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**Nothing is more permanent than the temporary:
Understanding protracted displacement and people's
own responses TRAFIG Synthesis Report**

Benjamin Etzold, Elvan Isikozlu, Simone Christ, Laura Morosanu, Albert Kraler, Ferruccio Pastore, Carolien Jacobs, Filyra Vlastou Dimopoulou, Eva Papatzani, Alexandra Siotou, et al.

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TRAFIG

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

Nothing is more permanent than the temporary

Understanding protracted displacement and people's own responses
TRAFIG Synthesis Report

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SUMMARY

Across the world, 16 million refugees and an unknown number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) experience long-lasting conditions of economic precarity, marginalisation, rightlessness and future uncertainty. They live under conditions of protracted displacement. Policy solutions often fail to recognise displaced people’s needs and limit rather than widen the range of available solutions.

This report brings together the central findings of the TRAFIG project’s empirical study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Tanzania, Jordan, Pakistan, Greece, Italy and Germany. We engaged with more than 3,120 people in our three-year project.

Our analysis centres around five factors that shape conditions of protracted displacement: 1) governance regimes of aid and asylum, 2) social practices and livelihoods, 3) networks and movements, 4) intergroup relations between displaced people and hosts, and 5) development incentives and economic interactions. We present multiple findings on each of these themes. Moreover, this report addresses gender and class-based differences and mental health related challenges in constellations of protracted displacement as well as political dynamics that impact on people’s own responses to protracted displacement.

Overall, our research shows that refugees, IDPs and other migrants by and large find protection, shelter, livelihood support, a sense of belonging and opportunities to migrate elsewhere through their personal networks. These networks often stretch across several places or even extend across multiple countries. While they are not a panacea for all challenges, people’s own connections are an essential resource for sustainable and long-term solutions to their precarious situation. They must not be ignored in policy responses to protracted displacement. Understanding the needs and the local, translocal and transnational ties of displaced people is the foundation for finding solutions that last.

KEYWORDS

protracted displacement, forced migrants, refugees, governance regimes, mobility, marginalisation, connectivity, migrant–host community relations, IDPs, livelihoods, transnational networks, Europe, Greece, Italy, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Pakistan, Germany, Tanzania

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Executive summary

What if displaced people were not forced to live in a perpetual state of waiting? What if they could get support to rebuild their lives with the people they choose, where and how they choose? The vision of the TRAFIG project is a world where the experience of being displaced is only temporary and where displaced people can quickly rebuild their lives and livelihoods after having been forcibly displaced.

Solutions to displacement do not necessarily look like what the policy world provides: place-based support, for example in refugee camps, where people must wait until an opportunity to resettle or return to their home arises. Such solutions fail to recognise that displaced people's needs are not tied to a particular place but to people. Our research has confirmed that refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and other migrants are embedded in multiple social constellations, such as families, neighbourhoods, religious communities or other solidarity groups. Through these personal networks, they find protection, shelter, livelihood support, a sense of belonging and opportunities to migrate to other places. In some cases, these constellations stretch across several places, even across multiple countries. Being a part of these networks does not guarantee a better future; however, our research has shown that displaced people's connections to other people are an essential resource for a sustainable and long-term solution to their precarious situation.

This *report* brings together the central findings of the TRAFIG project's empirical study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Tanzania, Jordan, Pakistan, Greece, Italy and Germany. Overall, we engaged with more than 3,120 people. Our study centred around five factors we believe help or hinder people from moving out of protracted displacement: 1) governance regimes, 2) social practices and livelihoods of refugees, 3) refugee networks and movements, 4) intergroup relations between refugees and hosts, and 5) development incentives for hosting refugees. In this *report*, we present multiple findings within each theme, which can be used to influence change for displaced people in the future.

First, when we looked at governance regimes, we found that restrictive regulations often force displaced people into (semi)irregularity as they cope with their protracted state of displacement. Formal support is often tied to staying put in one place (e.g., a refugee camp), which goes against displaced people's need for small-scale, national or international mobility to build a life. Here, governance regimes tend to hinder rather than help displaced people from exiting a protracted state.

Second, our research showed that displaced people who were most dependent on humanitarian assistance and lived in refugee camps were also the most marginalised. Everyday lives and

livelihoods are at risk for those with no legal entitlements and those stranded in camps. But they are not the only ones: People with no networks to help them move out of their precarious situation also risk permanent 'limbo'. In general, a higher degree of legal insecurity, which is reflected in weak protection standards and no or only temporary residency status, inevitably leads to a higher degree of socio-economic exclusion and marginalisation.

A third key finding is that personal networks—family ties in particular—decisively shape displaced people's journeys to places of refuge. Functioning and trustful network relations are also necessary to move out of refugee camps and to benefit from circular mobility. Networks across multiple places and countries have the potential to lift displaced people out of protractedness. However, networks and mobility are not stand-alone solutions to protracted displacement but only 'stepping-stones' to finding lasting solutions.

Fourth, forced displacement inevitably changes and often challenges existing social relations at a place. We were able to see patterns in how different groups interacted and related, which were marked by distinct forms of dependence, reciprocity and disconnection. It became clear that displaced people encounter difficulties forging relationships when being in a (prolonged) state of waiting and uncertainty. Finding a way to build alliances is critical for displaced people to have a sense of belonging among the people they live.

Finally, TRAFIG's empirical research saw cases where local markets and populations benefited from long-lasting displacement situations. Acknowledging displaced people's translocal connections can contribute to creating new markets, employment and future opportunities for people in various places. Moreover, we noted the significance of gender and class-based differences, mental health as well as political dynamics when understanding people's own responses to protracted displacement.

From the reflections of hundreds of displaced people themselves, we see that the experience of protracted displacement is like a labyrinth: There are endless turns, hurdles, barriers and dead ends. This labyrinth is a side effect, if not a deliberate consequence of policy choices, which means that it can also be changed. Instead of single, place-based solutions, displaced people need multiple options to better navigate and move out of the labyrinth. People-based solutions begin with recognising people's own preferences, their mobility needs and their networks. They reflect the reality that many displaced people already live translocal or transnational lives. Host governments as well as humanitarian and development actors should adjust their responses to this reality to better support displaced people in finding solutions that are, in fact, permanent.

1. Introduction

We envisage a world in which people who are forcibly displaced from their homes receive the support they need to rebuild their lives. This support does not always look like what the policy world provides. The policy world prioritises solutions that are tied to a certain place—a place where displaced people are protected from the circumstances they fled. If they cannot return to the home they were forced to flee, then their options are to be integrated in a certain place or resettled to another.

But for displaced people, the support they need is not tied to a particular place—it is tied to people. Our research has confirmed that refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and other migrants are always embedded in multiple social constellations, such as families, neighbourhoods, labour relations with employers, religious and ethnic communities, or other solidarity groups. Through these personal networks, they find protection, shelter, livelihood support, a sense of belonging, inspiration to carry on and opportunities to migrate to other places.

In some cases, these constellations are located at a certain place, while in other cases they stretch across several places, even across multiple countries—that is why mobility and having the freedom to re-connect are so crucial for forcibly displaced people. Being a part of these constellations does not guarantee a better future; however, our research has shown that displaced people's connections to people are the most essential resource for a sustainable and long-term solution to their precarious situation.

One of the central gaps we wanted to address with our project TRAFIG is the gap between what the policy world prioritises as 'solutions' to displacement versus what displaced people need. The policy world favours a place-based approach to protecting displaced people. In this approach, they are often viewed as isolated individuals (having certain traits, capacities and rights) or as homogeneous groups with the same basic needs, all being located at a certain place. This is neither enough nor accurate.

A more sustainable approach is people-based, where displaced people's social constellations, which we call 'figurations of displacement', are used as resources to build secure futures in one or across different places. Such an approach also acknowledges displaced people's need for mobility—to re-connect with others in one's network, seek opportunities at other places and utilise the potential that lies in one's translocal and transnational relations. How displaced people use their networks and mobility to develop their own solutions to protracted displacement will be shown over the course of this *report*.

The TRAFIG project

"Transnational Figurations of Displacement" (TRAFIG) is a collaborative project of 12 partner organisations, namely BICC (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, the project's coordinator) in Germany, Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece, CMI (Chr. Michelsen Institute) in Norway, Danube University Krems in Austria, Dignity Kwanza–Community Solutions in Tanzania, FIERI (Forum of International and European Research on Immigration) in Italy, ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) in Austria, SHARP (Society for Human Rights & Prisoners' Aid) in Pakistan, Leiden University in The Netherlands, the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom and Yarmouk University in Jordan. The European Union has financed the project through the Horizon 2020 work programme ([MIGRATION-08-2018](#)).

For three and a half years (2019–2022), more than 100 researchers, practitioners and research assistants investigated long-lasting displacement situations at multiple sites in Africa, Asia and Europe and analysed options to improve displaced people's lives. Our overall objective was to contribute to an enhanced understanding of protracted displacement and develop alternative solutions that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement.

In our TRAFIG research, we combined multiple sources of information to better comprehend protracted displacement and formulate alternative solutions. Desk research of academic literature and policy documents was the basis of our conceptual paper "Transnational Figurations of Displacement" (**TWP1**), our historical analysis of policies and instruments addressing protracted displacement "Learning from the past" (**TWP2**), and the analysis of legal frameworks and policies at the global, regional and national level that are "Governing protracted displacement" (**TWP3**). These working papers—and the internal papers that led to them—provided the necessary background for our empirical research in Africa, Asia and Europe.

This report

This *report* presents central findings of our empirical study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, **TWP4**), Ethiopia (**TWP5**), Jordan (**TWP6**), Pakistan (**TWP7**), Tanzania (**TWP8**), Greece and Italy (**TWP9**) and Germany (**TWP10**). In this *report*, we connect and systematise our findings across these case studies and our project's core themes (see Section 4). The notions of connectivity and mobility, as well as the concept of 'translocal figurations of displacement' (**TWP1**) connect these different strands of study. We also present cross-cutting themes and trends that emerged as particularly relevant in our study, such as gender, class-based differences, trauma and mental health as well as dynamically changing political constellations (see Section 5). TRAFIG's central hypothesis—that the more connected and mobile displaced people are, the less likely it is that they end up in a situation of protracted displacement—will be tested based on our survey data (see Section 6).

What is the empirical evidence behind this *report*? In our study, we engaged with more than 3,120 people from August 2019 to June 2021 (see Section 3 for details on methods). Among them were

- 659 displaced persons with whom we conducted qualitative interviews,
- 395 people who joined in participatory group discussions,
- 1,897 displaced individuals who participated in a quantitative survey in six countries (in the DRC, Ethiopia, Jordan, Pakistan, Greece and Italy) and
- 172 experts and other key stakeholders.

This *report* combines findings from our qualitative research with insights from our quantitative survey.

2. Protracted displacement, connectivity and mobility

2.1 Protracted displacement

Protracted displacement is a key term that has guided our project. Conventionally, it is used to refer to situations where exile extends for many years. Our understanding of protracted displacement in TRAFIG differs from this understanding in several ways, as described in more detail below. Historically, conceptually and in terms of policy, the term is closely linked to (durable) solutions.

The concept of protracted displacement goes back to the notion of '**protracted refugee situations**', a term introduced by UNHCR's Executive Committee in 2004 to draw attention to the plight of refugees in extended exile and to promote more durable solutions. Defined as a situation "in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo" (UNHCR, 2004), the concept has been used by UNHCR and other stakeholders to highlight the increasing share of refugees who could neither return due to continuing conflict or persecution, nor are offered pathways to integration in their host country, nor could resettle to a third country. The focus was thereby set on refugees for whom none of the conventional durable solutions were available.

Using a crude measure of protracted refugee situations based on situations lasting longer than five years, 74 per cent of the total global refugee population, or 15.9 million people, live in such a protracted refugee situation (UNHCR, 2022, p. 20). Yet, protracted displacement also affects populations other than (recognised) refugees under the mandate of UNHCR, notably internally displaced persons (IDPs). Reflecting this, the term protracted displacement has more generally been used to refer to situations where displaced people remain in precarious situations for prolonged periods of time. It is this broader understanding of protracted displacement that the TRAFIG project has adopted.

We understand **protracted displacement** to be a **long-lasting condition of economic precarity, marginalisation, rightlessness and future uncertainty, which displaced people experience after their initial displacement**. Our understanding centres on why displaced people remain somewhat stuck and cannot rebuild their lives after displacement, but we do not frame this as a static condition. On the contrary, we want to shed light on the changing social constellations in displacement. We, therefore, also do not speak of protracted displacement 'situations'—as they seem fixed and static—but rather of protracted displacement as such (TWP1).

Protracted displacement can thus be conceived of as a specific social constellation in which the capabilities of displaced persons to rebuild their lives after displacement and the opportunities available to do so are severely limited for prolonged periods as they endure

- displacing forces that hinder return,
- marginalising forces that prevent local integration and
- immobilising forces that block displaced people's mobility and chances to seek a future elsewhere (TWP1, p. 20).

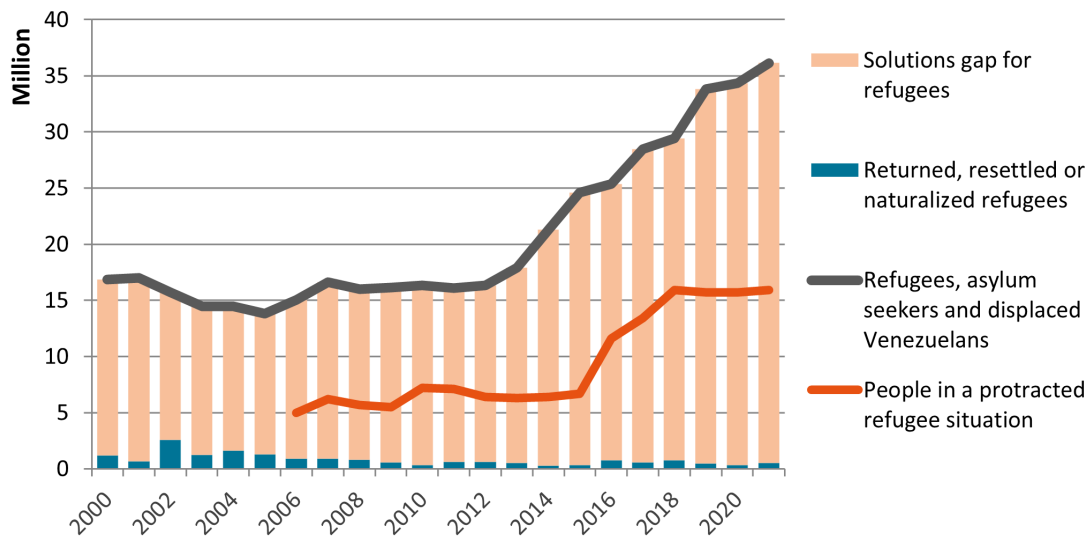
2.2 Solutions to protracted displacement and remaining gaps

TRAFIG aims to identify solutions to protracted displacement, which better resonate with the needs and capacities of displaced people, be they refugees or internally displaced persons. We understand solutions in a broad sense as **measures or opportunities that enable people to rebuild their lives after displacement and become self-reliant**. The three conventional 'durable solutions' (return, local integration and resettlement) are pathways to that end rather than solutions in themselves.

Finding solutions for protracted displacement is a long-standing concern. Although the notion of protracted displacement was introduced as a policy concept only in 2004, the debate dates back to the 1970s and is rooted in concerns about the long-term dependence of refugees on humanitarian aid and limited capacities of host states to provide this aid or pathways to local integration. Durable solutions, and subsequently protracted displacement, initially focused on displacement in the global South (TWP2). This geographical focus has been too narrow. Our research clearly shows that the conditions of protractedness and the barriers to durable solutions can be observed in different geographic contexts, also in southern Europe (TWP9).

The protection system built around the three conventional solutions is falling short of its stated ambitions. Although there are increasingly complex and resourceful governance arrangements to address displacement (TWP3), they leave significant gaps in protection and implementation. As a result, *long-term* and *effective* solutions for those experiencing vulnerability and precarity after initial displacement remain elusive. Since 2005, the gap between needed and available solutions has only widened (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gap between global displacement and available solutions for refugees



Source: Benjamin Etzold, BICC. Data source: UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=4OWsUa>

More recent efforts to address protracted displacement clearly recognise this 'solutions gap'. The African Union's Kampala Declaration on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2009) emphasises the urgent need to identify durable solutions and thereby draw on displaced people's self-reliance. Both the European Union's policy framework on forced displacement and development "Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance" (2016), and the United Nations' Global Compact on Refugees (2018) acknowledge the wide-ranging implications of long-lasting displacement and call for suitable solutions and complementary pathways to protection (TWP3, TPN1).

The scarcity of effective long-term solutions offered by states has meant that **displaced people have relied on their own strategies to cope with and move out of displacement**. Most of these strategies involve their networks, which are a lifeline for displaced people. In conjunction with networks, mobility can be a crucial resource for displaced people's livelihoods, including securing adequate employment, and for their quest to lead dignified lives together with their families (TWP1).

The problem is that current policies often work to restrict displaced individuals' access to their networks, for instance as mobility is impeded. This only results in dependence on humanitarian support, thus perpetuating, rather than solving, protracted displacement.

2.3 Connectivity in displacement

Imagine that war and insecurity force you to leave your home. Most likely, you are also forced to leave your work, colleagues and friends and, at worst, members of your family. The social networks you relied upon in your daily life are suddenly disrupted as you navigate life in different surroundings and circumstances. They cannot be easily restored elsewhere, but they also change their geography. Networks become **translocalised** for IDPs who seek refuge within the same country and **transnationalised** for those who crossed international borders to find protection.

Access to livelihoods, remittances, family reunification, employment opportunities, emotional support and care are only some examples of many where **networks help in displacement contexts**. Networks are thus not an abstract idea but supportive relations that need to be maintained through regular contact. An individual's translocal or transnational network only exists if they can keep in contact with others living elsewhere, if information and transactions continue to flow across the distance, and if they have access to the respective technology that facilitates communication and transfers (TWP1).

Displaced people's social networks unfold at different spatial levels. For the sake of simplicity, we differentiate between **local networks** at the place of living (e.g., relations in the neighbourhood or with employers), **translocal networks** that connect various places within a country (e.g., parts of a family living in a refugee camp and other family members living in a city) and **transnational networks**, which are marked by close contacts across international borders (e.g., relatives living in the country of origin or a third state).

In many cases (see Section 4.3), displaced people cannot maintain connections across multiple places or countries as they would want to, for instance, because **visa regimes and other mobility restrictions linked to their legal status in a country of reception do not allow them to visit family members living elsewhere**. In other cases, individuals might become accidentally disconnected or purposely excluded from networks of care and solidarity. Or the resources available in a family, for instance, simply do not suffice to provide support for all. Material deprivation, disconnection from needed technologies, lack of rights to mobility, ruptures in network relations and traumatic experiences can all add to or aggravate social isolation in immobility.

2.4 Mobility in displacement

The social constellations of displaced people are inherently shaped by mobility and relations across a multitude of places. Other than conventionally assumed in the debate about protracted displacement, refugees and IDPs are often not 'stuck' in a place. While being displaced, they move around in the city or region where they live to access support, livelihoods, or education; they move within the country of reception for work, family, or other reasons; and they move on to other countries to build a better future under entirely different circumstances.

However, encampment and containment policies, restrictive family reunification regulations, temporary legal statuses and wider efforts to securitise borders and prevent onward cross-border movement often limit displaced people's freedom to move (TPN3). These measures seriously impede displaced people's abilities to become self-reliant and build fulfilling lives post-displacement.

In TRAFIG, we set out to understand whether and how displaced people's networks and their mobilities can be part of the solution to protracted displacement. We assumed that 'unlocking protracted displacement' requires solutions that are not bound to one place only, in the sense that displaced persons either stay, return, or move on. Rather, we assessed to what extent mobility and translocality—the networks that stretch across several places—are normal and potentially beneficial parts of displaced people's lives.

2.5 The TRAFIG hypothesis

The following hypothesis guided our research:

The more connected and mobile refugees, IDPs and other migrants are, the less likely they end up in a situation of protracted displacement. Conversely, the less connected and the more immobilised displaced persons are, the greater the risk of being vulnerable, dependent and becoming stuck in precarity.

This hypothesis is built on two key factors for moving out of protracted displacement: Connectivity and mobility.

- **Connectivity** refers to people's social relations in and across countries, which can be utilised as resources. Our premise is that **the better-connected displaced people are and the more diverse their network structure is, the greater their self-reliance and the less the risk of living in an intractable state of vulnerability, dependency and legal insecurity**.
- Potentials for **mobility** depend in part on people's own capacities and connections but also on institutional and legal structures that either limit or allow their mobility. We presume that **the more freely displaced people can move within or across borders, the easier it is for them to find security, pursue livelihood opportunities and become resilient again**.

Table 1: Risk of living in protracted displacement

	Mobile	Immobile
Connected	Low risk	Medium risk
Unconnected	Medium risk	High risk

An assessment of our hypotheses' validity, based on our qualitative and or quantitative research, is presented in Section 6.

2.6 The five core themes of our empirical study

While the notions of connectivity and mobility are two central factors cutting across our research, we organised our empirical investigations in Africa, Asia and Europe around five core themes:

Theme 1: Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum

We examined how displaced individuals and families are governed by and navigate the institutional landscapes of refugee protection, humanitarian aid, labour market regimes and migration policies to find protection, assistance, sustainable livelihoods and a future.

Theme 2: Living in 'limbo'—Everyday lives and livelihoods in protracted displacement

The everyday lives and social practices of displaced people are at the heart of our analysis. We investigated different strategies that IDPs and refugees use to access work, education and health services, sustain their livelihoods and overcome phases of waiting and immobility in camps or cities.

Theme 3: Following the networks—Connectivity and mobility out of protracted displacement

We explored displaced people's journeys to safety, their everyday mobilities and aspirations to return or move on—and how all relate to network relations. We looked at how displaced—and often spatially dispersed—families and communities maintain contact and the role that resource transfers such as remittances play in providing protection, securing livelihoods and widening life chances.

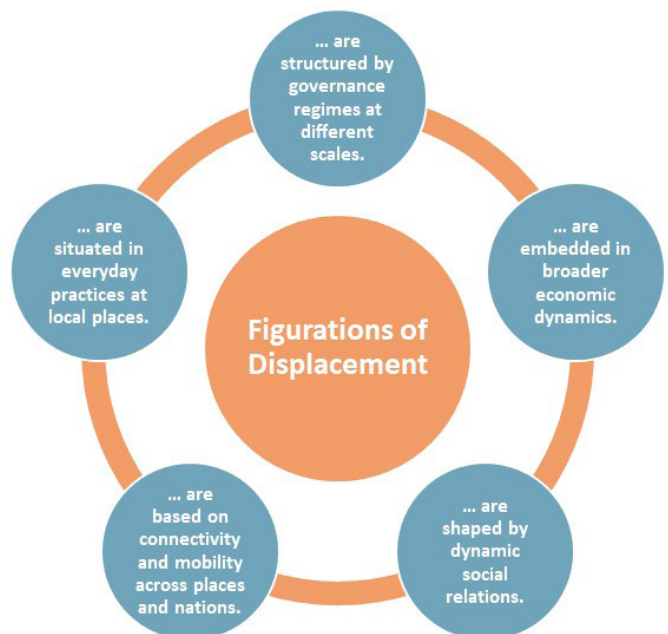
Theme 4: Building alliances—Integration and inter-group relations between refugees and hosts

The dynamic social relations and interactions between receiving communities and displaced people profoundly shape protracted displacement. We examined daily interactions and conflicts as well as processes of local integration and social exclusion and how they are constantly contested and transformed by the changing institutional, political and economic settings.

Theme 5: Seizing opportunities—Development incentives and new economic interactions

Hosting displaced populations is often portrayed as a 'burden' for receiving communities. Countering this perspective, we studied the development impulses to local economies, labour markets and services through IDPs and refugees' presence, skills and ideas, and the new markets and trade linkages that can emerge through displaced persons' local, national or transnational connections.

Figure 2: Central dimensions of Figurations of Displacement



3. Research methods and ethical challenges

3.1 Research locations and sampling

TRAFIG's empirical research took place in six main regions across three continents:

Continent	Regions	Country of field research	Group under study
<i>Africa</i>	Horn of Africa, East Africa	Ethiopia, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of the Congo	Eritrean refugees, Congolese refugees and IDPs
<i>Asia</i>	Middle East, South Asia	Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon*, Iran*	Afghan refugees, Syrian refugees
<i>Europe</i>	southern Europe, western Europe	Greece, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands*	migrants, including refugees, from South Asia, the Middle East, East and West Africa

* In Lebanon (Forster & Abdalkader, 2021), Iran (Asghari, 2021) and the Netherlands (Wilson et al., 2022), less extensive field research was carried out, but it still allows for a comparative understanding of the conditions of protracted displacement in diverse contexts.

Our empirical fieldwork began in August 2019 and ended in June 2021. Our fieldwork was severely impacted and delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic but also by other crises and emergencies in our countries of study (see Section 5). Further details on the time frames of our empirical studies and the respective limitations caused by major transformative events are accessible in the respective working papers (**TWP4** on the DRC, **TWP5** on Ethiopia, **TWP6** on Jordan, **TWP7** on Pakistan, **TWP8** on Tanzania, **TWP9** on Greece and Italy, **TWP10** on Germany).

We focused on **three sub-groups of people affected by protracted displacement**:

- **People who have experienced (protracted) displacement:** This group made up 94 per cent of our respondents and included people with their own experience of mobility due to conflict and violence and/or own experience of being 'stuck' in a precarious situation at our research site.
- **Members of receiving communities:** The perspectives of members of local communities who are (in)directly affected by displacement were included but made up only three per cent of our sample.
- **Network contacts:** Persons who had not fled themselves but maintain contact with others who experienced displacement, e.g., family members, made up a small share (2%) of our sample.

In our research, we hoped to give voice to a wide variety of experiences and viewpoints. The sampling criteria included sex, age, family status, educational background, nationality, legal status, or the existence of translocal and/or transnational connections. For our qualitative research, we were led by non-probability sampling, i.e., a sampling of typical cases and a sampling of maximal variation. For the TRAFIG quantitative survey, we used probability sampling.

Three-quarters of the 2,950 displaced persons who participated in our study sites lived outside of refugee camps or reception facilities. We primarily conducted our research in urban settings and the peri-urban spaces around large metropolises.

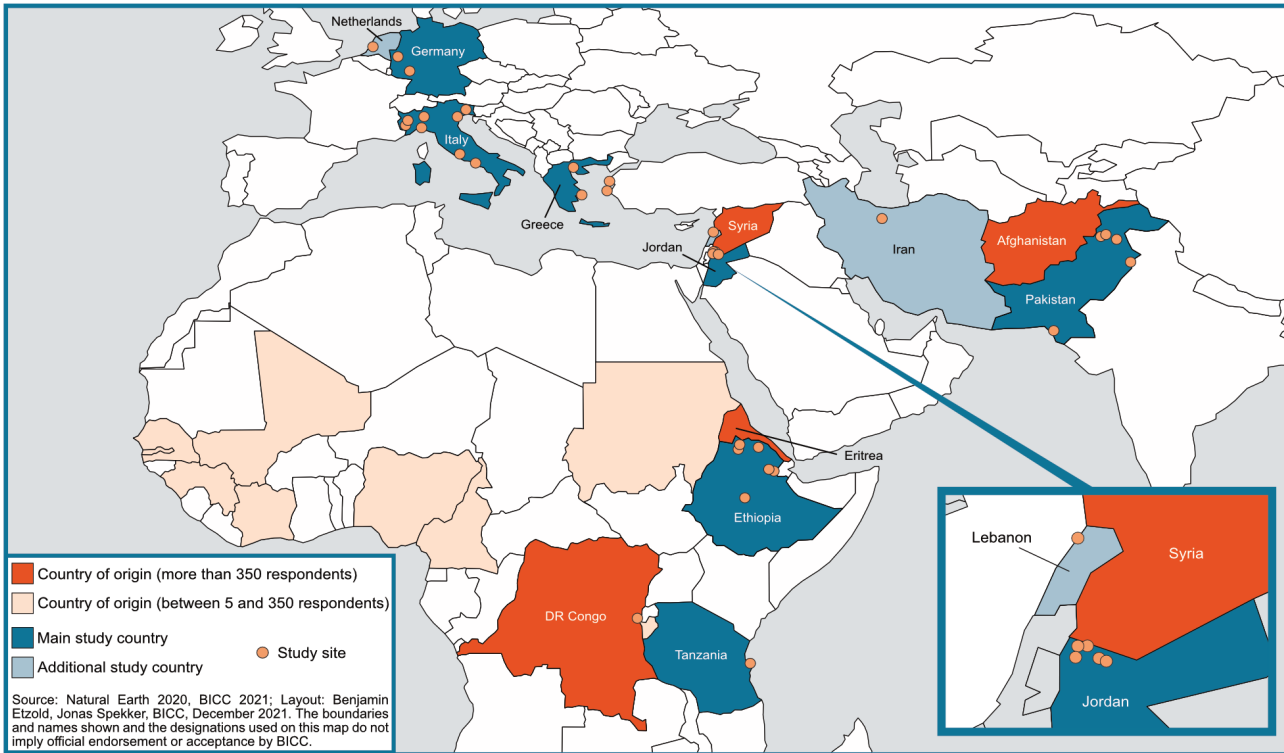
Across all study countries, 39 per cent of participants were women, whilst 58 per cent were men.

Even though the teams tried their best to have an equal representation of research participants, some samples contain a selection bias. In some countries, the gender representation was imbalanced as disproportionately more men took part in the research. In Greece and Italy, this imbalance reflected the composition of the overall population of forced migrants. In Pakistan and Germany, it was a question of the research team's access to participants. In Pakistan there was also an imbalance with regard to the legal status of the participants. The bulk of the interviews were conducted with UNHCR-registered Afghans, while only a few undocumented or more affluent Afghans were interviewed due to the limited access (**TWP7**). Women were the main focus of the study in Tanzania to contribute to the growing work on female refugees (**TWP8**).

TRAFIG researchers entered survey and qualitative data into the [KoBo toolbox](#). The KoBo toolbox is commonly used by humanitarian organisations, aid workers and researchers in challenging environments. After saving metadata, survey questions, interview protocols, recordings, informed consent and other data through KoBo, the data was transferred to a secure cloud server, to which only TRAFIG team members have access.¹

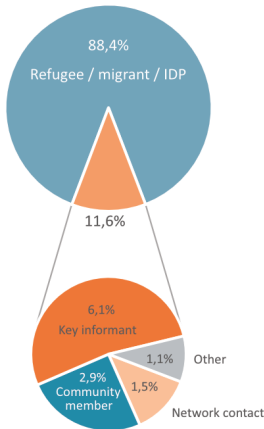
1 Each data entry has a unique identifier, e.g. EInt-BICC-SC-009-DEU, which reflects the respective method, partner responsible for the research, name of the interviewer, interview number and study country. These unique IDs are used when quoting insights from the respective interview across all TRAFIG working papers.

Overview of TRAF*G Research



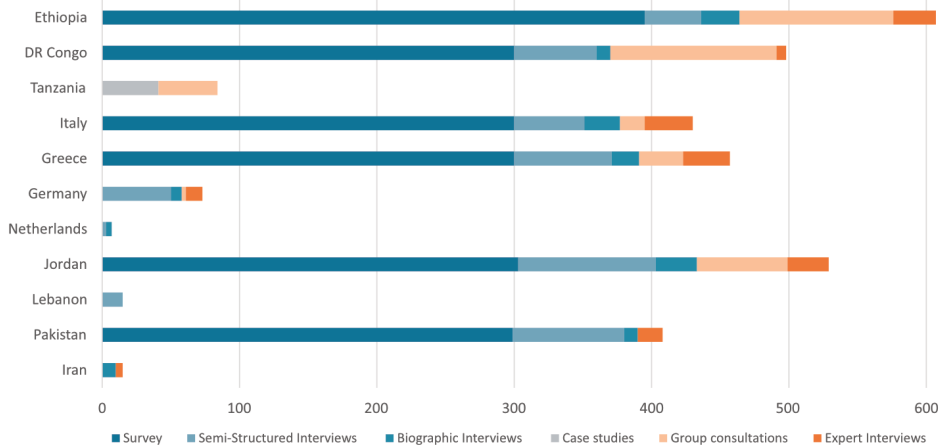
Time of empirical research: 08/2019 - 06/2021

Respondent type

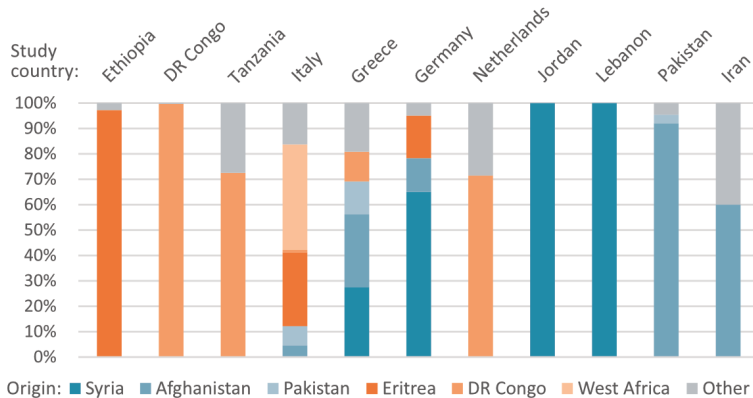


People reached by method per country

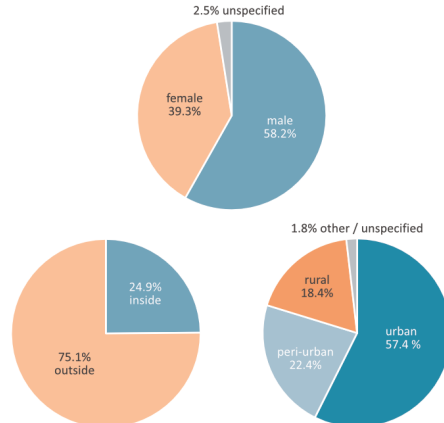
Total = 3123 respondents



Share of respondents in study country by origin



Gender distribution



Living in/outside of camps

Residential distribution

3.2 Research methods

Overall, we engaged with 3,123 participants, among them 1,897 in the quantitative survey and 1,226 in different forms of qualitative methods (see Table 2).

- **Qualitative interviews** were the foundation of our empirical research. We conducted **semi-structured interviews** (472) with displaced people, their network contacts and members of receiving communities. **Biographic interviews** (146) allowed for in-depth insights into the life histories, everyday practices, mobility trajectories and translocal networks of a selected number of persons affected by protracted displacement. **Expert interviews** (172) complemented the analysis from the perspective of stakeholders from national government bodies, regional and international organisations or NGOs in refugee protection, humanitarian aid, development cooperation or social work.
- **Quantitative data** used in the project consists of our survey and secondary data that complements our own data collection. A total of 1,897 individuals participated in our TRAFIG survey, which included questions on basic demographic information, key determinants of livelihoods, access to protection and vulnerability as well as perceptions of the protractedness of their situation, information on mobility trajectories, future mobility aspirations, the existence of local, translocal and transnational networks and on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Group consultation processes** enabled us to engage with a larger number of stakeholders and, at the same time, make use of the inclusive nature and inherent dynamics of group processes. **Focus group discussions** (FGD) helped to facilitate a participatory form of knowledge production with displaced people, better-structured discussions and the visualisation of findings. **Stakeholder workshops** addressed policymakers, practitioners and other key stakeholders in refugee protection, asylum, development, migration and community development. Their purpose was to include stakeholders' perspectives in our research, disseminate findings and discuss potential lessons for policymaking and practice. **Multi-stakeholder community consultations** brought together displaced people with members of the receiving community to evoke dialogue and a better mutual understanding of their respective perspectives and situations (Milabyo Kyamusugulwa et al., 2020).
- A range of **ethnographic methods** were employed throughout our research. At some of the field sites, **transect walks** with key actors introduced researchers into the physical, social, and economic structures at the study sites. **Participant observation** was a continuous part of the research. It included observations of the daily rhythms and challenges in the people's lives at the respective sites and multiple informal conversations.

Table 2: Number of participants per method and country of study

Method	ETH	DRC	TZA	ITA	GRC	DEU	NLD	JOR	LBN	PAK	IRN	all
<i>Survey</i>	395	300		300	300			303		299		1897
<i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	41	60		51	71	50	3	100	15	81		472
<i>Biographic interviews</i>	28	10		26	20	8	4	30		10	10	146
<i>Case studies*</i>			41									41
<i>Focus group discussions</i>	112	105	43	10	24	3		66				363
<i>Multi-stakeholder community consultations</i>		16		8	8							32
Total number	607	498	84	430	457	73	7	529	15	408	15	3123

* In Tanzania, we were unable to conduct conventional research because we did not receive a research permit. Instead, the Dignity Kwanza team collected 41 personal case studies and conducted seven FGDs with 43 participants during its legal and advisory work with displaced persons living in Dar es Salaam. Dignity Kwanza then shared the fully anonymised notes with Leiden University and jointly analysed them for the sake of meeting the TRAFIG project's demands. See **TWP8** for details and the study's results.

3.3 Limitations of the research and ethical challenges

Composition of the research teams and positionality

More than 100 persons² conducted empirical research, contributed to the analysis and the publications or supported the implementation of the TRAFIG project. Experienced colleagues in the global South brought in most local and national contextual knowledge and often worked as organisers of empirical data collection. Experienced partners from the North translated the project's concepts and methods to local contexts, organised data management or led the analysis, for example.

The specific composition of the research teams matters fundamentally in empirical research as each researcher has a different stance towards the research participants depending on his/her gender, age, ethnicity, class status, country of origin, having had their own experiences of displacement or not, among others. This positionality mirrors the power imbalance between researchers and respondents and influences whether trust can be built as the basis for a fruitful encounter.

Positionality is also relevant with regard to the gender composition of the research team. In Pakistan, for example, only one female researcher and one female data manager were involved in gathering semi-structured and survey interviews, which resulted in an imbalance in the representation of women in the interviews.

Whereas researchers with a vastly different background from the participants might have difficulties accessing the research site and gaining rapport, researchers who are part of the community might face other challenges, as the Italian team reported. An interviewer in Rome who conducted the interviews for the survey with Eritreans is Eritrean himself. Due to the common origin and shared identity, the interviewer was confronted with reciprocal expectations and obligations. He recalls: "For whatever cooperation they decide to offer, there is normally a high expectation of direct gain in return. Normally, they expect special support from me on their future needs and assumed that I owe them something" (Gonzales et al., 2021). Knowing that he could not immediately satisfy the need of his interviewees living under harsh conditions in squats in Rome represented a moral challenge for him.

Informed consent forms

Research ethics require people's voluntary participation in the research. They must be informed about the project and provide informed consent. For this purpose, the TRAFIG project developed an information sheet containing the most crucial information on the project, a written informed consent form and an oral informed consent form (Christ & Thiem, 2019).

Getting informed consent was a sensitive process that influenced the course of the interview by creating distrust or raising unrealistic expectations. While experiences varied across all research sites, it became clear that the use of standardised consent forms was not the right way to go. The different country teams discussed these issues and found pragmatic and ethically meaningful solutions, as mentioned by Jacobs for the DRC team: "As a team, we are committed to using the forms, keeping in mind that we have to do our best to find a balance between upward accountability, downward transparency and research interests in an optimal way" (Jacobs, 2020b).

Expectation management

In the DRC, many respondents expected to receive aid in exchange for being interviewed. This was especially the case when written consent forms were used. Researchers did their best to manage these expectations, but they also felt unsatisfied by not being able to meet very concrete needs of their interviewees. Jacobs summarised for the DRC: "We are not there to take stock of their needs and to come back some days later with the aid they would like to get; we are not able to have a direct impact on their lives and to decide on policy changes" (Jacobs, 2020a).

Expectations were also high among Afghan refugees in Pakistan who had taken part in many assessments and received aid after participating. Using tablets for data collection aggravated these expectations, so the interview team stopped using tablets, recording interviews and asked for oral rather than written consent.

Participants may have had their expectations raised by the presence of TRAFIG researchers, but they also doubted whether any immediate benefit to them would materialise. According to the Italian TRAFIG team, Eritreans living in Rome "had already been involved in other research projects in the past, which promised to offer solutions while providing no follow-up" (TWP9, p. 10). Our researchers listened to participants' concerns and offered the opportunity for dialogue and expression of their opinions.³

2 All TRAFIG researchers and contributors are listed by name at the end of this report in the Acknowledgements.

3 We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Professor Dr Michael Schön-huth (University of Trier, Section for Sociology and Anthropology) to our project. As TRAFIG's ethics advisor, he gave the fieldwork teams important feedback and advice on how to handle the ethical dilemmas we were dealing with on a day-to-day basis in our empirical work across the countries of study.

Fieldwork under conditions of a pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic affected our research differently across the research countries. In the DRC and Ethiopia, fieldwork was almost finished by the time the pandemic started. But in Italy and Germany, fieldwork was about to start when the pandemic hit and had to be quickly postponed and readjusted. In Greece, fieldwork had to stop during the strictest phases of contact restrictions, and the number of field sites and visits had to be reduced. While some interviews were done online, the pandemic significantly disrupted our access to research participants. However, in many contexts, researchers benefited from previously existing institutional and personal contacts (Gonzales et al., 2021).

The country teams also had to adjust their methodology. For example, to conduct biographic interviews under the conditions of the pandemic, researchers in southern Europe asked interviewees to share photos, videos or music and to engage in multiple conversation sessions online. Yet, this was difficult in some cases without having built trust in face-to-face encounters first. In Jordan, it was impossible to conduct 'usual' focus group discussions. Instead, focus group discussions were held with extended family units.

To gain trust in times of social distancing, some researchers (e.g. in Italy, Germany) recorded short introductory videos of themselves, in which they explained the project and their interview request. This proved to be immensely helpful in breaking the ice. To build rapport in online interviews, an interviewer of the German team met the potential interviewee outside so they could get to know each other before the actual interview took place online later. Alternatively, the interviewers had a longer phone conversation before the actual online interview. Overall, the teams had to be creative and find reasonable and secure solutions to contact people and engage with them for the research. Building rapport with vulnerable people during social distancing was a challenge. In the end, we had to make trade-offs such as access to certain (e.g. rural) research sites or additional contextual information that we would have gained under non-pandemic research conditions.

4. Central findings along TRAFIG's key themes

4.1 Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum

In this section, we discuss the main findings to the question: "How do displaced people gain access to, make use of, and are governed by policies and programmes in the fields of humanitarian aid, development, and protection?" Our findings show that whilst governance regimes pose multiple challenges and contribute to (re)producing protracted displacement, displaced people develop various strategies to navigate, use and sometimes subvert them. Mobility and personal networks are instrumental in accessing, supplementing or filling gaps in protection and formal support, yet they are not uniformly helpful nor necessarily sufficient to pull one out of protracted displacement.

Finding 1: Gaps in current governance regimes of protection deepen and prolong displaced people's vulnerability.

The legal and policy landscape of protection is fraught with gaps and limitations, creating multiple challenges for displaced people. Across our countries of study, we observed three major trends.

1. Protection and support systems appear to be severely limited, patchy, and are, in some cases, entirely absent. This includes access to asylum or international protection, as well as access to basic needs such as shelter, food, education, housing or healthcare. Even where provisions exist, significant implementation gaps remain. The extent to which displaced people could find protection and had access to formal support varied considerably between our countries of study. States' legal frameworks, policies and implemented instruments, as well as the involved actors and organisations, differed quite substantially, too, —not only between the countries in the global South and the North but also between the signatories (Ethiopia, Tanzania, the DRC and EU member states) and non-signatories (Jordan and Pakistan) of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Moreover, states have either a limited interest or capacity to align their refugee response to global processes like the Global Compact for Refugees or regional protection frameworks like the African Union's (OAU) Refugee Convention or the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). One reason is the politicisation of the 'refugee question' in most cases (see Section 5); another is the fact that global and regional agreements are rarely binding and their (non-) implementation is hardly—positively or negatively—sanctioned (see **TWP3** and the country working papers for a more detailed analysis of the relevant governance regimes of protection).

2. Protection and support tend to apply unevenly, where available, depending on nationality, location or legal status, and they come with various restrictions. For example, protection and formal support are often restricted to individuals living in camps or having registered their status, which means that many displaced people fall through the cracks. Twenty-five per cent of all TRAFIG survey respondents fell outside of international protection frames as IDPs or for other reasons. Others had never registered with UNHCR or never applied for asylum (3%), or their application had already been rejected (3%; see Annex for an overview of key variables). In urban settings in the DRC, state and non-state actors are extremely reluctant to provide aid to IDPs, fearing that it will become a pull factor for others to move to the city (**TWP4**). In Tanzania, encampment is mandatory, and official support is limited to camp-based refugees. Leaving the camp to work, for example, is a punishable offence. But still, around 10,000 refugees choose to live in the country's largest city, Dar es Salaam, even though this means life in 'illegality' with no access to formal support (**TWP8**). In Ethiopia, tens of thousands of refugees from different countries live in larger cities like Addis Ababa. There is an out-of-camp policy (OCP), but this only applies to Eritreans, not South Sudanese or Somalis. Those Eritreans who leave the camps under the OCP lose access to official support, including food, housing, healthcare and education, resulting, for many, in protracted displacement and marginalisation in urban centres (**TWP5**).

3. The sheer complexity of notoriously difficult to navigate governance regimes and asylum systems poses further challenges. The proliferation of statuses is particularly problematic. It is challenging to understand the different statuses available (e.g. international protection under the Geneva Convention, national asylum, subsidiary protection, humanitarian protection or a suspension of deportation), why they are granted, and what rights are associated with them (**TWP9** and **TWP10**). Also, legal regulations tend to change quickly. We saw this, for instance, in Greece over the past four years, where a constantly transforming system of rules and restrictions emerged that is difficult to understand among experts in the field, let alone by refugees and volunteers (**TWP9**). Processes like family reunification or document renewal applications are also long and complex, with unpredictable waiting times and the need for applicants to engage with their home-country institutions, which can cause distress (see Box 1).

In sum, governance regimes create multiple obstacles and contribute to (re)producing protracted displacement through limited and uneven access to rights and support, restrictive and complex regulations, and prolonged uncertainty.

Box 1: Transnational governance of (non-) protection: The family reunification process of Eritreans in Germany

For Eritreans in Germany, family reunification is an exceedingly lengthy and complicated process with uncertain outcomes. Eritreans must navigate between authorities of the German state, such as the Immigration Office, which reviews cases at the local level, the Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, and the respective German embassies in Eritrea's neighbouring states, where family members must apply for a visa. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is also involved in the application process as an intermediary. Given the limitations of the Eritrean official documentation system, many Eritreans fail to supply the required documents for family reunification, or the German embassy does not accept the religious birth or marriage certificates that they have. Eritreans must then contact authorities in their country of origin to obtain the necessary documents. When they do so, they must sign a 'regret form' and pay a diaspora tax, equivalent to two per cent of their income. Many refrain from contacting Eritrean authorities out of fear that this might lead to the persecution of their family members in Eritrea. Consequently, they tend to submit incomplete applications, which result in rejection, due to (purposefully) missing evidence of one's identity and/or the family connection. Eritrean families living across two continents are then separated for years, and their rights to family life are violated because of these overcomplicated transnational bureaucratic processes. Moreover, while the refugees in Germany suffer under the heavy burden of being separated from family members and not being able to adequately care for their children, spouse or parents, the respective relatives in the region of origin continue to be exposed to conditions of violence and protracted displacement due to the ongoing separation (TWP10).

Finding 2: Most displaced people are far from having reached a durable solution as the rights they are granted and the support they receive can hardly secure their futures.

The statistical definition by UNHCR sets the threshold for a protracted refugee situation at five years. The participants in our survey had been displaced from their homes for 11 years on average and had lived at the place where the interview took place for almost eight years. Figure 3a shows the averages across all countries.

The Afghan respondents in Pakistan had, by far, been displaced the longest: 29 years on average, with some of the individuals we spoke to having fled to the country more than 40 years ago when Russia inter-vened in Afghanistan in 1979 (TWP7). In comparison, refugees and other migrants we spoke to in Greece had been living there for three years on average. Figure 3b shows that the degree of the displaced people's marginalisation is the highest for those who have been living at the current place for five years or less. It also shows that it is the lowest for those living at one place the longest. In other words, the economic, legal and social situation of refugees and IDPs (for the DRC) improves over time. Nonetheless, many remain under quite precarious conditions (see Section 6 on the Marginalisation Index).

Figure 3a: Time in displacement by study country

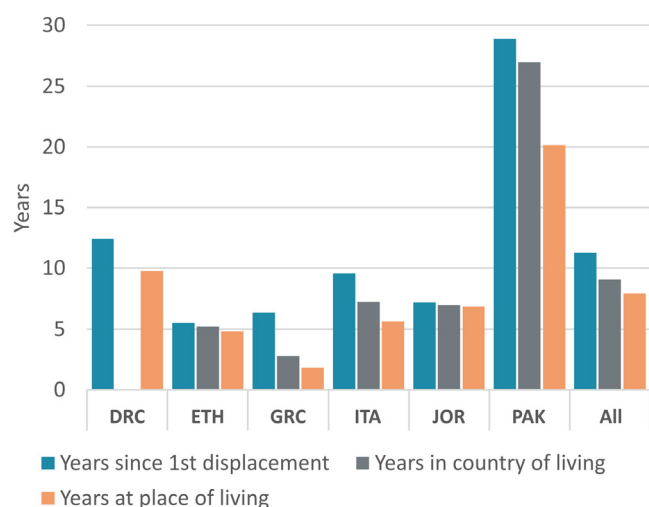
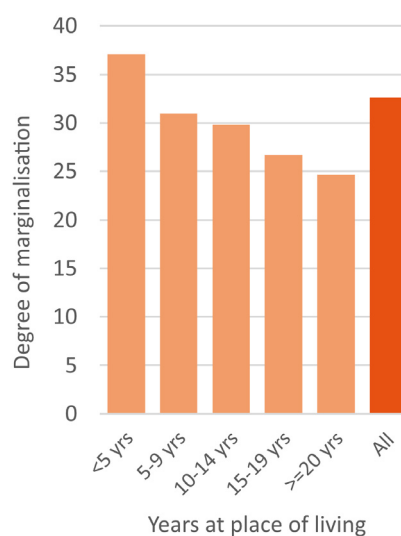


Figure 3b: Degree of marginalisation



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1882) of protracted displacement in diverse contexts.

Note: The degree of marginalisation is a relative measure combining several survey questions on respondents' legal status, access to health, education, housing and work, economic situation, etc. A high score indicates a higher degree of actual vulnerability and perceived marginalisation (see Section 6 for details).

Figure 4a: Survey respondents' protection status

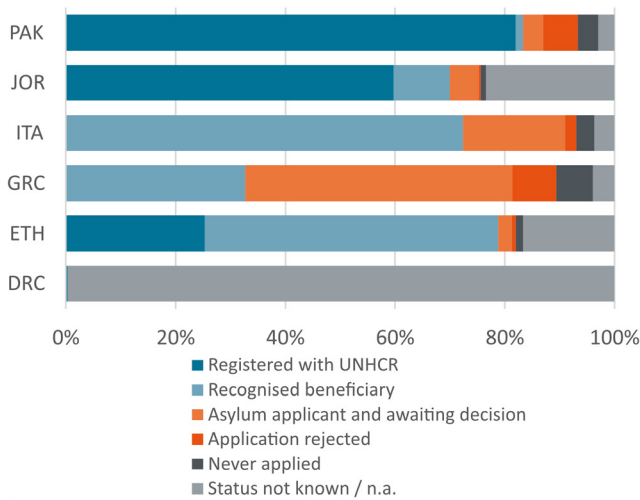
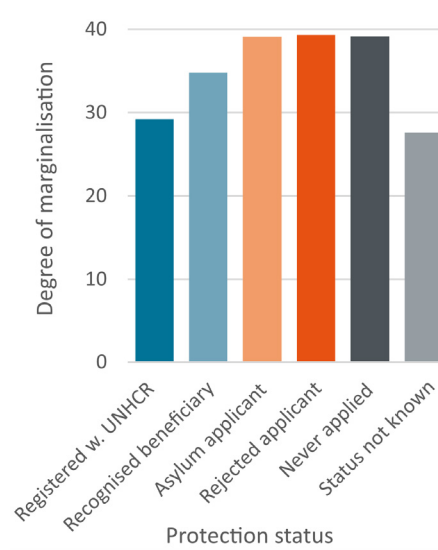


Figure 4b: Degree of marginalisation



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1882)

States decide which residency statuses refugees have access to and for how long they remain in an insecure situation with only a temporary title. Except for Jordan, where 25 per cent of the interviewed refugees have permanent residency status, temporary residency titles are much more common and dominant in Pakistan, Greece and Italy. Most of those with permanent residence permits are either registered with UNHCR (42%) or recognised as beneficiaries of protection (45%). Amongst those with temporary permits, one-third are registered with UNHCR, 44 per cent are recognised protection beneficiaries, and 15 per cent are asylum applicants awaiting a decision.

A hierarchy of protection is implemented through different protection statuses, rights of residency, access to work and external support. Those who are registered with UNHCR or are recognised beneficiaries of international protection fare better than asylum applicants, those who were rejected and those who never applied (Figure 4). **An insecure legal status is one of the most significant factors contributing to displaced persons' marginalisation** and a high risk of remaining in a protracted situation.

The survey data also highlights the relatively limited and uneven access to support across the countries studied. Less than a half of the survey respondents (48%) received formal support, be it from the government or state agencies, international organisations, local NGOs or religious groups in 2021. The lowest rates of support are registered in the DRC (12%) and Pakistan (27%), while the highest share is in Greece (77%), followed by Jordan (63%) (see Figure 5a). While these differences in the level of support can be considered an important finding in itself, it also reflects the particular composition of our sample in the respective countries of study.

There is a **significant difference between the support one can access in camps and out of camps**. Those living in camps are much better supported with shelter, medical aid and health care, and cash transfers but also have better access to legal advice, vocational training, language courses or other education (see Figure 5b). Independent legal advice, which is predominantly provided by international organisations and local NGOs, is a particularly decisive form of support to end long-term conditions of economic precarity and legal insecurity. But only about one-fifth (21%) of all respondents received legal advice in 2021. Of those who did, two-thirds lived in camps. Furthermore, legal aid may be limited to certain categories of refugees (e.g. UNHCR-registered Afghans in Pakistan), and information about access to aid may be unevenly distributed (e.g. depending on gender and social status, as discussed in the case of Pakistan, **TWP7**).

This in/out of camp divide, which we clearly observed in Ethiopia (**TWP5**), Jordan (**PN6**), and Greece (**TWP9**) should, however, be placed within the context of general living conditions in camps. After experiencing conditions in Zaatari camp, some participants from Jordan poignantly remarked that they "would have been better off if they had died in Syria" (**TWP6**, p. 19). While perhaps extreme, this example is a stark reminder that although support is often more accessible in camps, living in camps comes with significant drawbacks, including surveillance, mobility restrictions, regimented and poor conditions, and indefinite waiting and boredom. Many thus decide to leave, particularly if they are embedded in supportive family networks outside of camps or combine living in and out of camps as a strategy to improve one's quality of life and well-being.

Figure 5a: Share of respondents having received formal support in the study country

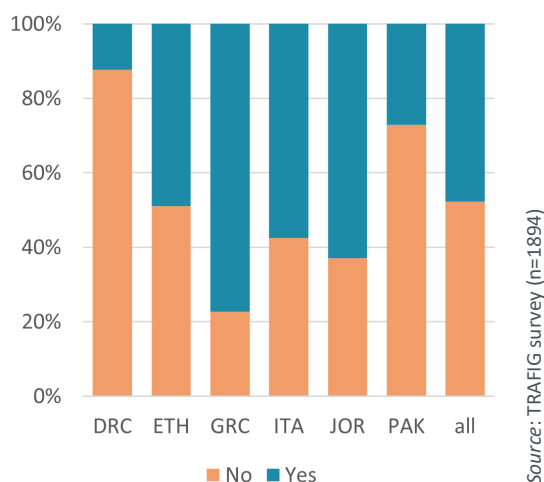
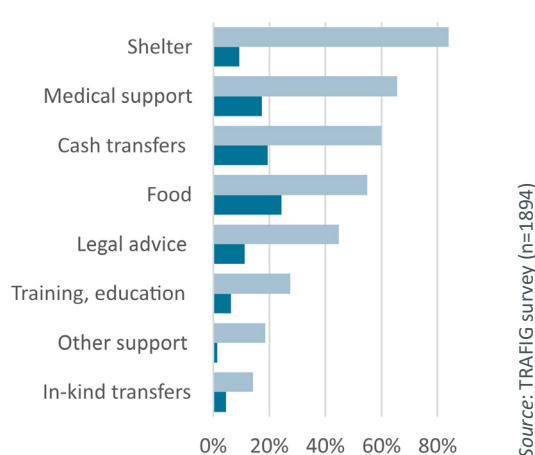


Figure 5b: Type of support received by those living in- and outside of refugee camps



Finding 3: Governance regimes tend to limit rather than provide opportunities for displaced people, so they often circumvent them.

With the problems and gaps in protection outlined above, navigating governance regimes is a complicated and often impossible task for displaced people. Our qualitative research revealed four broad strategies that displaced people use to navigate the complex migration and asylum-related legal landscape: (1) making the most of restrictive regulations, (2) combining lawful and unlawful strategies, (3) circumventing registration and "staying under the radar" and (4) waiting or coping with future uncertainty.

Making the most of restrictive regulations

Displaced people actively engage with existing regulations, trying to make the most of specific rules and procedures to move ahead in life. For example, experts interviewed in Greece connected an increase in applications from pregnant women to legal amendments that ended housing provisions for recognised refugees, except for "the most vulnerable", which included pregnant women and families with small children (TWP9). Other strategies include intentional family separation (Greece, TWP9), exiting and re-entering the country regularly to retain one's status as a tourist visa holder or to abide by the legally permitted maximum length of three months of stay in another Schengen country for protection beneficiaries (Italy, TWP9) or obtaining a peasant permit to leave the camp and work (Tanzania, TWP8).

Combining lawful and unlawful strategies

Another common strategy involves combining lawful and unlawful means to navigate the constraints imposed by restrictive regulations. This may entail regularly moving between a refugee camp and accommodation outside the camp to retain certain benefits restricted to camp-based refugees. In Greece, for example, we saw that some formally retain their place in the camp—with the support of friends or family—to avoid being excluded from asylum procedures or losing cash assistance but unofficially live outside of the camp (TWP9). In Ethiopia's Tigray region, we noted how some Eritreans lead a translocal life between camps and nearby cities where they are gradually building a livelihood, but are carefully maintaining their access to subsidised food or medical support that is only available for camp residents (TWP5). Others combine living and working informally in cities with an intermittent return to camps to access education there.

Circumventing registration and "staying under the radar"

A third strategy is bypassing the formal protection system, not registering, and moving on to places where one can live and work safely, albeit often informally. The reasons why displaced people circumvent formal protection vary across the different cases. For example, in Tanzania, Congolese or Burundian refugees who previously lived in cities have been known to struggle with the isolation and living conditions in rural camps and prefer to head to Dar es Salaam, despite the risks associated with being, living and working undocumented in the city (TWP8). Some of the Syrian and Eritrean refugees that the German research team spoke to mentioned that they consciously avoided having their fingerprints taken after arrival in Italy. They knew that they could not that easily move on from

Italy and apply for asylum at their desired destination once they were already formally registered. As they wanted to join family, work or believed in better chances of protection in Germany, circumventing registration—and a fingerprint entry in the EURODAC database—and moving on "under the radar" was a decisive step to keep their pathway to the future open (TWP10, p. 16).

Coping with waiting and uncertainty

Waiting is an undeniable consequence of complicated and lengthy asylum procedures. Displaced people face a complex asylum and aid landscape and prolonged waiting times and uncertainty, aggravated by governance regimes spanning national borders and including countries beyond those of origin and destination. They often wait: For a safe passage to a destination, for an appointment at an embassy, for money to arrive to pay for migration services, for messages from family and friends, for registration after arrival in a new country, for food being distributed in the camp, for access to medical support, for an asylum interview and its decision or family reunification.

Box 2: "I wasted thirteen years of my life, and I do not know what will happen next. I am just waiting and waiting."

Tekeste is a 30-year-old Eritrean refugee the Ethiopian research team met in Addis Ababa in November 2019. In Eritrea, he joined the army just as he completed grade eleven. After a few months of military training, he tried to run away but was caught and spent five years in prison. In 2012, he managed to escape from prison and fled to Ethiopia, where he first lived in Adi Harush camp in the Tigray region. A few months later, he arrived in Addis Ababa, where he was eligible for the urban assistance programme for medical reasons. He considered that more than one-third of his life had been unproductive, a time he had been waiting to transit to a 'productive life' (TWP5, p. 16).

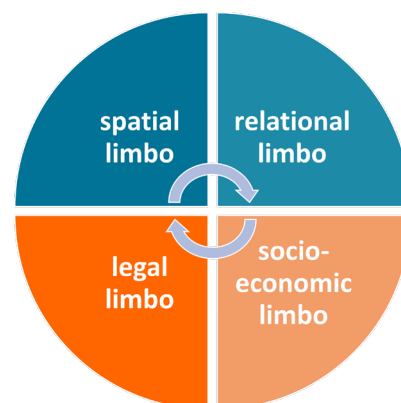
Waiting has wide-ranging implications on individuals' relationships, work trajectories and general well-being, amplifying the trauma of displacement and negatively impacting one's self-image. Navigating governance regimes thus also requires coping with waiting. Many refugees have demonstrated remarkable resilience and developed creative strategies to gain control over 'their time'. Their strategies range from volunteering to taking language classes or engaging in various leisure activities. But they also use the time to move back and forth between countries to renew their registration, as one Eritrean who frequently moves between Italy, Sweden and Norway, told us (TWP9, p. 28). While lengthy asylum procedures are severely limiting, they can equally ignite new hopes.

This was signalled, for example, in the Greek context, where a negative asylum decision did not necessarily mean that all options were exhausted. Even restrictive governance regimes allow applicants to appeal unsuccessful claims or pursue alternative routes to secure their status. With appropriate support, one can thus start new procedures and resume waiting for a better and more secure future (TWP9).

Conclusions—Theme 1

Governance regimes' increasingly complex and restrictive nature makes it challenging to navigate without specialised support and significant material and emotional resources. Restrictive regulations often force displaced people into irregularity or semi-legality as they try to cope with their situation by combining lawful and unlawful strategies. Formal support is often tied to staying put in one place (e.g., refugee camp), which goes against displaced people's need for small-scale, national or international mobility. Still, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and creativity in navigating regulatory frameworks, identifying and combining various sources of support and developing varied strategies to improve their living conditions. Personal networks and mobility are crucial in this process, and the former may facilitate the latter (as we show later in Section 4.3). But the limited access to expert (legal) advice and formal support leave people vulnerable to a host of issues, ranging from misinformation, prolonged uncertainty, economic precarity, exploitation and irregularity.

Figure 6: Protracted displacement as a multi-dimensional limbo



4.2 Living in limbo: Everyday lives and livelihoods in protracted displacement

'Local integration' is officially denied as a durable solution in many contexts (see Section 5). We nevertheless observed displaced people's 'de facto integration' in local neighbourhoods and labour markets and how this is facilitated through family, kin relations or other networks and within informal economies. Whilst integrating, displaced people are, however, enduring insecurity and intertwined conditions of 'limbo' that contribute to their marginalisation and thus to displacement becoming protracted. Some governments prefer giving temporary humanitarian support and successively prolonging it rather than granting displaced people permanent rights for equal participation in societies and economies—if they do not choose to ignore the presence of displaced people altogether (TWP3).

Box 3: Our understanding of integration, marginalisation and 'lives in limbo'

*The concept of **integration** is widely used when studying migrants' changing social, economic, political and cultural positions in receiving societies. **UNHCR** understands '**local integration**' as a "durable solution for refugees that involves their permanent settlement in a host country. Local integration is a complex and gradual process, comprising three distinct but interrelated dimensions: legal, economic, and socio-cultural. The process is often concluded with the naturalisation of the refugee". Given the multiple barriers put up by governments in all our study countries to prevent displaced people from staying, settling in permanently and becoming immersed in the receiving society, we think it is necessary to highlight the ongoing processes of marginalisation and the 'intertwined limbos' that refugees and IDPs encounter while trying to integrate.*

***Marginalisation** is a process of exclusion that operates simultaneously across legal-administrative, economic, social, cultural and political spheres (TWP9). In our quantitative analysis, we operationalised the concept of marginalisation by constructing a synthetic index comprised of eight indicators, namely legal status, health service access, education access, housing situation, formal support received, economic situation as well as perception of physical safety and social cohesion (see <https://trafig.eu/data>). Our measure of the 'degree of marginalisation' corresponds closely to the IASC's criteria on whether displaced persons have achieved a durable solution (see **TWPI**, p. 14).*

*The term '**limbo**' is a metaphor for a condition of chronic uncertainty and marginalisation. It denotes key aspects of protracted displacement but does not necessarily deny migrants' agency, such as their capacity to counter the immobilising and marginalising forces that constrain them (TWPI, p. 19).*

Protractedly displaced people are constantly 'living in limbo'. We identified four key dimensions to these constellations of chronic uncertainty (see also **TWP4**, p. 15, **TWP8**, p. 12): legal limbo or rightlessness, socio-economic limbo or precarity, relational limbo or exclusion and spatial limbo or being 'out of place' (Figure 6). These factors are interdependent as they constantly reinforce each other.

The following discussion describes our findings on the interrelations between these marginalising dynamics.

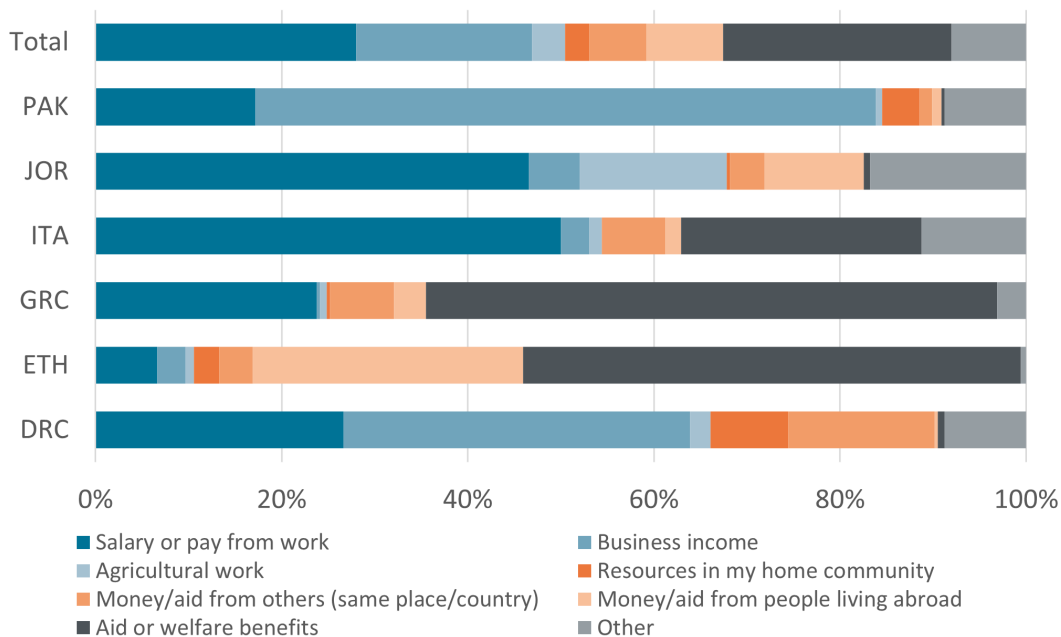
Finding 1: Displaced people's livelihood patterns largely depend on their legal entitlements and the support that is locally available to them.

According to our survey, one-quarter (26%) of displaced persons across all study sites sustain their living through employment or paid work, almost another quarter (23%) depend on humanitarian aid or social welfare, 18 per cent are self-employed, while eight per cent draw on transnational support such as remittances from relatives living in other countries (see Figure 7 for more detail).

Many cannot solely rely on one source of living but combine different practices and strategies. One-quarter of our survey respondents had a second source of living, while seven per cent also mentioned a third. In the context of multiple crises and insecurities, it is essential to diversify one's livelihoods, for instance, by combining the aid available in a refugee camp with jobs in a nearby city (as we saw in Ethiopia, **TWP5**), relying on one's work but receiving remittances from family, too (as reported in Jordan, **TWP6**), having a small street shop but occasionally getting food or other donations from churchgoers (as in Tanzania, **TWP8**), or supplementing formal employment with informal work (as in Italy, **TWP9**). Here, larger households, which can use the labour power of several family members, including children, and which have far-reaching networks fare better.

Across our study, livelihood patterns in protracted displacement—and thereby also patterns of marginalisation or inclusion—differ considerably, as shown in Figure 8. These **differences in livelihoods can be explained mainly by the institutional setup of protection regimes and legal entitlements**, in particular the extent of encampment and displaced people's right to work (this will be explained further below). Other factors that cannot be explained here in detail include:

- the **place of living**: the share of employment and own business income is much higher in urban and peri-urban areas than in rural areas where, in turn, agricultural work and humanitarian aid (for those living in rural camps) play a more prominent role

Figure 7: Displaced people's sources of living (main source) by country of study


Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

- personal characteristics such as **age**—the youngest (16–19 yrs) being disproportionately dependent on aid or welfare benefits, while employment is highest amongst those in their thirties, and business income highest amongst those 50+, **qualifications**—the higher the level of qualification the larger the share of employment (39% among those with tertiary education, 31% with primary or secondary school, and 16% with no formal schooling) or **gender** (see Section 4.6).

Finding 2: If not barred from access to work altogether, displaced people are structurally disadvantaged in accessing employment opportunities.

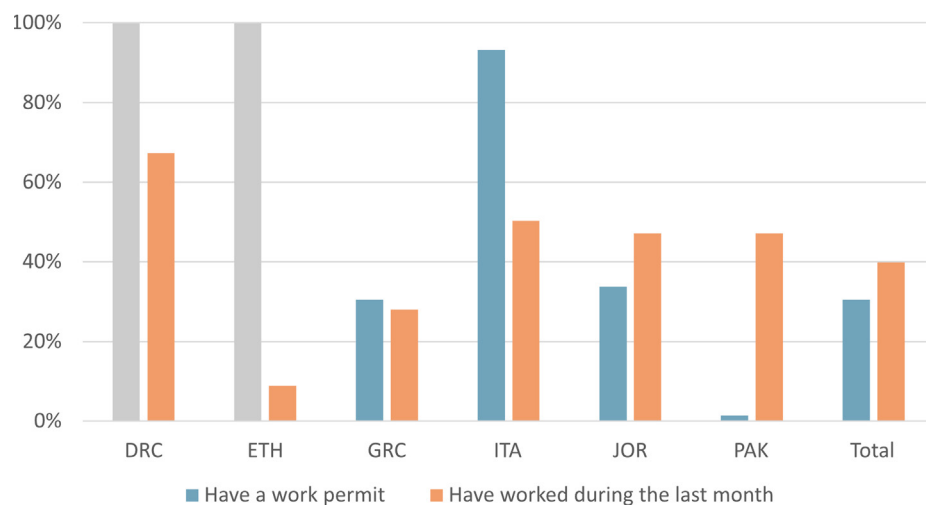
Displaced people's legal entitlements differ remarkably across countries, reflecting the rather different protection regimes and legal frameworks in place (see the respective working papers and **TWP3** for an overview of refugees' access to rights and services in East Africa, the Middle East and Europe) and the different structures of, in many contexts largely informal, economies.

Refugees may have the right to work on paper, yet the **lack of support programmes, employers' reluctance to hire refugees or limited work opportunities more generally keep many out of work** or compel them to resort to informal employment.

In **Jordan**, more than half of Syrians were unemployed. The share of those who possess a work permit (34%) compared to those who work (47%, see Figure 8) already indicates the significance of informal work in a country marked by high unemployment. Three-quarters of those Syrians who worked had jobs without a formal contract, mainly in low-skilled (service sector) professions. This is also the result of policies that limit foreign workers' formal employment to certain sectors, including agriculture, construction and food services. Better-skilled persons and female respondents described pervasive job market exclusion, low pay, and deskilling as they worked below their qualifications (**TPN6**, pp. 11, 24–26).

In **Pakistan**, we noticed similar tendencies as in Jordan, but on a more extreme level. A much lower share of Afghan respondents is legally entitled to work, but almost 50 per cent work nonetheless. Labour participation is much higher among those who had already gained Pakistani citizenship vis-à-vis those who have only temporary residency, whilst only one-third of unregistered Afghan migrants—i.e. those who have no legal security whatsoever—are (self-) employed. Some Afghan refugees are successful and quite wealthy businesspeople, particularly those whose families have been involved in the regional cross-border carpet trade, for instance, for years. But the majority work in low-skilled professions or in labour market niches in the cities, for instance, collecting scrap and recycling waste. Notably, Afghans are not eligible to work in the country's public sector (**TWP7**, pp. 17–23).

Figure 8: Respondents with a work permit and who have worked over the past month



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

Note: In the DRC, the question regarding a work permit was excluded as the interviewed IDPs are national citizens and thus do not require any permit. In Ethiopia, refugees have the right to employment and, since coming into force of the new Refugee Proclamation in 2019, have not needed a work permit.

In Dar es Salaam in **Tanzania**, Congolese and Burundian refugees make their living based on informal work, for instance as petty traders. The expensive work permits for foreigners are out of reach for most. While the informal economy can be considered the ‘normal’ economy in the country, it functions differently for nationals and immigrants. For refugees, navigating through a complex and hierarchised informal economy, with upper layers often de facto reserved to nationals, is further complicated by their need to hide their identities and stay under the radar in the city, as they are officially obliged to live in refugee camps and villages in rural areas. Moreover, besides the multiple barriers to entering the labour market and the informal nature of labour, refugees in Tanzania experience a lack of recognition of their skills and capacities, which aggravates the psychological distress of ‘living in limbo’ (TWP8, pp. 16–18).

In Europe, the informal economy is less prevalent than in low and medium-income countries in Asia and Africa. Nonetheless, many refugees are informally employed in the **southern European countries** that we studied. Labour market participation is lower (28%) in Greece, where only one-third are formally allowed to work, than in Italy (50%), where most have a work permit (93%). The respective lower or higher reliance on one’s own labour power corresponds with the dependency on aid—or the functioning of the asylum regime—in both countries, as the share of those relying on humanitarian aid and welfare benefits is much higher in Greece (59%) than in Italy (25%). Most notably, 63 per cent of working refugees in Greece reported that they had been (occasionally) employed without any contract. This was the other way around in Italy, where 71 per cent had contracts and only a small proportion were self-employed. This is not to say that informal and often exploitative working condi-

tions do not exist in Italy—they do, and they are often linked to the governance of migration and asylum, migrants’ legal status and their enforced (im)mobility within the country (see TWP9 and Section 4.3 on the ‘mobility paradox’ below).

Across our study countries, we clearly noticed a relation between displaced people’s legal limbo and socio-economic limbo. In each country, we saw an emerging “hierarchy of protection” (TWP10), as legal status and protection statuses are inevitably coupled to the access to humanitarian aid (or lack thereof) and selective in- or exclusion from the labour market. However, this relation varies in each context (see Figure 8). We cannot simply say that all displaced people are marginalised and face dire prospects in terms of legal,

economic, and social inclusion. What we can say is that the set-up of protection regimes, national policies and institutional logics that aim to enable or prevent displaced people from accessing employment opportunities play a decisive role—good or bad—in their everyday lives and future.

Finding 3: Refugees who live in camps are more dependent on aid. Whilst life outside of camps offers more opportunities, it does not mean living a life outside precarity.

When comparing everyday living conditions and livelihoods of protractedly displaced people, a fundamental cleavage emerged between those who live in refugee camps or camp-like situations and those who live outside of camps, mostly but not exclusively in urban areas. The in-camp/out-of-camp divide reflects existing patterns of inequality between displaced populations and within our countries of study. These differences directly reflect how protracted displacement is being governed, to what degree people are spatially (im)mobilisable, and to what degree they can draw on their own networks.

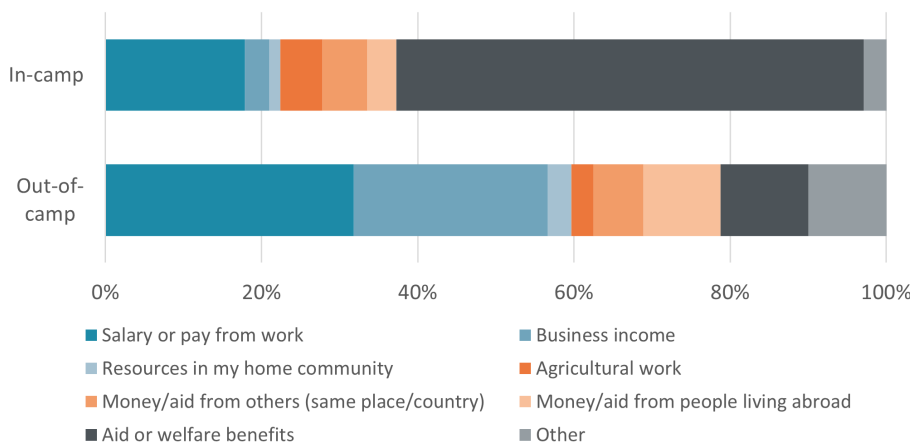
Compared to those who live outside of camps, people in camps are more dependent on financial or in-kind support from states and/or international organisations. Just over half (55%) of our survey respondents mentioned aid or welfare benefits as their first source of living and, unsurprisingly, lived in refugee camps or other large-scale facilities. Only 11 per cent of respondents living outside of camps depended on external aid as their main source of living. Correspondingly, paid work (16%) and self-employment (3%) play a much smaller role for those in camps in contrast to those living outside in cities or villages

(shares being 30% and 24% respectively). Interestingly, we also see that those who live in camps are much more disconnected from informal support and cannot draw that much on personal networks in the same country (5%) or remittances from those who live in other countries (3%), compared to those outside of camps (shares being 6% and 10%, respectively)(see Figure 9).

The different realities of living—and one has to say surviving—in and outside of camps are most strikingly apparent in our research in Jordan, Ethiopia and Greece. In **Jordan**, the refugee camps Zaatari and Azraq offer benefits, including housing, water and electricity, but they are also associated with lower social status and elevated levels of governmental surveillance. Since the outset of displacement crises, Syrians have tried to avoid such camps and self-settled in Jordans’ urban and peri-urban areas, where 80 per cent of Syrians now live. Those who first lived in one of the large camps but had relatives or Jordanian friends who could support them tried to move out as

quickly as they could; those without such supporting networks remained in the camp. While levels of unemployment are high in both groups, it showed that out-of-camp refugees were more likely to work without a contract and in the informal sector. Interestingly, the proportion of the Zaatari camp residents having formal employment with a regular contract was higher than that of those living outside. Cash-for-work programmes also exist, but they are restricted to Syrians living in camps, and often those with good connections (‘wasta’) to influential people in the local community are exclusively granted access to these programmes. While life outside the camp goes hand in hand with more freedom, independence and social contacts—also to Jordanian nationals—this does not necessarily mean that it is secure and not precarious (TWP6, TPN6). The case of Ahmed (Box 5) provides an example of the multiple challenges many refugees face in securing their lives under conditions of long-lasting displacement.

Figure 9: Displaced people’s sources of living (main source)



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

Box 4: What we mean by ‘camp’ and ‘camp-like situations’

For the sake of simplicity, we use the term ‘camp’ in a broad sense. It should be noted, however, that this term covers vastly different realities across our target countries and regions.

In some cases (Ethiopia, Jordan, Pakistan, Greece), fieldwork took place at least in part in refugee camps, namely agglomerates of tents, huts or other temporary accommodation managed by international organisations, local humanitarian actors or municipalities. In Pakistan, we also conducted research in former refugee camps that were created more than 30 years ago in the vicinity of cities but have meanwhile turned into large informal or formal settlements. In Italy, we partially worked in ‘camp-like’ settings and thereby refer to large-scale facilities for recently arrived protection-seekers such as former schools or army barracks run by NGOs under the responsibility of local municipalities or prefectures.

Common to all these ‘camps’ is that they are specifically and often exclusively meant for displaced people or asylum seekers. Humanitarian support is provided in or through them, and people live closely together, often with hardly any privacy. Camps are purposely separated from other settlements or housing schemes and had initially been envisaged as temporary forms of accommodation but often became permanent structures and institutions.

Box 5: Sustaining a living in Irbid, Jordan

Ahmed, a 29-year-old Syrian originally from Dar'a area, came to Jordan alone in 2012. He first arrived at Zaatari camp and later left it to search for work. In Syria, he used to be an independent trader like many members of his family. Upon leaving the camp, he wanted to draw on this experience and started to work in a second-hand clothing store in the city of Irbid. Later, he moved on to work in a clothing store for three years. After that, he worked as a supermarket attendant, a job he got with the help of one of his friends. Ahmad got married in 2016 and had two children but said that it was tough to meet his family's daily needs based on his meagre income of 240 dinars (US \$338) per month. Extra payments he received when working overtime helped a little. Besides his own salary, the family had no other livelihood support. They did not receive food coupons from UNHCR, although he had approached their office several times but was always rejected. No other organisations provided aid to them. There were no relatives in other countries who could have supported them financially with some remittances (SSI-YU-TA-Th05-001-JOR).

In **Ethiopia**, our team conducted research in several refugee camps in Tigray region (before the violent conflict broke out in November 2020) and Afar region, as well as in urban areas of Addis Ababa and Shire (Tigray). **There are stark differences in living conditions and the time people have endured precarity and marginality at the respective places.** Many of the Kunuma refugees lived in Shimelba camp (in Tigray) for more than 20 years. On average, Eritrean refugees lived in camps for more than six years, but the longer people stayed in the camps, the more difficult it was to move out. Livelihood patterns are quite different, too. Even though UNHCR, ARRA (the Ethiopian Refugee Agency) and humanitarian organisations provide shelter, food rations, financial support, education and health services inside camps, respondents frequently reiterated that the support they received was hardly sufficient to meet basic needs. Many suffered from hunger. Only few of those who lived inside camps had work or were involved in businesses—but there are notable exemptions. In general, many Eritrean refugees felt trapped in the camps. In a focus group discussion in Adi Harush camp in Tigray, one participant described their experience as follows:

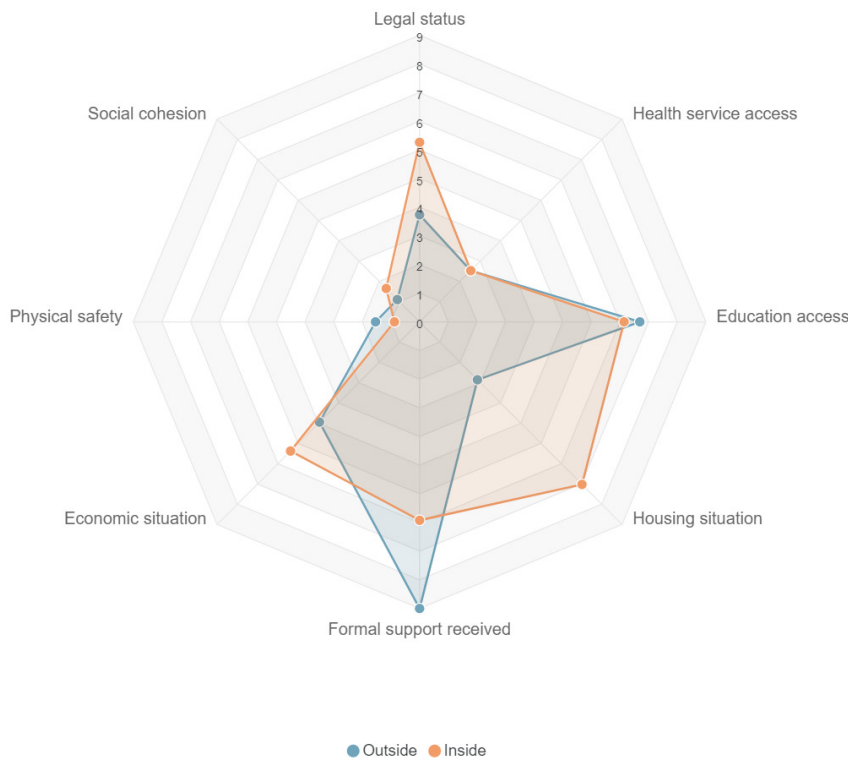
This is a prison where the young's dream is shattered, where they cannot work or bring any change in their lives. We are spared from the prisons in Eritrea that is all (...) the refugee camps in Ethiopia, [are] a big prison [where] you are allowed to see the sun and feel the wind. [Other than that], many of the young have developed disabilities—physically and mentally. (...) The dreams of

our young generation are dimmed. Moreover, living as a victim, most have become weak physically and mentally (...) those who were very strong with a desire for education and work live in darkness. That is how I see it. The young could not work, marry and have children or change the social status and cannot even move (TWP5, p. 17)

There are thus many good reasons to move on from camps, and the Ethiopian out-of-camp policy makes this possible for Eritreans. When moving on to a city, displaced people, however, lose access to state support and are then forced to become 'self-reliant'. As accessing work is difficult for many because they lack a work permit, experience or language competence, the level of unemployment among urban refugees is very high (93%). Occasionally, people work informally to sustain their life, but for the majority, covering the expenses for housing, food and health remains a challenge. They thus also require support, but this support rarely comes from UNCHR or the Ethiopian state. While around one-third of respondents in cities sometimes receive help from humanitarian organisations, transnational networks are the most important lifeline: Just below half (44%) of urban refugees stated that they—occasionally or regularly—receive money or aid from family members or friends who live in another country. As several individual cases (particularly of female refugees) show, this vital translocal support has created dependencies and comes with its risks. Remittances can stop abruptly as long-distance relations are accidentally interrupted or purposely cut, leaving the dependent person in a precarious situation once more (TWP5, pp. 17-20).

In Greece, the reception and protection system massively shapes displaced people's daily lives. While the administration of asylum procedures and the provision of humanitarian support take place in the 'hot spots' on the Aegean Islands and the large camps on the mainland, migrants' mobility—on site, within the country and internationally—is also controlled and constrained there. Moreover, through the institution of the camp, migrants are kept in legal limbo, preventing them from access to employment and thus actively moving ahead in life. Only 13 per cent of migrants living in Greek camps had work compared to 53 per cent living outside of camps; in fact, without a work permit, most of those who worked (96%) did so informally, thus facing low pay, low job security and even exploitation.

As a result of constantly facing restrictions and being immobilised and marginalised, displaced people in Greece are mentally exhausted, feel disempowered and devaluated after months and often years of camp life. They cope with their legal, socio-economic and spatial limbo by subversively using existing legal regulations of local, intra- and transnational mobility

Figure 10: (Non)Encamped displaced people’s marginalisation along eight key dimensions


Source: TRAFIG Survey (n=1897, across all study sites), see our [online data panel](#).

Figure 10 shows how refugees living inside and outside of camps are vulnerable to marginalisation to a different degree—a higher score indicates greater vulnerability or precarity. Those who live in camps tend to have a worse legal status, while both groups’ access to health services and education is similar. Housing conditions are much worse for encamped refugees, they also perceive their economic situation as worse, but they have better access to formal support than those living outside of camps. There are only slight differences in the perception of physical safety and social cohesion between displaced people living inside and outside of camps.

(see Section 4.1). An Afghan asylum seeker we met in Greece explained his coping strategy between the camp and the city of Athens, where he chose to rent a house with his money:

Officially, I live in Malakasa camp now. But in reality, I live in an apartment in Athens, because in Malakasa things are difficult; there are fights every night. [...] Malakasa is close to my work, but I don’t like the situation there. I prefer staying in Athens, even if I have to travel every day to work. Once a month, I have to be in the camp to sign, but they don’t know that I live in an apartment in Athens and that I have a job. If they knew, they would kick me out of the camp (TWP9, p. 23).

In Greece but also in Jordan and Ethiopia, **we often came across such ‘micro-mobilities’ between camps and other settlements**. With such informal strategies, refugees aim to reconcile the pros and cons of each condition—better access to support in (many, not all!) camps versus more freedoms in urban neighbourhoods. Mobility is then not only unidirectional but can also be circular or lead to a, at least temporary, return to the camps as life outside them is often even more precarious. Examples from Greece and Tanzania showed that returning to camps—however paradoxical this may be—might be an adequate strategy for some as camps are a familiar environment and contact zone and also provide a safety net to fall back to (TWP9, p. 24; TWP8, p. 12).

Conclusions—Theme 2

As a matter of course, receiving public or international support can be a key or even crucial factor of relief in a situation of emergency. But when such dependence becomes chronic, it may generate vicious circles of inactivity, demotivation, deskilling and marginalisation. Despite the variance across our sites, it is probably not by chance that those countries where migrants were more dependent on humanitarian assistance (Ethiopia and Greece) and where the share of respondents living in camps was the highest were also those with the highest levels of marginalisation.

Across all our sites, we saw that the different dimensions of limbo interact in multifarious ways. Simply put, **a higher degree of legal insecurity, reflected in weak protection standards and only temporary or even no residency status, inevitably leads to a higher degree of socio-economic exclusion and marginality**. The risk of permanently ‘living in limbo’ is thus the highest for those who lack legal entitlements, are stranded in camps, and, as we will see below, do not have the personal networks to help them to move out of such precarious situations.

4.3 Following the networks: Connectivity and mobility out of protracted displacement

In TRAFIG, we assumed that ‘unlocking protracted displacement’ requires us to depart from the far too narrow view that ‘durable solutions’ are bound to one place only, namely that displaced people either **stay**, **return**, or **move on**. Embracing the notions of mobility and translocality as a normal and potentially beneficial part of displaced people’s lives widens the options at hand so that lives can be rebuilt after initial displacement. In the following, we bring together selective findings on the multifarious relations between connectivity and mobility. We provide an answer to the question: How do translocal or transnational networks shape the lives, mobilities and aspirations of displaced people?

Finding 1: Personal networks decisively shape the direction and trajectories of IDPs’ and refugees’ journeys.

We tried to better understand the displacement trajectories and settlement options of IDPs and refugees. Among our survey participants, the vast majority (40%) stated that they came to the place where we interviewed them because it had been closer or easier to reach compared to other places or countries they had considered. Moreover, many viewed the security situation (35%) and the economic conditions (32%) as better than elsewhere or at their place of origin. A similar language, tradition and custom compared to home were also stated as a reason by many respondents (19%). Of course, the answers vary by context and country of study, most notably whether people had fled to neighbouring countries, for instance, from Syria to Jordan, or travelled long distances, for instance, from Eritrea to Italy (Figure 11).

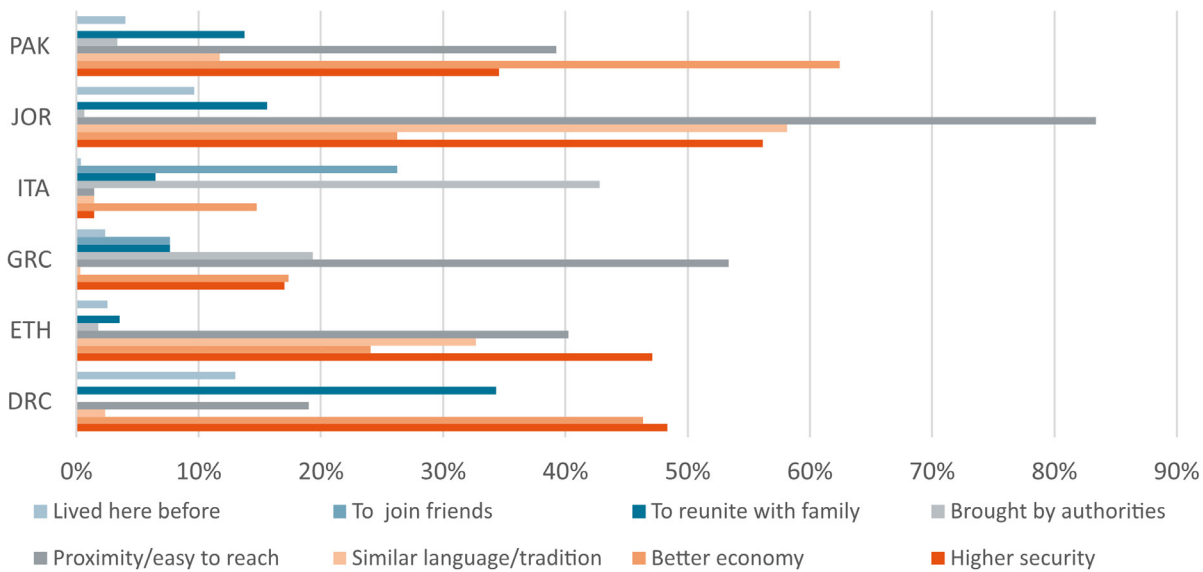
We also asked refugees and IDPs about the role of family, friends and other support networks for their mobility. **We found that family relations and other personal contacts strongly influence the choice of destination and individuals’ displacement trajectories.** According to our survey, 13 per cent of displaced people moved to their current place of living to join family members who already lived there before they came themselves; the highest shares were in the DRC (34%), Jordan (16%) and Pakistan (14%) and thus in contexts, where people did not travel large distances and/or where longer established relations between their places of origin and destination existed. A smaller share of five per cent noted that they settled where they are because they joined friends or other people they knew before; one-quarter of respondents in Italy said so, which was the highest share (see Figure 12, p. 29).

Displaced people not only ‘follow their networks’ to a destination. **They also receive decisive support through their networks.** Half of our respondents stated that they had received assistance on their journey—and the longer and more expensive the journeys were, the larger the share of those receiving support (e.g. 17% in Pakistan and 19% in Ethiopia versus 81% in Italy and 86% in Greece). Refugees embedded in transnational networks received assistance for their journey much more frequently (72%) than those who are not very connected beyond their place of living (31%). Who provided this support? The vast majority (82%) stated that they were assisted in their journeys by their family or close friends—either by those living back home (37%), at the place of residence (25%) or in third countries (21%). Almost half of our respondents across all countries indicated that they had paid smugglers for (parts of) the journey. Among those interviewed in Greece (93%) and Italy (72%), the dependence on smugglers and other paid services for facilitating their journeys was striking.

Our qualitative research showed how powerfully **networks and previous migration shape displaced people’s journeys to safety.** In many cases, individuals had been mobile and lived at the later place of refuge before, or other family members migrated earlier, and they then (re)connected later. In **Jordan**, for instance, our team met several Syrian women who were part of multi-local kin networks that facilitated their families’ movements, first across the border to Jordan, then out of Zaatari camp to cities in the country’s north—until 2015 Syrians could only leave the camp if they had a Jordanian national acting as a sponsor or legal guardian under the so called Kafala system. Later, family ties decisively shaped their settlement and integration (**TWP6**, p. 18). In the **DR Congo**, an IDP became familiar with Bukavu through previous visits and earlier displacement. When forced to flee again, the direction was clear. His brother, who has been living in the city for years, provided shelter and access to work in the first months after arrival. The personal relations then initiated a ‘chain of connectivity’ to others, which is needed in the longer run (**TWP4**, pp. 15–17). Our study in **Tanzania** showed that the journeys of Congolese and Burundian refugees are interlinked not only with the mobilities of family members but also with opportunities for and barriers to movement at certain points of time. However, in the end, this does not guarantee that displaced families can move and actually live together in one place; they often remain separated (**TWP8**, pp.18–21).

Distinct patterns of displacement mobility became apparent in our study. It is clear that our survey participants in Greece and Italy had much longer trajectories that involved multiple countries than those interviewed in Pakistan, Jordan or Ethiopia who crossed only one international border or those in the DRC who moved within the country. Maps of displacement trajectories show how the longer journeys to Europe resemble

Figure 11: Major reasons for moving to the current place of living by country of study



Source: TRAFIG Survey (n=1872), multiple answers were possible

the often-discussed journeys along the Eastern Mediterranean route, for instance, Afghans crossing through Iran to Turkey and then to Greece, or the Central Mediterranean route, e.g. Eritreans first moving to Ethiopia and then on to Sudan, Libya and eventually to Italy. Each journey is unique, however. Some Afghan migrants we interviewed in Italy had moved through Russia and Ukraine or through Iran, Turkey and Estonia (see Map 1 and the [online maps on the TRAFIG website](#)).

When we zoom in on a region and listen to people’s stories of displacement, we learn that individuals’ journeys are often a distinct part of their respective families’ longer history of mobility and transnational networks that developed over time, sometimes over generations. Individual movements often escape clear categories such as forced displacement, labour migration or family reunification. Moreover, personal life trajectories encompass different, sometimes repeated phases of mobility, permanent stay, return, and/or circular mobility.

Moosa’s journey (blue arrows in Map 2), for instance, started off more than 40 years ago with internal labour migration from Badakhshan to Kabul and included multiple (irregular) journeys, deportation and remigration between Afghanistan and Iran. Waqar’s family (orange arrows) first fled from Imam Sahib district in Afghanistan to Peshawar in Pakistan more than 30 years ago, but while parts of the family stayed there, some returned home, and others moved on within Pakistan to Karachi. For the past 20 years, the family has led a transnational life between multiple places in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the individuals’ moves always being enmeshed in the structure and logic of the wider family network (TWP7, pp. 25–26).

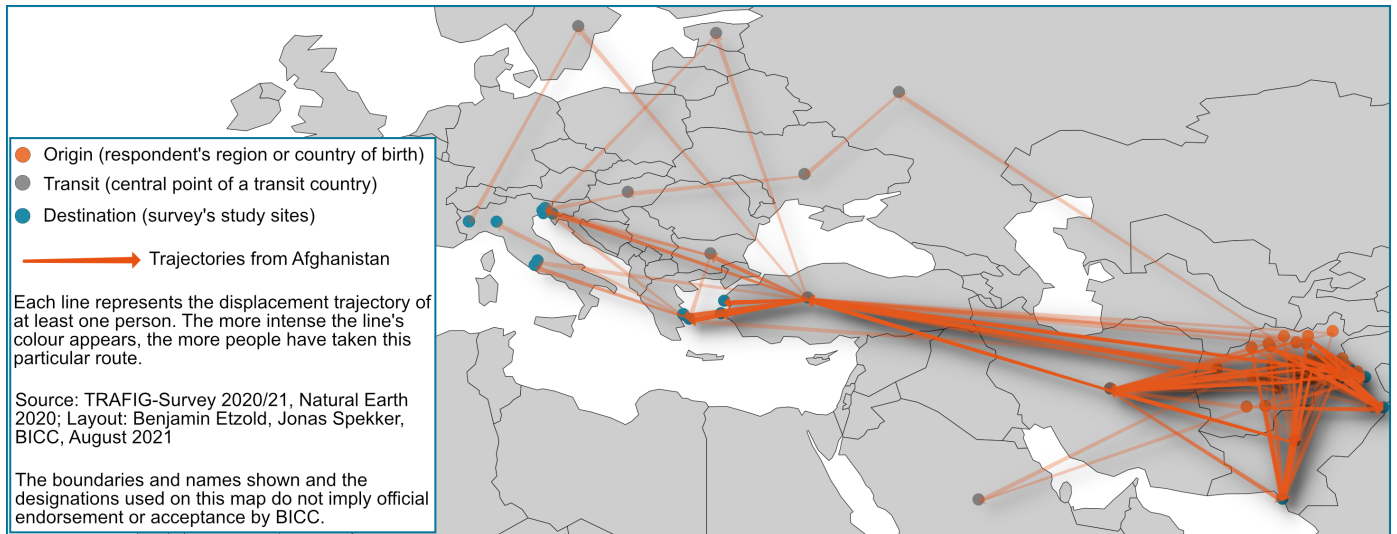
Overall, we found that **family relations are the most fundamental type of social network relation** that shapes displacement trajectories. They strongly influence who flees, where people flee to and find protection in the first place, and then continue to influence the direction and patterns of movements after initial displacement, including return mobilities.

Finding 2: Mobility after displacement is widespread and, if unhindered, a potential source of livelihood.

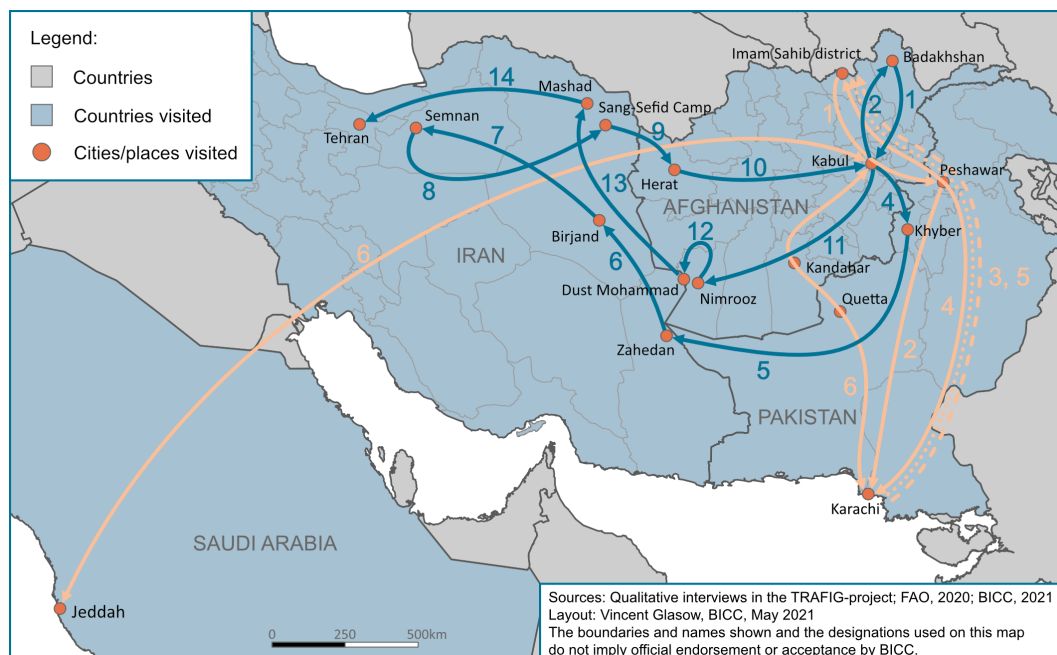
Protracted displacement seems to imply passivity, stasis and being ‘stuck’ in one place. This is too narrow an understanding, if not a misconception. While immobility after initial displacement is common, mobility within the country is a widely used practice, too, if not a requirement to rebuild one’s life. It is only a matter of being allowed to be mobile by the receiving state.

In **Pakistan**, for instance, Afghans’ protracted displacement situation that had evolved in the country since the 1980s was gradually eased by 1995, when Afghans were officially allowed to move out of the camps because international aid had stopped facilitating large-scale refugee camps. While some stayed in camps that eventually turned into (peri)urban settlements where many just stayed, others returned to Afghanistan, be it voluntarily or forcibly. The majority, however, chose to remain in Pakistan and went on to seek employment in the cities. As Afghans maintained contact across a multitude of places, and many even expanded their family clans, for example, through marriage, distinct translocal connections evolved between different hubs of Afghan residents, particularly between the large

Map 1: Afghans' displacement trajectory to Pakistan, Greece and Italy



Map 2: Displacement and movement trajectories of two Afghan families



cities of Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta (see also Map 2 above). According to our survey, the social relations of most Afghans (almost two-thirds) are solely concentrated at their current place of living. Yet, more than one-third maintain social relations with people who live elsewhere in Pakistan. We see this as a key indicator of translocal connectivity (TWP7, p. 24).

Mobility is needed to sustain one's livelihood and maintain one's social relations across multiple places. Taking care of translocal connections is, however, impeded by Afghans' general lack of rights—even after years of living in the country, most only have a temporary status with proof-of-registration (PoR) cards that regularly need to be renewed—and multiple

mobility restrictions, abuse and discrimination in cross-provincial travel. One expert from Pakistan explained:

For domestic mobility, PoR cards do not enable freedom of movement. Especially when crossing provincial borders, Afghans face a lot of problems. For example, if coming from Quetta, people are stopped at D.I. Khan border check posts and are usually not allowed to pass. [...] it is increasingly hard to find any driver because they fear problems with the security authorities. Afghans are not even allowed to buy tickets to travel by bus or train; they are not sold to Afghans (TWP7, p. 28).

Many governments restrict displaced people’s mobility directly by limiting their mobility rights and/or indirectly by providing aid to camp-based refugees only, thus forcing them to stay put. Forty per cent of our survey respondents had experienced barriers to movements within the country of living (see Figure 12). Three-quarters mentioned legal restrictions to mobility linked to their registration or protection status, as in Pakistan. In **Greece**, ‘geographical restrictions’ prevent asylum seekers’ onward mobility from the Aegean Islands (TWP9, p. 16), while the out-of-camp policies in **Ethiopia** and **Jordan** allow leaving a camp and settling in a city only for those Eritreans and Syrians, respectively, who could show their ‘self-reliance’ or who could provide a sponsor—a rule that was valid in Jordan until 2015 (TWP5, p. 10; TWP6, p. 17). In both cases, onward movements from camps were enabled by one’s network within the country or restricted by the lack of such translocal connections.

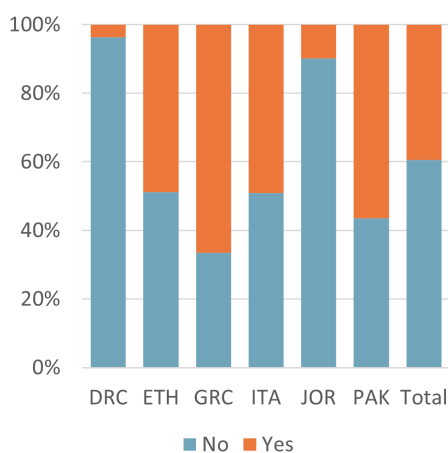
The fact that IDPs in the **DR Congo** face comparatively few mobility restrictions, which is predominantly due to their protected legal status as citizens, points to the mobility potentials for displaced people. Our research team in the DRC noted **diverse patterns of mobility among IDPs**, which are not that different from other people’s who had not been displaced. Many men moved on from Bukavu to work in South-eastern Congo’s mining areas, although the relative success of entering this arduous labour is disputable. Some women joined traders associations and are now engaged in cross-border fruit trade with Rwanda—the association provides the economic platform and a social network through which personal risks are shared and thereby reduced. Moreover, **circular mobility to access resources back home** to trade goods between the former to the current place of living or simply to maintain social relations have been quite common in the DRC (TWP4, pp. 21, 27, 29).

Consider Ntama, a Congolese woman in her fifties who lives in Bukavu but regularly visits her home community she once fled. She still owns some land there and has entered a share-cropping arrangement with a local church, which keeps most of the harvest. However, Ntama regularly picks up a substantial share of vegetables and crops and then sells them on a market in Bukavu or prepares them for her family to eat. Trustful network relations with people in her home place and at her place of living, as well as the circular mobility between the city and the village—in other words, her translocal connectivity—constitutes an important part of her livelihood (TWP4, p. 29).

But mobility alone is rarely a durable solution. It often comes with risks and downsides. Research in **southern Europe** amongst migrants who work in Italy and Greece’s agriculture and who thus often move from one place to the other, for instance, showed that **constant mobility can put individuals out of reach of humanitarian support and be detrimental to securing their legal status in the longer term**. In consequence, this might trap individuals in a permanent undocumented state, which exposes them to exploitation and discrimination and impedes the development of solid local ties. A Senegalese asylum seeker interviewed in Italy offered a striking illustration of the legal precariousness that accompanies ongoing mobility:

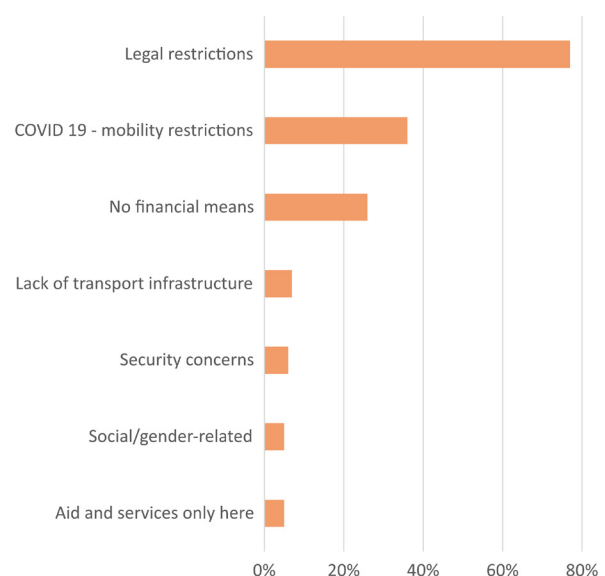
These people travel around Europe without documents to find a job. But if they move around then stay, they are forever undocumented. It is better to stay in one place and wait for the situation to be resolved. Because without documents, you will never be able to return to your country, which is the most important thing for me! (TWP9, p. 28).

Figure 12a: Restrictions faced in moving within the country of residence



Note: By country of residence

Figure 12b: Most important reasons for immobility across all countries



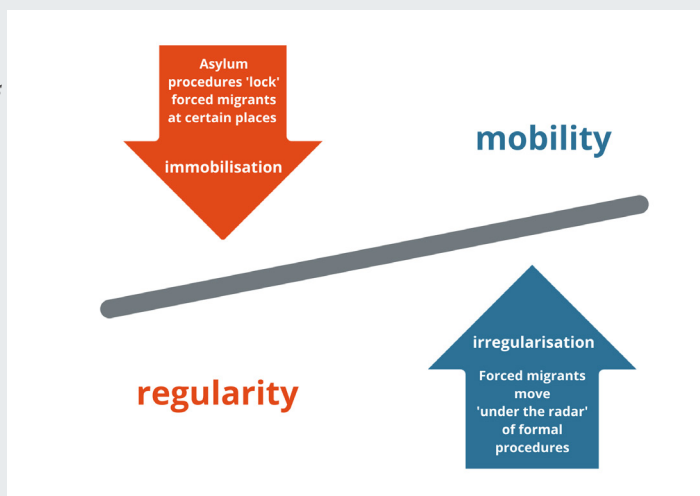
Source: TRAFIG Survey (n=1885)

Box 6: The mobility paradox

Mobility can contribute to ending displaced people’s marginalisation and protractedness, but it can also lead to new forms of instability, exclusion and even exploitation. Mobility can thus turn into a ‘trap’ for migrants’ lives and freedom, reproducing and protracting their displacement.

On the one hand, ‘regularity’ (i.e., going through asylum procedures, conforming with reception regulations while waiting for a decision, adhering to constraints on secondary movement after a decision, etc.) restricts mobility, increases dependence and can lead to marginalisation, at least in the short run. On the other, ‘irregularity’ (i.e., bypassing asylum procedures and related restrictions) allows for mobility and provides opportunities to overcome marginalisation, albeit ver risky. In other words, increased mobility can lead to decreased regularity and vice versa.

To overcome this mobility paradox, policies must first acknowledge that displaced people do move, despite multiple constraints and precarities. By ensuring migrants’ access to rights and livelihoods, enhancing legal channels for mobility, offering options for regularisation, and fostering social inclusion, migrants’ own efforts to strengthen their self-reliance and to move ahead in their lives can be best supported (TPN9).



We call this migrant-specific vicious circle the “mobility paradox” (TWP9, p. 43). It exposes policies that immobilise displaced people in peripheral areas where they can rarely become ‘self-reliant’ (e.g., migrants arriving from Turkey who are confined to camps on the Aegean islands) or that spur people to move around and avoid being ‘locked’ in protracted displacement, leading to a perpetual irregular status. The mobility paradox provides an example of how a situation of legal and socio-economic limbo in the first EU country of residence may push migrants into a spatial and relational limbo.

Finding 3: Transnational network relations shape displaced people’s everyday lives and are critical to finding solutions to protracted displacement.

The social relations of almost half (49%) of the displaced people who participated in our survey mainly revolve around their respective places of living. If we flip the statistic around, we note, however, that a slight majority (51%) is personally connected to people they consider as ‘important contacts’ but who live elsewhere, for instance in another city or country. While 14 per cent have **translocal contacts** to family or others living at another place in the same country, 42 per cent of all respondents are embedded in **transnational networks** as they keep in contact with at least one person in another country. Seventeen per cent have remained in touch with people in their home country, whilst almost one-third (32%) have personal contact with somebody living in a third country.

Overall, the 1,897 displaced persons we interviewed had been in contact with 2,019 individuals living in 67 countries. If we thus consider the wider social relations of displaced people, **protracted displacement can hardly be understood as a phenomenon that is restricted to one place only.**

However, the spatial patterns of displaced people’s networks vary considerably (see Figure 13, Map 3 and the [online maps on the TRAFIG website](#)). Most refugees and migrants who live in **Italy, Greece and Jordan** maintain transnational relations—both to people in the country of origin and to contacts living in other countries. In the **DRC**, two-thirds of the interviewed IDPs did not mention contacts beyond their city of living while only a minority had transnational contacts. In **Pakistan**, the respective distribution is similar. In **Ethiopia**, almost two-thirds have only local contacts while one-third have contact with people in other countries. We note a clear difference between more locally-bound Eritreans living in refugee camps in Tigray and Afar and the more transnationally oriented urban refugees (TWP5, p. 22). The same trend is visible in **Jordan**: Refugees who live in camps are less likely to be embedded in transnational networks.

With whom do people maintain contacts beyond their place of living? Most said that their ‘important contacts’ living elsewhere were close family members (66%), some had contact with other relatives (16%) and friends (17%), while business partners were hardly mentioned.

The short narratives in Box 7 show that **transnational relations play a decisive role in many displaced people's lives. Remittances received from relatives** help to pay for food, accommodation, children's education and other daily expenses. Family members' remittances also help to launch entrepreneurial projects as we saw, for example, in Tanzania, where a male refugee was only able/permitted to start his own business with the financial support of his uncle living in Austria (TPB4, p. 3). Such money transfers are crucial when there is a health crisis or another emergency (TWP5, TWP6). Contacts with family members in other countries can even be considered the lifeline that keeps people afloat under highly precarious conditions. The more relatives are abroad, and the better contacts are maintained—social media play a crucial role in this regard—the more likely it is to receive support. Figure 7 (in Section 4.2) already showed that eight per cent of our survey respondents primarily rely on remittances from relatives living in other countries for their livelihood; in Ethiopia, the share was even 24 per cent.

Overall, **one out of five displaced people had received financial support from contacts living in other countries.** The respective shares of recipients of remittances have been substantially higher among those living outside of camps (22%) than among those living in refugee camps (13%); they are higher among those who live in cities (25%) than among those who live in rural areas (8%); they are higher among men (22%) than among women (16%, see also Section 5 below); and higher among those with tertiary education (28%) than among those who had no schooling (9%). As Figure 14 (p. 34) shows, nearly half of the respondents in Italy had received remittances from key contact persons in other countries, while only four per cent of interviewees in Pakistan had access to such financial support.

Figure 14 also illustrates that the share of those capable of supporting others, mainly family members in their home countries, financially has been by far the highest in the two European countries. A small share of Syrian refugees in Jordan is also sending money back home. Giving remittances does not necessarily mean that one is not at risk of living in protracted displacement. Our qualitative research confirms that many migrants in Greece, Italy and Germany feel compelled by social norms to send remittances back home, even though they themselves lived in quite precarious conditions (TWP9, TWP10).

While financial transfers are a crucial form of support, they are only one facet of transnational social relations many displaced people are embedded in. Taking part in the everyday lives of loved ones, **emotional support in difficult situations and information, guidance and advice on critical decisions are invaluable.** Many people we spoke to noted that being and feeling connected across

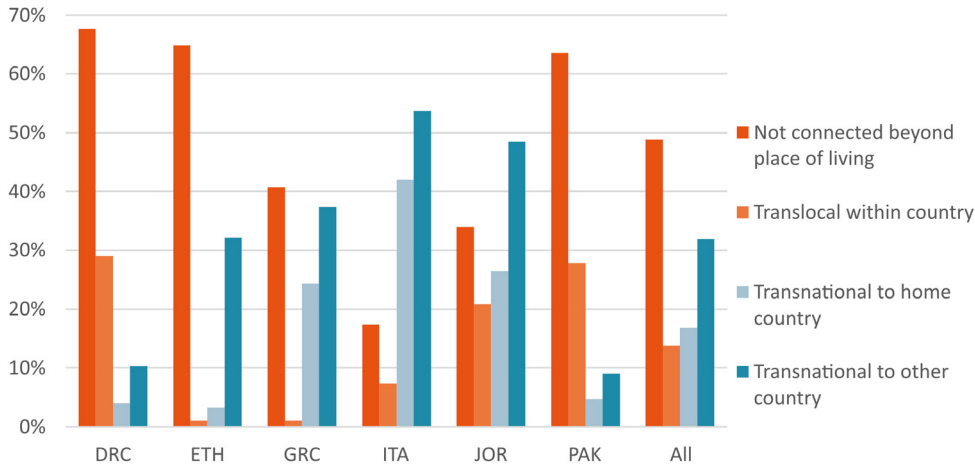
the distance, particularly by phone and through social media, has been essential for them while living through challenging moments and intractable phases of waiting and insecurity (TWP10, pp 36–38). The emotional resources in transnational care relations can, however, also drain over time; they need to be renewed. And this is one of the reasons why mobility is so crucial.

More than **half of our survey respondents intend to move on to another place or country.** But there are substantial differences between study countries. While eight out of ten Afghans aim to stay in Pakistan, nine out of ten refugees in Ethiopia and Greece would like to move on to another, a better place. Looking at the data according to existing network ties, it shows that **transnationally connected refugees are, by far, more inclined to move elsewhere.** And among those who have been separated, either forcibly or voluntarily, from family members on their journeys, the intention to move on is much higher than among those who were jointly displaced. **Overcoming family separation is thus a key motive for onward mobility.**

The cases of **Kam, Umm-Alaa** and **Yordanos** (see Box 7) illustrate how transnational networks shape migrants' mobility aspirations. Many displaced people try to 'follow their networks'. They hope that close ties to family members who live in a third country will eventually help them to escape protractedness in the country of first reception and find protection and—even more importantly—a self-determined future in a more secure and prosperous country. Our research in Germany documented many cases of refugees who moved to the country through family reunification, resettlement or special humanitarian admission programmes—and thus through legal pathways in which family ties or a proven relation to Germany played a decisive role (TWP10, pp. 13–20; Etzold & Christ, 2021).

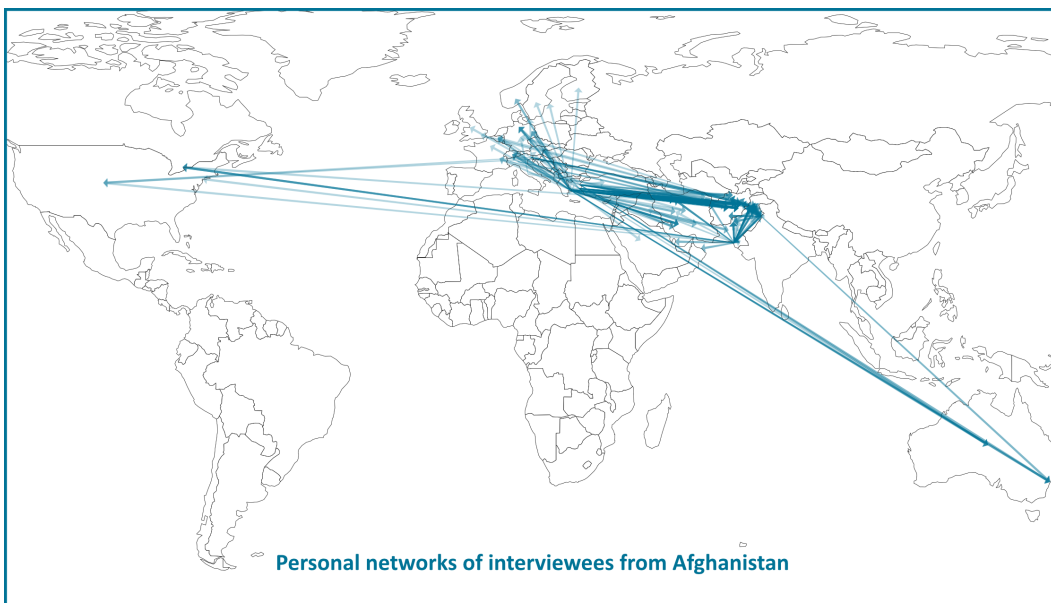
Across our study, however, **many individuals were hindered in seizing the potential in their network relations**—with strict border and visa regimes or too narrow a definition of 'family' preventing family reunification. And hardly any of our respondents in Jordan, and nobody in Pakistan or Ethiopia had ever been suggested for resettlement. When formal pathways are not available or are consistently blocked, many people resort to irregular journeys to realise their mobility ambitions, while others either do not want to risk irregular border crossings and dangerous sea passages or do not have the financial means to afford them and remain stuck under precarious conditions of protracted displacement. One particularly devastating effect of this is that many families remain separated for years and years—as the case of the Eritrean woman **Dahab**, who has been separated from her children for seven years now, illustrates (see Box 7, TWP10, p. 34).

Figure 13: Spatial scope of displaced people’s network connections by country of study



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)
 Note: These relations were assessed by comparing the respondents' places of living with the places of living of up to five 'important contact persons'. Note that a respondent could maintain contact with friends in the country of living, family in the home country and relatives in another country.

Map 3: Transnational network relations of Eritrean and Afghan refugees



Note: Each arrow represents a personal contact as mentioned by an interviewee. The arrowhead signifies where the respective contact person lives. (Where the exact place was not mentioned, the arrowhead points to the centre of the country of residence.) The more intense an arrow's colour appears, the more interviewees at a study site mentioned a contact at the other end of the arrow.

Source of data: TRAFIG-Survey 2020/21, Natural Earth 2020; Layout: Benjamin Etzold, Jonas Spekker, BICC, June 2022; The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

Box 7: Why transnational contacts matter for people experiencing protracted displacement

Kam is a 48-year-old Afghan woman. She fled, together with her—now-deceased—husband, from Afghanistan to Pakistan in 1997 and returned home two years later. In 2011, they were forced to flee once more. Since then, she has lived in Islamabad with her two daughters and her son. Kam currently has no work, but her adult children support her financially. The strongest support comes from two of her brothers who moved to Canada 20 years ago. She is in regular contact with them, and they send her some money every month. Once, she also applied for an immigration visa to join them, but her application was rejected, even though her brothers would have sponsored her (TWP7, p. 28).

Umm-Alaa is a 44-year-old Syrian woman who left her home in the first months of the war in 2011. Together with her five children, she crossed the border to Jordan and found shelter with her brother, who had been living in a Jordanian city for several years. While some relatives returned to Syria, she preferred to stay because it was more secure, even though they lived under precarious conditions for more than ten years. Um-Alaa's husband, from whom she had separated before the war, moved to Kuwait as a labour migrant, but they hardly have contact, and he rarely supports her and the children. She gets by through the assistance of her brother and mother-in-law in Jordan and her sister, who was resettled to Canada in 2015 and regularly sends remittances. Um-Alaa's own application for resettlement was rejected (TWP6, pp. 3, 18) (Tobin et al., 2022).

Yordanos is a 20-year-old-Eritrean woman who fled to Ethiopia with her sister in 2018. They both lived in Shire, a city in Ethiopia's Tigray region, when our researchers met her (before the violent conflict broke out in November 2020). In Ethiopia, the two sisters were able to quickly move out of a refugee camp and rent an apartment in Shire due to the support of another sister who lives in Sweden. They are seven siblings, but the family is scattered across five countries. While the parents still live in Eritrea, the siblings live in Ethiopia, Sweden, Switzerland and Canada—supporting each other and their parents as best as they can. Just after we met her, Yordanos moved to her brother in Canada who had organised her onward move through a private sponsorship programme (TWPS, p. 24).

Dahab is a 35-year-old Eritrean woman who arrived in Germany in 2015 after crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea. Being aware of the risks of such a perilous journey, she had left her two small children with her mother in Ethiopia; her husband had already died. In Germany, Dahab was recognised as a refugee in 2016 and immediately applied for family reunification. But even six years later, she is still separated from her children. All efforts to bring them to safety failed due to missing formal birth certificates and bureaucratic procedures that seem to be designed to prevent mobility instead of bringing separated families together again. Meanwhile, Dahab has a new partner and has given birth to three more children, but the indefinite separation from her two eldest who live in the war-torn Tigray region, weighs heavily on her (TWP10, p. 34).

Family separation is one of the most significant reasons why people intend to return to their place or country of origin.

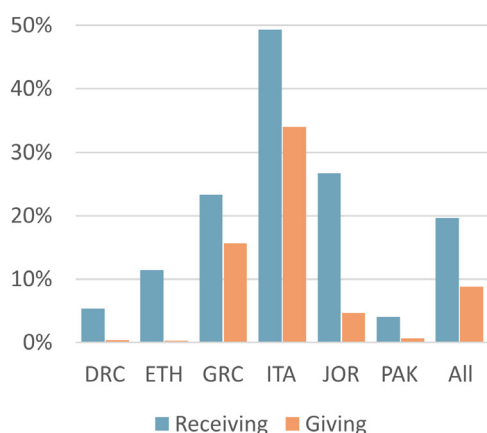
Four out of five displaced interviewees do not aim to return home soon. The presence of one's family in the same country of living has been mentioned by 20 per cent as a decisive reason for not wanting to return home. The desire for family cohesion was the third most important reason, after persisting fear of violence and/or persecution (82%) and the loss of assets (25%). In turn, amongst those wishing to return, overcoming family separation was the prime motive: 64 per cent said they wanted to be close to their family and/or friends again, while 40 per cent wished to return to their old profession. In general, the ambition to return home has been the highest (42%) amongst those still in close contact with people in their country of origin and lowest (16%) amongst those who have not maintained contacts beyond their place of living. We clearly see that **lived transnationalism**—in the sense of the relevance of transnational network relations in people's everyday lives—is a decisive factor for displaced people's mobility aspirations (both onward and return) and thus a critical indicator of people's preferred solutions to protracted displacement.

Conclusions—Theme 3

Mobility and network connections across a multitude of places are basic parts of social life—and they can become even more critical for people when they are forced to flee and must endure conditions of protracted displacement. This section first demonstrated that **personal networks—family ties in particular—decisively shape displaced people's journeys to places of refuge**. When fleeing, previous mobility experiences, the location of close family members, and support and advice given by key contacts provide much-needed orientation. Networks do, however, not determine movements as individuals often decide by themselves where to go and how to get there.

We also argued that **mobility within the country of living is widespread, needed to overcome constraining conditions, and an essential source of livelihood for many displaced people**. Functioning and trustful network relations across places are necessary to move out of refugee camps, for instance, and to benefit from circular mobility. Yet, restrictive laws and (encampment) policies often impede this mobility. If displaced people continuously circumvent such restrictions, there is the risk that they forgo formal support and slip into irregularity—a phenomenon we call the **mobility paradox**.

Figure 14: Share of respondents receiving/giving remittances to key contacts in other countries



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

This section also illustrated the **wide geographical expansion of displaced people’s networks and the relevance of cross-border connections**. Here, we argued that transnational network relations, for instance, the crucial financial and emotional support provided by family members in other countries, can serve as a critical lifeline for protractedly displaced people. Moreover, trans-local or transnational connections are also essential in shaping displaced people’s preferences and aspirations to stay or become mobile once more, either moving onward or returning home. **Networks across multiple places and countries can potentially lift displaced people out of protractedness** and are thus critical for finding long-term solutions.

Still, there are also **significant limitations to relying on networks**. On the one hand, people can **become dependent on network support** and thus highly vulnerable to ruptures of connectivity. We noted this, for instance, in Ethiopia, where urban refugees relied on regular remittances from abroad but ended up in destitute conditions when relatives suddenly discontinued transfers (TWP5, p. 25). During the recent war, refugees in Tigray were cut-off from external support due to a complete breakdown of communication, transfer channels and humanitarian aid, which led to the extreme suffering of the displaced Eritreans and further aggravated despair among family members in Europe who, besides realising that they were not able to support their loved ones, also did not know their whereabouts (TWP10, p. 35).

On the other hand, the support one can obtain via personal or transnational networks depends on the quality of resources these possess. Fieldwork conducted in contexts as diverse as DR Congo, Pakistan, Italy and Germany confirms that **not all displaced people’s ties are equally helpful**. Kin and friendship ties can supplement gaps in aid, but they do not necessarily possess useful resources to compensate for deficient legal systems, secure one’s status and enable international mobility. When it comes to navigating asylum regimes and complex conditions of arrival, refugees and IDPs generally benefit most from “vertical connections”, i.e. being connected to locals and other migrants who are more knowledgeable, better off socio-economically or more integrated into the country of settlement (TPN4). In many contexts, horizontal or similar-level ties might be sufficient to ‘get by’ under precarious conditions of protracted displacement but not enough to ‘get ahead’ in life. **Personal network relations, be they local, translocal or transnational, can thus be considered as steppingstones to solutions to protracted displacement**, but not as solutions in themselves.

4.4 Building alliances—Local figurations between displaced people and hosts

Displaced people are perceived by, interact with, relate to and inhabit their ‘host societies’ and communities in various ways. This chapter is about interactions between displaced people and receiving communities in the context of protracted displacement. We focus on three themes that structure these intergroup relations in local settings: The gap between the attitude of hosts, displaced people’s perceptions and actual experiences or interaction; the range of reciprocal relations they share; and the boundaries that keep displaced people and local communities apart.

Finding 1: Displaced people’s subjective feelings of acceptance (or rejection) do not necessarily translate into actual interaction with members of host communities.

Media and policy discourses often portray refugees as ‘vulnerable’ persons, as a ‘burden’ or as a ‘threat’. While public opinion may often be characterised by indifference, people are influenced by such narratives. **For displaced people, feeling accepted is crucial for developing a sense of familiarity and belonging, and for building a new life in a new place**, even if only temporarily.

In our survey, we asked displaced persons about their feelings of acceptance or rejection by others. About half of all respondents stated that they felt “somewhat” or “very much” accepted, whilst just over 12 per cent said they felt “somewhat” or “extremely” rejected at their places of residence. However, there are significant discrepancies between countries, with low shares of displaced people feeling rejected in Pakistan, Jordan

or Congo, while 39 per cent in Greece felt extremely or somewhat rejected. When looking at our focal groups, the low share of Eritreans who perceive being largely accepted stands out. Congolese—predominantly IDPs in the DRC, but also a small share of Congolese in Greece—are by far the group that feels the least rejected (see Figure 15).

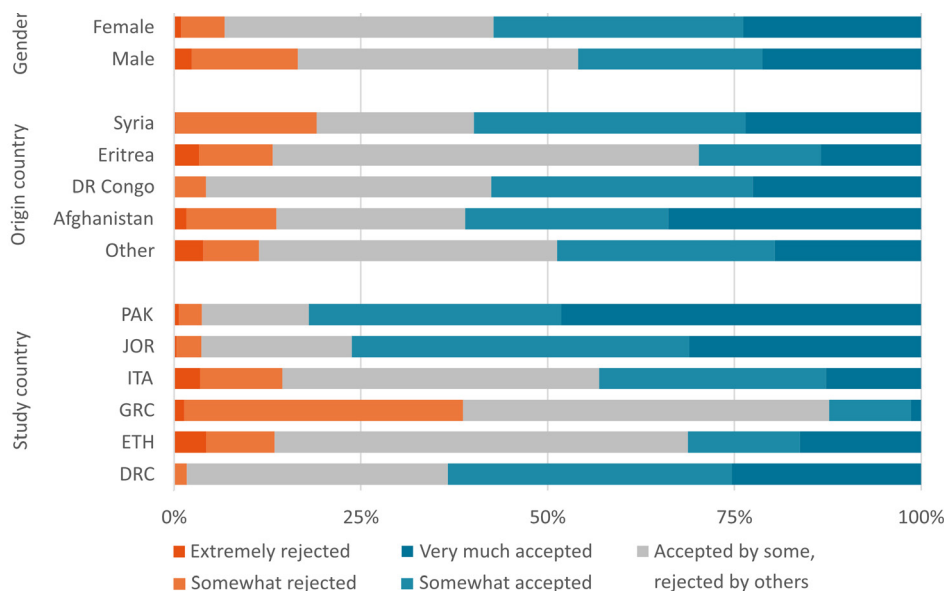
The timing and circumstances of the fieldwork as well as the place of refuge may play a role in these perceptions of being welcome or not: Just over one-third of respondents residing in a camp said they felt accepted, compared to nearly 57 per cent of those living outside camps who felt accepted by their hosts. Moreover, feelings of acceptance appear to be more frequent among those over 40 years old or those registered with UNHCR at the time of the survey. Female refugees and IDPs tend to perceive their acceptance more positively than men.

The feelings of acceptance might, however, not necessarily reflect actual experiences or interactions. Respondents were also asked about their ‘important’ local contacts, in the sense of people they regularly spend time with. The majority mentioned five such important persons; the median number being higher among men (5) than among women (4) and higher in urban (5) than in rural areas (3). Across the whole sample, most met frequently with people from their home communities (63%), other family members (42%), persons with whom they shared ethnicity (29%), and persons with whom they worked (21%). Less than one out of five (19%) included members of the local community. Across the sample, there were again significant differences between countries: About half of respondents in the DRC mentioned having contacts to members of local ‘host communities’, over one-third in Italy, and 15 per cent in Pakistan, but below 10 per cent in Greece, Ethiopia or Jordan (Figure 16).

As far as negative experiences are concerned, some 17 per cent of all respondents said they had been subjected to harassment or intimidation in their place of residence at least once—we noted the highest shares in Italy (39%) and the DRC (25%), but the lowest in Jordan (8%) and Greece (4%). Similarly, 12 per cent of all interviewed displaced persons had been subjected to violence where they currently live, with the higher shares observed in European destinations: Italy (17%) and Greece (16%). Among those who reported violence, most said members of local communities inflicted this violence, while in southern Europe, violence appears to largely come from state actors such as the police.

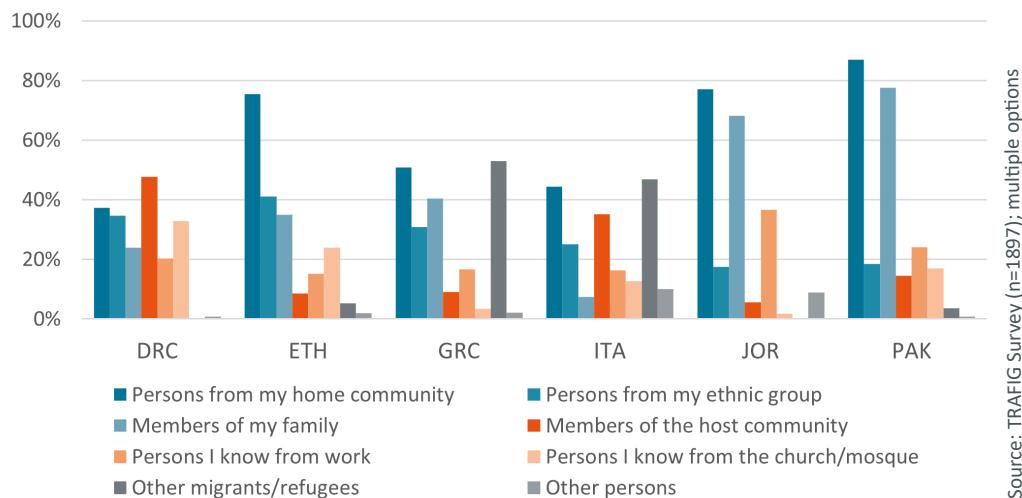
Last but not least, the **survey confirmed the crucial role of (local) social networks**. Qualitative material deriving from interviews and ethnographic methods showed the decisive role that networks play in expanding displaced people’s possibilities. Survey respondents with local connections in their city of residence are more likely to feel accepted (79%) and less frequently experience harassment (12%) or violence (7%). Local relations do, however, not always translate into “weak” ties that may foster “bridging” or “linking” social capital, and are thus a potential source of support (see **TWP4**, p. 24). Local networks entail a diversity of contacts, ranging from accidental encounters to necessary (even unwanted) interactions, but also to friendships and intimate relationships. Actual contacts may initially be scarce, perhaps limited to family or kin at first, and only opening up over time to the local population.

Figure 15: Displaced people’s perception of social in-/exclusion by the host community



Source: TRAFIG Survey (n=1897)

Figure 16: Key contact persons of displaced people at place of living



Finding 2: Various types of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity exist between displaced people and receiving communities.

In all studied countries, we observed relationships of reciprocity, support and cooperation between host populations and displaced people. Examples include accidental encounters to lasting contacts with ‘weak ties’, in many cases centred on the unidirectional provision of help and care for ‘others in need’, but also durable contacts with ‘strong ties’ based on mutual trust and respect or even intimate relations such as friendships and marriages. Such relationships vary considerably in type, quality, duration and stability; they also differ across generations, genders and ethnic or linguistic affiliations.

Common activities

Common activities usually provide a field for reciprocal and cooperative relationships. For example, **relationships built around employment or trade**, together with instances of exploitation and the hierarchies mentioned above, **involve a range of interpersonal relationships of support**: In **Tanzania**, partnering among hosts and refugees in businesses has proved beneficial for both sides (TWP8). In the **DR Congo**, refugees’ entrepreneurship has given birth to supportive local contacts (TWP4). In **Ethiopia**, cooperation emerges around sharecropping arrangements for refugees living in Shimelba camp, as they contribute their labour and agricultural skills and plough the host community’s land (TWP5, TPN5). And in **Pakistan**, personal networks and trust relations with Pakistani citizens are rooted in long-term relationships based on joint work experience and other factors (TWP7, p. 32).

Shared spaces

Place-based interactions (can) emerge in shared spaces. In **Ethiopia**, weekly markets in towns nearby the camps provide an important field for interactions between camp-based refugees and host populations, where refugee clients and local shop-owners develop relationships of trust, with the former sometimes providing products on credit (TWP5, p. 28). Places of worship also function as spaces of refugee–host approximation, as common religion transcends the boundaries of nationality. Such is the case of the Congolese in **Tanzania**, where churches may function as “spaces of freedom” where refugees do not have to hide their identities as they do elsewhere (TWP8, pp. 27–29). Similarly, Afghans in **Pakistan**, as well as Syrians in **Jordan**, meet in mosques and for religious festivities: “In Ramadan, you find Syrians and Jordanians together, and they met in the mosque, and some Jordanians would like to interact with Syrians, and there are some NGOs that conduct joint activities” (TWP6, p. 21).

Neighbourly affections

The place of stay has a decisive impact on reciprocity and support. **Living in close spatial proximity with locals allows displaced people to start place-based interactions, from superficial relations to even more substantial ones.** For example, in our research, in Jordanian cities, Syrian and Jordanian neighbours became friends, and relations of mutual help developed even with “landlords, who let them pay rent when they were able to but just as often lent them money when they were in need” (TWP6, p. 22). In Bukavu in the **DRC**, relationships of support were also forged based on shared origin. People from the same regions or shared class often lived together in neighbourhoods like Afghans in **Pakistan**, where reciprocal relationships included occasional visits for festivities or marriages. The in-camp/out-of-camp divide also plays a

role, as discussed (see Section 4.2). In **Greece**, asylum seekers residing in state-provided urban apartments are more likely to develop social relations and more regularly exchange with locals living in the same buildings than those residing in remote camps (TWP9). In different contexts, however, the specific location of a camp also matters, combined with the composition of its population or local economic development: In some regions of **Ethiopia**, exchanges, alliances and trust between refugees living in camps and residents of nearby towns may offer opportunities for local integration (TWP5).

Elective affinities

National, ethnic, social and cultural commonalities are the basis for courtesy, respect and reciprocity. Syrians and Jordanians share a common language, religion and culture (including food, wedding customs, forms of socialising, market practices, etc.), which also sets the basis for Syrians' 'de-facto' integration in Jordan (TWP6, p. 21). Shared culture or religion may also be constitutive of moral obligations as the "African solidarity" in the **DR Congo** (TWP4, p. 25), the "Good Samaritans" in **Tanzania** (TWP8, p. 25) or the support provided within the Ismaili ethno-religious network in **Pakistan** (TWP7, p. 22)—all framing relationships of hospitality and solidarity towards refugees based on commonalities. The shared experiences of displacement also constitute a key motive for support: In the **DR Congo**, long-term residents, who have their own displacement experiences and histories, exhibit such solidarity towards the more recent IDPs, as they share a common understanding of their needs:

I cannot refuse hospitality to a displaced person because you never know. Today it's them, but tomorrow it might be me. In 1996, I fled with empty pockets and no precise destination. I had about 10 dependents. A stranger picked me up in a banana plantation one evening. This good-faith man kept me in his house and fed me and my family for three weeks (TWP4, p. 10)

Collective alliances

Beyond the individual level of intergroup relations, cooperation and reciprocity also emerge through the participation in other collectives, whether informal or institutional. Employment-related associations or unions not only enable refugees to access the labour market but also provide new alliances: In the **DR Congo**, being a member of a workers' or business association provides new connections with hosts (even if membership fees may exclude IDPs who do not have the means to pay) (TWP4, p. 27). Organisations like Dignity Kwanza in **Tanzania** and established migrants' communities and associations in all study countries also function as a vehicle through which refugees receive support and are provided with opportunities to meet hosts. Similarly, community centres, solidarity groups, artistic initiatives or political organisations in Italy, Greece or Germany

are places where relationships between refugees and volunteers or activists emerge at an interpersonal level and sometimes lead to friendships, helping displaced people to develop a sense of belonging. It should be mentioned, however, that such relationships are often unequal or hierarchical since "the volunteers are at the giving end, whereas the displaced people at the receiving end" (TWP10, p. 29).

Finding 3: Displaced people experience tensions, discrimination and disconnections in their local relations with host communities.

Superficial relations, indifference, hostility and conflicts indicate different forms of disconnections between host communities and displaced people. These are influenced by political discourses, asylum policies, socio-economic contexts, cultural narratives or language barriers—to name but a few factors. Yet, despite varying causes, hosts and displaced people maintain and (re)establish clear boundaries in their daily practice. This section looks at such disconnections between the 'established' hosts and displaced people who are perceived as "strangers" or "outsiders" depending on whether coexistence out of necessity is marked by tensions or distance.

Coexistence in tension

Afghans have not contributed anything positive to society. Whenever something happens, it is attributed to Afghans, especially concerning the law-and-order situation... (TWP7, p. 3).

The quote above is indicative of common patterns of displaced people's negative representations across our study countries. Despite notable differences in national and local contexts, **viewing refugees as a 'burden' is a framing that keeps recurring in public discourses.** Stereotypes, often fed by ignorance and misconceptions, lead to scapegoating and cultivate xenophobia. In **Greece**, care provided by the asylum system becomes an object of dispute loaded with misconceptions which derive from asylum seekers' portrayals as a burden for social welfare. A nurse comments on the perception of part of the host population, namely that "refugees don't do anything, they just sit and receive financial aid and they do not really want to integrate" (TWP9, p. 33). Moreover, stereotypical representations question who is deserving and why; for instance, among long-term residents in Bukavu, **DRC**, some contest the reasons for the displacement of better-off migrants, whom they do not see as 'real' IDPs. Tolerance under such conditions breeds mistrust, hostility and tension (TWP4, p. 26).

Widespread mistrust and negative public opinion results in the discrimination of displaced people in daily interactions. In **Greece**, one such interaction is the issuance of only a limited number of tickets to migrants on the bus route from Thessaloniki to Polykastro, representing one of a variety of (informal) arrangements to maintain a native majority of passengers (TWP9, p. 34). Such behaviours may spread fear and generate suspicion among refugees, even among those in a better economic situation. In **Tanzania**, many urban refugees “do not know whom to trust and to whom to turn for help” (TWP8, p. 13), whilst in **Pakistan**, upper-income-class Afghans expressed being in constant fear when engaging in their businesses (TWP7, p. 33). Restrictive policies may also legitimise discrimination: The so-called Salvini decree in **Italy**, for example, fostered a political atmosphere based on the motto “Italians first”, cutting-off migrants’ access to services (TWP9, p. 37).

Discrimination and racism may be generally felt in displaced people’s daily interactions in their local communities (e.g. in Jordan) and result in segregationist practices in public spaces and services. As experienced by Sabir, a young migrant from Ivory Coast living in **Italy**:

Racism was more in the trains and buses. Whites on one side and blacks on the other. This is really the reality of Castel Volturno (TWP9, p. 37).

Quite often, though, racism is embodied in incidents of harassment and intimidation. Not infrequently, such incidents involve police and migration officers. Visible signs of difference (e.g. skin colour, clothing, etc.) may thus expose people to (the possibility of) physical attacks.

Racist hostility can occasionally turn nasty, resulting in violent escalation and open conflict. Since 2017, **Greece’s** Eastern Aegean islands, particularly Lesbos, have seen growing friction, including violent attacks on refugees and conflicts around the infamous Moria hotspot. In this, as in other cases, the local governance of migration has played a significant role in inducing the factors that brought local populations and refugees into antagonistic positions: The Greek islands became an internal buffer zone ‘hosting’ thousands of displaced people in appalling conditions, but also humanitarian workers, volunteers, officials, etc. who used the same public services as locals. In **Ethiopia**, the recent arrival of thousands of Eritrean refugees created new tensions between hosts and refugees regarding housing and access to basic services, as well as between newcomers and refugees who had been living in camps for protracted periods of time (TWP5). Real or perceived competition over (sometimes scarce) resources critically determines intergroup relations in such contexts (TWP9).

Coexistence in distance

“Superficial but affectionate”: This is how Umm-Omar, a 49-year-old Syrian, described her relationships with Jordanian neighbours (TWP6, p. 27). Interviewees in **Jordan** broadly defined “good relations” with members of their host communities as neighbourly relations “without active conflict, but not necessarily friendly or close” (TWP6, p. 22). Similarly, Afghans in **Pakistan** commonly distinguished between “normal and neutral” vs. “close and friendly” contacts, and some also spoke of “superficial” relations (TWP7, p. 33). Superficial relations and neutral interactions also indicate forms of disconnections related to segregation in everyday life and thus coexistence in distance, revealing some degree of tolerance, conditional acceptance, or even general indifference by the host populations.

The lack of meaningful interactions may result from societal neglect, coupled with a lack of integration policies and infrastructures of care. Segregation and invisibility often contribute decisively to displaced people’s isolation. Asylum seekers stranded in remote camps in **Greece** are cut-off from opportunities to socialise. In northern **Italy**, asylum seekers live dispersed in the countryside or are housed in the farms where they work during the harvest season: Local residents are often not aware of their presence except for their employers. But isolation and neglect may also be the case in urban areas: In European cities with an already high level of diversity, such as Torino, newcomers often go “unnoticed because locals are used to the presence of foreign people and ignore their precarious work and social conditions” (TWP9, p. 35); in Addis Ababa’s neighbourhoods, the sense of anonymity in a big city may explain the lower shares of refugees who feel accepted (TWP5, p. 29).

Nevertheless, disconnections and distance emerge also as coping strategies related to the reasons and conditions of displacement and its protracted and uncertain character. Some of the IDPs in **DR Congo** who have been victims of sexual violence, former rebels or captives of rebels are not able or willing to establish relations of trust with others out of fear of being stigmatised or accused. To protect themselves, they prefer to disconnect (TWP4, p. 20). In **Greece**, some displaced people’s status of irregularity leads them to distance themselves from others to stay ‘under the radar’ to reassure their journey to Europe (TWP9, p. 25). In **Tanzania**, some may deliberately keep a low profile to avoid being recognised as a refugee/foreigner (TWP8, p. 23).

Conclusions—Theme 4

Forced displacement inevitably changes and often challenges existing social relations at a place. The binary distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘hosts’ alone is too vague to offer any substantive meaning to the multiplicity of relations observed in different countries and localities. In none of our sites of study, ‘the displaced people’ were a homogeneous group, neither was ‘the local community’ a homogeneous entity. When individuals with such diverse backgrounds, capacities and orientations interact at a place, the social constellations become extremely diverse, too. Yet, as shown, there are notable patterns in the interactions and relations between ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ (TWP1, p. 30) that are marked by distinct forms of reciprocity and disconnections, but also dependency.

What has been observed in the **DR Congo** appears to hold general relevance: **Displaced people encounter difficulties forging relationships when on the move, or when being in a (prolonged) state of waiting and uncertainty.** A relational limbo aggravates the legal and socio-economic limbo as “at each new site, they have to start anew, developing social relations with people in the immediate surrounding” (TWP4, p. 17). Moreover, relationships with hosts are determined by displaced people’s limited autonomy over their lives and are often shaped by hierarchies and dependency. Displacement and its governance undermine people’s opportunities for autonomous living, producing subjectivities in need. They require help to secure their livelihoods in daily life, need care, which in some countries is provided by humanitarian actors, and work to support their families. Their various and varying needs may thus result in dependencies in their interactions with host populations, which are often mediated by others, creating in some cases further vulnerabilities.

Change over time must also be considered. Not only because meaningful relations require time to develop but also because they change over one person’s life course and shifting circumstances or across generations. Moreover, displaced people’s encounters and interactions with local communities are often influenced by forces that are beyond their control: The ‘burden’ of history, governance regimes and policies, political discourses and public opinion, or the structure of civil society crucially shape the actual social relations between displaced people and hosts. These forces are also subject to change.

The 2018 peace deal with Eritrea and the opening of the border to **Ethiopia** renewed possibilities for interaction between refugees and their host and home communities. However, the arrival of thousands of new refugees thereafter created new

tensions between hosts and refugees—and then another violent conflict emerged which again destroyed not only lives and property, but also violently altered social relations that had so carefully been forged (TWP5). In **Tanzania**, alongside the policy shift from ‘open doors’ to a ‘security’ approach, public opinion also turned from welcoming to hostile (TWP8). Similarly, the rise of concerns over terrorism and political change in **Pakistan** have contributed decisively to shift public perceptions of Afghans from being welcome to a burden, and from support to ‘coexistence in tension’, after forty years of close interaction (TWP7). In Europe, the wave of solidarity to refugees in 2015 was soon replaced by a climate of increasing hostility alongside restrictive responses to the increase in asylum applications, also reflected on the rise of xenophobic political forces (TWP9, TWP10). Such shifts in policies, political contexts and discourses (see also Section 5) fundamentally alter previously formed local constellations between ‘the established’ and ‘the outsiders’.

Building alliances locally allows displaced people to become ‘emplaced’ and develop a sense of belonging to their place of living. But a dilemma emerges as the contacts of many displaced people—who have been, are and often aspire to be mobile (again)—are dispersed across multiple places: On the one hand, many have translocal or transnational connections, particularly with family, but these ‘strong ties’ are often not locally available. On the other hand, local networks and ‘weak ties’ that must be built anew are essential for settling down and building a secure future in a host community.

4.5 Seizing opportunities: Development incentives and new economic interactions

In this section, we present some findings on the economic impacts of protracted displacement and transnational figurations of displacement in the medium and longer term. A premise that runs through our analysis is that mobility and networks that both build bridges between multiple places and countries are not only essential for displaced people’s everyday lives, livelihoods and future opportunities, but can also bring along wider benefits for the receiving communities.

Finding 1: Local markets and populations often benefit from hosting displaced people over longer periods of time.

While hosting displaced populations is generally portrayed as a ‘burden’ for local and national societies and economies, **significant development impulses, be it on housing markets, labour markets or local services, are induced by displaced people’s—often long-lasting—presence at a place.**

In our research in **Ethiopia**, several respondents highlighted the positive effects of Eritrean refugee camps in the Tigray region such as a better road, transport and market infrastructure around the camps and in small urban agglomerations—a benefit for refugees and the host community alike. According to an interviewee, the local authorities knew that the presence of refugees could potentially bring economic stimulus to a previously disadvantaged region:

When a camp was established around Mai Tsebri [a small town in Tigray], the surrounding community opposed it. Then, top officials of the region came and discussed with the community. They said, “we thoughtfully selected this area for the camps to benefit the local community. Refugee camps will transform this locality, which is underdeveloped and does not have many resources, through different development projects that will target the refugees (TWP5, p. 31).

Residents interviewed in Mai Tsebri also said that the town had benefitted from more than 50,000 refugees living in nearby Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps for over ten years. Especially after the restrictions on their mobility out of camps were eased, the local markets thrived, and refugees became active consumers in the towns. Moreover, national and international aid organisations came to the area and contributed to the locality’s development as they needed local staff, accommodation, food and other services. In the following, entrepreneurs started to build structures such as business centres, shops, hotels, bars and Internet cafés. The state also built transportation infrastructures, schools and health facilities. Overall, the economic activities in the town, which was just a village a decade ago, had picked up considerably with many jobs and other positive implications for the livelihoods of the host community (TWP5, p. 31).

In **Greece**, similar economic dynamics, yet at a much larger scale, could be observed when—in the course of the widely portrayed ‘migration crisis’—more migrants arrived in the country in 2015. Since that year, Greece has benefited from over euro 3.12 billion of EU support “to better manage migration and borders” and handle the humanitarian emergency. These funds mainly went to UNHCR, the IOM, the Greek government, a limited number of international NGOs, and subsequently to chains of national and local subcontractors. These funds allowed to build temporary and permanent infrastructure such as camps and other accommodation, deliver a range of services for refugees, create jobs and purchase various types of goods which, in turn, were beneficial to a wide range of economic actors, including civil society organisations, private companies and local individuals. The humanitarian support for the arriving refugees thereby contributed to the boost that the

Greek economy has experienced since 2016. The impact was particularly tangible on the Aegean islands, with the arrival of tens of thousands of migrants, who were channelled through them and remained stuck over the past eight years. While local respondents expressed mixed feelings about the benefits and negative repercussions of the presence of the migrants and the ‘humanitarian industry’ on the islands, a 30 per cent growth of jobs between 2014 and 2019 on the Northern Aegean islands is clearly related to the local, and now long-lasting, displacement constellation. Nevertheless, findings also reveal the uneven distribution of financial resources among different actors and localities (Vlastou et al., 2021).

Finding 2. Based on their skills, creativity and networks, displaced people can contribute significantly to local (labour) markets.

While the regional economies and host communities at the receiving locations might benefit from refugees’ long-term presence and related public investments and international support, displaced people themselves substantially contribute to these economic dynamics, too. If only they were allowed to work (see Section 4.2), **displaced people could bring in their skills, competencies and creativity and contribute productively to local economies**. A large number of respondents mentioned paid labour and self-employment as sources of displaced people’s livelihoods across all our countries of study. Whether this results in a competition with local residents in some economic fields is highly debatable and depends very much on the context. Often, they work in different jobs, particularly informal and precarious labour, that residents do not want. For example, Afghans occupy niche sectors in the Pakistani economy, such as the scrap business and recycling of waste, where they do not compete with Pakistani labourers (TWP7, p. 37).

A third option is to collaborate directly. Our research showed multiple examples of how **local networks between displaced people and local residents emerged and how both groups, and thereby also the broader economy, benefitted from these ‘new alliances’**. We documented business partnerships and other forms of economic cooperation ranging from jointly operated shops or services and sharecropping arrangements between Eritreans and Ethiopians (TWP5, pp. 31–32; TPN5), between Syrians and Jordanians (TWP6, p. 26), between Afghans and Pakistanis (TWP7, p. 36) and between Congolese and Tanzanians (TWP8, p. 18, TPB4).

Respondents in several locations of our research mentioned that **refugees and IDPs had changed the business landscape in the longer run through their innovative business ideas**, predominantly in service provision, trade and hospitality. They created not only new jobs for others, including local residents

but also new consumer demands and thereby developed new markets (TWP4, p. 28, TWP5, p. 33, TWP7, p. 36; TPB4). For example, many Syrian refugees work in the food and hospitality industry in Jordan's cities, either in then-current or new restaurants or food shops that they established themselves. Often, these establishments benefited from the reputation of “Syrian chefs” as masters of cooking skills in Middle Eastern cuisine (TWP6, p. 26).

The broader economic conditions, political contexts and demographic patterns in our study countries varied too much to allow for a general answer to the debatable question of whether refugees and IDPs should be seen as a ‘burden’ or an ‘opportunity’ for the receiving communities. What clearly emerged, however, is that the wider economic, social and political costs of hosting displaced people are far greater when they are administered and merely supported through humanitarian aid, when they are spatially and socially isolated in camps, and when barriers to their participation in labour markets and to own businesses or property are maintained, particularly over long periods of time. **If displaced people are purposely blocked from access to work, from launching their own businesses and thereby from becoming more self-reliant, local communities can also not benefit from their contributions.** Unlocking refugees’ potential can thus pay off. In Ethiopia, for instance, a revised refugee proclamation in 2019 allowed refugees to work and establish their own businesses more easily. This changed legal framework directly contributed to enhancing refugees’ self-reliance and resulted in a positive impact on the Ethiopian economy (TPB4, p. 2)—at least until the war in Tigray started.

Finding 3: Displaced people’s mobilities and translocal networks create new markets, job opportunities and future opportunities.

Displaced people bring new knowledge, skills and ideas to the place where they find refuge. What many also bring along are functioning network connections across a multitude of places. These are often not only an element of people’s own livelihood support system (see Section 4.3) but can also be seen as an economic asset, particularly in trade.

In general, most forcibly displaced people flee within their countries of origin, and among refugees, most seek refuge in a neighbouring country, such as Eritreans in Ethiopia or Afghans in Pakistan. Wherever possible, they maintain mobility and translocal networks between interconnected yet not very distant places. In the Syrian case, it was noticeable that most Syrian refugees fled to border cities in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan—at least initially—because most border cities on both sides make it easier for displaced people to uphold cross-border commercial

activities and even family connections. **The long history of economic ties between Syria and Jordan has helped Syrians and Jordanians to establish collaborative trade and labour relations.** As long as cross-border mobility is possible, people, goods, information and financial capital continue to circulate between the two countries—thereby creating specific markets on both sides of the borders where traders benefit from the respective higher/lower demand for goods or the respective price differentials, for instance of raw materials or food items. Regional trade thus enhances businesses and creates specific job opportunities in Jordan and Syria alike. However, tighter host countries’ border controls restricting cross-border mobility, too dangerous conditions in the country of origin, or the specific risks of some (im)mobile actors (e.g. many Syrian young refugees fear being conscripted to the Syrian army if they return and are caught crossing the borders) impede these businesses (TPB5, p. 4).

A particularly striking case in which the **transnational trade networks are the key asset of livelihoods is the carpet businesses of Afghans**, who became displaced and now live in Pakistan. Many traders frequently cross the Afghanistan–Pakistan border and often travel to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia. Their carpets are exported to various countries, including Germany, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. The traders operate out of Pakistan with their Afghan passports and Pakistani visa. Increasingly, however, cross-border trade and their own travels between Afghanistan and Pakistan have become much more difficult due to the highly volatile political relations between the two countries and subsequent border closures. The mobility restrictions jeopardise the livelihoods of these Afghans who have been used to a highly mobile life and intense transnational relations for generations and the tremendous potential for bilateral cross-border trade, more generally (TWP7, p. 36; TPB5, p. 5).

In the **DR Congo, many IDPs do not solely sustain their living at the place they fled to but are also involved in trans-local trade** (Jacobs et al., 2020). If it is safe to go there and the infrastructure allows, some regularly move to their place of origin, where they, family members or other acquaintances take care of their land and then bring some harvest (e.g., vegetables, crops) to sell in Bukavu’s markets or to consume themselves. Others have become transport workers or traders who transport rural resources (such as firewood or charcoal) to the city and other products from the city to the village. Many of these (former) IDPs provide crucial links between rural and urban spaces and have built a successful and sustainable livelihood around this translocal mobility and their rural-urban networks. In so doing, they contribute substantially to the economic development of both places (TPB2, p. 5, TWP4, p. 28, TPN4; see also the case of Ntama in Section 4.3).

Conclusion—Theme 5

Social constellations of displacement are inevitably shaped by the wider political and economic structures in the countries and at the places of reception. But the opposite is true as well; the long-lasting presence of displaced people, their own actions, as well as the practices and investments of states, humanitarian and other economic actors who cater to refugees and IDPs, respectively, influence the social, political and economic dynamics at localities. In many cases, **we have seen an economy of scale evolving in protracted displacement situations to the benefit of local markets and populations.**

While realising the sometimes-limited capacities of displaced people to contribute to local economies (due to other immediate needs, precarious conditions or trauma), it is, in our understanding, crucial to recognise and foster their potential. Based on their skills, creativity and networks, **displaced people can contribute substantially to local labour markets** if they are only allowed to do so and not hindered by restrictive regulations.

Moreover, a considerable potential lies in displaced people's experiences of mobility and life at different places, in their ongoing mobility practices, and the networks they maintain across several places and often countries. **Acknowledging these translocal and transnational connections can contribute to creating new markets, employment and future opportunities**—for refugees and IDPs themselves and the respective receiving communities. Barriers to mobility hindering translocal networks for livelihoods and businesses should thus be removed and better connections fostered.

5. Cross-cutting findings

Having previously discussed the key findings along TRAFIG’s main themes, this chapter looks into four cross-cutting findings and trends that emerged in our study and that we want to address in more depth: 1) gender and displacement; 2) the relevance of social class in protracted displacement; 3) mental health; 4) turbulent transformations in displacement constellations. Note that these findings were not the focus of our research but rather emerged inductively from our analysis. They merit follow-up research to be better understood.

5.1 Gender and protracted displacement

Finding: Protracted displacement affects men and women equally, but in different ways.

In this section, we look into the different experiences of displacement gained by men and women and how the process of displacement impacts our respondents’ gender identities, roles and relations, with a particular focus on livelihoods, mobility and connectivity.

Across countries, we note that the **experience of displacement varies quite a bit between men and women**. Men tend to travel across longer distances. More men are also inclined to move to another place or country. As more men than women undertake the long and dangerous journey towards Europe, they are over-represented in our survey in Greece and Italy. Female respondents are, in turn, better represented in neighbouring host countries, such as Ethiopia, Jordan and Pakistan than in the European countries of study. This is also reflected in the mobility indicators that we created based on our survey (see Figure 17 and the [MCM Data panel](#)).

Seventy per cent of displaced persons we spoke to for our survey had not fled alone but with others, predominantly with close family members (78%), relatives (28%) or with friends (21%). The share of men who departed alone (37%) was more than twice that of women travelling alone (17%). Displaced men flee more frequently alone and over long distances, often in the hope of bringing their relatives over at a later stage through safer modes of travelling.

Yet, starting off together does not necessarily mean that one can also stay united on turbulent and frequently traumatic journeys to safety. Thirteen per cent said that they had been involuntarily separated from family members on their journeys, while another 13 per cent said that they intentionally chose to separate from relatives so that they ended up at different places. Both sexes report that they heavily rely on the support of others for their journeys. Often, family members covered the fees charged by smugglers for irregular journeys. Several women we spoke to in Germany reported that they had arrived through family reunification, but in other contexts, displacement has led to long-term family separation and complex family constellations that stretch across multiple places and countries (TWP10).

The more restrictive border regimes are, the less mobile women tend to become. For some women, the opportunities to find refuge elsewhere are further diminished; for others, this directly affects their opportunity to maintain social relations across a distance (TWP10). For instance, the more recent tightening of border regimes and mobility control by the Pakistan authorities meant that Afghan women became increasingly excluded from transnational networks of interaction as they are prevented from visiting their family for weddings, funerals and other family occasions (TWP7, p. 38).

Figure 17a: Key mobility indicators

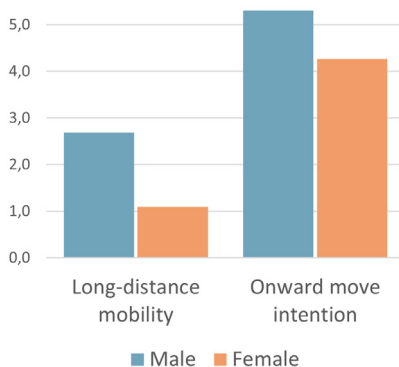
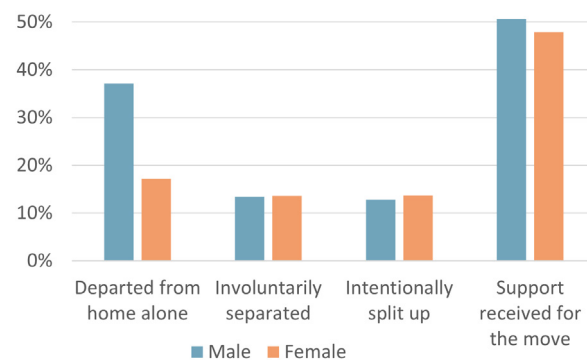


Figure 17b: Separation on the journey and support received by gender



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897), the mobility indicators (left) display a relative value—the higher the score, the longer the refugee’s journey has been and the more inclined they are to move on to another place or country.

Gender identities, roles within a household and relations within the wider family and kin network often change in the wake of (long-lasting) displacement, as the example of John, a Congolese refugee living in Tanzania, shows. Back home in the DRC, John was a doctor and the family’s main breadwinner, but in Dar es Salaam, where he fled to with his family, he cannot work legally in his profession. He only works as a volunteer watchman and cleaner at the church. As he can no longer sustain their family’s livelihood, his wife Hilda started as a petty trader in the city. Even though she is quite successful, John personally experiences the situation as devastating (TWP8, p. 17; 30).

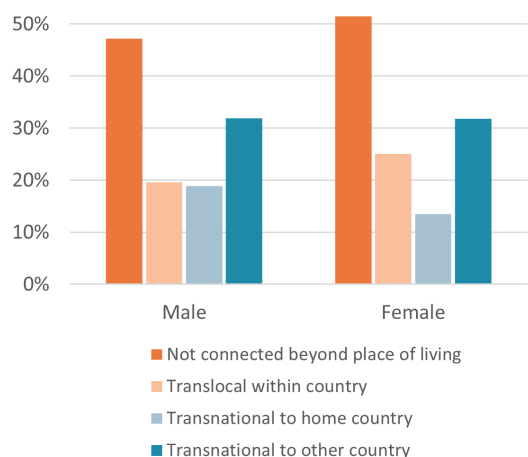
As in this case, many displaced women in the DRC, Tanzania and Ethiopia have become heads of households after displacement, which they were not before. The family constellations, household compositions and roles change because the men of the household passed away due to the conflict, because families were torn apart during the journey; because male relatives have no longer access to the same livelihoods as before displacement; or because some moved on in search of better economic opportunities. Heading a household places a considerable burden of care on these women, as they have to find means of livelihood in their new place of living to provide for their accompanying dependents. We also noticed that women—often out of necessity—quickly adjusted to changing circumstances and engaged in low-reputed or even stigmatised employment to cope with displacement. This did not necessarily enable them to overcome vulnerable positions, but it did contribute to their empowerment and self-esteem once being able to cope and, for instance, managing to send their children to school (TWP4, TWP8). In other cases, we saw children or young adults taking on a lot of responsibility within the family, in particular, when they arrived at the destination before their parents and/or adopted the foreign language quicker (TWP10).

Many of our male respondents struggled more with the changing household roles in displacement, and in some cases, prevailing ideas about gender impacted decisions to move—or not—to certain destinations. Some of the Syrian male respondents in Jordan, for instance, were reluctant to move to Europe with their families as they feared it would drastically change existing gender relations within the household (TWP6). Many displaced men felt embarrassed about not being capable of providing adequate security and protection to their family and subsequently felt ashamed to take up low-reputed and low-paid jobs. Such shame sometimes motivated them to circumvent connections with relatives who stay behind and completely escape their familial responsibilities (TWP9).

Protracted displacement also means that people, particularly the younger generation between 16 and 30 years, miss out on ‘normal’ experiences of early adulthood and finding partners, as the relational turbulences of their own displacement crises prevent them from establishing stable relations. Those who have partners often postpone marriage and the birth of children to a later period in life, where there is a sense of safety and recovery; but often, this stability and security never comes (TWP5, p. 17 on Ethiopia, TWP4, p. 17 on the DRC). However, research in Italy showed that some Eritrean women could not or did not want to further postpone motherhood but then entered (and left) partnerships, gave birth and raised children amidst highly precarious living conditions (TWP9, p. 30). These findings all point to relational limbos as a result of protracted displacement.

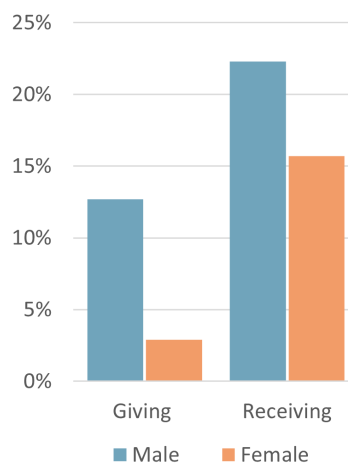
There is a mixed picture when we look at displaced people’s local contacts according to gender. In our survey, family members and persons from the ‘home community’ were mentioned more frequently as important local contact persons by displaced

Figure 18a: Share of (fe)male respondents maintaining social relations to other places



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

Figure 18b: Respective shares of giving and receiving financial remittances



women. But more men regularly spend time with colleagues at work, migrants from other countries or host community members. As mentioned above, Afghan female refugees in Pakistan got increasingly disconnected from their transnational networks, and most have few ‘outside’ contacts where they live. In contrast, many Eritrean women in camps in Ethiopia have stronger local connections than their male counterparts simply because such connections are crucial for these women’s everyday survival (TWP5, p. 34).

Overall, our survey findings show relatively **few differences in terms of local, translocal and transnational connections according to gender**, as Figure 18 shows. At 52 per cent, the share of women who do not maintain relations beyond the place of living is higher than among men (47%). More men are in contact with family members in their home country (19% compared to 13% among female respondents). This corresponds with the extent to which respondents provide or receive transnational financial support. One out of five interviewed has received remittances, but the share among displaced men is substantially higher (22%) than among women (16%). In turn, however, disproportionally more men send money to relatives in other countries (13% versus only 3% of interviewed women). This can partially be explained by the fact that men constitute a larger percentage of refugee groups in Europe who also send remittances more frequently. But it also points to different roles and responsibilities within displaced and transnationally separated families as lined out in more detail in our German case study, which explains different ‘family figurations in displacement’ and how they relate to refugees’ mobilities and transnational lives (TWP10, pp. 42–43).

5.2 Classed protractedness

Finding: Socio-economic and class-based differences between and within groups manifest and are further accentuated under conditions of protracted displacement.

Protractedly displaced people who endure similar conditions at one place are not a homogeneous group. Besides gender, ethnic and age-related disparities, **socio-economic and status differences among migrants in protracted displacement were visible in all our study cases**, but most notable in Pakistan, Jordan and Ethiopia.

If we use educational attainment as a proxy indicator, our survey results give an indication of the socio-economic homogeneity or stratification of protractedly displaced people in one country (noting, of course, that the results are influenced by our sampling strategy and a possible ‘selection bias’, see Section 3). In **Pakistan**, for instance, three-quarters of interviewed Afghans

had not finished primary school (compared to one-third in the full sample), only two per cent had a tertiary education degree (compared to eight per cent of all). There are clear differences between individuals when looking at their educational level. Labour participation is higher among better educated Afghans, whereas the share of those primarily relying on external support, including their own networks, is higher among those with a lower educational status. While most respondents perceived their economic situation to be better in Pakistan than in Afghanistan, the **relative degree of marginalisation** (see our Index in Section 6) **is substantially higher among those least educated**. Our qualitative study confirms that the chances of upward social mobility or the risk of remaining in conditions of vulnerability and dependence are inevitably linked to one’s socio-economic position or the prestige of one’s family. Despite legal hurdles that most Afghans face unequivocally, a better status and higher educational attainment makes it more likely that a person can escape from protractedness and is accepted in the host community. We see this as an indication of ‘classed protractedness’ (TWP7, p. 38).

In other study countries, we also noted that **social status heavily influenced people’s options to flee in the first place, and then to move out of protracted displacement**. It is self-evident that longer journeys are more costly. Not all people affected by war or being personally persecuted can afford these higher costs but rather seek refuge within the country of origin or a neighbouring country. Over time, as certain pathways are travelled more frequently, these costs can go down thereby opening up opportunities for more people, as we have seen along the Eastern Mediterranean route towards Europe since 2014. In **Greece**, the first larger cohort of Syrian refugees was relatively well-off and well-educated, which led to more positive attitudes among host communities towards Syrians than towards other refugees, making it easier for Syrian refugees to integrate. Later, however, Syrians of more diverse socio-economic backgrounds arrived in Greece (TWP9).

Interviews conducted in Germany also revealed the stratifying effects of long-distance mobility. An irregular journey from the Middle East to Germany costs between 2,000 and 10,000 Euros. Several Syrian respondents noted that their families could only afford to pay for one person to go all the way. Others then remained behind in their home country or the first country of refuge, often in Turkey. Those ‘left behind’ now primarily depend on remittances sent from the family member(s) in Germany. Even though the educational background and socio-economic status of Syrians now living in the country are quite diverse, on average, they are higher than among those who live in the war-torn country’s immediate neighbourhoods such as Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. **If you made it all the way to Germany, you could be quite sure to have made it out of protracted displacement** (TWP10).

In **Italy**, however, the socio-economic differences between migrants upon their arrival by sea seem to be less marked. The irregular journeys through Libya, especially for West African migrants, are more atomised, gradual and self-selective and are undertaken mainly by young males from poor strata of the respective country of origin—but not the poorest strata who cannot afford the costs of being smuggled across the Sahara and the Mediterranean. **The migration regime** (i.e. high risks along the sea passage or other migration channels for more affluent migrants) **contributes to sorting migrants by class**, leaving out the ‘middle class’ and the poorest, thus flattening the differences between those who arrive. Few West African migrants we interviewed in Italy had significant amounts of original (meaning pre-displacement) capital. Their socio-economic stratification unfolded mainly after they arrived in Italy under the quite specific conditions of high mobility yet ongoing legal insecurity (see Section 4.3).

Overall, it shows that **socio-economic status and class-based differences shape migration opportunities decisively**. At the places of living, these differences between and within groups are further accentuated and thereby influence displaced people’s needs, including those of external support and their options for upward social mobility. The abstract notion of ‘classed protractedness’ can be translated into a simple model containing three general groups who are equipped with different levels of human, social and/or financial capital and who embark on different pathways in the context of (protracted) displacement (see Figure 19 and **TPB3**, pp. 4–6).

- Most of those with strong networks, many skills and a lot of financial capital find their own way out of displacement situations; most often outside of the formal protection system. For mobility, they often choose labour or educational migration or family reunification.

- Those with the weakest network ties, least human capital and little resources are most likely to become trapped in protracted displacement. Yet, they are also likely to live in camps and receive humanitarian support and protection.
- Those in-between, who have some skills, resources and network ties but not enough to really move on in their lives, need particular attention and should not fall ‘between the cracks’ of the humanitarian aid system and development actors.

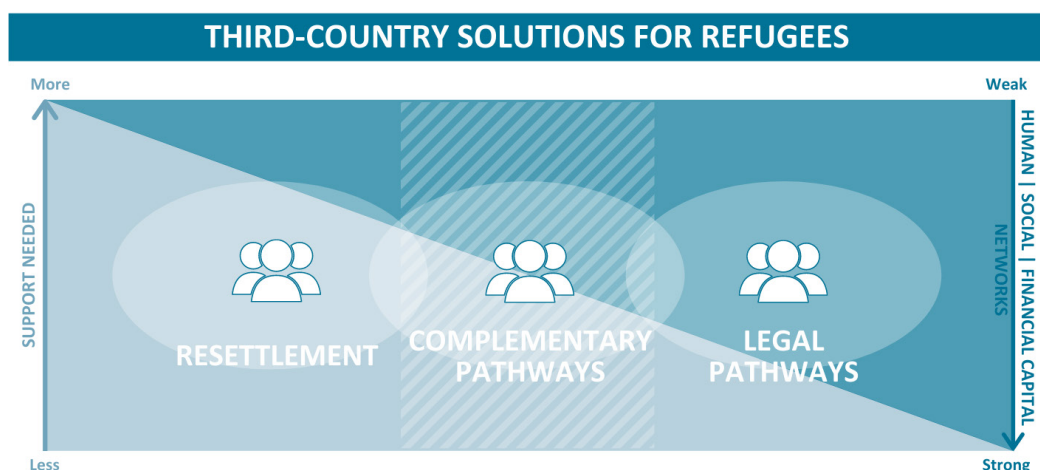
Acknowledging this diversity of socio-economic positions is a first yet decisive step toward developing long-term solutions that are tailored to displaced people’s different needs, capacities and potentials.

5.3 Trauma and mental health

Finding: Protracted displacement affects people’s mental health and can contribute to their state of protracted displacement.

It is generally well-known that people suffer before and during displacement. Displaced people experience traumatic events before they flee, on their journeys, or where they find refuge. Numerous respondents told us about such experiences that had long-lasting impacts on their mental well-being. But we want to draw attention to two elements of suffering that tend to be overlooked: **The extent to which traumatising experiences prevent people from finding durable solutions and ‘lift themselves’ out of protracted displacement, and the extent to which ‘intractable waiting’ adds further mental strains on people.**

Figure 19: Different socio-economic positions and needs of displaced people—A simplified model



While fleeing is an act that physically moves people away from places of insecurity and violence, escaping such insecurity and violence mentally is more difficult for many. Mental health issues that arise from traumatic experiences are hardly openly discussed and sometimes even completely silenced. For instance, this can be the case for victims of sexual violence or people forcibly recruited by armed groups (TWP4, p. 17). Mental health disorders tend to be more prevalent among war refugees, continuing many years after resettlement. Ongoing mental health issues, if untreated, may prevent people from overcoming protracted displacement. Stigma and taboos may jeopardise local integration as it withholds people from reaching out to others or taking new initiatives in displacement. Memories of violence and suffering may haunt people upon return to their former places of residence or prevent them from returning at all.

Fleeing itself is an extreme psychological and physical experience that is potentially traumatising. Several refugees in Germany told us about their encounters with death, their fears for their own, their children's and partner's lives, separation from loved ones, sexual abuse, forced labour, imprisonment, torture and violence on their long journeys, for instance from Afghanistan via Turkey and the Aegean Sea to Greece, or from Eritrea via the Sahara, Libya and the Central Mediterranean to Italy. We noted the incredible strength and psychological resilience of some who lived through these horrors (TWP10, pp. 39–40).

Settlement in a presumably safe location can also lead to new mental challenges for displaced people. In our study in Ethiopia, we used the term “intractable waiting” to describe a social, psychological and existential condition in which displaced people feel dependent and useless, physically and mentally weak. Their lives have been ‘put on hold’, even though they might have had strong desires and ambitions for their future before (TWP5, p. 15). In Greece, Italy and Germany, many displaced people also expressed not having control over ‘their’ time. These feelings are fed not only by the impossibility to return but also by long-lasting and uncertain asylum procedures, insurmountable barriers to family reunification and limited perspectives to work, find housing, or learn languages. The following quotes are illustrative:

I can learn, do an apprenticeship. I can live independently. I did not want to sit like a poor woman [only at home]. I am young, I have strength, I want to work. Now I am like an old woman, sitting at home, getting only money from social services. I asked for a work permit a thousand times (Eritrean woman in Germany, who was waiting for her appeal after her initial asylum application had been rejected; TWP10, p. 40).

Many people don't make it. You can see them immediately in the street. In Castel Volturno there are many. Let's say that those like that are burned back and forth. They are burned backwards because they have nothing left at home. And they are burned forward because they don't know what to do with their lives. They just survive. (Young man from Ivory Coast who built a stable life after years of labour exploitation in Italy; TWP9, p. 27).

The quotes reveal that **poor mental health and traumata are** not (just) an immediate consequence of forced migration but also (and sometimes even more so) **a consequence of ‘living in limbo’ for many years.** This kind of post-displacement trauma is often neglected. Our research shows how deep, pervasive and damaging it is, and how important it is to acknowledge it, investigate it more in-depth and address it in targeted ways (both in and out of camps and across all countries). People who suffer serious mental health problems as a result of traumatic events or as a result of intractable waiting are less likely to overcome their situation of protracted displacement, no matter how conducive their environment of refuge is.

5.4 Transformations in protracted displacement

Finding: The social and political constellations of displacement can change rapidly and dramatically, forcing displaced people to constantly adapt.

Displacement situations are never static. **Sudden and systemic changes in the wider political and/or economic constellations can be particularly dramatic and disrupting** for displaced persons, receiving populations and local institutions. During our fieldwork, the vulnerability of refugees to exogenous shocks was made dramatically evident by several abrupt and systemic changes.

First, the **COVID-19 pandemic impacted protractedly displaced people just as much as others in our countries of study, but they were far less able to cope with its effects.** Refugees in Pakistan and Jordan noted, for instance, that their access to livelihoods, external support and education substantially deteriorated due to the pandemic. Moreover, strict lockdowns further impeded their mobility, which was particularly devastating for those who depended directly on mobility for their livelihoods. It was also more difficult for humanitarian actors to reach out to displaced people (see TWP7, p. 39 for Pakistan; see TWP6, p. 28 and Tobin et al., 2022 for more detailed results from Jordan). Across Europe, the reception conditions for asylum seekers initially deteriorated. In Italy, the pandemic further increased migrants' vulnerability and aggravated already existing patterns of social exclusion (Pastore,

2020). And in Greece, strict lockdown measures led to the escalation of an already very tense situation on the Aegean islands and eventually to the devastating fire of camp Moria on Lesbos.

Displaced people also have to live with and adapt to (geo)political turbulences. In Europe, the control of external borders and the governance of protection are highly politicised. In Greece and Italy, for instance, policy discourses and policies in migration and asylum, as well as the protection instruments and legal norms, have fluctuated considerably over the past years. While the rhetoric toward migrants has become more moderate in Italy in recent years, it has become more xenophobic in Greece (TWP9, p. 44). Under such circumstances, the reception conditions on the Aegean islands have deteriorated considerably since early 2020 due to racist violence, diplomatic tensions between Turkey and Greece that led to a temporary “opening” of the border by Turkey, and the Greek governments’ policies that aimed at deterrence, border protection and migrants’ containment (Pastore et al., 2020). Migrants were then caught in a constantly changing, protracted situation under appalling humanitarian conditions they could hardly escape.

Two major political crises had, and still have, a tragic impact on protractedly displaced people in our countries of study. **The still ongoing armed conflict that erupted in Ethiopia’s Tigray region** in November 2020 and the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan followed by the **return of the Taliban into power** in August 2021. We conducted most of our fieldwork in Ethiopia and Pakistan before these two significant turning points. While we could not analyse their impact in detail, it became clear that both not only led to new killings, human rights violations and displacement but also **changed and further aggravated the already long-lasting displacement constellations.** Ethiopian and Eritrean troops targeted Eritrean refugees in Tigray, tens of thousands were once more forced to flee, this time from the camps and cities where they had painstakingly built their livelihoods, and most were, at least temporarily, cut off from their local, regional and transnational networks (TWP5). While more and more Afghans crossed the border into Pakistan in need of protection and humanitarian support, the prospects of circular mobility and return of those who already lived in the country were further diminished (TWP7, TPN7).

We can only speculate what the **implications of the ongoing war in Ukraine** and mass displacement within and from the country on other displacement constellations—in- and outside Europe—are: We already see that political interest and, subsequently, funds for humanitarian action and development are diverted away from long-lasting, yet seemingly less-urgent crises. Skyrocketing food prices due to the decline in food supply from Ukraine already have severe repercussions for

the poor across the globe and thus also impact protractedly displaced people—those who cater for themselves and those who directly depend on food aid. In many European countries, we are witnessing double standards in cross-border mobility, reception, provisions of services and legal entitlements of those fleeing the war in Ukraine and ‘other refugees’ fleeing violent conflict, persecution and destitution elsewhere. It is also likely that EU member states will reduce their offers for resettlement or other complementary pathways to protection as their own capacities are limited, and they currently focus their support on Ukrainian refugees. While resettlement places have been too scarce for long, another reduction further diminishes the range of durable solutions available to protractedly displaced people outside of Europe.

Overall, such **macro-level ruptures remind us of the processual and intrinsically unstable nature of protracted displacement.** While displaced people caught in conditions of limbo are forced to cope as much as they can with these turbulences, states’ regulatory systems and international governance regimes are often very slow in their reactions to exogenous shocks, particularly if they lack the political will to adapt. Our case studies generally show an inherent tension between the staticity or inertness of governance frameworks on the one hand and the adaptiveness of migrants and the plasticity of their strategies on the other.

6. Testing the TRAFIG hypothesis

How do connectivity, mobility and protracted displacement relate to one another? One objective of our study has been to investigate the triangular relation between these three aspects.

With our central hypothesis (see Section 2), we assumed

1. that there is a relation between the extent of people's connectivity, mobility and protractedness; and
2. that higher levels of both connectivity and mobility would go hand in hand with a lower degree of protracted displacement.

To complement the findings of our qualitative research, we 'translated' the terms connectivity, mobility and marginalisation into variables that we could measure and correlate. Based on the answers to a selection of survey questions, we created three different indices that measure the respondents' degree of connectivity, mobility and marginalisation. Each of the three indices contains eight sub-indicators (see <https://trafig.eu/data/panel> for details and the relevant questions), with values ranging from 0 to 10 each that are added in a manually developed score system.

- **Connectivity** refers to the size, spatial scope—local, translocal and transnational—and relevance of respondents' personal networks for their livelihoods and mobility decisions. The connectivity value ranges from 1 to 62. A high index score corresponds to a greater degree of network connectivity.
- **Mobility** refers to the distance respondents had travelled, the internal mobility patterns, the frequency of return moves, and the aspirations to return or move on to another place. The mobility value ranges from 0 to 49. A high index score corresponds to a greater degree of mobility and higher aspirations to become mobile in the future.
- **Marginalisation** is our proxy for the degree of 'protractedness' and reflects the respondents' legal status, access to health, education and housing, work status and economic situation, as well as perceived physical safety and social cohesion at their place of living. The marginalisation value ranges from 8 to 75. A high index score means a greater degree of (actual and perceived) marginalisation.

Using IBM SPSS Statistics 27, we analysed relationships between all 24 indicator values and the overarching three indices across the data set. The visualised scatter plots show relations between each index; data points are coloured by country of study, and a linear regression line indicates a trend within the country data sets. The resulting values are stated as Pearson/

Spearman correlation coefficients (r). In total, 192 bivariate correlations were possible. In this section, we will test our project's central hypothesis but only present the most relevant and robust correlations ($r > 0,2$ or $< -0,2$).

There are methodological limitations to our approach. First, the sampling at our study sites, which may include or exclude displaced people living in camps due to difficulties in accessing them, potentially distorts some of our results regarding marginalisation. Second, due to the significant differences between our countries and places of study, aggregated results across the whole sample need to be treated with caution. Third, composite indices might disguise more considerable differences between certain questions, such as the more local or transnational extent of networks or people's intentions to move onwards or return. Fourth, strong correlations close to one are almost impossible because our indices have been built with multiple individual variables. We thus also considered lower values as possibly relevant. We are aware of these limitations and will explore, explain and reflect upon our methodology, the indices construction and the results in further publications. The findings presented in the following are thus tentative results that need further verification and triangulation with our insights from qualitative research.

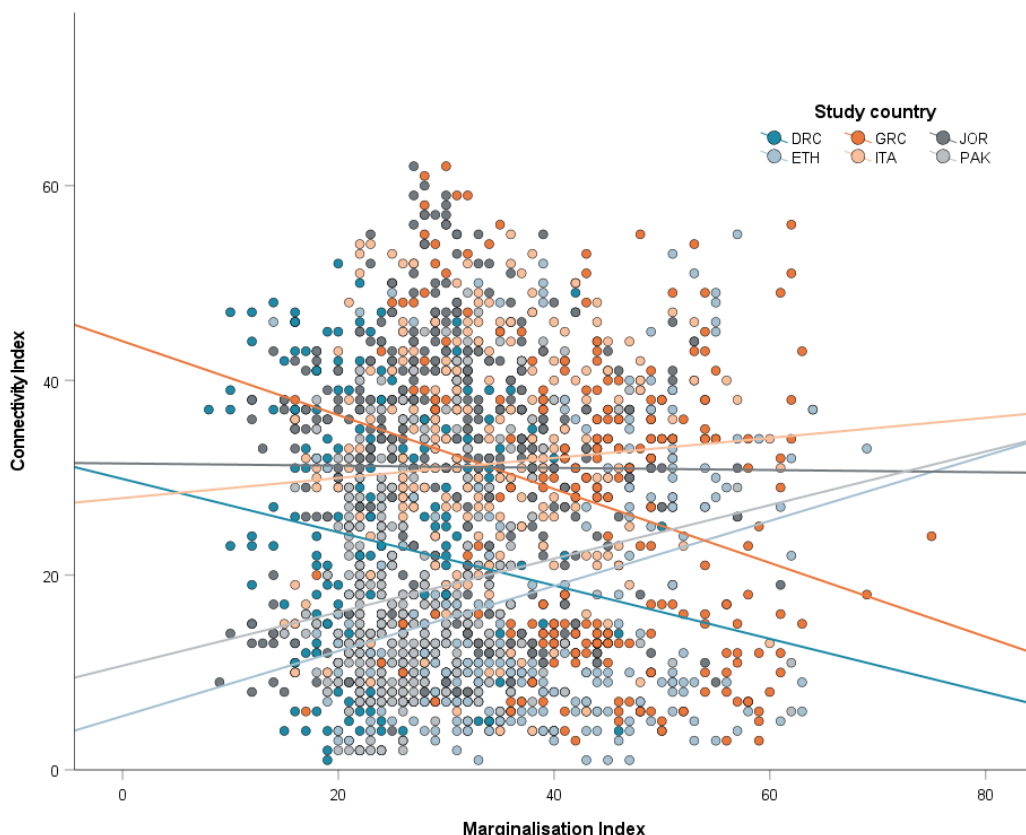
Finding 1: The relations between displaced persons' network connectivity and the degree of their marginalisation are ambiguous.

There is no overall correlation between connectivity and marginalisation ($r=0.041$) across the whole data set. However, there is great variance between different study sites. In Italy ($r=0.077$) and Jordan ($r=-0.008$), there is no relationship between both indices—indicated by nearly horizontal regression lines. The data from Ethiopia reveals a weak positive correlation ($r=0.281$), which tentatively means that better-connected refugees living in Ethiopia are more marginalised. A similar but less significant trend emerges for Pakistan ($r=0.172$). The opposite is visible for DR Congo ($r=-0.155$) and Greece ($r=-0.256$), which both show weak negative relationships. This indicates that the better-connected respondents are also less marginalised, whilst those with smaller networks and weaker connections are more vulnerable.

So, our TRAFIG hypothesis on the relation between connectivity and marginalisation only holds for some countries: The DRC and Greece.

When looking into the relations between individual indicators, an interesting finding on people's translocal support networks (Connectivity indicator 6) and their housing situation

Figure 20: Relations between respondents' degree of connectivity and their marginalisation



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

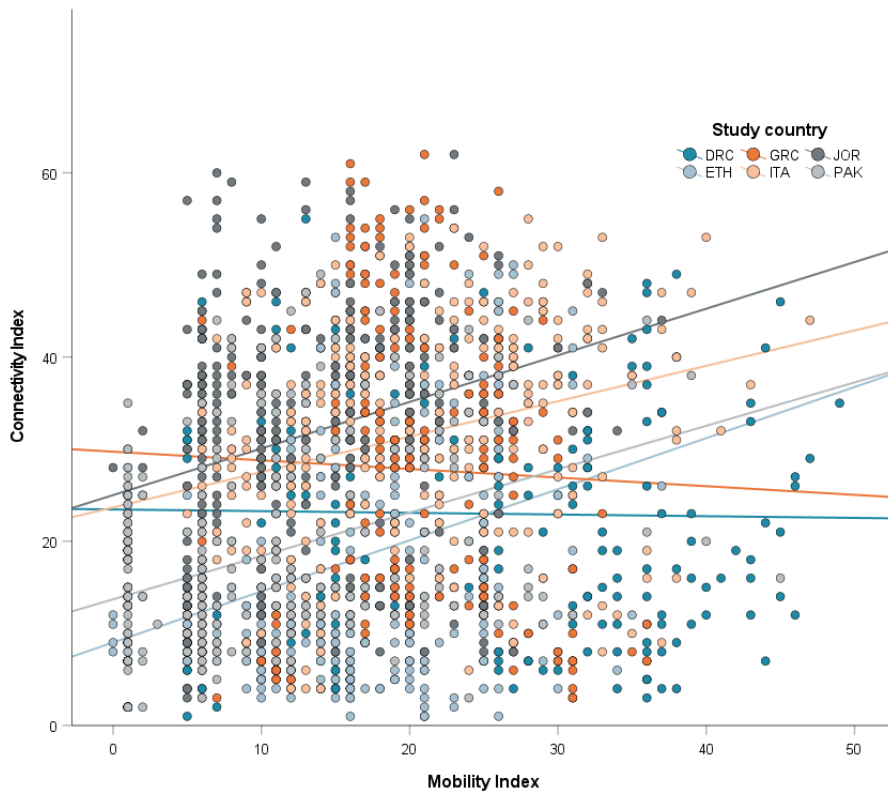
(Marginalisation indicator 4) emerges across the full data set: Respondents who regularly receive support from family, friends or other network members living in other places are less likely to live in bad housing conditions compared to those who lack this support ($r=-0.184$).

Finding 2: Better-connected displaced people tend to (aspire to) be more mobile, whilst less-connected individuals are more immobile.

There is a weak positive correlation ($r=0.202$) between the connectivity and the mobility indices. But again, there is no uniform trend across all sites. Greece ($r=-0.037$) and DR Congo (-0.016) have a minimal negative relationship that can be neglected as it is too close to zero. But for all the other study countries, there seems to be a weak to medium positive correlation between mobility and connectivity, which means that **displaced persons with wider networks and better connections are also more mobile and/or show greater mobility aspirations, whilst those who are less widely connected tend to be more immobile**. This pattern is quite strong among refugees in Pakistan ($r=0.387$) and Ethiopia ($r=0.301$) but also visible among those in Italy ($r=0.289$) and Jordan ($r=0.265$).

There is a clear relation ($r=0.327$) between long-distance mobility (Mobility indicator 1) and networked mobility (Connectivity indicator 1), which means that **the longer the journeys are for respondents, the more important their network contacts are for facilitating that journey**. A similar relationship exists between distance and networks' spatial extent: longer journeys seem to correlate with more transnational contacts ($r=0.289$), which is not surprising. There is a weak positive relation between return intentions (Mobility indicator 4) and the relevance of their networks for the decision to return (Connectivity indicator 2). **If personal relations play a prominent role in respondents' decision to return, then the intention to return is also higher** ($r=0.35$). Lastly, we find weak positive relations between onward move attempts (Mobility indicator 5) and having transnational contacts (Connectivity indicator 5) and giving support to others elsewhere (Connectivity indicator 7). We can assume, on the one hand, that **the larger and more transnational displaced persons' networks are, the more often they attempt (or have already attempted) to move onwards** ($r=0.227$). On the other, it indicates that the more frequently respondents give support to key contacts living in other places, the more often they attempt to move onwards themselves ($r=0.216$).

Figure 21: Relations between respondents' degree of connectivity and their mobility (aspirations)



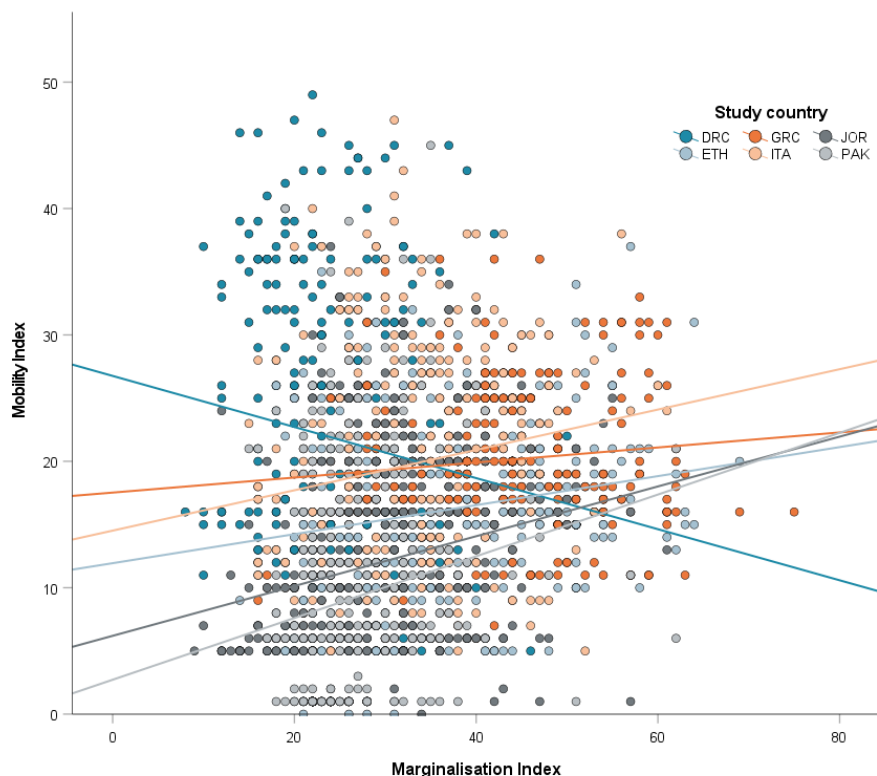
Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

Finding 3: There is no clear relation between displaced people's mobility and the degree of their marginalisation.

There is a very weak positive relation ($r=0.156$) between mobility and marginalisation based on the full data set. But again, there are quite different patterns across the study countries. DR Congo is the only study site with a very weak negative correlation, which means that more mobility tends to go hand in hand with less marginalisation and vice versa ($r=-0.131$). For all other countries, **a higher degree of mobility (both their actual moves and their aspirations to move) is visible for more marginalised respondents**. In Jordan, this pattern is most obvious and robust ($r=0.258$), but it is also visible among those refugees in Pakistan ($r=0.186$) and Ethiopia ($r=0.178$). Compared to these three countries, the European study sites show a substantially higher degree of mobility, but the relation between mobility and marginalisation is less profound in Italy ($r=0.159$) and Greece ($r=0.101$). **Our TRAFIG hypothesis on the relationship between mobility and marginalisation thereby only holds true for one country: The DR Congo.** And here, the comparatively high degree of internal and return mobility and the better legal status plays a decisive role.

The correlation of individual indicators across the full data set also confirms this. Here we find interesting relationships between respondents' long-distance and return mobility with their legal status. First, **the longer the displacement journey has been, the worse the current legal status** ($r=0.268$). This reflects the insecure status of migrants in Italy and Greece who arrived after long journeys across multiple countries, and the better status of IDPs in DR Congo who travelled within their own country. Second, we note that **the worse the legal status of respondents, the lower their return rate to their place of former living** ($r=-0.388$). There is also a positive correlation between displaced persons' intention to move on to other places or countries (Mobility indicator 6) and their economic situation (Marginalisation indicator.6). Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, **the worse the economic situation**, in terms of access to work and perceived change to previous conditions, **the greater the intention to move onward to another place** ($r=0.317$).

Figure 22: Relations between respondents' degree of mobility (aspirations) and their marginalisation



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=1897)

Lastly, we can see a relationship between long-distance mobility and social cohesion as perceived by the respondents (Marginalisation indicator 8). A longer displacement journey goes along with a worse perception of social cohesion at the current place of living ($r=0.203$). This finding reflects the animosity several migrants have experienced in Europe, whilst other **refugees who went to neighbouring countries**, e.g. from Syria to Jordan or Afghanistan to Pakistan, **or IDPs who moved within their own country largely perceived local relations where they lived more positively**.

Conclusions: Putting our hypothesis to the test

The aggregated results from our survey help to set the insights gained through qualitative research in perspective. In previous sections, we presented narratives of individuals for whom network connections, for instance, transnational family ties, play a decisive role in their everyday lives. These connections also provide strategies to cope with precarious conditions and for their options to move out of protractedness, particularly through mobility. Even though we are aware of the risks of disconnections and the dependency relations inherent in such social constellations, we might tend to overestimate the impact

of networks, especially transnational ties, on protractedly displaced people's degree of marginalisation and their mobility. In fact, the majority (58%) of survey respondents are not connected beyond their country of living and can thus neither rely on remittances nor on the support of family members to migrate elsewhere. And even for those who are very well connected—locally, within the country of living and across multiple countries—this network connectivity cannot guarantee a better social position or does not necessarily 'pay off' in terms of long-term security.

The scatterplots (Figures 20–22) show overarching trends and key differences between respondents for our study countries. **For migrants in Greece, for instance, our hypothesis that the better connected a person, the lower their degree of marginalisation—which we use as an indicator for the degree of protracted displacement—is confirmed.** And still, some well-connected migrants are nonetheless in a very precarious situation (the orange 'dots' in the top right corner). The opposite seems to hold true for Ethiopia, where those Eritrean refugees with better network connections are those who are more marginalised—a finding that contrasts the impressions we won through qualitative research (TWPS). Of course, there are methodological limitations to both strands of research and the index construction based on the survey answers in particular.

The relations between network connectivity and mobility are a little more straightforward. **We can largely confirm that the better-connected displaced people are, the more mobile and the higher their mobility aspirations**; again, noting individual exceptions in each country and the sub-sample from Greece and DR Congo where this relationship cannot be established. In contrast to our initial assumption, **our survey data does not show a clear relation between displaced people’s mobility (aspirations) and the degree of their marginalisation**. Only in the DR Congo were we able to note that a higher degree of mobility—here, this is particularly due to more frequent return mobility and few barriers to moving within the country (see **TWP4** and the [radar charts in our MCM data panel](#))—tends to go hand in hand with less marginalisation. This supports the argument we have made earlier on mobility and functioning network relations across multiple places as a pathway out of protracted displacement and as a source of translocal resilience (**TPN4**).

What can practitioners working for and with displaced people learn from this data exercise?

Assessing displaced people’s livelihoods, access to services, perceptions of safety and security or whether one has achieved a ‘durable solution’, as defined in the Interagency Standing Committee’s framework on durable solutions (IASC, 2010), for example, is not enough. When organisations collect data on their respective clientele as part of their vulnerability assessments and support instruments, they should complement their data sets with specific information on displaced persons’ connectivity and mobility. Complex data sets can thereby be built that have the potential to capture displaced persons’ needs and their network connectivity and mobility much more accurately. This allows developing tailored pathways out of protracted displacement and towards reaching a truly durable solution.

7. Reflections and lessons learned

“Nothing is more permanent than the temporary”. This Greek proverb reflects the essence of the experience of displacement—an extremely challenging situation that was initially temporary and that people had hoped to overcome quickly but eventually turned into a permanent condition of protractedness. We have listened to hundreds of displaced people’s reflections about their experiences of protracted displacement, of ‘intractable waiting’ and being stuck in a precarious situation, and their relentless efforts to open promising pathways to their futures. Many of the strategies they described to us revolved around mobility as a source of livelihood, as a means to overcome precarity and marginalisation or reunite with family members after years of separation. Social network relations in which they are locally embedded or which stretch across multiple places and countries played a prominent role in IDPs’ and refugees’ narratives. While we have heard impressive stories of courage, resilience and self-reliance, we were also repeatedly confronted with heart-wrenching accounts of loss, violence, destitution, trauma and ongoing separation.

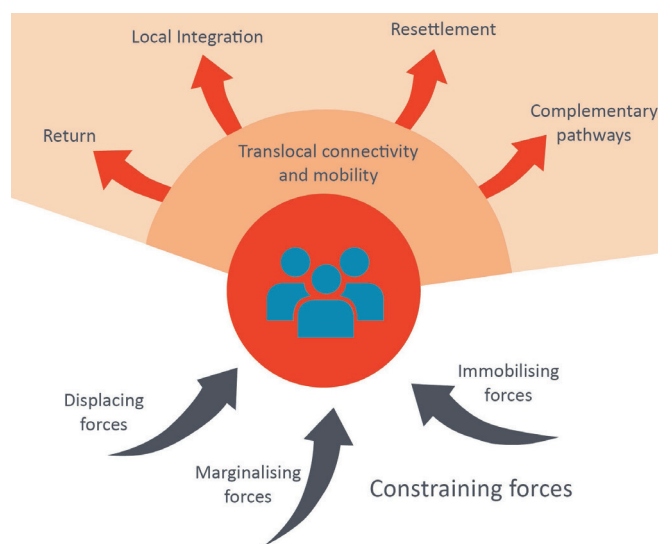
We thereby garnered the impression that **displaced people’s situation in and pathways out of protracted displacement mirror a labyrinth**—they do their best to move ahead in life but constantly face bureaucratic hurdles, insurmountable barriers, personal rejection and dead ends to roads that once started promisingly. This leaves many frustrated, discouraged, some even depressed and immobilised, whilst others feel that they are forced to circumvent formal rules and continue ‘under the radar’ or even to openly resist the state that denies them a chance to a better future. Does this have to be the case?

Displaced people’s living conditions in camps or cities, their social relations with ‘host communities’ and their future options are fundamentally shaped by the—in many contexts increasingly volatile and in some even hostile—policies and politics of receiving states. Governing frameworks, protection regimes and respective legal entitlements are essential. Simply put, if displaced people’s protection and assistance is only patchy and temporary due to a lack of means, if they are altogether excluded from protection or only awarded insecure legal status due to a lack of political will, the stronger their marginalisation and the higher the risk of becoming persistently ‘stuck’ in protracted displacement (see Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.4).

It became clear that **letting displaced people live for years and years under conditions of legal insecurity, socio-economic precarity as well as marginality and exclusion is a side effect, if not a deliberate consequence of policy choices** (see Take-away #1 in TPH). Likewise, ending protracted displacement is possible if states show the political will and jointly tackle all dimensions of protractedly displaced migrants’ precarity.

The displacement crisis unfolding due to the war in Ukraine has spurred a quick response from the international community. In the European Union, the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive marked a turning point in refugee protection. Under this directive, people displaced by violent conflict in Ukraine are not only allowed to legally enter the European Union, but they are also collectively granted temporary protection. Long times of waiting and insecurity during asylum procedures and a legal limbo that might result from negative decisions are thereby circumvented. Moreover, they immediately receive access to health care, education and work. Importantly, they are free to choose which EU member state they want to live in, enabling many to link up with personal connections they already have in the European Union, acknowledging refugees’ existing transnational network relations. The ‘free choice’ model stands in contrast to the usual EU asylum policy, which prevents asylum seekers and refugees’ mobility within the European Union. This approach shows that it is possible to activate solutions offering immediate access to services, work and mobility (within the European Union) when there is a political will. Why shouldn’t such an approach be extended?

Figure 23: Pathways out of protracted displacement



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At the beginning of the project, we sketched the conditions leading to protracted displacement and the pathways leading out of it in a simple model (TWPI, TPN1). The empirical findings we gathered over three years now underscore its value.

The multiple **constraining forces that keep protractedly displaced people in a limbo situation** are undisputed: Violent conflicts, human insecurity in regions of origin and other **displacing forces** are much more persistent than often assumed and consistently renew the need to stay in exile and prevent most IDPs and refugees from returning home; policies and protection regimes in receiving states are often designed to keep displaced people at a certain place—they are being **immobilised**; an insecure legal status, the lack of work permits, limited opportunities to work and rejection by local host communities contribute decisively to displaced people's **marginalisation**.

When it comes to the **pathways out of protracted displacement**, we see that multiple options are at hand—one not necessarily excluding the other.

- While the vast majority of displaced people rule out **return** as a viable option, many have already returned to their respective place of origin. The temporary and circular mobilities of Congolese IDPs to their home villages and of traders between Afghanistan and Pakistan (before the Taliban's return to power) had been promising examples of how return could be reimagined—not as a durable solution and 'endpoint' of mobility, but as a complementary livelihood strategy that is embedded in a wider network of translocal relations.
- **Local integration** is the most widespread strategy we observed. Displaced people try their best to 'blend in' and 'build alliances' with locals, they work and open businesses, go to school, marry and make friends, etc. Even if receiving states formally object to the longer-term settlement of refugees, and even though many remain politically, economically and socially marginalised, people are there, and most are 'de facto' integrated. In so doing, many displaced people also resist their immobilisation and engage in small-scale or regional mobility within states.
- Lastly, **onward mobility to third countries** remains a strategy. Hardly any displaced person we spoke to had been offered resettlement or relocation. The majority who wanted to move on thus took their fate into their own hands. Labour migration to other countries was widespread, for instance, among Syrians who departed for work in the Gulf states. A few also left to study in other countries or were able to move or support family members' mobility through family reunification or humanitarian admission programmes. And yet, there are substantial limitations to formal **complementary pathways**. That is why self-organised, irregular journeys to other countries were seen and used by many as the sole option to move forward in life—despite the multiple risks they entail.

It is important to reiterate, once more, that these potential pathways out of protracted displacement must not be seen in isolation from one another; they are complementary. **For many displaced families, different family members used not one of these pathways but a combination of several avenues as an appropriate solution for a better future.** After years of violent conflict and after years of displacement, many Syrian families, for instance, now live dispersed across the world, with some family members in Syria, some in Jordan, others in Turkey, Greece, Germany, Sweden or Canada (**TWP6, TWP9, TWP10**). **Consistent contact and mutual support within such transnationally extended families** serve as a buffer in times of renewed crises and can increase potential income streams and business opportunities as well as mobility and asylum options in the longer term. For those Syrians in Jordan, ties to the world was even a means to offset a reduction in aid to refugees.

Translocal or transnational relations that occur through displacement and onward migration are not short-term phenomena. Such spatially expanded social networks, cross-border transfers of financial resources, knowledge and values and the global mobilities they evoke will continue to shape the lives of (formerly displaced) people. **Sustainable solutions to protracted displacement must thus not be limited to one place only but could also rest in multiple solutions that are strategically interlinked with one another and across places.**

It is thus essential that policies do not ignore or even disrupt the vital functions of social networks in which displaced people are embedded locally within the receiving states and across international borders. **Understanding the local, translocal and transnational ties of displaced people—whether these are strong, weak or non-existent—and their mobility needs to build up or use these networks is the foundation for finding solutions that last.**

Keeping people connected and establishing new connections can unlock manifold opportunities for displaced people. Receiving states should actively support displaced people in using their own resources and capacities, including their networks. **Host governments, development and humanitarian actors and other stakeholders should embrace networks as a force multiplier for solutions that displaced people prefer themselves** (Key Takeaway 4 in TPH). Still, displaced individuals' different embeddedness in networks, which varies according to gender, age, educational level, socio-economic class position, the size of one's family, etc. (see **TWP3** and Figure 19 in Section 5), also requires different solutions and different forms of support.

Data annex—Overview of TRAFIG survey findings

Variable by study site	DR Congo	Ethiopia	Greece	Italy	Jordan	Pakistan	Total
Total	300	395	300	300	303	299	1897
	15.8%	20.8%	15.8%	15.8%	16.0%	15.8%	100%
Countries of origin							
Afghanistan	0	0	99	13	0	261	373
	0.0%	0.0%	33.0%	4.3%	0.0%	87.3%	19.7%
DR Congo	298	0	50	3	0	0	351
	99.3%	0.0%	16.7%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.5%
Eritrea	0	383	0	95	0	0	478
	0.0%	97.0%	0.0%	31.8%	0.0%	0.0%	25.2%
Syria	0	0	100	1	303	0	404
	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.3%	100.0%	0.0%	21.3%
Other	2	12	51	187	0	38	290
	0.7%	4.1%	17.6%	64.5%	0.0%	13.1%	15.3%
In-/Outside of camp							
Outside	300	200	111	209	244	289	1353
	100.0%	50.6%	37.0%	69.7%	80.5%	96.7%	71.3%
Inside	0	195	189	91	59	10	544
	0.0%	49.4%	63.0%	30.3%	19.5%	3.3%	28.7%
Site type							
Urban site	137	210	270	260	163	271	1311
	45.7%	53.2%	90.0%	86.7%	53.8%	90.6%	69.1%
Peri-urban site	163	19	12	12	47	20	273
	54.3%	4.8%	4.0%	4.0%	15.5%	6.7%	14.4%
Rural site	0	166	18	28	93	8	313
	0.0%	42.0%	6.0%	9.3%	30.7%	2.7%	16.5%
Gender							
Male	127	231	215	247	165	156	1141
	42.3%	58.5%	71.7%	82.3%	54.6%	52.2%	60.2%
Female	173	164	84	51	137	143	752
	57.7%	41.5%	28.0%	17.0%	45.4%	47.8%	39.7%
Not specified	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Age							
16-19	6	52	19	5	8	0	90
	2.0%	13.2%	6.3%	1.7%	2.6%	0.0%	4.7%
20-29	81	154	103	138	75	17	568
	27.0%	39.0%	34.3%	46.0%	24.8%	5.7%	29.9%
30-39	87	116	130	98	87	58	576
	29.0%	29.4%	43.3%	32.7%	28.7%	19.4%	30.4%
40-49	52	53	32	46	88	105	376
	17.3%	13.4%	10.7%	15.3%	29.0%	35.1%	19.8%
50-59	51	13	15	10	32	89	210
	17.0%	3.3%	5.0%	3.3%	10.6%	29.8%	11.1%
60+	23	7	1	3	13	30	77
	7.7%	1.8%	0.3%	1.0%	4.3%	10.0%	4.1%

Variable by study site	DR Congo	Ethiopia	Greece	Italy	Jordan	Pakistan	Total
Marital status							
Single	29	187	114	166	43	15	554
	9.7%	47.3%	38.0%	55.7%	14.2%	5.0%	29.3%
Married	125	184	153	87	215	258	1022
	41.7%	46.6%	51.0%	29.2%	71.2%	86.3%	54.0%
In partnership, but not married	114	5	16	36	2	0	173
	38.0%	1.3%	5.3%	12.1%	0.7%	0.0%	9.1%
Separated or divorced	14	18	10	4	21	4	71
	4.7%	4.6%	3.3%	1.3%	7.0%	1.3%	3.7%
Widowed	18	1	7	5	21	22	74
	6.0%	0.3%	2.3%	1.7%	7.0%	7.4%	3.9%
Education							
None / Illiterate	108	99	85	30	87	228	637
	36.0%	25.1%	28.3%	10.0%	28.7%	76.3%	33.6%
Primary school	130	157	133	108	164	32	724
	43.3%	39.7%	44.3%	36.1%	54.1%	10.7%	38.2%
Secondary or high school	48	88	56	108	24	15	339
	16.0%	22.3%	18.7%	36.1%	7.9%	5.0%	17.9%
Tertiary education (university, colleges, etc.)	14	51	12	49	28	6	160
	4.7%	12.9%	4.0%	16.4%	9.2%	2.0%	8.4%
Other (Madrasa, vocational training, etc.)	0	0	14	4	0	18	36
	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	1.3%	0.0%	6.0%	1.9%
Protection status							
Registered with UNHCR	1	100	0	0	181	245	527
	0.3%	25.3%	0.0%	0.0%	59.7%	81.9%	27.8%
Applied for asylum and await decision	0	10	146	56	16	11	239
	0.0%	2.5%	48.7%	18.7%	5.3%	3.7%	12.6%
Recognised as beneficiary of protection	0	211	98	217	31	4	561
	0.0%	53.4%	32.7%	72.3%	10.2%	1.3%	29.6%
Application rejected	0	3	24	6	1	19	53
	0.0%	0.8%	8.0%	2.0%	0.3%	6.4%	2.8%
Never applied	0	5	20	10	3	11	49
	0.0%	1.3%	6.7%	3.3%	1.0%	3.7%	2.6%
Status not known	299	66	12	11	71	9	468
	99.7%	16.7%	4.0%	3.7%	23.4%	3.0%	24.7%
Legal status							
Citizen	299	50	0	7	67	3	426
	99.7%	12.7%	0.0%	2.3%	22.1%	1.0%	22.5%
Permanent resident	0	0	7	11	75	1	94
	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	3.7%	24.8%	0.3%	5.0%
Temporary resident	1	228	106	267	77	269	948
	0.3%	57.7%	35.3%	89.0%	25.4%	90.0%	50.0%
Registered migrant, but unclear duration	0	113	171	14	84	24	406
	0.0%	28.6%	57.0%	4.7%	27.7%	8.0%	21.4%
Unregistered migrant	0	4	16	1	0	2	23
	0.0%	1.0%	5.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	1.2%

Variable by study site	DR Congo	Ethiopia	Greece	Italy	Jordan	Pakistan	Total
	Network connectivity *						
Not connected beyond place of living	138	256	120	50	89	189	842
	46.0%	64.8%	40.0%	16.7%	29.4%	63.2%	44.4%
Locally connected within city	65	0	2	2	14	1	84
	21.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	4.6%	0.3%	4.4%
Translocally connected within country	87	4	3	22	63	83	262
	29.0%	1.0%	1.0%	7.3%	20.8%	27.8%	13.8%
Transnationally connected (only home country)	12	13	73	126	80	14	318
	4.0%	3.3%	24.3%	42.0%	26.4%	4.7%	16.8%
Transnationally connected (elsewhere)	31	127	112	161	147	27	605
	10.3%	32.2%	37.3%	53.7%	48.5%	9.0%	31.9%

* Respondents who are connected to other people can be part of multiple categories for network connectivity, therefore, the values add up to more than the total respondent size.

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TRAFIG provides academic evidence on refugee movements and protracted displacement; analyses which conditions could help to improve displaced people's everyday lives and informs policymakers on how to develop solutions to protracted displacement.

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