RESEARCH REPORT

Separated Families: who stays, who goes and why?

Decision-making and its consequences for families separated by mixed migration

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REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

MMP MIXED MIGRATION PLATFORM

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This report was produced by REACH in the framework of the Mixed Migration Platform.

The Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) is a joint-NGO initiative providing quality mixed migration-related information for policy, programming and advocacy work, as well as critical information for people on the move. The platform was established by seven partners—ACAPS, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Ground Truth Solutions, Internews, INTERSOS, REACH & Translators without Borders—as a hub for the Middle East Region. For more information visit: mixedmigrationplatform.org

A note on terminology

In this report, the term 'migration' is at times used to describe the movement of all people who travel as part of mixed migration flows. Moving within these flows are refugees and asylum seekers, for whom a specific protection regime exists. This report also considers migrants, trafficked persons, and others on the move – for whom protection challenges also exist – in line with the scope of the Mixed Migration Platform's work. People make the decision to leave home for a variety of reasons, but in doing so, often travel along the same routes and face similar risks.

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Executive Summary

The decision to move from the Middle East to Europe is made for a variety of reasons, and not only by those who make the journey. A significant body of research has been gathered on refugees and other migrants arriving in Europe in recent years, but comparatively little is known about how decisions to move or stay are made within families, nor about how family members moving affects those left behind.

This qualitative study seeks to understand the different influences on decision-making within families across the Middle East, specifically how gender, cultural and socio-economic factors play a role in the decision to move or stay. Focusing on the experience of 90 Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi families across five countries, the research examines how mixed migration[1] has affected the everyday lives of those left behind, as well as their aspirations and future intentions. The points below provide an overview of key findings from the research:

1. **Moving irregularly is a coping strategy and last resort – most families do everything they can to minimise risk**. Families are generally well aware of the dangers of the journey to Europe and for most, the decision to leave is taken jointly, with the well-being of the whole family in mind. In the absence of other legal channels, moving by irregular means is seen by many as 'the only viable option', often after attempting – and failing – to access other legal pathways to leave. Those who travel are generally the most able to manage the hardships of the journey. However, in a small number of cases, more vulnerable individuals such as those who are sick, disabled, or elderly are sent alone to access better care.
2. **Awareness of asylum and migration policies along the journey and in Europe has an influence on how families think about and plan for moving.** Awareness of policies affecting asylum seekers in countries of arrival is high, especially among Syrians and Iraqis who use their knowledge to limit risk and maximise travel through legal channels, such as family reunification. Despite careful planning, the successive implementation of increasingly restrictive policy changes towards refugees and other migrants – such as visa requirements to enter Turkey, the EU Turkey Agreement, and the introduction of different types of protected status – have left many families interviewed in this study separated for years.
3. **Not everyone who travels to Europe from a refugee-producing country plans to reunify with family**. Some families plan for a temporary separation and hope to be reunited as soon as possible upon arrival in their intended destination. In other cases, some family members never intended to travel.
4. **Drivers of movement are multiple, inter-related, and often affect the family as a whole. In contrast, the decision to stay at home is generally made at an individual level**. Members of the same family may face different levels of risk and have different aspirations, which affect their individual decisions to leave or stay.

[1] Throughout this report, the term 'migration' is used to describe the movement of all people who travel as part of mixed migration flows. This includes refugees and asylum seekers, for whom a specific protection regime exists, as well as migrants, trafficked persons, and others on the move. We recognise that people make the decision to leave home for a variety of reasons, but in doing so, often travel along the same routes and face similar risks.

Family members – including those who never intend to travel themselves – often have a significant influence in suggesting and supporting their relatives' decisions to make the journey to Europe.

5. **Access to livelihoods is a key driver behind movement within mixed migration flows to Europe for Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians, but few enjoy the benefits they had imagined straight away**. The inability to access sufficient livelihood opportunities either at home or in displacement, together with a belief that employment opportunities would be better in Europe, were consistently reported as a key reason for leaving. However, when the main earner or head of household left, remaining family members were more likely to experience reduced income, greater difficulties accessing basic services and aid, lower quality housing and increased challenges related to protection.
6. **The time it takes to be in a position to send remittances is frequently underestimated**. Many people plan to contribute to family incomes with money earned abroad, but few are able to do so straight away, due to the lengthy process of status determination, restrictions on working, or failure to reach the intended destination altogether. In families who spent all their savings, sold productive assets, or took on large debts to fund a family member's journey to Europe, those left behind may be particularly vulnerable – commonly waiting for up to two years to receive any remittances at all.
7. **Families who plan for a temporary separation are less likely to make contingency plans than those who envisage a longer-term separation.** As a result of limited preparation, families imagining a temporary separation often become more vulnerable than before the individual left and are more likely to perceive moving irregularly as negative overall. Limited contingency planning – or none at all – is therefore an important indicator of vulnerability.
8. **Humanitarian assistance for family members left behind is often difficult to access and insufficient to meet needs.** Evidence collected for this study shows that aid adjustments are rarely sufficient to compensate for the loss of the main earner, suggesting a need to incorporate contingency planning into vulnerability criteria for aid programmes in countries of departure. Female-headed households often face difficulties re-registering to receive aid in their own names, often leading to delays in access to assistance.
9. **Faced with limited resources and insufficient support, families who are negatively affected by irregular migration often turn to other coping strategies to survive**. Negative coping strategies include: children dropping out of school in order to work; moving to cheaper, lower quality housing; selling essential household assets; and taking on illegal work.
10. **Slow processes of status determination and family reunification in Europe have contributed to families' vulnerability and limited their agency**. Those awaiting status determination in Europe are unable to work to support their families, nor can they begin the process to reunite. At the same time, those left behind often lack support and are in greater need of humanitarian assistance than before a family member left.

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Introduction

Over 3.6 million people have sought asylum in European Union countries since the start of 2013, 44% of them from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.[2] The men, women, boys and girls who left for Europe from these refugee-producing countries represent only a fraction of those affected by ongoing conflict, violence and insecurity across the Middle East, but have garnered substantial attention as part of the so-called "European migration crisis".

In the absence of safe, legal channels for migration, the majority of those seeking asylum in Europe have travelled via irregular means, often investing considerable resources and taking great personal risk to make the journey. Perhaps because of the nature of risk involved, the characteristics of mixed migration to Europe differ compared to other global migration flows. Data on arrivals to Europe show that those who make the journey are predominantly adult men, while women, young children and elderly people are often left behind – in many cases resulting in separated families. While in some cases, other family members never intended to move, in others, separation was only intended to be temporary.

Against a backdrop of increasingly restrictive policies towards asylum seekers in European countries, those attempting to reunite with family members have faced growing challenges. In late 2015, the German government's decision to grant "subsidiary protection" instead of asylum or refugee status left many new arrivals eligible for residency for only a year, and not entitled to "privileged family reunification".[3] A few months later, successive border closures and the introduction of the EU Turkey Statement dramatically reduced the number of refugees and other migrants able to travel to Europe independently through Turkey and the Western Balkans.

This study was designed to understand more about the experience of the thousands of families affected by mixed migration to Europe, across the Middle East and Afghanistan, with a focus on those recently left behind. It draws on qualitative data collected through 90 interviews with displaced and non-displaced family members who remained in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, but had relatives who departed for Europe between 2013 and 2016.

Extensive analysis has been conducted on the 'push' and 'pull' factors that lead people to leave their homes and travel to Europe, but very few studies have sought to understand the dynamics of decision-making *within* families when it comes to mixed migration. Based on primary data collected in February and March 2017, the research seeks to understand not only the decision-making process within families as to who stays and who goes, but how mixed migration has affected those who remain. For those who stayed, has the departure of a family member affected their standard of living, access to protection, services and livelihoods? And how has the experience of those who left affected the aspirations and intentions of those who stayed?

[2] From 2013-2016, a total of 3,642,565 people applied for asylum in EU countries. Of these, 1,602,265 were of Syrian, Afghan or Iraqi nationality. Eurostat [migr_asyappctza].
[3] German Asylum Act (AsylG), section 4 subs. 1.

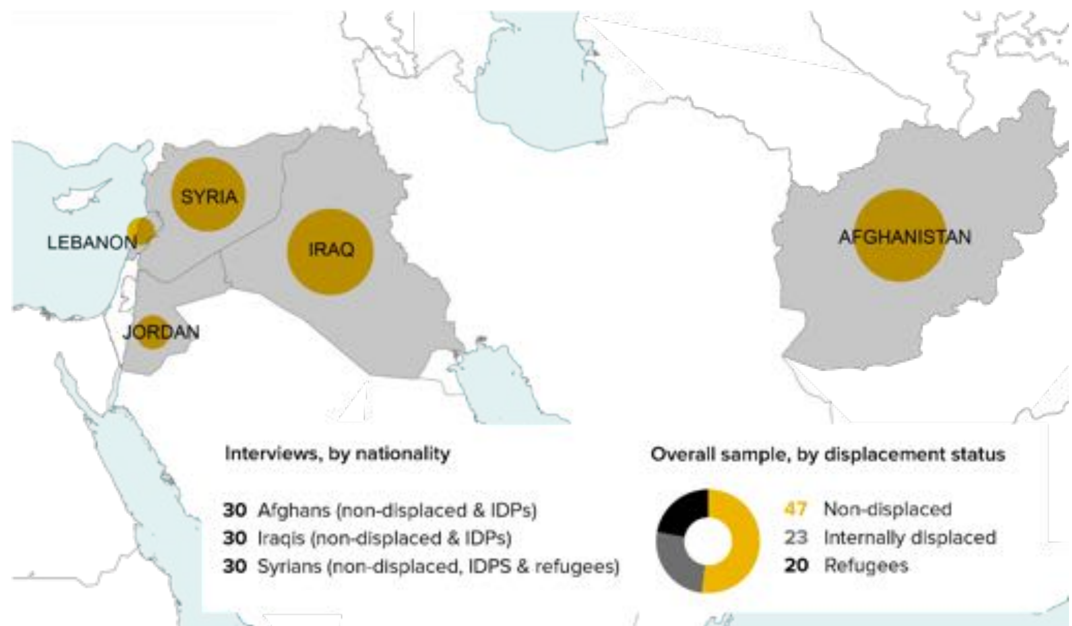
Methodology

Approach

This study used a qualitative approach to assess the drivers and influences affecting the decisions to leave and to stay, as well as how mixed migration has affected the situation and aspirations of those left behind. Using individual, semi-structured interviews with people who have remained in countries of origin, this research sought to identify common themes around the factors influencing the decision to travel and the effects of irregular migration on family members left behind.

Primary data was collected from 90 individuals across five countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The sample was equally divided between the top three nationalities of recent arrivals to Europe – Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians – and included people from non-displaced, internally displaced and refugee families. To the extent possible, participants were selected from a range of locations within each country and included the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and children of those who had left for Europe. For the purposes of this study, "family" was considered as the nuclear family, although in a small number of cases, participants spoke about the departure of a member of the extended family who lived in the same household, such as a cousin or grandchild.

Figure 1: Location of interviews, by nationality and displacement status



Interviews were conducted by bilingual data collectors, all of them trained on interview techniques and specific issues related to family separation and protection. Questions were asked in each participant's mother tongue, and where possible by an interviewer of the same gender. All interviews were then transcribed and translated to English by the same person who administered the interview. Each interviewer was subsequently debriefed to double check answers given and incorporate preliminary analysis from the interviewers themselves. Where possible, interviews were conducted face-to-face, or alternatively by telephone or Skype where conflict or access posed challenges.

Interviews followed a semi-structured questioning route and the full transcripts were analysed alongside the completed debriefing forms. Interviews were coded using qualitative analysis software according to the themes that emerged. Quotes from participants and interviewers are used throughout this report to illustrate the perspectives of the people interviewed as directly as possible. All participants gave informed consent prior to taking part, and pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities. For reference, basic details about each participant are listed in Annex 1.

Analytical framework

Building on a recent study by Hagen-Zanker and Mallet,[4] this research used an analytical framework called the "migration thresholds" approach, developed by van der Velde and van Naerssen,[5] to understand the extent to which a range of factors contributed to decision-making and intentions.

The migration thresholds model offers a helpful framework that allows for nuanced discussion of the multiple, often overlapping drivers of human mobility, as well as the factors that motivate people to stay in any given location. In this study, the model is used primarily to examine the decision-making process around a family member's departure, but also offers a helpful framework to consider the effects of migration on the aspirations and intentions of those left behind.

The model takes as a starting point that before actually leaving home, a person must pass through a series of thresholds: first a person must overcome their *indifference* towards the concept of migration; second the *idea* of migration starts to be seen as positive rather than negative; third a *destination* is selected; and fourth a 'trajectory' or *journey* is decided upon to get there.

In the context of this study, the reasons given for staying rather than leaving can be analysed according to the threshold at which opinions within the family differed. Taking as an example a family in which one individual wanted to travel but other family members never intended to do so, opinions could be classified as diverging at the *idea* threshold: *"we did not even think of leaving"* explained one participant.[6] In another case, all family members might have agreed to leave and had decided on a location, but a lack of resources or fears about the dangers of the journey meant that only one person was chosen to travel immediately. In this case, opinions diverged at the *journey* threshold: "for women and children it's too dangerous."[7]

Challenges and limitations

The qualitative nature of this study and purposive selection of participants means that findings are not statistically representative of the populations assessed, but instead illustrate trends, particularly between the different experiences of refugees, internally displaced and non-displaced families of Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians.

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[4] Hagen-Zanker, J & Mallet, R (2016) *Journeys to Europe: The role of policy in migrant decision-making*. London: ODI.
[5] Van der Velde, M. & van Naerssen, T. (2011) 'People, borders, trajectories: An approach to cross-border mobility and immobility in and to the European Union'; and Van der Velde, M. & van Naerssen, T. (Eds.) (2015) *Mobility and migration choices: Thresholds to crossing borders.* Farnham: Ashgate.
[6] S27. Syrian refugee male, Jordan.
[7] A24. Afghan female, Afghanistan.

The following limitations should also be considered:

- This study focussed on families in which one or more individuals departed for Europe between 2013 and 2016. Their experiences are specific to this particular period in time.
- Despite being a major transit country for refugees and other migrants of all three nationalities, it was not possible to collect data in Turkey due to operational constraints. Further research is required to understand the motivating factors and effects of departure on families in Turkey.
- The purposive selection of participants within selected countries means that there is a possibility of selection bias. As much as possible, data collection teams attempted to interview respondents from a range of geographic locations and ethnic backgrounds in order to mitigate against this.
- Given participants were discussing events in the past – sometimes up to four years ago – there is a possibility of recall bias. To avoid this, participants were encouraged only to provide information they were sure of.
- Participants include males, females, refugees, internally displaced and non-displaced people, aged from 17-76. However, the sample is not completely balanced, which limits the ability to draw meaningful comparisons for all indicators.
- Not all participants provided information to all questions. Where data visualisations are used to illustrate findings, the relevant sample size is noted below each graph.
- Practical and cultural constraints mean that the sample collected in Afghanistan was predominantly from men in non-displaced families. As a result, insufficient findings are available to analyse trends relating to internally displaced Afghans.

Findings

Planning to move and the nature of decision-making

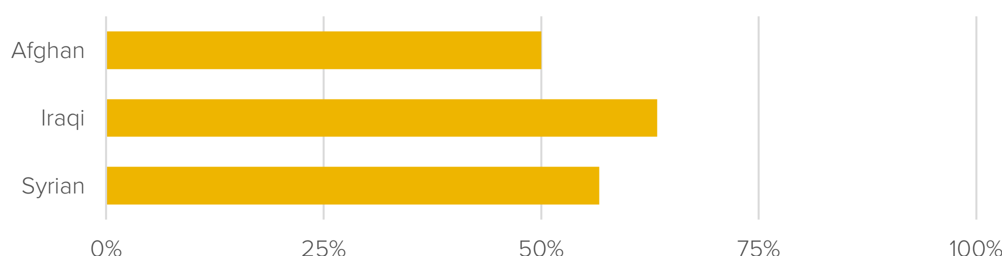
The decision to leave home, family, friends, livelihoods, language and culture is a major undertaking. Taking into account the extremely high travel costs, a route fraught with danger and the possibility of no return, it is hardly surprising that the decision for a family member to leave home is rarely undertaken lightly. This section examines the process of decision-making prior to moving, describing some of the different strategies employed and the motivations behind them.

1. 'Planting' the idea of moving

Before any concrete plans are put in place, the beginning of every migration journey requires acceptance of the *idea* of leaving, before moving can be seen as something that could bring about positive change. Within families, the development of migration as an idea is highly complex and several important dynamics were observed at this threshold.

For over half of the families included in this study, members of the same family had *different* ideas about moving and it was never intended for everyone to travel. Despite often not wishing to move themselves, other family members not only participated in the decision for someone else to leave, but on some occasions were the first to initiate discussion around the idea of them leaving.

Figure 2: Families in which at least one member disagreed with the 'idea' of a family member leaving



Note: Proportions are based on data from 28 Afghans, 30 Iraqis and 30 Syrians

In several cases, parents had suggested the idea of migration to their sons or daughters, while for one Afghan teenager, "his uncle had been encouraging him to travel…because he was underage and entitled to protection as a minor…then he could continue his studies".[8] While this teenager does not appear to have been coerced against his will – "it was his dream to travel to Europe" explained his grandmother – the weight of influence held by family members emerged as an important factor in this and several interviews, raising questions about the extent to which some individuals, especially minors, may genuinely be able to take informed decisions.

Such examples underline how a family member leaving can be seen as a strategy for the well-being of a family as a whole, even if only one person actually travels. In the words of

[8] A04. Afghan female, Afghanistan.

one Afghan woman, "things are not working very well here due to prolonged unemployment, unstable government and economy so finally we had to conclude to send my son abroad."[9] For similar reasons, others initiated the decision themselves, for example leaving in order to "support [the] family financially from abroad."[10]

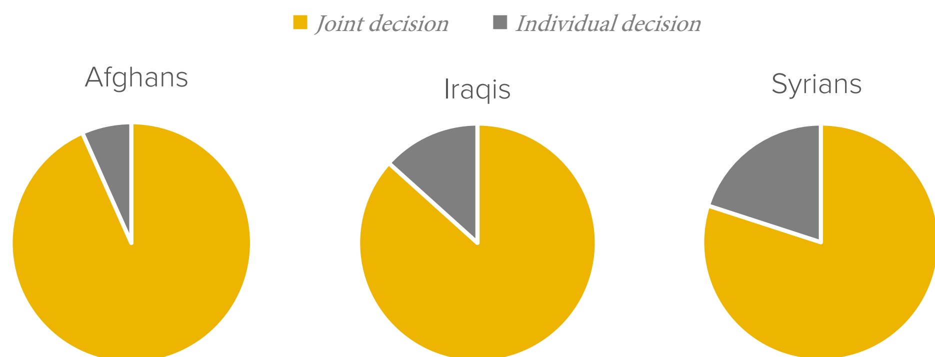
The idea that migration and remittances can benefit those left behind has been extensively argued, both for families employing this strategy themselves,[11] and in wider developmental terms.[12] However, the extent to which recent arrivals to Europe have already been able to enjoy the benefits they imagined is less well understood, especially given the specific characteristics of their journey, including high exposure to risk and significant investment prior to departure.[13]

2. Making joint decisions

Once an idea has been planted, the individual or joint nature of the decision is influenced by the origins of the idea itself, as well as the nature of the plan to move and the degree of support required to make it happen.

A large majority of all interviewed families reported that the decision was made jointly, rather than by any one individual. This is consistent with the understanding that not all family members might support the idea of moving themselves, but are prepared to encourage and support other family members to do so.

Figure 3: Families in which the decision to move was made jointly, by nationality



Note: Proportions are based on 90 interviews, 30 of each nationality

Figure 3 shows a similar trend for all three nationalities, although Afghans were the most likely to report a joint decision and Syrians the least. Most commonly, adult members of the nuclear family had a say in decision-making, while in some cases, the extended family members contributed as well, including those living abroad.

[9] A21. Internally displaced Afghan male, Afghanistan.
[10] A01. Afghan female, Afghanistan.
[11] See for example: Adams, R H & Page, J (2005) *Do International Migration and Remittances Reduce Poverty in Developing Countries?* Washington DC: World Bank.
[12] Hein de Haas provides a good overview of the fluctuating discourse around migration and development over time in: De Haas, H (2008) *Migration and development: A theoretical perspective*. International Migration Institute Working Paper, No. 9.
[13] Hagen-Zanker, J & Mallet, R (2016) *Journeys to Europe: The role of policy in migrant decision-making*. London: ODI.

Box 1: Negotiating the decision to leave

Sahrbel's son and daughter travelled from Iraq to Sweden in September 2014. One month earlier, the whole family had been internally displaced by conflict from their home in Bartella on the Nineveh Plains.

The decision for them to leave was made jointly, through a process of negotiation. Their daughter was aged 19 at the time and Sahrbel and his wife had given their daughter the idea to leave. "We were afraid of what might happen to her because of the presence of *daesh*[14] and the stories they had heard of Christian women being particularly at risk", he explained, "and wanted our daughter to be able to continue studying". As the possibility was being discussed with their relatives abroad, their older son explained that he also wanted to travel so that he could work and support the family. After consulting family members already in Sweden, "all relatives and friends agreed to send the two children abroad. Both the boy and the girl were so happy to hear that their family supported this."[15]

Sahrbel's story (**Box 1**) illustrates not only the complex nature of discussion and negotiation that often took place prior to leaving, but also how joint decision-making was common, even in situations where not all family members ultimately intended to move. Despite initiating the decision and spending 15,000 USD on his children's travel, Sahrbel and his wife never intended to leave: "We wanted to stay close in order to be able to return home…we never wanted to leave the country."[16]

In other cases, a joint decision was made, despite initial disagreement among family members. For one Afghan family the idea was discussed between members of both the immediate and extended family, but "it was clear that the grandson was so motivated to leave that he even mentioned stealing valuables from the household in order to make his dream come true." [17] According to the interviewer, this appeared to have made other members of the family keen to support him.

3. Longer-term and temporary separation

For the purpose of this study, the term 'longer-term separation' is used to describe situations in which family separation was intentional, and expected to last for some time. This includes not only those families whose perspectives on migration differed at the idea threshold, but also those in which individuals supported the idea in principle, but never saw it as a realistic or viable possibility for themselves.

In a small minority of cases, separation was not planned at all, either as a longer-term, or temporary strategy. Instead, all family members intended to travel together, but became separated along the way, for example due to apprehension by authorities, as in the case of Abdul's family (see **Box 4**, below). Since separation was never a conscious decision, the experience of these families is not discussed in this section.

For over half of the families assessed, their separation can be considered 'longer-term', while a minority envisaged 'temporary separation'. This second group, whose

[14] Another name for the so-called Islamic State / ISIS / ISIL.
[15] I15. Internally displaced Iraqi male, Iraq.
[16] I15. Internally displaced Iraqi male, Iraq.
[17] A04. Afghan female, Afghanistan.

opinions diverged at the 'journey' threshold, imagined that those left behind would soon be able to re-join their relatives – usually within a matter of months – either through irregular means at a later date, or through formal channels, such as family reunification or resettlement.

Throughout the analysis process, clear differences emerged between the characteristics of families who had envisaged a 'longer-term' and 'temporary' separation. In the following sections of this report, these concepts are used to organise and compare approaches to migration and their effects.

4. Planning for departure

The length of time from initial idea to actual departure varied considerably, from three days in the shortest instance to around three years in the longest. The median time however was three months, during which families discussed the idea, gathered resources to pay for the journey and in some cases, made contingency plans for those who would stay behind.

Figure 4: Time from initial idea to departure, by nationality

The darker the colour the higher the frequency

	< 1 month	1-3 months	4-6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	25-36 months
Afghans						
Iraqis						
Syrians						
Total						

Note: Based on reported times by the 30 Afghans, 29 Iraqis and 15 Syrians, for whom data was available

While few clear differences can be observed between Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians, families planning a longer-term separation generally spent longer transforming the initial idea of migration into reality, than those who imagined a temporary separation.

What affects decision-making?

This section discusses the multiple and overlapping factors that affected decisions to leave and to stay behind. It aims to identify the extent to which motivating factors are shared by those who leave and those who stay, as well as the point at which opinions differ.

The decision to leave

Numerous studies have sought to understand the reasons why people have moved in mixed migration flows to Europe, resulting in a large body of often quantitative evidence on the role of a range of "push" and "pull" factors.[18] Rather than duplicate these efforts, this study seeks to understand the extent to which reasons for leaving are shared by

[18] See for example: DRC (2015) *Going to Europe, a Syrian Perspective*; MEDMIG (2016) *Destination Europe: Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015*; REACH (2016) *Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans.*

members of the same family, and how the interaction of multiple factors affected the decision for someone to leave.

Reasons behind the decision to leave were largely *exogenous* to those who left and tended to affect the family as a whole, rather than only the person who moved. In most cases, participants described multiple influences, often closely intertwined (see **Box 2**).

Box 2: Overlapping motivations to leave

Abdullah, a 34-year-old Syrian from Hama, had been internally displaced for a year when his mother, his three brothers and their wives and children left for Sweden in November 2013. Insecurity played an important part in their decision to first leave home, since they were wanted by intelligence in Hama. Only two months after arriving in Samada, they began to think about leaving, since "the situation was not safe because of shelling and airstrikes." Displacement and ongoing insecurity had affected their access to livelihoods, leaving the family dependent on daily labour and "in a bad financial situation." They were also concerned that "there was no proper education service for the children." When conflict in Samada began to escalate, leaving suddenly seemed a more viable possibility: "we felt that the conflict is getting worse and it will likely take years [for the war to end], so we decided to migrate."[19]

Consistent with other studies,[20] issues related to a lack of access to livelihoods and the pursuit of economic opportunity were the most commonly mentioned factors behind the decision to leave, closely followed by concerns relating to conflict or insecurity. Education was mentioned by a notable minority, particularly among Afghans and Syrians. Finally, concerns related to health or access to healthcare were rarely mentioned but in a small number of cases constituted the primary reason for leaving, usually for the treatment of a chronically ill individual.

Based on the number of interviews in which each factor was mentioned as a reason for leaving (either negatively as a "push" factor, or positively as a "pull" factor towards Europe), Figure 5 shows many similarities between the motivations of Afghans and Syrians, while Iraqis tended to talk about a broader set of influences.

Figure 5: Factors behind the decision to leave

The darker the colour, the more frequently mentioned the issue

	Livelihoods	Security	Education	Health
Afghans				
Iraqis				
Syrians				
Total				

[19] S07. Internally displaced Syrian male, Syria.

[20] These include, MEDMIG (2016) *Destination Europe: Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015*; REACH (2016) *Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans*; REACH (2015) *Migration Trends and Patterns of Syrian Asylum Seekers in the EU*.

Note: Based on the number of interviews in which each factor was mentioned

Within the broad category of **livelihoods**, access to secure employment was a widely held concern. This ranged from those who had no work at all, to those who had failed to find the sort of work they desired and were keen to seek opportunities elsewhere. For Syrian refugees in Jordan, their inability to access legal working opportunities was a common concern:[21]

"[My husband] was afraid to be deported to Syria if he was caught working in Jordan without permit once more, knowing that he had been arrested three times before by Jordanian authorities… so he heard about moving to Europe from other Syrians he knew and decided to go for that option, hoping for a better life for him and his family. Especially the children' education."[22]

As in this example, one person's access to work was frequently considered as a means to provide for the family as a whole. While in this case his family members were supposed to join him at a later date, in others, plans for one person to travel and send remittances meant that that others would be able to enjoy better circumstances without having to leave at all.

Mentions of **conflict and insecurity** included both specific threats and incidents, as well as broader fears about general insecurity and a lack of stability that had a knock-on effect on other areas of life. Similar to Aboud (see: **Box 3**) Ahmad's brother had left due to "fear of detention and conscription as he was very close to the age when males are being forced to join the army" and because of "his commitment to continue his studies," since the risks and restrictions on movement had led him to think about dropping out of university.[23] In cases like this one, the departure of an individual at specific risk from the conflict or insecurity had a positive effect on the family as a whole, as well as the individual in question: "it's such a relief for us to no longer fear that our son will be detained or participate with the army, to kill people or get killed."[24]

For both displaced and non-displaced families, the idea that conflict was ongoing and unlikely to end in the near future also emerged as a common theme, causing families to lose hope in their current situation: "there were no indications that conflict would end soon", explained one Syrian.

However, discrimination appears to have been particularly influential for internally displaced and refugee families. These families often explained that they felt discriminated against while seeking employment in displacement, although this sentiment reportedly affected access to housing, education and other areas of life as well.

[21] It is important to note that in most of the families interviewed, relatives left before 2016 when the introduction of the Jordan Compact extended legal employment opportunities to Syrians in Jordan.
[22] S22. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.
[23] S10. Internally displaced Syrian male, Syria.
[24] S10. Internally displaced Syrian male, Syria.

Box 3: Disagreement around the idea of leaving

For Retaj's cousin Aboud, the decision to leave Syria was individual. He discussed it with his family and his wife's family, but they disagreed with the idea of going to Europe.

Having previously served in the army but later deserted, Aboud was wanted by the regime so decided to leave nonetheless. Five months after getting married, he arranged a divorce with his wife upon request from her family. Her parents insisted upon this as they did not want her to be away from her husband, were scared that the husband and wife might never see each other again if he left, and did not want their daughter to leave Syria to join him.

For those motivated to travel because of **education**, two main aspects stood out: for teenagers and young adults, access to quality higher education was a common preoccupation, while parents with young children were more likely to talk about good educational opportunities for their sons and daughters. For one Afghan family, the most important reasons were unemployment, insecurity and not having access to a "standard and sound education system." For this family, "education was both for the other children [left behind] and the person who left." When they sent their son to Europe, they were "imagining that he would be working as well as studying higher education in Germany and will support the remaining children to attend private schools [through remittances]."[25]

Among those who mentioned **healthcare**, concerns generally surrounded a lack of access to specific treatment or specialist support for an existing, sometimes chronic condition. In some cases, family members lacked the financial resources to pay for expensive medicines or treatment and believed it would be easier to access in Europe. In others, the required treatment or conditions for recovery were seen as unattainable at home. In one Afghan family, Baghlan and his relatives were concerned about the mental health of his nephew and saw migration as a potential solution:

"After he survived a suicide attack in 2015 he was severely depressed and every time he heard of another attack, his mental health got worse. So the doctors advised him to move to a safe and secure place, then his family members decided on sending him into Europe."[26]

Catalysts for movement

An important minority of participants mentioned that specific shocks or "trigger" events had accelerated their decision to leave. These were sudden events, usually related to conflict, insecurity or livelihoods, which caused ties to a current location to be severed, or a loss of hope about ever improving the family situation. Since ties to a host community are often more fragile by nature, displaced families – both internally displaced and refugee families – were more likely than non-displaced families to mention that a trigger event had affected the decision to leave.

[25] A01, Afghan female, Afghanistan.
[26] A27. Afghan male, Afghanistan.

For one Syrian refugee in Lebanon, "his fiancée [who was still in Syria at the time] was killed after 13 years of a loving relationship just a week before their marriage date." According to his brother, "he was totally depressed and he hated the whole of Syria…his friends [in Lebanon] were planning to leave and he wanted to start a new chapter in his life."[27]

As highlighted in this example, the influence of friends and family should also be considered an important catalyst for movement. In several cases, others not only planted the initial idea to travel, but provided significant financial support to make the journey possible. In addition, the presence of family and friends either already in Europe or who were planning to travel together, was an influential factor for almost half the families included in this study. The experiences of others both served to confirm that migration was achievable (for example: "She had friends who had already travelled to Germany, using the same route. This gave her hope that it would be possible to migrate as well"[28]) as well as to actively encourage others to travel: "his friends pushed him so much to go with them."[29]

The influence of friends and family appears particularly important for Iraqis and Syrians, among whom the idea has become so normalised as to be described as a "culture of migration" by some analysts.[30] In the words of one Syrian participant: "Everyone else in Syria was talking about it…[the idea of moving] was very seductive for young people."[31] For young adults who were still dependent on their parents and with few ties to livelihoods, studies, or a spouse, moving away seems to be have been a particularly attractive possibility. Describing his younger brother, who left at the age of 23, Moafaq explained: "He wasn't married yet, so he had few responsibilities and nothing holding him down or tying him to Iraq."[32]

The decision to stay

In contrast to the decision to leave, the decision to stay was more commonly based on *endogenous* factors, affecting some individuals within the family to a much greater extent than others. The type and role of these factors varied considerably between families who envisaged a temporary or longer-term separation.

For families who planned only a *temporary separation* or none at all, differences of opinion generally occurred at the *journey* threshold. In these families, all members ultimately hoped to travel, but the high risk associated with the journey or insufficient resources to pay for travel prevented some from being able to leave.

For families who prepared for a *longer-term separation*, the differences of opinion between those who stayed and those who left more commonly occurred at the *idea* threshold. This was usually due to one or more of the following reasons:

[27] S02. Syrian refugee female, Lebanon.
[28] I22. Internally displaced female, Iraq.
[29] I07. Iraqi male, Iraq.
[30] Hagen-Zanker, J & Mallet, R (2016) Journeys to Europe: The role of policy in migrant decision-making. London: ODI.
[31] S10. Internally displaced male, Syria.
[32] I16. Internally displaced male, Iraq.

1. Differing levels of vulnerability to specific threats (for example a situation in which only one family member was targeted or at risk);
2. Ties to people or place (including stable livelihoods, caring responsibilities, love of the homeland, or a wish to stay close to home and assets);
3. A lack of confidence that life would be better elsewhere or apprehension about the safety of the migration journey;
4. A general hopelessness about their current situation, which prevented them from imagining any kind of alternative future.

How does mixed migration affect those left behind?

The vulnerability of family members left behind was found to be closely linked to their degree of preparation and planning prior to moving. This section begins by examining the extent to which families made contingency plans to look after those left behind, and goes on to discuss the different ways in which mixed migration affected individuals within families who planned for only a temporary separation, and those who prepared for a longer-term separation.

Contingency planning

Just over half of the families included in this study did some sort of contingency planning to look after the well-being of those family members left behind. Families planning a longer-term separation were more likely to put concrete measures in place than those who envisaged separation as only temporary. Some variation was seen according to displacement status, with non-displaced families more likely to make plans for family members left behind than internally displaced or refugee families.

Figure 6: Making contingency plans

More likely to make contingency plans	Less likely to make contingency plans
• Families planning a longer-term separation • Non-displaced families	• Families planning a temporary separation • Displaced families (IDPs & refugees)

Strategies for contingency planning varied considerably in scale and effectiveness. Based on the experiences of the slim majority of families in this study who made any plans at all, the single most effective strategy to guarantee the well-being of family members was for the main earner – usually a father or adult son – to stay behind. However, this strategy was often not seen by participants as a contingency plan at all, especially when younger individuals who had not previously been contributing to the family income, were the ones to leave: "there was no need for a contingency plan…income [from the main earner] is still available for the ones who stayed and if there is money they will be ok."[33]

Other common strategies involved the sale of property, land and other assets, or moving in with parents or other members of the extended family. Staying with another household was most common among Afghan families, especially in cases when a woman would

[33] A23. Afghan female, Afghanistan.

otherwise have been left alone to manage the household, without the protection of a man. Some families continued to live on their own, but moved to smaller accommodation that would be more affordable, while others took care of paperwork, applying for pensions, gathering registration documents and certificates, or re-registering the person who stayed as the head of household so that the remaining family members could continue to access services and humanitarian assistance.

Families planning only a temporary separation often employed multiple short-term strategies, which had negative consequences in the longer-term. Examples include taking out loans to fund the living costs of remaining family members, spending remaining savings, or making rental payments up front before others were able to travel as well. Such short-term strategies were often the most problematic, since almost all families in this situation underestimated the time it would take to reunify:

"There was minimum preparation – the husband thought it would be very quick to get resettled and gambled…the only thing that the husband did was pay one month's rent in advance. There were no other strategies."[34]

Changes to everyday life

Livelihoods and income

Departure of a family's main earner frequently resulted in reduced access to income for those left behind, especially for displaced families who were already more likely to struggle to make ends meet. In these situations, other family members frequently stepped in to fill the role of providing for the rest of the family, most commonly the eldest remaining son(s) or the female head of household. For all three nationalities, it was common for teenage boys to take on work in order to support the household – a coping strategy which often came at the expense of their studies, as in this account of an internally displaced Iraqi family:

"The younger brother of the person who left dropped out of his secondary school in order to do daily work to support the household."[35]

Even when other adults were still able to contribute to the household income, the repayment of debts taken on to fund the journey often posed an additional burden. Strategies to alleviate pressure on the household included increasing working hours, taking on additional work, or starting small home-based businesses, such as selling home-cooked food. While such strategies could be considered positive in some situations, it is important to note that they are highly dependent on context – for Syrian refugees in Jordan, for example, starting an informal business is against the law and places families at risk of being sent to a camp.

[34] S12. Internally displaced male, Syria.
[35] I13. Internally displaced Iraqi male.

In other cases, family members reduced expenditure on other aspects of life in order to set money aside: "the family took on debt to pay for the journey (10,000 USD), which they borrowed from friends and relatives…they had to reduce expenditure on their everyday life in order to pay back the debt."[36] Reducing expenditure on other priorities, such as education and healthcare, can also be considered a negative coping strategy, especially when sustained for long periods.

The sale of productive assets to fund family members' journeys often negatively affected access to livelihoods for those who stayed, as illustrated by Abdul's story:

Box 4: A failed attempt to migrate

Abdul's family did not plan to stay in Afghanistan. The whole family had prepared to travel to Germany, but while crossing Iran, they were apprehended by the authorities and deported. Two of his brothers were travelling in another vehicle and successfully made it to Europe, but Abdul and the rest of his family were sent back to Afghanistan.

Prior to leaving, Abdul and his brothers worked as taxi drivers, but had sold their two cars and taken out a loan to fund the journey. Immediately after deportation, the situation was very difficult for the family members still in Afghanistan – since their productive assets had been sold to pay for their passage to Europe, they were unable to restart the family business. Eventually the older brother opened a grocery shop instead, which started to make money. "Together with some remittances from my brothers' weekly allowance in Germany, things are starting to get better," he explained.

The idea of sending back remittances from Europe was frequently considered when planning migration, but very few of the families interviewed for this study reported having received any remittances at all. For those who had, the money they received sometimes came from the monthly stipend of the person who left, as in the example in **Box 4**, and was therefore far lower than they would have imagined. The main reason for this is the time needed to process asylum applications, which most families had vastly underestimated. Some were also unaware that it would not be possible to access legal work until status determination was complete: "He has now realised it will take at least five years to settle in Europe going through all the formal processes, then he will be able to make life better" explained the brother of one Afghan male who travelled to Germany in October 2016.[37]

Assistance

Humanitarian aid was important to several of the families interviewed, particularly refugees. In contrast, most of those travelling straight from home reported having received no assistance at all, either before or after moving.

Families reliant on humanitarian assistance reported two main challenges following the departure of a relative. First, the need to de-register the person who left and re-register a new head of household could result in long delays, in one case leaving the remaining

[36] I30. Iraqi female, Iraq.
[37] A05. Afghan male, Afghanistan.

family members with no access to cash assistance for over a year. Second, families were generally entitled to lower levels of assistance, since their family size had decreased. Despite the fact that female headed households are generally supposed to receive more assistance to compensate for higher vulnerability to a range of factors,[38] in no case was increased aid following the departure of a family member reported to be an adequate substitute for someone working.

Box 5: Challenges accessing aid

When Noor's husband and daughter left for Europe in October 2015, the family made no real contingency plans apart from paying a month's rent up front.

A Syrian refugee in Jordan with three young children, her husband had been the sole breadwinner before he left. Unable to work and with no money coming in, Noor was struggling to pay the rent and sold most of the family's furniture to make ends meet. After her husband had been away for two months, she approached UNHCR to follow up with the cash assistance that he used to receive. While they agreed to change the registration so that she and her children could still receive payments, it took a further three months before the change of registration could be processed.

By this time she had moved in with her brother, who lived nearby, and offered for her to come and share the rent. Even with the cash and food assistance, money was still short and she was still struggling. At first he insisted that she share only the cost of food, but by the time of the interview, her brother was covering everything.

Housing

Family members left behind employed multiple shelter-related coping strategies to adapt to changing circumstances, often resulting in overcrowding, a lack of privacy, and changes to family dynamics. In several cases, remaining family members moved in with relatives, where space was limited ("In the father-in-law's house the space is not big enough for everyone and only one room is given to the children and their mother for living"[39]) placing increased pressure on the household that supported them. While no participants in this study made specific mention of gender-based violence as a result of changing shelter circumstances, international guidelines link overcrowded housing to increased likelihood of exposure to gender-based violence, as well as other protection concerns.[40]

While for many, the decision to move house was part of the family's contingency planning, for others there was little choice involved:

[38] See for example: Verme, Paolo, Chiara Gigliarano, Christina Wieser, Kerren Hedlund, Marc Petzoldt, and Marco Santacroce. 2016. *The Welfare of Syrian Refugees: Evidence from Jordan and Lebanon*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
[39] A06. Afghan male, Afghanistan.
[40] IASC (2015) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action.

"Before her husband left, he maintained the house and paid for two months' rent in advance. After two months, they evicted her. She found many houses, very bad houses, but couldn't find anywhere good. The current owner of her house refuses to let any males into her house.[41]

For renters without a source of income, keeping up monthly payments posed a considerable challenge that was often insufficiently addressed in pre-departure planning. In some cases, families sold basic household items, such as blankets and heaters, as a coping strategy in order to maintain rental payments (see **Box 5**), making conditions within the home more difficult and leaving those who remained, particularly children, more vulnerable to cold winter weather and illness.

Protection

Following the departure of a family member, changes to the safety and security of remaining family members varied considerably, depending on which member of the family left.

In families where certain individuals had previously faced specific threats - such as military recruitment - migration generally improved levels of safety and security. In these cases, participants explained that improvements were both practical as well as psychological, since the safety of one individual affected the wellbeing of the whole family. In one Iraqi family for example, a 62-year old woman travelled to join her daughters who were already in Germany, while her husband – a government employee with a stable source of income – stayed behind. "My wife was feeling very unsafe [particularly as a Christian woman] because of the presence of ISIS" he explained. Despite missing her terribly, her departure had a positive impact on his own sense of security: "Now I feel safer because she is safe."[42]

When the person who left was a dependent child, family members reported few changes to the physical safety of the rest of the family. In contrast, negative changes to safety and security were most common in cases where male heads of households had left, and wives and children had no protection from an adult male. In these cases, individuals within the family were affected differently, depending on age and gender.

For some adult women, concerns about their own safety had caused them to limit their movements outside the home:

"She can't really move outside the home because she is worried about her safety. She has small children also - her daughter [aged 6] is in the first grade and she goes to school alone. If the husband was here, he would accompany her.[43]

As in the example above, children – particularly girls – were often described as facing greater risks in single-parent families. If mothers were caring for infants at home, often no-one was available to take older children to school or to run other basic errands. For

[41] S24. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.
[42] I11. Internally displaced male, Iraq.
[43] S23. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.

one Syrian refugee family in Jordan, harassment of the teenage daughters became so problematic that the family moved house: "Before my husband left we had no protection or security troubles or concerns, but after he left the teenage girls started to complain from Jordanian boys on the way to school…in the villages people can still easily identify Syrians and [they] knew that these girls do not have a man to defend them, so we had to leave to Irbid because it is a city and no-one pays attention to other people's business."[44]

Elderly family members were also considered at particular risk when left to live alone. Following their children's departure, some elderly parents became reliant on members of their extended family for support and felt at greater risk as a result: "She is afraid of robbery because she is alone," explained one interviewer, "If she is sick who is there to help her?"[45]

Access to basic amenities

Families' access to basic amenities, such as markets, healthcare and education was closely related to their ability to access livelihoods, income, and assistance. As for other aspects of life, the departure of a male head of household or main earner proved most problematic for the rest of the family, especially in cases where preparation had been minimal.

For families with significantly reduced income, access to services could often be challenging because of the limited funds to go around. Access to healthcare was often particularly challenging due to the high cost of medicine, while the ability to physically access healthcare services, shops and municipal services could also be difficult, especially for women who lacked a male chaperone. In the words of a Syrian widow whose son left for Germany:

> *"Access to services became more difficult for me and my daughters because of cultural and traditional challenges. Before he left, my eldest son used to be the one to deal with administrative stuff and arrange things. In his absence, we had to do that ourselves and that was difficult, for example travelling [to the health centre] or going to the municipality, which are basically men's duties."*[46]

For Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, difficulties in obtaining or changing paperwork had made service access more difficult, especially when the male head of household had left without changing his family's registration with the authorities. When family members hoped to be reunited quickly, they often skipped this step, leaving female heads of household particularly vulnerable in the months and years that followed.

Education

Access to education was often reduced following the departure of the main breadwinner, generally because young men and boys had dropped out of their studies in order to make up for a shortfall in household income. This negative coping strategy often began with teenage boys taking on part-time work alongside their studies, only to abandon their education completely as soon as savings or other income sources ran out. When this happened, children generally dropped out of school within the first few months of a

[44] S20. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.
[45] I21. Internally displaced female, Iraq.
[46] S13. Syrian female, Syria.

person leaving, highlighting the importance of early identification and intervention to ensure that families receive adequate support for children to be able to finish their studies.

Changes to family life

In more than a third of assessed families, roles and responsibilities within the family had changed as a result of a family member leaving, affecting who earned the money, who managed the household's assets and who made decisions about healthcare, education and other spending. When male heads of household left, women or older sons tended to assume the role of the head of household, changing dynamics within the family:

"The elder brother has more burden on his shoulders now as he has to do each and every thing at home such as taking care of children in regards to their school, health and other necessities of life. Before, it was the father of the children who left for Europe.[47]

Several women mentioned how difficult it had been to manage family finances for the first time and felt ill-prepared to do so. In many cases, remaining family members became increasingly dependent on wider family networks, including siblings and in-laws, through joint living arrangements. This often altered the power balance within families – adding new responsibilities to those who hosted, while reducing the agency of those who remained. "I used to have more control of my life and my children's lives before we moved" explained Salwa, who moved into her husband's family house when he left Syria in early 2015.[48] For Noor, a Syrian refugee in Jordan, the experience of having to move in with her brother's family had been deeply distressing: "I'm living without dignity in this house" she said.[49]

Psychosocial well-being

The psychological effects of family separation on health also emerged as a common theme across all five countries. Many families described the pain of separation, missing their loved ones and how much they had feared for their safety during the journey. In several cases, participants mentioned that this had contributed to depression or even served to exacerbate existing medical conditions.

"Every time when his son is calling them to chat, he feels sad about his grandson and cries a lot because he misses him. The grandfather has a weak heart, and it affects him a lot when he sees his grandson on Skype or Viber… at one point he started to have palpitations because of all the emotion. Now he prefers just to speak to his grandson, but not to see him [using the video] as this makes him too emotional."[50]

The psychosocial impact was felt not just by those who stayed, but also by those who left. Lengthy status determination and reunification processes have placed lives on hold, both in countries of arrival and back home. Inability to access work upon arrival in Europe also

[47] A05. Afghan male, Afghanistan.
[48] S17. Syrian female, Syria.
[49] S19. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.
[50] I13. Internally displaced male, Iraq.

changed family dynamics, in some cases leading to tensions and arguments with family members back home. In several cases, family members spoke of the disempowerment felt by those who had travelled to Europe, but continued to wait in reception centres for a decision. “My dad is depressed now” explained Wesam “as he has been away from us for a year and a half…he doesn’t even know how life is in Germany, since he never goes out.”[51]

Changes to intentions and aspirations

Unsurprisingly, the wide variety of mixed migration experiences covered in this assessment have affected families differently. However, when asked about whether they saw their situation as a positive or negative experience overall, slightly more than half described their experience of migration as negative, at least in the immediate term.

When disaggregated by nationality, Afghans and Syrians were most likely to see the effects of having moved as a negative experience, while for Iraqis the effects were more commonly positive or mixed. One possible explanation for this is due to the differing profile of those who moved. Compared to other nationalities, the sample of Iraqis contained a higher proportion of families reliant on government employment (a good source of income), as well as a higher proportion of families in which the main earner stayed – factors which are likely to have contributed to better outcomes for remaining family members.

Almost a third of all participants explained that their aspirations to travel to Europe had changed since their relatives had left – some becoming keener to travel than before and others much less so. Those planning a temporary, rather than a longer-term separation, were more likely to report that their aspirations had changed, most likely because more was at stake.

Box 6: Changing asylum and migration policies and challenges of reunification

The idea of leaving for Europe came from Ammar, the family’s 12-year old son. They had heard about other Syrian refugee families sending children to Europe and knew that it was easier to be granted family reunification this way, but his parents disagreed with the idea, especially his mother. One day, a few weeks after the initial idea, his father came home and told his wife that he had already bought the ticket for his son to go. In the same extended family, two other children (the boy’s cousins) were also travelling and the idea that they would go together gave everyone hope.

Ammar flew from Jordan to Algeria, accompanied by his cousins and another adult known to the family. From there, they crossed from Algeria to Italy, reaching Germany a month later in March 2014. Upon arrival the children were given support, and were eventually granted residency. Ammar’s permit was for only a year, meaning that he was not entitled to reunify with his parents. While they don’t understand why, Ammar’s cousins received a longer residency and were able to begin the process of family reunification.[52]

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[51] S20. Syrian refugee male, Jordan.
[52] S27. Syrian refugee male, Jordan.

All interviewed participants explained they kept regular contact with those who left, most commonly communicating via social media on a daily or weekly basis. Perhaps as a result of this, perceptions of life in Europe had often become more nuanced: "The reality of life in Europe is more difficult than we imagined" explained the brother of an Iraqi who had travelled to Germany.[53] Other family members expressed their relief at the kind treatment their relatives had received and the relative ease of integration: "We had some worries before about the differences between language and cultures…but [our son] explained to us about the care he received, access to services and the good quality of life in Germany and this makes us less worried."[54]

When asked about the possibility of future travel, the majority of those who had planned a temporary separation described their surprise at the length of the status determination process and their disappointment and frustration to learn that family reunification was either taking so long, or impossible altogether. In several cases, plans had been made based on an understanding of migration and asylum policies that subsequently changed, (see for example **Box 6**). Given the limited preparations in many cases, these families often constitute a particularly vulnerable group – those who remain often fall through the cracks in the provision of humanitarian aid, while those in Europe must wait in line together with other asylum seekers. For those who become frustrated with the process, there is often no easy way back either:

"My husband travelled to Germany, but received only a one year residency that did not allow for reunification. Back in Jordan, we had no support of any kind, so he tried to come back, but since he had left the country illegally, via Syria, he was not allowed to enter Jordan again. He stayed four days in Amman airport until they sent him back to Germany…We just want to be together, either in Europe or Jordan.[55]

[53] I03. Iraqi male, Iraq.
[54] I29. Iraqi female, Iraq.
[55] S04. Syrian refugee female, Jordan.

Figure 7: Summary of challenges and coping strategies employed as a result of mixed migration

The following table provides an overview of how family members left behind can be differently affected as a result of mixed migration. It is based only on the 90 interviews conducted and is not intended to be exhaustive.

What may happen to those who stay?	What strategies are used to cope?
Who leaves? Main earner (most commonly, the father, older brother or another **adult male**)	
- Reduced access to income and aid - Reduced access to livelihoods - Limited resources to pay rent - Increased burden on family finances due to the need to repay debt - Challenges related to mental health, due to concern about the one who left	**Women** (especially when left alone with young children): - Spend savings; sell household assets; reduce spending on other essentials - Take on (sometimes illegal) work; start home-based businesses; rely on extended family - Move to cheaper, lower quality rented housing; move in with relatives / other families **Sons** (especially the eldest remaining son)**:** - Take on additional work to contribute to household income - Drop out of school or studies to work **Daughters:** - Take on additional work to contribute to household income - Take over responsibilities, such as childcare, from other family members who have taken on work
Who leaves? Head of family (most commonly the father or another **adult male**)	
- Women and girls more vulnerable to harassment outside the home - Other family members, commonly the wife or eldest remaining son, step in to fill the role of head of household - Administrative challenges and delays when re-registering for humanitarian aid - Difficulties registering births and applying for official documentation - Challenges related to mental health, due to concern about the one who left	**Women:** - Limit leaving the house to avoid risk of harassment; send other family members to run errands instead - Rely on older sons or members of the extended family as chaperones - Take on greater responsibility for managing finances, taking decisions, and allocating spending **Sons** (especially the eldest remaining son)**:** - Step up to fill the role of head of household - Take on additional responsibilities in household management - Act as chaperone for women and girls **Daughters:** - Limit leaving the house to avoid risk of harassment - Rely on other family members as chaperones
Who leaves? Dependent child (most commonly a **young adult or adolescent male**)	
- Increased burden on family finances due to debt repayments - Reduced monthly aid payments, since family size is smaller - Challenges related to mental health, due to concern about the one who left	**Men** (father and older sons): - Take on additional work to afford debt repayments or compensate for reduced aid **Women** (mother and older daughters)**:** - Reduce household expenditure; take on additional work to afford debt repayments or compensate for reduced aid **-** Sell personal or household assets (eg. jewellery)
Who leaves? At-risk / vulnerable individual (someone facing a specific threat, chronically ill or elderly)	
- Increased burden on family finances due to debt repayments - Reduced monthly aid payments, since family size is smaller and vulnerability may have changed - Challenges related to mental health, due to concern about the one who left	**Men** (father and older sons): - Reduce household expenditure; take on additional work to afford debt repayments or compensate for reduced aid **Women** (mother and older daughters): - Reduce household expenditure; take on additional work to afford to debt repayments or compensate for reduced aid

Conclusion

This study focussed on the experience of Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian families, who had become separated by family members leaving for Europe. Based on 90 qualitative interviews with remaining family members in five countries, this research sought to answer two questions: i) How was the decision to move made within the family, and what were the influences on who stays and who goes?; and ii) How did this decision affect those left behind, in both practical and psychosocial terms?

This research found that the decision to move within families was influenced by multiple factors, which frequently overlapped. Moving was a coping strategy in response to a range of challenges affecting the whole family: ongoing conflict and insecurity, chronic unemployment, and a lack of access to good education. Like other coping strategies, it was not necessary for all family members to actually move in order to potentially benefit: over half of the families in our sample never intended for all individuals to migrate at all. Most decisions were made jointly by at least the nuclear family, who often discussed the idea for months before anyone actually left.

Those who decided to stay behind did so for a range of reasons, most of them particular to the individuals in question. Ties to a homeland, community, culture, family, livelihoods or studies all played a role in people's decisions to stay, but for displaced families, ties were weaker and tended to be more easily worn down by discrimination or broken by a sudden shock. In other cases, only the person who left faced a specific risk, or stood to benefit from moving more than others due to age or health, for example to take up educational opportunities or to access treatment for an acute condition.

For families who ultimately hoped to be reunited in Europe, plans to move were developed with care, taking into account available resources, exposure to risk and often a good understanding of the policies that might affect them upon arrival. Wherever possible, families tried to limit risk, sending those who were best able to make the journey first, so that safer, formal channels could be used for other, more vulnerable family members. Several families had only turned to irregular means when other legal channels were inaccessible or were perceived to have failed, highlighting the need to improve access to alternative legal migration pathways.

Aware of the dangers but desperate to leave, these families surrounded themselves with information they trusted – primarily from friends and family – which helped them to believe that the risks would be worth taking. Hoping that status determination and reunification would be quick, contingency planning for family members left behind was minimal (if considered at all) and usually inadequate, especially for displaced families who tended to have fewer resources and smaller support networks to fall back on.

Once a member of the family had left, the extent of contingency planning played a crucial role in determining the well-being of those who remained. The single most effective strategy observed in this study was for the main earner to stay behind, maintaining access to protection and livelihoods, and generally enabling the family to continue to meet their everyday needs.

In contrast, families in which the main breadwinner migrated were generally the most vulnerable to a range of challenges. When few financial resources and little support from the extended family were available, women left alone with young children were particularly vulnerable and often in need of external support. Despite this, administrative

challenges and a lack of awareness often delayed their access to humanitarian assistance or even prevented it all together. In addition to providing clear information about the need to re-register for assistance if the head of household leaves, aid actors should consider providing temporary support to address the needs of this vulnerable group and prevent the use of negative coping strategies, such as children dropping out of school to work. Assessments should take into account not only changes to household size, but also the extent of contingency planning and a person's progress through the asylum process elsewhere. Additional forms of support, such as skills training in household asset management, could also be beneficial to those left in charge of managing family finances for the first time.

In Europe, the lengthy processes of status determination and family reunification have placed lives on hold. Plans that families make to move are frequently influenced by an understanding of policy, but sudden changes – such as the introduction of 'subsidiary protection' in Germany – have prolonged separation and had negative consequences on those who remain, both practically and psychosocially.

For those who hoped to send remittances from Europe to family members left behind, the evidence from this study suggests that the time it takes to obtain asylum and establish oneself in Europe is frequently underestimated. Less than a quarter of those who mentioned planning to send remittances had sent any at all – and only among those who left before 2015, had the majority managed to send anything back. The vulnerability of families intending to rely on remittance payments from abroad is likely to decrease over time, but the limited evidence from this study suggests that it may easily take two years for such payments to come through. In the interim, families who gambled everything on sending someone may be especially vulnerable and in need of targeted support, both to meet their basic needs and manage the repayment of often significant debt.

Despite the challenges associated with the journey and the increasingly restrictive policies in place, people's initial ideas about migration were generally not altered by the departure of a family member. On the whole, those who planned a longer-term separation still intend to stay, while those who envisaged a temporary separation – often the most vulnerable members of the family – still hope to travel, yet understand that the process may be longer and more difficult than they imagined.

In many of these cases, slow asylum processes in Europe have contributed to families' vulnerability and limited their agency. Those awaiting status determination in Europe are unable to work to support their families, nor can they begin the process to reunite. At the same time, those left behind often lack support and are in greater need of humanitarian assistance than before.

Annex 1: List of participants

Form ID	Nationality	Gender	Age	Displacement status	Current location
A01	Afghan	Female	38	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A02	Afghan	Male	59	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A03	Afghan	Female	43	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A04	Afghan	Female	70	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A05	Afghan	Male	-	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A06	Afghan	Male	32	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A07	Afghan	Male	40	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A08	Afghan	Male	19	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A09	Afghan	Male	72	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A10	Afghan	Female	40	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A11	Afghan	Male	45	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A12	Afghan	Male	44	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A13	Afghan	Male	38	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A14	Afghan	Male	24	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A15	Afghan	Male	18	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A16	Afghan	Male	26	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A17	Afghan	Male	24	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A18	Afghan	Male	40	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A19	Afghan	Male	17	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A20	Afghan	Male	22	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A21	Afghan	Male	53	IDP	Afghanistan
A22	Afghan	Male	56	IDP	Afghanistan
A23	Afghan	Female	41	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A24	Afghan	Female	70	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A25	Afghan	Male	24	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A26	Afghan	Male	37	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A27	Afghan	Male	41	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A28	Afghan	Male	38	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A29	Afghan	Male	65	Non-displaced	Afghanistan
A30	Afghan	Male	30	IDP	Afghanistan
I01	Iraqi	Male	54	Refugee	Lebanon
I02	Iraqi	Female	44	Refugee	Lebanon
I03	Iraqi	Male	23	Non-displaced	Iraq
I04	Iraqi	Male	57	Non-displaced	Iraq
I05	Iraqi	Male	37	Non-displaced	Iraq
I06	Iraqi	Male	25	Non-displaced	Iraq
I07	Iraqi	Male	48	Non-displaced	Iraq
I08	Iraqi	Male	23	Non-displaced	Iraq
I09	Iraqi	Male	55	Non-displaced	Iraq
I10	Iraqi	Male	52	IDP	Iraq
I11	Iraqi	Male	62	IDP	Iraq
I12	Iraqi	Male	57	IDP	Iraq
I13	Iraqi	Male	72	IDP	Iraq
I14	Iraqi	Male	47	IDP	Iraq
I15	Iraqi	Male	63	IDP	Iraq

Form ID	Nationality	Gender	Age	Displacement status	Current location
I16	Iraqi	Male	42	IDP	Iraq
I17	Iraqi	Female	68	IDP	Iraq
I18	Iraqi	Female	48	IDP	Iraq
I19	Iraqi	Female	67	IDP	Iraq
I20	Iraqi	Female	37	IDP	Iraq
I21	Iraqi	Female	47	IDP	Iraq
I22	Iraqi	Female	76	IDP	Iraq
I23	Iraqi	Female	44	IDP	Iraq
I24	Iraqi	Female	50	Non-displaced	Iraq
I25	Iraqi	Female	52	Non-displaced	Iraq
I26	Iraqi	Female	53	Non-displaced	Iraq
I27	Iraqi	Female	19	Non-displaced	Iraq
I28	Iraqi	Female	45	Non-displaced	Iraq
I29	Iraqi	Female	42	Non-displaced	Iraq
I30	Iraqi	Female	65	Non-displaced	Iraq
S01	Syrian	Female	-	Refugee	Lebanon
S02	Syrian	Male	24	Refugee	Lebanon
S03	Syrian	Male	28	Refugee	Lebanon
S04	Syrian	Male	-	Refugee	Lebanon
S05	Syrian	Female	-	Refugee	Lebanon
S06	Syrian	Female	35	Refugee	Lebanon
S07	Syrian	Male	34	IDP	Syria
S08	Syrian	Male	55	IDP	Syria
S09	Syrian	Female	40	IDP	Syria
S10	Syrian	Male	-	IDP	Syria
S11	Syrian	Female	-	IDP	Syria
S12	Syrian	Male	-	IDP	Syria
S13	Syrian	Female	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S14	Syrian	Male	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S15	Syrian	Male	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S16	Syrian	Female	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S17	Syrian	Female	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S18	Syrian	Female	-	Non-displaced	Syria
S19	Syrian	Female	35	Refugee	Jordan
S20	Syrian	Male	47	Refugee	Jordan
S21	Syrian	Male	20	Refugee	Jordan
S22	Syrian	Female	42	Refugee	Jordan
S23	Syrian	Female	34	Refugee	Jordan
S24	Syrian	Female	36	Refugee	Jordan
S25	Syrian	Female	42	Refugee	Jordan
S26	Syrian	Female	45	Refugee	Jordan
S27	Syrian	Male	47	Refugee	Jordan
S28	Syrian	Male		Refugee	Jordan
S29	Syrian	Male	59	Refugee	Jordan
S30	Syrian	Male	24	Refugee	Jordan

Further details about the methodology used for this study are available in the research terms of reference and questioning route.

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