



# LERRN WORKING PAPER SERIES

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT REFUGEE  
RESEARCH NETWORK

**PAPER NO. 27 - MAY 2024**

## IN THE MEANTIME: GENDER, RACE, NATIONALITY, AND “PARA- SOLUTIONS” FOR REFUGEES IN AMMAN, JORDAN

**SARAH NANDI**

*Department of Political Science, McGill University*

**OROUB EL ABED**

*International Migration and Refugee Studies, Birzeit University*

**MEGAN BRADLEY**

*Department of Political Science, McGill University*

**HAMZAH QARDAN**

*USAID, Jordan*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Executive Summary</u>	4
	<u>Introduction</u>	5
	1.1. Context	8
	1.2. Methodology	11
<b>2</b>	<u>Theoretical Analysis</u>	12
	2.1. Othering and Intersectionality	12
	2.2. Liminality and Uncertainty	14
	2.3. Humanitarian Bureaucracies	15
<b>3</b>	<u>Para-solutions</u>	17
	3.1. Para-residency	18
	3.2. Para-mobility	32
	<u>Conclusion</u>	42
	<u>Works Cited</u>	44

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

**CBO** Community Based Organization

---

**IO** International Organization

---

**IOM** International Organization for Migration

---

**MoU** Memorandum of Understanding

---

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organization

---

**RLO** Refugee-led Organization

---

**RSD** Refugee status determination

---

**WEN** Women's Empowerment Network

---

**UN** United Nations

---

**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The three durable solutions, namely resettlement to a third country, local integration, and voluntary repatriation, aim to resolve refugeehood. However, these traditional pathways are no longer feasible for the majority of refugees. How different refugees access or think about solutions for their situation, including their perceptions and pursuit of the traditional and alternative pathways, are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, race, nationality, and class. In order to better understand how different displaced communities navigate this “meantime” period of liminality, this study draws upon interviews with refugees and humanitarian staff in Amman, Jordan to examine the paths that refugees make for themselves even under enormous risk and constraints. To do so, we propose the concept of “para-solutions”, which can be understood as the parallel pathways that refugees create for themselves to access some of the benefits associated with residency rights or limited forms of establishing a life outside of Jordan. Para-solutions include both the tangible practices that refugees use in solutions-making in the present as well as the future hope attached to the different strategies. We examine para-solutions through two sub-categories: para-residency and para-mobility. Para-residency includes solutions that are localized in the Jordanian setting, deal mainly in the temporal present, and include practices such as pursuing education, vocational training, and volunteering opportunities.

Para-mobility is often focused on the future by including a hopefulness for what may become possible outside of Jordan and operates through higher education scholarships, short-term labour contracts in other countries or online, or travel through family relationships and marriage. Together, these para-solutions offer a more complete and intersectional representation of what “solutions” look like from the perspectives of refugees and show how the traditional pathways are always situated within a much broader solutions spectrum that challenges preconceived notions of belonging while also speaking to the critical role of hope.

# INTRODUCTION

“

I can't go out. My passport is expired and I don't have an embassy here in Jordan. I can't go to renew my passport. I can't do anything else. I have to just wait here because I can't get another solution. This is the problem. If I even apply in the meantime, they will ask me, "Is your passport working? Do you have your barcode?" I've been here, waiting for ten years. No one can help me. We need a solution (Interview 43, 2022).

”

The traditional durable solutions for refugees, namely resettlement to a third country, local integration, and voluntary repatriation, aim to resolve the situation of those experiencing displacement through eventual access to residency and the rights that come with citizenship. However, these solutions are no longer accessible for the majority of forced migrants. Resettlement is accessed by less than one percent of refugees, voluntary repatriation is rare, and integration remains politically infeasible in many host states (UNHCR 2022a).

**This lack of solutions has left refugees in enduring states of liminality, precarity, and vulnerability that is exacerbated by racialized and gendered forms of Othering.**

As a particularly salient case of how refugees of different nationalities and gender identities are navigating the lack of formal solutions, Jordan is host to an estimated 760,000 registered refugees and an unknown number of other forced migrants who have been left out of formal refugee recognition (Turner 2023). This research focuses on how these different refugees strategize and aspire to craft solutions for themselves during the “meantime” in Jordan.

**Given the inaccessibility of the traditional durable solutions, we introduce the idea of “para-solutions”, which we define as the parallel pathways that refugees create for themselves in order to access some of the benefits associated with residency rights or limited forms of establishing a life outside of Jordan.**

Para-solutions include both the tangible practices that refugees use to engage in solutions-making in the present as well as the hope for a future attached to the different strategies. Para-solutions should not be mistaken for traditional solutions and, notably, they do not fully resolve the many challenges that refugees face. Instead, para-solutions can be understood as parallel pathways that often come with enormous risk but nonetheless help forced migrants access some of the benefits associated with residency rights in what we call para-mobility,

which includes activities such as the ability to travel out of the country-of-asylum through educational or labour avenues, and para-residency, which includes the ability to attend school at various levels and to navigate possible opportunities to eke out a living.

**Analyzing these strategies requires an intersectional analysis given the ways that combining social, racialized, gendered, and classed identities as well as nationality-based statuses often determine how barriers and access to solutions shift based on individuals' overlapping categories.**

Just as the traditional durable solutions are gendered, classed, and raced, (Long and Oxfeld 2004; McSpadden 2008; Crawley 2001) so too are para-solutions. This means that different factors of nationality, race, gender, and class combine to create harms, absences, and invisibilization. Hillier-Smith (2020) defines these harms as both structural and direct. In Jordan, structural harms include policies that foster forced immobility and recognition practices that exclude some forced migrants, which includes financial harms wherein funding is earmarked for certain nationalities of refugees. Direct harms include restricted access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Adding to this, absences and invisibilization occur for refugees in this case, and others (Janmyr 2021; Hammond 2008), as a process of marginalization wherein certain refugees are not considered as formal refugees.

For example, the informal labeling of some as “minority” refugees or “non-Syrians” has significant, exclusionary consequences for those who fall into these categories (Turner 2023). Race, gender, refugee status, class, and nationality combine to shape how different refugees endure harms and invisibilization that push them to seek para-solutions outside of traditional solutions frameworks.

Using this as a basis, we argue that, in the case of the para-solutions, refugees often engaged in both para-residency and para-mobility in starkly different ways based on their social location. In this case, we found that Somali and Sudanese men and women often envisioned of solutions as being outside of Jordan through para-mobility given their frequent encounters with racialized exclusion, with similar but less intense sentiments expressed by Iraqi and Yemeni men who were also navigating being a “refugee minority”. Alternatively, Syrian women most often engaged with para-residency and had the most tangible opportunities to access this para-solution through gendered programs empowering women. Syrian men, depending on their age, were more likely to hinge their strategizing around para-mobility, but still engaged with para-residency, often guided by the gendered expectations that they provide for their families. However, Syrian men also attempted to access para-residency through these same gendered labour roles, but faced barriers shaped partially by Jordanian understandings of masculinity. The empirical sections of this report more fully explore these pluralistic and situated engagements.

More broadly, we find that attention to these para-solutions reveals two key insights about the larger concepts of belonging and liminality. First, in contrast with the repeated assumption that only the host community can grant access to acceptance and belonging in integration, our attention to para-residency practices showed that refugees also make their own belonging by fostering commonality with members of the host community and even other refugee communities in the settings offered by CBOs and NGOs. Second, our exploration of para-mobility revealed that in spite of the enormous constraints imposed by liminality, refugees continued to hope for their futures, which was often expressed through planning travel out of Jordan.

**Together, these insights underscore the central role that refugees play in attempting to produce their own solutions as alternatives to the traditional durable solutions that are inaccessible to them, an interest that is also reflected in humanitarian actors' recent focus on "complementary pathways".<sup>1</sup>**

Complementary pathways can be understood as an umbrella term for several means of gaining lawful stay in a third country through humanitarian, education, employment, sponsorship, and family reunification.

For example, employment pathways can occur when the private sector is given the authority to screen applying refugee applicants for labour opportunities based on their skills and if their human capital matches their needs, they are given access to relocating at least temporarily.

To explore these ideas, this study begins by providing a description of our methodology. This section is followed by an overview of the context in Jordan and the status of the different refugee communities in the Kingdom, noting the key variables of gender, race, and nationality in relation to para-solutions. We then present our theoretical framework, which engages with literature on Othering and intersectionality, liminality and uncertainty, and humanitarian bureaucracy as a means of analyzing the diverse experiences of participants in this study. We continue with the two main empirical sections that explore the para-solutions of "para-residency" and "para-mobility", which are based on in-depth interviews with refugees in Jordan and is organized in two main sections that parse out the strategies embedded in para-mobility, such as the pursuit of scholarships, remote work, and marriage, as well as para-residency, which occurs in the forms of primary education access, vocational trainings, and CBO volunteering. We end with a brief conclusion.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Global Compact on Refugees, complementary pathways are defined as, "safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement resettlement by providing lawful stay in a third country where their international protection needs are met." Complementary pathways are an umbrella term that includes, humanitarian pathways, such as humanitarian visas, education pathways, such as scholarships or apprenticeships, employment pathways, including job opportunities, sponsorship, and family reunification procedures (Global Compact, 2023).

## 1. CONTEXT

---

The context in Jordan is complex as the country continues to host six diverse communities of people who have been displaced throughout the past 75 years, despite the Kingdom not being a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. These communities include Palestinians from the West Bank, whose presence has shaped the state's refugee responses and policies in every ensuing situation; Gazan Palestinians who have little formal recognition; as well as Iraqis, Yemenis, Somalis, Syrians, and Sudanese people.<sup>2</sup> The status of each of these groups and the lack of solutions accorded to them varies considerably. Jordan hosts refugees through its open border politics, but it is not involved in finding solutions for those who enter the state. Instead, a large consortium of international organizations (IOs), civil society groups, private sector organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), and refugee communities themselves have stepped in to address the situation of refugees (El-Abed et al. 2023).

Notably from this group of actors, the UNHCR has operated in Jordan since 1998 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which gives the UNHCR the right to interview asylum seekers in Jordan and to determine their

refugee status. The MoU lists the responsibilities of the host state as facilitating the role of UNHCR in handling refugees' basic needs and protection through granting legal status (Stevens 2013; Qumri and Turner 2023).

The MoU also incorporates the Convention definition of a refugee, ensures that refugees should have legal status, and asserts that the only durable solutions for refugees in Jordan are voluntary return and resettlement, ruling out formal local integration (Davis et al. 2016). As Lewis (2023: 4) explained, this "essentially frames Jordan as a transit country". The lack of signatory status has given rise to the need for what Janmyr (2022) calls an "alternative protection regime" for refugee rights.

This alternative protection regime varies widely for individuals from different groups and is prone to changes based on the political situation in Jordan and the region. The Law on Residence and Foreigners' Affairs determines which nationalities can be recognized as refugees and UNHCR, at times in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), then manages aid and access to resettlement for refugees.

---

<sup>2</sup> The situation of the different generations and communities of Palestinian refugees was not formally included in the focus of this study given the fact that the Palestinian situation remains unique and highly diverse in part due to the fact that durable solutions for Palestinians are conceptualized differently due to their right to return to their ancestral homeland and the fact that they are not included in UNHCR programming, but rather through UNRWA. For more on this, see: Hanafi, S., Hilal, L., and L. Takkenberg. (2014). UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From relief and works to human development. New York: Taylor and Francis.



“

As El-Abed (2014: 82) explains, “Labels given to ‘forced migrants’ have varied according to public policy practices” and “represent a discursive ‘act of state’ in which power is rationalized, drawing boundaries as to who can be included within the process of subjectification and who shall be excluded”.

”

This complex and shifting system of labeling (El-Abed 2014) creates immense barriers for refugees seeking long-term solutions for their situations, as well as challenges for day-to-day well-being.

Nationality not only determines who can receive refugee status in Jordan, but also the varying conditions faced by the six main groups in the country. First, many Iraqis, given their close proximity and the close political relations between the two countries, sought refuge in Jordan beginning with the first Gulf War and again following the American invasion and occupation of the country in 2003 (Al-Qdah and Lacroix 2011). UNHCR’s MoU with Jordan permitted this group to qualify as refugees and resources were allocated for some education and service provisions. Despite this support, Iraqis still face a more restricted situation in terms of accessing legal and secure livelihoods (Nelems and Currie 2012). Somali refugees have also sought asylum in Jordan since the civil war in 1991, as have Sudanese refugees since the early 2000s, yet both groups do not receive nationality-based refugee status and

instead must go through individual refugee status determinations (RSDs) (CRP 2022). When the Kingdom decided to establish its first Syrian camp in 2013, they also began blanket status determinations for Syrians as refugees. Forced migrants from Yemen have also come to Jordan following the fluctuations of the civil war starting around 2014, but many have faced a similar situation as Somali and Sudanese refugees in that their refugee status is variable (Al Majali 2022). A focus on nationality in Jordan shows that official access to refugee status varies considerably, and that most refugee communities face enduring status-precarity where their rights and access to basic necessities and the likelihood of longer term solutions are dependent on their original citizenship. Since 2019, UNHCR, in coordination with Government of Jordan, stopped registering any new refugees coming to the country. As a result, many of the Iraqis, Yemeni and Sudanese entering Jordan could no longer register as refugees.

For each of these groups, official durable solutions are not typically possible. These solutions aim to permanently resolve refugeehood by eventually “achieving” the rights of residency or citizenship by resettling refugees in a third state where they may eventually become citizens (Libal et al. 2022), locally integrating refugees into the host state (Wali 2021), or voluntarily repatriating to the former state and resuming the citizenship relationship. While these are seemingly straightforward, each of these solutions intersects with more complex economic, political, cultural, financial and even religious impediments that deter refugees from

accessing these solutions both generally and in the Jordanian case specifically. As Jordan is a non-signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, local integration is highly politically sensitive. The state, with limited resources and a high number of naturalized Palestinian refugees, has become increasingly wary of the shifting demography and has no legal obligation to integrate the refugees crossing its borders. Calls for repatriation often oversimplify the notion of the homeland and of the understanding of “post-conflict” (Bradley 2014). Sustainable returns typically require the re-establishment of stability and peace, which is not on the near horizon for many of the conflicts that have brought refugees to Jordan (Long 2013; Pearson 2021). Moreover, repatriation policies often overlook the impacts of transgenerational displacement, as many refugees have never even seen their former state, complicating the extent to which this can function as a meaningful solution for refugees (Majidi 2013). The third solution, resettlement, is often unavailable to most refugees given the lack of meaningful commitments from third country states due to the rise of populist politics, lengthy bureaucratic procedures, and most notably, the overemphasis on containment (Solf and Rehberg 2021).

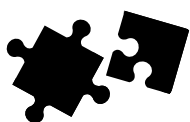
Containment is a series of Global North policies that seek to hold refugees in their regions of origins by providing financial incentives and development aid in the host state. This practice has significantly weakened resettlement and amplified the xenophobic rhetoric directed against those coming to the

Global North from other regions or continents (Alienikoff 1992). Funding by the Global North to contain refugees in their own regions now takes up the majority of spending allocations and international negotiations on refugees (Watkins 2022). In Jordan, containment has become so normalized that scholars have described the situation as a classic case of “refugee rentierism” (Freier et al. 2021; Morris 2020). Refugee rentierism or commodification can be understood as the “external income linked to the treatment of forcibly displaced population groups” (Tsourapas 2021a: 251) or when states use refugees as “instruments of interstate bargaining” (254). A rich body of literature has explored this containment and the ensuing rentierism of refugees in Jordan (Pasha 2021; Anholt and Sinatti 2019; Dionigi 2023), demonstrating the ways in which negotiations, such as the Jordan Compact, and other humanitarian-development nexus solutions, such as resilience-building, act as containment strategies to ensure that refugees do not travel outside of Jordan while channeling ample funding to the state to secure this outcome. As Costello (2020: 18) summarizes, “containment evidently has an immense cost in human lives” and the suffering that it engenders amongst refugees in Jordan has become the norm.

**Thus, given the reality that the traditional pathways appear to be far out of reach for most refugees in Jordan, this research examines the ways in which refugees find alternative strategies, or “para-solutions”, that target one or two of the benefits embedded within these traditional solutions, such as access to education, employment, or health. In doing so, these communities find small and constrained ways that must be navigated constantly through their gendered, racialized, and nationality-based status to effectively provide themselves with the rights that are denied to them by states due to their enduring status as refugees.**

## 2. METHODOLOGY

To investigate the status of solutions in Jordan, this research began with the following question:



**Given widespread lack of access in Jordan to the traditional “durable solutions,” how do gender, race, nationality, class, and other identities shape perceptions of what “solutions” to displacement might involve, and how do refugees manage key challenges in their daily lives in the meantime? (e.g., access to services, education, and work).**

More simply put, this project aimed to account for what happens when none of the traditional solutions are viable anymore. We investigated this question with close attention to how nationality, status, gender, race, and class combined to produce different outcomes.

To address these questions, the researchers drew on qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted in Amman, Jordan over the course of three months in 2022. The researchers conducted interviews with 21 refugees from Syrian, Somali, Sudanese, and Yemeni nationalities as well as 25 IO, CBO staff, and state representatives, for a total of 46 interviews. Participants were recruited through a mixed approach of snowball sampling. The researchers also held two focus group sessions with 31 total participants. The first focus group was comprised of Syrian women. The second was a group of other nationalities – namely Iraqi, Yemeni, and Somali people – and also included a mix of gender identities.

To further contextualize this data, observation was conducted at cultural events, NGO offices, and public meetings between refugee community members, government workers, and NGO staff. To interpret this interview and focus group data, the researchers used inductive coding to craft an understanding of participants’ views and experiences.

## 2. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

To understand refugees' strategies and to capture their diversity, we adopt three interrelated theoretical frameworks that provide the basis for our analysis of the para-solutions.

**These frameworks are**

**(i) intersectionality with a focus on gendered and racialized Othering;**

**(ii) liminality and uncertainty; and finally,**

**(iii) humanitarian bureaucracies.**

The Othering that refugees experience exacerbates the liminality and uncertainty that they encounter, which is reinforced by humanitarian actors that aim to offer resources, assistance, and protection, but frequently fall short due to the complex arrangements of the state and their inability to operate independently, particularly in non-signatory contexts. Because of these experiences, refugees increasingly seek para-solutions as a means of responding to Othering by crafting belonging or attempting to leave. They cope with their liminality by insisting on planning for the future anyways. Humanitarian bureaucracies, while often exacerbating the barriers that refugees face when aiming to access key areas of education or employment, at times unintentionally, still provide a setting where refugees can craft their para-residency or para-mobility strategies.

These approaches show the complex relationships between actors, as well as the fact that refugees in Jordan are maneuvering their present positioning and strategizing their futures despite the constraints and failures of their political environment.

### 2.1. OTHERING AND INTERSECTIONALITY

First, refugees in Jordan face pervasive Othering based on their gender, race, and skin tone. As an intersectional approach reveals, social identities overlap in ways that often produce different forms of Othering. For example, we found that Syrian boys face specific forms of gendered bullying in school that can deter them from continuing on while Somali, Sudanese, Iraqi, and Yemeni parents struggle to access primary education for their children at all.

**The experiences of Othering taking place in Jordan require an intersectional analysis because the challenges that refugees face even when attempting to access para-solutions are not defined homogenously but rather through specific overlapping of categories.**

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989) and developed by scholars such as McCall (2005), is an analytical framework that recognizes that structural discrimination and harms are produced through combinations of factors such as gender, race, class, geographic location, religion, age, ability/disability, and other social, cultural, and economic positionalities and subject formations. As Hancock (2007) demonstrates, intersectionality focuses on which intersections matter in producing social harms and inequality. As Clark-Kazak and Thomson (2019: 214) explain, for refugees navigating solutions, “[t]hese patterns of human relations are constructed by individual and collective agents but also form structural opportunities and constraints within which refugees individually and collectively exercise their agency”. Attention to intersectionality can reveal both structural barriers and the unique ways that differently positioned refugees work within inequitable systems to strategize for their futures.

Proposing generic solutions for “refugees” problematically generalizes the vastly different situations and experiences of forced migrants into one homogenous category. Even attempts to undertake a gendered analysis of access to solutions can be insufficient because of how nationality, race, class, and ability can influence the situation of men, women, and non-binary people (Baines 2004; Buckley-Zistel and Krause 2017). For example, Sudanese and Somali refugee men and women both emphasize facing racism and discrimination when accessing employment, but Sudanese and Somali

women often continue to search for ways to engage in the formal labour market whereas Sudanese men are pushed into the informal market due to the gendered expectations of men to provide for their families. Sudanese men frequently discussed how they feared work each day because “if they [the authorities] come to the job site looking for illegal workers, they’ll see and right away they’ll know” (Interview 4, 2022). Being easily identified as an outsider by Jordanian authorities due to the racialized assumption that only Arabs are Jordanians presents serious risks for participants that show variation based on gender and race. As another example, Syrian women are able to access NGO programs more readily than their male counterparts, but are only able to do so because of the pervasive perception amongst many Jordanian and international actors that Syrian women are more in need of reform due to their “socially regressive” customs (Interview 38, 2022). Intersectionality can thus provide insight into the differences in how Somali, Sudanese, or Syrian refugee men and women are Othered in Jordan.

Othering can be understood as a process that “serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself” (Weis 1995). In the case of forced migration, Grove and Zwi (2006) show that refugees are often Othered: “Where people outside of their ‘proper’ place of belonging and within our boundaries they are increasingly represented as a threat to notions of community and sovereignty, forcing questions of ‘who is in’ and ‘who is out’”.

For refugees, the definitions of 'in' and 'out' prominently relate to their legal status, with some being recognized as refugees and others as asylum seekers or guests, categories which are tied to nationality and race in proceedings pertaining to access to durable solutions, and in smaller daily interactions. For example, for Somali and Sudanese refugees, they often explained that their appearance and their race made them unable to ever hope to be accepted or to fit in with Jordanian society. Language and accent can also be tactics through which some are Othered, as Syrian men would commonly complain about their accent distinguishing them from locals, leading to some Jordanians perceiving them as "effeminate" (Interview, 2022). In such ways, as Sonnis-Bell et al. (2019: 31) show, "Othering" is "arbitrarily defined along ambiguous lines of class, religion race, ethnicity, nationality, social status, and geography...and has very tangible consequences of those constructed as the other". These ambiguous lines of definition take a significant toll on the possibilities available to refugees, as will be explored in the following sections.

## 2.2. LIMINALITY AND UNCERTAINTY

---

Our intersectional analysis underscores chronic forms of liminality and uncertainty for different refugees in Jordan.

**This study builds on theories of liminality and uncertainty given the prolonged periods of displacement that each of these refugee communities endure, with the majority of participants explaining that they had been in Jordan for ten years or more and struggling with a lack of clear, longer-term solutions to their predicament.**

Defined by Turner (1967) as waiting on the threshold in a state of "betwixt and between", liminality fosters precarity as refugees wait to move from one phase of life to another and is the focus of an extensive body of literature in refugee studies given the increasing normalization of protracted displacement. Liminality fosters a sense of uncertainty about the future that impedes refugees' abilities to plan for their future or securely navigate the present. Studies show that liminality and uncertainty have significant impacts in constraining the situations and options available to refugees and that this uncertainty weighs on their mental and physical well-being because they cannot assuredly plan for what comes next (Schaefer 2014; Mason 2011; Löbel 2020; Maas et al. 2022). These dynamics have impacted refugees in Jordan, with research showing both the difficulty of this state of waiting as well as the dynamic and adaptive coping mechanisms that refugees in this context craft for their own well-being.



As Morrice and Salem (2021: 13) outline for Syrian refugees in Jordan, “liminality is spatial and temporal, as individuals wait, often for years in inhumane conditions, to move from pre-migration statuses to the determination of new legal and social positions.” Liminality can undercut refugees’ ability to plan or hope for their future given the enduring uncertainty of the present.

In our research, we frequently encountered experiences of liminality and uncertainty, but more importantly, we observed how para-solutions were an antidote to liminality for the insistence of being able to plan and hope for a future.

**Para-solutions offer a coping mechanism because they are a strategy that insists on planning despite liminality and acting to create some form of certainty.**

Instead of accepting an unknowable future where one’s status is determined by states and IOs, refugees found ways to engage with the future through planning and navigating the present even under enormous constraints and risk. While liminality is an enduring condition, para-solutions offer a fundamental way of conceptualizing how refugees are crafting their own solutions in the meantime.

### **2.3. HUMANITARIAN BUREAUCRACIES**

In pursuing their own para-solutions, refugees also must navigate complex humanitarian bureaucracies that exacerbate liminality and operate through Othering, as

humanitarian bureaucracies are embedded within a larger system that remains hostile to refugees. We find that Yemeni, Iraqi, Somali, and Sudanese refugees often struggle to gain recognition from UNHCR and many are given the status of an “asylum-seeker” for years while they wait in Jordan.



**This lack of clear institutional support can exacerbate children being refused education, exclusion from resettlement procedures, limited or a lack of monthly financial support, and other harms that make the state of liminality that refugees experience in Jordan unbearable.**

In spite of this, humanitarian settings can often unintentionally offer an environment for refugees to continue pursuing para-solutions in the form of basic educational and vocational programming, or in volunteer opportunities that bring people from different refugee communities together.

The power of humanitarian bureaucracies to exacerbate, rather than resolve, some of the problems that refugees face is a well explored topic in research on liminality. As Barnett (2011: 12) explains, humanitarianism has become increasingly wedded to state interests through funding structures, resulting in a paternalistic form of “care and control” that is bureaucratically heavy-handed.

Refugees “are subjected to a whole host of disciplinary and regulatory technologies and are restricted and immobilized through punitive legislation resulting in ‘everyday bordering’” (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). Everyday hurdles, such as requiring non-expired passports for aid delivery or national barcodes for access to children’s education, were consistently named as serious difficulties in our interviews, as participants often explained how these processes became both a daily and a structural constraint that significantly impeded their well-being. When asked about how different organizations responded to the needs of “non-Syrian” refugees, most organizations insisted that they turned no one away. However, few produced any evidence that their programs could reach or be accessed by other refugee communities. The legal requirements that many refugees lack, and the absence of assistance that refugees receive in obtaining them, create formidable and often gendered and racialized barriers that impede access even to para-solutions.

Overseeing these labyrinths, as Napier-Moore (2011) calls them, **“humanicrats”** are paradoxically welcoming while also engaging in hostile practices, resulting in little practical help to find solutions for many refugees and leaving them in harmful states of enduring liminality. As Kibreab (1993) has shown, humanitarian perceptions of the refugee population considerably influence how they are addressed in programming, and how their needs are considered. When asked about how they work with refugees on durable solutions, one UN participant

explained, “we spend a lot of our time trying to manage these expectations...in many ways we are just expectation managers” (Interview 3 2022). As opposed to providing refugees with better knowledge of the programs available or helping them find short-term solutions, refugees feel that these actors offer little, stressing the lack of support and solutions in most interviews. These acts are a part of ‘bureaucratic violence’, wherein refugees are exposed “to structural and physical violence by being forced to live in precarious states of indeterminate waiting.” (Martinez 2023: 2). This bureaucratic violence is an enduring condition that exacerbates the precarious conditions in the lives of refugees.



**Faced with this hostile humanitarian bureaucracy, refugees aim to escape liminality and uncertainty by both imagining and pursuing para-solutions. Through bypassing legal and administrative impediments, refugees establish, imagine, and access para-solutions to claim their own well-being and secure some rights despite the enormous constraints that they face.**



### 3. PARA-SOLUTIONS

*Para-solutions* approaches show that refugees in Jordan are maneuvering their present positioning and strategizing their futures despite the constraints and failures of their political environment. In spite of the limited access to traditional durable solutions, refugees in Jordan are working to develop para-solutions that offer at least some of the benefits offered by the durable solutions, even if they cannot fully resolve their displacement and liminality. Of the various para-solutions, the most prominent amongst participants in this study are para-mobility and para-residency. Given the importance of the future in solutions planning, para-solutions involve both immediate responses to everyday challenges, as well as long-term dreams.

*Para-residency* involves refugees making plans to stay in Jordan (despite their lack of secure legal status) and establishing ties in the country through educational and vocational training, as well as volunteering with IOs, CBOs, and NGOs. Para-residency can also entail refugees seeing themselves as a part of communities in Jordan and feeling a sense of belonging. Rather than understanding this as de-facto integration, this study specifies these strategies and actions as para-residency because of the effort and the agency that refugees put into shaping their own lives and making their own luck, rather than as an ad hoc process that simply unfolds before them.

*Para-mobility* can take the form of working abroad, either through remote employment or through labour migration, family reunification, scholarship, or educational programs, or dreaming of ways to do so. In the following sections, these two para-solutions are examined in detail while also exploring how access to para-solutions is deeply shaped by racial, gendered, classed, and nationality-based factors.

In doing so, this study notes the many challenges that refugees face even when attempting to access para-solutions. Race, nationality, and gender influence how different groups think about their options and what avenues are closed to them due to factors outside of their control. This research repeatedly found that the experiences of these groups are markedly distinguished from one another, showing how the often-used categories of “refugees” or even “Syrian refugees” or “women refugees” are not meaningful frameworks or full representations.

**Instead, understanding how refugees are accessing their own para-solutions requires detail and specificity to be meaningful. What is viable as a para-solution shifts drastically depending on whether an individual holds formal refugee status, status as an “asylum-seeker”, a “guest”, or informal status, which primarily hinges on nationality, but is also influenced by factors such as race, gender, and class.**

Notwithstanding refugees' critiques of the hostile humanitarian bureaucracy in Jordan, we found that IOs and CBOs are actively participating in the production of para-solutions both in the programs that they offer as well as in their definitional practices. For example, many NGOs in Jordan have redefined the language of durable solutions to "finding ways to strengthen resilience, self-reliance" (Interview 1, 2022) instead of referring to the processes of resettlement, local integration, and voluntary repatriation. As an IO staff member commented:

“

I think we need to work with today's realities, right? I think we need the durable solutions. The three durable solutions do still stand. They are important. They are the end goal. But in today's reality, we have to acknowledge that if that is not a possibility, how can we creatively make the best of the situation for refugees and Jordan that is looking at inclusion and empowerment? (Interview 3, 2022)

”

Thus, analysis of these evolving meanings and the programs that these organizations offer is a key aspect of understanding the emerging system of para-solutions in Jordan.

### 3.1. PARA-RESIDENCY

---

For those who remain in Jordan without any longer-term formal solutions, para-residency is used as a means of navigating day-to-day life while aiming to build a sense of belonging and community.

**Not to be confused with de facto or de jure integration, para-residency does not come with the promise of citizenship, nor does it take place as an ad hoc process of gradual and widespread social acceptance that can lead to naturalization.**

Instead, para-residency operates by making the most of the meantime through local educational, vocational, and volunteering opportunities that together help to establish meaningful relationships that can have social and material benefits. Similar to the idea posed in Brun et al.'s (2017: 221) discussion of abjection as both a process of state-controlled exclusion and a form of "ambiguous citizenship," para-residency involves practices emerging from refugees' liminal status. Para-residency operates by seizing some of the benefits and social security that come with localized citizenship, such as a sense of belonging and access to socioeconomic support, even if tenuous. Yet, gender, race, class, nationality, and other dynamics shape different refugee communities' para-residency strategies. For example, racism and xenophobia particularly impact the experiences of Somali and Sudanese refugees who manage to access education and to feel a sense of belonging.

One Somali woman explained that even friendships with Jordanians were strained because, “some of them are racist, to be honest with you. They don't like to be friends with the black skin even. You can tell” (Interview 38, 2022). This section examines these para-residency strategies while also noting the many ways in which they remain limited due to these intersectional factors.

### 3.1.1. PRIMARY EDUCATION

---

Education is highly sought after by different refugee communities but remains largely inaccessible due to restrictions around nationality and class. In addition to being perceived as an opportunity to pursue life outside of Jordan, which will be covered in the next section, education is also seen as the main avenue through which refugees can build belonging for themselves or their children in the Jordanian community. Several scholars have evaluated the ways in which education facilitates refugees' access to social, cultural, and political belonging in local settings (Abdelmahdi 2020; Culbertson and Constant 2015; Hattar-Pollara 2019; Kirk et al. 2011; Thorne 2021). IOs and CBOs also recognize the significance of education, with one UN staff member commenting that the programming staff are well aware that “the focus is really getting refugees to feature as part of national programs, education and scholarship programs in particular” (Interview 3, 2022). Refugees who can access primary and secondary education in spite of immense barriers gain relationships that ease their navigation of life in Jordan, thus facilitating the para-residency process.

However, this access is largely determined first by the policies and the legality of status, followed by a combination of factors relating to class, race, nationality, and gender.

Syrians are at times portrayed by NGOs and government reports as having more access to primary and secondary education (Interview 10, 2022; Karasapan 2022), but in reality, they face many challenges that extend beyond legal access to education and that are shaped by gendered and classed dynamics. Only 145,000 Syrian children are enrolled in Jordanian schools, which is estimated to be approximately half of the school-aged children in the country (Karasapan and Shah 2018; Karasapan 2022).

**A Human Rights Watch study listed the following as the main reasons for low and declining enrollment rates of Syrian children in schools: poverty, lack of transportation, poor quality, lack of future opportunities linked to education, administrative barriers, and a lack of accommodations for disabled children (Stauffer 2020).**

For those who do manage to enroll in school, the Ministry of Education implemented the “double-shift” program wherein Syrian students attended school at night, after Jordanian children. This program has been identified as contributing to worsened education outcomes (Salem 2021), and limits relationship-building opportunities that are integral to para-residency for both boys and girls.

Furthermore, although public education is free for Jordanians and Syrians who fall under the Jordan Response Plan, education can be costly in Jordan with fees ranging from 40-60JD (approximately 60-100 USD). While not overtly high, these fees can cause “indirect discrimination” for refugees with limited income (Interview 14, 2022). Only Syrians’ education fees were waived because of the allocated funds following their mass influx. As an education specialist working for an NGO commented, “if most families could do private school, they would without hesitation, but it places a financial burden that refugee families and the bottom half of Jordanian society cannot afford” (Interview 46, 2022). Class size also limits the educational options available to Syrians and other refugee nationalities. Despite the fact that since 2014, almost 200 schools in Jordan have operated in two shifts (morning and afternoon), the classes are reported to be overcrowded. Educational staff on the second shift are either exhausted after their morning shift or not up to date with the curriculum because they are retired teachers.

In a focus group discussing the public schooling options available to them, married Syrian women strongly emphasized that they saw primary education for their children as the most important factor in their lives. They expressed dissatisfaction with not only the double-shift programs, but also the bullying, physical violence, and discrimination against their children, mainly boys, in schools (Focus Group 1, 2022). They claimed that these traumatic instances were major challenges to their children gaining an education and building lasting ties (Focus Group 1, 2022).

One woman commented: “Education for us isn’t the same as education for Jordanians. The teachers who teach our children aren’t qualified and their school hours are in the evenings not the mornings” (Focus Group 1, 2022). In an interview, a young Syrian man explained that his experiences attending the double-shift program echoed these sentiments. He was bullied due to speaking with a “soft accent” that marked him out as Syrian, to the point that he felt like dropping out. He described a particularly painful incident that led him to transfer to a double-shift program to escape the bullying. He explained:

“

I remember one day, when I was in my 10th grade, a guy came to hit me just because I am Syrian in my school and I was defending myself and we both were just fighting. Then a teacher came and without asking, “What’s wrong?” or without splitting us up, he came and hit me also. And I went home crying, not because that kid was hitting me or something. No, but because the teacher held him and hit me (Interview 7, 2022).

”

The teacher, who the participant emphasized was Jordanian, sided against the Syrian child. In response, some Syrians respond with the proverb that “when you are stranger, you must be polite” because, as a refugee, trouble should be avoided. Following this, the participant explained that he felt obliged to keep quiet and not make a fuss for fear that he would be denied access to education altogether.

**The gendered dynamics at play in Jordanian-Syrian interactions between young men and boys often involve accusations from Jordanians that Syrians are “effeminate” or “soft” as a justification for bullying that consequently prevents greater social inclusion.**

Schools in Jordan are often segregated by sex. In boys’ schools, conflicts have emerged in which a “mainstream” Jordanian masculinity is pitched against Syrian boys’ ways of speaking and behaving. This same participant went on to explain that even in double-shift schools, because they were known to be for Syrians, Jordanian boys would wait outside the school that ended late at night, and attack Syrian boys as they were leaving. Echoing these sentiments, a Syrian woman explained how she borrowed money from relatives to send her son to a Catholic private school because she worried that her son would be “brutalized” in the public schooling system for the way that he spoke and behaved (Interview 44, 2022). In line with previous research showing the many barriers that Syrian children face (Culbertson and Constant 2015; Hattar-Pollara 2019), these experiences emphasize that Syrian boys in particular face enormous challenges in accessing local education with Jordanian students. An education specialist also confirmed, “bullying is especially in the boys’ schools and the students will destroy each other if there is no cohesion” (Interview 46, 2022). While the situation for Syrian girls in schools remains underfunded and restricted, no participants described the same types of bullying from Jordanian students against their daughters.

In addition to localized gender dynamics, this situation could also be owing to the fact that NGOs frequently focused on girls’ education as a site of intervention and provided more accessible funding for girls to attend schooling that secures transportation and safe mobility, which was confirmed in an interview with a prominent NGO in Jordan (Interview 27, 2022).

In spite of these challenges, Syrian families are still finding ways to place their children in schools. By doing so, Syrian families are connecting their children to Jordanian friends, institutions, and social networks. A Syrian woman who also works as a social worker explained that she saw Syrian children in Jordanian schools as the only way that Syrians could create belonging for themselves:

“

Children are able to succeed in integration because in school, they make friends. Also, children cannot compare between their lives now and their lives in Syria because they were born here. There are no options in their minds other than living in Jordan (Interview 14, 2022).

”

Agreeing with this, an older Syrian man and his wife explained how their eldest son worked to put his younger siblings through school, which had enabled them to feel like “we are a part of Jordan, even in this small way, we belong. The older one sacrifices and the younger ones can fit in and through them, we too belong” (Interview 16, 2022).

Similarly, after growing up struggling to gain access to education, a Syrian participant described how he finally made it to university in Jordan. There, he began to make Jordanian friends, making life in Jordan easier. “When I go to the university, I make friends, I see that Jordanian people, they are not all bad. And they help me. They show me how to do things that I did not know before” (Interview 40, 2022). When asked how such friendships came about, a Somali woman discussed that she had observed children in her community participate in children’s programming at CBOs where Jordanian children and children from refugee backgrounds could come together. One of the parents said:

“

My kid is getting a lot of bullying at school and he didn’t have any friends, but after he came to this program, [it] provided a safe space and created this cohesion. He met kids through this program and then once they went back to school, they recognized each other and they were able to form friendship, even at school (Interview 25, 2022).

”

In these ways, while both access to and completion of education remains limited in part due to gendered factors and class, many participants felt that “the solution is complete inclusion in the classroom and beyond” (Interview 52, 2022).

**However, for Somali and Sudanese children, access to education is much more difficult as these communities struggle to enroll their children in schools at all and face broad problems even with para-residency.**

For Somali refugees, this is also in part because many do not speak Arabic very well, and that they lack formal permission to enroll in Jordanian schools. This lack of permission is due to their lack of documentation based on their precarious status in Jordan. Many Jordanian schools require a national ID number or documentation from the UNHCR, which many Sudanese people are unable to provide. A Sudanese woman explained in an interview that:

“

**If Sudanese do not receive education services, I have a friend who has a daughter in high school. She decided not to complete because she cannot get to university and the girl is very smart. She wants to study medicine, but how? Even my daughter who is twelve years old, we pray the laws will change, I tell her, “You study and sit for exams and God will open opportunities” (Interview 33, 2022).**

”



Being unable to afford international fees for university and being denied legal refugee status in Jordan bars her daughter from educational opportunities. In addition, the participant's emphasis on "laws" shows the limited options for Sudanese, Somali, and Yemeni refugees in Jordan. These so called "minority" refugee communities are required to either hold a work permit valid for one year, which can be secured through a Jordanian employer, or to be registered as an asylum seeker with the UNHCR. Without either of these options, children in these communities miss their chances to access services such as education.

Because of these barriers, in contrast with Syrians, "minority" refugees struggle to acquire the paperwork necessary to enroll their children in educational institutions. For example, a Somali refugee father explained that he saw no viable possibilities to enroll his daughter in school:

“

...the teachers deal with us differently. The papers that they need from us Somalis are different. It's just more difficult to get an education. My daughter was studying three months. After that, when they asked me for a barcode from the government [to prove holding work permit and a residency], I had to stop. I can't go there because I'm here illegally and I don't have protection. If I go there, I will get arrested.

”

“

**That's why, now, my daughter is not studying. Eventually, we don't have the basic things like studies and basic things that a human should get. That's the most difficult. And even my daughter, the Arabic, it's a little bit [difficult]. She speaks English because in Somalia, Arabic communication is a bit more different. And they see us, they see her as different (Interview 43, 2022).**

”

These bureaucratic processes create barriers for Somali and Sudanese refugees as well as Iraqis and Yemenis in part because these groups do not have consistent access to refugee status, especially after 2019 when registration with UNHCR was no longer an option. As an education specialist for a foreign development agency commented: "the most attention is given to Syrians. We only mean Syrians when we talk about refugees" (Interview 51, 2022). Because of this, other nationalities are addressed by the government in an ad hoc manner and receive mixed assistance from NGOs. This situation means less access to resources for refugees, limiting their ability to engage in para-residency due to the fact that no funding from the international community is earmarked for non-Syrian refugees. Reports of discrimination against refugee minorities in Jordan underscore the inaccessibility of education for these groups, undercutting possibilities for para-residency as a viable coping strategy (Davis et al. 2016).

A CBO staff member explained the disparities that she had observed between Syrian children and other refugee children:

“

For Syrian children, I think that the integration to school is a little bit easier, not only because the registration process has been easier for some time and because Syrian children have Ministry of Interior registration with the Jordanian government. There's no barriers to registering at school that are really intense. (...). So I feel like attention was given there. But for refugees of other nationalities, whether it's Iraqi, Sudanese or Somalis or Yemenis, the situation is a little bit different because there's a cost to entering your child [because they are treated as migrants], you have to pay tuition and there isn't always support from other non-profit organizations to cover those costs (Interview 37, 2022).

”

Minority refugees are thus often left out of programming and education opportunities.

As an additional barrier, racist behaviors also push Black refugees out of schools even if they have managed to gain access.

Phenotypical differences between Jordanians and sub-Saharan African refugees mean that these refugees are often easily singled out. A Sudanese mother described her daughter's negative experiences in school. She explained:

“

**Even the nature of the hair, they make fun of it in schools. My daughter wore the hijab two years early, not based on liking for the hijab. No. It is so they don't tell her, "Your hair is a 'wire sponge'". Even the Syrians bully my daughter. I enrolled my daughters in a Syrian school for a month, but they bullied them. They kept telling them "you black", you "slave".<sup>3</sup> They poured water in her school bag. I complained to the principal. She said, "What happens outside the school is not my responsibility" (Interview 39, 2022).**

”

With the bureaucratic requirements for enrolling in education becoming nearly impassable and as instances of racism continue to exclude Somali and Sudanese from schooling opportunities, access to para-residency declines.

---

<sup>3</sup> As a note, this reference originates in the historical context of the region, reflecting a period when individuals from Habesha, or present-day Ethiopians, were forcibly brought to the region to labor for affluent families. They were often referred to as 'slaves' and were identified as Black (Miran 2012: 131).



The consequences of this exclusion have both long-term and short-term implications. For example, many participants highlighted how there are no programs even to teach Somali parents Jordanian Arabic. One Somali woman explained, “Especially Somalis. They don't speak Arabic at all. So they can't integrate with the society as well” (Interview 38, 2022). Racialized barriers heavily weigh on Somali and Sudanese parents trying to access para-residency.

In spite of this reality, Somali and Sudanese refugees in Jordan continue to see education as a right and as an important point of access to para-residency. As one Sudanese woman explained: “the solution is to find permanent solutions for refugees in their host country, namely education, including higher education” (Interview 5, 2022). As this section has shown, para-residency through primary and secondary education is a difficult endeavor, marked by limited access based primarily on nationality and race while also being shaped by gender dynamics. However, it is one that still holds promise given the ways in which it has connected participants with some sense of belonging and their children with friendships and localized understandings. As a Jordanian education specialist commented: “education, though it's tough, is something that we have to keep working on, to keep creating opportunities for Syrians and for the others so that they can have some life here” (Interview 38, 2022).

An informative example of the ways in which members of refugee communities are providing solutions for themselves can be found in Sawyian, a NGO founded by a

Sudanese activist and Somali educator hoping to provide education to Somali and Sudanese children as well as other members of the community. As a means of crafting para-residency, this refugee-led initiative offered English lessons and sought to ensure a sense of a community for people who are treated differently. When discussing this, one of them explained: “I wanted to do everything I could for my community. I will teach what I know from my own kitchen if I must” (Interview 47, 2023). Their work proves that despite an apparent lack of support, refugees are providing education for each other even under enormous constraints.

### **3.1.2. VOCATIONAL TRAININGS**

---

While the formal labor market in Jordan is largely closed to refugees, funded vocational training programs by local and international NGOs have become important spaces for pursuing para-residency. Sector-specific restrictions took place between 2016 and 2019 when the Jordanian Ministry of Labour closed off first 19, and then an additional 28, professional positions for Syrians. They subsequently banned the right to work for refugees of other nationalities, limiting their work opportunities to three sectors: agriculture, construction and some services (El-Abed and Shaibatah 2020). Even for Syrians who can access the labour market, bureaucratic hurdles and complex financial requirements have made accessing a Jordanian work permit nearly impossible for most of the population, especially in the professional sectors (Kattaa and Byrne 2018).

Syrians who have been able to secure employment can typically only do so in exploited, precarious, and poor conditions in both the formal and the informal sectors; Syrian refugee women continue to face additional challenges owing to gender roles restricting women to childcare and home-based employment (Sahin and Nashwan 2021). Iraqi, Yemeni, Somali, Sudanese, and refugees of other nationalities have limited access to labour permits and remain outside international negotiations on labour market access unless they can secure a Jordanian employer's sponsorship (Morris 2020). Part of this restriction is believed to be from the Jordanian Government's view that refugees have placed an immense economic burden on the country through competition for housing, resources, healthcare, schooling, and jobs (Interview 9, 2022). Several scholars have echoed these discourses, asserting that the Jordanian economy is simply not robust enough to support the large numbers of labourers in addition to the Jordanian population (Seeberg 2022; Khawaldah and Alzboun 2022). Since 2016, the international community funded the work permit cost for some 200,000 Syrian refugees, yet no money was allocated for non-Syrians.<sup>4</sup> This decision rendered work permits for non-Syrians very expensive and thus working rights have become inaccessible.

**Administrative hurdles and the confusion that they produce compound the precarity that displaced people experience by fostering a sense of fear surrounding registration, taxation, and other aspects of formally and legally running a business in Jordan.**

Jordanians can only operate their own shops and register them at the municipality if they have the amount of JD50,000 to register the business and all affiliated services such as water and electricity. As a result, the majority of refugees seek to partner with Jordanian businessmen. However, these partnerships often result in imbalanced power dynamics wherein the biggest share is owned by Jordanians and the business is registered under their name, while the refugees are left to pay most, or sometimes all, of the costs.

In response, NGOs often aim to provide legal aid to those interested in navigating this system and efforts are being made to bring bureaucrats and refugees into the same room to address these concerns. However, the results have been limited in creating positive, long-term solutions. For example, the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) organized an open meeting for refugee and Jordanian network members, staff from NGOs with entrepreneurial programs, and government bureaucrats working in taxation and registration to address the confusion around this process. However, this meeting revealed the everchanging landscape that refugees face and the ways in which laws inconsistently apply to some but not to others. Disagreements amongst bureaucrats interrupted the meeting as they argued over which industries were open and closed to refugees, what percentage of participants in NGO programs had to be Jordanian, what the income threshold was for a business versus a home business, and several other major differences.

<sup>4</sup> Although official statistics are difficult to confirm, the number of the issued work permits is estimated to have exceeded 380,000 by 2023 (Pearson 2021).

Several Sudanese and Somali women stood up to ask the representatives how they could run their own business, but were told that they could only do so legally if they are a “foreign investor”, to which a Sudanese woman rebutted, “if I am being treated as an investor, I need 50,000JD in the bank. How can I get this as a refugee?” The contradictions and infeasibility of these requirements thus foster the exclusion of refugees of other nationalities, and even further marginalize the many Sudanese and Somali women who wish to become entrepreneurs in a patriarchal workforce.

In spite of these challenges, both IOs and refugees conceptualize vocational training as a form of inclusion that advances para-residency both conceptually and practically by helping refugees progress towards having a licensed business. An NGO staff member working on supporting Syrian entrepreneurs stated: “basically the entrepreneurial mindset is somebody who is creating a solution for their situation” (Interview 17, 2022). She went on to note:

“

because waiting is a big word. What are they [refugees] waiting for? Asylum? Are they going to migrate? Are they going to leave Jordan, for example? Where are they going? Are they going to leave the camps? Are they allowed to leave the camps? And if they are leaving the camps, are they going back to Syria or going somewhere else? So refugees in general have not so many choices. (Interview 17, 2022).

”

Despite these limitations, participants emphasized that vocational training was a way of pursuing belonging in the meantime. Along these lines, a UN staff member added that “economic inclusion is something that we’re really trying to promote” and explained that she saw certain sectors in Jordan opening up more to refugees and creating opportunities as an interim solution (Interview 3, 2022).

Facilitating this form of para-residency, CBOs and NGOs are working to develop the skills of Syrian refugees in Jordan and to find them work by offering frequent job training opportunities in many different sectors. As one NGO staff member explained:

“

**We help match jobseekers with jobs and we provide mentoring to help Syrians find their career path. We serve Syrians and host communities in those countries because we do more for inclusion and including them in the community. It doesn’t make sense to separate them (Interview 17, 2022).**

”

By not separating the two groups, these organizations are able to offer a rare setting where refugee community members and Jordanians can encounter and interact with one another. Programming mirrors this logic due to a regulation in the Jordan Response Plan which stipulates that 50% of participants in every NGO program must be Jordanian nationals in order to ensure the social inclusion of newcomers.

The remaining 50% is then allocated for refugee community participants. While this allocation has narrowed the opportunities available to minority refugee community members, it nonetheless remains one of the few spaces where refugees and Jordanians mix (Interview 32, 2022). NGO programs primarily target marginalized and impoverished Jordanians, which can build modest forms of solidarity and understanding between Jordanian and Syrian participants, who see themselves as sharing similar problems (Interview 32, 2022). One NGO staff member explained, “in those programs, you open a communication platform that they get to chat with each other [...] the theory is when you provide equal chances to people they don't have to feel that they need to compete” (Interview 17, 2022). These relationships challenge the official discourse, which has often emphasized the risk of hosting refugees on the local economy and the way hosting refugees depreciates the prices and the labourer’s pay. While personnel recognize that these opportunities are imperfect in securing employment, they see vocational training as facilitating a limited, but crucial, encounter between Jordanians and Syrians. Another NGO staff member added: “we also have those community engagement projects when we mix them and match them and we get investors from different nationalities. So we give them a sense that it's okay not to have the same, for example, nationality or views. And it doesn't matter. Like in business, it doesn't matter” (Interview 17, 2022). Empirically, it does of course matter, as nationality is the basis for legal status and ensuing access. Another staff member from the vocational training programs reaffirmed this dynamic, explaining that between marginalized Jordanians and Syrians,

“some of the challenges are similar, but of course, there are challenges for them as only Syrians that they can face as Syrians in Jordan” (Interview 13, 2022). She went on to elaborate on these connections, specifically how understanding is being built between these groups through friendships formed during the trainings:

“

There’s a lot of socializing. There’s WhatsApp groups, there’s going out. They are all searching for jobs, so sometimes they will be sending each other, like “we have a vacancy here.” It’s really helpful in social interaction and having connections that can help them short and long term (Interview 13, 2022).

”

By bringing these two nationalities together, there are increased opportunities for fostering social inclusion across communities, in turn advancing para-residency as a solution.

**In terms of who can access vocational training, Syrian women have a clearer pathway to running a small business than other nationalities due to the focus on female empowerment by NGOs. However, the division of labour is still highly gendered despite NGOs’ attempts to bring women into what they call “non-traditional fields for women,” such as car mechanics and plumbing (Interview 22, 2022; Interview 2, 2022).**

Syrian women typically participate in beauty training, home kitchens, and other “feminized” forms of labor (Focus Group 1, 2022; Interview 13, 2022). In contrast, Syrian men often work in either the informal sector or in computer work, carpentry, and other forms of “masculinized” labour (Interview 22, 2022; Interview 4, 2022). Regardless of the persisting structures of gendered labour, NGO staff working in employment and vocational training still see their programs as a space where Syrian women can transgress these boundaries (Interview 12, 2022; Interview 15, 2022; Interview 27, 2022). One NGO staff member working at an entrepreneurship and startup NGO commented:

“

Women's applications are much less than men's application, but women's application[s] are usually a higher quality. To be a female that could do a great startup, you would have to have certain characteristics and a character that could compete in this kind of scenarios of a female-male balanced environment. But we find that they [women] have a greater tendency to be succeeding on startups. Women are very committed (Interview 17, 2022).

”

Similarly, the head of another labour program emphasized that he saw women as more engaged and easier to work with than men. He explained, “women are stronger than men. More engaged.

More full of hope than men. It is them who we want to empower” (Interview 42, 2022). Thus, while the majority of programs are aimed at both Syrian men and women, Syrian women were frequently seen as more valuable and skilled participants in NGO vocational and entrepreneurial programs.

Despite the increased barriers to their participation, Yemeni, Somali, and Sudanese women also work with NGOs and CBOs to engage in para-residency through participating in vocational training and establishing small business opportunities. A notable example is a henna training program led by Sudanese women and supported by a CBO (Interview 37, 2022). A Somali refugee woman explained that this program has created space for other Sudanese, Yemeni, and Somali women in Jordan because “the art of henna [a temporary tattoo drawn on the skin using natural dye], is more famous and more culturally appropriate to open here. It makes space for us to make money and to feel more welcomed” (Interview 25, 2022). In support of these women, another CBO regularly hosts festivals in central Amman where Sudanese, Somali, and other refugee communities are invited to sell their henna skills, perform traditional music, sell their handicrafts, and spend the day with the local Jordanian community. The annual Festival of Encounter in Amman, which is hosted by refugee community members and partnered NGOs aims to bring “the local community and the minority refugee community face-to-face, not just through their suffering, but also through their culture, their art, their craftsmanship” (Interview 6, 2022).



In the festival, refugees from all nationalities are invited to publicly celebrate their culture. These acts are significant in a context where most refugees are barred from employment opportunities because of their status, let alone have a chance to celebrate their skills.

Beyond providing tangible skills and strategies to navigating the uncertainties and precarities of the present, vocational training is also about looking to the future and providing hope for the possibility of para-residency. As an NGO worker questioned: “from an NGO perspective, is livelihood training in this case only for their future and not for their present? So if we’re thinking about durable solutions in these sort of things, I think there’s an existential question there of what are we training for?” (Interview 37, 2022). In this line, a Somali man commented:

“

I do these trainings, I go, I study because I need to be ready for the future. If I stay, if I go. I need to be ready” (Interview 4, 2022).

”

These trainings are seen as a way to prepare for a future through action, even though the results may be limited.

### 3.1.3. VOLUNTEERING

In addition to these para-residency strategies, volunteering with different NGOs also plays a crucial role for refugees of all nationalities.

**When most forms of employment are unavailable and formal education is inaccessible, volunteering offers an opportunity that can connect refugees with Jordanians and other refugee communities. As a way of advancing para-residency, volunteering challenges the notion that host community policies and practices definitively determine integration possibilities by showing how refugees can build their own sense of belonging with others, even across nationalities. Through volunteering, refugees thus strengthen their own communities, networks, and resources as legitimate groups contributing to Jordanian society.**

Although unpaid, volunteering provides a rare opportunity to gain access to limited material support. As one Syrian man explained, “people tend to go do some volunteering and sometimes if you do volunteering you get transportation in return. And the transportation money sometimes can be like a bit of bread. It’s something” (Interview 7, 2022). These roles often offer 5-15 JD a day (7 USD-21 USD) for 8 hours of work, but are nonetheless sought-after given the intensive restrictions on refugee employment in Jordan. One Sudanese woman described: “I started volunteering, even if the pay for the day is 5 JDs. I go there walking and come back walking even if it’s far, so I don’t spend any of the money they give me” (Interview 38, 2022). She explained that she did so after attempting to start a small business without any permit:

“

I tried to work from home. I got scared of being reported on and imprisoned. I don't want to open any big business, I wanted to make soap and sell it [...] I'm very scared of being reported on. I only volunteer (Interview 38, 2022).

”

As this participant's experiences indicate, volunteering is a role that feels safe for many refugees and can still connect them to institutional belonging and resources.

**Beyond offering limited access to financial compensation, volunteering also enables community-based support and mutual aid.**

For example, an older Syrian woman coordinates a network of mutual aid that helps to pay for school tuition, rent, and food for other Syrians in need. Through her relationships, she connects with people in her community and even in other refugee communities. When asked how she got her start, she explained that “I started as a volunteer in CBOs. I would contact people who had donations available. Little by little, I learned that we had to help one another to navigate all of this” (Interview 18, 2022). Her experience as a volunteer trained her how to identify and respond to needs of others and put her in touch with various refugee communities.

Drawing from this experience as her inspiration, she began to “connect people” to help one another. Other similar refugee networks have also arisen from volunteering in NGOs, such as a Sudanese women's network. One participant commented: “in my volunteer work, we try to spread awareness messages to as many refugees as possible. How can you as a refugee know your rights and the legal support and how to reach psychosocial services?” (Interview 19, 2022). Similarly, a group of Syrian women formed their own mutual aid group after volunteering in an organization network together and seeing how the organization funded its projects. They formed savings groups, or *jameya*, as a means of supporting one another's families, such as by paying a member's daughter's tuition (Al-Khatib and Cox 2023). Thus, volunteering can connect refugees with one another and can provide them with knowledge that can lead to larger mutual aid projects that help advance para-residency goals.

In addition, volunteer positions can connect refugees of multiple nationalities to transnational networks that can strengthen their ability to stay in Jordan and improve their situation. In this vein, one Somali woman described her work as a volunteer:

## 3.2. PARA-MOBILITY

---

Traditional resettlement remains a highly gendered and racialized practice as the selection process is determined by state preferences around a refugee's gender and nationality, as well as religion, age, ability, marital status, and number of children (Hyndman and Giles 2016). Typically, the UNHCR recommends refugees for resettlement on the basis of their perceived vulnerability and need for protection, a gendered and racialized process that "draws selectively from gender identities, gender roles, gender power relations, and systems of gender stratifications" (Boyd 1999: 6). Similarly, regarding race, as Costello and Foster argue, "the global refugee regime treats different refugees differently, as a matter of course" (2022: 245). Race, gender and nationality affect how forced migrants in Jordan are "sorted" and whether they are excluded from resettlement possibilities, however limited.

**Para-mobility can take different forms, such as remote work conducted in Jordan, or travel to other countries seen as more hospitable through alternative pathways than resettlement.**

These maneuvers and the hopes associated with them are gendered in how they are accessed, with men receiving more encouragement to engage with alternatives and women more frequently either hoping to remain in Jordan or to be selected for traditional resettlement.

These refugees see the ways that they could belong in Jordanian society, and pursue para-solutions as a means of accessing some of their rights, despite the overarching barriers to official membership in the state. However, conflict and forced migration can upend traditional gender norms and create new opportunities, especially for women (Martin 2004; Snyder 2008). Planning for a future as a means of subverting their own liminality, members of different refugee communities in Jordan envision and prepare for a life outside of Jordan through gendered strategies and considerations. As one Somali woman working for an NGO commented: "not only is this waiting time, it's also that state of waiting and it's nerve racking. They [other refugees] need to get out of their home. They need to make connections, they need to continue living. The clock cannot stop until they receive this phone call, 'Okay, you got resettlement'" (Interview 25, 2022). Thus, para-mobility involves a complex web of both imagined and tangible strategies and benefits, wherein many forced migrants in Jordan envision and pursue spaces in which they can build a life for themselves through access to education, employment, and mobility. Scholarship programs abroad, short-term and remote work opportunities, and romantic relationships, either with members of one's own refugee community resettled abroad or with foreigners, stand out as key elements of para-mobility.



### 3.2.1. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

---

**Many refugees see education as one of the only remaining pathways as a solution to displacement, and as an alternative to the lengthy wait for resettlement. Part of the appeal of applying for educational opportunities abroad lies in the fact that many feel that they can exercise more control over the process.**

In contrast, several participants commented on the opacity of resettlement and the fact that, “Nobody applies for resettlement. You just wait and you register at the UNHCR and they pick someone and they call them” (Interview 3, 2022). A Somali man explained that many refugees in his community no longer see resettlement as possible. He commented: “They feel helpless. They feel depression. Resettlement takes time, like three years, four years. You don't know the answer. You don't know if they will accept you or not” (Interview 43, 2022). As a result, for both themselves and for their children, many refugees who wish to leave Jordan prioritize international education as one of the only reliable pathways.

Ideally, pursuing international educational is a form of para-mobility that grants refugees of all nationalities the opportunity to travel outside of Jordan and establish the foundations for a new life elsewhere.

Participants viewed education as an inherently important and desirable aspect of life that Jordan did not offer, but they also connected educational opportunities to a potential life outside of Jordan. Although accessing international education is highly limited by factors such as socio-economic status, age, and ability, many refugees see education as their only viable opportunity to pursue life outside of Jordan, even if only temporarily. When asked what could help someone leave Jordan, a Syrian woman responded: “maybe there is someone who wants to continue their education, they might offer them a scholarship for university” (Focus Group 1, 2022).

This hope for future possibilities is a key aspect of para-mobility strategies. Nearly all of the refugees involved in this research indicated that they had contemplated this para-solution as an aspiration either for themselves or for their children because the current system left them with no other options. Parents, particularly those of Somali and Sudanese refugees, face an exclusive educational system in Jordan since they are expected to pay for public education. In spite of the difficulties that come with securing a legal status, many explained that finding ways to ensure that their children could one day study abroad was still their most reliable option for leaving the country and providing them with a future. One Sudanese mother explained that, for her two daughters, “my hope is for them to have degrees, so they can resettle and be employed outside of Jordan, because in Jordan it's not allowed” (Interview 5, 2022).

While studying is technically permitted, the financial barriers and their precarious legal status act as a structural constraint that keeps refugees from accessing education. The closed system and the many constraints that different refugee communities face prompts a focus on settings outside of Jordan where it is hoped that education may be more accessible and a more stable life could follow. As mentioned earlier, Syrian women in a focus group shared how education, for both them and their children, was their most important concern. One woman commented: “in other countries, we would have more rights, we would practice our hobbies, we would find employment, and our children would learn” (Focus Group 1, 2022). This learning is thus not solely about the present, but is deeply connected to opportunities and hope for the future. As one Syrian man commented, “for me, I was thinking about having good marks and being patient about getting good marks in the university so you can apply to a Master’s degree abroad and you can leave Jordan forever. So that’s what it was. So for me [...] since I do not have the right to travel or get a visa, I wanted to use the certificate as a key out of here” (Interview 3). Aspiring to use education and credentials as a “key” out of Jordan is often at the heart of refugees’ own strategies.

UNHCR and other organizations have taken note of this, identifying scholarships and labour migration as complementary pathways that may help resolve refugee situations alongside the traditional pathways. Organizations in Jordan have embraced this terminology and promoted the idea that complementary pathways can lead to the goal of resettlement. Discussing these pathways, one UN staff member noted:

“

I’m a complementary pathways advocate. And I would say that they can be considered part of the durable solutions spectrum because they are such a stepping stone towards a long term solution. I mean, when you take the Canadian private sponsorship program, people get permanent residency [...] It ticks the box. You go to Italy on a scholarship program, there’s no guarantee that you will get Italian citizenship, but you’re on a path and we work to make sure that there are opportunities which mean you won’t return to your country of origin, forcibly of course. In fact, you’re not allowed to return to Jordan. So we embark on those programs knowing that they are a stepping stone towards the solution (Interview 3, 2022).

”

In this manner, gaining access to foreign scholarships to attend undergraduate or graduate education is gaining traction as a way of traveling outside of Jordan and pursuing a different life with institutional support. However, it does come with the risk that refugees will not be able to return to Jordan unless they are eventually able to gain permanent residency in the third state where they study.

In contrast to typical student visas where students must prove that they have an intention to return to their state of origin, the UNHCR and implementing partners have shown that return is not available to students who are refugees (Fratzke et al. 2021). Adding to this issue, states such as Jordan may block a student refugee from returning to the country after their studies on the grounds that they forfeited their refugee recognition when they departed (Fincham 2022). The UNHCR listed this as a major concern in an exploratory report on complementary pathways. They wrote: “if refugees cannot return to the first country of asylum or to their country of origin, they need to be able to seek asylum, or attain another secure legal status allowing them to remain in the third country after completion of the program” (UNHCR 2019). This complementary pathway is consequently seen as a one-way ticket with future security remaining highly uncertain. However, many refugees, even those who do not have the formal education necessary to qualify for these positions, explained that they hoped to still apply because there are few other possibilities of being able to leave, showing both the practical and aspirational impact of international education as a para-solution.

Yet, this para-solution is situated within nationality-based, classed, raced, and gendered barriers that restrict access to different groups. As mentioned, access to primary education is generally not available for non-Syrian nationalities. Meanwhile, Syrian students operate within a highly restricted system, hindering their access to university education outside of Jordan.

Without a solid primary education, Syrian students cannot compete with Jordanian or other international students for placements.

Many Syrian students had their schooling interrupted or cut off altogether due to the ongoing conflict, blocking them from this para-solution. A young Syrian man who came to Jordan when he was eleven years old explained that he had to leave school when his family was forced to move within Jordan and that he could never re-enter the education system due to his inability to pass the main high school exam in Jordan (the Tawjihi): “So I was doing Tawjihi, because I was on the edge for Tawjihi, you know? And they said, ‘You should [go] back three years before you take the test again. Study again for three years and then do Tawjihi.’ And then I didn’t do that [...] I will study, but not in the university or Tawjihi” (Interview 24, 2022). This experience pushed this young man to take on more informal forms of labour and to see scholarships abroad as closed off to him.

Exemplifying other, familial constraints, several Somali men refugees reported that they had been told that they were ineligible for scholarship programs because they already had families, leading to the perception that their role as fathers had excluded them from education. A Somali participant explained that he was ineligible for graduate study scholarships outside of Jordan because he was married and had a child: “I was applying two times, but now when I have a family, they don’t accept me because I have family” (Interview 1).

While several participants from IOs commented that this is a “misperception” (Interview 6, 2022), many respondents indicated that having a family had prevented them from pursuing this para-solution. Other participants explained that they were not eligible for scholarship programs at all because of their nationality, such as a Somali woman who explained: “it is very difficult in this type of way. And also, in scholarship distribution it is difficult because they ask for specific conditionalities for some scholarships. And the minority groups like us from Somalia, you don’t get [these] opportunities” (Interview 34, 2022). This evident confusion about eligibility and a lack of support for minority refugees in this area are other barriers for accessing education as a para-mobility strategy.

Reflecting another gendered experience, Syrian women noted that social relationships within their families had been shifting and that, while their families previously would have been against them pursuing their studies outside of Jordan, now came to see this as a positive opportunity for the whole family. One Syrian woman commented: “work has become a necessity, because of our needs and our children’s needs. The husband cannot cover it all. Rent, bills and education costs require a lot more wages” (Focus Group 1, 2022). Noting this need and the shift in social perceptions, many NGOs have also modeled their programs around various strategies aimed at female empowerment for Syrians.

Several participants commented that they noted the absence of men in education and entrepreneurial programs and the presence of women as the majority of participants. One NGO program manager explained: “the women, they would come to all of the programs. Men, they lost hope, they stayed behind. But for the education and the jobs training, it was women” (Interview 10, 2022). Thus, accessing para-mobility via scholarships for international studies remains complex and shaped by factors such as gender, race, and class.

### 3.2.2. LABOUR MOBILITY

**Beyond looking towards international education as a para-solution, refugees also engage with other forms of para-mobility through informal, temporary, and sometimes remote employment outside of Jordan.**

Many refugees pursue work outside of Jordan through the informal sector, short-term contracts, or by learning how to freelance online. Although precarious, this aspect of para-mobility provides short-term income through the ability to work outside the country and, oftentimes, to provide for families in Jordan. However, just as access to scholarships is shaped by factors such as gender, race, nationality, and class, so too are labour opportunities.

Informal labour sought by traveling outside of Jordan through informal or smuggling routes, although a common strategy, lies outside of the scope of this study, but has already been covered extensively in other existing literature (Mora and Piper 2021; Brell et al. 2020; Ruhs 2019).

In practice, refugees' options are very limited when seeking to secure an opportunity abroad, whether it be to work or to study.

**As a para-mobility strategy, they are still acutely aware that they want this option to be legal in order to ensure that they can get back to Jordan to see their families.**

As one Syrian young man commented:

“

If I left Jordan, I cannot come back because if I left now, I could only come back to Jordan if I have a paper from the government, like a visa, to enter back. It's not easy to get that. I'm trying now to have these papers because I need to travel somewhere in the New Year. I'm trying, but it's not easy (Interview 38, 2022).

”

Pursuing para-mobility can be therefore restrictive due to the one-way nature of the travel wherein without legal paperwork, it is difficult to return to Jordan after an opportunity concludes.

**Two different methods of work – temporary regional contracts and remote work – connect refugees with markets and experiences outside of Jordan.**

First, due to the inability to work formally or to make ends meet through informal employment in Jordan, many Syrian men and some Somali men have gained access to short term or temporary employment in the Gulf states. The families of these men commented that though the work is “on a month-by-month basis” and is “without a license, social security, nor health insurance”, they feel that these are crucial opportunities that open up the possibility of moving to those states (Interview 20, 2022). When talking about her husband, who works as an engineer in the UAE, a Syrian woman noted: “I might go to Gulf countries, the UAE for example, if I get the opportunity, I would go. The UAE has a lot of work opportunities, especially for my husband” (Interview 20, 2022). However, these positions are often uncertain and bureaucratically complex. Another Syrian woman disclosed that her husband was working in the UAE, and in spite of bringing in a little bit of income, the situation was difficult because the living cost is quite high and their future was consequently uncertain. She became emotional when she spoke of their separation:

“

I cannot see my husband. I have not seen him for one year. He has no real benefits, only the basic needs. In the future, when he receives his residency permit, he will have access to employment, to housing, to everything. He will be treated as a human being (Interview 18, 2022).

”

In spite of the difficulty of her situation, she still expressed hope that her husband would someday receive residency, leading to a longer-term solution beyond para-mobility. It is evident then that while para-mobility offers a means of accessing international labour markets and traveling outside of Jordan, it is also heavily connected to future hopes (Zuntz 2021; Levkowitz 2023). Although opportunities are dangerous and limited, refugee men pursue these short-term opportunities to work outside Jordan in order to provide for their families, and in turn their families continue to have hope for more access and stability in the future. When contracts conclude, respondents reported that the way back to Jordan was barred as the state neither wished to permit re-entry nor did Gulf states permit external travel. As a result, searching for further employment or clandestinely returning to Jordan was the only possibility for them. While this predicament remains difficult, the hope for a future possibility is a key benefit of para-mobility.

**Remote work has emerged as a much less dangerous and cost-effective way of pursuing improved labour opportunities associated with resettlement.**

A series of Jordanian NGOs have added components to their programs to train Syrian refugees in remote work and provide them with small loans for computers and wireless internet services. A freelance trainer working for an NGO described the situation as opening up possibilities. She explained:

“

**Thinking about freelance for a moment, it's quite helpful, especially for Syrians because of some of the labour restrictions. They are very limited on where they can live, but they can travel with freelance. There are positions for Syrians in Italy, they can work anywhere in the world. They can move, they can work, they can gain money, but they don't need to go anywhere. This is a solution (Interview 13, 2022).**

”

Remote work opportunities are key for connecting different refugee communities to international labour markets given the fact that they are so frequently barred from safe forms of labor in Jordan. However, just as the other forms of labour are shaped by classed, gendered, and nationality-based considerations, remote work is also shaped by the same factors.



As frequent beneficiaries of these online programs, Syrian young men can receive training or small grants from local CBOs or NGOs to gain trainings. One Syrian man explained that while he had done many different jobs in Jordan, the enduring precarity was constantly pushing him to pursue para-mobility through remote work opportunities that he hoped could lead to more mobility. He shared: “barista or bartender or recycling or pizza. Now I'm studying graphic design. I need to do anything just to get me out of Jordan, even if I don't leave myself. So now I'm waiting on a chance. And I'm trying also” (Interview 24, 2022). Without ever physically leaving, this form of work offers an opportunity to transport one's labour and to obtain some sort of international mobility. This participant's experience overlapped with views expressed by a staff member of a Jordanian NGO who trains Syrians and Jordanians in freelancing:

“

They [Syrian men] have a desire for freelancing and this drives our programming because we want to help them leave the informal sector. You can't do that in Jordan easily without opening up international markets. And because leaving is challenging, this offers a small way to go (Interview 22, 2022).

”

The online sector, though new in most parts of the world, is a means through which Syrians are “traveling” outside of the region to gain work without ever leaving their homes, even though this sector is often still governed by many restrictive laws that reduce the contracts available to refugees. However, while remote work opportunities are a key aspect of many refugees' para-mobility strategies, they do not offer the same kinds of hope that physically leaving the country can, as observed in the context of studying abroad or securing external regional labour contracts.

### 3.2.3. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND REUNIFICATION

---

**Finally, a third means for engaging in para-mobility is through formal and informal relational processes, such as marriage, dating, and family reunification. Marriage or planning these relationships between family members and other resettled refugees can be a way in which some refugees can secure the opportunity to move away from Jordan, ideally to more stable and prosperous circumstances.**

In addition, given the large population of European and North American “ex-pats” in Jordan working at NGOs, studying Arabic, or volunteering, some refugees tap into these relationships and conceptualize these love affairs as a means to travel outside of Jordan.

Finally, family reunification can be a way through which refugees gain access to solutions outside of Jordan. In each case, gender, class, nationality, and race also shape the ways in which refugees think about and gain access to this specific approach to para-mobility.

First, through social networks, some Syrian women are pursuing marriages for themselves or for members of their families with resettled Syrians in the US or Canada. Cultivating such relationships emerges as an alternative strategy while refugees wait for solutions. Sieverding et al. (2020) found that while the conflict itself was not a driver of early marriage for Syrian refugee women and girls, poverty has both spurred on this practice as well as limited it. As families face fewer economic opportunities, exacerbating their food and housing insecurity, they may seek out a groom who can care for their daughter. At the same time, displaced families' lack of financial resources has made it difficult for them to negotiate satisfactory marriage arrangements. In their primary research, Al Akash and Chalmiers (2021) found that Syrian women had begun to use cell phones more frequently after the civil war to stay connected to family, which also connected them to online dating and marriage practices. Syrian matchmakers have begun to establish businesses to connect more Syrian women in Jordan with Syrian men who have been able to resettle as refugees or to settle through labour migration. In these ways, longstanding social networks are used to link Syrians living in Jordan with community members abroad, sometimes translating into opportunities to move on to other countries with the hope of better conditions.

The online sector, though new in most parts of the world, is a means through which Syrians are "traveling" outside of the region to gain work without ever leaving their homes, even though this sector is often still governed by many restrictive laws that reduce the contracts available to refugees. However, while remote work opportunities are a key aspect of many refugees' para-mobility strategies, they do not offer the same kinds of hope that physically leaving the country can, as observed in the context of studying abroad or securing external regional labour contracts.

Some refugees who live and work in neighbourhoods with many "ex-pats" pursue romantic relationships with non-Jordanians that they meet there. As participants explained, these relationships help them imagine what it feels like to travel outside of Jordan, and perhaps also afford the chance to visit. A Syrian young man explained: "I have a lot of friends and sometimes a lot of girlfriends. When I am with them, I feel like I am travelling the world" (Interview 24, 2022). In one instance, he explained that his girlfriend would help him apply for a visa to the Netherlands if he were able to procure exit papers from the Jordanian government: "I will try to apply for a visa to the Netherlands. I'm not working for a company or anything, but I think she can help. She can make arrangements for me" (Interview 24, 2022). Similarly, a Somali young man explained: "I love to meet the foreign girls at all the parties because they take me away from here in my mind and in my dreams" (Interview 45, 2022).

While these relationships may not facilitate any actual travel or longer-term solutions outside Jordan, the speculation for the future and the development of international networks that they entail strengthen refugees' engagement with para-mobility.

Family reunification is a component of para-mobility that can provide hope for onward migration and in turn become solutions for families fragmented by conflict. Chandler et al. (2020) found that Syrian refugees were frequently separated from their families during their flight from Syria, while living in Jordan, or while traveling onwards to find a better work situation. The authors emphasize the importance of reunification, arguing that “[f]or many Syrians living in Jordan, the durable solution is being reunited with their families and refugees want to migrate to wherever reunification is possible” (Chandler et al. 2020: 386). However, reunification can be disrupted or delayed for many reasons, with Syrian families in Jordan often remaining fragmented.

Reflecting class-based limitations to marriage and family reunification as para-solutions, refugees are often unable to afford weddings given their lack of income-generating opportunities in Jordan. Reflecting broader concerns that were expressed in many interviews across communities, an Iraqi man explained:

“

I would like to get married, maybe to [an Iraqi] girl in America, my family has suggested to me many times. But I cannot afford it. We cannot afford it. I do not have relatives outside of Jordan to rely on (Focus Group 2, 2022).

”

Weddings can be costly, especially for refugees from communities that use a dowry system and cannot work formally. Because of this cost, marriage is not a viable strategy or consideration for many. However, relationships still offer a means through which refugees of different nationalities can hope for a different future following displacement. Marriages within extended networks abroad, dating those from other countries in Jordan, and reunification with other relatives are pathway through which refugees plan for their uncertain futures via para-mobility.

# CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the experiences of refugees in conceiving and accessing para-solutions varies by race, nationality, class, and gender.

**Overall, the study demonstrates that there is a larger spectrum of solutions that merits attention.**

In our case, para-solutions include forms of para-mobility, such as pursuing scholarship opportunities outside of Jordan, short term work in the Gulf, remote work freelancing, and movement via relationships. Each of these para-mobility strategies imagines a life outside of Jordan, where opportunities are limited, and attempts to make this movement achievable. While some refugees pursue para-mobility, others focus on para-residency strategies, attempting to better root themselves in Jordan despite barriers to integration. Some choose to advance a multi-pronged strategy, simultaneously looking towards para-mobility while trying to better establish themselves as residents in Jordan. Para-residency encompasses strategies to access primary education, vocational training, and volunteering. Rather than seeking to leave Jordan, each of these strategies connects refugees to members of the local community and helps to develop a sense of community belonging for themselves.

Beyond bringing into focus how forced migrants themselves work to advance strategies, this study has also shown how

NGO and IO activities can affect access to para-solutions. Overall, given the lack of access to traditional durable solutions in Jordan, new and creative means for pursuing and imagining solutions are fundamental to recognizing and supporting the agency of refugees. With traditional solutions “totally off the table” (Interview 9, 2022), refugees are often left with few institutions to rely upon in accessing key benefits and resources. The patchwork consortium of NGOs, civil society groups, IOs, CBOs, and others working together to provide support in the “meantime” cannot offer largescale solutions. However, we argue that attention to these two para-solutions reveals two additional broad insights. First, in contrast with the often-repeated assumption that only the host community can grant access to acceptance and belonging in integration, our attention to para-residency practices showed that refugees also create their own belonging often by fostering commonality with members of the host community and even other refugee communities in the settings offered by CBOs and NGOs. Second, our exploration of para-mobility revealed that in spite of the enormous constraints imposed by liminality, refugees continued to hope for their futures, often expressed through planning travel outside of Jordan. This agency adds complexity to understandings of liminality by investigating how those directly impacted by uncertainty cope, respond, and plan in spite of these challenges.

Although refugees navigate restrictions in every aspect of their lives with variation by gender, race, nationality, and class, many people with whom we spoke still feel a sense of hope that they enact in their engagement with the para-solutions. When asked what a solution looks like to her, a Sudanese woman, smiling, responded:

“

We have not given up hope. The first thirteen years here have been a struggle. I thought I would leave Jordan, and God willing I will get the opportunity for resettlement someday. But for now, I will do what I can to finish my education, to do any job, to keep hope alive for the younger generation. To make a solution for my two daughters (Interview 5, 2022).

”

# WORKS CITED

- ABDELMAHDI, A.** (2020) 'The Socio-Economic Impact of Syrian Refugees on Labor in Jordan'. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*: 10.
- ABEER DABABNEH, S. T.** (2016) 'Women's Economic Participation in Jordan: Reality and challenges of the private sector'. Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies.
- ALIENIKOFF, T. A.** (1992). 'State-Centered Refugee Law: From resettlement to containment'. *Michigan Journal of International Law* 120.
- AL AKASH, R. and CHALMIERS, M. A.** (2021) 'Early marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan exploring contested meanings through ethnography'. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 29: 287-302.
- AL KHATIB, W. and COX, K.** (2023). 'The Impact of Institutions on Syrian Refugees in Jordan'. *SIPGI Working Paper 2*: 1-13.
- AL MAJALI, S.** (2022) 'A Precarious Refuge: Yemeni asylum-seekers in Jordan'. Sana'a: Center for Strategic Studies.
- AL-QDAH, T. and LACROIX, M.** (2011) 'Iraqi refugees in Jordan: Lessons for practice with refugees globally'. *International Social Work* 54: 521-534.
- ANHOLT, R. and G. SINATTI.** (2019). 'Under the Guise of Resilience: EU Migration and displacement management in Jordan and Lebanon'. *Contemporary Security Policy*.
- BAINES, E. K.** (2004) *Vulnerable bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- BARNETT, M.** (2011). *Empire of Humanity: A history of humanitarianism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- BRELL, C., DUSTMAN, C. and PRESTON, I.** (2020) 'The Labor Market Integration of Refugee Migrants in High-Income Countries'. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34(1): 94-121.
- BRUN, C., FÁBOS, A. H. and EL-ABED, O.** (2017) 'Displaced citizens and abject living: The categorical discomfort with subjects out of place'. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography* 71(4): 220-232.
- BOYD, M.** (1999) 'Gender, Refugee Status, and Permanent Settlement'. *Gender Issues* 17: 5-25.
- BRADLEY, M.** (2014) *Refugee Repatriation : Justice, Responsibility and Redress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S. and KRAUSE, U.** (2017) *Gender, violence, refugees*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- CHANDLER, H., BOOTHBY, N., MCNATT, Z., BERRIGAN, M., ZEBIB, L., FREELS, P. E., ALSHANNAQ, H., MAJDALANI, N., MAHMOUD, A. and MAJD, E.** (2020) 'Causes of Family Separation and Barriers to Reunification: Syrian refugees in Jordan'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33: 371-389.
- CLARK-KAZAK, C. and THOMSON, M. J.** (2019). 'Refugees' Roles in Resettlement from Uganda and Tanzania: Agency, intersectionality, and relationships'. In Bradley, M., Milner, J., and B. Peruniak. *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement and Building Peace: Beyond Beneficiaries*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- COSTELLO, C.** (2020). 'Overcoming Refugee Containment and Crisis'. *German Law Journal* 21(1):17-22.



- COSTELLO, C. and FOSTER, M.** (2022) '(Some) refugees welcome: When is differentiating between refugees unlawful discrimination?' *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 22: 244-280
- CRAWLEY, H.** (2001). *Refugees and gender: Law and process*. New York, Jordan Publishing Ltd.
- CRENSHAW, K.** (2015) 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* [Online], 1989.
- CULBERTSON, S. and CONSTANT, L.** (2015) *Education of Syrian refugee children : managing the crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan*. Santa Monica: RAND.
- DAVIS, R., TAYLOR, A., TODMAN, W. and MURPHY, E.** (2016) 'Sudanese and Somali Refugees in Jordan: Hierarchies of Aid in Protracted Displacement Crises'. *Middle East study* 46: 2-12.
- DIONIGI, F.** (2023). 'Displacement as Heterotopic Space: The Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan'. *Geopolitics* 29(1): 203-229.
- EL-ABED, O.** (2014) 'The discourse of Guesthood: Forced Migrants in Jordan'. In Fabos, A. and Isotalo, R. (eds.) *Managing Muslim Motilities, Religion and Global Migrations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- EL-ABED, O., NAJDI, W. and HOSHMAND, M.** (2023) 'Patterns of Refugee-Led Organisations in the Middle East'. *Journal for Migration and Human Security* 11(1).
- EL-ABED, O. and NUSEIBAH SHABAITAH.** (2020) 'Impact of COVID-19 on Syrian Refugees in Jordan from the Refugee Perspective'. *World Refugee and Migration Council Research Paper*.
- FINCHAM, K.** (2022) 'Syrian refugee women's negotiation of higher education opportunities in Jordan and Lebanon'. *International Journal of Educational Development* 92.
- FRATZKE, S., BELEN ZANZUCHI, M., HOOPER, K., BEIRENS, H., KAINZ, L., BENSON, N., BATEMAN, E. and J. BOLTER.** (2021) 'Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Opportunities for growth'. *UNHCR and Migration Policy Institute*.
- FREIER, L., MICINSKI, N. and G. TSOURAPAS.** (2021). 'Refugee Commodification: The diffusion of refuge rent-seeking in the Global South'. *Third World Quarterly* 42(11): 2747-2766.
- GROVE, N. and ZWI, A.** (2006). 'Our Health and Theirs: Forced migration, othering, and public health'. *Social Science and Medicine* 62(8): 1931-1942).
- HAMMOND, L.** (2008). 'Strategies of Invisibilization: How Ethiopia's Resettlement Programme Hides the Poorest of the Poor'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(4): 517-536.
- HANCOCK, A. M.** (2007). 'When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm'. *Perspectives on Politics* 5(1): 63-79.
- HATTAR-POLLARA, M.** (2019) 'Barriers to Education of Syrian Refugee Girls in Jordan: Gender-Based Threats and Challenges'. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 51: 241-251.
- HILLIER-SMITH, B.** (2020). 'Doing and Allowing Harm to Refugees'. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 18(3).
- HYNDMAN, J. and W. GILES.** (2011) 'Waiting for what? The feminization of asylum in protracted situations'. *Gender, Place & Culture* 18(3): 361-379.
- JANMYR, M.** (2021). 'Non-signatory states and the international refugee regime'. *Forced Migration Review* 67.

- KARASAPAN, O.** (2022) 'Syrian refugees in Jordan: A decade and counting'. *Brookings Institution*.
- KARASAPAN, O. and SHAH, S.** (2018) 'Syrian refugees and the schooling challenge'. *Brookings Institution*.
- KATTAA, M. and BYRNE, M.** (2018) 'Quality of work for Syrian refugees in Jordan'. *Forced Migration Review* 58.
- KHAWALDAH, H. and ALZBOUN, N.** (2022) 'Socio-economic and environmental impacts of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Jordanians' perspective'. *Heliyon* 8.
- KIBREAB, G.** (1993) 'The Myth of Dependency among Camp Refugees in Somalia 1979–1989'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6(4): 321-349.
- KIRK, J., MUNDY, K. E. and DRYDEN-PETERSON, S.** (2011) *Educating children in conflict zones: research, policy, and practice for systemic change: a tribute to Jackie Kirk*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- LEVKOWITZ, J.** (2023) 'For Syrian migrants, the Gulf dream has faded'. *Institute of Current World Affairs*.
- LIBAL, K., HARDING, S. and HALL-FAUL, M.** (2022) 'Community and Private Sponsorship of Refugees in the USA: Rebirth of a Model'. *Journal of Policy Practice and Research* 3: 259-276.
- LÖBEL, L. M.** (2020) 'Family Separation and Refugee Mental Health: A network perspective'. *Social Networks* 61: 20-33.
- LONG, K.** 'In Search of Sanctuary: Border closures, 'safe' zones and refugee protection'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 26(3): 458-476.
- LONG, L. D. and OXFELD, E.** (2004) *Coming Home? Refugees, migrants, and those who stayed behind*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- MAAS, F, MUNCH, S., SCHADER, M. and H. SCHAMMANN.** (2022) 'The Politics of Uncertainty: Producing, Reinforcing, and Mediating (Legal) Uncertainty in Local Refugee Reception—Introduction to the Special Issue'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34 (4): 3559-3569.
- MAJIDI, N.** (2013). 'Home sweet home! Repatriation, reintegration and land allocation in Afghanistan. *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 133: 207-225.
- MARTIN, S. F.** (2004). *Refugee Women*. New York: Lexington Books.
- MARTINEZ, C.** (2023). 'Waiting in Captivity: Slow borders, predatory bureaucracies, and the necrotemporality of asylum deterrence'. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 39(2): 1-17.
- MASON, V.** (2011) 'The Im/mobilities of Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Pan-Arabism, 'Hospitality' and the Figure of the 'Refugee'. *Mobilities* 6: 353-373.
- MCSPADDEN, L. A.** (2008) 'Negotiating Masculinity in the Reconstruction of Social Place: Eritrean and Ethiopian Refugees in the United States and Sweden'. In D.M. Indra (ed.) *Engendering forced migration: Theory and practice*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- MIRAN, J.** (2012) 'Red Sea Translocals: Hadrami migration, entrepreneurship, and strategies of Integration 1840s-1970s'. *Northeast African Studies* 12(1): 129-167.
- MORA, C. and PIPER, N.** (2021) *The Palgrave handbook of gender and migration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MORRICE, L. and SALEM, H.** (2023) 'Quality and social justice in refugee education: Syrian refugee students' experiences of integration into national education systems in Jordan'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 1-21.

- MORRIS, J.** (2020) 'Extractive Landscapes: The Case of the Jordan Refugee Compact'. *Refugee* 36.
- NAPIER-MOORE, R.** (2011). 'Humanicrats': The social production of compassion, indifference, and hostility in long-term camps'. *Development in Practice* 21(1): 73-84.
- NELEMS, M. and CURRIE, V.** (2012) 'Listening to Iraqi refugee children in Jordan, but then what? Exploring the impact of participatory research with children'. *Development in Practice* 22: 600-612.
- PASHA, S.** (2021). 'Humanitarianism, Securitization, and Containment in Jordan's Za'atari Refugee Camp'. *The British Journal of Sociology* 72(4): 1141-1155.
- PEARSON, E.** (2021) 'From Voluntary Repatriation to Voluntary Re-Establishment: Cessation of refugee status under Article 1C(4) of the Refugee Convention'. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 33(3): 436-468.
- RUHS, M.** (2019) 'Can Labor Immigration Work for Refugees?' *Current History* 118(804): 22-28.
- SAHIN, M. and NASHWAN, A. J.** (2021) 'Employment of Syrian refugees in Jordan: challenges and opportunities'. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 30: 500-522.
- SALEM, H.** (2021) 'Realities of School 'Integration': Insights from Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan's Double-Shift Schools'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34: 4188-4206.
- SCHAEFER, G.** (2014) 'From War to Liminality: Female Iraqi refugees in Jordan'. *Kaleidoscope* 11.
- SEEBERG, P.** (2022) 'Syrian refugees in Jordan and their integration in the labour market: Jordanian migration diplomacy and EU incentives'. *Mediterranean Politics* 27: 192-211.
- SIEVERDING, M., KRAFFT, C., BERRI, N. and KEO, C.** (2020) 'Persistence and Change in Marriage Practices among Syrian Refugees in Jordan'. *Studies in family planning* 51: 225-249.
- SNYDER, A.** (2008). 'Gender relations and conflict transformation among refugee women'. In Sandole, D., Byrne, S., Sandole-Staroste, I. and J. Senehi (eds). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. New York: Routledge.
- SOLF, B. and REHBERG, K.** (2021) 'The Resettlement Gap: A record number of global refugees, but few are resettled'. *Migration Policy Institute*.
- SONNIS-BELL, M., BELL, D. E. and RYAN, M.** (2019). *Strangers, Aliens, Foreigners: The politics of Othering from Migrants to Corporations*. New York: Brill.
- STAUFFER, B.** (2020) "I Want to Continue to Study": Barriers to secondary education for Syrian refugee children in Jordan'. *Human Rights Watch*.
- STEVENS, D.** (2013) 'Legal status, labelling, and protection: The case of Iraqi 'Refugees' in Jordan'. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 25: 1-38.
- THORNE, A.** (2021) 'The potential for skills development programmes to empower poverty-affected and refugee women in rural Jordan'. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 73: 526-542.
- TSOURAPAS, G.** 2021a. The perils of refugee rentierism in the post-2011 Middle East. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 30, 251-255.
- TSOURAPAS, G.** 2021b. Refugees, Residents, and Rentierism: A critical assessment of responses to the Syrian Crisis. *Bustan*, 12, 1-15.
- TURNER, V.** (1967). 'Betwixt and Between: The liminal period in rites de passage'. In *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.



- TURNER, L.** (2023) 'Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36(3).
- UNHCR.** (2019) 'Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees to Third Countries: Key considerations'. *UNHCR*.
- UNHCR 2022a.** Durable Solutions: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkiye. UNHCR.
- UNHCR 2022b.** Pathways to Success. UNHCR Jordan.
- UNHCR 2022c.** Registered People of Concern: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Jordan. UNHCR.
- UNHCR 2022d.** Seventh Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria (RPIS): Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan.
- WALI, H.** (2021) 'Local Integration of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey'. In: Comak, H., Seker, B. Ş., Ultan, M. Ö., Civelek, Y. & Bozkuş, Ç. A. (eds.) *Refugee Crisis in International Policy-Volume I Legal and Social Statuses of Refugees*. London: Transnational Press.
- WATKINS, J.** (2022). 'Regions, Containment, and Justice in the International Refugee Regime'. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 21(6): 658-676.
- WEIS, L.** (1995). 'Identity Formation and the Processes of 'Othering': Unraveling sexual threads'. *Educational Foundations* 9(1): 17-33.
- YUVAL-DAVIS, N., WEMYSS, G. and CASSIDY, K.** (2018). 'Everyday Bordering, Belonging, and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation'. *Sociology* 52(2): 228-244.
- ZUNTZ, A. C.** (2021) 'Refugees' Transnational Livelihoods and Remittances: Syrian Mobilities in the Middle East Before and After 2011'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(2): 1400-1422.

# LERRN

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT REFUGEE  
RESEARCH NETWORK



**TWITTER**



**OUR WEBSITE**



**CONTACT US**



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.