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Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Demographics, Labor Market Outcomes, and Wellbeing through 2025

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Abstract

How are the Syrian refugees in Jordan faring in protracted displacement? This paper leverages the 2016 and 2025 waves of the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey to explore how the Syrian refugees, who arrived in Jordan starting in 2011, have struggled or succeeded over time. The paper explores the evolution of refugees' demographics – age, sex, marital status, and household composition – as well as key legal and regulatory aspects of their identities, such as registration with the government and UNHCR, along with residence in camps. Syrian refugees are a young population, but have recently had declining fertility, rising ages at marriage, and reductions in child marriage. The analyses examine educational enrollment and attainment over time, with a particular focus on differences by sex, age, and place of residence. Syrian refugees' school enrollment has increased over time. The paper also investigates refugees' wellbeing, including health, health insurance, access to health care, and mental health over time. A particular focus is on refugees' livelihood strategies, including not only labor market participation, but also legal and social supports, such as work permits, cash-for-work programs, and social assistance receipt. Labor force participation rates increased for Syrian refugees from 2016 to 2025, driven by increases in both employment and unemployment. Refugees remain largely informally employed when they find work. Lastly, the paper explores Syrian refugees' intentions to return or migrate elsewhere. More than half of Syrian refugees hope to return to Syria and most of those hope to do so within a year.

Keywords: Refugees, Syrians, Jordan, Demographics, Labor Markets, Education, Health, Social protection, Work permits

JEL Classifications: F22, O15, J21, I30, I20, I10

ملخص

ما هي أوضاع اللاجئين السوريين في الأردن في ظل النزوح الطويل الأمد؟ تستفيد هذه الورقة من موجتي 2016 و2025 من المسح التتبعي لسوق العمل في الأردن لاستكشاف كيف ناضل اللاجئون السوريون، الذين وصلوا إلى الأردن ابتداءً من عام 2011، أو نجحوا مع مرور الوقت. يستكشف هذا البحث تطور اللاجئين ' التركيبة السكانية – العمر والنوع والحالة الاجتماعية وتكوين الأسرة – بالإضافة إلى الجوانب القانونية والتنظيمية الرئيسية لهوياتهم، مثل التسجيل لدى الحكومة والمفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين، إلى جانب الإقامة في المخيمات. اللاجئون السوريون هم من السكان الشباب، ولكنهم شهدوا في الآونة الأخيرة انخفاضاً في معدلات الخصوبة، وارتفاعاً في سن الزواج، وانخفاضاً في زواج الأطفال. تدرس التحليلات الالتحاق بالتعليم والتحصيل العلمي على مر الزمن، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الاختلافات حسب الجنس والعمر ومكان الإقامة. ارتفع معدل الالتحاق بالمدارس للاجئين السوريين' بمرور الوقت. تبحث الورقة أيضًا في رفاهية اللاجئين، بما في ذلك الصحة والتأمين الصحي والحصول على الرعاية الصحية والصحة العقلية بمرور الوقت. وينصب التركيز بشكل خاص على استراتيجيات سبل عيش اللاجئين، بما في ذلك ليس فقط المشاركة في سوق العمل، ولكن أيضًا الدعم القانوني والاجتماعي، مثل تصاريح العمل، وبرامج النقد مقابل العمل، وتلقي المساعدة الاجتماعية. ارتفعت معدلات المشاركة في القوى العاملة للاجئين السوريين من عام 2016 إلى عام 2025، مدفوعة بالزيادات في كل من العمالة والبطالة. ويظل اللاجئون يعملون بشكل غير رسمي إلى حد كبير عندما يجدون عملاً. وأخيرًا، تستكشف الورقة نوايا اللاجئين السوريين للعودة أو الهجرة إلى مكان آخر. ويأمل أكثر من نصف اللاجئين السوريين في العودة إلى سوريا، ويأمل معظمهم في القيام بذلك خلال عام.

1. Introduction

Jordan has long hosted myriad populations of refugees, starting with Palestinians in 1948 (Turner 2016). With the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syrian refugees began to arrive in Jordan. The exact number of Syrian refugees is uncertain and evolving, since as well as Syrian refugees who are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are refugees who are not registered (Krafft, Razzaz, et al. 2019). The Population Census of 2015 enumerated 1.3 million Syrians (not all of whom were registered as refugees) (Department of Statistics (Jordan) 2015). At the same time, UNHCR estimated there were 632,228 registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2015).

There has not been a subsequent Population Census (although one was planned for late 2025), so that the numbers of Syrians as of early 2025 remain uncertain, due not only to births, deaths, and migration elsewhere, but also potential returns to Syria since the overthrow of Bashar Al-Assad in December 2024. For instance, while at the end of November 2024 UNHCR estimated 619,559 Syrians registered in Jordan, by end of March 2025, in the midst of the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) 2025 fielding, there were 557,783 registered Syrian individuals, falling to 447,014 at the end of September 2025 (UNHCR 2025c).

This paper investigates the demographics, labor market outcomes, and wellbeing of Syrian refugees in Jordan from 2016-2025, drawing on the JLMPS 2016 and 2025 waves (Krafft and Assaad 2021; Krafft, Assaad, and Ragab 2026; OAMDI 2018, 2026). The surveys over-sampled areas with a high share of non-Jordanians in the 2015 Population Census; this over-sampling is accounted for in the sample weights, which are used throughout the analysis.[1] We compare Syrian refugees to Jordanians in 2025 and between 2016 and 2025. The paper also investigates demographics, illustrating that while Syrian refugees are predominantly quite young, their fertility rates have decreased from 4.5 births per woman in 2016 to 3.1 births per woman in 2025, such that the peak of the Syrian population is aged 10-14 in 2025. Ages at marriage have risen over time, and girl child marriage has substantially declined for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

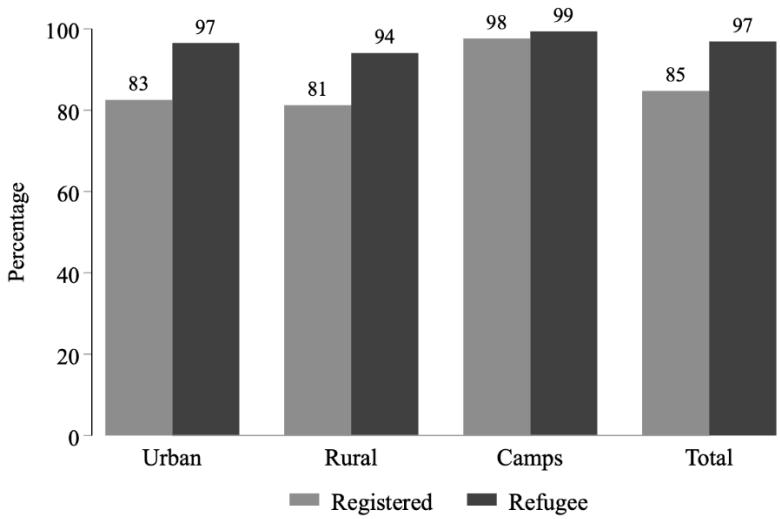
Syrian refugees experienced educational disruptions during conflict and initial displacement, but educational progression had recovered to pre-conflict levels by 2016 (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2022). Enrollments had risen further by 2025, although still were below those of Jordanians. Syrian refugees have poorer health and less health care access than Jordanians. Syrian refugees have experienced rising labor force participation, driven by increases in their employment rates from 2016 to 2025, but also rising unemployment rates. Their work remains largely informal and in vulnerable types of employment. Given their challenging livelihoods situations, refugees often struggle with high prices and expenses such as rent. Refugees, particularly those in refugee camps, often receive critical social assistance. The majority of Syrian refugees hope to return to Syria, often within the next year.

[1] Since there has not been a population census since 2015, the JLMPS 2025 wave uses the sample design combined with population projections for Jordanians to generate Jordanians' weights, and the corresponding ratio of non-Jordanians to Jordanians observed in enumeration for JLMPS 2025 to generate non-Jordanian's weights (Krafft, Assaad, and Ragab 2026).

2. Demographics

Figure 1 explores the composition of the Syrian population in Jordan by refugee status, namely (1) registering as a refugee or (2) being a refugee, namely registering or having fled violence[2] since 2011, focusing on the Syrian population aged 15+. In 2016, 93 percent of Syrians in Jordan were refugees by these measures (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2019); in 2025 the share is 97 percent. The majority (85 percent) of Syrians are registered as refugees. The figure also explores differences in these metrics by location. Unsurprisingly, 99 percent of those living in refugee camps are refugees, with 98 percent reporting being registered. Those in urban areas are less likely to be registered, at 83 percent, and those in rural areas least likely, at 81 percent. There are, however, very few Syrians in rural areas, just 1 percent, compared to 15 percent in camps and 84 percent in urban areas. In what follows, we focus our analyses on specifically refugees among Syrians. We hereafter also compare host communities (which include urban and rural areas) to camps rather than disaggregating urban from rural, given the limited rural population.

Figure 1. Refugee status of Syrians (percentage registered or refugee), by location, Syrians aged 15+ 2025

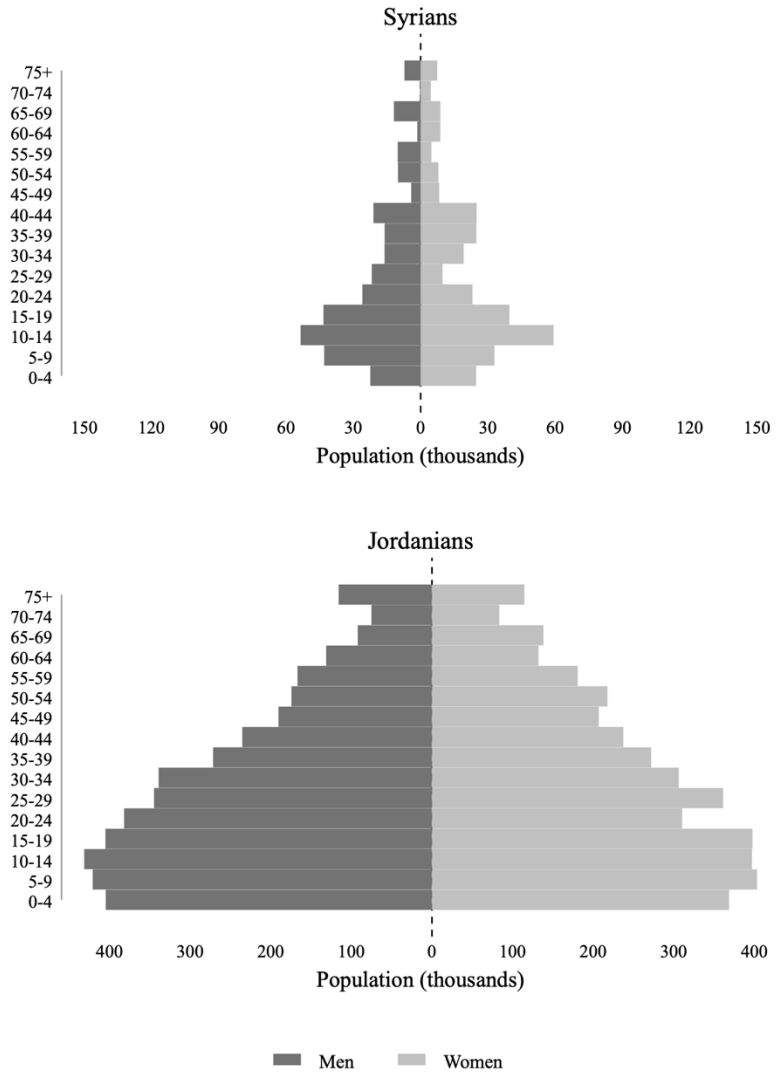


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Refugee is registered or a residential move since 2011 that was due to conflict/violence.

Figure 2 explores population pyramids (population by age and sex, in thousands), comparing Syrian refugees and Jordanians. Both populations notably have a youth bulge that is largest at ages 10-14. There are fewer 5–9-year-olds than 10-14-year-olds, and likewise fewer 0–4-year-olds than 5–9-year-olds in both populations, but with particularly sizeable differences for Syrian refugees. As shown below and in Krafft, Assaad, and Abushehab (2026), while both Syrian refugees and Jordanians experienced falling fertility, Syrians had relatively larger reductions. Unlike the unimodal Jordanian population, the Syrian population has a bimodal distribution, with a second mode at ages 40-44, and relatively fewer 20–29-year-olds.

[2] Per the residential mobility history.

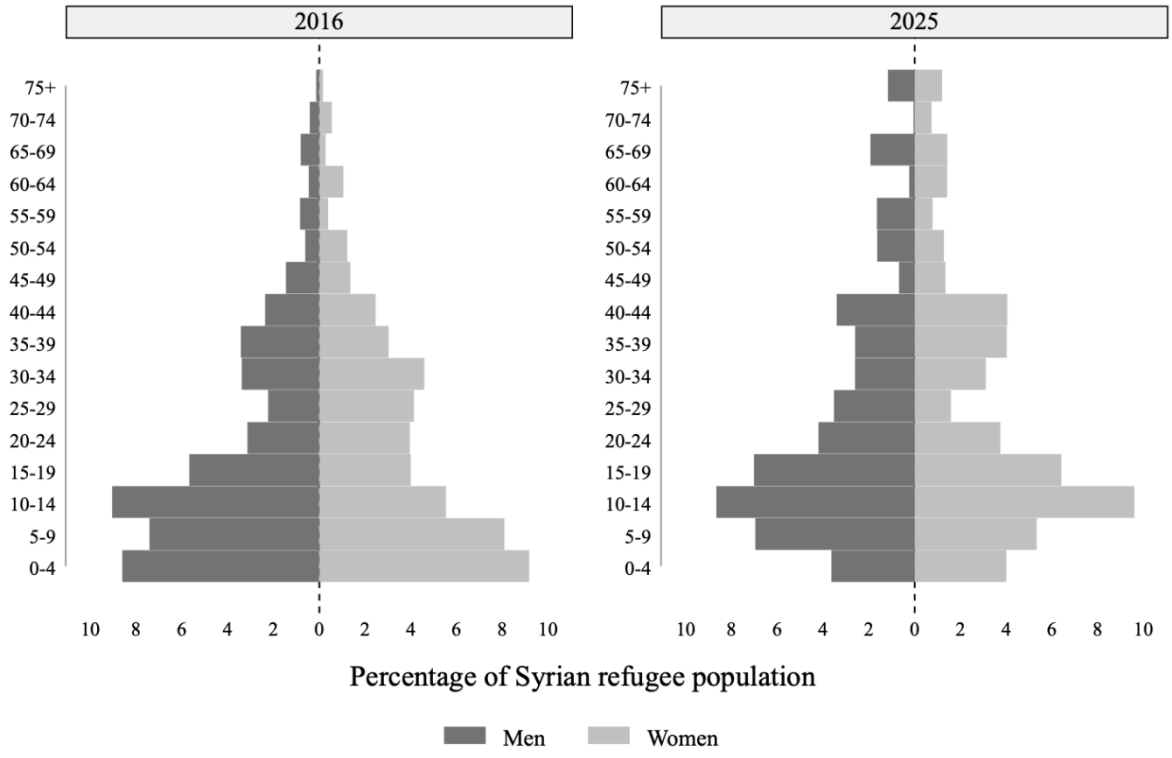
Figure 2. Population pyramids (distribution by age group and sex) for Jordanians and Syrian refugees (in thousands), 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Figure 3 explores how the structure of the Syrian refugee population has evolved from 2016 to 2025, in percentage terms. The population mode that, in 2025, was aged around 40-44 is visible at ages 30-34 a decade earlier in 2016, suggesting this mode has been consistently present rather than the result of any recent migration. The mode at ages 10-14 in 2025 was the young child (age 0-4) population in 2016. The Syrian refugee population thus remains disproportionately young but increasingly approaching labor market entry rather than school entry age in 2025. There is also suggestive evidence that those who were approaching labor market entry age in 2016 may have migrated by 2025, since those 10-19 in 2016 are not reflected in a sizeable 20-29 age group in 2025.

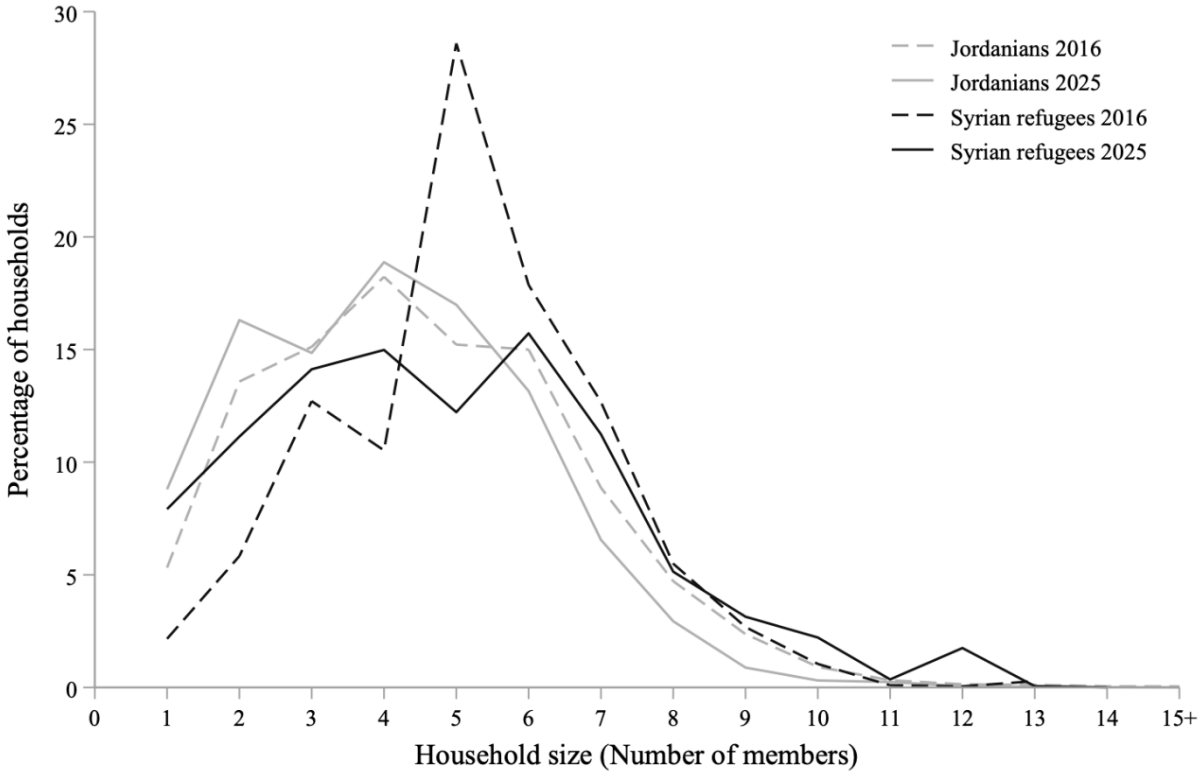
Figure 3. Population pyramids (distribution by age group and sex) for Syrian refugees (percentage of Syrian refugee population), 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Figure 4 explores household sizes for Syrian refugees and Jordanians in 2016 and 2025. Both groups have experienced smaller households over time, dropping from a mean of 4.6 in 2016 among Jordanians to 4.1 in 2025, and likewise from 5.2 among Syrians in 2016 to 4.8 in 2025. While 29% of Syrian households in 2016 had five people, this dropped to 12% in 2025, with the more common household size being four people (15% in 2025, 11% in 2016).

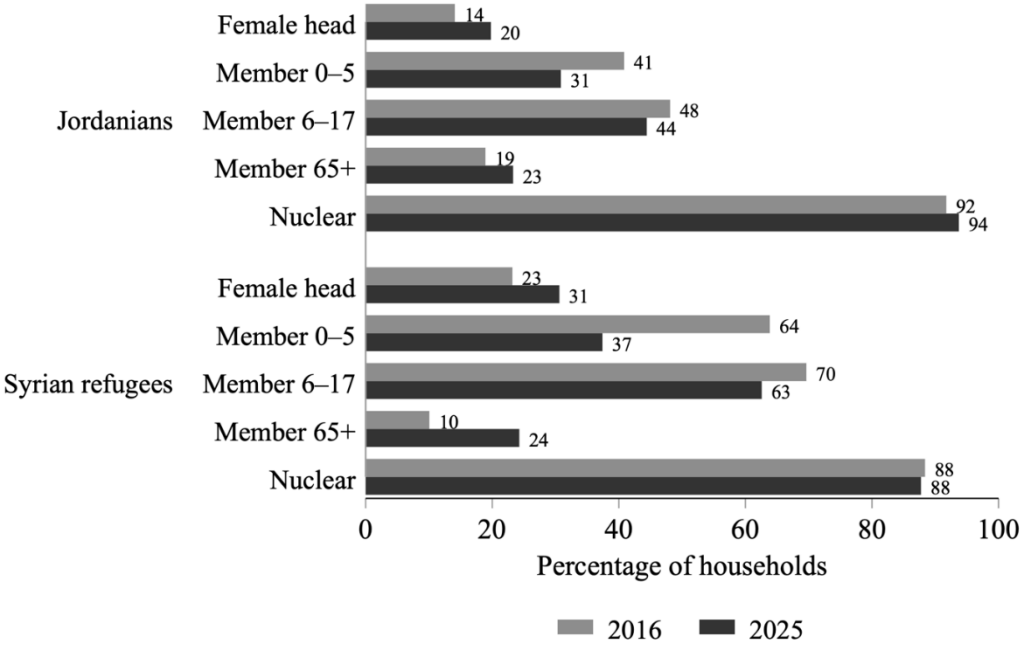
Figure 4. Household size (total number of members in the household as a percentage of households), Jordanians and Syrian refugees, 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Figure 5 explores the household structure of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households, comparing 2016 and 2025 as well. Syrian refugee households are more likely to have a female head, and increasingly so over time. While 23 percent of Syrian refugee households had a female head in 2016, this increased to 31 percent in 2025, compared to 20 percent among Jordanian households in 2025. Female-headed households may face a variety of unique challenges in the absence of a male head, but they may also be more (de facto) empowered – for instance, they may have greater physical mobility (Krafft et al. 2024).

Figure 5. Household composition: Percentage of households with a female head, a member aged 0-5, a member aged 6-17, a member 65+, percentage nuclear, Jordanians and Syrian refugees, 2016 and 2025

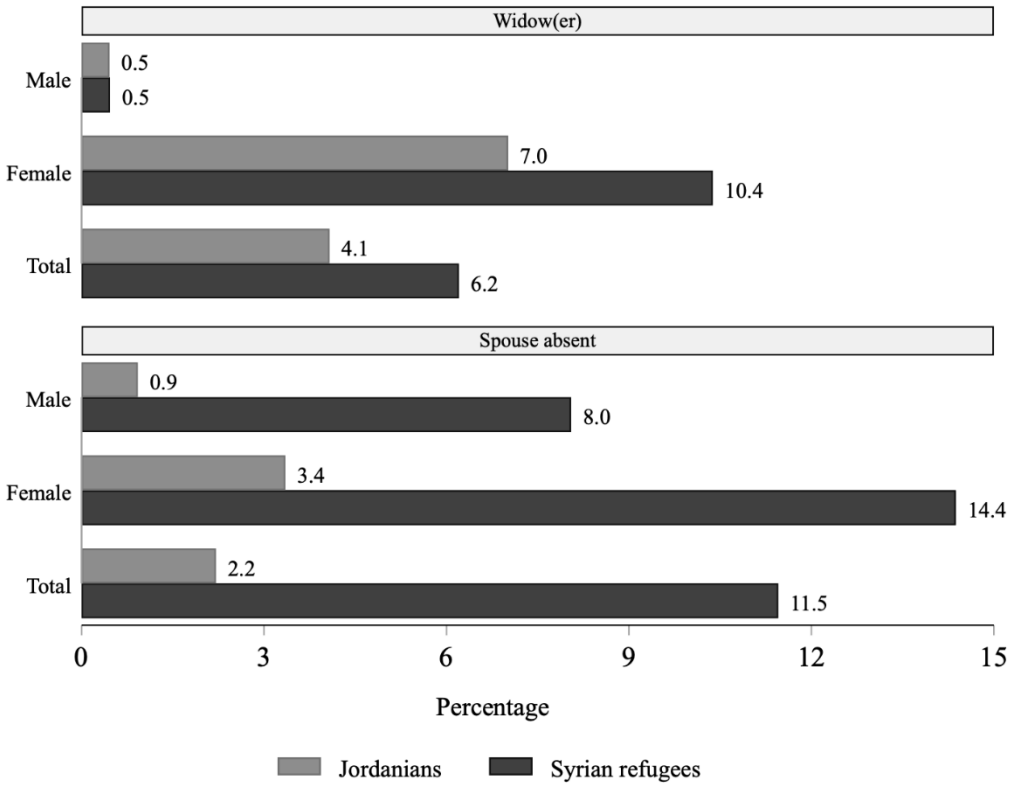


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Over time, Syrian households became less likely to have a member who was younger than primary school age (aged 0-5, inclusive) but still remained more likely than Jordanian households (Figure 5). In 2016, 64 percent of Syrian households had a member aged 0-5, and this rate fell to 37 percent in 2025, approaching the rate of Jordanian households in 2025 (31 percent). There was a smaller decrease in the share of Syrian refugee households with school age (6-17 years) children, from 70 percent in 2016 to 63 percent in 2025 (compared to 44 percent of Jordanians in 2025). There has been a substantial increase in the share of Syrian households with elderly members, aged 65+, from 10 percent in 2016 to 24 percent in 2025 (versus 23 percent for Jordanians in 2025). The share of households that are nuclear (only head, spouse, and children; no extended family members) has remained stable for Syrians, at 88 percent (versus 94 percent for Jordanians in 2025).

Figure 6 explores family member absence and loss as of 2025, focusing on those aged 15-64. Among the ever married, 4.1 percent of Jordanians and 6.2 percent of Syrians are widow(er)s. Almost all of this spouse loss is among women (7.0 percent of Jordanian women and 10.4 percent of Syrian women are widowed). Among the currently married, 2.2 percent of Jordanians and 11.5 percent of Syrians have absent spouses, with higher rates among women (14.4 percent of Syrian women had absent spouses in 2025). These rates for Syrians are higher than 2016 (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2019), which is likely a driver of increases in female-headed households.

Figure 6. Widow(er) as a percentage of the ever married, spouse absence as a percentage of the currently married, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 15-64, 2025



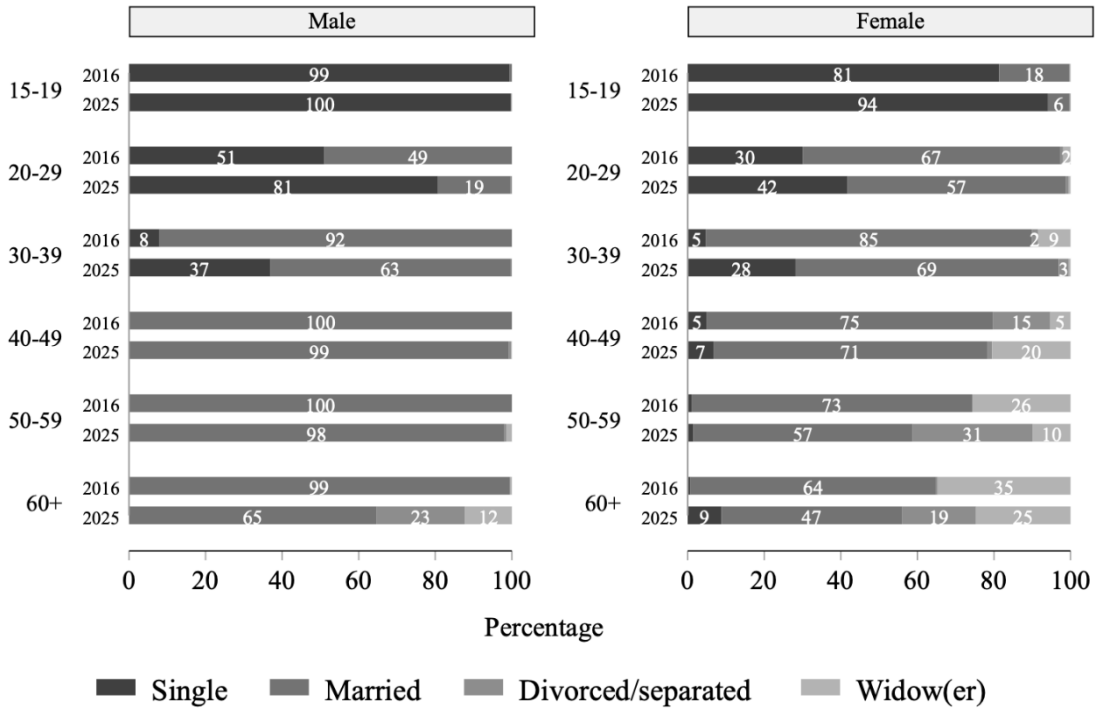
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

3. Marriage and fertility

Figure 7 explores marital status of Syrian refugees aged 15+ by sex and round. Historically, Syrian refugees had relatively high rates of girl child marriage (under age 18) even in Syria, a practice that had continued at similar rates for Syrian refugees in Jordan through 2016 (Sieverding et al. 2019, 2020). At that time, there was evidence that marriage market dynamics, such as marriage costs, might decelerate marriage, and indeed the figure demonstrates this to be the case. While in 2016, 18 percent of Syrian refugee women aged 15-19 had ever married, in 2025, this was only 6 percent. Looking specifically at child marriage (not shown), in 2016, 15 percent of girls aged 15-17 were married, and this had fallen to 3 percent in 2025. Focusing on those aged 18-24 in each wave, while in 2016 the probability of marrying by age 18 was 18 percent for girls, this had dropped to 9 percent in 2025. Marriage has become later (but still nearly universal) for Syrian refugees. For instance, 49 percent of men were married in the 20-29 age group in 2016, but this had dropped to 19 percent in 2025. Yet less than one percent of men aged 40-49 had never married in both 2016 and 2025, and 5-7 percent of women aged 40-49 were still single across waves. From 2016 to 2025, the median age at marriage[3] for the population aged 15+ increased, from 20 to 22 years old for women and from 25 to 26 years old for men.

[3] Estimated using Kaplan-Meier failure function, which accounts for censoring (those not yet married).

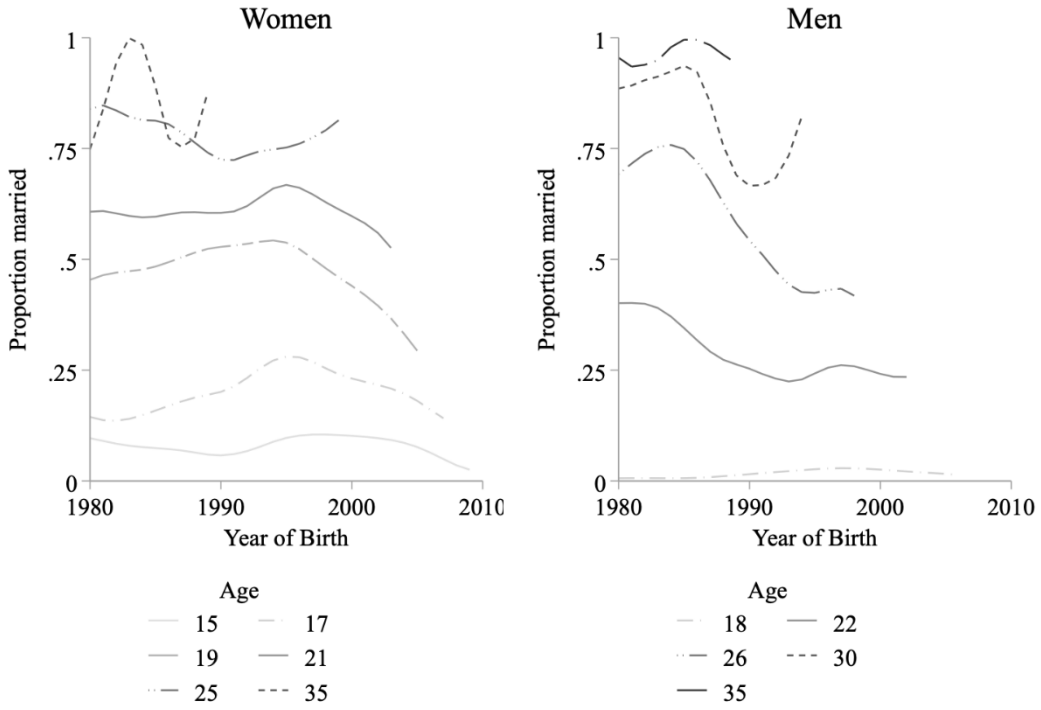
Figure 7. Marital status (percentage) by sex and age group, Syrian refugees aged 15+, 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Figure 8 explores the proportion of Syrian refugee women and men married by various ages, by birth cohort, for cohorts born 1980-2010. The high rate of girl child marriage, rising even somewhat through mid-1990s birth cohorts (when girls were back in Syria), has demonstrably decreased for recent cohorts, who were adolescents in Jordan. Very few Syrian men were ever married by age 18. The proportion of women married by ages 19 and 21 has also declined steadily for cohorts born since the mid-1990s, and likewise the proportion of men married by age 26 has fallen for recent cohorts. Although there has been some historical decline in women married by 25 and men married by 30, there has also been some more recent stabilization or increase, and marriage remains near universal by age 35 for both men and women.

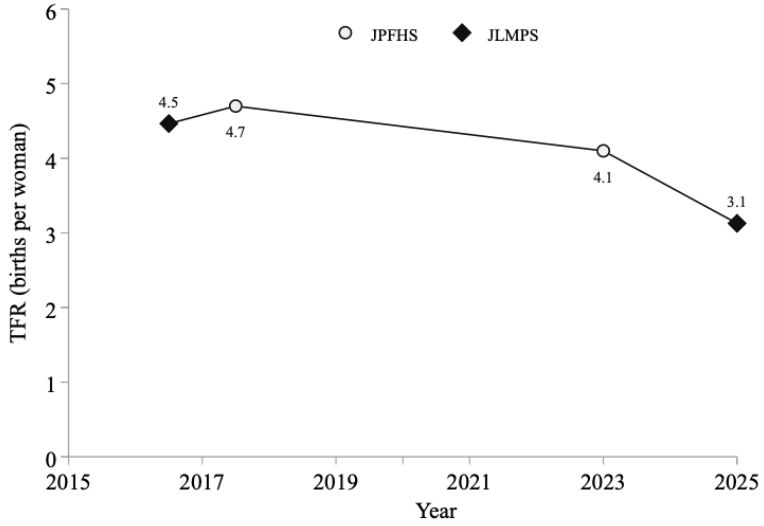
Figure 8. Percentage married before various ages, by birth cohort, cohorts born 1980-2010, Syrian refugees, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025
Notes: Lowess (locally weighted regression) mean smoother, bandwidth 2

Figure 9 examines the total fertility rate (TFR, births per woman) for Syrian refugees over time using the JLMPS and also the Jordan Population and Family Health Survey (JPFHS) of 2017-18 and 2023 (Department of Statistics (DoS) [Jordan] and ICF 2024; Department of Statistics (Jordan) and ICF 2019). The JLMPS in 2016 documented a TFR of 4.5 births per woman for Syrian refugees and the JPFHS in 2017-18 estimated 4.7 births per woman for Syrians, similar to the same population in pre-conflict Syria (TFR of 4.9 (Sieverding et al. 2019)). Fertility had declined by 2023, to 4.1 births per woman per the JPFHS, and further fell to 3.1 births per woman in 2025 according to the JLMPS. Jordanian women had a lower fertility rate than Syrian women in 2016 and although they had experienced a fertility stall at that time (Krafft et al. 2021; Sieverding et al. 2019), have also subsequently experienced fertility decline (Krafft, Assaad, and Abushehab 2026). Although fertility decline is often assumed to be a steady process, there are also common patterns of rapid fertility decline globally, as well as stalls and even reversals (Bongaarts and Hodgson 2022). The fertility decline for Syrian refugees in Jordan over a decade is similar in magnitude to that that took place in the Southern region of Africa, from 4.5 births per woman in 1985-1990 to 3.0 births per woman in 1995-2000, a decade later (Bongaarts and Hodgson 2022).

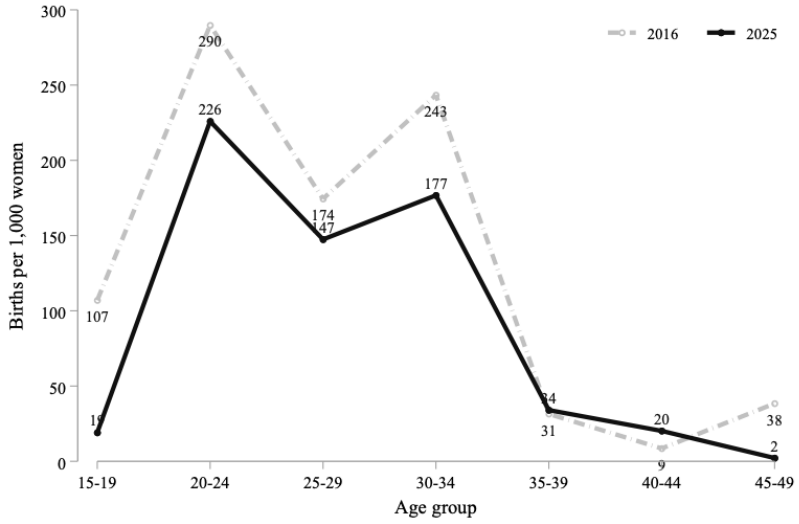
Figure 9. Total fertility rate, Syrian refugees, 2016-2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025
Notes: JLMPS statistics calculated from the three calendar years preceding the survey; Jordan Population and Family Health Survey (JPFHS) statistics for Syrians from published reports (Department of Statistics (DoS) [Jordan] and ICF 2024; Department of Statistics (Jordan) and ICF 2019).

Figure 10 explores age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for Syrian refugees in the JLMPS 2016 and 2025. Fertility has fallen substantially at ages 15-19, in line with drops in early marriage, from an ASFR of 107 annual births per thousand women in 2016 to 19 in 2025. Peak fertility is at ages 20-24 in both waves, but with an ASFR of 290 annual births per thousand women in 2016 and 226 in 2025. Fertility at ages 25-29 is actually slightly lower than 30-34 in both waves, at 174 in 2016 (versus 243 at ages 30-34) and 147 (versus 177 at ages 30-34) in 2025. Fertility at ages 35-44 is slightly higher in 2025 than 2016, but still much lower than for ages 20-34, suggesting some potential postponement.

Figure 10. Age specific fertility rates (annual births per thousand women), Syrian refugees, 2016 and 2025

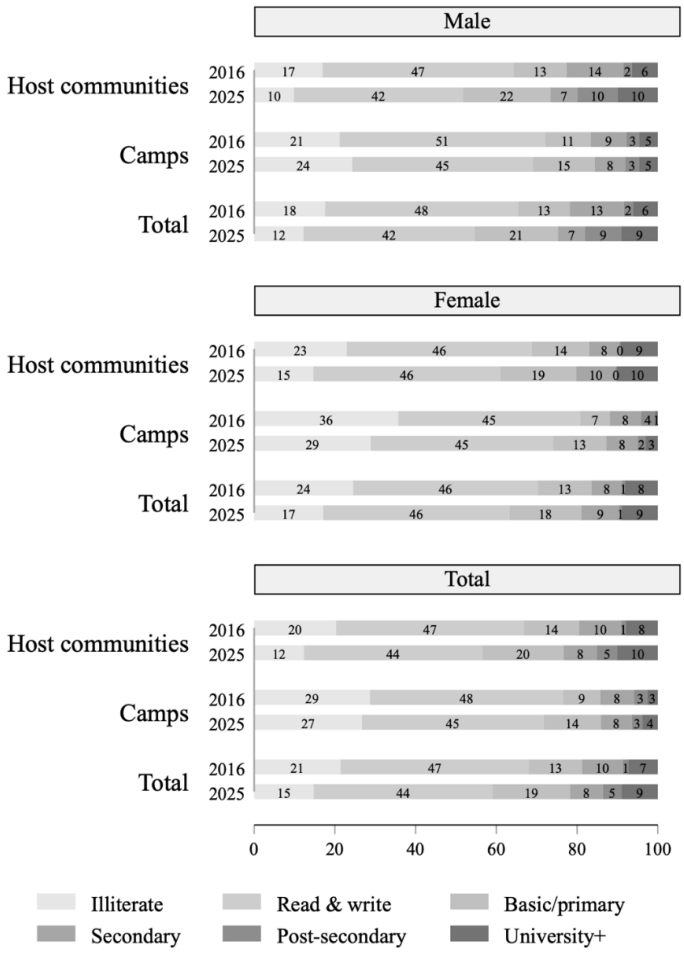


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025
Notes: JLMPS statistics calculated from the three calendar years preceding the survey

4. Education

The adult Syrian refugee population (aged 25-64) in Jordan has low levels of education (Figure 11) with only slight changes from 2016 to 2025 (we explore enrollment for youth, for whom there have been improvements, in the next figure). Overall, 15 percent of adult Syrian refugees in 2025 were illiterate, down from 21 percent in 2016. The most common education level of Syrian refugees is read and write, 44-47 percent in 2016 and 2025. The mean number of years of school for Syrian refugee adults was 7.0 in 2016 and 7.7 in 2025. Relatively few Syrian refugees, but more over time, completed primary or basic education, 13 percent in 2016 and 19 percent in 2025. Some did complete secondary, 10 percent in 2016 and 8 percent in 2023, and more had attained higher education (post-secondary or university degrees) in 2025 (14 percent) than 2016 (8 percent). In 2016 particularly, women were less educated, but made some progress converging with men by 2025. The population in camps was also less educated and more likely to be illiterate than those in host communities (non-camp areas, which in Jordan are predominantly urban), underscoring the selected and vulnerable nature of the camp population (Obi 2021; Ginn 2020).

Figure 11. Educational attainment of Syrian refugees (percentage) by sex and location, ages 25-64, 2016 and 2025



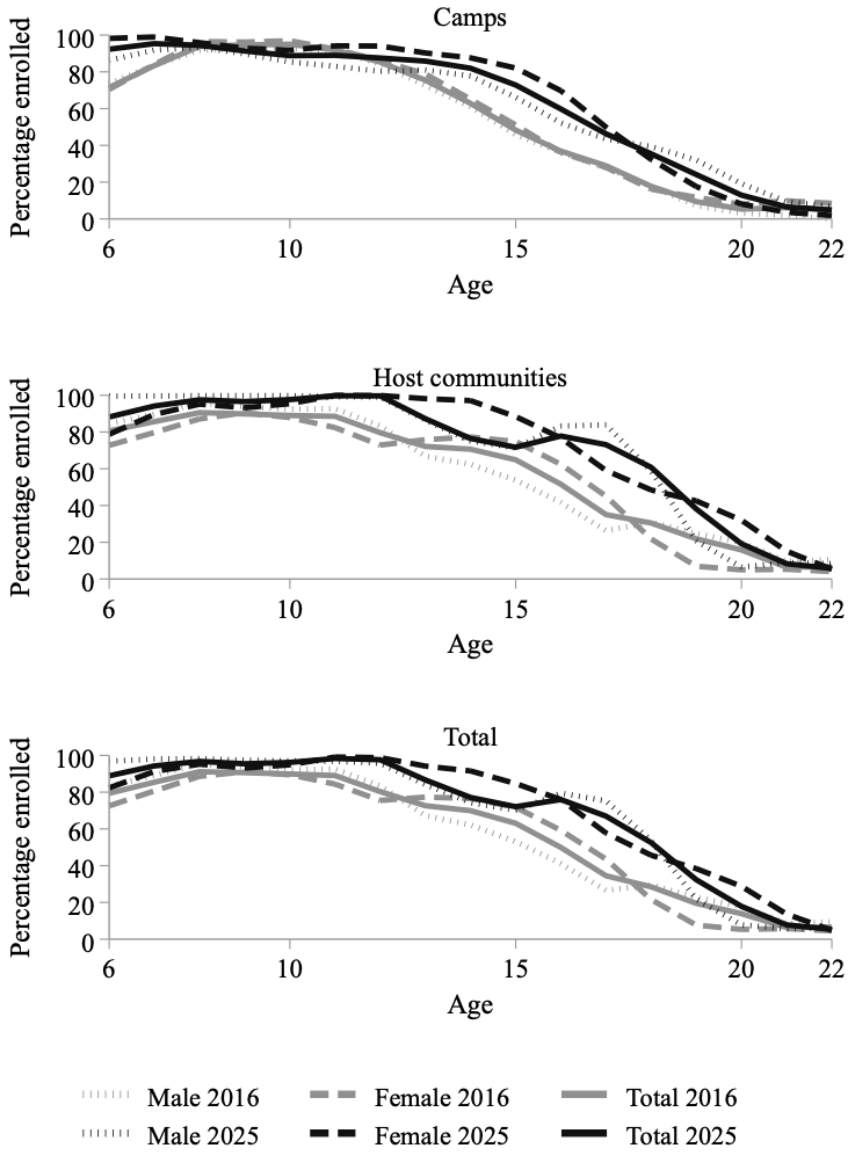
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Syrian refugee children had, by 2016, achieved educational enrollments similar to the levels experienced by the Syrian refugees who fled to Jordan when they were in Syria pre-conflict (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2022). A critical component of Syrian refugees' access to school in Jordan, in comparison to other contexts such as Lebanon, has been their integration into the public school system, with no fees charged for basic or secondary education (Krafft, Malaeb, et al. 2022). By 2025, enrollments had increased further, as shown in Figure 12. Although there is some delayed entry in 2025, enrollments at ages 8-12 are nearly universal. Although enrollments in 2025 begin to decline in the teen years, the drop is smaller and delayed relative to 2016, when enrollments fell after age 10. Comparing 2016 and 2025 there is a particularly large difference in enrollments for teenagers, and enrollments are higher (but remain low) through age 22.

Although some of these enrollments may be delayed and outside the correct grade for age, net enrollment rates – capturing those enrolled in the correct grade for their age – have risen over time, as has on-time completion. Net enrollment rates for Syrian refugees in Jordan have risen from 83 percent to 90 percent in 2025 for basic education (ages 6-15), from 21 percent in 2016 to 58 percent in 2025 for secondary school (ages 16-17) and from 3 percent in 2016 to 14 percent in 2025 for higher education (ages 18-22). In terms of on-time completion, among Syrian refugees aged 16-17, the share who had completed basic rose from 32 percent in 2016 to 64 percent in 2025. Among Syrian refugees aged 18-19, the share who had completed secondary rose from 3 percent to 40 percent over 2016 to 2025.

Enrollments tend to be higher in host communities than camps, particularly in the teenage years. Girls' enrollments are also comparable to boys, and particularly higher in the early teens, when boys start to drop out, potentially to participate in the labor market (Presler-Marshall et al. 2025). Although Syrian refugees' enrollment rates have made substantial progress over time, these school enrollment rates remain below those of Jordanians (Krafft, Assaad, and Abushehab 2026).

Figure 12. Educational enrollment of Syrian refugees (percentage) by sex, age group, and location, ages 6-22, 2016 and 2025

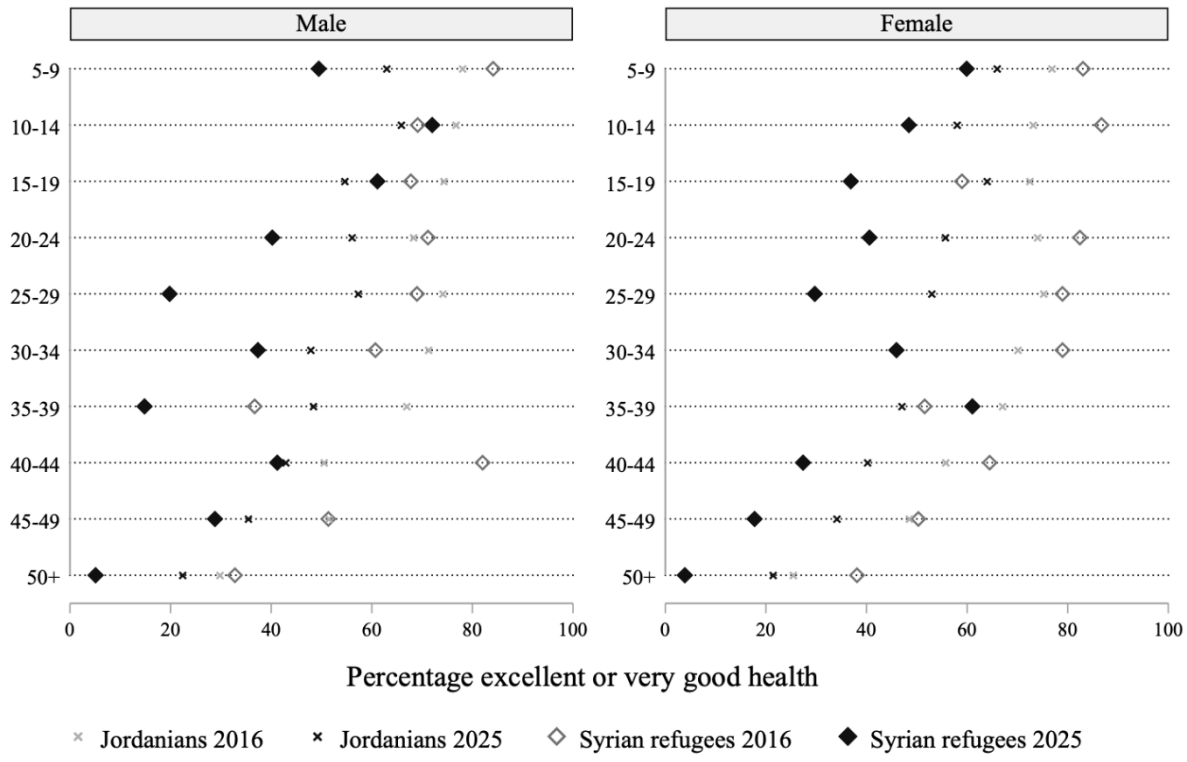


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025
Notes: Percentage of age group enrolled, regardless of grade. Lowess (locally weighted regression) mean smoother, bandwidth 0.33

5. Health and wellbeing

Syrian refugees have worse health than Jordanians, which may be a result of conflict as well as experiences during displacement. While initially Syrian refugees could access health care for free, in 2015 they faced the same prices as Jordanians and in 2018 were charged higher prices as foreigners (Tamimi et al. 2024). Figure 13 shows the percentage of those aged 6+ who reported excellent or very good health by nationality, sex, age group, and wave. Syrian refugees' health is worse than that of Jordanians in 2025 and has also declined over time, usually to a greater extent than for Jordanians. Health declines substantially with age, with large declines starting at earlier ages for Syrians than Jordanians.

Figure 13. Excellent or very good health (percentage), by sex and age group, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 6+, 2016 and 2025

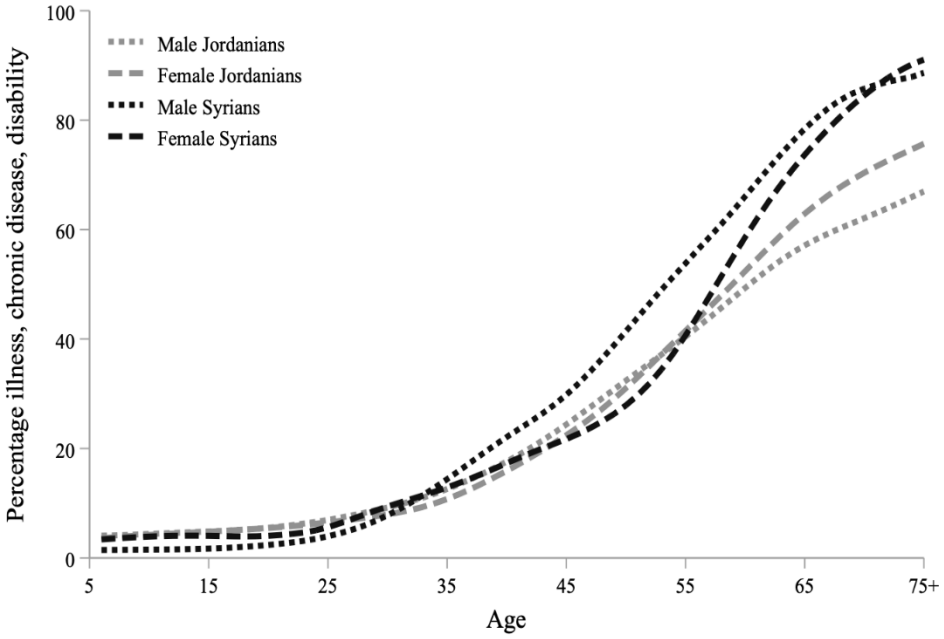


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Figure 14 explores disability or self-reported long-term or chronic illness by nationality and age group for ages 6+. Disability is based on facing any level of difficulty in functioning in any of six domains per the Washington Group short questionnaire on functioning (Washington Group on Disability Statistics 2022).[4] Syrians and Jordanians have similar and low rates of illness and disability through their twenties. Starting at around age 35, male Syrians have higher rates of illness and disability than other groups, and starting around age 55 female Syrians have higher rates of illness and disability than Jordanians (for whom men have the lowest levels of illness and disability at older ages). Syrians' and particularly Syrian men's worse health could be due to a variety of factors, including selection, with healthier individuals staying in Syria or migrating elsewhere, or ill health due to greater exposure to active conflict (whether protesting or, for men, in military service), or from undertaking relatively more hazardous work in Jordan. Worse health could also be the result of worse access to health care, a point we explore below.

[4] Data are not available in 2016, and hence we cannot compare over time.

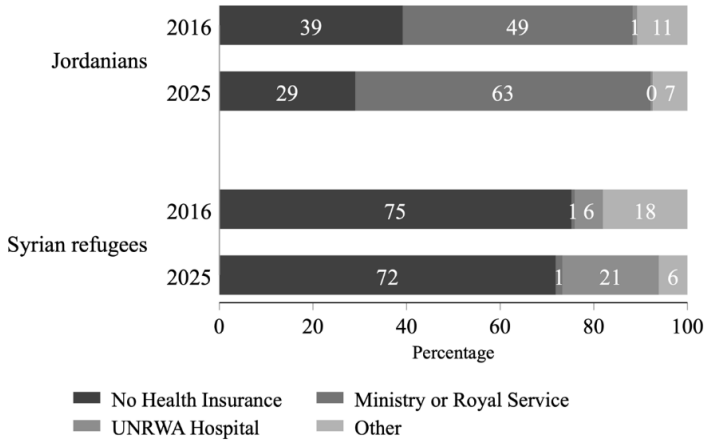
Figure 14. Disability or self-reported long-term or chronic illness, (percentage), by sex and age group, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 6+, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Lowess (locally weighted regression) mean smoother, bandwidth 0.5

Syrian refugees rarely have health insurance, with only small improvement over time in rates of health insurance (Figure 15). In 2016, 75 percent of Syrians aged 6+ had no health insurance coverage, compared to 39 percent of Jordanians. In 2025, this had decreased slightly to 72 percent with no health insurance (vs. 29 percent of Jordanians). There was a sizeable increase in UNRWA hospital insurance for Syrians (from 6 percent in 2016 to 21 percent in 2025), which is primarily used by refugees in camps.

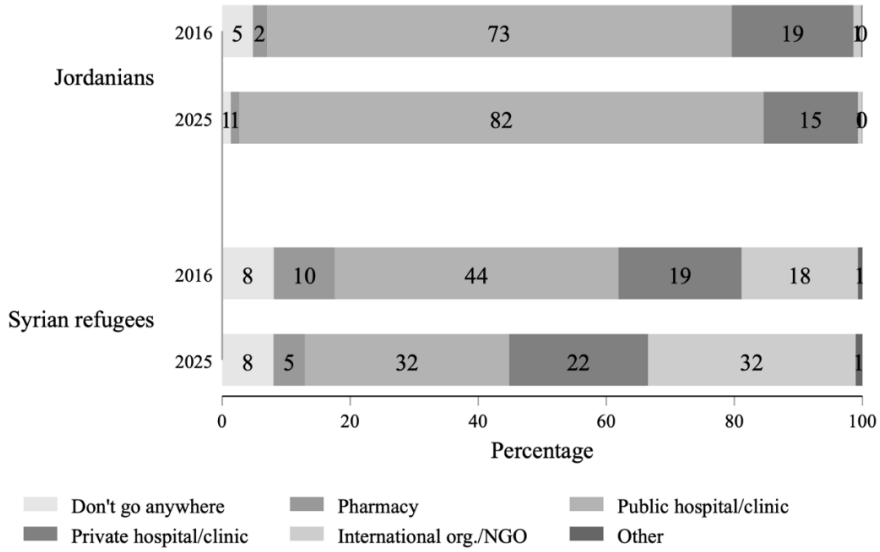
Figure 15. Health insurance (percentage), Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 6+, 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025
Notes: Primary type of insurance if multiple types of insurance (multiple only possible in 2025)

Figure 16 shows where Jordanians and Syrian refugees go for health care for those aged 6+, comparing 2016 and 2025. For Syrians, there has been a steady share not going anywhere for care, 8 percent in 2016 and 2025 (compared to just 1 percent for Jordanians in 2025). Use of pharmacies (from 10 percent to 5 percent) and public hospitals/clinics (from 44 to 32 percent) as care sources declined for Syrian refugees. Use of private hospitals/clinics remained stable (19-22 percent), and use of international organization/NGO clinics increased substantially (from 18 percent to 32 percent), likely as a result of increasing fees in public settings over time (Tamimi et al. 2024).

Figure 16. Health care source (percentage), Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 6+, 2016 and 2025

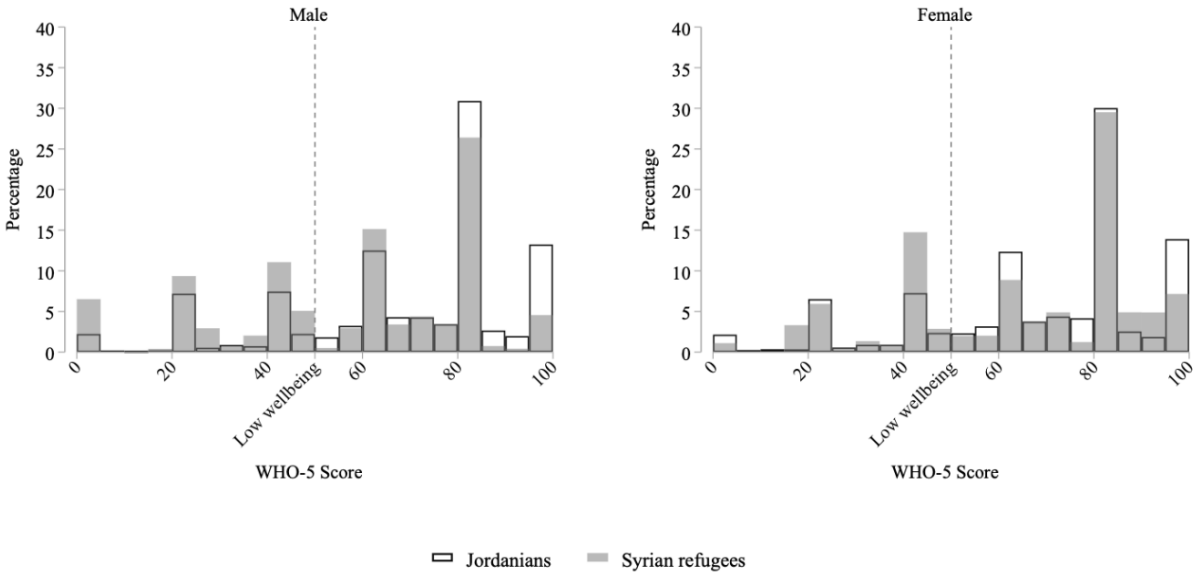


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Syrian refugees have slightly lower subjective wellbeing and higher rates of low wellbeing than Jordanians. Figure 17 shows the distribution, for those 15+, of the WHO-5 wellbeing score (ranging from 0-100, the worst possible to best possible wellbeing, with 50 used as a cutoff for low wellbeing) (Topp et al. 2015). Syrians are slightly more likely to be at the low end of the distribution, with 34 percent (38 percent of men and 31 percent of women) having low wellbeing (WHO-5 score below 50). For Jordanians, 22 percent of men and women have low wellbeing. The mean WHO-5 score is 64 for Syrian women and 47 for Syrian men, compared to 68 for Jordanian women and men.[5]

[5] Research on wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic showed lower levels but no significant gender differences in wellbeing (Sieverding et al. 2023).

Figure 17. Distribution (percentage) of WHO-5 wellbeing score by sex, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 15+, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

6. Labor market outcomes

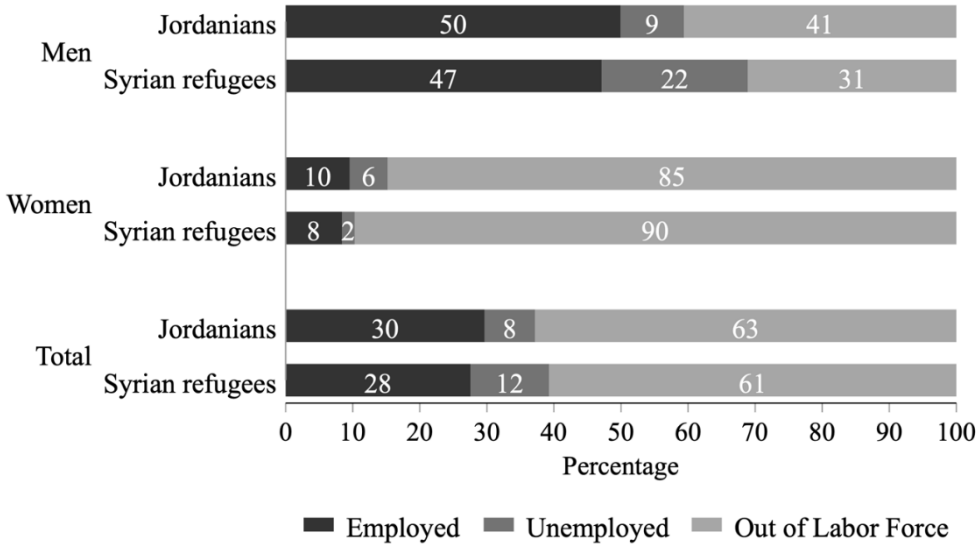
Turning to labor market outcomes, we follow international guidance in defining employment as work for pay or profit (ILO 2013), even if for just one hour, and we examine labor market outcomes based on activity in the seven days preceding the survey.[6] In Figure 18, in exploring labor market statuses, we focus on the standard definition of unemployment, which requires that an individual was not employed in the preceding week, wanted to work, was available to work, and searched within the past four weeks. Labor force participation is the union of employment and unemployment (versus being out of the labor force). In Figure 18 we present the distribution of labor market statuses – importantly, the percentage of the population that is unemployed is not the unemployment rate – the unemployment rate is instead the share of the labor force that is unemployed. The unemployment rate is shown in Figure 19, which uses an additional definition of broad unemployment – dropping the search criterion from the standard definition, and thus capturing discouraged unemployment (and correspondingly the labor force including the discouraged).

Figure 18 explores the labor market status, in 2025, of Jordanians and Syrian refugees, by sex. A smaller share of Syrian refugees are employed (28 percent of those aged 15-64) compared to Jordanians (30 percent). A similar share are in the labor force, 37 percent of Jordanians and 39 percent of Syrians, but this is because more Syrians are unemployed (12 percent of the population versus 8 percent for Jordanians; note that this is not an unemployment rate). Syrian men's participation, at 69 percent, exceeds

[6] In some contexts, work may be under-detected, or there may be additional subsistence work that is not employment but for own consumption (Keo et al. 2022; Assaad and Krafft 2024). This under-detection tends to be particularly in contexts with high shares of agriculture in the economy, which is a small share of Jordan's economy (Assaad and Krafft 2024; Assaad and Khraise 2026).

that of Jordanian men's, at 59 percent, but their employment rates are lower – 47 percent versus 50 percent for Jordanian men. More than a fifth of Syrian men are unemployed (not an unemployment rate) compared to 9 percent of Jordanian men. In contrast, Syrian refugee women are even less likely to participate in the labor force than Jordanian women; only 10 percent are in the labor force versus 15 percent of Jordanian women and only 8 percent are employed versus 10 percent of Jordanian women.

Figure 18. Labor market status (percentage) by sex, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 15-64, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Unemployed, shown here as a share of the population, is not an unemployment rate.

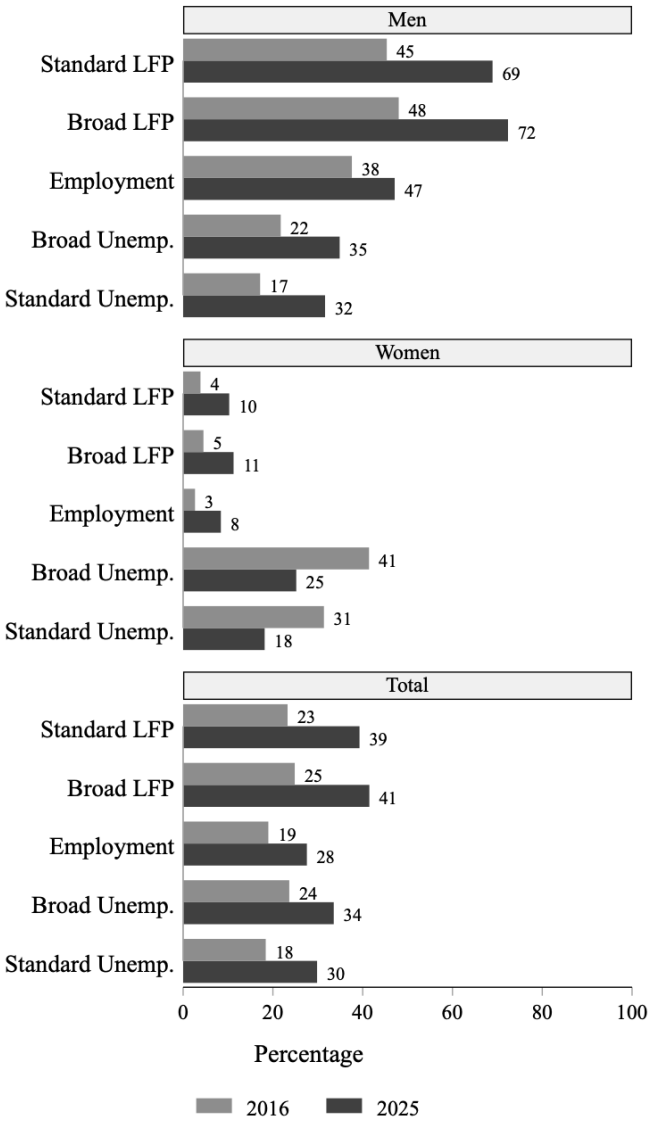
Figure 19 explores labor force participation, employment, and unemployment rates over 2016 and 2025 and by sex for Syrian refugees aged 15-64,[7] showing both the standard and broad definitions of unemployment and thus the labor force. Labor force participation has risen over time, driven by increases in both employment and unemployment rates. While in 2016 the standard labor force participation rate was 23 percent for Syrian refugees, this rose to 39 percent in 2025 (rates using the broad definition were two percentage points higher in both years). Women's participation increased over time but remained low, e.g., rising from 4 to 10 percent by the standard definition), while men's rose substantially from 45 percent to 69 percent using the standard definition.

Employment rates rose by less than labor force participation, but did rise, from 19 percent in 2016 to 28 percent in 2025. They rose from 3 to 8 percent for women and 38 to 47 percent for men. Unemployment rates among Syrian refugees are very high and rose substantially over 2016 to 2025; from

[7] Rates of child labor are low, 1.3 percent in 2025 for ages 6-17 and 0.5 percent for ages 6-14, similar to 2016 (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2019). In 2025, using time use data for ages 10-17, we confirmed that child labor was not under-reported with the direct question, as similarly little child labor was in the time use data, although it is possible both were underreported.

18 to 30 percent using the standard definition and 24 to 34 percent using the broad definition. Men's unemployment rate increased from 17 percent to 32 percent using the standard definition. Women's rates were already high, 31 percent by the standard definition in 2016, falling to 18 percent in 2025. Overall, the picture that emerges over time is that increasing shares of Syrians, especially Syrian men, want to work, and while slightly more have found employment, men have experienced increasing unemployment.

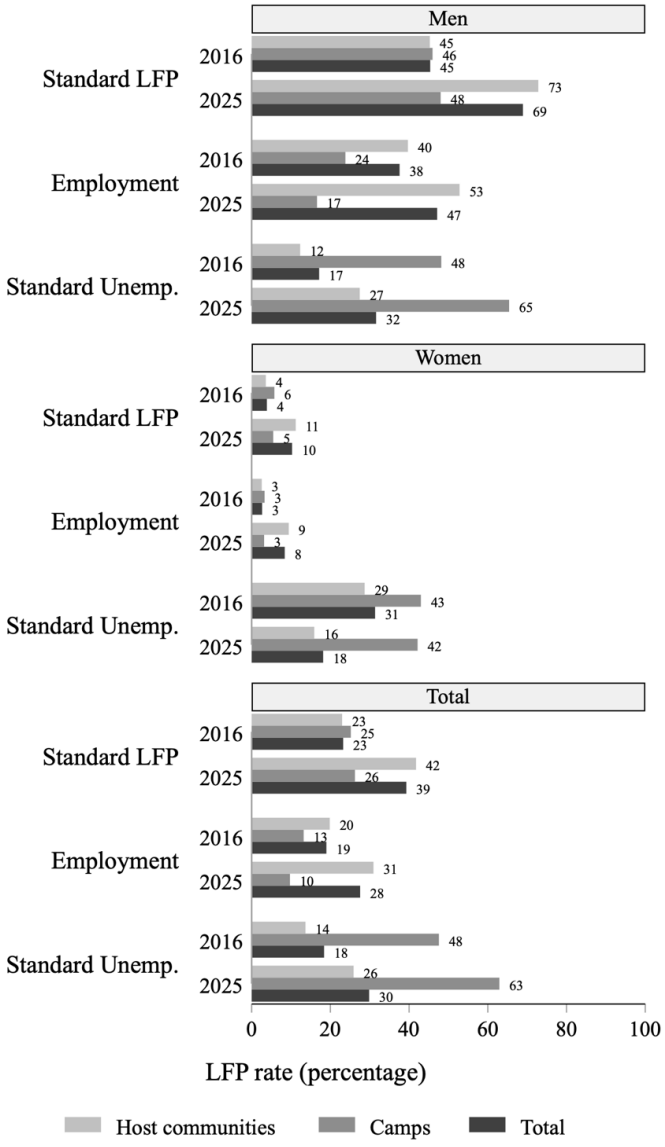
Figure 19. Labor force participation (percentage of the population), employment (percentage of the population), and unemployment (percentage of the labor force) rates by sex and definition, Syrian refugees aged 15-64, 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

Figure 20 explores how labor force outcomes have evolved over time for Syrian refugees by whether they reside in camps versus host communities. In both 2016 and 2025, employment rates were lower in camps (10 percent in 2025 vs. 31 percent in host communities) and unemployment rates were higher (63 percent in 2025 in camps versus 26 percent in host communities). In 2025, for men, participation rates in camps were similar to 2016, but employment fell, and unemployment rose slightly. In host communities, participation rose substantially and employment slightly, with unemployment rates also rising substantially, although still far below the unemployment rates in camps. Women's employment and participation was low in both camps and host communities in both waves, with the slight improvements that took place driven by host communities.

Figure 20. Labor force participation (percentage of the population), employment (percentage of the population), and unemployment rates (percentage of the labor force), standard definition, by sex and residence, Syrian refugees aged 15-64, 2016 and 2025

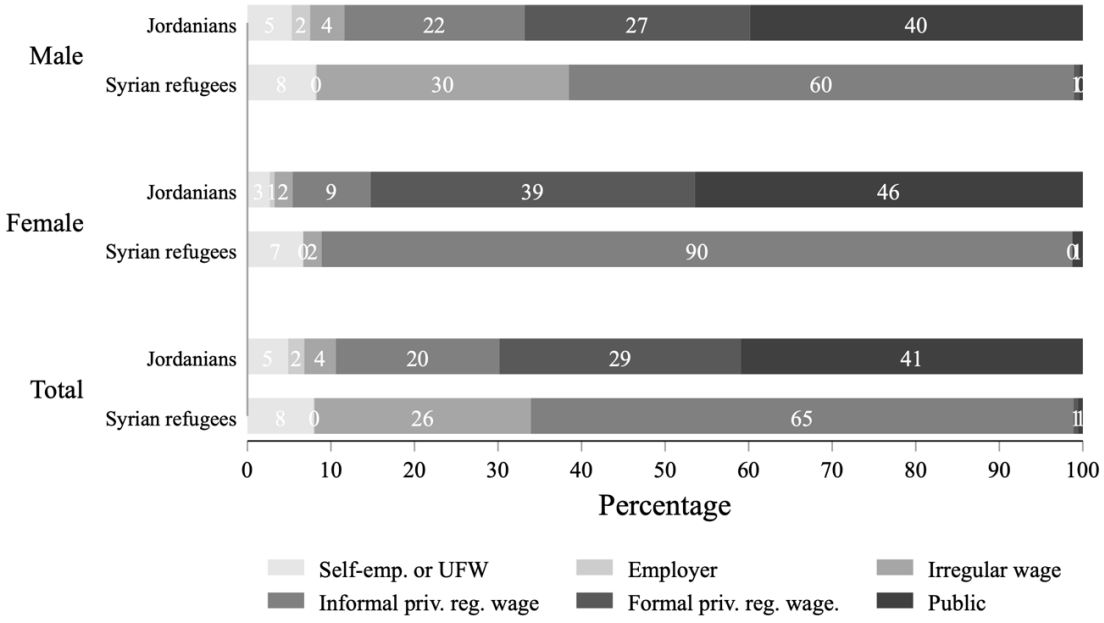


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

For the employed, Figure 21 explores the type of work Syrian refugees and Jordanians had in 2025, by sex. Syrians and Jordanians occupy quite different segments of the labor market, in line with past research (Fallah et al. 2019; Razzaz 2017). Past research has also established that the Syrian refugee influx did not worsen labor market outcomes for Jordanians, nor specifically for youth (Fallah et al. 2019). However, Syrian refugees may have displaced other migrant groups, such as Egyptians (Malaeb and Wahba 2024).

We distinguish by employment status, sector, and formality, where formality is defined by social insurance (social security) coverage, following international guidance (International Labour Organization 2013). Syrians did not have access to social insurance until 2021 (Stave et al. 2021). Among Jordanians, 41 percent are employed in the public sector, compared to 1 percent of Syrian refugees. While 27 percent of Jordanians work in the formal private sector in wage work, only 1 percent of Syrians do so. Syrians largely work in informal private regular wage work (65 percent), a status held by few Jordanians (20 percent) or irregular (casual/seasonal)[8] wage work (26 percent), a status held by even fewer Jordanians (4 percent). While some Jordanians (2 percent) are employers, and 5 percent self-employed or unpaid family workers (UFW), less than one percent of Syrians are employers but 8 percent self-employed or UFW. Because very few women work, the patterns for men are nearly identical to those overall. The few Syrian women who do work are mostly in informal private sector wage work (90 percent).

Figure 21. Type of work (percentage) by sex, Jordanians, Syrian refugees, and other nationalities, employed individuals aged 15-64, 2025

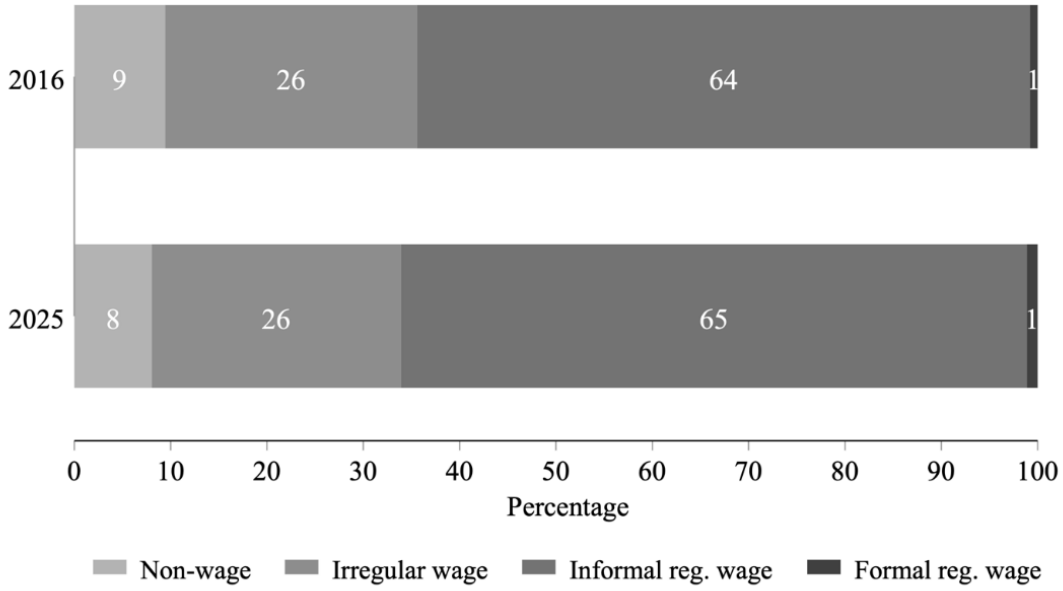


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Sample size of employed Syrian refugee women in 2025 is only N=41

[8] Only 0.5 percent of all Syrian refugees aged 15-64, 1.2 percent of those who ever worked, and 1.2 percent of those who currently worked had ever engaged in a cash-for-work program. None of those currently working were working in a cash for work program at the time.

Figure 22 demonstrates how little the type of work has evolved over time for employed Syrian refugees. The share with formal regular wage employment has remained at 1 percent. The share in informal private sector wage work has increased very slightly, from 65 to 66 percent. The share in irregular wage work remains 26 percent, and non-wage work slightly decreased from 9 percent to 8 percent. Syrian refugees thus remain in a distinct and marginalized segment of the labor market.

Figure 22. Type of work (percentage), Syrian refugees, employed individuals aged 15-64, 2016 and 2025



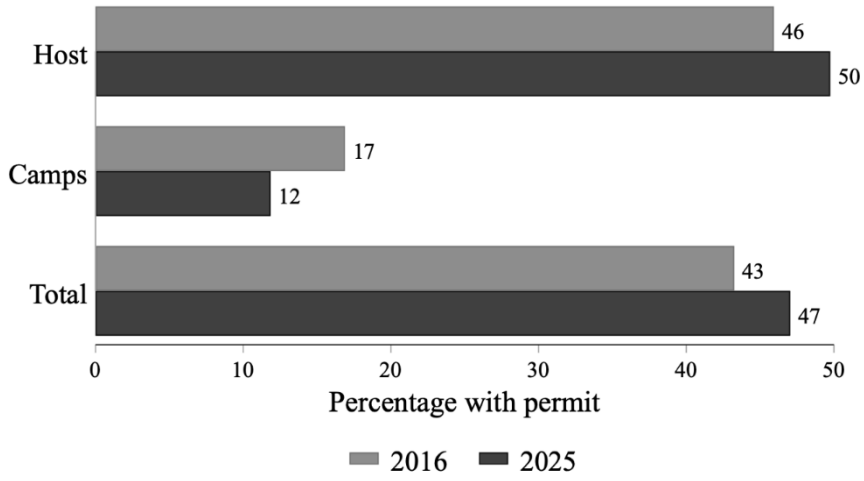
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Not disaggregating by sex due to insufficient sample size of employed Syrian refugee women in 2016

The share of Syrians who are employed and engaged in work for export has risen substantially over time (not shown). While 2 percent of both Jordanians and Syrians worked for firms who produced products for exports in 2016, this share was 4 percent for Jordanians and 10 percent for Syrians in 2025. This shift is likely due to EU relaxation in trade regulations for factories in industrial zones when they employ a high share of Syrian workers (Lenner and Turner 2018).

Although initially Syrian refugees in Jordan were not legally allowed to work, starting in 2016, with the Jordan Compact, they were allowed to legally work in a limited set of sectors, if they obtained a work permit (International Rescue Committee 2017; Lenner and Turner 2018). While the set of occupations remains limited, it had expanded by 2025, along with other improvements such as increased flexibility in work permits (not necessarily tied to a single employer) and inclusion in social insurance (Stave et al. 2021). However, in 2025, the costs of permits were high and required social insurance contributions (UNHCR 2025d).

Figure 23 explores what percentage of employed workers have a work permit by their work location. The percentage with a work permit has risen slightly from 2016 to 2025, from 43 percent to 47 percent.[9] That many individuals still lack work permits may be due to the high costs of the permits (UNHCR 2025d). Workers residing in camps are much less likely to have work permits (12 percent in 2025) than those residing in host communities (50 percent in 2025).

Figure 23. Percentage of workers with a work permit by location of residence, Syrian refugees, employed individuals aged 15-59, 2016 and 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2016 and 2025

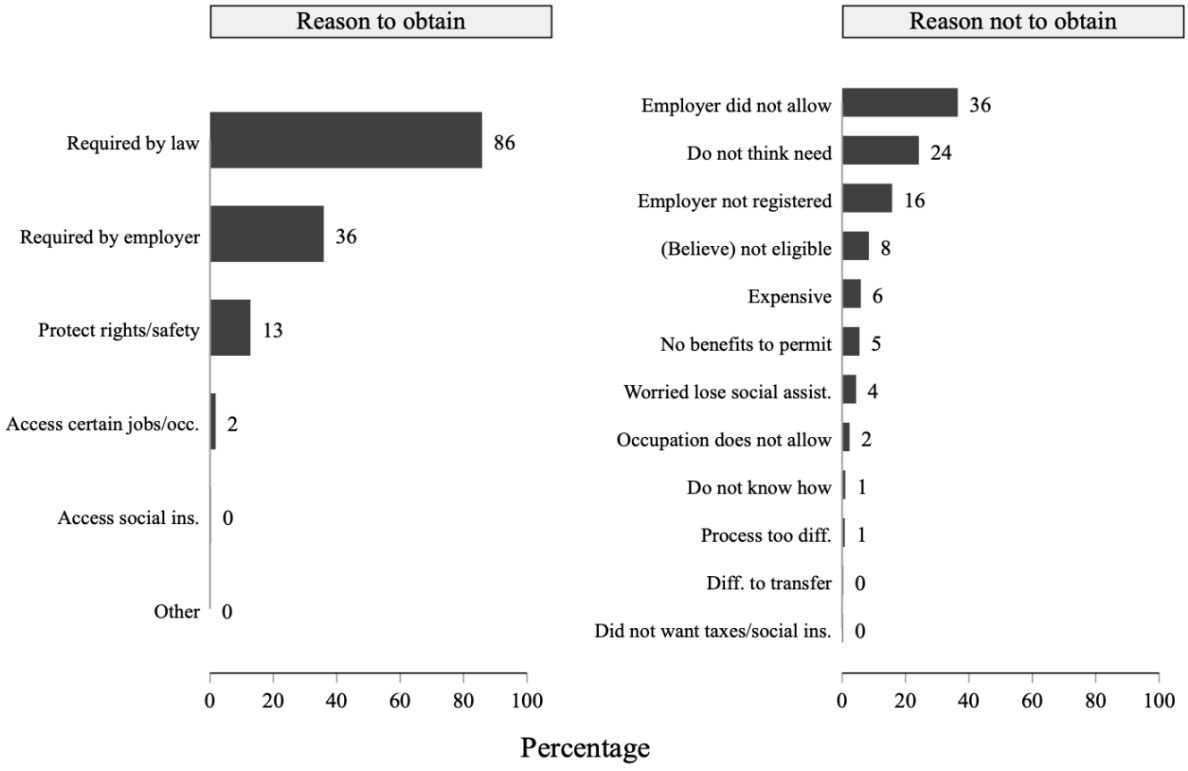
Ongoing changes to the work permit program have been undertaken to try to address barriers to take up of work permits (Stave et al. 2021). However, as of 2025, work permits had added substantial fees and required social security contributions (UNHCR 2025d), which may have disincentivized take-up. Figure 24 explores the reasons for obtaining a work permit, for those who did, or the reasons for not doing so, for those who did not. Multiple reasons are possible in each case. The primary reason for those who obtained work permits to do so was the permits were required by law (86 percent), followed by required by employer (36 percent). Workers were less likely to obtain work permits to protect their rights and safety (13 percent), access certain jobs or occupations (2 percent) or access social insurance (<1 percent).

For those who did not obtain work permits, the most common reasons were the employer not allowing it (36 percent), the individual not thinking he or she needed it (24 percent), or because the employer was not registered (16 percent). Workers sometimes believed they were not eligible (8 percent), found the costs prohibitive (6 percent), perceived no benefits to the permit (5 percent) or that they might lose

[9] Administrative data shows a similar number of work permits were issued in 2025 as in 2017 (UNHCR 2026), when most of JLMPS 2016 fielding took place. Although some other surveys have shown a lower rate of work permits (UNHCR 2024), our results of work permit coverage are consistent with estimates of the population of employed Syrian refugees and the number of work permits (UNHCR 2024, 2026).

social assistance (4 percent). Barriers such as an occupation not allowing (2 percent) were also occasionally an issue. However, only one percent or fewer of workers said the process was too difficult or permits were difficult to transfer, that they did not know how to get a permit, or they did not want taxes or social insurance.

Figure 24. Reasons for obtaining a work permit (percentage of employed with a work permit) or not obtaining a work permit (percentage employed, no work permit), Syrian refugees, employed individuals aged 15-64, 2025

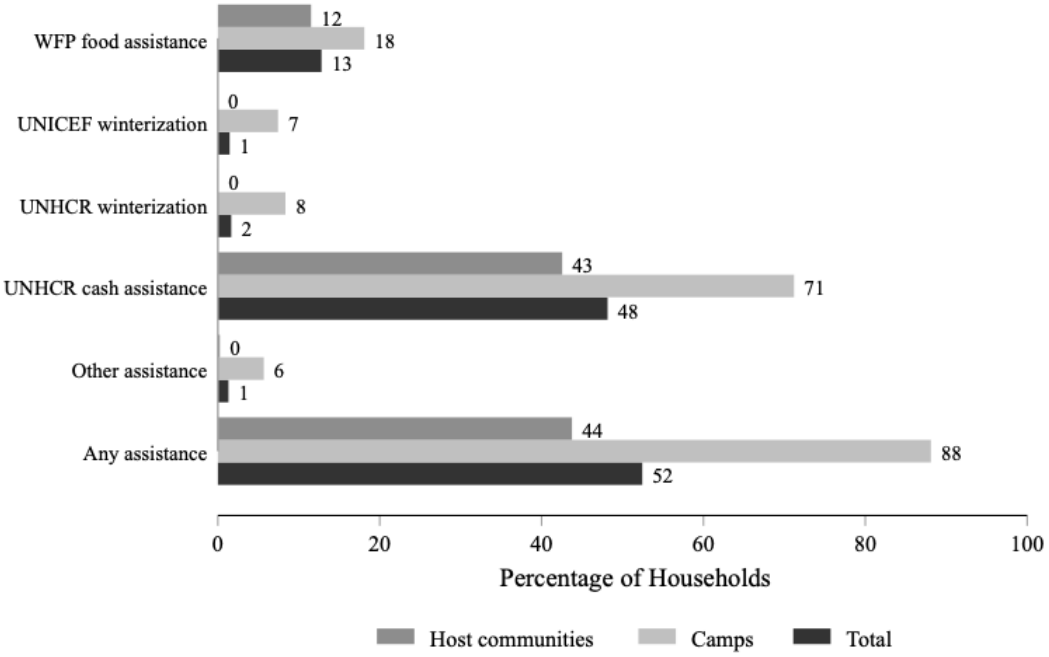


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Multiple reasons possible. "Expensive" response not specifically asked but based on recoding of "other" responses.

7. Assistance, rent, and return intentions

Half of Syrian refugee households received some form of social assistance in the 12 months preceding the survey (52 percent per Figure 25). Assistance is much more common in camps (88 percent) than host communities (44 percent). The most common form of assistance in 2025 is UNHCR cash assistance (48 percent overall, 71 percent in camps), followed by World Food Programme (WFP) assistance (12 percent, 18 percent in camps). Although rare outside of camps, UNICEF or UNHCR winterization or other assistance were each received by 7-8 percent of households in camps. These rates of assistance represent a decline compared to 2016, when, for example, 91 percent of Syrians in camps received food support and 72 percent of those in host communities (Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2019). Cutbacks in international aid have reduced the reach and value of assistance in Jordan (World Food Programme 2025).

Figure 25. Percentage of households receiving various forms of social assistance within the preceding 12 months, by residence, Syrian refugees, 2025

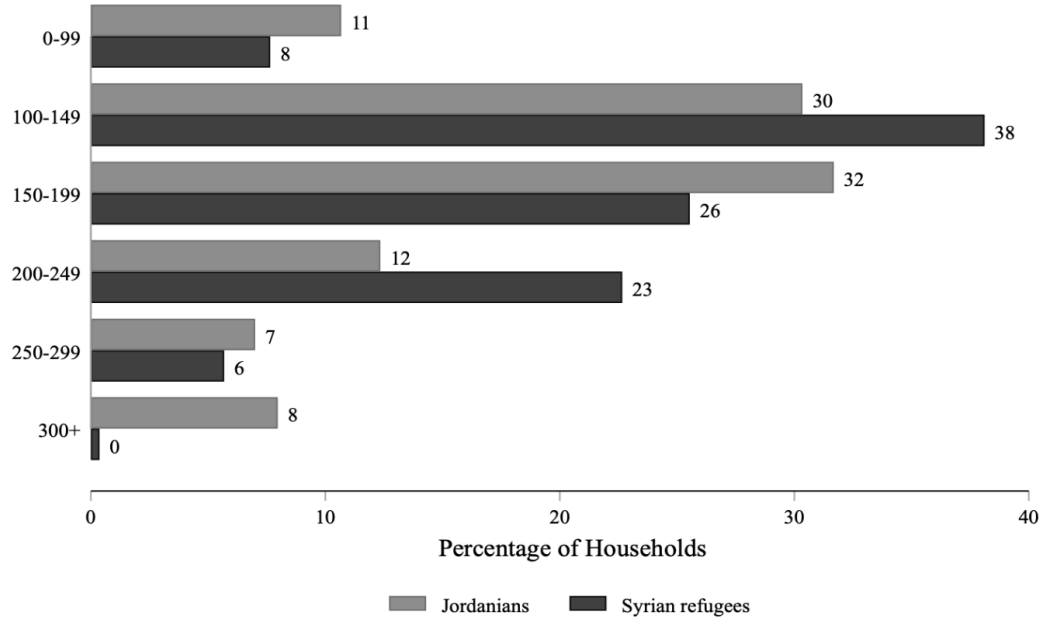


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
Notes: Multiple forms of assistance possible. Other assistance includes UNICEF Hajati cash for school, other cash for school, other winterization, Zakat fund, WFP school feeding program, NAF cash assistance (including Takaful), Ministry of Finance, Income and Sales Tax Department/Cash assistance replacing bread subsidy, Unemployment fund, Old age pension, survivor pension, maternity benefits, disability, employment injury benefits, and any other assistance.

Both WFP assistance and UNHCR cash assistance had a reported median of 15 Jordanian dinar (JD) per month per capita, consistent with current funding levels (World Food Programme 2025). UNHCR winterization had a value of 8 JD per month per capita, and other assistance (which was rarely received) had a median of 27 JD per month per capita (summing across types of assistance).

One of the most substantial expenses Syrian refugees face in host communities is paying for monthly rent. While in 2025 only 20 percent of Jordanians rented their dwelling, 76 percent of Syrians rented their dwelling (the remainder mostly have free housing, 18 percent, primarily in camps, and only 6 percent own their house). The arrival of Syrian refugees created additional pressures on Jordan's housing market, including some increases in rent (Al-Hawarin et al. 2021). The increases in rent resulted from higher demand and unresponsive supply in the local housing market (Rozo and Sviatschi 2021). Figure 26 shows the distribution of households' monthly rent (for renters). Jordanians are more likely to have very low rental costs, under 100 JD per month (11 percent, versus 8 percent of Syrian refugees). Syrians most commonly pay between 100-149 JD per month (38 percent, versus 30 percent of Jordanians). While 26 percent of Syrians pay 150-199 JD per month, 32 percent of Jordanians do so. More Syrians pay 200-249 JD per month (23 percent versus 12 percent of Jordanians), a similar share (6-7 percent) 250-299 JD per month, and few Syrians 300 or more JD per month (less than 1 percent, versus 8 percent of Jordanians). Syrians thus face high housing costs with less resources than Jordanians.

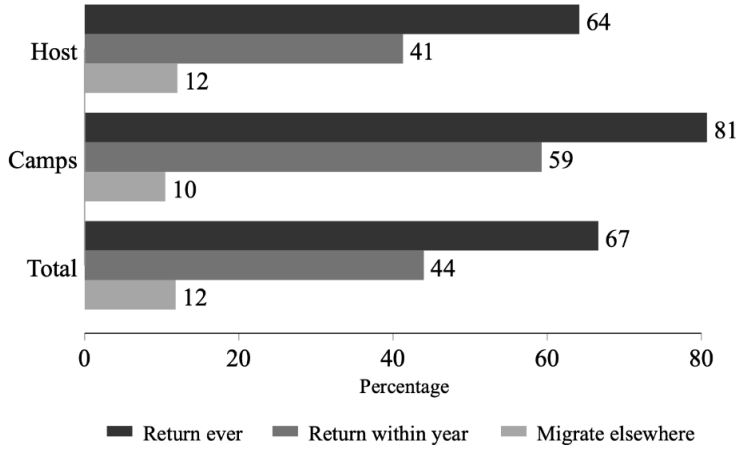
Figure 26. Distribution (percentage of households) of monthly rent, Jordanians and Syrian refugees, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

More than two-thirds of Syrians intend to return to Syria at some point (Figure 27, 67 percent), while 44 percent intended to return to Syria within a year, and 12 percent intend to migrate elsewhere within five years.[10] Those in camps are more likely to intend to return to Syria than those in host communities. For instance, 81 percent of those in camps intend to return to Syria eventually compared to 64 percent of those in host communities.

Figure 27. Intention to return to Syria one day, intention to return to Syria within the next year, intention to migrate elsewhere within the next five years (percentages), by residence, Syrian refugees aged 15+, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

[10] Other surveys found 40 percent of Syrian refugees intended to return within one year in January 2025 and 22 percent of Syrian refugees intended to return within one year in June 2025 (UNHCR 2025a, 2025b), at which point a sizeable fraction may have already returned; the JLMPS was fielded in January-June 2025.

8. Conclusions

Syrian refugees in Jordan are a young and vulnerable population. Syrian refugee families often have absent or perished members. Syrian refugees are disproportionately young, but since fertility has fallen from 2016 to 2025, the largest age group is aged 10-14 for Syrians. Age at marriage has increased for Syrians, which may be symptomatic of difficulties in affording marriage or the result of being exposed to somewhat later marriages or different gender norms among Jordanians (Krafft, Assaad, and Abushehab 2026; Krafft et al. 2024). Girl child marriage has dropped substantially since 2016, although it has not been eliminated.

In terms of education and health, Syrian refugees have increased their school enrollments in 2025 compared to 2016, although they still enroll at rates below those of Jordanians. Education policies that allow Syrian refugee children access to basic and secondary schools likely play an important role in this progress (Presler-Marshall et al. 2025; Krafft, Sieverding, et al. 2022). Syrian refugees' health outcomes are poorer than Jordanians, potentially a result of both conflict, displacement, and poorer health insurance coverage and health care access in Jordan. Due to changes in healthcare costs for Syrians, they are increasingly reliant on charitable and international organization providers of care (Tamimi et al. 2024).

Labor market outcomes for Syrians have improved slightly from 2016 to 2025; slightly more are employed, 28 percent of those aged 15-64, compared to 19 percent in 2016. Syrian refugees, however, remain in largely informal wage work, and only slightly more of the employed have work permits despite reforms to the work permit system. In addition to labor income, Syrian refugees often depend on social assistance, particularly for refugees in camps.

The future of Syrian refugees in Jordan is uncertain and likely depends to on the evolution of conditions in Syria. Official UNHCR numbers suggest Syrian refugees have begun leaving Jordan since the fall of Al-Assad (UNHCR 2025c), but also that most Syrian refugees remain. In the JLMPS survey, the majority of Syrian refugees hoped to return to Syria eventually and often within the year, as well as a sizeable share aspiring to migrate elsewhere. Continuing to monitor the wellbeing of Syrian refugees will be quite important for understanding their decisions to return and the vulnerability of those who remain.

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