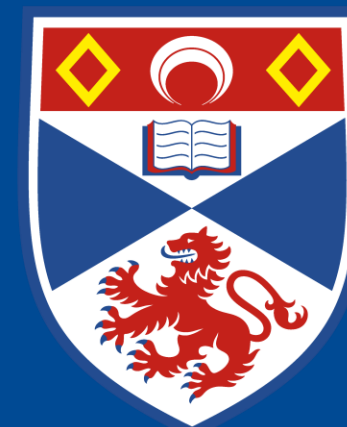


One Crisis, Two Responses: Jordan and Lebanon's Contrasting Approaches to Syrian Refugee Integration



University of
St Andrews

Miki O'Connell, supervised by Prof. Fiona McCallum Guiney
School of International Relations



Introduction

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, over 6 million Syrians have fled their homeland.¹ Many have sought refuge in Jordan and Lebanon. Although the two countries share significant characteristics, Syrian refugees have faced greater difficulty integrating in Lebanon than in Jordan. My research project examined how each country's history, politics, and policies shaped these different outcomes.

Methodology

- Academic literature
- Policy reports
- Interviews with 8 representatives of non-governmental organisations in Jordan and Lebanon, including several conducted during a research trip to Amman, Jordan



▲ Figure 1. Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, 2015

Legal Frameworks

The 1951 Refugee Convention outlines the legal obligations of host countries towards refugees. As non-signatories, Jordan and Lebanon are not bound by this treaty.² Legal frameworks for asylum are also absent from the domestic law of both states. Jordan and Lebanon are reluctant to assume legal obligations towards refugees because of their experiences hosting Palestinian refugees, which had contributed to political instability.³

Policies Towards Syrian Refugees

Although their existing legal frameworks are similar, Jordan and Lebanon's policy responses to the Syrian refugee crisis have diverged. Lebanon's policy until late 2014 was a 'policy of no policy' that contrasted Jordan's swift response to the influx of Syrian refugees.⁴ Since then, Jordan has implemented policies aimed at integrating Syrian refugees into Jordanian society, while Lebanon's policies have grown increasingly hostile. Lebanon prohibited the UNHCR from registering new Syrian refugees⁵ and deported numerous refugees back to Syria.⁶ Hate speech and violence against Syrians is also more common in Lebanon.⁷

Several factors explain these differences:

- Jordan's stable government enabled more effective coordination, in contrast to Lebanon's dysfunctional sectarian political system.
- Lebanon has been undergoing a severe economic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the refugee influx according to many Lebanese.⁸
- Lebanon was occupied by the Syrian government until 2005, and the trauma of this experience has lingered.
- Lebanon is home to different religious communities, and some perceived the mostly Sunni Muslim Syrian refugee population as a demographic threat.

▼ Figure 2. Palestinian 'Fedayeen' guerrillas in Beirut, 1979



Conclusion

Jordan and Lebanon have taken different approaches to the management of Syrian refugees. This case study demonstrates the importance of country-specific conditions in shaping the integration of refugees into host societies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation for providing me with the opportunity to carry out this research project. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Fiona McCallum Guiney, for her support.

References

- Figure 1 Photo Credit: Norwegian Refugee Council. (2021). Voices of Syria: 10 Years of Pain <https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/stories/voices-of-syria---ten-years-of-pain/index.html>.
Figure 2. Photo Credit: Tiamat. Fateh Militia.jpg. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fateh_Militia.jpg
- [1] International Organization for Migration. (2025). *Crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic*. International Organization for Migration. <https://www.iom.int/crisis-syrian-arab-republic>
[2] Yahya, M., & Kassir, J. (2018). Policy Framework for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. In K. el-Hariri (Ed.), *Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home* (pp. 11–24). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
[3] Participant 2, personal communication, 2025
[4] Ghaddar, S. (2017, April 4). *Lebanon treats refugees as a security problem—and it doesn't work*. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/lebanon-treats-refugees-security-problem-doesnt-work/>
[5] Frangieh, G. (2016). Relations between UNHCR and Arab governments: Memoranda of Understanding in Lebanon and Jordan. *LSE Middle East Centre Collected Papers*, 6.
[6] Amnesty International. (2023). *Lebanese authorities must halt unlawful deportations of Syrian refugees*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/lebanon-authorities-must-halt-unlawful-deportations-of-syrian-refugees/>
[7] Participant 4, personal communication, 2024
[8] Nachabe, C. (2019). The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the Lebanese communities. In J. Beaujouan & A. Rasheed (Eds.), *Syrian crisis, Syrian refugees* (pp. 99–118). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35016-1_8