



HPG Report

Livelihoods in displacement

From refugee perspectives to aid agency response

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Acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CBO	community-based organisation
CPA	Comprehensive Plan of Action
DAR	Development Assistance for Refugees
EU	European Union
FCFA	Franc Communauté Financière d’Afrique
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NNGO	national non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This HPG Report explores the lives and livelihoods of refugees living in protracted displacement. There is a need to better understand the livelihoods of refugees, particularly in the current geopolitical context: over 65 million people are displaced (more than 21m of whom are refugees); more than 75% of all displaced people live outside camps; and displacement is increasingly protracted, meaning that, far from accessing a durable solution in a timely manner, forced displacement is often a reality for multiple generations.

This report synthesises research from four case studies and extends the analysis to consider common themes. It explores how Central African, Rohingya and Syrian refugees sustain themselves in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan, analysing the policy implications of refugees' livelihoods objectives, strategies, actions and outcomes. It also considers the formal and informal institutions, networks and actors that shape the livelihoods risks and opportunities for refugees. The report identifies the ways in which the lives and livelihoods of refugees residing outside camps in protracted displacement can be better supported.

Different host states, different policies: the policy environment in Cameroon, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia

The legal framework and configuration of state and non-state actors that interact (whether formally or informally) with refugees in any given country strongly affects how refugee policy is developed, interpreted and enacted, and the support and services refugees can potentially access. This varies significantly from country to country, as clearly illustrated in the four countries considered in this research. Cameroon, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia each conceptualised their role and reacted to the presence of refugees very differently: Cameroon is a facilitating host, with the most permissive legal framework; Jordan is a more controlling host, having directed international support for Syrian refugees in a

way that serves both refugees and state political and economic interests; Turkey is an implementing host, where the government has strongly led the refugee response and looked at the refugee crisis as a political opportunity; and Malaysia is a reluctant host, tacitly acknowledging the presence of refugees, but with the most restrictive state policies of the four case studies.

National refugee policy frameworks and how they are implemented are arguably the single most significant element shaping the lives and livelihoods of refugees. Yet even within more conducive policy and legal environments, with the right to work, freedom of movement and access to public services, refugees struggled to make a living and sustain themselves and their families, because of a lack of economic opportunities, unregulated informal labour environments and development challenges. This suggests that state policies are a necessary, but not in themselves sufficient, determinant of refugees' livelihoods.

Refugee livelihoods: priorities and aspirations

While recognising that, like everyone's, refugees' goals and aspirations are subjective and differ between individuals and over time, from the onset of displacement there were striking similarities in the goals and aspirations of refugees in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan. These included finding safety, family unity, finding ways to sustain themselves and providing for the education and future of their children. Yet while refugees were often able to identify clear goals and aspirations, high levels of uncertainty in their lives and circumstances meant that they sometimes struggled to know or take practical steps to achieve these longer-term aspirations. For all refugees in protracted displacement, the very tangible ways in which short-term, temporary policy responses undermine their strategies and responses to the 'opportunities' available to them indicates the need for longer-term planning and protection.

Work permits for refugees have been a recent focus of humanitarian and development advocacy. Yet our

analysis supports the assertion that work permits are a positive step, not a panacea. Work permits were just one (relatively minor) factor in a broader livelihood calculation involving wages and treatment at work, the number of family members working, job stability, the cost of food, education and healthcare and levels of assistance. Most refugees we interviewed were either struggling to make ends meet or felt their (relative) success was fragile. Refugee livelihoods are often cyclical, marked by iterations of hard work and investment (of time, energy and sometimes money), shocks (related to employment or health), struggle (where refugees build a livelihood only to have it falter or fail), and adjustment (attempting similar things again, changing tack). Failure – rather than success – is often what drove change in the goals and strategies refugees pursued over their years of displacement.

Refugees' networks, the host community and the role of assistance

Networks – with other refugees, people in the host environment and internationally – are critically important in the lives and livelihoods of refugees. Most networks primarily comprise other refugees (family, friends, villagers or people of the same tribe). Refugees supported each other in a range of different ways, particularly through assistance, employment and accommodation. Most importantly, networks were used as a source of information on everything from where to seek asylum and settle in the host country to employment, assistance and the policies and procedures of states and NGOs. Refugees interviewed for this research also recognised the implicit or explicit limits to the extent and duration of the help they could receive from pre-existing networks, and the pressures providing such help imposes on individual refugees. While pre-existing networks are critical, for many refugees they served as short-term sources of help towards the onset of displacement, rather than a sustainable source of support in the long run.

Interactions between refugees and nationals of the country of asylum are complex and dynamic, varying widely for different individuals over time. Across the four case studies, refugees' descriptions of their daily contacts with members of the host environment were characterised by two dominant themes: exploitation and assistance. Rather than seeing people in the host

environment as categorically helpful or threatening, a common reflection among refugees across the case studies was that there are good people and bad people everywhere. While refugee and host networks can be mutually beneficial and important, they are not enough on their own to help refugees overcome the effects of restrictive refugee policies set by host governments, and the associated structural and institutional barriers.

How can aid agencies better support refugee livelihoods in protracted displacement?

Our findings indicate that the main problem is not understanding: aid actors are, to varying degrees, cognisant of the main features of refugees' lives, including the types of work they undertake, the protection risks they face and the constraints they confront in trying to meet their basic subsistence needs. The issue is that, for the most part, aid actors have failed to integrate the perspectives of refugees into their programming either systematically or well.

There are many reasons why it is challenging to support the livelihoods of refugees in displacement. Yet there are also many opportunities. Analysis from the four case studies highlights many ways that aid agencies, host states, the private sector and individuals can better help refugees. Based on this analysis, this study identifies nine key principles of an effective livelihood response:

- develop and plan strategies to support the long-term livelihoods of refugees at the onset of a refugee movement;
- base livelihoods support on refugees' own perspectives and agency;
- integrate social protection and the provision of safety nets in livelihoods support;
- go beyond supporting economic activities to integrate wider refugee needs and rights;
- engage a coalition of actors in supporting refugee livelihoods;
- effectively integrate host community relations and social integration as a core part of livelihood strategies;
- support refugee livelihoods through multiple levels of intervention;
- consider the livelihoods of refugees differently from non-refugee populations; and
- strive for more effective advocacy, durable solutions and innovative approaches to support refugee livelihoods.

1 Introduction

Statistics succinctly depict the state of displacement around the world today. Over 65 million people are currently displaced, including more than 21m refugees (UNHCR, 2016a: 2).¹ Most refugees seek asylum in countries close to home (eight out of ten refugees live in neighbouring countries) (Cosgrave, Crawford and Mosel, 2016: 2), with the burden falling on lower- and middle-income countries: 86% of the world's refugees (under UNHCR's mandate) are being hosted in developing regions (UNHCR, 2016a: 2). More than 75% of all displaced people live outside organised camps (Cosgrave, Crawford and Mosel, 2016),² and displacement is becoming increasingly protracted: by the end of 2015, 6.7m refugees around the world were living in protracted displacement (UNHCR, 2016a: 8),³ meaning that displacement is often a reality for multiple generations. The average length of displacement for people who are currently refugees is 10.3 years (World Bank, 2016a: 11).

Responses to large-scale forced displacement are also changing, driven in part by the Iraqi and Syrian refugee crises. Development actors are increasingly involved, policies around the livelihoods (work rights in particular) of refugees living in protracted displacement are changing and new – and potentially problematic – arrangements are being made to support countries hosting large numbers of refugees, and to discourage refugees' onward movement. Yet while the scale of the displacement from Syria has served as a catalyst for policy reform, the crisis has also absorbed a large proportion of the global resources used to respond to forced displacement, while the needs of millions of refugees living in protracted

displacement in countries around the world are neither prioritised nor well understood. To contextualise how displacement is experienced and negotiated in such circumstances, this report generates insight into the lived realities of refugees in four contexts: refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) in Cameroon; Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; refugees from Syria in Zarqa, Jordan; and refugees from Syria in Istanbul, Turkey.⁴ It draws together four case studies⁵ on the lives and livelihoods of refugees living in protracted displacement. It considers state policies alongside the perspectives of refugees, people in host communities and aid actors, and extends the analysis beyond the specific case study countries to consider broader implications for responses to protracted displacement.

There is increasing recognition that programming in the context of protracted displacement – and protracted crises in general – cannot be credible or effective unless it incorporates and reflects the perspectives of refugees (Nah, 2010; Cohen, 2008; Brown and Mansfield, 2009). Yet efforts over many years to engage with refugees in more participatory ways have not succeeded in ensuring that assistance is planned and implemented in ways that accord with the lives and priorities of people affected by crisis (Waldron, 1988; Harrell-Bond, 2002; Walkup, 1997; Goveas, 2002). The power relations between givers and receivers of aid undermine refugees' ability to influence what aid is given to whom (Harrell-Bond, 2002); the aid system favours accountability to donors rather than refugees (Harrell-Bond, 2002); and humanitarian organisations tend to adopt conservative approaches (Walkup, 1997)

1 Of these, 16.1 million are under the mandate of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and 5.2m are Palestinian and under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

2 While there is a tendency to refer to out of camp refugees as urban refugees, it is more accurate to recognise that refugees' diverse residence patterns include rural, peri-urban, urbanising and urban areas.

3 According to the UNHCR definition, protracted displacement is 'a situation in which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or longer in a given asylum country' (UNHCR, 2016a: 8).

4 Not all refugees are treated the same; within a given host country, the protection and services refugees have access to often vary (according to factors such as ethnicity, nationality and date of arrival in the country). The case studies focused on Rohingya refugees (in Malaysia), Syrian nationals (in Jordan and Turkey, including a few ethnic Kurds interviewed in Turkey), and Mbororo, Haussa, Gbayas, Runga, Nordanko, Kare, Kanoiri, Daba, Mandja, Soumas, Mbaka, Yakouma, Kaba and Arabs from the Central African Republic in Cameroon.

5 Full references to the four case studies can be found at the end of this report: Bellamy et al. (2017), Barbelet and Wake (2017), Wake and Cheung (2016), Wake (2016), Barbelet (2017a), Barbelet (2017b).

that fail to incorporate the anthropological insights necessary to inform interventions that align with refugees' perspectives (Waldron, 1988). While forced displacement is increasingly urban and protracted, and characterised by 'overlapping' displacements, spatially and temporally (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016a), humanitarian agencies have found it difficult to adapt their procedures and mechanisms to non-camp settings, and the problems confronting refugees still tend to be addressed as short-term obstacles, rather than long-term developmental challenges.

This report aims to address some of these issues by improving understanding of the lives and livelihoods of refugees in protracted displacement. It explores how Central African, Rohingya and Syrian refugees sustain themselves in protracted displacement in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan, analysing the policy implications of refugees' livelihoods objectives, strategies, actions and outcomes, and considering the formal and informal institutions, networks and actors that shape the livelihoods risks and opportunities for refugees. Drawing on the findings of the four case studies, the report identifies the ways in which the lives and livelihoods of refugees living out of camps in protracted displacement can be better supported.

1.1 Methods and data collection

The research framework for the case studies involved two phases of fieldwork per country: the first explored, from the perspective of refugees, their goals, strategies, actions and livelihood outcomes. The second phase explored the networks and institutions refugees have

engaged with, including host communities, government and local and international organisations, and the factors that shape these interactions. In doing so, the research aimed to uncover opportunities to support refugees through a better understanding of their perspectives and their relationships with the many individuals, networks and institutions that shape their livelihoods. The study approach and methodology were strongly informed by a paper (Levine, 2014) which elucidates the challenges associated with using sustainable livelihoods conceptual frameworks to inform practical livelihoods research, and provides pertinent guidance as to how this can be done.

The research questions guiding the study explored the different priorities of refugees over the course of protracted displacement, and the strategies they used to meet them; how these aims and strategies changed during displacement; the shocks refugees experience over the course of their displacement; how they see the opportunities for their social and economic integration in their country of asylum, given the legal framework; the extent to which refugees are able to participate in discussions and decision-making processes; and the opportunities available to support refugees through a richer understanding of their perspectives, and the roles and perspectives of the people, networks and institutions that shape their lives in displacement.

Close to 400 interviews were conducted, including 281 with refugees⁶ and 106 with other stakeholders, including UN agencies, international and national NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), politicians, authorities, refugee employers, people in the host environment⁷ and regional experts. The statistics,

Table 1: Details of fieldwork

	Cameroon	Malaysia	Turkey	Jordan
Location of research	Bertoua, Mandjou, Tongo Gandima, Guiwa, Boulembe, Kouba and Adinkol	Kuala Lumpur	Istanbul (refugee and NGO interviews); Ankara (government officials not refugees)	Zarqa (refugee and NGO interviews); Amman
Fieldwork dates (phase one; phase two)	October–November 2015; February–March 2016	June 2015; February–March 2016	May 2016; June 2016	May 2016; August 2016

⁶ The names of refugees quoted in this report have been changed to protect their identity.

⁷ The term 'host environment' is used to refer to people (including nationals and established refugee communities) in the host state who formally and informally interact with refugees, including but not limited to those who live in the same neighbourhoods, religious leaders and people who regularly serve refugees in a professional capacity (e.g. nurses and doctors at public hospitals). The word 'environment' is used instead of 'community' because the categories of people it denotes represent a diverse range of individuals and communities.

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policies and situations in fieldwork sites referenced in this report were up to date at the time of publication of the individual case studies (see footnote 5 for references).

As one aim of the research was to explore the lives of a wide range of refugees, purposeful, maximum variation sampling based on pre-established criteria (including age, sex, employment status, vulnerability status and length of displacement) was used to recruit a diverse sample. Samples were drawn from out-of-camp refugees, though some of the Syrian refugees interviewed had spent time in refugee camps (and chosen to leave them). While sex was a sampling criterion (with the aim of achieving near-parity of male and female refugees interviewed for each case study), gender was not used explicitly as a lens for analysis. Instead, the project hoped the research design would generate insights into some of the gender dynamics around livelihoods.

By studying livelihoods from the perspective of refugees, the authors took the view that the primary agents in refugee livelihoods are refugees themselves. While we found that formal actors such as aid agencies wanting to support refugees had some understanding of their lives, aspirations and challenges, refugees' views often seemed to be gathered in an ad hoc way, and after, rather than before, major policy changes. Refugees were rarely involved in decisions about the policies and programmes that had a direct impact on their lives, and aid agencies often solicited refugee 'voices' and perspectives in a limited and controlled manner, rather than positioning refugees as agents of change.

Recent studies have highlighted the challenges of protracted displacement, and focused on protractedness as a central analytical lens (Crawford et al., 2015; Van der Stouwe and Oh, 2008; Zetter and Long, 2012; Milner and Loescher, 2011;

Haysom, 2013). The study team believes that the protractedness of displacement is important in two ways in the analysis that follows: in the sense that there is no durable solution in the medium to long term for refugees, leaving them in a state of 'temporariness' (understood not only temporally, but also by the absence of a solution to their situation); and in the sense that protracted displacement necessitates more long-term planning for refugees. It is this juxtaposition of temporariness and long-term planning that affected the perceptions and choices of refugees.

1.2 The report

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides contextual analysis of the policy environments vis-à-vis refugees in Cameroon, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia. It includes discussion of the legal frameworks and configurations of state and non-state actors that interact with refugees, and how states respond to refugees on their soil. Chapter 3 considers the perspectives,⁸ aspirations and strategies of refugees, with a particular focus on their livelihoods. In Chapter 4, the report considers refugees' networks, the host environment and the role of assistance in refugee livelihoods. Chapter 5 explores how aid agencies can better support refugee livelihoods in protracted displacement, and proposes nine principles of a holistic livelihoods response framework. The report concludes with a summary of key points in Chapter 6.

8 The 'perspectives' of refugees can mean many things. In the context of this report, it refers to the views and experiences refugees shared in interviews during primary data collection. While each refugee has their own unique displacement life history, and these are considered in greater detail in the case studies, this report elevates the analysis to consider emergent typographies of refugees, as well as cross-cutting issues and themes.

2 The policy environment in Cameroon, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia

The legal framework and configuration of state and non-state actors that interact (whether formally or informally) with refugees in any country strongly affects how refugee policy is developed, interpreted and enacted, and the support and services refugees can potentially access. This varies significantly from country to country, as clearly illustrated in the four countries considered in this research, as Cameroon, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia each conceptualised their role and reacted to the presence of refugees in their country very differently.

2.1 Cameroon

Cameroon currently hosts more than 340,000 refugees, the large majority of them (around 250,000) from the Central African Republic (UNHCR, 2015a).⁹ CAR refugees arrived in eastern Cameroon at two distinct periods: first in the mid-2000s, and second following communal violence in 2014. The first movement of refugees settled in Cameroonian communities, in both rural villages and to a lesser extent urban and peri-urban areas. Refugees in the second movement were mainly from towns and cities, and settled in more urban or peri-urban areas, as well as in refugee camps.

Of the four countries studied, Cameroon has the most permissive legal framework governing refugees. It has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention¹⁰ and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention,¹¹ and allows refugees freedom of movement

and the right to work. Cameroon also extends to refugees the same public services available to its own citizens: refugees are able to send their children to primary school and can access government healthcare. In most cases the humanitarian community (international, national and local humanitarian organisations in Cameroon) and international donors meet the costs of extending services to refugees, including developing new infrastructure and occasionally directly providing staff. UNHCR and other agencies also provide a range of assistance, including registration and documentation, food aid and access to water and sanitation at refugee sites. The emphasis has been on protection and assistance, with only limited attention to self-reliance and livelihoods support.

Despite a relatively open policy framework in principle, the authorities' attitudes towards refugees appeared to be hardening in practice as displacement became protracted and the number of refugees grew with the second movement in 2014 (Barbelet, 2017b; IEDA Relief, 2014). In the early phase of the crisis both humanitarian organisations and the government encouraged refugees to self-settle, in part in response to delays in locating adequate camp sites. Since then, growing concerns around insecurity (CRS, 2016), in particular the infiltration into the country of armed groups from CAR and the conflict with Boko Haram in the north, appear to have prompted a more assertive approach to self-settlement, and to refugee movement in general. In an interview one humanitarian worker explained the change in attitude: 'before the government was open to local integration, but with the new movement of refugees this is no longer possible. The security issue has become crucial'.

At the time of the research the relationship between the government and UNHCR and other aid agencies also appeared to be changing as the flexible operating environment the government's hands-off approach afforded aid agencies responding to the first movement of CAR refugees in the mid-2000s gave way to a

9 There are another 200,000 CAR refugees in Congo, Chad and the DRC, in addition to a further 450,000 internally displaced people.

10 Cameroon signed the 1967 protocol removing the geographical limitation of the 1951 Refugee Convention to events taking place in Europe.

11 Cameroon further committed to addressing forced displacement issues through signing the 2009 Kampala Convention (formally known as the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa).

Box 1: National and regional responses to refugees in historical context

Much of the current discourse surrounding refugees is ahistorical, and insufficient consideration is often given to how state and regional responses to displacement have evolved over time, and in response to particular movements of refugees. Current policies towards refugees in Malaysia, for example, are rooted in the Indochina refugee crisis (1975–95) and the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) developed in response. Under the CPA, Malaysia and other countries agreed to accept asylum-seekers temporarily, on the understanding that most would be repatriated or permanently resettled outside the region (Robinson, 2004; McConnahie, 2014). While a qualified success as a response to the Indochina refugee crisis, the “asylum for resettlement” bargaining strategy arguably consolidated South-East Asia as a region outside the global refugee regime and entrenched the belief among those nations that the global refugee regime was not in their regional interests’ (McConnahie, 2014: 632).

Understanding historical instances of large-scale displacement in the Middle East, and individual states’ responses, is also helpful in understanding Turkey and Jordan’s current approach to the movement of refugees from Syria. Jordan has for decades hosted Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, and

frames its current role in terms of this history as a refugee host, emphasising both that Syrian refugees are received on the basis of solidarity, hospitality and indigenous norms, while also insisting that Jordan cannot be expected to be a perpetual and ever-receptive host (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016). Turkey’s refugee policy applies a geographical restriction to the 1951 Convention (which originally related only to events occurring in Europe), thus applying different policies to different refugee groups and emphasising the temporary nature of the protection it affords to refugees.

Cameroon’s relatively open refugee policy is a reflection of the wider regional commitment towards refugees. African states have widely adhered to the 1951 Convention (and the 1967 protocol), and have developed their own regional refugee framework through the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which expands the definition of refugees to encompass people fleeing due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in their country of origin. Sub-regional agreements such as the Great Lakes Pact reaffirm the region’s commitment to refugee rights, and the rights of internally displaced people (NRC et al., 2008).

more controlling approach.¹² While this is in part a function of the government’s increasing concerns around security, it may also be a response to pressure from UNHCR for a more developmental approach, requiring closer partnership with the government and raising more politically sensitive questions around the permanent presence and integration of refugees into Cameroonian society, and the more politically complex issues that have held back development in east Cameroon more generally (Barbelet, 2017b).

2.2 Jordan

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, Jordan has seen large movements of Syrian refugees.¹³ As of mid-2016, almost 600,000 Syrian refugees were

registered with UNHCR. Tens of thousands more have been denied entry and are stuck in a no-man’s land between the two countries. Around 20% of refugees who have succeeded in entering the country are in six camps in the north, but most have settled among host communities outside camps (Bellamy et al., 2017). Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the legal framework for refugees is ambiguous.

Jordan is, in some ways, a similar case to Cameroon. Over the years, the country has developed a facilitating environment for Syrian refugees (but not for all refugees in Jordan), including allowing them to live outside camps and creating a work permit scheme

¹² See Barbelet (2017b) for more on the implications of this changing relationship.

¹³ Jordan hosts a diverse group of refugees, including Palestinians, Iraqis, Yemenis and Sudanese. The movement of people from Syria has also brought in different groups, including Palestinians from Syria. For more details see the case study on Jordan see Bellamy et al. (2017).

to enable legal employment in selected sectors. Like Cameroon, Jordan allows access to healthcare services (although not on the same terms as Jordanian nationals) and to education. The international community meets the costs of extending these services to refugees, and most implementation is in the hands of aid agencies. Compared to most refugee situations, assistance is generous, including over \$35m in cash assistance in 2015 (Bellamy et al., 2017).

Unlike Cameroon, the government has taken a much more controlling role vis-à-vis the refugee response, especially in terms of the types of interventions that can be implemented in the country: until recently, for example, agencies were forbidden from implementing any livelihoods interventions. The government leads the drafting of the national plan for the refugee response as well as the coordination structure set up to manage its implementation. Jordan's control over the refugee situation has also restricted the livelihoods options open to refugees in urban areas, who risk deportation back to the camps if they are caught working illegally in the informal sector.¹⁴ Although the government has eased restrictions on access to work permits, and as of February 2017 almost 40,000 Syrians had received a permit (ILO, 2017), refugees interviewed for this study were confused about the new policy and doubtful of its benefits.

The new work permit policy is part of a package of measures agreed under the Jordan Compact in February 2016, including improved access to education and a more flexible approach to livelihoods programming. In exchange, the government is seeking improved access to the European Union (EU) market.¹⁵ The Compact also includes budget support and access to funds from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as technical assistance. An outcome of Jordan's unwritten refugee policy, the Compact – and parallel efforts to highlight the

challenges that the refugee crisis poses to its capacity to continue to provide services, including citing a refugee figure substantially higher than UNHCR's – is in effect an attempt to leverage its continued support for Syrian refugees within its borders to advance its political and economic interests. The Compact's actual impact on the lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees is as yet unclear.¹⁶

2.3 Turkey

The response to the almost 3m Syrian refugees in Turkey¹⁷ has been strongly government-led: the state has financed 25 camps across ten provinces near the Syrian border, and is also managing the response for the vast majority of refugees living in cities and surrounding areas in the south. Support from NGOs in Istanbul is small-scale and ad hoc, and while some municipalities have provided significant help, others have regarded refugees as outside their scope of responsibility.

Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention, it has retained the original agreement's geographical focus on Europe. The government has created a new category of 'Temporary Protection', which gives Syrians substantially more rights than other nationalities, including freedom of movement, documentation such as the national refugee identity card or *kimlik*,¹⁸ access to a work permit scheme and access to health services and education. The government has also raised the possibility of granting citizenship to skilled refugees, though confusion surrounding the future status of refugees, and a failure to clearly communicate the implications of rapidly changing policies, has created an atmosphere of uncertainty among refugees and generated tensions within Turkish society.

14 References to the informal sector throughout this report relate to activities that have historically employed individuals informally (food preparation and sales, agriculture, construction, textiles). Informal employment means that individuals work without contracts and formal protection, and do not pay taxes or contribute to social protection schemes. Similarly, employers do not pay taxes or any employer contributions.

15 Improved access to the European Union market is in particular linked to the development of Jordan's Special Economic Zones. The potential – yet to be evaluated – benefit of using Jordan's Special Economic Zones is further developed in Betts and Collier (2017). The book has received some critical – and some less critical – reviews (see Crawley (2017) and Maxwell (2017)).

16 For more reflections on the Jordan Compact see Bellamy et al. (2017), Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2017) and Hargrave et al. (2016); and on refugee compacts in general see CDG and IRC (2017).

17 Turkey hosts a number of refugees from other nationalities, estimated by UNHCR at 350,000. The majority of these non-Syrian refugees are from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, but up to 65 different nationalities are present among this group (UNHCR, 2017a). In Turkey, Kurds, Turks and Palestinians are important minorities among refugees from Syria. See Bellamy et al. (2017) for more analysis on these different groups.

18 The *kimlik* is critical as it gives refugees access to services and work permits. However, during this study refugees identified a number of obstacles to obtaining *kimliks*. See Bellamy et al. (2017).

Like Jordan, Turkey has looked at the refugee crisis as a political opportunity. A controversial deal with the EU provides for the repatriation of migrants and refugees back to Turkey, in return for which Turkey has requested the liberalisation of visas to Europe for its nationals, accelerated talks on Ankara's admission to the EU, an increase in the resettlement of refugees residing in Turkey and increased financial support to the refugee response. The work permit scheme¹⁹ is also a result of this agreement, as are new cash safety net programmes funded by the EU and implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the government.

2.4 Malaysia

Decades of persecution in Myanmar have displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to countries in South-East Asia. In Malaysia, the Rohingya population – with over 53,000 registered by UNHCR²⁰ and tens of thousands more unregistered – consists of a mix of new arrivals and first- and second-generation refugees living in protracted displacement. The majority are concentrated in and around the capital Kuala Lumpur, though there are also sizable populations in other areas of the country, including Penang, Johor and Malacca. Most are stateless because Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law denies them the right to citizenship, and refugees born in Malaysia are not granted Malaysian citizenship.

Malaysia is a reluctant host: there is tacit acknowledgment of the presence of Rohingya refugees and their need for temporary protection, but state policies are the most restrictive among the four case studies. Malaysia has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, and its official policy is that refugees in Malaysia are 'illegal' migrants, and subject to detention. With no administrative framework for

¹⁹ The number of work permit applications that have been made remains unclear as no official government figures have been published. Between January and April 2016, the government received 2,000 work permit applications for refugees from Syria (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2017).

²⁰ UNHCR had registered 150,845 refugees and asylum-seekers by the end of March 2017: 134,175 are from Myanmar, comprising 57,619 Rohingyas, 39,591 Chins, 10,347 Myanmar Muslims, 4,497 Rakhinese and Arakanese, and other ethnicities. There are some 16,670 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, including 3,196 Pakistanis, 2,562 Sri Lankans, 2,025 Yemenis, 1,943 Somalis, 1,921 Syrians, 1,463 Iraqis, 1,041 Afghans and 684 Palestinians. https://www.unhcr.org/my/About_Us/@-Figures_At_A_Glance.aspx

responding to asylum-seekers and refugees, or a coherent, whole-of-government policy, responses to refugees tend to be ad hoc and inconsistent. The government extends little to no services to refugees: refugees have no legal right to work,²¹ they cannot attend Malaysian schools and access to health care is a struggle for most due to lack of documentation and costs. Historically and currently UNHCR is the primary actor responding to refugees and asylum-seekers, but restrictive registration policies make it difficult for asylum-seekers to gain registration and refugee status, and the vast majority receive no assistance. It can also be difficult for international NGOs to register in the country, and very few have done so.

2.5 The role of national policy and government in refugee livelihoods

Across the four case studies, there was a spectrum of approaches, from Cameroon's permissive legal framework and largely laissez-faire stance, at least initially, to more controlling policy environments in Turkey and Jordan and actively restrictive policies in Malaysia. In Cameroon, Jordan and Turkey, refugees were better able to pursue livelihoods options because their basic rights as refugees were protected. In Malaysia, by contrast, these rights were denied to Rohingya refugees, and their status was not recognised.

The studies also suggest that aid agencies' more formal understanding of the policy environment did not match the lived experience of refugees and the challenges they themselves identified; in effect, the impact of state policy was assumed, rather than assessed in the light of the perspectives of refugees. In particular, refugees typically experience national policies through their interpretation and implementation by sub-national authorities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016a; IRC, 2016). Policy frameworks and how they are implemented are arguably the single most significant element shaping the lives and livelihoods of refugees, yet even within more conducive policy and legal environments, with the right to work, freedom of movement and access to public services, refugees struggled to make a living and sustain

²¹ There have been discussions in Malaysia regarding the possibility of a work permit scheme for refugees, and a small pilot is currently under way. See Wake (2016) for further discussion.

themselves and their families because of a lack of economic opportunities, unregulated informal labour markets and development challenges, suggesting that state policies are a necessary, but not in themselves sufficient, determinant of refugees' livelihoods.

In Malaysia, Jordan and to a lesser extent Turkey, governments have limited and controlled the way aid agencies operate, but even in Cameroon, where

the operational space is more open, aid agencies have struggled to support refugees' agency and their livelihoods, suggesting that other elements beyond national policies, both within the host environment and specific to refugees themselves, can be just as important. The following chapters reflect the perspectives of refugees on their lives and livelihoods in displacement, their agency, the role of refugees' own networks and individuals in the host environment.

3 Refugee agency: perspectives, aspirations and strategies

This chapter considers how refugees' aims and strategies change over the course of displacement, as well as concomitant issues such as employment and perceptions of and interactions with the host environment. As the lives of refugees are heavily affected by the policies and people in their country of asylum, key lines of inquiry for this study included the institutions refugees identify as shaping their lives in displacement, and the people, organisations and institutions that challenge refugees' livelihoods, or that they depend on for support. This section of the paper looks at the livelihoods of refugees across the four contexts in this study, with a particular emphasis on their jobs, networks, assistance and aspirations.

3.1 Refugees' lives and livelihoods: priorities and aspirations

While recognising that, like everyone's, refugees' goals and aspirations are subjective and differ between individuals and over time, from the onset of displacement there were striking similarities in the goals and aspirations of refugees in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan. The refugees we interviewed fled for a variety of reasons (from individual persecution to civil war), and for most their primary goal was to find safety. While for some it was an intentional decision to seek refuge in a particular country or city, for others this was not planned or 'rational' – people simply fled towards the nearest open border, or moved within their country of refuge because they could not see a way to subsist where they were, or found conditions intolerable. The initial adjustment was often difficult, and necessitated a recalibration of expectations – one Syrian woman in Jordan said that she had initially thought she would be in Jordan for a few months, but had been there for several years; one Syrian refugee said that he had hoped to find safety, but now felt there was no hope and was just counting the days.

Finding safety has costs. Rohingya refugees interviewed reported being held on overcrowded boats or in camps run by smugglers in Thailand, denied sufficient food and water, subjected to verbal and physical abuse, kidnapped while trying to reach Malaysia on their own, tortured, sold into slave labour and forced to borrow large sums of money to pay smugglers. Many Central African refugees reported arriving in Cameroon with some money or assets they could sell (jewellery, blankets, cattle), but these assets were depleted to finance secondary movement within the country as refugees sought to move to villages and towns further away from the border. Many also reported having to pay bribes to the police to reach places they considered safe.

Much literature²² has documented the importance of family, friends and people from refugees' country of origin more broadly in helping refugees complete their journey and settle in a country of asylum. This was a consistent finding in all four of the case studies, where a priority for refugees was to be close to people from their pre-existing networks. For example, the decision of where to eventually settle in a country of asylum was, in most cases, based on being close to pre-existing networks of family, friends and people from the same village or tribe. In Cameroon, onward movement deeper into the country was also linked to a desire to rejoin family members.

A second priority in the studies was the desire to keep families together. Some refugees make the difficult decision to disperse their families – within and between countries of origin and asylum, often based on characteristics of age and gender – as part of their livelihood strategy (e.g. to maximise their access to resources and opportunities) (Brees, 2008; Neidhardt, 2013; Young, Jacobsen and Osman, 2009). Although splitting families may be a necessary strategy for some refugees, in the present research family unity influenced critical decisions in the lives of refugees

²² See for example Buscher (2012); Campbell (2005); Jacobsen (2006); Palmgren (2014); Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2016).

interviewed, including the choice of country in which to seek asylum and the city in which to settle. One refugee in Jordan, Omar, was initially keen to be resettled in a third country, but when he was called for a second resettlement interview his mother had recently passed away, and one of her dying requests had been for him to keep his extended family together. With this in mind, he felt he had to terminate the resettlement process.

Another family priority was education. In line with existing literature (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Perlman Robinson and Alpar, 2009; Watkins and Zyck, 2014), this research also found that the education and future of their children was a paramount goal for most refugees. Refugees clearly saw the potential for education to improve their children's livelihood and life outcomes, and worked hard (though not always successfully) to overcome the barriers to sending their children to school. Such barriers include cost (school fees, transport), loss of potential income (having one less labourer in the family), difficulties in enrolling children (due to overcrowded schools, or rules prohibiting the enrolment of refugee children, as in Malaysia), stigma and discrimination.

Education was also linked to respect, change and hope. There was a sense among some adult refugees that their lives were 'faded' or 'over', and that their only purpose and hope was that their children would have a better life. Education can also provide a critical mechanism for de facto or de jure integration, providing a range of opportunities to align the younger generation of refugees' linguistic and technical skills with the requirements of their country of asylum. The importance refugees place on the future of their children suggests a need for devoting far greater emphasis and resources to improving the education and livelihood prospects of young refugees. In line with what others have suggested, it is therefore key that livelihoods should not be considered in isolation, but rather more holistically within the economic, political and policy context of the country of asylum, and alongside refugees' longer-term plans and aspirations (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016).

The priorities of refugees described above were strikingly similar across the case studies. So too was the way they struggled to navigate the temporary nature of their lives in indefinite, but almost certainly protracted, displacement. Scholarly work has explored how forced displacement affects refugees

psychologically, and how living in a perpetual state of temporariness affects refugees' lives (Brun and Fábos, 2015; Brun, 2015; El-Shaarawi, 2015). The findings of this research indicate that both topics are highly relevant and linked to refugee livelihoods – indeed, in many ways they seemed to frame the decisions refugees made. As Brun and Fábos (2015: 6) write: 'For refugees and forced migrants, the multiple urges for safety, for meaningful lives and livelihoods, and for belonging are not well served by the "permanence of temporariness," as these protracted liminal states have been called'.

For the refugees interviewed as part of this research, trauma and the psychological consequences of displacement meant that most choices they made were underpinned (and, in many cases, undermined) by feelings of uncertainty. Refugees' high levels of uncertainty – about their personal lives, the circumstances in which they lived, and the future – emerged clearly when analysing refugees' livelihood strategies and actions. For example, while refugees were often able to identify clear goals and aspirations, high levels of uncertainty in their personal lives and circumstances meant they struggled to know what practical steps to take to achieve these longer-term aspirations.

In discussing their goals, strategies and actions, refugees also revealed how 'softer' psychological elements stemming from their displacement affected their ability to reach better livelihoods outcomes. The temporal aspects of displacement, and the issue of 'temporariness' in particular, is often framed in the context of host states (short-term funding and programme interventions, the measures states take to ensure refugees are only accepted as temporary guests). Yet there is also a need to better understand how states use uncertainty to govern displaced populations (Biehl, 2015), and how refugees make sense of the 'temporary' status and resultant uncertainty imposed on them by host states. El-Shaarawi (2015) provides pertinent analysis of how refugees in Cairo perceived displacement as uncertain, and how that uncertainty engendered significant distress. Similarly, the present research identified the negative psychological impact of waking up every day knowing that your life and livelihood is uncertain, and the effects on refugees' incentives and perceptions surrounding risks, benefits and investments. There was some variation (on an aggregate level) in this across the case studies, linked to length of displacement. At the time of the fieldwork

the Syria conflict had only recently been deemed protracted, and many of the refugees interviewed were still resisting the idea of long-term displacement and were hopeful of returning home. This was noticeably different from Rohingya refugees, some of whom had been displaced for decades, and who seemed readier to accept (and more resigned to) the long-term nature of their displacement, and the subsequent importance of continuing to build their lives in exile.

3.2 Refugee livelihoods: strategies, actions and outcomes

Refugees in this study sought to sustain themselves and their families in a variety of ways: finding a job, land or business partnerships, getting out of a camp to find work and relocating to where assistance was available. While all the refugees interviewed

in the study actively sought assistance and support where possible – both through formal (aid agencies, CBOs, host states) and informal institutions (a religious community, neighbours, friends) – the search for autonomy through work was often an urgent parallel priority. Refugees reported working in low-paying jobs in insecure positions, regardless of their skills or desired sector of work, or in poor conditions; drawing on their networks to find better or more secure jobs; having multiple family members working, in some cases including children, to increase household income and mitigate the risk of relying on a single income source; borrowing money from relatives and friends (risking high levels of debt, as seen with Syrian refugees, for instance); negotiating with the authorities to avoid paying fines or bribes; seeking formal support from UN agencies, international and national NGOs or the local authorities, or more ad hoc help such as cash, in-kind donations or a place to stay from neighbours,

Box 2: Surviving, struggling, integrating: refugee livelihoods in Istanbul²³

The lives and livelihoods of interviewees in Istanbul broadly fell into three categories: surviving, struggling and integrating.²⁴

Surviving. The priorities of those with the least capital (financial, social, linguistic, health) were often firmly centred on survival and meeting basic needs. These refugees often relied on limited formal or informal assistance, or did ad hoc, low-paid and insecure jobs, essentially living a hand-to-mouth existence. Some resorted to risky strategies such as begging or child labour. Worry was pervasive among these refugees, and their aspirations often involved attaining a basic level of security, whether through registration/documentation, more secure employment or resettlement.

Struggling. The goals of refugees with somewhat greater capital and stability in their lives, such as those with secure housing and financial capital for subsistence (whether through work, assistance or some other means) often focused on improving their employment (more lucrative, secure or dignified),

housing and prospects, for instance by investing in education. Some refugees also tried to support family members in their country of origin through remittances. Attaining these goals was a struggle, and often required trade-offs based on calculations of perceived risks and benefits.

Integrating. The small proportion of refugees in this category were more comfortable financially, with decent living conditions and less anxiety about the future. Common characteristics include strong networks or connections in Istanbul, often with the legal status to work. Goals within this group shifted noticeably to building respect, engaging with the wider refugee and/or host communities and increasing employment or educational opportunities. Many refugees, regardless of their own status, vulnerabilities or capacity to help, felt it was important that the most vulnerable refugees received support. While not a goal or aspiration per se, there was recognition among refugees that some people in their community were even worse off than themselves, and needed their help.

²³ Based on Bellamy's livelihood categorisation developed in the Turkey case study. See Bellamy et al. (2017).

²⁴ A distinction can be made between de jure and de facto integration of refugees in a country of asylum – the former being official recognition (i.e. through political or legal means), and the latter more informal integration at individual or community levels.

employers and friends. Refugees often make trade-offs between competing priorities in order to meet even their most basic needs, such as rent, food and living expenses, security, healthcare and education. Examples include working illegally to generate an income, even though this may put refugees at risk of being fined or detained by the authorities, or taking a teenage child out of school so they can work.

Refugees faced manifold challenges to their livelihoods across all four case studies. In Cameroon, stricter government policies towards refugees reduced their freedom of movement and their scope for self-settlement in a context of pre-existing, chronic under-development. In Jordan and Turkey, Syrian refugees felt forced into informal, low-paying jobs despite the introduction of work permit schemes in both countries (see Box 3). Syrian refugees in Jordan also faced the threat of deportation back to camps in the event they were caught working illegally. In Malaysia, most Rohingya refugees received no formal assistance and did not have the right to work, leaving them no choice but to sustain themselves by working illegally, putting them at risk of detention by the authorities.

Refugees rarely found work aligned with their previous profession or employment in their home country. In Malaysia, this is in part because of profound differences between the socioeconomic and development context of Rakhine state in Myanmar and the urban capital of Kuala Lumpur; in Jordan, while the work permit scheme enables refugees to undertake some types of work legally, the response among refugees has been tentative, and highly skilled workers in particular have struggled to gain lawful employment in their sectors; likewise in Turkey, some refugees are highly educated and skilled but struggle to gain employment in their field; in Cameroon, most refugees are unable to pursue the traditional pastoralist livelihoods that they followed in CAR and struggle to gain the capital and skills to move into other sectors. These findings support existing literature exploring the challenges and opportunities refugees confront in transitioning their livelihoods from their country of origin to country of asylum, and then back to their country of origin. For example, Ritchie (2017) notes that, while displacement pushed Syrian women refugees to explore new livelihood opportunities in Jordan, these were fragile in a country with little legal and social protection; Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016) note that, because of differences in labour markets and (in)

formality of work, refugees often struggle to transfer livelihoods from their country of asylum to their country of origin when they return.

Box 3: Work permits: a positive step, not a panacea

Advocacy in the Syrian refugee crisis has focused strongly on getting refugees the right to work, and to some extent the work permit schemes in Turkey and Jordan are a response to these demands. However, while they represent a step forward, and offer the prospect for refugees to move towards legal and formal employment, they cannot be equated with granting refugees the right to work: they merely give refugees similar rights to work as other foreign nationals, in specific employment sectors, and conditional on having an employer willing to apply for the permit. Refugees were keenly aware – and in many cases wary of – the costs and restrictions associated with work permits. Interviewees felt that being tied to a single employer would give employers greater power to mistreat them, and did not believe that employers would agree to pay the direct and indirect costs associated with the permits, including the tax and social benefit costs of legal employment, or would simply pass the costs on to them. In Jordan refugees were concerned that obtaining a work permit would affect the level of assistance they received (despite assurances from UNHCR that this was not the case). Skilled professions are largely excluded from work permit schemes, and refugees who ran home businesses or worked in the informal sector did not see how they could access legal work or convince their current employer to legalise their situation. Refugees also perceived the process of obtaining a permit as confusing, and particularly difficult for women who felt unable to work outside the home. Refugees who had work permits tended to possess specialised skills, often acquired in their country of origin, strong social or linguistic capital and a supportive and sympathetic employer. Ultimately, work permits were just one (relatively minor) factor in a broader livelihood calculation involving wages and treatment at work, the number of family members working, job stability and the cost of food, education and health care and level of assistances.

3.3 Factors in achieving successful refugee livelihoods

While many refugees struggle to build sustainable livelihoods in their country of asylum, a small proportion of the refugees interviewed in the study found various forms of success, including work they enjoyed, work that allowed a good work–life balance, work that was aligned with their goals and aspirations, and work that generated sufficient income (see also Kibreab, 2003; Mallett et al., 2016; Campbell, D’Arc Kakusu and Musyemi, 2006). In the studies, more successful livelihood outcomes were not necessarily linked with the length of time refugees had spent in the country of asylum. Refugees with unstable livelihoods, living in countries with legal frameworks that afford them little protection, will be vulnerable to shocks (such as those related to health or employment) regardless of whether they have been there two years or 20.

What contributes to the ‘success’ some refugees attain? Existing research has highlighted factors such as gender, age, language ability (Porter et al., 2008) and the strength of refugee, host and transnational networks (*ibid.*; Omata and Kaplan, 2013) as affecting refugee livelihoods. Similarly, the present research identified networks (discussed in section 4), education and skills as contributing to refugees’ livelihood success, alongside soft and interpersonal skills. Previous education and experience, particularly technical and linguistic skills, can also be important, though legal and institutional barriers often impede the extent and ease with which this translates into secure and successful livelihoods. For example, skilled Syrian refugees, such as doctors, scientists, accountants, entrepreneurs, artisans, craftspeople and educators, struggled to find jobs to match their educational background and professional profile in Turkey. Like numerous refugees interviewed in the study, Najib was skilled and had a successful livelihood in Syria, but was unable to translate this into a sustainable livelihood in Turkey. An elevator technician in Syria, Najib was told by international companies in Turkey that they would not employ him because he was not a Turkish citizen. He was hired by a small Turkish company, but his boss would not get him a work permit (because he did not want to pay for it or for insurance), so Najib was hired to work only at night, and paid a fraction of the salary

Turkish employees earned for doing the same work. Najib found the experience of working illegally for the Turkish company so upsetting that he gave up trying to find employment within his skill set, and started working at a restaurant.

The present research identified soft skills and personal attributes – including interpersonal skills (communication, networking), adaptability, flexibility, tenacity, persuasiveness and drive – as one of the most consistent factors affecting refugees’ livelihood success across the case studies. While the importance of soft skills is not widely discussed in the literature on refugee livelihoods, it is recognised in a mid-term evaluation of the graduation programme for refugees in Egypt (Beit al Karma, 2016), and recent literature indicates that strengthening soft skills is a component of various livelihood programmes for refugees (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016).

While some of the factors that affect the success or otherwise of refugee livelihoods are not inherently different from those affecting the livelihoods of other people, success for refugees is almost always hard-earned and fragile, and it was striking how much of a struggle life was, even for refugees who had enjoyed relative livelihood success. The story of Mohamed, a refugee in Malaysia, exemplifies this. It is a story of relative success: Mohamed used skills and experience gained in Myanmar, as well as strong interpersonal skills (including communication and tenacity), to earn an income in Malaysia; he achieved goals related to both his family and his livelihood, and he recovered from a serious shock to start his own business, as many refugees aspire to do. Even so, his situation was precarious: he had a significant debt to repay, and he was in an industry where competition is high and businesses struggle. The fact that Mohamed has had ‘success’ numerous times, lost it and had to rebuild is illustrative of the fact that ‘success’ is not something achieved, but something that has to be maintained. Livelihoods are often cyclical, marked by iterations of hard work and investment (of time, energy and sometimes money), shocks (related to employment or health), struggle (where refugees build a livelihood only to have it falter or fail), and adjustment (attempting similar things again, changing tack). Failure – rather than success – is often what drove change in the goals and strategies refugees pursued over their years of displacement.

4 Refugees' networks, the host environment and the role of assistance

4.1 Refugee communities and networks

The importance of networks is clearly evident in the lives and livelihoods of refugees in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan. Strong and wide networks (social and familial networks, with refugee and host communities, as well as political, cultural and religious networks) are important because they help refugees get established in their country of asylum, provide tangible support (such as assistance or start-up money) and link refugees to people and opportunities. The roles networks play in shaping risks and opportunities for refugees, in particular those outside of camps, has also been recognised by other studies (Landau and Duponchel, 2011; Omatta and Kaplan, 2013; Zaman, 2012). Landau and Duponchel (2011) argue that informal networks can be a more significant determinant of refugee lives and their protection than assistance or policy frameworks. Others have highlighted the specific role networks play in refugee livelihoods and livelihood outcomes for refugees (Buscher, 2012; Campbell, 2005; Jacobsen, 2006).

Most networks are made up primarily of other refugees (family, friends, villagers or people of the same tribe or faith group, refugees from different caseloads or places of origin). Often, relationships and networks were established in refugees' country of origin, with additional connections being forged in their country of asylum and occasionally internationally (with refugees or others who had sought asylum in a different country, or who had been resettled). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that in some countries, such as Jordan, overlapping displacement means that refugees may form networks with people from multiple countries of origin, such as when historical caseloads of refugees support newer ones (e.g. Palestinians supporting Iraqis and Syrians).²⁵ Refugees' networks also extended,

to varying degrees, to nationals in their country of asylum, including networks related to employment (employers, job brokers), health and education (staff at public and community health and education organisations) and community (neighbours). Networks of refugees with greater social status, documentation and capital (linguistic, financial) also extended into the higher echelons of the host state and the aid sector, including politicians, the authorities, village chiefs and staff of national and international NGOs and the UN.

Refugees supported each other in a range of different ways: assistance (lending or giving money, in-kind donations), employment (connecting other refugees with employers or job opportunities, providing assets to start businesses) and accommodation (putting up refugees without accommodation, particularly new arrivals).²⁶ Most importantly, networks were used as a source of information on everything from where to seek asylum and settle in the host country to employment, assistance and the policies and procedures of states and NGOs. As Zaman (2012: 137) states: 'Networks that braid together ethnic, kin, and religious ties are mobilised to help deal with the alienation of prolonged exile'.²⁷ This support was critical throughout the various phases of protracted displacement, but particularly so in the early stages, and when institutional support was scarce. For example, Central Africans were welcomed in Cameroon by family members who were either refugees or Cameroonians. Family members provided

26 This finding is in line with research involving other refugees and cities, such as that of Palmgren (2014: 30), who states that 'Vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok utilize various forms of social capital from social ties of varying strength to find shelter, work, and assistance'.

27 For further discussion see Bucher (2011), who considers the relative strength of social ties and networks within Somali, Congolese and Burundian refugee communities in Kampala, as well as literature on faith-based responses to refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2011).

25 See Fiddian-Qasmiyah (2016b) for further discussion.

shelter, trading opportunities and money to buy clothes and pay medical bills. The story of Ousmanou shows how family can help when assistance becomes unavailable. When his food ration was cut, Ousmanou had to leave his village. His brother put him and his family up for a few months until Ousmanou was able to save enough money to build a house.

Nearly every refugee interviewed for this study described receiving help from other refugees: relatives, friends, villagers, co-workers, community workers, neighbours and even strangers. A minority had very limited networks, and a few arrived alone and had no known contacts in their country of asylum. While refugees often expanded their networks over time in their country of asylum, expansion for expansion's sake was not the objective, and some refugees were strategic or selective about what networks they became part of. For example, some Rohingya refugees born in Malaysia preferred to associate with Malaysians rather than with other refugees. While refugees most often received support from family or personal connections on an ad hoc basis, more formalised support mechanisms also existed. In Cameroon, revolving funds or tontines were one of the main institutional mechanisms through which refugees helped each other. In Malaysia, a country with notable gaps in services provided by the state and aid actors, refugee CBOs undertake a range of important roles, including providing documentation, liaising with local institutions, education and assistance. However, not all CBOs are benevolent (they can be competitive, mistrustful, or sources of exploitation), and this is one example of how protection risks can arise from the very same networks that stand to provide support.

Refugees interviewed for this research also recognised the implicit or explicit limits to the extent and duration of the help they could receive from pre-existing networks, and the pressures providing such help imposes on individual refugees. While pre-existing networks are critical, for many refugees they served as short-term sources of help towards the onset of displacement, rather than a sustainable source of support in the long run. Helping others entails compromises and sacrifices (Shaw, 2007); while internal assistance within refugee communities is often perceived as a sign of social cohesion, collective agency and communal solidarity (Doron, 2005), it can also be seen as 'an inevitable response to communal crisis, rather than evidence of the

vibrancy of solidarity, as people are compelled to help each other even with limited access to material assets' (Omata, 2013: 275). As one refugee in Malaysia put it: 'how can we help when we live hand to mouth ourselves?'

4.2 Refugees and the host community: exploitation and assistance

The interactions between refugees and nationals of the country of asylum are complex and dynamic, varying widely for different individuals over time. Most of the refugees in urban and peri-urban areas interviewed for this study live in pockets of poverty, among poor citizens of the host country, immigrants or established refugee communities. The wider literature on urban displacement confirms that, like the refugees interviewed in this study, refugees tend to settle within poorer neighbourhoods (Campbell, 2005; Jacobsen, 2006; Pantuliano et al., 2012). Having settled among poor populations, refugees often face similar challenges to their livelihoods as locals (Feinstein International Center, 2012; Maystadt and Philip, 2009).

Refugees often work with or for nationals of their host country, attend local hospitals, pray at local mosques and send their children to local schools. Across the four case studies, refugees' descriptions of their daily interactions with members of the host environment were characterised by two dominant themes: exploitation and assistance. Many scholars have sought to understand the relations, tensions and mutual benefits between refugee and host communities (e.g. Porter et al., 2008), from effects on the economy (Chambers, 1986; Maystadt and Philip, 2009; Alix-Garcia and Saah, 2010), environmental impacts (Martin, 2005), security (Jacobsen, 2002), society and culture, with the commonality being that findings are context-specific. The findings of this research confirm this trend, in particular the very localised and temporal nature of refugee–host relations.

Refugees described being exploited in a wide variety of ways. Most frequently mentioned was exploitation and abuse at the hands of employers (requiring refugees to work long hours for very low pay, arbitrary dismissal, withheld pay, sexual harassment), landlords (inflated rent, disagreements about repairs, broken agreements or understandings) and the authorities (such as police

or immigration officers demanding bribes). Also mentioned was harrowing exploitation at the hands of traffickers (in Malaysia), discrimination, verbal abuse and criminals targeting refugees because they saw them as vulnerable, and therefore easy targets. Exploitation was generally compounded by the fact that refugees had (or perceived themselves to have) little recourse to justice, and as such exploitation was often carried out with impunity.

The great majority of refugees interviewed for this study described multiple instances of exploitation, but they also spoke of the assistance they had received from local people, including direct help (donations of cash and goods, reduced rent), livelihoods support (employing refugees or helping them secure jobs); help in overcoming bureaucratic restrictions (purchasing goods for refugees that they are prohibited from buying themselves, such as vehicles); and facilitating access to institutions (UNHCR, hospitals). In Cameroon, the close ethnic and economic relations between Cameroon and CAR facilitated the development of relationships prior to displacement, which most refugees could turn to on their arrival in Cameroon. In Turkey, several refugees described positive interactions with Turkish people: one said ‘It is very nice with the Turkish, they come every day to help my wife. They take her to places [like the municipality] so that she can get help in the area and get the monthly box of food’; another told us that ‘The neighbours gave us some food. I think that they heard about our problems with the landlord, and they sympathised with us’.

Rather than seeing people in the host environment as categorically helpful or threatening, a common reflection among refugees across the case studies was that there are good people and bad people everywhere, a sentiment captured by one refugee woman in Jordan, who said: ‘some people give you things for half price because you are a refugee, and some people charge you double’. In Cameroon, Malaysia and Turkey, refugees generally described support they received from members of the host environment on a personal/individual basis, though it also exists at community level. The most striking example is of a (refugee) chief from CAR, who brought his entire village with him to Cameroon. With the authorisation of the local *préfet* (government representative) in the border town where the refugees arrived, he went in search of agricultural land. Once he found a suitable village, he sought the permission of the chief to move his village there

and was granted land for farming and homes. This profound demonstration of support from members of the host environment is the product of several factors, including Cameroon’s relatively permissive legal and policy framework for refugees, clear statements from the government that village chiefs had a duty to welcome CAR refugees and the sense of solidarity and humanity that host communities around the world often feel when faced with people forced to flee their countries.

Yet even such bold examples of support have limitations. Such opportunities appear less attractive to and attainable by the newer influx of refugees to Cameroon, who tend to be from urban areas and rely less on village chiefs as a source of leadership and support. It also appears that the support of local chiefs has eroded over time with the demographic impact of multiple waves of refugee arrivals. In one Cameroonian village (out of five visited during the research), refugees mentioned that the chief was reclaiming land from them. This example clearly illustrates the dynamic nature of refugee–host interactions, which change alongside a myriad of other variables (in this case including the size of refugee populations and the duration of displacement, land availability, economic prospects and levels of assistance to refugees and host communities). While refugee and host networks can be mutually beneficial and important, they are not enough on their own to help refugees overcome the effects of restrictive refugee policies set by host governments, and the associated structural, institutional and cultural barriers.

Integration remains an area requiring further inquiry (Crisp, 2002; Zetter et al., 2002; Ager and Strang, 2008). All the case studies raised questions pertaining to integration, including how it is measured, at what point local integration becomes a solution, and what successful integration looks like, from whose perspective. But what came out clearly was the lack of links between economic integration (and the technical focus of many livelihoods interventions) and social integration (creating bridges among refugees and between refugees and hosts) in current livelihoods support to refugees. This is despite recognition in the refugee studies literature that integration and livelihoods are ultimately interlinked (Campbell et al., 2006; Al-Sharmany, 2004; De Vriese, 2004; Stone et al., 2005; Golooba-Mutebi, 2004).

4.3 UNHCR and the role of humanitarian assistance in refugee livelihoods

The wider literature on refugees has highlighted how they survive despite non-existent, limited or ineffective aid interventions (Jacobsen, 2006; Campbell et al., 2006; Buscher, 2011; Metcalfe et al., 2012). While this is the case, it is important to note how aid, when it is available, shapes refugees' decision-making and livelihood strategies. Refugees in all the country studies sought cash, food or in-kind assistance from UN agencies, international and national NGOs or the local municipality. However, the extent to which they obtained it and relied on it varied greatly. Assistance constituted a primary source of income and component of their livelihood strategy for many refugees in Jordan and Cameroon, and refugees reacted and adapted, albeit often with difficulty, to the ebbs, flows and limitations of assistance. Assistance often complicated refugees' assessments of risks and benefits surrounding employment: in Cameroon, for instance, one refugee quit his job when UNHCR began registering people, in the expectation that the agency would pay school fees or provide jobs. It did neither (though it did provide a food ration), leaving the refugee scrambling to find another job. In Turkey, where less assistance is available, and in Malaysia, where for many refugees there is no assistance at all, the question of aid was nonetheless at the back of refugees' minds as an underlying expectation and driver of behaviour. In Malaysia, for example, despite the severely limited assistance available, refugees described trying to get aid from UNHCR. While a few were successful, others were not, and one refugee who had gone to great lengths to navigate (ultimately unsuccessfully) UNHCR's process of acquiring medical assistance for her son described feeling disappointed and distressed, with nowhere to go and lodge a complaint.

UNHCR has a legal mandate to provide and promote international protection of refugees and stateless persons. It also has a supervisory role over compliance with all international instruments related to refugee protection, and is accorded the central role in coordinating the international refugee response system.²⁸ However, the extent to which refugees are actually able to access and benefit

28 For full details on the mandate and role of UNHCR, see UNHCR (2013; 2014).

from UNHCR programmes and services is variable and often dependent on factors beyond refugees' control (such as location, funding and individual characteristics, including age and gender). Individual refugees interviewed for this study held diverse views of the agency – from those grateful to have received registration, assistance or an opportunity for resettlement, to those who were angry, disappointed, confused and embittered as a result of their interactions with UNHCR. Refugees' descriptions of their views of and experiences with UNHCR were often characterised by ambiguity, underpinned by a recognition of their dependence on, and lack of alternatives to, UNHCR. Refugees also had higher expectations of UNHCR than of community-based, national or international NGOs, and judged it harshly when it failed to meet their expectations, regardless of whether these expectations were justified or based on accurate information. While UN agencies were, in some instances, making a concerted effort to provide information to refugees regarding programmes and policies, the correct information often did not reach refugees in a timely manner. Even when it did, mistrust (often stemming from individual experience or the historical legacy of engagement between UNHCR and refugee communities) sometimes caused refugees to doubt or dismiss it.

4.4 The role of development actors

Developmental approaches to supporting refugees, host states and host communities are far from new: as far back as the aftermath of the First World War, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) played a central role in supporting refugees in Europe through vocational training and facilitating employment (Betts et al., 2017). Regional international conferences in Africa and Latin America in the 1980s contributed to calls for more developmental approaches to refugee situations (*ibid.*), and in the 2000s UNHCR expanded its policies and programmes to allow for a greater focus on supporting local integration and development assistance for refugees (UNHCR, 2003).

Historical examples provide some lessons as to how development actors can – and should – play a role in supporting the livelihoods of refugees. Uganda's local integration policies are one example of measures to

support the livelihoods of both host communities and refugees (Betts et al., 2017). In the Syria refugee response, UNDP has focused on supporting local services through a resilience-based development approach (Bailey and Barbelet, 2014). The ILO has helped Jordan roll out the work permit scheme, and has worked with the government to develop a system under which agricultural cooperatives can apply for work permits for Syrian refugees, allowing refugees to work for multiple farmers (Bellamy et al., 2017). Alongside the World Bank, the ILO is also supporting reforms and enhancing safeguards for workers in the informal sector in Turkey and Jordan. Through new financing platforms for middle-income countries hosting refugees, the World Bank is taking on a significant new role in refugee situations, lending expertise to support the macro-economic reforms needed to improve the business environment and supporting local governance structures to deliver

services such as education, health and water (Bellamy et al., 2017).

Such recent efforts by development actors to address the needs of host states and refugees – most notably in countries neighbouring Syria, but also in other host states, such as Ethiopia – represent an important contribution to and component of an effective response to refugee situations. Yet strong and early engagement of development actors in refugee responses remains an exception, not the norm, and issues related to the delineation of roles and responsibilities (between humanitarian, development and other actors), timing and funding mechanisms remain persistent challenges. The challenges in adopting a developmental approach from the onset of refugee situations, as well as opportunities and strategies for aid agencies in supporting refugee livelihoods in protracted displacement, are discussed in the following section.

5 Supporting refugee livelihoods in protracted displacement: opportunities and strategies for aid agencies

This study set out to explore opportunities to better support refugees' livelihoods through a deeper understanding of their objectives, strategies and actions, the outcomes they achieve and the actors, formal and less so, that shape their livelihoods opportunities. Our findings indicate that the main problem is not understanding: aid actors are, to varying degrees, cognisant of the main features of refugees' lives, including the types of work they undertake, the protection risks they face and the constraints they confront in trying to meet their basic subsistence needs. The issue is that, for the most part, aid actors have failed to integrate the perspectives of refugees into their programming, either systematically or well.

Among other factors, this discrepancy is explained by a lack of reactive and adaptive programming, restricted funding and competing priorities based on incomplete understandings of vulnerability, the use of static tools to inform programming and a conception of livelihoods programming as providing assets, rather than resolving the livelihoods barriers faced by refugees. More importantly, aid agencies fail to adequately gather evidence and information on refugee perspectives in a timely manner. Rather, the views of refugees tend to be collected in an ad hoc way, and after, rather than before, major policy changes. Refugees are rarely involved in decisions regarding policies and programmes that have a direct impact on their lives, and their 'voices' are typically solicited in a limited and controlled way. Positioning refugees as central agents of change (Dick, 2003; Betts et al., 2017) requires moving livelihoods interventions away from a supply-driven approach (providing jobs, training) to an enabling role that can support refugees in addressing the obstacles they face and the actions they are already taking (Levine, 2014; Jacobsen, 2002).

5.1 Adapting to refugees' realities and displacement trends

The need to go beyond emergency assistance and the humanitarian paradigm in responding to displacement has long been acknowledged (Harell-Bond, 1986; Jacobsen, 2005; Horst, 2006; Zetter, 2014). Yet despite initiatives from UNHCR and others (the Solutions Alliance) in the last ten years, livelihoods and developmental approaches to forced displacement remain ad hoc and sidelined in aid agencies' responses to refugee crises (Zetter, 2014; Betts et al., 2017), even though we know that the majority of refugee crises become protracted (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016), and that, over time, funding for them tends to decline. Instead, aid agencies typically think of self-reliance and livelihoods in a sequential way – a concern to be addressed only after the emergency is 'over'. In programming terms, this tends to translate into the provision of emergency aid at the onset of a refugee movement, followed by an often-belated turn to self-reliance and livelihoods support. This study provides further evidence that such an operational paradigm is disconnected from the reality many refugees face, and thus misses opportunities to invest in more sustainable support to refugees.

The experiences and perspectives of refugees gathered by this study suggest that there is a strong case for early support to livelihoods, especially geared towards the protection of assets and the prevention of indebtedness. In Cameroon, for example, by the time aid agencies started thinking about livelihoods many refugees had exhausted the assets they had brought with them, and the small-scale livelihoods

support they received – which was not designed with their input – failed to create sustainable livelihoods opportunities. While aid agencies in Cameroon thought of livelihoods and self-reliance programming as a follow-on to emergency aid, and looked to indicators to tell them when to switch to longer-term programming, an integrated strategy of livelihoods support and emergency aid from the outset of the response would have helped those refugees in a position to sustain themselves early on, while also recognising the need for emergency assistance, among both the old and new caseloads of refugees.

The assumption of a linear transition from emergency assistance to livelihoods support is linked to a related assumption that newly arrived refugees are necessarily the most vulnerable, and that vulnerability declines over time as they find their feet in their new circumstances. While assumptions around this linear transition have been challenged in the displacement literature (Hill et al., 2006), practice continues to be based on the presumption of acute vulnerabilities at the onset of displacement, followed by an increasing capacity for self-reliance. Some Central African refugees did indeed reach Cameroon traumatised, undernourished and sick, yet others within the same displacement arrived with assets, in good health and with contacts to help them out. The evidence from these studies revealed that refugees struggled with different challenges at different points of their displacement: some new arrivals are extremely vulnerable and others less so; for some vulnerability decreases over time, but for others it deepens as assets are depleted, assistance declines and charity dries up.

There is also an assumption that, by taking care of people's basic needs, assistance will support self-reliance and livelihoods in the long term. Evidence from this study and others concludes that basic humanitarian assistance will not build a way towards self-reliance (Crawford et al., 2015; Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016). Instead, in all the case study countries the research team encountered refugees who were able to sustain themselves to a certain degree, but who also encountered structural obstacles: in Cameroon, due to the lack of economic opportunities and chronic under-development; in Malaysia, due to the lack of recognition of refugees' status and legal protection; in Turkey and Jordan, due to limitations around the work permit schemes,

lack of economic growth and labour conditions in the informal sector. Many more refugees were unable to reach basic levels of self-sustenance and lacked the linguistic, physical, financial or social capital to find a decent job or run a profitable business. For these refugees, livelihoods support needs to be in the form of safety nets and social protection.

There is a consensus that recognises the non-humanitarian dimension of protracted displacement crises (Zetter and Long, 2012; Zetter, 2014; Harild, 2016). While refugees will continue to need specific protection, and UNHCR has a legal mandate to contribute to this through registration and providing documentation to refugees, it is evident that a refugee protection system that relies on the provision of long-term humanitarian assistance is neither sustainable, nor is it supporting sustainable long-term solutions for refugees. This approach has also failed to effectively address the consequences for host environments of the arrival of large numbers of refugees. However, organisations responding to displacement at its onset face a dilemma when their mandates or functions are geared towards emergency and short-term assistance, rather than support to self-reliance and longer-term support. Agencies face a genuine ethical problem, especially at the start of a refugee crisis, in spending often limited resources on livelihoods support. As funding for humanitarian response decreases over time, the most pressing needs – even if for a minority of the refugee population – continue to be prioritised over longer-term livelihoods assistance (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016: 26).

Donor policy is another reason why aid agencies have struggled to integrate self-reliance and livelihoods early on in their response to refugee movements. For instance, UNHCR and WFP have, in the past, been unable to use funds for development projects in refugee settings because the US Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM)'s policy did not allow it (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016: 26). The case study in Cameroon highlighted similar restrictions from donors that provide support to refugees in protracted crises through their humanitarian funds, which have limits on both the scope and timing of programming (often only allowing short-term funding). However, in Turkey and Jordan development partners have supported refugees, host communities and host states using a range of funding mechanisms, on a larger scale and also longer-term.

5.2 Integrating the perspectives of refugees

In addition to the challenges aid agencies face in adapting to displacement trends, they have struggled to design interventions that reflect refugees' lived reality, to integrate refugees' perspectives and to support their strategies. While aid agencies (and other actors shaping refugees' livelihoods) had a congruent vision of the realities and challenges refugees faced in Cameroon, Malaysia, Turkey and Jordan, most failed to use that understanding as a basis for programming that is sensitive and adaptable enough to respond to refugees' changing circumstances. In Cameroon, aid agencies admitted being behind the curve when it came to providing the right support to refugees at the right time. Agencies felt that they had not invested enough in monitoring the right socio-economic indicators to adapt their programming, and the transition out of emergency assistance was driven by aid agencies, rather than by the changing circumstances of refugees.

One of the reasons why aid agencies fail to integrate the perspectives of refugees in a meaningful way stems from their continued reliance on programming based on tools, rather than analysis. If good livelihoods programming is about removing the obstacles refugees face in their own actions and strategies, as this study argues it is, then ready-made tools and programmes will continue to fail to provide the support refugees need. An analytical approach to support problem-solving interventions may be more effective, but this will require a much deeper evidence base on what actually contributes to better livelihoods outcomes and self-reliance than currently exists (Crawford et al., 2015: 6; Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016). This is the case for livelihoods interventions in general (Levine and Sharp, 2015: 8), and even more so for refugee livelihoods. When livelihood interventions for refugees are evaluated, the focus tends to be on how successfully they delivered outputs, rather than on the outcomes for refugees (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016: 6). The case study on work permits in Turkey and Jordan highlights how little attention has been given to understanding whether permits had actually been transformative for most refugees; instead, success was measured in the number of permits delivered.

Greater attention to the perspectives of refugees themselves would also highlight how displacement

and their status as refugees affect their attitudes, behaviours and identity and their attitude towards their livelihoods objectives, strategies, actions and outcomes. In Cameroon, Central Africans felt that their past trading partners perceived them differently and withheld opportunities after they became refugees; at the same time, interviews highlighted how CAR refugees themselves took calculated and conservative risks because of their status as refugees. In Turkey, Syrian refugees felt stuck and unable to weigh the benefits and costs of different strategies as they perceived their environment to be uncertain and fast-changing. In Malaysia, refugees who had been displaced for decades felt that their lives were essentially 'gone', and all hopes rested on their children, again influencing the risks they took and their priorities. In Jordan, refugees saw working in the informal sector as difficult and very risky (because they might be caught and deported to a camp), yet many did it anyway because they did not feel they had a choice.

How people perceive the livelihoods risks and opportunities open to them is a critical element in why they make the choices they do. Levine's revised sustainable livelihoods framework adds these elements as a filter through which individuals perceive their environment, institutions and assets (Levine, 2014). While the psychological impact of crisis on people's livelihood outcomes remains under-researched, the literature on supporting refugees in protracted displacement increasingly recognises how important these 'softer' aspects are to supporting refugees and their livelihoods, though this has not yet translated into concrete programming (De Vriese, 2006; Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016; Beit Al Karma, 2016). The World Bank, while acknowledging that it can do little to address the specific vulnerabilities refugees acquire as a result of forced displacement, nonetheless understands how this 'affect[s] their ability to seize economic opportunities and ... trap[s] them in poverty' (World Bank, 2016b: 3). It also recognises the role that uncertainty can play, as refugees 'have short planning horizons that can lead to less than optimal decisions' (World Bank, 2016b: 11). Likewise, an evaluation of the Graduation Approach,²⁹ developed by BRAC in Bangladesh and adopted and piloted by UNHCR as part of its Global Livelihoods Strategy (UNHCR, 2014b), highlights counselling and mentorship as critical elements in

29 See <http://www.unhcr.org/55005bc39.pdf>.

Box 4: What makes the livelihoods of refugees different?

- *Uncertainty*: While everyone experiences uncertainty, refugees experience heightened uncertainty about (and have little to no control over) fundamental aspects of their lives, including where they live and if and where they work. Changes in policies (and programming), even when they stand to benefit refugees, can perpetuate structural uncertainty and have a disruptive effect on refugees' agency and livelihood outcomes. While information does not necessarily provide refugees with greater autonomy, it can reduce uncertainty and support refugee livelihoods by providing refugees with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.
- *Being stuck; living in limbo and temporariness*: Refugees often start thinking about their livelihoods from a place where they feel they have limited choices, lack of opportunities and an understandably pessimistic rather than optimistic view of their situation. It underlines how livelihoods interventions ultimately require some form of coaching and psychological support to enable refugees to see opportunities and reassess their perception of risks.
- *Durable solutions³⁰ and livelihood choices*: Whether or not a refugee sees his or her long-term future in a particular country of asylum changes their approach to their livelihood. If a refugee thinks they are only there temporarily and may return home soon, they tend to make little investment and have short-term strategies. If refugees are thinking about resettlement, then all their effort is geared towards their future life in another country (hopes of receiving a university education, for instance). If local integration is their objective, then refugees tend to adopt a longer-term strategy. Understanding how refugees view their local integration should inform the type of support refugees receive.
- *Skills mismatch and reality mismatch*: Refugees will have built up certain expectations and strategies based on the realities they faced in their home country prior to displacement. Skills mismatch is often understood as refugees needing training to fit the host labour market. In fact, the mismatch goes deeper and requires support to adapt to a new environment, new market conditions and technology and new ways of creating networks.
- *Semi-legal nature of their livelihoods*: In a great many cases, legal frameworks that restrict refugee employment mean that supporting the livelihoods of refugees entails supporting what are considered illegal or semi-legal livelihoods choices.
- *Trauma*: The trauma experienced by many refugees also means they may struggle to make certain decisions or pursue certain livelihood strategies; this tends not to be sufficiently recognised or accommodated in livelihoods programming and higher-level strategic responses.

enhancing livelihoods outcomes for refugees (Beit Al Karma Consulting Egypt, 2016).³¹

This study argues that considering the implications of trauma and other psychosocial issues (see Porter and Haslam, 2005) pertaining to protracted displacement

should be part of livelihoods interventions if they are to go beyond a supply-driven system where aid agencies support livelihoods through cash-for-work type-interventions, and instead remove the barriers refugees face in reaching better livelihoods outcomes. This runs counter to Jacobsen and Fratzke's

³⁰ Durable solutions include de jure local integration in country of asylum, resettlement in a third country (not the country of origin and not the first country of asylum) and return to the country of origin. Durable solutions have historically only been available for a minority of refugees and are increasingly considered unrealistic. Instead, de facto local integration alongside complementary pathways such as labour mobility, humanitarian visas and scholarship schemes have been proposed. See the Comprehensive Refugee Response

Framework and New York Declarations, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>.

³¹ As its name suggests, the Graduation Approach provides graduated support towards self-sufficiency by developing the skills and investments people need to move out of cash assistance. In its original form it incorporated coaching and mentoring, but it is often implemented partially, with the coaching and mentoring elements absent.

conclusion that ‘livelihoods programs are not equipped to overcome these barriers’ (2016: 14), and instead argues for a more substantial paradigm shift in the way livelihoods support is conceived.³²

5.3 The nine principles of an effective livelihood response

There are many reasons why supporting the livelihoods of refugees in displacement is challenging. Yet there are also opportunities, and the analysis from the four case studies highlights many ways that aid agencies, host states, the private sector and individuals can support refugees. This section identifies key principles³³ of an effective livelihood response.

Principle 1: Develop and plan strategies to support the long-term livelihoods of refugees at the onset of a refugee movement.

The study findings challenge the common assumption that newly arrived refugees are necessarily more vulnerable and cannot benefit from livelihoods support. Rather, refugees will have different livelihoods trajectories during their displacement, with some able to support themselves at the outset but needing help later on, and others in need of unconditional emergency assistance. Some refugees who have been displaced for years will remain in need of social protection programmes, rather than seeing food rations cut and all efforts shifting to pure livelihoods interventions. While refugee situations are increasingly being defined as a development challenge rather than a humanitarian crisis, changing donor policies and the policies and profiles (skill set, standard operating procedures, length of programming) of organisations supporting refugees will help organisations and donors shift the focus away from emergency aid to provide the right funding to the

32 De Vriese (2006) identifies unaddressed psychological needs as one of the barriers refugees face in becoming more self-sustaining and fulfilling their livelihoods goals. The need to include strong psychological support as part of livelihoods support to refugees was further argued for in a recent evaluation of UNHCR’s livelihood intervention in Egypt (Beit Al Karma Consulting Egypt, 2016).

33 Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016) identify five external factors shaping livelihoods for refugees: political and policy context in the host country; types and extent of economic opportunities available in the host economy; capacity and willingness of refugees to invest in livelihoods; political economy landscape; and evaluation. The key principles presented in this section integrate these factors.

right programming. Shifting organisational and donor focus can be further facilitated by taking on board the lessons from LRRD and resilience, especially around the need to invest in learning and monitoring and adaptive programming. Mosel and Levine (2014) present key principles of a more effective approach to LRRD, including the need for more flexible programming that allows both for changes in modalities of delivery and in the content of programming planning and implementation;³⁴ risk-taking and openness to learning; working with local institutions; context and political analysis; joint analysis, planning and learning at country level; and realistic programming.

Principle 2: Base livelihoods support on refugees’ own perspectives and agency.

In place of the current ad hoc approach, the perspectives of refugees should be gathered through participatory methods at every stage of strategy development: assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Integrating the perspectives of refugees includes designing livelihoods support that is based on refugees’ own initiative, their livelihoods objectives, strategies and actions and the challenges they face in reaching better livelihood outcomes.³⁵ It also entails designing strategies that account for the way refugees perceive their environment, the livelihood risks and opportunities they confront and how they experience and interact with the policies, institutions, organisations, networks and individuals shaping their lives and livelihoods. In particular, this study highlighted how refugees may perceive risks and opportunities (especially those linked to the policy environment) differently from aid agencies.

Principle 3: Incorporate social protection and the provision of safety nets into livelihoods support.

By focusing on the history of their displacement, this study was able to highlight how different refugees experience displacement differently. In particular, the linear emergency-to-stability understanding of displacement does not fit the experience of refugees whose vulnerability increases during displacement, rather than decreases. This means that an effective livelihoods response framework needs to incorporate varying needs and types of support

34 See Ludi (2012) for more on the criticality of adaptive programming in development in particular adaptive capacity.

35 Fiddian-Qasimiyeh (2016a) calls for more attention to be paid to experiences and not just outcomes.

if it is to adequately respond to shifting types and levels of vulnerability. Assistance or social protection mechanisms need to become part of livelihoods response – not de-coupled from it. A more granular approach to targeting individuals with the right assistance is critical to ensure that those who need safety nets can access them, while those who can gravitate towards self-sufficiency are provided with the right kind of support to enable them to do so. Adaptive programming is again a critical element.

Principle 4: Go beyond supporting economic activities to consider wider refugee needs and rights.

A strategy to support livelihoods needs to understand how refugees meet their needs, access services and defend their rights.³⁶ This reinforces the need to look at their lives holistically, and not assume that economic subsistence means that refugees will be able to meet other needs and enjoy their rights. Refugees in the case studies often balanced the risks and opportunities of different livelihoods opportunities with safety, their children's education and cultural norms when making decisions and choosing livelihoods options. Across the four case studies, refugees had surprisingly similar short-term goals: safety and family unification. They also had surprisingly similar long-term goals, based on a deep concern for the future of their children, emphasising the extent to which the livelihood choices parents made were geared towards supporting the next generation in their displacement. Among other things, this means that education for children and enabling children to gain the right skills to open up opportunities in their country of first asylum were paramount. This strengthens the argument for ensuring that livelihood strategies provide not only short-term support for refugees, but also support for their longer-term objectives, including children's education and skills improvement.

Principle 5: Engage a coalition of actors in supporting refugee livelihoods.

Better support for the livelihoods of refugees requires a dual rather than sequential approach combining the best of humanitarian and development expertise and comparative advantage. The Syrian refugee response in particular holds important lessons around how

humanitarian and development actors can best work with refugees, host communities, the private sector and host states in order to improve outcomes for refugees. Development actors not only bring new – and much more substantial – funding to refugee crises, but in Jordan and Turkey they have demonstrated complementary skills and ways of working that are both relevant to supporting the livelihoods of refugees, and rare among humanitarian organisations. The World Bank and ILO work at the macro level on economic and policy reform to facilitate the creation of economic opportunities for refugees. Initial lessons from this study highlight how, for their part, humanitarian actors need to refocus their attention on humanitarian advocacy, monitoring the impact of interventions and policy changes, keeping the perspective of refugees at the centre of policies and interventions, and ensuring that refugees' needs and rights are considered holistically.

Principle 6: Consider host community relations and social integration as a core part of livelihood strategies.

The host community is a critical 'institution' shaping the livelihoods of refugees, yet host community/refugee relations and social integration are rarely effectively considered alongside livelihood support. The dynamics of overlapping refugee movements and refugees hosting refugees so typical of protracted displacement further adds to social cohesion and integration challenges (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016b). Economic and social integration are fundamentally linked, and cannot be considered separately. An effective livelihoods response framework therefore needs to consider host community relations and social integration as one aspect of supporting refugee livelihoods. Current ways of considering host community relations have failed to support better experiences and sustainable outcomes for refugees. Evaluating the impact of current approaches to integrating host community relations into livelihoods interventions should inform future support.

Principle 7: Support refugee livelihoods through interventions at multiple levels.

Livelihood interventions to support refugees are often modest, involving small-scale asset transfers or ad hoc vocational training. Aid agencies have become better at linking these interventions to market assessments and value chain analysis. However, there remains little systematic thinking in the design of livelihoods support

³⁶ An evaluation of the graduation approach with refugees highlighted that 'the majority of refugees interviewed reported lack of protection as one of the main reasons behind job loss or business failure' (Beit Al Karma Consulting Egypt, 2016: 9).

about what needs to be done, by whom and at which level for the overall investment in refugee livelihoods to add up to more than the sum of its parts and improve livelihood outcomes for refugees. Strategies need to outline interventions from the macro level (policy and economic reform), meso level, in particular looking at the role of local authorities, all the way down to the micro level (mentoring and coaching of refugees).

Principle 8: The livelihoods of refugees are not the same as the livelihoods of the non-refugee population.

Interviews with refugees for this study clearly showed the need to better understand how refugees' forced displacement experiences change the way they look at livelihood opportunities and risks (Levine, 2014). In that sense, supporting the livelihoods of refugees should consider good practices and experience from the wider livelihoods literature, while also integrating specific analysis of the impact of displacement on refugees, their choices and outlooks. In designing strategies to support refugees' livelihoods and self-reliance, aid agencies must take into account the impact of trauma, feelings of uncertainty, feelings of being in limbo or stuck, pessimism about livelihood risks and opportunities, mismatches not only in skills but also in how the expectations of refugees are shaped by their original environment rather than their host environment, the semi-legal or illegal nature of their work and attitudes towards durable solutions.

Principle 9: Supporting refugee livelihoods through advocacy, durable solutions and innovative approaches.

Supporting the livelihoods of refugees includes pushing for more third-country resettlement and further considering – through evaluations that analyse the experiences of refugees and their perspectives – options such as labour mobility, humanitarian visas and scholarships for refugees. It also includes continued strategic interventions and advocacy to open up restrictive policy environments, both at the global level, through the Refugee

Compact process, but also at national and sub-national levels, ensuring that the focus is always on refugees' own perspectives and agency.³⁷

These principles consider higher-level strategic considerations, in part because of the lack of macro-level strategic planning and response that most livelihoods responses suffer from. Micro-level, small-scale livelihoods interventions have failed to provide the full spectrum of solutions refugees require to sustain themselves or isolate them from the wider political economy hindering their livelihoods in many settings. At the same time, in Turkey and Jordan different levels of intervention have failed to come together to create impacts that go beyond the sum of their parts. While macro-level interventions have focused on resolving the chronic issues that prevent refugees (and many in their host communities) from sustaining themselves, they have not strategically linked to more micro-level support, and vice-versa. In practical terms, this implies a need to consider what refugees already do, and their perceptions and interpretations of the obstacles they face. It also means creating at country level a strategic plan that identifies the multiple interventions required to address these obstacles, identifying where these interventions should take place (at the macro, meso and micro level), and who is best placed to facilitate or implement them (aid organisations, the authorities, the private sector, coalitions of actors). Essential to the principles presented here is the need for continuous monitoring and learning, and mechanisms that allow programmes to adapt. More granular, adaptive programming is the only way to align support to refugees and host communities with their lived realities and experiences. Adaptive programming requires a fundamental cultural shift at the strategic and operational levels, so that projects are not implemented blindly, but solutions are tried and tested, and can be changed as individual and contextual circumstance evolve.

³⁷ Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016: 19) argue for the necessity to 'pair technical livelihoods programming with advocacy efforts to improve the policy and political operating environment'.

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