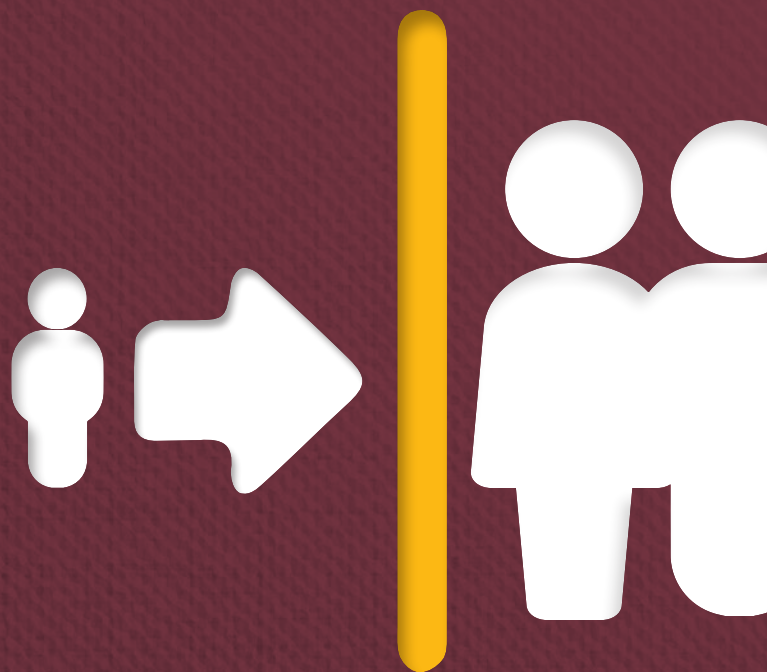


FAMILY SEPARATION

Barriers to Reunification of Syrian Refugees in Jordan



Summary

About us

The Fostering Resilience Initiative:

Our interdisciplinary team works to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth facing adversity.

By measuring and addressing risks and assets at the child-level, as well as within homes, schools, and communities, we promote a holistic approach to child and youth development. Our goal is to create environments that not only fulfill children's and youth's basic needs, but also promote nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills, and civic engagement.

We work with non-governmental organizations, policy makers, communities and other stakeholders in seven countries: Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and Peru. Our initiative focuses on three key areas:

1. Learning and Development

Improving learning and development of children and youth, both at school and outside of school.

2. Risk Measurement

Developing, validating and piloting measurement tools to assess risks, assets, and outcomes across several countries.

3. Global Network for Resilience

Building a global network of actors who foster systemic resilience.



Neil Boothby
Director, Fostering Resilience Initiative

Introduction

Millions of people have been displaced by the chaos of the Syrian civil war. Since 2011, over 5.6 million have fled to neighboring countries, while 6.6 million have been internally displaced. Of the 1.26 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, more than a third are separated from their family.

Photo by: Lainey Freels



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Immigrants and refugees, who are lawfully residing in a state, should be able to reunite with their family members as soon as possible, without going through laborious procedures. Being denied the human right to be with one's family makes life more burdensome and integration much more difficult.

- Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Comment

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Family separation causes great distress for those who flee violence and cross international borders and is harmful to refugees' wellbeing and their livelihoods.

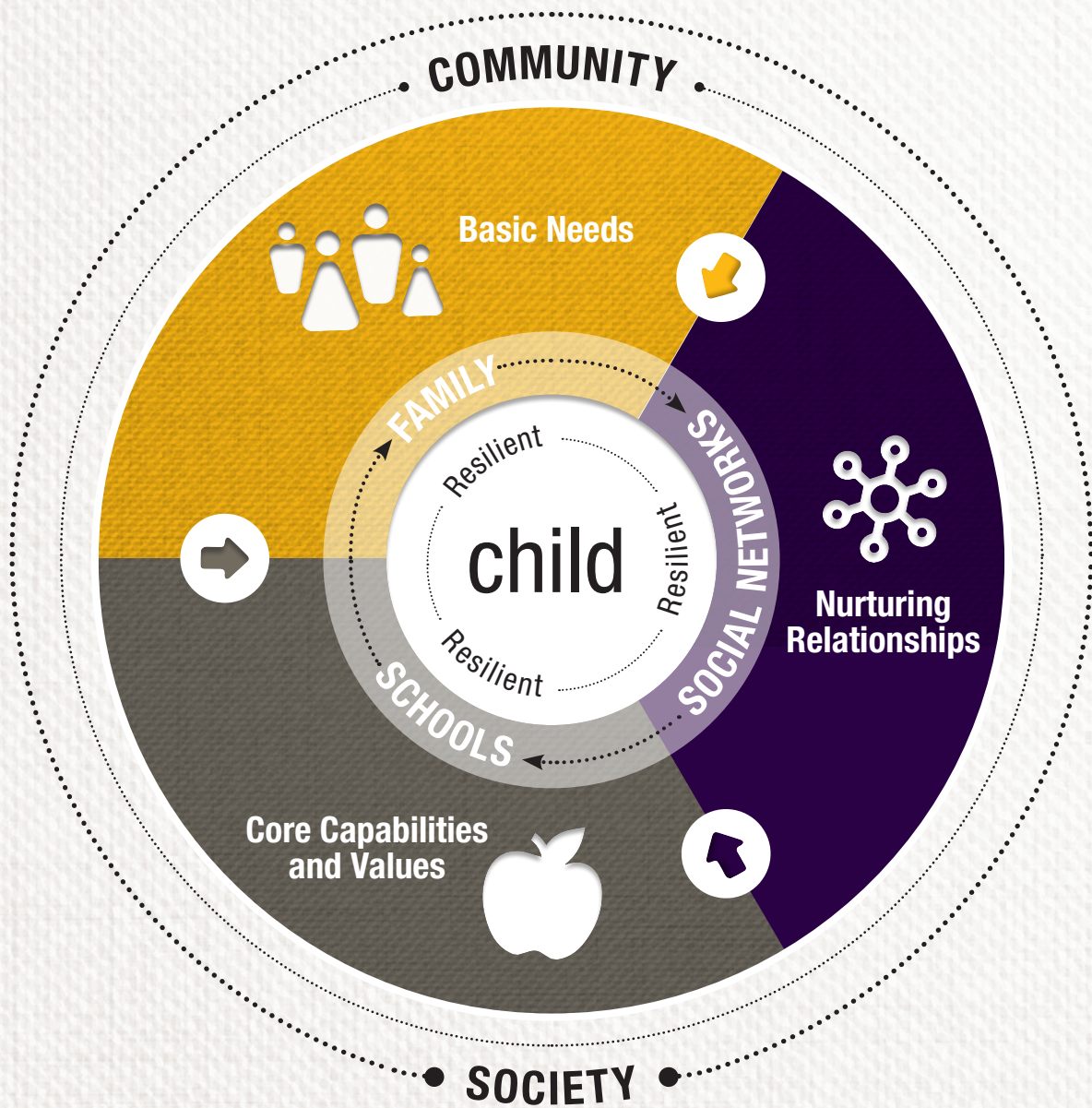
Imagine a world... where nearly 1 person is forcibly displaced every two seconds because of conflict or persecution. As of June 2019, 70.8 million people globally have been forcibly displaced. The conflict in Syria, which has displaced 12.2 million people (UNHCR 2018), has contributed to the largest refugee crisis since World War II (Cumming-Bruce 2019).

Less than 1% of refugees are resettled and it is usually too dangerous for refugees to repatriate; they are often rejected from their host country.

A study by Dr. Neil Boothby and his research team set out to examine the causes and impact of family separation. Focused on Syrian families living in Jordan, it revealed that family separation occurs at distinct times during migration. It identified key factors that perpetuate separation and prevent refugees from reuniting with their families. These include unclear reunification processes, documentation issues, and exorbitant costs. It also highlighted opportunities to improve policies and procedures for families displaced in conflict and crisis globally. This brief highlights these findings.

Building blocks **for** children's resilience

A holistic approach—one that not only addresses children's basic needs, but also promotes nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills and civic engagement—is the foundation to fostering resilience in children facing adversity.



Family Separation of Syrian Refugees at-a-glance



Syria is the **biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time**, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world.

- Filippo Grandi, UNHCR High Commissioner



12.2 million people
displaced by Syrian conflict.



1.26 million
Syrian refugees in Jordan,
only 662,010
have **registered as refugees.**



Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon,
Iraq, and Egypt **host** the

**most Syrian
refugees.**



Photo by: © World Bank

36.5% of Syrian refugees in Jordan
are **separated from a family member.**

93% live
below the poverty line.



18% live in camps.



Statistics: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
See <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>
(accessed July 2019).

Photo by: Sebastian Rich/Photographer/Photojournalist

Family Separation: Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Stories from the Field

In August 2017, 85 interviews were held with Syrian refugees across Jordan who had been separated from family. They spoke of their families, the trials of separation and migration, their efforts to reunite, life in Jordan, parent-child dynamics and hopes for the future. Here's a sample of what some of the participants had to say:

“

Separated when leaving Syria

They will not come here [Jordan]. They will not leave their cattle. They say that they would rather die than leave.

My husband didn't want us to leave. I told him that even if he doesn't leave with us, I'm going to leave with the children. I'm going to save my children. I couldn't bare the sight of dead young men.

My daughter, who is now in Syria, cannot come to Jordan. Her husband was arrested by the Syrian authorities and she and the children were left alone. Then the Syrian authorities released him. Now he is serving with the Syrian army.”



Photo by: UN Photo/Mark Garten



Photo by: Hannah Chandler

Separated once in Jordan

“ My son bought us an electric stove, so we could cook. And that's how slowly we made a home of our own in the tent. We also received blankets, food. After making sure that everything is in place, my son told me that he...wanted to leave and find work.

He was a top student in Syria – but here, it didn't work...He used to fight with other children daily and come back home with ripped clothes and a ripped bag... everyone said that Germany is great for education, so I let him go and I sent him there. But I didn't know it involved traveling by the sea.”

Separated prior to the conflict

“ At first I refused, my daughters are young and the trip was hard and people get injured... Until one day we were sitting and we were bombed. The house was destroyed. My parents-in-law told me to go and they will stay and will accept their fate. We went on the road and became hungry, everything happened to us on the road. But we arrived safely, thank God.

I told him that we're going to Jordan and... he maybe find a way to join us here. It never happened. Six years have passed, without him being able to join us. ”



Photo by: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

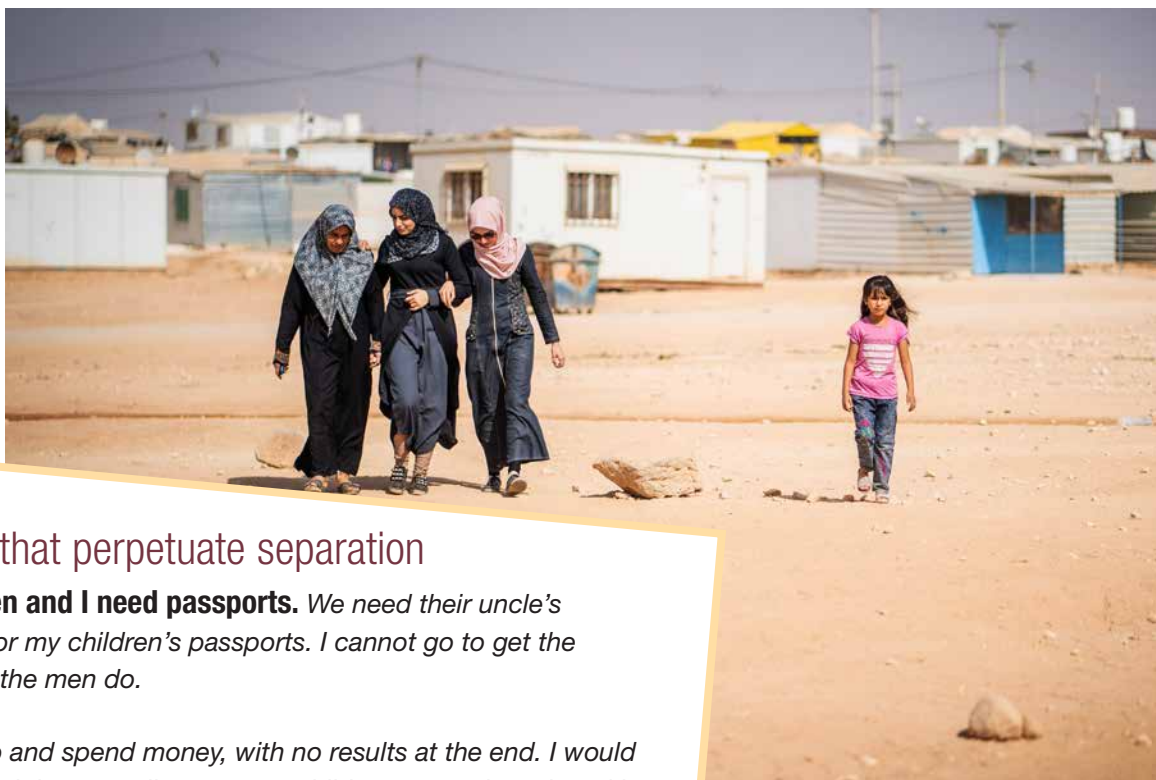


Photo by: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

Factors that perpetuate separation

“ **My children and I need passports.** We need their uncle's signature for my children's passports. I cannot go to get the passports, the men do.

I cannot go and spend money, with no results at the end. I would rather spend these 50 dinars on my children, water, bread, and buy food for them.

If only they give me hope that I will leave one day. But... I have no idea what's happening to my profile. Is it eligible, rejected, or being examined; where it is? ... No one helps me.

I applied 13 times; they all were rejected. So, they didn't come... I haven't seen my father for four years now.

”

What is the impact of separation on refugee families?

“The extended absence of the nurturing protection provided by a parent or other responsive caregiver produces a toxic stress response that increases the risk of serious impairments that can last a lifetime.”

- Jack P. Shonkoff, *Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*

The study found that family separation among refugees is associated with poor mental and physical health outcomes, and that it leads to increased financial burden and more children leaving school to get a job. It also revealed that it is more difficult for refugees to settle and integrate into their host country when their family is not united.

Many refugee families have already had to make impossible decisions of whether to leave some members behind in Syria. The constant fear and anxiety about the wellbeing of separated family members can be devastating, preventing refugees from rebuilding their lives.

When does separation occur?

Family separation occurred at three (3) distinct times:

1. Separated when leaving

Syria: Most (60%) were separated while leaving Syria to escape the danger of war. Some stayed because of family and work ties. Others tried to join their family later and were not successful or ended up in different countries.

2. Separated once in Jordan:

Once families settle in, the pressures of unemployment, housing and healthcare expenses take a toll. Some leave Jordan and return to Syria. Others live in different locations within Jordan.

3. Separated prior to the

conflict: Families who lived apart before the conflict (for work, travel or education) found it difficult to visit family. If they entered Syria, they risked not being able to leave again or being conscripted into the army. High costs, residency issues, and closed borders also made it challenging to reunite with family.



5 barriers to reunification

The following factors perpetuate separation and keep Syrian refugees from being reunited with their family:

01 Families need resident status to apply for reunification. Tough criteria for establishing residency restricts reunification.

02 Without full refugee status, it is difficult to apply for family reunification.

03 While the UN Refugee Convention establishes the right to family reunification, the countries that host the largest number of Syrian refugees did not sign this convention.

04 The definition of family under international law does not match the cultural definition of family, which includes children over 18 and extended family members.

05 Lack of documentation that proves relationships, travel costs, language barriers, limited access to embassies and consulates, lack of information on procedures, and time constraints all make it challenging to apply for family reunification.



Photo by: UN Photo/Sahem Rababah





Photo by: © Russell Watkins

Family separation is not just happening to Syrian refugees. It is happening all around the world. In the United States, the government intentionally separated children from their parents to keep asylum seekers from entering the country. This “zero tolerance” policy separated at least 2,654 children from their parents between April and June of 2018.

Germany and other European countries have also closed doors to family reunification. In Germany, those applying for reunification must prove proper living space, financial responsibility for family members, and basic German language skills. In March 2016, Germany implemented a two-year freeze on family reunification for asylum seekers. Instead, asylum seekers were provided “subsidiary protection” status with a 1-year residency permit, whereas individuals with full refugee status were given a 3-year residency permit.

“

Family separation is a symptom of a larger, global issue: how receiving countries treat migrants, who are often fleeing unstable and/or violent situations.

– Root and Schmidt, 2018

”

Family reunification is already an arduous, complex, and expensive process and these additional regulations make family reunification virtually impossible.

Governments are also becoming more restrictive in their aid to refugees and asylum seekers to reduce the number of people entering their countries. Some are even going out to sea to prevent asylum seekers from reaching their shores.

Local integration, repatriation (when safe), and resettlement to a third country are not feasible for many refugees. This results in many refugees in host countries, like Jordan, with no options.

We cannot rely on the government to protect family unity. In moments of crisis, civil society and human rights groups must step-up and demand that everyone’s right to family unity is protected.

The barriers preventing family reunification must be urgently addressed. Keeping families together helps both the individuals in the family and the community they are joining. For many, family reunion is often the best way for vulnerable families to thrive. If the aim of responding to refugee crises is not only to save lives but to help families create a stable future, then reunification should be a key component of a sustainable solution.

Photo by: © 2012 Brian Sokol



fostering **RESILIENCE** initiative

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