

# Citizens of Somewhere

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns  
Amman, Jordan

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**Cover photo:** Superficially, it is difficult to distinguish whether passersby on the streets of Amman are Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, or Jordanian, yet at a deeper level, obstacles to integration exist in many aspects of residents’ lives, especially pathways to Jordanian citizenship. All report photos by Allyson Hawkins.

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# Location



Amman is a sprawling city that has grown along the valley between seven hillsides. It is divided between the older, generally lower income part of the city—East Amman—and the newer areas in West Amman.



Bordering Iraq, Syria, and the Palestinian territories, Jordan has a long history of hosting refugees from across the region. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

**For more background on refugees in Jordan and Amman, continue to the appendices.**

# Introduction

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As the nature of migration has changed over the years and with more people on the move than ever before, the meaning of “refugee” has also shifted. No longer does this word simply conjure images of people living in crowded camps. Rather, refugees have increasingly woven themselves into the fabric of urban centers, with Amman, Jordan being a prime example. Particularly since the 2012 outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the makeup of Amman has evolved. There are more restaurants catering to Syrians (and those who enjoy Syrian food), for example, and more burger joints catering to the increasing number of western non-governmental organization (NGO) workers using Amman as their base for humanitarian work or research.

Some Jordanians lament the changing landscape of their capital. They state that the increased numbers of Syrians, Iraqis, Sudanese, and Yemenis mean “nothing in Amman feels Jordanian anymore.” Some refugees, however, are grateful for the welcome they’ve received and the obscurity the city provides, allowing them to work under the table and piece together a new life for their families. Others, in contrast, note challenges with harassment and discrimination they face as refugees and “just want to go home.” Ultimately, whether the city has changed for the better or for the worse largely depends on whom you ask.

This case report focuses on Amman, which has for years been at the center of prolonged refugee experiences. Jordan has served as a haven for different groups fleeing persecution throughout history, from the arrival of Palestinian refugees after 1948 and again after 1967, to the acceptance of Iraqi refugees in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Since 2012, there has been an influx of Syrian refugees. Recently, Sudanese and Yemeni refugee populations have also started to grow, as has the presence of migrant workers from Egypt, and others from African and Southeast Asian countries.

As refugee flows within the Middle East have become protracted, the lines of modern citizenship have become blurred, creating a “pseudo-citizenry,”<sup>1</sup> in which refugees experience an unclear status of belonging and citizenship, with only partial rights and obligations. This report shares how refugees in Amman are not and cannot be “citizens” of a single place with a single set of rights and identities. Rather, these individuals have mixed identities, personal connections, and aspirations that extend across borders.

Therefore, in an effort to better understand how notions of citizenship impact refugee integration, this report explores the degrees of partial citizenship afforded, or not, across a range of welfare rights, services, and protections. Refugees find themselves in a citizenship limbo, wherein different groups have been able to secure varying degrees of citizenship rights in their countries of residence, typically tied to their national identity or the duration of their presence. Palestinians, for example, have enjoyed

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<sup>1</sup> Sanyal, 2012, p. 638.

citizenship rights in Jordan on par with native Jordanians but have also, beginning in 1988, faced policies that arbitrarily revoke their Jordanian citizenship, rendering them stateless.<sup>2</sup>

Iraqis in Jordan also experience partial citizenship rights primarily based on their socio-economic status. Wealthy Iraqis have been able to purchase residency permits, which afford them access to better work opportunities and public services in Jordan. Iraqis who are unable to afford residency permits have no legal status and are vulnerable to harassment, exploitation, and deportation.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Syrians without proper identity documentation (e.g., passports, proof of kinship) can be denied access to services in Jordan, although efforts are currently underway to establish legal status and access to various public services for this group.<sup>4</sup> A work permit program specifically targeting Syrian refugees has also been established, which helps Syrians find legal work in certain sectors of the Jordanian economy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Syrian refugees in Jordan receive certain forms of basic aid that are not available to refugees from other countries. Sudanese, Somali, and Yemeni refugees, due to their smaller numbers, have not received similar assistance and face additional challenges with racism and harassment, hindering their integration.<sup>6</sup>

## A Focus on Amman

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Cities complicate citizenship for refugees. In this report, we aim to present the subjective experiences of refugees and Jordanian hosts and try to use their own quotes directly whenever possible. Despite the complications that accompany urban living for many refugees, Amman remains a desirable place for many refugee groups to seek stability. The freedom of movement and sense of dignity the city affords refugees are a draw, compared to refugee camps or more rural locales away from services and community. Established networks of extended family and friends, better housing options, greater accessibility to services, and the possibility of finding work also make Amman a desirable place for refugees to seek stability and rebuild their lives.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed exploration of this issue and how Jordanian nationality law applies to Palestinians residing in Jordan, see Human Rights Watch's report, "Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality," accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/02/01/stateless-again/palestinian-origin-jordanians-deprived-their-nationality#>.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch's piece, "The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan," provides a detailed overview of the Jordanian government's approach to protection and access to rights and services for Iraqis residing in Jordan.

<sup>4</sup> The Norwegian Refugee Council is pursuing advocacy efforts to establish legal identities for Syrians without documentation. Read more about their initiatives here: <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/june/fighting-for-syrians-right-to-a-legal-identity-in-jordan/>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about work permits for Syrian refugees, please see the policy report published by the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies, authored by Victoria Kelberer: "The Work Permit Initiative for Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Implications for Policy and Practice," accessible at: <https://www.bcars-global.org/bcars-reports>.

<sup>6</sup> The report by Dina Baslan and Izza Leghtas, "We Need to Help Jordan's Other Refugees," published in Syria Deeply, explores how aid has been disproportionately administered to Syrian refugees, leaving refugees from Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan struggling. Accessible here: <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2018/10/11/we-need-to-help-jordans-other-refugees>.

In the past ten years, Amman has also seen the expansion of humanitarian and development organizations. NGO “saturation” in Amman has put the city at the center of myriad studies on refugee integration and experiences.

Since beginning to work together in 2016, authors Allyson and Ruby have been a part of this phenomenon but have sought to place refugee narratives from the various communities in Amman at the center of their research. While some researchers and NGOs genuinely strive for broad inclusivity in their activities, others focus their research or assistance on specific communities, contributing to a sense of separation and in some cases, competition, between locals in Amman and refugees. In spite of the concentration of research and assistance based in Amman, we find very few studies that focus on and cite the first-hand experiences of Amman’s urban refugees. Therefore, in this report, we seek to give voice to refugees and average Jordanian residents.

## A Note on Terminology

The terminology employed in this report, particularly the terms “refugee” and “local,” had varied meanings among the people to whom we spoke. Although many of our research participants identified themselves as “refugees,” several rejected the term as a personal descriptor outright. We also recognize that, in this context, “refugee” does not necessarily refer to someone with a legal or formal recognition of this status, since many in Amman are not registered. As this report makes clear, “refugee” and “Jordanian” are both terms that encompass many different identities and experiences simultaneously. Finally, we do not use the term “hosts,” because we feel it implies refugees are parasitic, and potentially

## The Amman Skyline



View of Amman from apartment rooftop.

## Refugee Homes



Visiting a Sudanese refugee home in Amman.

renders refugees anonymous and dehumanized. Instead we simply refer to “Jordanians” who live alongside refugees in Amman.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, although we only interviewed refugees and local Jordanians for this report, we recognize that the term “refugee integration” has been classified in certain humanitarian and development circles as taboo. Official discourse often adopts “refugee inclusion” instead in an attempt to avoid insinuations of protracted stays and permanent settlement. We did not use either term explicitly in our interviews to avoid this polarizing language and instead framed our questions in terms of 1) access to rights and services, and 2) notions of identity, community, and belonging.

## The Authors’ Positions in Amman and Experiences Researching this Case

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I [Allyson] was, as a young American woman, the “outsider” and therefore played an observational and discreet role during the interviews. I have previously conducted similar field research and have worked in a humanitarian capacity with urban refugees in Amman before. These experiences gave me perspective about what to anticipate when interviewing refugees, particularly Iraqis and Syrians, and I was comfortable interjecting a bit in these interviews. However, interviewing Jordanians, Jordanian Palestinians, and Sudanese was new for me. I leaned on Ruby and Amira’s local expertise (both have lived for years in Amman), experience working with vulnerable populations, and interpreting skills during interviews. I was the primary author of this report.

Ruby served as the facilitator, interpreter, and cultural consultant for this research. She is a regional researcher and communications specialist whose work centers on projects with refugees and marginalized communities. As a Jordanian woman, her local knowledge, ability to make people feel comfortable, and ability to speak Arabic with people from different countries with different dialects made her the natural leader in our discussions with both refugees and Jordanians. She is particularly skilled at interacting with NGOs and refugee households, and is herself proudly Jordanian. Ruby, unlike many of our research participants, and perhaps because she works with diverse populations so closely, has a very inclusive and egalitarian approach to anyone she speaks with, which was an asset in our interviews with both Jordanians and with refugees.

Denis has been conducting research on refugees in Jordan since 2012, when the first groups of Syrians fled to Jordan. He conducted field work (individually and in group projects) in Za’atari and all other refugee camps beginning in 2013 and has worked closely with UNHCR (the regional office and the Jordan office, both in Amman). Due to his experience and expertise with both refugee and citizenship issues, Denis edited and critiqued the final versions of this report. Denis also supported research and writing of this report through BCARS, the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies.

<sup>7</sup> Turton, 2003.

# The Urban Impact

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For both refugees and Jordanians, it was clear that money and status influence the ease of access to healthcare, legal, and educational services, as well as employment and affordable housing.<sup>8</sup>

## Citizenship, Socio-economic Status, and Access to Rights and Services

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### Healthcare Services

*“In Jordan, if you have money, then everything is good.” – Iraqi woman*

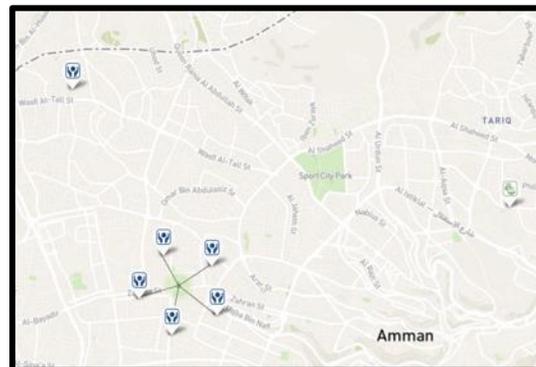
Overburdened public services in Amman—like healthcare—mean that the ability to pay, as opposed to refugee or citizenship status, determine who has access. One Sudanese man said:

For health services, as a refugee I’m entitled to medical assistance from UNHCR [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]...but there’s always a long [line]. They just say, “Come back tomorrow, come back tomorrow...” When I needed treatment, I gave up and just went to a private hospital. There I paid like anyone else, even with my UNHCR card. – Sudanese man

A Gazan man, who has not been granted the same citizenship rights as other Palestinian Jordanians living in Amman, echoed this experience:

I don’t have public healthcare. Two years ago, I was really sick, and I went to a government [public] hospital. When I went to pay, they asked for my ID card. “You’re not Jordanian?” they asked...”Oh, OK, you have to pay 70 JD [Jordanian dinar] then.” I asked him, if I was Jordanian, what the bill would have cost and he said 12 JD. I lost my cool, I yelled at the guy. I gave him 12 JD, and he let me go. Basically, when we pay, we pay the same price we would to go to a private hospital, so we might as well just go there. – Gazan man

The ability to access healthcare is crucial for refugees, and the degree to which they can do so can impact their ability to integrate overall. For refugees whose financial resources are already limited, the inability to access better-quality services can impact their livelihoods, which can have negative consequences for integration throughout an entire family (i.e., parents who cannot work due to their health may not be able to send their children to school).



Official services for refugees are distributed across Amman, although the two largest providers are CARE (lower left), and UNHCR (upper left), both located in the relatively upscale neighborhoods of West Amman. Map from UNHCR Services Advisor Client.

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<sup>8</sup> All domains of integration. See Ager and Strang, 2008.

## Legal Services & Security

Both refugee status and socio-economic status influence access to legal assistance as well as the ways people interact with the police. When asked about going to the police for help, a Sudanese man noted, “[If] it’s something serious, yes. The police will look at it in a straightforward way and help you. But if it’s something smaller, they will just take the side of the Jordanians...But undocumented people don’t go to the police for help—only if you have residency, a UNHCR card, or some other documentation.”

An Iraqi woman also noted how socio-economic status could play a role in getting justice through the court system. “For example, my husband, he put his trust in a Jordanian person, and this person stole from him. Lawyers said, ‘Because you’re Iraqi and he’s Jordanian, this will take time in the courts.’ Unless you have the money to raise the case in court, you can’t get your rights.” Stories like these demonstrate how socio-economic status, regardless of the refugee group to which one belongs, can impact one’s access to rights and hinder integration in the city. Domestic violence, landlord-tenant issues, disputes over employment, theft, debt and recovery, civil disputes, and general harassment are protection issues many Syrians and other refugees currently face in Amman, more commonly than the majority of the host population. There have been some initiatives aimed at strengthening access to legal aid and justice for both “host communities” and “refugees” to create greater cohesion between the two groups.<sup>9</sup>

## Educational Services

Refugee children in Amman are entitled to public educational services, but refugee status and socio-economic status both play a role in children’s educational experiences and how successfully they can integrate into Jordanian school systems. One Sudanese woman with Jordanian citizenship described her children’s experience in school:

For my kids there were differences, in school. They could say, “My mom is Jordanian,” and this was big. Also, we didn’t have to pay for the school fees, books, things like that. Also, before I had citizenship [and I was considered by the government to be Sudanese] the government was

## Refugee Services



Refugees form a line to receive services in Amman.

<sup>9</sup> Both the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have initiated projects to enhance access to rights and legal services for Jordanians and refugees. For more information, explore the World Bank’s approach here: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/367071471033119396/pdf/Jordan-SPF-Grant-PAD-revised-after-DM-P157861.pdf>, and UNDP’s approach here: [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/Governance/Comm%20Security%20Project%20Document\\_FINAL%20\\_JUN-2015.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/Governance/Comm%20Security%20Project%20Document_FINAL%20_JUN-2015.pdf).

really strict about deadlines and fees for renewing our residency, but now not so much. Now my kids get the same treatment as Jordanian kids...and they should be treated as Jordanian if their mom is Jordanian, but they can't get citizenship from their mother. – *Sudanese woman*

Although not characterized as “refugees” by the Jordanian state, Gazans living in Amman also experience challenges with the public school system, as one man’s story highlighted:

There’s discrimination between Jordanian and other nationalities, especially in high schools. If Gazans go to a government school, they’ll need to pay the same amount they would pay to go to a private one [since public schools aren’t subsidized for Gazans] so many just go to the private schools. – *Gazan man*

These experiences demonstrate that, while on paper refugee children have access to public education in Amman, their experiences with the system vary greatly.

#### Integration in Urban Amman

Access to health, education, legal, and security services represent *tangible* hurdles to integration (versus the *intangible* barriers like racism discussed later in this report).

Additionally, access to affordable housing and employment represent key issues for refugees in urban settings, and come with unique challenges and advantages.

#### Integration to Amman’s Housing Market

Another issue for many refugee families in urban settings like Amman is finding affordable housing; rental prices in Amman are notoriously high, with Jordanians and refugees alike lamenting the cost. However, our Gazan participant made clear that the ability to buy property hinged greatly on Jordanian nationality for Gazans living in Amman:

I can only rent. I’ve rented apartments in Amman, but I can’t buy one...My grandfather wanted to build a house here at one point, but we couldn’t own the house or the land ourselves. We have one relative [a distant aunt] who has a Jordanian ID number, so we basically had to do everything through her. Everything is in her name. – *Gazan man*

#### Local NGOs



A group of refugee women meeting with a local NGO in Amman.

## Economic Integration

For Gazans, the right to buy property, to work, and to obtain credit are dependent on having a Jordanian “partner” with a national ID number:

On our ID cards, we just have our name and our picture. This is a big problem because we can’t get jobs without the national ID number. Travel is incredibly difficult—it’s hard to prove who you are! We can’t buy houses, open a business...we can only do these things if we have a Jordanian “partner.” – *Gazan man*

This man noted that he would be able to work under the table and receive money but not an official paycheck. “I’ll have to work in cash with no security, no credit.” Other refugees also noted the difficulty not just in obtaining *legal* work, but finding employment at all. One Syrian man, when questioned about his right to work, told us:

I do have rights, and nothing against my rights, but I’m really just looking for **work**. We’ve had really hard days, four to five months this winter when there was no work. I just sat and did nothing...We’ve gone to UNHCR a thousand times and no one listened to us...[my wife and I] are illiterate and we can’t help our kids. – *Syrian man*

Currently, Syrian refugees are eligible for legal work permits in specific sectors of Jordan’s economy such as service work, agriculture, and construction. While some of this work may take place in Amman itself, it often can require travel to work sites outside the city in order for refugees to pursue these opportunities. Refugees from other countries are not eligible for work permits. UNHCR, however, clearly advocates for refugees’ right to work as a critical part of integration and refugee self-sufficiency, particularly in urban

## Refugee Homes



While refugees in Jordan have a wide range of socioeconomic statuses from low to high income, this photo shows the kitchen of a low-income refugee family in an Ammani apartment.

## A View from the Street



Typical low-to-middle-income apartments in Amman, sitting above a line of storefronts.

settings.<sup>10</sup> The fact that other refugee populations in Jordan do not have access to work permits as Syrians do highlights a disconnect between policy and rights as outlined by UNHCR.

The degree to which different refugee groups seek out public services also varies along socio-economic lines. A wealthy Iraqi man noted, “There are so many other people who need that assistance more than us. We have a decent financial situation...so we are OK sacrificing in this way.”

Perceptions about the ways different groups “contribute” to Jordanian society and the economy can impact impressions of other refugee groups, and economic participation (or lack thereof) is often more visible in urban versus rural settings. “We pay taxes here on my businesses, but don’t get equal amount of services in return,” one Iraqi man noted. He elaborated further:

The problems are with the Syrians. They don’t pay. Iraqis, for example, we brought our own money to this country...we invest, we pay. But Syrians don’t give back in the same way. They only purchase things. They don’t invest in the country. No one here benefits from them. – *Iraqi man*

While this tension does center around notions of “contribution,” the dynamics extend beyond simply who can contribute economically and who cannot. Perceptions about who is “reliant,” and how much people contribute to their communities in the long term are also at play. A Jordanian woman noted that Palestinian refugees in Jordan have been in Jordan longer and are “more settled” than other refugee nationalities: “They’ve lived here longer, they own their own businesses, their experience is closer to Jordanians.” An Iraqi woman put things quite plainly, “[T]he more money you have, the better your access to rights.” One Iraqi man, citing his successful business in Amman, preferred not to be considered a refugee or rely on public services at all. “Other people need aid more,” he said. “People here consider me an investor, not a refugee. Some people use the title of “refugee” even if they don’t need it, even if they don’t need aid.”

# Jordanian Experiences

## Perceptions of Scarcity

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When examining the quality of and access to services in Amman, many Jordanians explained things in terms of “before and after” the arrival of refugees. One Jordanian man remarked, “[Our] access to services and resources was better before the refugees came...We always used to have plenty of water, and now, not so much. Jobs for our kids also. Now opportunities are scarcer and the quality of health services is lower.” When we asked Jordanians if they thought refugees experienced state services differently than Jordanian nationals, they cited both socio-economic status and refugee status as factors that determined any differences:

<sup>10</sup> Kelberer, “The Work Permit Initiative.”

There might be a difference, depending on nationality...But it's not really about that. It's about class. The public hospitals, the public schools for example, are lower quality. But if you have more money, that's what makes the difference—you can afford better. It's an economic issue. Those with more money have access to better services. – *Jordanian woman*

Another Jordanian man told us, “Now [refugees’] access to different services is limited because of their refugee status. If they were granted citizenship, they would have a *right* to access that they don’t currently have.” Ruby, who works closely with refugee and Jordanian communities and is Jordanian herself, expressed similar frustrations about employment. “People are tired and bored of researchers and research,” she said. Alongside research, “There must also be job creation...nearly all the refugees we spoke with were looking for and emphasizing their need for employment. Refugees want to contribute and support their families.” Many residents of Amman are quick to attribute a deterioration in public services to the influx of refugees. However, our conversations highlight the role class plays, refugee or not, in the quality and access of services for both Jordanian citizens and refugees. Ultimately, our conversations demonstrated a frustration, both among refugees and Jordanian citizens, at the quality of services available to the public (refugees and locals) and the status quo that ensures that those who have the money will be able to access better services overall.

These perspectives from both refugees and Jordanians demonstrate that the links between citizenship, socio-economic class, and the ability to contribute economically to Jordanian society impact the integration experiences of refugees in myriad ways. While there has been a surge of academic and economic arguments framing the presence of refugee populations in Jordan as an economic boon rather than a burden,<sup>11</sup> many negative perceptions still persist and must be addressed for successful refugee integration into Ammani society.

# Refugees’ Experiences

## Intangible Barriers to Integration

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Research participants highlighted perceptions about belonging, about who is an “insider” and who is an “outsider,” as well as a belief that groups had negative perceptions of other identity groups as key barriers to refugee integration. One conversation with a Sudanese refugee revealed how stereotypes about different nationalities play a role in this alienation:

I think [Jordanians] don’t like me, that they make jokes about me [because I’m Sudanese]...they don’t think I’m smart or capable. I don’t trust them. I’m really only in touch with Sudanese people. I have a few neighbors who are Jordanian but it’s like we are invisible to each other. – *Sudanese man*

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Betts and Paul Collier have written extensively on this topic, both in Jordan and in other countries. “Help Refugees Help Themselves,” published in *Foreign Affairs*, highlights their key arguments. Accessible here: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/levant/2015-10-20/help-refugees-help-themselves>.

Not only did many of the refugees we spoke to identify a psychological or cultural struggle to connect with different groups, they also consistently pointed to the ease with which they connect with others of the same nationality. One Sudanese participant stated very concisely: “It’s mostly Sudanese with Sudanese. It’s easy to connect. We belong to each other.” A Syrian man also echoed the same sentiment: “There are a few Syrians in our neighborhood that we’ve gotten to know...you know, you’re Syrian, I’m Syrian, so we start to connect.” When asked about her relationships with people of other nationalities in Jordan, one Iraqi woman said:

Other Iraqis [connect with non-Iraqis] for sure: they have wide-ranging relationships, but not me. This is different from how I was in Iraq. There I was really social, but there was trust. Here, I’m more wary...I don’t like to leave my kids alone. It’s a barrier: there’s no family support system and that’s the biggest challenge for forming relationships outside. – *Iraqi woman*

A Syrian woman noted that it was “easier” not to mix with other groups: “I have a [Jordanian] neighbor who I trust, but it’s easier not to mix. You have so many people here talking about each other, there is a lot of gossip.” The close quarters of Amman and its established networks of tribes, extended families, and wider communities contribute to a lack of privacy that refugees in other cities might not face.

Furthermore, the experience of a Syrian refugee woman revealed that, despite sharing a language, religion, and many cultural norms with Jordanians, cultural barriers still exist:

It’s easier to talk to Syrians than it is to talk to Jordanians. I love Jordan but I still feel like a stranger. The traditions, the culture, are different here. My husband has Jordanian family, for example. And meeting with them—it’s not easy, it has to be organized, it’s more formal...you can’t just drop in to say hello. It’s less welcoming. We’ve been here six years, and my husband’s aunt—we still don’t know where her house is! So there are emotional barriers, and different traditions. – *Syrian woman*

Additionally, Sudanese participants noted the role race plays in integration as well. “Jordanians are very critical of our skin color, especially Palestinian Jordanians. Not so much the ‘Jordanian Jordanians’ but they all live far away...Iraqis are better, Bedouins, people with tribal origins, they are closer to our Sudanese culture than Palestinian Jordanians.”

From the Jordanian perspective, many interactions with non-Jordanians were hierarchical and based on class or status. “My main interaction with ‘non-Jordanians’ is with maids,” one Jordanian woman, living in an affluent part of Amman, noted. Another Jordanian we spoke with had a few relationships with Iraqis and Syrians, but these interactions were also coded by class. His Iraqi friends are ones he met at university, and his Syrian contacts are his employees on his farm outside Amman. The spheres

## A View from the Street



Street art reading “Jordan first,” signifies a kind of nationalism and exclusivity.

of interaction between Jordanians and refugees are often hierarchical (employer/employee, customer/server, for example). People who cross these lines, such as the classmates mentioned by our Jordanian research participant, are able to do so through economic means.

These perspectives all demonstrate that intangible challenges to refugee integration in Amman can be psychological, cultural, and personal. While logistics, geography, and finances undoubtedly also play a role, the nuanced aspects of social and cultural integration require just as much attention from those working to integrate refugees into Ammani society as do livelihoods, housing, or other aspects more commonly focused on in the humanitarian and development arenas.

## Insiders and Outsiders

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Tensions among refugee populations and local Jordanians have been cited by multiple studies,<sup>12</sup> but rather than simply painting other groups as the source of tension, our conversations with participants revealed that outsider/insider lines didn't always coincide with refugee/non-refugee groups but can be drawn along religious, economic, or cultural lines.

Many of the refugees and locals we spoke to had stories about how they perceive others from different nationalities, as well as how others perceive them. One Sudanese woman noted, "Arabs are difficult to get along with. For example, our neighbor is Jordanian. He doesn't even say hello to us during Ramadan or the Eid!"

Insiders and outsiders are also perceived along religious lines. Sunni/Shia divides are pronounced in Amman, and Shia Iraqis can face religious discrimination for their beliefs. Even though Iraqis, Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Sudanese are all Muslim, there are important distinctions and in/out groups depending on which Islamic sect one belongs to. For example:

Now when you go outside in Iraq, it's also a question of whether you're Sunni or Shia. Even if Shia aren't bad people, if you're Shia they won't respect you. Even here in Jordan, there were so many checks at the airport, even there they wanted to know "Sunni or Shia?" And in taxis, they will ask and investigate. If you're Shia, they will harass you. – *Iraqi woman*

Several Jordanians and refugees we spoke with also had negative perceptions of outsiders, particularly Syrians. One Iraqi woman we spoke with thought that "Syrians should return to Syria:"

The economy, prices are going up...I sympathize more with the Jordanian people, honestly. Also, I think Syrians are aggressive. They argue in queues [e.g., when she goes to pay the electricity bill], they are impatient, angry. They're always fighting and asking about their rights.

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<sup>12</sup> Publications documenting "host community-refugee tensions" in Jordan abound, with the struggles around social cohesion being documented primarily by international organizations and NGOs but also by researchers and academics. "Livelihoods, Employment and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Refugees" published by the REACH Initiative and "Analysis of Host Community-Refugee Tensions" published by UNHCR are examples of how NGOs are documenting this phenomenon. "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Reality Check" by Luigi Achilli and published by the Migration Policy Centre also examines this issue.

They lie to grasp [gain] sympathy, they're not "real refugees" looking to live in peace. – *Iraqi woman*

A Jordanian woman we spoke with took issue with the presence of all refugees, regardless of their nationalities, in Amman:

They have their own passports—why should they have ours? Our economy is affected by refugees. Food, housing, resources: all affected. Water, electricity, taking our kids' opportunities. Refugees accept lower salaries than Jordanians will so the private sector in Jordan is leaning towards them. They [refugees] are also bringing their own traditions and attitudes to Jordan. They are taking away our young men. In Irbid, there are so many single girls. – *Jordanian woman*

When asked about citizenship rights for refugees, a Jordanian man drew insider/outsider lines based on his conception of national loyalty. "Anyone who is criticizing the country, its policies, its services, anyone who doesn't appreciate this country just doesn't belong," he explained. "They should go be a citizen elsewhere." Here, he was commenting about anyone, not just refugees, emphasizing that loyalty to a place was a key criteria for citizenship and access to rights, as opposed to national origin or refugee status.

Refugee participants we spoke with acknowledged that negative perceptions of them from insider groups presented challenges to both integration and personal safety. One Syrian man remarked, "I think Jordanians think we need their help, their pity, their money. That we are always begging. But we don't need that...I only want to work. I'm not looking for luxury."

A Syrian mother recounted a confrontation with a Jordanian she met on the street after attempting to protect her child from bullies at school:

[The school is] not very near our house. Older kids once threatened my son with sticks on the street as he was walking home from school. He told me this so the next day I walked behind him as he went to school, so I could keep an eye on him. Right near my house, the father of these kids [the ones who had threatened her son] confronted me. He was yelling and screaming at me, he told me, "I'll make you go back to Syria!" and he took his shoes off, like

### A View from the Street



The downtown neighborhood outside of the apartment of a refugee.

### A View from Above



The view of Amman's ancient citadel and the east of the city from a rooftop café.

he was going to throw them at me or hit me with them. For two days after this, I was crying. –  
*Syrian woman*

The “traditional” two sides of the integration coin—refugees and host population—don’t always align with notions of “insiders” and “outsiders” in Amman. Understanding the contexts in which one an “insider” and the impact of negative perceptions on access to services is crucial for a better understanding of refugee integration.

## **Citizenship, Conceptions of Belonging, Loyalty, and Integration**

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Prior to becoming refugees, the people we spoke with were all citizens of *somewhere*. Now, their refugee status has put their access to citizenship rights in flux, with many finding greater access to rights in Amman than in the cities from which they fled. However, when asked about their citizenship status and the criteria of citizenship, many of their responses indicated that conflicting notions of citizenship and loyalty could pose a challenge to social, cultural, and political integration into Amman.

Supporting these constructed notions of “insiders” and “outsiders” were strong conceptions of citizenship, as well as a spectrum of opinions on what citizenship rights one is entitled to based on nationality, status (as a local or a refugee), and social class:

I’m Sudanese. I will remain Sudanese. I became Jordanian [acquired Jordanian citizenship] to make things easier. – *Sudanese woman*

Anyone you ask, if they could, would go back to their original country if the situation there were better. Loyalty for your country is what makes you a citizen. – *Iraqi woman*

Part of citizenship is about the country and what it provides to its citizens. A country needs to bring services to its citizens. Right now, in Iraq, this isn’t happening. I don’t feel like an Iraqi citizen now and I wouldn’t like to go back. The war changed the relationship between citizens and the state. – *Iraqi man*

Regarding my citizenship, I’m conflicted. I hate myself for being Iraqi. Really, I have no identity. In Iraq, in Jordan...I have no rights in either place. – *Iraqi woman*

Those are my origins [in Syria]. I was born there. Nothing can make me change my roots, my nationality. The place you’re born makes you a citizen...the place you’re born and raised. –  
*Syrian woman*

As these quotes demonstrate, notions of citizenship, belonging, and loyalty vary among different groups of refugees. Some feel loyal to their home countries, and others are willing to question their citizenship in their countries of origin to pursue greater rights in Amman or elsewhere. Jordanians also held strong conceptions of citizenship and questioned refugees’ ability to ever be “loyal” to Jordan, therefore undermining their ability to become actual citizens entitled to equal rights and protections.

While many participants presented strong ideas about their citizenship, citing their national identities proudly, the term “refugee” wasn’t expressed in such concrete terms. For example, one Syrian man

didn't want to identify himself as a refugee, specifically because of the negative connotations he perceived Jordanians to have with the term. "I'm a Syrian in Jordan. I refuse to say the word 'refugee.' Here, to a Jordanian, that word means a source of problems or competition." While in certain contexts refugee status is sought after for the protections and assistance that can accompany it, our conversations revealed a hesitancy to be labeled as a refugee, in part due to the negative connotations and tension that people might feel from other refugee communities or local Jordanians due to this status.

When asked if there was a different citizenship he might prefer, instead of Iraqi, one man responded that he would be willing to take on a new identity, but not that of "refugee." He said, "I would prefer to have English citizenship...but I don't want to go to another country just to be a 'refugee.' I would go for work or something, but I want to go with my dignity. I don't want that title."

Many of the refugees we interviewed, however, had different conceptions of and desires for citizenship when considering their children. An Iraqi woman, when asked about her child's future in Jordan, expressed, "I think it's possible for them to feel like citizens...especially the second generation—for them it will be truly their country. They open their eyes and they're living there." She also included her daughter's perspective: "Now we are settled here. My daughter feels like Jordan is her country. She says, 'Jordan is also Iraq.'"

An older Jordanian man with grandchildren living in the United States also remarked that feelings of citizenship and loyalty are "most likely generational...First-generation immigrants," he said, "are still loyal to their [home] countries, but their children have more loyalty to their [host] country than their parents."

Our interviews revealed that there were fractures in thinking among people with the same national identity. A Sudanese man's experience demonstrates this:

There are really two Sudanese communities in Jordan: the refugee community and others.<sup>13</sup> We have community leaders for refugees and hold regular meetings. If there are any issues, we bring them up in these meetings for discussion. We even organize protests this way and approve actions and mobilize. We also share updates about services through these

<sup>13</sup> In another interview with a different Sudanese woman, this contrast between the "two Sudanese communities" was also apparent. According to our participants, these communities are divided along identity-based lines. Those who see themselves as "refugees" associate and form communities with each other, while others who have taken various steps to integrate into Jordanian society (even going as far as seeking Jordanian residency or citizenship) form a separate group within the overall Sudanese community in Jordan.

### Street Art or Graffiti?



A wall near a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) school. Is it "street art" from members of the community, or "graffiti" from those who are excluded? It might depend on the identity of the painter and the identity of the viewer.

groups...we share news and updates with each other and we work on committees. – *Sudanese man*

Additionally, expressions of identity can vary depending on the audience. When asked about his citizenship, a man from Gaza responded, “I would say Palestinian, but it depends on who is asking. The simple answer for foreigners is to just say, ‘Jordanian.’ Otherwise it’s hard to explain. I don’t have an ‘original’ nationality...but here in Jordan, anyone who sees my passport can tell I’m from Gaza.”

Notions of citizenship are fluid, despite legal definitions being rigidly tied to national origin. In the experiences of migrants and hosts, citizenship is not only about rights, but a sense of belonging, based on both nationality and social class.

## Conclusion

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Lack of trust between citizens and the state and between segments of the population, including migrants and the forcibly displaced, is a serious risk to social cohesion – especially in cities where the forcibly displaced and host communities coexist in close spatial proximity. – *World Bank, 2017, p. 20.*

I’d rather go back to Sudan...there are many asylum seekers here from Sudan, they go to UNHCR but they’re not given any attention, they’re hanging out with no legal rights...Many journalists interview them, but nothing is done. – *Sudanese man*

We believe that Amman, as a city and as a gathering point for refugees, represents a possibility for refugee *integration* that includes greater access to rights and services, rather than for refugee *inclusion*. Efforts such as the work permit initiative demonstrate on paper attempts at refugee *inclusion*, but the long-term nature of refugee displacement in Amman is a reality that will require more meaningful efforts to *integrate* refugees if the country hopes to improve the quality of life for refugees living in Amman. However, the lack of legal and citizenship rights, the reluctant attitude of the Jordanian government,<sup>14</sup> and the resistance of the local population to take concrete steps to afford refugees these rights present major challenges. The Amman case highlights the role citizenship and identity play in creating insider and outsider categories, and how crucial insider status—as it is both perceived and experienced—is to refugee integration.

Many of Amman’s refugees arrived fleeing war or other life-threatening circumstances. Humanitarian aid, while essential, does not address the long-term needs of urban refugees. Emphasis on comprehensive development assistance that involves both refugee and host community members can help refugees and host communities better cope with prolonged refugee presence and the

<sup>14</sup> The Jordanian government avoids official recognition of refugees under its domestic laws, and refers to refugees as “visitors” and “guests.” The lack of a legal domestic framework to address refugees and the fact that Jordan is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol demonstrate the government’s reluctance to acknowledge the long-term and systemic issues created by refugee presence in Jordan. For more information, see “Refugee Law and Policy: Jordan,” a resource from the Library of Congress, accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/jordan.php>.

accompanying stress on services and resources. This is increasingly important for refugee and Jordanian youth. As the conditions that sent refugees to Amman persist, the opportunity for Jordanian and refugee youth to overcome insider/outsider barriers lies with long-term development and psychosocial assistance.

The authors hope the information in this report is useful to those seeking greater insights into refugee perspectives on integration, notions of citizenship, and access to rights and services. We hope that this information is useful to those seeking to better understand the lives of refugees in Amman.

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# Appendix A: Methods

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Between June and July 2018, the authors conducted 12 distinct, semi-structured interviews with the assistance of Dr. Amira Ahmed Mohamed<sup>15</sup> and observed key sites and neighborhoods. The participants included two Sudanese, three Iraqis, three Syrians, three Jordanians, and one Gazan living in Amman.

Our methodology was inspired by key tenets of feminist research, with a commitment to understanding the power dynamics and the value of contextual knowledge throughout the interviews.<sup>16</sup> We approached the interviews with the knowledge that the categories and identities held and examined by the research participants, including “refugee,” “Jordanian,” “Palestinian,” “Syrian,” and the like are socially constructed and open to interpretation. Our open interpretation of the refugee terminology allowed us to uncover new narratives, as we were able to reach beyond the typical refugee research subjects.

Research participants’ family members were often present during interviews, so we captured some of their views also. We interacted with refugees in a variety of settings, including cafes, homes, and, in one case, his place of employment. We attempted to interview people with a variety of ages (early 20s to early 60s), socio-economic backgrounds, and education levels. However, due to our access, the Jordanians and Iraqis we spoke with were from higher socio-economic classes than the Syrians and Sudanese.

The research participants had been residing in Amman for varying lengths of time, from their whole lives (as was the case with several of the Jordanians we interviewed) to just a few years (as was the case with some of the Sudanese and Syrian participants). While not comprehensive, these interviews highlight key attitudes and shed light on differences in integration experiences among refugees and reveal the roles that identity and citizenship rights play as refugees resettle and rebuild their lives.

## Field Research Challenges and Limitations

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The biggest challenge we encountered was engaging with a diverse set of research participants. More time would have allowed us to create connections with individuals from different economic, educational, and socio-cultural backgrounds within each nationality group. While Ruby and Amira’s personal and professional connections with members of different communities worked greatly to our advantage, our research also faced skepticism, and many refugees were not interested in talking to us because they have been interviewed so frequently. Due to the small number of people we were able to interview, this

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Amira Ahmed Mohamed served as Assistant Director for Policy & Practice at the Boston Consortium of Arab Region Studies in 2017–2018. She has previous experience living and working in Amman for the International Organization for Migration. She helped connect Allyson and Ruby to members of the Sudanese community in Amman.

<sup>16</sup> Brinton Lykes and Hershberg, 2012.

report may not be comprehensive or representative of the wide swath of refugees' experiences from different groups, but it does offer avenues of exploration for further research.

Another challenge was ethically interacting with refugees who experience “research fatigue” or who have had previous negative experiences with NGOs or researchers. This is where Ruby’s expertise in working with refugee populations was critical. In her previous work, she has encountered situations where research participants experience “research fatigue,” meaning they are perpetually interviewed or relied upon for their personal knowledge by researchers or NGOs but do not necessarily receive assistance or compensation for this service. This, in turn, presents challenges for researchers. Finding willing participants who haven’t already participated in similar studies helps combat this issue.

Accessing what Ruby termed “truthful information”—meaning information that wasn’t biased by refugees to advance their own personal goals—is also a challenge. Establishing clear expectations and trust among participants can require considerable time spent with individuals, acquiring information over multiple sessions instead of a single interview or conversation. Unfortunately for this project, we were unable to speak with our research participants more than once. Additionally, not raising expectations or hopes among research participants for potential in-kind or logistical aid was a challenge, particularly since we were often met with great hospitality from interviewees. This was especially apparent to us, as we received requests for visa assistance, employment opportunities, or additional aid.

## Appendix B: Background on Refugees in Jordan

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Jordan is host to refugees and asylum-seekers from more than 45 different countries, with the largest populations coming from Syria (1.4 million, 658,517 registered with UNHCR), Iraq (66,262), Yemen (9,839), Sudan (4,058), and Somalia (810).<sup>17</sup> Jordan is also host to large numbers of Palestinians, with more than 2 million registered with UNRWA. Conflict drives many refugees to Jordan: Syrians who began to arrive in 2012 after the beginning of civil unrest in Syria in 2011; Iraqis who sought refuge in Jordan after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and a new wave from northern Iraq in 2014 fleeing renewed violence; Palestinians who have come to Jordan in waves since 1948 and are now fleeing the conflict in Syria; and the newest group of refugees who are fleeing the present conflict in Yemen.

Furthermore, the majority of Jordan’s refugees live in cities (80%), not in camps.<sup>18</sup> Amman itself hosts 32% of Jordan’s refugees, “[h]owever, secondary cities and towns near the borders of sending countries have higher proportions of refugees relative to their population and are therefore often more affected.” Additionally, the refugee population of Jordan skews young, with a median age of 17, and

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, 2017, p. 6.

62% of refugees are under the age of 24.<sup>19</sup> Despite its history as a welcoming haven for refugees, Jordan is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 Protocol. Instead, in 1998 the Jordanian government concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, agreeing to let UNHCR fulfill certain commitments, including carrying out refugee registration, conducting status determination, providing basic needs to support refugees, and seeking durable solutions for recognized refugees.<sup>20</sup>

Current discussions about citizenship for migrants in Jordan center on equal citizenship rights for Jordanian men and women under the law; giving Jordanian women the ability to pass citizenship on to their children; and the arbitrary withdrawal of Jordanian nationality from citizens of Palestinian origin.<sup>21</sup> These discussions rarely intersect with conversations about refugees. Even the term “refugee integration” has been classified in certain humanitarian and development circles as taboo, official discourse often adopting “refugee inclusion” instead in an attempt to avoid insinuations of protracted stays and permanent settlement. However, as various refugee groups extend their stays in Amman, the possibility of integration (versus inclusion) must be recognized and explored.

With its history as a refugee haven, Jordan has, in many ways, been heralded as a good example of a “refugee-receiving” country, due to its effective working relationship with UNHCR and other international NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Additionally, since many of the refugees that have sought safety in Jordan hail from the Middle East, some view the country as an ideal location for refugee resettlement, due to the shared language, religion, and culture with the host population. However, many studies done on refugee integration in the country by academics, NGOs, and other institutions cite tension between local Jordanians and refugee populations as a key hurdle to refugee integration in Jordan.<sup>22</sup>

## Appendix C: Background on Refugees in Amman

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Despite Jordan’s reputation as a good refugee host, the city of Amman has issues with integration. Lack of economic opportunity and jobs, the high prices of rent, and crime rates in the city have all been attributed to refugee presence and are cited as sources of the tension that arises between Jordanian residents of Amman and refugees.

Despite this narrative, the relationship between Jordanians and refugees hasn’t always been fraught. Palestinian refugees have integrated both economically and socially into the fabric of Amman, and have a different status and associated rights than other refugee groups in Jordan. However, informally a

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, 2017, p. 7–8.

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR, 2018, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> See for example “Livelihoods, Employment and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Refugees,” REACH Initiative; “Analysis of Host Community-Refugee Tensions,” UNHCR; “Syrian Refugees in Jordan,” Achilli.

distinction between “Jordanian Jordanians” and “Palestinian Jordanians” persists. Iraqi refugees have come in separate waves to the city and span the socio-economic spectrum. Many have settled in East Amman neighborhoods like Hashemi Shemali to find affordable housing and have access to humanitarian assistance, while other “upper class” Iraqis have integrated in expensive neighborhoods such as Abdoun, purchasing posh family homes and enrolling their children in international schools. Many Syrian refugees to come to Amman expecting to find under-the-table work, although in reality opportunities are scarce. Amman’s urban center does however afford Syrians a proximity to services and family/friend networks, as well as freedom of movement not found in reception sites like Za’atari and other camps.

Sudanese refugees also flock to the city to find opportunities for informal work but do not have the same access to services as other recognized refugee groups. The larger refugee populations (Iraqis and Syrians) are the target of most humanitarian funding and programs, and while all (non-Palestinian) refugee groups are equally recognized by UNHCR, unequal funding streams and political imperatives create inequality and vastly different lived experiences for different refugee groups in Jordan. “Refugees who do not fit that citizenship-based designation are often left without emergency care and assistance...Furthermore, their citizenship, rather than their status as displaced, frames how most international NGOs and the UNHCR respond to them.”<sup>23</sup> In this case, Amman is a coming-together point for self-organization. However, this self-mobilization is no substitute for services desperately needed by “fringe” groups of refugees and migrants in the capital. Therefore, more research and attention must be devoted to the experience of refugee groups “on the margins” of Amman, in an effort to better respond to their needs regardless of nationality, but by virtue of their refugee status.

With the high cost of living and lack of comprehensive services, why do so many refugees seek out Amman as a potential place to start over? The sense of stability, freedom of movement, and sense of dignity found in the city (as opposed to Jordan’s refugee camps) are all reasons refugees might choose to come to Jordan, rather than another country of first asylum. Furthermore, as the capital, it is often easier for large families to find housing options that keep the family and extended family physically together. The established presence of refugees historically in East Amman, as well as the fact that many refugees, in particular Iraqis and Syrians, might already possess contacts or extended family living in the capital prior to their arrival, mean that Amman can provide refugees both logistical and emotional sources of support as they rebuild their lives and networks in a new place.

<sup>23</sup> Davis et al., 2018.

# About the RIT Project

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The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

## Our goals are twofold

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Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

## Why now?

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The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

## For more on RIT

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On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

[www.refugeesintowns.org](http://www.refugeesintowns.org)

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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