

# Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises

## Synthesis Report

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forced displacement is a critical global issue. Rising refugee populations are of significant concern in regions where mounting tensions have led to outbreaks of insurgency due to political, economic, religious, ethnic and social pressures. Further, protracted displacement has become the norm in some areas with states existing in a cycle of perpetual crises. Of particular concern are the 600 million young people living in fragile or conflict areas across the globe and over half of refugee populations under the age of 18.

DFID is responding to this difficult and changing context by examining the effects of protracted displacement on youth transitions. The focus on youth reflects growing policy interest in addressing the challenges created by forced displacement on trajectories into adulthood, for young refugees. This research is intended to contribute to addressing a knowledge gap in understanding how displacement affects youth transitions to inform better policy and programme design.

The participatory and youth-led research discussed in this report has been undertaken in Uganda and Jordan with young refugees aged 10-24 years old. In Uganda, the research worked with participants originating from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Jordan, young refugees

were from Syria, Iraq and Palestinians from Gaza. In both countries, young participants have been drawn from camp and urban settings, with 505 young people involved in surveys, 80 in focus groups, 92 giving narrative interviews and 25 producing story maps that give deep insight into youth experiences, 14 of which are published in the online story map.

### Factors Affecting Transition

The research provided new conceptual insights into the processes of transition and the specific challenges encountered by children and youth affected by protracted displacement. The key findings from each context are highlighted in the box below. The research indicates that becoming a refugee is a rupture in the transition to adulthood, which has multiple consequences for young people to establish adult lives in host countries. The research identifies four conditional factors that shape the transitions of youth into adulthood.

#### Traumatic experiences of becoming and being a refugee.

Experiences of violence and loss has a deep effect on psychological wellbeing and sense of self. Displacement is a break in the continuity of growing up, affecting expectations about the future. Becoming a refugee affects ideas of

## KEY FINDINGS

### Uganda

**Education.** Participants recognised the importance of education both as a marker of transition to adulthood and as a prerequisite for obtaining quality employment. However, youth reported a range of barriers that affected participation in education, including: loss of certificates, making it difficult to recommence education; hidden costs within a ‘free’ education system; language barriers; discrimination and harassment; conflicting home responsibilities; and a lack of school places, particularly in Nakivale, the rural camp settlement.

**Work and livelihoods.** The transition into work is a key life stage for young people. For refugees, this is frustrated by the lack of labour market opportunities in both urban and camp settings; low competitiveness of refugees due to unfinished education; lack of social connections; discrimination; and language barriers.

**Family life.** Marriage and family formation is viewed as a means to establish social status. This may be unavailable to young refugees because of dowry and wedding expenses; lack of a suitable match; conflicts with future aspirations such as permanent relocation; discrimination; and a sense of instability where marriage may worsen conditions for all.

### Jordan

**Education.** In Jordan education is perceived as vitally important, but was a source of frustration for research participants. Young people highlighted the loss of documentation from home countries, meaning that they were placed in the wrong grade. The variable quality of education within a two shift system, where refugees take the second shift; limitations on subject choices, costs of access to higher education; and conflicting family responsibilities were all identified as barriers.

**Work and livelihoods.** Work is highlighted as a primary pathway into adult life. However, options in Jordan were limited by legal restrictions on the types of work available to refugees; a lack of national ID numbers; and discrimination and exploitation in the workplace.

**Family life.** Similar to Uganda, opportunities to marry and establish family life were constrained by the costs of dowry and wedding arrangements; discrimination that limits the potential to make a good match; a lack of assets and stability can delay marriage; and concern that getting married as a refugee closes off other possibilities.

belonging and efficacy and is described by participants as being a ‘partial life’ compared to the lives they anticipated.

**Temporal: the ‘temporary’ lives of refugees.** Despite the long term nature of displacement, temporariness remains central to both humanitarian policy and the expectations of refugees. Strongly held imaginings of the future as depending on a return home or permanent relocation lead to decisions not to invest in the present. However, not realising these imagined futures leads to frustration and risk taking.

**Social relations: the importance of networks.** The research demonstrated that displacement breaks networks and bonds important for social capital. The loss of these connections impacts on the construction of identity and links to cultural heritage. It can also lead to fractures within refugee communities, particularly where there is experience of discrimination or sectarianism. Many of the transition pathways that rely on social relationships as a source of information or support are unavailable to refugee youth.

**Institutional conditions: navigating rules.** The rules and regulations that define status and govern the everyday activities of refugees have a major impact on transitions. Institutions have a practical impact on freedom of movement, work, education and the accumulation of assets as well as a more subtle effect on social status and the ability of youth to make plans for the future.



Main street, Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on analysis of the data and feedback from both young people and stakeholders in each country, the research has identified the following recommendations.

- Improve the **integration of services** to develop a more holistic approach to delivery, centred around the needs and experiences of the person/family. Better information flows and engagement, using community based providers and networks, would aid targeting and planning.
- Address deficits in **system capacity**, particularly in education, to ensure the availability of fully funded school places at primary and secondary level and scholarships into higher education. Country-level partnerships could be used to identify and tackle procedural barriers that impede transitions.
- Improve the relevance and **targeting of skills and training** to connect with labour market demand and young people’s preferences. Create opportunities for employer-led vocational training and pathways; the provision of careers information and increased capacity for enterprise skills, training and start-up.
- Create enabling conditions that **improve accessibility of transition pathways** through education, work and family life by removing bureaucratic barriers.
- Increase the **involvement of young people** in debate and policy making, recognising the unique value of their direct experience.



Refugee settlement, East Amman, Jordan.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017 UNHCR identified some 64 million people across the globe as displaced, of these over 16 million were classified as refugees.<sup>1</sup> Continuing instability in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa is causing prolonged periods of displacement for those affected by crises, with the majority of refugees hosted by countries with high levels of poverty. UNHCR highlights that the average period of displacement has risen to more than 20 years,<sup>2</sup> creating significant challenges for humanitarian and development action.

The context of displacement is also becoming more complex, both in the reasons that people are seeking refuge and the conditions of asylum in host countries. This includes an increasing shift of displaced populations to urban settings, which compared to traditional camp environments lack the delivery infrastructure to provide basic services and support. Of particular concern is the situation for children and youth, with around 600 million young people living in fragile or conflict areas across the globe<sup>3</sup> and over half of refugee populations under the age of 18.<sup>4</sup>

DFID is responding to this difficult and changing context by examining the effects of protracted displacement on youth transitions. The focus on youth reflects growing policy concerns to address the challenges created by forced displacement on trajectories into adulthood, for young refugees. This research is intended to contribute to addressing a knowledge gap in understanding how displacement affects youth transitions to inform better policy and programme design.

This research aims to explore how youth, experience and navigate pathways to adulthood when growing up in situations of protracted crises to inform policy and multi-sector humanitarian and development programming. The specific objectives of the research are as follows.

- To explore how youth experience transitions to adulthood in the context of protracted displacement.
- To explore the social, spatial, relational and temporal dimensions to such transitions.
- To explore how youth transitions in protracted crises vary according to age, gender and other social markers.
- To develop policy recommendations and practical strategies for supporting refugee youth transitions.

The primary research discussed in this report has been undertaken in Uganda and Jordan with young refugees aged 10-24 years old. In Uganda, the research worked with participants originating from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Jordan, young refugees were from Syria, Iraq and Palestinians from Gaza. In both countries, young participants have been drawn from camp and urban settings.

The research has taken a participatory and youth-led approach to directly involve young refugees in the collection and analysis of data. The involvement of youth researchers marks a commitment to recognise the agency of young people in their own lives and to capture the added insights from youth reflecting on their own experience, and that of their peers. While youth-led research creates some challenges for the research process, this is offset by improved access to difficult to reach communities and greater nuance in understanding the conditions of displacement reported in the research data.

This report provides a synthesis of the data collected and analysed through the research, focusing on the factors that accelerate or delay transitions of young refugees into adulthood. In order to make this report operationally relevant, emphasis is given here to findings that appear to have importance for the design of policy and multi-agency programming.

The report begins with a brief overview of the context of protracted crisis and a conceptual frame for youth transitions, building from academic and policy literature. The background information is followed by an overview of the research methods employed for this study and then moves to discuss the key findings in each case study country. These have been structured around 14 case studies that illustrate the challenges of particular pathways to adulthood experienced by young refugees in the research. The report then concludes and provides summary recommendations. The brevity of this synthesis report does not allow for all the research material to be discussed. Additional material including the inception report and story maps, created by young researchers during this project, can be found at [www.youth-transitions.com](http://www.youth-transitions.com) to provide additional insights into the experiences of growing up in protracted crises.

## Global Context

Forced displacement is a critical issue facing the world today. UNHCR data<sup>5</sup> shows 65.6 million persons were displaced due to conflict and violence at the end of 2016 – 300,000 more than the previous year, with numbers remaining at a record high. Young people constitute significantly more than half of global refugee populations, with UNHCR indicating that 51 per cent of refugees are below the age of 18. Additional numbers of youth, aged up to 24 years, are not disaggregated in refugee statistics despite special concerns regarding the impact of displacement on their lives. Further, the youth ‘bulge’, means that the needs of displaced youth must be given attention. This is a particularly important across Africa where 60 per cent of the population are aged below 25 years, but also in other regions where displacement is significant, such as the Middle East, with youth constituting 46 per cent of the population.<sup>6</sup>



More generally, significant barriers exist to understanding and planning to meet the aspirations of youth in contexts where crises have severely limited economic growth and employment opportunities.<sup>7</sup> Youth are therefore frustrated in their ability to attain social adulthood and feel excluded within their local communities.<sup>8</sup> For those affected by protracted crises, exclusion will be amplified, limiting both individual potential and creating negative social implications. It is now critical that the impacts of displacement on youth transitions to adulthood are fully understood.

Rising refugee populations globally are of critical concern in regions where mounting tensions have led to outbreaks of insurgency due to political, economic, religious, ethnic and social pressures. The vast majority of displaced people live in areas of the world with the highest levels of poverty and inequality,<sup>9</sup> with low income countries hosting 84 per cent of the world's refugees.<sup>10</sup> Protracted displacement has become the norm in many areas suffering sustained and prolonged conflict, with some states existing in a cycle of perpetual crises.<sup>11</sup> For example, on-going and episodic conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 2012 has resulted in continued internal displacement of people in North and South Kivu, as well as cross-border protracted displacement of Congolese refugees to neighbouring countries, particularly Uganda. Similarly, since 2013 crises in South Sudan and Syria have resulted in over 1.4 million and 5.5 million refugees respectively.<sup>12</sup> More than half the Syrian population are now displaced, and at the end of 2016, almost 70 per cent of refugees were living in a protracted situation.<sup>13</sup>

The end of a period of conflict has not always reversed the process of displacement, with many refugees choosing not to return home due to fears of renewed violence. Successive waves of displaced people in the Middle East are adding further complexity to the lives of refugees already affected by protracted crises. For example, Jordan and Lebanon have been significantly affected by conflicts in neighbouring countries; both the current security crisis in Syria and over the last decades by events in Iraq and Gaza. Jordan has one of the largest refugee populations, with 55 per cent of camp residents under 19 years old.<sup>14</sup> In 2016 Uganda reported the highest number of new arrivals, primarily from South Sudan. Pressure created by conflict in neighbouring countries and the impact of large numbers of refugees creates a difficult socio-economic situation and significant issues of urban poverty directly affecting youth transitions.

Refugee populations are increasingly choosing urban rather than camp locations, despite lower access to basic service provision in urban settings.<sup>15</sup> Research<sup>16</sup> highlights the selection of urban locations as places where refugees have greater autonomy, can access livelihood opportunities and find safety with people of the same national or cultural

identity. This is likely to have temporal and spatial implications for youth transitions, not least as countries endeavour to develop new collective identities that unite citizens.<sup>17</sup>

In many cities, local communities of displaced people have settled in particular areas. Studies have highlighted<sup>18</sup> that displaced people gain employment from others of similar ethnic origin demonstrating the importance of social networks among displaced people for securing livelihoods. Such strategies are necessary with high youth unemployment in areas with large numbers of refugees. Research by Kiwan in 2014<sup>19</sup> also notes that whilst there has been investment in education in the Middle East, there is a mismatch with employment opportunities in a region that has high youth unemployment at over 25 per cent.<sup>20</sup> Further, cultural strategies of civic integration for refugees by western governments and international organisations have been critiqued for promoting a 'depoliticised' and decontextualized citizenship.<sup>21</sup>

The international community, alongside host national governments, provide a variety of services, largely in camp locations, that aim to address the negative impact of displacement through the provision of shelter and food and access to health, education and vocational training provision. It is recognised however, given the average length of protracted refugee situations, there is an urgent need to reconcile short term humanitarian actions with longer term investment in human and economic development. This is particularly salient for refugee youth as a means of substantiating options and pathways into adulthood. A number of studies have indicated that young people in protracted crisis situations make decisions (such as early marriage, educational attendance and informal employment) as short term responses to family and individual need and that these (constrained) choices may condition longer term development outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

## Conceptualising Refugee Youth Transitions to Adulthood

Conceptually, youth transitions have been positioned in a variety of ways to describe the complex factors which culminate in the process of growing up and attaining adulthood. Locke and Lintelo in 2012 highlighted<sup>23</sup> that in the Global South the school-to-work transition has gained prominence within the donor and NGO community as a means to reduce youth unemployment. Yet, this narrow focus neglects youth's own voices, ambitions and realities that are present in a wider social understanding of transition to adulthood. Social scientists have also drawn on the youth transitions literature in the Global North and begun to apply this to other contexts. This literature conceptualises transitions more broadly covering social, economic, political

and cultural aspects of life. Discourse no longer positions adulthood as a singular fixed stage attained at a special age or time, but a series of boundary crossings such as leaving home, obtaining employment, cohabitation/marriage or family life.<sup>24</sup>

The transition journey that encompasses these different boundary crossings has been uncritically positioned within global policy as a linear set of pathways.<sup>25</sup> Research is now beginning to explore the disrupted, complex and divergent routes that many youth embark on towards adulthood. Significantly, contexts, including historical, political, social and economic situations, are now seen as important for shaping the ways in which transition pathways are experienced by youth. Emerging work now considers the impacts of marginality where there is reliance on informal and illegal forms of work<sup>26</sup> and explores the social and relational aspects of transitions in contexts of poverty.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, rather than following a prescribed, clearly mapped out pathway to adulthood, youth are conceptualised here as navigating pathways: journeys that are in flux, not always straightforward, sometimes cyclical and often difficult. Through navigating pathways, transitions are conceptualised as spatial, but also temporal and social, taking place in particular locations as well as over time and within complex social structures.

This suggests that it is essential to consider how different pathways are produced both in terms of the length of time this process takes as well as where this process takes place. This enables failures to be integrated with successes and obstacles along the way to be overcome rather than fixed as a marker of insurmountable difficulty. Here it is possible to define transition as on-going, a process which has a real and imagined future for youth.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of critical moments of significance have been applied to youth transitions where key life events are no longer happening in a specified order, and may be delayed, stretched or unattained particularly in relation to completing education, accessing formal work, marriage and childbearing. Johnson-Hanks and Jeffery<sup>29</sup> apply the term ‘vital conjunctures’ to refer to these key moments, particularly where there is a major change in circumstance. This is useful for explaining how unique instances in a young person’s life can be critical components for transition pathways, at the same time demonstrating their complexity as potentially future-producing. Therefore, in a key moment the place (camp or urban informal settlement) defines the space, time and social relations through which youth must realise their (real and imagined) futures. Through an analysis of the diversity of youth’s lived experiences the spaces and times of transition pathways, critical moments are unpacked to develop both theoretical and policy insights.

Across African settings, this reflects the changing circumstances of growing up with rural to urban migration, improved life expectancy and health, basic education, coupled with a burgeoning youth population and an infiltration of globalisation of cultural, social and economic conditions into everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

The important distinction in conceptualising youth transitions in this way allows for non-critical life events such as unexpected pregnancy, illness, or family death to produce opportunities, constraints and transformations of the transition journey. Similarly, it allows for youth perspectives to be included, for example where youth respond creatively to adverse conditions to create strategies, such as for earnings that fall outside of expected patterns of economic activity.<sup>31</sup> Despite this emergent theorising around youth’s position within their own transition journeys, crisis conditions are rarely discussed, and are particularly neglected where crisis results in migration across borders. Where migration has been positioned in relation to youth transitions, even in contexts of poverty, this has tended to focus on migration as a transformational vital conjuncture – a critical moment of significance that creates opportunities for positive outcomes including work and independence.<sup>32</sup>

This research undertaken in Uganda and Jordan is focused on deconstructing the conditions and factors affecting transitions for youth affected by protracted displacement. Building upon the existing knowledge outlined above, this research examines youth transitions as multiple, varied and complex pathways that are navigated across space, over time and which draw on various social relations as well as positioned within particular economic, political, social and cultural contexts. The lived reality of situations of protracted crises shapes the present and the possibility of imagined futures.

**Figure 1** represents the conceptual thinking behind the research questions, which is then discussed in light of the findings in the following sections. Moving beyond simple linear transitions, the model illustrates how political, economic, social and cultural contexts shape youth’s perspectives and therefore their aspirations of transitions.

The central tenet of the model highlights the complexity of experiences that result in diverse transition pathways, which are shaped by multiple and overlapping factors. These include social relations (that of family, friends, communities), which are structured by age, gender and other markers of difference. In addition, this research explores the spatial (camp/urban location) and temporal (protracted nature of refugee status) aspects.

Darling<sup>16</sup> states that until recently the urban setting was not recognised by those researching refugees. Camp and urban

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an in-depth participatory, youth-led process for data collection and analysis through a reflexive, dynamic approach, which is sensitive to young people's lives and their changing needs.<sup>34</sup> The approach is based on the premise that all young people are experts on their lives and able to articulate their needs and requirements when opportunities are provided for them.<sup>35</sup> Participatory research is considered more respectful of participants, but has been criticised as not always achieving the levels of empowerment initially desired.<sup>36</sup> Further, to understand the complex processes and contextual factors that affect transitions to adulthood for young people affected by displacement and crisis, and to investigate issues in-depth, strong researcher-participant rapport is critical due to the vulnerable contexts of young refugees,<sup>37</sup> particularly because they have experienced social exclusion, duress and displacement.<sup>38</sup>

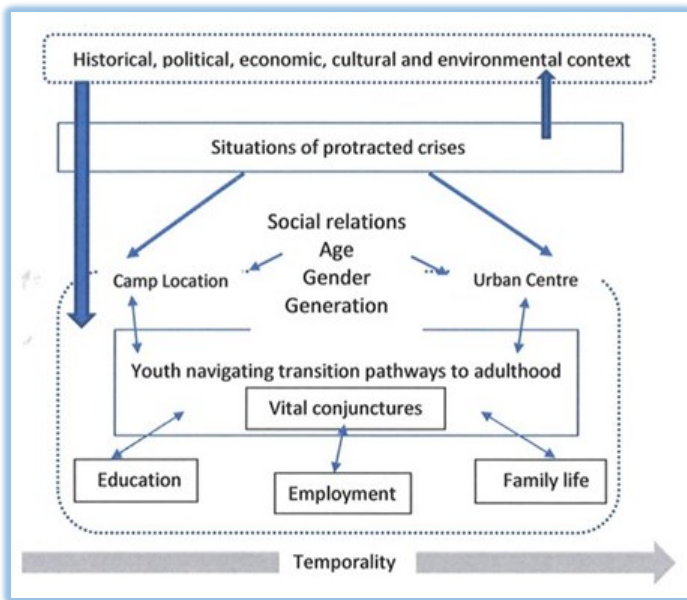
A participatory approach, combined with youth-led collaboration, facilitated active engagement on young people's terms and in their familiar places. Building on leading practice of research with youth people,<sup>39</sup> Youth Researchers (YR) were invited to engage in the research. They were asked to participate in training; were supported to undertake data collection with their peers; contribute to analysis; and share knowledge exchange with stakeholders. The research process is outlined here with a more in-depth account contained in the methodology paper available on the project [website](#).

Ethical review, based on principles for undertaking research with young people was undertaken and approved by the University of Dundee Ethics Committee. Specific approval was also obtained from Uganda and Jordan.

### Research Stages

The research was delivered across five linked stages, allowing for a broad understanding of the key issues as well as delving deeply into the specific experiences of individuals and their complex transition pathways.

- The inception phase confirmed the selection of research locations and groups, engaged government and NGO actors working with displaced youth, established the international advisory board and obtained ethics approval from the University of Dundee.
- The background phase brought together academic and policy documents on protracted crisis and on youth transitions. YR were engaged, recruited and trained.
- The data collection phase included surveys, narrative interviews, focus groups (for 10-14 year olds) and story mapping activities.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework.

locations create different pressures affecting transitions of young people; camps reinforce patterns of dependency that may limit opportunities to achieve markers of adulthood, while urban locations may provide a relative degree of freedom yet creating additional vulnerabilities or barriers to successful transition. Crisp et al<sup>15</sup> note that refugees have little access to humanitarian assistance in urban areas forcing greater dependency on informal or unsafe methods of income generation. Section 5 explores these differences in detail.

The complexity of youth transitions is also explored through both positive and negative vital conjunctures which hinder, accelerate or complicate pathways into adulthood. As with Zeus<sup>33</sup> example of displaced youth in Thailand, where the struggle to access higher education became a driver for wider refugee empowerment, this research shows how efforts to adapt and overcome barriers of transitions contribute more broadly to youth agency. Sections 3 and 4 of the report draw out the specific vital conjunctures that influence transition pathways for refugee youth in this research, most notably in relation to, education, work/livelihoods and family life. The research also highlights the importance of the specific context of being a refugee in situations of protracted displacement.

Following the discussion of findings in Uganda and Jordan, the conceptual model is returned to in section 5 where specific focus on the impact of refugee status on transitions theory is discussed. In addition to applying a vital conjunctures approach to youth transitions, the research findings indicate a gap in thinking around conceptualising transitions in situations of crises which is more fully developed in a revised model.



- The data analysis phase resulted in the qualitative material being thematically coded through NVivo then discussed with YR as part of the initial analysis. The coded and analysed data was further analysed in relation to the research questions, and by comparing location, age and gender.
- The dissemination phase involved a reverse cascade of workshops in each country, followed by a refinement of the findings for publication as outputs for academic, policy and government audiences.

## Youth Researchers

Youth were recruited into the research as investigators and participants. Eight YR were identified in each country through local partners employing an informed consent process that provided the opportunity for young people to opt into the project. YR were paid locally agreed rates for work. Expenses were also covered for travel and meetings.

In each country YR were selected from camp and urban locations; aged 16-24; male and female; and had held refugee status for at least 3 years. In addition, they were part of the following refugee communities: Somali and Congolese in Uganda; and Syrian, Iraqi, and Gazan Palestinian in Jordan. All YR were required to have three years of secondary education as a measure of literacy. In addition, selection looked for strong interpersonal communication skills, empathy and confidence; reflective and analytical skills; reliability and desire to engage in the research. To avoid elite capture, youth were invited to information sessions by CBOs working with refugees. In each country, 20 prospective YR were trained over three days in research skills and ethical practice. Following interviews, eight were offered YR positions and the others invited to remain in the project as participants.

## Data Collection

Primary data collection was undertaken in three linked stages in each country: a tablet-based survey; narrative interviews and focus groups; and in-depth story mapping. The survey was conducted with a total of 505 youth, disaggregated by age (10-14; 15-19; and 20-24); gender; national group and urban/camp locations. The survey captured background information on participants; types of transition experience and attitudes and perceptions of growing up as a refugee. The survey used a stratified snowball sampling strategy to ensure all groups were represented equally, but also drew on local participant networks to avoid elite capture. The survey was developed in collaboration with YR and local partners, piloted in training and collected by YR via Survey123 on tablets and sent to the University of Dundee for analysis using SPSS.

The survey data was initially analysed to highlight transition pathways for further investigation and to select a range of participants, aged 15-24, for interview. In-depth interviews

were carried out by each YR in each country: 49 in Uganda and 42 in Jordan. The narrative interviews sought to explore transition experiences from multiple perspectives to understand the conditions for decision making, constraints and opportunities within specific pathways and the emotions and journeys of being a refugee. Interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed and translated before being sent to the University of Dundee for coding in NVivo. Instead of inviting 10-14 year old participants to interviews discussing transition experiences, four focus groups were carried out in each country involving 80 participants (following the same breakdown by gender, nationality and location), to discuss their expectations of adulthood. The focus groups were conducted by local academics, supported by YR and recorded, transcribed, translated and coded in NVivo.

Following interview analysis, key transition pathways were selected for story mapping. Here individual stories that represent each pathway and how they are experienced differently according to age, gender, national group and location are used to create an interactive web app that acts as a knowledge exchange and public engagement tool. YR were supported to facilitate multi-media data collection through video, audio, pictorial and story formats with participants, which was then used to create the protracted crises [story map](#) using ESRI software by the University of Dundee. The map enables the analysis of transitions to be contextual and provides insight into different experiences of urban and camp lives. It offers exploration of in-depth integrated transition case studies.

## Analysis and Dissemination

The data was analysed after each method to provide themes and pathways for further analysis. This then fed into a reverse cascade of participatory analysis and dissemination workshops in each country. YR, participants and stakeholders discussed the meaning and implications of the data for issues of transition. This process was insightful for conceptualising refugee transitions and informing policy and programming. The research team further analysed the data for comparisons and to identify recommendations.

This report, policy briefings and subsequent academic papers will be disseminated to key stakeholders in each country as well as to DFID, and UK/international stakeholders through electronic dissemination as well as presentations to various key stakeholders. The collaborative and participatory nature of the research ensures the voices of youth are able to contribute to an accurate conceptualisation of youth transitions in situations of protracted crises. Dissemination activity is on-going and geared to influencing policy and multi-sector programming of services.

### 3. UGANDA KEY FINDINGS

#### Context

Since the 1950s, Uganda has been a primary destination for refugees fleeing conflict in its neighbouring countries. At the end of May 2017, UNHCR reported that Uganda had a population of 1,277,476 refugees and asylum seekers, with the largest group (74 per cent) arriving from the ongoing conflict in South Sudan.<sup>40</sup> During the last two decades, Uganda has been host to refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda and Eritrea. Newly arriving refugees register with the Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and UNHCR. Refugees are resident in settlements across the country and in urban areas, most significantly in the capital city, Kampala.

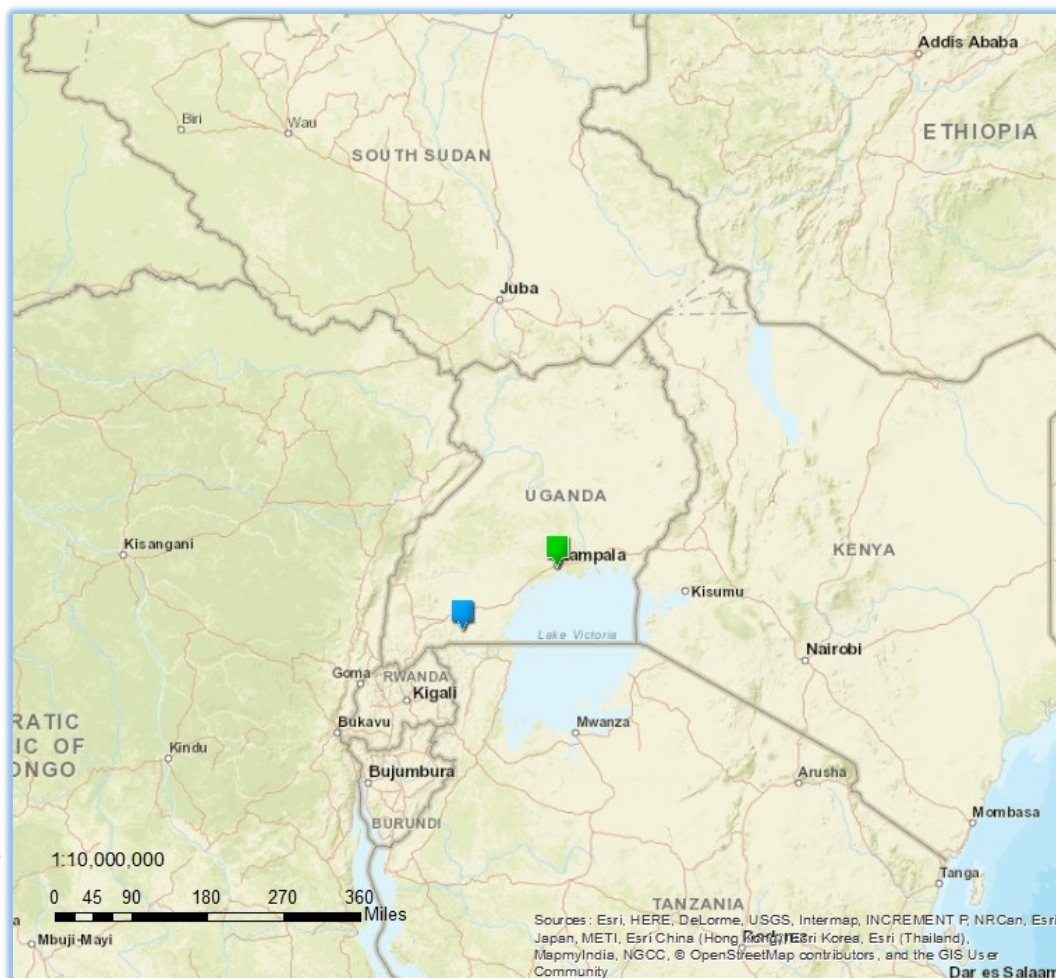
The locations in Uganda with the largest populations of refugees are found in the north west of the country in the Yumbe, Adjumani and Arua districts. These areas are primary point of entry into Uganda for people fleeing conflict in South Sudan and provide refugees with transit reception and settlement. Nakivale settlement in the south of Uganda is one of the oldest and largest in the country with Congolese, Somali, Burundian and Rwandan refugees forming the majority populations. Kampala is also a primary destination for refugees, with over 90,000 people registered as resident in the city.<sup>41</sup> In Kampala refugee populations are dispersed across the city, with key concentrations found in the low-income areas of Kisenyi, Katwe, Makindye and Masajja.<sup>42</sup> **Figure 2** locates Ugandan research sites.

Uganda is recognised globally as having one of the most progressive legal frameworks for refugees. The Ugandan Refugee Act 2006 and 2010 Refugee Regulations provide for relative freedom of movement, the right to work, identity documents, agricultural land in settlements and access to education and health services. These legal rights form part of a national commitment, in conjunction with international humanitarian agencies, to offering refugees a place of safety.

A majority of refugees in Uganda are experiencing protracted displacement and are unable to return to their home countries due to continuing instability and conflict. According to the World Bank<sup>43</sup> the long-term character of displacement creates a particular challenge for refugees in Uganda, because the legal frameworks “do not provide a permanent solution for those people who can neither repatriate or be resettled in another country”. In practice refugees in Uganda, and any children they have, remain refugees for life.

Despite the progressive legal frameworks established in Uganda, refugees experience poverty and vulnerability. Published case studies of refugee communities in Uganda highlight the combined impact on wellbeing of the loss of assets and social connections resulting from displacement and the limited labour market opportunity available to refugees. These include the following:

- The experience of discrimination and difficulty in expanding beneficial social networks in urban and camp locations.<sup>44</sup>
- A reliance on informal and irregular economic activity. There are few formal jobs available and business formation is constrained by limited access to finance, intense competition, high business registration costs and weak



**Figure 2:** Map showing Ugandan research sites and surrounding geographical context. Blue square: Nakivale Refugee Settlement; Green square: Kisenyi, an informal settlement in Kampala. Scale: 1:10,000,000. Source: ESRI/ArcMaps.

language skills that restrict enterprise to less stable and profitable activity.<sup>45</sup>

- Marginal income levels and lack of assets make people highly vulnerable to shocks.<sup>46</sup>
- Too few school places and hidden costs of attending primary and secondary school limit participation and attainment.<sup>47</sup>
- Limited provision of public services maintains reliance on humanitarian support.<sup>48</sup>

## Youth transitions in Uganda

The traumatic experiences of violence and loss is central to the experience of becoming a refugee and shapes how youth understand the present and frame expectations for the future. The young refugees involved in the Ugandan research report disrupted transitions to adulthood due to multiple and overlapping factors of legal status, poverty, weak social networks and limited access to education and employment.

The combined impact of these conditional factors affects the ability of young people to obtain the social status and degree of economic independence that would enable them to feel like an adult and to be respected as an adult within the community. Becoming a refugee is a large-scale rupture to growing up, fundamentally shifting aspirations and possible pathways to adulthood. The precarious nature of life as a refugee makes forward planning and the accumulation of social and material assets difficult, interrupting the construction of adult lives.

The complexity of conditions and the variable ability of youth to cope with the practical and emotional demands of being a refugee mean that individual experiences differ across the participants involved in the research. While these young people face a number of common challenges, as explained below, transitions cannot be simplified as delayed or accelerated, but are constantly shifting across aspects of life as youth respond to changing patterns of responsibility and to opportunity and risk. In order to examine the dynamism of youth experiences, education, work/livelihoods and family life are considered, to identify the challenges and responses to growing up in contexts of protracted crises.

“I had a lot of plans when I came here, but after becoming a refugee, I lost all the hopes because you don’t see jobs and there is no education here. You live in sadness and you are always thinking of your future” (*Nala, 19 year-old Somali female, Nakivale*).

“I cannot talk about good things when I am a refugee. There is nothing good here” (*Louis, 20 year-old Congolese male, Kampala*).

## Education

Completing education is recognised by all research participants as vitally important, both as a symbolic marker of transition and as a prerequisite for obtaining quality employment. Most of the young people taking part in the research have experienced disrupted education: interrupted by conflict in their home country and because of difficulties in restarting school, and/or as a refugee in Uganda.

“I am not even able to go to school because he [brother] can’t go to the toilet alone or he can’t do anything for himself and he faints a lot” (*Amiir, 23 year-old Somali male, Nakivale*).

“I do not have money for school fees and my academic documents to not qualify me to get any job here” (*Renan, 15 year-old Congolese male, Kampala*).

While Uganda has a policy of free universal primary and secondary education for all children, including refugees, participation rates are low, with UNHCR reporting at the end of 2015 that around two-thirds of refugee children of primary school age were attending education, a rate that falls rapidly with just 5.5 per cent of secondary school age children attending school.<sup>49</sup> Youth reported a range of barriers that affected participation in education as a transition pathway, including:

- a loss of certificates – making it difficult to recommence education or compete for work;
- hidden costs – ‘fees’, uniform, equipment and travel can cost over 300,000 UGx (GBP£63) per year per child to attend primary school (see **Figure 3**);
- language barriers – Somali and Congolese children must learn English to actively participate in education;
- discrimination and harassment – from fellow pupils and teachers because of their refugee status, with girls reporting sexual harassment;
- home responsibilities – many have caring and work responsibilities that prevent regular attendance; and
- lack of school places – particularly in Nakivale there are insufficient primary and secondary school places available to meet demand.

The barriers to completing education have a significant impact on youth’s expectations for adult life and their self-esteem, with youth seeing their options curtailed because they were unable to complete education.

The research highlights that there are multiple implications for youth transitions associated with the limited access to and



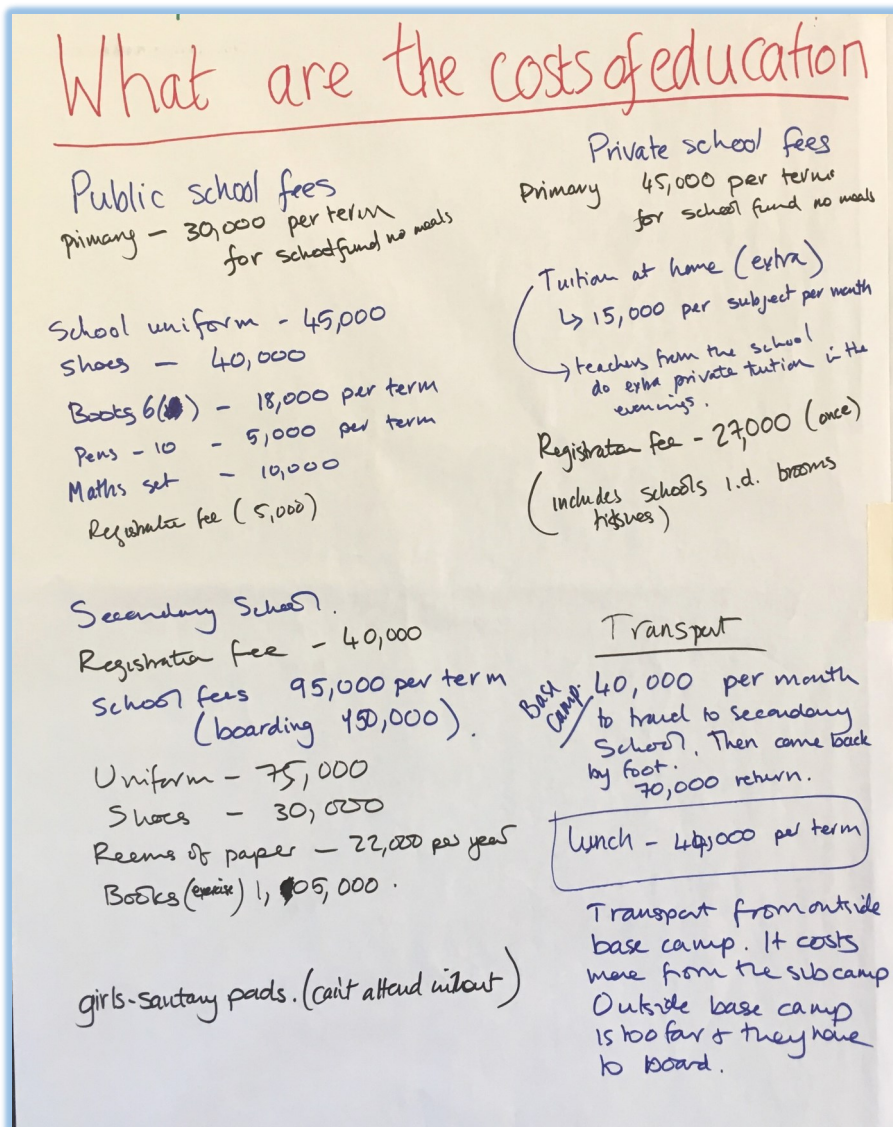


Figure 3: Workshop discussion, Nakivale, on costs of education.

participation in education. First is the role of education in how children and youth construct notions and plans for adult lives. Education is future oriented; it is a means to achieve goals and a signifier of stage-change. A Somali girl in Nakivale reflects on her inability to return to study saying: “I wanted to become someone with skills and get a job.”<sup>50</sup> Respondents commented how, before fleeing to Uganda, they were in school and expected to be able to complete education as a foundation for adult life.

The loss of this pathway opportunity undermines agency and can lead to low self-esteem: “I see myself as a useless person. I cannot be compared to those who have completed education.”<sup>51</sup> This type of response to not finishing education appears to lead to negative behaviours and higher risk decision making. For example, the lack of opportunity in Uganda is viewed by one young Somali as a justification for making a risky journey to illegally cross the Mediterranean.<sup>52</sup> Youth have expectations that becoming a refugee will open new opportunities for them to progress toward adulthood. Being a refugee is more than avoiding physical danger, but these additional expectations are in reality unavailable in Uganda.

The second area is the relationship between education and transition to work. The transition from school to work is firmly established as an important marker into an ‘adult world’. The challenges of participating in and completing education remove this important staging. A Somali youth comments “in order to work you need to be educated and I am not educated.”<sup>53</sup> Research respondents often feel that they have the ability to complete education, but the key barriers of cost, access and competing responsibilities limit their opportunities and their ability to realise their goals for adulthood.

A third implication underlines the gender aspects of education and particular implications for girls. Education provides a means to exercise a degree of influence over their futures and prepare for work and family life in adulthood that improves their financial prospects. Remaining in education for girls can be important in shaping the terms of transitions. Girls report that participation in education is often delayed where they have caring responsibilities in the home: “I did not continue my education because I was busy looking after the family [...] and now I don’t study.”<sup>54</sup> Refugee Law

Project research,<sup>55</sup> undertaken with girls in Kampala, underlines this issue in noting that when girls stop attending school, regardless of their age, they may face pressure from parents to marry as it may be easier for the family to find a husband than to meet the financial costs of school.

## Work and Livelihoods

The research captured the importance of accessing work as a key life stage towards economic independence and adulthood. In an African context, this transition is more complex than is typically found in literature reporting research from Europe or North America, as African families often expect children to contribute their unpaid or paid labour towards household income from a comparatively earlier age.<sup>56</sup> The focus given by research participants was on how becoming a refugee ruptured their expectations of adult careers and the unavailability of “good work.”

Participants highlighted a disparity between the generosity of the Refugee Act 2006, which provides unhindered access to the labour market and the reality where there is very limited opportunity for quality employment. The research identifies a range of important barriers that limit the ability of youth to

find pathways, through work, to establish adult lives that include:

- a lack of labour market opportunity – few formal jobs are available and refugees face competition from Ugandan nationals for vacancies;
- education and skills – incomplete school attendance, lost qualifications certificates and a lack of marketable skills;
- social connections – limited social relations with the host community restrict access to formal and informal jobs for refugees;
- discrimination – experienced in the recruitment process, with employers perceived as biased to Ugandan citizens; and
- language – the need to speak good English and Luganda to compete for work.

The experience of young people involved in the research, in common with many Ugandan nationals, is that there are few job opportunities available in the economy and as refugees they are restricted to low quality, poorly paid and unstable employment activity. Under pressure to contribute to family income or to meet their individual basic needs, youth can become trapped in a cycle of precarious employment activity or face exclusion from the economy.

“I am a living person and my brains and heart are still working and I don’t want to sit around and be like a tree; I want to be a person with goals and moving ahead” (*Filsan, 18 year-old Somali male, Nakivale*).

“The kinds of work that I can do are domestic work, restaurant work or selling in a shop [...] those are the jobs for uneducated people”. (*Louis, 20 year-old Congolese male, Kampala*).

“The problem I face here is a language barrier, there are no jobs, I do not work, I just sit at home and hunger all the time” (*Serge, 21 year-old Congolese male, Nakivale*).

The issue of “good work” was emphasised by participants, during the research, as being unavailable to refugees. Good work was defined as employment that offered a sufficient income, contract stability and acceptable conditions. More importantly, good work was activity that earned the person respect, was fulfilling and consistent with the ideals and ambitions held in childhood. The perceived ‘loss’ of potential to access professional careers as doctors, accountants, engineers and lawyers was synonymous with other losses associated with displacement. The importance of this is less about the realism of whether these young people were ever able to access such careers, but the impotence they felt in the loss of opportunity through becoming a refugee.

“I hope my children will get work in offices and get good jobs, but the kind of life for refugees pushes us to sweep people’s compounds, fetch water for people and do low jobs. All this does not make me happy” (*Julie, 24 year-old Congolese female, Nakivale*).

The perception of being unable to construct a future, ‘stuck’ as a refugee, pervades the thinking and decisions of young research participants. This has importance for transitions as these decisions are formative of both the person and the wider community. A key concern is the limitations that the perceived lack of options has on decision making. Refugees are encouraged by refugee agencies to become ‘self-reliant’, but this is a policy frame inherently problematic in situations where the local economy is unable to absorb the entry or enterprise activity of large numbers of refugees. With refugees under pressure to be “responsible entrepreneurial subjects in a climate of increasing isolation, marginalisation and poverty,”<sup>57</sup> policies of self-reliance may heighten a sense of frustration. For young people, it establishes an expectation that economic independence is possible and available as a refugee. However, the difficulty of accessing good work reinforces feelings of exclusion and failure of lost possibilities and delayed adulthood.

### Family Life

The third aspect of youth transitions, explored in Uganda, focused on issues of marriage and family formation. Marriage and parenthood are aspirations for young people as pillars of adult life and means of earning respect within the community. However, expected pathways to marriage are disrupted by being a refugee, in relation to changed economic circumstances, the loss of social connections and the impact of marriage on realising other life goals, including relocation to another country. It should be noted that only heteronormative explanations of marriage were given and no alternative family or relationships were raised by participants.



Beating crops, Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

The issues identified by youth research participants in Uganda included the following:

- cost – lack of money or other assets to meet dowry, the expense of wedding celebrations and concerns about the longer-term costs of raising a family;
- availability of a suitable match – difficulty identifying partners within the same tribal groups or a person with an acceptable financial status;
- implications for future choices – where marriage limits the realisation of other plans such as education and resettlement;
- experiences of discrimination – where choices are limited because the individual is a refugee; and
- general sense of instability – where marriage may worsen conditions for the individual and their new partners.

“When you’re married and when you’re single it’s not the same. Like when you are a married, people will respect you and you see you as a respected person and an adult” (*Uba, 20 year-old Somali female, Nakivale*).

Marriage is an indication showing that someone has started an adult life [...] I do not think of getting married without a job and having money, because I do not want my family to suffer.” (*Arthur, Congolese male, Kampala*).

Marriage and starting a family were viewed positively as life goals. When viewed through the experience of being a refugee, many of the interview respondents commented that getting married, and the associated financial and emotional responsibilities, was inconsistent with their current unstable circumstances. Marriage in some respects cements an acceptance of refugee life. Statements such as “when I have peace, I can get married”<sup>58</sup> and “I want to leave this country and after that, when I get enough money to raise children, that is when I want to get married”<sup>59</sup> were made throughout the research. Delay, in expectation of better opportunities and more stable lives, was a common response to marriage as a transition pathway.

Youth aspirations for marriage were strongly linked to the idea of building a foundation for adult life through the accumulation of financial assets such as a dowry, a partner with a stable income or good education and improved social standing. While there were some examples of marriage improving household income, more typically reflected those of a young Somali female: “because this is a refugee camp [Nakivale] you won’t see someone who is better than you financially.”<sup>60</sup> There are also institutional deterrents to marriage in the management of relocation waiting lists. An unmarried individual who is registered for relocation would

lose their ‘place’ should they have to re-register after getting married. This consequence was viewed as an important disincentive for youth in the research to marry.

Youth researchers identified negative consequences arising from delayed marriage for the transition to adulthood. In Nakivale and Kampala these included a lack of community respect for unmarried young people; rising dowry costs for older brides; reduced possibility of children – particularly where there is cultural pressure to have large families; increased possibility of pregnancy outside of marriage; and a general sense of family pressure and frustration. Marriage is important as a binding factor within society, with delays creating the potential for friction and discontent within communities that may have consequences for wider social relations.

## Gender Issues

Across the Ugandan data the responses of boys and girls were similar, with participants of both genders highlighting the broader conditions of being a refugee as more important than specific gender issues. There were however, a number of areas where participants identified gender based differences in experience.

The first issue relates to the socio-economic position of boys and girls. Data from the surveys showed a higher percentage of girls than boys had caring responsibilities in the family, 36 per cent compared to 20 per cent respectively. The overall of percentage of participants with caring responsibilities falls significantly to 16 per cent in the city, compared to 39 per cent in the camp. This may reflect higher levels of economic opportunity outside of the home among those resident in the city. The survey also indicates that a higher percentage of girls were dependent on family and friends as their primary source of income than boys (38 per cent compared to 15 per cent of boys). There were also gendering to the types of work roles, with girls undertaking cleaning and hairdressing and boys engaged in manual work and begging. Differences were also evident in the survey on savings, with 30 per cent of girls saving money compared to 18 per cent of boys, which may reflect both additional responsibility in the home to manage money given to girls and also efforts to reduce financial dependency on family members.

Expectations about the future were similar among boys and girls across the Uganda research. Pathways that included education, work and family registered as equally important, however there were differences in some specific challenges experienced. During workshop discussions, girls highlighted sex discrimination in both education and the workplace as a key barrier to participation that affected transition. Cultural differences within refugee communities were also highlighted: “being a girl can make you to be looked down on [...] as you



know Somali people don't take girls to school and boys are the only ones who are taken to school."<sup>61</sup> In education, girls also noted the additional costs and stigma associated with menstruation, with the costs of sanitary pads and the lack of secure toilets facilities impacting on attendance at school.

In respect to marriage boys and girls had differing ideas in respect to the primary barriers to marriage. Boys identified cost as being a key reason for delayed marriage, whereas girls highlighted the difficulty of obtaining a suitable match. The consequences however, were similar, as indicated above, affecting social status and family formation.

### Cross-Cutting Issues

Data from Uganda suggests a deep sense of frustration among refugee youth who are coping with the traumatic experience of displacement, broken expectations of adulthood and uncertain futures. While there is a constrained form of agency evident in the decisions that young people are making about their adult lives, poor access to education, poverty driven by limited labour market opportunity and low self-esteem in being a refugee fundamentally affects transitions to adulthood.

In addition to the thematic issues of education, work/livelihoods and family life summarised above, there are cross-cutting challenges important in different aspects of life and experience that affect transitions.

- Discrimination – affects how youth feel about themselves and how they shape their social relations. Young participants in the research feel that “people look at refugees as a no-body and a person without value.”<sup>62</sup> Somalis are accused of being al-Shabab, even though these young people have been terrorised and caused to leave their homes by this group. Discrimination limits the prospects of integration and the confidence of youth to create adult lives.
- Belonging and identity – young adulthood is a period when youth solidify their sense of self, but being a refugee in Uganda can overwhelm the creation of identity. A young person commented: “being a refugee is bigger than your Somali name.”<sup>63</sup> The lack of a sense of connection with Uganda and the limited options of return, leads to feelings of illegitimacy and alienation: “I do not have a place, I am lost and I do not know where my home is.”<sup>64</sup> This appears to lead to decisions that may include illegal migration to Europe as a way to exercise some sense of control.

While the policy conditions in Uganda offer a model for other countries responding to large influx of refugees, there is clearly a gap between stated rights and real experience. These conditions shape the way in which interlocking pathways to adulthood are manifest for youth growing up in Uganda.

## 4. JORDAN KEY FINDINGS

### Context

Jordan has hosted successive waves of refugee populations almost since its formation as a state in 1946. Palestinians from the Arab–Israeli conflict in 1948 and 1967; refugees from Iraq since 2003 and subsequent sectarian violence and instability; refugees fleeing conflict in Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia; and the current large-scale and on-going conflict in Syria since 2011. In a country with a population of some 9.5 million people,<sup>65</sup> Jordan hosts 659,593 Syrians registered with UNHCR,<sup>66</sup> in a total population of Syrians that the Government of Jordan estimates at around 1.26 million.<sup>67</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) identifies more than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees resident in Jordan.<sup>68</sup> There are currently 63,024 Iraqis registered by UNHCR in Jordan,<sup>69</sup> forming part of a larger Iraqi population estimated at 130,000, including those who are resident but not registered with UN agencies.<sup>70</sup>

Refugee populations in Jordan are concentrated in the north of the country, with the majority resident in the Amman, Zarqa and Irbid Governorates (see **Figures 4a and 4b**). There are established camps for Palestinian and Syrian refugees that are managed by UNRWA and UNHCR respectively. UNRWA operates ten official camps providing education, health and support services. These camps form part of urban areas, with open boundaries. Syrians have facilities in three camps, the largest and first established being Za'atari in the Mafraq province. The Syrian camps, which house just 21.4 per cent of Syrian refugees, have controlled access and exit, with services provided on site by UNHCR and a co-ordinated network of national and international agencies. Iraqi refugee populations do not have camps and are integrated within urban areas – primarily Amman and Zarqa. Across all groups, a majority of refugees in Jordan are resident outside of camps.

Jordan has a long track record of providing safe refuge for people fleeing violence and conflict in the region. Yet Jordan does not have a specific statutory framework defining the status and rights of refugees and to date the Government has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol (Refugee Convention). The lack of a legal platform, such as adopted in Uganda, has the advantage of enabling Jordan to position its response to refugee crises within complex regional politics, although this has resulted in a patchwork of regulations that can lack clarity and can be perceived as unfair by refugee groups. While institutional conditions are in some respects problematic, Jordan is exemplary in the way in which it accommodates refugees, despite the difficulties and additional costs it creates for the national economy.

The publication of the Jordan Compact, from the London Conference<sup>72</sup> on supporting Syria, held in February 2016, provides an important structure to focus assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan. The Compact aims to integrate donor investment (particularly in education, skills and employment) with the broader economic development of Jordan as a way to stimulate growth and improve opportunities for refugees and the Jordanian host community. The Compact adds to the existing institutional arrangements, supporting refugees by recognising the overlap between humanitarian and development assistance in contexts of protracted displacement.

While Jordan provides a vital place of refuge and stability within a volatile region, the effects of displacement have implications on the conditions and experiences of refugees. Case studies from the literature on Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in Jordan report the following key challenges.

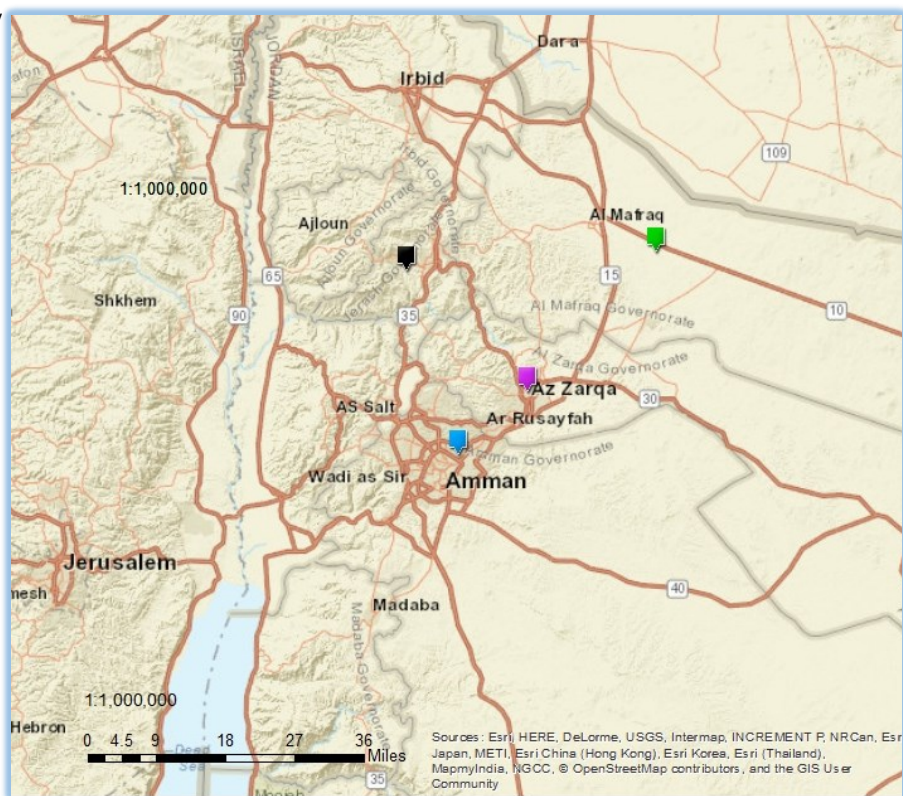
- Low education participation and attainment – Syrians are reported to have high dropout rates from education and a low progression rate from primary to secondary school.<sup>73</sup>
- Limited labour market access – the majority of Syrian and Iraqi workers are engaged in informal economic activity, characterised by low pay and poor working conditions.<sup>74</sup>
- Poverty – Palestinians originally from Gaza are amongst the poorest people in Jordan, whose vulnerability is exacerbated by their legal status as ‘foreigners’ which severely limits work and educational opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

### Youth Transitions in Jordan

The three refugee communities engaged in Jordan have different experiences of becoming and living as refugees that shape their everyday experiences and their expectations of adult life. For Iraqi and Syrian participants, the traumatic experiences of displacement are recent and directly affects their behaviour and decisions. For Palestinians from Gaza, becoming a refugee is an historic event which affected parents or grandparents, but is maintained as fact in the



**Figure 4a:** Map showing Jordan research sites within surrounding geographical context; key below. Scale: 1:10,000,000. Source: ESRI/ArcMaps.



**Figure 4b:** Map showing Jordan research sites: ■ Jerash Camp; ■ East Amman; ■ Zarqa and ■ Za'atari. Scale: 1:1,000,000. Source: ESRI/ArcMaps.

but is maintained as fact in the present through cultural identity, a fractured sense of belonging and a lack of full citizenship rights in Jordan.

The opportunities for transition to adulthood, as a refugee in Jordan, become defined through engagement with institutional conditions that determine access to education, work and social relations. While there is a deep sense of appreciation of the safety and support provided in Jordan, participants in the research also describe how being a refugee curtails future options: imagined adult lives must be recast within the realities of being a refugee.

“When you live in a place that allows you to develop your talents and develop your future plans, you would be able to achieve your goal. But when it doesn’t, like the camp, and when you are invisible in the society, then your future would be lost” (*Thaer, 16 year-old Palestinian male, Gaza Camp Jerash*).

“My life changed drastically. I turned from being a citizen in my country to a refugee in another. I had my home, my village and my town. Suddenly everything has changed. I am now a refugee living in a tent in the desert” (*Shayma, 18 year-old Syrian female, Za’atari*).

To explore the experiences and perspectives of refugees, issues of education, work/livelihoods and family life are examined to highlight the challenges of growing up in a context of protracted crisis.

## Education

Education was considered very important by research participants in shaping possibilities of adult life. For Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the experience of sudden displacement and inability to recommence education at the same grade they had left in their home country was a major source of frustration. An Iraqi participant commented: “It ruined our future, all these years we wasted without education because of asylum.”<sup>76</sup> For Gazan Palestinians, issues with the quality of education and the restrictions placed on areas of study and professional careers affected decision making. A Palestinian participant said: “a class has a minimum of 50 students. It’s overcrowded, so the teacher cannot engage all students in the lesson.”<sup>77</sup>

Refugees in Jordan have access to education, with varying levels of support and subsidy. Syrians have dedicated schools provided in camps (including Za’atari) and the costs of education fees and textbooks are met by UNHCR for those outside of the camp. Syrians also have access to informal NGO funded education catch-up and life skills training. UNRWA provides free education, up to grade 10, with Palestinians

transferring to Jordanian state schools for year 11 and 12 and Tawjihi examinations.<sup>78</sup> Iraqi children have free access to government primary and secondary schools, although reports indicate that there are issues of low enrolment and attendance due to costs, bullying and a sense that residence in Jordan is temporary leading to low motivation to continue education.<sup>79</sup>

While education provision is made available, research participants highlighted important barriers that affected education participation and achievement and the transition into adult life, which included the following:

- loss of documentation – Syrian and Iraqi pupils were unable to demonstrate previous attainment and enter the correct school grade;
- quality of provision – the two shift system in schools (Syrians take the second shift when teachers are exhausted), poor quality learning environments and overstretched teaching staff affected pupil achievement;
- limited subject choice – restrictions on study areas for all refugee groups impacted on their motivation to participate in education.
- costs and access to higher education – fees and system of competition for places disadvantages refugee youth; and
- family commitments – caring and work responsibilities in the home restrict participation in education.

“I lost all hope without my education. It felt like having a bleak and unknown future” (*Nasim, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa*).

“We stop pursuing our education after the tenth grade, because we know that we are not going to be doctors or engineers” (*Maysam, 18 year-old Palestinian female, Gaza Camp Jerash*).

The experience of education is formative and the data suggest that it has two specific implications for youth transition in Jordan. First, it contributes to the construction of self-esteem, with failures and restrictions affecting self-worth and plans for the future. An Iraqi participant compares his experience of education with that of family members who have remained in Iraq: “my people who have stayed in Iraq, like my cousin as an example, some of them have already graduated. But for me I am still studying at home.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, a Syrian girl states: “I wanted to continue my education and be like the other girls. [...] But I cannot do this now because we are a family. I have to work selling vegetables to support my family so we can live.”<sup>81</sup> Given the importance assigned to education as a means of realising ambitions for adult life, failure to attain education goals have a wider impact on emotional wellbeing and decision making.





UNRWA Secondary School, Gaza Camp Jerash.

A second and related issue in Jordan is the effect of education in creating periods of waiting and delayed transition, as youth attempt to realise education goals. This is particularly evident among Gazan Palestinian participants discussing higher education. The combined effect of restrictions placed on professional career routes, unaffordable fees, the small number of scholarships available and lack of national ID make accessing university courses difficult: “as a refugee, I can’t major in a specific field because I know that I wouldn’t be able to find a job in it.”<sup>82</sup> In order to qualify for a small number of scholarships, many young people retake examinations multiple times in order to improve their grades and more effectively compete for university spaces within the Gazan Palestinian quota. The Youth Researchers note that this system creates a deep sense of injustice and frustration and tensions within the family, particularly for boys who are traditionally expected to make a contribution to household income.

## Work and Livelihoods

The progression into work was viewed as a vitally important step towards adulthood, but one that is severely restricted by regulations governing labour market access and movement. As found in Uganda, obtaining work has multiple implications for youth transitions that affect social status, the ability of individuals to make a contribution to the income and wellbeing of the family and as a means of demonstrating independence. A young Syrian commented “I feel disappointed because I am not able to meet my own demands independently and neither the demands of the house. I feel utter sadness because I am unable to do so.”<sup>83</sup> The ability to realise an adult future through career choice and quality employment has important implications for self-esteem and sense of efficacy.

Participants in Jordan saw the institutional constraints as the primary barrier to securing “good work”. Across all three refugee groups, regulation acted as a barrier to choice of employment pathway and labour market participation, with restrictions contributing to under/unemployment among

young people and a wider sense of alienation from mainstream Jordanian society. While recent changes have been put in place to expand access to work permits for Syrian refugees, the effects of new rules and clear information about the implications of changes appear slow to reach refugee communities. Additionally, there are a number of specific barriers identified by participants during the research.

- Restrictions to sectors of employment – Syrians are only able to access work in agriculture, construction and service industries typically in low skill occupations, regardless of their qualifications and experience.
- Lack of national ID number – Gazan Palestinians are excluded from professions because they lack national ID numbers or face additional exclusions on security grounds from employment in public services or around airports.
- Discrimination and exploitation – refugees are forced to accept low pay and poor working conditions and may be required to pay bribes to employers in order to secure support for work permits.

The difficulties in obtaining approved work and the limitations in opportunity are an incentive for youth to engage in informal employment, thereby increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and the negative consequences of working illegally. “I am afraid of being caught by the labour office... I will be working undercover so that I will not attract attention... and risk the possibility of being investigated.”<sup>85</sup> For youth transitions, precarious and low paid work does little to reinforce a sense of belonging or remove stresses associated with risks of arrest or deportation. Employment where individuals are able to obtain work permits has wider wellbeing benefits, as found by ILO,<sup>86</sup> that contribute a sense of stability and legitimacy absent from informal activity.

“If you go to a job interview they ask you about your nationality and national number, if you say you don’t have it your chance of work is less than if you were a Jordanian” (*Thaer, 16 year-old Palestinian male, Gaza Camp Jerash*).

“I am not allowed to work in anything ... or as a cleaner or something like that” (*Adnan, 17 year-old Syrian male, E. Amman*).

“We cannot work and we cannot learn a tradecraft. If you end up working at some place, the employer will shower you with insults and will exploit you because you are Iraqi” (*Milad, 19 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa*).

Work opportunity is further restricted in the Syrian camps to short term contracts with NGO and service provider organisations. Participants reported both high levels of

competition for employment in the camps and the limitations placed on refugees, who were restricted to working as ‘assistants’ for a fraction of the pay of non-refugee workers. Disparity in pay was applied regardless of the qualifications held by the refugee. The regulations governing permitted work encourages young people to search for income outside the camp: “...of course there is a risk to work outside of the camp without a permit [...] So I left the camp and worked for around two to three months, and I didn’t stop working, but the treatment was bad in general.”<sup>87</sup> This reflects the tensions experienced by youth who have a desire to build their economic independence, but are fixed in contexts where many pathways are blocked; creating a growing sense of frustration.

## Family Life

Youth transition through marriage and family life was viewed by all participants in Jordan as a key aspect of becoming, and being recognised as, an adult. For both boys and girls involved in the research, heteronormative marriage is perceived as a marker of maturity, a form of religious observation and a point where youth broaden their responsibilities within the community. While very important, participants identified barriers that affect the ability to marry and establish their own families.

- Costs – that include dowry and wedding fees can be unaffordable in situations where refugees have low or unstable incomes.
- Negative attitudes towards refugees – discrimination limits marriage options to others within the same community.
- Lack of assets and stability – inability to provide a house, material assets or demonstrate stable forms of employment delay marriage.
- Closing off of other possibilities – reluctance to marry where individuals are still pursuing education options or are seeking relocation.

“It’s a big step. If one doesn’t have a job it is not possible to get married and establish a family” (*Zain, 20 year-old Syrian male, Za’atari*).

“The idea of marriage and having children makes the youth think seriously about their future. Every young man should put some serious thought into it” (*Nasim, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa*).

Additionally, bureaucratic barriers were also identified by some of the participants in relation to their formal status in Jordan. Iraqis for example have difficulty in obtaining marriage contracts if they have accumulated fines for overstaying their entry visa: “the marriage contract will not be written if you haven’t paid the fines that you owe”. Also for

Gazan Palestinians, participants noted the difficulty in obtaining title for a house as a barrier to realising a suitable match.

Marriage is further complicated in the context of displacement in Jordan, with reports of rising levels of early marriage among Syrians<sup>89</sup> and more generally marriage being used instrumentally by families as a way to advance or protect their position, for example marriage to Jordanians to avoid deportation. A Syrian participant noted: “some are getting married only to get a caravan or a visa or so on. Others have given their children in marriage so they cannot return to Syria.”<sup>90</sup>

Concerns about the costs and the instability of life are expressed by participants. An Iraqi male comments “why should I drag her down with me? I cannot settle down right now.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, “marriage is related to work, because marriage without money isn’t possible. No one would give you their daughter without money and I wouldn’t accept proposing to a girl in such a situation.”<sup>92</sup> The financial costs and implications of marriage and family are reported as a key barrier to family life as a transition pathway.

Research participants identify mixed positive and negative implications for youth transitions and social relations arising from delays to marriage. Later marriage for boys is seen as having some benefits in allowing them to have freedom for a longer time, to mature and make choices about adult life. There are negative aspects including not obtaining the respect of the community and having a feeling of missing out on something important. For girls however, later marriage provides opportunities to complete education that would otherwise be curtailed within marriage.

## Gender Issues

Research in Jordan, similar to findings in Uganda, suggest that wider conditions of being a refugee were more important for transition to adulthood than specific gender issues. However, in Jordan participants highlighted that gender expectations were strongly influenced by cultural norms in relation to issues of education, work and marriage. Jordan has one of the lowest rates of female labour force participation in the world according to a recent study. Across the research the word ‘appropriate’ was frequently used when participants were describing and seeking to define the activities of girls. On work and livelihoods, gender issues were raised in relation to types of work but also more specifically because of concerns about safety, as one girl states: “the obstacle is the distance from home to the place I am going to, I can’t go, my family doesn’t allow me to go out, they are afraid to let me out”. Pressure is placed on girls by male family members not to work: “it is good [in Gaza Camp], but we are under pressure. Girls are not allowed to work because it is considered inappropriate”.



Female participants in Jordan collecting visual story map data.

The impact of cultural restrictions on access to work is also reflected in the high percentage of girls that are dependent on family and friends for their primary source of income at 66 per cent compared to boys at 48 per cent. Survey data indicates that overall, girls have limited participation in the labour market compared to boys and are involved in a narrower set of income earning activities.

Consistent with cultural norms, marriage is given high importance among participants in Jordan. Similar to Uganda, key barriers to marriage differ between boys and girls, with girls concerned about constraints that limit a good match and boys about cost and their ability to provide a home for their family. Additional emphasis was placed on marriage for girls as a way to obtain stability and reduce costs on their parents. A Syrian participant in Za'atari commented: "generally girls are better off getting married. Much better."<sup>96</sup> Marriage is seen as a way to avoid verbal insults within the Syrian community, as being married gives status and removes the stigma of being a "camp-girl."<sup>97</sup>

During workshop discussions, it was noted that Syrian girls had concerns about gender based violence. This related both to issues of physical safety of girls within camp and urban settings and also psychosocial harm that was being created when girls are forced into marriage as a family response to low household incomes. Comments also highlighted the growing sense of frustration among girls associated with experiences of exclusion from education and work.

## Cross-Cutting Issues

The responses of young people reported in this research show gratitude for the safety they have found in Jordan, but also a deep sense of frustration about their status as refugees and the rules that govern their everyday life. As found in Uganda, becoming a refugee is a transformative process where young people lose many of the social and material assets they would have expected to rely on as they enter adulthood and have to reimagine new futures in very different contexts. For young refugees the transition to adulthood requires reconciling expectations grounded in the past with the realities of poverty and exclusion that shape opportunities in the future.

The 'temporary' character of being a refugee also creates uncertainty that pervades planning and decision making about adult life. "When we came here we used to say that we were going back to Syria every week. We kept saying that we were going back and we haven't until now. Four years and we didn't go back."<sup>98</sup> Waiting for certainty is an endemic condition of being a refugee that affects the shape and possibilities of adult life.

Cutting across the specific issues of education, work/ livelihoods and family life discussed above, there are also important issues about belonging and identity and the experience of discrimination.

- **Belonging and identity** – participants noted the tension created by their status as refugees in building an identity. For Gazan Palestinians, who were born in Jordan: "I don't have a nationality and not having a nationality in the country where I live as a refugee forces me to be treated as a foreigner."<sup>99</sup> Participants noted that they retained a cultural attachment to their home country, but also felt a sense of disconnection: "you no longer feel that you belong to a place, a society or to the country."<sup>100</sup> The assigned identity of being a refugee comes to dominate everyday life.
- **Discrimination** – participants in the research report a mixed experience of discrimination in Jordan. Because of the shared Arabic language and cultures, refugees and Jordanian nationals blend more easily than was found in Uganda. But there are specific incidences of discrimination reported in the workplace: "you are going to be blamed no matter what you do actually, because you are a refugee"<sup>101</sup>; due to where refugees live, with perceptions that "Gaza camp is full of bad boys"<sup>102</sup>; and a feeling of being different, "when I walk in the street I am afraid of how people look at me. They give me this refugee look."<sup>103</sup>

The key challenge in Jordan is the way that institutional conditions embed difference across a range of economic and social spheres. These affect identity formation and shape the available pathways into adulthood for all refugee groups.



## 5. RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

### Introduction

Sections 3 and 4 have explored in detail the findings emerging from the research in relation to specific pathways and experiences for refugee youth growing up in Uganda and Jordan. In this section, specific cross-cutting themes are drawn out from the case studies and countries.

### Factors Affecting Transition

Analysis of data collected in Jordan and Uganda suggest that there are four conditional factors that shape the transitions of youth into adulthood: the lasting traumatic experience of displacement; the temporal effects of lives lived on a ‘temporary’ basis; limits to the formation of social relations; and the institutional conditions that govern everyday life. Each of these issues is now examined, drawing from the research data.

#### Traumatic experience – becoming and being a refugee

The effects of often violent displacement, loss of socio-cultural ties and disrupted plans for the future (real, imagined, or remembered) are evident across the data. While the impact of traumatic experiences manifest differently among participants, in relation to the specific circumstances of becoming a refugee, it appears to have a lasting effect on the construction of self-esteem. Young people report a sense of alienation “I am not like the rest of the people”<sup>104</sup> and difference that prevents them earning respect: “even if I become a tycoon, I cannot be respected by other people.”<sup>105</sup> While many participants expressed relief in being safe from physical harm, there was a clear sense that being a refugee was a partial or impaired life, with expectations about the routes into adulthood broken in the process of becoming displaced. This experience creates feelings of disorientation and a loss of identity that pervade all aspects of life.

A consequence of this is a loss of the efficacy that children expect to have as they become young adults. Data from focus group discussions with 10-14 year olds show that adulthood is viewed as a time of agency when individuals can “understand what you are doing and why you are doing it”<sup>106</sup>; to have control and “pass through difficult situations and challenge them”<sup>107</sup>; and a time of responsibility, “it means that you can take care of your family.”<sup>108</sup> Older youth however articulate a lack of agency into adulthood and an inability to realise the degree of autonomy they would have expected: “yesterday you were an independent person and today you feel like you depend on others.”<sup>109</sup>

Across the research, being a refugee is experienced both through violence at the time of displacement and the continued loss of expected futures: “I am not sure if I will be

the kind of person that I wanted to be in the future.”<sup>110</sup> While many young people demonstrate resilience in building adult futures, as illustrated in the individual story maps, despite their experiences, there appears to be a significant need for psychosocial counselling services to enable young people to cope with their experiences and to rebuild confidence about attaining future adult lives.

#### Temporal – ‘temporary’ lives of refugees

Despite the lengthening average period of protracted crises, the notion of temporariness remains central to humanitarian policy and is also evident in decisions of young participants involved in this research. Young people understand being a refugee as a short term status that will be resolved through a return home, permanent resettlement or obtaining citizenship in the host country. Focusing on an imagined future is a way to cope with the immediate challenges of being a refugee: “if I leave this refugee life and reach somewhere good, I believe I can be someone good and independent and leave this life where people look down on you.”<sup>111</sup> It also provides a justification for short term decision making that maintains the hope of a resolution to displacement, to a future point when adult life can ‘really’ begin.

The data does indicate some ambiguity in thinking, with a majority of survey respondents in Uganda and in Jordan (78 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) indicating that they expected to remain as refugees in 12 months. This suggests a realistic understanding of the nature of protracted crises, but also an indication of how youth frame decisions in the present in relation to an imagined future. The significance of this for transitions is delay in pathways including education: “I did not continue because I was hoping for a resettlement”<sup>112</sup> and marriage: “I cannot get married when I have no peace. When I have peace I can get married.”<sup>113</sup>

The research does however also suggest how repeated delays and disappointments are a cause of frustration that may lead to more risky behaviours. Somali youth in Uganda discuss travelling illegally to Europe as a way to realise their ambitions for adulthood to obtain work and support their families. In Jordan, obtaining informal employment is a way to earn an income and circumvent legal restrictions on work. A key issue for youth transitions is recognising the significance of a culture of temporariness in contexts where young refugees can expect to grow up as a displaced person. The combined effect of short term action, both in policy and in individual decision making, can limit the full potential of adult lives lived as a refugee.

#### Social relations – importance of networks

A third issue affecting transitions that emerges from the data is the formation of social relations. A number of factors affect the ability and the willingness of refugees to form social bonds

both within their own communities and with citizens of the host country. Refugee status creates a particular category of difference that participants in the research identified as important in determining how they feel about themselves and how they are treated. In both Uganda and Jordan young people had direct experience of discrimination that affected participation in education, work and in making a suitable marriage.

These negative experiences influence the pathways that appear available to young people and the decisions they make about their future. Somalis in Uganda restrict their involvement with the host community because of discrimination: “every Somali person they see they tell them that they are al-Shabab.”<sup>114</sup> Marriage is difficult outside of the refugee group, with for example an Iraqi young person citing sectarian discrimination because he is a Shiite Muslim.<sup>115</sup> In the workplace refugees in Uganda are restricted to low status jobs, with ‘good work’ informally reserved for ‘nationals’.<sup>116</sup>

Integration is further curtailed by the lack of social connections in the host population. “If you are a refugee in a foreign country and you don’t know anyone here and you can’t do anything for yourself.”<sup>117</sup> The lack of social networks has particular importance for transitions, as it creates an initial barrier to information about work opportunities or sources of capital for investment. The lack of social networks in host communities places greater reliance on mutual support within refugee groups. This is perhaps most evident among Somalis in Uganda who due to language and cultural differences and experience of discrimination rely on other Somalis inside and outside of Uganda. While this may be understandable in contexts where there is discrimination and few opportunities, it restricts integration and narrows the options available for transition.

### **Institutional conditions – navigating rules**

The final issue that is important across both research contexts is the effect of institutional conditions – the rules and regulations that determine rights and govern everyday life. While the institutional conditions in Uganda and Jordan are quite different, the research shows that young refugees share many of the same challenges in their transitions to adulthood. Laws applying to refugees shape the landscape of what is possible, with youth navigating pathways to adulthood around existing rules.

The effects of institutional conditions on transitions can be observed by considering access to work and livelihoods. As described in the country analysis, research participants identified difficulties in accessing ‘good work’ as a key concern that limits both career development and income. In Uganda the Refugee Act 2006 guarantees that refugees have equal

access to the labour market. However, in practice weak economic conditions, competition with Ugandans for jobs alongside specific barriers of language, skills and discrimination mean that young people are restricted to low quality or informal employment. In Jordan by comparison, labour market access is highly regulated through a patchwork of rules for different groups, where refugees have no automatic right to employment without work permits. While economic conditions are stronger than Uganda, young refugees in Jordan also have limited access to quality work, with Syrians and Iraqis relying on informal employment and Gazan Palestinians prevented from working in certain professions and public sector roles.

The effect of institutional conditions also has a more subtle impact on how young people understand their social status and construct plans for the future. In Jordan a participant comments that due to the legal requirements “I am not completely free to plan for my future.”<sup>118</sup> In Uganda a participant noted that being a refugee means “not being able to achieve all the plans that I had.”<sup>119</sup> Legal status and social position define available options and the decisions that young people take in their pathways to adult life.

### **Markers of Difference**

In general the research highlights that the condition of being a refugee had a much greater holistic impact on youth transitions than any particular markers of social difference for young people. As a participant in Kampala states: “it is not about religion or gender. It is all about the identity that we have. [...] We refugees are taken as inferior, they treat us like we are inhuman.” (Jean, a 23-year-old Congolese male in Kampala).

While Jean’s point is clear, and the analysis throughout this report supports his view, there are nuances in experience due to markers of difference. Young people are still affected in marginally different ways, based on age, gender, national group and location.

With respect to age, those in the 10-14 years range had more aspirational dreams for future adulthood than those who were older. The research highlighted that those aged 15-24 (youth), were more likely to think of undertaking livelihood strategies for survival rather than the younger participants who had expectations of being able to access professional careers. Younger participants were more positive than those who had aged and were beginning to think beyond educational transitions towards livelihoods and family life. Daahir participated in the story map, and his story illustrates this well. Following the traumatic experience of becoming a refugee, he was injured en route and his education was disrupted, other aspects of his aspirations for adulthood have been affected.

“Sometimes I need to go out [of the classroom] because of the heat, because of the injury on my head. So sometimes I can’t stay in the classroom. ... [And in Somalia] I was so motivated to learn more, but now I’m becoming older, I’m becoming an adult; being a refugee is a problem.” (*Daahir, 16 year-old Somali male, Kampala*).

The research also highlighted that transitions are protracted in the same way as refugee status, with young people remaining single longer than cultural norms dictate due to inability to achieve educational and livelihood goals. Most young people felt that this process was limiting their social status within communities.

Similarly, few gender and national group differences emerged in terms of transition experience. Both young men and women valued education and establishing a livelihood and future family life. The research does indicate some differences in gender experiences in areas such as caring, with girls taking on additional responsibilities in the homes; gender discrimination and restrictions on access to work, particularly for Somali women in Uganda whose religion and dress code made them more obviously stand out as refugees; and on marriage on issues such as age where the idea age for girls to marry was younger than for boys. While there were no overriding gender issues, the research does indicate pressure on girls to both conform to cultural norms while also taking on new or early responsibilities to support the family, which adds to the frustration of being a refugee.

Returning to the case studies as detailed in the story map, Alima’s experience of being a Palestinian refugee and female, has resulted in stricter limitations placed on her. She notes that her community is conservative and that because they are outside Palestine, her father is even more protective of her. This has limited her options for education and work: “The Palestinian community is very conservative. More than is necessary. Girls are not allowed to come and go... the priority for her is to get married. It’s better for her to get married and sit at home; that’s the best thing for her.... and all of this is related to the culture of shame.” (*Alima, 19 year-old female Palestinian refugee, Jerash, Jordan*).

Minor differences in experience can also be identified based on whether youth live in a camp or an urban setting. While the research suggests that location has limited impact on transitions, there were differences for example in education, with cities offering better access than was available in camps. Further, the remoteness of some camps (regardless of actual physical proximity to the city), meant that young people only

“I used to think it is only us Palestinians and this is our community here. I didn’t know we were living in Jordan.” (*Najeeb, 16 year-old Palestinian male refugee, Jordan*).



Mosque in Jerash, photograph taken by research participant Najeeb for his story map.

became aware of services and opportunities available to them once they were able to leave the camp.

However, other than Syrian youth based in Za’atari camp in Jordan, young people were able to freely move around and so access to additional opportunities existed. Indeed Palestinian youth in Jerash (Gaza Camp), although initially confined to the camp primary school, discussed attending high school and further education/employment outside the camp boundaries, as Najeeb’s story in the [story map](#) demonstrates. In Uganda, youth move between camp settlement and city on a regular basis. They may live in Nakivale and periodically travel to Kampala to look for work, attend education or visit relatives and friends. Also youth live in Kampala and travel to Nakivale for registration, to collect food aid, or visit relatives and friends.

Additional markers of vulnerability such as disability and sexuality did not emerge strongly through the research. Some participants reported how injuries and disabilities obtained as they fled conflict had a debilitating impact on their lives and wellbeing – see the story maps for an illustration of this. Participants also noted how caring for other family members with disabilities created additional challenges in limiting the transition pathways available to them. Issues of sexuality were not raised by participants, as would be expected given the conservative character of Uganda and Jordan.



## Conceptual Implications

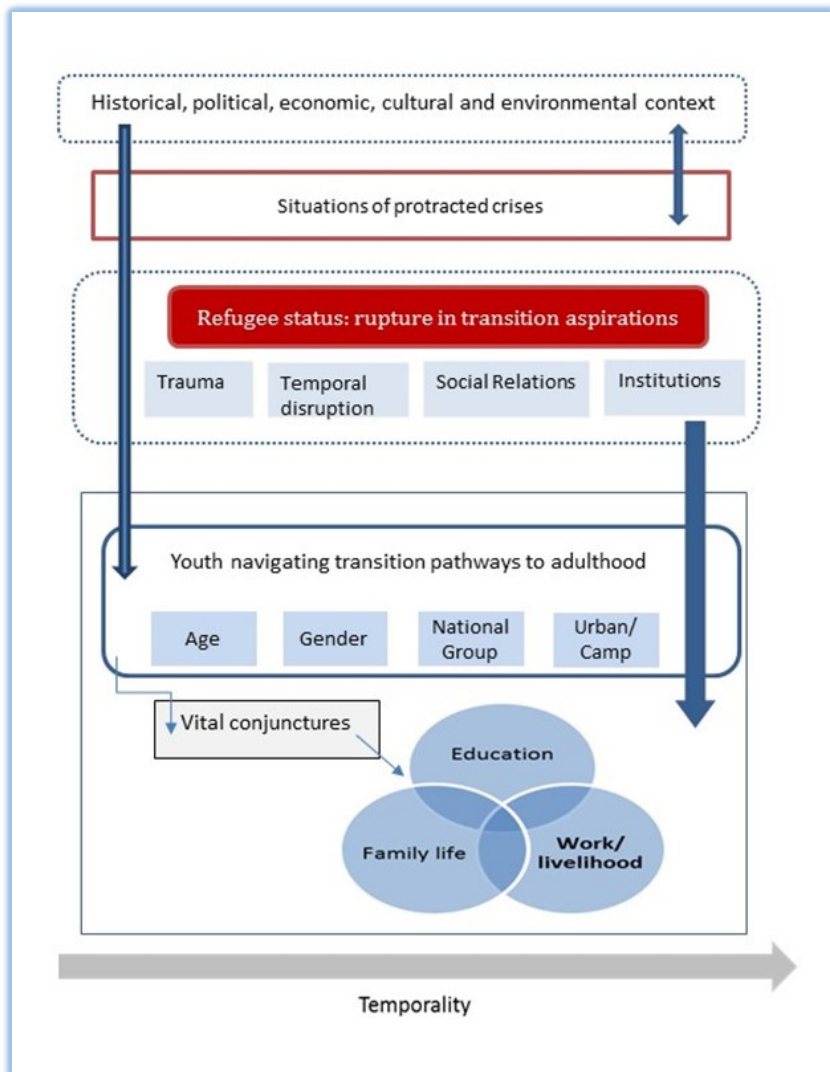
The relatively minor differences in experiences drawn out across markers of difference in this research, and the much greater impact of refugee status, and the associated conditional factors, on youth transitions to adulthood has implications for the way in which youth transitions are conceptualised and theoretically applied. This research demonstrates the need to explore youth transitions from a holistic perspective for refugees, offering some interesting insights that have been overlooked in youth transitions research. Where previous research has noted the complexity of transition experiences (see section 1), there has tended to be a focus on either individual pathways (work or education) or on particular facets of young people’s lives, especially where a change or vital juncture has occurred. Not belittling the importance of such critical moments, the experiences of refugees cannot be confined by this concept. Instead, this research advocates for the need to consider rupture in transition journeys for youth as elaborated in **Figure 5**.

This revised conceptual model highlights the rupturing of the whole transition experience for young refugees. Beyond a vital juncture affecting one aspect of young people’s life (such as death of a parent, or pregnancy), young refugees’ entire journey towards adulthood has been affected in a large-scale way through a simultaneous shift across all potential transition pathways.

“Being a refugee has affected my plans, I have been taken backwards [...] I returned to zero. I am like a young child starting afresh with life.” (*Arthur, Congolese male, Uganda*).

“... here in Jordan and although the people have been great ... it’s not like the help you get from your family. I mean you can say that future plans have failed already, that means there is no future!” (*Samer, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa*).

The overwhelming experience of becoming a refugee is shown to transform aspirations and shape the direction of young people’s potential pathways. To illustrate the strength of the impact of such a rupture, and its conditional effects, this rupture has been introduced to the conceptual model situated between the general context within which a young person grows up and his/her transition experience.



**Figure 5:** Refugee status as a rupture in transitions.

In addition to the impact of a rupture, the revised model also demonstrates that transition pathways cannot be conceptualised independently but are integrated through each young person’s experience. The findings presented throughout this report illustrate that each of the individual pathways are integrally connected. For example, education and family life are affected by livelihoods and vice versa. The lower part of the revised model more clearly demonstrates this integration, but also highlights that work and livelihoods have a stronger significance as enabling other pathways such as marriage (or indeed are dependent on the completion of education). For this reason work/livelihoods is more prominent and overlaps with education and family life. The research has indicated the important connections between context and pathways and that acceleration along one path cannot compensate for delays in other paths. Although nuances do exist related to location, age, gender and other markers of difference, which remain in the model; of greater critical significance to the outcomes for young people who grow up in protracted crises is the impact of being a refugee on aspirations for adult life.

## Country Contexts

While the research was not set up to directly compare the contexts of Uganda and Jordan for youth transitions, data analysis does raise a number of issues that may have wider applicability to other country contexts, where there are also large refugee populations.

First, the scale and age profile of refugee populations. Both Uganda and Jordan have large numbers of refugees that have arrived in waves over long periods. Refugees' age profile in both countries is younger than that of the host population. In Uganda 60.3 per cent of the refugee population is aged under 18 compared to 55.1 per cent of the host population.<sup>120</sup> In Jordan 54.1 per cent of refugees (excluding UNRWA) are under the age of 20 compared to 44.3 per cent of the host population.<sup>121</sup> With both countries hosting populations of over 1 million refugees, there is significant pressure on public services and competition among young people for education and livelihoods. This competition can increase the frustration of youth whose routes into adulthood have already been ruptured in becoming a refugee.

Second, is the importance of economic context. The research countries have different economic environments with Uganda categorised as a low income nation with a GDP in 2016 of US\$25.5 billion while Jordan is a lower middle income country with a GDP of US\$38.7 billion in 2016.<sup>122</sup> Young people report the limited range of opportunities for formal employment and access to career pathways linked to education. In Uganda young people are seeking employment in underperforming labour markets and competing with Ugandan nationals for jobs. In Jordan institutional arrangements limit access to high skilled sectors of the economy and despite the stronger economic base, are unable to participate in what the research participants have termed 'good jobs'. A key challenge for both countries is to realise economic development, utilising the skills and capacity of refugees in the workforce, while managing the additional pressure on public services.

Third, is the improvement of institutional frameworks. As detailed above, Uganda and Jordan have very different legal frames that define and regulate the conduct and position of refugees. While these systems are rooted in regional histories and the political culture of each country, the underlying intentions of these different systems offer open and positive response to refugees. In addition to the weaknesses of implementation described above, there is lack specificity on the rights and needs of children and youth and in particular focused response to support effective transitions to adulthood. At both policy and operational levels stronger connections to international debates such as Child Rights in the Global Compacts,<sup>123</sup> would add a further dimension to the understanding and responding to the needs of displaced children and youth.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has demonstrated the complexity of growing up in protracted crises for young people in Uganda and Jordan. Working across two very different contexts, the research has shown that youth face many common challenges in realising their goals for adult life.

By deepening understanding of transition pathways and the conditional factors that affect opportunity and decision making, this project fills a vital gap in knowledge needed to target assistance to displaced youth and support their efforts to build productive adult lives. The research has shown that the condition of being a refugee has significant implications for young people and in particular where their displacement is protracted. Transitioning to adulthood is a time when aspirations are realised and long-term decisions made regarding education, work/livelihoods and family life. Displacement ruptures young people's plans and specific support is required to ensure that changes to transition pathways are positively impacted with as little disruption as possible.

Based on the research and workshop discussions with practitioner organisations engaged with young refugees, the following conclusions and recommendations are offered.

### Recommendations

The recommendations from the research identifies implications for policy and programming. Given the existing complex arrangements for service delivery, through national and international groups, actions should be co-ordinated at country and local level and involve state, donor, NGO, community based organisations and youth representatives in the design of new services.

**Integrated nature of refugee experience:** the design of policy and programming should be better aligned with the lived experience of being a refugee. This has implications for cross-sector and co-ordinated planning and delivery of services. Specifically, the research indicates:

- piloting and evaluation of person / family centred planning of multi-agency support for young refugees resident in camp and urban settings;
- expanded provision of psychosocial counselling, mentoring and self-esteem building, augmenting existing networked NGO services; and
- improved country support for decentralised programming at settlement level to more effectively connect providers and improve targeting of resources.

- **System capacity:** the operation of laws and regulations that determine status and access to services need to be refined to avoid negative consequences on youth transitions. This includes:
  - partnership action plan at country level, with government and key stakeholder organisations, to identify where legal frameworks impede youth transitions, such as access to ‘good work’ or administrative barriers to marriage;
  - ensuring sufficient capacity of education provision in camp and urban settlements for refugees at primary and secondary level to reduce number of out of school children;
  - remove institutional disadvantages in education including hidden costs, class overcrowding, low quality teaching environments;
  - expand the availability of fully funded scholarships for refugee youth into higher education; and
  - reducing discrimination through better public information and community action to build bridges between host and refugee populations.

**Skills and training:** planning for the long term; assuming that employment will be in the host country. Including:

- vocational training to have stronger links to labour market demand and potential skills of young people and to include options for progression to higher level qualifications;
- diversification of opportunities for youth to enable selection of livelihood pathways.
- creating opportunities for youth who have missed education due to language or traumatic experiences to catch up outside of age-based schooling;
- the provision of career information as part of person / family centred service delivery; and
- increased capacity for enterprise skills, training and access to start-up capital.

**Enabling conditions:** funding and increased focus on creating conditions that enable transition into adulthood. This should:

- streamline processes for young refugees to obtain replacement education certificates lost during displacement or translate documents;
- use NGOs / CBOs more effectively as conduits for information to and engagement of refugee youth; and
- in Uganda increase provision of language training to remove a key barrier to integration.

**Youth voice:** young people are experts on their own lives, regardless of the circumstances they find themselves in.

Youth should be supported to voice their opinions and perspectives on their future adult lives. This could include:

- the creation and involvement of youth fora in service planning and delivery at settlement and national levels, where refugee youth are properly and appropriately facilitated to meaningfully participate; and
- facilitating youth as champions and advocates within and across refugee communities, supported through CBOs.

## Beneficiaries for Targeted Knowledge Exchange

There are a number of key beneficiary groups that will directly benefit from their involvement in the research activity and more widely, benefit from evidence that will be generated from the project.

**Governments** in Uganda and Jordan will benefit from detailed local information on the factors affecting youth transition, to feed into and improve the efficacy of programme design. This report and Briefing Papers should be shared via DFID’s local and regional offices.

**International Agencies** working at a global level will benefit from the Report and Briefing Papers; invitations to a UK All Party Parliamentary Group, and a workshop that provides evidence from which to directly impact policy and practice. Key agencies will be invited to presentations of these findings.

**NGO Delivery Agencies** – local organisations working with displaced youth were involved as stakeholders through the local partner organisations. They benefit from improved understanding of the constraints affecting youth, feeding intelligence into their own planning.

**Youth** – those involved in the project have benefitted from training while undertaking research and by having opportunities to voice their ideas/experience directly to stakeholders. More broadly, youth will benefit from improved tailoring of state and donor programming.



Dissemination workshop held in Jordan. YR, research team and stakeholders discuss the meaning and implications of the data.



## Endnotes

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Za'atari camp, by research participant Hatem. Photograph taken for his story map.

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Dissemination workshop held in Uganda. YR, research team and stakeholders discuss the meaning and implications of the data.



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<sup>76</sup> Interview – Lana, 21 year-old Iraqi female, Zarqa.

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<sup>97</sup> Interview – Shayma, 18 year-old Syrian female, Za’atari

<sup>98</sup> Interview – Qasim, 18 year-old Syrian male, E. Amman.

<sup>99</sup> Interview – Adham, 22 year-old Palestinian male, Jerash.

<sup>100</sup> Interview – Querima, 17 year-old Iraqi female, Zarqa.

<sup>101</sup> Interview – Samer, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa.

<sup>102</sup> Interview – Farid, 15 year-old Palestinian male, Jerash.

<sup>103</sup> Interview – Haya, 16 year-old Syrian female, E Amman.

<sup>104</sup> Interview – Uba, 20 year-old Somali female, Nakivale.

<sup>105</sup> Interview – Régis, 16 year-old Congolese male, Nakivale.

<sup>106</sup> Focus group – Somali girl, Nakivale.

<sup>107</sup> Focus group – Iraqi boy, Zarqa.

<sup>108</sup> Focus group – Congolese girl, Kampala.

<sup>109</sup> Interview – Cabdi 20 year-old Somali male, Nakivale.

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Research participant Khadra shows an example of a Somali wedding dress, in Kisenyi, Kampala. Photograph taken for her story map.



**Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises:**

A collaboration between the University of Dundee, UK, Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL), King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF), Jordan.

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