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# The Voices of Reason: Learning from Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan

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## The Voices of Reason: Learning from Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan

Based on findings from a PhD study I conducted in 2017 with Syrian refugee students in Jordan, this policy paper discusses the importance of listening to and engaging with student voice in view of building improved educational systems for refugee students. This paper does so by delving into cases of the main concerns, motivations, and reflections Syrian refugee students shared during the study. Furthermore, this paper also provides key recommendations in seeking to better support the education and well-being of refugee students.

In particular, this paper outlines:

- an overview of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and its implications for the Jordanian and Syrian refugee communities.
- student voice: the importance and history of including children in research.
- a summary of the PhD study and refugee students' experiences in Jordan, including what participants had to say about being heard and listened to.
- wider lessons on students' educations and well-being. This includes recommendations for researchers, donors, and local organisations and governments.

This paper also focuses on the importance of gender in studying the needs of refugee students by building on some of the points explored in the literature review "The Transitions Adolescent Girls Face: Education in Conflict-Affected Settings".

### Key Messages

More than ever, the global refugee crisis poses a prominent barrier as researchers, agencies, and international communities strive towards achieving inclusive, quality, and equitable education for all. Seven years into the conflict, the Syrian refugee crisis continues to shape global debates as millions struggle in displacement. While over 5 million Syrian refugees have been displaced across Syria's neighbouring countries alone, the challenges facing refugees and their host nations are often responded to with little attention paid to important contexts.

In a discussion of the research findings of a PhD case study involving Syrian refugee students in Jordan, this paper advocates the need to understand individual context and the importance of listening to the voices of those affected. This paper also formulates recommendations based on the findings of this case study.

### Jordan. What we know:

Jordan presents a complex and challenging case. The country holds the world's second-highest number of refugees per capita at 87 refugees per every 1,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> This comprises 654,000 Syrian refugees<sup>2</sup> and an additional number of over two million refugees from Palestine and Iraq who fled past conflicts. The Syrian crisis marks a turning point for Jordan's aid capabilities, with its prolonged nature having drained resources and exerted unrelenting pressure on the country's infrastructure, economy, and security.

Jordan has sought to support Syrian refugees through its own resources, as well as through international aid. In 2016, governments and international communities joined together for the *Supporting Syria & the Region* conference in London. Staggering grants of over \$12 billion and loans of over \$41 billion – the largest amount ever raised in a single day for a humanitarian crisis – were pledged to support Syria and its neighbouring countries.<sup>3</sup> These funds are based on highly concessional terms, agreed upon by the governments of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, including the expansion of educational and work opportunities for Syrian refugees. To date, some reports have tracked the delivery of these grants and targets. These reports show the successful delivery of some pledges and the subsequent work delivered in the countries receiving these grants. However, the reports also show the unevenly-timed delivery of pledges amongst donors. Some donors are yet to deliver fully, while others have delivered grants much later than when the school year commenced. Additionally, despite progress made to increase work permits and educational opportunities in countries such as Jordan, the lack of consistent and scheduled targets and goals currently challenges the potential success of these commitments.<sup>4</sup>

Today, over 80 per cent of Syrian refugees live outside Jordan's established camps.<sup>5</sup> The largest camps are Zaatari and Azraq, hosting nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees<sup>6</sup> and over 53,000 Syrian refugees<sup>7</sup>, respectively. On top of residential displacement, Syrian refugees also experience occupational loss. Due to remaining legal restrictions, most Syrian refugees cannot access work permits. Consequently, families are dependent on humanitarian aid, diminished savings, and coping measures formed out of desperation, precipitating a rise in child labour, early marriage, and recruitment into armed groups. Around 90 per cent of Syrian families live under the national poverty line. 60 per cent of these families rely on money earned by their own children.<sup>8</sup>

Dire living conditions such as these have major implications on a child's likelihood of accessing and continuing school. To date, Jordan has been committed to providing education for refugees through formal, non-formal, and informal settings. Through the implementation of double-shift systems, over 64 per cent of Syrian refugees are now enrolled in formal education settings.<sup>9</sup> Within these schools, Syrian refugees attend a segregated evening school shift. However, extremely high dropout rates continue to challenge the efforts of this system. Syrian refugee students leave school due to financial pressure, harassment and discrimination, and lack of normalcy.

The aforementioned factors have also contributed to the threats facing Jordan's development and security. Amongst other areas of difficulty, the Syrian refugee crisis has contributed to increased national housing costs, higher unemployment rates, reduced availability of already-scarce resources, and a threatened educational system. Pre-Syrian conflict, Jordan's Ministry of Education aimed to reduce the number of double shift systems in place in order to improve the nation's quality of education. Schools following this system are arranged to run two sets of school hours, the morning and evening shift, to increase student enrolment opportunities. Instead, around 200 double shift schools have been designed to accommodate the high number of Syrian refugee students,<sup>10</sup> leaving Jordanian students with shortened school hours, pressurised school infrastructure, and higher demand on teaching staff.<sup>11</sup> The effects of these challenges are strongly evident in the disrupted social cohesion between the Jordanian and Syrian communities.<sup>12</sup>

## Exploring the voices of Syrian refugee students in Jordan:

The term "a lost generation" is often attached to reports describing the challenges and risks facing Syrian refugee children. Forced to bear the weight of the conflict, Syrian refugee children navigate the harsh realities of a refugee existence with little to no normalcy, low school attainment, and negative coping strategies. Despite huge international assistance, Syrian refugee students in Jordan are unlikely to complete secondary education and are far less likely to continue into higher education. A 2014 survey shows that only 16 per cent of Syrian refugee students completed secondary education<sup>13</sup>, in comparison with 46 per cent of Jordanians. Globally, the UNHCR estimates that fewer than 1 per cent of refugees attend higher education.<sup>14</sup> Numerous reports cite the main contributors to educational incompleteness as poverty, harassment and discrimination experienced on the journey to and from school, early marriage, and domestic and informal work commitments.

To better understand the challenges facing Syrian refugee students in Amman, and the ways in which students respond to these challenges, a case study using qualitative research was conducted across four schools. The results of the case study inform this paper. The study focuses on student voice and student well-being, seeking to understand the ways students navigate their school settings and lives in Jordan. A total of 80 Syrian refugee students were interviewed using visual-based methods in addition to classroom observations and five teacher interviews.

## Why student voice?

The 1991 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a pivotal human rights treaty that binds international law to recognise the rights of children.<sup>15</sup> Article 12 states that treaty ratifiers shall "assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child". Article 13 clarifies that the right to freedom of expression "shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers".

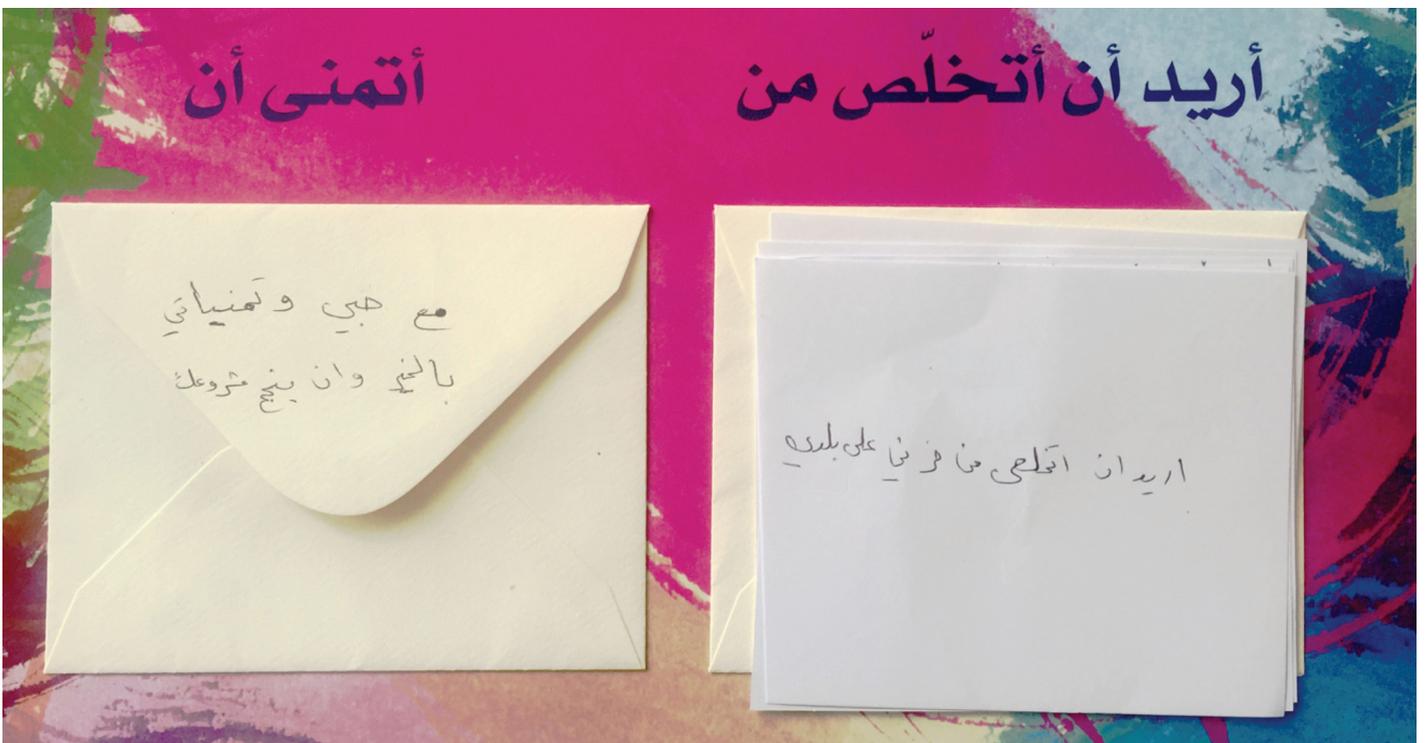
This recognition has been a force of inspiration, allowing for a shift in research from being *on* children to research done *with* children. Research with student voice is shaped by the understanding that children are agents of their own lives, whose voices, experiences, and opinions are valuable to any research and discourse relating to matters which affect them. As these studies allow researchers to understand notions which may otherwise not be visible to adults, student voice has proved valuable to assessment and policymaking decisions.

Researching student voice should, regardless of form, aim to allow students to express their opinions and perceptions through ethical and age-appropriate measures. For the study that informs this paper, visual-based methods were used to guide the development of printed personal diaries given to each student. As the challenges posed by entering adolescence and continuing secondary education are a key focus of this study, selected participants were in grade 7 and 8. Using these diaries, students were asked to respond to questions regarding matters that affect their lives in Jordan and their education, followed by individual interviews designed to help elaborate upon diary responses. The diaries contained five different activities designed using a theoretical understanding of student well-being, guided by the values that literature on the subject deems essential to positive states of well-being for refugee students.

Figure A: Front Cover. "This diary belongs to:"



Figure B: "make a happy wish, send the bad ones away" activity example



The diaries and follow-up interviews in this study were used to elicit student voice to better understand the value that children attribute to their education, their aspirations, their reflections on their current lives, and the needs identified, both separate and mutual, between boys and girls. In addition to listening to student voice, five teachers across these four sample schools were interviewed to assess whether the challenges children face and the needs they have are reflected in teachers' understandings of this context.

## Part 1: Student Experiences

### What do Syrian refugee students want us to know?

From the initial student diary work to the final day of this study, children who participated displayed resounding commitment to the project. They expressed joy, engagement, and curiosity. Over a period of two months, each participant personalised a diary with their memories, stories, wishes, and worries. These diaries and follow-up interviews provide an insight into the challenging world of a Syrian refugee student in Jordan, conveying numerous important messages that researchers and organisations may learn from.

### What the students are telling us about their education:

#### 1. Segregation, bullying, and discrimination

Students identified bullying, harassment, and discrimination as the three greatest concerns of being a Syrian refugee student in Jordan. As part of the discussion, students expressed their feelings about being segregated from home students. Most participants stated their wish to remain segregated due to fear stemming from the bullying that is prevalent on the journey to and from school and within school itself. These discussions included vivid narrations of bullying, theft, physical violence, and verbal discrimination that students are exposed to every day. For female students, sexual harassment was also frequently reported.

*“I don’t want to be integrated into a school with Jordanian students. They upset me. They wait for me outside of school every day so they can beat me up and steal my money.”*

Male, 14

*“The boys follow us and harass us. They tell us that we have no one to protect us because we’re refugees, and that they can do anything to us.”*

Female, 15

Students also feel that being with their Syrian peers allows for an environment of understanding and bonding due to the similar challenges and experiences they face. Many students who had previously been inserted into classrooms with Jordanian students transferred schools because they were not able to form friendships. In these instances, unbalanced integration was present in the classroom. These children reported that they were the only Syrian refugee student in a class of Jordanian students and were singled-out by home students as a result, usually by way of harassment.

However, other Syrian refugee students expressed their desire to meet more Jordanians. Reasons include curiosity, wanting to know more people, and a wish to reduce animosity between refugee and home students caused by the “unknown”. Out of the four sample schools in this study, one school sought to bring together Syrian refugee students and Jordanian students once a week through extracurricular activities such as baking and arts. The result of this approach yielded a promising outcome. Unlike instances of singular integration, where only one Syrian refugee student may be placed into an all-Jordanian classroom and experience harassment, Syrian refugee students experienced positive exchanges of conversation with Jordanian students. Subsequently, the positive anticipation of Syrian refugee students grew twofold with regards to developing companionships with Jordanian students. Teachers of this school commented on the reduction of bullying and harassment.

*“I would like to be in a school with Jordanians. My school organises activities with Jordanian students once a week. I used to feel scared, but to be honest, they are very nice to us and I would like to meet more Jordanians.”*

Female, 14

When taking part in an activity that required students to identify the key elements that they believed determined a good school and a good teacher, students stated that they sometimes felt discriminated against by some teachers. The students described their desire to attend a clean school with fewer students in each classroom overall, facilities such as fan and heating systems, drinking water, and for teachers to treat them with respect and patience. Many students found that these elements were all

lacking in their schools. Additionally, some facilities were believed to be unavailable exclusively during the evening shift, such as cleaning facilities or janitors. Students felt that certain incidents of poor treatment correlated with their Syrian identities and, as a result, created feelings of shame and embarrassment.

*A good teacher is a teacher who laughs with you, is kind to you, and is patient with you. She explains slowly. She doesn't yell and she doesn't say hurtful things like that all Syrians smell bad.*

Female, 13

*A good school is clean. They leave the school dirty after the morning shift, so we have to do the sweeping and cleaning before we can start our lessons. ”*

Female, 14

## 2. Poverty and familial support

*“My dad does not let me work at the café anymore, but sometimes I wish I weren't at school so I could work and help my family.”*

Male, 15

*“I have to help my father. I start work at 4, after I finish school, and I don't go home until 1 AM.”*

Male, 15

The dire financial conditions Syrian refugee students currently face appear to have a grave impact on their well-being and educational experiences. Many students find these circumstances detrimental to their ability to concentrate on school work, acting as potential barriers to their prospects of completing secondary education. Forced displacement and the consequential state of poverty and change in familial dynamics are discussed by both boys and girls. However, gender is a salient factor within these discussions as the repercussions of forced displacement are experienced differently.

A high percentage of this study's male participants had been forced to take on a contributing role to their family's income, often becoming the sole earners in the family. This is often a result of the loss or absence of the father, parents' inability to find work due to legal restrictions, or the insufficiency of money earned through illegal work and humanitarian aid. These students are forced to undertake illegal paid labour before or after school hours and during summer vacations. For some, labour was sometimes a complete substitute for school during school terms or years due to extremely urgent financial needs.

Students display great distress and concern over their family's financial state and emotional well-being. The need to work is described as urgent and necessary, and may be disruptive to students' abilities to develop long-term aspirations. However, despite these commitments, many students expressed a desire and will to continue their studies.

By contrast, the effects of poverty and displacement are experienced differently by female students. Early marriage was identified as the most urgent concern, a coping mechanism families may feel compelled to impose. These students expressed extreme sadness and worry due to the increased occurrence of discussions about marriage arrangements initiated by their families. Most students recognised that this would mean an immediate end to their education, as they believed an arranged early marriage would result in household responsibilities and early motherhood.

*“I was crying all night yesterday. I don't want to get married but I have to lessen the burdens on my mother and siblings.”*

Female, 15

The prospects of early marriage were discussed by a high percentage of female participants. However, these were also heightened in cases where fathers are absent. For a single mother, extreme financial hardships, threatened security and protection of herself and her family, and increased cultural pressure from intervening family members are key factors that may force a mother to enter her daughter into an early arranged marriage.

*“My father is no longer with us and now the prospect of a marriage arrangement for me is an everyday threat. My relatives have convinced my mother that it's the best way. I love studying and it has always been my dream to become an optometrist... I am very scared she will give in to the pressure.”*

Female, 16

### 3. Lack of normalcy

Schools may help students regain normalcy lost through forced displacement by providing a space for learning, friendship, and care. However, the structures of these settings may either respond to or disregard specific needs and challenges. Students discussed numerous issues they believe have constricted their ability to regain normalcy.

Of these issues, the timing of school hours and the number of school days were seen to have a negative effect on their ability to catch-up on their studies, spend time with their families, and feel safe. Students attend school six days a week, from noon until early evening. As a result of shortened weekends and late school hours, many students report that the new school timetable reduces the time they have available with their families. Students expressed a drastic change in their bond with their families, describing the negative impact this has had on their sense of feeling cared for. Additionally, students find that these school hours cause them to feel less safe, exposing them to further incidents of harassment.

*“Syrian refugees are the only ones attending school in the evening and the weekends. When I walk home from school, everyone knows I am a Syrian refugee because no one else comes back from school this late. Why can’t I be like the rest? I don’t even ever get to spend time with my family anymore.”*

Female, 15

Participants of the study felt that their Jordanian peers are allowed to engage in extended activities. The limited opportunities to socialise and engage in activities therefore reduces students’ sense of belonging and community. Due to additional restrictions set by the Jordanian government, Syrian refugee students are also not allowed to engage in school trips. Students expressed that the reasons behind these restrictions are not communicated to them, therefore instilling a potent sense of injustice and discrimination.

*“We are not allowed to go on any school trips here. We used to go out every weekend in Syria...but I can’t remember the last time I went out or did anything in Jordan. I haven’t seen anything of the country. It’s always school to house, house to school.”*

Female, 14

*“In my three years here, this is our first time in this library. There are artwork projects displayed from the morning shift everywhere, but we are never allowed to do anything but schoolwork.”*

Male, 15

### 4. Low well-being with little support

A high percentage of students ranked their state of well-being as low as 1, 2, or 3 on a scale out of 10. These numbers were described in relation to the result of the trauma experienced within Syria, during subsequent displacement, and in becoming a fully-fledged refugee. Most of these students had never spoken about their feelings on these matters, which included disinterest in education and loss of aspiration, fear, anxiety, inability to sleep, sadness, anger, and depression.

*“There is a lot of anger and sadness inside me. I don’t know why and I don’t know how to get rid of it. It makes me want to avoid everyone.”*

Male, 15

*“I sometimes wish I weren’t alive... I don’t know why or what to do, but I have seen too much. My childhood has been taken from me.”*

Female, 14

Students struggled to cope with their memories of Syria, the dangers they were exposed to, the death and loss of family and friends, and the financial and social repercussions of becoming a refugee. They felt that their teachers may be unaware of the difficulties they face. They also felt that they cannot express their state of well-being to their families for fear of increasing their parents' stress. The schools did not seem to provide any psychosocial support to help students express and reconcile with these feelings.

*“I don’t sleep well because I worry and think about things we have been through. I don’t like mixing with people and I don’t sit with my family anymore. I just like to sit in my room alone.”*

Female, 15

## 5. Aspiration

While student aspiration is affected by the above four challenges, many students exhibited resilience and drive. Though students were aware that continuing education may be extremely difficult due to financial hardship, some gained positivity and drive from the prospect of academic success and scholarship opportunities. Many responded to the difficulties experienced by aspiring for change, justice, and distinction.

*“I taught myself how to programme and I also love math. I want to be the founder of a new mathematical theory. I spend my time at home working on it every day. I want my name to go down in books.”*

Male, 15

*“I want to study and accomplish my goals. I want to be the strongest woman on Earth.”*

Female, 15

*“I want to become a lawyer. I have seen so much injustice committed to children, women, and refugees. I want to help defend people.”*

Female, 16

### What students had to say about their voice being listened to:

All participants of this study were eagerly committed to beginning and completing their personal diaries. Students felt empowered by the opportunity given to them to tell their own stories, express their wishes and concerns, and the prospect of being listened to. Through their years of forced displacement, students felt that they had been given little attention or space for discussion and care.

*“I loved this project because it gives us a chance to talk, and might help people see that refugees are not bad people. In this diary I have written all my secrets and I was able to let things out. I was going to explode from keeping everything inside me.”*

Male, 15

*“Thank you for coming to talk to students about how they feel after the war. No one has asked me how I am in five years. No one comes near us. No one ever speaks to us.”*

Male, 15

Students wished for their stories to not only be heard but to be listened to and responded to.

*“Our voices matter. I want them to listen. I want them to know our stories... but I don’t want them to just hear them and walk away. Do something.”*

Female, 15

Students also valued the methods used in this study, including the structure of the diaries project. The project allowed them to explore their own ability to write and communicate, therein allowing students the time to reflect on their own interests and goals.

*“I learned that I can be a good writer and that it can help me deal with my feelings.”*

Male, 15

*“You have given us the chance to think about our lives and our futures... I started feeling more hopeful the day this project started.”*

Female, 15

## Part 2: Conclusions, Reflections, and Recommendations

The notion of student voice in this study proves valuable and useful, allowing for an enriched understanding of individual context, including the challenges, successes, and areas for improvement. Research using student voice may help children feel empowered and valued by involving them as agents of their own lives, and by creating the space and time for discussions.

***Moving forward, this study highlights the urgent need for researchers and organisations to listen to students to:***

### **1. Understand context and what works, and to inform decision-making and assessment**

The experiences and challenges experienced by refugees will likely be best depicted by those living these daily realities. As outlined in the case study, illuminating discussions with students revealed the ways in which they responded to the uncertainties and difficulties presented by the complexities of forced displacement, and the many ways in which these impact their educational experiences.

In contextualising these challenges, student voice and the very often erudite perceptions of students are valuable to policymaking decisions and assessment. Students helped inform this study of what appears to work best for them in school, and in contrast, the dimensions of school that may actually be detrimental to their well-being. For example, based on the conclusions drawn, the study suggests that the following points require revisiting:

#### **a. Segregation and lack of awareness**

Students’ experiences denote the negative effects of segregation. Being the “Other” in these schools, unknown to Jordanian peers except outside of classroom walls, is seen to increase the likelihood of bullying and discrimination. On the other hand, an integration programme discussed in Part 1 above demonstrates the promising effect of allowing students to engage within appropriate spaces.

These examples highlight the importance of increasing awareness within the two communities, by enriching children’s understandings of the current situation in Jordan, and by providing a space for these students to communicate and engage with each other as peers. Therefore, the need to increase opportunities of balanced integration and engagement are crucial to helping the two communities respond to the changes in the country.

**b. School timetable**

The majority of Syrian refugee students enrolled in formal schools in Jordan attend school in the evening hours, six days a week. Students report this timetable to have negative effects on their well-being due to lack of safety, reduced quality time with family and loved ones, and reduced time to study and enjoy personal time. Additionally, the shortened weekend is regarded by students as extremely challenging, leaving them overwhelmed with the amount of work to be reviewed with little time at home.

**c. Security systems**

This study unequivocally confirms the issues of bullying, violence, sexual and verbal harassment that have been reported by many studies. However, students highlight the need for teachers and administrators to be involved in helping to provide a more secure school setting. For example, none of the participants in this study felt they were able to speak to their teachers about the incidents of harassment they faced. Many of the participants also felt that even if they spoke to teachers about these incidents, the teachers would not take any action to combat them.

**d. Protection from exploitation**

Participants' involvement in work and early marriage arrangements are extremely common and threatening. This study provides an enriched understanding of which factors likely increase these risks and the ways in which students respond to these challenges. Understanding the ways by which organisations may help better protect children from exploitation is key.

**e. Well-being and psychosocial support**

Students in this study expressed extremely low states of well-being, including feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, students were unable to discuss these feelings with family or teachers and, as such, were not receiving any form of psychosocial support to help cope with displacement and post-conflict trauma. This study therefore suggests a pressing need to increase attention to well-being and to provide support for refugee children living within contexts of displacement.

The Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis identifies psychosocial support as one of the key priorities in the 2016-2018 agenda.<sup>16</sup> Jordan has supported the implementation of psychosocial programmes, such as UNICEF's Makani.<sup>17</sup> Makani offers safe learning spaces and psychosocial support for Syrian refugee children and vulnerable Jordanian youth across 200 learning centres.<sup>18</sup> In partnership with governmental and non-governmental organisations, Makani also seeks to strengthen social cohesion between the Syrian and Jordanian communities through its trained staff and innovative activities. Similarly, programmes by the Norwegian Refugee Council,<sup>19</sup> Save the Children,<sup>20</sup> World Vision,<sup>21</sup> and CARE<sup>22</sup> have been designed to support Syrian refugee children and families across camps and host-communities through psychosocial support services, arts-based activities, and livelihood projects.<sup>23</sup>

Until recently, many of these initiatives targeted children not attending formal education who require opportunities for alternative education. As the majority of students attending formal state schools continue to receive limited psychosocial support, the expansion of these programmes is essential as they have the potential of having positive impact on students' educational experiences, well-being, and reduced likelihood of dropping out.

**2. Giving attention to gender and age**

The study finds that more attention must be given to gender and age. There are shared risks to personal safety that exist for both boys and girls, which have implications of shared desires, needs, and experiences. However, this study emphasises the different risks that exist separately for either gender, including different levels and forms of exploitation, harassment, and pressures. The challenges must therefore be responded to accordingly.

Most male participants in this study were exposed to physical violence, theft, and verbal harassment on the way to school. These participants were also likely to engage in paid labour, and their educational experiences were therefore shaped by these particular challenges and difficulties.

By contrast, female participants in this study frequently described being exposed to verbal and sexual harassment from male students on the way to school. Additionally, many of these participants were engaged to be married, or in the process of dealing with the prospect of marriage arrangements.

As all participants in this study were in their years of adolescence, the particular challenges and the ways in which students managed these pressures are central factors. The vulnerabilities that gender and age impose must therefore be studied further and responded to.

### 3. Engaging local governments, teachers, and families

Student voice is a singular and integral part of a grand and complex system. The needs of students may only be responded to by further engaging the parties, persons, and policies shaping these experiences. Based on students' discussions, this study finds the need to:

#### a. Support teachers in responding to students' needs

The responsibilities of teaching refugee students within these complex settings may be overwhelming. Teachers are a central part of students' experiences, who must provide not only curricular support but must also understand their students' needs in order to provide protection. Well-being impacts upon educational development and vice versa.

Teachers are also able to gain insight into the challenges and circumstances facing refugee students, may identify students who require additional support, and may help report these valuable findings to organisations and local ministries to help assess these challenges. This will also allow students to feel heard and protected. However, teachers must be supported through further training, resources, finances, and engagement.

Several teacher training programmes have been implemented in Jordan. The Cultivating Inclusive and Supporting Learning Environments (CISLE), by the USAID and Jordan's Ministry of Education, has helped train over 4,700 teachers and reach over 7,700 Syrian refugee students across 409 schools. These trainings seek to equip teachers with interactive teaching pedagogies and the skills needed to address the psychosocial needs of both communities. A second important initiative is UNESCO's Blended Approach to Teacher Training. In partnership with the Queen Rania Teacher's Academy, this pilot project seeks to teach psychosocial support skills through face-to-face and online delivery methods. These programmes represent positive examples of increased awareness for psychosocial support, but must also serve as a reminder of the pressing need to further expand training programmes, reaching all vulnerable students.

#### b. Engage students' families

Students' lives at home greatly impact their educational experiences and prospects. The challenges facing families must be communicated directly with parents and addressed to help protect students from exploitation to better support their well-being and the development of their futures.

Working closely with families through awareness and advice programmes may be key to helping families cope with pressures and to seeing value in education. For example, working closely with single mothers to discuss alternatives to early marriage arrangements for their daughters may have impact on the protection of adolescent refugee girls. While projects such as Makani also provide community-based psychosocial support by engaging parents, programmes encouraging parental engagement within formal schools continue to be limited. However, this does not eliminate the urgent need for financial assistance.

#### c. Review challenges and policies with local ministries and governments

A communication network between schools, researchers, and organisations, and local ministries must be established for enriched decision-making and assessment. For example, the challenges discussed by the section "Student Experiences" in this report may be reviewed with the support of local organisations and ministries. Communication between these parties is essential to helping review what works, what categorically does not, and the best approach to moving forward. Policies and legislature are pivotal for improving the conditions of Syrian refugee students and their families in this time of extraordinary hardship.

## 4. Improving data and transparency

Lack of clearly defined and consistent targets executed in a transparent and timely fashion challenges the prospective success of funds allocated to humanitarian crises. For example, following the donor conference in London, specific targets and timelines are yet to be clear in some cases. Not only must donors deliver the funds pledged within the right timescales, the targets set by both donors and receiving countries must also be transparent, with data and progress continually tracked and published. Additionally, discrepancies between donors' expectations and timelines and receiving nations' targets must be addressed. For example, donors co-hosting the London conference announced that receiving nations will enrol all refugee students by 2017. However, host nations have not been able to fulfil these expectations and have instead developed long-term goals. In some cases, the lack of transparency concerning the amount of money delivered to the countries has problematised these goals. In both Jordan and Lebanon, the amount of education funding pledged has not been fully delivered, and different sources offer varying accounts of the amounts received.<sup>26</sup> Delivering funds past deadlines, such as in the case where educational funds in Jordan were delivered after the start of the school year, also hinder the efforts of receiving nations.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the consequences of the limited number of work permits issued and poor living conditions continue to threaten the progress of educational opportunities. Work opportunities for Syrian refugee families continue to vary across receiving nations. In Lebanon, work permits have been highly restricted. The slow and limited status of this progress across countries has vast implications on students' ability to continue education, regardless of increased educational spaces. Jordan has taken the lead in addressing this issue by beginning to increase the number of work permits for Syrian refugees. Following the pledges made at the London conference, Jordan committed to employing up to 200,000 Syrian refugees.<sup>28</sup> A recent report by the International Labour Organisation report states that by March 2017, over 40,000 work permits had been issued to Syrian refugees.<sup>29</sup>

## Key Recommendations

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The pledges made to all refugees can only be delivered effectively if the organisations and establishments that govern them are transparent with one another and achieve consistency in their targets.

These parties must engage in a chain of transparency, enabling the voices of those in need of support to be understood at all levels of the decision-making process in an ascending fashion from the point of contact with refugees to the end game of governmental rule.

The voices of refugees are invaluable to us. The lives of refugees are heavily impacted by the decisions of supporting nations that shape their education, security, and well-being. They must be heard.

## Endnotes

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