



# PERCEPTIONS OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT IN JORDANIAN COMMUNITIES HOSTING SYRIAN REFUGEES

## THEMATIC ASSESSMENT REPORT

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British Embassy  
Amman

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## SUMMARY

With the protracted Syrian crisis extending into its fourth year, the conflict continues to force millions of Syrians to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. These host countries are bearing the brunt of the crisis, which represents the largest refugee exodus in recent history with a total of 2,863,595 registered refugees now living outside of Syria.<sup>1</sup> Since 2011, approximately 600,000 Syrians have crossed the border into Jordan, putting immense strain on already scarce resources, and intensifying competition for basic services. The vast majority of these refugees do not reside in camps, but are hosted by Jordanian communities,<sup>2</sup> where limited opportunities, a lack of resources and inadequate living space present a challenge to social cohesion and community resilience.

In Jordan, few comprehensive studies have been conducted to provide an in-depth understanding of the key drivers of host community tensions. To address this information gap, this multi-sectoral REACH assessment aimed at identifying where tensions have emerged across northern Jordan as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, and how they could be mitigated through social cohesion and resilience programming. In the shift from humanitarian relief to long-term development, the assessment aims to promote and inform the mainstreaming of a 'Do No Harm' approach in the response provided to conflict-affected populations residing in Jordanian host communities. Sectors assessed included: education, external support, healthcare, livelihoods, municipal services, shelter and water.

With support from the British Embassy in Amman, REACH carried out the assessment between August 2013 and March 2014 across the six northern Jordanian governorates of Ajloun, Balqa, Irbid, Jarash, Al Mafraq and Zarqa. The main coordination mechanism for the assessment was a steering committee comprised of government officials and representatives from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MoMA). In addition to these government ministries, key stakeholders included the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), UN agencies, and other humanitarian and development actors from the international community.

REACH found external support to be a major source of tension in host communities that were estimated to be at relatively high risk of tension at the time of assessment. Key findings from the assessment include:

- 41% of respondents reported that their community had received external support.
- 70% of respondents who received assistance agreed that support had helped their community.
- However, 67% amongst those that agreed support had helped their community also stated that support had negative effects.
- 83% of those who stated that aid had negative effects said this related to more tension in the community.
- Considerably more Jordanian respondents (78%) than Syrian respondents (58%) felt that support was unevenly accessible by the two groups.
- Overall, more female (91%) than male respondents (66%) and more Syrians (91%) than Jordanians (75%) considered that external support had caused more tension in their community.

This report highlights that while external support aims to provide relief, reduce conflict and minimise harm in Jordanian host communities it is inextricably linked to community dynamics. It may catalyse frictions between Jordanian and Syrian populations, escalating tensions and negative perceptions of assistance. Assessment findings reinforced the need for humanitarian and development actors to carefully address the way that support is perceived to be distributed among both Jordanian and Syrian beneficiaries in host communities to maximise aid effectiveness. Adhering to the 'Do No Harm' principle and taking a long-term approach to development in the region will be crucial to building greater social cohesion. As the humanitarian community transitions to allocating more aid outside formal camp settings, the way in which aid is distributed among refugees and the local community will become an increasingly important issue, especially in northern Jordan.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, <[www.data.unhcr.org](http://www.data.unhcr.org)>, [last checked 10 July 2014].

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, Joint Assessment Review of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan, (January 2014).

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### About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH works to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

For more information about REACH and to access our information products, please visit: [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org). You can also write to us at: [jordan@reach-initiative.org](mailto:jordan@reach-initiative.org) and follow us @REACH\_info.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>CBOs</b>	Community-Based Organisations
<b>CERF</b>	UN's Central Emergency Response Fund
<b>FCO</b>	British Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<b>FGD</b>	FGD Discussion
<b>GoJ</b>	Government of Jordan
<b>HCSP</b>	Host Community Support Platform
<b>Mol</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MoMA</b>	Ministry of Municipal Affairs
<b>MoPIC</b>	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
<b>NFI</b>	Non Food Items
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NRP</b>	National Resilience Plan
<b>ODK</b>	Open Data Kit
<b>RRP</b>	Regional Response Plan's
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

<b>Governorate</b>	In Jordan this is the highest administrative boundary below the national level.
<b>District</b>	Governorates are divided into districts.
<b>Municipality</b>	Districts are divided into municipalities.
<b>Sub-Municipality</b>	Municipalities are divided into sub-municipalities.
<b>Community</b>	Sub-municipalities are divided into communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

A vast amount of aid and international support continues to be channelled into Jordan as humanitarian and development actors seek to mitigate the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis. In 2013 alone the United Nations' (UN) Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) contributed US\$14.7 million to the refugee response in Jordan to assist with food, shelter, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health, education, shelter, protection, human rights and the rule of law.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Jordan is part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Syria Regional Response Plan's (RRP6) US\$4.26 billion appeal aimed to provide for the burgeoning needs of Syrian refugees residing in both refugee camps and host communities.<sup>4</sup>

This latest appeal is based on projections of continuing humanitarian needs and large-scale displacement into the countries neighbouring Syria in 2014, and is supported by more than one hundred partner organisations, including UN agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, with the release of the National Resilience Plan 2014 – 2016 (NRP), the Host Community Support Platform (HCSP) has set out a strategic plan to target key areas for development across the northern governorates of Jordan, which have been particularly affected by the crisis.<sup>6</sup> External support is providing a lifeline to many Syrians and Jordanians in the host communities, who are struggling to access basic services, sustain livelihoods and meet rising living costs.

While external support has played a vital role in bolstering host community capacity and resilience, it has also been linked to community level tensions.<sup>7</sup> According to Syrian and Jordanian focus group discussion (FGD) participants interviewed by REACH, perceptions of the uneven access to assistance and inadequate targeting of aid have led to increased friction between the two communities, leading to negative impressions of external support. These negative perceptions have been compounded by the rapid influx of Syrian refugees into northern Jordan placing additional pressures on scarce resources, exacerbating existing community vulnerabilities and creating new challenges to social cohesion.<sup>8</sup>

This study, which is one in a series of thematic reports, follows two previous papers released based on assessment findings where sector-specific needs of self-settled Syrian refugees living in northern Jordan were mapped and identified.<sup>9</sup> The overall assessment, conducted from August 2013 to March 2014, concentrated on the dynamics of refugee-host community relations and explored the factors influencing tension and destabilization.

## METHODOLOGY

REACH, with support from the British Embassy in Amman, undertook a large assessment in Jordanian host communities focusing on prioritization of needs, vulnerabilities and tensions that have emerged as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis. The assessment was undertaken over a six month time period between August and March 2014 and included a series of data collection and analysis exercises. First, a desk review was conducted to outline the broad challenges, needs and priorities in Jordan as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis. The findings from this desk review informed the methodology for a **key informant assessment** in 446 communities in the six northern governorates of Ajloun, Balqa, Irbid, Jarash, Al Mafraq and Zarqa.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> UNOCHA/CERF, <[www.unocha.org/cerf/cerf-worldwide/where-we-work/syr-2014](http://www.unocha.org/cerf/cerf-worldwide/where-we-work/syr-2014)>, [Last checked 03.06.2014]

<sup>4</sup> RRP6, 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan, <<http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/docs/Syria-rrp6-full-report.pdf>> [Last checked 03.06.2014]

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> HCSP, National Resilience Plan 2014-2016: Proposed Priority Responses to Mitigate the Impact of the Syrian refugee Crisis on Jordan and Jordanian Host communities, (January 2014).

<sup>7</sup> REACH, Evaluating the effects of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Stability and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities: Preliminary Impact Assessment, (January 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> REACH, Syrian Refugees in Host Communities – Key Informant Interviews/District Profiling, (January 2014), and, Evaluating the Effect of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Stability and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities, (January 2014).

<sup>10</sup> REACH, 'Syrian Refugees in Host Communities – Key Informant Interviews/District Profiling', (January 2014).

Findings from the key informant assessment were then used to select the 160 host communities most at risk of high tension and insecurity, which were identified based on having the lowest level of resilience.<sup>11</sup> REACH then undertook a **community-level assessment** of Jordanians and Syrians living in these 160 communities from December 2013 until early March 2014. Administration of questionnaires and eight FGDs with on average 6 participants per group were undertaken in each of these communities. During the targeted assessment phase 7,158 individual questionnaires were completed and 1,280 FGDs with Jordanians and Syrians.

In addition, REACH hosted six **participatory workshops with local government representatives** from the six sampled governorates during January and February 2014. The aim of these workshops was to gain a better understanding of perceptions, challenges and needs of local government institutions in providing support to host communities and incoming refugees. In particular, these workshops sought to identify the priority sectors in each governorate to inform programming around social cohesion and resilience. They thereby complemented the community-level data collection to illustrate a comprehensive and nuanced perspective of vulnerabilities and challenges to resilience in Jordanian host communities.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION METHODOLOGY

In each of the 160 communities a FGD was held with each of the following demographic groups: Jordanian women, Jordanian men, young Jordanian women, young Jordanian men, Syrian women, Syrian men, young Syrian women, and young Syrian men. The upper-age threshold determining whether individuals were placed in the younger FGD was 30 years of age. The groups were divided in this manner to allow for different types of discussions to surface in the FGD setting. Previous assessments had already indicated the importance of separating Jordanian and Syrian FGDs<sup>12</sup> but it was also deemed necessary to separate according to sex and age groups to allow for a more nuanced discussion.

Prior to each FGD, participants were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire using Open Data Kit (ODK) which was uploaded onto smart phones. The questionnaires were filled out individually with the enumerators' guidance, and served the purpose of gauging the individual challenges, priorities, and perceptions held by participants in the FGDs. The ODK survey was completed before the FGDs so as not to have the group dynamics of the FGD influence the responses.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

A purposive sampling approach was adopted for the community-level assessment to clarify the specific challenges to social cohesion and resilience within different demographic groups in Jordanian host communities. Furthermore, the selection of respondents and participants in these communities was also purposive, and the sampling approach therefore is not intended to generate statistically significant findings, generalisable to the assessed communities or to northern Jordan. Instead, it allows for a more nuanced thematic understanding of the challenges to social cohesion and resilience facing people living in tension-prone Jordanian host communities.

In some communities, there were occasions when both Jordanians and Syrians were reluctant to participate in the assessment. On the whole, this was not a major challenge, but it complicated operational planning as certain FGDs had to be rescheduled and moved around in order to achieve an acceptable level of participation in the assessment. Furthermore, in some communities it highlighted growing assessment fatigue; some Jordanians and Syrians felt that too many assessments are being conducted without being followed by action.

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<sup>11</sup> REACH, Evaluating the Effect of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Stability and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities: Preliminary Impact Assessment, (January 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Mercy Corps, Mapping of Host Community – Refugee Tensions in Al Mafraq and Ramtha, Jordan, (May 2013).

## FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the main findings related to external support that were generated through the assessment of Jordanian host communities. It outlines perceptions of support; aid appropriation; aid effectiveness; and tensions surrounding external support across the six northern governorates assessed.

### PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT

The majority of respondents sampled in this assessment (59%) reported that their community had not received external support. **Notably more Syrian than Jordanian respondents stated that they had received assistance (45% and 38%, respectively).** For those who did receive external support, findings were equivocal, with Jordanians and Syrians expressing mixed perceptions of assistance across the northern governorates.

Of those who reported that their community had received support, the majority of Jordanian and Syrian respondents (70%) agreed or strongly agreed that this support had helped their community (see Figure 1). Paradoxically, 67% of these respondents also considered that support had negative effects on their community. Overall, a total of 58% of respondents reported that support had negative effects, with the remaining 42% disagreeing with this statement. This finding indicates that the majority of respondents view external support as having both advantages and disadvantages in the assessed host communities.

When disaggregated by nationality, 10% more Syrians (75%) than Jordanians (65%) reported that assistance had helped their community (Figure 3). These nuanced results demand further investigation of host community attitudes, behaviours and knowledge vis-à-vis external support. **However, they indicate that while the vast majority of sampled respondents valued assistance from the aid community, many also perceived it as entailing detrimental effects.**

Figure 1: Support helped the community

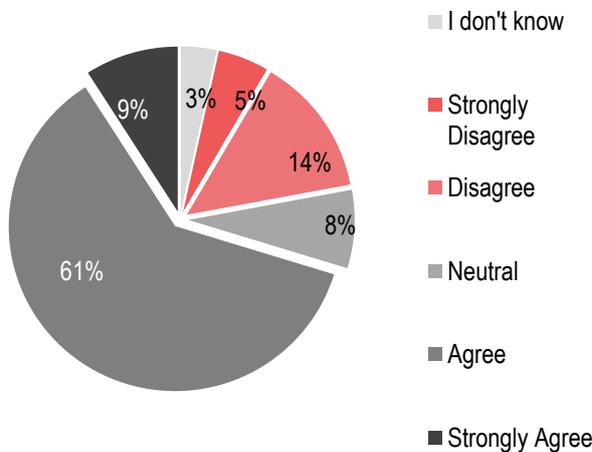


Figure 2: Support had negative effects on the community

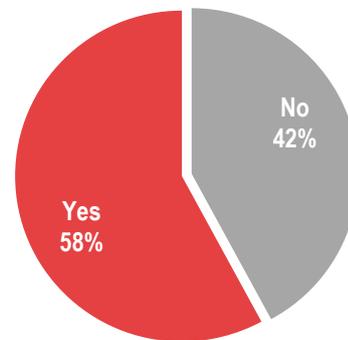
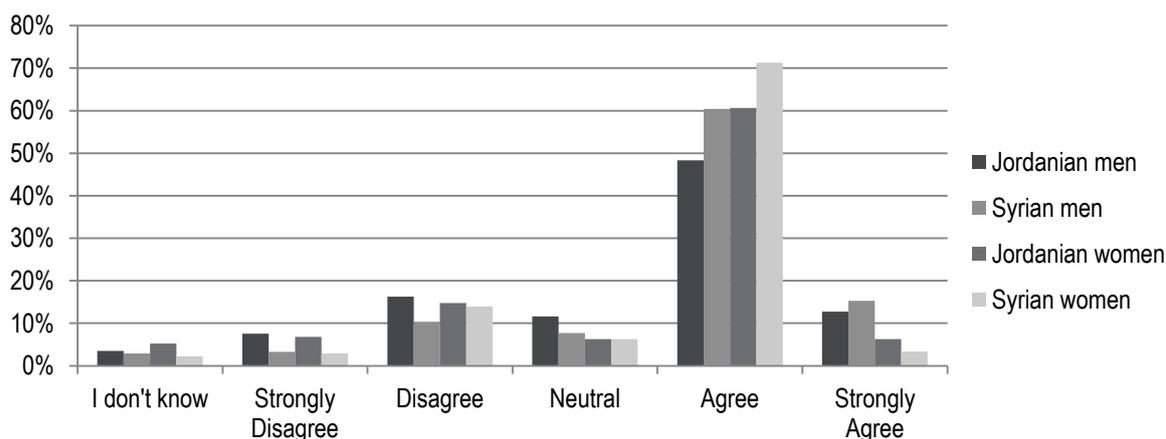


Figure 3: Support helped the community (by nationality and sex)

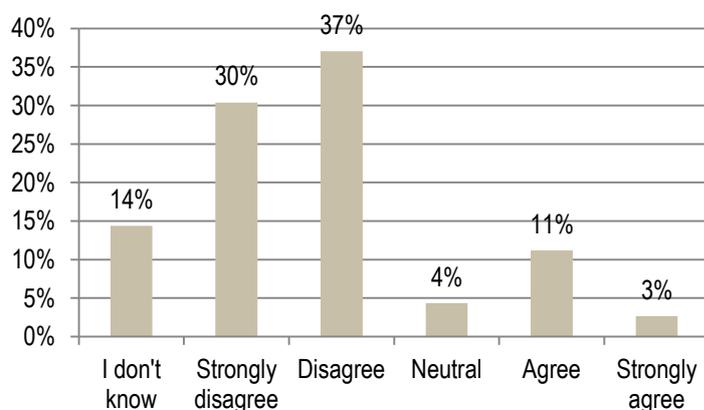


A breakdown by sex and nationality shows that Jordanian men were the least convinced that external support had helped the community, with 24% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement (see Figure 3). A similar percentage of Jordanian women shared this opinion with 22% selecting these two responses, compared to 13% of Syrian men and 17% Syrian women. Notably, Syrian men represented the group with the most respondents reporting that support had helped the community at a total of 75%. Similarly some 74% of Syrian women either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Jordanian men and women expressed lower levels of agreement at 67% and 61% respectively. From these findings it is possible to see that overall more Syrians than Jordanians perceived external support to be beneficial for their community. This may be due to more Syrians being targeted for assistance by aid organisations than their Jordanian counterparts. Additionally, it is possible that Jordanians perceive assistance as creating inequalities between local Jordanians and Syrian refugees in the community, where before there was no external support.

### AID APPROPRIATION

Perceptions of aid allocation between Jordanians and Syrians shed some light on negative impressions of external support. At 67%, the majority of respondents expressed the perception that aid was not evenly accessible between Jordanians and Syrians in the sampled host communities; with a small minority of 14% in agreement that aid was evenly accessible (see Figure 4). This may be attributed to the fact that humanitarian aid was initially targeted toward the refugee population, and only recently has the international community expanded the scope of beneficiary criteria to include vulnerable Jordanians. From a social cohesion perspective these findings could be a cause for concern, as perceptions of uneven distribution of support are likely to give way to feelings of injustice and resentment among beneficiary communities.

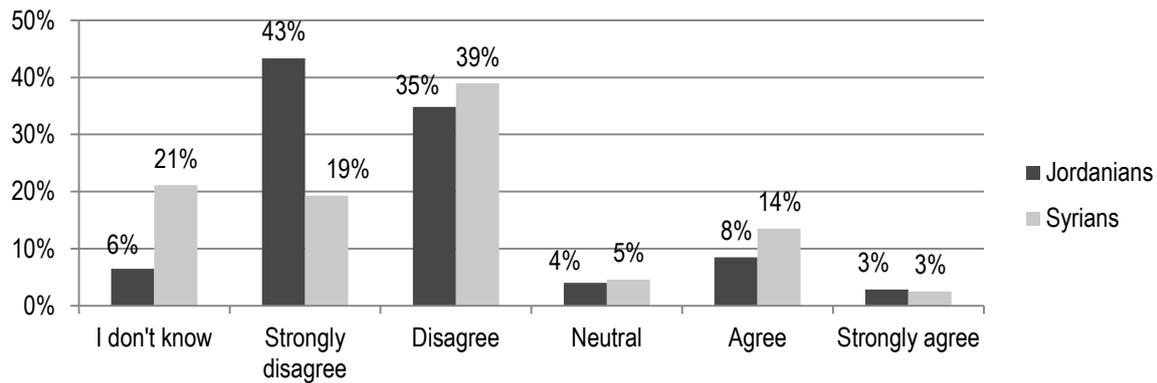
Figure 4: Support evenly accessible between Jordanians and Syrians



When responses were disaggregated by nationality **more Jordanian FGD participants than Syrians perceived assistance as unevenly accessible.** Some 43% of Jordanian respondents felt strongly that support had not been evenly distributed between the two communities, while only 19% of Syrians shared this view (see Figure 5). These results may be attributed to Jordanian perceptions of refugee centrism and humanitarian strategies seen as failing to incorporate, or adequately support

vulnerable Jordanians. These findings were corroborated by FGDs in which Jordanians repeatedly voiced their concerns that Syrians were targeted for assistance, while many poor Jordanian families were neglected.

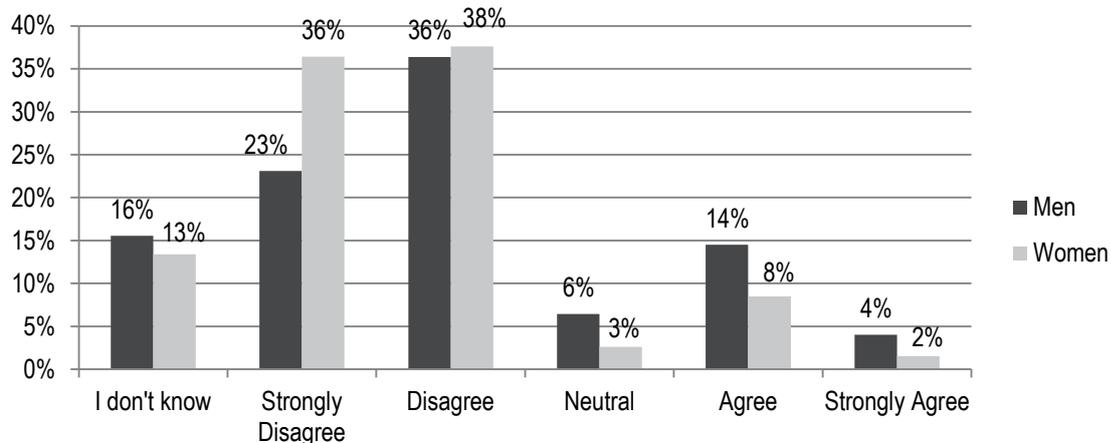
Figure 5: Support evenly accessible between Jordanians and Syrians (by nationality)



In Qmaim, Irbid, Jordanian FGD participants stated specifically that they felt discriminated against because nothing had been done to support their community while both Jordanians and Syrians were suffering from deteriorating living conditions. In Dair Alla, Balqa some Jordanian respondents reported that they had considered relocating to other areas due to a lack of support being provided to them. In Mazzeh, Al Mafrq Jordanian youths expressed that they were willing to steal aid from Syrians, perceiving them to be economically better off than Jordanians.

These negative perceptions are likely to have contributed to deteriorating social cohesion within the assessed host communities, entrenching resentment between Jordanian and Syrian groups. This highlights that it is important for organisations providing assistance to clearly communicate beneficiary selection criteria with host community populations.

Figure 6: Support evenly accessible between Jordanians and Syrians (by sex)

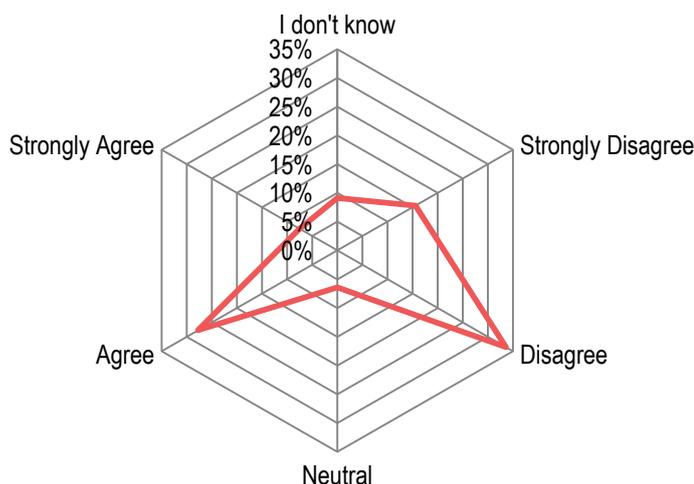


**There was a notable difference between male and female perceptions of aid appropriation** (see Figure 6). Some 36% of women felt strongly that aid had not been evenly accessible, compared to 23% of men. Overall, only 10% of female respondents agreed that aid was evenly accessible between Jordanians and Syrians in the community, compared to 18% of male respondents, indicating higher levels of dissatisfaction with external support among female respondents. A possible conclusion that could be drawn from these findings is that women in the assessed communities may be responsible for managing aid vouchers and non-food items (NFIs) in their households, giving them a more acute awareness of the limitations to aid accessibility. Alternately, this trend may indicate inadequate inclusion of women in community wide decision making processes and aid distribution networks. **These results underscore the need for actors delivering support to Syrians and Jordanians in host communities to engage with women through participatory appraisal of programming.**

## EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT

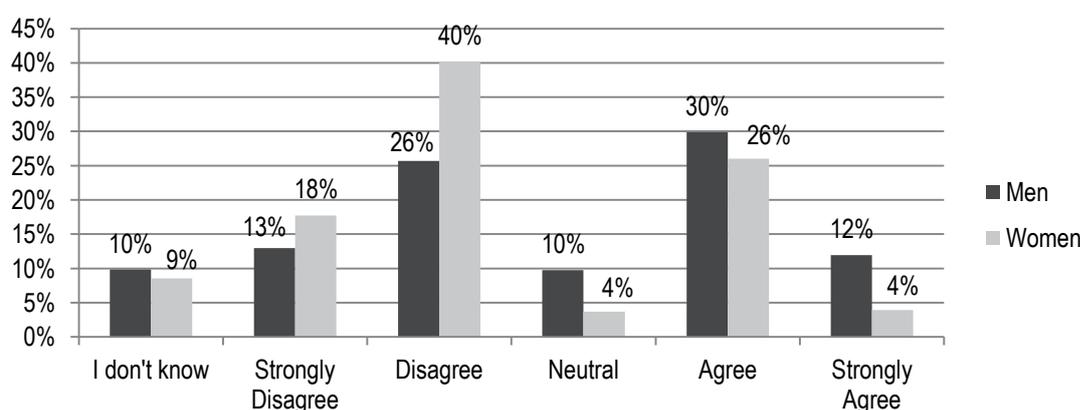
Perceptions of aid effectiveness were predominantly negative, with a majority of respondents reporting that assistance had not been distributed to those most in need. Figure 7 illustrates that 50% of Jordanian and Syrian sampled respondents did not think that support had been distributed to the most vulnerable beneficiaries. These findings were reflected in FGDs where participants stated that external assistance was sometimes inadequate and did not always cater to their most urgent needs. Those most in need of support are often the hardest to access, which may explain dissatisfaction with the scope of previous distribution strategies.

Figure 7: Support targets those most in need (all respondents)



A breakdown by sex indicated that significantly more women (58%) than men (39%) perceived support as failing to target those most in need (see Figure 8). That said, it is critical to point out that the majority of the interviewees did not receive assistance, which may be a possible reason for their dissatisfaction with distribution strategies. Additionally, these perceptions may be attributed to the fact that respondents did not know how aid was being distributed at the time of assessment.

Figure 8: Support targets those most in need (by sex)



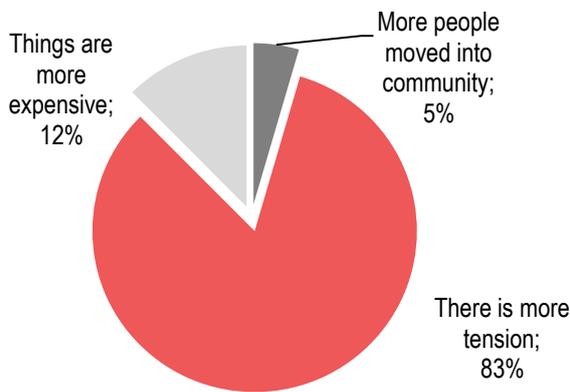
FGDs also provided anecdotal evidence to suggest that Jordanians and Syrians in the assessed host communities were being forced to adopt coping mechanisms such as selling aid vouchers and other assistance in order to cover basic living costs. In Ras Moneef, Ajloun, FGD participants reported that many recipients of external support were resorting to selling aid items as they were not able to meet their most urgent needs, such as payments for rent. In Tabariya, Irbid Syrian families participating in FGDs reported that they sold valuables and household items to compensate for the shortage of aid being allocated to their community.

From these findings, it is possible to infer that those who perceived support as failing to reach the most in need may harbour higher levels of dissatisfaction with external humanitarian and development actors. While

assistance has increasingly been targeted toward the most vulnerable groups, negative perceptions of aid effectiveness persist among Jordanian and Syrian respondents in the host communities assessed. This serves to highlight the importance of ensuring those living with the highest levels of deprivation are provided with adequate support.

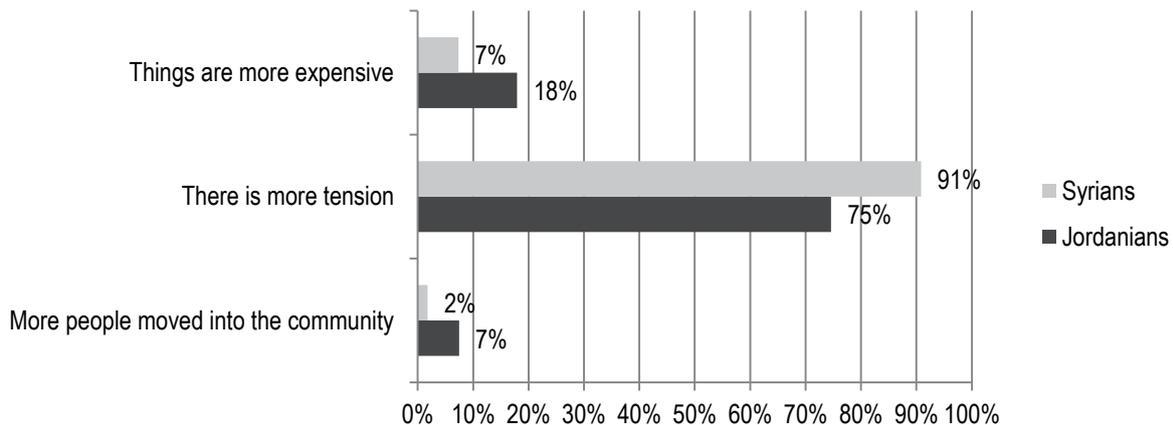
## TENSIONS AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Figure 9: How has support had a negative effect on the community?



Some 83% of respondents that perceived external support had a negative effect on their community said that this related to an increase in tension (see Figure 9). However, assessment findings indicate that it is not necessarily the assistance itself, but perceptions of ineffective aid distribution and uneven access to support that are likely to have contributed to reported tensions. Just 12% of respondents cited a rise in prices as a negative effect of support on the community, and, perhaps surprisingly, only a small minority related the negative impact of support to the increase in population.

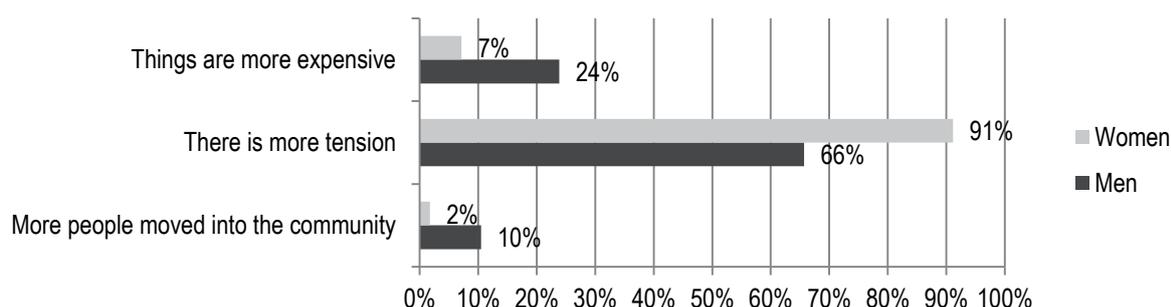
Figure 10: How has support had negative effects on the community? (by nationality)



When disaggregated by nationality findings show that a larger proportion of Syrians than Jordanian respondents perceived support as leading to more tension, with 91% of Syrians selecting this response compared to 75% of Jordanians (see Figure 10). Jordanians were more concerned about a rise in prices than their Syrian counterparts, with 18% of Jordanians and 7% of Syrians selecting this response respectively. A minority of Jordanians and Syrians attributed the negative effects of support to an increase in population.

Perceptions of inadequate and insufficient support may be contributing to negative perceptions of development and humanitarian actors. In Feisaliyyeh, Al Mafraq, FGD participants stated that they would soon begin protesting against NGOs as there was a lack of aid targeting the area. In Sabha, Al Mafraq Jordanians reported that they were willing to resort to violence in order to secure their basic needs, which were not being met by external support. Additional sources of tension relating to external support cited by FGD participants included the eye-scanning system that allows refugees to receive cash assistance, and the common concern that shop owners were fixing higher prices for items purchased with aid vouchers.

Figure 11: How has support had negative effects on the community? (by sex)



An overwhelming majority of women perceived aid as causing more tension in the community, with 91% of all female participants choosing this response, compared to 66% of men (see Figure 11). Male respondents were more concerned with rising prices and population increase in the community than women (24% and 7% respectively).

FGDs also relayed negative perceptions surrounding the transparency and accountability of humanitarian and development organisations, with some participants reporting the perception that support had been given to families that maintained good relationships with aid organizations or based on acquaintances. Additionally, FGD participants who had attempted to register with charitable organisations without success expressed frustration.

Putting in place accountable complaint channels that allow constructive feedback to be processed and dealt with in an appropriate manner could help to mitigate these tensions. With increasing focus on transparency and accountability, actors involved in providing assistance should evaluate the advantages of having beneficiary selection criteria openly available for people living in the communities that they work in.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this report suggest that external support could inadvertently have become a contributor to tension, sparking resentment between Syrians and Jordanians in the assessed host communities. FGD and questionnaire results combined suggest that negative perceptions of aid accessibility could be linked to deteriorating social cohesion and rising levels of tension. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that perceptions of refugee centrism may be entrenching negative impressions of external support among the Jordanian population.

The majority of sampled respondents reported that external assistance had both helped and hindered their communities. However, more women than men perceived a strong link between external support and tensions in the community. Overall, women also expressed less satisfaction with aid accessibility and aid effectiveness than their male counterparts. These gender disparities in perceptions of external support indicate that some women may have been excluded from decision making processes and assistance channels targeting the host communities. With this in mind, development and humanitarian actors should continue to focus on gender impact and enhanced access to aid for women. In particular, the specific needs of female-headed households should be taken into account as they are generally more vulnerable and often isolated from the rest of the community.<sup>13</sup>

There was a widespread perception within sampled host communities that assistance had not been provided to those who were most in need. This serves to highlight that the beneficiary community should be adequately informed about which households are eligible to receive support and why, in order to avoid exacerbating the root causes of tension. If the process for identifying and targeting beneficiaries within communities is widely known, systematic and transparent, this will go a long way to diminishing tensions and accusations of misappropriation or bias in aid targeting. For Jordanian host community tensions to be mitigated the allocation of resources must be seen as fair and serving long-term development goals.

<sup>13</sup> UN Secretariat Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, New York, (2010).

**ANNEX I: MAP OF COMMUNITIES ASSESSED AND ASSESSMENT TIMEFRAME**

