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# RPPR Final Report

## as of 24-May-2023

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**INVESTIGATOR(S):**

**Agreement Number: W911NF-18-1-0088**

**Name:** Arie Kruglanski  
**Email:** kruglanski@gmail.com  
**Phone Number:** 3014055918  
**Principal:** Y

Organization: **University of Maryland - College Park**

Address: The University of Maryland, College Park, MD 207425141

Country: USA

DUNS Number: 790934285

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Submitted By: Arie Kruglanski

Email: kruglanski@gmail.com

Phone: (301) 405-5918

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**Major Goals:** The current refugee problem

As defined by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, refugees are people who fled their country of origin for reasons of "feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection." The number of refugee has escalated, more than doubling within the past decade, and the migration of refugees has the potential to increase instability in the countries where they seek refuge.

As countries across the world grapple with how to best address the circumstances brought on by refugee migration, it is important to examine the veracity of perceptions held by all parties involved. This includes the beliefs held by members of the host communities about the refugee populations they host, as well as the perceptions that refugees hold about themselves, their circumstances, and how they are perceived in the countries that host them. At an interpersonal level, these perceptions are likely to inform how both parties treat and interact with each other. At a societal level, they also likely influence the policies enacted toward bettering the lives of refugees and addressing the impact of refugee migration on societal systems. Ensuring these perceptions accurately reflect reality is thus of critical importance.

In this report, we elaborate on research that was conducted within the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, and in countries that have been major resettlement hubs for Syrians, namely, Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, and the Netherlands (UNHCR, 2020). This research involved qualitative and quantitative research methods with Syrian refugees and members of their host communities. It was aimed at collecting data and ascertaining policy implications of those data. An initial round of 12 focus groups were conducted with Syrian refugees and host community members in Jordan, Lebanon, Germany, and the Netherlands. These were followed with longitudinal surveys in the same Countries in June-September 2020 and May-September 2021 with a total of 1740 Syrian refugees and 1439 host community members completing wave 1 and 1153 refugees and 762 host community members completing both rounds of the survey. Finally, four survey feedback were conducted with refugees, host community members, and people working in the refugee resettlement and aid industries in Jordan, Lebanon, and Germany. During these survey feedback, participants were presented with findings from the previous data collections to identify policy implications. In the remainder of this section, we discuss the (mis)perceptions we explored in our work. In the Major Accomplishments section, we provide a summary overview of key findings (related Figures and Tables are reported in "uploads"). Some of the results we present in this report are also extensively discussed in manuscripts currently under review (see "products"). We also plan to submit a proposal for a book with a major academic press where we can fully disseminate the numerous important findings generated by this research.

(1) Refugees are (not) helpless. In an effort to distinguish refugees from other migrants, Echteroff and colleagues (2020) identified what they termed "forcedness" – a perceived lack of choice over refugees' circumstances and

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migration decisions as a key distinction. Indeed, these beliefs are persistent, with refugees commonly framed as passive victims of their circumstances (e.g., D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). This view of refugees has major implications. Echteroff and colleagues (2020) suggest that higher perceptions of forcedness may determine refugees' integration into host communities by evoking greater empathy, helping behavior, and positivity.

(2) Refugees' relocation is (not) temporary. Refugee status is considered temporary because it is designed to merely fill a gap caused by the breakdown of the normal bond between an individual and their state (Durieux, 2014). This belief in their temporary status likely increases willingness to assist, as people are often willing to help others during brief periods of humanitarian crisis. As these crises continue, however, people are likely to experience compassion fatigue, similar to what is experienced by people in the helping professions that have extended exposure to trauma and loss (e.g., Killian, 2008). Moreover, the belief that refugees want to return home as soon as possible may decrease threats about competition over valuable resources (e.g., jobs) or anxiety related to symbolic influence on the host culture. On the other hand, when individuals come to see refugees as permanent, they may think less about how they can help them, and more about the strain that a lengthy commitment of humanitarian aid will put on the economy and social service sectors of society.

(3) Refugees are (not) concerned only about basic needs. Also intrinsic in the definition of "refugee" is that, because refugees flee war, persecution, etc., they are mostly concerned with satisfying their basic needs for survival and safety. If refugees are mainly and mostly concerned about their basic needs, thus any country willing to satisfy their needs should be a desirable destination. However, refugees are displaced to diverse countries, many of which neighbor their country of origin, but others are more remote. One argument is that, refugees are similar to other migrant populations, and they choose to reside in locations that best afford the fulfillment of various economic (Constant & Massey, 2003) or relational (Constant & Zimmermann, 2012) needs. This implies that refugees might make migration decisions as any other group of immigrants and chose their destination based on the anticipated satisfaction of higher order needs.

(4) Refugees are (not) a security concern. Refugee migration forces individuals of both the migrant and host country communities into close contact with otherness, as each population must learn to live with people of different cultures, worldviews, and religions. This may threaten individuals' sense of security, inducing epistemic and existential uncertainties and promoting tension. Thus, refugee migration can lead to both instability within states (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006) and conflicts between states (Salehyan, 2008). Increasingly, residents of host countries around the world have voiced concerns in this regard. For instance, a January 2017 public opinion survey found that 46% of Americans viewed "a large number of refugees leaving countries such as Iraq and Syria" as a major threat to the well-being of the U.S (Pew Research Center, 2017). Similarly, public opinion polls in the United States (Smith, 2017) and across Europe showed that most respondents feared that Syrian refugees would increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons, 2016). Moreover, refugees are commonly portrayed in the media intruders (e.g., Efe, 2019; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). Within the intruder frame refugees are people who will commit illegal activities and hence pose a threat to the host community (Banks, 2012; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018).

(5) Refugees' metaperceive (perceive) how they are perceived. Whereas the previous sections discussed host community perceptions about refugees, the present section pertains to what are called metaperceptions – i.e., how refugees think they are perceived by the host community. Metaperceptions have long been studied in interpersonal and intergroup settings, where they have been found to have important impacts on human behavior. For instance, more negative metaperceptions are related to various markers of greater intergroup conflict – e.g., when people think they are perceived negatively by another social group they are less willing to interact with members of that group and hold more negative attitudes toward that group. To our knowledge there is no previous work examining the metaperceptions of Syrian refugees.

**Accomplishments:** (1) Refugees are not helpless, (2) nor is their relocation temporary.

Surveys conducted with refugees and among host community members measured the constructs of agency and permanence of migration. Agency was captured with items that examined the extent to which refugees thought they had or were seen as having choice or control over their migration. As is depicted in Figure 1, refugees perceive significantly greater agency in their migration than is ascribed to them by the host community. Moreover, the perceptions of refugees in all countries are at or above the midpoint on the scales, indicating that refugees perceive themselves as agentic. To measure migration permanence, participants were surveyed about the migration intentions of refugees – i.e., to what extent refugees want to stay in their host country, relative to returning to their country of origin. In Figure 2, the red lines show that the members of host communities perceived refugees as simultaneously willing to stay in the host country and willing to return to Syria if it was possible. However, when we examined the migration intentions among the refugees (blue lines in Figure 2), a much clearer pattern emerged. In three out of four countries, the willingness to stay in the host country was much stronger than the willingness to return to Syria, even when there would be no obstacles preventing refugees from returning. Again, this diverges from the viewpoint that refugees see their migration as temporary.

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Finally, results revealed that the more members of host communities perceived refugees as agentic and refugee migration as permanent, the less they supported benevolent refugee policies. Participants from Jordan and Lebanon were less supportive of these policies than participants in Germany. Participants in Germany did not differ significantly from those in the Netherlands. According to these results and what emerged from the survey feedback, refugees should be better integrated in the community within a long-time perspective, that is considering that they will be active citizens of the hosting society. That implies that not only refugees should be supported to learn culture and language of the host country, but the hosting community as well should be exposed to Syrian refugees' culture.

(3) Refugees are not concerned only about basic needs.

The fulfillment of basic needs like food, water, shelter, and safety constitute a fundamental driving force that prompted the refugees' flight from their homeland. However, as time goes by, especially if refugees' survival and security concerns are assuaged to some extent, these basic needs may recede into the background and cede their salience and ability to influence attitudes and behavior to alternative concerns. These alternative concerns are prompted by higher needs (Maslow, 1943), namely, the needs to matter, to feel significant, and respected (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Refugees' forced relocation typically entails a loss of their station in life, professional standing, and/or their social support network; all these may compound the refugees' insecurity and sense of insignificance and helplessness. In such circumstances, individuals are likely to desire restitution of their personal significance and mattering; they may embark on a quest for significance and be sensitized to opportunities of regaining significance (see Kruglanski et al., 2022). Toward this endeavor, we measured the extent to which refugees basic and higher order needs were satisfied. Higher order needs were measured both at the personal and group levels (i.e., how significant they felt as individuals vs. how significant they felt as Syrians). As depicted in Figure 3, with the exception of Lebanon, refugees expressed low feelings of insignificance across all countries. Also, with the exception of Lebanon, they also felt that their basic needs were mostly satisfied. Analyses then examine how need satisfaction influenced migration intentions. Figure 4 shows that across all the countries examined, the more refugees felt insignificant (whether individually or as Syrians) they lesser their desire to stay in the host country. On the other hand, the more they felt their basic needs were satisfied, the greater their willingness to stay in the host country. In other words, their intention to stay in the host country is not only affected by the satisfaction of their basic needs, but it is importantly affected by whether they feel respected. It derives that, for refugees' resettlement to succeed, the refugees need that they have a place in the host society and are accepted and respected. According to the survey feedbacks, the sense of respect can be achieved in several ways, for example by solving the numerous issues refugees have with legal documentation and transaction between legal status, providing job opportunities, and involvement of refugees into politics.

(4) Refugees are not a security concern.

We examined how refugees' migration intentions influenced extremist attitudes. We measured extreme political and religious beliefs that were both violent and non-violent. We found no relation between refugees' willingness to stay in the host country and holding non-violent extreme beliefs, except for refugees residing in Jordan (see Table 1). Moreover, whereas there was no relation between migration intention and violent extremism in the Middle East, we found that refugees residing in Germany and the Netherlands who held violent extreme beliefs were less willing to stay in the host country (see Table 1) and both those who hold non-violent and violent extreme beliefs are more motivated to go back to Syria (see Table 2). Refugees most interested in staying in Europe are less likely to endorse tenets of Islamic extremism, do not wish to engage in costly sacrifice or violence for their beliefs, and harbor no negative sentiment toward Western countries. In contrast, the ideological concerns of politically extreme refugees may appear to be best served by returning to their homeland where the issues they care about are a salient priority. These results are in line with our previous research (Jasko et al., 2021). According to the survey feedbacks we run, there are several ways to overcome the stereotype of Syrian refugees as dangerous. For example, by introducing refugees' culture and tradition to host communities through cultural activities, sport, tv programs etc. Also, a change in the media and how they portray refugees and especially Arab refugees is seen as necessary to reduce prejudice towards them.

(5) Refugees underestimate how negatively they are perceived.

Finally, we examined refugees metaperceptions. In the focus groups, refugee participants were asked to discuss how they thought members of their host communities perceived Syrian refugees. Figure 5 shows the most prevalent metaperceptions emerged. As depicted, the most consistently held metaperceptions across all samples were that refugees (1) were a threat to the host community, (2) should leave the country, and are (3) immoral and (4) dangerous. Metaperceptions of threat were more prevalent than the rest, accounting for more than 1/3 of all coded response. In the surveys, we tested the accuracy of refugees' metaperceptions by comparing them to perceptions held by members of the communities that host them. We found that although refugees' metaperceptions were somewhat accurate reflections of host community perceptions, they were also positively biased. In other words, when host community perceptions about refugees were more negative, refugees' metaperceptions of how they were perceived were likewise more negative. At the same time, however, refugees significantly underestimated how negatively they were viewed. This is particularly interesting, as this latter finding

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diverges from past work done primarily with political partisans, where participants were found to overestimate how negatively they were perceived (e.g., Lees & Cikara, 2020).

**Training Opportunities:** During this project we trained one post-doctoral fellows, who successfully applied for a professorship position during the duration of the project. We also trained graduate and undergraduate students who supported this research with coding, literature reviews, preparation of study material, and summaries write up.

### **Results Dissemination:** Publications

Webber, D., Molinario, E., Jasko, K., Gelfand, M., Kruglanski, A. W. (R&R). The Way They See Us: Intergroup Metaperceptions of Syrian Refugees. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*

Jasko, K., Webber, D., Molinario, E., Kruglanski, A. W., Górska, P., Gelfand, M., Schumpe, B. (R&R). The agency and permanence of the migration decisions of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees as seen by the communities that host them. *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology Review*

### Conference presentations and talks

Kruglanski A.W., Webber D., Jasko K., Molinario E., (January 12th, 2021). Syrian Refugees in the Middle East and Europe: On the Psychology of a Humanitarian Challenge. Online outreach event. Bahá'í Chair for World Peace-UMD.

Jasko, K. (2021). Psychological aspects of migration decisions of Syrian refugees. Interdisciplinary Seminar in Empirical Social Science, Warsaw University

Jasko, K., Webber, D., Molinario, E., Kruglanski, A. W. (2022). Ideological extremism and migration intentions among Syrian refugees. Annual Meeting of International Society of Political Psychology, Athens.

Jasko, K., Webber, D., Molinario, E., Kruglanski, A. W. (2022). Migration decisions of refugees. SPSP Preconference „The psychology of extremism”. (online)

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### **PARTICIPANTS:**

**Participant Type:** PD/PI

**Participant:** Arie W. Kruglanski

**Person Months Worked:** 15.00

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Funding Support:**

**Participant Type:** Co PD/PI

**Participant:** David Webber

**Person Months Worked:** 15.00

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Funding Support:**

**Participant Type:** Co PD/PI

**Participant:** Michele Gelfand

**Person Months Worked:** 9.00

Project Contribution:

**Funding Support:**

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National Academy Member: Y

**Participant Type:** Postdoctoral (scholar, fellow or other postdoctoral position)

**Participant:** Erica Molinario

**Person Months Worked:** 15.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Consultant

**Participant:** Katarzyna Jasko

**Person Months Worked:** 15.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Graduate Student (research assistant)

**Participant:** Huixian Yu

**Person Months Worked:** 2.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Consultant

**Participant:** Arwa Dagher

**Person Months Worked:** 6.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Consultant

**Participant:** Munqith Dagher

**Person Months Worked:** 6.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Co PD/PI

**Participant:** Sarah Lyons-Padilla

**Person Months Worked:** 1.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

**Participant Type:** Undergraduate Student

**Participant:** Kevin Gunaratna

**Person Months Worked:** 2.00

**Funding Support:**

Project Contribution:

National Academy Member: N

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as of 24-May-2023

**Participant Type:** Consultant  
**Participant:** Jan-Jaap van Eerten  
**Person Months Worked:** 4.00  
Project Contribution:  
National Academy Member: N

**Funding Support:**

**Participant Type:** Graduate Student (research assistant)  
**Participant:** Molly Ellenberg  
**Person Months Worked:** 3.00  
Project Contribution:  
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**Article Title:** The Way They See Us: Intergroup Metaperceptions of Syrian Refugees.

**Authors:** Webber, D., Molinario, E., Jasko, K., Gelfand, M., Kruglanski, A. W.

**Keywords:** refugees, intergroup metaperceptions, threat, intergroup relations

**Abstract:** Refugees are people who are forced to flee their country to seek safety. Their situation is often assumed to be temporary as they will go back to their home country after the situation is stabilized. Whereas two characteristics – lack of choice and permanence - appear in the discussions surrounding refugee status, it is unclear how the host communities see these characteristics and what the possible consequences of these perceptions are for helping refugees. To address this gap, we conducted two studies with members of communities that host refugees from the recent wars in Syria and Ukraine. Participants were surveyed in Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. We found that the more residents of host communities perceived refugees as deprived of choice and willing to return to their home country as soon as possible, the more they supported more accommodating policies toward refugees. We also surveyed refugees about their agency and future migration intentions.

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**Article Title:** The agency and permanence of the migration decisions of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees as seen by the communities that host them

**Authors:** Jasko, K, Webber, D., Molinario, E., Kruglanski, A. W., Górska, P., Gelfand, M., Schumpe, B.

**Keywords:** refugees, migration policies, agency

**Abstract:** Refugees are people who are forced to flee their country to seek safety. Their situation is often assumed to be temporary as they will go back to their home country after the situation is stabilized. Whereas two characteristics – lack of choice and permanence - appear in the discussions surrounding refugee status, it is unclear how the host communities see these characteristics and what the possible consequences of these perceptions are for helping refugees. To address this gap, we conducted two studies with members of communities that host refugees from the recent wars in Syria and Ukraine. Participants were surveyed in Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. We found that the more residents of host communities perceived refugees as deprived of choice and willing to return to their home country as soon as possible, the more they supported more accommodating policies toward refugees. We also surveyed refugees about their agency and future migration intentions.

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### Partners

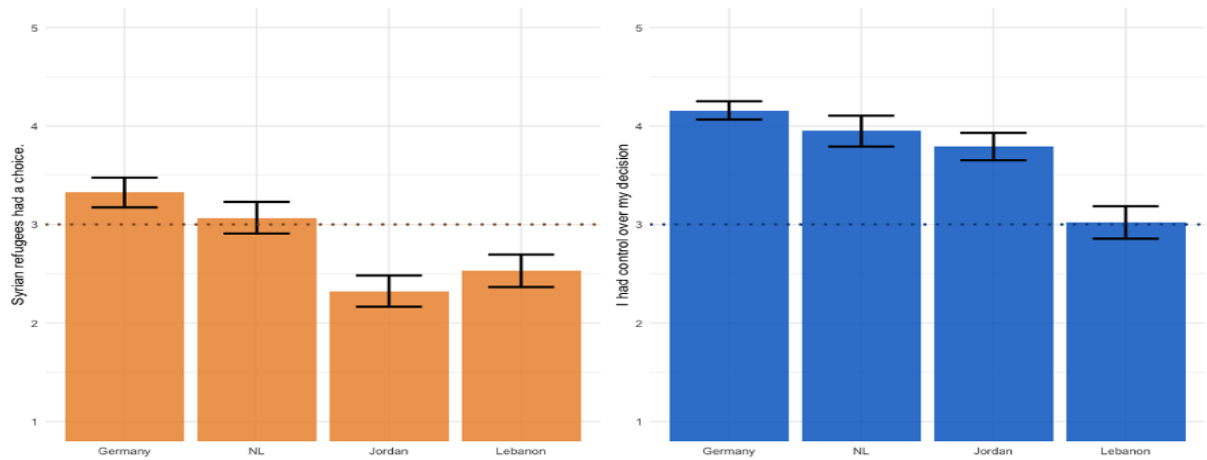
I certify that the information in the report is complete and accurate:

Signature: Arie W. Kruglanski

Signature Date: 5/23/23 1:52PM

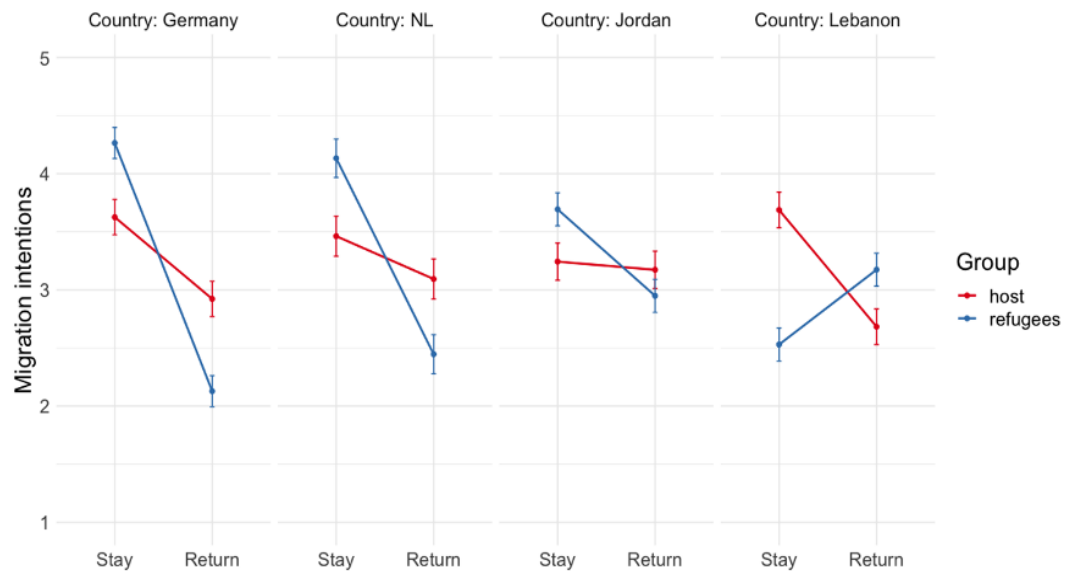


Figure 1. Perceptions of agency among host communities (left) and refugees (right).



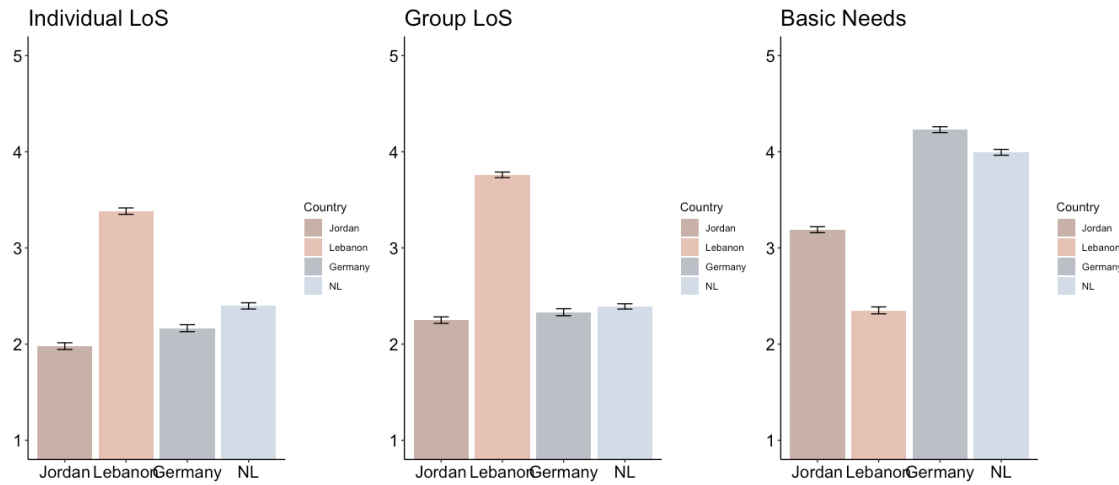
Note: Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Figure 2. Migration intentions of Syrian refugees and their perceptions by host communities



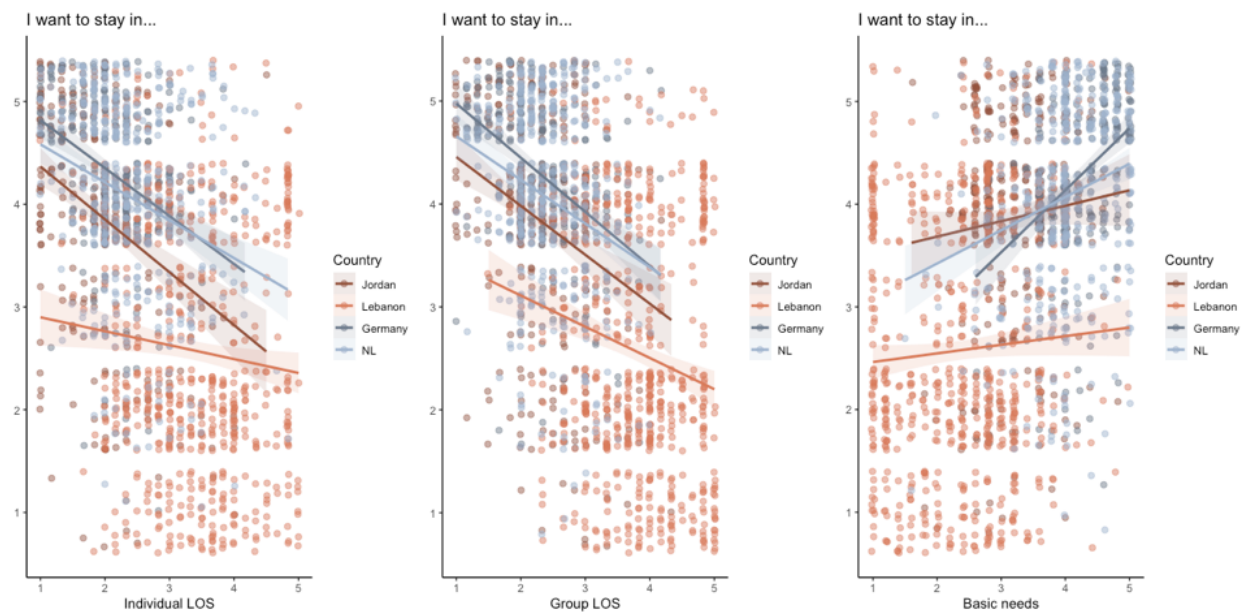
Note: Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Figure 3. Needs satisfaction.



Note: Responses were given on a scale ranging from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 5 (Totally Agree).

Figure 4. Needs satisfaction and migration intentions.



Note: Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Table 1. Intention to stay and extremism

	I want to stay in [the host country].			
	Lebanon	Jordan	Germany	Netherlands
Non-violent extremism	-.04	.15*	.05	-.06
Violent extremism	-.02	-.09	-.30***	-.20***

Table 2. Intention to return to Syria and extremism

	I want to return to Syria.			
	Lebanon	Jordan	Germany	Netherlands
Non-violent extremism	.08	.10	.16*	.25***
Violent extremism	-.08	.10	.29***	.29***

Figure 5. Prevalence of metaperception themes discussed during focus group interviews

