

# How do policy approaches affect refugee economic outcomes? Insights from studies of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon

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## Abstract

The vast majority of refugees globally are hosted in developing countries. In Jordan and Lebanon, nearly one in ten people are refugees. This paper reviews how different policy environments in Jordan and Lebanon have shaped economic outcomes for Syrian refugees, focusing on education, work, social assistance, and welfare outcomes. The review summarizes key research on how to improve refugee economic outcomes. We demonstrate that there can be effective service delivery for refugees, dependent on state capacity. For example, differences in policy led to better education outcomes for Syrian refugees in Jordan than Lebanon. A variety of interventions can support refugee livelihoods, while generally doing no harm to host communities. Both countries also demonstrate the difficulties of achieving refugee economic self-sufficiency. Although Jordan has allowed (limited) legal work opportunities for refugees, Syrian refugees in both countries remain primarily in precarious work and supported by international aid.

**JEL codes:** F22, J21, O15, I24

**Keywords:** Refugees, Syrians, Jordan, Lebanon, Policies, Integration, Education, Employment, Livelihoods

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This is the first draft of a paper subsequently published as:

Caroline Krafft, Bilal Malaeb, and Saja Al Zoubi. 2022. “How do policy approaches affect refugee economic outcomes? Insights from studies of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 38(3): 654-677. DOI: 10.1093/oxrep/grac019  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grac019>

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## **I Introduction**

Refugees from Syria, 6.7 million as of 2020, are the largest population of refugees globally (UNHCR, 2021a). They are primarily hosted in neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. In Lebanon, one in eight people is a refugee, and in Jordan, one in fifteen people is a refugee (UNHCR, 2021a). The experiences and wellbeing of refugees depend substantially on the economic and social conditions and policies towards refugees in their country of refuge (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Kool & Nimeh, 2021; UNHCR, 2016; Zetter, Ruaudel, & Schuettler, 2018). Countries vary in the legal protections and rights they afford refugees, the services they theoretically and effectively provide to refugees, and specific education, labour market, and social assistance policies for refugees.

This paper compares the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon to examine how different policy, economic, and social environments and approaches have impacted refugees' wellbeing and livelihoods. We discuss the approaches each country took overall and for specific outcomes: education, work and work permits, social assistance, and welfare (poverty, food insecurity, and negative coping strategies). We review the research on how these different policy choices have affected economic outcomes for refugees.

The findings demonstrate that developing countries can provide critical services, such as education, successfully to refugees, but that this depends substantially on state capacity. For example, Jordan integrated Syrian refugees into the Jordanian education system early – and effectively. Refugee education outcomes had recovered to pre-conflict levels by 2016 and continued to improve since (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, Keo, & Sharpless, 2018; Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019; UNICEF & Ministry of Education (Jordan), 2020). Lebanon, with a weak public school system, did not initially integrate refugees and, although there have been improvements over time, continues to have substantially poorer refugee education outcomes (Ministry Of Education and Higher Education (Lebanon), 2014; UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). As well as the policy environment, cash assistance to refugee households helps support children's enrolment in school (Salti et al., 2022; UNICEF, 2018).

A contentious topic in refugee policy, particularly in developing countries, is whether to allow refugees to (legally) work. Jordan has allowed (limited) legal work opportunities for Syrian refugees, while Lebanon, which historically had a large number of Syrian migrant workers, has curtailed the rights and work opportunities for Syrian refugees (Janmyr, 2016; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020; Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021). Despite work permits, Syrian refugees in Jordan remain largely informally employed, with low employment rates and high unemployment rates (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019; Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021).

Both countries demonstrate that economic self-reliance of refugees is difficult to achieve. Even with some employment opportunities, in both countries Syrian refugees remain highly dependent on social assistance, formulated almost entirely as international aid (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen,

2019; UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). This social assistance, which has largely shifted towards cash rather than in-kind aid, has been highly effective in promoting refugee welfare and reducing poverty, food insecurity, and negative coping strategies (Salti et al., 2022; The Boston Consulting Group, 2017). However, particularly given international funding shortfalls and less than universal coverage, poverty, food insecurity, and negative coping strategies remain common for refugees.

Jordan and Lebanon have also pushed strongly for a “resilience” approach to international aid, supporting host communities and vulnerable Jordanians and Lebanese, as well as refugees (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2015, 2021; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), 2014, 2017). Especially given their experience with Palestinian refugees since the 1940s and ongoing international aid for this population, political economy considerations preclude fully integrating refugees or relying on national rather than international funding for assistance.

Potentially, in part, due to international assistance, the inclusion of refugees in the education system and (partially) in the labour market has not harmed host communities, an important lesson for global refugee policy. In Jordan, areas with a larger influx of Syrian refugees did no worse in terms of Jordanians’ labour market outcomes (Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019). Including Syrian refugees in Jordanian schools did not lead to worse education outcomes for Jordanian students (Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh, 2018).

In what follows, we first provide a section on key background, including the Syrian conflict and the specificities of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. In the subsequent section we examine policies and outcomes for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, focusing on education, work and work permits, social assistance policies, and welfare outcomes (poverty, food insecurity, and negative coping strategies). We provide both descriptions and comparisons of policy responses and outcomes, as well as discussing the rigorous research on the impact of policies and programs trying to improve refugee outcomes. We conclude with a discussion of the key implications of the comparison of Jordan and Lebanon for supporting refugee wellbeing and livelihoods. We also highlight important areas for future data collection and research.

## **II Background**

### ***II.I The Syrian conflict and Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon***

The Syrian civil war began in 2011. Refugees began arriving in Jordan and Lebanon shortly after conflict began. Lebanon and Jordan saw rising numbers of refugees in 2012 and the majority of Syrian refugees in each country arrived in 2013 (UNHCR, 2018a, 2021b). The 1951 Refugee Convention sets out certain rights for refugees, but a number of countries, including Jordan and Lebanon, are not party to the convention (UNHCR, 2011, 2015a). The influx of Syrian refugees,

given the history of hosting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, made governments wary of a prolonged refugee presence without resolution (Turner, 2016; Yahya, 2018).

By the end of 2014, Lebanon had shifted policies to discourage and limit entry of Syrians and encourage return to Syria (Janmyr, 2016). In early 2015 the Lebanese government requested UNHCR cease registering refugees. The government also implemented costly fees for refugees to obtain or renew their residency permits, which led to nearly three-quarters of adult Syrian refugees in Lebanon being without legal residency by 2018 (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). Overall, the recent Lebanese policy approach has aimed to push Syrian refugees out of the country (Brun, Fakhri, Shuayb, & Hammoud, 2021). Although by 2016 the border between Syria and Jordan was closed on security grounds and few refugees arrived thereafter, UNHCR registration and residency in Jordan have been less problematic, although some documentation issues persist (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020).

### *II.II The characteristics of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon*

The exact number of refugees in Jordan remains a subject of debate. As of 2016 UNHCR reported around 650,000 registered Syrian refugees while the 2015 Jordan Population Census enumerated 1.3 million Syrians (Krafft, Razzaz, Keo, & Assaad, 2019; Lenner, 2020).<sup>4</sup> All data sources agree that the Syrian refugee population is disproportionately young, with around half aged 0-14 (Krafft, Razzaz, Keo, & Assaad, 2019). Among adults, young women are over-represented relative to men (Krafft, Razzaz, Keo, & Assaad, 2019).

Similarly, in Lebanon, due to the absence of a population census since 1932, the number of refugees, as well as the host community, are difficult to estimate (Faour, 2007). According to UNHCR Lebanon, there were around 850,000 Syrian individuals registered in 2021, down from a peak of 1.2 million in 2015 (UNHCR, 2021b). Lebanese government estimates suggest that the total population of Syrian refugees in 2021 was around 1.5 million people (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2021). The demographic composition of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as in Jordan, is disproportionately young (54% of registered refugees are under age 18) and women are over-represented relative to men among adults (UNHCR, 2021c). The disproportionately young and female refugee populations have important implications for refugee policy and outcomes; these populations are more likely to need services, such as education and health care, but are less likely to engage in the labour market (Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019; Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019).

The Syrians who fled to Jordan and Lebanon share some common background and experiences, but also have some specific characteristics compared to each other and those who remained in

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<sup>4</sup> Some of this difference may be because not all Syrians are or are registered as refugees. However, since surveys typically find more than 90% of Syrians are registered with UNHCR or fled conflict or violence (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019; Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019), they meet the international definition of refugees and we therefore refer to Syrians and refugees synonymously.

Syria or sought other destinations, such as Turkey or Europe. For example, Syrian refugees are less educated than the pre-crisis Syrian population overall and Syrians in Lebanon are less educated than Syrians in Jordan or Europe (Aksoy & Poutvaara, 2019; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020; Verme et al., 2016). Differences in part relate to where different groups of refugees originated.

The Syrians who fled to Lebanon were primarily from rural areas and conservative communities in Syria nearer the Lebanese border, areas that were relatively less educated pre-conflict (PAPFAM, 2011; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020; UNHCR, 2015b, 2018b). There had also been a long history of economic migration from Syria to Lebanon, more so than from Syria to Jordan, but the migration was primarily in lower-wage sectors such as agriculture and construction (Krafft, Razzaz, Keo, & Assaad, 2019; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020). On some other dimensions of vulnerability, Syrians who fled to Jordan were disadvantaged relative to the Syrian national population pre-conflict. For example, the Syrians who fled to Jordan came from areas within Syria that had higher rates of early marriage pre-conflict (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo, 2020).

The varying characteristics of different groups of refugees, as well their experiences of displacement and conflict within Syria, are important context to keep in mind in understanding how policy responses of host countries have impacted Syrian refugees. The varying characteristics of refugees also present a challenge to rigorously assessing the impact of conflict, displacement, and policies in new host countries. Simply comparing the outcomes of displaced populations to national averages pre-conflict is likely to be biased (Becker & Ferrara, 2019; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2013). The shortage of data providing representative samples of refugees and very limited panel or retrospective data frequently preclude comparing experiences in countries of origin and refuge (Verwimp, Justino, & Bruck, 2019). There is thus a limited body of rigorous research on policies and their impact on refugees, relying on a mix of quasi-experimental and randomized controlled trial (RCT) methods.

### **III Policies and outcomes for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon**

In this section we start with the overarching frameworks Jordan and Lebanon have applied to refugee policy, then turn to specific policies and outcomes for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. We both provide a description of policies and programs and a discussion of the impact of different policies and interventions on Syrian refugees, comparing and contrasting approaches in Lebanon and Jordan. As much as possible we review and discuss the rigorous empirical evidence, but also note that an important area for future research is building the evidence base as there are a limited number of rigorous studies. Table 1 summarizes the rigorous empirical evidence on education, work, and social assistance policies and programs for refugees, as well as the impact of refugees on host communities. We discuss this rigorous empirical evidence together with key contextual information throughout this section.

**Table 1. Studies on impacts of policies and programs on Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon and Jordanian and Lebanese host communities**

Author and year of publication	Location/population	Period	Policy/program	Empirical strategy	Results
<i>Studies on outcomes for Syrian refugees</i>					
Altindag & O'Connell (2021)	Syrian households in Lebanon	2016-2019	Unconditional cash transfer, food voucher	RDD	For cash (*if also for food voucher): Primary outcomes: (+) expenditure* (-) child hardship (0) adverse health (0) negative food coping strategies (- for food voucher) (-) livelihood coping strategies*. All effects go to zero after assistance ends.
Battistin (2016)	Syrian households in Lebanon	2015	Unconditional cash transfer	RDD	(+) consumption (+) food consumption (+) food security (+) gas for cooking (-) negative coping (+) work as main source of income (+) happiness (+) financial stress (+) social cohesion
de Hoop, Morey, & Seidenfeld (2019)	Syrian children in Lebanon	2016/17	Labelled cash transfer	RDD	(+) attendance (0) enrolment (+) education expenditure (+) bus commuting
Ginn (2020)	Syrians in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon	2015/16	Refugee camps	D-in-D, PSM	Main outcomes: (-) household income (+) household income net of minimum costs (0) male labour force participation (-) male employment (-) male hours of work (+) female labour force participation (+) female employment (0) female hours of work (0) male and female self-employment (0) male and female wages. (+) heating expenditure (+) heating assets (0) own clothing and blankets (+) clothing expenditure (+) warmth (+) food expenditure (+) food security (+) water expenditure (0) prices (+) school attendance (-) child labour (-) hazardous work (-) days of work (+) social cohesion with Lebanese (0) social cohesion among Syrians (-) intra-household disputes (0) vice goods (0) in-migration to locations receiving assistance (0) debts (-) selling assets
Lehmann & Masterson (2014)	Syrians in Lebanon	2014	Winter (labelled) cash assistance	RDD	(+) transition from non-formal to formal school (-) child labour (+) health outcomes (+) access to primary health care
Moussa et al. (2021)	Syrian children in Lebanon	2019	Unconditional cash transfer (varying durations)	RDD	(-) early marriage
Obi (2021)	Syrians in Jordan	2015	Refugee camps	D-in-D, PSM	(-) quality of life (-) earnings (+) poverty (-) assets (+) housing overcrowding (-) satisfaction with access to services (-) life satisfaction (-) ability to lend (savings)

Author and year of publication	Location/population	Period	Policy/program	Empirical strategy	Results
Salti et al. (2022)	Syrians in Lebanon	2019	Unconditional cash transfer (varying durations)	RDD	For long-run cash (* if also for short-run/discontinued cash): (+) total expenditures* (+) food expenditures* (+) housing (+) children's school enrolment* (-) non-formal education (-) child labour* (-) labour force participation (-) unemployment (0) employment For short-run cash only: (+) health spending
Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo (2020)	Syrians in Jordan	2016/17	Conflict & displacement	LDM	(0) early marriage
Sieverding et al. (2018)	Syrians in Jordan	2016/17	Conflict & displacement Modality of WFP assistance:	LDM	Conflict: (0 or +) school exit (varies by grade) Displacement in Jordan: (0 or -) school exit (varies by grade)
The Boston Consulting Group (2017)	Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon living in host communities Syrian households in Jordan with children in school at baseline	2016	unrestricted cash vs. food-restricted vouchers (assignment + choice groups)	RCT	Unrestricted cash vs. food-restricted vouchers: (+) food security (0) food expenditure (+) purchasing power (0) non-food expenditure (0) negative coping strategies (0) temptation goods (0) household disagreements (0) women's decision-making power Choice group: (+) use of cash
UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti (2021)	Syrians in Jordan with children in school at baseline	2019	Labelled cash transfer	Cluster RCT (randomized scale-down)	(+) food security (+) basic items index (+) attending school (+) owns school items (+) psycho-social well-being (+) child plans to graduate secondary school (-) child labour (0) migration plans (-) early marriage (0) pregnancy

*Studies on outcomes for Jordanian/Lebanese host communities*

Al-Hawarin, Assaad, & Elsayed (2021)	Jordanians	2016/17	Influx of Syrians	D-in-D; LDM; IVs	(-) Jordanians' housing quality (+) Jordanians' rent (+) Jordanians' residential mobility (0) Jordanians' dwelling ownership (0) Jordanians' area per person (0) Jordanians' rooms per person
Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh (2018)	Jordanian students	2016/17	Influx of Syrian students	D-in-D	(0) Jordanians' educational attainment
Elmallakh & Wahba (2021)	Jordanians	2016/17	Influx of Syrians (camp-hosting areas)	D-in-D; LDM; IVs	(+) Jordanian residential out-migration (+) Jordanian job mobility (commuting in)

<b>Author and year of publication</b>	<b>Location/population</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Policy/program</b>	<b>Empirical strategy</b>	<b>Results</b>
Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba (2019)	Jordanians Immigrants (non-Jordanian, non-Syrians) in	2016/17	Influx of Syrians	D-in-D; LDM; IVs	(0) Jordanians' labour market outcomes
Malaeb & Wahba (2018)	Jordan	2016/17	Influx of Syrians	IVs; LDM	(+) immigrants in informal work (-) immigrant hours (-) immigrant wages

Source: Authors' construction based on listed studies. To be included: Studies must use a rigorous empirical identification strategy to estimate impacts. Studies must be of the impacts of policies (broadly defined) or programs on Syrian refugees' outcomes or of Syrian refugees' impacts on host community outcomes. Studies must be examining education, work, social assistance, or refugee-hosting policies or programs.

Notes: Results are presented as the impact of the policy/program on the outcome. (+) denotes a statistically significant positive effect (0) a null or statistically insignificant effect and (-) a statistically significant negative effect on the outcome listed. Methods: D-in-D=Difference-in-differences; IVs=Instrumental variables; LDM=Longitudinal data methods (exploiting panel or retrospective data); PSM=Propensity score matching; RCT=Randomized controlled trial; RDD=Regression discontinuity design.



### *III.I Frameworks for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon*

Starting in late 2014, Jordan undertook a relatively comprehensive approach to Syrian refugees in Jordan under the Jordan Response Plan (JRP) (Salemi, Bowman, & Compton, 2018). The JRP coordinates foreign aid via the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, with annual plans (e.g. Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), 2014, 2017). The JRP represents a centralized, national, and international approach, although some local services (e.g., health centres, local municipal services) and local project selection occurred (Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis, 2016). The central government also enforced policy locally, for instance ensuring that local schools followed through with education policies (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, Keo, & Sharpless, 2018).<sup>5</sup>

A key feature of the JRP approach is an emphasis on helping both Syrians and host communities, particularly vulnerable Jordanians. A central pillar of the JRP is “resilience,” a somewhat ambiguous term that covers programming in host communities, including Jordanians, or engaging in infrastructure and public works (Salemi, Bowman, & Compton, 2018). The resilience framing is at least in part a reflection of efforts to alleviate some of the challenges a refugee influx poses to the host community and to generate durable solutions. The JRP explicitly focuses on shifting from emergency humanitarian aid to a longer-term development approach centring national systems, while relying on international funding (Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis, 2016).

The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) has stability as its core pillar. In this context, stability refers to mitigating welfare and social tension consequences of hosting Syrian refugees, while meeting the emerging humanitarian and service delivery needs of refugees in light of poor existing infrastructure and public services (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2015). The plan does not stipulate the integration of Syrian refugees in Lebanese society, beyond basic integration measures of children in schooling systems in the context of minimizing social tensions. This approach affirmed Lebanon’s position as a transit and not an asylum country (Fakhoury, 2017).

The plan also emphasizes the role of the government in coordinating the response, but with a strong reliance on international organizations for cash assistance and international organizations, international, and local NGOs in service provision (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2015, 2021). As with Jordan, planning and policy were highly centralized; local government was involved primarily in terms of local service delivery or selecting specific projects (e.g. infrastructure, local agricultural projects) (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> The local implementation of policy can be very important for refugees’ experiences and outcomes (Irgil, 2022), but has not been systematically studied in Jordan or Lebanon.

The country's Economic and Social Fund for Development, for example, received funding for locally-owned investments (Government of Lebanon & United Nations, 2015).

### ***III.II Education***

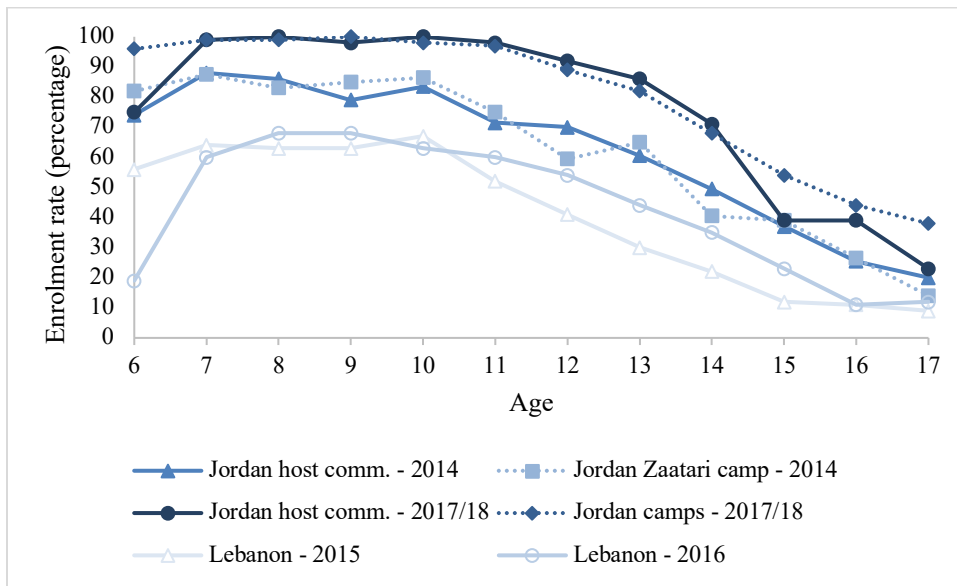
Jordan and Lebanon have taken very different education policy approaches to Syrian refugees, shaped in part by the state of their education systems (Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020). Jordan had historically made large investments in expanding education such that by 2016 only 6% of working-age Jordanians were illiterate and the average years of schooling completed was 11 for the working-age population (Assaad, Krafft, & Keo, 2019; Assaad & Saleh, 2018). Education quality and learning were not high in international comparisons, but access to schooling and completion of at least 10 years of basic education was increasingly widespread (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2020; Hailat, 2019).

Lebanon's public school system was historically weak and served primarily disadvantaged students (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020; Bahou, 2015). Only 29% of students attended public schools as of 2011 (Ministry Of Education and Higher Education (Lebanon), 2014). Although quality of learning in Lebanon was mixed, educational attainment was high, with only 4% of the labour force illiterate and a quarter with a university degree (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2020; Nahas, 2011).

The Jordanian government took a relatively prompt and inclusive approach to Syrian refugees' education. Syrian refugees were allowed to enrol in primary and secondary education through the public system since April 2012 with fees waived (Culbertson et al., 2016). While enrolment priority was given to Jordanian students, Syrian students were able to enrol in shifts with capacity available, and second shifts and subsequently schools were added as needed (Brussels II Conference, 2018). In part as a result of a relatively prompt and inclusive response, the enrolment of Syrian refugees in Jordan recovered to pre-existing levels in this same group prior to the conflict (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, Keo, & Sharpless, 2018). Although Syrian refugees' enrolment remained below that of Jordanian students, disparities can be explained primarily by the differences in socio-economic status between Syrian refugee and Jordanian households (Krafft, Assaad, & Pastoor, 2021).

As of 2017/18, only 4% of Syrian school-age children had never entered school in Jordan. Figure 1 illustrates enrolment rates in Jordan in 2014 and 2017/18 by single year of age, showing enrolments that are higher in Jordan than Lebanon (2015, 2016) and have increased over time. Enrolment rates are particularly high for Syrian children aged 6-11 in Jordan, nearly 99% by one 2017/18 estimate (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, Keo, & Sharpless, 2018; Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019; UNICEF & Ministry of Education (Jordan), 2020). Enrolments fall at ages 12-14, but progress has been made over time; in 2014 only 49% of Syrian 14-year-olds in Jordan attended basic education, but this rose to 68% by 2017 (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019).

**Figure 1. School enrolment rate (percentage) by single year of age, location, and year**



Sources: Authors' construction from data on Jordan in 2014 (Stave & Hillesund, 2015) and 2017/18 (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019), data on Lebanon in 2015 (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2015) and 2016 (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2016).

Notes: Figure is limited to years with data available by single year of age. Jordan 2014 numbers based on a survey in the areas with the highest number of refugees (Stave & Hillesund, 2015). Jordan 2014 numbers average statistics presented for girls and boys to calculate a total. Lebanon numbers based on Lebanon's Vulnerability Assessment surveys of Syrians registered with UNHCR.

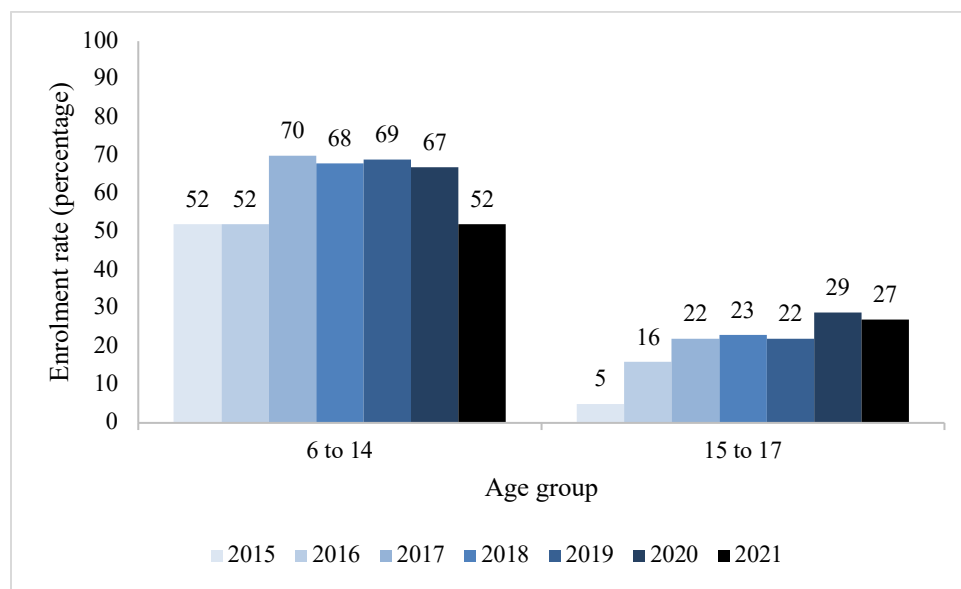
Access to secondary school in Jordan has also improved; among 17-year olds 17% were enrolled in secondary in 2014, and this rose to 21% by 2017 (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). Syrian refugees have limited access to higher education in Jordan; in 2017/18 only 5% of those aged 20 were enrolled in higher education (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). As a point of comparison, only 3% of refugees globally are enrolled in higher education (UNHCR, 2019). Although limited labour market opportunities might discourage investment in education, global evidence also suggests that, when they can, refugees may particularly invest education due to its portability (Bauer, Braun, & Kvasnicka, 2013; Becker, Grosfeld, Grosjean, Voigtländer, & Zhuravskaya, 2020; Cortes, 2013; Méndez, Sepúlveda, & Valdes, 2016).

The positive educational outcomes for Syrians in Jordan were also, importantly, not at the cost of Jordanians' educational outcomes; educational attainment was not affected for Jordanian youth in areas that experienced high levels of refugee influx (Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh, 2018). School building and the use of second shifts, although presenting some challenges for Syrians, may have played an important role as teacher-student ratios and class sizes were ultimately not affected (Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh, 2018).

The Lebanese government, in contrast, did not initially guarantee access to public schools for Syrians and international and local NGOs provided the limited, primarily informal education opportunities (Buckner, Spencer, & Cha, 2018). The public education system in Lebanon had long-standing weaknesses, with the majority of Lebanese students attending private schools (Buckner, Spencer, & Cha, 2018). In 2012, the government did instruct schools to enrol Syrian refugees, waiving fees for the primary level, but only 38% of Syrian refugees were enrolled in primary and only 2% in secondary education during 2012-2013 (Ministry Of Education and Higher Education (Lebanon), 2014). Afternoon shifts, to create additional capacity for Syrians, were launched in 2013 (De Hoop, Morey, & Seidenfeld, 2019).

Over time, following Lebanon’s national plan for refugee education starting in 2014, outcomes improved somewhat. Figure 1 shows enrolment by single year of age for 2015 and 2016 and Figure 2 by age groups for 2015-2021 (as single years of age were not available after 2016). In 2015 and 2016 enrolments had risen to 52% of those aged 6-14 enrolled in school and by 2017 this had risen further to 70% (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). Enrolments for ages 15-17 increased as well but remained around a quarter and moreover included many students who were in a grade below where they were expected per their age. Only 3% of Syrians were enrolled in universities in 2015/16 (El-Ghali, DeKnight, Abdel Latif, & Alameddine, 2019).

**Figure 2. School enrolment rate (percentage), by age group and year, Lebanon**



Sources: Authors’ construction from Lebanon’s Vulnerability Assessment surveys of Syrians registered with UNHCR, reports in 2015 (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2015), 2016 (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2016), 2017 (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2017), 2018 (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2018), and 2021 (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021) (reports for 2019, 2020, and 2021).

Notes: 2021 data/question switched from enrolment to attendance.

As a result, in 2017 in Lebanon, only 13% of those aged 12-14 (lower secondary age) were currently attending lower secondary and only 4% of those aged 15-18 (upper secondary age) were attending upper secondary (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). Direct comparisons of enrolment patterns in Jordan and Lebanon in 2016 also underscore higher enrolments in Jordan than Lebanon across sex and age groups (Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020) (see also Figure 1). Thus, while Jordan's policy efforts to integrate Syrian refugees were prompt and effective, Lebanon's lower state capacity and initial non-integration continue to harm refugees' education outcomes.

Subsequently, as Figure 2 shows, enrolments in Lebanon have plateaued for ages 6-14 from 2017 (70%) through 2020 (67%) and then declined substantially to 52% in 2021 (although the 2021 question switched to attendance). Enrolments at ages 15-17 continued to improve through 2020 (from 22% in 2017 to 29% in 2020), but then declined to 27% attendance in 2021. A variety of political, policy, and economic challenges in Lebanon are likely contributing to the lack of progress on enrolments and even reversals for Syrian refugees.

Although country-level policy has played a key role in education outcomes, specific programmatic interventions can also support refugees' education outcomes. A cash transfer programme in Lebanon designed to benefit children in public primary schools was evaluated using a geographical regression discontinuity design and shown to increase school attendance by 0.5-0.7 days per week (De Hoop, Morey, & Seidenfeld, 2019). The programme did not increase enrolments, but this may be because enrolments were rising in Lebanon at this time leading to supply-side capacity constraints.

However, multi-purpose cash assistance (not targeted specifically to education, but a much larger payment) did substantially improve children's enrolment among Syrian refugees in Lebanon (Salti et al., 2022). In Jordan, the *Hajati* labelled cash assistance programme, targeted at families with at least one child in public school and with primarily Syrian beneficiaries, was shown to increase enrolment modestly, from 86% to 91% (enrolments were already high) in a cluster-randomized school evaluation (UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021). An information and encouragement campaign, evaluated in the same experiment, did not significantly change education outcomes.

### ***III.III Work and work permits***

Until 2016, access to safe, legal, and decent work for refugees in Jordan was restrictive. Syrian refugees are required to have a work permit to work legally (Davis, Benton, Todman, & Murphy, 2017; Razzaz, 2017). Work permits were only issued in certain sectors, primarily agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, relatively low-wage sectors in which few Jordanians worked (Razzaz, 2017). Fees and regulations for the work permits were prohibitive for refugees prior to 2016 – as of 2015, only 5,000 Syrians had work permits (Davis, Benton, Todman, & Murphy, 2017).

The Jordan Compact, in early 2016, extracted aid and trade concessions in exchange for increasing the number of work permits and reducing fees for Syrian refugees (Davis, Benton, Todman, & Murphy, 2017; European Commission, 2016). Although the number of permits increased substantially, take-up was less than hoped for and most Syrians who worked continued to be employed informally (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019; Lenner & Turner, 2018).<sup>6</sup> Concerns that work permits would reduce aid, the fact that work permits initially tied a worker to a particular employer, and other challenges reduced Syrians participation in the work permit scheme (Razzaz, 2017). Although initially excluded, in 2017, the government extended the law to cover refugees residing in camps to obtain permits for jobs outside the camp (Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021). Over time, permits have become more flexible, including allowing for home-based businesses and self-employment in certain sectors and extending social security coverage to refugees (Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021).

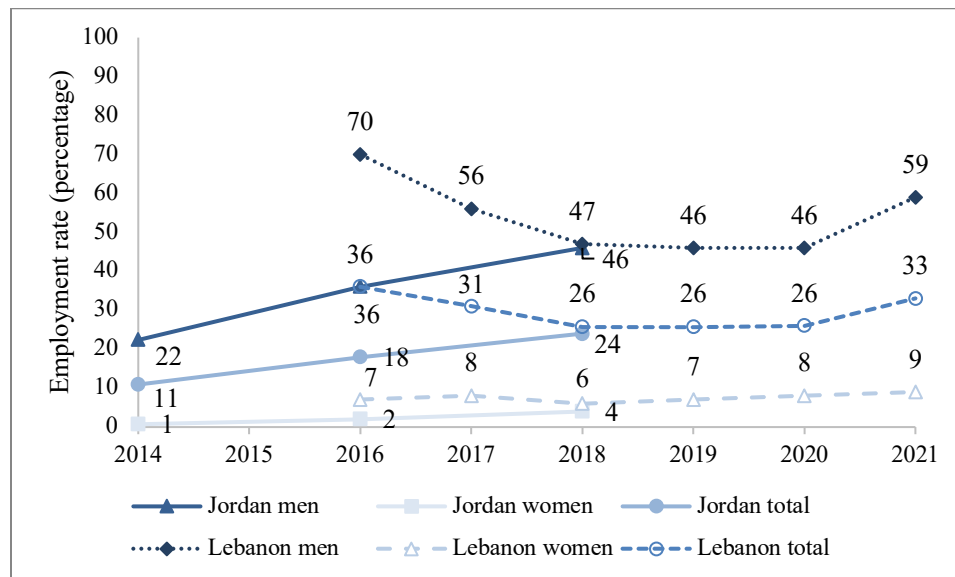
By 2021, a cumulative total of 230,000 permits were issued. However, annual permits peaked at around 48,000 in 2019 and fell to 39,000 in 2020 (Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021). Estimates are that 35,000-45,000 Syrians were covered by work permits at any given time (Lenner & Turner, 2018). Evidence suggests that by 2020, 23 percent of employed Syrian refugees had a valid work permit (Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021). Work permits are associated with higher wages, work stability and formality, and reduced risk of vulnerability to exploitative employee-employer relationships (Stave, Kebede, & Kattaa, 2021).

For Syrian refugee women in Jordan, while employment rates remain very low, they increased from 1 percent in 2014 before the Compact to around 4 percent afterwards in 2018, while men's employment rate increased from 22 percent to 46 percent over the same period (see Figure 3). Unemployment rates also fell, from 57 per cent for men and 88 per cent for women in 2014 to 23 percent for men and 46 percent for women in 2018 (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). Although these findings suggest positive impacts, work permits have not been evaluated with a rigorous identification strategy, and the associations suggest the impacts of work permits, although potentially positive, may also be limited in magnitude and insufficient to ensure self-reliance.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the other policy measures, such as special economic zones, have also under-performed, with few Syrians employed (Lenner, 2020).

**Figure 3. Employment rates (percentage of the working age population), by sex and country, 2014-2021**



Source: Authors' construction from nationally representative surveys (Assaad, Krafft, & Keo, 2019; Inter-Agency Coordination, UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2020; Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019; UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021)

Notes: Data only available for some years and to varying degrees by country. Age ranges (e.g., 15-64, 15+, 18+, 18-64, or 18-65) for statistics vary by year and country (particularly for Lebanon). Some indicators had to be calculated for some years and countries, e.g., total based on sex ratio in the population and women's and men's reported rates.

After Jordan provided legal work opportunities for Syrians, a number of cash-for-work programs rolled out, typically employing participants for a short period of 3-6 months and often providing some skills training (Loewe & Zintl, 2021). Although participants' income increases substantially during the program, after programmes end, household income drops even below previous levels, as refugees struggle to find new jobs (Loewe & Zintl, 2021). Importantly, funding for these programs also remains aid-reliant.

In Lebanon, the employment situation for Syrians was different, even before the collapse of the Lebanese economy in 2020. Syrian labour had historically been a feature of the Lebanese labour market (Janmyr, 2016; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020), mainly in the agriculture and construction sectors. An estimated 300,000 Syrians were in Lebanon pre-conflict (Ajluni & Kwar, 2015). However, most of this labour was characterized by informality and precarity. In Lebanon, access to legal/formal work for non-nationals, including refugees, requires a work permit. Indeed, obstacles to accessing work permits are linked to their high fees and bureaucracy, but more fundamentally to problems with the legal presence and residency of refugees in the country to begin with (Atrache, 2020).

While the Lebanese government has not taken steps to ease access to work permits and legal work, for refugees registered prior to 2015, it waived the high residency fees previously required (UNHCR, 2020). However, the government revoked UNHCR's ability to register new refugees after 2015, such that three-quarters were not legal residents and thus could not obtain permits as of 2018 (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2018). As a result, in 2020, among a sample of vulnerable workers, around 95 percent of Syrians were found to be in informal employment (International Labour Organization, 2021).

In 2021 in Lebanon, the employment rate among men was 59 percent (Figure 3) and their unemployment rate was 27 percent (International Labour Organization, 2021). Women's employment rate was 9 percent, and their unemployment rate 45 percent (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021). Although changing age ranges for employment statistics make comparisons over time difficult, it appears employment in Lebanon declined from 2016-2018 (when it reached a similar level to Jordan) was stable through 2020 and increased somewhat in 2021. Most of the Syrian workforce in the country continues to work primarily in wholesale and retail trade, agriculture, construction, and manufacturing (International Labour Organization, 2021).

One common thread between the policy approaches to work and work permits in Jordan and Lebanon was restricting (legal) work opportunities for Syrians to sectors that had been dominated by migrant labour in both countries. In Lebanon, the Syrians were historically engaged in migrant labour in the same sectors (Janmyr, 2016; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020), and in Jordan, Syrians were allowed to work legally primarily in sectors dominated by migrant labour (Malaeb & Wahba, 2018, 2019; Wahba, 2014). With host communities being less willing to accept the jobs typically held by migrant workers (Assaad et al., 2021; Groh, McKenzie, Shammout, & Vishwanath, 2015), work permits in those sectors were more politically feasible. Syrians in Jordan thus displaced primarily migrant workers (Malaeb & Wahba, 2018). The sectors and conditions of their work for Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon are precarious and put workers at risk of exploitation (Ajluni & Kawar, 2015; Al Zoubi, Aw-Hassan, & Dhehibi, 2019; Razzaz, 2017).

Despite the evidence that Syrians in Jordan have had no negative impact on Jordanians' labour market outcomes (Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019), there is still a narrative that Jordanians' employment difficulties are due to Syrians (Assaad et al., 2021), which makes policies to further expand access to labour market opportunities challenging. The narrative in Lebanon likewise often attributes the economic and financial crisis in Lebanon to Syrian refugees, even though the empirical evidence is that the crisis was not refugee-driven and indeed foreign aid for refugees has helped support the country during the crisis (Brun, Fakh, Shuayb, & Hammoud, 2021).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Evidence from Turkey also suggests that while there may have been some initial labour market impacts of the refugee influx, they were transitory and no negative impacts were observed long-term (Ceritoglu, Yunculer, Torun, & Tumen, 2017; Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015; Tumen, 2016).



### *III.IV Cash assistance policies and refugee welfare and poverty*

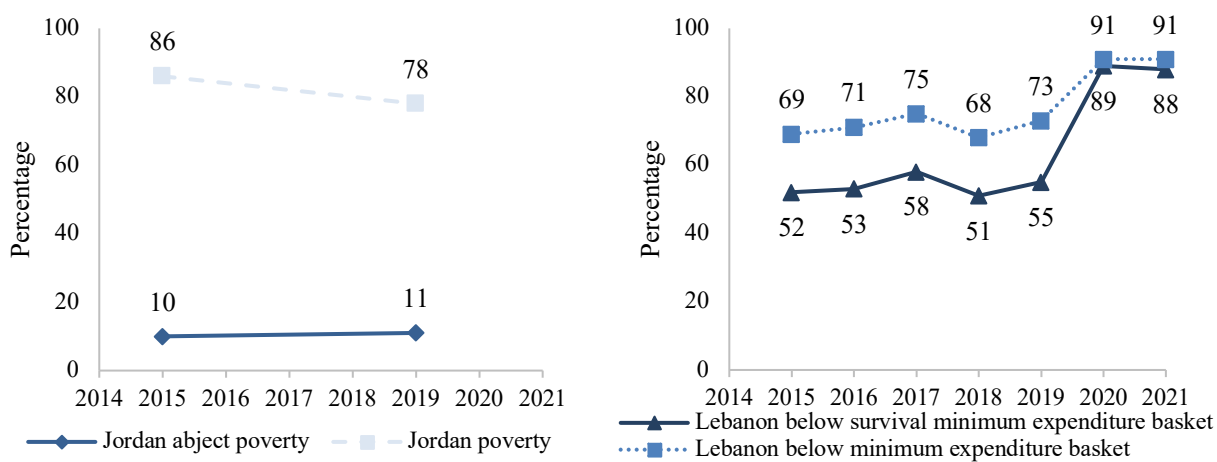
Refugee households have high rates of social assistance receipt in Jordan. As of 2017/18 90% of Syrian refugee households received some institutional support (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). Half (47%) received UNHCR cash assistance. Aid from other UN agencies (18%) and in-kind assistance from international actors (67%) were also common. Two thirds (63%) of households received electronic food vouchers from the World Food Program (WFP).

Refugees in Jordan are heavily reliant on assistance – 33% of households rely solely on transfer income, 26% mainly on transfer income, 12% on both transfer and employment income, and only 27% mainly on employment income (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). Almost all assistance in Jordan is funded and implemented via international partners – just 1% of households reported assistance from Jordan’s National Aid Fund (NAF), 2% cash from Jordanian charities, and 4% in-kind aid from Jordanian charities (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). More so than Syrians receiving Jordanian national assistance funds, vulnerable Jordanians have been included in international actors’ funding in line with the “resilience” framework (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), 2017).

Cash assistance provided by international organizations has been the primary vehicle to support refugees in Lebanon as well (Al Zoubi, Aw-Hassan, & Dhehibi, 2019; UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021). Initially, refugees were provided cash assistance from UNHCR and food vouchers from WFP, but as of 2017, the various organizations consolidated in a multi-purpose cash assistance program (MPC) (Salti et al., 2022). The program provides Syrian refugee households with 175 USD per household per month. WFP and UNHCR use a proxy-means testing formula based on a set of socio-demographic characteristics to determine eligibility (Salti et al., 2022). Evaluations of the MPC program in Lebanon (see Table 1) suggest that it increases household expenditure (particularly on food and health), and improves food security outcomes, housing and, children’s enrolment in school (Battistin, 2016; Salti et al., 2022).

Cash assistance plays an important role in reducing the depth of poverty; one study estimates UNHCR cash assistance together with WFP food vouchers could reduce poverty to less than 10% -- if they were applied together universally they are not (Verme et al., 2016). Aid is not universal and, therefore, poverty rates remain high. Figure 4 shows poverty and abject poverty rates for Syrian refugees in Jordan, based on Jordan’s national poverty lines. While in 2015, the poverty rate for Syrian refugees in Jordan was 86 percent, this fell slightly to 78 percent in 2019. Abject poverty remained 10-11 percent. Although more recent poverty rates are not available, a representative survey of Syrian refugees in late 2020 that asked about pre-COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, and post-lockdown outcomes showed large decreases in income during the (very stringent) lockdown, and substantial but incomplete recovery after the lockdown (Hale et al., 2021; Miguel, Palmer, Rozo, Stillman, & Smith, 2022).

**Figure 4. Syrian refugees living below the poverty line and abject poverty line in Jordan (percentage of individuals) and below the survival and minimum expenditure baskets in Lebanon (percentage of households)**



Source: Vulnerability assessment surveys of Syrian refugees in Jordan (Brown, Giordano, Maughan, & Wadeson, 2019; UNHCR, 2015c) and Lebanon (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021).

Notes: The poverty rates in Jordan are based on Jordan’s poverty line (constant over time) (Brown, Giordano, Maughan, & Wadeson, 2019; UNHCR, 2015c). In Lebanon, the rates are based on the survival and minimum expenditure baskets (SMEB and MEB), which, as the names suggest, are the cost of a basket of goods to meet minimum dignified or survival needs (World Food Programme, 2020a). The baskets were originally set in 2014 and then updated in 2020 to new prices and an updated basket (World Food Programme, 2020a). Prices were further updated in 2021 (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021). Note that due to the differences in methodologies and baskets between the two countries, the various rates are not directly comparable and in Lebanon methods changed over time.

In Lebanon, household poverty is measured by being below the minimum expenditure basket (MEB) or the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB). The baskets were set in 2014, but revised in 2020 (both basket and prices) and 2021 (prices), which is important to keep in mind for comparisons over time (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021; World Food Programme, 2020a). The percentage of households below the MEB fluctuated between 68-75 percent over 2015-2019 and below the SMEB between 52-58 percent. However, the overall economic situation in Lebanon deteriorated substantially in 2020, with the Beirut port blast, followed by Lebanon’s major economic and political crisis, rampant inflation, and the effects of the pandemic (Inter-Agency Coordination, UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2020). As a result, the share of households below the MEB rose to 91 percent in 2020-2021 and the share below the SMEB was 88-89 percent over this period. The series of crises in Lebanon has made supporting the wellbeing of vulnerable Syrian refugees particularly challenging.

An important challenge with Syrian refugees’ reliance on internationally funded cash assistance is the variability of funding. Assistance is not universal, but based on funding availability and vulnerability assessments (UNHCR, 2015c). There are regular funding gaps and variable and

unpredictable funding of key assistance, such as WFP, can create challenges – contributing to hunger (Associated Press in Amman, 2016). Comparisons of short-term (12 months or less) versus long-term cash receipt underscore that the positive impacts of cash are primarily from long-term receipt (Salti et al., 2022). Short-term interventions do have positive effects, but ones which tend to fade (Altindag & O’Connell, 2021). This finding underscores a key pillar of the Global Compact for Refugees – ensuring reliable, multi-year funding (UNHCR, 2018c).

### ***III.V Food aid and food insecurity***

As a result of poverty and constrained food assistance, food insecurity is a substantial challenge for Syrian refugees in Jordan (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019). As of 2017, 40% of households were experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity (18% specifically severe food insecurity) (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). The refugee population in Lebanon is also characterized by food insecurity. Indeed, it is estimated that 46% have a poor or borderline food consumption score (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021). Refugees cope with food insecurity through a variety of strategies, including purchasing lower quality food, reducing portions and meals, and gleaning food from agricultural jobs (Al Zoubi, Aw-Hassan, & Dhehibi, 2019). Credit and debt play an important role in obtaining food for refugees, particularly for those in Lebanon whose inability to register with UNHCR has limited access to assistance (Al Zoubi, Aw-Hassan, & Dhehibi, 2019).

Over time, WFP assistance outside of refugee camps has shifted to unrestricted cash aid rather than food-restricted assistance (World Food Programme, 2020b). The global evidence on cash as more cost-effective than in-kind food aid and evidence specifically from Jordan and Lebanon using an experiment demonstrated that cash led to as good or better food security (Gentilini, 2016; The Boston Consulting Group, 2017), which motivated this shift. The impact evaluation also found that cash performed better especially in contexts with low food security, in part by effectively raising purchasing power by 15-20%, and was strongly preferred by beneficiaries (The Boston Consulting Group, 2017). An impact evaluation of a winter cash transfer of \$575, designed to keep refugees warm and safe during winter months, likewise found that refugees strongly preferred cash to in-kind goods, using cash for a variety of other basic needs purposes as well as heating and housing, primarily food and water (Lehmann & Masterson, 2014).

### ***III.VI Negative coping strategies: Child labour and child marriage***

Despite assistance, Syrians sometimes engage in negative coping strategies in response to their precarious situations. Although poverty is high, child labour remains low in Jordan. Estimates of child labour show employment for only 1% of children aged 9- or 10-14, more so for boys than girls (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019; Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019). In Lebanon, 5% of children aged 5-17 were engaged in child labour, more so boys (8%) than girls (2%) and more so among older children (e.g. 16% for 17-year-olds) (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021). Cash assistance programs, such as *Hajati* or MPC, reduce child labour (Salti et al., 2022);

UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021). In Lebanon, long-term cash assistance reduced child labour significantly, by four percentage points (Salti et al., 2022). Winter cash assistance in Lebanon likewise reduced child labour (Lehmann & Masterson, 2014).

One negative coping strategy of particular concern for Syrian refugee girls is child marriage (marriage before age 18). High rates of girl child marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have raised concerns (e.g. Cherri, Cuesta, Rodriguez-Llanes, & Guha-Sapir, 2017; Shaheen et al., 2022). However, the population of Syrians who fled to Jordan and Lebanon came from communities with traditions of child marriage and high rates of child marriage pre-conflict (Al Zoubi, Aw-Hassan, & Dhehibi, 2019; Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo, 2020). At least in Jordan, multiple sources of representative data indicate child marriage has not risen – although the dynamics and drivers may have changed (Department of Statistics (Jordan) & ICF, 2019; Miguel, Palmer, Rozo, Stillman, & Smith, 2022; Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo, 2020).

Concerns with poverty and security may have been key drivers of child marriage for girls, while at the same time poverty among Syrians also made affording marriage more difficult for young men (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo, 2020). The *Hajati* cash assistance program found cash assistance reduced child marriage but not pregnancy (which was very rare) (UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021). In Lebanon, the MPC program cash assistance likewise reduced marriage among girls aged 15-19 (Moussa et al., 2021).

Fertility among Syrian refugees in Jordan is higher than that of the host population and the national average pre-conflict, but has declined from 4.9 to 4.4 births per woman among the particular population of Syrians who fled to Jordan, who had high fertility pre-conflict (Sieverding, Berri, & Abdulrahim, 2019). Fertility in Lebanon appears to have remained similarly stable. Although there are not representative statistics on Syrian refugees' fertility rates in Lebanon, there has consistently been an average of one child under five per household from 2014-2021 for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and the age structure of the population shows similar sizes across the 0-4 and 5-9 age groups, suggesting demographic stability (UNHCR, WFP, & UNICEF, 2021; WFP, UNICEF, & UNHCR, 2014). Overall, across countries, there are complex family formation dynamics and new drivers, which underscore the need for ongoing data collection, nationally representative data, and retrospective questions to allow for appropriate comparisons.

### ***III.VII Encampment***

One particularly important difference between Jordan's and Lebanon's refugee-hosting policies was their approach to encampment. The Lebanese government did not allow any official UNHCR refugee camps. Jordan, in contrast, opened refugee camps starting in July 2012. Although the rules have changed substantially over time, Syrian refugees arriving later were more likely to enter – and subsequently face difficulty leaving—Jordanian refugee camps (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019; Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020; Turner, 2016).

Arguably, the presence of camps, which are funded primarily by UNHCR, has helped Jordan receive foreign aid (Turner, 2016).

Nonetheless, only 13% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in official camps (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019). A small number also live in informal tented settlements, but the vast majority live in host communities, specifically urban areas in the north of Jordan (near the Syrian border and refugee camps) or in the capital, Amman (Krafft, Razzaz, Keo, & Assaad, 2019; REACH, 2013). In contrast, in Lebanon, 24% of Syrian refugees as of 2016 lived in informal tented settlements and most Syrians lived in rural areas (Sieverding & Calderon-Mejia, 2020).

Despite theoretically greater access to services, quality of life is lower for Syrian refugees in refugee camps in Jordan (Obi, 2021). Households in camps are disadvantaged, but are still more likely to live in abject poverty after accounting for pre-conflict and pre-displacement characteristics (Obi, 2021). Food insecurity is particularly high for those in camps (Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, & Keo, 2019).

Similarly, cross-country evidence, comparing Lebanon to Jordan, suggests that camps reduce refugees' household income (Ginn, 2020). However, considered holistically with a comprehensive set of outcome measures, research suggests that camps can be an efficient subsidy for refugees who opt out of urban housing markets (Ginn, 2020). Camps may also help reduce pressure on local housing markets for native workers. Although the Syrian refugee influx into Jordan did not have negative impacts on labour market or education outcomes for Jordanians, it did increase housing costs and cause internal migration for Jordanians (Al-Hawarin, Assaad, & Elsayed, 2021; Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh, 2018; Elmallakh & Wahba, 2022; Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019).

#### **IV Discussion and conclusions**

Protracted refugee situations, where refugees have been in exile for at least five years, are increasingly common, with more than three-quarters of refugees in protracted displacement as of 2020 (UNHCR, 2021a). In part due to the increase in protracted displacement, the new Global Compact on Refugees aims to increase integration, shift from a humanitarian to developmental approach, and find durable solutions (integration, repatriation, or resettlement) for the displaced (UNHCR, 2018d). Our study comparing policies and outcomes for refugees in Jordan and Lebanon can help shed light on different approaches and challenges to supporting refugees' wellbeing and livelihoods. While the two settings are not directly comparable, due to a myriad of confounding factors, we rely on those policy variations to delineate differences in refugee outcomes in each country.

There are substantial differences across countries in refugees' experiences and particularly protection of rights and access to services, such as education, depending on country policy. Jordan and Lebanon have integrated some services but are not providing social assistance to

Syrian refugees out of the country's own budget, instead relying on (variable, but persistent) international aid to support both refugees and locals. Jordan has been substantially more successful than Lebanon in providing education to refugees due to a strong initial push for integration (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, Keo, & Sharpless, 2018). This finding highlights the importance a concerted state effort and state capacity can have in supporting refugees, even (or perhaps particularly) in a developing country context.

Jordan has also provided (limited but legal) work opportunities for Syrians. Although there is suggestive evidence that this policy leads to better work outcomes, it has done so at most modestly, and has not been rigorously evaluated. Despite legal work opportunities, in neither country have Syrians achieved sustainable self-reliance. Refugees remain substantially dependent on international aid, without which already-high poverty rates would be even higher (Verme et al., 2016). Cash assistance does reduce poverty and negative coping strategies, while improving education and food security outcomes (Salti et al., 2022; UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021; Verme et al., 2016).

Importantly, providing education, work, and social assistance opportunities not only often helps refugees, but appears to do no harm to (and can potentially benefit) hosts (Assaad, Ginn, & Saleh, 2018; Fallah, Krafft, & Wahba, 2019; The Boston Consulting Group, 2017). Yet there is a relatively limited body of research, particularly rigorous research, on policies and programs to support refugees, as well as their impacts on host communities. This is particularly the case in Jordan and Lebanon but also globally.

Data challenges, fragmentation of programs, and concerns about experimental research particularly in the context of vulnerable populations (refugees) have limited research to date. A concerted effort to collect data on refugees, particularly data that provides appropriate counterfactuals (such as retrospective data or experimental data) is much needed. More fundamentally, standardized data collection and publication of standardized statistics over time and across refugee populations on basic socio-economic indicators is sorely needed, as illustrated by the challenges comparing key statistics (e.g., poverty, employment rates) for varying populations and definitions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

Refugees were already living in vulnerable, and in some cases very precarious conditions, and the COVID-19 pandemic only made their situation worse. Refugees who were working were particularly likely to be working in sectors (both in terms of industry and informality) that experienced downturns with the pandemic and lockdowns (Dempster et al., 2020; Krafft, Assaad, & Marouani, 2021). Understanding the impact of the pandemic on refugees and how pandemic policy responses may have particularly affected refugees is an important area for future research.

Syrian refugees have been displaced for a decade now, following the global trend towards increasingly protracted displacement. What are their prospects for durable solutions and self-reliance? Syrian refugees in Jordan are unlikely to return to Syria; in a 2020/21 survey only 2%

of youth agreed that it was currently safe for them to return to Syria (Assaad et al., 2021). Future prospects for durable solutions in Jordan and Lebanon are constrained by domestic political economy considerations. For instance, in Lebanon, historical, political, and demographic tensions, and barriers to legal presence, contributed to increased tensions between the host community and the Syrian refugees (ARK & UNDP, 2021). Indeed, data from regular perception surveys on social tensions in Lebanon suggests that prejudice remains a cornerstone of the interaction between the two communities, and the perception of the quality of relations between the host community and refugees continues to deteriorate (ARK & UNDP, 2021).

The fragility of the Lebanese state, and subsequently its economy, meant that the economic downturn and the removal of subsidies on goods and services also affected the quality of societal interactions in the midst of competition for very scarce resources (ARK & UNDP, 2021). By 2021, around a third of the Lebanese population described its relations with the Syrian refugees as negative or very negative (ARK & UNDP, 2021). Further, data from a field experiment revealed that mixing of the host and refugee groups leads to lower contributions to the public good, while in-group cooperation is consistently stronger (Drouvelis, Malaeb, Vlassopoulos, & Wahba, 2021).

Both Jordan and Lebanon are wary of another protracted refugee crisis, as with Palestinians (Turner, 2016; Yahya, 2018). An important area for future research is understanding how to address some of those constraints on Syrian refugees' integration and design and communicate policies that are both politically feasible and economically effective. As situations evolve from initial humanitarian response to protracted displacement, and local conditions change due to local and global economic and political factors, research is needed on how refugees' socio-economic status and wellbeing evolve and what policies and programs are most effective over different phases and time horizons.

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