



ICTJ | Justice
Truth
Dignity

An Uncertain Homecoming

Views of Syrian Refugees in Jordan on Return, Justice, and Coexistence



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

An Uncertain Homecoming

Views of Syrian Refugees in Jordan on Return, Justice, and
Coexistence

RESEARCH REPORT

Acknowledgments

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) acknowledges the support of the UK Department for International Development, which funded this research and publication. ICTJ and the authors of the report also gratefully acknowledge all of those who generously gave their time to be interviewed for this report and contributed their experiences and insights.

About the Authors

Cilina Nasser wrote sections V through XII of this report and led the development of the Introduction and Recommendations. Nasser is a Beirut-based independent researcher and expert on human rights who also works on transitional justice issues. She has worked extensively on investigating human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, primarily in Syria, but also in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, such as Yemen, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. She was a researcher at Amnesty International focusing on countries in crisis and conflict from 2009 to 2015 and, before that, a journalist who covered major events in Lebanon.

Zeina Jallad Charpentier wrote sections III, XIII, and XIV of this report. Jallad Charpentier is a legal consultant, researcher, and lecturer in law, whose work focuses on the intersection between international law, human rights law, social mobility, access to justice and resilience of disenfranchised populations, refugees, and impact litigation. She has worked in the United States, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey. She is a member of the Palestinian Bar Association and the New York City Bar Association, where she previously served as Secretary of the Committee on Middle East and North Africa. She is a J.S.D candidate at Columbia Law School.

About ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice works across society and borders to challenge the causes and address the consequences of massive human rights violations. We affirm victims' dignity, fight impunity, and promote responsive institutions in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved. ICTJ envisions a world where societies break the cycle of massive human rights violations and lay the foundations for peace, justice, and inclusion. For more information, visit www.ictj.org

This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

The people who appear in the photographs throughout this publication neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

©2019 International Center for Transitional Justice. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	5
II. Methodology	9
III. Refugee Situation in Jordan	11
IV. Summary of Findings and Recommendations	13
Views on Return.....	13
Views on Justice.....	13
Views on Coexistence.....	14
Views According to Age and Gender.....	15
Intersectional Vulnerabilities.....	16
Experiences in Jordan.....	16
Recommendations.....	17
V. Refugees from Daraa: Bosra al-Sham	21
Sunni-Shi'a Hostilities.....	22
Refugee Views on Sunni-Shi'a Relations.....	23
Refugee Views on Return.....	26
Refugee Views on Justice.....	27
Refugee Views on Coexistence.....	29
VI. Refugees from Daraa: Bosr al-Harir	32
Refugee Views on Return.....	32
Refugee Views on Justice.....	33
Refugee Views on Coexistence.....	33
VII. Refugees from Swayda	35
Druze Concerns over Opposition Goals.....	35
Refugee Views on Abductions.....	37
Refugee Views on Return.....	37
Refugee Views on Justice.....	39
Refugee Views on Coexistence.....	40
VIII. Refugees from Homs	42
Refugee Views on Return.....	44
Refugee Views on Justice.....	44
Refugee Views on Coexistence.....	45
IX. Children and Youth Refugees from Homs	48
Children's Accounts of Protests and Violence.....	48
Children's Views on Return and Resettlement.....	50
Children's Views on Justice.....	51

Children’s Views on Coexistence	51
X. Male Adult Refugees.....	54
Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance.....	54
Accounts of Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance	55
Forced Conscription	56
Accounts of Forced Conscription	57
XI. Female Adult Refugees	59
Women’s Accounts of the Conflict.....	59
Women’s Views on Family Relationships	60
Women’s Views on Return and Resettlement	62
Women’s Views on Justice.....	65
XII. Property	66
Refugee Views on Law No. 10 of 2018 Affecting Property Rights.....	66
XIII. Intersectional Vulnerabilities	69
Experiences of Displacement	69
Views on Return, Justice, and Coexistence	74
XIV. Refugee Experiences in Jordan	80
Refugee Views on Economic and Social Exclusion.....	80
Refugee Views on Safety, Community Relations, and Social Tensions.....	83
Vulnerability and Resilience of Refugees	85
XV. Conclusion.....	90

Executive Summary

The protracted conflict in Syria continues to have serious and widespread ill effects on the lives of Syrian individuals, households, and communities. The majority of the Syrian population has been affected by the war, including women, children, and elderly, with millions forced to leave in search of protection and safety. Most have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and beyond the region, in Europe and elsewhere.

After the war ends, drafting a new constitution, reconstruction efforts, reforming state institutions, holding elections, and mending the economy will be necessary but not sufficient to secure peace at the local and community levels. A peacebuilding process that fails to understand the political, sectarian, and social dynamics at the local level will also fail to promote peaceful coexistence or recreate social trust. A bottom-up approach to refugee return, justice, and coexistence that engages refugees, along with local civil society and communities, and that prioritizes listening to and addressing local needs is critical.

This study addresses the impact of the conflict and displacement on Syrian refugees in Jordan and the potential for justice and coexistence among Syrian communities. It aims to provide a better understanding of the experiences of Syrian refugees, including the harms and losses they have suffered, both individually and collectively, and their expectations, concerns, and priorities for potential durable solutions to their displacement, including the conditions that would facilitate return to their country and communities and help them to overcome divisions, rebuild relationships, and promote justice.

The concerns raised by the refugees interviewed for this study are pressing, particularly after Syrian government forces retook most of the country last year. The current regime, which is run by a feared and notorious security system, is winning the war militarily but has offered no acknowledgment of committing any crimes or abuses and therefore no reform agenda for its security institutions, making it extremely difficult—if not impossible—for refugees to return in the short term.

Despite the continued lack of security, some host countries have used the near-complete return of government control as a pretext to call for the large-scale return of refugees. Another unfortunate push factor is the dwindling funding provided for refugees by the international community, despite the position of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that present conditions in Syria are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity.

The focus on coexistence in this study shows the extent of the challenges, revealing the level of enmity resulting from injustice and the need to identify adequate steps for return that would allow refugees to feel safe in going back to their homes and living with members of community groups perceived to be hostile. The general sense among interviewees was that the change to government control has brought a situation of victor's justice and that

there will be no justice in Syria, particularly as long as the regime remains in power. This study demonstrates the need for forms of justice to be adopted nationally and internationally to address war crimes and crimes against humanity that have taken place in Syria.

Syrian refugees' experiences and views are shaped in important ways by the geographical areas in Syria from where refugees came as well as their gender, age, and faith. Regarding return, interviewees from all areas expressed a common concern about safety and security, especially fears of arrest and detention, punitive or retaliatory acts, indiscriminate shelling, physical destruction, sectarian divisions, and perceived demographic changes.

Economic concerns included damage to or occupation of homes, broader destruction of the country's physical infrastructure, and employment. Women interviewees, especially widows, expressed particular concern about going back to Syria without a house or source of income. Syrian legislation that allows the government to claim abandoned property was perceived by some as an effort to dissuade refugees from returning, in part because of the difficulty of obtaining documents proving ownership.

Refugees articulated skepticism about the possibility of achieving justice, although some spoke about the need for truth, reform, accountability, compensation, divine justice, and restitution of housing, land, and property. Views on future coexistence were more varied. For refugees from Daraa's Bosra al-Sham and Homs, concerns centered around Sunni-Shi'a and Sunni-Alawite relations. Among refugees from Daraa and Swayda, concerns also had to do with relations between Sunni and Druze. In each case, their concerns were shaped by their perceptions of the roles of different groups in the violence, political dynamics, and their personal experiences during displacement.

Children and youth spoke about safety and security, sectarian divisions, and especially the trauma caused by what they had seen and experienced. Men spoke about their fear of arrest, detention, torture, and forced conscription, in particular, while women related their traumas and larger responsibilities, family relationships, and economic challenges, as well as their resilience and new social roles.

Intersectional vulnerabilities among different social groups have also affected the views of refugees, revealing similar concerns about safety and security and distrust of the state or fear of armed opposition groups. For some, security meant removing the current regime and holding its members accountable or dismantling militias and armed groups. Some said they could not forgive those who supported the opposition, which they perceived as causing the destruction of the country.

Refugees' experiences while in Jordan also have implications for return, justice, and coexistence. They have faced a range of challenges, including social and economic exclusion, tensions with host communities, and restrictive state policies. While these have left refugees vulnerable as a whole, particular groups are especially marginalized, and refugees in camps often feel trapped and excluded. At the same time, refugees both inside and outside of camps have shown their resilience in the face of hardship.

In efforts to find durable solutions, pursue justice, and foster coexistence, refugees must be part of the process. The following steps are therefore recommended:

Recommendations to Prevent Involuntary Returns

- **Jordan and other host countries** must uphold the right to voluntary return and respect the principle of nonrefoulement.
- **Jordan and other host countries, the Syrian government, the international community, and civil society** actors should provide refugees with sufficient information to make informed decisions about return.

- The **international community** and **donor states** should continue to provide funds to support refugees' basic needs in host countries.
- **Jordan, civil society,** and the **international community** should recognize and help refugees to overcome the exclusion, vulnerability, and challenges they face in Jordan.
- The **international community** should ensure that durable solutions to the Syrian crisis include resettlement and, where appropriate, integration.
- **Jordan** and **other host countries** should facilitate the full engagement of Syrian and other civil society actors in host countries at all stages of discussion of return.
- The **international community** and **donors** should support transitional justice processes that include the participation of refugee and diaspora communities.
- **The international community, donors,** and **host countries** should support a public awareness campaign to educate Syrian refugees on their right to safe, voluntary, and dignified return.
- **Donors** should support further research on the views, concerns, needs, and priorities of Syrian refugees on justice and coexistence.

Recommendations to Facilitate Refugees' Voluntary Return to Syria

- **Host countries,** the **Syrian government,** the **international community,** and **civil society** must place refugee needs and rights at the heart of any durable solution framework.
- **Host countries,** the **Syrian government,** the **international community,** and **civil society** must prioritize the safety and security of refugees when they return to Syria.
- The **Syrian government** should allow the United Nations and other international organizations to be fully engaged in the process of refugee return.
- The **Syrian government** should allow the United Nations and relevant international organizations to access returning refugees.
- The **Syrian government** should provide returnees with services required to facilitate settlement, ensure a fair distribution of aid, and prioritize the reconstruction of schools, power, and water supplies.
- The **international community** should exercise its pressure to reach a settlement that guarantees conditions that will facilitate voluntary, safe, and informed return.
- All **stakeholders** involved in the political process must ensure that any political agreement or new constitution includes specific guarantees addressing the refugee crisis.
- All **stakeholders** involved in the political process should ensure that any new constitution commits the future political leadership to a massive reform of state institutions.

Recommendations on Justice

- The **international community** and **parties to the political process** should ensure that any political settlement does not grant impunity for the most egregious and systematic crimes.
- The **international community** should sponsor a political settlement guaranteeing that information is provided to the families of the forcibly disappeared and abducted, mass graves are identified and protected, and mechanisms for DNA identification of victims are put in place.
- **Donors** and **international NGOs** must work to raise awareness among refugees about their rights to compensation and restitution and other potential justice claims.
- The **Syrian government**, the **international community**, and **civil society** actors should seek to facilitate restitution and restoration of housing, land, and property.

Recommendations on Coexistence

- **Donors** and **international organizations** should support awareness programs on dignified coexistence targeting local communities and refugees.
- The **Syrian government** should allow international and Syrian NGOs specialized in transitional justice and conflict resolution to access the areas where refugees are returning.
- The **Syrian government** should set up measures to prevent situations where returning refugees find their homes occupied by others, particularly in demographically mixed areas.
- **States that have influence in Syria** should support the creation of revenge-detering mechanisms to avoid sectarian violence.
- The **international community** should stress the need to engage local participatory structures to address local community needs.
- The **international community** must adopt a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding by fully engaging local civil society organizations, refugees, and community leaders and members.
- **Donors, civil society**, and the **Syrian government** should seek to provide reconciliation methods that address the long-term emotional needs of refugee communities.
- The **international community** and **civil society** should support women in facing the economic, social, and psychological challenges related to displacement and help them in retaining the independence and access to new roles that were established during displacement.
- The **international community** and **civil society** should help to address the trauma suffered by children and youth, provide psychosocial support and assistance in accessing education, and support civic education initiatives.

I. Introduction

The protracted conflict in Syria continues to have serious and widespread ill effects on the lives of Syrian individuals, households, and communities. The majority of the Syrian population has been tremendously affected by the war, including women, children, and elderly, with millions having been forced to leave behind their life projects, memories, hopes, and dreams in search of protection and safety. For Syrian refugees, very basic needs, such as food, health services, education, water, utilities, and sanitation, had become unattainable and staying alive meant leaving their lives behind to escape the constant risk of shelling, artillery strikes, abduction, enforced disappearance, exploitation, forced displacement, and violence. Most have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and beyond the region, in Europe and elsewhere.

This report addresses the impact of the conflict and displacement on Syrian refugees in Jordan and the potential for justice and coexistence among Syrian communities. It aims to provide a better understanding of the experiences of Syrian refugees, including the harms and losses they have suffered, both individually and collectively, and their expectations, concerns, and priorities for potential durable solutions to their displacement, including the conditions that would facilitate return to their country and communities and help them to overcome divisions, rebuild relationships, and promote justice.

The concerns raised by the refugees interviewed for this report are pressing, particularly after Syrian government forces, backed by the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, retook most of the country last year, including three key areas in Syria: Eastern Ghouta,¹ the southern Damascus areas of al-Hajar al-Aswad and Yarmouk Camp,² and the governorate of Daraa.³ The current regime, which is run by a feared and notorious security system, is winning the war militarily but has offered no acknowledgment of committing crimes or abuses and therefore no reform agenda for its security institutions, making it extremely difficult—if not impossible—for refugees to return to their homeland in the short term. One of the most common concerns among refugees interviewed for this report was the risk of being subjected to arbitrary arrest, after which one's fate becomes uncertain and, in many cases, unknown.

The concerns raised by the refugees interviewed for this report are pressing, particularly after Syrian government forces, backed by the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, retook most of the country last year.

1 By mid-April 2018, all anti-government forces had left Eastern Ghouta after a military offensive that began on February 18, 2018.

2 By May 21, 2018, the Syrian government had regained full control of Damascus for the first time since 2012 after its armed forces recaptured the Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus.

3 By the end of July 2018, the Syrian government regained full control of the governorate of Daraa after a six-week offensive.

Such fears voiced by refugees about return are well founded, with credible reports of various security branches arbitrarily arresting returnees,⁴ including in areas that fell under government control in 2018, like Daraa.⁵ These arrests have taken place despite, for example, local agreements in the Daraa governorate between armed opposition groups and the government and/or pro-government authorities intended to a large extent to settle the status of individuals. This process, also known as regularizing one's status, aims to protect wanted persons and other individuals, primarily adult males, from being arbitrarily arrested. Individuals seeking to regularize their status include opposition fighters,⁶ military-aged male adults, and other civilians who either knew that they were wanted or were unsure. According to credible reports from Daraa, those arrested have included fighters and civilians who had regularized their status with government authorities.

Despite the continued lack of security, the government's retaking of most parts of the country has been used by some host countries as a pretext to call for the large-scale return of refugees. Another unfortunate push factor is the dwindling funding provided for refugees by the international community,⁷ despite the position of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that present conditions in Syria are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity.

This report provides insights into the challenges that refugees will likely face in a post-war Syria. It focuses primarily on three geographical areas: Daraa, Homs, and Swayda.

This report provides insights into the challenges that refugees will likely face in a post-war Syria. It focuses primarily on three geographical areas: Daraa, Homs, and Swayda. Daraa and Homs are two of four governorates where the majority of Syrian refugees in Syria's neighboring host countries originate,⁸ and where the majority of refugees in Jordan, if they return, are most likely to

return, in addition to rural Damascus and Aleppo. Further, the overwhelming majority of refugees from Daraa and Homs are Sunni Muslim, which means that should they return, they will live among, or in close proximity to, communities belonging to minority sects (like Alawite and Shi'a) that are overwhelmingly perceived as pro-government and largely hostile to Sunnis.

In Daraa, the report gives particular attention to refugees from the town of Bosra al-Sham, because of its mixed Sunni-Shi'a population. While this report focuses on refugees in Jordan, only Sunni refugees from Daraa were interviewed. Most of the Shi'a who fled Bosra headed to neighboring Swayda and from there many resettled internally in the Sayeda Zeinab area of Damascus. Also, it is much more likely that Shi'a who fled the war crossed into Lebanon than Jordan, apparently because Lebanon has a large Shi'a community with strong political and military standing in the country.

In Swayda, which is home to the largest Druze population in Syria and neighbors the overwhelmingly Sunni governorate of Daraa, a state of chaos and distrust between inhabitants has emerged and grown significantly over the years of armed conflict. This report, therefore, gives particular attention to Swayda and eastern rural areas of Daraa that border the Swayda governorate.

4 Anchal Vohra, "A Deadly Welcome Awaits Syria's Returning Refugees," *ForeignPolicy.com*, February 6, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/06/a-deadly-welcome-awaits-syrias-returning-refugees/>

5 Interviews conducted on November 29, 2018, and February 3, 2019, with a lawyer and a human rights activist who monitor the situation of arbitrary arrests in Daraa.

6 With the exception of those belonging to ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.

7 Ana V. Ibáñez Prieto, "UNICEF Slashes Services to Syrian Refugees Due to Shortfall," *The Jordan Times*, September 8, 2018, www.jordantimes.com/news/local/unicef-slashes-services-syrian-refugees-due-shortfall

8 UNHCR data for refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon shows that the majority (63.7% or 1.3 million persons) originate from four governorates: Aleppo (17.2%), Homs (17.5%), Daraa (16.7%), and Rural Damascus (12.2%); UNHCR, "Comprehensive Protection and Solution Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return To Syria," February 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/ar/documents/download/63223>

Finally, Homs is one of the most challenging governorates in terms of future peaceful coexistence, particularly because brutal and vicious abductions, torture, and summary killings and other forms of abuse were carried out between neighborhoods, mainly on the basis of sectarian identity.

The focus on coexistence in this report attempts to show the extent of the challenges by illustrating the feelings of hatred and enmity resulting from violence and violations and the need to identify adequate steps for return that would allow refugees to feel safe in going back to their homes and living in close proximity to, or among, members of “hostile” community groups. Refugees’ lack of trust in government authorities and armed opposition groups means that they look cynically at the so-called reconciliation agreements reached between government and/or pro-government authorities and armed opposition groups and community leaders in areas under or formerly under the control of armed opposition groups.

There was a general sense among interviewees that the change to government control has brought a situation of victor’s justice and that there will be no justice in Syria, particularly as long as the regime, which they consider the main perpetrator in the conflict, remains in power. The findings of this report, which include refugees’ fear of return and the challenges to future coexistence and lasting peace, demonstrate the need for forms of justice to be adopted nationally and internationally to address war crimes and crimes against humanity that have taken place in Syria.

This report aims to capture the range of Syrian refugees’ experiences and views, which are shaped in important ways by where the refugees came from and who they are—in other words, by their place of origin and their identity, which are, of course, connected. Its findings are, therefore, presented according to the geographical areas where refugees had lived in Syria, including Daraa, Swayda, and Homs, as well as their gender, age, and intersectionality. While all refugees have common experiences of displacement and violence, the details of where they came from and who they are provides a more accurate and specific picture of why they were forced to leave their homes and what they feel they need to return.

The first sections of the report present the views of refugees according to their place of origin in Syria—Daraa, Homs, and Swayda. Regarding return, interviewees from all areas expressed a common concern about safety and security, especially fears of arrest and detention, punitive or retaliatory acts, indiscriminate shelling, physical destruction, sectarian divisions, and perceived demographic changes. Refugees also articulated skepticism about the possibility of achieving justice, although some spoke about the need for truth, reform, accountability, compensation, divine justice, and housing, land, and property.



Refugees in the camp in Madaba live in tents. Madaba, Jordan, 2018. (Zeina Jallad Charpentier)

Views on future coexistence were more varied: for refugees from Daraa’s Bosra al-Sham and Homs, concerns centered around Sunni-Shi’a and Sunni-Alawite relations. Among refugees from Daraa and Swayda, concerns also

had to do with relations between Sunni and Druze. In each case, their concerns were shaped by their perceptions of group roles in the violence, political dynamics, and their experiences during displacement.

The report also looks at how gender and age have shaped refugees' experiences and views. Children and youth spoke about safety and security, sectarian divisions, and especially the trauma caused by what they had seen and experienced. Men spoke about their fear of arrest, detention, torture, and forced conscription, in particular, while women related their traumas and responsibilities, family relationships, and economic challenges as well as their resilience and new social roles.

The report examines how intersectional vulnerabilities among different social groups have affected the views of refugees, revealing similar concerns about safety and security and distrust of the state or fear of armed opposition groups. For some, security meant removing the current regime and holding its members accountable or dismantling militias and armed groups. Some said they could not forgive those who supported the opposition, which they perceived as causing the destruction of the country.

It also reviews refugee experiences in Jordan (their host country) and the implications for return, justice, and coexistence. Many Syrians fled to Jordan because of its social, cultural, and religious similarities to their own country and the fact that they already had family members there. Nevertheless, they have faced a range of challenges, including social and economic exclusion, tensions with host communities, and restrictive state policies. While these leave refugees vulnerable as a whole, particular groups, like Palestinian refugees, are especially marginalized and refugees in camps often feel trapped and excluded. At the same time, refugees both inside and outside of camps have shown their resilience in the face of hardship.

II. Methodology

This report is part of an ICTJ research project into the views, expectations, and priorities of Syrian refugees for future coexistence and justice in Syria should they return one day. In 2017, a first phase of this project was conducted in Lebanon and the findings published in a report titled *Not Without Dignity: Views of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon on Displacement, Conditions of Return, and Coexistence*.⁹ This study complements the previous report on Lebanon but examines a wider range of refugee experiences and views. It is based on empirical and qualitative research in Jordan, primarily in the central and northern governorates of Amman, Irbid, Madaba, Mafraq, Sahab, and Zarqa as well as al-Za'atari refugee camp and informal camps. It is based on interviews with refugees conducted by two bilingual (Arabic and English) consultants from April 11 to June 12, 2018.

In total, 121 Syrian refugees were interviewed, including 32 refugees from Daraa, 21 from Damascus (including 4 from Yarmouk camp), 20 from Homs, 11 from Swayda, eight from Hama, seven from Idlib, six from Eastern Ghouta, five from Aleppo, five from Quneitra, two from Rif Dimashq, one from Hasaka, one from Tartus, one from Latakia, and one from Daraa camp. Sixty-four interviewees were male and 57 were females. Ages ranged from 18 to 75 years. Religious affiliations included 101 Sunni Muslims, 11 Druze, three Ismaelites, two Alawites, and two Christians. Interviewees included six Palestinian refugees from Syria, six Bedouins, five Circassians, two Kurds, two Rifa'ites, and one Chichnian.

Interviewees included university students, members of the media, civil society activists, humanitarian aid workers, defected Syrian soldiers, defected members of the Syrian government, a former member of an opposition armed group, current and former members of political parties, chiefs of tribal communities, activists, educators, lawyers, doctors, bloggers, manual laborers, and housewives. A large number of interviewees were living in poverty or extreme poverty, unemployed, and dependent on assistance and humanitarian aid.

Interviews with refugees focused on the following areas: the harms and losses that led to their displacement and the hardships they have suffered in their host country; the conditions that would allow for their return to Syria, integration in the host country, or resettlement in a third country; the measures or support that would facilitate their return, integration, or resettlement in Syria; the types of changes and divisions within Syrian communities; understandings of coexistence and justice; and the potential role of external actors in supporting durable solutions and reconciliation.

This research study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals, which allows for their personal views and stories to be spotlighted.

⁹ Rim El Gantri and Karim El Mufti, *Not Without Dignity: Views of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon on Displacement, Conditions of Return, and Coexistence*, New York: ICTJ, 2017.

Each interview ranged in length from one to four hours. Some were followed up with a second session, to ensure the validity and the value of the findings. This study is not a survey but a set of qualitative interviews that address the complexities of refugee experiences, circumstances, and views on the future. Interviews were conducted rigorously and minimized bias. For example, by not using terms such as “reconciliation” or “transitional justice” unless the respondents themselves used them first, the interviews took an open-ended approach in order to avoid leading with pre-determined ideas, measures, or proposals.

Given the trauma experienced by many of the interview subjects, interviews were conducted at length with sensitivity, establishing appropriate relationships between the researchers and interviewees. In order to prioritize the respondents’ comfort level and minimize any risks to them, interviews were held in different places, including private homes, camp tents, local offices of NGOs, and more public places, such as cafes and universities.

This report also complements other work being done on the experiences and views of Syrian refugees in the major countries of asylum, including a 2017 Oxfam report on the perceptions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon based on focus group discussions and a broader survey, but not focusing on issues of reconciliation and justice or using in-depth individual interviews;¹⁰ a CARE International 2017 survey of Syrian refugees and host households in Jordan, which also does not focus on reconciliation and justice;¹¹ a 2018 Hague Institute for Innovation of Law study, based primarily on surveys of 1,800 Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, on their justice needs and experiences;¹² and a 2018 study by the Carnegie Middle East Center on the needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan for returning based primarily on focus group discussions.¹³

This ICTJ research study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals, which allows for their personal views and stories to be spotlighted. In addition, and partly as a result of the methodology, these stories demonstrate the complicated and nuanced nature of the relationships among individuals, families, religious and ethnic groups, government institutions, and nonstate groups and the immense challenges that efforts to rebuild those relationships and establish coexistence will undoubtedly face in the aftermath of the Syrian war.

10 Nour Shawaf and Francesca El Asmar, “We’re Not There Yet:” *Voices of Refugees from Syria in Lebanon*, Oxfam Research Reports, Oxfam, May 2017.

11 CARE International, *7 Years into Exile: How Urban Syrian Refugees, Vulnerable Jordanians and Other Refugees in Jordan Are Being Impacted by the Syria Crisis*, June 2017.

12 Hague Institute for Innovation of Law, *Justice Needs of Syrian Refugees: Legal Problems in Daily Life*, The Hague: HIL, 2018.

13 Maha Yahya with Jean Kassir and Khalil el-Hariri, *Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home*, Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2018.

III. Refugee Situation in Jordan

Although Jordan never ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its accompanying 1967 protocol, according to UNHCR, Jordan is the second largest refugee host country in the world per capita.¹⁴ The Jordanian government adopted a “guest approach” to hosting the fleeing populations, viewing them merely as guests (asylum seekers) rather than refugees. Accordingly, it was not mandatory for Jordan to respect their rights as refugees or the guarantees enshrined in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, unless those rights were guaranteed by domestic law or another international instrument. This approach is likely intended to prevent asylum seekers from integrating into the host country and ensuring their eventual return to Syria.¹⁵

Most Syrian refugees arrived in Jordan in 2012 and 2013, at the peak of Syrian political turmoil and armed violence. Due to their cultural, social, and geographical proximity, most of the exodus to Jordan came from the provinces of Daraa, Homs, Swayda, Hama, and Damascus and their neighboring towns and villages. Seventy to 80 percent of the refugees in Jordan are women and children.¹⁶ Many of those who escaped the war sought refuge in Irbid and Mafraq governorates. Ethnic and religious groups that constitute a minority of the refugee influx—outside of the camps, in the host communities, mainly in Irbid and Amman—include Palestinian refugees from Syria, Alawite, Chichnian, Circassian, Druze, Ismaelite, Rifa’ite, and Christian refugees, including Armenians.

The exact number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is difficult to determine, with estimates varying. While UNHCR has registered 670,238 Syrian refugees in Jordan, the Jordanian government estimates the number to be closer to 1.5 million.¹⁷ The stark discrepancy between the two figures is likely attributable to several factors. First, some refugees prefer to go unregistered rather than risk being moved to a refugee camp or being forced back to Syria. Second, according to local Jordanian human rights NGOs, the government of Jordan utilizes different counting methods than UNHCR, probably for aid purposes. For example, it includes Syrians who arrived in Jordan in the 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁸

The exact number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is difficult to determine, with estimates varying. While UNHCR has registered 670,238 Syrian refugees in Jordan, the Jordanian government estimates the number to be closer to 1.5 million.

14 Refugee per capita by hosting countries in 2016 (February 2018), European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/chad/document/echo-refugee-capita-hosting-countries-2016-february-2018.

15 Carnegie Middle East Center, “Policy Framework for Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan,” April 16, 2018, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2018/04/16/policy-framework-for-refugees-in-lebanon-and-jordan-pub-76058>

16 UN Women, “Inter-Agency Assessment of Gender-based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, with a Focus on Early Marriage,” July 2013, www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/7/report-web%20pdf.pdf?la=en&vs=1458

17 UNHCR Operational Portal: Refugee Situations, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>

18 Interview with Linda Al Kalash, Executive Director, Tamkeen Fields for Aid, May 17, 2018, Amman, Jordan.

Most refugees in Jordan live under precarious conditions. While bearing the brunt of the disastrous war, marked by emotional and financial suffering, they also struggle to secure the most pressing needs of survival, such as shelter, food, and work. According to UNHCR, as of February 2018, over 80 percent of registered refugees residing in host communities lived below the Jordanian poverty line.¹⁹

Approximately 80 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan reside in host communities, while only 20 percent live in designated camps,²⁰ mainly in al-Za'atari (the world's second largest refugee camp) and al-Azraq camps. Those registered in official camps are not allowed to leave to settle in host communities, but can temporarily leave the camp with special permits for certain purposes, like visiting family members. Until January 2015, the Jordanian government allowed an official bailout process by which refugees could legally leave the camps and move to host communities under certain conditions, including sponsorship by a Jordanian citizen who was a relative over 35 years old.²¹ Refugees are required to register with the Jordanian Ministry of Interior and UNHCR. They receive a biometric service card from the Jordanian government and proof of registration or an asylum seeker certificate from UNHCR.

In 2016, citing security threats, the Jordanian government officially closed its northern and northeastern borders with Syria and declared them to be military zones. Currently, under very strict conditions, Syrians can enter Jordan temporarily via Alia International Airport, while the Jaber-Nasib Border Crossing between Jordan and Syria for people and goods reopened in October 2018.

Refugees who lack asylum status risk forced deportation to Syria, whereby the Jordanian authorities send them to a deserted no-man's land along Jordan's far northeastern border, a practice known as *al-Qathef* ("expelling"). Refugees there remain stranded between two states, expelled by the Jordanians and denied entry by the Syrians. They live in unsafe and dire conditions, facing major barriers to accessing the most fundamental needs, such as food, health, and shelter.

19 UNHCR, *Jordan Factsheet*, February 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FactSheetJordanFebruary2018-FINAL_o.pdf

20 UNICEF, "UNICEF's Response to the Syria Crisis 2018," www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/2018-04_-_UNICEF_response_to_the_Syria_Crisis.pdf. See also Katharina Lenner and Susanne Schmelter, "Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon: between Refuge and Ongoing Deprivation?," *Mobility and Refugee Crisis in the Mediterranean*, IEMed. *Mediterranean Yearbook 2016*, www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2016/IEMed_MedYearBook2016_Refugges%20Jordan%20Lebanon_Lenner_Schmelter.pdf

21 Norwegian Refugee Council, "Securing Status Syrian Refugees and the Documentation of Legal Status, Identity, and Family Relationships in Jordan," November 2016, www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/securing-status.pdf

IV. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Interviewees of different ages, genders, faiths, ethnicities, political affiliations, and socioeconomic status all shared the devastating effects of the war on all spheres of life. They narrated stories of fear, pain, and suffering that led to their exodus from Syria. They talked about the tarnished memories they carried with them from their shattered country and the long-lasting scars that remain for them and their livelihoods. The prolonged crisis, with its ongoing violence, continues to constitute an assault on refugees and is a reminder of the plight of displacement. Despite the different profiles, backgrounds, and experiences of refugees, each and every story from the fieldwork contributes to a collective narrative.

Views on Return

Certain views on return cut across geography and identity. For example, the main concern for refugees regarding potential return to Syria was generally safety and security, although particularities varied. Most refugees from Bosra al-Sham, in Daraa, said they feared return even after the war due to the risk of retaliatory measures by the government, such as arrest and detention (for example, for avoiding military service) and/or armed opposition groups (for not supporting them). Refugees from Bosr al-Harir, in Daraa, also feared return because of both the risks of indiscriminate shelling and arbitrary arrest and detention. Refugees from both areas spoke of the need for regime change or international intervention to make Syria safe for return and of the need to have adequate information about the security situation to make a decision about return.

Due to government shelling of their town, refugees from Bosr al-Harir also identified damage to their homes as a primary obstacle to return, while those from Homs also pointed to the general physical destruction caused by the war. Refugees from

Homs were concerned about return because of their distrust of government institutions responsible for their displacement but also the insecurity related to sectarian divisions that led to abductions and summary killings between once coexisting communities, leading some to voice a desire to resettle elsewhere. In Swayda, where hundreds of Druze have been abducted, most interviewees did not want to return for fear of punitive measures for avoiding military service or deserting jobs in the public sector or because they do not believe that the security situation will improve.

Views on Justice

For the massive human rights violations committed during the war, refugees frequently expressed a desire to see justice, but also a deep skepticism that it would ever be achieved. They pointed to the difficulty of determining truth and responsibility for alleged crimes, their lack of trust in government institutions and in the international

For the massive human rights violations committed during the war, refugees frequently expressed a desire to see justice, but also a deep skepticism that it would ever be achieved.

community's commitment to accountability, the regime's recapturing of most of the territory from armed opposition groups, and the limits of compensation for the many injustices suffered by Syrians.

Those who did speak about specific justice outcomes highlighted the need to know what had happened to relatives and friends who had been disappeared or detained and the need to reform state security institutions. For the most part, the few who talked about compensation did not believe that it could make up for or replace the losses and harms they had suffered or that it would be feasible given the massive number of victims. Many of those who believed justice could happen focused on accountability, while many referred to religion and divine justice. Others looked to local mediators to promote justice and coexistence. Interviewees were often unaware of justice elements like reparation; therefore, they did not demand such measures.

Refugees who had lost housing, land, and property often said that guarantees for restoring and rebuilding damaged property were crucial for return. Some did not know the current status of their property, while others knew that their property no longer existed or was in the hands of the regime or opposition groups or occupied by internally displaced persons. The recently passed property law that allows the Syrian state to create redevelopment zones under the pretext of urban planning was generally understood by interviewees to be aimed at confiscating the property of refugees, internally displaced persons, and residents seen to be opposed to the regime without due process or compensation. Most interviewees were unaware of the law, but those who were familiar with it believed it was intended to prevent them from returning to Syria. Refugees also spoke about the difficulty of obtaining the documents needed to prove their ownership of property.

Views on Coexistence

Refugee views on the potential for coexistence varied widely, depending largely on where the refugee came from in Syria. Some Sunni interviewees said their relationships with Shi'a had come to a permanent end, blaming them for instigating the violence and informing on them to authorities. They spoke of a lack of trust and sometimes hatred. In Bosra al-Sham, for example, Sunnis generally perceive Shi'a Muslims to be pro-government and foreign Shi'a armed groups are seen to have played a significant role in the Syrian war. Shi'a residents fled Bosra al-Sham in March 2015, and some refugees from there said that they did not want them to return. Others had more conciliatory views, refusing to blame an entire group for the actions of a few, believing that coexistence had existed in the past and could eventually return.

In Homs, which had previously been religiously and ethnically diverse, sectarian tensions, particularly between Sunni Muslims on one side and Alawite and Shi'a Muslims on the other, has led to the most brutal acts of violence between neighbors, resulting in a trust deficit that will make the city and the governorate one of the most challenging places for peaceful coexistence and safe return.

Refugees who had lost housing, land, and property often said that guarantees for restoring and rebuilding damaged property were crucial for return.

Refugees from Homs expressed a range of views about the potential for coexistence, often influenced by negative personal experiences with members of other groups and experiences of their community. Some said that they could coexist, given their positive interactions; others worried about the other groups'

intentions. Some said that they could live with the other side but would never resume economic activity with them. Some refugees said they could never coexist with "hostile" communities and, therefore, were seeking resettlement in a third country. This was expressed particularly by some interviewees from Homs because Alawites and Shi'a are already in Homs and the interviewees could not see themselves going back and coexisting with them.

Sunni refugees from Bosr al-Harir framed their views on coexistence with regard to concerns about both Shi'a from Daraa and the Druze from the neighboring governorate. While some referred to the Druze negatively, others reported that their interactions with people from Swayda as internally displaced persons and refugees had actually improved their views of members of the minority. The Druze are generally perceived by Sunni Muslims as pro-government, and refugees from Swayda said obstacles to coexistence between the people of Swayda and Daraa included mutual lack of trust, fear that displaced populations and armed groups would spread violence, intolerance toward Druze religious beliefs, and blame for their perceived support for the government. However, some believed that coexistence was possible. Some refugees from Swayda expressed concern about Islamist armed groups that were still operating in Daraa, which may have been exacerbated by attacks in Swayda by the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) on July 25, 2018, during which approximately 200 people were killed and 30 others, mainly women and children, were taken hostage.²²

Views According to Age and Gender

Age and gender also shaped the experiences and views of refugees. Children and youth have been killed, detained, and subjected to torture and enforced disappearance in the conflict. Many were injured and traumatized, lost beloved ones, participated in violence, and were forced to flee their homes. The stories of young people show some of the traumas they have been through and the horrific violence they have seen. As with adults, young refugees were concerned with safety and security back in Syria. Some wished to resettle in another country, because they did not think they would be safe if they returned to Syria, and they did not want to stay in Jordan, where they felt discriminated against. Again, like adults, the young refugees interviewed for this report called for justice for certain crimes but did not think it was likely to happen. Their stories also revealed the sectarian divisions resulting from the war, the end of personal relationships, and even hatred. They spoke of both a weary willingness to coexist and an outright refusal to do so.



Men and women have been affected by the conflict in Syria in particular ways. In addition to the harms caused by indiscriminate attacks and bombings, adult males have been the primary targets of a wide-range of abuses, including detention, torture, and enforced disappearance, and have been forcibly conscripted into the army. Interviewees said that they feared arrest, torture, and conscription if they return. In terms of justice, they prioritized regime change, institutional reform, international guarantees, and information about the forcibly disappeared and abducted.

A Syrian woman and her 11-year-old grandson visit the International Rescue Committee-run clinic in Ramtha, Jordan. The woman just attended a trauma counselling session. She says she hopes for peace in Syria for her grandson, who wants to be an engineer. Ramtha, Jordan, 2013 (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

Women and girls have also been subjected to arrest, detention, torture, enforced disappearance, sexual abuse, and abduction. Shelling and bombings in residential areas have killed and injured women in their homes, while sieges have restricted access to food and medicine. Women have also been subjected to summary killings. Women

22 This occurred two months after interviews were conducted.

who survived the violence and loss of loved ones have had to deal with their traumas and the responsibility to protect their children. Many women who before the war had been restricted to the traditional role of housewives lost the breadwinner of their family and became the sole provider. A number of women whose husbands were killed or went missing said the conflict had changed their relationships with family members, usually for the worse, particularly while displaced.

All women interviewees faced economic challenges in displacement, and most said they would not want to return to Syria, even after the war, because their homes were destroyed, they would have no income, and/or they feared for the safety of their family members and the psychological distress of returning to the place where they had experienced such trauma and loss. Numerous women spoke about the importance of retaining their independence and access to new roles, regardless of where they settled after the war. Most women interviewees did not believe that there would be justice in Syria, although some spoke about the need to hold perpetrators accountable.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities

Refugees who were members of other minority groups—including Circassian, Ismaelite, Alawite, Rifa'ite, Palestinian, Chichnian, and Armenian Christian refugees—recounted experiences that suggest how the harms and vulnerabilities of violence and displacement affect a wide range of identities. They spoke about living through shelling, shooting, gender-based violence and other forms of insecurity, death of loved ones, material losses, and growing sectarian divisions that created mistrust, fear, and hatred. They talked about the risk of being conscripted into the military and narrated the suffering caused by deprivation of resources. Many refugees told stories of multiple displacements within and outside of Syria.

Refugees from a range of groups identified safety and security as the most important condition for their return, although this often meant different things for different groups. For some, safety and security meant removing the current regime and holding its members accountable. For others, it meant the dismantling of all militias and armed groups, including those supported by foreign states. Some who blamed the opposition for causing the destruction of the country said that they could not forgive those who had supported the opposition. Interviewees also emphasized the need to abolish mandatory military conscription as well as arbitrary detention, abductions, and other repressive state policies.

While many voiced feelings of distrust and pessimism about the Syrian state, some expressed their exhaustion and fatigue with the conflict and its hardships, saying that they would be willing to return to Syria even if President Bashar al-Assad remained in power. Some of those who supported the regime felt that those who backed and mobilized the revolution were traitors and should be punished for contributing to the conflict, instability, and sectarianism. Under current conditions, many members of minority groups thought that overcoming the divisions between different groups of Syrians would be impossible.

Experiences in Jordan

While the violence, abuse, and deprivation that forced Syrians to flee their communities and country were critical to shaping their views on justice and coexistence, so too were their experiences as refugees outside the country. Displacement is often a time of acute vulnerability when individuals are more likely to experience additional injustices, which has implications for relationships among groups. Many refugees went to Jordan because they

All women interviewees faced economic challenges in displacement, and most said they would not want to return to Syria, even after the war, because their homes were destroyed, they would have no income, and/or they feared for the safety of their family members.

felt it was most socially, culturally, and religiously similar to their own country. Many also had family members there, whom they could count on to facilitate their arrival and integration.

However, refugees have faced a wide range of challenges in Jordan, whether in a host community or a refugee camp. These include social and economic exclusion from and tensions with host communities—especially in regard to education and employment—as well as restrictive state policies, discrimination, domestic violence, and mental health problems. Accessing fundamental rights is a constant challenge, and refugees face numerous barriers to accessing work, health care, and education. Interviewees felt highly vulnerable. They said that Jordanians perceived them as competitors for scarce resources and employment opportunities and as social burdens dependent on humanitarian aid.

Due to their ethnic or political backgrounds, some refugee populations in Jordan are particularly vulnerable. Palestinian refugees from Syria, for example, were displaced for a second time, facing compounded struggle. Refugees living in camps expressed general feelings of entrapment and exclusion, with limited access to the outside world and limited opportunities to meet and live with the Jordanian population. At the same time, however, refugees in both host communities and camps have shown resilience in adapting to and overcoming myriad challenges and in taking on new roles, as women have done in the labor market.

Recommendations

Recommendations to Prevent Involuntary Returns

- **Jordan and other host countries** must uphold the right to voluntary return and respect the principle of nonrefoulement.
- **Jordan and other host countries, the Syrian government, the international community, and civil society** actors should seek to provide refugees with sufficient information to enable them to make informed decisions about when to return. These include sufficient information about the security situation in the intended area of return; the status of the refugees' homes and/or other property in terms of material damages and occupation by internally displaced persons and/or individuals belonging to Syrian or other communities perceived as hostile to the returning refugee; if houses are damaged, the available shelter in the intended area of return; and the status of operating schools and hospitals, the basic services that are provided, and the work opportunities in the intended area of return.
- The **international community** and **donor states** should continue to provide funds to the United Nations and other programs that support refugees' basic needs in host countries, in order to avoid situations whereby refugees are compelled to return while conditions are not conducive to safe and dignified return, due to an inability to access basic services and/or meet their families' basic needs in their host country.
- **Jordan, civil society, and the international community** should recognize the exclusion, vulnerability, and challenges faced by refugees while in Jordan and how these experiences shape their decisions regarding return and resettlement and the potential for coexistence; support social cohesion programs that aim to mitigate tensions between refugee populations and host communities by changing misperceptions and recognizing the positive role that refugees can play in society; help refugees to overcome barriers to work, health care, and education; recognize the particular vulnerabilities of certain groups, such as refugees in camps, Palestinian refugees from Syria, women, and children; and discourage any policies that might tighten the space on the Syrian presence in host communities.

- The **international community** should ensure that durable solutions to the Syrian crisis include resettlement and, where appropriate, integration, given the number of refugees who do not wish to return to Syria.
- **Jordan** and **other host countries** should facilitate the full engagement of Syrian and other civil society actors in host countries at all stages of discussion of the return of refugees and ensure that they are thoroughly consulted and afforded opportunities to participate, including with developing policy positions and determining priorities for return.
- The **international community and donors** should support transitional justice processes that include the participation of refugee and diaspora communities.
- The **international community, donors, and host countries** should support civil society organizations in designing and implementing a public awareness campaign to educate Syrian refugees on their right to safe, voluntary, and dignified return.
- **Donors** should support further research on the views, concerns, needs, and priorities of Syrian refugees on justice and coexistence.

Recommendations to Facilitate Refugees' Voluntary Return to Syria

- **Host countries, the Syrian government, the international community, and civil society** must place refugee needs and rights at the heart of any durable solution framework.
- **Host countries, the Syrian government, the international community, and civil society** must prioritize the safety and security of refugees when they return to Syria, taking into account their specific fears depending on their particular destinations within the country. Particularly where local agreements exist or a change to government control has occurred, this should include measures guaranteeing protections from violence related to political and/or sectarian divisions and arbitrary arrests and other retaliatory measures, including abductions and summary killings.
- The **Syrian government** should allow the United Nations and other specialized international organizations to be fully engaged in the process of refugee return; to monitor, track, and assess populations within Syria; to regularly collect and verify population data at the community level; and to provide humanitarian key stakeholders with information and indicators to address priority needs and required humanitarian interventions.
- The **Syrian government** should allow the United Nations and relevant international organizations to access returning refugees in order to monitor and document their experiences and identify difficulties to learn lessons and avoid negative situations for other refugees when they return.
- The **Syrian government** should provide returnees with services required to facilitate their settlement, such as food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and housing. It should ensure a fair distribution of aid for returnees based on need, without discrimination; and prioritize the reconstruction of schools, power, water supplies, and other infrastructure and social services in Syria, again without discrimination and based on objective needs assessments.
- The **international community** should exercise its pressure either bilaterally or through existing UN-sponsored political processes to reach a settlement that guarantees conditions that will facilitate voluntary, safe, and informed return. The fear and/or objection to forced conscription preventing many refugees from return requires serious consideration and the adoption of long-term flexible and innovative solutions,

including the acceptance of conscientious objection to compulsory military service. In addition to fears of arbitrary arrests and forced conscription, many refugees do not feel that they can go back to their areas of origin because they had to leave for political and/or sectarian reasons either by fleeing after mass killings were committed in their neighborhoods or areas or by organized forced displacements resulting from local agreements that usually lead to a change to government control. Some refugees are concerned about the possibility of demographic changes, and therefore will only feel able and comfortable to return after it is clearer what political leadership will be formed in a post-conflict Syria.

- All **stakeholders** involved in the political process, including the constitutional process, must ensure that any political agreement or constitution—whether transitional or permanent—includes specific guarantees addressing the refugee crisis by seeking to grant refugees the right to choose whether to return to their areas of residence and/or areas of origin in Syria.
- All **stakeholders** involved in the political process, including the constitutional process, should ensure that a new constitution must commit any future political leadership to a massive reform of state institutions, particularly security institutions, and to clearly define their role and limit their mandate, given the vast powers presently granted to state security branches that have terrorized Syrians. With the lack of clarity on when the political process, including the constitutional process, will move forward, plans on reforming the security institutions should start without delay as this is directly linked to a safe return of refugees as well as their willingness to return.

Recommendations on Justice

- The **international community** and **parties to the political process** should ensure that any political settlement does not grant impunity to those responsible for the most egregious and systematic crimes, regardless of their political affiliation—for example, those in charge of notorious detention centers where tens of thousands of people have been subjected to enforced disappearances.
- The **international community** should only sponsor a political settlement guaranteeing that detailed and sufficient information is provided to the families of those forcibly disappeared and abducted, mass graves are identified and protected, and mechanisms for DNA identification of victims are put in place with a timeframe for implementation. The **international community** should pressure the Syrian government to agree to fully cooperate in such a process.
- **Donors** and **international NGOs** must work and support local civil society groups to raise awareness among refugees about their rights to compensation and restitution and other potential justice claims, given the high number of refugees who lack basic knowledge about their rights as victims of human rights violations.
- The **Syrian government**, the **international community**, and **civil society** actors should seek to facilitate the restitution and restoration of housing, land, and property lost or damaged during the war and displacement, according to best practices and international standards; help refugees to obtain the documents necessary to prove ownership of property; and advocate the annulment or amendment of laws that allow the Syrian government to confiscate and redevelop residents' property without due process.

Recommendations on Coexistence

- **Donors** and **international organizations** should support awareness-raising programs on dignified coexistence processes targeting local actors and refugees, particularly those who lost family members, and hear what they need in order to coexist with communities perceived as “hostile.” The word “reconciliation”

is viewed very negatively by many Syrian refugees opposed to the government because it is used by the government to refer to local agreements that result in forced displacements of inhabitants, sometimes after the imposition of inhumane sieges and the intensive bombardment of the targeted area; many therefore see these agreements as the only means to survive rather than viewing it as a reconciliation.

- The **Syrian government** should allow international and Syrian NGOs that are specialized in transitional justice issues and conflict resolution to access the areas where refugees are returning.
- The **Syrian government** should set up measures to prevent situations where returning refugees find their homes occupied by others, particularly if from communities perceived as hostile, to prevent further distressing situations for returnees and to avoid exacerbating feelings of enmity that may undermine the potential for coexistence, particularly in demographically mixed areas.
- **States that have influence in Syria** should support the creation of revenge-detering mechanisms to avoid sectarian or other acts of violence against returnees and/or against those who did not leave Syria, regardless of their religious or political affiliation.
- The **international community** should stress the need to engage local participatory structures to address local community needs. While international attention is set on high-level political talks involving regional and world powers, individuals and communities are central to the reestablishment of long-term coexistence, required to achieve a lasting peace.
- The **international community** must adopt a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding by fully engaging local civil society organizations, refugees, and community leaders and members; prioritizing listening to and addressing local needs; and encouraging dialogue among different communities of Syrian refugees.
- **Donors, international and local NGOs**, and the **Syrian government** should seek to provide reconciliation methods that address the long-term emotional needs of those within the internally displaced and refugee communities and those who remained in Syria.
- The **international community** and **civil society** actors should support women in facing the economic challenges related to displacement, return, and resettlement, including their new roles as family breadwinners; the social challenges of mending family relationships damaged by violence and displacement; and the psychological challenges of dealing with loss and enforced disappearance of loved ones. They should ensure that the provision of support to women helps them to retain the independence and access to new roles that were established during displacement.
- The **international community** and **civil society** actors should help to address the trauma suffered by children and youth during the war and displacement, including witnessing and being involved in violence in Syria and suffering discrimination and exclusion in Jordan; provide psychosocial support and assistance in accessing education both now and on their return or resettlement; provide spaces for young people to talk about their experiences, and support their participation in campaigns against the normalization of violence and civic education initiatives that provide positive experiences; and support policies that restrict child labor and child marriage.

V. Refugees from Daraa: Bosra al-Sham

The ancient city of Bosra al-Sham has a population with a Sunni majority and Shi'a minority that enjoyed very good relationships with each other for many decades prior to 2011. The uprising and subsequent armed conflict in Syria strained ties between members of the two Muslim sects, however, leading to armed clashes and exchanges of sniper fire in the city. On March 25, 2015, when opposition armed groups defeated pro-government Shi'a armed groups in the city,²³ all Shi'a residents fled and have not returned since.

Quwwat Shabab al-Sunnah (or simply Shabab al-Sunnah), an armed group that led the battle against the Shi'a in Bosra, became the most dominant force in the city and one of the most powerful armed groups in the Daraa governorate. Led by Ahmad al-'Odeh, it set up a security office known as "Branch 600" in Bosra's fortress as a detention area for people accused of collaborating with the regime or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The available information indicates that detainees were subjected to torture and other ill treatment in the fortress and that, in at least one well-known case in Daraa, Colonel Zidan al-Nseirat, an opposition officer accused by Shabab al-Sunnah of collaborating with the regime, is believed to have died under torture.²⁴

The uprising and subsequent armed conflict in Syria strained ties between members of the two Muslim sects, leading to armed clashes and exchanges of sniper fire in the city.

In a community that gives particular importance to families, al-'Odeh, who comes from a small family in Bosra, was seen as sidelining and dismissing the role of the big families, such as al-Meqdad and al-Doss. Several members of these families interviewed for this report expressed discontent with and even fear of Shabab al-Sunnah.

On June 19, 2018, the Syrian government launched a wide-scale offensive to recapture the southern governorates of Daraa and Quneitra and parts of Swayda that were still mostly held by opposition forces.²⁵ On July 1, Shabab al-Sunnah struck a deal with Russia to hand over its heavy weaponry to Syrian government forces and cease hostilities,²⁶ triggering widespread condemnation by other opposition groups that accused Shabab al-Sunnah's leader, al-'Odeh, of treason.

23 Tom Perry, "Syrian Rebels Seize Historic Town in South – Monitor," Reuters, March 25, 2015, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-town/syrian-rebels-seize-historic-town-in-south-monitor-idUKKBNoMLoOR2o15o325>

24 In a video posted online on May 10, 2016, al-Nseirat's brother said released detainees informed him that the colonel had died under torture on the third day of his detention at the hands of Shabab al-Sunnah, while he had survived for three years in regime prisons. The colonel's brother likened Shabab al-Sunnah's leader, Ahmad al-'Odeh, to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swocKK4XPj4>

25 "Deraa, Birthplace of Syria Uprising, Retaken by Government Forces," BBC, July 12, 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44806045

26 Ibid.

In his defense, al-‘Odeh released an audio statement claiming that the deal was the only way for women who had fled Bosra during the June 2018 offensive and were stranded at the Jordanian border to safely return to their homes.²⁷ He considered the deal to have protected the “honor” of these women and said the deal had prevented the Shi’a from regaining control of Bosra and “holding *‘latmiyat* [Shi’a religious rituals of beating chests to commemorate the killing of Imam Hussein²⁸] in your streets.”²⁹ His statement came amid media reports that the terms of the agreement with Russia would prevent the Shi’a of Bosra from returning to their homes.³⁰

Sunni-Shi’a Hostilities³¹

Shi’a Muslims constitute a small minority of the Syrian population. Along with the larger Alawite minority and Ismailis, they make up only 13 percent of the population,³² while Sunnis constitute 74 percent.³³ Before 2011, the Shi’a were geographically dispersed throughout Damascus, the city and villages of Homs, the towns of Kefraya and al-Fou’a in Idlib, the towns of Nobbul and al-Zohra in Aleppo (with an estimated population of 60,000 Shi’a),³⁴ and several cities and villages in Daraa.

Lebanon’s Shi’a Hezbollah armed group’s pro-government position during the uprising in 2011, despite the killings of protesters at the hands of government authorities and its participation in the war after the country slipped into an armed conflict in 2012 along with other foreign Shi’a armed groups, contributed significantly to hostile sentiments toward the Shi’a in general by Sunni communities that opposed the government. International human rights groups have documented abductions and killings of civilians from minority groups, including Shi’a, in what appeared to be sectarian-motivated crimes during the first year of the uprising.³⁵ The government has armed “Popular Committees” in some areas since at least mid-2012 and later formed the National Defence Forces, recruiting civilians from minority groups, including the Shi’a. These forces are believed to have carried out mass killings of civilians, including women and children, such as in al-Baydah and Banias on May 2 and 3, 2013.³⁶ In July 2012, rebels that had seized most of Aleppo’s northern rural areas laid siege to the Shi’a towns of Nobbul and al-Zahra until February 3, 2016, when the siege was broken by the government and its allies.³⁷

On September 18, 2012, the chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Paulo Pinheiro, confirmed the increasing presence of foreign armed elements in Syria, including Jihadist militants, who were either joining anti-government forces or operating independently.³⁸ Syrian ethnic and religious minorities also formed armed groups, demonstrating increasing sectarian tensions in Syria.³⁹ In its February 2013 report,

27 A copy of the audio recording from July, 28, 2018, is on file with the author, Cilina Nasser. Jordanian authorities did not allow people fleeing the offensive to enter Jordan. Megan Specia, “Syrian Offensive Leaves Thousands Stranded at Jordan’s Closed Border,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/30/world/middleeast/syria-jordan-border-daraa.html

28 Imam Hussein is the son of the fourth Caliph, Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb, and grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. Imam Hussein (626–680AD) is highly revered by the Shi’a, who believe that he sacrificed his life to save Islam in the battle of Karbala.

29 Al-Odeh’s statement taken from the audio recording he made in July 2018.

30 Because the terms of the agreement are not publicly available, the author cannot confirm these reports. Almodononline.com, July 9, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2uwX1EL>

31 While this section attempts to explain how and why the relationship between Sunni and Shi’a in Bosra was strained, in order to identify the difficulties facing peaceful coexistence, this report is not mandated to establish facts about which side initiated hostilities and/or committed more abuses.

32 US Department of State, *Syria 2017 International Religious Freedom Report, 2017*, www.state.gov/documents/organization/281250.pdf

33 Ibid. That includes ethnic Arabs, Chechens, Circassians, Kurds, and some Turkomans.

34 Laila Bassam, “Syrian Army and Allies Breaks Rebel Siege of Shi’ite Towns: Army,” Reuters, February 3, 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKCN0VC1VQ

35 Amnesty International, “Syria: Summary Killings and Other Abuses by Armed Opposition Groups,” March 14, 2013, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/008/2013/en/

36 Amnesty International, “Syria: Civilians in al-Baydah and Banias Exposed to Summary Executions,” July 26, 2013, www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/16000/mde240372013en.pdf

37 Ibid.

38 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Commission of Inquiry on Syria: Civilians Bearing the Brunt of the ‘Unrelenting Spiral of Violence,’” September 18, 2012, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ClonSyriaciviliansunrelentingspiralofviolence.aspx

39 Ibid.

the commission concluded that the “conflict has become increasingly sectarian, with the conduct of the parties becoming significantly more radicalized and militarized.”⁴⁰

The role of foreign Shi’a armed groups in the conflict exacerbated hostilities against the Shi’a by communities opposed to the government. On June 5, 2013, Lebanon’s Hezbollah Shi’a armed group defeated rebels in al-Qusayr, a strategic city near the Lebanese border that was serving as an important supply route for rebels in Homs, a city on the frontlines of the war at that time. Six days later, Sunni armed groups raided the village of Hatla, in the governorate of Deir al-Zour, and carried out a mass killing of 60 Shi’a, including women and children.⁴¹ Hezbollah’s participation in the armed conflict continued to grow. With Syrian government forces, it laid siege to the town of Madaya, near the Lebanese border, in June 2015, triggering enormous criticism of its role in the Syrian war, as harrowing images of emaciated children came out of the town.⁴²

In addition to Hezbollah, other foreign Shi’a armed groups have participated in the war, particularly Iraqi ones. All foreign Shi’a armed groups active in Syria in support of the regime are widely believed to have been led by Iranian Major General Qassem Suleimani, who heads the elite Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards.⁴³ There are reports that Hezbollah and Quds Forces have trained local Shi’a armed groups, including those who fought in Bosra.

In March 2014, Islamist armed groups, including Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, which is linked to al-Qaeda, laid siege to the Shi’a villages of Fu’a and Kefraya, in Idlib. A deal to evacuate Shi’a residents, reached in April 2017, was halted when a bombing targeting the evacuation convoy killed 150 evacuees, including 72 children.⁴⁴ On July 18, 2018, over 6,000 Shi’a residents left their besieged towns in another evacuation deal, in return for the release of 1,500 prisoners.⁴⁵ In Daraa, foreign Shi’a armed groups were reported to have taken part in battles against rebel groups, including in the 2017 battle to control the Hayy al-Manshiyeh neighborhood, in Daraa al-Balad.

Refugee Views on Sunni-Shi’a Relations

Before 2011, Shi’a in Daraa lived peacefully with the overwhelming majority of Sunni residents, in a number of areas in Daraa. Most lived in Bosra al-Sham. All refugees from Bosra interviewed by the International Center for Transitional Justice for this report gave consistent testimonies on the close relationships that Sunni and Shi’a residents had enjoyed before the uprising,⁴⁶ with most describing residents belonging to the two sects prior to March 2011 as one community.

All refugees said they had at least one relative, friend, or acquaintance from their hometown who was married to a Shi’a and that such intermarriages were usually acceptable to both communities. One woman who had

40 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/22/59, February 5, 2013, www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A.HRC.22.59_en.pdf

41 See Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Syria Fighting Flares Both Sides of Lebanese Border,” Reuters, April 21, 2013, www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-lebanon/syria-fighting-flares-both-sides-of-lebanese-border-idUSBRE93KoDN20130421 and LiveLeak, “VERY GRAPHIC - Picture of Butchered Child After Hatla Massacre,” www.liveleak.com/view?i=896_1371157041

42 Nicholas Blanford, “Starvation in Madaya: How Hezbollah Role in Siege Could Hurt It in Lebanon,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 8, 2016, www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2016/0108/Starvation-in-Madaya-How-Hezbollah-role-in-siege-could-hurt-it-in-Lebanon

43 Alexandra Zavis, “Who is Maj. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, the Man Who Stumped Trump?,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2015, www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iran-qassem-suleimani-20150904-story.html

44 Al Jazeera, “Syria: Buses Arrive to Evacuate Two Rebel-Besieged Shia Towns,” July 18, 2018, www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/syria-buses-arrive-evacuate-rebel-besieged-shia-towns-180718071338036.html

45 Ibid.

46 Refugees from Bosra interviewed for this report were all Sunni. The author met with them in April and May 2018, before the July 1, 2018, deal was struck between Shabab al-Sunnah and Russia. The author could not find Shi’a from Bosra living in Jordan, because they initially sought shelter in neighbouring Swayda when they fled their homes in March 2015. They then moved mainly to Sayeda Zaynab, an area 10km south of Damascus named after the sister of Imam Hussein, whose shrine is located there. As a result, the Shi’a were not interviewed for this report, to give their side of the story.

three relatives married to Shi'a said, "We used to feel that we're the same. Many Sunnis in Bosra are married to Shi'a and many Shi'a are married to Sunnis, but I don't know what happened."⁴⁷ Another woman whose uncle-in-law was married to a Shi'a said, "We still love her because she's with the oppressed against the oppressor. Her husband and two sons have been detained by the regime. She didn't leave Bosra when the Shi'a left in 2015. She stayed with us."⁴⁸

Many refugees said that the Shi'a of Bosra took up arms in 2012, and most blamed the Shi'a for starting hostilities with the majority Sunni inhabitants of Daraa. Several used the phrase, "After the revolution, they showed their true face." A smaller number of interviewees, however, while strongly opposed to the current predominantly pro-government Shi'a stance, cast doubt on claims that Shi'a residents of Daraa had engaged in violence against the Sunni at the early stage of the uprising. One elderly man from Daraa said his sons' Shi'a friends had taken part in protests in the early days of the uprising and used to go to the mosques that were used as gathering points for protesters: "But some protesters turned the demonstrations into sectarian events, shouting religious and sectarian chants . . . this made Christians and Shi'a turn their backs and leave [the protests]."⁴⁹

Two widows from Bosra al-Sham who expressed anti-Shi'a sentiments that had developed during the armed conflict said the Shi'a of Bosra were no different from the Sunni in rushing to help those shot by government forces during peaceful protests in the early stages of the uprising.⁵⁰ Like other refugees, they said they did not understand why the Shi'a had changed their stance. One said, "I don't know what happened for them to change like that." A teacher from Daraa al-Balad said the Shi'a who had lived in the Hayy al-Karak neighborhood "did not harm anyone and were not harmed by anyone. They were just scared and fled to the government-held Daraa al-Mahatta."⁵¹

A Sunni refugee from al-Mzeireeb said that a Shi'a elderly man who was a "good person" and a friend of his father had been abducted and killed, after which all Shi'a residents fled the village.⁵² A Sunni lawyer and civil society activist from Daraa

said the Shi'a of Bosra took up arms partly because Sunni armed groups initiated hostilities by targeting them and partly because the regime scared them into believing that Sunnis wanted to kill them.⁵³ One Sunni man from Bosra made a distinction between members of non-Syrian Shi'a armed groups who participated in the war and Shi'a residents of Bosra, saying the latter took up arms to "protect themselves."⁵⁴

In testimony that shows how good relationships between the Sunni and Shi'a of Bosra became strained and eventually turned into enmity, one 27-year-old widow said:

My parents live in a neighborhood where most of the Shi'a live and their relationship with the [Shi'a] Jaafar family was more than excellent. They were part of us and we were part of them. We used to visit each other, and many Sunnis and Shi'a got married to each other. My aunt used to spend all of her time with her Shi'a friends. By God, we were happy and safe. But in 2012, things changed. Shi'a

Many refugees said that the Shi'a of Bosra took up arms in 2012, and most blamed the Shi'a for starting hostilities with the majority Sunni inhabitants of Daraa. Several used the phrase, "After the revolution, they showed their true face."

47 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

48 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

49 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 13, 2018.

50 Interviews conducted separately in Amman on April 24, 2018.

51 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

52 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 13, 2018.

53 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 13, 2018.

54 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

youths started to throw stones at people marching in funeral processions for Sunni martyrs. The Shi'a became armed . . . even their children were armed. Their children grew up during the years of the uprising with hatred toward us. But there were Shi'a who were good to us. Once my husband was at his work and his Shi'a colleague alerted him to leave the office early and to stay indoors after learning from Shi'a fighters that there were going to be clashes. After my husband arrived [home], clashes did break out between Shi'a and Sunni fighters. Once, [the Shi'a] shot and injured an electrician; another time, they shot a girl called Israa who was going to school, only because she was Sunni⁵⁵ . . . There's now an abnormal level of hatred against the Shi'a. Eventually, before my husband's death [in December 2012], my parents' relationship with their Shi'a neighbors changed. They stopped visiting each other. The Shi'a didn't hurt my parents at all . . . it's just that the relationships died down.⁵⁶

Interviewees from Bosra explained that Shi'a families from the eastern neighborhood moved to the western neighborhood, which has a larger number of Shi'a residents and became a stronghold for local Shi'a armed groups, and that Sunni fighters who joined Sunni armed groups moved to the eastern neighborhood. One man who lived in the western neighborhood said that in 2012:

My Shi'a neighbors mounted a 500mm machine-gun on their window. The western neighborhood became a red line . . . and no one could enter it. Anyone from the eastern neighborhood was not allowed to enter the western neighborhood. In our neighborhood, the Shi'a were very angry at people from the eastern neighborhood, because the highest number of Sunni men who took up arms were from the eastern neighborhood. And the Sunni men from the western neighborhood who took up arms left for the eastern neighborhood.⁵⁷

Pro-government media reported that a siege was laid on the western neighborhood by Sunni armed groups,⁵⁸ and Sunni refugees interviewed for this report—who had continued to live in the western neighborhood even after the Shi'a armed groups controlled it—confirmed that sometimes the neighborhood would run out of basic necessities, such as fuel and bread. To bring goods and food to the neighborhood, the Shi'a of Bosra had to take an unofficial road to Swayda, which was sometimes targeted by Sunni armed groups. One man, aged 30, said: “When fuel and gas ran out, the Shi'a men in the neighborhood would get it, and I would buy it from them, as did Shi'a residents.”⁵⁹ Another man, aged 48, said: “When I wanted bread, my Shi'a neighbor would get it for me.”⁶⁰

Interviewees who had lived in the western neighborhood also consistently reported that snipers belonging to Shi'a armed groups would shoot at people who left or entered the western neighborhood without permission. One woman said: “When my husband was killed, my parents called their Shi'a neighbors to tell the snipers that they needed to get out of the neighborhood to see me, so that [the snipers] wouldn't shoot them while exiting the area.”⁶¹

A man, aged 50, said that when he wanted to bring his family to Jordan in November 2012 he called Shi'a acquaintances and told them that his wife's sister had had a baby, and “they secured a safe route for us in the roads they controlled, so that we could leave . . . basically, we maintained some good relationships with each other—it was like laughing at each other—just so that we could carry on with our lives.”⁶² An elderly man said

55 The interviewee was referring to the killing of an engineering student, Israa al-Tohme, on November 18, 2012, when the car she was traveling in came under fire. Her sister, Alaa, was injured and died of her wounds on November 27, 2012. Freedom Martyrs, December 19, 2012, <https://bit.ly/2voSVPI>

56 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

57 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

58 “Providing Safety to 12,000 Civilians and a Plan to Retake Bosra al-Sham,” *al-Mayadeen Channel*, March 26, 2015.

59 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

60 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

61 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

62 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

that when his daughter-in-law needed to go to a hospital in Swayda to deliver her baby, his relatives told him to contact a member of the Shi'a armed group in Bosra to secure a safe passage.⁶³ "But I refused to ask him to be my mediator. I took her through an unofficial road . . . that leads to Swayda."

Others who had lived outside of the western neighborhood said they were exposed to gunfire from snipers holed up in the area. A woman whose husband was killed by snipers said he had been an employee of the Baath Party; shortly after the uprising began, his superiors told him it was no longer safe for him to work at the party and moved him to the Ministry of Agriculture.⁶⁴ According to his wife, he supported neither side of conflict, but one day he finished his shift at the office and went to buy bread in an area exposed to snipers in the western neighborhood. "He was shot and fell to the ground and laid there for around an hour without anyone able to help him, because of the continuous sniper fire. As he lay on the ground, people on the street took cover . . . so no one could provide him with the assistance he so urgently needed. He bled for around an hour until the shooting stopped, and he was rushed to a hospital, where he was treated and returned home looking very yellow." She became distressed and cried as she recounted what had happened: "He was in a lot of pain . . . he then passed away. I didn't believe that he had died and said that he might have passed out. He was only 34. The snipers were Shi'a because the shooting that killed my husband came from [the direction of] their neighborhood."

Refugee Views on Return

Among refugees from Bosra, safety was the most prominent concern regarding return. Most interviewees said they feared return even after the civil war, either because they would be at risk of retaliatory measures, such as arrest and detention by the government for failing to fulfill their military service, or because they might be perceived as anti-government and/or at risk of retaliatory action by opposition armed groups for not supporting them. Some spoke

of the need for regime change, others of the need for international intervention, in order to make Syria safe for return. As one man said, "I don't understand politics, but if there are interests for the regional powers that we return, then we will."⁶⁵

"Safety is when there is no shelling of our homes; when your children can go to school and you know that they will come home; safety is not worrying that my children will be hit by a bullet or a bomb."

A widow, aged 33, who had lost her husband in 2012, said: "I wish I could return . . . if there is safety, I will."⁶⁶ Asked what safety meant for her, the woman, who has four children between the ages of 9 and 15, said: "Safety is when there is no shelling of our homes; when your children can go to school and you know that they will come home; safety is not worrying that my

children will be hit by a bullet or a bomb." Even if the war ends, she would not go back to Syria right away but would "wait until I am sure that it is safe, that [the war] really had ended. My family and my in-laws are there. And schools are open in Bosra." Similarly, a man with children between the ages of 8 and 17 said they dreamed of returning to Syria, but that the "country has been destroyed and, as a result, it is now ruled by armed gangs. Abduction is widespread so I cannot return without worrying about my son or daughter. The most important thing is safety . . . My son should go to university and my daughter to school, while they are relaxed, not scared."⁶⁷

Interviewees expressed fear of detention or forced conscription into the Syrian army if they returned to Bosra after the change to government control. A man, aged 50, who has three sons aged 16, 20, and 21, said that "the regime lies. It cannot be trusted. So we can only return when the regime falls and there are no longer any

63 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

64 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

65 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

66 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

67 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

random questionings.”⁶⁸ If he were to return now and his sons needed to do official paperwork, he said, they would have to go to government-held Swayda, where the regime might take his sons into military service or detention. “Everyone is scared about bad things happening to them.” His wife asked, “On what basis are we going to return? We want guarantees to return.”⁶⁹

A man, aged 30, whose brother has been detained since August 2013 and forcibly disappeared, said his return would depend on the security situation in Syria.⁷⁰ “The most important thing is safety, so no one assaults us, no one stops us at a checkpoint, no one takes me or anyone else and detains us, just like what happened to my brother. For me, I cannot go back to Syria unless there is safe passage.” His friend had told him not to come back for now because there was neither safety nor work. “We just want to live as we were living in Syria in the old days.”

A refugee, aged 70, said that his advanced age ruled out resettlement.⁷¹ He believed that the war would end at some point and President Bashar al-Assad would not stay in power forever. “And when he goes, I’ll return to Syria . . . It’s scary to go back while this regime is still ruling. They might subject me to interrogations for having been a refugee. They might accuse me of having left the country and not defending the ‘homeland’ . . . I am 70 years old. I’m not going to immigrate at this age. My son crossed the sea to reach Europe, and, thank God, he’s now in Sweden. Immigration is for young people, not for me.”

Some interviewees expressed fear of both the regime and Shabab al-Sunnah, without referring to the armed group by name. An ex-fighter in the Ibn Katheer armed group, aged 50, said: “We want safety and security. The regime should be removed from the roots. We should get rid of the nasty factions.”⁷² A man with children between the ages of 8 and 17 said that armed opposition groups consider him a traitor for not taking up arms, while the regime accuses him of running away from joining the army to fight “terrorism.”⁷³ “If



A young Syrian refugee secures ropes to the outside of his family’s tent in al-Za’atari camp to reinforce it against the approaching winter’s harsh winds and weather. Al-Za’atari camp, Jordan, 2012 (DFID/UNCHR/Sokol). The person in this photograph neither was interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

we return, we want to live with peace of mind. Now you cannot talk, you should not open your mouth, until there’s a strong state that can apply the law effectively. And that I don’t believe will happen any time soon. We have an uncertain future.”

A grandmother, aged 58, who had not seen her two daughters and grandchildren, who had remained in Syria, since 2013, said: “I wish I could go tomorrow to my Syria. I miss it so much, mostly for the smell of its soil and for my daughters. But we need safety. We can no longer feel safe, even with our own people.”⁷⁴ She said they were scared of Sunni armed factions, which had “become filthier than the regime . . . May God curse them both.”

68 Interview conducted in Rseifeh, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

69 Interview conducted in Rseifeh, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

70 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

71 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

72 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

73 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

74 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

Refugee Views on Justice

Most of those interviewed from Bosra did not believe that any form of justice would take place in Syria. The reasons for their skepticism included the difficulty of determining responsibility for crimes and atrocities, a lack of trust in the international community, and the limits of compensation in the face of such massive injustice. Many said they would rely instead on divine justice, while some pointed to the need for truth (to know what happened to the missing) and the need to reform state security institutions.

In a statement that captured the mood of those interviewed, a 58-year-old woman said: “If there was justice, we wouldn’t have reached this stage.”⁷⁵ Similarly, a widow whose husband had been killed by sniper fire in 2012 said: “There will be no justice in Syria. No one knows who did what. Syria is like a jungle. All parties are killing each other and civilians, and no one can identify exactly who did what. It was Shi’a snipers who killed my husband, because the shooting came from the direction of their neighborhood . . . But I don’t know who opened fire, who pulled the trigger.”⁷⁶

Another widow, aged 27, whose husband was killed when he was caught in crossfire when an opposition armed group attacked the Samad army checkpoint near their home, said: “My husband’s killing is a great injustice. He was neither with the army nor with the Free Syrian Army (FSA). And many children were killed because of the war . . . For justice to take place in Syria, there needs to be a miracle . . . if there is no justice in this world, then there is God’s justice.”⁷⁷ The woman also has a brother who was detained and forcibly disappeared since the summer of 2013. The justice that she hoped for was to find her brother and see him freed from prison: “We are hoping that we learn about my brother’s whereabouts, and we are hoping that he will be released. Was it not for hope, we could not have stayed alive.”⁷⁸

One interviewee said he knew the Shi’a man who he believed had handed his brother over to government forces before he went missing. Asked what kind of justice he wanted for his brother, he said: “I cannot blame the entire Shi’a community. It was one man who turned my brother into the regime, and this man was killed in the war. God took revenge for us.”⁷⁹ Another man

“Who will return my uncle and his children who were killed? Who will be able to return my house? Who will compensate me for what happened to us? Where is my dignity? As a refugee, who will give me back my dignity?”

expressed distrust of the international community’s ability and intentions to achieve justice for Syrians: “Neither Human Rights Watch nor the United Nations nor the United States nor anyone can achieve justice for Syria. This is only in God’s hands.”⁸⁰ “[Staffan] De Mistura [the UN Special Envoy to Syria at the time] has done nothing, and he is collaborating with the regime. The United States occupied half of Syria.”

The overwhelming majority of refugees interviewed, including those from Bosra, did not mention compensation. Those who did for the most part did not believe compensation could make up for or replace the huge losses and harms inflicted on the people of Syria nor that it was feasible, given the massive number of victims. One man whose uncle and 16 members of his family, including his grandchildren, were killed when two barrel bombs were dropped on their home in Bosra’s eastern neighborhood asked: “Who will return my uncle and his children who were killed? Who will be able to return my house? Who will compensate me for what happened to us? Where is

75 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

76 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

77 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

78 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

79 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

80 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

my dignity? As a refugee, who will give me back my dignity? I am living in a house that is not my home. Politics is more powerful than justice, freedom, equality, and democracy. Everything is gone. I am desperate. There is no hope. The future is uncertain.”⁸¹

Similarly, one ex-fighter said: “Some people lost three or four family members. What compensation can make up for their loss?”⁸² He explained that he had been living a civilian life in Jordan for more than five years and that he was willing to embrace civilian life in his hometown of Bosra if justice was served. According to him, reforms leading to the dismantling of security services were necessary. “A security state regime that is aggressive and arrogant will never be able to provide justice,” he said. “People have to get their rights. My shop was destroyed. Can the state return it to me as it was? I just want to work in dignity in my country.”

Refugee Views on Coexistence

Refugees from Bosra expressed a range of sentiments about the potential for peaceful coexistence, illustrating the complexity of social relations between Sunni and Shi’a amid the Syrian conflict. Some interviewees said their relationships with Shi’a had come to a permanent end, blaming them for instigating the violence, occupying their homes, and informing on them to authorities. They spoke of a lack of trust and of hatred. Others had more lenient views, refusing to blame an entire group for the actions of a few, believing that coexistence had existed in the past and would return in the future.

Some interviewees made no distinction between civilians and fighters when they spoke about the Shi’a of Bosra, with the actions of Shi’a fighters and/or pro-government activists having a significant impact on their relations with Shi’a civilians. An elderly man from the al-Meqdad family who had two younger relatives in the FSA who were killed during a confrontation with government forces on March 19, 2012,⁸³ said he had severed ties with all of his Shi’a neighbors and friends with whom he had enjoyed excellent relations for decades. He said: “When two of my cousins were killed, I said to my Shi’a neighbors, ‘I don’t want anyone of you to come and visit me.’ They told me that we had always been neighbors and that the fighters from both sides were reckless and young. But I told them that our relationship was over.”⁸⁴

The man, who had lived in the western neighborhood, also said that while he had been displaced in Swayda his neighbors had told him that “some Shi’a” had occupied his house. His daughter, who was still in Bosra, went to her parents’ home to take the refrigerator, but the Shi’a refused to give it to her. He said: “If the Shi’a return to their homes, and that is what will happen, then let them come back. But I will have no relationship with them. I cannot live like we did before. I cannot make eye contact with them anymore. They hurt me too much.”

A woman, aged 58, blamed the severing of her relationships with her Shi’a friends and neighbors on the Shi’a.⁸⁵ “We were living with them,” she said. “We used to eat together. If someone fell ill, we would go check on them and they’d do the same for us. We shared joy and grief together. The children of our Shi’a neighbors studied with our children in school.” After the revolution, however, things changed. “When the Shi’a took up arms and started shooting at our [Sunni] men, I cut off my relationship with all Shi’a. I said to them, ‘You mind your business and I’ll mind mine.’ A Shi’a neighbor calls me every now and then to check on us. When I see his name on the screen, I don’t answer.” The woman said although her grandmother was a Shi’a, the war had affected her ties

81 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

82 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

83 While ICTJ cannot confirm the facts of the incident, the man claimed that three fighters, including his two younger cousins, had planned an attack on security forces in Bosra, but the forces were alerted by pro-government Shi’a agents and, therefore, government forces were able to ambush the fighters and kill them.

84 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

85 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

with her Shi'a relatives. "I like my great uncles who are Shi'a, and they like me . . . but there is no relationship between us anymore." She said that Iran could help in resolving the issues between the Sunni and Shi'a residents of Bosra by convincing the Shi'a to settle elsewhere in Syria. "Let them sell their homes and lands in Bosra and settle somewhere else. There's no place for them in Bosra anymore."

A man who had been detained for three months said he believed Shi'a informers had tipped off security forces to arrest him in August 2012, because he had just moved out of the western neighborhood, where he had been working in construction.⁸⁶ He was accused of being involved in a security incident that had taken place while he was in Lebanon. "It is impossible for the Shi'a to return to Bosra," he said. "If the Shi'a return, I won't. They ruined everything. Even if there is a formal reconciliation, they are not trustworthy." He used to work as a construction worker in southern Lebanon for a Shi'a employer, who was "like a *lira* ["a very good person"], never did anything wrong to me. But I dropped him because he's a Shi'a. I no longer want to have anything to do with any Shi'a person, good ones or bad ones."

A widow whose husband was killed in crossfire said that coexistence with the Shi'a would be difficult "because we have reached such a level of hatred on both sides. If things return to normal between Sunnis and Shi'a, then that's another miracle [she had said that justice in Syria would be a miracle]."⁸⁷

Other interviewees from Bosra rejected the idea of living again with Shi'a, while expressing either leniency toward Shi'a or a longing for the days of coexistence prior to 2011. A cofounder of an armed group, aged 50, said: "Are you asking about coexisting with the Shi'a again in Bosra? Impossible! My brother confronted a whole tank with only

his rifle, he was killed in an oppressed and aggressive way. My brother's blood will not go to waste, and I will not forget his killing . . . If I long for the old days, when we lived together, I surely will change . . . but they continue to hate us, so I can't."⁸⁸

A widow with four children, all under age 16, who believed her husband was killed by Shi'a snipers said that the Shi'a wife of her cousin-in-law had visited her to pay her condolences.⁸⁹ "I can't blame all of the Shi'a for [his] killing. Some of our leaders said that Shi'a leaders were not happy with what their fighters were doing. No one wants the destruction of their country . . . I can't say all the Shi'a are bad because of a few." She said that if the Shi'a returned to Bosra and that, if she felt safe, she could coexist



Some refugees in al-Za'atari camp have set up their own small businesses to provide for their families. Al-Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan, 2018 (Cilina Nasser)

with them over time. However, when asked if she would buy from a grocery shop owned by a Shi'a, the 33-year-old woman said: "I cannot buy anything from someone who is Shi'a. I used to, even after the revolution began. But when my husband, who had nothing to do with the revolution, was killed, I stopped. I can no longer do it."

86 Interview conducted in Rseifeh, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

87 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

88 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

89 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

Other interviewees said they believed they could live again with Shi'a. A 48-year-old man who had lived in the western neighborhood said he had very good Shi'a friends and cited Lebanon as an example of coexistence after a 15-year civil war.⁹⁰ "Reality will impose itself on everyone," he said. "Didn't the people of Lebanon go back to coexisting with each other after the civil war? Coexistence will happen when disarmament takes place. I can have hatred in my heart for the first two years after the war and then, *khalas* ["that's it"], life goes on. My brother is living in Haret Hreik [a Hezbollah-controlled Shi'a area in the southern suburbs of Beirut] and he's coexisting with them [the Shi'a] very well. His Shi'a employer likes him because my brother is trustworthy."

A 30-year-old man said the war did not have an effect on his relationship with the Shi'a friends he had grown up with.⁹¹ "I spent my childhood with them, and we were together all the time," he explained. "I used to sleep at their homes, and they used to sleep at mine. After the revolution, my relationship with them remained the same." Eventually, people on different sides in Bosra took up arms, including his Shi'a friends, but this did not affect their relationships. "They remained the same, and there were times where I would be chatting with them on the street, while they were carrying their weapons," he said. "I did not feel threatened, because they knew me . . . I wasn't with the regime or the FSA. For them, since I did not take up arms, they had nothing against me. They took up arms to protect themselves. And there are Shi'a guys who did not take up arms at all. Personally, I can live with them again. But others who lost loved ones might not be able to do so. For me, I do not like to generalize that all Shi'a are to blame for what happened." His wife, also from Bosra, said: "Both sides made mistakes. We cannot say that only the Shi'a committed wrongs. Our side [Sunnis] did too."⁹²

90 Interview conducted in Thleil, Zarqa, on May 3, 2018.

91 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

92 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

VI. Refugees from Daraa: Bosr al-Harir

Bosr al-Harir, a town in the rural northeastern part of Daraa, was under the control of armed opposition group ‘Amoud Horan from 2014 until government forces recaptured it in June 2018. Its residents are Sunni, from the Hariri clan. It is close to both the government-held governorate of Swayda, whose residents predominantly belong to the Druze religious minority, and Izraa, an area in Daraa where Christians as well as army officers and their families from the Alawite religious minority live. Refugees in Jordan from Bosr al-Harir say that 60 to 70 percent of the town’s houses have been destroyed or damaged by government shelling, which intensified after the town fell under ‘Amoud Horan’s control, prompting the majority of people to flee.

Refugee Views on Return

Refugees from Bosr al-Harir highlighted the need for regime change and a resolution of the conflict for them to return home. As a result of the extended shelling of the town, however, they also spoke of the damage to their homes as a primary obstacle to return. A 31-year-old man said all refugees would return to Syria if Assad was removed from power.⁹³ A 43-year-old man who had lost his uncle and three cousins in the war linked his ability to return to an internationally sponsored agreement that would end the armed conflict, saying: “It is the interests of powerful states that will determine what will happen in Syria. If these states continue to disagree, we refugees will not be able to return home.”⁹⁴

The man’s house in Bosr al-Harir was partially damaged, while his father’s home was totally destroyed, but for him, “home” is his hometown of Bosr al-Harir. He said: “I will not return to Syria if we are told to go to Idlib. They will cleanse us if we go to Idlib. Either I go where my home is or we will stay here.” Even if a political compromise was reached, however, the man, who has eight children between the ages of 2 and 19, said he would not take his family back to Bosr al-Harir right away: “Me and the other men in the family, we will go first to assess the situation, check the damage to our home. We will fix what needs to be fixed, make sure we get adequate accommodation and that we have access to water and electricity, and then we’ll bring our family back to Syria.”

Other interviewees from Bosr al-Harir expressed fear of returning because of the indiscriminate shelling of their homes and possible arrest and detention of themselves or other family members. One refugee said: “We cannot go back just like that . . . what guarantees do we have that a shell won’t land on my home just like that if my family and I return to Bosr al-Harir? . . . How do we know we won’t be picked up and arrested for nothing?”⁹⁵

93 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

94 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

95 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

Refugees in Jordan from Bosr al-Harir say that 60 to 70 percent of the town’s houses have been destroyed or damaged by government shelling, prompting the majority of people to flee.

Refugee Views on Justice

As with those from other regions, most interviewees from Bosr al-Harir thought that justice was desirable but did not believe they would see it in Syria or that the international community was serious about holding perpetrators of war crimes to account. A tribal leader of the Hariri clan in Jordan linked accountability to better chances of coexistence: “Accountability is necessary to calm down the rage in people’s hearts, and those with blood on their hands should face justice.”⁹⁶ Another refugee, however, spoke for many when he cited the April 14, 2018, airstrikes against targets in Syria by the United States, United Kingdom, and France in response to a suspected chemical attack in Douma as an example of the international community’s reluctance to act decisively to stop the regime from committing war crimes.⁹⁷ He said: “The airstrikes targeted a scientific research facility . . . the attacks were just symbolic, so that they could say, ‘we did something’ . . . they did not genuinely intend to cause real harm to the regime.”⁹⁸ If the international community genuinely wanted to hold Assad accountable, he argued, “they would have done that already. He bombs his people with chemical weapons every couple of years. He has killed tens of thousands of people. We have become refugees by the millions because of him. If they want to hold him accountable, what are they still waiting for?”

Refugee Views on Coexistence

Given the proximity of the town to Swayda and Izraa, refugees from Bosr al-Harir spoke about relations with the Druze from the neighboring governorate, with Alawites and Christians in Izraa, and with other Sunnis. While some referred to the Druze negatively, others explained how their interactions with residents of Swayda as both internally displaced persons and refugees had changed their views about the Druze.

A man, aged 43, did not believe that his community would have a problem with coexistence, because everyone belonged to the al-Hariri clan and the Sunni sect.⁹⁹ “In our hometown,” he explained, “we are all relatives, and returning to normal life will be easier than in the cities and towns where there are [people from] different religions and sects.” Another Sunni man who came to Jordan in 2013 disagreed.¹⁰⁰ “See my own people?” he asked. “I have no trust in them anymore. I do not know what happened. People changed. The [opposition] factions in Hauran [another name or reference to Daraa] fight each other. My cousin was an FSA commander and he was killed by a roadside bomb. Who told the regime that Ahmad was going to use that road on that day? Who planted the bomb only four kilometers away from the regime’s military base?”

On coexistence with the Alawite community after the end of the war in nearby Izraa, a man who lost his uncle and three cousins in the war, said: “We are the majority and we are Sunnis, and if [Assad] as an Alawite remains in power, there will always be some form of sectarian strife.”¹⁰¹ A university student said he had had Alawite friends whom he had met either at school or at a gym in Izraa and that they had protected him at checkpoints when he travelled by bus to and from his university, and that one Alawite friend, whose father was an officer, would speak to the personnel at checkpoints to ensure his safety.¹⁰² Five years after fleeing to Jordan, however, he said he was hesitant to contact them because he feared rejection. “I have no problem talking to them,” he said, “but I don’t know what happened in their lives. Probably they lost a mother or father or brother . . . so they have changed. No close relative was killed from my family.”

96 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

97 BBC, “Syria Air Strikes: US and Allies Attack ‘Chemical Weapons Sites,’” April 14, 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43762251

98 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

99 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

100 Interview conducted in Amman on May 15, 2018.

101 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

102 Interview conducted in Amman on May 15, 2018.

On coexisting with the Druze community from Swayda, near Bosr al-Harir, a refugee said: “We never really dealt with them before the war, except when we had to work on our official paperwork in government offices based there. And it is impossible for any Sunni to marry a Druze. We have our community and they have theirs.”¹⁰³ The leader said he had frequently engaged in discussions with people from Bosr al-Harir and other areas in Daraa who perceived the Druze of Swayda in a negative way, recounting part of a conversation he had had with a man from Daraa, which was similar to conversations he had had with others: “One man told me, ‘The Druze are traitors, because they support the regime.’ I replied, ‘What about the men from Hauran [Daraa] who are still in their posts as senior officers in the Syrian army!’ And then I would usually say that not all Druze are bad and the only way to move forward after the war is for both sides to reach out to each other and create bridges between the Hauran Valley [Daraa] and the Mountain of the Druze [Swayda]. At the end, you cannot eliminate half a million Druze.”

A 25-year-old refugee said that people from his hometown were like many Syrian Sunni: cautious of the Druze primarily because they have a different religion.¹⁰⁴ “If a Druze guest would come to Daraa, people would welcome him and show the hospitality that they’d show to anyone else,” he said. “But they wouldn’t take the relationship with the Druze beyond that.” The activist, who is on a scholarship program for Syrian refugees that covers his university fees in Jordan, talked about how meeting a Druze student changed the stereotype he had had of the Druze. “Previously, I had had very limited encounters with the Druze,” he explained. “But I now have a Druze friend, whom I met a year ago through the scholarship program, and his behavior and attitude gave me a very, very, very good image of the people of Swayda . . . If I return to Syria, I would like to visit Swayda.”

Another refugee who has two children under the age of 5 and lost two uncles and two female cousins in the war said that despite the pro-regime stance that people in Swayda had taken, he considered them good people. His opinion of the Druze was shaped by the displacement experiences of his relatives who stayed at a church in the government-held town of Izraa and in a Druze town in Swayda that made him believe that the people of Daraa could coexist with the Christians and Druze.¹⁰⁵ “The Druze were hospitable to my cousin and his family, who were forced to flee Bosr al-Harir and spent 20 days in Swayda,” he said. “The Druze provided them with all the food they needed for free. My other cousin and his children and grandchildren fled to Swayda and stayed there for three months and spoke highly of the Druze . . . the Druze are dignified and wise men.”

Similarly, a leader praised the people of Swayda for receiving and taking care of tens of thousands of displaced families from Daraa, saying that despite their pro-regime stance, forgiveness and coexistence would prevail after the war for the sake of the Druze who opposed the regime. He said that the “wrongdoings done by some Druze,” which meant supporting the regime, would be forgiven for the sake of Khaldoun Zeineddine, the first Druze officer to defect from the army who was killed in a battle he was leading against regime forces, and Samih Shqeir, a Druze singer from Swayda, “for being the first to sing for the children of Daraa.”¹⁰⁶

A leader praised the people of Swayda for receiving and taking care of tens of thousands of displaced families from Daraa, saying that despite their pro-regime stance, forgiveness and coexistence would prevail after the war for the sake of the Druze who opposed the regime.

103 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

104 Interview conducted in Amman on May 15, 2018.

105 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

106 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

VII. Refugees from Swayda

Syria's southern governorate of Swayda is believed to be home to approximately half a million Druze, making it the largest concentration of Druze in the country (who nationally number approximately 700,000).¹⁰⁷ The Druze are generally perceived by Sunni Muslims as pro-government, which is similar to how other religious minorities are perceived, although not all Druze are pro-government, with some openly supporting the uprising and opposition. There are no reports that pro-government groups in Swayda, such as the pro-government militia Shabiha, helped crush protests in neighboring Daraa in the early stage of the uprising. Nor did pro-government Druze militias in Swayda later participate in battles with the Syrian army or independently against opposition armed groups in territory inside Daraa.

The Druze of Swayda did engage in clashes or battles against any group encroaching on their territory, such as the Battle of Tha'le Military Airport in Swayda in June 2015, during which at least three Druze militias reportedly supported government forces in repelling armed opposition groups.¹⁰⁸ At least one Druze armed group, the Sultan Pasha al-Atrash Battalion, was established with the aim of toppling the regime,¹⁰⁹ while another, Men of Dignity, emerged in 2014 around a Druze sheikh, Waheed Bal'ous, who rose to prominence and became popular, mainly for his fierce opposition to the drafting of thousands of Druze men from Swayda into the military.

A few interviewees from Daraa considered the Druze partly responsible for government atrocities because of their general reluctance to side with the opposition. Other interviewees from Daraa expressed a certain degree of understanding that the Druze did not want to hurt them or be hurt by them, and that the Druze did not bear responsibility for killings committed by the regime in Daraa. Additionally, over the past few years, Swayda has hosted tens of thousands of internally displaced people fleeing the shelling and deteriorating security situation in Daraa. Some interviewees, who had been displaced or whose families had been displaced to Swayda, praised the support they had received from people there.

Druze Concerns over Opposition Goals

The Druze community in Swayda has a history of rising up against authoritarian rulers trying to exert control over its territory, as it did during the Ottoman Empire and the French mandate. Some see the Druze's reluctance to join the 2011 uprising against Assad as inconsistent with their rebellious history, while some interviewees from Swayda expressed serious concern over the intentions of the opposition. The Druze say they are *mowahhideen* ("monotheists/unitarians"), and while their faith is believed to have developed out of the Ismaeli sect of Islam, they do not fast during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and do not pray five times a day. Their sacred book of al-Hikmeh ("wisdom") is secretive and only the pious have access to it.

107 Larry Hanauer, "Israel's Interests and Options in Syria," Rand Corporation, 2016, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE185/RAND_PE185.pdf

108 These armed groups are the National Defence Forces in Swayda, Der' al-Jabal, and Homat al-Diyar, according to the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, which supports the Syrian regime. *Al Akhbar*, "Tha'le Airport Is Steadfast and Swayda Gathers Its Forces," June 12, 2015: <https://al-akhbar.com/Syria/22453>

109 Interview with a member of Kateebat Sultan Pasha al-Atrash in Amman on April 12 and 22, 2018.

Many Muslims regard the Druze as heretics, and the secrecy of their religious beliefs have given rise to demeaning rumors about them, dating back at least a few decades. Just over a month after protests began in Daraa, a video was posted on YouTube sparking anger in Swayda and creating discomfort and fear among Druze women working in Daraa.¹¹⁰ The video, published on April 25, 2011, showed Sheikh Abd al-Salam al-Khalili at a mosque

sermon in Daraa lashing out at Druze women who worked in public schools in Daraa for not adhering to the Islamic dress code and blaming them for what he referred to as widespread prostitution in Daraa.¹¹¹

Many Muslims regard the Druze as heretics, and the secrecy of their religious beliefs have given rise to demeaning rumors about them, dating back at least a few decades.

In 2012, incidents of kidnappings increased, with a well-known dignitary in Swayda, Jamal Ezzeddine, kidnapped in Daraa. A Druze refugee, aged 32, from Swayda said: “Abducting someone as important as Jamal Ezzeddine made us realize the extent of how much the Druze had become targeted.”¹¹² In July 2013, the abduction of a Sultan Pasha al-Atrash Battalion fighter based in

Daraa, along with a Druze civilian, led Druze supporters of the uprising to feel disenchantment and lose trust in an opposition that had become predominantly Islamist. A family member of the abducted Druze fighter, who strongly opposes the regime, expressed his disappointment: “I hated the entire situation and started opposing them [the opposition armed groups]. But I certainly didn’t switch loyalties to Bashar [al-Assad]; never! It turned out that they oppose Bashar because he’s Alawite, not because he’s oppressive.” A close friend of the abducted Druze fighter and a fellow member of the battalion said with his abduction “there was no option except to leave for Jordan . . . we could not go back to Swayda except if we lived in hiding, because we were now considered collaborators with the Islamists.”¹¹³

On August 16, 2014, Sunni fighters reportedly belonging to Bedouins living in the al-Lojat region in Swayda clashed with Druze fighters and raided houses in the Druze village of Deir Dama, killing 12 Druze, including a 12-year-old boy, Nader al-Quntar.¹¹⁴ The boy was referred to as a hero in social media pages in Swayda, reportedly for opening the door to the armed men after he asked his mother and younger siblings to hide.¹¹⁵ On June 10, 2015, at least 20 Druze from the village of Qalb Lawze in the northern governorate of Idlib were killed by Jabhat al-Nusra,¹¹⁶ which issued a statement saying its fighters had acted without the knowledge of its leadership and pledging to try those responsible before a shari’a court set up in areas under its control.¹¹⁷

One Druze from Swayda responded to this claim by saying: “Of course, we don’t believe that,” adding that there were Druze families from the Idlib governorate who moved to Swayda after ISIS enslaved Yezidi women in Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014.¹¹⁸ The refugee, who has four sisters living in Swayda, said there was such a growing feeling

110 This incident was mentioned by several Druze interviewees from Swayda as contributing to discomfort, tensions, and fear toward those staging the uprising in Daraa.

111 While the video was posted on YouTube in April 2011, it is unclear when the actual sermon had happened and if it had happened during or before the uprising. YouTube, April 25, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqjygcBpjQ

112 Interview conducted in Amman on April 27, 2018.

113 Interview conducted in Amman on April 22, 2018.

114 Facebook post, We Shall Not Forget The Battle of Dama, August 27, 2016, <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/shamsham.1988/posts/766686080100882>. al-Lojat is a rocky area located on the foothills of the Druze Mountain, comprising villages inhabited separately by Sunni Bedouins and Druze. Historically, small clashes were common between the Bedouins and Druze there, sometimes for sheep grazing that encroached on land not belonging to the sheep owner.

115 <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Martyrs.alswaida/photos/a.405363682884978.100385.335225306565483/992032790884728/?type=3>

116 Questions and responses from a Turkey-based human rights and media activist who covered Idlib extensively on the Qalb Lawze killings on July 6 and 7, 2018, are on file with the author. See also <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-druze/calls-for-aid-to-syrias-druze-after-al-qaeda-kills-20-idUSKBN0ORoNV20150611>

117 *Aljazeera*, “Nusra: Killing of Druze in Qalb Lawze Is an Unjustified Mistake,” June 13, 2015.

118 Interview conducted in Amman on April 27, 2018.

of danger gripping the Druze of Swayda that he seriously considered returning home to defend his community. The 32-year-old, a sheikh in Swayda, said: “Our men were getting arms and even I thought of returning to protect our people . . . our village, where my family lives, is far from Daraa, and it wasn’t about my family. The fate of our community was at risk. Those with extremist ideologies were not only interested in targeting individuals . . . we felt the Druze were in danger.” On July 25, 2018, ISIS carried out coordinated multiple attacks in the Swayda governorate, including suicide bombings, killing more than 200 people and abducting 30 hostages, mainly women and children.

Refugee Views on Abductions

There have been limited battles and clashes in the Druze Mountain and a few car bombings have killed civilians in the city of Swayda since the country slipped into civil war.¹¹⁹ The main problem in Swayda, however, has been chaos and a worsening security situation, with armed groups and armed gangs involved in drug dealing, smuggling of goods, car and other thefts, and abductions. Hundreds of Druze have been abducted in Swayda, Daraa, or other parts of Syria, because of their sectarian identity, during their military service outside Swayda, or for being perceived as loyal to the regime.

Abductees are held without evidence of having committed any crime, and in many cases the motivation appears to be to secure a ransom for the hostage’s release or to try to force other parties to release individuals they have kidnapped. Interviewees from Swayda said in some instances Druze armed gangs who know which families in Swayda can afford to pay would identify and abduct persons and hand them over to Daraa gangs, who in turn would ask their families for a ransom. There are cases of abductee swaps between the Druze and Sunnis, and at least several videos filming such exchanges have been posted online.¹²⁰ Some social media pages on Swayda specialize in publishing the names of abducted Druze individuals, asking for information about newly kidnapped persons and publishing news on others on their release.

The main problem in Swayda has been chaos and a worsening security situation, with armed groups and armed gangs involved in drug dealing, smuggling of goods, car and other thefts, and abductions.

A woman from the village of Kefer al-Lehf who arrived in Jordan in 2016 spoke about the impact of abductions on social life in Swayda.¹²¹ “In the past, we used to mingle and go out and about,” she said. “But now there is no social life anymore . . . families stay indoors. We only go out on special occasions to perform social duties, such as to pay condolences or to attend weddings.” When her in-laws visited, her mother would ask them to leave before sunset because she was worried they would otherwise be abducted. “Our primary concern in Swayda is kidnappings,” she explained, with car bombings second.

Refugee Views on Return

Most interviewees from Swayda said they did not want to return to Syria after the civil war, because either they feared punitive measures for failing to fulfill their military service or deserting their job in the public sector, because they have no faith that the security situation will improve, or because of the bad economic situation in Swayda. Two Druze interviewees who actively opposed the regime said they could not return because the rest of the Druze community perceived them unfavorably.

119 These include a car bombing killing the head and deputy head of the Air Force Security branch in Swayda along with others in November 2013, and two car bombings that killed Bal’ous, leading figures of his group, and civilians in September 2015.

120 Video of an exchange of abductees between Swayda and Daraa and published by Baladi News Network on August 13, 2015 can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nrijkz7Nfoc>

121 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

A woman who had been a musician in Syria said she thought her absence from her country would not last for more than a few months. She has been in Jordan for six years.¹²² “I left my guitar and my lute at home, and they are both so close to my heart,” she said. “But I never imagined that I would stay here this long.” Now, she says she would not return because her priority is her daughter’s safety. “I don’t have to return to Syria and risk my daughter paying the price until people get convinced that they should love each other again. People are not the same as before, and safety will never be restored 100 percent. It’s a civil war, and the country is full of gangs and it’ll take 15 to 20 years after the war for life to get back to normal.”

A refugee from the village of al-Khazmeh said the presence of armed groups and gangs in Swayda and their easy access to arms was an obstacle for people to return.¹²³ “Not all armed groups [in Swayda] are there to protect the [Druze] community,” he observed. “Some were formed by the security services and others are linked to political agendas.” The man, who has been working in Jordan since 2009, said he would return to Syria after the armed



This family fled from Syria in 2015 and now lives in al-Azraq camp, about 30 miles from the border in the Jordanian desert. Al-Azraq refugee camp, 2017 (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

conflict but not permanently, due to the difficult living conditions and lack of job opportunities. A man from the village of al-Majdal said he did not see himself returning in the foreseeable future.¹²⁴ “Anyone saying the war will end in the next five years is very wrong,” he claimed. “Our country has become the center for terrorism, the terrorism of armed opposition groups and the terrorism of the regime. I refuse to return to Syria.”

An opposition activist said he could not return to Syria after the war, at least in the foreseeable future, because he would feel like a persona non grata in overwhelmingly pro-government Swayda.¹²⁵ “They are not going to kill me,” he said. “But I won’t be able to behave comfortably, like before, to say hello to people as I’m walking in the street, because they now perceive us

[opposition activists] very unfavorably. Probably after 10 years, when people move on with their lives, after the war and things calm down, I can return.” A member of the Sultan Pasha al-Atrash Battalion said: “As long as the regime continues to exist, I will not return, even after 100 years.”¹²⁶

A 37-year-old woman said it would be difficult to return. “My husband is wanted to serve in the army as a reservist. The most important thing to enable us to return is for the war to end; then the economic situation should improve. What’s the point of going back to Syria to find no jobs? How are we going to live?”¹²⁷ An employee at a public hospital, who had left her job to join her husband in Jordan after she was afraid living alone with her children in Swayda, said that any state employee who leaves his or her job will have to face trial.¹²⁸ “There is a

122 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

123 Interview conducted in Amman on April 27, 2018.

124 Interview conducted in Amman on April 19, 2018.

125 Interview conducted in Amman on April 20, 2018.

126 Interview conducted in Amman on April 22, 2018.

127 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

128 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

case against me, so if anything happens to my mother, I can't go to Syria to see her," she explained. "I cannot return until they find a solution for public employees who left their jobs." She added: "No one wishes not to return to their homeland. My brother wants to get married. Can you imagine how difficult it is that I cannot attend his wedding?"

Refugee Views on Justice

Interviewees from Swayda differed in their views on whether justice will take place in Syria after the civil war. Those who believed justice could happen focused on accountability, while, as in Daraa, others were skeptical about the potential for justice, the intentions of the international community, and the feasibility of determining the truth about what happened.

A man from Kefer al-Lehef said: "Every town [in Swayda] has 20 to 25 martyrs, so, yes, we want accountability, whoever is the perpetrator . . . many women were pregnant when their husbands were killed."¹²⁹ A woman whose 48-year-old brother with a respiratory problem passed away in 2013 because of the thick dust caused by a shell that landed next to his home, said: "There must be accountability, so that people who lost their loved ones can feel that at least some of their rights are going to be restored."¹³⁰

A soldier who had defected detailed what he would like to see happen to achieve justice in Syria after the conflict.¹³¹ The United Nations must intervene and help to disarm all armed groups, pro-government and opposition, he said, after which an international tribunal should be established to try figures such as the head of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate,¹³² Jamil al-Hassan; the head of the National Security Bureau, Ali al-Mamlouk; and Assad's brother and commander of the Republican Guards and the elite Fourth Armoured Division, Maher al-Assad. On June 8, 2018, Germany's chief prosecutor issued an international arrest warrant against al-Hassan, charging him with crimes against humanity.¹³³

A refugee whose brother was abducted by an armed gang in Daraa said he knew his brother's kidnapper by name because his family had engaged in negotiations with him before his brother was sold to Jabhat al-Nusra. His brother is believed to have been killed by Jabhat al-Nusra. The refugee said of the kidnapper: "I will not do like [him] and slaughter him to avenge my brother's abduction, because I will become just like him. Therefore, he must face trial. I'd like to see him in jail and getting rehabilitated, so that he doesn't become a criminal worse than he already is."¹³⁴ The refugee said he believed the suffering that the Syrian people endured would make them reject not only Assad but any other dictator wishing to rule Syria. They would not accept replacing someone like former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak with someone like current Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

An interviewee from Qessama said there would never be justice in Syria because the international community had not shown any intention to act, despite "massive destruction that's comparable to the effect of Hiroshima."¹³⁵ If the international community was serious, he asked, "Why didn't they apply international law from the beginning of the crisis? Even the United Nations, all it did was talk in the media more than take any meaningful action . . . and the United States kept saying that chemical weapons were a red line, but their response to Assad's use of chemical weapons was . . . use it less. They don't care about the Syrian people." Even if there was to be justice in the form

129 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

130 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

131 Interview conducted in Amman on April 19, 2018.

132 One of Syria's most feared security services known for its brutal torture of detainees, many of whom have died in its custody.

133 Jorg Diehl, Christoph Reuter, and Fidelius Schmid, "Germany Takes Aim at Assad's Torture Boss," *Der Spiegel*, June 8, 2018, www.spiegel.de/international/world/senior-assad-aid-charged-with-war-crimes-a-1211923.html

134 Interview conducted in Amman on April 20, 2018.

135 Interview conducted in Amman on April 25, 2018.

of truth telling, however, one man from the village of al-Khazmeh doubted its feasibility and legitimacy.¹³⁶ “The conflict has gone on too long now, and that affects establishing the truth about what happened,” he lamented. “Additionally, any truth commissions set up after the war might very much be politicized.”

Refugee Views on Coexistence

Refugees from Swayda talked about several obstacles to coexistence between the people of Swayda and Daraa, including lack of trust between the two communities, fear that displaced populations and armed groups would spread violence, intolerance toward Druze religious beliefs, and blame for Swayda people’s perceived support of the government. As with refugees from other regions, however, there were some who felt that coexistence was possible.

A woman from Swayda expressed total distrust of the people of Daraa. She said that even before the uprising, there was no trust between people from Swayda and Daraa.¹³⁷ “We were preserving our community and living by ourselves. I was a midwife, studied in Swayda, and worked at a hospital in Swayda,” she recalled. “And I was not asked by families in Daraa to go and deliver babies at their homes. There was no mingling between us . . . So now, after all that’s happened, no, there won’t be coexistence.” Another woman talked about the fears she had had while living in Kefer al-Lehef, two years before.¹³⁸ She said people had been scared that people from Daraa would bring terrorism to Swayda, which had already taken in and welcomed many displaced people from Daraa. “Daraa was very close to our village, and it’s full of armed groups of different kinds and colors. So, of course, we were scared,” she said. “We were scared that the armed groups would get into our town . . . we became so scared that we no longer dared to go out at night, because there were many abductions and car thefts. If I were in Swayda now and someone from Daraa approached me to ask me about anything, I’d be scared, because there is no trust anymore.”

“If I were in Swayda now and someone from Daraa approached me to ask me about anything, I’d be scared, because there is no trust anymore.”

A volunteer from Swayda that works with refugees at an international organization in Jordan said she felt shunned by the refugees from Daraa and, therefore, had a negative view of coexistence in the future.¹³⁹ “[The people of Daraa] don’t like us,” she said. “We are very different from them, so they just cannot accept us. But they are my colleagues at work, and I have to spend a lot of time with them. What can I do?” Several interviewees from Swayda said refugees from Daraa perceived them as pro-government. One woman from the village of Kefer al-Lehef said that a woman from Daraa told her: “By God, they once shelled us from your areas, people of Swayda.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly, a man from Swayda said: “When I meet people from Daraa and they know I’m from Swayda, they tell me, ‘they shelled us from Swayda.’ What sin did I commit? It’s the army that shelled them, not me.”¹⁴¹

A university student said a lot of the Syrian students kept a distance from him because of his Druze identity. He said that students from eastern rural Daraa had interacted with Druze before, because they had lived very close to Swayda geographically.¹⁴² “But students from other areas, like Daraa’s western rural areas and other regions in Syria,” he related, “look at me with a lot of doubt. Some perceive me as a heretic and a Shabih.¹⁴³ They harass my friend from Homs, asking her why she hangs out with me, a Druze.”

136 Interview conducted in Amman on April 27, 2018.

137 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

138 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

139 Interview conducted with a woman INGO volunteer in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

140 Interview conducted with woman from Kefer al-Lehef in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

141 Interview conducted with man from Swayda in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

142 Interview conducted with the university student on April 20, 2018.

143 A member of the pro-government Shabiha militia.

Another refugee, a volunteer, linked Daraa refugees' blaming and shaming of the people of Swayda for their perceived pro-government stance as an obstacle to coexistence.¹⁴⁴ "People from Daraa hate us," she said. "They tell me, 'You support the regime . . . if you had joined us in fighting the regime, the revolution would have succeeded. Why would they want to coexist with us if they see us this way?'" Another woman agreed that the people of Daraa blame the people of Swayda for the failure of the revolution.¹⁴⁵ "This might affect the relationship between people of Daraa and Swayda," she suggested. "A huge divide (*sharkh*) has been created between us and them. But no one knows what will happen in the future that might change things."

A member of the Sultan Pasha al-Atrash Battalion said he believed people from Swayda and Daraa would restore good relations with time, particularly as neither side has engaged in any large-scale killings of or battles against the other.¹⁴⁶ "The first thing is that both sides should refrain from using the sectarian language that has been there all along historically but was fueled during the war," he argued. "In Swayda and Daraa, one group cannot eliminate the other. History and geography are stronger than any current situation. They may hate each other now, but the people of Swayda want to eat, so they'll have to go to the people of Hauran [another name for Daraa] to buy food." The 31-year-old man said that the presence of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons from Daraa in Swayda signified that the two communities could actually live together. Another man from the village of Qessama agreed.¹⁴⁷ "The Syrian people are nice, and we can coexist with each other in no time," he claimed. "People are fed up with the war, and they just want peace . . . even those who lost a family member. Everyone lost in this war. So at the end, people will choose coexistence."

144 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

145 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

146 Interview conducted in Amman on April 22, 2018.

147 Interview conducted in Amman on April 25, 2018.

VIII. Refugees from Homs

The war in Syria turned Homs from a haven of diversity for religious and ethnic groups into a battleground for egregious acts of violence among neighbors, making it one of the most challenging areas for refugees to feel safe to return to and for coexistence to prevail. Political divisions took a sharp sectarian turn shortly after the uprising began, with pro-government and opposition armed groups formed by both sides. The predominantly Alawite Muslim al-Zohra neighborhood turned into a stronghold for the Shabiha, while predominantly Sunni areas, such as Baba Amr, Bab al-Sbaa', al-Khaldiyeh, and Hayy Asheereh, established themselves as fierce opponents of the regime, with armed men organizing themselves into the FSA.

With significant parts of the city under the control of the opposition, Homs turned into a key battleground against the Syrian government; it was dubbed by Syrians opposed to Assad as the “capital of the revolution.” Sectarian tensions evolved into enmity in Syria’s third largest city, particularly between Alawite and Shi’a Muslims on one side and Sunni Muslims on the other, leading to horrific abductions and counter-abductions and summary killings and counter-killings in the once peacefully coexisting neighborhoods.

On February 4, 2012, the Syrian military launched an operation aimed at crushing the opposition in Homs, during which the Baba Amr neighborhood was subjected to a month of intensive bombardment, resulting in the withdrawal of the FSA on March 1, 2012.¹⁴⁸ When the Syrian forces and the Shabiha entered the neighborhood, they subjected many male adults to summary killings. Incidents of summary killings also took place elsewhere in Homs city and areas in its governorate during raids by government and/or pro-government forces or after areas were recaptured from retreating armed opposition groups.

A well-known mass killing of at least 47 people, mainly women and children, took place in the `Adwiyya, Karm el-Zaitoun, and Refa`i neighborhoods of Homs, on March 11 and 12, 2012.¹⁴⁹

This resulted in an out-flux from Homs areas recaptured by government forces in 2012 and 2013 of Sunni residents who feared being subjected to summary killings, abductions, detentions, enforced disappearances, and other retaliatory acts. The exodus of residents from Homs—the city and towns of the governorate—was the beginning of another phase of suffering in terms of displacement, continued risk to life, and uncertainty.

Sectarian tensions evolved into enmity in Syria’s third largest city, particularly between Alawite and Shi’a Muslims on one side and Sunni Muslims on the other, leading to horrific abductions and counter-abductions and summary killings and counter-killings among the once peacefully coexisting neighborhoods.

¹⁴⁸ “Battle for Baba Amr – Dateline,” *The Guardian*, March 1, 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/01/battle-baba-amr-timeline-syria
¹⁴⁹ “In Cold Blood: Summary Executions by Syrian Security Forces and Pro-Government Militias,” Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2012, www.hrw.org/report/2012/04/09/cold-blood/summary-executions-syrian-security-forces-and-pro-government-militias

One man's displacement experience reflects the difficulties that refugees have endured.¹⁵⁰ Aged 49, he had owned three shops in al-Bayada's once-buzzing main road, as he and his brothers built on the reputation that his father had established over 30 years of business. His relationships with residents of al-Bayada from different sects had been excellent, as he described them, with his shop surrounded by approximately five Shi'a-owned shops and customers from all sects. He described how the uprising had changed his hometown and devastated his life. His family had owned a four-story building, three shops, and a car. They lost everything. After the uprising began, as in other areas of Homs, protests were held every Friday. Tensions were simmering, particularly after the situation developed into daily armed clashes between opposition activists and government forces on the main road where his three shops were located. He described his ordeal as follows:

We spent nearly a year without work, staying mostly indoors at home. My family and I did not take part in the uprising or the protests . . . in February 2012, the army and Shabiha were gathering their vehicles to take control of the town [al-Bayada], as Baba Amr was under attack. I had to flee with my family, and so we could not bring any of our valuables with us. We had to leave only with things to cover our basic needs. We hardly had any cash, because we had put all our money in goods in our shops . . . We left, and we lost everything we had. We went to Qara,¹⁵¹ in Rural Damascus, because my sister had gone there two weeks before us. My family and I stayed in a room on a hill used for sheep. There was no place to shower, so we would go to where my sister was staying and have our showers there . . . I could not bear staying there for more than two months. So some friends helped me pay for a hotel room in al-Hojeira, in the Sayeda Zeinab area [a Shi'a Muslim area in Damascus]. I started selling accessories to marble warehouses, and things went very well for four months. Suddenly, we started seeing [Shi'a] men wearing headbands with slogans written on them "Oh Ali" and "Oh Zeinab," and *husseinyas* [a congregation hall for Shi'a commemoration and mourning ceremonies] started popping up. There was shelling of the al-Hojeira area, so we had to go back to a farm in Qara; but the farm was hit by [government] mortar shells, so we went to al-Nabek [a city north of Damascus] and stayed in a rest house during Ramadan and then moved to around seven different houses in the city over a period of a year and the half. I was selling apples during that period. Suddenly, in late 2013, the security situation deteriorated in al-Nabek to the extent that we had to shelter in a basement for 18 days. It was so scary, terrifying. When things calmed down and we got out of the basement, my Peugeot car was destroyed in the shelling, but the van was fine. The army had entered and taken control of the town. We returned to the house and found that most of the furniture had been looted. At around 10:30 at night, there was a knock at the door. I opened it and there were armed men. They asked where I was from; I told them I was from Homs. One said, 'you have 24 hours to leave the area. I don't want to see you here.' So I had to ask Alawites to accompany us while leaving the area so they would protect us. They asked for 10,000 Syrian pounds for that, and they bought my van for 200,000 Syrian pounds, although it was worth much more than that. I used the money to get passports for my family and we came to Jordan in February 2014.

Similar to this man, many initially fled their homes out of fear of summary killings and other abuses, and at a later stage, Sunni residents of Homs were subjected to forced displacements resulting from local agreements in Old Homs in 2014, al-Waer neighborhood in 2017, and northern rural Homs governorate in 2018. Leaving out of fear of abuses and forced displacements resulting from local agreements has left the Sunni community in Homs feeling that significant demographic changes have taken place. The concerns, priorities, and expectations of refugees from Homs on return, justice, and coexistence have also been clearly shaped by the fear of being subjected to horrific abuses and heightened enmity and lack of trust among communities in Homs.

150 Interview conducted in Amman on April 16, 2018.

151 Qara is in al-Nabek District of the Rif Dimashq (Rural Damascus) Governorate, between the Qalamoun Mountains and Eastern Lebanon.

Refugee Views on Return

The concerns that refugees from Homs had about return included distrust of the government institutions responsible for their displacement, insecurity related to sectarian divisions, and physical destruction caused by the war, leading some to voice a desire to resettle elsewhere. A 30-year-old media activist, who covered the mass killing of civilians including women and children in Karm al-Zeitoun, said:¹⁵² “The regime might give guarantees for our safety if we return, as a show for the sake of public opinion, but then it would send someone to kill me.” The man said he might return if a post-war president and government are free from people with blood on their hands. They might accept Farouq al-Sharaa, the former vice-president and Sunni politician from Daraa, the man said, because he was not involved in killings. “This way, we might return, but the murderers should be held accountable,” he said. “Bashar [al-Assad] used chemical weapons and internationally prohibited weapons . . . Just like Saddam Hussein was removed from power, Bashar can be removed too. How am I going to feel safe for my children to return [to Syria] under a bloodthirsty president? Is it reasonable that Bashar does not give up the presidency while we, the people, are expected to give up our rights?”

A 49-year-old man, also from al-Bayada, said there was too little safety to return to Syria, even if guarantees were given for refugees.¹⁵³ “The regime has to be uprooted from top to bottom,” he declared. “How can I go back when the conflict has turned sectarian? If I stop at a checkpoint, they’ll take me away only because I’m Sunni. I don’t see myself returning to Syria.” Pointing to his six-year-old son, he said “I think [his] children will return to Syria, or [his] grandchildren.” In addition to the fear of retaliation, the man said other problems that have resulted from the war hinder return. “All the buildings are razed to the ground. How are they going to be rebuilt?” he asked. “The talk about reconstruction is just talk to hush people up. It’s very difficult to return.”

“I want to know if my brother is dead or alive. If he’s alive, then he should be released. If he’s dead, then my parents and his wife should be given compensation. He’s been subjected to enforced disappearance for over four years and he was a civilian.”

Interviewees also showed little trust in the international community’s ability to do much for refugees. One said the international community should take steps to facilitate the resettlement of Syrians in Jordan and European countries.¹⁵⁴ “All the people I know who are now refugees in Europe say they are comfortable,” he said. “I have a friend who is already in France. He has a kidney illness and he’s receiving medical treatment for free . . . I have elderly parents and my father needs medical attention. He had a stroke. There’s a lot of financial pressure on refugees because the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] stopped certain services, including medical care. That’s why we want resettlement.” (UNHCR services had decreased at the time due at least in part to reduced funding.)

Refugee Views on Justice

Like most refugees from other areas, interviewees from Homs strongly doubted that justice would prevail in Syria and were skeptical of the international community’s commitment to it, while those who expressed specific justice-related priorities spoke of compensation and truth about the disappeared. One man from al-Bayada said:¹⁵⁵ “What justice? There will be no justice in Syria, because justice requires honesty, and this generation does not have the culture of honesty. Europe worked for decades after its wars to reach this level, where their citizens’ rights are secured.” On accountability for war crimes committed, he said that if the international community

¹⁵² Interview conducted in Amman on May 4, 2018.

¹⁵³ Interview conducted in Amman on April 16, 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Interview conducted in Amman on April 16, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

genuinely wanted justice in Syria, it would not have allowed the scale of the crimes to reach this level. “So why would they now want justice, when for seven years they watched and did nothing?” he asked.

Another man was among the very few interviewees who demanded compensation for the losses and trauma inflicted on the people of Syria.¹⁵⁶ “I demand compensation, not only from Bashar al-Assad’s regime,” he stated, “but also from all the states that invaded our country: Russia, Iran, Iraq . . . as well as the armed groups, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, ISIS, and Jabhat al-Nusra.” He said he rejected the idea that trials should happen under the sponsorship of the Arab League or any Arab state, “because the Arab League did not give me, as a Syrian, anything.” Instead, he demanded an international, UN-mandated trial for perpetrators, “whether they are from the regime or the opposition and regardless if they are Sunni, Alawite, Shi’a, Christian, or Yezidi.”

On his brother’s enforced disappearance, the man’s perspective of justice changed during the interview within minutes. “I want to know if my brother is dead or alive,” he said. “If he’s alive, then he should be released. If he’s dead, then my parents and his wife should be given compensation. He’s been subjected to enforced disappearance for over four years and he was a civilian. He was a trader.” According to this man, his brother was handed over by an Alawite man whom he had known since 2005 and had done business with his family. The man, he said, handed him over to a reconciliation committee that was established before Ramadan 2013, which, in turn, handed him over to an unidentified government body. He has not been heard from since.



A mural in al-Za’atari camp near Mafraq, Jordan, depicts the clock tower square in Homs, Syria. It is painted without any people, apparently to signify the mass exodus from the once bustling city since the conflict broke out. Al-Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan, 2018 (Cilina Nasser)

At first, the refugee said he had forgiven the Alawite man. But just a few minutes later, he said: “If I saw [Alawite man’s name], I would kill him in revenge for what he did to my brother, and this is me, who is educated . . . so you can imagine what an ordinary person would do. It just doesn’t work that you forgive the person who caused the killing or disappearance of your own brother . . . I might not kill him with my own hands, probably others would. Or I might let the rule of law take its course.” Two minutes later, however, he said: “I wouldn’t dare to kill him. I can’t kill an animal and so I won’t be able to kill a human being. It’s very difficult: Other than the religious reasons that prevent me from doing so, I can’t, because it’s not humanitarian.”

Refugee Views on Coexistence

Refugees from Homs expressed a range of views about the potential for coexistence, often clearly based on their experiences with members of other groups. Some were willing to coexist, given their positive interactions with other groups, while others revealed a fear of violence and uncertainty about other groups’ intentions. Some said they could live with other groups but not purchase anything from them, as elsewhere, demonstrating the different levels at which coexistence could exist. Others were completely unwilling to coexist, even suggesting other groups should leave the country entirely.

¹⁵⁶ Interview conducted in Amman on May 4, 2018.

One woman, aged 31, from Deir Ba'albeh, watched as her husband, along with his coworkers, was abducted before her eyes in September 2012, by a group that she believed were Alawite Shabiha.¹⁵⁷ Still, she said she was willing to coexist with people from other communities because of good personal experiences that she had had with some. "We dealt all our lives with people from other communities," she explained. When the security situation worsened, her husband gave her contact numbers for three friends to ask for help if anything happened to him: an Alawite; a Shi'a; and a Sunni. "When my husband was taken away," she said, "[name of Shi'a friend] asked about him in all the security branches but couldn't find him." Two years later, she overheard her father tell her husband's brother that he had not told her yet that her husband had been killed and burned on the day he was abducted. "After the abduction of my husband, I went to a Christian area in Homs called Maskaneh for three days, and, when my son got sick, it was [name of Shi'a friend] who took us to the doctor. I was scared to go to the area where my parents were, because I would have to go through government checkpoints, so my husband's Alawite friend would drive me in his car."

A widow, aged 41, whose husband was subjected to a summary killing in al-Haswiyeh, in Homs, said that she would not blame the Alawite community for the abuses committed by the regime and its proxy militias, adding that an Alawite woman had helped her stepson escape during a raid in the village, during which young men were arbitrarily arrested.¹⁵⁸ "The security forces were conducting house-to-house searches and taking young men away," she recalled. "My stepson ran away and started climbing one house and jumping to another, to avoid being seen on the street by security forces . . . when an Alawite woman, who used to be my neighbor, saw him, she quickly put up a ladder so that he could easily climb up her home and run away. He was able to escape." On another occasion, after her husband was killed and she was displaced, her brother sent an Alawite friend to drive her past checkpoints manned by security forces and drop her at her mother's house. "I personally did not see any personal ill-intentions toward me [by Alawites], and I can live with them again."

Another widow whose husband was killed while fighting with armed opposition groups expressed a willingness to live again with Alawites, but backed down when asked to give details of what coexistence entails.¹⁵⁹ The 29-year-old from the rural area of Qseir was in her fourth year at the Ba'ath University in Homs

when the uprising began. She stopped going to university due to the worsening security situation. "We were all from different sects studying together," she reflected. "I don't hate them. Civilians are not guilty . . . just as we lost loved ones, they did too . . . but I don't dare to start contacting my Alawite friends because they now hate [Sunnis]. I don't know what their reaction would be if I did." Asked if she would send her children to a mixed school with Alawites if she returns to Syria, she said: "I won't . . . I would worry about my children . . . [Alawites] now hate us a lot. If I knew that their intentions were like mine, then I would. But how could I know?"

A 30-year-old media activist from al-Bayada said relations with Alawites from nearby areas in Homs changed after the early stage of the uprising, because the government used Alawite men from the predominantly Alawite neighborhoods to disperse Sunni protesters by hitting them with batons.¹⁶⁰ By August 2011, hostilities between Sunnis on one side and Alawites and Shi'a on the other had heightened, and the activist gave an example of the level of hatred reached between the two communities from an experience he had had with an Alawite childhood friend:

"I would not buy from an Alawite selling poultry, but I wouldn't mind if they bought from me. It's difficult for people who have been killing you for seven years and then you coexist with them as simply as that."

157 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

158 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

159 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

160 Interview conducted in Amman on May 4, 2018.

In August or September 2011, an Alawite friend invited me to his home in the Alawite neighborhood in al-Bayada . . . He told me, “we’re with you and we’ve been together for a long time.” I sensed there was something wrong because his invitation came at a time when the situation was particularly tense. I told a Sunni guy about it and he strongly advised me not to go. So I told my Alawite friend that I was busy and wouldn’t be able to make it. He texted me saying, “By God, we’re going to kill you. You want freedom, eh? You were able to get away this time, but we’re going to get you.” So he basically confirmed to me that he had wanted to abduct me. He was a childhood friend, so I was really shocked and frustrated. He was killed later because he was a fighter with one of the pro-regime militias . . . I didn’t contact his family to give my condolences. I didn’t feel that I wanted to.

The man said he was willing to live with Alawites again, however. “Just like people have coexisted in Lebanon after the civil war there, the Syrians can as well, but, of course, without having to deal with anyone whose hands have been stained with blood.” Asked if he would trade in his family’s poultry business with Alawites, he said: “I would not buy from an Alawite selling poultry, but I wouldn’t mind if they bought from me. It’s difficult for people who have been killing you for seven years and then you coexist with them as simply as that. I hate [Alawites], but for my country’s sake, I might accept living with them . . . probably after years, we could change our views. It’s going to be difficult in the first few years, but at the end, we will coexist with them. I am for integrating Alawites within the Syrian society, and not confining them to the coastal areas.” He said he also hated the Shi’a but would not be able to accept them the way he would Alawites. “The Shi’a . . . had a big role in the war in Syria,” he said. “The Shi’a have become ‘forsaken’ in Syria, and I believe they should just leave the country. I don’t care where to . . . let them go to Lebanon or Iraq, because there are Shi’a in these two countries.”

A 44-year-old widow, whose husband was forcibly disappeared in October 2012 and who found out he had died more than two years later, said she was no longer willing to live with Alawites again.¹⁶¹ “My husband was a state employee . . . he was not a fighter and he was even confused: One day he’d say the opposition was right, and another day he’d tell me the regime was right.” One day, her husband went to work and disappeared after leaving the office. She thought that the opposition might have abducted him because he was a state employee or that the regime might have taken him arbitrarily. “Two months later, the driver of the bus that my husband used to get to and from work every day came to me and told me that when the bus had stopped at a checkpoint manned by the regime’s security, my husband was arrested after they checked his ID. My husband’s place of birth is Baba Amr, and it was enough for him to be from that area to be arrested. In that moment, I knew that my husband would not survive: He had cardiac problems, a slip disc, and an ear infection . . . Two years later, I saw an image of his corpse among the “Caesar” photos.¹⁶² Even if the war ends, I no longer feel safe living in a neighborhood close to Alawites, because those who did what they have done are capable of repeating their actions again. Before the uprising, life was very normal. But after the uprising, they showed us their true faces.”

A 49-year-old man from al-Bayada responded to a question about coexistence by saying:¹⁶³ “No! God forbid! With Alawites and Shi’a, no way! With Christians, yes. Christians are people of the book, while Alawites and Shi’a have nothing to do with religion, not even 1 percent. With the scale of crimes committed in Syria and the slaughtering of people, you think we will go back to living together just like that? My cousin was killed by a sniper; my uncle laid on the ground for five days without anyone being able to remove his body because of nonstop shooting.”

¹⁶¹ Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

¹⁶² An official forensic photographer for the Military Police, code-named Caesar, defected in 2013 and smuggled out of Syria photos of corpses of over 6,000 torture victims, including 352 who were held at an Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus between May 2011 and August 2013, according to Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch, *If the Dead Could Speak: Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria’s Detention Facilities*, December 16, 2015, www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities

¹⁶³ Interview conducted in Amman on April 16, 2018.

IX. Children and Youth Refugees from Homs

Thousands of children and youth have died in the Syrian conflict in brutal attacks, such as barrel bombs, chemical weapons, and mass killings, or have been detained and subjected to torture or other ill treatment and enforced disappearance. Many more have been maimed, injured, lost loved ones, traumatized, participated in violence, and forced to flee their homes. The young people of Syria have witnessed horrific abuses, and the perspective of those who grew up to become adults in neighboring countries provides an important view of their experiences. What they think about return, justice, and coexistence, particularly in a place such as Homs, where return would entail living side by side with “hostile” communities, will matter greatly in the aftermath of the war.

Children’s Accounts of Protests and Violence

Ahmad,¹⁶⁴ who was only 16 when he started filming protests and other uprising-related incidents in 2011, witnessed a crime in Homs that changed him forever.¹⁶⁵ He recounted what happened that day:

At 7 a.m., the doorbell rang. It was someone I knew. He told me, ‘Get your camera and come with me.’ He took me to a house, led me to a dark room, then switched the lights on. There was a dead man laying on the floor with his arms cut off from the shoulder and placed next to him on both sides of his body. There was a gunshot wound to his chest. It looked like he was in his 40s and his face was a bit swollen. His body was found dumped in a waste container near his neighborhood . . . This was the first scene I witnessed that took my childhood away and turned me into having a “dead heart.”

A few weeks later, Ahmad found himself in circumstances in which he had to make a decision about the killing of an Alawite man. The polite, soft-spoken, and shy young man who is now 23 told the story of what happened:

I went to film cars damaged in a raid a day earlier, following a street fight between Sunnis and Alawites on the main road. As I was rolling my camera, a man walked toward me holding up his phone and filming me, saying: “So it is you who is filming.” I was concerned for my safety [that the footage would be turned over to the security or Shabiha, which would detain or abduct him] and reported the man to the *thuwwar* (“revolutionaries”) and directed them to the door of his house, because I didn’t know him. The *thuwwar* were able to identify him and they told me he was an Alawite. They said to me, “this person is going to destroy you and your family. Will you accept that shedding his blood will be your responsibility?” I replied, “no.” I then went to a man I trusted very much, told him what had happened, and consulted him about what to do. He said to me, “do not hesitate . . . he is an individual and will lose his life, but for you and your family, [if he is not killed and he harms you], then you and your family will wish to die.” At this moment, the scene of the dead man whose arms were cut off came to my mind. I went back to the *thuwwar* and asked them to kill him . . . I did not feel guilty at all. I made this decision because it was self-defense. He was filming me and therefore he had bad intentions. By the following morning, his body was dumped in a waste

¹⁶⁴ Not his real name.

¹⁶⁵ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

container . . . but I did not go to see him. Probably if I did, I might have felt guilty . . . If I went back in time and faced the same situation, I would make the same decision.

Rabih,¹⁶⁶ who was 14 when the uprising began, said he witnessed four summary killings carried out by his cousins, members of the FSA.¹⁶⁷ According to Rabih, the FSA in his neighborhood used to abduct men who were not from the city and who had lost their way. He said that the FSA changed the road signs deliberately so that Alawites and Shi'a heading to Hayy al-Zohra would fall into FSA hands. He recounted incidents of summary killings and abuses he witnessed:

My relatives were members of the FSA. They once brought a large man wearing black trousers to our street . . . he looked like a Shabih. He was led by around four or five men from our neighborhood carrying rifles. They laid him on the sidewalk with his neck placed on the edge of the sidewalk and his head on the asphalt. He was submissive, of course, with four or five armed men surrounding him. One got a shovel and he struck it against the man's neck . . . he kept striking his neck until his head was totally cut off. I felt disgust as I watched his head being chopped off . . . but at the same time, he deserved that. If he didn't, [the FSA fighters] wouldn't have done what they did to him . . . Then they carried his body to the street's sewage hole, opened the manhole cover, and dumped his body there.

Asked why he was confident that the man was guilty, Rabih said: "Because it was my relatives who carried out the killing, and the guy is either an Alawite or a Shi'a." Asked what if the man was just a civilian, Rabih said, "he was 100 percent guilty, otherwise he wouldn't have been killed."

Another summary killing that Rabih witnessed was carried out by his cousin, who he described as fearless and scary, at a poultry farm that the FSA had turned into a detention center:

I went there once, just to see it . . . it was emptied of all chickens and other animals, and it was being used solely as a detention center for Alawites and officers. I saw four men who were *mashboheen* upside down [a method of torture used widely at government detention facilities whereby the detainee is forced into a stress position for long periods and beaten, usually by being tied by the wrists to a bar high enough off the ground to force the detainee to stand on his tiptoes]. There was also a large blindfolded man sitting in a corner, with a broken drawer hanging around his neck. Apparently, the drawer was struck against his head in a way that broke the thin piece of wood on the bottom of the drawer that is probably only 2 millimeters thick, which was why the drawer ended up hanging around his neck. I asked my cousin, "what's this guy's story?" He told me, "we're trying to get information from him, but he's not saying anything." I spent around half an hour at the poultry farm and returned home. After two or three days, I went to attend his killing . . . I knew that they wanted to kill him because my cousin used to talk about things. The man was a Shi'a, and they were not benefiting from him because he just did not give them any information, he wouldn't talk. The drawer was still stuck around his neck, his hands were tied behind his back, and he was blindfolded . . . they made him sit cross-legged at the edge of a big sewage hole after opening the man-hole cover . . . they told him, "recite the al-Fatiha [a short chapter in the Qur'an that Muslims recite for their dead] because you're a Muslim." The man did not say a word. They shot him twice in the back and then once in the back of the head, and they pushed his body in the hole. He fell into the sewage.

Another killing that Rabih witnessed was of two army officers:

I was sitting with my brother and two friends on our street when a military vehicle passing on the main road, just outside our neighborhood, opened fire on us. We were terrified, but no one was hurt. My cousin immediately returned fire, until the vehicle stopped and couldn't move. He and other fighters ran to the vehicle, and I saw them take the officer sitting next to the driver out of the car,

¹⁶⁶ Not his real name.

¹⁶⁷ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

throw him on the ground, and my cousin finished his automatic rifle's bullets on him. From where I was standing, I couldn't see how they killed the other man, who was driving. But we were told both men were army officers. I got scared watching this, but at the same time, I was glad because the officer tried to target us.

Rabih became a child soldier assisting fighters. For example, in March 2012, when government forces were recapturing his neighborhood, he would reload fighters' Kalashnikovs, while his older brother, aged 17 at the time, would prepare rocket-propelled grenades. "My mother would force us to stay with her in the shelter," he said, "but we would leave and go back to the street to help the fighters." He arrived in Jordan in July 2012.

Waleed¹⁶⁸ was 14 or 15 years old when he saw two men subjected to summary killing on March 9, 2012, the day when Hayy Asheereh, the area where he lived, fell to government forces.¹⁶⁹ He recounted that his family's home was in a five-story building, and he used to go to the rooftop to watch the streets in and around the neighborhood. One Friday, early in the morning, he woke up and went to the roof, where he saw that the army had entered a street behind the neighborhood. "I saw a man dressed in a military uniform push two men against the wall, with their faces to the wall, and then he shot them, just like that."

Children's Views on Return and Resettlement

Only one of the four interviewees who had been minors while in Homs said he was willing to return to Syria, the former child soldier. His desire to return arose from bad experiences his family had had while displaced, particularly with Jordanian landlords. But he said he would need international guarantees of safe return.

Another young man was the only one who said he wished to stay in Jordan; he did not want to return to Syria or immigrate to a third country because he thought that those going abroad would eventually forget Syria.¹⁷⁰ Another was also concerned about safety, saying he did not believe he would see appropriate conditions for return for at least another ten years.¹⁷¹ "I wasn't involved at all in the war, but others who were also not involved lost their lives," he said. "Even if the war ends, who can guarantee that I will not be harmed when I am back in Syria?

It's about living in dignity, not just in a geographical area called home." Another young interviewee said he would not want to return and explained why: "Our homeland is our memories . . . but it is no longer what we hoped it would become."¹⁷²

"Maybe what is happening in Syria will end one day, because all sides [to the conflict] are exhausted. But the war would resume decades later because the real perpetrators who caused the war would still be there."

Two interviewees expressed a wish to resettle in a third country, because they were not confident that they would be safe if they returned to Syria and they did not want to stay in Jordan, where they felt discriminated against.¹⁷³ "The other day, I was walking around in the street with my friend drinking coffee at around 1:30 a.m. and we got arrested by the Jordanian security," one

explained.¹⁷⁴ "We were questioned and told, 'you're planning a bombing.' Anyway, they held us until the following afternoon and we were released. That's why I want to live abroad . . . any country away from this region, so that I can continue my studies without anyone interfering in my religious and political views or my lifestyle."

168 Not his real name.

169 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

170 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

171 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

172 Interview conducted in Amman on April 23, 2018.

173 Interviews conducted in Amman and Mafraq on April 23 and May 13, 2018.

174 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

Children's Views on Justice

The young refugees from Homs called for justice for certain crimes, in one case describing it as revenge, but did not necessarily think justice was likely to happen, which could lead to the recurrence of violence. One proposed bringing to justice those involved in the killings of protesters before the situation developed into an armed conflict as well as those who used internationally banned weapons, such as chemical weapons or cluster bombs in residential areas or weapons that are indiscriminate in nature.¹⁷⁵ “Such accountability would remove the idea of *tha'ar* (“vengeful killings”) from people’s minds,” he contended. According to him, however, it would be impossible to bring to justice all those who had taken up arms and committed abuses.

Another young refugee whose brother had been killed during the war had to pause to keep himself from crying as he said: “When the victim is empowered, he shall oppress those who oppressed him. It’s revenge. The oppressor must experience the same suffering felt by his victims.”¹⁷⁶ He said he was for the death penalty, at least for a period of time, to control the situation and deter people: “What can extinguish the fire in the hearts of people who lost family members?” he asked.

Another interviewee who lost three uncles in a government shelling and an uncle and his two sons who had been taken away from their homes in Karm al-Zeitoun on March 11, 2012, whose fate remains unknown, said he did not believe that justice was going to take place in Syria.¹⁷⁷ He believed that because the government was never held accountable for previous killings and because the outcome of the war in Syria would favor the government forces. “If there was ever going to be justice,” he said, “it would have happened after the Hama massacres [in 1982]. Those responsible would have been held accountable.” He



A child shows his drawing of what Syria means to him. He and his family live a refugee camp in Madaba. He is enrolled in an informal schooling program established by a Syrian refugee. Madaba, Jordan, 2018 (Zeina Jallad Charpentier)

then went on to warn of the risk of violence recurring if people were not held accountable. “Maybe what is happening in Syria will end one day, because all sides [to the conflict] are exhausted. But the war would resume decades later because the real perpetrators who caused the war would still be there: It is clear that the regime is winning this war.”

Children's Views on Coexistence

The relationships between the interviewees, who had been minors when they were displaced with their families from their homes, and their Alawite friends became strained shortly after the uprising began. Their stories revealed the sectarian divisions resulting from the war, the end of inter-sectarian personal relationships, and even sectarian hatred in some cases. They spoke of both a weary willingness to coexist and an outright refusal to do so, at least in the short term; although they also linked the potential to live together again with accountability measures and reforms.

¹⁷⁵ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

Two months after protests began in Homs, Ahmad said that when he saw an Alawite friend from school in the street in Bab Tadmor, he approached him to say hello and stretched out his hand, but his friend did not reciprocate.¹⁷⁸ “It was a shock to me,” he said. “It was as if they always did not like us but only showed us that they didn’t like us after the protests began . . . After that, we had this geographical separation and I couldn’t see my other Alawite friends.”

Waleed, who said he and his family members kept their political views to themselves and never took part in protests, had been in a mixed school that included Sunni, Christian, and Alawite students.¹⁷⁹ Before the uprising, he said they had not thought about differences between sects, and everyone used to talk and play together. But then divisions had become visible at his school. “After the uprising,” he explained, “I remember seeing in the playground Christian students of my class standing alone; Alawites alone; and we, the Sunnis, alone talking about developments [in Syria]. We continued to say hello to each other and talk, but it was as if we all became cautious of each other and felt more comfortable distancing ourselves from those from other sects.”

Rabih, a member of a well-known tribe in Homs, said he physically assaulted his Alawite friend after an argument about the uprising in Homs.¹⁸⁰ He described how the hostility between the two led to a breakdown of his friendship by June or July 2011:

The first time I took part in a protest was after the “New Clock Tower massacre” on April 18 [2011]¹⁸¹ . . . one month later [on May 20, 2011], my cousin was hit by a bullet . . . I saw him fall before my eyes. We were at a protest and did not even have a field hospital in our neighborhood. He was taken to a Christian doctor, who was closest to the area. For the first time, I felt hatred toward the other side. My cousin was shot right in front of me . . . my other cousin immediately went to his home, got a gun, came back to the street, aimed at the security forces, and started shooting. We don’t know if he killed anyone, but when I saw that, I was filled with fear. I don’t know why I felt scared . . . probably because I was worried he would become a target . . . other protesters were being killed for weeks.

When I met my Alawite friend and wanted to talk to him about why they were killing us, he would just avoid the conversation. He didn’t want to talk about it . . . In June or July [2011], I was playing football with him, then we went to his house for tea. I told him, “I want to ask you a question, but you cannot tell me not to talk about this.” He said, “what?” I said, “why are you doing this to us?” He asked, “what are we doing?” I said, “what you’ve done to us: Abou Abdo [a bus driver killed by a bullet] has died; my cousin was shot and injured.” He replied, “let’s not talk about this . . . we’ve had this talk before.” I said to him, “I want to get an answer from you and then leave.” He said, “I have nothing to do with all of this.” I said, “me neither, but why are you doing this?” And then we had a heated conversation . . . I can’t remember exactly what we said to each other, but he ended up saying: “Whatever happens, we will always be your masters.” I immediately got up and headed to the door. He walked with me to the street and it seems he realized that what he said had been hurtful, so he repeated it, this time in a joking way. So I hit him, because I was bigger than him, and left.

It was the last time I saw him. I really wanted to understand why they were doing that to us. Because of what he said to me, I cut off relations with all my other Alawite friends also. I stopped going to their neighborhood and they stopped coming to our neighborhood. Just like my parents would tell me not to go to Hayy al-Madabé, I’m sure their parents told them not to come to our neighborhood . . . It wasn’t safe anymore. What my friend said is really how all the Alawites think, because my uncle was also told the same thing by his Alawite friend: they would always be our masters.

178 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

179 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

180 Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

181 This demonstration was a turning point for protesters in Homs. At least 5,000 demonstrators staged an all-night peaceful sit-in, in the city center, at New Clock Tower Square (Sahat al-Sa`a), on April 18-19. Security forces opened fire at them, killing at least 17 protesters. BBC, “Syria Protests: Homs City Sit-In ‘Dispersed by Gunfire,’” April 19, 2011, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13130401; and <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13126476>; and Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Rising Toll in Homs,” July 2, 2011, www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/02/syria-rising-toll-homs

The former child soldier, however, said he was willing to coexist with Alawites and Shi'a because "Syria is for all its citizens. We're exhausted . . . if I knew that we would end up moving from one place to another and treated badly, I wouldn't have gone to any protests. I was a child, what did I know?"

Another interviewee said he could not live with Alawites again in the foreseeable future.¹⁸² "It is impossible for our generation to forget or to be able to coexist with them [Alawites], especially us who have lost family members," he stated. "As for the generation of my children [he currently is not married and has no children], then probably they could return and coexist with others." He also linked accountability to coexistence, saying that when those responsible for killings are held accountable, people would not need to carry out vigilante justice and only then could coexistence happen.

One interviewee blamed the government for communities' inability to live peacefully together in Syria.¹⁸³ "There are many Syrians who immigrated to Sweden, and they are coexisting with each other, Sunnis, Alawites, and Christians, whether they like it or not. Why?" he asked. "Because they live under a proper government. But in Syria, it is impossible for them to live together, because the environment there encourages killing and permits it." He said the regime in a post-war Syria should change because it was impossible for the overwhelming majority of Sunnis to accept being ruled by a head of state belonging to a minority. What would help coexistence, he suggested, would be "to have a Sunni president, even if he was part of the current [Syrian] regime, as long as he did not have blood on his hands and as long as his status as president would be in the hands of the people."

¹⁸² Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

¹⁸³ Interview conducted in Mafraq on May 13, 2018.

X. Male Adult Refugees

Male adults have been affected significantly—and in particular ways—by the armed conflict in Syria. In addition to falling victim to indiscriminate attacks and bombings, male adults have been the primary targets of a wide range of abuses, especially detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and forced conscription. These particular experiences have shaped their views about return, justice, and coexistence. Male refugees fear arrest and torture and/or conscription of themselves or their children if they returned, while they prioritize regime change, institutional reform, international guarantees, and knowledge about the missing.

Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance

It is mainly male adults who have been arrested at checkpoints or government institutions in Syria while seeking to obtain passports or other official paperwork and who have been picked up from their homes or taken away as part of mass arrests during security or military operations. Usually, individuals who are arrested are held incommunicado, without access to their families or a lawyer, and their families are not informed about their whereabouts. Detainees are usually held in detention facilities operated by Syria's four main security services and/

or in prisons across the country. These security services, which are notorious and feared by Syrians, include the Department of Military Security, the Air Force Security Directorate, the Political Security Directorate, and the General Intelligence Directorate (better known as the State Security).

Usually individuals who are arrested are held incommunicado, without access to their families or a lawyer; and their families are not informed about their whereabouts.

Widespread torture and other ill treatment in these detention facilities has been well documented over the years by international human rights groups. Tens of thousands are believed to have been detained and subjected to enforced disappearance since

the war began.¹⁸⁴ From the earliest days of the uprising,¹⁸⁵ deaths in custody have also been reported by local and international human rights groups. In January 2014, 28,707 images of dead bodies of 6,786 detainees were released after being smuggled out of Syria by an official forensic photographer, codenamed “Caesar,” who had worked for Syria's Military Police.¹⁸⁶ Of the victims, only one was female and 6,785 were male.¹⁸⁷ According to a doctor who reviewed the photos, at least 100 of the victims appeared to be children.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ The Syrian Network for Human Rights said it had recorded the names of 81,652 people subjected to enforced disappearance between March 2011 and June 2018, and of 13,066 who died due to torture at Syrian government official and unofficial detention facilities and prisons also between March 2011 and June 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Amnesty International, “Crackdown in Syria: Terror in Tell Kalakh,” July 6, 2011, MDE 24/029/2011, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/029/2011/en/

¹⁸⁶ The photographs were taken between May 2011 and August 2013, the month “Caesar” reportedly defected. Human Rights Watch, *If the Dead Could Speak*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Accounts of Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance

At least one refugee interviewed for this report said she had learned about the death of her husband, who was arrested in October 2012, when she saw a photo of his body online among what became widely known as the “Caesar photos.”¹⁸⁹ Other interviewees said they had had male family members who were detained and about whom they have had no information since their arrest or disappearance in 2012 and the years that followed. Several interviewees were themselves detained and subjected to torture and other ill treatment before they were eventually released.

A fighter from Bosra al-Sham, aged 50, was detained in the summer of 2012 and held at the Military Security in Swayda for 23 days, during which he was subjected to torture and other ill treatment.¹⁹⁰ As a result, he had an injured shoulder and foot and lost some teeth. He was cursed at, beaten up badly with a three-to-four-inch-long baton, and forced into a stress position known as the *shabah* (“ghost”) for two hours. Interrogators offended his religious beliefs by asking him who his God was and when he answered, “Allah,” they responded that it was Bashar [al-Assad]. “They couldn’t tie me to any crime, so I was released,” he said. “But I felt physically and psychologically exhausted . . . I had no strength to carry a rifle.”



Another 50-year-old man, also from Bosra al-Sham, said he was detained in August 2012 for approximately three months, during which he was tortured.¹⁹¹ He was held in solitary confinement for 28 days, beaten with a plastic stick, and burned when one security member placed a small shisha coal on his neck and threw hot water on it. A man from Daraa al-Balad,

A community leader in al-Za’atari camp sits with his sons. Al-Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan, 2015 (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

aged 34, was arrested and held by the Military Security in 2012 for four months, during which he was subjected to torture and other ill treatment that resulted in his abdominal muscles being crushed.¹⁹²

A 36-year-old man from Bosra al-Harir, in Daraa, was arbitrarily arrested in his home, along with his brother, in February 2012, approximately 10 days after they had arrived in Syria for a holiday. They were held at the Air Force Security Branch in Daraa.¹⁹³ “I was tortured, but it was an ordinary kind of torture; no *shabah*, thank God . . . just beating me up and hitting me with a plastic water pipe,” he recounted. “During the first four days, the beatings were so bad that I made false confessions, just so they would stop. My brother was held in another cell, but I heard them call out his name and the name of two other men from our town to transfer them to Damascus. The three of them are still missing.” After he was held for five weeks, he said another brother joined an armed opposition group in reaction to his brothers’ detention; prior to that, he had not taken part in demonstrations. He was killed in January 2013, leaving behind seven children.

189 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

190 Interview conducted in Amman on May 1, 2018.

191 Interview conducted in Rseifeh, Zarqa on May 3, 2018.

192 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

193 Interview conducted in al-Hamra, near Irbid, on May 10, 2018.

Some people who are arrested, particularly during security or military operations, have been summarily killed before being transferred to a detention facility. On many occasions, they are killed near their home, either by the army or local pro-government militias. A man, aged 64, from Daraa al-Balad said he had fled with his family after witnessing the summary killing of his son-in-law in the third week of January 2013, during a raid by government forces in the Abu al-Raha area.¹⁹⁴ “They took my daughter’s husband, beat him up, and broke his foot,” he said. “They told his mother to go bring a piece of cloth so they could tie it up for him. When she left, they shot him in the head while he was sitting on the ground with his hands behind his head.” His son-in-law was 30 years old, with three children and a fourth child on the way. “He was a farmer, a civilian, who had nothing to do with the revolution,” said the man. “When I saw that happen before my eyes, we decided to leave immediately . . . there was a curfew, so we started leaving one by one, so we wouldn’t be noticed. And we arrived in Jordan in February 2013.”

The large number of people detained and the lack of information on why they were detained, where they were being held, and whether they were dead or alive are reflected throughout this report. Most male interviewees said the fear of arrest was either the main reason or one of the main reasons why they had fled Syria. All of them expressed fear of arrest and torture if they returned to Syria, even after the conflict. Female interviewees also mentioned arrest and detention as a reason for fleeing Syria and/or a reason hindering them from returning to their country. Several asked the same question: “Who would guarantee that I won’t be detained?”

Some of those who said they would return to Syria mentioned institutional reform and international guarantees as a way of enabling their return. A man from Daraa al-Balad captured the essence of many interviewees’ concerns when he said: “All security branches should be dismantled. If Bashar [al-Assad] is no longer president while the security services remain, it doesn’t make a difference. The army should return to its military bases. If I return, I don’t want anyone to stop me or take me away.”¹⁹⁵ A father of five children who was arrested and tortured for five weeks also said he needed safety and security to return with his family.¹⁹⁶ “We should be able to move without fear from one area to another,” he said. “The regime must go and its forces should be replaced with an international peacekeeping force. This way, there won’t be any checkpoints for the government forces where I might be taken away.”

A man from Bosr al-Harir whose brother has been subjected to enforced disappearance since his detention in February 2012 said: “To start somewhere with justice, [my family] wants to know if my brother is dead or alive. If he is alive, then he should be set free, and if he is dead, then let us know. In any case, justice cannot prevail unless the regime falls.”¹⁹⁷

Forced Conscription

A significant reason why many male adults in government-held areas have left Syria over the past seven years is to avoid being drafted into military service. They wanted to escape compulsory military service and/or reserve duty and being sent to their deaths on the frontlines, which rapidly and widely spread across the country,¹⁹⁸ particularly since 2012.

¹⁹⁴ Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Interview conducted in Irbid on May 10, 2018.

¹⁹⁸ The Syrian government put in place restrictions and regulations to make it easier to draft men into the military, such as a 2012 ban on all males between 18 and 42 from traveling outside the country. See David Enders, “As Syria’s War Rages, Assad Bans Military-Age Men from Leaving,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 27, 2012, www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0327/As-Syria-s-war-rages-Assad-bans-military-age-men-from-leaving

In Syria, every male adult between the ages of 18 and 42 is obligated to serve in the military for a period of time,¹⁹⁹ except those who are exempted for a number of reasons, such as if they are an only son or have a medical condition.²⁰⁰ On March 19, 2011, compulsory military service was reduced from 24 months to 18 months,²⁰¹ and to 21 months for those who had not received a Grade 5 diploma.²⁰² However, in October 2011, the army stopped releasing those who had completed their compulsory service and kept them on reserve duty. On May 26, 2018, the pro-government media reported that the Ministry of Defense was going to release soldiers of Military Course 102 beginning on June 1,²⁰³ with media reports saying the army conscripts had served for just over eight years, the longest duration for compulsory service in the history of the Syrian army.²⁰⁴

Accounts of Forced Conscription

One interviewee from Swayda who had been conscripted in May 2010 when he was 19 years old said he had completed his obligatory service in November 2011 but was forced to continue serving as a reservist until his defection in July 2013.²⁰⁵ He fled to Jordan in November 2013. Another refugee from the village of al-Majdal in Swayda said his brother had completed his compulsory military service in 2013 but was not released from the army and was kept on duty as a reservist until he defected in early 2018.²⁰⁶ The 31-year-old said he, himself, had come to Jordan in March 2012 to avoid conscription. “I was scared of death,” he said. “I had two cousins who were soldiers in the army and they were both killed, one in Damascus and the other in Aleppo . . . people are dying for no reason.”

“To start somewhere with justice, [my family] wants to know if my brother is dead or alive. If he is alive, then he should be set free, and if he is dead, then let us know. In any case, justice cannot prevail unless the regime falls.”

A man, aged 25, from the town of Jbab in Daraa said his cousin had been conscripted in the military seven to eight years ago and had not been released.²⁰⁷ A refugee from Homs said his cousin had been serving in the army for approximately four years now and that he was not given holidays or permission to visit his family, so that he would not defect. “His parents go and visit him,” he explained, “but there was a time when he was based in Deir al-Zor and it was too far and too risky for them to go there, so they did not see their son for around a year.”

A man from Bosra al-Sham, in Daraa, said his brother had served for at least five years in the army and that he was now too scared to defect and risk retaliation, not only from the Syrian military but also from armed opposition groups.²⁰⁸ “He really wants to leave [the army]. I talked to him about it,” said the refugee, “but then he would have to hide in opposition [held] areas, and he cannot do so now, because he would be asked by the opposition, ‘why did you stay this long before defecting?’ They’ll accuse him of supporting the regime. He is stuck.”

199 Syrian Arab Republic, Law No. 30 of 2007, on military service in Syria, Article 4, <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5571&cat=4921>

200 Ibid, Articles 12 and 13.

201 Syrian Arab Republic, Legislative Decree No. 35 of 2011, which amended Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2007, <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5571&nid=4431&First=o&Last=56&CurrentPage=o&mid=&refBack=>

202 Ibid.

203 Alaraby, “Syrian Regime Issues Decision to Release Army Conscripts of Course 102”, May 26, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2tZRYNV>; and Enabbaladi, “Decision to Release [Army Conscripts of] Course 102 After Eight Years in the Army,” May 26, 2018, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/230816>

204 Ibid.

205 Interview conducted in Amman on April 19, 2018.

206 Interview conducted in Amman on April 19, 2018.

207 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

208 Interview conducted in Thleil on May 3, 2018,

Others left Syria before they were called to military service or reserve duty, fearing for their lives. It was difficult, however, for single male adults to enter Jordan unless they were injured and needed emergency medical attention.²⁰⁹ One man from the government-controlled town of Jbab, in Daraa, recounted how his injury had helped him to enter Jordan in 2013, at the age of 20.²¹⁰ “I neither support the opposition nor do I support the regime,” he said. “I don’t want to fight anyone in the army, and that’s why I wanted to come to Jordan. But the [Jordanian] authorities were only allowing married men with their families and wounded persons.” One day he was walking with his cousin when aircraft fired near them, injuring his leg. “The injury was so good for me . . . I came to Jordan and wished I had been injured much earlier.”²¹¹

A man from Swayda, aged 35, who had been living in Jordan since 2004, said he used to go to Syria to visit his family every six months until his last visit in August 2011, after which he was called to reserve duty in the army.²¹² “They came to our family house more than once and requested that I report for duty,” he said, “so I stopped going, although I have no political affiliations and I’m not engaged in any political activities.” As a result, he had not seen his parents, who were too old to travel to see him, for nearly seven years. He was concerned that his wife would be questioned or harassed by the authorities, so she had not gone to Syria to visit her family either.

A 19-year-old man from Homs who had arrived with his family in Jordan in April 2013 said that his father had seriously considered returning to Syria a few years before, because he felt he was unable to provide for the family’s needs in Amman.²¹³ But he then decided to remain in Jordan out of fear that his son would be drafted into the military. “The only thing that changed my father’s mind about returning,” he said, “was that in a few years’ time, I was going to be eligible for military service. This, for him, was worse than the shelling.”

A man from the town of Kefer al-Lehef, in Swayda, said he supported the regime but was unwilling to return to Syria, because his son would have to serve in the military in three years: “We support the regime, but for me to now throw my son to death? No, I will not. We can no longer know who is right and who is wrong in this war.”²¹⁴ The man from Jbab with the leg injury said he would not return if the regime continued to rule.²¹⁵ “What will the regime consider us?” he asked. “That we avoided [serving in] the army and that therefore we are traitors . . . what guarantee do I have that the regime won’t detain me?”

209 “Jordan: Syrians Blocked, Stranded in Desert,” Human Rights Watch, June 3, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/03/jordan-syrians-blocked-stranded-desert>

210 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

211 Restrictions on entering Jordan increased after the war started. On April 1, 2015, Jordan closed its border with Syria, known as al-Nasib, citing an escalation in violence. *The Jordan Times*, “Jordan Closes Border Crossing with Syria,” April 1, 2015, www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-closes-border-crossing-syria. On June 21, 2015, Jordan sealed its last entry points for Syrian refugees after a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in a no-man’s land on the border, killing six Jordanian soldiers. BBC, “Jordan Declares Syria and Iraq Borders Closed Military Zones,” June 22, 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36593579

212 Interview conducted in Amman on April 25, 2018.

213 Interview conducted in Amman on April 23, 2018.

214 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 18, 2018.

215 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

XI. Female Adult Refugees

The toll of the Syrian conflict on Syrian women has been huge. Women and girls have been subjected to arrest, detention, torture, and enforced disappearance. Some released detainees reported that they had been sexually abused.²¹⁶ Nonstate armed groups have also abducted women, the most prominent of whom is human rights defender Razan Zeitouneh, who feared arrest by government authorities and fled to rebel-held Eastern Ghouta, along with her female colleague Samira Khalil and Razan's husband, Wael Hamada, and their colleague, Nazem Hammadi. But in December 2013 they were all abducted in the Eastern Ghouta town of Douma, which was under the control of the then-powerful Jaish al-Islam armed group. Their fate remains unknown.

Air strikes and other attacks targeting residential areas have killed and injured women in their homes, while the siege of villages and towns had restricted access to food and medicine for all civilians in besieged areas, including women and children. While usually men are the primary targets of summary killings, women and children have been subjected to summary killings by government forces and their local militias, such as the Shabiha and the National Defence Forces, in different parts of the country, including mass killings in Houla, in the governorate of Homs, on May 25, 2012;²¹⁷ Daraya, in rural Damascus, in August 2012;²¹⁸ and al-Baydah and Baniyas, in the governorate of Tartus, on May 2 and 3, 2013.²¹⁹ Opposition and Islamist armed groups have also carried out mass killings, including of women and children, such as in the village of Hatla, in Deir al-Zor, on June 11, 2013.²²⁰

Women's Accounts of the Conflict

Women who survived attacks, raids, and the loss of loved ones had no time or space to deal with their traumas and found themselves consumed with the responsibility to save their children. A woman, aged 41, recounted the terror she had experienced when she had lost her husband in a raid on their village of al-Hasweh, in Homs, on January 15, 2013, after which she became responsible for her five children, now aged 11 to 17:²²¹

At around 7:30 a.m. . . . men dressed in military uniform with different colors, some camouflaged and others wearing beige, forced themselves into our home and took my husband away. There was a jug of water on the fire heater in the living room. A soldier kicked the fire heater and the carpet caught fire, but the jug of water fell on it, putting out the fire. They went into the bedrooms and

216 "Syria: Detention and Abuse of Female Activists," Human Rights Watch, June 24, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/24/syria-detention-and-abuse-female-activists>

217 "Syria: UN Inquiry Should Investigate Houla Killings," Human Rights Watch, May 27, 2012, www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/27/syria-un-inquiry-should-investigate-houla-killings

218 BBC, "Timeline: Syria's Bloodiest Days," December 2, 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18255521

219 Amnesty International, "Syria: Civilians in Al-Baydah And Baniyas Exposed to Summary Executions," July 26, 2013, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/037/2013/en/%20/

220 Hania Mourtada and Anne Barnard, "Dozens of Shiites Reported Killed in Raid by Syria Rebels," *New York Times*, June 12, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/06/13/world/middleeast/syria.html?from=global.home

221 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

threw the closet on the floor and turned the beds and duvets upside down. I looked outside and saw my husband, along with all the men in the village, lined up against a wall on the street. He was kept like that until around 1 p.m. They then allowed my husband to come back to the house and he collected his car key and I gave him his mobile phone and wallet. He told me, “take care of yourself and the kids.” He got in his car with two men dressed in military uniforms and drove away. Around two and a half hours later, I saw his car driven by one of the men dressed in a military uniform. I ran to him and asked, “where is [my husband]?” He shouted at me, “go back inside before I shoot you!” Us women were kicked out of our homes and spent the day sitting outside. Some of my children were in school when the raid started, so we picked them up, and we left the village with a few female relatives. It was the last time I saw my house. A few days later, my stepson went back to the village to look for his dad. He found him dead in an abandoned room used for water pumping for a nearby farm.

Many women who had been restricted to their traditional role of being housewives before the war suddenly lost the breadwinner of the family and became the sole providers for their children. Many had no previous work experience or education qualifications that could enable them to provide financially for themselves and/or their dependents. In addition, they lost their homes when they sought safety in neighboring countries.

Six women from al-‘Eteibeh, ‘Erbeen, and al-Abbadeh, in Eastern Ghouta, whose husbands were killed or missing, said they had never worked in Syria or since arriving in Jordan—and showed no desire to work. One from ‘Erbeen said: “We don’t work, *‘eib* [it’s shameful] for us women to come in and go out and spend time outside the house here and there.”²²² Other women said they and their children had become a burden on their fathers or brothers after had they lost their husbands, which was why they had sought the support of charities. One woman from the town of Sheikh Miskeen, in Daraa, said: “My parents have a big house in Sheikh Miskeen and a 10-denum parcel of land . . . but now they are displaced in Nawa [Daraa] and they lost a lot. They cannot afford to support me.”²²³

A woman whose husband, a state employee, was detained in October 2012 after they were displaced from their home in Bab al-Dreib, in Homs, to the town of al-Qaraytein, said that his salary had been suspended.²²⁴ She went to her husband’s work and asked the official in charge for his salary but was told they could not transfer the money as long as her husband was not dead. “I burst into tears, because I was a housewife, totally on my own, responsible for my children without the presence of any of my family or his in al-Qaraytein,” she recounted. “I eventually left al-Qaraytein because men who knew I was now without a man and needed to provide for my children would offer me financial support in return for indecent acts, and I would never compromise on this matter at all. I came to Jordan in May 2013, after my family and in-laws had arrived here.”

Women’s Views on Family Relationships

A number of single mothers whose husbands had been either killed or gone missing said the conflict in Syria had changed their relationships with family members. Several said the war had revealed the “real face” of people close to them. One woman, aged 29, from the town of al-‘Eteibeh, in Eastern Ghouta, said her relationship with her brother deteriorated as a result of the stress accompanying displacement.²²⁵ “Before the war, my relationship with my brother was just like two siblings, very good,” she said. “Now, there is a kind of hatred. After my husband was killed, I was left with four children and he had two. We were all displaced inside Syria, so we lived together in the same house, and my brother’s wife couldn’t put up with my children . . . both my brother and his wife didn’t want to provide for my four children.”

222 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

223 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

224 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

225 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

Another woman, aged 32, from ‘Erbeen, in Eastern Ghouta, whose husband had been forcibly disappeared, said she and her husband had greatly respected her husband’s brother and thought he was wise and resolved people’s problems.²²⁶ When she fled to Jordan, she stayed with her brother-in-law, who had also sought shelter in Jordan, but their relationship soon deteriorated when he started abusing her. The widow, who had two daughters aged nine and seven, said: “He used to shout at me and call me names like donkey. And I used to answer back . . . Once, he picked up a wooden chair and wanted to hit me with it. I used to put up with all of this because I didn’t want people to talk and say that I’m a widow living alone; it’s inappropriate . . . but when my daughter [aged 9] told me that his 22-year-old son was doing things to her that she didn’t understand . . . sexual things . . . I couldn’t stay. I left and came here [an apartment sponsored by the Ketab wa al-Sunnah Islamic charity].”

One widow, aged 38, with three boys and two girls aged between 4 and 14, said her husband’s sister, who was also a refugee in Jordan, would not ask about her nephews and nieces at all.²²⁷ A woman activist, aged 44, from Homs, said her son’s arrest on March 1, 2013, and his continued detention had fractured her family.²²⁸ As an activist, she was blamed by her in-laws for encouraging her son to follow in her footsteps, and her husband eventually adopted the same argument, saying his son would have been free if she had not been an activist. “My in-laws blame me for my son’s detention,” she said. “They told my husband, ‘she chose that path, so let her bear the consequences.’ I came here [Jordan] with three children and none of them helped me with anything. My husband was good, and then we started having these huge problems because of my work, and he started using the same arguments against me as his parents.” She eventually separated from her husband, and he now lives in Sweden. Her son’s fate remains unknown.



Other women had better relationships with family members who had supported them during difficult times, as much as they could afford to. One woman, aged 33, from al-‘Eteibeh, in Eastern Ghouta, whose husband was killed in October 2013, said her husband’s brother had been very supportive of her and her four children, aged 6, 7, 12, and 13.²²⁹ “My brother-in-law is very tender with my kids . . . he’s very kind,” she said. “Initially, he was unable to support me financially, but as soon as he found work on a farm, and although he’s just a worker, he started covering our living costs, although he knew I was receiving support from the United Nations. My youngest daughter was very little when her father was killed, and she loves her uncle very much, because he’s so kind to her. She calls him ‘baba’ [“daddy”]. At first, I didn’t like it, I felt very bad. I didn’t want her to replace her dad with anyone . . . but then I thought that I didn’t want to deprive her from saying ‘baba’ and feeling the presence of a father.”

Syrian women attend a counselling session at the International Rescue Committee-run clinic near Mafraq in northern Jordan. With support from the United Kingdom, the clinic provides Syrian refugees medical and psychosocial care such as trauma counselling. (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

226 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

227 Interview conducted in al-Ramtha on April 28, 2018.

228 Interview conducted in Amman on May 12, 2018.

229 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

Women's Views on Return and Resettlement

All women interviewed faced stressful situations and challenges that they said had made them long for a return to pre-war conditions. Most women with absent husbands, whose home, income, and education for their children were covered mainly by Islamic charities in Jordan, however, said they would not want to return to Syria, even after the war. This was primarily because their homes were destroyed and they would have no source of income, but also because they feared for the safety of their families and the psychological distress of returning to a place where they had experienced such trauma and loss. Many women spoke about the importance of retaining their independence and access to new roles, regardless of where they settled after the war.

All the women interviewed expressed concern over their loss of property, particularly their homes. A widow, aged 31, from Deir Ba'albeh, who had twin boys, aged 7, said:

I prefer to return to Syria, but how? Where to? And who will pay for it? I cannot return. My home was burned; my second home was destroyed; my husband is dead; how am I going to live? I cannot work and make a living, because I was only 14 when I got married and left school . . . my husband and I were well-off in Syria. I used to love my home and the flowers in the garden. My parents were well-off too. My father owned two clothing shops in Homs, four houses, and a farm in al-Zhooriyeh. But there's no cash: A year before the uprising began, my parents sold all their gold to buy a piece of land. They built their family home on it in the first months of the uprising. No one expected that the situation would deteriorate the way it did and that we'd be forced to leave. Now, my father is sick and he keeps saying the same thing over and over again: "Look where I was and what I've become." He's now deprived of the fruit of all of his hard work. My parents have no cash left, so they cannot provide for me. And now look at the conditions I'm living in: a tiny flat with my two sons, living off charity. That's why I prefer to stay in Jordan . . . only because the charity is providing for us.²³⁰

A widow from Eastern Ghouta said: "There's no house and no income . . . our house was destroyed and my parents' home was destroyed, and they are now staying in another house that has no doors or windows. My father is in his sixties and he cannot provide for me."²³¹

Another major concern for all of the women who were interviewed was the safety of themselves, their children, and other members of their family. A widow, aged 31, from al-Qseir, in the governorate of Homs, who has one daughter, said: "To return, we need to have safety and security . . . but to go there without safety, it doesn't work . . . Safety is when there's no shelling, no fear, no manipulation . . . I might return only after people return and report to me that things are fine . . . I might feel comfortable to go back."²³²

A woman from al-Haswiyeh, in Homs, who has five children, said the first and most important thing was safety.²³³ She said she would no longer feel secure living by herself in Syria and that she worried about her daughters, who had grown into young women. "Safety is living at my home without having surprise raids, without having strangers in uniforms forcing themselves into my home and vandalizing my furniture before my eyes," she said. "They would take anything and anyone; they would even take girls. And you cannot report them anywhere, because they themselves belong to the security."

Another widow, aged 29, from al-Dab'a village, in the rural area of al-Qseir, Homs, who has a son and daughter aged 9 and 7, said: "Safety is when there is no shooting or shelling, no house raids . . . it is to live like in the old

230 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

231 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

232 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

233 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

days, being at home without having to worry about the regime attacking us . . . my kids don't want to return to Syria, although they were little when we left. They hear about the killings and shelling in Syria, so they say they are scared to go there.”²³⁴

Widows whose husbands had fought with armed opposition groups were concerned about retaliation against them or their families if they returned to Syria. One woman said her husband, a commander of an armed group who had been killed in July 2012, had defected, “so he was wanted, so I might also be wanted, because I am his widow. How are they going to treat me and my daughter?”²³⁵ Another widow of an opposition fighter said that if there were safety and security and a home for her and her children, and if the International Committee of the Red Cross transported them directly to their hometown, then she was willing to return.²³⁶ “I am the widow of a fighter; therefore, I cannot be stopped at checkpoints manned by government forces, because my husband was wanted,” she explained. “The problem is that the regime does not fulfil its promises and it cannot be trusted. If we return to our hometown, then regime forces would have to leave. As long as there are Assad forces there, it's going to be difficult to have security. Let those responsible turn [al-Qseir and its rural area] into a buffer zone, so that we feel safe going back there with international protection and guarantees.”

Widows whose husbands had fought with armed opposition groups were concerned about retaliation against them or their families if they returned to Syria.

Several women said returning to Syria would cause them psychological distress. An elderly woman from al-Qseir, in Homs, whose son and at least seven other members of her family had been killed in separate incidents said: “Returning to Syria is a nice notion, but in reality it will be bitter. The wounds will reopen . . . where is my son, where is my brother, where are my nephews? Our homeland is burning and our morale is destroyed. If you have a surgical operation, your wounds will heal, but our kinds of wounds will never heal . . . May God give us patience and energy.”²³⁷

A widow from al-Haswiyeh, in Homs, said that if the war ended and the situation in Syria was stable, then she might return, but not to her home.²³⁸ “Psychologically, I cannot,” she said. “I will remember how my husband was taken away from our home, how he was forced to stand against a wall with other men from our neighborhood, and how 10 days later his son found his body, bloated, in an abandoned house used for farming, just a few meters from our home. If I do return to Syria, I'd live at my mother's home in [another town].”

A widow, aged 27, from Sheikh Miskeen, in Daraa, similarly said she could not return to her house or neighborhood.²³⁹ “My husband is no longer there,” she said. “I was good friends with my sister-in-law and my neighbors, but they were killed in air strikes . . . I won't be happy. I will feel strongly those who are no longer with us.” Another widow, aged 27, from Bosra al-Sham, in Daraa, said that after her husband had been killed, she hated their bedroom and could not sleep there.²⁴⁰ “Sometimes I feel that I do not want to return. What is left for me there? It is true my place is there, but everything has changed,” she said. “But then sometimes a breeze of fresh air takes me back to memories and I feel I want to return.”

234 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

235 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

236 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

237 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

238 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

239 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

240 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

A widow, aged 32, from al-‘Eteibeh, who had fled to al-Qalamoun due to starvation in the besieged Eastern Ghouta four months before her husband was killed there, also said she did not want to return.²⁴¹ “Everything



Refugee children play in the waiting room at the International Rescue Committee-run clinic in Ramtha, Jordan. With support from the United Kingdom, the clinic provides Syrian refugees medical and psychosocial care such as trauma counselling. Ramtha, Jordan, 2013 (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

there will remind me of my husband,” she said. “I did not attend his funeral because I was in Qalamoun . . . I eventually came to Jordan, so I haven’t visited his grave. I don’t want to.” Another widow, aged 32, from al-Qseir said: “I cannot imagine myself returning home and feeling the emptiness of the house without him . . . anyway, I might not even find our home, because I don’t know if it was destroyed. I’ve been away for six years.”²⁴²

Four women interviewed for this report said they had either embraced or would like to embrace traditionally male roles and had no wish to relinquish them once the armed conflict was over. A widow, aged 32, said she did not want to ask people for money.²⁴³ “When [my husband] was killed, I plunged into depression and confined myself to the home for two years,”

she remembered. “I then realized that I had to help myself . . . I took a Montessori-sponsored workshop that [a charity] held so that I could become a teacher and, prior to that, I did a sewing course. If I returned, I could work as a teacher at a nursery.”

A widow from Bosra al-Sham who had been in university while pregnant, but had to drop out for fear of an increasing number of government-manned checkpoints, said that to return, “I need a house for me and my kids. I need a job so that I have a salary and can support my kids, so that I have independence and won’t need any help from anyone.”²⁴⁴ A woman who had separated from her husband and who had become highly active in the refugee community in Jordan said that it was impossible for her to establish a new family.²⁴⁵ “I have found myself in work,” she said. “Even if I had to start over from scratch, I’m willing to rebuild myself and work rather than rely on anyone.”

A woman, aged 44, from Homs whose husband had been detained in October 2012 and who had arrived in Jordan with her four children in May 2013 said that in the years she had been displaced she had started teaching students private lessons in math, putting to use her university degree.²⁴⁶ “I no longer think of returning to Syria or of resettling elsewhere,” she reported. “I worked very hard in Jordan to make a good reputation for myself among students, and to leave all this and start from scratch in Syria is impossible. I’m not in my twenties or thirties, to have the energy to start from zero all over again.”

241 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

242 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

243 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

244 Interview conducted in Amman on April 24, 2018.

245 Interview conducted in Amman on May 12, 2018.

246 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

Several women said they had declined offers from UNHCR to resettle in a third country, because it was for them and their children only and they would feel vulnerable and isolated without their family.²⁴⁷ One widow, aged 31, said she had been asked to go to a country in Europe, but turned it down, even though she would have preferred it to Jordan. “I don’t want to go alone to Europe without my family,” she explained. “If they take my parents, I will go.” Another widow, aged 29, said she had been asked if she was interested in going to the United States. “I refused,” she stated, “because they said they’d take only me and my children. If it was with my mother and siblings, I would have accepted.”

A widow, aged 41, said she had also asked about going to the United States, but turned it down as well. Her brother, sister, and uncle, and their families were in Jordan, and her mother was still in Syria. “I haven’t seen her since I came to Jordan four years ago,” she said. “If I go to the United States, I don’t think I will ever see her again. Also, I was concerned that raising my girls [aged 15 and 17] in the United States might be difficult. There, people have different customs and traditions.”

Women’s Views on Justice

Most women interviewed did not believe there was going to be justice in Syria for the losses and harms they had endured over the years of war and displacement. While some spoke about the regime change and accountability that should be pursued, others pointed to the international community’s failure to act and the difficulty of determining responsibility for abuses. A widow, aged 32, said that “the regime should be removed from the roots. Otherwise, we won’t be able to go back there.”²⁴⁸ She also thought that the FSA should be held accountable. “My husband was killed by the regime,” she recounted, “but it was after a rival [opposition] armed group sent a message to government forces about his whereabouts, along with his fellow fighters. He wanted to leave the FSA because of the things he had witnessed. FSA fighters would kill someone just like that, easily and without any proof. He was tired of it.”

Another widow, aged 29, echoing other refugees, said that if the international community had wanted to hold Assad accountable, they would have already done so. “I ask God to hold him accountable,” she said, “and I regard my husband to be a martyr.” Another widow, whose husband was subjected to summary killing, said: “I do not have the courage to demand justice for my husband. Also, I do not know the names of the men who killed him. Who will I report the killers to?” Another widow, aged 31, from Homs whose husband had been abducted before her eyes by unidentified men dressed in military uniforms and Shabiha in September 2012 and was believed to have been summarily killed, said: “I have no proof of who killed my husband and no one really knows the killers of their loved ones.”²⁴⁹

247 Interviews conducted in Amman on April 17 and 18, 2018.

248 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

249 Interview conducted in Amman on April 17, 2018.

XII. Property

A property law that allows the Syrian state to create “redevelopment zones” under the pretext of urban planning is believed to be aimed at confiscating property belonging to refugees, internally displaced persons, and residents perceived as opposed to the regime without due process or compensation. Law No. 10 of 2018 was passed by the Syrian People’s Assembly (or parliament) on March 19, 2018,²⁵⁰ stipulating that within one week of a redevelopment zone being designated, local authorities may request a list of property owners from the area’s public real estate authorities, who in turn must provide the list within 45 days.²⁵¹ Those whose properties do not appear on the list would have only 30 days to submit documents proving ownership to local authorities.²⁵² There was an international uproar criticizing the law,²⁵³ claiming it created a major obstacle for refugees to return to Syria.

On November 11, 2018, Assad issued Law No. 42 of 2018²⁵⁴ amending Law No. 10. Among the amendments were an extension of the time period for proving ownership from 30 days to one year, and the right of owners to appeal the decision in regular courts. However, the lengthy process and obstacles that security agencies may place for owners to obtain required documents to prove ownership is a significant concern.

Refugee Views on Law No. 10 of 2018 Affecting Property Rights

Most refugees interviewed were not aware of the property law.²⁵⁵ Some expressed concern, however, saying it was intended to prevent them from returning to Syria. A widow from al-Eteibeh, in Eastern Ghouta, said: “They came up with this law so that they wouldn’t leave anything for the people who fled to come back to.”²⁵⁶ One man living in al-Za’atari said: “[Syrian authorities] are telling us, ‘we will make you return under dangerous, humiliating conditions, so you can secure your right to your own home.’ Well, that will not work!”²⁵⁷

250 The full text of the law in Arabic can be accessed at Syria’s official website for the Prime Ministry: <https://bit.ly/2qIRGci>

251 Human Rights Watch, “Q&A: Syria’s New Property Law,” May 29, 2018, www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/29/qa-syrias-new-property-law#_What_is_Law

252 Ibid.

253 A senior government official, who was briefed on talks between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin about the issue, was quoted as saying: “Decree 10 is designed to expropriate refugees . . . It is pretty clear that Assad’s goal is to replace the old population with a new one.” Merkel and Putin met on May 18, 2018, in the Russian city of Sochi before the announced amendment of the law. Joseph Nasr, “Assad’s Property Law Hits Hope of Return for Syrians in Germany,” June 14, 2018, Reuters, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-germany-insight/assads-property-law-hits-hope-of-return-for-syrians-in-germany-idUSKBN1JA1V1. Reportedly, Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil wrote to his Syrian counterpart al-Moualem that the terms of “Law 10” could make it difficult for refugees to prove property ownership and in turn discourage some from returning. Reuters, “Lebanon Tells Syria Development Law Could Hinder Refugees’ Return,” May 26, 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-law/lebanon-tells-syria-development-law-could-hinder-refugees-return-idUSKCN11R09O

254 Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), “President Assad Issues Law Amending Some Articles of Law No. 10 of 2018,” November 11, 2018, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=842393>

255 Interviews for this report were conducted before the amendment of the law.

256 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

257 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

A man from Homs, whose family owned a four-story building, three shops and a car, said about the law: “Let Bashar take it all, let him take it all . . . I have no hope of returning anyway.”²⁵⁸ Two men from Daraa said the regime had created the law to replace Syrian residents who opposed the regime with foreigners who fought in the war in support of the regime. One interviewee, aged 44, said that if the government implemented the law, “I would stop owning anything just because I left Syria . . . they came up with this law because, for the regime, we are traitors . . . for them, we did not ‘defend’ Syria [against the opposition] . . . They want to replace us with Iranians.”²⁵⁹ Another said, the government came up with the law “so that they could give those who supported the regime our homes and register them in the names of [members of] Iranian militias.”²⁶⁰

A widow, who last saw her home in al-Haswiyeh, in Homs, on January 15, 2013, described the law as unfair, saying it was impossible for anyone, let alone refugees, to be able to obtain the required documents to prove their ownership of their homes or other property in just 30 days.²⁶¹ Her husband had been summarily killed either by the Syrian army or a proxy militia during a raid on her village. She had to leave with her kids in a rush, carrying only her ID. Her stepson, who later was able to return briefly to the village, said the house had been totally ransacked and he could not find any official identity or property documents. “I spent an entire month going to the civil status department and other places,” she said, “to prove that I am the mother of my children and get them identity cards, so that I could bring them with me to Jordan.”

The 41-year-old widow also talked about her mother’s experience with acquiring IDs for her family members after her father’s enforced disappearance in Homs, as he had been carrying the briefcase that contained the family’s official documents. “My father went missing with his samsonite briefcase, where he kept all of our official identity documents, while on his way to see a lawyer to try find out where my brother was being detained,” she explained. Her mother then spent two years going from one government department to another, in search of new identity documents. “So it is impossible for someone like me, who fled my home during an army raid and left all my belongings and documents behind, to prove that our home belongs to my dead husband. I might need to go 100 times to different public departments to be able to get a new property deed.”



Syrian refugees conduct business, shop, and socialize in the market place of al-Azraq camp near al-Azraq, Jordan. Al-Azraq refugee camp, Jordan, 2017 (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

A man from the town of al-Ghariyeh al-Sharqiyeh, in Daraa, echoed her concern. He said he had owned his house, a four-to-five-dunam parcel of land that he had inherited from his father, and two shops: “I cannot issue an ID for myself in 30 days in Syria, but the regime expects me to prove that I have all of the documents required to prove that I own my property in 30 days? Anyway, we are not going to lose more than what we’ve already lost.”²⁶²

258 Interview conducted in Amman on April 16, 2018.

259 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

260 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

261 Interview conducted in Amman on April 18, 2018.

262 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

A man, aged 38, from the town of Khirbet Ghazaleh, in Daraa, said he had owned a house, four shops that he had been renting out, and a six-to-seven-dunum parcel of farm land, but now fears he will lose it all. He said the terms of the law, which allowed fourth-degree relatives to come forward in place of the property owner if the latter could not make the claim,²⁶³ were problematic.²⁶⁴ “Is it reasonable that relatives of the fourth degree can handle our property? What if they register the property in their name?” he asked. “These days, brothers have problems with each other because of inheritance distribution, and [government authorities] want to pass responsibility for our own property on to our fourth-degree relatives? If this law is implemented, it’s going to create huge problems. Greed exists in every human being.”

A lawyer from Daraa, who had been detained on three different occasions in Syria, and a man from Damascus,²⁶⁵ who said he had been sentenced to death for activities supporting the opposition prior to the uprising, both voiced their concern that if their wives or siblings worked on securing their property documents, they would be at risk of arrest and torture.²⁶⁶ The man from Damascus, whose brother and two nephews have been held since he had appeared on a talk show after the uprising began, said that many refugees are wanted by the regime and, therefore, would not dare to return to try to secure their property deeds and no one would dare to try on their behalf. “If my brother or sister does,” he said, “they will be at risk of being questioned about why they are in contact with me and probably arrested.” The lawyer from Daraa, who is a member of the Free Syrian Lawyers’ Association and has a home in Damascus, said: “If I send my wife to work on proving my property rights, I worry that I’ll be putting her at risk of being arrested and held as a hostage to force me to go back and surrender to them.”

263 In accordance with Law No. 10 of 2018.

264 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

265 Interview conducted in Amman on April 15, 2018.

266 Interview conducted in al-Za’atari refugee camp on May 14, 2018.

XIII. Intersectional Vulnerabilities

Regardless of their age, gender, faith, ethnicity, political affiliation, and socioeconomic status, refugees interviewed in this part of the report, including women, children, and the elderly, shared devastating effects of the war on all spheres of life that are similar to those recounted in previous parts. They narrated stories of fear, pain, suffering, and difficult experiences that led to their exodus from war-torn Syria in search of protection. They talked about the tarnished memories they left their shattered country with and the long-lasting scars that remain on them and their livelihoods. The prolonged crisis, with its ongoing violence, continues to constitute an assault and is a reminder of the plight of displacement. To these refugees, the conflict not only tore up their country but also led to a lost generation. In addition, however, the interviews in this section demonstrate the ways in which the intersecting elements of refugees' identities often shape their particular vulnerabilities, views, and expectations about return, justice, and coexistence.

This section reflects the complexity of the social structure of Syrian society and the myriad nuances of the experiences of Circassian, Ismaelite, Alawite, Rifa'ite, Chichnian, Palestinian, and Christian refugees, including Armenians, among others. These refugees fled shelling, shooting, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence and insecurity; they suffered human loss and material loss; they witnessed growing sectarian divisions, marked by mistrust, fear, and even hatred; they worried about conscription of themselves and relatives into the army; they repeatedly shared their fears of forced disappearance, exploitation, forced displacement, and violence, including different forms of gender-based violence; and they were deprived of food, water, and electricity. Many of the refugees related stories of being displaced numerous times within or outside Syria on their way to Jordan. In general, these interviewees also felt that the Syria they had known and grown up in—the once-celebrated melting pot with a unique *mélange* of groups—had changed. The conflict opened up old wounds and placed some groups in a precarious situation. They became the scapegoats for other groups. With Syria no longer a possible home, they had no other choice but to leave everything behind and escape.

Experiences of Displacement

Refugees interviewed for this section spoke about what drove them out of their country. Some were reserved, cautious, and guarded. They were wary of every response they gave, carrying their sense of distrust, self-censorship, and silence even outside their country. Others were more relaxed to talk about their experiences and engagements inside and outside of Syria. Some opted to share more of their personal experiences, without referring to politics. As one explained, “We know nothing about politics, it is a bigger game. We the weak, we are powerless, we only pay the price.”²⁶⁷

A woman in her forties belonging to the Rifa'i faith hesitantly shared the losses that had led her and her family to leave Syria and the bitter feelings she still had. She said:

²⁶⁷ Interview conducted in Al Salt on May 21, 2018.

Homeland [*watan*] is a huge word. It is your past, present, and future. It is your life, stories, memories, and sense of belonging. It is the smell of the earth, the color of the trees, and the sound of your people. To be uprooted is very difficult. No one would choose to leave their homeland, to become a stranger for no reason. Displacement and loss are so painful. I lost my husband and my son, whom I had waited ten years to have. They had nothing to do with the conflict. They were killed in cold blood in my husband's shop while working to provide for our family. I lost my identity, I lost everything I had in Syria. I struggle every single day. I have so much hatred for Bashar [al-Assad] and his regime, I pray to God to punish them every single day. I cry to God to take revenge for me. I cannot forgive them.²⁶⁸

A minority Ismaelite family had endured the brunt of besiegement in Barzeh, north of Damascus, in 2013, including starvation and serious humanitarian violations, after losing two of their children and most of their property.²⁶⁹ Enduring multiple internal displacements while searching for shelter and security, they ended up fleeing to Jordan. As the mother of the family explained, “we smelt blood and death. When we escaped, we had to walk over dead bodies. We saw death with our very own eyes.” Their only choice was to leave in the middle of the night to reach the Jordanian border. When they arrived, however, the borders were closed, and they had to sleep in the desert for three nights until they managed to get in.

A refugee woman from Homs, currently living in Amman, shared her experience of the insecurity, fear of sexual violence, deprivation, and multiple displacements that had led her to Jordan in 2013.²⁷⁰ She had been living in Qudsyya when armed opposition groups took over the town, after which the Syrian military laid siege to it, with heavy and indiscriminate shooting, tank raids, and heavy shelling, in an attempt to reclaim the area. After her brother was forcefully conscripted into the Syrian military and her brother-in-law was abducted and killed by one of the opposition groups, she and her family saw no future for them to remain in Syria. “We were so scared,” she recounted. “We had no electricity, running water, or food. We were starving but we had no way to leave our homes. The Assad military forces were merciless: They raided homes, arrested men, and raped women. As soon as there was a break in the fighting, we left everything behind and fled; we were the last family to leave our neighborhood.” Her family went to an area close by, but when it became dangerous, they went to Lebanon, where conditions were also very difficult. “Because we are Syrians, Lebanon is the worst place to live. The Lebanese have a very bad opinion of Syrians. They hate us, although it was the Syrian army and its forces [that has tried to destabilize Lebanon] and which has also caused destruction in Syria.” After six months in Lebanon, they ran out of savings and moved to Jordan, where her husband's relatives were living, hoping to find security, get over their trauma, and rebuild their lives. They stayed with the relatives for 10 months, who then asked them to leave and look for a separate accommodation, putting them in contact with the Circassian Association, which in turn provided them with a housing and paid their rent for a year.

“We had no electricity, running water, or food. We were starving but we had no way to leave our homes. The Assad military forces were merciless: they raided homes, arrested men, and raped women. As soon as there was a break in the fighting, we left everything behind and fled; we were the last family to leave our neighborhood.”

A woman in a Circassian family emphasized how growing divisions in Syrian society had fed the insecurity that forced them to leave—and caused her family to become separated in the process.²⁷¹ She had worked in the Syrian Department of Education with colleagues from different backgrounds, including Alawites and Christians, which, she said, was never an issue. While Alawites were favored by the government and received better positions

268 Interview conducted in Amman on May 23, 2018.

269 Interview conducted in Al Salt on May 21, 2018.

270 Interview conducted in Amman on May 6, 2018.

271 Interview conducted in Amman on May 18, 2018.

in the civil service sector, she explained, “we were working and living together in harmony.” Once the political situation worsened, however, she said:

A lot of hidden underlying issues started to surface. At work, we started to feel differences. Differences, tensions and divides became more visible. As if behind the façade of harmony there was really a bubbling volcano. At work, Alawites started to show animosity and distrust toward us, and pestered us. They caused us a lot of trouble. The work environment became hostile. Even on the bus on the way to work or back home, employees were fighting. Politics showed people’s ugly faces.

The bus that took the woman to and from work began to stop before it reached Sunni areas, where she lived, and there were days when she had to walk about 5 miles (more than eight kilometers) each way to work and back.

My last days in Syria were very difficult. Our house wasn’t safe, because armed groups used to hide in our neighborhood. The regime used to shoot at them between the houses. My twin son and daughter were 15. I feared for them. I was unable to protect them. I was afraid my son would be conscripted into the army. We heard a lot of stories about abduction and rape. There was no hope in Syria.

Her children fled to Germany, while she and her husband left for Jordan.

An Alawite engineer, who was against the Assad regime and in favor of the revolution, spoke about his multiple displacements and experience of identity-based fear and insecurity.²⁷² He explained that soon after the outbreak of the revolution, Syrian security approached him multiple times demanding his cooperation if he wanted to keep his house, job, and family. In 2012, the deterioration of the security situation and the increase in checkpoints, shellings, and bombings left him little choice but to move his family to a safer neighborhood. Soon after, the regime again started threatening him.

Fearing enforced disappearance and worrying about the safety of his wife and two teenaged daughters, he decided to leave for Jordan. In a very difficult journey that took almost seven months, during which they had to pay smugglers, avoid bombings and shootings from different armed groups, walk long distances in the dark, and sleep in the desert, they arrived in al-Za’atari refugee camp. However, on the day of their arrival, a UN officer in the registration tent asked them their religion out loud in front of other people. “We were shocked. We didn’t know what to say. We felt threatened again,” he said. “At that moment, my wife and I realized that we had left everything behind; run for our



Syrians refugees must often go through tremendous bureaucratic and legal hurdles before settling in a host country. This is especially true for families in which parents have different nationalities. These documents belong to a Syrian refugee family in Jordan, in which the father is a Palestinian refugee from Syria and the mother is a Jordanian from Syria. Irbid, Jordan, 2018 (Zeina Jallad Charpentier)

lives, only to arrive in a refugee camp where we were again threatened because of our religion. For a couple of nights, we didn’t dare to open our mouths, until we found a way to leave the camp and settle in Amman. Even today in Amman, we have to hide our faith. We never speak about it. We feel scared.”

272 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

Another Alawite woman gave similar accounts of sectarian divisions, even within families, and the fear and insecurity it had engendered.²⁷³ Her mother was a Sunni and her father an Alawite, and her extended family had been close to the regime. She had felt that her mixed background was ordinary for her country, reflecting a diverse Syrian society. She had been in favor of the revolution and was part of the youth social movement that “dreamed about bringing change to Syria.” She supported demonstrations on her college campus and mobilized people to speak out against injustice. “However, when things started to take a violent turn, people started to look at me and treat me differently,” she explained. “I was no longer an anti-regime activist, a fighter for justice, a lawyer, and assistant lecturer. I was pigeonholed. I was looked at as an Alawite, the enemy that should be targeted.” Despite taking the wounded to hospitals and distributing food and aid, she received threats and was chased by unknown groups. “The general situation in Syria was terrifying,” she said. “I remember running with my mom and sister to hide in the bathroom, to escape the shooting. I was constantly scared for myself, my mom, my brother, and my sister. Many nights passed when we were in tears. We were caught in the middle, being both Sunni and Alawite. We were targeted by everyone, Sunni and Alawites, those who were pro-regime and those who were opponents. Even my mom’s family started to hate me and my sister for being Alawite.” After her sister was arrested by the regime and her brother was abducted by Al Nusra Front, she fled to Jordan, although she had to wear *hijab* (headscarf) and hide her identity. “I left myself, my name, my family, my life, and everything behind and crossed the border all alone. I left a tragic reality for the unknown, in search of protection. Leaving Syria felt like a death.”

Some minority refugees fled Syria because they were targeted for their political views or actions. A Kurdish journalist who was an extreme opponent of the Assad regime saw no future for himself or his family in Syria, where authorities target activists and those who speak out against the regime. The only way for him to continue fighting for justice was to leave Syria. In Jordan, he worked for a Syrian-affiliated online newsletter.²⁷⁴ An Ismaelite woman, who had been a judge in Syria, explained that she had left in 2013 because her husband had defected from the Syrian intelligence agency.²⁷⁵ Her distrust of her fellow citizens had stayed with her in Jordan. “When I left Syria, it was a difficult time,” she recalled. “My husband was wanted by the regime. I couldn’t go to Turkey, and Lebanon is heavily controlled by the Shi’a. The safest option for me was Jordan.” As a minority belonging to the Ismaelite faith, she found a way to leave the refugee camp with her family and moved to Amman, where she decided to live in an area far from where most Syrian refugees live. “I didn’t want to meet any Syrians. I didn’t trust anyone and didn’t want to deal with anyone.”

A Sunni refugee who had been a senior official in the Syrian military explained how the regime’s atrocities had led him to join the opposition movement, after which he realized that the group he had joined also had a violent and destructive agenda. The violence and threats against him left him no other choice than to flee the country. In 2014, he moved with his wife and two children to Jordan, where he had friends willing to help him. He said:

My life was very decent. I had three cars and two huge villas. My family was living in extreme comfort. What led me to defect was witnessing all the violence and killing. I didn’t want to be involved in any of it. I left my high position, one of the very few such positions held by a Sunni, because I did not want to give orders to kill innocent civilians. Although, I was not in favor of the so-called Arab Spring, I never could have tolerated using arms to kill innocent civilians. I decided to disobey orders and defected to Jordan. I left to save my dignity and my family.²⁷⁶

Bedouin Syrians fled mainly to the Mafraq Governorate in Jordan, due to its proximity to the Syrian border and their historical family ties and intermarriages with Jordanians. With their nomadic lifestyle, most Bedouin refugees have resisted living in al-Za’atari refugee camp or in host communities, where they feel confined and

273 Interview conducted in Amman on May 10, 2018.

274 Interview conducted in Amman on May 26, 2018.

275 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

276 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

insecure. Instead, they escaped to rural areas, where they formed their own informal camps, like the unauthorized camps in Madaba and Irbid. Because the camps are illegal, Bedouins Syrians there are living outside of the law and, therefore, ineligible for humanitarian aid. They do not have access to legal documentation; even their deaths and births are unregistered.²⁷⁷ Bedouins constantly fear a government crackdown against them, forced relocation to al-Azraq camp, or even deportation to Syria.²⁷⁸

A Bedouin woman in the unauthorized Madaba camp shared her experience of fleeing Syria. After she and her sister had lost their husbands in the war, they had no means of survival and decided to take their children to Jordan, where they had extended family. On the way, like many other refugees, they used their savings to pay proxies to cross the border. On the journey, they experienced several traumatic episodes, including shootings, bombings, and walking among corpses. They found a baby lying next to his dead mother. They could not leave the baby, so they brought him along with them. After two days, they arrived at al-Za'atari camp without any legal documentation. At the registration tent, the woman registered herself as a widow, claiming her children and the baby under her name. Soon she and her sister could not bear being confined in the camp. They felt isolated, with no sense of commonality with other refugees in the camp. "We were mixed with different Syrians," she elaborated.²⁷⁹ "We didn't have anything in common with them. We have different traditions and lifestyles." So, she and her sister managed to flee the camp and resettle near Madaba. They were living in dire conditions, in a very simple tent, without any furniture or basic services. They had one water tank and a few mattresses. None of the children were enrolled in school. The adopted child, who had different features from the rest of the children, was less talkative and interactive. When asked about his dreams, he responded: "I dream of having a bicycle."

One Palestinian refugee from the Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus talked about the reasons she had left Syria, including loss of property and violence. "My house was bombed," she said.²⁸⁰ "I have no idea if my land is still there or if someone has taken it over, or even if the government, with its new land law, has declared it as state property." In 2012, her husband and two elder sons were abducted by the regime, when it raided the camp, and she later learned that her husband and one son had been killed. "I still do not know the fate of my eldest son," she said. "If he is alive, he would be 35 years old now. He was married to a Syrian woman from Aleppo and has three daughters." After his prolonged disappearance, she took her other children and fled the camp. They arrived in Jordan hoping that her Palestinian relatives would help them, but none did: "we slept in the street, until a generous man had mercy on me and my children. He opened his house to us and allowed us to stay with him and his family. We had nothing, not even clothes. The only solution was for me to beg people and to seek help from charities, 20 Dinars here and 15 Dinars there, at least to pay for our food."

A Palestinian woman holding the Jordanian citizenship, who grew up in the Yarmouk refugee camp and was married to a Palestinian refugee from Syria, also shared her complicated experience fleeing the country with her children. "I lost my husband during the war," she said.²⁸¹ "I don't know anything about what happened to him. He disappeared in 2013. I don't know whether he's still alive or not. In 2014, my life was unbearable. There was

"I lost my husband during the war. I don't know anything about what happened to him. He disappeared in 2013. I don't know whether he's still alive or not. In 2014, my life was unbearable. There was no security in the camp and I had no source of income."

277 Interview conducted in Amman on May 21, 2018.

278 Tien Tran, "Bedouins: The Forgotten Victims of the Syrian Crisis," *Equal Times*, December 1, 2015, www.equaltimes.org/bedouins-the-forgotten-victims-of?lang=en#.WzCzW1OFNE4

279 Interview conducted in Madaba on May 21, 2018.

280 Interview conducted in Irbid on May 22, 2018.

281 Interview conducted in Irbid on June 5, 2018.

no security in the camp and I had no source of income.” She decided to leave Syria because her family was in Jordan. She knew she would have no problem entering Jordan as a Jordanian, but her children were Palestinians, registered under their father’s name. “I didn’t know what to do,” she recalled. “I went across the border. I paid a trafficker 1,000 Dinars and had no news about my children for 12 days, until they arrived in Jordan with another family. According to Jordanian laws, I can’t pass on my Jordanian citizenship to my children. I’m afraid of losing them. I suffer all the time.”

Another Palestinian refugee from Dara’a camp in Syria who was living in Irbid explained how the violence and hardships of the war had left her no choice but to enter Jordan illegally, where she struggled without proper documentation.²⁸² “We were living in misery,” she recounted. “We were starving in Syria. There was a shortage of everything. Days went by without water or electricity. One day my house in Dara’a was bombed.” After staying with her brother, a neighbor gave her the ID card of his daughter who had recently been killed, which she used to cross the border with her children and register herself and her four children at al-Za’atari refugee camp. After stays at the camp and another brother’s house, they sought refuge with her husband at a public school in an abandoned area of al-Bowaida, where they lived for nearly two years. They moved to Irbid, where she gave birth to a boy and registered him under the name of the deceased woman whose ID she carried. “To date, my son isn’t legally mine,” she said. “There is no way to prove that he is mine. I’m in a trap. I can’t take him out of the house. I can’t send him to school or anywhere. If the police find out, they would take him away from me.” Her other four children were unable to enroll in school for four years, until she managed to get the paperwork she needed (her marriage certificate, family book, and birth certificates) from Syria. “I remember the exact date when I entered Jordan,” she said. “It was January 24, 2014. I can never forget that date. It is the day I lost my identity and myself.”

Views on Return, Justice, and Coexistence

Questions about return, justice, and coexistence elicited a mixture of conflicted feelings among minority refugees, depending on their political affiliation, experience of displacement, and social background. Despite all of the challenges, discomfort, and discontent with their current living situation in their host communities, none of the refugees felt that the situation in Syria was safe enough for a dignified return. They were all wary due to the unpredictability and uncertainty of the country’s future. The majority of interviewees considered their stay in Jordan to be temporary, with many aspiring to relocate to Europe, the United States, or Canada. Their ultimate goal was to live in dignity, peace, and safety and rebuild their lives.

As with other refugees, safety and security were the most recurrent prerequisites for return, although understandings of these notions varied among respondents. For some, safety and security meant the removal of and accountability for Assad and his regime. As one Kurdish refugee woman put it, “the solution is to have independent and transparent elections without Bashar [al-Assad] and his regime. In the past we had elections, but they were never free or real.”²⁸³ Further, she argued:

All those who participated in the violence, regardless of their background or affiliation, must be brought to justice. Justice can be achieved only by having an international tribunal hold all criminals accountable. It cannot be a domestic one, and it cannot have any ties to the Assad regime. For me, I believe that a regime that slaughtered its people is incapable of achieving justice.

A Circassian aviation major general who had defected from the Syrian military held very harsh opinions about the Assad regime, conditioning any prospect of return on its removal.²⁸⁴ He contended:

²⁸² Interview conducted in Irbid on June 1, 2018.

²⁸³ Interview conducted in Salt on June 2, 2018.

²⁸⁴ Interview conducted in Amman on May 7, 2018.

The immoral, authoritarian, abusive regime could have contained the demonstrations of Daraa in 2011, but instead it was only interested in slaughtering people, to show that it is the only voice and the only power [in Syria]. As Nero burnt Rome, Bashar [al-Assad] burnt Syria. Without getting rid of the puppet Bashar and those around him, who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, who used lethal chemical weapons against their own people and ethnically cleansed Syria, it is not possible for me to go back to Syria. We must have transparent accountability and fair transitional justice. We need impartial truth and investigation committees.

For others, safety and security meant the dismantling of all militias and armed groups, including those supported by foreign powers. Most interviewees highlighted the need to abolish mandatory military conscription and end arbitrary detention, abduction, and all other state policies meant to terrify citizens and strip them of their freedom. “In Syria, armed groups of all backgrounds destroyed and looted the country,” a Circassian woman explained.²⁸⁵ “Today, it is difficult to say who did what. Every group played a role in bringing the country down. It’s a hopeless case. There is no security, only constant fear. There is risk of abduction, forced conscription, and sexual violence. I fear for my children and my family. They are all I have. I cannot imagine losing them.”

Some refugees believed that the presence of foreign armed groups in Syria was one of the main impediments to resolving the conflict. Without getting rid of the Turkish, Russian, Iranian, and ISIS (ISIL) presence, they felt peace would never return. According to an Ismaelite refugee, international intervention in Syria was not aimed at ending the conflict, but ended up playing into the hands of the regime.²⁸⁶ “Russia, Iran, Europe, the United States, and all the countries that have been involved militarily, what did they achieve?” another Circassian refugee asked.²⁸⁷ “Why is the international community not interested in putting an end to the Assad regime? Why did the same international players manage to get rid of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Qaddafi in Libya in no time, and now they are unwilling to get rid of the bloody Ba’thist Bashar [al-Assad] in Syria? If they wanted to, they could end the bloodshed, but they don’t want to.”

Some refugees understood security to mean food security and shelter for them and their children. A Bedouin refugee man, who had fled Idlib for Jordan and was living in a camp, said:

I am 33 years old and my wife is 30 years old, we have 7 children. My eldest son is 10 years old. My children do not know anything about Syria. In Jordan, we receive steady monthly aid. We get cash support and food support. My children receive aid, medical care, and educational support. Although what we have is little, it is at least consistent. We are relying on it. If we have to go back to Syria, we will face the unknown. When we left Syria, we were starving. We barely had enough food to survive. I can’t think of going back for the time being.²⁸⁸

Some refugees, although they were living in extreme discomfort and poverty in Jordan, saw no better solution than going back to their country, rebuilding their houses, and living in peace. They believed the best solution was looking ahead—that to break the vicious cycles of violence in Syria, it was necessary to forget the past eight years and think only about rebuilding the country, regardless of who was in power. For some, Assad was not the problem; in their opinion, the war was a foreign game aimed at toppling the regime and further destabilizing the region. They expressed being so exhausted and fatigued that they were willing to go back and live under Assad’s regime.

Internal displacement and fears of possible demographic shifts in Syria were other serious concerns of the refugees. As one Syrian journalist, who was an activist during the revolution put it, the prospect of refugee return to Syria is “strongly linked to finding solutions for those who have been internally displaced. From the media, we learn

285 Interview conducted in Amman on May 24, 2018.

286 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

287 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

288 Interview conducted in Madaba on May 21, 2018.

about huge numbers of internally displaced Syrians, with figures ranging from 6 to 7 million people. Before thinking of returning from Jordan or diaspora to Syria, internally displaced Syrians need a solution.”²⁸⁹ Refugees who had lost their land, home, and property did not envision the possibility of return without guarantees that their property would be restored and rebuilt. Some did not know the status of the property they had left behind. Others knew that their claims to property no longer existed or that their property had fallen into the hands of the regime or other opposition groups. One refugee, who is still in touch with his extended family, knew that an internally displaced family was living in his home.²⁹⁰ Without viable solutions to help returnees reclaim, restore, or rebuild their property, or find suitable alternatives, refugees were not willing to go back to their homeland.

An Ismaelite refugee who was married to a Kurdish Syrian explained that they still owned their house in Al Salamiya, but the war had not only changed the reality on the ground:

The conflict changed the manners and spirits of the people. Today, I don't know who lives in my city; many families from different backgrounds have moved in. It's no longer the city I used to know. My city was a home for Sunni, Shi'a, Kurds, and Christians. Since 2011, Al Nusra Front, ISIS, and the Alawites have been destroying the town and its social fabric for their own political gain. If in the past we were living in injustice, today the level of injustice is 100 times worse. I don't think I can go back to Syria now, although life in Jordan is very difficult. Only, if I were forced to go back to Syria would I go, and even then, I wouldn't go back to my city. I would sell my house in Salamiya and live in Rukn al Din, in Damascus, where it's relatively safer and more secure.²⁹¹

Syria's current state of lawlessness, the absence of the rule of law, and the lack of a transparent, independent, and impartial judicial system were also serious issues of concern. Refugees indicated that without access to a legal system that provides the necessary safeguards for people to live in safety and dignity, it would be impossible to consider going back. An Alawite refugee opposed to the regime described the structure of the current regime as complicated and one that could not be easily dismantled:

It is built on a legacy of corruption, repression, and dictatorship. There was never a voice for citizens or a role for civil society. The rule of law or independence of state institutions is unheard of in Syria. I have great distrust for the ruling regime and all the so-called opposition groups. Which state do I want to consider returning to, a repressive terrorist police state? Without a real fundamental change that can bring about safety and justice, return is not an option.²⁹²

Similar feelings of distrust and pessimism were shared by members of other minorities. A Circassian refugee said:

Trust is nonexistent. I don't trust the regime and all those involved in the conflict. All actors have dirty hands and ugly agendas. None care about the people of Syria. Without clear international resolutions that can achieve drastic change on the ground, Syria will continue exporting refugees to the world. It is a failing case, and we are losing hope of returning to live in justice, safety, and dignity.²⁹³

Memories of the Syrian regime, with its corruption, nepotism, and discriminatory legal system, had stayed with the refugees in exile. The ghost of the police state and its violence and violations of fundamental human rights continued to live with them and haunted them as they thought about return. “Freedom of expression and the public space in Syria were artificial,” said an Alawite refugee woman.²⁹⁴ The same feelings were shared

289 Syrian male journalist from Hama who left Syria in October 2012. Because journalism is one of the professions closed to Syrians in Jordan, he is currently working as a freelance writer for international media outlets. Interview conducted in Amman on May 29, 2018.

290 Interview conducted in Salt on June 2, 2018.

291 Interview conducted in Al Salt on June 02, 2018.

292 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

293 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

294 Interview conducted in Amman on May 10, 2018.

by a Circassian refugee “The state is built on praising the Assad regime. The law and the judiciary have always been tools to control people and their destinies. The system is built on nepotism, corruption, and favoritism; if you don’t praise the regime, there is no place for you in Syria.”²⁹⁵ Many refugees believed that achieving justice would be possible only by toppling the Assad regime, bringing not only Assad but all members of his regime to justice.

Interviewees were against the idea of granting blanket amnesty to those who had committed crimes during the conflict. As one Kurdish refugee expressed, “All those with blood on their hands need to pay the price, regardless of their affiliation or background.”²⁹⁶

Some of the refugees in Jordan were very concerned about the beliefs that other, pro-regime refugees held about them. For some of those who supported the regime, all those who were in favor of the revolution were traitors and needed to be punished. Some thought that those opposed to the regime had caused the conflict, claiming they had destabilized Syria, ignited sectarianism, and started a civil war. One Alawite refugee, who is married to a Palestinian refugee from Syria, elaborated: “I can’t imagine that the generation that was born outside of Syria would go back one day to a country that’s currently shaped by religious divides, alienation, discrimination, hatred, and hostility. Maybe one day, if the landscape changes, return could be possible, but not in the foreseeable future.”²⁹⁷ Another refugee from Eastern Ghouta, who had been a member of the Ba’athist party and was married to a Palestinian refugee from Syria, claimed that “the so-called revolution was all fabricated. People were paid and pushed to go out against the regime. Today, Syria is fertile soil for breeding sectarianism, violence, bigotry, hatred, and discrimination. All those who contributed to destroying Syria must be held accountable and should pay a very high price.”²⁹⁸

“Trust is nonexistent. I don’t trust the regime and all those involved in the conflict. All actors have dirty hands and ugly agendas. None care about the people of Syria.”

Some refugees held extreme positions on the question of peaceful coexistence. Under current conditions, they thought that overcoming the divisions among different groups of Syrians would be impossible. A Syrian woman who had left al-Azraq camp and was living in Amman with her grandchildren explained:

I had no problem with the regime. Both of my children are serving in the military. When I left Syria I was fleeing the violence of terrorist groups. The terrorists destroyed Syria, claiming they wanted freedom. What freedom did they want, to slaughter people and rape women? Bashar [al-Assad] must remain in power; he is the right man to continue leading our country. All other groups must be held accountable. There isn’t any possibility of making peace with them. I cannot accept them ever; they have to pay the price for forcing us out of Syria. We were living in a paradise, and only Bashar can restore peace in Syria.²⁹⁹

A Christian refugee said that resolving the conflict and achieving coexistence for now was impossible. “The Syria that we once knew no longer exists,” she contended. “The demographic makeup of Syria today is different. For me as a minority, it is very hard to think about reconciliation or acceptance of armed groups that killed people and destroyed our country.”³⁰⁰

295 Interview conducted in Amman on May 7, 2018.

296 Interview conducted in Amman on May 26, 2018.

297 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

298 Interview conducted in Sahab on June 2, 2018.

299 Interview conducted in Amman on May 14, 2018.

300 Interview conducted in Amman on May 31, 2018.

Because they expect the demographic map of Syria to no longer be the same as before the war, some minority refugees have serious concerns about going back to their original neighborhoods or towns. Social structures have changed, they said, which could exacerbate post-conflict tensions and affect refugees' decision to return. One Circassian Sunni Muslim refugee, for example, could not imagine living side by side with a Shi'a—for him, it was an absolute barrier to return.³⁰¹ Another believed that those with Islamic agendas constituted the real threat to coexistence in Syria. "Our biggest disaster is being a haven for radical, delusional groups that attach themselves to Islam," the refugee argued.³⁰² "They are far divorced from it and have nothing to do with any religion."

"The Syria that we once knew no longer exists . . . For me as a minority, it is very hard to think about reconciliation or acceptance of armed groups that killed people and destroyed our country."

Another refugee spoke of how the regime's forced displacement of certain groups allowed it to pursue wholesale demographic change, with mercenaries and militias from Iraq, Iran, and Hezbollah-controlled areas also playing a vital role in changing the demographics of Syria. "External powers invented religions, religious movements, and brainwashed people and mercenaries to take over Syria," said one refugee.³⁰³

Many of the younger generation of refugees interviewed for this report expressed a desire to go back to Syria "one day," but did not feel it would happen in the near future. They thought that

remaining in exile for now might provide them with better opportunities for work and empowerment before going back to their country. A young Kurdish refugee explained:

I love Syria and, it will always be my home country. However, for the time being, even if I want to go back, I cannot do much for my country. I still have a long way to go. I prefer to continue my education, improve myself, and make the best out of being in Jordan. The time isn't right to consider return. We have a lot to do to prepare ourselves to go back and rebuild our country.³⁰⁴

A young Christian refugee woman said, "my relationship with Syria is about my roots. Maybe sometime in the future I would consider going back for a visit, but I would never consider going back permanently."³⁰⁵ A young Circassian refugee woman also expressed her unwillingness to return to Syria: "I'm still young. I have dreams and aspirations. I want to get a good education, build a successful career, and have a family, in peace. Syria cannot offer me any of that."³⁰⁶

Activists and those who were vocal critics of the regime saw no prospect for return without safeguards that would protect them against criminal prosecution or inhumane treatment. A journalist from Aleppo, who had covered a number of demonstrations and lobbied to mobilize citizens during the 2011 revolution, was on a blacklist.³⁰⁷ She did not feel that return was an option for her or her children. She recounted:

I was known in Syria as "the lady with the white phone." With courage and determination, a group of young Syrians and I mobilized via Facebook and utilized social media to organize demonstrations in Aleppo. We never expected to be targeted. Tragically, the state met our demands with force and gunfire. It cracked down on journalists. Several people in my Facebook activist group were targeted. I was next in line. My life was at risk. I was forced to flee. According to the Assad regime, I am a terrorist. The regime considers all who speak out as terrorists, so there is no return for us.

301 Interview conducted in Amman on May 18, 2018.

302 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

303 Interview conducted in Amman on May 19, 2018.

304 Interview conducted in Amman on May 26, 2018.

305 Interview conducted in Amman on May 31, 2018.

306 Interview conducted in Amman on May 18, 2018.

307 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

Evident among the majority of those interviewed was skepticism about the international community, which they viewed as part of the problem and responsible for widening divisions among people in Syria. Many believed that the role of Hezbollah, Iran, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in the conflict was further complicating it. They professed disbelief about the ability of the League of Arab States to restore peace and justice in Syria, seeing Arab countries as too weak and already exhausted by internal peace and security issues to effectively intervene. With their war-torn country divided into mini provinces, each one falling under the control of a different power and their people constituting the largest refugee population in the world, interviewees did not believe there was genuine goodwill among members of the international community toward Syria. They felt abandoned or failed by international actors, including the United Nations. Despite numerous resolutions by the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly, the human suffering in Syria has remained one of the most horrific tragedies in modern history.³⁰⁸ Instead of a population that seeks peace and prosperity, the Syrian people today are considered as a burden on the international community.

Refugees expressed frustration with the way the international community has treated them. Whether in the Arab region or in the West, countries have adopted more restrictive policies toward them. Many countries have closed their doors to asylum seekers. Interviewees, therefore, felt caught in a precarious situation. While for the time being they cannot go back to their country in peace and dignity, they did not see any prospect for integration in their host country or possibility for resettlement in a third country.³⁰⁹ As one refugee who belonged to the Sufi path, an inward spiritual mystical form of Islam,³¹⁰ expressed, “the word refugee kills me daily.”³¹¹ Some refugees, however, did believe that the United Nations could play a vital role in resolving the conflict by sending peacekeeping missions to Syria to halt the fighting, help restore peace, and form a truth and reconciliation commission.³¹²

Refugees highlighted the necessity of engaging Syrian people in the search for durable solutions and engaging with those who have borne the brunt of the conflict. Despite the impact of the conflict on social cohesion and security, they said, Syrian citizens were capable of bringing peace to their country. They believed that peace must be achieved from within, without the influence of external political agendas.³¹³ Many refugees insisted on the need for a more forward-looking and optimistic culture of coexistence and forgiveness in Syria. Without disregarding the tremendous pain and suffering of Syrians, whether internally displaced or in diaspora, they stressed the need for national talks and open discussions.³¹⁴

Refugees expressed frustration with the way the international community has treated them. Whether in the Arab region or in the West, countries have adopted more restrictive policies toward them.

308 Interview conducted in Sahab on May 7, 2018.

309 Interview conducted in Irbid on June 5, 2018.

310 For more information about Sufism, see Sufism in Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2260>

311 Interview conducted in Amman on May 5, 2018.

312 Interview conducted in al-Za'atari camp on May 4, 2018.

313 Interview conducted in Amman on May 11, 2018.

314 Interview conducted in Amman on May 29, 2018.

XIV. Refugee Experiences in Jordan

Most of the refugee influx to Jordan took place between 2012 and 2013.³¹⁵ Entry points to the country varied, with some refugees flying from Damascus into Queen Alia International Airport in Amman. Many others came through the Jaber-Nasib border crossing, which had been closed by Jordanian authorities since 2015 for security reasons but reopened in 2018. For some, Jordan was their only refuge. They felt it was socially, culturally, and religiously the closest to their home country. It was, in their opinion, the right destination for temporary shelter.

Many refugees when they entered Jordan already had family members living there, whom they counted on to facilitate their settlement process. As one Circassian who left Syria in 2013 interviewee explained:

When we left Syria, we thought of Jordan as the only possible country to seek refuge. It is an Arab country, with the same language, religion, and lifestyle [as Syria]. There is a Circassian community and association that helped us to settle after a very troubling and extremely difficult experience leaving Syria. My uncle was in Jordan. He brought us here because Jordanians live the same way as we do and have the same traditions. We thought we would be here for no more than three months. Now it is six years later, and we are still here.³¹⁶

In the years since they arrived in Jordan, refugees have faced a wide range of challenges in both host communities and refugee camps that will have implications for justice and coexistence in Syrian society after the war. These include social and economic exclusion and tensions with host communities—especially regarding areas such as education and employment—restrictive state policies, discrimination, domestic violence, and mental health. At the same time, however, refugees have shown resilience in adapting to and overcoming certain challenges and taking on new roles, like women have done in the Jordanian labor market.

Refugee Views on Economic and Social Exclusion

One of the most common concerns among refugees was the experience of economic and social exclusion. They felt both that the experience of displacement had undermined their human dignity and that their host country at large was deliberately treating them as foreigners who would never be part of their country. Despite efforts by the Jordanian government and donor community to engage refugees in economic stabilization and encourage their economic independence, they continued to face economic and social difficulties. Accessing fundamental rights remained a challenge. They faced myriad barriers to work, health care, and education. Interviewees felt highly vulnerable, situated on the periphery of society and excluded from any prospect of full socioeconomic integration.

³¹⁵ “ACAPS Thematic Report: Jordan - Syrian Refugees: Political and Financial Dynamics,” August 24, 2016, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/acaps_thematic_report_jordan_syrian_refugees_political_and_financial_dynamics.pdf

³¹⁶ Interview conducted in Amman on May 24, 2018.

According to CARE International, nine in ten Syrian refugees are in debt.³¹⁷ In line with these findings, most interviewees for this research reported having debts, mainly to their landlords. They expressed their frustration about dwindling humanitarian aid, high living expenses, and shortage of financial resources. They reported facing extreme difficulties in meeting their basic needs. To bridge the gap between their expenditure and earnings, refugees resorted to pulling their children out of schools, marrying young daughters, and sending children to work.

Interviewees expressed discontent with how certain segments of host communities perceived them. They explained that, in Jordan, Syrian refugees were all “painted with one color”—that of vulnerability, helplessness, and powerlessness. Instead of being looked at as a population with added value that contributes to a flourishing society, they have been seen as social burdens—competitors for scarce resources and opportunities—who are temporarily draining the system and reliant on Jordan’s job market and humanitarian aid. As a result, in their everyday life, refugees in Jordanian host communities faced different types of exploitation, discrimination, and violence, including harassment and bullying. One refugee reflected:

One day we were known for our excellence in the culinary arts, trade, hospitality, fine arts, education, and science. We had, and still have, a very rich culture and a history that has contributed to Arabic civilization. We are a nation of artisans, business owners, and craftsmen. We are a very rich society, full of ethnic, religious, and social diversity. We love to work; anywhere we go we manage to navigate the system and build something out of nothing. We have a lot to offer any nation. . . Jordanians think that we are here to steal their jobs and threaten their lives. Instead of thinking of us a burden, why don't they think of us as an asset?³¹⁸

A refugee woman from Aleppo living in Irbid shared her experience working at a clothing factory.³¹⁹ Her husband had cancer, she had two daughters, and the little humanitarian aid they received hardly covered the cost of their food. She found a job at a clothing factory specializing in Islamic prayer clothing but could not tolerate the work environment and quit. “The owner persistently harassed me,” she said, “especially when he found out that my husband was sick. He felt that he had the upper hand and tried to abuse his power.” Her work colleagues were also unkind, constantly telling her that she did not need a job, that she was taking work from Jordanians. “The only solution for me to preserve my honor and dignity was to leave that place,” she stated. “I had never worked before, and I do not know where I can find a job where I will not be threatened physically and psychologically. It’s very difficult to be a stranger in an unknown, unwelcoming country. I dream of going back to my homeland.”

According to UNHCR, over 50 percent of Syrian refugees are children, in need of education and developmental and health services.³²⁰ The existing educational system in Jordan already suffered from lack of sufficient infrastructural, professional, and material resources. Today, more than 100 public schools in Jordan operate in double shifts,³²¹ while 90 percent of public schools lack classrooms, proper heating systems, and water and bathrooms facilities.³²² While the government is working to accommodate Syrian children in the system, the available infrastructure and educational capacities

In the years since they arrived in Jordan, refugees have faced a wide range of challenges in both host communities and refugee camps that will have implications for justice and coexistence in Syrian society after the war.

317 CARE International Jordan, “2018 Urban Assessment of the Situation of Syrian and Non-Syrian Refugees, and Vulnerable Jordanians,” August 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/66468>

318 Interview conducted in Amman on May 14, 2018.

319 Interview conducted in Sahab on June 2, 2018.

320 UNHCR, *Jordan Factsheet*, February 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FactSheetJordanFebruary2018-FINAL_o.pdf

321 The early shift from 7am to 12:30pm is dedicated for Jordanian students, whereas the shorter afternoon shift from 1pm to 4:30pm is allocated for Syrian students.

322 Double Shift, “Public Schooling,” <https://www.double-shift.org/double-shift/double-shift>

cannot meet their needs.³²³ Syrian refugees have to attend afternoon school shifts, which poses multiple challenges for refugees. First, refugees are not fully integrated into the academic system and do not have the opportunity to meet and interact with their Jordanian peers. Second, school hours are short and only offered in the afternoon.³²⁴ Families said most schools were far from their homes, so they feared sending their children to unfamiliar neighborhoods, especially parents of adolescent daughters.³²⁵ Due to limited financial resources, some families did not have the means to send their children to school. Although Jordanian public schools are tuition free for Syrian refugees,³²⁶ refugees typically cannot afford to pay for other school-related expenses for their children, such as stationary, transportation, and food.³²⁷ Parents also complained about the attitude of Jordanian teachers and students toward



A woman from Syria and a woman from Jordan work together in a Syrian-owned food processing factory. Al Dura foods used to operate in Syria, but was forced to close because of the conflict. It has since relocated to Jordan and employs some of its former Syrian workers, who are now refugees, as well as local Jordanian staff. Jordan, 2016 (Bea Arscott/DFID). The people in this photograph neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

their children. They narrated episodes of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Further, as a result of poverty and a lack of hope, many had ended up pulling their children out of school.

Since their arrival in host communities, refugees interviewed for this report reported struggling to enter the job market and secure a minimum standard of living. They held informal jobs, mainly in the food, construction, and services sectors. Workers faced myriad challenges, including underpayment and exploitation. Jordan in 2016 (unlike other host countries) adopted a new approach to the number of new Syrian refugees in the country by allowing them to legally enter the job market and temporarily work in specific sectors. As part of its commitment to its international obligations at the Supporting Syria Conference in London,

the Jordanian government signed the Jordan Compact. Accordingly, it pledged to issue 200,000 temporary work permits to Syrian refugees in specific sectors, mainly construction, agriculture, and manufacturing.³²⁸

The permits were the first of their kind offered in the Arab region to help formalize the Syrian diaspora working population.³²⁹ Although this intention was widely welcomed by the international community as a way to integrate refugees into the Jordanian economy and reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid,³³⁰ self-employment and most higher-paying work sectors remain closed to refugees. In its commitment, the Jordanian government

323 UNICEF Jordan, "Education," January 2017, [https://www.unicef.org/jordan/2_Education_-_2017\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/jordan/2_Education_-_2017(1).pdf)

324 Ritesh Shah, "Evaluation of NRC's Host Community Education Programme in Jordan," Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), July 2018, <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/evaluations/nrc-hc-evaluation-final.pdf>

325 Interviews in Amman on May 20, 2018 and Irbid on May 22, 2018.

326 Charlie Dunmore and Annie Sakkab, "School Offers Syrian Girls in Jordan the Chance to Flourish," UNHCR, March 6, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2018/3/5a9ec9ad4/school-offers-syrian-girls-jordan-chance-flourish.html>

327 Fafo, "The Living Conditions of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 Survey of Syrian Refugees Inside and Outside Camps," February 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/67914>

328 Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan, International Labour Organization, Regional Office for Arab States, 2017.

329 UNHCR, "Refugee Livelihoods: Jordan," September 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60230>

330 Svein Erik Stave and Solveig Hillesund, "Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market," International Labour Office and Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, 2015, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_364162.pdf

pledged to issue work permits, but not to create jobs for refugees.³³¹ Further, it restricted the number of permits that could be issued and placed a strict procedure on permit renewal that falls mainly on the shoulders of the refugee, not the employer, to carry out.³³² The procedure puts Syrian workers in a difficult position, as failing to obtain a required work permit before working may result in a refugee being sent to one of the designated refugee camps or even deported back to Syria.³³³

A former general who had defected from the Syrian army explained that when his family had arrived in Jordan in 2014, they depended on his savings and expected to stay in Jordan only for a couple of weeks.³³⁴ His wife, who had never worked before, soon suffered from severe depression, struggling with the transition from being a woman of wealth and comfort to a refugee who could barely afford the basics. He looked for a job but could not find one. “No one wanted to hire a Syrian refugee in his fifties who had no manual labor experience,” he recounted. “The only work I found, thanks to my size, was in construction. Occasionally, I find open employers that need laborers to load and unload heavy materials for construction. It’s unsustainable and doesn’t pay much at all.” Last year, he sought food support from UNHCR, which made him feel “like dying.” “I do not want charity,” he said. “I do not want to be dependent on humanitarian organizations or charities. I feel powerless and helpless. My family and I struggle daily in Jordan. Our living conditions are harsh.”

Refugee Views on Safety, Community Relations, and Social Tensions

Refugees in host communities often said they felt intimidated by Jordanian policies. For example, the majority of refugees who were interviewed highlighted the inconvenience caused by policies that bar Syrians from obtaining driver’s licenses in Jordan. As one Circassian refugee recounted “My car is parked outside, I am not even allowed to drive it. At the moment, it serves only as a reminder of my life in Syria and the painful journey that I took to arrive to Jordan.”³³⁵ A Kurdish refugee who was driving an illegally rented car explained:³³⁶ “Syrians who enter Jordan as tourists are allowed to drive, but those who are in Jordan as refugees must obtain identification cards from the General Security, as well as a Jordanian driving license. Now I am not allowed to drive legally, but I have to. It is unaffordable and inconvenient to keep hiring taxis. To get the permit, I need to enroll again in classes, sit for the driving tests, and apply for a permit. It is costly, long, and just impossible!”

They also talked about the rules restricting their free movement and ability to exit and return to Jordan. A female Syrian graduate student enrolled in the German Jordanian University explained that she had lost an opportunity to participate in a summer academic program in Spain, when she failed to secure a permit to travel and return to Jordan (known as *Ithen Khorooj wa Oudeh*) due to security constraints on Syrian refugees.³³⁷ A Syrian journalist explained:³³⁸

The travel and return permit is a mandatory procedure for all Syrians who wish to ensure their return to Jordan. Generally, it is a procedure that takes a minimum of two weeks. Syrian students, investors, and workers with valid work permits are eligible to request a travel and return permit from the Ministry of Interior. In many cases, the decision depends on a security clearance from the intelligence. The permit costs around \$10. Refugees who decide to travel outside of Jordan without the travel and return permit risk being denied entry upon return at the Jordanian borders.

331 Maha Kattaa and Meredith Byrne, “Quality of Work for Syrian Refugees in Jordan,” *Forced Migration Review*, June 2018, <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/kattaa-byrne.pdf>

332 International Labour Organization, Regional Office for Arab States, “Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan,” June 2017, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_559151.pdf

333 Jordan INGO Forum, “61 International NGOs in Jordan Warn: Too Many Syrian Refugees in Jordan Risk to Remain Excluded from Long-hoped for Development, Jordan Compact Study 2017,” September 2017, <https://jordaningoforum.org/2017/10/02/jordan-compact-study-2017/>

334 Interview conducted in Amman on May 20, 2018.

335 Interview conducted in Amman on May 24, 2018.

336 Interview conducted in Amman on May 26, 2018.

337 Interview conducted in Amman on May 10, 2018.

338 Interview conducted in Amman on May 29, 2018.

Social tensions between refugees and members of the host communities were likely inevitable. Livelihoods and work constituted the main sources of tension. According to those interviewed, there was a dominant negative narrative in Jordan that Syrians steal jobs, exhaust already-scarce resources, burden the system, and contribute to economic inflation. Refugees shared anecdotes demonstrating the prejudice, abuse, exploitation, and discrimination against them and their children, especially at school and in the workplace. A Christian refugee who worked for a travel agency explained that he was more educated than his coworkers and worked longer hours than them but received the lowest amount of pay.³³⁹ “I have been working there for four years and have never gotten a raise,” he said. “I have no health insurance or any rights, like the other employees. When I tried to raise these concerns with my employer, he said that I have to be thankful to have a job in Jordan and if I was unhappy I could go back to Syria.”

A Chichnian refugee explained that he had come to Jordan to avoid forced conscription into the military or being targeted by armed groups.³⁴⁰ He enrolled in a private university and found a part-time job. He said:

Unfortunately, my experience in Jordan has been rough. I was always discriminated against, at both school and work. At the university, students always looked down on me for the mere fact that I was a Syrian refugee. I was never close to the other students and never felt that I belonged to any of the social circles. I didn't have any friends. Even those Syrians who were at the university didn't accept me, because they came from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

At work, his experience was not any better. “I was exploited by my employer, underpaid, and repeatedly bullied by my Jordanian coworkers, even by Jordanians of Palestinian origin who also initially came to Jordan as refugees.” He was reported to the police as an illegal worker because coworkers saw him as a competitor. He was treated “like a machine,” developed severe chronic eczema from using harsh chemicals, and was laid off. Without health insurance, most of his money went to pay for medication and treatment. The Chichnian Association stopped paying his tuition, he left school, and was looking for a job at the time of the interview. “I wish one day I could move to Europe,” he said.

Another Christian refugee who worked as a waiter in a restaurant in a town outside of Amman described the conservatism of Jordanian people in the community as one of the factors that increased his discomfort. He said:

My wife doesn't feel safe walking alone in the street. Whenever she has to leave the house, she is insulted by Jordanians because she doesn't cover her hair. We are Christians, not Muslims. I don't understand why people give themselves permission to interfere in every aspect of our life. Because we are vulnerable and peaceful, Jordanians think that they have power over us. I know that we are refugees from a religious minority and I know that Jordan is generously hosting us, but we are uncomfortable here.³⁴¹

His wife started wearing *hijab*, which made him uncomfortable. “I feel she is forced to hide who she is, just to avoid trouble,” he said. “Until we find another option, we will continue abiding by the Arabic adage ‘Keep your head low and steer away from trouble [*Imshi il heet il heet w qol ya rab el seter*].’ I dream of leaving Jordan. I want to go to Europe. It is hard to be poor, a member of a minority group, and a refugee.”

A mother of a teenaged girl talked about the discrimination that her daughter faced at school. “My daughter hates going to school. In the morning she cries,” she said.³⁴² “Sometimes she comes home without uttering a single word. She is always sad and barely interacts with us. When I insist on her speaking, she only talks about wanting to leave school. She complains about the way the teachers treat Syrian students. She says that they

339 Interview conducted in Amman on May 31, 2018.

340 Interview conducted in Amman on June 2, 2018.

341 Interview conducted in Jerash on May 15, 2018.

342 Interview conducted in Irbid on June 5, 2018.

laugh at their accents and intimidate them.” Her daughter and other Syrian students attend night school. “At the school entrance,” she explained, the Jordanian girls “laugh and harass them, say hurtful things, pull their hair, and bother them.” The school principal and teachers asked the Syrian students to clean the school after the Jordanian students go home.

Minority refugees highlighted Jordanian restrictions on religious freedom that do not allow them to practice their religion openly. Those belonging to “unrecognized faiths” shared a fear of practicing their religion, including Druze, Baha’I, Ismaelites, Rifa’ites, and Shi’a. As a Druze refugee described:

In Jordan we don’t mention our faith openly. It’s a conservative society that doesn’t have great tolerance. Although there is a Druze community in Jordan, they do not talk openly about their faith or religious affiliation. When it comes to religious activities, we do not practice anything openly. We can’t be open about it, otherwise we might risk prosecution or even deportation.³⁴³

A Syrian refugee with anti-government views who had defected from the Syrian army in 2013 shared some of the challenges that he faced when he arrived in Jordan.³⁴⁴ He chose to go to Jordan because he had an uncle who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and had fled Hafez al-Assad’s regime in 1979. “When I arrived in Irbid, where my uncle lives,” he related, “I was struck by his level of conservatism and radicalism.” He met many people who belonged to the same political and ideological movement as his uncle: “They tried persistently to change my views. When they failed, they started to be resentful of me. They even asked my uncle not to have me around their circle.” He found a new job and place to live.

Vulnerability and Resilience of Refugees

Due to their ethnic or political backgrounds, some refugee groups in Jordan were extremely vulnerable. Palestinian refugees from Syria, who have been forcibly displaced as a group for the second time, provided an example of a marginalized group facing compounded struggle. Stateless Palestinian refugees, due to political and legal constraints,³⁴⁵ and the nature of their first experience of displacement from Palestine in 1948, have a distinct legal status internationally, in accordance with the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.³⁴⁶ They are excluded from the mandate of UNHCR, instead falling under that of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which only increases their vulnerability and allows for discriminatory policies.

Unlike Syrian refugees in Jordan, Palestinian refugees from Syria are not considered asylum seekers, which makes them ineligible for assistance from other UN agencies, including UNHCR and the World Food Programme.³⁴⁷ They are also not allowed to seek resettlement in a third country. In breach of international law, in 2013, the Jordanian government adopted a no-entry policy for Palestinian refugees escaping the war in Syria. As a result, they were stranded at the Syrian border without even the bare minimum needed to survive. The distinct status of Palestinian refugees has intensified their suffering. To date, they have faced myriad challenges to securing their basic needs and navigating a system that disenfranchizes them. They have encountered complications in carrying out civil processes, including registering births, marriages, and deaths, and accessing Jordanian government services and work permits. They have been at constant risk of refoulement (forced return to a country where a refugee is liable to be subjected to persecution).³⁴⁸

343 Interview conducted in Amman on May 17, 2018.

344 Interview conducted in Amman on May 29, 2018.

345 *Al Majdal*, “Palestinian Refugees from Syria: Ongoing Nakba, Ongoing Discrimination,” Issue No. 56, Autumn 2014, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/al-majdal-56.pdf>

346 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1D, 1951.

347 Human Rights Watch, “Lebanon: Palestinians Barred, Sent to Syria Reverse Blanket Rejection of Refugees,” May 5, 2014, www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/05/lebanon-palestinians-barred-sent-syria

348 UNRWA, “PRS in Jordan,” www.unrwa.org/prs-jordan

A Jordanian woman who was married to a Palestinian refugee shared her experience of deportation as a result of state policy.³⁴⁹ Her family had come to Jordan legally in 2013, but soon the Jordanian government stopped granting spouses entry or residency permissions, and her husband and children were forced to leave the country. “They threw us in the no-man’s land between the Syrian and Jordanian border,” she recounted. “We were stranded in the street without any shelter. We didn’t have even food for the children. It was freezing cold. I couldn’t keep my kids warm. We waited until a bus came and took us back to Syria. Our house had been completely destroyed.” They stayed with her in-laws, who humiliated her and treated her poorly, so she took her children to the Nasib border, where there are armed opposition camps. When she arrived, however, the opposition group arrested her and sent the family back to Syria. She explained:

As a Jordanian, I could have continued my journey and crossed the border, but without my children, which wasn’t an option for me. In prison, I met other women. Some had been brutally beaten and others were crying. In the detention cell, the conditions were dire. We didn’t have access to food or even toilets.

Eventually, through connections, traffickers working with the armed opposition border control helped the family cross into Jordan.

Due to a lack of financial resources and shortage of aid, more women refugees are informally entering the labor market in Jordan. They mainly work in the areas of catering, handcrafts, beauty services, and domestic work. Without protection, some face exploitation and harassment. For those coming from a traditional society, like Syria, this is new, especially for women from rural areas. Several women, however, spoke about certain positive sides to participating in the labor market. Being a breadwinner or even a contributor in financing a household gave women new agency, which had contributed to shifting their traditional gender roles.

Several women spoke about certain positive sides to participating in the labor market. Being a breadwinner or even a contributor in financing a household gave women new agency, which had contributed to shifting their traditional gender roles.

They were no longer limited to the roles of homemaker and mother.

A refugee from Damascus explained that she had never worked outside of the house. “I never knew anything about the outside world,” she shared.³⁵⁰ “I got married at a young age. My husband was in charge of everything. I didn’t continue my education. I was a very obedient wife who only said, ‘yes sir!’ Coming to

Jordan taught me what it means to have my own personality.” When she came to Jordan, her husband could not find a job and was ill and depressed. “I had to work to buy food for my children,” she said. “I worked in houses, prepared food for Jordanian families.” Then she enrolled in a training course in cosmetology and found a job in a hair salon. “All of it is new to me. I feel stronger inside and outside of the house. I honestly do not wish to go back to my old lifestyle. I don’t want to go back to being the blind cat who knows nothing!”

Gender-based violence and domestic violence against women and girl refugees were also evident. Women lacked protection inside the house as well as in the public sphere. Incidents of intimidation and exploitation in their workplaces, schools, and on public transportation were recounted. One case involved human trafficking. A group of six young Syrian women had been trapped in a prostitution ring, providing services to men from the Gulf states, mainly Kuwait and Qatar. After being blackmailed, exploited, and physically and emotionally abused, one woman sought the help of a Jordanian legal aid organization, which worked with the Jordanian authorities to classify the

³⁴⁹ Interview conducted in Irbid on June 5, 2018.

³⁵⁰ Interview conducted in Amman on May 11, 2018.

crime as human trafficking, instead of sex work, to avoid pressing charges against women. Accordingly, women were referred to a *Karamah* (dignity in Arabic) shelter for human trafficking, located in Jofeh suburb in east Amman. There, and with the support of a legal aid organization, women were provided basic needs, protection, counselling, and rehabilitation services with the aim of helping them return to their communities in safety and reintegrate into their families without fears of ostracization.³⁵¹

An illiterate woman originally from Aleppo who had been married at age 15 never chose to come to Jordan, but out of pressure from her husband and out of fear of losing her young child, she joined him against her will. “I never wanted to come to Jordan,” she said.³⁵² “My husband threatened that if I didn’t join him in Jordan, he would take my child away and leave me in Syria, while he went to Jordan and then somewhere else.” In Jordan they lived with her husband’s brother’s family and his parents. “His mother used to lock me in a room. She didn’t want me to eat separately with my husband. She didn’t want me to even spend a minute alone with him. She used to make up stories about me. She took away my passport, ID, and all my papers.” When they registered with UNHCR, her son was registered under her husband’s name. Her husband kept all the papers, including her security biometric card and soon kicked her out of the house. “One night, he literally threw me in the street,” she said. “I left without any of my papers. I asked the police to help me. They thought I was illegal; they took me to the police station and put me in jail. I didn’t know what to do.” A friend from Damascus bailed her out with the help of a legal aid center and let her live with her. “I am stranded in Jordan,” she said. “I still have no legal documentation or access to my child. I can’t work or step outside of the house. I have no money and can’t seek the aid of the UNHCR. I’m registered under my husband and he takes my aid. I want to go back to Syria, but I need papers and my son.”

A refugee woman from Damascus living in a low-income neighborhood in Eastern Amman talked about the trauma of displacement and the emotional baggage that comes with it. But she also spoke about what resilience meant to her. When she and her husband arrived in Jordan in 2013, she tried to enroll in university but failed to produce the educational certificates needed for admission. She tried to work, but Syrians are not allowed to open businesses in Jordan. She developed severe depression. She recalled:

I didn’t want to leave my tiny apartment, which I hated terribly. I stayed inside for months, until one day someone knocked on my door and asked me to help her daughter with her schoolwork. She knew that my husband had been a lawyer with a university degree in Syria. She thought that I could help her daughter. I still don’t know where I got the confidence to do it, but I sat with the girl and helped her.³⁵³

She then decided to look for places to volunteer and now works with Iraqis, Jordanians, and Syrians, providing psychosocial and educational support.

I tutor Syrians for free at home and help those around me who suffer as a result of the war and its traumatic impacts on refugees. In my neighborhood, I became a point person for support for refugees and Jordanians. I provide counseling to children who have dropped out of school. Additionally, I work with Syrian parents who are afraid to send their children, mainly girls, to school.

Refugees in camps expressed general feelings of being trapped. With limited access to the outside world and limited opportunities to meet and live with the Jordanian population, they felt excluded. Some had never been outside of their camp. They barely knew the geography of their area. They yearned for any chance to leave the camp and

351 Interview with one of the trafficked girls, conducted in Amman on May 5, 2018.

352 Interview conducted in Amman on May 14, 2018.

353 Interview conducted in Amman on May 6, 2018.

live in a host community. They described their presence in the camp as being under house arrest. Several women brought up incidents of domestic violence committed against them and their children, describing the toll that the war and living in the camp had taken on their husbands. Most men in the camp are unemployed. Due to limited work opportunities and financial resources, the refugee men interviewed for this report felt that their role as the main provider for their family was shrinking. In response, their agony, powerlessness, and vulnerability was expressed as aggression in the house. A woman from al-Za'atari camp said:

After all we have lost and continue to lose, our tragedy must come to an end. Every Syrian lost part of their life; we are all victims. We are tired, very tired. When we will stop suffering? Our life in the camp isn't a life. We are not living. We are breathing bodies without souls. We cannot forget, but we need to forgive and move forward. We need to open our minds and hearts, and think about the remaining years of our lives and the future of our children. We need to have more tolerance and acceptance, to eliminate all the pain and suffering and think of how we can rebuild our Syria.³⁵⁴

The head of a tribe who lived with his three wives and 12 children in al-Za'atari camp perceived his presence in Jordan as temporary. He believed that one day he would either go back to Syria or seek asylum in Turkey. His transition from tribal leader to refugee in a camp put him in a very peculiar situation. With the change in his social status, he felt that he had not only lost his property and presence in Syria, but also part of who he was. Today he does not enjoy the same power as he did in Syria. In the camp, he tries to play the role of a mediator, resolving conflicts between refugees in his tribal capacity as a reputable figure. He works to hold the members of his tribe close to each other. He is aware of their issues, concerns, and problems. In his informal social capacity, he also tries to communicate his community's concerns to the camp administration. Along with other heads of tribes, they have formed a type of a council in the camp. He said:³⁵⁵

Refugees in camps expressed general feelings of being trapped. With limited access to the outside world and limited opportunities to meet and live with the Jordanian population, they felt excluded.

As a tribal leader, I do not have a legal capacity, but I have a social and an informal power that is based on the acceptance of the people. In the camp, people trust me. They seek my help. They come to me to resolve their issues. As Syrians, we appreciate the role and the generosity of the Jordanian government, but why would we need to go to the police to resolve our issues? We have the capabilities and the power to do it internally.

While showing pictures of his house and property in Syria, he hesitantly talked about his dependence on humanitarian aid and the ways it contributes further to his feelings of vulnerability. He explained:

I am the first tribal leader to leave Syria. I was abducted and held for three days. I witnessed nightmares and later was forced to go on TV to praise Assad's regime. My son and brother were targeted. They disappeared, and only a year and half later were we told that they had died in prison. We were never given their bodies or the chance to bury them and say goodbye. I was put under tremendous pressure. I was threatened. I needed to escape. Today, when I think about my life in the camp, I feel sorry for myself. It's very difficult to come to terms with my current social and economic status. It hurts me how I am so weak, I cannot even drive a car. I am tribal leader who can only roam a refugee camp on a bike.

354 Interview conducted in al-Za'atari camp on May 4, 2018.

355 Interview conducted in al-Za'atari camp on May 4, 2018.

Refugees living in other informal camps also demonstrated resilience. In one random camp in Madaba, a young man who had worked as a school teacher in Syria sought the help of UNICEF and a Spanish organization, Global Humanity, to secure a tent and stationary to help teach refugee children who were out of school.³⁵⁶ “I entered al-Za’atari camp in 2013 after a long journey to cross the border,” he recounted. “Back then, conditions at the camp were harsh. I ran away and later became a legal refugee.” He started working in a strawberry farm and realized that none of the children he saw were enrolled in school. He said:

They were illiterate, living with illiterate families. I felt horrible. We Syrians, the people of education and culture, are losing our next generation. I decided to start teaching kids informally. Three years ago, I set up a tent where I could teach children between the ages of 6 and 15. I teach them Arabic reading and writing as well as math and English. In 2014, UNICEF and global humanity started helping me. I am the only teacher, and today I have 60 students.

356 Interview conducted in Madaba on May 21, 2018.

XV. Conclusion

After an armed conflict, drafting a new constitution, reconstruction efforts, reforming state institutions, holding elections, and mending the economy are necessary, but they are not sufficient to secure peace at the local and community levels. A peacebuilding process that fails to understand the political, sectarian, social, and other dynamics at the local level and that neglects local actors will not be able to promote peaceful coexistence or recreate social trust—two elements necessary to establish stability and ensure lasting peace. A bottom-up approach to refugee return, justice, and coexistence that engages refugees, along with local civil society organizations and community leaders and members, and that prioritizes listening to and addressing local needs is critical.

The findings of this study into refugee views on return, justice, and coexistence showed that the decision to voluntarily return to Syria and peacefully coexist with other communities, including minorities, is not only linked to the progress of high-level talks between the government and opposition parties and their respective allies in Geneva and Astana. It is also strongly linked to the sense of security at the local level and refugees' willingness, or lack of it, to live side-by-side with other communities perceived as hostile.

The international community must, therefore, abide by its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which calls for ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. To do so, it should ensure that the concerns, needs, and priorities of refugees—including the most vulnerable segments of the refugee population—are addressed, paying particular attention to where returnees came from and where they will return to, and that their specific concerns and needs according to their gender and age are also adequately addressed.

Given that refugee experiences and views depend on where they came from, where they live now, who they are, and what they believe, the report focuses largely on the areas in Syria where the refugees interviewed for this study originated; their gender, age, and faith; and their experiences in their host country.

A number of themes cross cut the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan. As is common in contexts of war and displacement, safety and security were their most immediate concern when talking about the potential of returning to Syria. They expressed concern for themselves, their children, and other relatives. Most feared arrest, detention, torture, enforced disappearance, abduction, forced conscription, gender-based violence, and indiscriminate shelling—which were often the same concerns that drove them out of their communities and their country in the first place. They also feared punitive or retaliatory measures by the government and armed groups.

In addition, this fear will not necessarily end when the armed conflict is over because it involves a deep distrust of state institutions, armed actors, and foreign powers, as well as the expectation that the insecurity arising from sectarian divisions is likely to persist. Relatedly, many refugees suffered significant trauma in both Syria

and Jordan. Psychological harms could be worsened by return if individuals have to face the places where they suffered loss and abuse. As the interviews revealed, the trauma inflicted on children and youth who witnessed and participated in violence means that the impact of the war will certainly be intergenerational.

Economic concerns were also prominent, again, as is common among displaced populations. In Syria, the homes of many refugees have been destroyed, damaged, or occupied by others amid the broader destruction of the country's physical infrastructure. Many interviewees had lost their employment either before or because they were forced to flee. While reclaiming property and finding jobs are clearly more than just economic issues, they are critical to livelihoods and resources. Returning to Syria will not automatically give homes and jobs back to refugees. Women interviewees, particularly widows, expressed concern about going back to Syria without a house or a source of income. Syrian legislation that is widely interpreted as paving the way for the government to claim abandoned property was perceived by some as an effort to dissuade refugees from returning, in part because of the difficulty of obtaining documents proving ownership.

For many refugees, the conflict often meant restricted access to or deprivation of food, water, medicine, and electricity, which contributed to their decision to leave the country. Now in Jordan, many feel that they are perceived by Jordanians as competitors for scarce resources. Many also face legal, economic, and social barriers to employment, health care, and education. Economic exclusion and vulnerability thus spanned the entirety of refugees' experiences of conflict and displacement.

One of the clearest messages to emerge from this study was the complexity of the challenges that Syrians will face in rebuilding social relationships after the war. Refugees spoke about sectarian tensions, divisions, and fears about Syria's changing demographic map, disclosing that they felt distrust, intolerance, and hatred toward other groups. Many of these feelings had grown out of the responsibilities they ascribed to different groups for their perceived roles in the violence—and out of a failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians in assigning collective blame to entire groups.

While some refugees had more conciliatory views toward other groups and talked about forgiveness, it was more common to hear about personal relationships coming to a permanent end, including family relationships. There was an economic element to sectarian divisions as well, as demonstrated by those who said they could no longer see themselves buying from or selling to members of other groups. Tensions with host communities in Jordan have added another layer of social problems, as refugees often faced discrimination, intimidation, exploitation, harassment, and bullying at their workplaces and in school. At the same time, however, it is important to note that some refugees were able to change their views of other groups, if they had had positive interactions with them while displaced.

When asked about the conditions or measures that would facilitate their return to Syria, refugees pointed to the need for guarantees of protection, regime change, reform of state security institutions, and the dismantling of nonstate armed groups and militias. They also articulated both a hope for justice, in the form of accountability, truth about forcibly disappeared or abducted loved ones, and return of land and property, and widespread skepticism that justice would ever be achieved, due to their lack of trust in the government, the difficulty of establishing what had happened, and the inherent limitations of reparation efforts. Some revealed a lack of awareness about their rights to justice. Others said they would look to religion and divine justice for retribution.

Skepticism about reform and justice led some refugees to fear the likelihood of violence and violations recurring even after this war ends. They often expressed a desire not to return to Syria but to resettle elsewhere. For those who do want to return, it is sometimes only out of exhaustion and fatigue over current conditions in Jordan.

At the same time, amid the deep skepticism and pessimism, refugees also exhibited their powerful resilience. Whether it was entering the labor market for the first time, overturning traditional gender roles, or starting an education program for children in a camp, refugees demonstrated their independence and agency. In efforts to find durable solutions, pursue justice, and foster coexistence, refugees must be part of the process.

Cover Images. Top row, from left: Mahmoud Abu Ibrahim, a community leader in al-Za'atari camp, sits with his sons. He was one of the first Syrian refugees to meet with the Jordanian police when they first started patrolling the camp. Al-Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan, 2015 (Russell Watkins/DFID). Syrians refugees must often go through tremendous bureaucratic and legal hurdles before settling in a host country. This is especially true for families in which parents have different nationalities. These documents belong to a Syrian refugee family in Jordan, in which the father is a Palestinian refugee from Syria and the mother is a Jordanian from Syria. Irbid, Jordan, 2018 (Zeina Jallad). A woman from Syria and a woman from Jordan work together in a Syrian-owned food processing factory. Al Dura foods used to operate in Syria, but was forced to close because of the conflict. It has since relocated to Jordan and employs some of its former Syrian workers, who are now refugees, as well as local Jordanian staff. Jordan, 2016 (Bea Arscott/DFID). A mural in al-Za'atari camp near Mafraq, Jordan, depicts the clock tower square in Homs, Syria. It is painted without any people, apparently to signify the mass exodus from the once bustling city since the conflict broke out. Al-Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan, 2018 (Cilina Nasser). Refugee children play in the waiting room at the International Rescue Committee-run clinic in Ramtha, Jordan. With support from the United Kingdom, the clinic provides Syrian refugees medical and psychosocial care such as trauma counselling. Ramtha, Jordan, 2013 (Russell Watkins/DFID). A young Syrian refugee secures ropes to the outside of his family's tent in al-Za'atari camp to reinforce it against the approaching winter's harsh winds and weather. Al-Za'atari camp, Jordan, 2012 (DFID/UN-CHR/Sokol). Syrian women attend a counselling session at the International Rescue Committee-run clinic near Mafraq in northern Jordan. With support from the United Kingdom, the clinic provides Syrian refugees medical and psychosocial care such as trauma counselling. (Russell Watkins/DFID). The people who appear in the photographs throughout this publication neither were interviewed nor participated in any way in the research conducted for this study.

ICTJ New York
50 Broadway, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10004
Tel +1 917 637 3800
Fax +1 917 637 3900
www.ictj.org

ICTJ

Justice
Truth
Dignity

