

# The political economy of refugee integration policies

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What political economy factors drive differing attitudes to refugees in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) refugee hosting states, in particular policy on the integration of refugees into host country basic services and labour markets?

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# 1. Summary

This rapid evidence review finds that refugee hosting governments' policy decisions concerning refugees' socioeconomic integration is impacted by an interplay of economic, political, and international aid factors.

However, though extensive research exists detailing the impact of refugee populations on host states and communities, the evidence base on how political economy factors (the interaction of political, economic and social processes) shape local integration policies is limited. While the body of context-specific literature examining political economy factors is emerging, comparative studies, global analyses, and systematic reviews remain scarce.

This review primarily draws on academic articles. Though policy reports were consulted, the field currently lacks a substantial body of research on this specific aspect of refugee integration. While comparative studies exist, case studies form the dominant research approach. The review synthesises findings from these studies, focusing on political, economic and to a lesser extent social factors that determine low- and middle-income refugee hosting states' decision-making regarding the socioeconomic integration of refugees. The review aims to provide a general overview of these factors before delving into case studies of Uganda, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, chosen for their ability to illustrate the interplay between political economy factors and the international funding architecture. This rapid evidence review is gender- and disability-blind.

Given the protracted nature of displacement and the limited access to durable solutions, local integration emerges as a potential pathway for longer-term prospects for refugees. This review refers to local integration as the process of fostering broader socioeconomic inclusion for refugees within host communities. However, political and economic considerations present significant hurdles. A confluence of these factors shapes the integration process, highlighting the critical need to understand them for designing effective policies that benefit both refugees and host communities.

Successful refugee integration requires local acceptance and addressing the needs of all stakeholders, particularly elites. National policies significantly impact integration outcomes, with decisions influenced by factors like long-term economic benefits and security concerns. Restrictive policies often stem from concerns over large refugee influxes, competition for jobs, and security. Furthermore, the relationship between host states and international funding creates a unique political economy. These states navigate a delicate balancing act between fulfilling their refugee hosting obligations and securing economic benefits through international funding.

The review examines economic, political and foreign aid political economy factors and makes the following key findings.

## Economic

The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees work rights, but many host countries hesitate to implement them due to economic concerns:

- ▶ Labour market disruption: Fears of exceeding the capacity to absorb new workers, overcrowding specific sectors, and competition with citizens for jobs.
- ▶ Wage suppression and declining working conditions: Apprehensions that refugee labour may lead to lower wages and poorer work environments.

Restrictions on work rights are often seen as a way to mitigate competition for scarce resources and prevent public backlash against refugees. Countries with stronger economies

with labour shortages tend to offer more work opportunities, while countries with weaker economies and limited capacity often impose stricter restrictions.

The case studies of Lebanon and Jordan illustrate how economic interests and social pressures influence refugee work policy:

- ▶ Lebanon did not separate Syrian refugees through formal camps. Syrians filled informal, unskilled jobs. This approach may have been partly motivated by a desire to benefit businesses with a readily available and inexpensive labour force.
- ▶ Initially, Jordan housed Syrian refugees in camps and restricted their socioeconomic integration to protect Jordanian jobs. This policy was likely influenced by high unemployment rates, particularly among young people and women.

## Political

- ▶ Many states, like Kenya and Pakistan, restrict refugee movement, employment, and social services due to perceived security risks.
- ▶ Democratisation offers both opportunities and challenges for refugee integration:
  - Strong democratic institutions and active civil society can lead to better protection of refugee rights (e.g. South Africa).
  - But political competition may lead to reduced refugee support due to public perception. Resource-limited states may prioritise citizens over refugees and governments might lose incentive to invest in refugees during elections unless there is a perceived benefit. Additionally, xenophobia can be used as a political tool to exploit fear of outsiders.
- ▶ Authoritarian leaders, facing less public pressure, may offer seemingly inclusive refugee policies to gain international support and resources.

Lebanon exemplifies the interplay of security, economics, and sectarian politics in shaping refugee policy. Common portrayals of sectarian divides (Sunni support vs. Shia opposition) are simplistic. However, fear of a permanent Sunni majority due to refugees likely motivated Lebanon to avoid policies facilitating long-term integration. Furthermore, restrictions on entry and return may have served, in part, to deflect blame from the government.

## The political economy of international funding

Some host countries leverage their role as refugee havens to secure financial or political concessions from the international community, acting as 'refugee rentier states.' This behaviour is driven by the availability of humanitarian and development aid, creating an incentive to maximise aid flows. The rise of anti-refugee sentiment in Europe has strengthened the hand of some hosting states. European states, aligned with their own goals of minimising refugee arrivals on their soil, are more willing to fund refugee care in initial host countries. Recognising this dynamic, these hosting states are not passive recipients of aid – they actively employ strategies to attract more funding:

- ▶ Lobbying for higher financial support by leveraging their refugee policies.
- ▶ Threatening to withdraw protection or let refugees leave the country if aid is not provided.

Examining a change in policies of refugee hosting states regarding refugee integration facilitates an examination of the political economy factors influencing these decisions.

- ▶ Uganda: Often lauded as a progressive model, Uganda allows refugees freedom of movement, access to services, and the ability to establish

businesses. However, the policy may serve a dual purpose: attracting international aid and consolidating government control in refugee-hosting regions.

- ▶ Jordan: The 2016 Jordan Compact reflects a shift from a purely humanitarian approach to a development-oriented strategy. By providing work permits and integrating Syrians into Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Jordan aims to attract investment and reduce competition for Jordanian jobs. This strategy can be seen as a ‘back-scratching’ exercise: a more open policy towards refugee integration in exchange for significant international support, including international development aid and trade deals with the EU.
- ▶ Lebanon: Economic and political instability hinder Lebanon's efforts to move beyond reliance on humanitarian aid. Despite international pressure for integration as part of the 2016 Lebanon Compact and unlike Jordan, Lebanon prioritises refugee repatriation and restricts access to work permits. Similar to Jordan, Lebanon acts as a ‘refugee rentier state,’ seeking international funding for hosting refugees. However, Lebanon resists pressure for integration and prioritises maintaining control over its borders and refugee population.
- ▶ Türkiye: While offering access to work and services, work permits are often temporary and restricted to specific sectors. Türkiye’s strategy involved negotiating a deal with the EU for increased funding in exchange for stricter border controls and readmission of refugees arriving in Greece. This approach differs from Jordan and Lebanon in its use of a ‘blackmailing’ strategy, exemplified by threats of sending more refugees to Europe. This tactic likely stems, in part, from elite perceptions of Türkiye's strategic importance, particularly its proximity to Greece.

## 2. Background

The current refugee system, designed for short-term displacement, struggles with the reality of protracted crises. While repatriation, resettlement, and naturalisation remain the ultimate goals, access to these durable solutions remains limited (Hynie, 2018). In any given year, less than 5% achieve such outcomes (Betts & Bradenbrink, 2019).

This emphasis on temporary solutions is increasingly out of sync with displacement realities. The average exile now lasts a decade or more, with many protracted situations exceeding 20 years. ‘Temporary’ refugee camps have become permanent fixtures in some regions (Hynie 2018), highlighting the need for a revised approach.

While securing durable solutions remains a global challenge, national and local governments must also address refugee integration. Integration is heavily influenced by policies impacting refugees' social and economic lives (Hynie, 2018). For protracted displacement, innovative models offer some level of longer-term prospects. These include granting working rights and temporary citizenship in asylum countries (e.g. Türkiye), establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with relaxed employment regulations for refugees (e.g. Jordan), and dismantling traditional camp models in favour of greater societal integration (e.g. Uganda) (Ramsay, 2020).

This report defines local integration as a dynamic process that fosters broader socioeconomic inclusion for refugees (Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021). Socioeconomic integration itself encompasses both the ongoing process and the ultimate outcome – the extent to which refugees participate in local, national, and global markets. Local integration is not a substitute for refugee protection or durable solutions. Instead, it serves as a critical foundation upon which both can be built (Betts, 2023). This review recognises the limitations

of solely market-based approaches to refugee integration that neglect the political and social causes of displacement (Bardelli, 2018).

The majority of refugees reside in resource-constrained, low- and middle-income countries, often in remote border regions (Betts & Bradenbrink, 2019). Effective socioeconomic integration requires collaboration between states and markets, with states establishing the legal framework for market participation (Betts, 2023). However, granting refugees the right to work often faces resistance due to protectionist policies fuelled by political and economic factors (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016). Overall, however, there is little research into the political economy factors (the interaction of economic, political and social processes) that govern decisions around integration. This is the focus of the remaining sections of this report.

### 3. The findings

This review identified several key political economy factors influencing national policy decisions on refugee integration:

- ▶ Economic: Perceptions of refugees as economic burdens or benefits, the strength of the host economy, and labour market conditions all significantly impact policy decisions.
- ▶ Political: Security concerns, the activity of civil society in democracies, and public and elite perceptions of refugees play a major role. Authoritarian regimes, less susceptible to public opinion, may offer seemingly inclusive policies to gain international support and deflect internal issues.
- ▶ Political economy of international funding: ‘refugee rentierism’ describes a situation where host states leverage their refugee populations to secure aid or benefits. Tactics include ‘blackmailing’ (threatening to overwhelm other states with refugees) or ‘back-scratching’ (promising to keep refugees contained) to secure aid or benefits in return for more local socioeconomic integration.

Successful local integration hinges on the goodwill of key groups in a host country. Without this support, refugees face significant challenges in settling and integrating. Public perception of the benefits and burdens associated with refugees heavily influences their willingness to accept integration. Crucially, successful integration requires addressing the interests of all stakeholders, especially those with the most power (Jacobsen, 2001).

Carvalho & Dryden-Peterson (2024) examine what shapes the role of host governments in social service provision (primarily education) for refugees in a theory generating article. They find that despite well-defined refugee rights in international law, host governments retain ultimate control over refugee policies, determining the type and extent of services and rights provided. This landscape is shaped by a confluence of domestic and international factors, including public opinion, adherence to legal frameworks, the intricacies of international aid, and foreign policy considerations.

Furthermore, government decisions regarding service provision are influenced by their anticipated return on investment. Policymakers may consider factors like the potential for political gain, a more productive workforce, or building inclusive societies – all with potentially long-term payoffs. However, the uncertain future of refugee populations makes these long-term returns difficult to predict. This creates a challenge for traditional political economy models, which often rely on clear time horizons and established responsibilities between governments and citizens (Carvalho & Dryden-Peterson, 2024).

Based on a sample of 20 countries, Zetter & Ruaudel (2016) find that several factors contribute to restrictive refugee policies by host governments. These include concern surrounding large-scale refugee influxes, reluctance to encourage permanent settlement, and concerns regarding competition in strained job markets. Additionally, security fears are often conflated with the presence of refugees, further hindering policies that promote refugee rights, particularly the right to work.

Furthermore, the relationship between host states and international aid agencies presents a complex dynamic. States risk international condemnation for neglecting refugee rights, but implementing generous policies can strain domestic resources. This tension often leads to 'strategic indifference' where states delegate some responsibility for refugee support to international aid agencies and civil society organisations, deflecting some of the financial and political burden (Salehyan & Savun, 2024).

## Economic impacts on refugee integration policies

Despite the right to work enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, many host countries hesitate to grant this right to refugees. This reluctance stems from concerns about potential disruptions to the labour market, including limited capacity to absorb new workers, overcrowding in specific sectors, and competition with citizens for available jobs. Concerns about wage suppression and declining working conditions further fuel these fears (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). By restricting refugees' access to socioeconomic opportunities, host states aim to mitigate competition for finite resources and potential public backlash (Betts, 2023).

The right to work for refugees varies significantly across host countries. States with robust economies and potential labour shortages (e.g. Germany, United Kingdom, United States) tend to offer more generous work entitlements. Conversely, countries with weaker economies and limited labour market capacity (e.g. Chad, Zambia, Pakistan) often impose stricter restrictions on refugee work rights. These countries frequently grapple with low Human Development Indicators and GDP, leading to stagnant, oversupplied, and less diverse labour markets. Informality is widespread, wages may be depressed, and working conditions poorly regulated. In these contexts, concerns surrounding competition for scarce resources and potential economic disruption often lead to protectionist policies that restrict refugee access to the labour market (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016).

Many countries hosting refugees face a surge in job seekers due to refugee inflows. For instance, Lebanon and Jordan have large refugee populations, constituting 25% and 9% of their respective national populations, respectively. Second, some refugee hosting countries are contending with rapid domestic labour force growth driven by demographic factors. This is evident in Kenya, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Pakistan, all experiencing significant population increases. The combined effect is a rapid rise in the number of individuals seeking employment, outpacing the ability of labour markets to expand and absorb new entrants (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016).

Lebanon's approach to Syrian refugees in the labour market reflects the interplay of economic interests and social pressures. Lebanon's decision not to separate Syrian refugees from the labour market through formal encampment is designed to benefit Lebanese businesses and capital by increasing a ready supply of labour, lowering wages, and increasing workers' precarity. Syrians have been a significant part of Lebanon's informal workforce for decades, with estimates suggesting their presence rebounded to 27-35% by 2014, partly due to leniency towards those without work permits (Turner 2015).

Turning to Jordan, until 2016, the government largely restricted Syrian refugees' ability to compete for work to protect Jordanian jobs. Unemployment stood at over 14% before the

Syrian conflict started. In 2016, it reached 15.8%. Notably, young people (aged 15-25) and women were especially affected, with around 30% of both groups being unemployed (Şahin-Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

The shift in policies of both Jordan and Lebanon in 2016 and 2014 respectively, and what this shows for a political economy analysis of local integration, is discussed below.

## Political impacts on refugee integration policies

In response to concerns regarding potential security risks associated with the influx of refugees, many states opt to restrict the movement and access to employment and social welfare services for refugees. For example, Kenya restricts Somali refugee movement due to concerns about Al-Shabaab and potential radicalisation (Salehyan & Savun, 2024). Similarly, Pakistan's response to Afghan refugees has been coloured by deteriorating security within its borders. The deaths of nearly 47,500 people (2003-2013) attributed to al-Qaeda and affiliated groups fuelled fears about Afghan refugees. Despite a lack of evidence linking registered Afghans to terrorism, the government subjected them to arbitrary detention, harassment, and forced deportation (Siddikoglu & Sagiroglu, 2023).

Carvalho and Dryden-Peterson (2024) examine how democratisation and civil society influence refugee rights, particularly access to education. They find that:

- ▶ Strong democratic institutions and active civil society can lead to better protection of refugee rights.
- ▶ Inclusion of refugees in states' services and labour market may be more likely if domestic civil society is willing to act on their behalf, as seen in South Africa. Civil society groups advocated for refugees through legal channels, where they successfully challenged restrictions on refugee access to education.
- ▶ Democratisation, however, can also present challenges. Political competition may lead to reduced investment in refugee education, depending on public perceptions of refugees. In resource-limited settings, political groups may shift between inclusive and exclusive policies based on competition levels and the perceived costs of including outsiders.
- ▶ Some scholars suggest elites offer rights when secure in their power, while others argue it's done for regime survival.

Carvalho and Dryden-Peterson's (2024) study also highlights the importance of understanding how citizens and elites view refugees:

- ▶ Perceptions of refugees as a threat or a resource can significantly influence policy decisions.
- ▶ Since refugees cannot vote, governments may be less inclined to invest in their education during intense competition unless elites believe refugees will benefit their political or ethnic group in the long term.
- ▶ Citizen views are also shaped by social and cultural ties to refugees. Integration may be easier for refugees from neighbouring countries with shared cultural backgrounds.
- ▶ Politicians may use xenophobia as a political tool. Using fear of outsiders can be a tactic in competitive political environments.

Carvalho and Dryden-Peterson (2024) also examine the situation in authoritarian regimes.

- ▶ Unlike democracies, authoritarian leaders face less pressure from public opinion on refugee issues.
- ▶ Authoritarian regimes may offer inclusive policies to gain international support, resources, and deflect attention from internal issues. Uganda's refugee education policies and Rwanda's agreements with high-income countries exemplify this strategy.
- ▶ Authoritarian regimes can also restrict rights with minimal domestic or international resistance.

In regard to political factors, Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis is shaped by multiple factors beyond security concerns (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2018; Salehyan & Savun, 2024). These include:

- ▶ Lebanon's weak economy struggles to support its own citizens.
- ▶ The presence of Palestinian refugees for decades has created tensions.
- ▶ Fear of a permanent Sunni majority due to the refugee influx motivated policies limiting integration (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2018).

Furthermore, Kabbanji & Kabbanji's (2018) report assessing the development-displacement nexus in Lebanon suggests that Lebanon's 2014 restrictions on entry and return, ostensibly for security reasons, may have been partly aimed at deflecting blame for the country's problems from its own political elite.

## Change in policies: Considering the political economy of international funding

Examining policy changes in refugee-hosting states reveals the influence of political economy factors. This section examines this by focusing on the well-established practice by some host countries of exploiting their role in accommodating refugees to obtain financial or political concessions, as suggested by Salehyan & Savun (2024) in their literature review on the factors that influence refugee policies.

The availability of international aid creates incentives for recipient countries to act in ways that maximise aid flows, potentially prioritising their own interests over the well-being of refugees (Almasri, 2021). This behaviour resembles a 'rentier state,' which relies on external resources for income rather than its own productive capacity. In this context, 'refugee rentierism' (Kelberer, 2017) can be understood as the practice of countries leveraging their status as refugee hosts to extract financial aid from the international community. Essentially, refugees become bargaining chips for foreign funds (Almasri, 2021).

Rising anti-refugee sentiment in Europe, coupled with the rise of far-right parties, created interest for some European states in retaining refugees in their initial host states (Almasri 2021). This gave refugee-hosting states greater leverage in negotiating aid packages that aligned with their own development goals. While most host countries engage in some degree of aid negotiation, the prevalence of this strategy in 'refugee rentier states' significantly influences policy decisions (Kelberer, 2017; Şahin-Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

Countries like Libya, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Afghanistan have used tactics like 'blackmailing' (threatening to overwhelm other states with refugees) or back-scratching (promising to keep refugees contained) to secure aid or benefits. Recognising these tactics, OECD countries advocate for local economic integration of refugees in host countries as a prerequisite for continued support, assuming improved conditions will deter refugees from seeking asylum in wealthier countries (Salehyan & Savun, 2024).

Host states prioritise international development assistance to improve conditions for refugees, host communities, and their own institutions, making the ‘development assistance-refugee employment nexus’ a key negotiating point with donors. While donors advocate for refugee employment, experienced host countries like Jordan, Turkey, and Pakistan hold significant bargaining power. These countries are not passive recipients – they actively employ strategies to attract more aid, including (Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021):

- ▶ Lobbying for higher financial support by leveraging their refugee policies.
- ▶ Threatening to withdraw protection or let refugees leave the country if aid is not provided.

The 2016 Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) are important elements. The framework emphasises the importance of integrating refugees into host communities and providing access to essential services through collaboration between governments, UN agencies, and humanitarian organisations. The GCR outlines four interconnected goals: (i) easing pressure on host countries; (ii) enhancing refugee self-reliance; (iii) expanding access to third country solutions; and (iv) supporting return in safety and dignity (Siddikoglu & Sagiroglu, 2023).

## Country Case Studies

### *Uganda*

Uganda's approach to refugees is often lauded by humanitarian and political actors for its progressive nature. As a CRRF pilot country with its Self-Reliance Strategy implemented in 1999, Uganda stands out in Africa for its inclusive approach. Unlike many African countries, Uganda allows refugees to work, own businesses, access public services, move freely, and even obtain land (Bohnet & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019; Ramsay, 2020).

However, this seemingly generous policy has limitations. Critics point to overworked land, limited mobility for some, and disadvantages for those unfamiliar with subsistence farming. While refugees can choose their location and work legally, most settle in designated settlements for easier access to aid. Urban refugees, on the other hand, often face limited integration opportunities and forego aid (Ramsay, 2020). Furthermore, this policy provides no permanent solution, leaving refugees (and potentially future generations) with limited options (World Bank, 2016).

The Ugandan asylum model raises concerns about balancing humanitarian goals with economic ones. Ramsay (2020), based on fieldwork in Uganda and Australia, argues the policy simplifies refugee support into a ‘neoliberal’ approach, potentially pushing refugees towards insecure and exploitative work in an unregulated market, creating new vulnerabilities.

A study by Betts (2021) analyses the under-examined political history behind Uganda's progressive refugee policy. Drawing on archival research to offer a political history of Ugandan refugee policy, Betts (2021) highlights the need to understand refugee policies, especially those viewed as progressive, in political and historical context. His analysis makes three empirical points:

- ▶ Uganda's self-reliance model is not new but has its roots in the colonial era.
- ▶ Supposedly liberal aspects of the model stem from illiberal motives, with figures like former president Idi Amin playing a previously overlooked role.
- ▶ The model serves a consistent political purpose - attracting international legitimacy, resources and strengthening presidential control over strategically

important refugee-hosting hinterlands.

According to a World Bank study (2016), other factors contribute to Uganda's approach. Ugandan empathy with refugees stems from many Ugandans, including President Museveni, having themselves been refugees or internally displaced persons. Cultural, linguistic, and ethnic similarities between Ugandans and some refugee groups contribute to a welcoming environment. Finally, Uganda's leadership embraces Pan-Africanism, emphasising unity among African nations. President Museveni exemplifies this, stating refugees are "Africans; and Uganda is therefore their home."

### *Jordan*

Jordan's policy towards refugees' socioeconomic integration has shifted from being preventative to more open, advertising it as a 'development opportunity' (AlShwawra, 2021). This evolution is linked to the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis and Jordan's transition from a humanitarian response to a development-oriented approach under the Syrian Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) with support from international donors (Zetter & Ruadel, 2018).

Lenner & Turner (2019) draw on interviews with humanitarian staff and Syrian refugees in Jordan and policy analysis. They discuss that before the 2016 Jordan Compact, Jordan prioritised policies discouraging permanent Syrian residency. This manifested in limited work permits, temporary-looking camps, and restrictions on non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) programmes focused on employment and livelihoods (Lenner & Turner, 2019). The Jordan Compact in 2016 marked a significant shift in Jordan's approach to Syrian refugees:

- ▶ Jordan agreed to a previously contentious measure: issuing up to 200,000 work permits to Syrians.
- ▶ The EU eased import restrictions for Jordanian goods produced in SEZs with a minimum Syrian workforce (15% initially, rising to 25%). Additionally, the World Bank provided loans and investment climate improvements to attract businesses.
- ▶ The Compact aimed to improve the well-being of both refugees and Jordanians through job creation and education initiatives (Lenner & Turner, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

While Jordan traditionally relied on the U.S. for 'geostrategic rent' due to its strategic location, it has also become a 'refugee rentier state.' Jordan leverages its refugee population to secure additional international support (Almasri, 2021). However, Jordan's cooperation with the international community is not solely driven by altruism. Since 2016, when aid became linked to integration efforts, Jordan has viewed refugee integration as a means to secure foreign aid, maximising its 'refugee rent' (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023). Jordan's decision to open its labour market to Syrians was driven by substantial economic benefits from the EU, including support for refugee integration. Jordan saw this as a pathway to EU development aid and potentially a free trade agreement. Additionally, policymakers envisioned a two-pronged benefit:

- ▶ Zoning Syrian workers into 18 SEZs aimed to alleviate competition for Jordanian jobs.
- ▶ Syrian labour integration was intended to revitalise the manufacturing sector and address Jordanian unemployment, particularly among youth. (Lenner & Turner, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

Overall, international advisors see Syrian integration as a win-win: improving their lives, reducing aid needs by strengthening Jordan's economy, and deterring further migration to Europe (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Jordan's evolving policy can be characterised as a 'back-

scratching' strategy where Jordan receives significant international support and resources in exchange for a more open approach to refugee integration, potentially leading to longer-term Syrian residency in Jordan (Tsourapas, 2019).

### *Lebanon*

Lebanon's economic woes, political fractures, and weak central government severely hinder efforts to move beyond humanitarian aid and pursue a development approach (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2019).

The 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact envisioned a path towards controlled expansion of Syrian refugee integration into the Lebanese job market, aiming to improve Lebanon's overall stability (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2018). The EU committed significant financial aid (over EUR400 million) to Lebanon for 2016-2017, exceeding prior commitments. Similar to the Jordan Compact, the EU framed this as an opportunity to improve Lebanon's well-being. Beyond direct refugee assistance, the Compact provided significant aid to Lebanon as a host nation, including support for key sectors like agriculture, waste management, and legislative reform (Tsourapas, 2019).

However, the EU Compact's vision for Syrian refugee integration in Lebanon has faced significant challenges due to economic and political constraints (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2018):

- ▶ Despite promises, Lebanon issued only 200 work permits in 2017. The formal Lebanese labour market was already saturated, offering few opportunities even for Lebanese citizens.
- ▶ Internal political divisions hindered the development and implementation of cohesive policies to address the crisis.
- ▶ Previous government pledges to create jobs for refugees have not materialised.

Instead of pursuing refugee socioeconomic integration, Lebanon's government, under pressure from its own population, has increasingly focused on repatriation efforts (Kabbanji & Kabbanji, 2018). Since 2018, a range of measures have been implemented to pressure Syrians to return, including reduced public services, stricter residency permits, business crackdowns, increased raids and curfews, and evictions (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023).

Similar to Jordan, Lebanon can be categorised as a 'refugee rentier state.' Beyond traditional humanitarian aid and the UNHCR's initial role in registration (until 2015), Lebanon has secured significant resources from the international community, including EU financial aid, capacity-building programmes, and trade benefits. Since 2016, Lebanon has received one of the highest levels of aid per capita (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023).

However, Lebanon's approach to international assistance differs from Jordan's in key ways (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023):

- ▶ Lebanon's relationship with international NGOs is more tense. The decision to suspend the UNHCR's registration function in 2015 highlights this.
- ▶ Lebanon seeks to leverage its refugee population to secure increased international funding, while resisting pressure for refugee integration.

Overall, Lebanon's strategy as a 'refugee rentier state' aims to maximise international aid while maintaining control over its territory and refugee population (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023).

However, Lebanon's motivation for its non-integration policies goes beyond this 'back-scratching' strategy. Geopolitical concerns also play a significant role (Şahin-Mencütek & Tsourapas, 2023):

- ▶ Historically vulnerable to regional conflict due to its location and internal divisions, Lebanon prioritises a quick resolution to the Syrian civil war to ensure stability.
- ▶ Lebanon avoids taking on a more regional role in the conflict, focusing instead on preventing spillover effects from the war, even if it means cooperating with the Syrian regime on refugee management.
- ▶ Following Syrian advancements in the war by 2018, Russia, a key Syrian ally, proposed refugee repatriation from Lebanon and Jordan. Lebanese President Aoun opened communication with Assad's government, and Russia called for international support for repatriation efforts. Lebanon embraced the proposal, adopting a (yet-unimplemented) framework for Syrian return in 2020. Deportations of 'illegal' Syrian arrivals increased between 2019-2020, raising concerns about human rights violations upon return.

### *Türkiye*

Since 2016, Türkiye has implemented legal reforms facilitating Syrian refugee access to employment, education, and healthcare. This shift follows a period (2012-2016) when temporary protection status and the anticipated swift resolution of the Syrian conflict limited work permit applications. While the 2016 reforms eased the application process, work permits often come with temporary restrictions and target low-skilled sectors (Tanrikulu, 2021; Zetter & Ruadel, 2016).

Much like Jordan and Lebanon, Türkiye and the EU negotiated a 'deal' in 2016. Building on a EUR3 billion EU aid package provided in November 2015, the March 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement offered an additional EUR3 billion in exchange for stricter Turkish border controls and readmission of Syrians arriving in Greece. This deal, contingent on Türkiye being designated a 'safe third country,' additionally promised resettlement of up to 72,000 Syrians from Türkiye to Europe. The EU accelerated visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens, disbursed additional aid for Syrian refugees in Türkiye, and committed to upgrading the Customs Union (Tsourapas, 2019).

Türkiye's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis differed from Jordan's and Lebanon's. Turkish leaders employed a tactic of 'blackmailing', exemplified by threats to send more refugees to Europe. Leaked discussions show President Erdogan directly threatening to 'flood' Europe with Syrians if the EU did not meet Türkiye's demands. The government's leverage in its 'blackmailing' strategy appears to stem, in part, from elite perceptions of the country's strategic, geopolitical importance, particularly its proximity to Greece (Tsourapas 2019).

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This Knowledge for Development and Diplomacy (K4DD) Rapid Evidence Review is based on 6 days of desk-based research. The K4DD research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development.

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