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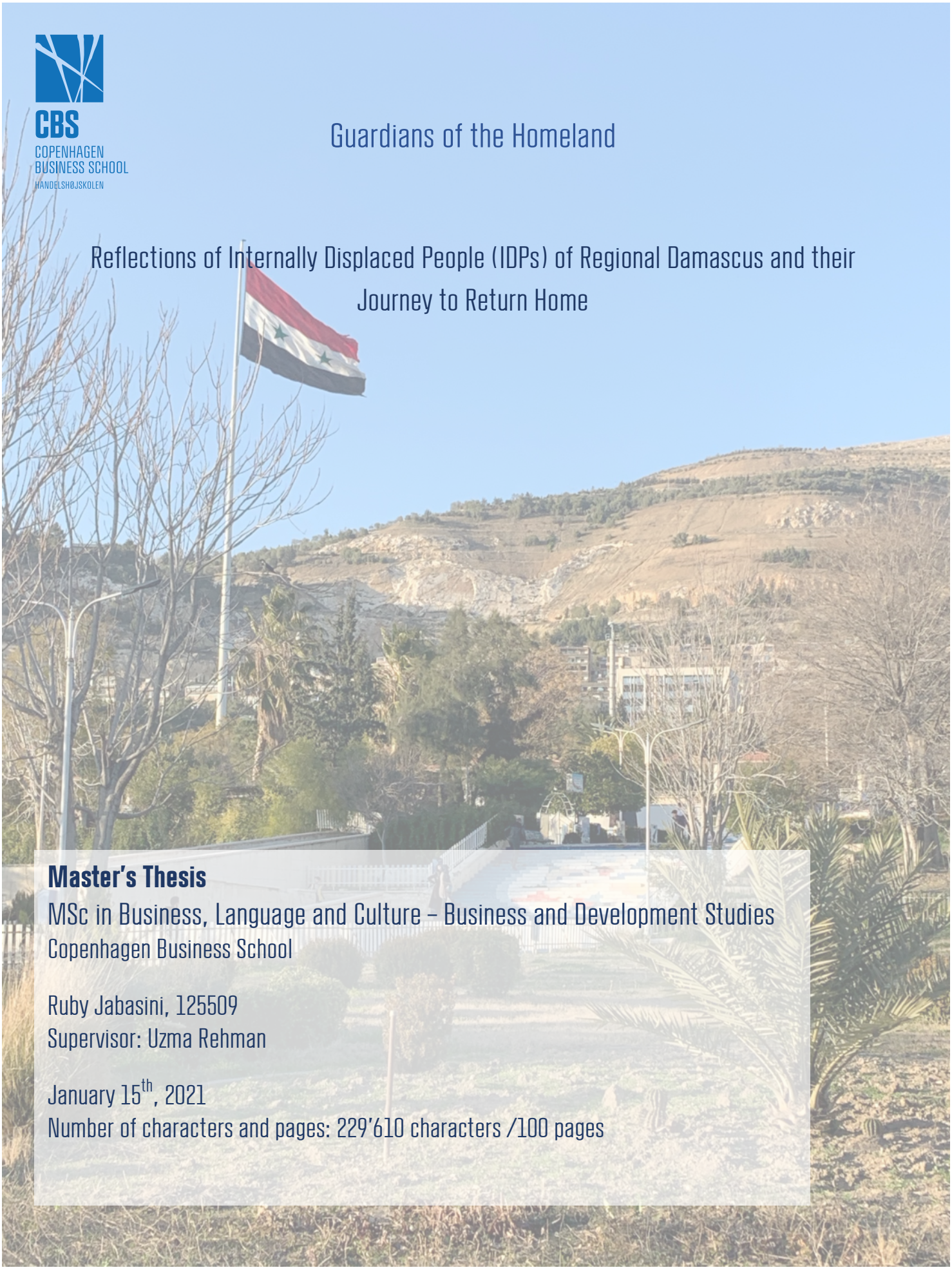
Guardians of the Homeland

Reflections of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) of Regional Damascus and their Journey to Return Home



Master's Thesis

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Abstract

More than 3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) have returned to their homes in Syria. This thesis examined the experience of Syrian IDP returnees in the rural Damascus area from their initial forced migration to their return. It explores this through examining their initial intention to return, their key reintegration challenges and the aspirational and structural factors that influence their return and reintegration. A comprehensive literature review on refugee returns established the foundation of a deductive approach to test the research question. Qualitative interviews with 58 Syrian IDP returnees were conducted between February and March 2020 in the countryside surrounding Damascus. These explorative case studies form the basis of the data analyzed through thematic coding in a content analysis. The findings expose an overarching narrative of forced migration where the intention to return was there from their initial departure. The vast majority were economically worse off during their displacement, longed for their home and struggled through multiple migrations before they finally return. Throughout their difficult journey family and close social networks played an important role and were a vital factor in ensuring a successful reintegration both personally and professionally. Many of these experiences are shared with refugees, however, the significant differences between return for IDPs and those who returned from abroad merits further research.

Keywords – internally displaced people; Syria; return migration; forced migration; reintegration

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

DAR	Development Assistance for Refugees
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally displaced people
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MAFE	Migration between Africa and Europe project
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SYP	Syrian pound
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States dollar

Chapter 1. Introduction

For centuries, the experience of seeking refuge has formed part of our collective human experience. A decade ago there were approximately 37.5 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) worldwide (Grandi, 2019). By 2020, this number has reached about 71 million. Despite the scale of the phenomenon and the unprecedented demand for long-term and sustainable solutions, the international response to refugees continues to be fragmented and unbalanced. The greatest impact of this failed response has been felt by the developing world. In spite of limited resources, countries in crisis-affected regions have often been the most generous, keeping their doors open for millions of neighboring refugees (World Bank, 2011). This generosity, over an extended period of time burdensome has economic and social consequences. If not adequately addressed, it can lead to resentment, and even instability in the host country. Thereby, the tendency to consider refugees as a political liability under these circumstances is understandable. The current global approach has poverty-stricken neighboring countries provide shelter and refuge while richer countries contribute financially to support keeping the refugees at bay.

Despite being depicted as a drain resources, refugees in fact provide essential human and material capital (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016). Narratives from asylum seekers repeatedly demonstrate bravery, determination and a potential to thrive. When given the opportunity, refugees gradually require less assistance, achieve increased self-reliance and financial security, and contribute to the economic development of the host country (Jacobsen, 2002). However, self-reliance is difficult to achieve when not given the right support, and as a result many refugees and IDPs remain dependent on humanitarian assistance for an extended period of time (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016). The lack of freedom of movement, access to education, skills training and employment opportunities inhibits them from achieving their potential and limits their economic and social contribution to the host country.

A further key challenge is found in the reintegration of returnees in post-conflict cases, which are often of politically fragile nature and complex (Macrae, 1999). Returnees often endure disadvantaged environments without the basic resources and opportunities for their future. Hence, some go back to their host country, a phenomenon of back-flows that is evident when reintegration is not sustainable.

What these issues have in common is that the needs of refugees and returnees have not been thoroughly integrated in development planning by the relevant governments and international actors

(Harild et al. 2015). International protection should pursue longer-term solutions as a counterweight. In fact, unless the international interventions seek such durable solutions, they are not enhancing the long-term protection for the refugee population. That is why humanitarian actors such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have an important role to ensure that solutions are sustainable. As part of its core mandate, the UNHCR has developed a *Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR)* framework for international action based on cultivating principled, but feasible, durable solutions for refugees (Core Group on Durable Solutions, 2003). The idea at the heart of the framework is to: improve burden-sharing for countries hosting large numbers of refugees; promote better quality of life and self-reliance for refugees; and a better quality of life for host communities. Thereby, refugees can generally count on the following three durable solutions (ibid.).

1. Voluntary repatriation: In post-conflict situations in countries of origin, voluntary repatriation means that refugees decide freely to return home in safety and dignity. By uniting humanitarian and development actors and funds, the objective is to allocate resources to create a conducive environment inside the countries of origin in a way to support return. Voluntary repatriation, when and where feasible under certain essential conditions, remains the most preferred durable solution, both for refugees and for the international community.
2. Local integration in the country of asylum: Depending on the host government policies where a permanent settlement of refugees is an option, assistance can be provided to heighten their prospects of a full local integration. This involves broad-based partnerships between governments, humanitarian and development agencies so as to achieve self-reliance for refugees along with improvements in the quality of life for host communities.
3. Resettlement to a third country: Resettlement entails the voluntary relocation from one country to which refugees fled to another that is willing to welcome them. To strive for a higher level of global responsibility-sharing, it is vital to use, expand on and enhance resettlement opportunities effectively.

The approach set out with these durable solution builds on decades of experience, whereby there is no hierarchy of durable solutions, but rather often a combination of solutions is necessary. This is most notably in more recent large-scale refugee crises such as the situation in Syria that has inspired a fundamental shift in how we engage with refugees (Grandi, 2019). After nine years of conflict in Syria resulting in the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, over 13 million Syrians have fled to safety either as refugees or IDPs (UNHCR, n.d.). Since 2017, Syria has witnessed gradual

progress in its overall security environment – albeit with ongoing violence in some parts of the country (El-Gamal, 2019). Therefore, states such as Russia and Lebanon have urged Syrian refugees to return home, and as a result, we have witnessed increasing return flows of Syrians, both refugees from the region as well as IDPs. Voluntary repatriation is the preferred approach outlined in the *DAR framework*, which recognizes that the planning and implementation should be "bottom-up" driven so as to include the returnees' capabilities and needs in development planning (Core Group on Durable Solutions, 2003). It is only when the productive capacity and needs of the displaced populations are addressed that return and reintegration can improve the country's rebuilding efforts.

1.1. Thesis objectives

The number of displaced people worldwide is increasing in both size and duration of displacement. The average duration of an individual's refugee status is 38 years (UNHCR, 2018a). This statistic refers only to refugees supported by UNHCR and does not account for unregistered refugees. This means that the figure is likely to be higher if not permanent for many undocumented refugees. For those stuck in endless uncertainty and limbo, returning home safely and securely is an increasingly attractive option. The majority of migration research focuses on push and pull factors that contributed to their departure from the country of origin and their integration in the host country (Jeffery & Murison, 2011). Elided in the academic research is the matter of return migration, particularly regarding IDP migration flows (Bernholz, 2004; Sinatti, 2011).

Over the past decade, the majority of forcedly displaced people remained within their country of origin as IDPs as illustrated in figure 1 below. Outside of the direct sphere of influence of global international players (nation states and organizations), IDPs often end up forgotten and under-resourced. The experience of internally forced displacement is just as multi-layered and complex. This thesis identifies overarching themes that focus on a handful of areas underlining the scale and variety of issues affecting Syrian IDP returnees. An empirical case study of IDP returnees in rural Damascus presents a useful insight to better understand social, economic and demographic change since the abatement of conflict in Syria.

Figure 1 | **Trend of global displacement and proportion displaced** | 2007-2017

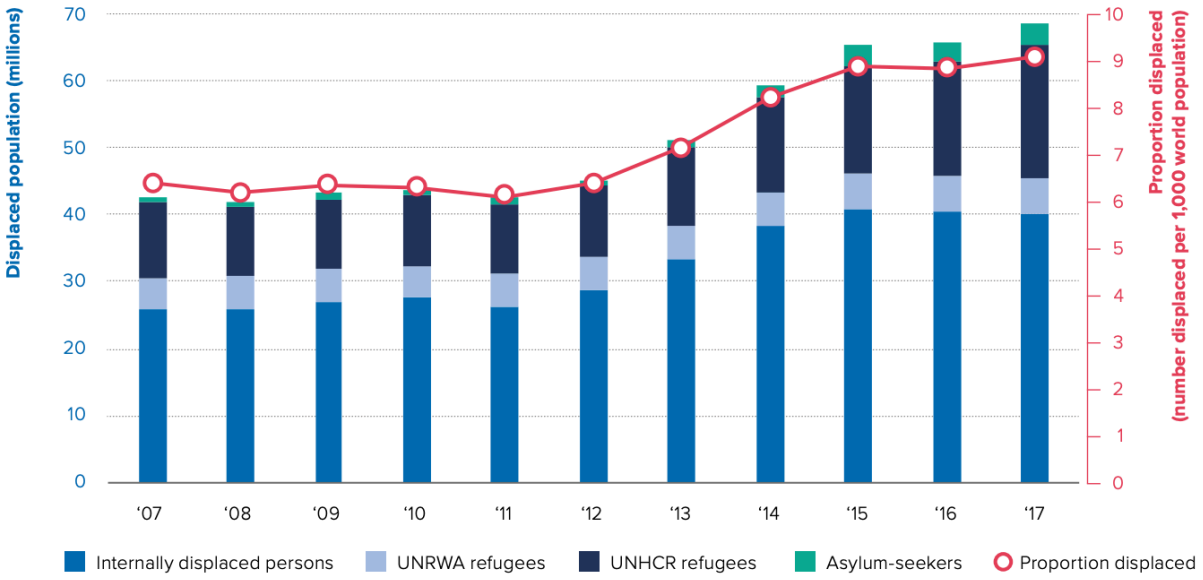

Figure 1: UNHCR Global Trends of Forced Displacement in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018a)

Within the existing literature exploring return migration, none have yet examined the journey of Syrian IDPs as they return home (Lietaert, 2016). This thesis addresses this lacuna through in-depth qualitative interviews with 58 IDP returnees based in Damascus documenting their experiences and expectations of reintegration. Broadening the knowledge base on the Syrian IDP returnees' experiences and perspectives illuminates the achievements and failures of humanitarian and aid organizations on the ground. It challenges the narrative that suggests IDP return is a 'natural', 'unproblematic' and 'permanent' experience marking the end of the migration process (Bernholz, 2004; Markowitz & Stefansson, 2004). Additionally, the research highlights the misrepresentation of returnees as a financial strain and economic burden, rather than human capital that can contribute to society and the recovery process.

The purpose, structure and method of this study centers IDP returnees' voices, acknowledging that their personal experiences offer an invaluable contribution and understanding pathways of return and planning for the future. Returnees should be considered the best judge of when they can return to safety and dignity. This thesis shares the experiences of people who involuntarily left their homes to find temporary shelter and the circumstances of their return and reintegration. It contributes to the debate whether the conditions in Syria are conducive for voluntary repatriation affecting thousands of individuals. Steps towards sustainable and durable solutions to returning IDPs can be identified through examining the experiences of the Syrians interviewed for this study and identifying the

barriers and challenges they faced. Improving systems of resettlement also help to address the potential backflows of individuals returning to their host country.

This research highlights the critical need for further large-scale, independent, scientific research and monitoring to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. Policy-makers in the region responsible for settling returning migrants require evidence-based research to support their development planning. Learnings from this research can also inform Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that assist in the reintegration of returnees as similar experiences might be shared with returnees in other conflict-torn countries. The research also offers insight to better prepare for future displacements (whether as a result of conflict, environmental disasters and other major incidents) allowing for faster and less disruptive return of involuntary displaced people. Thereby, this research falls into the Business, Language and Culture Master's Thesis learning objective in terms of the relevance to organizations.

To meet these described objectives, the main research question for this thesis is:

"What is the experience of reintegration for forcibly displaced Syrian IDP returnees in the rural Damascus area?"

The research question is explored through three sub questions:

- What are IDP migrants' initial intention to return when they first leave and does it change during their displacement?
- What are the key reintegration challenges for IDP returnees?
- How do IDP returnees' aspirations and structural factors influence their reintegration?

1.2. Thesis outline

The findings of this research are represented in line with the requirements for the Business, Language and Culture Master's Thesis at the Copenhagen Business School. The introduction begins by offering a brief overview of the growing problem of forced displacement globally. This provides the context and purpose of the study, which focuses on the experiences of IDPs returning to their home following a period of forced displacement. After drawing attention to the background and motivation of the study, this first chapter acknowledges the overall objectives of the thesis and defines the research questions (see above). The second chapter provides more detail on the plight of Syrian returnees and explores the drivers behind their return migration. Different theories related to the phenomenon of migrants return journey is explored and their relevance to the flow of Syrian IDP returnees is demonstrated.

Chapter three describes the methodological design and approach for the research including the applied qualitative research design, data collection and analytical methods. With respect to best practice, the methodological limitations of the research are considered and explored.

The following chapter four reviews the literature related to migration and refugee return exploring the characteristics around the intention to return and the various factors in play. Thereafter, the literature review focuses on exploring the characteristics related to reintegration after return. Chapter five begins with an in-depth review of the dominant theoretical approaches towards return migration. It then synthesizes these theories offering a new theoretical framework utilizing key predictors of return relevant to the subsequent research.

The results of the qualitative data collection are presented in chapter six. The first part explores the intention to return and the return experience, while the second part elaborates on the experiences of reintegration after return. Chapter seven links the theoretical bases of chapters four and five with the empirical findings from the previous chapter in a discussion in order to address the defined research questions.

The final concluding chapter offers summary remarks regarding the analysis and findings followed by an insight on potential areas for further research.

Chapter 2. The Evolution of Syrian Returnees

Guardians of the homeland, upon you be peace, [our] proud spirits refuse to be humiliated.

The den of Arabism is a sacred sanctuary, and the throne of the suns is a preserve that will not be subjugated.

The quarters of Levant are towers in height, which are in dialogue with the zenith of the skies.

A land resplendent with brilliant suns, becoming another sky or almost a sky.

The flutter of hopes and the beat of the heart, are on a flag that united the entire country.

Is there not blackness from every eye, and ink from every martyr's blood?

[Our] spirits are defiant and [our] history is glorious, and our martyrs' souls are formidable guardians.

From us is "Al-Walid" and from us is "ar-Rashid", so why wouldn't we prosper and why wouldn't we build?

- Syrian National Anthem

This chapter deals with the return phenomenon to Syria in more detail. It begins with addressing the host countries with the largest Syrian refugee population and the type of legal status refugees hold in order to provide context around the evolution of returns. The protection thresholds for the return of refugees and IDPs are then reviewed followed by an overview of the rise in returns since 2017.

2.1. Refugee status in host countries

Syrians continue to be the largest forcibly displaced population in the world, with over 12 million people at the end of 2019 (USA for UNHCR, n.d.). That is more than half of the Syrian population (Worldometer, n.d.). As recorded by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), at least 6.1 million people are internally displaced within Syria, accounting for about half of all displaced Syrians worldwide (OCHA, n.d.). Of those who have fled Syria, the vast majority stayed in the Middle East. More than five million people are registered in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq amounting to 41 percent of Syrians displaced around the world – most of which live below the poverty line (Marshall, n.d.). There is a strong tradition of duty-based asylum in the Middle East

and pre-war Syria was a refuge rather than a refugee state granting asylum to Armenians, Kurds, Palestinians and Iraqis (Todd, 2019). The remaining nearly one million Syrian refugees have taken journeys across the Mediterranean to Europe, with a fraction also migrating to North America (ibid.). Figure 2 presents the ten countries with the highest number of displaced Syrians.

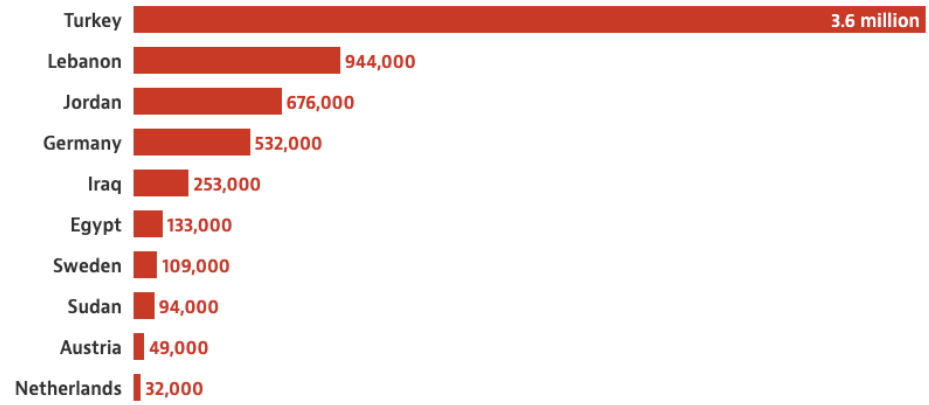

Figure 2: 10 countries with the highest number of displaced Syrians (Todd, 2019)

Refugee legal status in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon meet increasing political insecurity. In accordance with the Turkish *Law on Foreigners and International Protection,* a 'temporary protection' status is in place for Syrian refugees in Turkey (Turkish Ministry of Interior, 2013). This law is confined to cases where there is a large influx into Turkey and where refugees cannot return to their country of origin. The majority of Syrians in Turkey fall under this category, however, growing restrictions have been established in recent years (EIP, 2019).

In Lebanon, which unlike Turkey is not a signatory of the *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (Janmyr, 2016). Syrian refugees do not have asylum protection and are considered guests or visitors. In 2015, at the request of the Lebanese government, the UNHCR suspended registration of Syrian refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Furthermore, the government introduced residency regulations requiring all Syrians, to pay an annual fee of 200 USD to obtain or renew residency permits; submit a housing pledge confirming their place of residence; and delegating a Lebanese national sponsor to sign a "pledge of responsibility" for individual or family. Some Lebanese nationals have found ways to generate income from these regulations, charging up to USD 1,000 for sponsorship. As a result of these extortionary tactics, most refugees are not able to comply with these regulations, leaving them vulnerable to be arrested and restricting employment opportunities and civil liberties. These increasingly dire circumstances often lead to further extortionary practices such as child labor and early marriages. The lack of legal status also prevents

children from accessing formal education further entrenching poverty and disadvantages. As it stands, tens of thousands of Syrian children born in Lebanon are at risk of statelessness and vulnerable to a range of abuses without the privilege of legal protections (ibid.).

Jordan's borders have been frequently opening and closing since the war in Syria. Jordan is also not a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention; however, it did allow Syrian refugees across the border between 2011 and 2014 (Francis, 2015). The three border crossings shut down after the armed opposition took control of one of them in 2015 and attacked the Jordanian army at another crossing in 2016 (EIP, 2019). At first the Jordanian government issued a law for Syrian refugees, allowing for access to health care and education without requiring a sponsor. The law later became stricter in 2015 with a new system of registration. Based on a report on *Securing Status*, Syrian refugees are issued biometric ID cards, which many are unable to obtain due to lack of the required documentation as asylum seekers or a lack of sufficient funds for the card (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016).

These neighboring countries offer temporary refuge for millions of displaced Syrians, but ultimately a more permanent and sustainable solution is most likely to be found in their return. Examining the experience of returned IDPs can provide useful insight to the key challenges involved for all those returning including returnees from abroad and for policy makers in host countries.

2.2. Protection thresholds for return

There is an ongoing debate in the international community about whether or not the time is right for thousands of Syrians to begin returning to their homeland. While fighting continues in some parts of Syria, the growing government-controlled territories have led people to return to areas where fighting has declined (EIP, 2019). The UNHCR has developed a *Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria*, a legal framework guaranteeing unhindered access to rights of both refugee and IDP returns (UNHCR, 2018b). As these conditions were not fulfilled, the agency's position is that the conditions in Syria are not at a stage for repatriation in safety and dignity, thus, it does not facilitate large-scale return. However, it does support those who are returning voluntarily to the best of their abilities. It is not clear how the UNHCR has kept track of the development that have occurred since the report's publication in February 2018. A year later, President Bashar Al-Assad formally called on refugees living abroad to return to their country (Middle East Monitor, 2019). The *European Institute of Peace (EIP)* has analyzed the fulfilment of the UNHCR thresholds in a report on returns

in Syria in May 2019 (see Appendix A). This report that is central to this chapter determined that they are unmet and that returning refugees and IDPs still face significant risk of harm (EIP, 2019).

One complex and underlying issue for humanitarian groups is the need to monitor these protection conditions. The government of Syria has sustained firm control on humanitarian access in the country (EIP, 2019). While the government controls data collection, agencies are not in a position to evaluate needs independently and require the approval of intelligence and security organizations. This applies to UNHCR in their mission to facilitate the protection thresholds. The agency has reported that "opportunities for systematic field-based data collection remain limited due to access or authorization restrictions, resulting in incomplete needs analysis in some areas" (Chnkdji, 2019). Access and monitoring ability are certainly key for UNHCR to encourage a strategy for large-scale return.

The topic of returns in Syria has become greatly politicized through foreign powers' conflicting objectives. Russia, Lebanon and Jordan are working alongside the Syrian government to repatriate citizens (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2019a). Yet, it is unclear if those incorporate the UNHCR protection thresholds. The European Union has expressed concern on returns to Syria and its governments are divided whereas Russia is pushing for the international community to support returns (Gotev, 2019). At the *Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region* conference in Brussels in March 2019, Germany, France and the Netherlands favor withholding reconstruction funds until a transition away from Assad is in progress. Italy, Austria and Hungary support the idea of working with Syrian authorities to allow refugees to return. Denmark has even reclassified Damascus as safe (Cornish & Khattab, 2019). Nonetheless, Syria, who was not part of the Brussels conference, declared that they would not accept the political conditions set forth in the conference for returnees (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2019a). Albeit, to form a sincere solution, all international actors involved in the conflict will need to cooperate.

2.3. A rise in returns

Irrespective of the political debate, thousands of Syrian IDPs and refugees have returned over the last three years. While the UNHCR does not officially facilitate large-scale return, it has increased its response to address the needs of returnees. According to a survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, approximately 19 percent stated that they do not ever intent to return to Syria (UNHCR, 2019). Whereas out of the 75 percent that do hope

to return one day, only nearly six percent intend to do so in the next 12 months. When asked about the key drivers influencing refugees on return, four broad areas emerged: safety and security, livelihoods opportunities, access to shelter, and access to basic services (ibid.). These factors therefore signify the conditions which need to be improved in order for people's intentions to shift. Resulting from a lack of access to information, UNHCR is struggling to fulfil its traditional function to maintain direct oversight of returns to Syria (EIP, 2019). Consequentially, the current rate of refugee and IDP returns is challenging to determine correctly. The government of Syria, who works in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Defense, as well as the UNHCR are all making an effort to track the rate of return, both from inside and outside the country (EIP, 2019).

As a vital actor in returns from neighboring countries, the UNHCR, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Jordanian and Lebanese governments, has transferred refugees who expressed the wish to go home to the Syrian border (Hamou, Nassar & Al Maleh, 2019). As of December 2019, the UNHCR recorded 230,418 refugee returns to Syria from Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt since September 2015 (Marshall, n.d.). The numbers reported are only those verified by UNHCR and do not reflect the entire refugee returns. Further, the OCHA has a widespread presence across Syria and an "IDP task force" composed of cross sector hubs in place, which monitors IDP movements (OCHA, n.d.). Based on OCHA's estimations, the total IDP returns since 2017 is 3,075,466 as illustrated in table 1 below (Kashata, 2020). As mentioned in chapter 1, the empirical research of thesis focuses on rural Damascus, where the sixth largest IDP return movements are tracked and 61 percent of IDPs have returned.

Table 1: IDP return flow data November 2020 (Kashata, 2020)

Province	IDPs	IDP returnees (total since 2017)
Aleppo	3'079'064	820'862
Al-Hasakeh	539'749	92'696
Ar-Raqqa	642'364	239'024
As-Sweida	29'665	4'354
Damascus	82'821	20'940
Dar'a	483'865	563'077
Deir-ez-Zor	387'638	274'493
Hama	272'512	200'666
Homs	108'514	97'594
Idleb	3'943'603	474'628
Lattakia	76'929	737
Quneitra	53'859	51'999
Rural Damascus	**384'406**	**234'396**
Grand Total	10'141'645	3'075'466

The Russian Ministry of Defense reported in October 2019 that 1,304,833 IDPs have returned, which is less than half of the number monitored by OCHA (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2019b). The significant variation in estimations represents the difficulty of accessing accurate information. The UNHCR is reportedly attempting to reconcile its returns figures with those recorded by the government of Syria, though this has not yet been completed (EIP, 2019).

IDPs who are returning to or form a formerly opposition-controlled area are required to complete forms to reconcile their affairs with the government (EIP, 2019). Many IDPs lived in so-called settlement centers during their displacement period, some of which housed up to 50'000 people. The Syrian government 'return form' (which involves denouncing terrorist groups) must be completed before they can move through military checkpoints. President Bashar Al-Assad declared in a speech with heads of local councils from across the country in February 2019, that the only way forward for those who left state control is through reconciliation (Sana, 2019). He emphasized that "the Syrian people with their big heart will forgive those who are honest in their repentance" (ibid.).

There is however a widespread fear of security threats facing those who did not remain in government-controlled areas during the conflict. Multiple sources have reported arrests and torture of Syrian refugees and IDPs returning home despite reconciling with the state (Hayden, 2018; Loveluck, 2019; Nassar & Clark, 2019). There are widely publicized arrest warrant lists and those returning to newly government-controlled areas from areas under opposition control are particularly vulnerable to arrest (EIP, 2019). According to a UN report, 14 percent of surveyed IDP and refugee returnees were stopped or detained during their return in 2018. A systematic tracking to monitor returns should ensure the safety of returnees. This risk correlates with the mentioned UNHCR intention survey, which identified improved safety and security as a key driver influencing return.

This chapter examined the drivers, such as the lack of legal protection in host countries inhibiting refugees in their self-reliance, that have led people to return to areas where fighting has receded in Syria. As self-organized returns for refugees and IDPs continue to rise despite certain protection thresholds not being met, it is critical to ensure that efforts are made in their repatriation to Syria. Therefore, presenting the experience of IDP returnees in this research can provide protection and solution strategies for policy makers in host countries.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The empirical analyses devoted to the question of return migration are based on qualitative data consisting of interviews conducted with 58 IDP returnees to the rural area around Damascus. Conducting the fieldwork in Syria facilitated a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political context in relation to how returns are experienced. The qualitative interviews allowed for in-depth exploration for the return experience; its perceptions, expectations and realities.

Qualitative research is known to yield more subjective results, as it aims to gain an understanding of phenomena based on specific cases (Sandelowski, 2000). It takes a more inclusive and flexible approach with a focus on context. In other words, it seeks to understand individual behaviors, representations and logics, taking into account the fact that they are part of a particular cultural, political and historical environment. The qualitative approach of this thesis promotes a complex understanding of the multifarious and diverse experience of return migration.

3.1. Philosophy of science

Migration examines the nature of what it means to be human and how we define our communities. Different philosophical traditions inform contrasting ways in which migration research is undertaken. This thesis considers the *ontological and epistemological view* as critical to build warranted belief and an appropriate research approach. Questions of ontology are concerned with the nature of reality and whether social entities should be perceived as objective or subjective (Bryman, 2016). This forms a certain belief system, which in the case of this thesis is found in constructivism. Constructivism implies that social phenomena and meaning are not pre-existent but constantly created through actors and their social interactions. While ontology defines how we view reality, epistemological reflections clarify what there is to learn about reality and what is regarded as reasonable knowledge for the research (Bryman, 2016). In that regard, this thesis follows an interpretivism method, which highlights the value in the emphatic awareness of human behavior in order to draw conclusions. This approach suggests the belief that human beings construct social realities, thus it is important to understand the implications such realities have for those who have created it (Bryman, 2016). Accordingly, with the aim of approaching human thinking and understanding their views and actions, studies such as this thesis should strive towards implementing the most suitable methods as possible.

3.2. Research design: case studies

The aim of the analysis is to trace the life of these migrants, to understand the circumstances of their migration and return, as well as to identify their subjective point of view in relation to their experience. An in-depth exploration of the return migration experience was achieved by using case-based research that focused on understanding the dynamics and complex factors effecting individual migrants (Eisenhardt, 1989). According to Dubois and Gadde (2002), it is necessary to define the boundaries by limiting variables such as time or place. For this thesis, the core of the cases is bound to Syrian IDP returnees, and further limited geographically to the rural area around Damascus as well as in time to the period of data collection between February and March 2020. A *deductive approach* was applied, which based on Lund's theory (2014), a testing of the existing theory knowledge, hypotheses and empirical observations is provided. In other words, deductive reasoning carries the rediscovery of the concept or model in the empirical material, which is particularly useful for the development of new theories (Lund, 2014).

This leads to the question of the type of approach to the case study. According to Heyes et al. (2015), *exploratory case studies* are condensed case studies performed before implementing a large-scale investigation on a topic where considerable uncertainty exists. Their basic purpose is to come to an educated initial perception of what is going on in a situation and helping to develop analytical strategies, questions, measures, designs and goals. More specifically, to prove that further investigation is necessary. Researchers are aware of the difficulty of reintegration for returnees, and are aware that the actions of war can caused these circumstances. However, beyond that, they do not know if certain experiences during their migration are more likely to contribute to their reintegration than others. The primary pitfall of explorative case studies that the authors mention is that the initial findings may seem convincing enough to be concluded prematurely (Heyes et al, 2015). To avoid premature assumptions, the analytical approach was designed to be flexible and responsive to emerging themes and unexpected conclusions.

Further, the case selection is important for the study as it connects the research question to the empirical dimension of the study – namely, the kind of information, lessons learned and conclusions obtained from the cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, a *random selection* of cases was chosen for this thesis in order to avoid systematic biases rather than selecting cases based on the expectations about their information content. Flyvybjerg (2006) further claims that a larger sample is suitable when using

random selections as opposed to information-oriented cases. This also correlates with the qualitative research design for exploratory case studies, for which a large number of cases should be collected to accurately represent the diversity of the study (Heyes et al,. 2015). In order to generalize for a specifically selected subgroup within the population, a *stratified sample* was necessary, which is described in the subsequent section, followed by the interview design (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.2.1. Participant sampling

The goal of the participant recruitment was to get a heterogeneous stratified sample of men and women of all ages and social backgrounds with a variety of migration experiences. Emphasis is set on selecting a varied sample of locations (place of origin) as it is vital to consider varying degrees of physical, economic and social damage caused by the war and circumstances that each village faced.

The field research component was primarily possible through an official letter of approval by the First Lady of Syria, Asma al-Assad, that granted permission to access and interview IDP returnees for the purpose of this study. This was a crucial and time-consuming step, as many areas, despite people returning and it being safe, are difficult to enter through military check-points without a valid reason due to high security measures. Furthermore, the letter of approval was necessary for the sake of authorizing local organizations to provide support with getting in touch with returnees.

With each of the organizations that provided access to returnees a different method for participant recruitment was applied. Where possible, the migrants were randomly drawn to avoid only receiving those whose return was exemplary for the relevant agency. The Syria Trust for Development, a national NPO working on solutions for various development challenges, introduced the largest sample taken for this study despite it concerning only one village. These IDP returnees did not benefit directly from the Syria Trust for Development; however, they were supported in terms of their return by a local NGO dedicated to their village. The approach used to invite participants to the study involved directly approaching individuals at shops, on the street or by visiting their home.

The second source of contact to returnees was provided by the Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation, though which access to the majority of the sampled locations was acquired. These IDP returnees did not benefit from any return programs or institutions. The recruitment of participants was acquired through referrals from participants (also known as the snowball method).

The last organization to introduce returnees is the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), an NGO recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that is helping people who are facing extreme difficult conditions because of the conflict. These IDP returnees benefited from their return assistance program. Unfortunately, after only one visit to a village with SARC, it was not possible to continue gathering a larger sample due to strict travel restrictions in the light of the coronavirus.

In total 58 IDP participants were recruited to participate in face-to-face interviews. Each interview took on average 30 minutes, ranging from eleven minutes to one hour and 14 minutes. Thereby, interviewees for this study were selected from a total of nine locations in rural Damascus as illustrated by the yellow starred locations on the map in figure 3.

Figure 3: Participant sample place of origin (adapted from Google maps, 2020)

The following table 2 provides a brief summary of each location, the number of participants, through which organization they were recruited, as well their access to a return assistance program.

Table 2: Participant recruitment overview

Location	Participants	Organization	Return assistance
Khan Alshekh (south-west)	1	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No
Artouz (south-west)	4	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No
Hjera (south)	3	The Syrian Arab Red Crescent	Yes
Shebaa (south-east)	1	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No
Hatitet Al-Turkman (south-east)	4	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No
Marj Al-Sultan (east)	29	Syria Trust for Development	Yes
Ein-Tarma (east)	8	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	Yes
Qudssaya (north-west)	2	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No
Al-Hameh (north-west)	6	Sandouk Al-Rajaa Foundation	No

In addition to the interviews with returnees, further primary sources were gathered through interviews with organizations that were involved with providing return assistance to returnees. These interviews provided further insight for the empirical part of the thesis and represent the relevance to organizations in this thesis. On the institutional side, the following interviews allowed for additional investigation on returns in Syria:

1. Legal Affairs Manager at the Syria Trust for Development (NPO running development programs)
2. Head of Marj Al-Sultan division at the Sharkasi Foundation (NGO providing emergency support)
3. Volunteers at Majmouet Wattad (youth organization assisting returns from settlement centers)
4. Architect (collaborating with the Danish Refugee Council in reconstruction projects)

3.2.2. Interview design

Seeking the data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with 64 questions, most of which were open-end questions in order to allow the participants to express their experiences to the fullest extent and to avoid setting limitations. Further, the data was collected in a voice recorded format with their agreement. Particular care is taken so that the questions are consistent regardless of the area, period of migration and time of reference in their lives. Initially designed in English, the questionnaire is translated to Arabic for interviewees in order to avoid key concepts getting lost in translation.

The interview design is inspired by the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project[1], which was implemented to analyze data on migration between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. The MAFE surveys have significant advantages for the analysis of return migration: they are multi-thematic and retrospective. Accordingly, a similar *multi-thematic retrospective approach* is taken in the interview design for this thesis. The question of return can arise from the moment the individual migrates until their return. Thereby, the interview guide (see Appendix B) is designed to relate their trajectory in a chronological manner to collect these life stories and fulfill the *retrospective* element. The challenges of retrospectively recollecting experiences are described further in the limitations of research section.

The MAFE project questionnaire is particularly rich and includes questions for carrying out analyses of the various phenomena related to return: the initial intention to return, the return experience and reintegration after return. Derived from the MAFE survey, the interview was designed to collect information on the following *multi-thematic* aspects of the individual's life trajectories:

(i) Socio-demographic characteristics of individuals

Basic socio-demographic characteristics were included in the surveys, including *gender*, the *age* of participants, and *level of education*.

(ii) The migration and return experience

The *reason for migration and return* were formed in the questionnaire as open-ended questions. A codification of the reasons for migration and return were grouped into categories for the analysis.

The area of displacement of the Syrian IDP migrants was also examined, as well as the length of time they spent there and when they returned. The *administrative situation* of IDPs when they are displaced was also information that can be taken into account.

(iii) The individual circumstances of migrants

The *family circumstances* of migrants was known through a combination of information on marital status and children and relatives to derive the family composition and the location of its members.

[1] The Migrations between Africa and Europe Project, https://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/

The *capital investments and resources* were taken into account through questions regarding their investments. Thus, it was possible to explore whether the participants is an owner of durable assets during his or her lifetime. It can be land, housing, or shops and businesses.

The *career opportunities* provided information on the type of job they hold with regard to the time before their migration, during their migration and after they return. A distinction can be made between migrants who work up to their skills, below their skills or are inactive.

(iv) The context

Questions regarding the context explored to what extent the contextual factors that characterize the Syrian migration crisis as discussed in chapter 2 play a role in this thesis. The survey also addressed the host community to which IDPs migrated to in reference further contextual factors at hand.

In conclusion, the first questions are related to their pre-departure situation before addressing the topic of migration. Questions include migrants' decision to leave and initial intentions to return. Then questions related to the migration experience are asked including their acquisition of social, financial and human capital. Finally, the topic of the actual of return is addressed: the circumstances of the return itself, and their professional and social experience after their return.

3.3. Analysis method

Within this section, the data analysis method is defined. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), analyses which are governed by a theoretical position may affect their utilization and may provide less freedom during the analysis process, whereas other methods are seen to be independent of theory and have the flexibility to be used across a variety of theoretical approaches. Thematic and content analyses are positioned within the latter approach and are dynamic, creative, iterative, yet disciplined craft of qualitative interpretation (Barnett, 2002). In the field of qualitative research, there are overlaps between thematic analysis and content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Both are methods to identify, analyze and report themes and patters within a data set, whereby codes and categories can stem from theory and literature of the data set itself. In spite of many similarities between thematic and content analysis, the main difference lies in "the possibility of quantification of data in content analysis by measuring the frequency of different categories and themes, which cautiously may stand as a proxy for significance" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 404). Thus, as this thesis was bound to a

larger sample with 58 cases where the frequency of the same codes in the transcription was be useful for the development of a theme, a content analysis was chosen as an appropriate analysis tool.

The interviews provided information on the participants life trajectory as case studies and were fully transcribed using the NVivo software in order to entirely immerse the research in the data. As a deductive approach was used, the themes and codes were initially identified based on the empirical literature review in order to guide the analysis. Using a thematic coding framework, the content analysis was carried out with to assess the main themes in the experience of returnees from their migration to their reintegration. The codes were thereafter set according to the two overarching themes of interest, namely:

a) migrants' intention to return as well as the return itself in terms of the decision, circumstances and process; and
b) reintegration after return.

Thereby, codes are defined based on the interview design, which is segmented in for example economic, professional and social terms, so as to examine certain points in greater depth. Throughout the coding stage codes were assigned across the whole data set from the interviews in order to create a comprehensive outlook. In other words, for each code identified, data extracts from each interview were collected. Thereafter, initial themes were identified and the data extracts were reviewed in order to create a thematic map. This allowed for new codes to emerge, hence, avoiding confirmation bias, which led to a reorganization of 142 thematic codes that clearly defined and reflected the data sets. The complete codebook is exported from NVivo and presented in Appendix C.

After defining the thematic codes, quotes were derived under each code that described the lived experiences based on the individuals' characteristics and their return. These quotes for example drew on their career or family situation, reason for migration and return. A cross-sectional retrospective description of the individual's situation, from their migration to their return, presents the evolution of the statuses occupied by returnees over time. Text boxes that include transcript extracts from the four interviews with NGOs offered further context around certain themes to present an organization's perspective. Thus, a completed in-depth review of all qualitative interviews ensured that the analysis reflects the research findings. Table 3 below represents a guide for the analysis of interview data sets.

Table 3: Steps of content analysis

Steps of content analysis	Description of the process
Generating initial codes	• Systematically assigned initial codes based on the empirical literature findings across the interview questions
Familiarization with the data	• Transcribed voice-recorded interviews from Arabic to English using the NVivo software • Collected data for each theme and created a list of initial codes
Identifying and defining thematic codes	• Checked data extracts matched with codes to create a thematic map • Expanded on initially defined coded themes that were not existing to avoid confirmation bias and to ensure they reflected the data sets
Analyzing thematic codes	• Extracted quotes per code that highlight the main findings • Finalized content analysis of themes and empirical findings • Related the analysis to the research question and literature

3.4. Ethical considerations and limitations of research

Stake (2003, p.154) points to the privileged position of the case study researcher and claims that "qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their codes of ethics strict". Hence, it was essential to be mindful of the ethical considerations throughout the study. According to Creswell (2013), it is important to be aware of cultural norms and the needs of any populations that may be part of the research. To that end, the study followed the no-harm policy that is set out in the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, which is supported by Copenhagen Business School (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2014). Prior to starting the interviews, the purpose of the research, how the data will be used in a way that will not jeopardize or harm them as well as their right to anonymity were explained. All participants were advised that participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw consent to participate at any point during the interview. Moreover, all data collected was anonymized to ensure confidentially.

As with the majority of studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. These limitations are an outcome of limited resources and time, but they also represent potential areas for future research.

- *Limited methodological approach:* There has been a certain fragmentation among migration studies, where it is either based on qualitative or quantitative methods, which is creating a division

between methodological approaches (Castagnone, 2011). Thereby, this thesis is also limited to using qualitative interview. Some authors advocate the adoption of mixed methods in migration case studies to better understand the realities at play (Bakewell, 2010; de Haas 2011). Moreover, the thesis identifies the need further exploration for specific measures on reintegration.

- *Limited number and range of participants involved:* This research canvased the discourse among IDP returnees in the countryside of Damascus. It did not include the discourse amongst those who have returned from abroad or Syrian migrants both inside and outside of the country that have not returned. This lacuna offers an opportunity for further research. The number of participants included in the study (n=58), while considerable for a qualitative study, is relatively small. A large-scale replication of this research could yield more in-depth analysis.
- *Limited interview design:* Some interview questions where participants recollected their experiences from the past were answered in retrospect, whereby biases with missing or selective information might affect the outcome. This leads to the inability for the research to ensure the outcome assessment and must rely on the retrospective view of participants. Furthermore, the interview was translated from Arabic to English forming a cross-language research. The researcher is fluent in Arabic and best efforts were made to reflect the understanding, however, it is acknowledged that different languages and expressions present a risk for things to get lost in translation.
- *Limited scope of the literature review:* There is a vast amount of literature on return migration that could not be incorporated into the literature review. This is a result of the broad nature of the subject incorporating issues of migration policies to local integration or resettlement. Additionally, new research is consistently being published adding to the expanse of literature. For simplicity, the thesis approached return migration as one cohesive phenomenon. However, return migration is complex, and there may be different rationalities in different areas of displacement and return. An attempt to reflect the realities from different parts of the world is taken for the empirical literature review, however, this is an area open for further exploration and research.
- *Dynamic nature of the discourse:* The number of returns is continuous to increase and the country remains to be affected by 'events'. These include terrorist events as well as political events and developments in the country. New policy dynamics may emerge and along with them new discourses and rationalities. However, the analysis and the discussion will still be useful and applicable for the foundational problematisation of 'reintegration'.

Chapter 4. An Empirical Literature Review on Return Migration

The topic of migrant return has been the subject of a growing number of empirical studies in the last decade (Carling et al., 2011), however, not many include IDP return flows. As a result, the following literature review has drawn largely from studies focusing on refugee returns with the intention to stimulate discussion on how these notions may apply to IDPs. This chapter is divided in two main sections. The first part of the literature review explores the experience of return from its inception (when an individual begins to set the intention to return) to its execution (the experience of migrating back home). The second part examines the literature of reintegration after return. Each section specifies which phenomena is studied, its factors and their linkages.

4.1. The intention to return and the return experience

A migrant may make the intention to return home at any point during the journey, from preparation to settlement in a host country. Some migrants initially intend to settle permanently in the host country, others plan to stay there temporarily, while some do not yet know if they want to return. Intentions for the return may also change during the migration period, depending on the context in the country of origin and host country, as well as opportunities and constraints that migrants encounter (Jeffery & Murison, 2011). This chapter draws on the literature that has examined the influencing factors on the intention of the return and the effective return of migrants. Based on the available data, various phenomena related to return have been studied. The three phenomena referred to in this thesis are: the intention to return, emigration from the host country and the return journey (ibid.).

- The migrants' intention to return: This refers to the will of migrants to return or to stay permanently abroad. The question may arise before the initial departure to the host country, but it is generally posed when they are in the host country during their migration period.
- Emigration: This is the departure of migrants from the host country to which they had migrated. Their departure may result in either a return to their country of origin or an arrival in another country.
- The return: It is defined as the movement of migrants from a host country to the country of origin. It must not necessarily be final, but must occur in a medium- or long-term view.

The literature review identifies and explores the key determinants of return migration to be used in the analysis and interpretation of results. These determinants (drawn from the MAFE project) are incorporated into the interview design and provide the framework for the analytical approach. They are grouped into the four categories below.

1. **Socio-demographic characteristics of migrants**: age, gender and level of education;
2. **The migration experience**: reasons for migration, migration period, the initial intention to return and residency status;
3. **Personal circumstances during migration**: family circumstances, capital investments and resources, career opportunities, financial security and income and social integration;
4. **The socio-political and economic context** on the intention to return and return experience.

4.1.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of migrants

This section explores how age, gender and education level of migrants influences their intention to return to their country of origin, the experience of emigration from a host country and the return itself.

Age

The age of migrants is a relevant variable regarding the intention to return and the return itself because it reflects which stage migrants are at in their life. Carling (2004), found that it is not uncommon for elderly migrants to seek to retire in their country of origin where they can enjoy a higher quality of life often taking advantage of more affordable living costs. Other studies have explored the role of age in determining the duration of the migration experience. In a study of Mexican migrants in the United States, Reyes (2004) revealed that those who arrived at an older age return quicker that their younger counterparts. Constant & Massey (2002) concur in their study on the emigration of migrants from Germany that elder migrants settled for shorter periods of time. These studies suggest that elderly migrants are more likely to experience integration difficulties in a host country and therefore prefer to live in the country of origin. However, there are certain contradictions between this idea and the outcome of other studies. Indeed, studies for example in Sweden (Nekby, 2006) and the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2005) found that the probability of emigrating decreases with age: the older people are, the less likely they are to leave the host country. This is also true in studies on the elderly migrants in France (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006) and the Netherlands (Bilgili & Siegel, 2015) with regards to their intention to return. These authors have argued that their preference for staying in the

host country is likely due to improved access to quality health care, which is an important element to consider for the elderly, as such services are not always available in their country of origin.

One factor to explain the contradictory evidence regarding elderly migration to their country of origin is to examine their duration of settlement. At the time of the initial migration, older individuals are more likely to want to return. On the other hand, the longer older migrants live abroad, the stronger are their ties are to their host country, which decreases the likelihood that they return.

Gender

The literature on gender as an influencing factor on the intention to return and the actual return offer contradictory evidence. A study among migrants in France suggests that it is more common for men to have an intention to return that women (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). Studies in Sweden (Nekby, 2006), the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2005) and the United States (Zakharenko, 2008) also found that women are less likely to leave the country to which they have migrated. However, other studies in Norway (Carling & Pettersen, 2013) and the Netherlands (Bilgili & Siegel, 2012) do not recognize the gender's influence on the intention to return. According to two studies on migrants in Germany (Constant & Massey, 2002; Gundel, 2008), there is no evidence to suggest gender plays a role at all.

There are research attempts to explain the reason why women tend to return less than men. In a study by Ley and Kobayashi (2005), Hong Kong men leave their families in Canada where life is more peaceful, and return to work in Hong Kong where they have better professional opportunities despite the stressful lifestyle. The spouse and children often choose to remain in Canada as the husband intend to rejoin their family after they retire. In this case, men seek to return to their country of origin because they seek improved professional and economic opportunities.

It should be noted, that the findings from this study do not apply to the large majority of refugee migrants coming from war-torn countries who often find improved economic and professional opportunities in their host countries. In contrast to this, women are particularly likely to benefit from improved economic and professional opportunities in their host countries. Typically, these countries (particularly those in the West) have more stability and protection for women. This means more opportunities to join the labour force and/or to pursue further education. Many migrant women adapt to more liberal cultural gender norms. While the men seek to return to Morocco at the end of their career, women are less eager to do so (Mekki-Berrada, 2019). For example, Mekki-Berrada writes

that Moroccan female migrants acquire a certain level of autonomy abroad where they are free to manage their home and there is less social pressure, which would be present if they lived in Morocco. Furthermore, they acquire some financial autonomy through access to the labour market. When they visit Morocco, Mekki-Berrada (2019) highlights that they realize that the personal and social status of women is still marked by inequality, and because of their experience in Europe they are able to perceive a critical view. They conclude that it would be difficult to reintegrate in Morocco. For men, however, the intention to return is present, even if it is not shared by their wife. Yet in reality, it seems that their plan for a permanent return becomes a myth over time (Mekki-Berrada, 2019). These examples show that, in addition to gender relations, the cultural gender norms of both the country of origin and the host country have an impact on the decision to return.

Level of education

The education level of migrants is one factor that seems to be significant in the literature determining the intention and success of return migration. For example, studies have found that Moroccans and Ghanaians in Italy and Spain, are more likely to return home if they have high levels of education (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Schoorl et al., 2000). Similarly, migrants most likely to leave Sweden are those with a university degree, especially those with a PhD (Nekby, 2006). This result also holds true for studies in Germany (Gundel 2008) and the United States (Cohen & Haberfeld, 2001). Nekby (2006) explains that employment opportunities for highly skilled level migrants may be limited in the host country, particularly when migrants do not have permanent work rights (permanent residency or citizenship) or when they face prejudice and racism. Migrants who have successfully attained degrees in professional fields may be tempted to find employment in their country of origin, especially if there is a lack of human resources in their field. As a result, lower-skilled migrants tend to stay in their host countries, where they usually enjoy a better standard of living. One exception to this is likely to be elderly professionals who have reached the end of their career and are less likely to follow their younger counterparts back to the country of origin, opting instead to benefit from stability and healthcare in their host countries (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006).

4.1.2. The migration experience

The migration experience refers to the conditions in which migration takes place, namely the reason for departure, the migration period, the initial intention to return and the administrative situation.

Reason for migration

There are many reasons why an individual will seek to migrate from their home country, they could be joining a spouse as newlyweds, moving to pursue a job opportunity, or fleeing a threat to life. This this is concerned with migrants who are 'forcibly displaced'. In practical terms, this means that individuals find their lives are no longer habitable, whether out of fear for their lives from armed (legitimate or illegitimate) groups, or fear for their lives from starvation or destitution. As this thesis relates to the context of the Syrian conflict, economic and political reasons are focused on rather than educational or family reasons. Most of the literature on the economic reasons for migration refers to voluntary migration and a desire to improve their living conditions. In the public narrative, economically motivated migrants are perceived to be less deserving of sympathy than politically motivated migrants. Is there a difference between politically and economically motivated migration with respect to intention to return to the country of origin?

Empirical work studying the phenomenon of emigration shows people who have left their country for political reasons seem the least likely to leave the host country. For example, migrants who arrived in Sweden for political reasons are less likely to emigrate than those who migrated for economic reasons (Edin et al., 2000). Due to their forced departure, they do not have the same options for return as other migrants and are dependent on developments in their country of origin. When the political situation improves, return may take place, which has been the case for example for Chilean (Gaillard, 1995) and South African (Israel, 2002) migrants. However, this is not always the case as Bilgili and Siegel (2012) state, Burundian, Ethiopian and Moroccan migrants in Norway who arrived for political or security reasons have no more or less intention to return compared to other reasons for migration.

Research in the Netherlands on the intention to return shows that there is no difference between those whose migration was motivated by economic factors (Bilgili & Siegel, 2012). In contrast, the study of migrants from Senegal, Ghana, Egypt and Morocco to Italy and Spain reveals that those who migrated to improve their living conditions are more likely to return to their country of origin (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Sinatti's (2011) study, specific to Senegalese migrants who migrated for economic reason, also underlines their willingness to one day return. Ultimately, evidence suggests that politically motivated migration is less likely to result in return migration, although this is not true in all contexts and depends on the political and economic change in the country of origin.

Migration period

The period of migration is a recurring theme in the empirical literature on the matter of return migration. Most experts agree that the longer the migration period, the less likely to make an intention or actively pursue return migration. This result appears in the literature on migrants' intentions to return from the United States (Waldorf, 1995) and France (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). In the latter research, the authors note that, while the intention to return may decrease over time, it is also determined by the migrants' goals, such as the acquisition of a skill. Some studies on emigration in Denmark (Jensen & Pedersen, 2007) and Germany (Dustmann, 2003) arrive at the same conclusion. Identifying intention to return has been measured by examining data on application for residence permit or citizenship, often correlating with duration and integration level (Amran & Urso, 2016).

The literature argues that as time passes, the more migrants establish social and economic ties to the host country, the more likely that their bond with the country of origin will weaken (Mekki-Berrada, 2019). In Ganga's (2006) study, the socialization process of Italian migrants in the United Kingdom alters their experience of Italy, effectively becoming tourists in the country of origin. In a study on retired African migrants in France, Hunter (2011) notes that the long absences away from the country of origin weakens nationalistic ties and reduces the desire to return. Unless there is a brutal constraint, return is unlikely to occur after a long period of settlement as migrants lose the enthusiasm and adventurous spirit of youth.

The initial intention to return

There is a correlation between migrants' initial *intention to return* and their intentions at the time of their participation in the study (Güngor & Tansel, 2005). This shows that migrants intention to return does not deplete over time. However, this does not imply that they actually return down the line. In contrast, other studies have focused more on why intentions change over time, suggesting that intentions do not necessarily result in actual returns.

Firstly, the literature indicates that migrants no longer wish to return because of situational changes. Mekki-Berrada, (2019), reveals that Moroccan women in France initially intend to return, but that becomes uncertain while abroad. Although they might depend on their husbands at first, their status changes with the birth of their children and participation in the labour market. They become gradually independent and wish to remain in France. Further, Sinatti's (2011) research claims that the objective

to return may remain, but it is tricky to foresee the time needed to obtain sufficient financial resources. Hence, plans become vague and return often takes the form of a myth since professional and personal factors affect their objectives. Second, the literature points out that intentions to return may change depending on the context in both countries. In his study on retired migrants in France, Hunter (2011) shows that migrants who intended to return eventually decide not to as they believe that this offers them greater financial stability and social benefits, including health care. Thirdly, the international context can explain changes in migrants' intentions. For example, the reinforcement of the Mexican border in the United states leads to migrants deciding not to return out of fear of not having the opportunity to come back to the United States even if they had initially intended to (Marcelli & Cornelius, 2001). The study by de Haas and Fokkema (2011) on Turkish, Senegalese, Ghanaian, and Egyptian migrants in Italy and Spain led to similar results in relation to European borders.

In summary, studies highlight the fact that initial intention plays a role in migrants' return behaviors, while some work emphasize that migrants' intentions change over time. However, these results are not contradictory. Having the intention to return increases the chances that return will take place, even if it is not certain, and that intentions and the context evolve during the time spent abroad.

Residency status

Little empirical evidence exists on the impact of residency status for migrants and their intention to return. It is clear that obtaining a residency is essential for individuals who want to settle permanently in their host country. According to Perrin (2004), migrants in Belgium face a dis-incentive to return because of the difficult path to obtain a visa or residence permit. This points to the fact that when migrants are documented, they tend to stay in the host country. A study on Mexican migrants in the United States also found that having official resident status facilitates permanent migration, as it opens avenues for families to join migrants (Massey et al., 1987). Reyes (2004) argues that irregular Mexican migrants do not return in the hope that their status will be regularized in the United States. This shows that restrictive settlement policies for migrants hampers the intention to return.

Sinatti (2011) also highlights that irregular Senegalese migrants cannot return to Senegal until they have a valid residency permit in Italy. For irregular migrants who have made the (often dangerous) journey and crossed the border, having a regular status is an insurance for migrants to have the possibility to come back if they return. The nationality can in particular facilitate movement between countries. In this respect, the work of Hunter (2011) and Sinatti (2011) note that migrants from Africa

who have worked for many years in Europe have obtained dual citizenship, which allows them to move back and forth. Nevertheless, migrants who have acquired the citizenship of the host country are less likely to emigrate or want to return (Perrin, 2004).

4.1.3. Personal circumstances during migration

Migrants' intention, emigration and experience of return can be influenced by a series of variables that relate to their personal circumstances be it family, material, professional, economic or social. The role of these factors in the experience of migration is discussed in this section.

Family circumstances

The influence of family circumstance is a crucial factor in the migration experience. The term 'family' is often defined as the immediate blood relatives or spouse, and studies consider marital status, the location of the spouse and/or children, and the number and gender of children.

The majority of the literature supports the conclusion that migrants wish to stay unified with their families. Therefore, it is unsurprising that migrants whose family reside in the host country have lower intentions to return (Waldorf, 1995). For instance, migrants from less developed countries living in Australia with their children are more likely to intend to remain in Australia because they know it offers better opportunities for their children (Khoo et al., 2008). As expected, studies have found that migrants with family living in the country of origin are more likely to want to return (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). In Belgium, for example, married migrants whose spouses have remained in the country of origin are more likely to emigrate (Perrin 2004). Similar results have been found in Germany, as Constant and Massey (2002) argue that having a family in the country of origin increases the chances of emigrating. It is possible however, that migrants who migrate without their family do so precisely because they are committed to returning to their country of origin. Therefore, it is unsurprising that they return at a higher rate than those who migrate with their families.

In some cases, the family members' preference for staying in the host country can also impact the chances of return. For example, many Moroccan migrants do not return because their children who grew up in Europe, and their wives who enjoy freedom abroad, are generally opposed to returning (Mekki-Berrada, 2019). Women and children can form a "coalition of no return" by anticipating the limited prospects and integration issues they might face in the country of origin (Haas & Fokkema,

2010). Thus, children can in fact amplify the barrier to return. For example, a study in Denmark found that migrants with more children had an increased likelihood of remaining in Denmark (Jensen & Pedersen, 2007). In Germany the likelihood of remaining was found to increase further if children were boys (Dustmann, 2003). This is driven by the belief that there are better prospects for young men in the host country. Once parents reach their later years, they become increasingly dependent on their children and therefore are further inhibited from returning to their country of origin. For elderly Italian migrants in the United Kingdom, whose children are unfamiliar with their country of origin, returning to Italy is impeded by a fear of losing the care provided by their children (Ganga, 2006).

In some cases, families with young children decide to leave their host country and return to their country of origin because of the value they place on their cultural heritage, language, and social networks. In a study on Indian returnees from the United States, parents justified their reason for return by emphasizing their children's well-being as a core motivating factor. They believed that growing up in India would compare more favorably to growing up in America (Varrel, 2008). Issues around conflicting cultural values and norms place challenges on children (and their parents), who find returning to their country of origin to be safer option.

Single people are more likely to want to return than migrants who are married or have children (Schoorl et al., 2000). For example, singles living in Sweden are more likely to emigrate (Klinthall, 2007). A lack of social ties is cited as the reason for increased rate of emigration of singles, yet little is known about the motivations for singles' decision to return.

It can be concluded that the geographical location of family members in an important factor in explaining migrants' decision to return to their country of origin. Migrants tend to return when their families are in the country of origin or stay in the host country when their families reside there.

Capital investments and resources

One of the variables of particular importance to migrants is their access to capital and resources. Often this capital is in the form of land, property and/or even businesses. Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of data on capital investments and resources of migrants in their country of origin.

Migrants who acquire property in their host country are less likely to intend to return to their country of origin. A French study concluded that migrants who intend to stay are more likely to invest in the

country (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). Similar conclusions were drawn in a study of Egyptians, Ghanaians, Senegalese, and Moroccans living in Italy and Spain (de Haas & Fokkema 2011). Mekki-Berrada (2019) argues that the inverse is also true, Moroccan women who are home owners are more likely to intend to stay in France. Similarly, migrants who own a business in the United States are less willing to return to Guatemala or El Salvador (Moran Taylor & Menjívar, 2005; Gundel, 2008).

Many migrants (particularly economic migrants) leave their country of origin with the goal of returning to buy property or a business. Massey and Esponisa (1997) write that write that Mexican migrants aspire to become homeowners in Mexico; they migrated for the purpose of working and saving money. Hence, owning property in the country of origin can be an attractive reason to return, as is evident in the case of Cape Verdean migrants (Carling, 2004) and for Senegalese, who perceive homeownership as a precondition for return (Sinatti, 2011). It is a reaffirmation of their roots and a testimony of their belonging to their country of origin despite being absent. In addition, these migrants invest in self-employment opportunities and other businesses in Senegal, which also signifies their attachment. However, studies show that migrants focus to a larger extent on acquiring real estate rather than a business (Mezger & Beauchemin, 2010). Quiminal (2002) notes that many Malian returnees have built retirement homes that are much larger with a higher standard of living than in France, which contributes to the fact that they enjoy great prestige upon their return. Ownership and investment appear to be good indicators of migrants' attachment to a particular place, which may reflect where they wish to live with their families in the future.

It is not uncommon for migrants to own capital (land, real estate, business) in their country of origin. Migration means having to leave their access to these resources behind. Ownership of this capital keeps individuals connected to their country of origin and can increase the intention to return.

Career opportunities

Non-working migrants are more likely to want to return to their country of origin than employed migrants. For example, unemployed Spanish migrants in Switzerland are strongly in favor of returning (Bolzman et al. 2006), as are unemployed Egyptians in Italy (Schoorl et al. 2000). Studies in Germany (Gundel, 2008), the Netherlands (Bijwaard et al., 2012) and Denmark (Jensen & Pedersen, 2007) reached similar results where non-working migrants are more likely to emigrate. This does not apply to retired migrants in France who are less in favor of returning than employed

migrants (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). However, it should be noted that there may be a selection bias in de Coulon and Wolff's study as migrants who had already returned could not be surveyed.

Some experts have questioned whether return is influenced by the migrants' job satisfaction. Migrants who are satisfied with their work in the United States are less likely to intend to return (Waldorf, 1995). Research on Hong Kongese migrants in Canada found that those with jobs not suitable to their skills feel undervalued and are more likely to return to their country of origin (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). Another study on Peruvian returnees shows that the professional de-skilling that they face in Europe due to the lack of diploma recognition motivates many returns (Nieto Sanchez, 2012).

In conclusion, non-working migrants do not necessarily stay in host countries, contrary to the popular believe that they stay for the welfare benefits. Sayad (1991) argues that unemployed migrants question their legitimacy in the host country. This is also true for migrants who are dissatisfied with their jobs. Being unemployed or underemployed is likely to motivate a return home, yet without a doubt this move will be determined to some extent by the economic and political context of 'home'.

Financial security and income

Understanding migrants financial security in the context of return migration requires an examination of income trends. Studies on migrants' intentions to return reveal that it not dependent on their economic status. For example, migrants in Norway who experience economic hardship have no more or less intention to return than others (Carling & Pettersen, 2013). Incomes of migrants in France also do not affect their intention to return (de Coulon & Wolff, 2006). Yet evidence from Sweden suggest that migrants who return are usually in a more financially secure position with a higher income (Klinthall, 2007). The hypothesis that migrants do not return if they have not secured enough financial stability is supported by data on Turkish (Razum et al., 2005) and Senegalese (Sinatti, 2011) migrants.

Social integration

Migrants' social integration can play a crucial role in the decision to return with most socially integrated migrants being the least willing to return. A study on the determinants of the intention to return of migrants from various African countries in Italy and Spain developed an indicator of socio-cultural integration based on: the ethnicity of social networks; participation in the community; language proficiency; complementarity in values of the host country; and sense of belonging to the host country (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). The findings suggest a negative correlation between the

socio-cultural integration of migrants and return intention: the more socially integrated migrants are, the less they intend to return. Another research examining the case of migrants in Norway also finds a negative association between the sense of belonging to society and the intention to return (Carling & Pettersen, 2013). This is supported by research on Moroccan suggesting that those who experience racism in Europe are more likely to want to return (de Haas et al. 2009).

The literature also explains how difficult integration in a host country can motivate the intention to return. Nieto Sanchez (2012) found that many Peruvian returnees claim experiences of racism and discrimination in Italy contributed to their departure. Another study on Algerian migrants in France distinguishes between two types of migrants based on their degree of integration (Le Masne, 1982). The first live on the margins of French society and have the firm intention of returning to Algeria. They continue to foster strong ties with Algeria, their main leisure activity is visiting Algerian friends and hearing news from those who visit Algeria. This gives them an insight into changes that have occurred since their departure such as job opportunities or political development. The second type tends to distance itself from the Algerian community and traditions. They discover another culture that leaves its mark on them and sense the difficulties they may have in readapting in Algeria, hence, their desire to return is relatively low. Ultimately, those who are better socially integrated in a host country are less likely to consider returning, while those who feel alienated or who have had hostile experiences (discrimination or racism) are more likely to want to return to their country of origin.

4.1.4. The socio-political and economic context on the intention to return and the return experience

Over the period of migration, migration policies are likely to change. Migrants may often postpone or cancel their plans to return to their country of origin due to increasingly restrictive policies in the host country. This is because there is no assurance of coming back to the host country at a later date if their reintegration in their home country is difficult. This is evident in the literature on migration between Mexico and the United States (Marcelli & Cornelius, 2001), but it is also mentioned in relation to migration between Africa and Europe (Carling, 2004; de Haas & Fokkema, 2010).

The migration period may also refer to the political and economic situation prevailing in the country of origin. On the one hand, an unstable economy in the country of origin may have a negative effect on the intention to return. In this respect, research on migrants from Guatemala and El Salvador (Moran-Taylor & Menjívar, 2005) suggests that lack of labour market opportunities and apprehension

about the political climate in country of origin explains why migrants do not consider returning. The economic crisis in Mexico is also a reason for fewer returns from the United States (Marcelli & Cornelius, 2001). On the other hand, improvements in the country of origin may encourage migrants to return. This is the case of India, which presents opportunities for skilled migrants seeking to return to their country of origin. Indeed, in the 2000s, well-paying jobs were created in India for highly skilled workers, prompting many of them to return (Varrel, 2008). The political and economic context is therefore an interesting element to take into account in migration return.

4.2. Reintegration after return

Having examined the factors influencing the initial intention and the determinants of the return, this section looks at the reintegration of returnees in the country of origin. Reintegration has been researched from various disciplines (anthropology, social policy, sociology, criminology and population studies to name a few), resulting in copiously diverse literature (Carling et al., 2011). As a result, there are a variety of methods, measures and approaches to understand the broad concept of migrants return to homeland. Reintegration can be studied through the subjective view of returnees, but also by measuring their situation against objective criteria (for example acquisition of capital or gaining employment). One of the frequently cited challenges of return migration is the 'sustainability' and capacity of home countries to reabsorb returnees. Based on Cassarino (2008b), however, one should be critical of the term *sustainability*. He argues that it entered popular use in migration literature about two decades ago to address the permanent nature of return, at a time when policy interest focused on the permanent return of undesirable irregular migrants in the host country. This thesis adopts the explored three dimensions to reintegration (economic, psychological and social) as proposed by Black et al. (2004). The literature is integrated in this thesis is based on the research by Black et al. (2004), who highlight *a subjective versus an objective approach* to study reintegration and the fact that reintegration is divided into three dimensions: *economic, psychological and social dimension*. Each of these dimensions are influenced by each other (Ruben et al., 2009). If economic reintegration goes well, psychological and social reintegration are also likely to go well. However, economic difficulties may have a negative impact on the psychological and social reintegration. Similarly, psychological or social difficulties can negatively impact economic opportunities. Therefore, this thesis classifies the psychological and social dimensions into one category.

- The economic dimension: economic reintegration refers to the material conditions necessary for an adequate livelihood (income, housing, transport, education and health care) and can be measured *subjectively*, by asking returnees whether they are satisfied with their situation, or *objectively*, by examining whether they meet pre-defined criteria. Thus, studying the subjective economic reintegration looks at how they receive their economic status of income, assets, employment and housing, whereas to know objectively what the situation is, one needs to measure and compare these elements to a standard (Black et al., 2004).
- The psychosocial dimension: the psychosocial dimension is also important for reintegration. Although not all returnees anticipated it, life post-return often represents a fresh start, with all the inherent fears and hopes (Ghanem, 2003). During their migration, changes may have taken place in their country of origin, and their expectations are not always met. This can affect their sense of belonging and relationships. Several researchers measure the social and psychological dimensions of reintegration *subjectively* (Davids & van Houte, 2008; Ruben et al., 2009). For them, the key to successful social reintegration is having a network that allow them to access information and share values with peers. The psychosocial dimension is important to build and express one's identity to feel at home, safe and secure, and to experience a certain well-being.

Having laid out the dimensions that define reintegration, it is at this stage possible to examines the empirical work examining the factors that influence the reintegration of returnees. The analysis of the literature resulted in four types of factors, those related to:

1. **Socio-demographic characteristics of returnees**: age, gender, level of education;
2. **The migration experience**: migration period and willingness to return;
3. **Personal circumstances after return**: the duration since return, family circumstances, capital investments and resources, career opportunities, financial security and income;
4. **The socio-political and economic context** on reintegration after return.

This following section are devoted to the analysis of each of these factors, highlighting their impact on the economic and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration.

4.2.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of returnees

As in the case with the intention to return and returning, the age, gender and education level can influence returnees reintegration as well. This chapter outlines the findings from the literature review.

Age

The age of individuals plays a role in their reintegration, just as it does in the intention and decision to return. A study on returnees to Afghanistan, Armenia, Sierra Leone, Togo and Vietnam shows that migrants in the middle age group between 31 and 47 years old are more likely to be better reintegrated that those who are younger or older (van Houte & de Koning, 2008). Younger people's social integration is inhibited by the lack of knowledge of the norms and values of their home country. Older people, on the other hand, face difficulties in finding employment (van Houte & de Koning, 2008). Those in the middle age group still feel a sense of belonging to their country of origin and are young enough to find a job. The difficulty of finding employment after a certain age is highlighted in a research on returnees in Chile (Gaillard, 1995). However, migrants who return at retirement age are satisfied with their reintegration. Studies on returnees to Morocco (Mekki-Berrada, 2019) and to Cape Verde (Carling, 2004) show that retired returnees have achieved what they expected from their migration – to improve the living conditions – and then enjoy life while receiving a pension.

Gender

As the literature has previously shown, women often anticipate struggles in returning to their country of origin and are therefore less likely to want to return. It is thus unsurprising that studies indicate reintegration is more difficult for women than for men, both economically and psychosocially.

With regard to the economic dimension, studies reveal that women have difficulty integrating particularly into the professional sphere. In India, women who have returned from the United States cannot easily find paid employment, which is explained by the social and cultural pressures against them, especially if they have children (Varrel, 2008). Those who have returned to Ghana and Ivory Coast feel discriminated against in terms of income relative to men, as well as in terms of recognition of their skills (Ammassari, 2009). As women, they are not recognized as capable of doing what men do, whereas in Europe and North America, they felt considered according to their abilities.

Woman also struggle from psycho-social perspective. Analysis of Afghan, Armenian, Sierra Leonean, Togolese and Vietnamese returnees found evidence of reverse 'cultural shock' (Ruben et al., 2009). Ghanaian women, for example, say that they are frowned upon if they go out in the evening for a drink and wear certain clothes, which was not a problem in Europe (Ammassari, 2009). For Indian women, it is not easy to re-enter the authoritarian relationships that characterize their society,

and they often lose certain autonomy within their family (Varrel, 2008). Moreover, women who find employment are not well regarded in the social and family sphere, whereas those who are no longer working do not generally express frustration. In her research on Irish returnees, Gmelch (1980) argues that men are more satisfied with their lives after return than women. These women find it difficult to get along with other women who have not migrated. Their migration experience has opened them up to the world, and they complain that other women with whom they got on well before are only concerned about their families and not interested in doing activities outside their homes.

While this tendency for women to experience less ease after return characterizes most studies, research on Jamaican returnees highlights the struggles faced by men (Golash-Boza, 2013). In Jamaica, men are responsible for providing for the family: to be considered 'a man', you have to be financially independent. Migrants who require financial support from relatives or others experience shame. This was also found in Bosnia and Armenia, who bear the brunt of financial responsibility for the family feel a great failure if they return empty-handed (van Houte & de Koning, 2008).

Level of education

The analysis of the education factor in the literature reveals that the reintegration of more educated returnees generally seems to go better than that of less educated ones. This echoes not only the fact that they are more willing to return, as the literature has previously shown, but also how they are reintegrated depends very much on the context in the country of origin.

Migrants with high levels of formal education are more likely to find employment, as shown by a study in Uganda (Thomas, 2008). In the case of returns in Chile, Gaillard (1995) points out that most qualified people have returned to the employment level they held before their departure. In contrast, in the case of Cape Verde, where economic opportunities are less certain, migrants who returned after studying abroad face employment difficulties (Carling, 2004). The level of education does not seem to play in favor of better reintegration in Ghana and Ivory Coast either, where according to returnees, even for the most qualified person, "if you are not someone's son, you are not considered" (Ammassari, 2004: 100). Thereby, employees are not recruited on the basis of excellence but through networked relationships. The context of the country of origin is therefore relevant to reintegration in terms of education. However, financially, a study indicates that higher education does result in higher incomes (Black et al., 2004). Further, a study of businesses run by returnees in Egypt found them to

be more sustainable than those run by Egyptians who never left. This suggests that alongside financial capital, skills acquired abroad are certainly important (Marchetta, 2012).

From the psychosocial point of view, a high level of education is favorable to reintegration as it is highly valued in most social networks. In Ghana and Ivory Coast, job-related problems for returnees are not uncommon, and lower-skilled returning migrants struggle more than the elite. The former mainly complain of problems in establishing their business, while the latter cite difficulties related to the lack of professionalism in their environment (Ammassari, 2009). Frustration is also found in Cape Verde, where migrants who return after studying abroad struggle with rigid hierarchies and having a superior with a lower level of education (Carling, 2004).

4.2.2. The migration experience

The migration experience refers to the conditions in which migration takes place, namely, the migration period and the willingness to return.

Migration period

The migration period can negatively influence the reintegration of returnees depending on the context. From an economic point of view, a longer migration period correlates with a higher chance of earning savings, which positively impacts their reintegration. Those with a pension guaranteeing them a regular income live mostly well after their return. Whether in the case of Cape Verde (Carling, 2004) or Morocco (Mekki-Berrada, 2019), these returnees lead comfortable lives. However, this result is related to their age and retirement. Working returnees in Ivory Coast and Ghana who were absent for many years without maintaining close relations with their country of origin tend to struggle in their job search since relationships are important in finding employment (Ammassari, 2009).

On the psychosocial level, reintegration after a long period of absence is tough. It reveals a trend that is consistent with the earlier analysis on the determinants of intention and return. Migrants who were abroad for a long time are less likely to return to their country of origin because they fear the difficulties of reintegration. Studies confirm that these fears are justified. For example, research on returnees to Ghana and Ivory Coast shows that those with a longer migration period face more problems in adapting to local living and working conditions. Similarly, in the case of Irish returnees, difficulties in re-establishing relationships increase with the migration period (Gmelch, 1980). The

longer the time abroad, the more they consider their old friends closed-minded. Moreover, as Gaillard (1995) points out in his study of returnees in Chile, being absent from the country may also be frowned upon. Returnees raise the lack of interest of those who did not migrate, which they say makes them feel that they had acquired abroad was worthless.

Willingness to return

The economic difficulties for those who were forced to return have been widely documented in various contexts. One study showed that migrants who returned involuntarily consider their situation the same or worse than before they left, which can be explained by the fact that they have done so reluctantly and had little or no time for preparation (Cassarino, 2008). Among returnees who built a business back in Mali, only the ones of those who voluntarily returned were successful (Choplin & Lombard, 2014). Preparing for the return therefore reduces the risk of reintegration failure. Further work on reintegration highlights that migrants who are forced to return more likely to become welfare recipients or dependent on their families (Quiminal, 2002). As a study on Malian returnees, who were irregular migrants in France, found there were more likely to have economic problems (Linares, 2009). Forced returnees who receive no financial support can find themselves in extreme poverty.

The psychosocial reintegration of returnees in their country of origin has been addressed by a number of studies underlining the major psychological and social costs of deportations. According to a study in Mali, returnees are considered "children of the curse" (Choplin & Lombard, 2014). As their family had placed all their hopes and efforts in them, they feel shame and do not accept the idea of being back, sometimes experiencing real psychological trauma. This is augmented by the derogatory perception from locals who, knowing that many others manage to live abroad without papers, conclude that these returnees must have done something extremely wrong for being deported (Carling, 2004). Similar findings were reported by Chappart (2008) who studied the reintegration of Cameroonians expelled from France arguing that the social exclusion of expelled migrants, who were once the pride of the community, is extremely difficult.

4.2.3. Personal circumstances after return

Migrants' reintegration after return can be influenced by a series of variables, in particular, the time since the return, as well as their family, economic, material and professional situation. The role of these factors in the life trajectories of individuals is discussed in the following section.

Time since the return

Migrant is a significant life event, and adjustment and settlement is most often gradual. However, it is only time that allows returnees to fully reintegrate into their country of origin. The period since the return has been studied mainly in relation to psychosocial reintegration. Studies in Ghana and Ivory Coast indicate that the returnees experience significant struggles immediately after their return, but that these diminish over time (Black et al., 2003). The same is true for Irish returnees. Gmelch (1980) suggest that the initial wave of struggle is a result of unmet expectations upon return arguing that over time returnees learn to adjust. Gaillard (1995) explains that returnees in Chile describes that the initial period after return as more chaotic than they expected. It is not easy for them to grieve the host country while trying to reintegrate in Chile, a country in which they have lost all their bearings.

Accordingly, Gaillard (1995) explains the five stages of the mental process of reintegration. The first stage is that of euphoria, which characterizes the reunion with the country and loved ones. Here, the returnees are overexcited and everything hits them: tastes, smells and so forth. They begin to perceive the changes that have taken place in people's behavior and in the environment. It is in the second stage that these become gradually evident. Returnees feel that they do not understand the people and vice versa. They feel rejected and confused. The third stage is that of depression, which leads to a devaluation of themselves and their environment and possibly the breaking of strong old ties with the past. Next, the fourth stage is rehabilitation. Gradually, returnees reorient themselves, and in a fifth stage they manage to reintegrate and begin to feel part of society again.

Of the studies mentioned above, only Gaillard (1995) discusses the effect of time on economic reintegration. Through the analysis on returned Chilean exiles, she notes that the period of financial instability can last from a few months to a few years, suggesting that they regain stability afterwards.

Family circumstances

From the literature, it appears that the family situation influences the reintegration of returnees. Living with family contributes to the individual well-being, however, the financial means must allow for this. Studies of returnees to Afghanistan, Armenia, Togo, Sierra Leone and Vietnam show that those with children are best reintegrated (Ruben et al., 2009). Despite not distinguishing between returnees whose families had also migrated and those whose families had remained, it generally appears that

returnees with families have more ties to the country of origin than those without children. Feeling responsible for securing their children's future can also contributes to more successful reintegration.

Regarding psychosocial reintegration, the same study shows that, for the same reasons, returnees reintegrate easier into social networks and psychologically if they have family in the country of origin compared to single migrants (Ruben et al., 2009). Further studies highlight the support provided by their families towards their reintegration (Sinatti, 2011), as well as the joy that they feel when they return to live with their families (de Haas & Fokkema, 2010).

Capital investments and resources

Migrants who own property in their country of origin are the most likely to return. Landlords are more prepared for their return as they have more financial security, which contributes to their successful reintegration (Carling, 2004). In many cases, returnees have been able to build a house, where they live with their families upon their return. Some people also invest in small businesses such as a bar, a taxi or farmland. Moreover, in the case of Morocco, those who were able to afford to own a house consider that the life they lead since their return is better than the one they had before their departure (Mekki-Berrada, 2019).

From a psychosocial point of view, migrants whose material situation is satisfactory also experience their return well. Irish returnees who find that their accommodation in Ireland is more comfortable than the one they had abroad are more satisfied (Gmelch, 1980). Based on Gaillard (1995), housing is one of the first practical difficulties returnees face. If they are accommodated by the family after their return, family relationships may worsen, especially if this situation lasts for a long time. This suggests that reintegration works best when migrants already have a home. In addition, returnees who have made investments enjoy a certain prestige in their communities. As such, returnees to Cape Verde who have made investments notice that they are particularly respected (Carling, 2004).

Career opportunities

The post-return employment situation of returnees has been measured in different ways that examines its impact on reintegration. Economically, the professional instability that characterizes the early stages after return is difficult to live with because it implies a fall in the standard of living. This is what Gaillard (1995) explains on the basis of returnees in Chile, although this instability may be tolerated as a rite of passage when there is hope of having a good professional status later on.

From a psychosocial point of view, the professional situation seems to play a role as well. According to Gmelch (1980), returnees who find their jobs in Ireland more satisfying than their jobs abroad tend not to regret their return. Ammassari (2009) compares the situation of Ghanaians and Ivorians who are employed or self-employed after return. His study shows that those with the least problems are those who are in paid employment, especially for Ghanaians.

Financial security and income

The economic situation of migrants after their return plays a vital role in their reintegration. It refers to the financial autonomy of returnees or their dependence on their families (Carling, 2004). The migrants least likely to return are those who are most economically vulnerable in the host country because they lack the means to prepare for their return (Cassarino, 2008). They choose not to return because they anticipate the reintegration problems they would face if they were back.

As has been mentioned in relation to Chilean returnees, the psychosocial reintegration cannot take place without an acceptable financial status (Gaillard, 1995). Migrants who return with very little savings experience their return poorly. In Ghana, returning empty-handed, without money, goods or gifts is very difficult and shameful (Kleist, 2013). By returning, they violate family expectations and the reciprocity that migration entails, as families often made sacrifices to finance their departure. They feel desperate and disoriented. As mentioned above, Jamaicans, especially men, feel a deep shame at having to live at the expense of the relatives to whom they sent money while abroad (Golash-Boza, 2013). Society's expectation in Jamaica is that if you go abroad you are supposed to get rich. That explains the shame they feel when they come back as poor as they were. Carling (2004) explains the same phenomenon in the context of Cape Verde, where becoming a burden on the family is also a very humiliating experience. As Sinatti (2011) explains, having migrated changes the structure of their interpersonal relationships with their relatives back home.

4.2.4. The socio-political and economic context on reintegration after return

In the literature, context not only refers to the situation prevailing in the country of origin at the economic, political, social or cultural level after return, but also to the international context. Since the context may change over time, the timing can be used as an indicator.

On the subject of economic reintegration, the timing in which the return takes place is important. For example, previously, returnees were likely to be integrated into the public sector in Ghana (Ammassari, 2009). However, finding employment has become difficult since recruitment in public administration was disrupted by structural adjustments. Therefore, for a higher chance of a successful economic reintegration, there must be a stable economic and political situation in the country of origin. Another study states that the primary reason for the failure of Malians' entrepreneurial investments is related to factors linked to the economic and social context (Linares, 2009). In Mali, access to credit is limited, which limits opportunities. Moreover, the private sector is poorly developed, and the burden of family responsibilities is heavy.

Psychosocial reintegration may be difficult for returnees because of the social context and the demands after return, as highlighted by a study in Cape Verde (Carling, 2004). For instance, the international context makes migration from Africa difficult, contributing to the fact that migrants who have been deported are accused of having wasted their opportunity. Returning empty-handed is a greater humiliation today than ever. Others have examined the difficulties experienced by returnees in their working lives. For example, returnees who have set up businesses in Ghana and Ivory Coast complain about the inadequate legitimate interference of local authorities (Ammassari, 2009). They claim that the work ethic of their employees is often poor and that they lack in professionalism, time-management, organization and productivity. They also complain about corruption. Context can play an uncertain role, as it did for South African migrants who returned after the end of Apartheid (Steyn & Grant, 2007). They have the impression that they are not returning to their society of origin as they knew it, which is generally not easy to live with. On the other hand, returning at the end of Apartheid, when a democratic government is established, gives them a certain gratification; being there is symbolic for them of having been able to hold their own during exile in difficult conditions.

Chapter 5. Theoretical Framework

The previous literature review chapter provided the basis of the current knowledge and theoretical findings of the factors and determinants for migrants' intentions of returning, their return as such, and their reintegration after the return. This chapter presents the research theories on return migration in order to subsequently establish a conceptual framework. By presenting the main theoretical approaches for international migration first, efforts can be made to integrate them into a theoretical framework as a basis for this thesis.

5.1. Main theoretical approaches towards return migration

This section begins by analyzing the main theoretical developments of international migration in order to observe to what extent the theories understand and approach return migration. The analysis of the theoretical trends provides insight into the influencing return factors that these theories favor, whether they are set at the micro (individual), meso (family or household) or macro (society as a whole) level. The theories in this section refer more to "theoretical trends" than uniform theories. Each theory is summarized in a way in which migration is considered in general first, before focusing on what is said or implied about return migration.

5.1.1. Neoclassical theory

The neoclassical approach is primary concerned with migration from an economic point of view believing that migration occurs as a consequence of economic imbalances between geographic areas. This theory explains migration at the macro level in terms of differences of labour demand and supply between countries of origin and host countries (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Lewis, 1954; Todaro, 1976). At a micro level, the theory considers migrants as rational actors who seek to maximize their income and decide to migrate based on a cost-benefit analysis because they expect to have a higher income abroad than in their own country (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Sjaastad, 1962). The neoclassical theory highlights the structural dimension of migration and is criticized for ignoring more complex variables. It only takes the predominant economic context into account, without considering the social, political and cultural context. As a result, the collective nature of migration is overlooked.

This theory does not address the subject of return. However, it can be assumed that if the differences between the country of origin and the host country persist, migrants do not return. The return would only occur in the case of economic developments in the country of origin, provided that individuals expect to have a higher income. If the chances of economic improvements are low, individuals presumably migrate without the intention of returning. Scholars (Cassarino, 2004; Constant & Massey, 2002; de Haas & Fokkema, 2011) who have expanded on the hypothesis of the neoclassical theory, explain that a return may take place when migrants fail to integrate and improve their life conditions in the host country. This was also found as a socio-demographic factor in chapter 4, where lower-skilled migrants behave according to the neoclassic theory, whereby migrants seek to maximize their welfare and are likely to stay abroad where living conditions are better. Accordingly, the return is the result of failure to achieve the profits that migrants expected from migration. This can cause difficulties reintegrating in the country of origin.

5.1.2. Theories of social systems

Inspired by the Luhmann social systems (Bommes & Geddes, 2000), this theory considers the individuals at the center of functional systems. Applied to international migration, the theory considers migrants as agents who have the possibility, under certain conditions, to have access to different spheres of society such as economics, law, politics, religion, family, education and health. These services provide justice through jurisdictional courts, health care through hospitals, as well as education at schools and universities. However, these services are not open to all. Authorities distinguish between individuals who wish to benefit from their services on the basis of whether or not access rules are met (Bommes & Geddes, 2000). For migrants accessing these services in the host country requires fulfilling certain conditions, particularly that of obtaining permanent residency. This theory therefore argues that requirements to be included in society influences individual's actions for example whether to migrate or to return to their country of origin. However, it does not examine other factors, in particular on the meso level linked to family and networks, which can also explain the individual's actions. If this theory considers that individuals make their own decisions, then social systems play a central role as macro factors are also important.

It is possible to apply this theory to the initial intention of migrants to return. Benefiting from services abroad, such as an education, health care or social security in general, can be the reason to choose to migrate when those services are absent or of poor quality in the country of origin (Bommes & Geddes,

2000). It can then be assumed that the migrants do not wish to return to their country unless services of similar quality are established there and the decision to return is made based on the functional systems that they are a part of. Accordingly, migrants make the decision of not returning due to their required presence in the host country in order to uphold their access to the available services, except in cases where rights are portable. In this regard, Hunter (2011) shows in his research on elderly North and West African migrants living in France that their presence is required based on policy conditions and access to health care. Their return would mean the inability to continue benefiting from the services their host country offers them. Thereby, the theory of social systems is in line with the findings of the previous literature review, where the decision for the elderly to stay abroad depends on access to better quality health care.

Contrarily, the social systems in the countries of origin can also motivate returns. For example, in the case of public officials to whom layoffs are granted for a fixed period in order to benefit from further studies or work abroad. At the end of this period they return to their country of origin in order to regain their status and social benefits. Finally, the social systems theory does not address the reintegration after the return. It can, however, be expected that it may depend on the services available in the country of origin. This theory, which raises the role of services offered to migrants, complements the neoclassical theory which emphasizes the differences in terms of wages.

5.1.3. The structural approach

Structuralism presents itself as a theoretical approach in social sciences which favors the study of the social structures at hand. Structuralism does not particularly focus on migration, but is more geared in social processes. Accordingly, the individual is limited by the social structures beyond their control that influences the choices and opportunities presented to them (Gmelch, 1980). The focus is therefore on the context in which individuals live, which not only refers to financial security, but also to social, institutional, cultural and religious capital. In this regard, a lot of work has been done on return migration[2]. It is not the migrants' intention to return that received attention, but the return experience as studied by Gmelch (1980). The author views forced returns due to external factors, returns in light of adjustment difficulties in the host country or homesickness, and returns that occur after migrants

[2] These works do not define the "structionalism" theory, however, Cassarino (2004) considers them as such in his literature review.

reach the goal of their migration. In the last two cases, the decision to return is based on opportunities that the migrants expect in their country of origin, as well as those they found in their host country.

The structuralist approach places particular emphasis on the lives of the individuals after their return. The difficulties that migrants face on return are linked to the fact that they have lived far and long outside their country of origin. Firstly, they are not connected with the local realities due to their absence from the traditional way of thinking and behavior. Power relations, values and traditions that predominate society affects their reintegration, even for those who returned with resources and innovative ideas and are willing to be contribute to development (Cerase, 1974). Furthermore, the context in their country of origin has changed since their departure, which the migrants may not consider in their decision to return. This also underlines the finding in the literature review above with regards to factors related to the migration experience on a psychological level. In view of the structuralist theory, these readjustment difficulties occur when migrants are inadequately prepared for their return (Cassarino, 2004). This approach therefore particularly challenges the reintegration of return migrants. Criticism against this theory stresses the negative role of structural factors on the reintegration of return migrants and disregards the ties that migrants can keep during their absence with their country of origin.

5.1.4. New economics of labour migration

Unlike the previous theories, the theory of new economics of labour migration focuses less on the migration as an individual choice instead choosing to recognize migration as a family decision with multiple variables at play. It considers migration as one of the strategies that households adopt to diversify sources of income in a context of market failure such as access to credit or insurance, which is the situation in many developing countries (Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001). The precarity of depending on the weather for an agricultural livelihood, unemployment and job insecurity, induces families to send their members abroad in order to diversify and minimize their economic risk (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Access to the market, income inequality and relative poverty are considered when deciding to migrate (Stark & Taylor, 1989). As a result, migration is largely considered an event undertaken by disadvantaged families and households who wish to live in better conditions.

This theory focuses on the decision to migrate, whereby the question of return is not central. According to the theory, migrants begin having intentions of returning when they have acquired the

resources necessary to overcome the market imperfections, which can improve the living conditions of their families. During migration, migrants send money to their families, but if they find it difficult to save due to low income or unemployment, their return will be deferred (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). In fact, returnees are those who have acquired enough financial capital and as a result have the capacity to achieve their goals in their home country. Several findings in the literature review are consistent with the new economics of labour migration theory. For instance, as with educational and economic factors, it was observed that skilled migrants who have professional ambitions, such as obtaining a degree, and the opportunity to exercise their skills in their home country are more likely to return after achieving their goal. Furthermore, factors on the family situation shows that it is also possible that migration takes place with the idea of acquiring financial capital in order to be able to get married at home. Cassarino (2004) goes further and claims that returnees who have successfully reached their objective, significantly less likely to encounter no obstacles during their reintegration.

An issue with this theory is, as noted by de Haas and Fokkema (2011), that it only links to the initial reason for migration, whereby individuals' motivations may evolve over time. It has been criticized for viewing households as homogeneous entities that decide based on collective interest, while disregarding the fact that conflicts of interest may exist within them. Yet, it provides perspective to understand the logic behind migration departure and returns, in particular with its collective dimension (the household) and structural dimension (imperfect markets).

5.1.5. Network Theory

Network Theory emphasizes the importance of social and family surroundings in the study of international migration (Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001; Massey et al., 1993). According to this theory, migration decisions are not only made individually or by households, but also by the broad social structures in which individuals find themselves. For Guilmoto and Sandron (2001), there are two levels of structures: the family, corresponding to the unit of production and consumption, which can be broken down into numerous variants (extended family, core family, paternal division etc.), and the community, which they define as the unit of social and cultural identification (friends, neighbors, ethnic group members etc.). Networks can also be understood as the interpersonal link between migrants, return migrants and non-migrants (Massey et al., 1987). Networks can facilitate the migration journey as well as integration into the host country and can be a source of social capital.

As Guilmoto and Sandron (2001) explain, families are often involved in the migration process of other members by financially supporting their cost of migration. This is often seen as an investment, and family members expect to receive a return on their investment mainly through money transfers. Thereby, an agreement, the so-called "migratory contract", is tactically set up between the migrants and their families. This aims to protect them again the opportunism of migrants who could choose to end ties with their relatives, meaning a loss of investment for the families. This is where the networks intervene to maintain the links between migrants and their families or communities in their country of origin. There is for example particular "surveillance" methods abroad between migrants from the same community (Chort et al., 2012). Furthermore, marriage with someone from the community of origin is often encouraged. The networks present themselves as insurance against the risks of migration, and are in turn a guarantee against migrants cutting ties with their communities of origin.

Network Theory does not address the topic of migrants' intention to return. Along the lines of the theory of new economics of labor migration, migrants may also be looking to return after improving their living conditions. It can be implied from the importance of the links to their community of origin that migrants who respected the "contract" return with the resources that allow them and their families to live in good conditions. However, over time as migrants adopt the value system of the society in their host country, they tend to depend less on their communities of origin for example to find a job or to get married. In the long-term, the role of networks, as well as the solidarity and homogeneity of groups and their ability to enforce their standards are weakening (Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001; Massey et al., 1987). In that evolution the return becomes less of a priority. This reflects the findings from the literature review recognizing that the more socially integrated migrants are, the less they intend to return. In terms of the role of networks in the reintegration of migrants who do return, the theory considers them to be individuals who have maintained strong ties to their home society during their migration. The resources they mobilize during their reintegration stem not only from their migration period, but also from what they had before leaving (Cassarino, 2004). The theory therefore emphasizes the importance of the social capital of return migrants for their reintegration.

5.1.6. Transnationalism

Transnational theory highlights that migrants maintain ties to their home society (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt et al., 2003; Portes et al., 1999). In that sense, transnationalism is close to the network theory. It mainly focuses on how migrants retain links with their countries of origin while being

abroad: not only by being in touch with people who stayed in the country, but also through the visits the migrants make in their country of origin (Portes et al., 1999). These ties can be related to an economic, political, sociocultural and religious context. Thus, migrants can participate in religious and political practices in their country of origin. The type of transnational activities and their intensity can vary. Migrants may be continuously engaged in commercial activities in their country of origin, while others only visit occasionally (Levitt et al., 2003). This theory of international migration contributes to a better understanding of the links that migrants have with their society of origin and of the identity that evolves during their time abroad. Over time, migrants can adapt an identity that combines traits from both their originating and host society (Vertovec, 2001).

This theory does not address the question of migrants' initial intention to return, however, as stated by Cassarino (2004), it positively views the return to and reintegration in the country of origin. The return is prepared by the migrants through visits and contact with their families, friends and community thanks to new technologies (internet, mobile phone). These links allow them to obtain information on the circumstances in their country of origin, the opportunities that exist there, upon which they make the decision on whether to return. Accordingly, the preparation of the return has a positive effect on the reintegration to the society of origin, while the transnational identity of the migrants influences their lives after the return (Hunter, 2011).

5.2. Theoretical limitations

Ultimately, there are various empirical studies in the literature review as well as in the theoretical approaches with gaps in defining and measuring reintegration. Firstly, the work does not always clarify what it exactly means by reintegration and addresses it either through an economic or a psychosocial dimension but rarely both. Further, many authors adopt the subjective or objective perspective when studying reintegration, which is subject to certain vagueness. Moreover, the work rarely specifies the points of comparison used to assess the reintegration of returnees. It often implicitly compares the situation after their return with the one they had in the host country or before leaving, or with that of non-migrants. In some cases, for example with programs supporting the returnees' reintegration, the criteria defining successful reintegration are inadequate. NGO evaluations often lack precision in measuring the return success with overly simple parameters, such as the purchase of materials for professional activities, which is due to their desire to highlight the results of their assistance (Black et al., 2004).

5.3. Integration of theoretical frameworks

Several authors have made efforts to consolidate theories of international migration such as Massey (1993). They point out that the theories to some extent complement each other although they were built independently. They shed light on the phenomenon of migration from different angles even if they do not draw the same conclusions.

Inspired by most of the theories developed above, Cassarino (2004, 2008) has developed a more complex conceptual framework on reintegration after return. The emphasis is set on the future of migrants' post-return rather than the initial intention and execution of the return. The framework derives from the network theory, which focuses on the utilization of the resources required for reintegration. Cassarino (2004, 2008) believes that the return preparation is essential: depending on the migrant's circumstances and motivations, the return may be more or less organized, which impacts their reintegration. Preparation is a time-consuming process that can be influenced by changes in personal or contextual circumstances in the host or origin country. The preparation should consider (a) "free will", as in voluntary return and (b) "readiness", meaning the ability to pool resources to ensure a return in the best conditions. This supports the findings from the literature review which emphasize the importance of preparation and attaining financial goals before returning. The concepts of free choice and being ready are important in the reintegration process: they are key elements to understand why the reintegration of some goes well while others face great difficulties.

a) Free will is the act of deciding to return at a time that seems logical and suitable in the migration journey. What matters is that the choice of return is neither dictated by others (family or community), nor due to external circumstances. Unexpected events or obstacles that force migrants to return earlier than expected may occur, and these have implications on reintegration.
b) Readiness reflects migrant access to resources vital for a smooth reintegration. These resources include financial, human and social capital[3] that they had before they migrated or acquired during

[3] Financial capital corresponds to the savings of migrants, whether through work or other means (e.g. inheritance or gifts) (Ammassari, 2009). Social capital refers to wealth from social relationships; this is a more subjective resource but can be useful in reintegration when links with family and friends have been maintained. Human capital covers the education, knowledge and skills of migrants.

their migration. This reflects new economics of labor migration theory, which emphasizes migrations as a mean of acquiring (financial) capital.

Ultimately, to be optimally prepared, the return must be freely decided and take place when sufficient resources have been mobilized. Cassarino (2004, 2008b) notes that these two elements can influence each other and depend on circumstances in both the host and home country. His framework categorizes the degree of return preparation. The first level of preparation refers to migrants who feel they have gathered enough resources to fulfil their aspirations in their home country. There is a high degree of preparation when they have maintained contacts during their absence, acquired knowledge and useful skills, taken the time to assess the costs and benefits of the return and have considered the changes in the country of origin since their departure. These migrants must, however, make efforts to rehabilitation upon their return. The literature review on factors of reintegration also points out that migrants most likely to experience successful reintegration are those who were most inclined to return. The general hypothesis is that migrants anticipate their reintegration well. If they are willing to return, they prepare the return in a way that their reintegration takes place in good conditions.

The second level of preparation refers to migrants whose time spent abroad was too short to mobilize the resources necessary for the return process (Cassarino, 2004, 2008b). Given the circumstances that are presented to them, often the choice to return is made considering that the cost of staying abroad is higher than returning. These migrants face difficulties back in the country of origin and have to rely on their original household for support.

Lastly, the third degree refers to individuals who have not freely chosen to return at this stage and who have not had the opportunity to mobilize resources (Cassarino, 2004, 2008b). In this case, circumstances have abruptly led to their return. Their level of preparation being non-existent, the conditions in which they live after their return can be extremely difficult. The constraints that limit the decisions of return are great and the returnee's freedom is often complex and multifrarious. Therefore, the author's approach may seem radical in the sense that migrants either chose to or are forced to return. However, the simplification is schematically necessary.

Cassarino's conceptual framework provides a better understanding of the reintegration. The framework also helps to understand why returning migrants have returned, but the original intention to return is not explicitly addressed. However, it can be concluded that the fact that migrants are

preparing their return demonstrates their intention to return, and the completion of the return depends on the degree to which they have prepared themselves, as well as on external constraints.

As mentioned, for most theoretical approaches to migration, the subject of return is not central. In addition, theories are only interested in certain aspects of the return. None of them encompass migrants' initial intentions to return, the return journey itself and reintegration after return in a single theory. This is shown in the theory analysis in table 4 below.

Table 4: Summary of theories in return migration studies

Theoretical approach	Intention to return	Return	Reintegration
Neoclassical theory	X		
Theories of social systems	X	X	
The structuralist approach		X	X
New economics of labour migration	X	X	
Network theory			X
Transnationalism		X	X
Cassarino's conceptional framework	X		X

5.4. Towards a new conceptual framework

A new conceptual framework is necessary to understand the question of the return holistically by capturing the intention to return, to the return journey to the reintegration process. The new framework should take the migrant's whole life trajectory into account including the links between the various phenomena related to return (intention to return the return experience and reintegration). At this point, Cassarino's (2004, 2008b) approach, which focuses on how the return is decided and prepared, as well as on the impacts that these elements have on reintegration after return, is an interesting starting point. The author highlights that the conditions under which the return takes place influence the reintegration. It is also indicated that the way migrants imagine their reintegration in their home country can have an impact. Migrants project themselves into the future according to their situation and the resources at their disposal, and imagine what their life would be like if they decide to return. If it is not through external constraints which forces them to return, it is the anticipation of the reintegration in their country of origin which may lead them to it.

One way to view individual's projection of the future is to examine their intention to return. The intention at the time of their migration might change during their time abroad. The intention to return

depends on the migrant's **aspirations** that push them towards a situation that they consider to be better for them and their families. Aspirations aim for a level of well-being, while the intention reflect the wish to return or to stay abroad. Migrants who intend to return are those who aspire to live in their country of origin again and can imagine a positive reintegration. On the other hand, besides being influenced by the difficulties faced abroad, migrants who do not intend to return are those who expect the reintegration to be too difficult. As de Haas (2011) points to the development of a theory that examines the whole complexity of migration, it is important to reflect on the individual's decisions based on their subjective aspirations and their preferences.

There is also a need to explore how **structural factors** affect the reintegration experience. As Massey (1993) concludes in his analysis of migration theories, a diverse array of entities and individuals take part in the migration process (the wider community, the family, and even government entities and business partners). The structures found in migration, whether in the country of origin or host country, can play a vital role in both the intention to return and reintegration. These structures can be economic, political or social. The political factors are at the macro level. The economic circumstances can refer to the macro level from a country or regional perspective, but also at a meso level from a family or household viewpoint. Similarly, in a social context, it can refer to the country origin, the community (ethnic group, village) or to family values.

Structural factors can be constraining to the migrants' freedom and aspirations. Migration policies of the host country for example may be restrictive limiting migrants capacity to gain employment, access to social services and in some cases resulting in forced deportation back to the country of origin. They can also prevent migrants who have been deported from returning to the host country for a certain period of time. Along the same lines, economic difficulties that they encounter abroad can be a barrier in fulfilling the objective of their migration. As de Haas (2011) argues, structures have an impact on what individuals feel is best for them and their families and are sometimes considered as a constraint to their aspirations and decisions. The migration is also deeply rooted in a social context which should be evaluated (Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001). The migrants' aspirations are imbedded with values that they share in common with their society. For example, migrants may choose to return in order to respect what is dictated by their traditions. A favorable political, economic and social context can be very beneficial for migrants and contribute to the realization of their aspirations.

Figure 4 shows the link between the **intention to return,** the **actual return** and the **reintegration**, while highlighting the role that the migrants' **aspirations** play as well as the **structural factors**. As mentioned, structural factors can influence the entire return process. These play a role in the evolution of their intentions and can encourage, but also discourage migrants from returning.

If migrants believe that the place where they can flourish and realize their life plans is their country of origin, they will express their intention to return from the start of their migration (Cassarino, 2004; 2008b). To this end, they will acquire human, social and financial capital in order to prepare for the return. It is possible that for some the return cannot be realized despite the preparation for it. This can be due to external constraints linked to their family situation or their legal status for example, where they wish to return but are unable to. Further, it may be that the desire to return diminishes with their integration into the host society. The fact that they find their place there can go hand in hand with the wish to no longer return to their country of origin (case 1). Alternatively, thanks to the preparation returning migrants can expect a satisfactory reintegration in the country of origin (case 2). On the other hand, if individuals aspire to live abroad they do not prepare for their return. Either unexpected external circumstances force them to return, in which case their reintegration is difficult (case 3), or they do not return and establish themselves permanently in their host country (case 4). Among those who do make a return (case 2 and 3), there are situations where the return takes place without having planned for it, but migrants manage to mobilize some of the required resources. Thereby, the return happens earlier than the migrants expected and there are mixed results of the reintegration (ibid.).

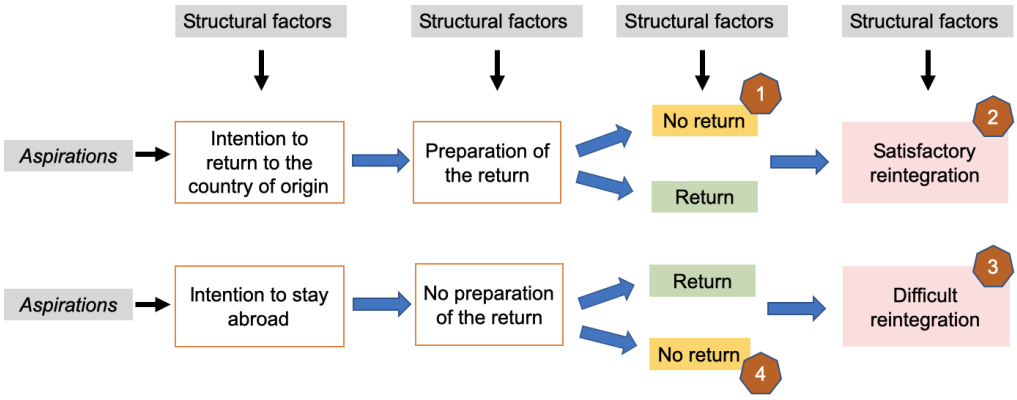

Figure 4: The return phenomenon and the role of aspirations and structural factors (own creation)

Figure 5 below summarizes the proposed framework taking up the different elements that can characterize the migrants return from their departure until their return. While migrants are in the area of displacement, questions of the intention to return arise. Thereupon the question of the actual return arises. However, as approached in the literature review, the frame combines the intention to return and return itself into one theme. Lastly, from the moment migrants return to their area of origin, the question about their reintegration arises, which constitutes the second theme in the analysis. Further, the conceptual framework incorporates the defined factors in each theme using codes. The findings of each of these themes, as well as the implied aspirations and structural factors, are presented in the following chapter.

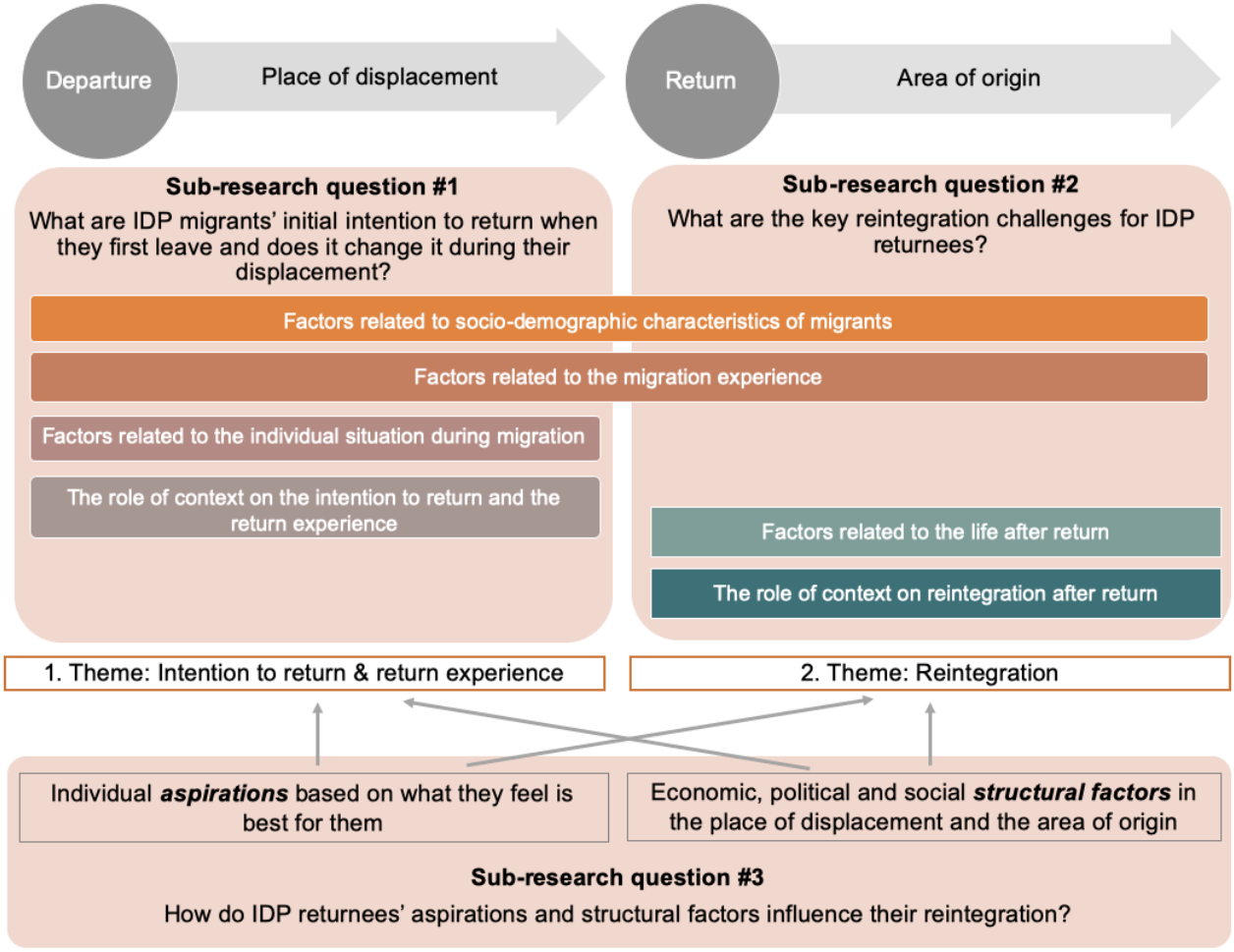

Figure 5: Conceptual framework (own creation)

Chapter 6. Empirical Data

The purpose and research question of the thesis is to explore how Syrian IDP returnees from the rural Damascus area perceive their reintegration and what are effective strategies for improving Syrian return migration. The data analysis method uses codes to categorize themes and concepts for the empirical findings chapter. The two overarching themes based on the gathered academic research are: (1) intention to return and the return experience and (2) reintegration after return. The findings below describe the general understanding of the similarities and contradictions for each thematic code based on the 58 interviews with returnees. Between three to five quotes from the interviews are extracted per code demonstrating the key concepts. For each quote a brief contextual understanding is given about the person behind the quote, however identifying data is removed to maintain anonymity. Furthermore, text boxes that include segments from the interviews with NGOs provide further context on the respective topic from an organization's perspective.

6.1. The intention to return and the return experience

The intention of migrants to return arise as soon as they leave and throughout their displacement. The empirical research examines the factors that were determined in the literature review with regards to the intention to return and the return experience. These are namely socio-demographic characteristics of migrants, the migration experience, the personal circumstances during migration and the socio-political and economic context on the intention to return and return experience.

6.1.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of migrants

Starting the empirical research with the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants, this section covers the age, gender and level of education determinants.

Age

Out of the 58 completed interviews there was a wide range of ages represented. The youngest participant was 26 years old and the oldest participant was 75 years old. Table 5 below shows the age ranges of the returnees across all 9 locations in the countryside of Damascus.

Table 5: Age of participants

Location / age range		25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65+
Khan Alshekh	(1 participant)		1			
Artouz	(4 participants)		1	1	2	
Hjera	(3 participants)		2	1		
Shebaa	(1 participant)	1				
Hatitet Al-Turkman	(4 participants)	2	1	1		
Marj Al-Sultan	(29 participants)	2	4	9	7	7
Ein-Tarma	(8 participants)	4	1	2	1	
Qudssaya	(2 participants)		2			
Al-Hameh	(6 participants)		1	2	2	1
Average age range (58 participants)		**9 (15.5%)**	**13 (22.4%)**	**16 (27.6%)**	**12 (20.7%)**	**8 (13.8%)**

Gender

Females were highly represented in the study (n=40) while men were underrepresented (n=18). It is possible that the participant recruitment design (attending people's homes during the day when men were likely at work or looking for work) could explain this outcome. Furthermore, the sole interviewer (author of the study) is a female and there is a chance that men were uncomfortable being approached and interviewed by a female.

Level of education

The participants had a wide range of education, from no formal education to university education. As a socialist country, education in Syria is largely state-funded and widely accessible. The ranges set in table 6 categorizes the educational levels that the participants commenced (not necessarily awarded). More than half of the participants had only received a basic education and did not continue their schooling past ninth grade. Of the 58 participants, 25 had completed some form of secondary education, and nine had pursued a university degree.

Table 6: Participants' level of education

Level of education (Al Hessan, 2016)	**Number of participants**	**Percentage of participants**
None	4	6.9%
Basic education: First cycle 1st – 4th grade	3	5.2%
Basic education: Second cycle 5th – 9th grade	26	44.8%
Secondary education: 10th – 12th grade	16	27.6%
Post-secondary education (university)	9	15.5%

6.1.2. The migration experience

With regards to factors related to the migration experience, determinants include reasons for migration, migration period, the initial intention to return and the administrative situation.

Reason for migration

The question of what was behind the reason for their migration was always answered quickly and unanimously by all 58 participants, in one word – *security*. Fear for their own safety, more importantly for their children's safety, was the fundamental driving factor. All participant's reason for migration was identical in the sense that they felt it was the only option in order to avoid the effects of the armed conflict and violence, which fits the definition of forced migration. For example, one woman, who was hesitant to leave at first because she could hear that the opposition had occupied the apartment below her and she was afraid they would do the same to her house during her absence, explained:

> "The attacks intensified so much one day that we gathered with 52 people in a basement for the night. The next day the mosques announced that we should all leave and that they arranged busses from the town center. We left amidst the attacks around us. Some people were shot at along the way but we had to accept that that would be our fate if something happened." – AHF01

When asked about how they made the decision to leave, many felt either encouraged or pressured (or perhaps both) by witnessing others from their village migrate. One woman described it as follows:

> "We saw cars packed full with people fleeing in our neighborhood. When you see other people in that state of fear, you get scared as well so you decided to follow." – AHF02

An unexpected finding was that the military was also sometimes involved in the decision making to leave as they often went door to door requesting people vacate their homes as a military attack was planned. The evaluation included relocating people who had nowhere to go to a temporary settlement center. One woman who used to run her tailoring business from home clarified:

> "There were attacks happening so the army asked us to leave and took us to a settlement center. We were relieved because living amongst the opposition became extremely difficult. They would buy out the land of farmers, take control of the agriculture and make it hard for us to secure food. It reached a point where we were cooking with grass that we picked from fields." – ETF07

The military presence also presented its challenges when it came to the checkpoints and road closures, resulting in the commute to work being a vital reason to migrate for many. In another example, one woman whose house was bombed only two weeks after they had migrated explained:

> "We were always hoping every attack would be the last. The army enclosed our area and there were heavy restrictions at the military checkpoints on who and what was entering and leaving the area. It got so bad that there was shortage of food supply here. We stayed until the very last moment that allowed my husband to commute to work; then they closed the road entirely." – HJF03

Migration period

The migration period (time spent outside the place of origin) offers context for further interpretation of the intention to return and return experience. The overview of the participants' migration period in table 7 demonstrates that the majority returned between five and seven years after they migrated.

Table 7: Migration period

Location / migration period		< 1 year	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-7 years	> 7 years
Khan Alshekh	(1 participant)				1	
Artouz	(4 participants)		2	1	1	
Hjera	(3 participants)				1	2
Shebaa	(1 participant)				1	
Hatitet Al-Turkman	(4 participants)				4	
Marj Al-Sultan	(29 participants)		1	1	25	2
Ein-Tarma	(8 participants)	3	1	1	1	2
Qudssaya	(2 participants)			1	1	
Al-Hameh	(6 participants)	4	1		1	
Average migration period (58 participants)		**7 (12.1%)**	**5 (8.6%)**	**4 (6.9%)**	**36 (62.1%)**	**6 (10.3%)**

The longest migration period was nine years with a participant that had only returned months before the interview took place. The shortest migration period on the other hand was only two weeks when the interviewee who went to a settlement center during intense bombardments in her area. It was also shorter migration periods for several participants from Al-Hameh, as their experience was characterized by multiple migrations where they sometimes returned during periods when the fighting decreased and fled again when it would get too dangerous. In fact, 33 out of the 58 cases involved between two and ten relocations, especially for the majority who migrated for a period of five to seven years. A 28-year-old widow from Hatitet Al-Turkman, who was just a newly-wed when the war began and is now a single mother to three children, explained:

> "We moved back and forth many times. We first left in fear of the attacks to Harasta and thought it was safe to come back after three days. The second time we had to flee we went to [town name] where some acquaintances were generous enough to welcome us for 27 days. Then we thought it was safe to return home and were able to stay for a month before we had to migrate back

> to [town name] again. This time we were there for 17 days until the situation got too dangerous as well. My husband then found us a rental in [town name] where we lived for about five years. That was when a lot of attacks also started happening there and the Syrian army took us to a settlement center. Us women were able to leave after two weeks while the men in the family had to stay longer." – HTF03

However, return visits was not a possibility for most. For returnees from Marj Al-Sultan, the largest interview sample, their migration period was marked by the road closure at the military checkpoints.

Box 6.1.2. Migration period: interview with Sharkasi foundation (Marj Al-Sultan division)

The opposition tried to take over our village several times. The attacks begun in 2012 and by April 2013 only around 1'200 locals remained here out of a population of 3'000. At that point there were a lot more newcomers to the village than locals. They reached around 7'000 people from 30 to 40 different villages, among which was a significant number that belonged to the opposition. That lasted until the army got involved on 23.12.2015. They asked all the remaining 150 locals to leave and did not allow people who had migrated to return until they could take control of the situation and established security in June 2018. During that period, the road was closed and no one was permitted to move through the military checkpoints in the area.

The initial intention to return

The next factor to be considered is the initial intention to return. To that end, participants were asked if they were planning to return or to stay elsewhere permanently and why. As a follow-up they were also questioned whether their intention might have changed at any time during their migration. The findings show that 53 participants (91.4 percent) dreamt of their return from day one. Many were not prepared for the war to last this long and fled under the impression that it would be a matter of a few weeks at most before they returned. One woman who was extremely proud of her son who had master's degree in history, but had lost him in a bombing attack, clearly described her intention as:

> "We fled in such a hurry during bombings that we didn't even bring a change of clothes. Although I spent 4 years in Sbena, I knew I was going to return as soon as it was safe to because the rent there was killing us. Even if I had come back to pile of rocks and dirt, I would have settled on top of that. Many people asked me to go abroad, but I refused. I want to die in my country; in my house." – ARF02

Besides the rent having a vital impact on their intention to return, those who lived with their relatives were aware that they were only guests there. Although blessed for the generosity of her relatives, one woman explained:

> "Our plan was to leave just for a few days when the fighting got intense and then to return. Even though our relatives took such good care of us and not

> let us lift a finger, we weren't happy. They didn't fail to provide anything, but we always dreamt of returning to our own home." – AHF02

As the reason for migration has shown that their departure was involuntary, many were attached to their roots. In another example, one woman who lived in a settlement center for seven years said:

> "The idea of permanently staying anywhere else never crossed my mind, but my husband thought about staying in that area. I didn't like that idea for two reasons. The first being that I was thinking of the difficulty my children would face commuting from there to university in the future if God is willing. The second reason is that our family and community have all returned here." – HJF01

Five participants initially did not intend to return or were at least not sure about their intention. As one woman, whose brother was kidnaped for ransom and she was threatened with the same, put it:

> "The attacks were so bad that we never thought there would be a village to return to. We thought that we would sell hour house if it was still standing after the war and settle somewhere else." – SHF01

The administrative situation

The general idea that the findings has shown is that the participants fled in such a hurry, some not even knowing where they were going, and they were not in a mindset to plan ahead. While their safety was threatened, many left their belongings behind because they believed that they would be able to return in a matter of days or weeks. With regards to the administrative steps she took before migrating, one woman who fled her home five times over the years explained:

> "We left in such a hurry each time during the attacks that I just made sure I always had my medicine with me, but we barely had time to pack anything or even call my relatives to let them know that we were coming to stay with them. We didn't have a car and had to arrange a ride with people from the neighborhood who were fleeing too. My family split up to make it work." – AHF05

Many did not have the means to afford rent, which is why their only choice was to stay with relatives. Overall, people relied on their network and generosity of others to provide shelter for them since the idea was after all only temporarily. What also emerged on multiple occasions is that participants knew of people who had migrated abroad and had a vacant house. Opening their homes was also of value to them as they feared that their houses would otherwise get occupied during their absence. This was the case for one woman who describes her experience below:

> "Our neighbor knew someone with a vacant house and was looking for a family to take care of it. We were able to stay for as long as we needed, so we were very blessed. The only preparation we did before we left was lock up

> our belongings in a storage room, but it was still robbed. My son-in-law arranged a car for us and luckily the roads were open so we didn't have issues getting there." – ETF05

Others who did not have a personal network to rely on found themselves in settlement centers. In a similar manner, this did not require administrative preparation beforehand. On woman who endured the fighting in her area for most of conflict in hope that the end would be around the corner stated:

> "The army knocked on our door during bombings and asked if we were willing to go to a settlement center. We didn't prepare much. The only thing we were allowed to bring on the bus was a plastic bag because of the lack of space. It was so overcrowded; like a pilgrimage, but much worse." – ETF04

The question of why they chose to go to one destination further sheds light on the administrative situation that migrants were evaluating in their decision making. As security was the main reason for their migration, it was naturally taken into consideration in the choice of location. For example, one woman who was shot at during her flight and has been through many surgical operations said:

> "We chose [town name] because it was considered safe. There wasn't any fighting happening there at the time and it was close to the highway, so if anything happened, we would be able to flee easier. The rent was also cheaper there, so we could afford a small apartment." – ARF02

As mentioned, many where in a situation of multiple relocations during their migration, which adds a further dimension to the administrative situation. With the difficulties from road closures and military checkpoints, the commute to work was also a defining factor. A government employee who fled because he was worried that the opposition would kidnap him by virtue of his job explained:

> "We had relatives who had a vacant house and allowed us to stay there. When they returned, we had to move to a rental. I stayed in that area because it's well connected for me to commute to work. We also knew many people from our community who had migrated there. Another benefit was that it is not too far from here and I was hoping to return as soon as possible." – MSM07

When it comes to official documents, the study showed that 70.7 percent (n = 41) of the interviewed returnees had them accessible on their flight and did not face any administrative problems. As one teacher who refused to leave her house for two years after migrating due to severe mental struggles clarified:

> "We were very aware of their importance and the bag with all our papers was always ready to grab first thing. It had our IDs, proof of house ownership and everything. I even brought family pictures, which I am thankful for because many people lost their sentimental treasures. I developed a little phobia, so this bag is still conveniently ready till this day." – QDF01

On the other hand, that was not the case for the remaining 17 participants who were missing some official papers. Some were lucky and did not face any issues down the line, while others did struggle in that regard. According to a woman who left amidst the attacks with only the clothes on her back:

> "I didn't think to bring any papers with me and they all got burned when my house was set on fire. All our papers like our IDs, official papers for the house and anything you can think of was gone. My daughter's new school set her back one year because we didn't have her old school's report card. Requesting new papers is a very complicated process and costly." – ETF07

Box 6.1.2. The administrative situation: interview with Syria Trust for Development

In 2014 we established a legal aids program, which was vital for the security of migrants. We provided legal assistance to migrants who for instance didn't have their IDs with them when the fled, or who didn't legally register their marriage or their children who were born during the conflict. Many people weren't aware of legal issues that they might face ahead. For example, our lawyers build many cases for people who were missing their IDs in order for them to find employment. Further, when it came to birth registrations, many faced the issue that their marriage wasn't officially registered in the first place. It's not possible to register their children if they never updated their marital status with the authorities. The same went for divorce cases. This is important especially for people who are returning from abroad, for which we established temporary centers at the borders to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan that provide legal expertise. They need to have their legal affairs in order so that they can start their lives over and reintegrate.

6.1.3. Personal circumstances during migration

There are five factors related to the personal circumstances that impact migration: (1) family circumstances; (2) capital investments and resources; (3) access to career opportunities; (4) financial security and income; and (5) and possibilities for social integration.

Family circumstances

The following section investigates the returnee's family situation in terms of marital status, children and family unification during the migration period. Table 8 below presents an overview.

Table 8: Family circumstances during migration

Marital status		
Single: 5 participants (8.6%)	Married: 42 participants (72.4%)	Widowed: 11 participants (19%)
Children		
Yes: 51 participants (87.9%) – ∅ 4 children	No: 7 participants (12.1%)	
Family unification during migration (incl. relatives lived with before migration)		
Full unification: 32 participants (55.2%)	Partial unification: 26 participants (44.8%)	No unification: 0 participants

72.4 percent (n = 42) of the interviewed participants are married, while 11 participants are widowed and a minority being five participants are single. None of the single participants had children and only one married participant was childless. All remaining returnees have on average four children, ranging from one to as many as twelve children per family. The study has shown that all participants migrated together with their families as a unit, whereby no family member stayed behind. Thereupon, the question of whether they stayed unified with their families during their migration period arises. As presented in table 8, 55.2 percent (n = 32) remained fully unified with all family members they were living with before throughout their migration. None of the participants remained on their own during the course of the migration, however, in 44.8 percent (n = 26) of the cases a partial separation occurred. These instances were based on children who moved away for marriage, military service or migration abroad; spouse and/or children who died; and spouse and/or children who were imprisoned. For instance, a 29-year-old widow who was relieved when the army suggested to relocate her family to a settlement center as a way for her to get medical treatment mentioned:

> "I was separated from my family soon after we arrived to the center because they took me to a hospital. I spent one year and eight months there. My husband and children later moved between my parents' and in-laws' houses until he passed away. My health had improved a bit by then so I was released to be with my children." – ETF08

In another example, an electrician and father of eight explained:

> "Our entire family stayed together during the first five years up until we moved to a settlement center. My sons had to stay longer, while the rest of the family was able to leave. One of them was eventually recruited in to the army and my other son was imprisoned." – HTM01

Box 6.1.3. The family situation: interview with Majmouet Wattad (youth organization)

Some people lived with their entire extended family as a unit in the settlement center. During the first phase, those who were exonerated were permitted to leave as a family. To get exonerated, people needed an advocate or sponsor from outside of the center, a relative for example, to plead their innocence and their non-involvement with the opposition. Some who were exonerated, but their houses were bombed and they didn't have the means to rebuild it, refused to leave. Others moved to live with their relatives or returned home if it was safe to do so. However, it was harder for young males to get exonerated since they had potential to be recruited into the army, which is where some family separation took place. The same went for those that turned out to be associated with the opposition, who were in some cases detained if they didn't reconcile with the government.

While many families were partially separated, others experience growth in the family by welcoming children during their migration. As explored in the previous section, many chose to stay with their relatives during their migration for administrative reason among others. Whether or not this was a

chance to strengthen their bods with their relatives, it indicates the importance of family in general. In the same manner, the family situation influences other factors as well such as the economic situation or social integration that will be separately evaluated in the following sections.

Capital investments and resources

All but one participant owned property in their place of origin. In other words, all interviewees with the exception of one are homeowners. This was concisely put by one participant, who was less than a year into his retirement when he migrated, as:

> "All our assets are here so we are very attached and that's why our plan was always to return." – MSM17

In contrast, only one participant mentioned a property ownership in their place of migration. Four types of accommodation emerged that nearly all participants moved to during their migration: (1) live with their relatives; (2) a vacant house that was offered to them; (3) into a rental; or (4) to a settlement center. More often than not, it is a combination of any of the four options since as previously mention, multiple migrations was not uncommon.

Other assets that returnees mentioned that had a role to play in their migration were ownership of a business or a car. Although this was not questioned in particular, ten participants mentioned that owning a car was very valuable to their migration experience as it provided mobility and flexibility. In contrast, business ownership was a liability: all twelve participants that claimed business ownership before their migration experienced significant losses. For farmers for instance, not only lost their place of residence, but also their source of income. Other businesses included mechanic shops, a tiles and stoneware shop, supermarkets and other commercial businesses. To cite one example one woman who is now dependent on her son's income stated:

> "My husband has to close down his mechanic shop since the opposition attempted to use it for their weapons." – AHF02

Career opportunities

As can be expected, migrant's career pathways and opportunities play a significant role in determining intention to return and migration experiences. The research sample was predominantly, women and many of them (27 out of 40 female participants) were housewives without formal employment. Eleven women were employed, and two number were self-employed. However, in line with new economics of labour migration theory, the research also identifies and considers the career

opportunities for the main income-earner in each family unit (often the husbands but in some cases the children). Table 9 identifies the employment status of the main income-earner in each family. An unexpected finding of this survey was the nearly equal division between employed and self-employed migrants. Among the employed participants the most common fields of profession before their migration were government employees or a military occupation (34.8 percent) and professionals, more specifically, teachers (30.4 percent). Self-employed participants were involved in craft and construction work (34.6 percent), as well as service and sales work (30.7 percent).

Table 9: Career opportunities before migration

Type of employment	58 participants		Employment by occupation	
Unemployed	5	8.6%		
Employed	23	39.7%	Government employee or military occupation Factory worker and machine operator Professional (teacher) Service and sales worker	8 4 7 4
Self-employed	26	44.8%	Agricultural worker Craft and construction worker Service and sales worker Technician or mechanic Others (odd jobs)	4 9 8 4 1
Retired	4	6.9%	Government employees or military occupation Professionals (teachers)	3 1

Of the participants with employed income-earners in their family, 79.3 percent (n = 46) were in a position to continue their employment during their migration. As indicated earlier, the issue of road closures and the commute to work played a role in determining to migrate in order to love close to their place of employment and secure their job. A teacher who has meanwhile developed manual labor skills after having to rebuild his house shared:

> "I had to find a new teaching job. It took a while because there was an influx of teachers in the city after so many migrated from the countryside. New laws came out during the conflict that eased the employment of teachers at government schools but there was still some competition." – MSM16

Overall, financial uncertainty was a delicate topic to discuss and challenging to those who were self-employed and were not in a position to continue their work. Many migrants also viewed their migration as temporary and this effected their capacity to secure permanent employment. For example, one man who at first lived with 34 family members in a two-bedroom apartment explained:

> "Every now and then I would find small jobs as an electrician, but nothing permanent. Most days I would come home empty-handed. My brother in Lebanon supports us sometimes." – HTM01

To draw on earlier findings, searching for employment during their migration might not have been at the forefront of their mind. The findings on their initial intention to return revealed that 91.4 percent (n = 53) were looking forward to returning since the day they migrated. Though the migration period for the majority was five to seven years, many expressed that they were expecting the conflict to be over any day and demonstrated a short-term outlook. Further, those living in settlement centers had access to basic services where they may not have found it necessary to search for employment. Yet, there were some who expressed the contrary such as this 50-year-old woman who said:

> "I didn't want to sit at home all day so I did a training that the SARC foundation provided to become a hairdresser with the idea that I can open a beauty parlor once I return." – MSF20

Financial security and income

Interviewed participants range from being unemployed before their migration with no income to a monthly income of roughly USD 3'000 for a lawyer who used to work internationally. Questions involving income revealed that male family members generally provided more in-depth information of their financial situation. The inquired average income of all interviewees before their migration amounts to roughly USD 428 per household as illustrated in table 10. A total of eleven participants showed an income of above USD 700, which certainly raised the average. Essential to note is that these calculations account for the income for an entire household, which also ranges in size.

Table 10: Financial security and income before migration (monthly income per household)

Monthly income per household in USD (exchange rate January 2012: 54 SYP/USD)[4]	**Number of participants**	**Average monthly income**
0 – 99 USD	12	**427.55 USD**
100 – 199 USD	10	
200 – 299 USD	6	
300 – 399 USD	3	
400 – 499 USD	7	
500 – 599 USD	7	
600 – 699 USD	3	
700+ USD	11	

When asked about the source of income, all participants noted that work, whether it was by one or multiple people in the household, was their only revenue stream. There were multiple follow-up

[4] The exchange rate is subject to constant fluctuations in times of crises. The exchange rate of the Syrian pound (SYP) to the USD during the stable situation pre-migration in January 2012 was 54 SYP/USD (Trading Economics, 2020). By the time of interviews in March 2020 it devalued to 1,220 SYP/USD (SP-Today, 2020)

clarifications, which provided insight that some participants used to be part of several families living under one roof with a shared pot of income and expenses. Many described their situation as comfortable before their migration, however, it is vital to point out that it is easier to be positive about things in the past when your present situation is more difficult. As one woman who lost a son in a bombing attack puts it:

> "In hindsight I wouldn't even dream of complaining about our situation before. I worked hard for 25 years to put my kids through their education. We still had a simple life through. We weren't wealthy or anything, but we didn't have any debt and even had the luxury of eating out sometimes." – ARF02

Many participants financial status differed when the questions shifted to their situation during the migration. This was especially the case for the participants from Ein Tarma who endured the fighting and the conditions that come with that in their area for years before they chose to migrate. For example, a woman who described the treatment in the settlement center as first class explained:

> "I was afraid my children were going to starve to death before we went to the center – our situation was that bad. My husband and I would live off one meal a day so our children could have more." – ETF02

Social integration

All except for two participants felt a strong sense of community in their place of origin pre-migration. This was particularly the situation for participants in Marj Al-Sultan. The village has a very strong and tightknit community, and one lawyer described his view as:

> "The people from our village differentiate themselves as being one family with our own traditions. Life was simple, but there was a lot of love and support around." – MSM09

Box 6.1.3. Social integration: interview with Sharkasi foundation (Marj Al-Sultan division)

Marj Al-Sultan is a village that is dominated by the 'Sharkasi' community. When the conflict began in 2012, people from Marj Al-Sultan migrated to areas that were populated by the Sharkasi society. Most of them went to stay with their relatives, which welcomed one or two families into their homes. Our foundation fought to keep people here as long as possible in order to cling on to the community as we know it, however, that was not an option anymore when the military closed the road to our village. The large majority of the local community migrated at around the same time due to the road closure, which is why from a society perspective our loss was greater compared to other villages.

The research, however, focuses on the social integration during their migration. As the earlier findings have shown, some migration periods were less than a year while others faced multiple migrations over the years, both of which give little opportunity to integrate. Compared to migrants abroad

though, these IDP migrants were faced with less cultural differences. The findings show that there were positive and negative aspects, or a combination of both, in terms of their experience integrating. Coming from the countryside, many struggled with the unfamiliarity with living in a large city. Further, as previously highlighted, it was common to move in with relatives, which can be both a blessing and a curse. For example, one woman who moved five times during her migration said:

> "Although our relatives took such good care of us and didn't let us lift a finger, we weren't happy. They didn't fail to provide anything, but you're never as comfortable as in your own home. We later had issues with locals from the area of the settlement center that we moved to. They treated us badly because they thought people from the center were taking away their water resources. They saw us as beggars and themselves above us. Even the kids in school were rude to our children." – HJF02

As for positive social integration cases, one mother of four explained:

> "It was a completely different environment. [name of town] is a town on the mountain and we weren't used to the difficulty of that; I started having back issues. My children went to a new school there and even graduated with honors. I made new friends too and tried to adapt to their mindset although we're from different communities. They even come visit me sometimes since I've returned." – MSF24

Lastly, some started out with difficulties integrating, which turned into positive experiences as time went on. As one woman who believes that those who have patience to live in a settlement center, will have patience for anything life may throw at a person described:

> "The first period in the center was very chaotic with that many people; I remember we cried a lot. We didn't have any of our belongings with us and we weren't used to living in those conditions. We would fight over water and such. The toilet drains were broken so you can imagine the filth we had to live with. Things improved after a while. I can't express how thankful I am for the assistance they gave us in the center. They really stood by our side. We all got used to each other after a while. We realized that we were in control of our own happiness and didn't expect that to come from anyone else. I found a new family that filled the void of the one I was separated from." – HJF01

6.1.4. The socio-political and economic context on the intention to return and the return experience

The social and political context plays a significant role in determining the intention to return and the experience of migration. The research revealed that 62.1 percent (n = 36) of participants experienced a migration period between five and seven years. Matters such as policy changes that have taken place in the meantime can be considered to provide additional context. Indeed, the research found a number of instances where participants were faced with restrictive policies, which did not necessary impact

their intention to return, however, postponed the actual return. It is important to mention that these policies may differ for each location depending on the level of conflict and security in the area of origin. According to one woman:

> "The army liberated our area from the opposition and announced that people could return. People who weren't involved in the fighting had to get a security-related agreement from the authorities that proved their innocence. That was the only thing we had to prepare before we returned." – KAF01

The unstable political and economic climate played a key role in determining migrants' intention to return. The research on the reason for migration revealed that seeking safety and security was the primary motivation. Therefore, the political situation and safety in the area of origin is directly correlated to migrants' intention to return. Furthermore, although the IDP participants did not migrate abroad and would have been affected by the unstable economy either way, those who became unemployed as a result of their migration or were required to pay rent when they did not have to before, faced greater economic burdens. Their intention to return was hence also influenced by the economic situation.

6.2. Reintegration after return

The following empirical findings reflect the participant's reintegration after return by comparing their situation after return with the one they had before migrating. The migration period is taken into consideration in an attempt to examine their situation within the same context. Reintegration after return includes socio-demographic characteristics of returnees, the migration experience, personal circumstances after return and the socio-political and economic context of reintegration after return. In analyzing these factors, some of the previous findings from this chapter are reflected up on.

6.2.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of returnees

Factors of socio-demographic characteristics of returnees take the age, gender and level of education into account. Given that these factors were examined in the first theme on the intention to return and return experience, they can be summarized as follows:

- This study sampled participants in the age range between 26 and 75 years old. 41 out of the 58 participants were found to be in the middle age group between 35 and 64 years old.
- 40 female and 18 male IDP returnees participated in the study.

- Half of the participants were found to have begun their basic education up till the ninth grade, whereas 25 participants continued to obtain their secondary education or a university degree.

6.2.2. The migration experience

For the purpose of this study, the 'migration experience' involves reflecting on the migration period and the willingness to return. The previous theme in section 6.1 determined that majority (n=36) returned between five and seven years after they migrated. This section therefore focuses on the willingness to return.

The willingness to return

On the question of why and under what circumstances they returned, the most mentioned motive for returning was that the Syrian army established security and liberated their area. Since security was found to be the primary reason for their forced migration, it seems as a natural progression to return once the safety aspect is provided. Combining that with the high rental prices and temporary solutions elsewhere, returning was the rational choice to make for most. For many, once roads reopened, it was clear that the time for their return had come. The interview findings show that out of 58 participants there were four cases that were opposed to the idea of returning. They described similar experiences where they were traumatized after the events that took place in their area of origin and did not feel ties to their community. However, their family encouraged to return as it was important for them to remain unified and they were only in temporary situation during their displacement where the cost of living was higher. The remaining 54 participants showed complete willingness to return from the moment it became a possibility for them. A widow who had to give up her job after she returned due to the difficulty of commuting and now lives off of the support of her family explained:

> "We heard on the television that the army had liberated our town and that it was safe to return. People from the community started calling each other and slowly started returning. My mother and sister came back first, which encouraged me to return as well. A home is a nation and no matter how long you stay somewhere else, the feeling of being your own home can't be compared." – ARF04

The willingness to return by 54 out of the 58 participants raises the subject of their preparation for their return. Participants explained that there was not much to prepare before security was established and the option to return became possible. When prompted about what types of preparations were made many answered in relation to financial and material preparation necessary to rebuild their homes

rather than mental preparation. A few did mention having to prepare mentally, such as this woman who had received a call informing her that her house was robbed and burned explained:

> "I was informed about what had happened to my house and tried to prepare myself mentally, but there was only so much I could prepare otherwise without money to rebuild my house." – MSF02

Box 6.2.2. Willingness to return: interview with Sharkasi foundation (Marj Al-Sultan division)

We were witnessing people from surrounding villages return, but the army was still in ours although it seemed to be safe again. Our organization asked the authorities to allow the return to Marj Al-Sultan. Two days later on June 23rd, 2018 our request was granted and the road officially opened. They informed four chosen people that played a leading role in the community and asked them to inform people that they can return. The news was also published on our facebook group. Word spread quickly and within hours people had gathered in the village center. That day only around ten families spent the night in the village as there was no electricity, water or any place to sleep on. With time, more people returned when the electricity situation improved and we received mattresses and blankets donations. Now there are 122 families out of the 446 who permanently returned and about 65 that are still going back and forth while they rebuild their homes.

6.2.3. Personal circumstances after return

There are five characteristics that form the factors related to the life after return; (1) time since the return, (2) family circumstances; (3) capital investments and resources; (4) career opportunities; and (5) financial security and income.

Time since the return

In order to evaluate the returnees reintegration after their return, it is essential to examine the time since their return. Table 11 below gives an overview of the time period since the participants' return based on their locations in order to identify certain patterns in their return migration. The findings illustrate how the areas that featured the previously defined shortest migration period, such as Artouz and Al-Hameh, correspond with the results that they were among the locations that participants first returned to. The longest time since return is a participant from Artouz who returned in early 2015. In contrast, the shortest time since return marks less than two months prior to the interview in January 2020. What can further be drawn from the table below is that 34 out of 58 participants returned between one and the two-year mark before the interviews took place. Thereby, Marj Al-Sultan greatly contributes to this result as it is the largest sample location and, as previously noted, the possibility to return presented itself for these participants at the same time. Therefore, most returned within the

same time frame. For some there were certain delays that occurred after security was established. For example, one woman who works as a teacher and caretaker at an orphanage said:

> "We waited six months after the army liberated the area to permanently return to ensure that the area was really safe. We would go back and forth every few days to get an idea of the situation." – QDF01

In another example, one woman whose son returned before she did in order for him to rebuild the house stated:

> "I had to wait a year after the reopened the road until my daughters finished school in that area, otherwise it would have been very inconvenient for them." – MSF04

Table 11: Time since the return

Location / time since the return	< 6 months	6 months – 1 year	1 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	> 3 years
Khan Alshekh (1 participant)			1		
Artouz (4 participants)			1		3
Hjera (3 participants)		2	1		
Shebaa (1 participant)			1		
Hatitet Al-Turkman (4 participants)			3	1	
Marj Al-Sultan (29 participants)	2	5	22		
Ein-Tarma (8 participants)	2		4	1	1
Qudssaya (2 participants)			1	1	
Al-Hameh (6 participants)				3	3
Average time since the return (58 participants)	**4 (6.9%)**	**7 (12.1%)**	**34 (58.6%)**	**6 (10.3%)**	**7 (12.1%)**

Family circumstances

Expanding on the previous data on the family situation, some evidence can provide further insight into their reintegration. For instance, it was found that five participants were single during their migration. Since the returns, one participant got married. Two participants furthermore lost their husband's since their return, thus, increasing the number of widowed returnees to 13 participants. Both these developments lead to 41 participants being married after their return. Besides these slight differences, what is essential to note with regards to their reintegration is that out of the four single participants only one lives alone while the remaining participants live with relatives. Similarly, all widowed participants have children or in-laws that they live with. One widow with three children who now lives with her in-laws mentioned:

> "The biggest difficulty I see today is that many men's lives were lost during the war and us women are filling a role that we are not used to. After my husband passed away, I value what it means to have a man around. Men today

> also carry a greater responsibility as they not only have to provide for their own wife and children, but for other women in the family who lost their husband." – HTF03

Furthermore, the findings of the family situation during migration show that 32 participants of participants remained fully unified with their families, whereas 26 participants were partially separated. This was similarly the case with their situation after their return. Apart from one participant who returned on her own, all remaining 57 participants returned with at least one family member – either with their spouse, children or their relatives. Of all the 58 participants, 31 (53.4 percent) remained fully unified with their families, 26 participants (44.8 percent) partially unified and one participant (1.8 percent) not unified with their families after their return.

Capital investments and resources

This section explores the role of capital investment and resources, such as ownership of real estate, business or vehicles. As discussed on the material situation pre-migration, 57 out of the 58 of participants claimed property ownership in their place of origin. Since their return, 51 participants have returned to the same home, whereas the remaining seven returned to a different house in the area. In these cases, the houses were uninhabitable – completely destroyed by bombing. These families addressed their living circumstances by either renting a place in the area or moving in with relatives. Participants who returned to the same house all have nearly identical experiences where bombing hit parts of their property, many continue the arduous task of restoring their damaged homes themselves. The majority of the houses had also been on fire and/or stripped to the bone (see fieldwork pictures in Appendix D). Beyond people's belongings, doors, windows, floor tiles, and electrical house wiring were frequently stolen or damaged. One woman who would during her migration climb the roof of buildings at a town near her place of origin to check on her house from afar described:

> "Our house was bombed and had to be gutted out from all the dirt and damage. All doors, windows and electrical wiring were gone. I fixed it up to a point that a street cat can't enter, but although it's been four years, I haven't been able to rebuild some parts of the house yet. My husband and I worked hard for 35 years to build it and now we're set back all these years. I can't afford anything new. I replaced an old fridge shortly before we migrated. Having that would be a luxury now." – ARF02

Another woman who sent her sons to Turkey out of fear because according to her, the opposition was trying to recruit them, said:

> "Our house was bombed many times. The doors were removed windows shattered, most of our belongings were stolen. There were bullet holes,

> cracked eggs, cigarettes and offensive writing on the walls everywhere. You could tell that the intention was purely to harm and damage. It's like starting from below zero. I've only been able to fix it to the bare minimum at this point." – AHF01

The question of preparation was most often responded to in relation to restoring their damaged homes. As discussed, the houses that the participant's returned to were characterized by their structural damage and frequently found in an uninhabitable state. For that reason, the majority did not settle in immediately, but rather moved back and forth to fix the house during visits first. This also amplifies the finding of the time since return, namely that some delays after security was established were common. For example, according to one man who sold his car to invest in rebuilding the house:

> "There wasn't much preparation needed before the return. The main thing to do was fix the house. The first time we returned I didn't even realize that we had arrived. I didn't recognize where I was. It's hard to describe, but it took me a week to feel like myself again. We would go back and forth working on the house for a few months just to get it to a stage that we could safely sleep in it." – MSF01

Box 6.2.3. The material situation: interview with architect

One way that our architecture firm works on housing projects for returnees are through mandates by the government or NGOs. These are either the returnees' homes that were bombed or new housing somewhere else that was not affected by the conflict. For example, we've worked with the Danish Refugee Council that offered interesting projects even beyond housing such as settlement centers, schools, as well as bakeries, which are very important for returnees. These organizations would request proposals from multiple architecture firms and usually go for the lowest price. That is why there's some competition in the architecture field also with these kinds of initiatives. We collaborated together as well for some projects. For instance, we were involved in a large assignment with 70 apartments, where we were responsible for the access to water, electricity, heating and windows. Other architecture firms were in charge of other matters in order for the project to be done quickly.

Career opportunities

In considering the participants professional situation upon their return, it is significant to compare their employment situation before and after their migration. As illustrated in table 12, the number of those who are unemployed increased by 17.3 percent. The amount of retired participants furthermore nearly doubled since their return. Retired government employees such as soldiers and public-school teachers (representing the majority of the retired participants) receive a pension. Moreover, while self-employment occupied the greatest number of participants pre-migration, the majority found themselves waged employment upon their return. Out of the 23 who were employees, 18 participants

(79.3 percent) were able to continue the same job as they had before or during their migration while two returnees found an employed position after their return.

Table 12: Career opportunities after return

Type of employment	Before & after migration		Employment by occupation
	Before	After	
Unemployed	5 (8.6%)	15 (25.9%)	
Employed	23 (39.7%)	20 (34.5%)	Government employee or military occupation 5 Factory worker and machine operator 3 Professional (teacher) 6 Service and sales worker 4 Technician or mechanic 1
Self-employed	26 (44.8%)	16 (27.6%)	Agricultural worker 2 Craft and construction worker 3 Service and sales worker 7 Technician or mechanic 3 Others (odd jobs) 1
Retired	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	Government employee or military occupation 3 Factory worker and machine operator 1 Professionals (teachers) 3

Some participants received government assistance to help set up new businesses. In terms of self-employment one woman, who received a loan from the government to open a supermarket explained:

> "My sons are in the army, so the government was informed of our economic situation. As part of an initiative to help small businesses, they gave us a loan to open this supermarket. Though I would have preferred a beauty parlor, since that is what I trained for in the settlement center, people need a supermarket more right now. The movement of people who have returned is still small though." – MSF20

Follow-up questions for unemployed and self-employed participants allowed insight into their preparation for finding work upon their return. In general, participant expressed concern around the difficulty of finding paid employment and the scarcity of jobs available, especially without the benefit of personal networks. Nevertheless, the data shows the returnees only occasionally kept in touch with people who could help them find employment. As with the previous example, an established reputation and connections were key also for this man who said:

> "Many people know me and my work in construction. I was blessed to have enough work since the infrastructure needs a lot of work after the war. This is a touristy area with many restaurants and countryside villas of wealthy families from the city, which is great for my business. A friend actually offered me a job at a factory before I returned but it's too far away." – HTM04

Returnees rarely gained any professional experience or skills during their migration due to the fact that they did not stay anywhere long enough through multiple migrations, they did not manage to find work, or their work during their migration is not related to their profession now. Participants additionally opened up about the difficulties they face with their job. According to one man who opened a locksmith shop after he returned:

> "I was a taxi driver during the migration. Some people give you advice and others treat you badly. It taught me people skills, but that has little to do with my job now. The difficulty for me is not being able to afford the materials that I need for my shop because of the inflation issue." – MSM13

Box 6.2.3. The professional situation: interview with Syria Trust for Development

Before 2011 we were involved in developmental projects, culture and establishing small business initiatives. Our strategy changed in light of the conflict to provide more mostly legal initiatives. This legal emergency took priority until 2015, after which our focus shifted back to developmental work. We have many pillars that we work on from youth programs to psychological support to small business initiatives. The small business programs for example provide business loans without interest that they can pay off in rates so returnees can reintegrate and contribute to the community. We offer training such as tailoring or hairdressing for women, which gives them the opportunity to work from home.

Financial security and income

In addition to the income from work and retirement payments participants also benefited financially from (1) family members; (2) assistance from NGOs and foundations; (3) loans; and (4) selling their assets. For instance, one woman who is dealing with the effects of being shot at during her flight mentioned:

> "My son supports me a bit, but he also doesn't have a steady job and can barely feed his own kids or buy them diapers. I try to get assistance from foundations when I can. I've received food baskets from SARC to get us off our feet. I have to stand in line all day, which is painful with my injuries. Otherwise I rely on my community's support: gifts and loans – whatever I can get. This is poverty." – ARF02

In another example, one teacher shared:

> "Both my sister and I contribute to the family household with our salaries. My father gets money as a retired government employee. My other siblings who migrated abroad transfer money from time to time, but they are struggling as well. I had to loan from my employer that I'm still paying off." – SHF01

Other participants also had to rely on loans, particularly to cover the cost of rebuilding their homes (one of the decisive factors determining their ability to return). Only ten out of 58 participants had

some money saved up prior to returning that they were able to invest in the house. This was, however, not the case for one woman who started working a cleaning job upon her return in order to support her family:

> "My husband is a government employee and requested financial aid so we can rebuild our house. They granted him SYP 125'000 [USD 102.46], which we are currently repaying. I consequentially save a third of my salary to contribute to our loan first and then I plan to invest more in the house." – KAF01

Many participants discussed having to sell their assets in order to find the resources to rebuild their homes. For those that moved to the city during their migration faced higher living costs, particularly if they were paying rent. One woman who sold her jewelry to help cover the cost of rebuilding the home explains:

> "No, we weren't able to save since the rent was taking up all of our income. My brother sold a piece of land so we could rebuild the house. I also sold all of my gold to contribute a little bit." – QDF01

Some IDP returnees work full time whereas others have part time jobs. Table 13 below illustrates that the average monthly income per household post-return is USD 184.78, which is a 56.78 percent decrease of the average income pre-migration. Thereby, the analysis revealed that the lowest monthly income post-return was USD 2.91 and the highest monthly income was recorded at USD 645.48. Moreover, the development of the income distribution as shown in table 13 demonstrates not only the effects of the conflict, but the massive inflation as well.

Table 13: Financial security and income after return (monthly income per household)

Monthly income (per household in USD)	**Income pre-migration** (January 2012: 54 SYP/USD)	**Income post-return** (March 2020: 1'220 SYP/USD)
0 – 99 USD	12	30
100 – 199 USD	10	12
200 – 299 USD	6	3
300 – 399 USD	3	4
400 – 499 USD	7	5
500 – 599 USD	7	2
600 – 699 USD	3	3
700+ USD	11	0
Average	**USD 427.55**	**USD 184.78**

6.2.4. The socio-political and economic context on reintegration after return

The last factor to be studied on the theme of reintegration after return, is the role of socio-political and economic context. To provide context on the reintegration, the research first examined the social aspect since their return. Results of 42 participants on whether they felt different from others in their area showed 22 positive and 20 negative experiences. Upon further evaluation, the majority of positive aspects came from Marj Al-Sultan returnees, which revealed a deeper connection to their community. Some participants found both positive and negative aspects to their social situation, which could also be the case for others who chose to express themselves selectively. A woman whose children are now struggling with the separation from their relatives after living with them in a settlement center stated:

> "We all went through similar circumstances. The people from the center became family and we became a stronger community through our shared experience. We still feel the bond till today." – HJF01

On the other hand, negative experiences in terms of their social integration were often linked to the economic and political differences within the community. As woman put it:

> "I get dirty looks and feel like an outsider here. I don't trust or keep in touch with anyone who stayed. Others who also migrated – uneducated people who were in poverty and lost their houses in fires – returned wealthier than ever with new cars and properties. I question them and wonder if the opposition gave them money for burning their houses and blaming it on the government." – SHF01

The economic and political difficulties returnees are facing since their return further shed light on the context of their reintegration. Besides the housing concerns that were previously elaborated on, the empirical research revealed eight issues listed in table 14 below that are prevailing in their area of origin. Some participants complained about multiple struggles. Consequently, the issues are evaluated based on the number of times it was mentioned and expanded on with a quote on each issue. Overall, infrastructure and transportation emerge as the predominant matter (30.7 percent), followed by education (13.16 percent), inflation (12.28 percent), electricity and healthcare (both 11.4 percent).

Table 14: Difficulties faced since return

Difficulty	Mentions (114 total)		Quote
Cellular connection	10	8.78%	"Cellular connection and internet are things that would encourage more people to return for sure. My children get bored here and it's why they don't want to return." – MSM11
Corruption	5	4.39%	"The local NGOs distribute their donations and food baskets, often based on the village mayor's suggestions, to their network and colleagues before considering the rest of us who are suffering more. The nepotism is horrible. It's much harder to survive in general if you don't have connections you can bribe." – ARF03
Education	15	13.16%	"My children missed out of fundamental years in school and desperately need tutoring, but I'm afraid I can't afford that. More investments in school would tremendously help the area. We can't leave our children vulnerable to believe anything." – ETF03
Electricity	13	11.40%	"I've tried to put the electricity issue forward with the Ministry of Energy through a connection I have. After many dialogs, they provided us with two hours of electricity during the day and six hours at mid-night. That's why many people work night shifts." – MSM19
Healthcare	13	11.40%	"Health is a big issue these days. There are no pharmacies and doctors nearby. Many people can't afford to go anyway. I need an eye operation, but I'm not able to afford the treatment." – ARF01
Inflation	14	12.28%	"The biggest struggle now is the inflation. During the war, we were purely in survival mode and couldn't think about the future. Today it's a different kind of survival full of worry about making it until the next payday. People are starving to death." – ETF07
Mental health	9	7.89%	"I am dealing with a lot of fear, phobia and depression after the damage I've seen and pain I've been through. My father worries about me as a woman leaving the house by myself till this day." – AHF02
Transportation & infrastructure	35	30.70%	"Transportation is a huge struggle. The roads are horrible from the bombings. Busses are extremely inconvenient, time consuming and expensive. People are rude get into fights. I've had people ash their cigarette on my head in the bus." – SHF01

Chapter 7. Discussion

The following discussion chapter is a reflection of the empirical findings on IDP returns from the previous chapter put in context of the literature review and theoretical framework on return migration. The thesis sampled IDP returnees who involuntarily migrated to nearby areas of displacement and made the journey back home. The selection bias presented in this sample is twofold; (1) the participant sample did not include IDPs that had not returned and therefore returnees and non-returnees could not be made; (2) and the returnees selected for this study were IDPs who did not migrate very far and stayed in the country as opposed to those who took a higher risk and migrated abroad. However, there is enough to be gained from the experiences of the cohort of IDP returnees in this study in terms of the similarities and differences they have with the findings on refugee returns from the literature review and theoretical trends. After having completed the research what can be said about the cohort in this study is that these are returnees who show a nationalistic mindset and are committed to their communities. The discussion reflects on the contributing factors on their intention to return and the challenges they face in their reintegration while exploring the relevance of theories on refugee return to IDPs forcibly displaces in Syria. It reviews the findings examining whether they support the literature and theories which correlates with the chosen deductive approach. Each section in this chapter is devoted to answering one of the three sub-research questions followed by a section reflecting on policy implications for governments and aid organizations.

7.1. What are IDP migrants' initial intention to return when they first leave and does it change during their displacement?

The literature highlights the fact that the initial intention to return plays a role in migrants' return behavior and emphasizes that those intentions may change depending on the context. Reasons not to intend to return may arise for professional or personal reasons (Mekki-Berrada, 2019) and plans may become vague if it is difficult to foresee the time needed to obtain sufficient financial resources (Sinatti, 2011). Overall, the literature states that having the intention to return increases the chances that the return will take place even if it is uncertain. Drawing on the empirical data in this study, 91.4 percent (n=53) of the IDP participants intended to return from the day they migrated. According to them in retrospect, their intention did not change over time. Many factors contributed to that end,

whereby the similarities and differences of the literature findings on refugee returns and the experiences of IDPs on the intention to return are elaborated on below.

7.1.1. Similarities between IDPs and refugees on their intention to return

Men intend to return for professional reasons. Within this study's sample of 40 female and 18 male participants, the sample is too small to draw any specific conclusion as to whether men or women generally have higher intentions to return. Some studies have shown that men have higher intentions to return more due to professional reasons (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). In line with the literature, all male participants intended to return, somewhat in hope that their professional and economic difficulties during their migration would improve upon their return. On the other hand, none of the women in the study revealed an intention to return based on professional reasons.

Educated migrants are just as motivated to return. While the influence of education is debated in the literature, some believe that better educated migrants are more in favor of returning due to occupational prospects while lower-skilled migrants intend to stay if they enjoy a higher living standard somewhere else (Nekby, 2006). 26 of the 58 participants have a basic education between fifth and ninth grade, which is below the average education level in Syria[5]. The data shows that they were financially worse off elsewhere, which supports the idea that those on the lower end of the education spectrum who did not raise their living standard intend to return. The 25 participants with a secondary or university education also indented to return, likely expecting better work opportunities, adding further credence to the notion that educated migrants are in favor of returning. The fact that the participants in the sample represented all levels of educational attainment suggests that the level of education is not a determining variable for IDPs who decide to return.

Longer migrations lead to lower intentions to return. The longer the migration duration, the more integrated refugees are, which decreases their intention to return (Amran & Urso, 2016). The majority of IDP returnees in this study were under the impression that their migration would be a matter of a few weeks at most. They were in temporary situations where they migrated to settlement centers, to live with relatives, were guests in vacant houses or rented a property. While the study found the

[5] Up until the outbreak of the conflict, Syrian youth were among the highest-educated in the Middle East region, with Syria having achieved a near universal secondary school completion rate of 74 percent (Al Hessan, 2016).

average migration was five to seven years, 35 of the 58 participants experienced multiple migrations where they lived for shorter periods in each location and many were displaced in settlement centers. Thus, they were not presented with the right conditions to integrate in the area of displacement. Similar to the literature on refugees, their shorter stays in one location, and therefore, lack of integration reinforced their intention to return.

Property ownership is a major pull motivation for return. For refugees, property ownership in the country of origin indicates migrants' attachment and is a precondition for return (Carling, 2004). This study showed that all but one IDP returnee were property owners in their area of origin before they migrated. As with refugees this clearly had a major impact on their intention to return; perhaps even the biggest pull factor for their return. The study found that their assets were tied to their property, where being a home owner was a significant life achievement. The twelve participants who additionally owned a business had further incentive to return.

Career opportunities drive returns. The majority of formerly self-employed IDPs in this study struggled to find work during their displacement, which is consistent with the findings in the literature that argues that non-working migrants are more likely to want to return (Bolzman et al., 2006). Employed IDPs also faced difficulties in their commute and made sacrifices to be able to keep they employment. Overall, the intention to return by 91.4 percent (n = 53) of participants was associated to a high degree with their unsatisfactory professional situation and the urge to build a secure livelihood. Although IDPs do not enjoy welfare benefit during their migration that refugees may benefit from, the employment status for both groups motivates their intention to return.

Lack of social networks in the host community support returns. The negative correlation between social integration in the host country and the intension to return is clearly pronounced in the literature (Carling & Pettersen, 2013). IDPs did not face significant cultural differences during their migrated compared to those that went abroad and thus, may have faced fewer obstacles to integrate in their place displacement. However, the study did reveal that multiple migrations or shorter migration periods did not necessarily create the right conditions to integrate for IDPs. Those who were living with relatives or in settlement centers and were surrounded by their social networks also did not seem to make a conscious effort to integrate into the respective community. Their lower sense of belonging further added to their intention to return, thereby supporting the literature.

7.1.2. Differences between IDPs and refugees on their intention to return

IDPs of all ages want to return. Reyes (2004) claims that older individuals who migrated for shorter periods are more likely to intend to return due to integration difficulties. The longer their migration, the lower their intention to return. Since IDPs from all ages sought to return in this study, it the idea that older people want to return is supported, yet is difficult to ascertain whether or not older people intend to return more than younger people. The study also found that the difficulty to integrate added to the intention to return for IDPs from all age ranges and did not necessarily find that older migrants struggled more in their integration. However, there could be a selection bias in this study, as only IDPs who did in fact return are taken into account and younger people who did not have an intention to return may have migrated further away.

Female refugees have lower intentions to return than female IDPs. Another reason why men intend to return more than women based on the literature is due to the autonomy gained abroad for women (Mekki-Berrada, 2019). This presents a major difference in the case of IDP women since they remained in the country where they did not necessary gain autonomy as a result of their migration. Even the social status change of widows who carry a greater responsibility in the family since their spouse's passing generally did not seem to have an impact on their intention to return. Depending on the conditions, if they were not getting along with their in-laws during their displacement or struggled to provide an income, it can be argued that that may have even increased their intention to return.

Involuntary migration impacts IDPs' intentions. All the participant cited security as their main reason for their involuntary migration. Due to their forced departure, the return depends on the political developments in the area of origin. Contrary to the literature stating that those forcibly displaced because of safety do not have higher intention to return than those who migrate for other reasons (Bilgili & Siege, 2012), the data revealed that the nature of the participants' forced migration is in fact reflected in their intention. Although they were well aware of the fighting taking place, their departure was generally described as the last option leading them to flee at the last minute. The lack of preparation in their forced departure resulted in their intention to return from the day they migrated.

IDPs' bond to their area of origin does not necessarily diminish over time. The similarity between refugees and IDPs was discussed in terms of how a longer migration period can mean a higher integration level in the place of displacement. This in turn leads to a lower intention to return.

However, in the case of refugees, it is explained by weakening ties with their place of origin during their absence (Hunter, 2011). The difference found in terms of IDPs is that even for those who migrated for several years, for example the 42 participants who were displaced for over five years, the time spent away did not take away from their bond with their area of origin. This contradicts the idea in the literature on refugees, which can be explained by the fact that they did not migrate as far. Being closer may have been an additional factor that led to their disinterest to integrate in their area of displacement irrespective of the migration period, thereby creating a stronger intention to return.

IDPs face legal obstacles too. Although the residency is not relevant for IDPs, the findings identified other potential legal obstacles if they were missing civil documents such as marriage, birth or school registrations. This was the case for 17 participants. IDPs did not cross international borders that are associated with complex migration policies, however, they did face restrictions at military checkpoints making it difficult to get from A to B and possibly getting them in trouble of the did not have the required civil documentation such as their ID. IDPs in a war situation do face restrictions in their movement – a similarity with refugees that is often looked over. However, these are minor enough that it did not impact the intention to return for IDPs in this study. This is a considerable difference to the experience refugees who deal with a more permanent view of their migration with residency permits, which significantly lowers their incentive to return (Sinatti, 2011; Perrin, 2004).

Family unification is a key component of the intention to return. Both the empirical data and the literature highlight the importance of family unification. The vital role of family on migration decisions is also highlighted in the theories of social systems, the new economics of labour migration and network theory. Refugees who have family with them in the host country are less open to returning (Waldorf, 1995). The data of 58 participants recorded that 32 remained fully unified with their family, while 26 stayed partially unified and none were on their own. The fact that none of the participants remained alone during the displacement shows that family unification may be more common with IDPs than refugees. This can be explained by the fact that they did not migrate as far. Despite the majority being fully unified with their family they still intended to return, which contradicts the literature's proposition that those who remain unified have lower intentions to return.

Protecting their property is a cause for return. The difference in the likelihood of the family unification between refugees and IDPs is also liked to their property ownership. It is common for families of refugees that one or a few members migrate, while the rest of the family stays at home.

IDP families were found to be more unified during their migration and did not have the peace of mind that their family is taking care of their property. The risk of it being occupied in their absence may have led to a higher intention to return than for refugees.

Income and livelihoods are common reasons to return. Refugee migrants intention to return is not determined by their economic status (Carling & Pettersen, 2013). However, there is a tendency that migrants who return are in a more financially secure position (Klinthall, 2007). While there seems to be differences on the role of financial security between refugees, the findings on IDP returnees clearly show that the economic burden during their migration contributed to their intention to return. Compared to refugees who may have a better chance to create financial stability abroad in a country with better public services and where the standard of living is higher, IDPs faced a different reality. They struggled to secure their livelihood as a result of their displacement within a war-torn country. Facing higher financial insecurity than before their migration combined with a perceived improvement of their economic situation definitely motivated their return.

Unfavorable political context does not diminish the interest to return. Based on the literature, an unstable political climate decreases their intent to return (Moran-Taylor & Menjivar, 2005). In the case of Syrian IDP returnees, the security situation in their area of origin indeed played a key role on their return. They were aware that regardless of their intentions, a return was only possible if the security situation improved. Yet, the 53 participants who intended to return during their migration reported that they were hopeful and determined that it would happen sooner or later, which does not supplement the theoretical notion that an unstable political climate decreases their intent to return.

In conclusion, there are slightly fewer similarities than differences between IDPs and refugees on what impacts their intention to return. As mentioned, 91.4 percent (n=53) of the IDP participants intended to return from the day they migrated which did not change over time. Professional and economic reasons, their lack of integration in their area of displacement and the desire to return to their property, their most valuable asset, were the common motivators for their return. Their involuntary migration additionally contributed to that end, as well as their bond to their area of origin that did not diminish over time. Overall, it was found that their intention to return certainly increased the probability of it coming into existence.

7.2. What are the key reintegration challenges for IDP returnees?

Having reviewed the IDPs intentions to return, it is at this stage possible to discuss the reintegration challenges in terms of the similarities and differences between IDPs and refugees.

7.2.1. Similarities between IDPs and refugees on reintegration

Women struggle more in their reintegration than men do. Reintegration is more difficult for women than for men according to the literature on refugees. It can be challenging to integrate professionally if women are less recognized for their skills (Ammassari, 2009), or struggle to reenter authoritarian relationships in their society (Varrel, 2008). These are less prominent issues for IDP returnees in this study as the societal difference in the respective place of displacement was not significant enough for them to gain recognition or autonomy. However, the study did point to a different reason as to why some women are confronted more obstacles upon their return making their reintegration more difficult than men. Those who lost their husband during the war are taking up the male role, and therefore, more responsibility in the family, which is a new territory to navigate.

A higher level of education may lead to better reintegration. Refugees with higher education find it easier to reintegrate as they are more equipped to find jobs (Thomas, 2008). Some participants stressed how people are recruited based on relationships rather than their qualifications, however, overall education was still valued within social networks (Ammassari, 2009). This echoes the experiences of IDP returnees, who often stressed the nepotism associated with finding jobs. The study found that none of the participants with a secondary or post-secondary education were unemployed after their return. Their education may have fulfilled its role for them; however, it cannot be determined as the only factor that led to their employment.

Lack of preparation makes reintegration more difficult. The literature further analyzed the effects forced returns have on returnees and how they are associated with little to no preparation (Cassarino, 2008). The lack of preparation after a forced return likely leads migrants to be financially dependent on their family, increasing the risk of failure to reintegrate (Quiminal, 2002). Forced returns was not the cases for any IDP returnees in this study. Four participants claimed that they were hesitant at first, but then were encouraged to return by their family. However, participants were not prepared despite their willingness and many were indeed financially dependent on their family. Although the reason

for their lack of financial preparation does not comply with the one described in the literature, the reliance on the family prevails for IDP returnees making their reintegration more challenging.

The longer the time since return, the better the experience of reintegration. It is crucial to consider reintegration at specific points in time, so as not to compare a migrant who has returned for one month with one who has been back for several years (Black et al., 2004). Returnees face significant struggles when they first return but these diminish over time. It is possible that refugees return with high expectations were unprepared for the reality of the devastation and that with time these expectations are adjusted (Gmelch, 1980). 34 out of 58 IDP returnees returned between one to two years prior to being interviewed while nearly an equal amount of the remaining participants returned either since less than a year or more than two years. Their experiences did confirm that the time since the return is vital to their reintegration. This was found to be reflected in relation to their property for example. They were not expecting the extent of the damage to their homes and learned to cope with it over time. Rebuilding their house first and foremost depends on their financial capacity which differed between all participants. However, it was common to go back and forth for months to rebuild their homes. It is described as a slow process where they fix up to their current abilities each time they can secure financial resources. Generally, those who returned the longest were able to invest in it more.

Family provides support to reintegrate. All but one IDP returnee remained fully or partially unified with their families since their return. The study found it to be extremely common for them to rely on each other's support which contributed to their well-being and facilitated their return. This is supported by the literature that found that those with children are best reintegrated as they tend to have more ties in their social networks and they have the added motivation of securing their children's future (Ruben et al., 2009). The experiences often evolved around their children, where for example questions directed towards the participant were answered in relation to their children. This can be attributed to the fact that more female participants were sampled, who are generally more involved in family matters.

Professional instability can hamper reintegration. The literature claims it can result in economic hardship where returnees are not able to maintain their standard of living (Gaillard, 1995). A good professional status also supports a healthy mindset and improves the reintegration experience (Ammassari, 2009). These propositions align with the empirical data, in which the IDP returnees'

professional circumstances hindered their smooth reintegration. Those in an unemployed situation increased by 19 percent since their displacement. Mainly self-employed participants who lost their business contributed to this development. Participants found it extremely difficult to find jobs, especially in the absence of personal connections. IDP returnees without steady jobs were more vulnerable and struggled to access basic needs such as food and medicine, thereby decreasing their overall well-being. Often those without a steady income still have not completed rebuilding their house years later. This is recognized by the Syria Trust for Development who financially support those willing to build businesses in order to facilitate their reintegration. IDP returnees who disclosed the least problems in their career were employed, especially those in the public sector, almost 80 percent of which were able to continue their employment throughout their migration.

Successful reintegration is difficult amid financial challenges. Many participants reported having reduced the quantity or quality of food consumed due to the lack of means. The majority stressed that they frequently turn to family and friends to borrow money for daily expenses such as healthcare and many have fallen into debt. This confirms how important networks are. It was also found to be common to rely on local organizations for support, which they found frustrating, as well as selling their assets if needed. This confirms the idea in the literature on refugees where they feel desperate, disoriented and humiliated when they return with very little savings and become financially dependent on their family (Kleist, 2013). Cassarino (2004, 2008) further emphasizes how returnees struggling with financial insecurity lack the means to prepare for their return and can anticipate reintegration problems. The study found that their average monthly income decreased by 56.78 percent between June 2012 and March 2020. While 10 participants (17.2 percent) had money saved up prior to returning, nearly all participants needed to invest in their house without the financial means available to do so. This highlights how they were not financially prepared, and therefore face more difficulties reintegrating. However, given the circumstances that were presented to them during their migration such as unemployment, higher cost of living and rental costs, the choice to return is made considering that the cost of staying elsewhere is higher than returning.

An unstable economy does not facilitate reintegration. The economic context may change over time, thereby affecting returnees' reintegration. Examples from the literature include structural changes that have made it more difficult to find employment and investment opportunities or a poorly developed private sector (Ammassari, 2009; Linares, 2009). The IDP returnees have witnessed the economic crisis in Syria over the years of the conflict that has led to the collapse of the currency and

a massive fall in living standards. This development may present a larger shock for returnees from abroad than for IDPs. However, it also clearly impacts IDP returnees and their livelihoods, making their reintegration more difficult than it would be in a stable situation. The massive inflation that only seems to be getting worse was a reoccurring topic for participants in this study as it directly or indirectly impacts all areas of their lives.

Negative socio-political relations within the community matter. The socio-political context can create challenges for returnees in their reintegration from corruption in their professional lives to unfamiliarity within the community in their personal lives (Ammassari, 2009; Steyn & Grant, 2007). There were mixed outcomes for IDP returnees in terms of their reintegration into the community. While some related to each other through the shared migration experiences, other communities suffered a divide between those who supported different political groups. Corruption was also an obstacle to their reintegration that was mentioned by many participants in this study, whether in terms of the local foundations distributing assistance or in their jobs. Overall, some of the difficulties experienced by IDP returnees complies with the concept that an appropriate socio-political situation can facilitate their reintegration.

7.2.2. Differences between IDPs and refugees on reintegration

Age does not necessarily affect the reintegration of IDPs. Returnees in the group from 31 to 47 years old are likely to find it easier to reintegrate (van Houte & de Koning, 2008). This group feel a sense of belonging to their area and are young enough to find jobs, whereas younger returnees are less familiar with the norms and values and older people may struggle to find jobs. As the youngest participant in this study is 26 years old and the average migration period was five to seven years, it can be argued that younger IDP returnees did not necessarily lose their sense of belonging to their area of origin. Their migration took place within the country where norms only slightly differed compared to refugees and their migration was perhaps too short for that to happen. Further, it was found that IDP returnees of all ages struggled to find jobs, which does not conform to the idea that younger returnees have a better chance in the job market. While the theoretical notions may have merit, it is challenging to draw conclusions on the IDPs reintegration based on their age. This study would have had to sampled a larger number of younger IDP returnees and specifically analyzed their employment opportunities compared to older returnees.

A shorter migration period is not a precondition for better reintegration. IDP returnees with the longest migration up to eight years in this study did not earn savings, which does not conform with the literature findings that a longer migration period often leads to savings, therefore positively impacting reintegration (Carling, 2004). On the other hand, some refer to a negative impact on social relationships where a long migration period reduces the chances of securing jobs (Ammassari, 2009) and can lead to difficulties in adapting upon return (Gmelch, 1980). Relationships are indeed relevant for Syrian IDPs in terms of finding jobs, however, the data did not determine a relation to the migration period. Moreover, it was found that their difficulty to adapt were not essentially due to the migration period, but rather based on other factors such as the state of their properties, lack of income and livelihood or access to basic services.

Owning a home can also be an obstacle to reintegrate. The literature highlighted that owning property in the country of origin implies that returnees are better prepared for their return and regards these returnees to be in a better financial position, thereby contributing to their reintegration (Carling, 2004). As housing is one of the first practical difficulties returnees face upon their return, Gmelch (1980) claims that reintegration works best when migrants already have a home. This was the case for all but one participant in this study. However, the data found that this does not imply that migrants were able to return immediately. Seven participants returned to rental housing or moved in with their relatives in the area as their entire building was under construction. All participants found structural damage to their property where it was bombed and had to rebuild it on their own. This study found that it was common for participants to go back and forth for up to months to work on their home before it reached a livable state. The period during which returnees rebuilt their property was the vital preparation needed before they could permanently return. Furthermore, some IDP returnees sold assets such as their car in order to invest in the property. While owning a house may be a vital asset adding to their reintegration compared to returnees that do not have one, the investment it requires in a war situation can present a further obstacle to reintegration. The local architecture firm interviewed in this study shows that this is a primary need that is assisted by several international NGOs.

In conclusion, there are more similarities than differences on the challenges of reintegration. Similar challenges include the lack of preparation prior to returning, professional and financial instability as well as unfavorable socio-political environment within the community. Family support, a higher education level and the time necessary to readjust can on the other hand support reintegration. Some

differences were found between IDPs and refugees such as the role of age and the migration period on reintegration, as well as the idea that owning a property makes reintegration easier.

7.3. How do IDP returnees' aspirations and structural factors influence their reintegration?

The previous sub-research questions determined which factors had an influence on the IDP migrants intention to return and reintegration by setting theoretical work in relation to the empirical data. This still begs the question of why some IDP returnees reintegrate better than others. Cassarino (2004) brings attention to the conditions influencing reintegration. The developed conceptual framework for this thesis add further elements of the migrants' aspirations and structural factors beyond the factors influencing the intention to return, the return experience and reintegration.

The migrants' intention to return is derived by their **aspirations** that push them towards a level of well-being (Cassarino, 2004). This implies that they could imagine a positive reintegration upon their return. In the question of IDP migrants in this study where the large majority of participants intended to return, it can be said that they aspired to live in their area of origin as the place where they can flourish and realize their life plans, and therefore, could imagine a positive reintegration.

In addition, Cassarino (2004, 2008) emphasizes return preparation as an essential element for reintegration. One of the two aspects of preparation is the **free will to return**. It is vital to discuss whether the participants who aspired and intended to return, indeed acted out of free will. Analysis of the empirical data found that IDP migrants returned soon after the official news that security was established in their area. As security was the reason for their forced migration, the act of deciding to return at a time when safety was not a concern anymore seems logical. Thus, their return took place under external circumstances in terms of security in which the timing in that regard was difficult to foresee. Especially for those who were in settlement centers that unexpectedly closed down after surrounding areas was secured. These IDPs had nowhere else to go, returning home may have seemed as the only option. However, although unexpected, that was what they initially had aspired to do and none of them were forced to return. The experiences of the four participants whose return was dictated by their family although they were not in favor at that time show that they would come to a different decision even in retrospect. Therefore, their reintegration was more challenging.

The migrants' freedom and aspirations are further constrained by the **structural factors** under which the return takes place. As illustrated in the conceptual framework, these can be economic, political or social influences to reintegration. The inflation throughout the conflict is reflected in the currency development, where one USD went from 54 SYP in January of 2012 to 1'220 SYP in March of 2020. Accordingly, this was mentioned in the findings by seven participants as the third most pressing issue IDP returnees are facing. The findings revealed that they were economically worse off during their migration. This was a change that they had witnessed as they remained in the country and one that is a major constraint to their aspirations and decisions especially since their migration was not tied to an economic objective. Therefore, although it was not an economic favorable position to remain in the country to begin with, it was still financially advantageous for IDPs to return.

In terms of political structural factors, the policies that affected IDP returnees beyond those that led to their involuntary migration were initially the establishment of security, and therefore, road re-openings. Further, in some cases where IDPs were returning from opposition-controlled areas permission to return by the authorities or reconciliation with the government was required before they could return. These involved participants needing to prove their innocence and non-involvement in the conflict. The data also showed that 17 participants (29.3 percent) were missing official papers after their return. However, only the minority of them faced legal issues constraining to their reintegration.

As for the social structural factor, the theory refers to the link between family and the individual in the decision making and migration process (Massey, 1993). The findings on IDP migrants validate that belief to a limited extent, whereby family values remained intact as the participants stayed at least partially unified. Nevertheless, those who for example migrated from a village to a larger city, especially for the ethnic group from Marj Al-Sultan, share values in common with their society that were missing during their migration. This contributed to the realization of their aspirations to return.

The second aspect of preparation in Cassarino's (2004, 2008) work is **readiness** of the resources available to migrants, which is vital for their reintegration. In terms of financial resources, the research on IDP returnees observed that only ten participants had money saved up prior to returning that they were able to invest in the house. In fact, the question whether participants attempted to prepare for a possible return, was usually answered in relation to rebuilding their house. This leads to a low degree of financial preparation, which, as discussed, is attributed to the professional and

economic struggles migrants faced during and after their migration. When it comes to human capital, which refers to education, knowledge and skills of migrants (Ammassari, 2009), the findings revealed that the IDP participants rarely gained any professional experience or skills during their migration. Lastly, social capital, which entails wealth from social relationships, several participants referred to the fact that nepotism was common. Those that have personal connections were in a better position to for example find employment upon their return. Nevertheless, links with family and friends who were with them during their migration or who migrated elsewhere were well maintained. However, the minority were in contact with people who did not migrate mainly due to the fact that there was only a small number of them.

This leads to the question of which of Cassarino's (2004, 2008) three levels of preparation apply to IDP returnees. As they maintained certain contacts, however, none that were vital to their reintegration that could lead to a job for example, and they did not acquire knowledge and useful skills during their migration, it cannot be concluded that they had a high degree of preparation. Therefore, the first level can be excluded. The third level can also be ruled out since they were not forced to return although some returned under unexpected circumstances. This results in the classification of the IDP returnees under the second level, in which the choice to return is made considering that the cost of staying is higher than returning. However, one precondition of the second level that migrants migration period was too short (or little opportunities existed) to mobilize the necessary resources is not applicable to all IDP returnees in this study. Overall, the limited level of preparedness leads to difficulties upon their return, whereby many resort to relying on their relatives and other support.

7.4. Policy implications and implications for aid organizations

As can be drawn from the literature review, there is an abundance of research that focus on refugees. This thesis was initially set out to focus on refugees that returned to Syria from abroad. The shift of its attention to IDP underlines how important it is to recognize that these are two different experiences and how a better understanding around IDPs is needed. A part of why this is vital is to challenge the narrative that all Syrian migrants aim to settle in Europe or other countries. The thesis shows that many people are willing to stay in Syria and want to return to and rebuild their houses. The question of what policy implications can be made for countries aiming to lower their refugee intake and what NGOs can do to encourage people to return and to support those who did revealed that:

- The ability to go visit their house while they repair the damage increases the likelihood that a more permanent return can take place. If people are scared to return to Syria because that means they are not allowed back over the border, they likely will not return. This also means providing administrative and legal support that make it safe to travel. If they can go back to Syria and rebuild their properties and personal connections, chances are that they will return.
- The war greatly affected Syria's infrastructure. One important service to enact returns is better public transport links. Many return to secluded areas and as taxis go unregulated and bus routes have been scaled back, returnees are spending the majority of their time and wages commuting to work. Aid organizations looking to invest could provide affordable transport, which would improve the reconstruction and allow displaced people to imagine an easier reintegration.
- Policy makers and aid organizations can facilitate returns by providing career opportunities in Syria for migrants. This allows them to be self-reliant, thereby increasing the likelihood that returns take place.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This thesis examined the voluntary return of IDPs in rural Damascus. Voluntary repatriation is the preferred approach outlined in the UNHCRs *DAR framework* on durable solutions for refugees and IDPs when and where feasible under certain essential conditions. This is relevant for Syria as a significant number of displaced people have begun to return. The thesis focused on IDP returnees in Damascus who involuntarily left their homes to find temporary shelter and the circumstances of their return and reintegration. The objective is to include returnees' capabilities and needs in development planning in order to facilitate their reintegration and improve the country's rebuilding efforts. The research shed light through in-depth qualitative interviews on the social, economic and demographic challenges and the barriers they faced in order to improve their reintegration.

With a combination of explorative and deductive approach, the thesis focused on obtaining a better understanding of the reintegration of IDPs in Damascus though a case study design and qualitative data collection. 58 IDP returnees and four local organizations participated in semi-structured interviews in order to understand their perspective of the achievements and failures of humanitarian and aid organizations on the ground and whether there is a conducive environment for returnees. Two overarching themes were found that functioned as the foundation of this thesis: (1) the intention to return and the return experience; and (2) reintegration. These were defined by 24 unique themes, which were then in the coded into 142 codes in the analysis process.

A lot can be gained from an insight into IDP experiences and the problems they are facing that is comparable with the literature and theories on refugees. The research question guiding this thesis was formulated as: *"What is the experience of reintegration for forcibly displaced Syrian IDP returnees in the rural Damascus area?"* After having completed the research, the main findings on how they perceive their reintegration and how return can be facilitated are highlighted in this study:

Reintegration is not prepared. The willingness to return and length of displacement are strong predictors of return. The research finds that the most common reason for return for IDPs in Damascus is the improvement of safety in the area of origin as well as the financial insecurity and lack of employment opportunities in places of displacement. Threshold for return was low as most IDPs returned despite knowing their homes were damaged and basic services and economic opportunities were lacking. All participants reported their home to be damaged. A perceived improvement in their

financial situation encourages, in part, their willingness to return. At the same time, in a society where personal networks matter, information on employment is limited. Compared to refugee returnees, IDP returnees who stayed close to the place of origin benefited from having the ability to check on their property and the viability of their return before settling back. Nevertheless, the post-return lives of IDP returnees are indeed less well prepared: they often lack information on reintegration. A strategy to facilitate them to be better prepared would be to provide information on livelihood programs and income generating or training opportunities to promote self-reliance, especially for women.

Community drives and supports return. When asked if they returned with their family or alone, the majority of participants stated that they remained unified with at least one other family member that they lived with before their displacement. The community including relatives, friends and neighbors played an important role in facilitating returns and reintegration. They influence the returnees' motivation to return and provide information and assurance that the area was safe and reintegration support (for example providing loans or a place to stay while they rebuild their house). Both positive and negative experiences were reported in terms of the social environment in the community after the IDPs return. Better access to information on questions around the return and reintegration could inform and guide IDPs in their decision-making. Ways to facilitate their communication with their community could include programs that can facilitate communication.

Needs and vulnerabilities affect IDPs. The empirical data shows how the conflict in Syria has led to many similar long-term structural changes negatively affecting the reintegration of IDP returnees. Besides their main household needs being income and livelihood, participants were mainly concerned about basic infrastructure, more specifically regarding electricity, the damaged roads and inadequate and expensive transportation methods. The war had a deteriorating effect on other issues as well impacting their daily life and reintegration. Three other needs that ranked closely were the quality of education, the consequences of the unstable economy and massive inflation, as well as the access to and cost of healthcare. Although IDP returnees' expectation may be lower than those returning from abroad as they have a better idea of the circumstances, their areas of displacement were not affected as much by the war, hence they were not used to these struggles to that extent prior to their return. Damaged schools and hospitals as well as basic infrastructure, combined with low access to water and electricity, makes reintegration difficult. Institutional support can be provided for all the mentioned needs to facilitate their reintegration.

The experiences of the IDP returnees in this study highlights how vulnerable they are and how much support they need after going through tragic lifechanging events. Much of the focus in the research on migration is on refugees, although the majority of displaced people worldwide are IDPs. As this study has shown, similarities between IDPs and refugees do exist, however, their realities are also quite different, which is why the attention should be on both groups. Research limitations presented in section 3.4 of the methodology chapter include limitations and suggestions that can be adapted for further research. Overall it can be said that there is a lot more that can be done to help people return.

Many conflict situations or environmental disasters around the world today are continuously leaving people internally displaced – a situation that will continue in the future. This is why it is important to understand the circumstances and challenges of IDPs in order to facilitate people's journey back home. There is not much than can be done in a situation where the main barrier to return is security, however, it is not the only barrier. Once security is established, efforts can be made in terms of facilitating their returns. This is even more important regarding IDPs displaced for environmental reasons such as an earthquake or a flood where the security factor is not relevant. Explore what helps migrants to return and reintegrate is important to research. Policy makers need to understand how to support returnees to rebuild their homes and facilitate their travel back and forth as they rebuild their properties. This thesis was a small-scale explorative study, which can also be done on a larger-scale across various countries and dynamics beyond civil conflict such as environmental causes of migration. Thereby, more ways to measure reintegration need to be established in order to better understand the challenges of reintegration even further. More can be done around mental health support as well as the possibilities around education and skill training in settlement centers and camps in order for them to use that time of displacement in a way that support their reintegration.

Furthermore, it was not in Syria's interest for half of the population to migrate abroad – assumingly the more educated affluent half. Further research on finding ways to keep people closer can be done by understand why IDPs migrated within the country and feel a closer bond to their country while others took the opportunities to migrate abroad. This may be due to unequal distribution of capital and resources worldwide, whereby research can focus on how these can be redistributed to create employment opportunities as a pull factor to entice people to stay. This can be stimulated as a way to lure migrants back, especially those who migrated to neighboring countries. To that end, it can also be further researched whether migrants who migrated to those neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have more in common with IDPs or refugees who migrated further away.

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Appendices

Appendix A: EIP analysis of the UNHCR Protection Thresholds

UNHCR Threshold		Current Status
Significant and durable reduction of hostilities.		In some areas of the country there has been a reduction in immediate conflict-related violence. It remains to be seen whether this is durable. In other areas, there remains an ongoing threat of conflict-related violence, such as in northeast, northwest, southern, and some areas of central Syria.
Conclusion of a formal agreement with the government, host countries, and other actors as required, to receive returnees.		Agreements have not been reached, nor do the conditions exist for these to be appropriate to enter into.
The government / actors in control of the return area provide genuine guarantees that returnees will not face harassment, discrimination, arbitrary detention, physical threat or prosecution on account of originating from an area previously or currently under de facto control of another party to the conflict; for having left Syria illegally; for having lodged an asylum claim abroad; or on account of any (individual or family) diversity characteristic.		Currently not being met in any location in Syria. Discrimination based on ethnic and political persuasion continues, as does discrimination based on which area of control or country someone resided in during the conflict. Arrests and detentions are occurring across all areas.
Every individual's decision to return is informed and genuinely voluntary, without any coercion.		No formal or independently verified information is currently available on the status of security conditions in areas for return; refugees rely on scarce informal networks. Reports of UNHCR failing to inform refugees that they lack the required access and information to counsel them on conditions for return.
Acceptance by the government / entity in control of the return area of returnees' free choice of destination and place of residence and right to freedom of movement.		Government not willing to allow freedom of movement to all within areas under their control; it is also rejecting the return requests of some prospective returnees.
The physical, legal, and material safety of refugees and returnees is ensured.		No. Physical, legal, and material safety is not guaranteed anywhere in the country. Arrests and detentions, opaque and unfair trials, and property dispossession are occurring in all areas.
Measures are in place to meet the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys, and to ensure that SGBV is prevented and responded to, that access to assistance is safe and dignified, and that protection, care and assistance are provided throughout all phases of the return and reintegration process. Refugees and returnees with specific needs (including, but not limited to, older persons and persons with disabilities) receive protection and support, through age- and gender-sensitive approaches.		No consistent humanitarian access to people in need, IDPs, and returnees, so it is impossible to ensure these needs are being met as a matter of course.
Identified unaccompanied or separated children are not returned prior to tracing family members and formal best interests of the child determinations have been undertaken.		Women and children are routinely separated from males, with reports of families being separated during arrests made during the return process which leave children unaccompanied. In other cases, children are given return permission without parents.
The principle of family unity is upheld, including the right to enter and remain for dependents who are not Syrian citizens.		Permission to return is not guaranteed for an entire family group, with permissions given in some cases to some family members and not others. Families of those who were forcibly evacuated during so-called reconciliations report being asked to disavow their family members in order to be allowed to return.
Refugees and returnees can effectively participate in the planning and implementation of the return and reintegration process.		Returnees are not able to participate in the planning of when and how they return, and in some cases are not able to return to their area of origin.
Activities by any entity that impede the informed, voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin or of choice are prevented and		There is currently no baseline information about the conditions for return or the security situation in potential areas for return. Therefore it is impossible to state whether

addressed.		the activities that impede return are being addressed or, indeed, to address them.
Returnees fully benefit from an amnesty in Syria, except for those who are charged with a serious violation of international humanitarian law, a crime against humanity, a crime constituting a serious violation of human rights, or a serious common crime involving death or serious bodily harm, committed prior to or during exile. The amnesty includes those who evaded compulsory military service or reservist service, have deserted from the armed forces, have joined a non-state armed group, and who left Syria illegally and/or lodged an asylum claim abroad.	■	No such amnesty exists in Syria. Forced conscription continues across the country, even within the 6-month periods of reprieve negotiated during reconciliations or returns. Informing on others has continued and increased both formally and informally, including through returns and reconciliation forms.
The government of Syria commits to recognizing changes in returnees' personal/civil status that occurred during the conflict, including in displacement and abroad (e.g. births, deaths, marriages, adoptions, divorces, custody – including the extension of Syrian nationality to returnee children born abroad and residence status with the possibility of naturalization for non-Syrian spouses). All returnees have access to affordable civil registration and documentation and validation of education certificates obtained abroad. Documentation issued by a competent authority indicating such changes is validated or re-issued.	■	Documentation and its recognition remain concerns inside and outside the country. Gaining formal government-issued documentation from abroad is prohibitively expensive for refugees. Documents issued in areas not under government control are not recognized. Women in particular struggle to access documentation if their male relatives or partners have died or been detained. Civil documentation offices and systems are closely linked to the security apparatus.
Appropriate evidentiary value is given to civil documentation issued by non-state entities and in non-government-controlled areas by local actors (e.g. birth attestation), and legitimate documentation issued by the competent Syrian authorities is recognized. For those not holding identity documentation, alternative forms of evidence are accepted. Documentation from UNHCR or other internationally mandated organizations is recognized.	■	There has not yet been any movement on the government of Syria's position regarding its lack of recognition of documents issued in areas outside its control during the conflict.
Legislative measures allow for the issuance of documents necessary to establish identity, family composition and nationality. To prevent statelessness, legislative measures are undertaken to ensure refugees born to a Syrian parent—female or male—are considered citizens of Syria, and birth certificates are issued to refugee children who are not in possession of such documents.	■	Documentation and its recognition remain concerns inside and outside the country.
The equivalency of academic/professional/vocational diplomas/certificates/degrees acquired during displacement is recognized by the government of Syria, as appropriate.	■	There has not yet been any movement on the government of Syria's position regarding its lack of recognition of educational achievements at all levels issued in areas outside its control during the conflict.
The government sets up efficient, accessible, and affordable mechanisms to address housing, land and property (HLP) issues and to provide for property restitution and compensation in line with international law. Particular attention needs to be paid to the rights of returnee women heads of households and the rights of secondary occupants of refugees' property.	■	The government of Syria continues to issue discriminatory HLP legislation and fails to rescind similarly concerning recent and historical laws. Many Syrians cannot assert their HLP rights due to land zoning, titling, and lack of documentation. Destruction of property is widespread, as is secondary habitation. Access to some neighbourhoods, towns, or properties is arbitrarily blocked by the government of Syria. No mechanism within or outside the country exists to address HLP issues.
Returnees enjoy free access to law enforcement bodies, courts of law, competent administrative authorities and other relevant entities.	■	Accessing the legal system is prohibitively expensive and opaque for many. In some areas, returnees report that law enforcement do not take their complaints seriously and fail to investigate them.
UNHCR's supervisory responsibility, which includes (but is not limited to) monitoring the voluntariness of the repatriation, the reintegration of returnees, and all interventions aimed at ensuring repatriation in safety and dignity are respected.	■	UNHCR does not have access to all areas of the country, nor does it enjoy uninhibited access to communities to monitor conditions or to follow and monitor or protect returnees throughout the return process.

Both Syria and host countries take all appropriate steps to ensure the security and safety of UNHCR staff and all other personnel engaged in the repatriation process.		UNHCR does not have access to all areas of the country, nor does it enjoy uninhibited access to communities to monitor conditions or to follow and monitor or protect returnees throughout the return process.
Removal of/marking of areas contaminated by landmines and other unexploded ordnance on main routes of return and in return areas is ensured. Mine awareness programmes are established in affected areas.		Mine removal work is ongoing but incomplete.
UNHCR is granted free and unhindered access to all refugees and returnees to monitor the conditions of reception and reintegration. Similarly, all refugees and returnees, wherever they are located, including in detention centres and prisons (in liaison with the International Committee for the Red Cross/Red Crescent), have access to UNHCR.		UNHCR does not have access to all areas of the country, nor does it enjoy uninhibited access to communities to monitor conditions or to follow and monitor or protect returnees throughout the return process.

Appendix B: Interview guide

Qualitative interview guide - English

- My introduction
- Brief explanation of the theme of the interview
- Confirm confidentiality
- Voice recording: it is from the transcription as part of the research and will stay anonymous

1. General introduction

➔ To start with, and to help set a time scale, we will use this time grid for the questions to locate the years.

1.1.		First name of the respondent:
1.2.		The respondent is: 1. A man, 2. A woman
1.3.		Can you tell me what year you were born?
1.4.		Where did you grow up?
1.5.		What was your parents' occupation?
1.6.		What is your marital status?
	1.6.1.	*If married*: What year did you get married?
1.7.		Do you have any children?
1.8.		How old are they/ what year where they born?
1.9.		Who do you live with?
	1.9.1.	Household size:
	1.9.2.	Do you have a spouse or other dependent children/family members not living with you?
1.10.		What is your level of education?
1.11.		Where did you go when you first left?
1.12.		How old were you / in what year was it?
1.13.		How long did you stay there?
1.14.		When did you return?

2. Before migration

➔ I would like to talk about your situation before leaving.

Social perspective

2.1.		Where did you live before you left?
	2.1.1.	1. Same community (rural) 2. Same community (urban)
2.2.		Who did you live with?
2.3.		Did you feel a sense of belonging to the community?

The professional and economic situation

2.4.		In what type of accommodation did you live in (were you landlords?)
2.5.		What was your professional situation?
2.6.		What did your work consist of?

2.7.		Did you earn a good living?
2.8.		What source of income did you have? (income from work + others? transfers? rentals?)
2.9.		Approximately how much did you earn on average?
3. Migration		
➔ Now we're going to talk about the migration and your time there.		
3.1.		Why did you leave?
3.2.		How did you make the decision to leave?
	3.2.1.	Who was involved in your decision to migrate?
3.3.		Why did you go to one destination and not to another?
3.4.		What steps did you take?
3.6.		Did you know anyone where you were going?
3.7.		Were you planning to return or stay elsewhere permanently? Why?
3.8.		What did you do in the destination you migrated to?
3.9.		Did you enjoy life in that area?
3.10.		Were you alone there or did you have family with you?
3.11.		Did you have any problems getting papers? Work permit?
3.12.		Did you sometimes come back to your area for short stays?
	3.12.1.	*If yes:* Have you thought about permanently coming back at that time?
The professional situation		
3.13.		Were you informed about job opportunities before returning? How and by whom?
3.14.		When you were living abroad, did you keep in touch with people who could help you to find employment later?
3.15.		Did you gain experience/knowledge abroad? Did you come back with specific professional skills?
3.16.		Do you think you came back with additional values from your time abroad? What has migration taught you?
The material and economic situation		
3.17.		What ties did you keep with family? Did you send money to the family frequently?
3.18.		Did you have a house?
	3.18.1.	If yes and it's still there: Did you invest in it during your absence?
3.19.		When you came home, did you have any money saved up? Where you able to save abroad?
	3.19.1	*If yes:* For what purpose was this money used? What were your plans?
4. After the return		
4.1.		Why and under what circumstances did you return?
4.2.		Did you prepare for your return? If so, how?
4.3.		Did you attempt to gather any information or make contacts in view of a possible return?
The professional and economic situation		

4.4.		What did you do when you got home?
	4.4.1.	*If own business:* What? Does it make much money? Create jobs? How much?
4.5.		Did you find work easily? How did you manage to find work? Where you helped? After how long?
4.6.		Did you work in the desired sector/status? Would you prefer to have another job?
4.7.		Do you use skills acquired abroad?
4.8.		What are your impressions about this job? Are you facing any problems or difficulties (e.g. administration? Customers?)
4.9.		What source of income have you had since your return? (income from work + other? transfers? rentals?)
4.10.		Approximately how much did you earn?
4.11.		Is it difficult to find a good job when you return?
Social integration		
4.12.		How did the return trip with the family go? What did they say about your return (family here or abroad)?
4.13.		Where and with whom did you live when you returned? In what type of housing?
4.14.		Do you feel different from other people in your area who did not leave?
4.15.		What difficulties are you facing since your return?
4.16.		Are you planning to stay or to leave again?
	4.16.1.	*If not:* Why? Do you have papers that allow you to go elsewhere? Which ones?
4.17.		Do you think that your return contributes to the development of the area? What activities do you consider as contributing to the development of the area? In your opinion, what would promote your involvement in the development of the area?
4.18.		How to you see the future?

Appendix C: Codebook extracted from NVivo

Codebook	References
A. Factors related to socio-demographic characteristics of migrants	0
01. Age	58
02. Gender	58
03. Level of education	0
a. None	4
b. Basic education first cycle 1st - 4th grade	3
c. Basic education second cycle 5th - 9 grade	26
d. Secondary education 10th - 12th grade	16
e. Post-secondary education	9
B. Factors related to the migration experience	0
04. Reason for migration	0
a. Why did you leave?	54
b. How did you make the decision to leave?	51
c. Who was involved in your decision to migrate?	7
05. Migration period	0
1-2 years	1
2-3 years	4
3-4 years	2
4-5 years	2
5-6 years	20
6-7 years	16
7-8 years	4
8-9 years	2
Less than 1 year	7
Where did you go when you first left?	0
Multiple migrations	35
06. The initial intention to return	0
Were you planning to return or to stay elsewhere permanently, why?	56
07. The administrative situation	0
a. Where did you go when you first left (multiple migrations)?	35

b. Why did you go to one destination and not to another?	50
c. What steps did you take?	46
d. Did you have any problems getting papers, work permit?	52
No	17
Yes	35
C. Factors related to the individual situation during migration	0
08. The family situation	0
a. What is your marital status?	0
Married	41
Single	4
Widowed	13
b. Do you have any children?	0
No	5
Yes	53
c. Family unification during migration	0
No	0
Partial	26
Yes, the entire family stayed together	32
09. The material situation	0
a. Where did you live before you left?	58
b. In what type of accommodation did you live in (property ownership)?	59
c. Other assets and investments?	22
10. The professional situation	0
a. What was your professional situation?	58
b. What did your work consist of?	54
c. What did you do in the destination you migrated to?	43
11. The economic situation	0
a. Did you earn a good living?	40
b. What source of income did you have?	58
c. Approx. how much did you earn on average?	48
12. Social integration	0
a. Did you feel a sense of belonging in the community?	33
b. Did you enjoy life in that area?	51
Negative	29

Negative that turned positive	6
Positive	16
c. Were you alone there ir did you have family with you?	54
D. The role of context on the intention to return and the return experience	0
13. The role of context on the intention to return and the return experience	0
a. Did you enjoy life in that area?	51
b. Were you alone there or did you have family with you?	54
E. Factors related to socio-demographic characteristics of returnees	0
14. Age	58
15. Gender	58
16. Level of education	58
F. Factors related to the migration experience	0
17. Migration period	58
18. The willingness to return	0
a. Why and under what circumstances did you return?	50
b. Did you prepare for your return? if so, how?	33
G. Factors related to the life after return	0
19. Time since the return	0
a. Less than 6 months	4
b. 6 months - 1 year	7
c. 1 - 2 years	34
d. 2 - 3 years	6
e. More than 3 years	7
f. Why and under what circumstances did you return?	50
20. The family situation	0
Children	53
First is born after return	2
Family unification after return	0
Returned alone	0
Widowed	13
Widowed after return	2
21. The material situation	1
a. Where did you live before you left?	0
Different house	7

Same house	51
b. Did you have a house?	48
c. If yes and it's still there, did you invest in it during your absence?	3
d. Did you prepare for your return? If so, how?	33
22. The professional situation	0
a. Were you informed about job opportunities before returning? how and by whom?	2
b. When you were living abroad, did you keep in touch with people who could help you to find employment later?	3
c. Did you gain experience, knowledge abroad? Did you come back with specific professional skills?	8
d. What did you do when you got home?	0
Employed	4
Same employment from before the migration	18
Retired	7
Self-employed	16
Unemployed	8
e. Did you find work easily? How did you manage to find work? Were you helped? After how long?	14
f. Do you use skills acquired abroad?	3
g. What are your impressions about this job? Are you facing any problems or difficulties?	4
h. Is it difficult to find a good job when you returned?	10
23. The economic situation	0
a. When you came home, did you have any money saved up? Were you able to save during your migration?	11
Loans	4
b. What source of income have you had since your return (income from work + other, transfers, rentals)?	52
c. Approximately how much did you earn?	42
H. The role of context on reintegration after return	0
24. The role of context on reintegration after return	0
a. Do you feel different from other people in your area who did not leave?	0
Negative	20
Positive	22
b. What difficulties are you facing since your return?	0
Cellular connection	10

Corruption	5
Electricity	13
Healthcare	13
Inflation & economic hardship	14
Mental health	9
Schooling	17
Transportation & infrastructure	35

Appendix D: Fieldwork pictures of properties