

Urban Refugees in the Dilemma of Integration and Differentiation: Syrian Refugees in Ar-Ramtha

Ola Majthoub

PhD student, National University of Public Service

Abstract

This study delved into the social acceptance process of urban refugees, investigating its significance as a pivotal barrier to their local integration. Following a comprehensive theoretical foundation, the research examined variables influencing refugee social acceptance and factors impacting this process, employing a survey method with a sample size of 519 individuals in Ar-Ramtha city. The analysis uncovered compelling insights. Overall, the study revealed a notably positive level of social acceptance toward refugees within the local population. Across various dimensions—community acceptance, expectations, adaptation, security, economic and legal integration, and social integration—refugees received moderately high mean scores, indicating a generally favourable perception of their integration within the community. Moreover, the hypotheses scrutinising the influence of demographic and socio-economic factors—gender, marital status, age, education level, and income—on social acceptance levels produced intriguing results. These factors showcased no significant impact on the perceived social acceptance among refugees. Despite diverse backgrounds, refugees experienced a relatively uniform level of social acceptance, suggesting a more inclusive and consistent attitude towards their integration within Ar-Ramtha. Understanding these findings is pivotal in fostering an environment that embraces and supports the integration of refugees into the local community.

Keywords: urban refugees, social acceptance, local integration, local-population refugee relations, Syrian refugees

JEL codes: R23

Introduction

Urbanisation and globalisation have profoundly affected social, economic, and cultural domains, as well as migration and asylum processes. Due to globalisation, internal migration from rural to urban areas, driven by the desire to access urban resources, has reached unprecedented levels. However, when urban areas cannot adequately respond to migration, the urban population exceeds sustainable levels (Lischer, 2005). Consequently, issues such as unemployment, informal labour, marginalisation, and illegal activities emerge, leading to a deterioration of urban environments and the desired image of a modern city.

Urban refugees also contribute to the pressures faced by urban areas. Individuals who seek asylum in cities often come from conflict-ridden regions, where their living conditions have been compromised. Urban areas, with their attractions and opportunities, have become the ultimate destination for many refugees, replacing traditional refugee camps (Bloch & Levy, 2011). While cities can provide economic self-sufficiency, access to services, and a sense of security, they also pose unique challenges for refugees (Chalmiers, 2020).

Refugees in urban areas encounter difficulties like those faced by other refugee groups, but they also experience specific issues. The response of urban refugees to these challenges, as well as the policies and attitudes of the local population, local governments, national states, and the international community, directly impact the quality of life for this population. Consequently, urban refugees either integrate into the urban fabric and contribute to local economies or live in isolation, relying heavily on external assistance (Hanieh, 2011). In this context, a comprehensive analysis of the social, economic, and political dimensions of the areas where urban refugees reside is essential for sustainable urban development, especially in cities where refugee visibility is high. This study focuses on the dilemma of integration and differentiation faced by Syrian refugees in Ar-Ramtha, exploring the level of social acceptance within the local community.

1. Integration

There is no universally accepted definition, theory, or model for immigrant and refugee integration, as evidenced by the existence of 49 different definitions and related topics. One of the broader meanings of integration is the interactive process between newcomers (immigrants or refugees) and the native host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Integration, which refers to adaptation and assimilation, implies overcoming social disconnection between individuals. It can be understood as the stability of relationships as a whole, emphasising the harmonious interaction between subunits (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

1.1.Social integration

The concept of social integration encompasses diverse theoretical and conceptual perspectives, reflecting the complexity of social phenomena. Social integration also involves maintaining or improving relationships within a system or structure, reflecting dynamic and balanced communication (Perşembe, 2005). Regarding refugees and asylum seekers, social integration primarily occurs at the local level, with local and regional actors playing a significant role in facilitating the process (Martin, 2013). The social integration of immigrants is shaped by the interaction between immigrant activities and specific social conditions characterised by incentives, opportunities, constraints, and costs (Esser, 2006). Immigrant integration within a host society can be understood as a distinct manifestation of social integration, involving settlement, acculturation, interaction, and identity processes (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The degree of social integration is influenced by the content and scope of available opportunities and constraints.

Moreover, enabling social integration between refugees and host communities involves a complex interplay of factors aimed at fostering acceptance, understanding, and cohesion. Exposure stands out as a critical enabler, offering host community members opportunities to interact with refugees personally, whether in structured settings like workplaces or through informal one-on-one meetings. These interactions provide avenues for empathy building, relationship formation, and the dismantling of stereotypes. Shared spaces, such as schools, also play a pivotal role in facilitating interactions between individuals from different communities, allowing for the development of friendships and mutual understanding (Catholic Relief Services, 2024; Aktan, 2022).

Community education initiatives play a significant role in fostering social integration by raising awareness and dispelling misinformation about refugees' experiences and challenges. These efforts seek to educate both host community members and refugees about each other's backgrounds, cultures, and rights, thereby mitigating prejudice and promoting empathy (Aktan, 2022).

The presence of a common cultural identity, such as a shared language or ethnicity, serves as a catalyst for social integration. Communities that share cultural features often experience greater acceptance and cohesion, as individuals bond over shared experiences, traditions, and values. Thought leaders, including community and national leaders, also influence public opinion and shape attitudes towards refugees (Sengupta & Blessinger, 2018). Their advocacy efforts create an environment conducive to social acceptance and inclusion by promoting empathy, understanding, and solidarity across diverse communities. By challenging stereotypes and

combating discrimination, thought leaders contribute to fostering a culture of empathy and compassion towards refugees.

In considering the dynamics of social integration, it's crucial to acknowledge the role of gender within host communities. Gender norms and expectations can influence how individuals from different genders engage with refugees. For instance, women in the host community may play a pivotal role in fostering social connections and empathy towards refugees, particularly through informal networks and community support initiatives (Catholic Relief Services, 2024). Conversely, gender-based stereotypes may shape attitudes and behaviours towards refugee integration. These stereotypes may intersect with broader societal norms, affecting the extent to which refugees, especially women, are included in social integration initiatives.

Gender-sensitive approaches are essential for addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by refugee women within host communities. Initiatives that prioritise gender equality and empowerment contribute to creating inclusive spaces where all individuals feel valued and respected, ultimately fostering social cohesion and inclusion across diverse communities (Perşembe, 2005).

1.2. Structural integration

Structural integration, which is one of the dimensions of social integration, refers to the acquisition of rights and access to positions and status within the core institutions of the host society, such as the economy and labour market, education and qualification systems, housing system, healthcare system, and political citizenship. Vermeulen and Penninx (1994), as well as Dagevos (2001), divide the concept of integration into two parts. The first part, which is structural integration, defines participation in social institutions. The other part is socio-cultural integration, which describes individuals' social interactions and cultural adaptation to society. Similarly, Veenman (1995) acknowledges these two aspects but argues that the attitudes of integrated individuals should also be taken into account (Wright, 2009).

According to Martikainen (2010), structural integration involves immigrants participating in various sectors and institutions of society—such as the economy, education, politics, and religion—and sometimes forming parallel structures that reflect their own cultural or community needs. The structural dimension of integration can be defined as the full participation of immigrants in central social institutions, especially the education system and the labour market (Snel et al., 2006). Institutions such as education and the economy, which are at the core of structural integration, play a significant role in the successful integration processes of newly arrived refugees into society.

1.3. Cultural integration

Cultural integration, which is one of the dimensions of social integration, generally refers to knowing the language of the host country and adhering to certain understandings and basic norms of the migrant society (Hamberger, 2009). Integration enables immigrants to adapt to and live in harmony with the society they are foreign to. When the cultural dimension of integration is completed, immigrants acquire the ability to behave according to social norms (Aigüzel, 2016).

Berry (1994, 1997) builds on the concept of integration as a process that recognises the changing nature of both immigrant groups and host societies, leading to the emergence of new identities. Integration, in this sense, emerges as a dimension of the acculturation process (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014). This means that immigrants acquiring and utilising the cultural practices of the countries they migrate to in their daily lives will serve as a means to accelerate social adaptation and acceptance. According to Berry (1997), integration is a process in which individuals and groups actively maintain their cultural identity within a larger social framework, emphasising the importance of mutual accommodation and compromise in the process of integration. The realisation of integration requires the belief in the ability of the minority and the mainstream society to coexist. The minority community accelerates the integration process by embracing the basic characteristics of the mainstream society, while the mainstream society contributes to the process by making arrangements that will benefit the minority community (Saygin & Hasta, 2018).

1.4. Interactive integration

Integration is multidimensional and not a linear process (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014). Interactive integration refers to the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants into the primary relationships and social networks of the host society. Indicators of this include social networks, friendships, partnerships, marriages, and membership in voluntary organisations (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The realisation of interactive integration requires the voluntary participation of both communities. In the case of voluntarism, a pragmatic attitude is not involved. The participation of newcomers in the labour market of the community they join may be a result of local employers preferring them as a cheap labour source or as a source of labour needed by the business. While a more pragmatic approach is present in the economic integration dimension, voluntary participation and interactions of individuals/communities are involved in the interactive integration dimension.

1.5. Identity integration

Identity integration, the fourth dimension of social integration, develops over time as a result of participation and acceptance in the process of integration. The mutual interactions of all dimensions of integration lie at the heart of the conditions for achieving identity integration. The culture can't exist in society without being influenced by the identity, and the economy cannot exist either without being influenced by the social environment. Identity integration policies can be listed as multiculturalism policies, recognition policies of secular and religious organisations of immigrants, and the promotion of the culture of acceptance of citizenship (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

1.6. Gender dynamics and integration

Ager and Strang (2008) have developed one of the most widely cited integration frameworks, aiming to identify key indicators of successful integration. Their framework defines successful integration through achievements in four areas: (1) access to employment, housing, education, and health; (2) facilitators and barriers such as language, culture, and the local environment; (3) social connections within the community and with other groups and institutions; and (4) the foundation, including access to rights and services. While Ager and Strang's conceptual model provides a valuable framework for understanding integration, it does have some limitations. For instance, it places significant emphasis on functional indicators but pays relatively little attention to the 'private sphere' of integration (Brown, 2018). This refers to the importance of adapting one's cultural and religious values to the receiving society. Şimşek (2020) emphasised that integration entails navigating shifts in identities and cultures across time, as well as building relationships with peers in host societies, aspects that extend beyond the easily quantifiable variables investigated by Ager and Strang (2008). Moreover, Ager and Strang's model appears to focus primarily on the collective refugee household as the main unit of analysis, which can overlook the perspectives of individual family members, such as wives, husbands, and children, who may have different roles and responsibilities within the household. Therefore, it is important to focus on the experiences and viewpoints of each family member and how they perceive their adjustment to a new living environment (Duong, 2018). The process of integration affects men and women differently. Displacement is commonly associated with disrupting people's lives, but it can also lead to "positive" changes, including gender empowerment (Asaf, 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014). Being separated from traditional social systems can create opportunities for the "*reconstruction and renegotiation of gender and other social relations*" in the context of exile (Grabska, 2006). Research indicates that

significant changes in gender norms and roles enable refugee women to experience new-found freedom and mobility. Forced migration often enables refugee women to pursue further education and employment, which enhances their autonomy, self-confidence, and involvement in household decision-making (Matsuoka & Sorensen, 1999). Additionally, aid organisations provide women with knowledge about their rights and legislation that protects them from abuse and exploitation (Lukunka, 2011).

As gender roles and responsibilities begin to shift, marital relationships can become strained. While forced migration may provide expanded opportunities and responsibilities for women, it often constrains men by altering their traditional status and role (Donaldson & Howson, 2009; Marlowe, 2012). Grabska and Fanjoy's (2015) research on refugees in Canada reveals that displacement often results in men losing their privileged position within the household and community due to challenges posed by gender equality discourses and the increasing authority of women. Male adult refugees are often expected to engage in unfamiliar domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and assisting with children's school activities, which may diminish their culturally valued role as the household breadwinner (Matsuoka & Sorensen, 1999; Nasser-Eddin, 2017). Consequently, these male refugees express feelings of a lack of achievement, frustration, and low self-esteem. Additionally, resettled refugee couples must navigate internal issues stemming from reconfigurations of cultural practices in the absence of senior family members who typically mediate family conflicts (Losoncz, 2019). Disagreements or conflicts arising from changes in gender roles can remain unresolved and sometimes lead to disruption and separation (Renzaho et al., 2011). While reconfiguring gender responsibilities is often necessary for integration into a new environment, the literature suggests that internalising and adopting these changes can be a contested process, particularly for individuals equipped with different practices and norms related to gender and cultural values.

2. Refugees' preferences for urban areas, processes of integration, discrimination in urban areas, and the challenges they face

Refugees are increasingly drawn to urban areas due to access to services, livelihood opportunities, and social networks, while the limited protection and opportunities in camps often push them toward cities (Crisp, Morris, & Refstie, 2012). Refugees residing in urban areas face greater protection risks compared to those in camps. They often receive limited material assistance, education, healthcare, housing, and social support. Uncertain legal statuses and the fear of apprehension can impede refugees' access

to these services. Moreover, bureaucratic, legal, and political authorities may not always support refugees' desire to live in urban areas (Lammers, 2007). Despite these challenges, refugees are drawn to cities due to the hope of overcoming difficulties and other appealing factors. There are three types of spatial organisation for refugees' living arrangements. The first type occurs in countries where camp policies are not enforced, and all refugees reside in urban areas. This model is commonly observed in developed countries. The second type entails strict enforcement of camp policies, with severe consequences for leaving the camp to isolate refugees from local dynamics and confine them within the camp environment. The third type involves a combination of the first two, allowing refugees to choose between living in camps or urban areas. In some cases, countries may officially maintain refugee camps but unofficially tolerate refugees living in urban areas. There is often interconnectivity between camp and urban areas, with urban areas serving as a source of livelihood for camp refugees (Baban et al., 2017). Refugees may venture into urban areas for work or trade during the day, sending money back to their families in the camps or returning after earning a certain amount. Limited income sources in camps make even modest financial gains significant for enhancing their status. This dynamic is also observed among Syrian refugees in Jordan, where many leave the camps daily to seek employment opportunities and earn income in urban areas (Betts & Collier, 2017).

2.1. Urban preferences of refugees

The characteristics of urban refugees can vary depending on the size of the host country. Irregular migration is not common in developed countries due to their border control capabilities and the enforcement of legal regulations. Refugees who come through the process of resettlement in developed countries tend to reside in urban areas. In developing countries, where border controls may be lacking and socio-economic structures, political factors, and cultural norms play a role, the number of illegal refugees is higher. According to the latest report by UNHCR (2023), 81% of refugees live in developing countries. This percentage has increased from 70% a decade ago, indicating that the share of developed countries in receiving refugees is growing due to their protectionist/security-oriented approach and recent asylum movements, highlighting the fact that the burden-sharing in refugee crises is not being done fairly. Urban areas where urban refugees currently reside can be divided into three main categories. Furthermore, there are similarities in the preferences of refugees who seek asylum in cities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who migrate within the country. When conflicts and crises are prolonged in the living spaces of refugees and IDPs, this typology turns into a ladder, and competition arises to reach the top level.

2.1.1. Urban background

The lifestyle of refugees in their home countries influences their preferences for living and settlement in the host country. Individuals who have lived in urban areas and lack sufficient knowledge of rural living conditions may face difficulties in adapting to camps and rural areas. Urban areas, where they can utilise their education, skills, and experiences, are considered a more suitable option for integration (Jacobsen, 2004; Marfleet, 2007; Sommers, 2001). The education levels of refugees living in cities are an important indicator in this regard (Kibreab, 1996; Macchiavello, 2004; Banki, 2006). Kibreab (1996) noted that the most significant qualitative difference between rural and urban refugees lies in their education levels. Specifically, 76% of urban refugees have received formal education, while 78% of rural refugees lack any formal education. Machiavello's (2004) findings also indicate that most urban refugees are educated urban residents. Among the interviewed individuals, 70% had at least a high school education before seeking asylum, and 30% had received a university education. Additionally, there are many professionals, such as academics, researchers, teachers, engineers, and musicians among them. Some refugees have sought asylum while pursuing their education and are looking for opportunities to complete their studies. In another study, it was found that almost half of the interviewed Burmese refugees residing in Tokyo were professionals (Banki, 2006).

2.1.2. Family and kinship connections

Many refugees choose to settle in urban areas with the support of family members or relatives who have previously established themselves there. These family and kinship connections serve as a vital mechanism for refugees to adapt and navigate the urban environment. The impact of family and kinship ties on the process of seeking refuge in urban areas can be observed in two distinct ways (Kelberer, 2017). Firstly, refugees may settle in urban areas where family members or relatives who were previously refugees have already established a presence. Secondly, refugees may seek asylum in urban areas where their family members or relatives are citizens of the host country, via the existence of ghetto-like structures. These structures, characterised by ethnic segregation in urban areas, can provide valuable support for newcomers as they adjust to their new surroundings. Although segregation is subject to criticism, they are considered beneficial for facilitating the integration of refugees into the urban community. Family connections and social networks among refugees from the same country offer opportunities for employment, housing, and access to financial services such as debt and credit facilities in urban areas (Jacobsen, 2004).

2.1.3. Access to services

In the face of forced displacement, individuals are presented with the opportunity to seek refuge in environments that can support their livelihood optimally. Beyond mere escape from repression and violence, the availability of essential resources for sustaining life assumes significant importance. (Ramsay, 2019) The concept of livelihood, widely discussed in refugee literature, encompasses access to resources and services that enhance the economic well-being of refugees confronting conflict and displacement. It aims to mitigate vulnerabilities stemming from the conflict environment and to achieve the necessary prerequisites for survival and potential return (Jacobsen, 2002). For refugees to sustain their lives, they must have access to a variety of essential resources and services, including employment, adequate housing, healthcare, education, and both institutional and social support systems, such as material assistance from humanitarian organisations (Crawford & Holloway, 2024).

2.1.4. Security

Security is a critical aspect for refugees in their quest to maintain their lives. While refugees aspire to live a good life, their primary need is to seek security, food, shelter, and healthcare opportunities (Orhan, 2014). If the security vulnerabilities that forced them to seek asylum persist in the host environment, it can have detrimental consequences for refugees. Research conducted on Eritrean refugees in the United States and Canada has shown that refugees tend to settle in environments where they feel safe, leading to the formation of families. Compared to temporary or legally insecure countries like Sudan or Egypt, refugees who attain legal status and find a safer living environment in other countries experience increased rates of marriage and childbirth (Ajygin, 1997). This highlights the significance of refugees ensuring their security before they can rebuild their lives.

The issue of security, which influences refugees' preference for urban areas over camps, has multiple dimensions. The perceived threats can be categorised into three types: threats posed by the host country and its citizens towards refugees in camps (Crisp et al., 2009), threats posed by their own countries towards refugees (Sommers, 2001), and threats posed by refugees towards each other. Firstly, conflicts over the use of natural resources in camp environments can result in violent confrontations with the local population. Particularly in camps where material aid is irregular or scarce, refugees may become a threat to the camp surroundings. Despite efforts to minimise tensions and interactions between camps and the local population, such situations frequently arise. Consequently, security vulnerabilities in refugee camps become significant factors driving refugees to

seek refuge in urban areas. UNHCR (2023) reports cite instances of refugees, particularly women, fleeing from incidents of sexual assault and killings in camps when they seek asylum in cities. Secondly, refugee camps can serve as recruitment grounds for militant groups or nation-states seeking to enlist soldiers. These camps are perceived as potential sources of radicalisation and terrorist activities. Due to limited educational opportunities, low living standards, and limited prospects for the future, young refugees can be exploited by illegal organisations (Betts & Collier, 2017).

2.2. Challenges faced by urban refugees

When refugees choose to migrate to urban areas in search of respite from the hardships they face in rural areas or camps, they often find themselves confronted with a new set of challenges. These challenges arise from various factors, including the legal framework, economic and social structures, national and local refugee policies, as well as their interactions with the local population of the host country (Coddington, 2018). Paradoxically, the very factors that drew refugees to the city can become the sources of problems they encounter there. It is important to note that many of these challenges are not exclusive to refugees but also affect the local population in underdeveloped countries. However, for refugees who seek peace and stability, the existing difficulties can become an additional burden. In this regard, the challenges faced by refugees in urban areas can be categorised into two groups: general challenges and specific challenges (JRC & IFRC, 2012). General challenges refer to the hardships that refugees commonly experience in urban areas, these challenges encompass extreme poverty, high rates of unemployment, economic hardships, inadequate access to essential services, limited availability of education and healthcare, infrastructure issues, food and housing insecurity, political marginalization, and security concerns (Jacobsen, 2006). Urban refugees also encounter specific problems that are unique to their situation, distinguishing them from other impoverished groups. Firstly, refugees can be subjected to individual or systemic violence, human rights violations, torture, and harassment, which can lead to physical and mental health issues as they endure long and arduous journeys. The prevalence of infectious diseases and stress-related mental disorders among refugees can be attributed to these factors (Jacobsen, 2006). Secondly, refugees face challenges related to their legal status. While international agreements mandate that nation-states provide assistance and protection to asylum seekers regardless of their legal status, in practice, these provisions often focus on refugees residing in camps, leaving those in urban areas overlooked. Consequently, urban refugees grapple with a lack of clear legal status, residing in an undocumented state, limited knowledge about their rights and how to

exercise them, language barriers in socio-economic interactions, arbitrary and unlawful arrests, threats of deportation, economic exploitation, bribery and abuse by authorities, discrimination, difficulties accessing services, social isolation, and segregation in urban areas, as well as xenophobia and discrimination (Jacobsen, 2006).

2.2.1. Legal status and registration issues

Urban refugees in many countries worldwide find themselves living in urban areas without legal documentation or with special statuses that lack international validity, as their presence is not officially recognised. Although many governments turn a blind eye to their existence, the uncertainty surrounding their legal status directly impacts their quality of life and sense of security (Al-Zaghlool, 2016). In numerous underdeveloped countries, governments adopt a camp policy that intentionally denies legal recognition or assigns different statuses to urban refugees, leaving them in a state of legal limbo, despite being well aware of their presence, numbers, and characteristics. The lack of legal status experienced by urban refugees contributes significantly to the challenges they face. Uncertainty surrounding their legal status affects every aspect of their lives. The absence of legal documentation and the prevalence of irregular migration place them at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing employment opportunities, healthcare, and education services, as well as the freedom to travel (Grab-ska & Jacobsen, 2006). In developing countries where enforcing border security is a complex task, authorities are often unable to prevent refugees from entering. To exert psychological pressure on refugees to return, governments implement policies denying them legal status. While there may be exceptions for settling outside camps in countries that strictly adhere to the camp policy, such exceptions are limited to specific cases, such as individuals undergoing the resettlement process, those in need of medical or psychological care, those requiring education, and those facing security threats within the camps (Kreichauf, 2018). Apart from these exceptional circumstances, legally leaving the camps becomes an impractical option. Refugees are left with no choice but to either reside within the confines of the camps or resort to illegal means to live in urban areas. However, leaving the camps without a guaranteed legal status exposes them to legal risks. Although authorities may tolerate their presence to some extent, even minor negative incidents can result in sanctions such as deportation or imprisonment (Jacobsen, 2006).

2.2.2. Economic challenges, unemployment, and exploitation

Unemployment poses a significant challenge in underdeveloped countries, particularly impacting urban refugees. A primary cause is the lack of skilled labour, exacerbating the already competitive job market. Urban refugees face additional hurdles such as cultural and language barriers, xenophobia, labour regulations, and exploitation, further hindering their employment prospects. Refugees require essential resources like housing and necessities to survive in urban areas. Unlike those in camps who often receive accommodations and aid, urban refugees, particularly in places like Jordan, must navigate higher living costs and the need to generate income. As the asylum process lengthens, refugees utilising their financial resources from their home countries may slide into poverty, necessitating employment. Many refugees, rather than viewing themselves as temporary asylum seekers awaiting the end of the conflict, see themselves as migrants striving to adapt to their new lives, uncertain about the possibility of returning home (Bloemraad et al, 2008).

2.2.3. Challenges in accessing services

Urban administrators face the daunting task of sustaining cities amidst a significant influx of refugees. Providing services to urban refugees, many of whom reside illegally or in unknown numbers, presents a dilemma. While officials aim to prevent further influx, they must also offer services to make cities livable. Emergency action plans in Jordan effectively cater to refugees in camps, yet challenges persist in serving those in urban areas (Ramsay, 2019).

Efforts to extend public services to urban refugees have encountered obstacles such as a lack of legal frameworks guiding access and coordination issues among service providers. The marginalisation of refugees, as identified by Grabska (2006), encompasses economic, cultural, political, and social dimensions, resulting from denying access to rights and services, systematic discrimination, and refugees' preference for isolation. However, such policies impede integration and have adverse implications for human rights and economic development. (Alloway, 2016).

2.2.4. Education issues

Ensuring the continuation of education for refugees in the host country is a crucial problem area (Jacobsen, 2006). Deliberate neglect or obstruction of refugees' educational rights by host states serves as a tool to incentivise their return (Grabska, 2006). The ability of refugees to continue their education is of vital importance for their integration into the country of asy-

lum (Campbell, 2006). This becomes even more significant when considering the high levels of education among urban refugees before seeking asylum (Kibreab, 1996; Macchiavello, 2004). Despite the essential nature of education, accessing educational opportunities is often costly in practice, even if legally permitted, and the majority of refugees cannot afford to benefit from these opportunities due to financial reasons (Jacobsen, 2006). Grabska (2006) notes that Sudanese refugee children in Cairo, who have legal permits, are unable to exercise their right to education due to bureaucratic processes, overcrowded classrooms, and discrimination faced by the children. According to Morris's (2010) estimates, only a quarter of Somali children among urban refugees in Yemen are enrolled in school, and most of these children face difficulties regarding uniforms, books, transportation, and food (2007).

2.2.5. Healthcare service issues

The provision of healthcare services for refugees and asylum seekers varies across different countries and is often insufficient, even in developed nations. Globally, refugees encounter significant obstacles in accessing essential healthcare services such as counselling, preventive care, diagnosis, treatment options, and medication (Mishori & Hannaford, 2018). Several factors contribute to these challenges, including limited awareness and experience of healthcare workers regarding refugees' specific needs, language barriers, cultural differences, difficulties in adapting to foreign healthcare systems, lack of information about healthcare rights, reluctance to report cases of abuse or assault, and financial constraints (Dreyden & Peterson, 2006). The right to health, as outlined by the World Health Organisation, encompasses refugees, aiming to ensure access to healthcare services for everyone (Karanja, 2010). Various legal frameworks and guidelines regulate the delivery of healthcare services to refugees, striving to uphold their right to health.

2.2.6. Security issues

Refugees, among the most vulnerable groups in any society, face numerous security challenges, especially in urban areas. Fleeing to cities in order to escape insecurity in rural areas and camps exposes refugees to different security risks. Heightened security threats often lead to increased control over refugees, resulting in human rights violations such as detention, discrimination, racist attacks, deportation, sexual assault, or arbitrary arrests, irrespective of their reasons for seeking asylum (Dreyden & Peterson, 2004). Urban refugees, lacking legal recognition, encounter difficulties in reporting human rights violations, fearing reprisals and deportation.

This fear often silences them in the face of injustices, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation (Dreyden & Peterson, 2004).

3. Research on the social acceptance of urban refugees

The research was conducted in Ar-Ramtha between November and December 2023. The crisis of Syrian refugees, which is considered the largest displacement process since World War II, has been at the forefront of discussions on the culture of social acceptance and social integration in Jordan, as well as in neighbouring countries. The Syrian refugee crisis, which presents a highly dynamic, multifaceted, and evolving situation, varies according to time, place, and various factors. In this section, the perception of the local population towards refugees will be analysed as one of the most influential factors in the process of integration and differentiation of refugees in the urban context.

3.1. General information about the research

This section will provide information about the purpose, significance, assumptions, limitations, methodology, sample selection, underlying model, hypotheses, and reliability analysis of the conducted field research.

3.1.1. Purpose of the research

Studies related to refugees are conducted in two dimensions. Most studies focus on identifying and analysing the socio-economic and psychological conditions of refugees. In these studies, the impact of the conditions in the country of asylum on refugees is determined, and refugees are treated as passive factors. The other dimension used in refugee studies is the socio-economic and psychological effects of refugees on the elements of the host country. In these studies, refugees are considered active factors, and the effects on the conditions of the host country are analysed from the perspective of the local population. The main purpose of this research is to measure the level of social acceptance of refugees living in the urban area, based on the example of Ar-Ramtha city. In this regard, the variables influencing the phenomenon of social acceptance and the sub-dimensions of the social acceptance process will be addressed.

3.1.2. Assumptions of the research

The assumptions of the research are as follows:

- The surveys obtained as a result of the field research provide reliable results when erroneous and incomplete ones are eliminated.

- Participants understand the survey questions correctly and answer them accurately without any misleading factors.
- The representativeness of the selected sample groups is sufficient.
- The findings apply to other cities similar to Ar-Ramtha.
- The "social acceptance scale" used in the research is suitable for the research purpose and testing of the research hypotheses.
- The statistical tests used are appropriate for the research objective and for determining the results.

3.1.3. Limitations of the research

In this study, the level of social acceptance of refugees by the local population was examined in Ar-Ramtha city sample. There are some limitations in terms of the quantitative aspects of the research that stem from the geographical area and the applied methodology. Since the research findings can vary according to demographic, social, and economic infrastructures, conducting the research in a specific region poses geographical limitations. Particularly, noticeable variations in research results can be expected in different cities with different socio-economic structures. Some studies have highlighted differences between cities near the Syrian border, which serve as major hubs for recent refugee movements, and other cities where the refugee population is minimal or non-existent.

There are also limitations regarding the nature of the research. For example, when examining the sub-dimensions of the "social acceptance" process, many different factors and variables that can influence the level of social acceptance can be involved. Factors such as historical prejudices, cultural, ethnic, and religious similarities and differences, social relationships, economic expectations, perceptions, and relationships are just some of the factors that can be research subjects on their own. Moreover, due to its interdisciplinary nature, comprehensively addressing methods, concepts, and approaches from various disciplines would fall outside the scope of this research.

3.1.4. Research methodology

The research is an exploratory study based on a literature review and applies an analytical approach to a specific case. The study's results and influential factors on the variables were analysed through a carefully selected sample. Since the main objective of the research is to determine the difference in the level of social acceptance based on specific variables, a specific case exploration method was used instead of a general review, and a restricted sample method was applied instead of simple random

sampling methods. The aim was to obtain quantifiable data that enables statistical analysis of all specified variables. The research sample consists of individuals aged 18 and above residing in the city of Ramtha and its immediate surroundings.

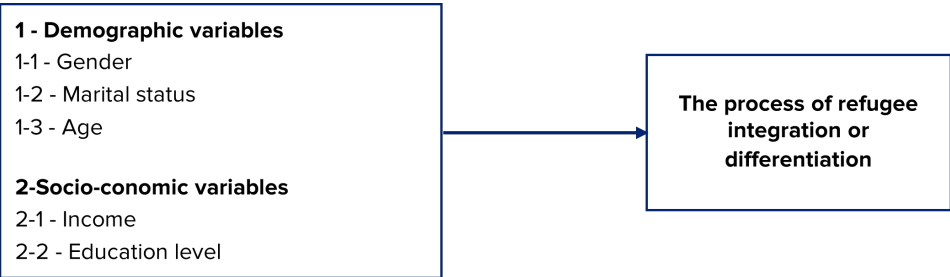
The neighbourhoods where the research was conducted were chosen to reflect a range of social and economic conditions, as well as different patterns of refugee distribution. In the data collection phase, a total of 519 questionnaires were distributed to the target audience within the research framework using two approaches: structured face-to-face interviews conducted by trained fieldworkers (200 questionnaires), and street-based surveys administered in public spaces due to limited access to participants' homes (319 questionnaires). Responses were recorded based on participants' interactions to ensure seriousness and reduce errors. The target population was selected randomly within the restricted sampling framework.

The "level of social acceptance" questionnaire used in the research consists of two main sections. The first part of the questionnaire includes questions related to demographic information, including age, gender, marital status, education, and monthly income. The second part of the questionnaire includes the "social acceptance scale". The scale consists of a set of 39 questions, which were adopted based on the researcher's scales for analysing residents' perceptions of refugees and migration. A five-point Likert scale was used, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree," 2 to "disagree," 3 to "neutral," 4 to "agree," and 5 to "strongly agree." Negative statements were reverse-scored during the analysis.

3.1.5. Research model and hypotheses

According to the research model shown in Figure 1, demographic and socio-economic variables are the variables that influence the "social acceptance level".

Figure 1: Research model for social acceptance level



Source: Edited by the author

The study question from the field study conducted to measure the level of social acceptance of refugees was as follows: What is the depth of perception of refugees towards their acceptance within the local community?

Hypotheses:

- H1: The level of social acceptance varies significantly based on gender.
- H2: The level of social acceptance varies significantly based on marital status.
- H3: The level of social acceptance increases with age.
- H4: The level of social acceptance increases with a higher education level.
- H5: The level of social acceptance increases with higher income.

3.1.6. Reliability of the study

The most common method used to measure the internal consistency of the research scale is Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The Alpha value ranges from 0 to 1, and it is desirable to have a value of at least 0.7. Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the research. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) determined through the reliability analysis of the subscales used in the questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability analysis of the social acceptance level scale

Scales	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Basis of acceptance	5	0.850
Expectations	5	0.722
Visualisation of adaptation	3	0.722
Perception of security	3	0.846
Economic competition	4	0.805
Economic integration	4	0.799
Legal integration	5	0.899
Social integration	10	0.849
Social acceptance scale	39	0.940

Source: Edited by the author

As indicated in Table 1, it has been observed that all subscales of the "social acceptance scale" have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.722 to 0.899. These coefficients suggest the internal consistency and

reliability of each scale. Generally, a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7 is considered acceptable for research purposes, indicating that the items in the scale are reliably measuring the same underlying construct. The total social acceptance scale also shows a high level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.940, suggesting strong reliability for the combined items.

Table 2: Sample characteristics of field research (N = 519)

	Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Female	254	48.9%
	Male	265	51.1%
Marital status	Divorced/widowed	73	14.1%
	Married	281	54.1%
	Single	165	31.8%
Age	18-24	136	26.2%
	25-34	239	46.1%
	35-55	127	24.5%
	Over 55	17	3.3%
Education level	No formal education	15	2.9%
	Undergraduate education	148	28.5%
	Primary education	120	23.1%
	Secondary education	223	43.0%
	Postgraduate education	13	2.5%
Income	1 - 100 JD	92	17.7%
	101 - 245 JD	87	16.8%
	246 - 400 JD	142	27.4%
	401 - 700 JD	81	15.6%
	More than 700	26	5.0%
	No income	91	17.5%

Source: Edited by the author

The gender distribution of the participants in the survey is 48.9% female and 51.1% male. The age ranges are as follows: 18-24 years old (26.2%), 25-34 years old (46.1%), 35-55 years old (24.5%), and over 55 years old (3.3%). In terms of marital status, 31.8% of the participants are single, while

54.1% are married, and 14.1% are divorced/widowed. Regarding education, 2.9% have no formal education, 23.1% have completed primary education, 43.0% have completed secondary education, 28.5% have undergraduate education, and 2.5% have postgraduate education.

Income distribution among participants is as follows: 17.7% earn between 1-100 JD, 16.8% earn between 101-245 JD, 27.4% earn between 246-400 JD, 15.6% earn between 401-700 JD, 5.0% earn more than 700 JD, and 17.5% have no reported income.

4. Factors affecting the social acceptance process of refugees

The data obtained through the survey were analysed using a statistical analysis program (SPSS 25). The data analysis is based on identifying variations in the assumed variables that influence the level of social acceptance, which is considered the average value of the survey questions. Independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the variables.

4.1. Answer to the study question and hypotheses

Table 3 displays the mean perception scores and standard deviations across different domains, representing refugees' perspectives on their acceptance and integration within the local community.

Table 3: The mean perception scores and standard deviations

	Mean	Std. deviation
Basis for acceptance	3.37	0.56
Expectations	3.40	0.53
Visualisation of adaptation	3.42	0.68
Perception of security	3.40	0.70
Economic competition	3.39	0.60
Economic integration	3.36	0.59
Legal integration	3.40	0.51
Social integration	3.40	0.37
Specific social acceptance	3.39	0.20

Source: Edited by the author

Mean perception scores:

- Basis for acceptance: The mean perception score is 3.37, indicating a moderately positive perception of the importance of community acceptance among refugees.
- Expectations: Refugees have relatively positive expectations with a mean score of 3.40 concerning various opportunities and inclusivity within the community.
- Visualisation of adaptation: Refugees perceive a slightly higher level of successful adaptation to the local lifestyle, with a mean score of 3.42.
- Perception of security: The perception of security within the community is relatively positive, reflected by a mean score of 3.40.
- Economic competition: Refugees perceive a moderate level of competition in the local job market, with a mean score of 3.39.
- Economic integration: The mean score of 3.36 suggests a reasonably positive perception regarding economic integration within the local economy.
- Legal integration: Refugees generally perceive fair legal integration, as indicated by the mean score of 3.40.
- Social integration: There is a positive perception of social integration, with a mean score of 3.40, suggesting a sense of being welcomed and connected within the community.

Standard deviations:

- The standard deviations show variability in responses across different domains. Lower standard deviations, such as in social integration (0.37) and overall perception (0.20), indicate more consistency in responses among refugees within these domains.
- Domains with higher standard deviations, like visualisation of adaptation (0.68) and perception of security (0.70), indicate greater variability in how refugees perceive their adaptation and security within the community.

Overall, the mean scores reflect a generally positive perception among refugees regarding their acceptance, integration, and various aspects within the local community. However, the standard deviations highlight varying levels of consistency in their perceptions across different domains, suggesting areas where perceptions may differ more among individuals.

4.1.1. H1: The level of social acceptance varies significantly based on gender.

The results of the t-test conducted to measure whether the level of social acceptance differs by gender are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Relationship between social acceptance level and gender

Independent samples test	F	Sig.	t	df
Equal variances assumed	2.831	0.093	0.023	517
Equal variances not assumed			0.023	508.776

Source: Edited by the author

- The t-test results with equal variances assumed and not assumed yield a t-value of 0.023 and a p-value of 0.093.
- As the p-value (0.093) is greater than the significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), we fail to reject the null hypothesis.
- Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no statistically significant difference found in social acceptance levels between genders among the surveyed population.

The results of the t-test and the findings suggest that gender does not appear to have a significant impact on the perceived social acceptance levels among the surveyed population.

4.1.2. H2: The level of social acceptance varies significantly based on marital status.

The results of the one-way ANOVA conducted to measure whether the level of social acceptance differs by marital status are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Relationship between social acceptance level and marital status

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.074	2	0.037	0.888	0.412
Within groups	21.565	516	0.042		
Total	21.639	518			

Source: Edited by the author

- The ANOVA results display an F-value of 0.888 and a corresponding p-value of 0.412.
- With a p-value greater than the significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), there's insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

- Consequently, based on this analysis, there is no statistically significant difference found in social acceptance levels among different marital statuses within the surveyed population.

These findings indicate that the marital status of individuals doesn't significantly influence the perceived social acceptance levels, as observed from the conducted one-way ANOVA.

4.1.3. H3: The level of social acceptance increases with age.

The results of the one-way ANOVA conducted to measure whether the level of social acceptance differs by age are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Relationship between social acceptance level and age

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.259	3	0.086	2.082	0.102
Within groups	21.380	515	0.042		
Total	21.639	518			

Source: Edited by the author

- The ANOVA results display an F-value of 2.082 and a corresponding p-value of 0.102.
- As the p-value exceeds the significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), there's insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.
- Consequently, based on this analysis, there is no statistically significant relationship found between different age groups and social acceptance levels within the surveyed population.

These findings suggest that age groups do not significantly impact the perceived social acceptance levels among the surveyed individuals, as observed from the conducted one-way ANOVA.

4.1.4. H4: The level of social acceptance increases with higher education level.

The results of the one-way ANOVA conducted to measure whether the level of social acceptance differs by education level are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Relationship between social acceptance level and education level

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.317	4	0.079	1.911	0.107
Within groups	21.322	514	0.041		
Total	21.639	518			

Source: Edited by the author

- The ANOVA results display an F-value of 1.911 and a corresponding p-value of 0.107.
- With the p-value exceeding the significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), there's insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.
- Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no statistically significant difference found in social acceptance levels among individuals with different education levels within the surveyed population.

These findings suggest that the level of education does not significantly impact the perceived social acceptance levels among the surveyed individuals, as observed from the conducted one-way ANOVA.

4.1.5. H5: The level of social acceptance increases with higher income.

The results of the one-way ANOVA conducted to measure whether the level of social acceptance differs by income are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Relationship between social acceptance level and income groups

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.247	5	0.049	1.183	0.316
Within groups	21.392	513	0.042		
Total	21.639	518			

Source: Edited by the author

- The ANOVA results display an F-value of 1.183 and a corresponding p-value of 0.316.
- With the p-value exceeding the significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), there's insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.
- Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no statistically significant difference found in social acceptance levels among individuals with different income groups within the surveyed population.

These findings suggest that the level of income does not significantly impact the perceived social acceptance levels among the surveyed individuals, as observed from the conducted one-way ANOVA.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the social acceptance of urban refugees in Al-Ramtha city, focusing on refugee integration dynamics and the attitudes of the host community in an urban context. We aimed to gauge the level of social acceptance towards refugees in urban areas and identify the factors influencing this process. Our findings revealed a significantly positive level of social acceptance among the local population, indicating a generally favourable perception of refugee integration in Al-Ramtha. Notably, demographic and socio-economic factors such as gender, marital status, age, education level, and income did not significantly impact perceived levels of social acceptance among refugees. This underscores the importance of fostering inclusive environments that facilitate refugee integration in urban settings. By juxtaposing our results with existing literature, we observed both differences and similarities, challenging common assumptions and emphasising the necessity of context-specific investigations into social acceptance dynamics. Furthermore, the positive level of social acceptance towards refugees in Al-Ramtha aligns with recent studies emphasising the role of community acceptance and integration in creating supportive environments for refugees. Our research contributes to understanding the processes of social acceptance among urban refugees and sheds light on the complex interaction of factors influencing the attitudes of the host community. By highlighting a relatively uniform level of social acceptance across diverse backgrounds, our study underscores the significance of promoting inclusive environments that facilitate refugee integration in urban settings.

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