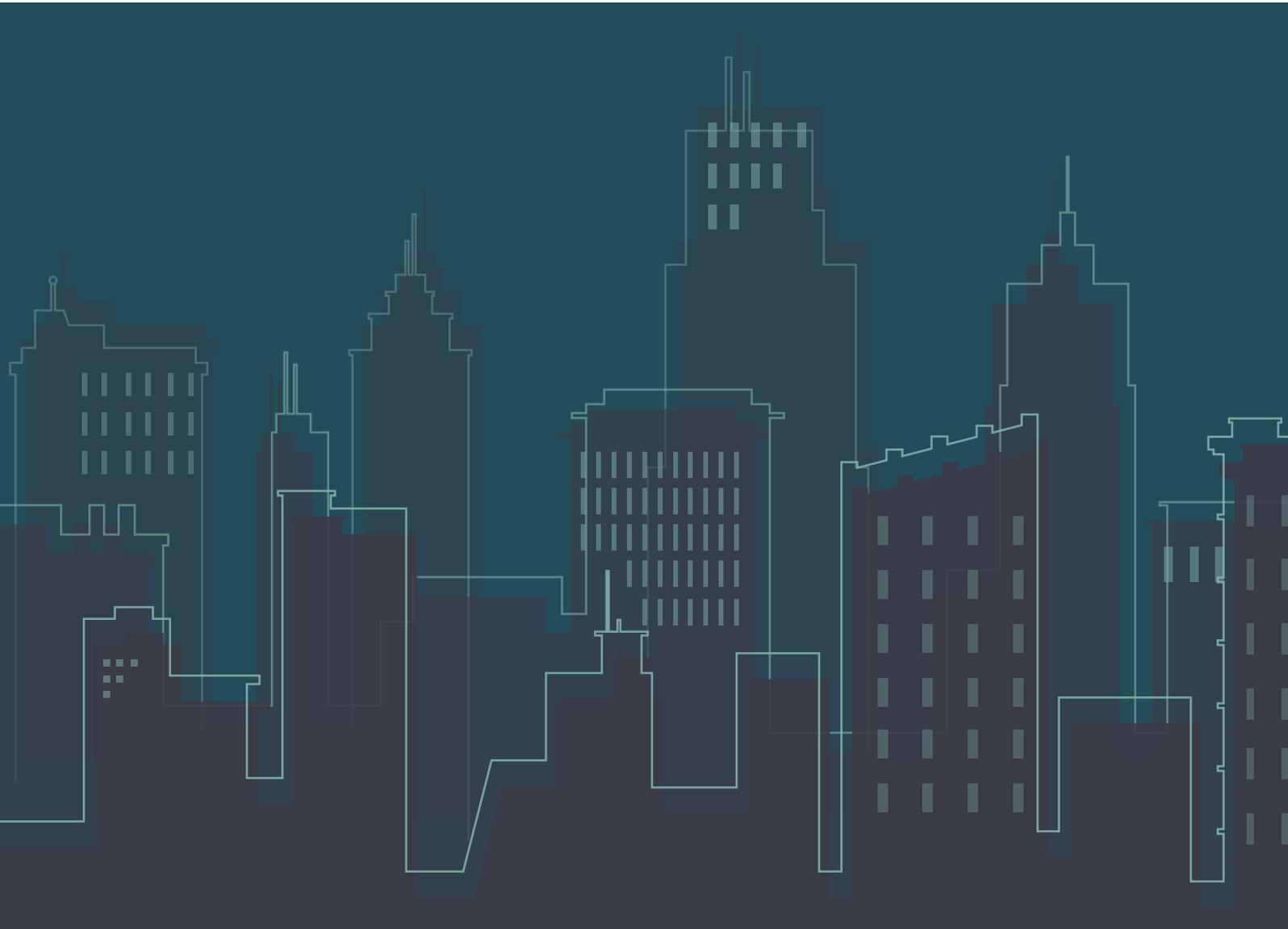


HPG working paper

Inclusion and exclusion in urban refugee displacement in Jordan

Amanda Gray Meral, Marcus Langley and Veronique Barbelet
with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development

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This report is one of multiple case studies, part of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG)’s Integrated Programme project ‘Falling through the cracks: inclusion and exclusion in humanitarian action’.

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Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) is a civil society organisation and a think tank that aspires to create all-inclusive intellectual and developmental change in the spirit of *Nahda* – the Arab Renaissance – through achieving social, economic and political justice, and assisting vulnerable segments of society in acquiring their rights.

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Acronyms

3RP	Regional Refugee Resilience Plan
AAP	accountability to affected people
ARDD	Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development
EU	European Union
FGD	focus group discussion
HCSP	Host Community Support Platform
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
VAF	Vulnerability Assessment Framework

Executive summary

The response to displacement in Jordan presents an opportunity to examine some of the barriers to a more inclusive response to a large-scale, protracted urban displacement crisis. This study explores issues of inclusion and exclusion in an urban displacement response and interrogates what the drivers of exclusion are for people affected by displacement, including those pertaining to humanitarian action. It examines the extent to which the displacement response has been inclusive and identifies factors that have either undermined or supported a more inclusive response in an urban displacement crisis.

Acknowledging the immense operational challenges aid workers and local government actors have faced, this study finds that the response has not been systematically inclusive. Donors, agencies and local actors have at times neglected the needs and concerns of certain communities, failing to adapt adequately to the out-of-camp context in which they are working, reducing the overall quality of the response. Drivers of exclusion and marginalisation in a city location, such as Amman, Jordan, have traditionally not been well understood. Responding to mass displacement in an urban context shines a light on the unique challenges facing operational agencies at the macro level, including the need for greater emphasis on: impartiality; monitoring and addressing inequity in access to assistance; livelihoods and services; ensuring effective and inclusive community engagement and participation; and dedicating space to addressing specific and diverse needs.

This research also found that differences in the treatment of people of non-Syrian nationality – but who had complex humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities – in the response has been a key driver of exclusion for refugees and vulnerable migrants not from Syria. Those interviewed reported discrimination and a perceived unfairness in their treatment. This was even more relevant because of the out-of-camp context, since, in a camp context, refugees would typically all be served together. Legal status was found to be a much greater predictor of exclusion in out-of-camp settings. While all refugees in Jordan face some level of legal restriction to equal rights, which has impacted access to labour markets and livelihoods, as well as essential services such as health and education, this was particularly pronounced for non-Syrians who were not granted de facto refugee status and had to go through a lengthy asylum process in order to identify their legal status.

However, it has not only been legal status that has had a more detrimental impact on non-Syrian refugees. Investment by international donors in terms of dedicated funding and policy processes has prioritised Syrian refugees. For example, the Jordan Compact, designed in partnership with the European Union (EU), focused exclusively on providing formal job opportunities to Syrian refugees, at the expense of other non-Syrian refugee groups as well as longer-standing migrant communities living in Jordan. While there have been positive signs of addressing that inequality towards the later period of the response, in particular through the ‘one refugee’ approach, the research identified significant barriers to its progress, including an ongoing reluctance by international aid donors and the Government of Jordan to include non-Syrian refugees systematically in aid and services. The inclusion of non-Syrian refugees in the 2021 Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) is a step in the right direction.

The scale of the response, in terms of it being measured by the quantity of programmes and people reached, still tends to prevail over quality. This includes measuring success via how many people have been reached, with less focus on impact, quality and equity. This was found to be impacting the ability of responders to successfully move towards an inclusive humanitarian response. In addition, there are intersectional factors that have led to individuals being excluded from participating in the response and marginalised from communication channels with responders, both of which have been missed in the response.

The urban nature of the response in Jordan intersects with the impacts of displacement to create heightened vulnerabilities for certain identity groups and communities. Urban drivers of exclusion intersect with the humanitarian response, yet humanitarian actors have failed to adequately take them into account. Most of the humanitarian agencies engaged in this study in interviews were found to have not acknowledged the urban context as being a key driver of exclusion and a challenge to impartiality. While efforts have been made to consider exclusions linked to gender and disability, the response has failed to fully understand and mitigate the wider dynamics of exclusion. This has further contributed to leaving whole sections of the population behind. This inadequate adjustment by the international community to the large-scale non-camp nature of the displacement response, especially during its early stages, exacerbated the specific exclusionary effects on vulnerable host and refugee communities.

These longer-term drivers of exclusion were further compounded rather than mitigated by a humanitarian response that was not systematically inclusive. A traditional sector-based approach to programming exacerbated forms of exclusion with inadequate individual targeting and vulnerability assessments enabling vulnerable people to ‘fall through the cracks’. The research also identified inadequate participation mechanisms for affected populations, including needs assessments, accessing effective feedback and complaint mechanisms, accessing assistance and services for specific needs, and having equitable access to services and assistance. An out-of-camp response, in particular one within a dense urban area, demands a complete rethink of how to coordinate the humanitarian response. Cities are ‘complex systems where many different factors interconnect in a relatively limited but densely populated space’ (Groupe URD, 2011: 7). The study finds that the sector-based approach that has traditionally been adopted by the humanitarian sector is not conducive to such a complex context where it is not straightforward to separate out needs.

Recommendations for a more inclusive urban refugee response

The following recommendations aim to inform future leadership and response to large-scale complex urban displacement crises such as in Amman, Jordan, and inform policy and practice for more inclusive humanitarian action.

Adopt more area-based approaches, moving away from traditional targeting and sector-based delivery of programmes

- Agencies should adopt a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of multiple actors and systems that make up a city.
- Work in partnership with local actors and development actors to design an area-based approach to programming and coordination that recognises the interrelatedness of multiple sectors.
- Work in partnership with local community organisations and committees to involve them in the design and reviewing of needs assessments, to ensure methods of targeting and assessment are perceived to be fair and appropriate by refugee communities.
- Move away from individual or household beneficiary identification and selection processes to a system that intervenes at a larger scale and considers existing services, infrastructure and other systems' interdependencies in the urban context.
- Monitoring and evaluation tools should consider integrating existing urban analysis, taking a collaborative approach with cities (e.g. mayors and local authority leaders) and working with existing infrastructure and service delivery systems where there are functioning and legitimate governments in place.
- Engage directly with local community organisations in agency-led consultations to ensure community needs are properly understood, the needs of the most vulnerable are foregrounded, channels for communication and feedback are established, and feedback loops are closed.
- Better embed formal processes of accountability and routes of two-way communication into the culture and practice of the urban humanitarian system.

Prioritise service delivery that is inclusive, locally owned and underpinned by international and local partnerships that bridge the development-humanitarian divide and are tailored for the urban context

- Implement interventions that support both displaced and host communities from the outset of a crisis. This demands bridging the humanitarian–development divide from the outset of a response.
- Support the absorption capacity of host towns and cities, prioritising the protection needs of the displaced to enhance inclusion.
- Advocate for *all* refugees to have access to labour markets and livelihoods to foster their economic contributions.
- Prioritise activities that restore urban systems (governance, infrastructure), which requires that agencies build partnerships with affected communities and local power holders and businesses.
- Where the local authority has the capacity, humanitarian agencies should play a greater facilitation role rather than direct service provision. This will demand investing in analysis of existing capacities and local authority services and analysis of the spatial and social structure in order to build closer and stronger partnerships with municipal and national governments, civil society and communities, as well as with the private sector, including the local private sector.

Establish a clearer policy framework that prioritises inclusion and impartiality as an operational and strategic focus

- The ‘one refugee’ approach in Jordan is an example of a policy framework that could enhance inclusion and impartiality with an operational and strategic focus, by taking a vulnerability-based approach to designing interventions.
- However, such a policy framework should allow for proactively monitoring organisational and response-wide impartiality, including through monitoring and tracking exclusion on grounds of nationality, legal status, barriers to legal status, etc.
- A policy paper, such as the one refugee approach, would also be useful to outline what is expected from aid actors to support inclusive humanitarian responses. Such a policy should clarify the definition and different elements of inclusion, its operational implications and its links to existing policies on gender, protection and accountability to affected people (AAP), as well as efforts to shift the system towards more local leadership.
- Humanitarian agencies should adopt the use of multi-risk assessments that are adapted to urban contexts.

Invest in more disaggregated data and analysis to inform more inclusive practices

- Continue to support the collection, analysis and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.
- Go beyond current data and analysis to inform humanitarian responses with an analysis of diversity and specific needs. This should include informing how best to carry out inclusive communication and community engagement, and how best to deploy inclusive feedback and complaint mechanisms, so that feedback and accountability are effective for a diversity of people. This should include gathering data on nationality, race/ethnicity and employment status.
- Work with local government and local leadership to support this collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data.
- Go beyond current data and analysis to inform humanitarian responses with an analysis of diversity and specific needs.
- Invest in more studies on drivers of exclusion, political economy, conflict analysis, conflict lines and social dynamics in the context of the urban crisis and their implications for potential risks of exclusion in the humanitarian response. This could be done by engaging with local and international human rights actors, peacebuilding actors, organisations representing individuals facing marginalisation, academics and urban planners with expertise in geographical areas, conducting political economy analysis with a social exclusion focus, and conducting knowledge, attitudes and practice assessments on specific diversity issues with aid workers and populations affected by crisis. This knowledge should be widely disseminated across the response, including as part of induction processes of new staff members. This could link with existing work done by REACH Initiative, for example.

Engage with a locally led response, including an enhanced role for local government and local civil society from the outset of a crisis, in order to better identify needs on the ground

- Conduct an analysis of community dynamics at the outset of the response to inform a solid community engagement strategy.
- Engage with a wide range of community leaders (going beyond the ‘gate-keepers’ to any one community) – such as those representing women, youth, people with disabilities and other minorities – including through their formal membership organisations or representative organisations, as per the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines and the push for localisation.

Advocate for improved access to services, rights and labour markets for refugees and vulnerable host communities

- Mitigate the financial vulnerability of refugees by increasing provision of employment training and enhancing cash assistance programmes with wider coverage and financial literacy training.
- Invest in advocacy around increasing inclusion of all refugees into formal labour markets.
- In partnership with local civil society, advocate for improved rights, including socioeconomic rights that would improve access to services such as education and healthcare and freedom of movement for the displaced.

1 Introduction

The Syrian refugee influx into Jordan has been characterised by its overwhelmingly urban nature. More than 80% of Syrian refugees live in the country's urban areas, with only 17% living inside the three official refugee camps (UNHCR, 2019a). Refugees of other nationalities, including Iraqis, Yemenis and Sudanese, also reside alongside host and Syrian refugee communities in urban and peri-urban areas, adding to the complexity of ensuring an impartial humanitarian response. While Syrians are the most numerous population of refugees registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Jordan, the other nationalities are much less visible, as a result of humanitarian assistance that has been too often 'conditioned on nationality' rather than being provided on the basis of need alone (Mennonite Central Committee, 2017: 4).

This report examines who has 'fallen through the cracks' in the response to the large-scale displacement in Jordan, as well as how a response to urban displacement, such as that seen in Jordan and elsewhere in the region over the last decade, can work towards being more inclusive. Specifically, it considers what the drivers of inclusion and exclusion are in the response to the displacement crisis in Jordan, including drivers that exist within and outside the response by humanitarian agencies; this includes what and whose needs are included and excluded and by whom in humanitarian action, and what an inclusive approach to a displacement crisis response looks like.

1.1 Rationale

This case study is part of wider research and is one of four case studies examining exclusion and inclusion in humanitarian action.¹ The case study focuses on why inclusion is important to the humanitarian sector; why inclusion is important in situations of protracted urban displacement; and why the case study of Jordan allows for a closer examination of how far the international community understands and takes account of these drivers of exclusion to inform a more inclusive urban displacement response.

While inclusion is a critical concept in humanitarian action, there is no agreed sector-wide definition. Most definitions include elements of impartiality, equitable access, addressing specific and diverse needs, and equal participation (Barbelet and Wake, 2020) (see Box 1).

¹ The overall research project, part of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG)'s Integrated Programme (HPG, 2019), seeks to inform how humanitarian action can become more inclusive.

Box 1 The concept of inclusion in humanitarian action

- **Inclusion as impartiality:** ensuring through inclusive assessments and the use of disaggregated data that humanitarian action reaches and focuses on the most urgent cases and those most affected by crises, without discrimination.
- **Inclusion as equitable access:** ensuring that all individuals affected by crises can have equal access to services and assistance.
- **Inclusion as addressing specific and diverse needs:** ensuring that humanitarian responses address the specific needs of individuals and cater to diverse needs, including by tailoring programmes.
- **Inclusion as participation:** ensuring that all individuals are able to participate in humanitarian responses, including by influencing the strategic direction of humanitarian responses, the capacities of all individuals being recognised and harnessed, and by humanitarian responses listening to the voices of those too often marginalised in societies and communities.

Adapted from Barbelet and Wake (2020)

Inclusive humanitarian action is embedded in the commitment to impartiality, which requires humanitarian action to be non-discriminatory and focus on the most urgent cases. However, evidence shows that too often it is those most urgent cases that fall through the cracks of large-scale responses to complex crises (Barbelet, 2018; Barbelet and Wake, 2020). While it remains at the core of various policy discussions and commitments, including the humanitarian principles, in practice inclusion remains at the periphery of responses, in particular in complex, protracted humanitarian situations. This failure to centre inclusive humanitarian response puts into question both the ethical essence of humanitarian action and its effectiveness (Barbelet and Wake, 2020).

The humanitarian response to the Syrian displacement crisis in Jordan from 2011 onwards provides an example of a large-scale, complex, urban, protracted displacement crisis within which to examine inclusion and exclusion. Its urban nature has meant that Syrian refugees have lived side by side with vulnerable and marginalised host and migrant communities, as well as refugees from many different nationalities also hosted by Jordan. Jordan has experienced an unusual policy/programming environment, including innovative policy approaches such as the Jordan Compact and a specific Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) to support targeting and identification of needs.

This case study, with its focus on large-scale protracted displacement in an urban setting, examines both how aid actors respond and how government and state actors (including urban actors) ensure an inclusive

response.² The report interrogates how far the humanitarian response is an inclusive response and what has facilitated and undermined the ability of aid actors and the Government of Jordan to be more inclusive. While it does not provide an in-depth study of drivers of exclusion in Jordan, it identifies how far the response understands and takes account of these drivers of exclusion to inform a more inclusive response.

1.2 Methodology

Following an in-depth review of the literature that covered academic and grey literature on refugees in Jordan, the humanitarian response in Jordan, and literature on what demonstrates a good-practice urban humanitarian response, this study used a qualitative approach to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the drivers of inclusion and exclusion in humanitarian crises, including drivers that exist within and outside the practice of humanitarian actors?
2. What and whose needs are included and excluded and by whom in humanitarian action?
3. What does an inclusive approach to humanitarian action look like?

In-depth interviews with global and local stakeholders as well as refugees in Jordan were conducted in Arabic in Amman by Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD). Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also held with refugees, again conducted in Arabic in Amman by ARDD. Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) researchers conducted interviews with international and local aid actors remotely, in English, between July and September 2021. For a full breakdown of FGDs and interviews conducted, see Tables 1–3 in the Appendix 1.

Data collection consisted of:

- **FGDs:** 11 FGDs, including one with Jordanian host communities as well as refugees from the following nationalities: Syrian, Palestinians originating from Syria, Iraqi, Sudanese and Yemeni. The FGDs were across various age groups: youth (18–25 years old), adults (25–45 years old) and the elderly (over 60 years old).
- **Key informant interviews with refugees:** 10 key informant interviews with individuals with specific identity factors that could lead to them facing marginalisation and exclusion. The identity factors included age, gender, disability, nationality and religion.
- **Key informant interviews with aid responders:** 15 key informant interviews, including with international and national organisations as well as relevant state ministries.

2 For the purposes of this report, one distinction to be made is between ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’. While recognising the importance of refugee integration, this case study is not about integration. Local integration is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving society. In many cases, acquiring the nationality of the country of asylum is the culmination of this process (www.unhcr.org/uk/local-integration-49c3646c101.html). It is also important to note that, while integration is not necessarily inclusive, effective integration should always be inclusive. Inclusion is about how refugee policies, refugee hosting and refugees’ interaction with the systems around them is experienced differently by different individuals due to diverse identity actors, which may mean these individuals face specific prejudice, marginalisation, discrimination or social exclusion due to legal, attitudinal and other reasons.

1.3 Introducing intersectionality

Intersectionality considers how different identity factors intersect to create specific vulnerabilities such as, for instance, the specific situation, capacity and needs of an older woman living with disabilities, as opposed to considering age, gender or disability in isolation. The analysis in this report employs an intersectional lens to examine the key drivers of exclusion in the urban refugee response in Jordan. Examining the various identity factors that intersect to produce vulnerabilities – including nationality, gender, age and disability – forms an important part of the analysis. The drivers discussed have been identified and understood based on a review of the literature on vulnerability and exclusion in humanitarian responses (see for example Barbelet and Wake, 2020), as well as the interview data collected by the research team.

1.4 Challenges and limitations

While the study aimed to reach multiple specific groups of people, the research faced several limitations. The focus was not representative and all-encompassing but instead aimed to draw out and identify some key issues that exemplify the exclusion of certain groups and how actors are responding or not. Some individuals and groups were not represented in the data collection. For example, religion, while recognised as an identity factor, was not adequately represented in the sample for interviews, with only one Iraqi informant who was Christian. This was mainly because this religious group was a minority in Jordan and was not prevalent in the refugee communities from which we took our sample. Further, many from displaced Christian communities in Jordan have left to be resettled to third countries. As such, we were able to draw only limited insights on religion as an identity factor. A further limitation to the study was the inadequate sampling of those with mental health problems. This was partly due to the challenges surrounding interviewing such vulnerable participants, with the need to avoid triggering emotional distress, and the researcher's cautiousness around causing ongoing trauma, in line with the required ethical clearance and permissions. Any absence of this group's perspectives was a limitation to the research. In addition, we were unable to interview any refugees living in camp settings, which was a further limitation to the research in that it didn't allow for a more systematic direct comparison with refugees living in non-camp contexts.

The study was exploratory, with wide-ranging hypotheses. To fully examine all aspects of inclusion in Jordan goes beyond the scope of this research project. Ideally, a pilot study would have been beneficial to test some of these hypotheses and refocus the methodological approach.

The research team was diverse with different levels of research expertise on humanitarian issues, and this collectively resulted in different levels of understanding of the concept of inclusion and related issues. A lack of understanding of the concept of inclusion is not unusual and, as the findings indicate, the same was true for humanitarian actors since the concept continues to lack clarity. This had implications on the way different concepts were explained and understood during data collection and how respondents' answers were interrogated during interviews or focus group discussions.

2 Refugee hosting and responses in Jordan

2.1 Jordan as a host country

With its position at the heart of a turbulent region, Jordan has a long history of providing refuge for the displaced. Many Jordanian citizens are of Palestinian origin, dating back to 1948. Additional influxes of Palestinians followed further displacement in 1967,³ as well as those displaced from Iraq and then Syria from 2011 onwards. More than two million Palestinians now live across ten official camps in Jordan, where conditions are poor and overcrowded (UNRWA, n.d.). In addition, Jordan hosts approximately 750,000 refugees of other nationalities, including some 655,000 Syrian refugees, 67,000 Iraqis, 15,000 Yemenis, 6,000 Sudanese and 2,500 refugees from 52 other nationalities (UNHCR, 2019b). These new populations have contributed to a huge population growth over the last decade (around 87%), with non-Jordanians now representing around one-third of the country's population (Jordan Times, 2016) and Jordan now hosting the second-highest number of refugees per inhabitants in the world.

Despite its long history of hosting refugees, the Jordanian government is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. The country has hosted Palestinian refugees since the 1948 Palestine War. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), established by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1949 'to prevent starvation and distress and to further the conditions for peace and stability', is primarily responsible for providing services and serving Palestinian communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza (McCann, 2009). While the 1992 Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World and the 1994 Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries offer guidance on Jordan's commitments to refugees, they are non-binding. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) (UNHCR, 1997) between UNHCR and Jordan, agreed in 1998 and renewed in 2014, does include the definition of a refugee that aligns with the 1951 Convention definition; upholds the principle of non-refoulement,⁴ which is widely held to be customary international law that all states are obliged to uphold; and includes a commitment to find durable solutions for refugees. The MOU is silent on numerous rights protected under the 1951 Convention, including the right to housing, public education, freedom of movement, and public relief and assistance. Jordan is, however, party to several international human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which address issues such as the right to work, education and housing. Still,

3 This second wave of Palestinians who arrived in Jordan in 1967 have not been nationalised and remain in Jordan as 'Gazan brothers' with temporary Jordanian passports, so not all Palestinians in Jordan enjoy the same legal status.

4 Non-refoulement forbids a country receiving asylum seekers from returning them to a country in which they would be in likely danger of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

the lack of any legally binding refugee framework has allowed for the legal rights of refugees, including Syrian refugees, to be debated and shifted subject to government policy changes over the course of the crisis, leaving refugees legally vulnerable.

While Jordan has five camps, including two official refugee camps for Syrian refugees – Zaatari, the largest of the official camps, opened in 2012 by the Jordanian government together with UNHCR and the second-largest refugee camp in the world, and Azraq, opened in April 2014 – the overwhelming majority (some 80%) of Syrian refugees have settled outside official refugee camps in Jordan's urban or peri-urban areas. Refugees and migrants of other nationalities have also settled in Jordan's urban and peri-urban areas as there are no designated camps for them.

For the most part, Syrian refugees have settled in the northern part of Jordan, close to the border with Syria, in particular the governorates of Irbid, Mafraq and Amman. In some towns in Irbid and Mafraq, Syrian refugees now make up half or most of the population. This has inevitably led to immense pressure on Jordan's public services and systems, exacerbating pre-existing challenges and stretching municipalities hosting the largest numbers of Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees themselves are overwhelmingly poor. Levels of vulnerability are also high among Jordan's impacted host communities and other displaced and migrant communities.

2.2 The humanitarian response to the Syrian displacement crisis

The scale of the Syrian displacement crisis in the Syrian region, as well as its complexity due to its urban nature, is immense. The humanitarian sector has had to grapple with the challenges and opportunities of working in a complex, middle-income, urban context with existing systems and infrastructure. In 2011, at the outset of the Syrian refugee crisis, the international humanitarian community, never before faced with an urban refugee emergency of such scale and complexity, struggled to adapt. It rolled out a traditional humanitarian response, launching UN humanitarian appeals that focused on Syrian refugees and disproportionately on Syrian refugee camps.

In Jordan, there was little bilateral support provided to the Jordanian government, with funding primarily directed through international agencies (Healy and Tiller, 2013). Jordanian municipalities and local actors were not adequately engaged in either implementation or coordination of the response, resulting in errors such as duplication of service provision and distribution of aid supplies (ibid).

In September 2013, the Host Community Support Platform (HCSP) was established to address the impacts of the crisis on Jordanian host communities. From that point, the Jordanian government took a much more proactive role in the crisis response, co-leading coordination and introducing a legal requirement that 30–50% of any humanitarian programming be directed to vulnerable Jordanians. This was followed in December 2014 by the launch of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which built on the HCSP. The 3RP, a coordinated region-wide response strategy involving more than 240

partners, including UN agencies across Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, set out the new guiding strategy for the international response to the Syrian crisis across the Syrian region. The 3RP has two components: a ‘refugee and humanitarian’ component and a ‘resilience’⁵ component.

1. The 3RP refugee protection and humanitarian component addresses the protection and assistance needs of refugees living in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, as well as in camps and settlements, in all sectors, as well as the most vulnerable members of impacted communities. It seeks to strengthen community-based protection by identifying and responding to the immediate support needs of communal services in affected communities.
2. The 3RP resilience/stabilisation-based development component addresses the resilience and stabilisation needs of impacted and vulnerable communities in all sectors, builds the capacities of national and subnational service delivery systems, strengthens the ability of governments to lead the crisis response, and provides the strategic, technical and policy support to advance national responses. At the country level, each sector has a working group that coordinates the implementation of programmes under that sector.

The 3RP strategy resulted in a significant shift in how the response was coordinated and implemented, with much greater attention given to the needs of vulnerable host communities, addressing the livelihood needs of all communities, more integrated programming, long-term funding through multi-year financing (including the emergence of new flexible aid financing under Concessional Financing Facilities⁶), and national ownership of the response. Under the 3RP, each country in the response has a country plan. For Jordan, this is referred to as the Jordan Response Plan (JRP).⁷ From an inclusion perspective, the 3RP has offered both advantages and disadvantages. It has widened the scope of the response, both in terms of the target population – expanding to respond to the needs of vulnerable host communities – and in terms of humanitarian aid and resilience, bridging the gap between humanitarian and development assistance. The downside of this expanded approach is that a wider number of needs – development and emergency needs across both displaced and host communities – have had to be addressed. With declines over time in humanitarian aid, this could lead to acute needs falling through the cracks or there being insufficient investment and support for those

5 ‘Resilience’ is defined as, ‘the ability of individuals, households, communities and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover and transform shocks and crises ... Therefore, a resilience-based development approach to the Syria crisis is different from humanitarian relief. Creating resilience involves investing in the capacity and resources abilities of those communities and institutions most affected by a crisis so that they can eventually deal with their intermediate and long-term needs. The resilience approach recognises people in need as active and creative agents and empowers them towards greater ownership of their own lives through rapid employment generation, life skills training and inclusive governance’ (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/52937>).

6 Concessional financing describes ‘Loans provided at sharply reduced interest rates than usually available, and/or with long ‘grace periods’, intended for customers who would not otherwise be able to repay.’ (Willitts-King et al., 2019: ix).

7 For more, see the Jordan Response Plan (www.jrp.gov.jo).

facing acute vulnerabilities in the immediate term. On the other hand, the longer-term approach offers the potential for greater recognition of longer-term processes of exclusion to be recognised and for social safety nets to be extended.

The JRP seeks to develop a ‘comprehensive response’ that better bridges short-term humanitarian responses with longer-term resilience approaches.⁸ However, the largest challenge for the 3RP, and therefore subsequent country plans, has been securing funding. Since its launch in 2014, the 3RP has been severely underfunded, leading to drastic cuts in services for both refugee and host communities.

2.2.1 Jordan Compact (and donor conferences)

In addition to its role as a leading donor in the international response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the EU agreed a bilateral agreement with the Government of Jordan, known as the Jordan Compact (‘the Compact’), a commitment that came out of the Supporting Syria and the Region conference held in London in February 2016. The objective of the Compact was to turn the humanitarian crisis in Jordan into a development opportunity by attracting new investments and easing access to the EU market for Jordanian exporters, with the aim that this would bring growth and job creation, benefiting host and refugee communities. The Compact aimed to build resilience among Jordanian host communities, through financing, mobilising grants and concessional financing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to fund the initiatives stemming from the Compact. However, the Jordan Compact’s most famous feature has been its ‘political commitment’ to include Syrian refugees in the formal Jordanian labour market (Lenner and Turner, 2019). The Jordanian government initially agreed to open access to 200,000 jobs for Syrian refugees in Jordan, through easing the bureaucratic process of work permits and attracting investment that would lead to job creation for both host and refugee communities. This was accompanied by the adoption of special policies to aid Syrians in registering and working in home-based businesses, and the removal of links between permits and employers in some sectors, such as construction and agriculture (see for example Jordan Times, 2017).

2.2.2 Assessing vulnerability in an urban context

The fragility, density and complexity of cities and urban contexts can pose a unique set of challenges that can impact the delivery of an effective humanitarian response (European Commission, n.d.). Urban displacement also raises its own protection concerns, with high levels of vulnerability exacerbated by political and logistical challenges and a lack of sufficient capacity to respond to immediate needs because of the additional pressure on services and infrastructure (ibid.). All of these issues can exacerbate the challenge of building an inclusive humanitarian response. The displaced can be hidden, at times through choice or out of fear that they will be returned home, and dispersed across large areas, remaining invisible to humanitarian actors and the authorities (Sanderson, 2019). This creates challenges assessing vulnerability, which can leave certain vulnerable groups excluded.

⁸ For more, see the full text of the Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2016–2018 (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP16_18_Document-final+draft.pdf).

Prior to 2013, agencies used their own vulnerability assessment criteria to identify and target those most in need of services and aid. The aim of the VAF, introduced in Jordan in 2013, was to consolidate the use of different vulnerability criteria by different agencies to ensure that data was comparable and could be combined across agencies to build a comprehensive picture of needs and vulnerabilities (see Box 2). VAF data – which covers a set of vulnerability indicators including welfare, coping strategies, dependency, basic needs, education, food security, health, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) – is collected through population surveys and home visits. The former is a random, representative sample of registered Syrian refugees surveyed in order to provide a periodic insight into their vulnerability, while periodic home visits are an ongoing method used by UNHCR to collect data from refugees requesting cash assistance (Brown et al., 2019).

There was also recognition, as the Syrian crisis became increasingly protracted and with humanitarian funding dwindling, of the need to target resources to the most vulnerable refugees. The VAF is used by humanitarian agencies to support this effort by assessing the needs and vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees within a protracted, urban context, allowing them to: 1) establish a profile of vulnerability among Syrian refugee households and enable monitoring of changes overtime; 2) target assistance in a more equitable manner, based on common vulnerability criteria; and 3) strengthen coordination and decision-making around the delivery of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2021a). The framework is a common assessment system aimed at making refugee groups equally visible through a common definition of vulnerability and attempts to embed principles of inclusion, including impartiality and equitable access, as outlined in Box 1. The VAF criteria are updated every year and it has a working group. In 2021, the humanitarian sector was due to conduct the first VAF to include non-Syrian refugees. The results are due to be published in the next few months.

Box 2 What is the Vulnerability Assessment Framework?

The Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) is a collaborative initiative developed with the engagement of donors, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) operating in Jordan.

Given the growing recognition of the differences in access to assistance across the many beneficiary populations in Jordan, and in light of increasing pressures on humanitarian aid budgets, UNHCR collects data to allow for improved targeting and prioritisation of Syrian refugees. This is known as the VAF. It aims to gather data on and identify urban Syrian refugees' vulnerability so that aid agencies can be more efficient and effective with their programming for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The VAF includes a targeting component. It provides information on the vulnerabilities and assistance required. A prioritisation component helps agencies to identify which cases require faster or more assistance than others.

Overall the VAF allows for UNHCR and partners to better identify needs and vulnerabilities for targeting and prioritise those cases in need of faster, more urgent assistance.

Source: <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/vulnerability-assessment-framework-vaf-jordan-guidance-note>.

3 An intersectional analysis of the drivers of exclusion in the refugee response in Jordan

This chapter examines the key drivers of exclusion in the urban refugee response in Jordan. By discussing the different identity factors that intersect to produce specific vulnerabilities, the following analysis explores how refugees are excluded from both humanitarian aid – delivered by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and donors – and public services, delivered by the Government of Jordan.

The chapter first looks at structural factors relating to refugees' legal and administrative status and how geography or settlement patterns have impacted access to aid and services. It then examines questions of individual identity (such as gender or age), as well as issues around how the response targets and listens to people – by assessing vulnerability, sourcing and communicating feedback and addressing digital exclusion. All of these factors include or exclude people, often in ways that overlap or reinforce across different levels.

The analysis of this chapter is based on the literature review, along with interviews with global and local stakeholders and refugees, FGDs with refugees, and interviews with international and local aid representatives (see section 1.2 on methodology).

3.1 Nationality and legal status

3.1.1 Nationality and the scope of the crisis

Since the start of the Syrian civil war, the displacement response in Jordan has understandably been heavily focused on Syrian refugees. While in more recent years there have been efforts to redress the balance, our research found that ongoing discrimination around access to aid prevails towards other vulnerable groups, in particular refugees and vulnerable migrants of other nationalities.

The skewed focus of the response is most clearly embodied in the structure of the Jordan Compact itself, which was negotiated to open job opportunities in Jordan for Syrian refugees in exchange for Europe opening up export routes for Jordanian factories and increased financial aid. However, it did not include provisions for non-Syrian refugees, such as Yemenis and Sudanese. Much older caseloads of Palestinian refugees in Jordan were also left out. As one INGO noted:

There was an agreement that UNHCR was going to take care of Syrian work permits ... Palestinian refugees were left behind. Until today this has not changed.

As our research shows, differential access to the right to work as a result of their exclusion from the Jordan Compact has left non-Syrian refugees especially vulnerable to exploitation in informal labour markets. Here, many interviewees spoke about how their wages were withheld, yet they felt unable to challenge this exploitation due to fear of being deported for working illegally. As one Iraqi refugee explained:

Iraqi refugees who live in separate areas in Jordan, such as agricultural areas, work in agriculture or handicrafts informally, and are exposed to a lot of infringement of their rights and do not receive salaries or receive very low salaries from employers. They face other violations, because they do not have residency and are prohibited from working, so they work without work contracts, and they are exploited.

Another Sudanese refugee reported:

Every day I suffer from discrimination, marginalisation and injustice. In many cases, I worked in places and after the end of my work they do not give me my wages.

Yemenis also spoke about how they were discriminated against and did not have the mechanisms to address exploitation because of fear of being returned to their home country:

We are forced to work for very long periods with little pay, and some employers defraud us and do not give us our wages. We cannot file a complaint against them because the government will deport us to our country, and UNHCR does not provide us with protection.

The inability to access work has even forced some non-Syrian refugees to return to their home countries, as they find themselves unable to meet the cost of living in an urban setting. As one Iraqi refugee mother described:

My son wanted to work and they refused to hire Iraqis. He travelled to Iraq for the purpose of work and so far, they refuse to let him return to Jordan.

By limiting its scope exclusively to Syrian refugees, the Jordan Compact has thus perpetuated and reinforced exclusion of non-Syrian refugees. Yet, given their relatively small numbers in comparison to the Syrian refugee population, facilitating their inclusion would have been straightforward (Lenner and Turner, 2019). As such, it has been argued that their exclusion was purposeful, linked to the wider aims of the international donor community to constrain the movement of Syrian refugees and limit flows of resettlement (Burlin, 2018). As Lenner and Turner (2019) argue, this status quo also reflects a lack of international advocacy for the rights and livelihoods of non-Syrians.

Towards a 'one refugee' approach'?

There have been notable developments in seeking to address the needs of refugees of other nationalities. In addition to widening inclusion of the VAF assessment (discussed in sub-section 2.2.2), under the 3RP partners have sought to adopt and advocate for an inclusive 'one refugee' approach in all sectors and services, to 'reduce and ultimately eliminate differences in rights and services based on

nationality in approaches to protection and assistance’ (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2021). While evidence indicates some progress towards this goal – most notably the inclusion of non-Syrians in the World Food Programme’s food assistance programmes in 2020 (Baslan and Williams, 2021); donors and agencies, including the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department funding and prioritising all refugee groups (European Commission, n.d.); and UNHCR delivering annual multipurpose cash assistance to 40,000 refugee families of all nationalities (UNHCR, 2019b) – nationality remains a driver of exclusion in the response.

Humanitarian workers interviewed as part of our study were critical of agencies’ failing to uphold the ‘one refugee’ doctrine. The influence of international donors and their tendency to prioritise targeting Syrian refugees in the response has undermined wider inclusion of refugees of other nationalities. As explained by one UN worker:

The whole response is on Syrian refugees. The one refugee approach is not implemented as a matter of donor priorities. You have non-Syrian refugees who are not registered, and a lot of other groups like migrants: Yemeni, Iraqi, Sudanese, Egyptian and Palestinians.

The incentives of donors are questioned by some local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with one suggesting that, ‘behind the middle-sized donors, you then have the American checkbook which is not about vulnerability and equity but about political stability’. ‘On a day-to-day basis it is very donor-driven and donor mandates [focus on] specific groups’, observed one NGO worker. For example, one respondent noted that, ‘in some programs, donors wanted to provide transport allowances to Syrians not Jordanians; we told them this will definitely cause tensions’. Beyond questions of policy, basic operational assumptions about who the response is serving can also end up excluding non-Syrian refugees. For example, as one INGO respondent noted, language can serve as a significant barrier: non-Syrians ‘do not necessarily access the same services because the services are only opened in Arabic ... the response plan does not include them’.

Resistance from the Jordanian government to the inclusion of other nationalities was also apparent, with one donor representative suggesting:

The Government of Jordan is happy to keep the Syrians separate. They don’t buy into the ‘one refugee’ approach. There are up to 100,000 refugees from Yemen and others who are not registered by UNHCR and they come through a variety of channels. However hard UNHCR pushes for these to be included, the government does not allow it.

The evidence discussed demonstrates the gap between intention and reality that currently exists in attempts to embed the ‘one refugee’ approach within the humanitarian response. As things stand, many nationalities still feel excluded from both humanitarian assistance and government services, which undermines the inclusivity of the overall response. Similarly, the prioritisation of Syrians is directly linked to the JRP. As one NGO worker explained:

Any humanitarian funding to Jordan should be aligned with the JRP; if it's not along the lines of the JRP, then it will be rejected by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.

This correlates with research by Johnston et al. (2019), which shows that schemes aimed at supporting non-Syrian refugees require governmental approval, creating a legislative barrier to including certain groups in the response.

Vulnerable non-refugees

As one Jordanian man interviewed for this study put it:

Aid [should] be given to all those who need it, whether they are refugees or Jordanians. Aid must include all members of the poor community.

This aligns with a historical legacy of discrimination against vulnerable host communities in the Syrian displacement response. Analysis by Carrion (2015) found that residents in Amman felt international aid was unfairly prioritised towards Syrians: a legacy that, she argued, was derived from the start of the crisis in 2011, when the international community had limited capacity to deliver aid other than emergency relief. Indeed, evidence shows that in Amman, many poorer Jordanians have been 'structurally marginalised' due to the arrival of refugees and international aid, putting lower-class host communities at a disadvantage.

Here, groups already at the periphery of Jordanian society due to pre-existing patterns of marginalisation have in some cases been disproportionately affected. While Jordanians of Palestinian origin are in many cases Jordanian citizens,⁹ they tend to work primarily in informal or low-paid sectors, with limited access to the professional sector or government jobs. As such, this brings them more directly into competition with Syrian refugees (Grawert, 2019). Recent analysis of the Jordan Compact itself has also demonstrated its negative impact on already-precarious Egyptian and South Asian migrant workers, who have seen their wages eroded and competition for jobs increase since its inception (Almasri, 2021). This demonstrates how people living beyond the horizon of the crisis can still be vulnerable to policy changes designed to ameliorate conditions within the crisis itself.

In the more recent years of the response, the Jordanian government's active role in the development of the 3RP has allowed it to ensure host communities at least are no longer excluded from the response, as was the case previously. However, chronic underfunding of the 3RP since its inception has resulted in cuts to services for both refugee and host communities. One NGO worker believed this had disproportionately impacted vulnerable host communities:

⁹ 'Palestinian-Jordanians' are holders of Jordanian citizenship (as distinct from other Palestinian refugee populations from the West Bank and Gaza living in Jordan, who do not). However, they still face systematic social, political and economic discrimination, and since the mid-2000s have faced a growing trend of revocation of their citizenship rights by the Jordanian authorities (Grawert, 2019).

Donors almost use it as an excuse – why should we support the host community [that’s a responsibility of the government]? But the government is struggling and we have a responsibility to support the country.

3.1.2 Legal status

To better understand who is included and excluded in the humanitarian response, it is critical to examine the legal status of refugee communities in Jordan and how issues of registration, rights and documentation determine refugees’ ability to access humanitarian assistance and public services. There are two issues at work: refugees’ abilities to access the rights and documentation they are theoretically entitled to, and more fundamental distinctions related to the different legal status of different types of refugee.

Contingent access to rights and documentation

The policy environment for refugees in Jordan is highly restrictive and bureaucratic. As argued by Steller (2018), many refugees live under a set of suspended rights while in exile, constantly exposed to the threat of ‘losing their rights to have rights’. Out of an estimated 1.3 million Syrians who have sought refuge in Jordan, approximately 670,000 were registered with UNHCR as of September 2021 (UNHCR, 2021a). Registration allows Syrians to access humanitarian assistance, including healthcare, food vouchers and cash schemes, in both camp and non-camp settings (NRC, 2016). In parallel to this, Jordan’s Ministry of Interior issues service cards that allow registered Syrian refugees to access public services, including free education and subsidised primary healthcare. However, this documentation does not guarantee citizenship, the right to marry or the right to work (Burlin and Ahmad, 2020) and is only valid if the individual in question stays within the district in which it was issued (NRC, 2016). This prevents Syrians from moving between districts in search of work and better livelihood opportunities.

For refugees living in urban settings, barriers to acquiring legal status and being included in the humanitarian response can be heightened, with one study showing that those living outside of camps were more likely to be excluded from the service card system. This is likely in part because the application process involves reporting to a police station, which may compromise the status of those who have illegally left camps to reside in Amman (NRC, 2016). Until 2014, refugees were permitted to leave camps and move to urban areas. This process was suspended thereafter, meaning refugees could only briefly legally leave camps through the issuing of a vacation pass (HRW, 2018). In addition, Syrians who cannot prove they live legally outside of camps are at risk of being arrested and, in some cases, deported (Grawert, 2019). Up until 2016, Syrians living outside of camps without permission were not eligible for monthly cash assistance from UNHCR.

Here, the contingent and limited nature of even Syrian refugees’ access to wider socioeconomic, civil and political rights has ultimately limited the effectiveness of the Jordan Compact’s efforts to support their economic inclusion within the country’s labour market (Burlin, 2018). While the Compact means that Syrian refugees are now beneficiaries to much-simplified procedures with allocated support to

find legal work, they are barred from accessing higher-skilled sectors including professional sectors,¹⁰ constraining them to work in low-salary jobs that typically include long working hours. Barriers to freedom of movement also affect people's ability to access job opportunities, while limited legal access to finance and credit constraints further limit wider economic participation (Zighan, 2020). In addition, the continued ties between work permits and specific employers in certain sectors mean that, due to the unequal power dynamics this creates in practice, there are limited mechanisms for Syrians to effectively communicate grievances against employers (Mencutek and Nashwan, 2020).

Differential legal status granted to different groups of refugees

Our research found that differential access to rights and legal status among different refugee groups was a key driver of exclusion in the response. In fact, this underlines many of the other challenges around exclusion, including the denial of access to services and rights.

Key informant interviews revealed the extent of the marginalisation faced by different communities in their attempts to acquire legal status and protection. The decision taken by UNHCR in 2019 to stop registering non-Syrians has left non-Syrians facing significant barriers due to being treated as asylum seekers. As one Iraqi man explained:

UNHCR does not recognise us as refugees, but as asylum seekers, knowing that this is contrary to international norms.

This contrasts with Syrians, who are immediately granted temporary protection and recognised as de facto refugees through the issuing of asylum seeker certificates and Ministry of Interior service cards (Burlin and Ahmad, 2020). This differential status has a significant impact on the rights they have (Habitat for Humanity, 2014). Moreover, given that refugee status determination procedures take time, the difference in legal status can persist for months if not years, during which time anyone with a pending claim is not permitted to access to services (Su, 2014). As one Yemeni refugee explained:

They consider us asylum seekers ... we are treated as if we are an unimportant group.

Another reported being refused access by an INGO service provider on the grounds that they were not registered as a refugee:

They told me that this service is only for refugees and not asylum seekers.

10 For more on Jordan's labour laws regarding access to work for Syrian refugees, see International Rescue Committee (n.d.) 'Overview of right to work for refugees, Syria crisis response: Lebanon and Jordan (www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/987/policybrief2righttoworkforrefugees-syriacrisisresponsejanuary25.pdf).

Not being registered as a refugee not only has implications for accessing services and assistance, it also makes it difficult to obtain a residency permit and identity documents. The issuing and management of residency permits for non-Syrians are regulated by standard Jordanian laws, whereas Syrian refugees are subject to less prohibitive procedures (Johnston et al., 2019). As one Iraqi male explained:

The biggest problem for me is residency. If this problem is resolved, my conditions will be good because it will allow me to work and travel and move freely.

The issuing of overstay fines is commonplace for those without the correct papers, which then precludes them from accessing free healthcare and education services. One Iraqi woman reported being arrested twice because of overstaying her residency permit:

Now I feel afraid to leave the house for fear of being arrested by the security forces.

Due to their lack of refugee status, non-Syrian men who enter Jordan require a visa and are subject to overstay fees if they break the conditions of their entry. Currently, most non-Syrian refugees accrue an overstay fee of 1.5 Jordanian dinars (\$2.12 as at 5 January 2021) per day as soon as their entry visa expires, and if they fail to pay before leaving Jordan, they are barred from re-entering for five years. This includes refugees registered with UNHCR and those possessing asylum seeker certificates. Furthermore, any intervention aimed at supporting non-Syrian refugees requires approval from the Ministry of Social Development and the Cabinet, demonstrating that the current humanitarian framework is designed almost exclusively to meet the needs of Syrians (Johnston et al., 2019). Evidence shows that Palestinian refugees from Syria are also slipping through the cracks. ‘We have no proof [of identity] except passports ... our presence in Jordan is like imprisonment,’ said one Palestinian.

3.2 Geography and settlement patterns

Humanitarian actors have traditionally struggled to deal with the complexity of cities (World Humanitarian Summit Urban Expert Group, 2015). This is true in the protracted crisis in Jordan where, as direct aid has decreased over time and the response has shifted from emergency relief to development-focused interventions (Idris, 2016), a lack of targeted, multisectoral service provision to urban-based refugees has perpetuated different modes of exclusion in Amman.

3.2.1 Dispersed nature of the target population

The disparate nature of urban populations makes it harder for aid agencies to identify, target and reach affected communities. The humanitarian response is fragmented across Amman. ‘Organisations have branches in refugee centres, but in the city they are scattered,’ explained one local NGO worker. Among aid actors interviewed for this research, there was general recognition that those displaced in the south of Jordan were more likely to be excluded from service provision, as the majority of services were in the north of the country to address higher refugee numbers there. This lack of geographical coverage is exacerbated by an overall shortage of services and declines in funding over recent years. ‘There is

a lack of services, and they are only concentrated in certain places,' explained a respondent, with one local NGO worker describing how those areas with the largest numbers of refugees, such as Basman, Qweismeh and Wast Al Balad, had better services than other areas. These factors have contributed to undermining inclusion in the response, with certain refugee communities excluded from service provision depending on where they live in Amman. While one INGO had 'branched out to different geographical areas – including the south of the country, which tends to be marginalised and ignored', coordination across the response has not adapted to an area-based approach to support geographical and spatial fairness regarding access to services.

The exclusion of certain communities based on geography is compounded by differences in access to transportation, with one refugee noting:

There are Syrian refugees who drive to UNHCR in their own car to apply for financial aid. There is no fair distribution of aid.

Barriers to transportation have had a particular impact on rural or semi-rural communities, as refugee leaders reported:

People in rural areas do not receive aid. If they want to receive coupons or assistance, they must use transportation to reach the organisations.

While some NGOs reported providing transportation so that refugees could access service centres, the evidence indicates aid agencies in Jordan are faced with a highly challenging urban context.

NGO workers noted the challenges of addressing the needs and rights of urban refugees:

In the camps, people receive more services. Refugees move outside the camps to many places. They also do not have a fixed residence, and even the contact numbers with them are variable, making it difficult to reach them.

As a result of the complexity of the urban space, some NGO workers felt camps were more conducive to an inclusive approach. As one NGO worker explained:

The camps are much more homogeneous in terms of population ... you know where people live and [there is] plenty of data on how many people are there and with disabilities. It is easier to reach more people and be more inclusive.

The general consensus among the agencies we interviewed was that, although greater opportunities for employment and livelihood development existed outside of camps, refugees were more likely to be invisible to responders and slip through the cracks of a humanitarian response largely characterised by a traditional sector-based approach. As one UN representative surmised:

In urban centres, there is not the same oversight [as camps] and they are more on their own and [because refugees are] using the official system, there is more room for discrimination.

However, this view that camps allowed for greater inclusion reflects a failure by the humanitarian sector to adequately adapt to the new urban context it finds itself working within. It highlights a flawed approach to the humanitarian response, unable to meet the challenges of the urban context, rather than the desires of refugees themselves.

For refugees, there is a clear trade-off between freedom of movement and overall autonomy in their lives, and access to services. Refugees interviewed for this research were fully aware of the difference in access to services between those living in camps compared to those living in Amman. One Syrian woman said:

We do not benefit from aid and services because we are residents of Amman, and aid and services differ from one region to another. For example, Syrian camp refugees receive aid.

However, they chose to remain in the cities because of the freedoms it allowed. As one Syrian community leader explained:

As for those in the camps, they receive aid on a regular basis, but they are prevented from working and prohibited from leaving the camp. For them, this is like imprisonment for freedom.

This highlights a trade-off between the inherent human need for freedom, dignity and autonomy, and the negative impact it may have on day-to-day survival.

3.2.2 Sector-based approaches do not support an inclusive response in an urban context

The delivery of humanitarian assistance in urban settings is compromised by the political and logistical complexity of cities; a lack of institutional capacity due to the significant strain on resources; and parallel systems of local government- and international agency-run services (European Commission, n.d.). Where the context is fragile (De Boer, 2015) and people's needs are complex and intersect, traditional 'sector-based' approaches to humanitarian action are inappropriate (Patel et al., 2017). While urban crises are different in nature, Brouder (2017) argues it is the same 'rigid international humanitarian system' that responds to them, failing to understand the local context and engage with populations appropriately to inform response programmes. In the interviews conducted for this research, there was recognition of the need to improve coordination to allow for identification of needs and services based on gaps in a given area, an approach that is spatially aware and has included urban mapping and analysis of existing services in order to avoid parallel services or duplication of programmes. As one INGO commented:

I think it is maybe coming back to the issue of inclusion of how all NGOs could work together and coordinate. Coordination is needed with all actors to make sure you are not leaving anybody behind.

The scale and disparate nature of the urban crisis has meant that, in some cases, agencies have employed multisectoral and intersectional responses to address multiple needs simultaneously. Many identified in our research focused on improving the inclusion of women refugees and diversifying the availability of services to women. Examples included centres that provide psychological and legal support services, case management, social and legal awareness, and vocational training in an attempt to develop economic self-support that women can achieve.

Age and gender were also noted as a priority in the design of multisectoral programmes. One key informant explained:

The services provided in our centres are comprehensive services that take care of people in all stages of their lives for women and children, and these are distinguished services, because each specific age has services dedicated to this stage.

Understanding why age, gender and disability have been prioritised in multisectoral approaches may be explained by the main concerns of donors. Funding agencies have prioritised gender, age and disability when deciding whether to fund a project. As one donor explained:

We have a Gender, Age, Disability Marker that is mandatory for all projects for them to be able to be funded by us. With this marker we look at four specific questions [via] disaggregated data ... We want to ensure these groups are specifically included in all aspects of the projects ... [even if a certain group is not included] we want to see that the organisations we fund have taken them into account and made sure [there is a rationale for] why they are not part of the project.

However, this dominant focus on a limited number of perceived vulnerable groups, such as women and children, risks perpetuating the traditional conception of vulnerability and who is vulnerable in a crisis, to the exclusion of other, less visible vulnerable groups, such as single men with acute needs or vulnerabilities.

3.2.3 The role of local actors, local government and local leadership

At the outset of the displacement crisis in Jordan, there was a lack of engagement by the humanitarian community of local municipalities, mayors and other urban actors, including little engagement of local humanitarian actors, such as Syrian and other refugee and migrant humanitarian organisations. Even as the crisis continued, most examples of partnerships were subcontractual in nature. Part of this was due to the highly constraining registration and compliance systems that local organisations had to satisfy, which they were unable to do. Without being officially registered, they could not secure funding from UN agencies or INGOs. With national, local and community-based organisations part of the social fabric

of a community, this lack of meaningful engagement of local actors meant that aid was provided in ways that did not reflect pre-existing modes of service provision and assistance in communities themselves. This constrained the inclusion of refugees.

To deliver an effective urban response to a displacement crisis:

requires much less direct service delivery [products] and far more engaging with existing services, advocating for access and supporting local governments and private sector partners to scale up and ensure quality of services (IRC, 2015: 6).

As one key informant noted, this demands ‘working in partnerships and alongside line ministries and [the] private sector and all members of communities’. Local government is responsible for ensuring the resilience of the urban space to the onset of displacement and to what extent the city is able to respond effectively to the influx (Archer and Dodman, 2017; Sanderson, 2019). As Satterwaite and Dodman argue (2013), well-resourced local authorities (such as Amman) can engage with external actors in service delivery and contribute their local expertise to ensure interventions are focused on longer-term development, not just short-term relief. In an urban displacement response, partnerships between humanitarian actors and non-traditional actors – such as local government, development actors and the private sector – are vital to ensure needs are met both in the short term and also over the medium to longer term, including access to jobs and safe housing (European Commission, n.d.). At the same time, local leadership can be more effective. As one elderly Syrian refugee woman said:

The treatment by government department employees is excellent and they take into account that I am an old woman, and they facilitate the procedures.

3.3 Identity and specific needs

The issue of an individual’s identity and what their specific needs are during a crisis directly impacts whether those needs are met in the response. The vulnerability of certain refugee communities can be amplified by the complex and unequal dynamics of a humanitarian response, with specific dynamics related to gender or age often reinforced by wider structural issues related to legal status, as well as intersecting with each other. Here, the use of status-based targeting risks becoming a blunt instrument that prioritises certain groups, irrespective of vulnerability and need, while excluding others. The case of the response in Jordan shows that particular identity groups face exclusion with their needs largely unaccounted for.

3.3.1 Overlapping forms of marginalisation by gender

Gender functions as a driver of exclusion in the Jordan response along multiple, often overlapping axes. At a macro level, other forms of exclusion such as nationality and legal status often have disproportionately gendered impacts, as seen, for example, through the lens of access to maternity services. Here, one Yemeni man explained:

My wife, when she was pregnant, went to the hospital to give birth. They refused to deliver her baby.

Similarly, one Syrian mother explained how she was refused free midwifery services during childbirth because, 'I don't have an official and registered marriage certificate'.

Gendered social norms within refugee and host communities can also have substantial impacts on people's ability to access services and employment, with female refugees generally facing more challenges in accessing day-to-day services than their male counterparts (UN Women, 2016). Expectations around women's social role as caregivers may impact their ability to leave the house in the absence of adequate childcare provision, which refugees are unable to afford. Norms governing the acceptability of women's presence in the public sphere may also affect where they can go and what they can do. Here, issues relating to transportation – including cost, unreliability and a lack of safety – have significant effects on access to services for refugee women living in urban settings in particular, where services are often far from people's place of residence (ibid.).

At a more fundamental level, the hostility of the public realm to women means they are more likely to be marginalised from 'non-essential' but psycho-socially vital leisure services such as parks and community centres. This is particularly true in Jordan's urban settings, where the provision of public space – including designated green space – and community and cultural spaces is lacking in some areas (Abed et al., 2015). 'I wish there was a park, swimming pool and gym to go to,' said one female Palestinian refugee from Syria. Barriers to accessing the public sphere are especially acute for single and unmarried women, who were identified by one NGO as a key group who did not present themselves to multiservice centres:

Adolescent girls ... if they are married, they are coming to the centre, but if they are unmarried, they are not coming.

Stigma around specific services can also play a role. As one NGO worker noted:

There are still very conservative gender norms for women to go to sexual and reproductive health services ... women fear being stigmatised.

Here, traditional norms around pregnancy, a lack of awareness of available services, a lack of reliable information on sexual and gender-based violence, and poorly trained healthcare providers all contribute to the exclusion of Syrian women from family planning and sexual health services (West et al., 2016). Amiri et al. (2020) argue that many of these contributing factors have been amplified by the 2018 revoking of subsidised healthcare to Syrian refugees residing outside of camps by the Government of Jordan. The question of stigma is not unique to women and girls; social norms governing acceptable behaviour for men have also reportedly limited their access to mental health services (see below).

The impacts of gendered social norms are also closely related to the gender sensitivity – or lack of it – of humanitarian policies and approaches to service delivery. This is vividly illustrated in the case of the

Jordan Compact, where only 4.8% of the 200,000 work permits issued have been allotted to women. This disparity is partially due to the intersection between the design of the Compact and the gendered structure of Jordanian labour markets. With a focus on developing special economic zones for construction and manufacturing, the majority of the jobs generated under the Compact have been in sectors largely dominated by men, where participation is socially inappropriate for all but a few women. More broadly, the Compact does little to ameliorate either the underlying conditions limiting women's access to labour markets, or the specific impact of the Syria crisis on these conditions. According to data collected by REACH and UN Women (2020), in 2018 Jordan had the third-lowest female labour force participation rate in the world, linked in large part to the social norms described previously. The refugee crisis has further polarised the labour market between men and women and has led to further exclusion of women from formal work. The Jordan Compact's failure to engage with these wider issues has in many cases resulted in further economic exclusion for women in Jordan, whose participation is a key indicator of economic resilience (UN Women, 2020).

Conversely, evidence shows that other elements of the Compact's design have had a more positive gendered impact. Here, Almasri (2021) notes how the regulations around home-based businesses linked to the Jordan Compact process have been a 'positive step for economic empowerment of women in Jordan'. This was supported by one key informant from a woman's centre, who noted:

Refugee women have better work opportunities than refugee men when it comes to home-based businesses; we know many ladies who own production kitchens, but their husbands are not employed.

As one NGO interviewee explained, 'the municipality introduced new legislation to register home-based businesses with no fees in the first three years'. As another highlighted, home-based businesses are especially important because:

Refugee women and Jordanian vulnerable women are more likely to work if they are at home and feel safe from harassment and can also attend the responsibility of home and taking care of the family.

Beyond questions of gender sensitivity, evidence also shows that flawed assumptions or outright biases around gender continue to drive key aspects of policy and programming. For example, the response was perceived by some interviewees to place significant emphasis on the needs of divorced or widowed refugee women. However, some women who fall into these categories but are not formally registered as such – for example, those separated from their spouses but not formally divorced, or those missing the right paperwork – found themselves cut off from assistance. Here, there was little flexibility or recognition that ex-spouses – on whom annulling marriage documents legally depends in Jordan – might be uncooperative or impossible to reach (if still in Syria). As one woman explained:

Neither UNHCR nor UNICEF [the UN Children's Fund] provided me with financial support, even when I told them I was divorced ... there is a need to produce separate documents [from my ex-husband].

Several refugee respondents also highlighted how similarly patriarchal assumptions around men's ability to be either breadwinners or economically self-sufficient were cutting off support from vulnerable households and individuals. As one Syrian explained, 'the mere presence of a man on the same UNHCR document deprives the family of assistance provided to refugees'. This correlates with vulnerability criteria set out by several aid agencies, including the Danish Refugee Council, Oxfam and Save the Children, which prioritise assistance to female-headed households and households without an able-bodied man aged between 18 and 59 (UNHCR, 2013). This is despite sometimes significant needs for assistance and support. As one older Syrian woman explained:

I live with my son, who is unmarried and is therefore cut off from various assistance services such as winter and coronavirus assistance.

In some cases, the assumed non-vulnerability of male household members was perceived to be superseding other identifiers of exclusion, such as disability. For example, one Syrian woman stated that her assistance was cut off after her son turned 18, 'even knowing that my son is a heart patient who cannot work'.

This form of marginalisation was often felt especially acutely by single men. Describing his attempts to navigate a challenging policy context without assistance, one young Syrian man explained:

It is difficult to obtain official documents and I face difficulties in obtaining a work permit and a social security card; the transactions take a long time, in addition to a large financial cost.

Here, research on refugee resettlement programmes for Syrian refugees has found that most host countries operate such schemes based on traditional understandings of vulnerability that prioritise 'authentic refugees' such as women and children (Turner, 2017). While such determinations of vulnerability are presented by host governments as objective, Turner (2017) argues they are in fact subjective and highly politicised, based on a perception that women are more vulnerable than men and that single Muslim Arab men pose a threat to Western democracy and values. Ultimately, the needs of some Syrian men, and the fact that they live in fear of their safety, are often not reflected in the international humanitarian response.

3.3.2 Excluding the needs of refugees with disabilities and mental health problems

The intersectional nature of the exclusion faced by some refugees is highlighted by the experiences and unmet needs of those living with disability. Many spoke of being excluded from primary healthcare assistance and facing high treatment costs at private facilities. One Syrian explained:

I had to go to a private doctor for my daughter's mental disabilities and the cost of treatment is very high. UNHCR evaluated our family circumstances but did not provide assistance for my daughter's treatment.

These issues may be further compounded for non-Syrian refugees, who face similar costs but with even fewer means to meet them. Those living with a disability also struggled to access education, experiencing exclusion on the grounds of both their disability and their status as a refugee. Refugee children with disabilities were excluded from mainstream schools or, if they were able to attend, they spoke about challenges with bullying and discrimination. One Syrian refugee explained how his son with disabilities was hit by a teacher:

I put my son with disabilities in a public school and the teacher hit him in the face and ear, and the ear was hurt a lot.

There was criticism towards humanitarian actors for failing to meet the needs of refugees with disabilities, with UNHCR singled out by many in focus group discussions for failing to provide appropriate education services where these were not being provided by the Jordanian state:

My son is disabled and has speech difficulties and learning difficulties. I contacted UNHCR. I told them that I want a centre for people with disabilities so that my son's future is not lost. He is still a child and I hope that he will speak [in the future]. Their response is that they do not provide this help.

As one Syrian refugee explained:

My son is autistic and needs a private school and I do not have the financial ability to place him in a private school, and I do not receive any assistance from the UNHCR.

While a National Disability Law exists in Jordan, physical infrastructure is not designed to be accessible for either host or refugee people with disabilities. One NGO worker surmised:

Inclusion is about being able to participate equally ... so he [a disabled person] understands his rights ... and how to reach services.

Mental health and access to mental health support were recurring challenges noted by those we interviewed. In particular, intersectional modes of exclusion are reflected in the provision of and access to refugees' mental health services. While some mental health services do exist in Jordan, including Centers for Victims of Torture, encouraging refugees to access mental health services remains a significant problem. This is influenced by language barriers, a lack of awareness within some communities about the importance of mental health, and the stigma associated with seeking help (Hassan et al., 2016). One local service provider explained:

The challenge is sometimes caused by the community itself, which does not believe [in] and does not realise the importance of awareness and psychological support.

Several refugees with psychological issues reported feeling excluded from support. A Palestinian refugee from Syria explained:

There is no organisation that has provided me with any kind of psychological support or services, and no one tells me that there are [such] services.

The experiences of respondents were substantiated by research that showed refugees arriving from Sudan, Somalia and Yemen often suffered trauma not just because of war and displacement, but also due to imprisonment and torture in their home and transit countries. It has also been reported that these communities are disproportionately affected by isolation, loneliness and depression, as well as racial discrimination and violence (Johnston et al., 2019: 32).

The unique challenges of living in an urban environment can exacerbate mental health problems. Environmental stressors such as insecure housing, cramped living conditions, insufficient income, exploitative working conditions and the curtailment of rights all negatively impact psychosocial well-being (Wells et al., 2016). The provision of certain services, including good-quality healthcare and access to decent work, can help to alleviate the impact of environmental stressors and reduce feelings of isolation and exclusion, yet they are hard to access for the urban displaced.

3.3.3 Addressing the needs of the elderly

Elderly people are more likely to ‘not have a social connection or social or family support’, increasing their risk of vulnerability. Yet, our research found that these specific vulnerabilities and needs were not being recognised or addressed. One local organisation spoke about how the elderly were ‘especially marginalised’, with few services provided specifically for them by organisations. For example, according to one respondent, older people were excluded from day-to-day services, while another suggested that older refugees’ needs:

are not well known ... maybe because there is a lack of data and other organisations are not well informed.

This was despite their unique vulnerabilities. For example, older men are particularly vulnerable to mental health struggles (Hassan et al., 2016), in part due to traditional cultural norms that suppress men’s willingness to acknowledge problems and seek help. Evidence suggests that a failure to fully understand the needs of elderly refugees and target services appropriately – including mental health services for older men – leads to the exclusion of elderly refugees.

In addition, refugees shared their frustration at the distinction between old and young regarding job opportunities, with older people experiencing exclusion from the labour market in preference for younger workers. As one Syrian community leader explained:

In Jordan, we do not have a future because the living conditions are very bad, in addition to a huge lack of job opportunities for the elderly. As for young people, there are job opportunities for them, so their conditions are better than us who are over the age of 45.

However, exclusion on grounds of age can also work the other way, with youth, particularly those who have left school aged 16 to 18, unable to access a work permit. Almost half of the 650,000 registered Syrians in Jordan are under the age of 18, and therefore not eligible for a work permit (Golesorkhi, 2020). The implications of this are evidenced by the growth of child labour, which more than doubled in Jordan between 2007 and 2016, fuelled by the Syrian crisis (Grawert, 2019).

3.4 Targeting and accountability within the humanitarian response

How a humanitarian response is designed, targeted and operationalised, and the participation of beneficiaries (or lack thereof) within that, significantly informs whose needs are met.

3.4.1 Assessing vulnerability

The VAF – the primary mechanism for assessing vulnerability used by agencies in Jordan – and how it simultaneously includes and excludes through its design and operationalisation was discussed by multiple respondents in our research. Some donors spoke of the merit in its formulation, noting ‘where it is most useful for us is getting the headline figures to justify to ministers on programming’. The VAF is updated every year and, as one agency argued, for that reason it enables better inclusion by ensuring understanding of vulnerability is dynamic and examined over time and across sectors. While one humanitarian agency stated that all refugees have the right to request a vulnerability assessment regardless of their country of origin, it is only from 2021 onwards that the VAF will include both Syrian and non-Syrian refugees, with preliminary results due in late 2021 before the final report in early 2022 (Inter-Sector Working Group in Jordan, 2021).

While some agencies were positive about the use of the VAF, others felt perceptions of vulnerability did not necessarily correlate with those advanced in the framework. Prior to 2021, non-Syrian refugees – a highly vulnerable group – had been excluded from the VAF. One humanitarian respondent noted:

The Jordanian humanitarian programme does not look at refugees of other nationalities. We talk about inclusion but ... the framework is excluding people by definition.

Another NGO worker said:

Unregistered refugees are left behind because they do not have access. Then refugees from other countries are also left behind. And many migrants in very precarious situations are even more vulnerable than refugees.

This was reflected in the experiences of non-Syrian refugees, with one Yemeni woman noting:

UNHCR says that there are people who are more deserving of help than us, even knowing that my father and mother are of adult age and no one is paying them and I have two children.

While moving forward this form of exclusion may be mitigated with the inclusion of non-Syrian refugees, some 10 years into the response it has undoubtedly come too late.

Another limitation of the VAF expressed was its limited representation of the views of women, with one NGO worker noting:

Unless there is a specific interest to speak with a woman, it is the head of the household ... who is going to reply so there is always an over-representation of male voices in home surveys.

Here, the views and experiences of Syrian women appear to be excluded from an important mechanism for collecting data around vulnerability,¹¹ resulting in a response that fails to fully understand and account for the needs and vulnerabilities of women, a critical element of a needs-based approach to humanitarian response (Barbelet and Wake, 2020). Furthermore, the VAF does not ensure total coverage of food security, with food security sector scores only available for around 35% of Syrian refugees. It is argued that this is partly because the Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI) index used for scoring food security in the VAF is not suitable for targeting food-insecure groups in contexts where a large proportion of people rely on food assistance, such as in Amman. The framework has also failed to reach 100% of the refugee population, 'in part due to limitations in conducting home visits in the wake of Covid-19' (World Food Programme, 2021: 8).

Finally, the VAF's failure to capture data on refugees' unique protection challenges, in particular around socioeconomic challenges posed by the urban context, was cited as an issue by respondents. One NGO worker explained:

Vulnerability is well understood in terms of urban refugees ... but what is less understood is the protection ... and how they are connected to the financial means to sustain and access basic needs. We noticed a lot of things they do not include; they do not disaggregate and only ask heads of households. Before, [they did] not use any female enumerators. It does not look at other forms of social discrimination and protection.

Evidence of the VAF, through its design and delivery, contributing to the exclusion of certain identity groups – whether it be non-Syrians or women – shows how refugee communities fall through the cracks of the response.

11 While an under-researched area, various studies have shown that responses to even apparently objective questions can vary substantially depending on both who the respondent is and who is asking the questions (e.g. Coates et al. (2010) on biases related to gender of respondent, or Ground Truth Solutions (2021) on ethnicity-of-enumerator effect). This raises questions around the validity of focusing predominantly on male heads of household as VAF respondents. Assessing vulnerability at household level also leaves the substantial question of intra-household inequalities unanswered.

3.4.2 A lack of faith in methods of targeting and assessment

How vulnerability is understood and assessed is critical to informing how resources are targeted and, consequently, influences how certain individuals and groups are included and excluded from a humanitarian response. The urban context in particular poses challenges for assessing vulnerability, with the displaced dispersed across a large urban area, often invisible to humanitarian actors and government authorities (Sanderson, 2019). Political and logistical challenges, as well as infrastructure challenges, in cities can exacerbate this by pushing more people into a state of vulnerability in the first place (European Commission, n.d.).

A key facet of a needs-based approach is targeting, the process by which individuals and groups are identified and selected for assistance programmes based on their vulnerability and needs (Smith et al., 2017). The perception among refugees interviewed for this research was that methods of targeting and assessment used by humanitarian agencies were unfit for purpose and perpetuated marginalisation. ‘It is a random selection; there is no clear criteria for selecting people,’ said one Syrian respondent. From the perspective of the Syrian community, there was no clear needs-based rationale for providing certain refugees with assistance while excluding others. Home assessments conducted by UNHCR were also criticised, with one Syrian woman noting:

When UNHCR visits our houses, the staff member doesn’t give the family space to explain their financial situation or talk about their needs, they cut off assistance to families that are most in need.

Some respondents reported that assessments were partly based on material goods found within a refugee family’s home, with one elderly Syrian stating:

Certain individuals donated an old TV to use ... yet when UNHCR visited ... he noted down that we own a TV and, due to that, our financial aid should be cut.

An Iraqi refugee described how:

a UNHCR employee came to conduct a home assessment for my family, and after a month, they told me that this is the last month to provide financial assistance, and that there are more deserving families than me, even knowing that my circumstances have not changed.

As Feldman (2018: 80) argues, objective targeting mechanisms based on proxies for economic vulnerability can in practice risk perpetuating a deserving- versus undeserving-poor approach to assistance provision, whereby people must be perceived to have no pleasures in order to qualify for support.

The research shows that refugees perceived the international humanitarian community’s approach to understanding needs and providing assistance as unfair, catalysing their lack of trust and sense of injustice. Some refugees questioned mechanisms employed for assessing needs, with one Iraqi stating:

When there is an interview for immigration purposes, there is a translator and a foreign employee, and often the translator translates wrong and this interview is fateful for the refugee.

Others suggested that some refugees had been able to fraudulently claim assistance by manipulating the assessment process. One Syrian refugee explained:

Many refugees lie and defraud organisations regarding aid. My brother-in-law immigrated to Canada, and now he receives the help of an iris scan,¹² which his sister receives through an ATM.

Another Syrian refugee woman stated:

My son has two twin daughters and cannot feed them ... UNHCR has deprived him ... because they give eye print assistance to families who use fraudulent methods.

This perceived unfairness in targeting extended to geographical location, too, with one young Syrian refugee noting:

There is discrimination or refusal to provide services to residents of certain areas, meaning that organisations assume that Hay Nazzal, Jubeiha, Abdoun and Marj al-Hamam are areas inhabited by people with good financial conditions.

Interview data showed that, in some cases, processes of assessment and targeting by agencies were not fully driven by an appropriate, impartial understanding and operationalisation of individual needs. Instead, they were perceived by refugees to be unfair and inconsistent, fuelling a sense of unjust exclusion from mechanisms of assistance. Refugees' first-hand experiences of problematic interactions with agencies support this finding and demonstrate that, in an urban context, impartiality is a particular challenge given the sheer scale and size of the area to be covered and the numerous vulnerable populations with equally deserving needs.

3.4.3 Weak communication flows

Minimal information provided to refugees by humanitarian agencies and a lack of two-way communication flows has perpetuated further exclusion for certain refugees in Jordan. For example, one Iraqi refugee reported that their relationship with UNHCR:

is superficial ... there is no communication, there is a problem communicating with the UNHCR because they refuse to admit us to the headquarters.

¹² In Jordan, cash assistance is delivered to many refugees via ATMs that employ iris-scanning biometric technology to verify recipients' identities. See Holloway et al. (2021) for a comprehensive examination of the links between inclusion and the use of digital identity and biometrics to deliver assistance to refugees in Jordan.

A Sudanese refugee explained:

When you go to the UNHCR office you do not get any answers, there is no benefit.

The problem extends to UNRWA, too, with one Palestinian refugee from Syria commenting that:

When we first came to Jordan, UNRWA used to communicate with us on a monthly basis to understand our needs, and now there is no one communicating with us.

Evidence shows refugees with disabilities also experience limited access to information from service providers, with one Syrian woman noting:

I contact them by phone and explain my situation to them in detail and there is no response or consideration to my family's circumstances.

Poor communication with affected people can have substantial impacts in terms of their awareness of what services are available to whom and on what terms – especially when policies change. A 2017 UNHCR study found that only 66% of minority refugees were aware of the provision of free healthcare services (UNHCR, 2017), while some Syrian refugees interviewed for this study appeared unaware that a 2018 revocation of subsidised healthcare for Syrians had subsequently been reversed.

More fundamentally, poor information provision and a lack of dialogue can erode refugees' trust in service providers: poor communication between authorities and host and refugee communities was identified by the Jordan Emergency Services and Social Resilience Project as a characteristic that underpinned dissatisfaction with municipal services in Amman (JESSRP, 2016). In some cases, mistrust can become so extreme that people withdraw from engaging with humanitarian services entirely. As one NGO staff member explained:

A lack of trust with UNHCR ... leads to people falling through the cracks, purely because they don't know where to get the support.

Challenges in communication are far from unique to the Jordanian context. They reflect similar trends around poor communication flows and the exclusion of affected populations from preparedness and response planning and decision-making processes that characterise many urban humanitarian responses (Brouder, 2017). During the pandemic, efforts have been made to improve the situation. For example, sector working groups began to reach out to government ministries – who had access to television channels and other national-level forms of communication – to coordinate with them on improving government communications, including enhancing their sign language provision to foster greater inclusivity.

3.4.4 Feedback mechanisms

As argued by Bonino et al. (2014), feedback utilisation is critical to adapting and improving humanitarian responses and increasing accountability to crisis-affected populations. Many of the agencies interviewed for this research spoke about the importance of hearing from respondents as to how their services were meeting people's needs. As one local organisation described:

When designing programs, the opinion of the people receiving services is taken into consideration through discussion groups.

Another explained:

We do focus groups with beneficiaries who received services in our centers, and they give feedback on the service and its quality, in addition to suggestions and improvements.

However, the perspectives of refugees and some NGO workers shows that feedback mechanisms provided by humanitarian and government actors have often been ineffective and indicative of wider problems regarding opportunities for refugees' participation in the response. For those living outside of Amman, respondents reported a sense that 'our voice does not reach, and no one takes our opinion'. Failures in different mechanisms for communication and providing feedback were highlighted by respondents, with one Iraqi noting:

I tried to communicate our case to the community through social media, and by communicating with the relevant decision-makers, and the response was that the UNHCR document must be abandoned in order for the refugee to obtain residency, so there is no real response.

One UN worker stated:

Sometimes the problem is also that it becomes very technocratic and not a structural change in the system ... similarly with accountability structures, you may have a complaint box or a hotline but ... not the trust on how you design your intervention and the durable solutions.

'The hotline that is used is a very bad way to communicate,' explained one Syrian refugee. These respondents' insights suggest a significant level of exclusion from providing feedback and communicating grievances. This characteristic of the response in Jordan correlates with typical urban humanitarian responses in recent years, where participation of affected communities continues to be poor despite increasing recognition and prioritisation of the importance of accountability (Brouder, 2017). It can be argued that the fragmented spatial component of an urban response, where refugee communities are dispersed across a sprawling and complex environment, impacts refugees' ability to remain connected with communities and mobilise to engage with decision-making in the humanitarian response. As one Syrian refugee leader explained:

At the beginning of the crisis, we used to meet with each other, but now we're scattered.

One study showed that refugees living in Jubilee District, eastern Amman, experienced geographical isolation from their communities, with their low incomes excluding them from connecting with friends and family living elsewhere in the city (Al-Tal and Ghanem, 2019: 603).

Some refugees are excluded from communicating grievances and participating in the judicial system out of fear of being identified by the authorities. One Syrian refugee explained:

My relatives and I live together, and we are subjected to harassment, disagreements, beatings, abusive speech, and insults by the neighbours. We cannot submit complaints because this exposes us to legal and security problems, so we prefer to stay silent and not take any action.

This example is indicative of a wider form of exclusion in the response, with many refugees unable to engage in formal grievance mechanisms with the Jordanian state. Unequal power dynamics and a legislative framework that is seemingly unnavigable for most refugee groups point to a lack of accountability of government actors that should be addressed to foster greater inclusion. This is reflected in the formulation of the Jordan Compact and the conditions of work permits that fail to offer mechanisms to communicate grievances against employers (Mencutek and Nashwan, 2020).

3.4.5 The implications of digital exclusion

Many agencies reported using mobile phones, social media or call centres to receive feedback. As one INGO explained:

We have other ways they can share their feedback through WhatsApp and Facebook. Recently our INGO invested in a technology [and] we developed a contact centre to receive calls and all calls are recorded for quality assurance where people can share the feedback confidentiality and documents for follow-up reasons and make sure they receive the service or required answered.

The use of technology to receive feedback can be a driver of both inclusion and exclusion. This is dependent on, for example, whether technology is accessible to that individual, or whether an individual is living with a disability that impairs their ability to understand communication via mobile phone. Conversely, technology can also drive inclusion where people are living with a physical disability and have limitations on their mobility or are unable to access buildings. Mobile phone communication has become particularly relevant as a means of communication during the Covid-19 pandemic, as agencies can communicate via telephone or WhatsApp during lockdowns.

However, significant pre-existing levels of digital exclusion prevalent among certain refugee communities in Jordan have meant conduits for communication and feedback remain limited. One Syrian refugee explained:

Some refugees do not have a mobile phone or phone to communicate with service providers and organisations.

Lack of access to multi-service centres compounds this, with many refugees left unable to provide feedback or communicate grievances because of their digital and physical exclusion. This correlates with findings from a gendered analysis by UN Women (2020) that shows a lack of internet access can lead to exclusion from opportunities relating to humanitarian assistance and work. Furthermore, Covid-19 has compounded the problems with communication and provision of feedback mechanisms apparent within the response, excluding elderly and disabled groups in particular. A UN representative explained:

We had difficulties reaching older people with disabilities because many of them did not have devices or [were] illiterate or digitally illiterate or [had] any other barriers such as speech or audio or visual impairment.

Exclusion from digital services can also have an impact on refugees' ability to access education, skills training and employment, again highlighting the intersectional nature of the marginalisation faced by many. One worker for an organisation that supports people with disabilities explained:

The challenges that refugees face in obtaining services include their inability to pay for the internet for online education.

According to research by UN Women (2020), women are particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion. This study found that fewer than 1% of Syrian women had access to a laptop or tablet. Poor infrastructure, poverty, affordability of digital services, and conservative socio-cultural and gender norms were identified as key barriers. Lack of access to the internet precluded Syrian refugee women from skilling up and accessing job opportunities. Connectivity also provided women with access to social and emotional support networks through contact with family and friends living elsewhere (ibid.). Women in particular are exposed to multiple forms of exclusion as a result of having either very limited or no access to digital services.

4 Moving towards a more inclusive humanitarian response in urban contexts of forced displacement: lessons from Jordan

The displacement response in Jordan provides an important opportunity to examine some of the barriers to a more inclusive humanitarian response in large-scale, complex and protracted displacement crises. While it is important to acknowledge the immense operational challenges facing humanitarian actors, this study found that the urban response has not been systematically inclusive. This has led to the exclusion of entire communities, undermining the response's effectiveness and impartiality.

A key driver of exclusion in the response has been how donors, agencies and local actors have failed to adapt adequately to the urban context they are working within, reducing the quality of the response. Drivers of exclusion and marginalisation in urban contexts have not always been well understood. Responding to mass displacement in an urban context has also demonstrated the unique challenges facing operational agencies at the macro level, including the need for more attention to be given to impartiality, monitoring and addressing inequity in access to assistance, livelihoods and services, ensuring effective and inclusive community engagement and participation, and how to dedicate space to address specific and diverse needs. An urban response, such as in Jordan, also demands a complete rethink of how to coordinate a humanitarian response. Cities are 'complex systems where many different factors interconnect in a relatively limited but densely populated space' (Groupe URD, 2011: 7). The sector-based approach that has been traditionally adopted by the humanitarian sector is not conducive to such a complex context, where separating needs is not straightforward.

Investments in terms of dedicated funding and policy processes have prioritised Syrian refugees. While there have been positive signs of addressing that inequality, in particular the 'one refugee' approach, the research also identified significant barriers to its progress, including an ongoing reluctance by international aid donors and the Government of Jordan to include non-Syrian refugees. In addition, it found intersectional factors that could lead to individuals being excluded from participation and communication that have been missed in the response, as well as providing mitigating actions and recommendations to ensure more inclusive participation.

The evidence outlined demonstrates the importance of ensuring accountability of humanitarian actors in an urban response and fostering pathways for active participation of refugee and host communities, particularly those who are traditionally marginalised in humanitarian action. Perceived accountability of agencies and government actors was found to be low among some refugee communities, with our research showing that feedback mechanisms provided in the response had been ineffectual and, in some cases, exclusionary. It can be argued that the response in Jordan is typical of urban humanitarian responses in recent years, where participation continues to be poor despite increasing recognition of

its importance. Limited two-way communication flows are also indicative of exclusion, often further amplified by the digital exclusion that many refugee communities in Jordan face. Such marginalisation has wider implications for access to education, skills development and employment opportunities. To foster more inclusive humanitarian action, the autonomy of affected people should be encouraged as it represents an opportunity to challenge processes of marginalisation (Barbelet and Wake, 2020).

4.1 Recommendations for a more inclusive urban refugee response

The following recommendations aim to inform future leadership and responses to large-scale complex urban displacement crises such as in Amman, Jordan, and to inform policy and practice for more inclusive humanitarian action.

4.1.1 Adopt more area-based approaches, moving away from traditional targeting and sector-based delivery of programmes

- Agencies should adopt a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of multiple actors and systems that make up a city.
- Work in partnership with local actors and development actors to design an area-based approach to programming and coordination that recognises the interrelatedness of multiple sectors.
- Work in partnership with local community organisations and committees to involve them in the design and reviewing of needs assessments, to ensure methods of targeting and assessment are perceived to be fair and appropriate by refugee communities.
- Move away from individual or household beneficiary identification and selection processes to one that intervenes at a larger scale and considers existing services, infrastructure and other systems' interdependencies in the urban context.
- Monitoring and evaluation tools should consider integrating existing urban analysis, taking a collaborative approach with cities (e.g. mayors and local authority leaders) and working with existing infrastructure and service delivery systems where there are already-functioning and legitimate governments in place.
- Engage directly with local community organisations in agency-led consultations to ensure community needs are properly understood, the needs of the most vulnerable are foregrounded, channels for communication and feedback are established, and feedback loops are closed.
- Better embed formal processes of accountability and routes of two-way communication into the culture and practice of the urban humanitarian system.

4.1.2 Prioritise service delivery that is inclusive, locally owned and underpinned by international and local partnerships that bridge the development-humanitarian divide and are tailored for the urban context

- Implement interventions that support both displaced and host communities from the outset of a crisis. This demands bridging the humanitarian and development divide from the start of a response.
- Support the absorption capacity of host towns and cities, prioritising the protection needs of the displaced to enhance inclusion.

- Advocate for all refugees to have access to labour markets and livelihoods to foster their economic contributions.
- Prioritise activities that restore urban systems (governance, infrastructure). This requires agencies to build partnerships with affected communities and local power holders and businesses.
- Where the local authority has the capacity, humanitarian agencies should play a greater facilitation role rather than direct service provision. This will demand investing in analysis of existing capacities and local authority services and in analysis of the spatial and social structure in order to build closer and stronger partnerships with municipal and national governments, civil society and communities as well as with the private sector, including the local private sector.

4.1.3 Establish a clearer policy framework that prioritises inclusion and impartiality as an operational and strategic focus

- The ‘one refugee’ approach in Jordan is an example of a policy framework that could enhance inclusion and impartiality with an operational and strategic focus, by taking a vulnerability-based approach to designing interventions.
- However, such a policy framework should allow for proactively monitoring organisation and response-wide impartiality, including through monitoring and tracking exclusion on grounds of nationality, legal status, barriers to legal status, etc.
- A policy paper, such as the one refugee approach, would also be useful to outline what is expected from aid actors to support inclusive humanitarian responses. Such a policy should clarify the definition and different elements of inclusion, its operational implications and its links to existing policies on gender, protection and AAP, as well as efforts to shift the system towards more local leadership.
- Humanitarian agencies should adopt the use of multi-risk assessments that are adapted to urban contexts.

4.1.4 Invest in more disaggregated data and analysis to inform more inclusive practices

- Continue to support the collection, analysis and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.
- Go beyond current data and analysis to inform humanitarian responses with an analysis of diversity and specific needs. This should include informing how best to carry out inclusive communication and community engagement, and how best to deploy inclusive feedback and complaint mechanisms, so that feedback and accountability is effective for a diversity of people. This should include gathering data on nationality, race/ethnicity and employment status.
- Work with local government and local leadership to support this collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data.
- Go beyond current data and analysis to inform humanitarian responses with an analysis of diversity and specific needs.
- Invest in more studies on drivers of exclusion, political economy, conflict analysis, conflict lines and social dynamics in the context of the urban crisis and their implications for potential risks of exclusion in the humanitarian response. This could be done by engaging with local and international human rights actors, peacebuilding actors, organisations representing individuals facing marginalisation,

academics and urban planners with expertise in geographical areas, conducting political economy analysis with a social exclusion focus, and conducting knowledge, attitudes and practice assessments on specific diversity issues with aid workers and populations affected by crisis. This knowledge should be widely disseminated across the response, including as part of induction processes of new staff members. This could link with existing work done by REACH Initiative, for example.

4.1.5 Engage with a locally led response, including an enhanced role for local government and local civil society from the outset of a crisis, in order to better identify needs on the ground

- Conduct an analysis of community dynamics at the outset of the response to inform a solid community engagement strategy.
- Engage with a wide range of community leaders (going beyond the ‘gate-keepers’ to any one community) – such as those representing women, youth, people with disabilities and other minorities – including through their formal membership organisations or representative organisation as per the IASC guidelines and the push for localisation.

4.1.6 Advocate for improved access to services, rights and labour markets for refugees and vulnerable host communities

- Mitigate the financial vulnerability of refugees by increasing provision of employment training and enhancing cash assistance programmes with wider coverage and financial literacy training.
- Invest in advocacy around increasing inclusion of all refugees into formal labour markets.
- In partnership with local civil society, advocate for improved rights, including socioeconomic rights that would improve access to services such as education and healthcare and freedom of movement for the displaced.

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Appendix 1 Breakdown of focus group discussions and interviews conducted

Table 1 Breakdown of focus group discussions with refugee and asylum seekers

Respondent type	Number of participants
Host community members, men	10
Iraqi refugees, women	15
Palestinian refugees originating from Syria	10
Sudanese refugees, women	10
Syrian refugees, aged 18–25	11
Syrian refugees living with a disability and care providers	10
Syrian refugees, living in a remote geographical area	11
Syrian refugees, aged 25–45	9
Syrian refugees, aged 60+	11
Yemeni refugees	12
Total respondents	109

Table 2 Breakdown of in-depth interviews with refugees and asylum seekers, by nationality

Respondent nationality	Number of interviews
Iraqi	2
Palestinian	1
Sudanese	1
Syrian	5
Yemeni	1
Total	10

Table 3 Breakdown of interviews with humanitarian actors

Type of organisation/actor	Number of interviews
Donor	3
Local or national non-governmental organisation	9
International non-governmental organisation	5
United Nations	6
Total	23



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