

Research Articles

Jordan's Response to Hosting Syrian and Palestinian Refugees: A Comparative Analytical Framework¹

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Abstract

Various political, economic, social, and legal challenges develop and accumulate in Jordan due to its hosting of refugees, such as their unemployment, health, education, documentation, and dependency on international support. Considering the significant role Jordan plays in peacekeeping and refugee assistance, this study aims to understand the impact that Palestinian and Syrian refugees have had on the Jordanian community in a comparative way. Based on a systematic literature review and a systematic thinking approach, an analytical framework was developed to analyze each case and understand Jordan's situation with both refugee groups over several years. It can be concluded that the impact of both groups has been imposed on the host community on different levels: political, economic, social, and legal. The results indicate the occurrence of complications and ramifications due to the hosting process, which overwhelms Jordan's capacities and thus brings its ability to face any potential crisis into question. On another note, this emphasizes the importance and the need for international support. The researcher recommends that policy makers in the international community commit to supporting and monitoring Jordan's efforts with refugees.

Key Words:

Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees, Jordan, hosting community, comparative study

1 Introduction

Jordan has a significant history of granting refuge to those who have been persecuted. (Francis, 2015) Regional migration patterns have affected the country, particularly in the previous six decades. Refugees and migrants have arrived in waves since soon after the creation of the Kingdom, causing repetitive shifts in Jordan's political, economic, and social situation, resulting in a fast population increase and changes in the population's

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and society's composition.

Although Jordan is not a part of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it has established an open-door policy towards refugees. Jordan has the third-largest population of Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The bulk of the population lives in cities, while others are primarily concentrated in camps. At the same time, Jordan is considered to be the first host of Palestinian refugees in the world. Each of these massive influxes has impacted the host community differently based on the respective circumstances.

This study aims to analyze the impact of Syrian and Palestinian refugees on Jordan's political, economic, and social status by comparing the experiences of both groups via an in-depth analysis using grey literature to extend the scope and include more relevant studies, resulting in a more comprehensive overview of the current situation. The following two subsections will provide a background on the Jordanian context of hosting refugees and on the demographics of the Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Jordan.

1.1 The Jordanian Context of Hosting Refugees

Jordan, thought to be a resource-poor kingdom, has been considered a safe haven for refugees since its early beginning, as it has the third-largest population of Syrian refugees and is considered the first refuge for Palestinians. Taking the history of Jordan hosting refugees since 1948 into account draws a clearer image of the economic burden on the Jordanian government's shoulders. Rising unemployment rates, higher food prices, a lack of adequate health services, reduced subsidies, and a substantial demand for these necessities among both citizens and refugees have led to an increase in government spending and budget deficits. Despite being surrounded by chaotic political situations in Palestine, Syria, Iraq and the Sinai Peninsula, Jordan seeks to maintain peace and stability, while being in the eye of the Arab cyclone (Comolet, 2014). Unlike other countries, Jordan has avoided large-scale regime change rallies, maintains a strong military for regional balance, and acts as a reliable ally for global powers. It hosts refugees from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, serves as an intermediary in regional conflicts, and provides skilled Jordanian workers to fill positions in the Gulf, all contributing to its relative stability and strategic importance in the Middle East.

Jordan responds to refugees in agreement with the Jordanian government's Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was signed in 1998 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1997) and lays out the rights and duties of refugees in Jordan. Likewise, refugees are treated in accordance with the Foreigners and Residence Law of 1973, which permits refugees to stay in Jordan until they are able to return to their home country or be resettled in a third country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.).

A number of internal and external motives and pressures affect the country's policies for dealing with influxes of refugees. For example, the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention affected the perception and protection policies for Palestinian refugees, as it excluded Palestinians from repatriation by excluding refugees who are under protection and assistance of any U.N. agency other than UNHCR. Although Jordan had no obligation, as it did not sign the Convention, its policy toward welcoming Palestinians was positive. Political integration symbolled by citizenship was a clear proof of this policy (Al Husseini, 2013). The Kingdom has played an active role in not only helping refugees obtain their essential

needs and services, but also in building their resilience and future. The Jordan Compact signed at the London Conference in 2016 aims to transform the humanitarian aid response into a development opportunity in education, investment, and job creation for both Jordanian and Syrian refugees. Such a compact, under the supervision of the host country, brings together the international humanitarian and development partners to reach more effective results and to mitigate the challenges faced (Barbelet et al., 2018). However, Jordan has both benefited from and been burdened by the Syrian refugee crisis, as it has received significant help for refugee services. Moreover, one of the results of the Syrian influx of refugees was the establishment of the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF). Host countries, like Jordan, leveraged the Syrian refugee crisis by getting the international community to establish such a facility, which helped Jordan in securing concessional loans (Global Concessional Financing Facility, 2019).

1.2 The Demographics of Palestinian and Syrian Refugees in Jordan

According to Jordan's 2018 Labor Force Survey (LFS), the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan are under the age of 30, with children under the age of 15 accounting for nearly half of the Syrian refugee population. When the data is broken down by gender, there are no notable differences, with males accounting for around 50.5 percent of the total Syrian refugee population.

For a variety of reasons, including identification, politics, and census criteria, estimating the demographics of Palestinians in Jordan is challenging. Nevertheless, because Palestinians in Jordan have the right to the Jordanian citizenship (see table 1: Status of non-refugee Jordanians, Palestinian-Jordanians, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and Syrian refugees), the number of Palestinians in Jordan cannot be determined through a population census. According to the official surveys and statistics by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Jordan has the highest proportion of Palestinian refugees in UNRWA's operational zones, and the population is described as young, productive, and educated (Al Husseini, 2013). However, going back to 1949, Palestinians arriving in Jordan worked mainly in agricultural activities, cultivating crops and animal farming. Besides farming, a small percentage of Palestinians were educated and worked to improve education among the country. Women's roles at that time were confined to household activities and cultivating plants.

Jordan hosts 720,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). However, the actual number is estimated at around 1.3 million when those not registered are taken into account (ACAPAS, 2024). On the other hand, Jordan currently hosts 2,307,011 registered refugees. Palestinian refugees, the largest number of Palestinian refugees of all UNRWA operational fields (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, n.d. -d). Most, but not all, have full citizenship. Additionally, there are thousands of Palestinians not registered with UNRWA, and it is challenging to accurately tally their numbers. Moreover, over 17,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria also live in Jordan after the Syrian war (Medical Aid for Palestinians, 2016).

2 Literature Review

This section of the study will be a thorough review of the related literature on the issues of contextual factors; the political, economic and social impacts; and the legal situation of

the Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Accordingly, the topics of Syrian and Palestinian refugees will be discussed separately.

2.1 Syria

Syria's civil war has caused a massive inflow of Syrian refugees into neighboring countries and beyond. Jordan has welcomed a significant number of Syrian refugees, potentially bringing the overall number to 1.3 million (ACAPAS, 2024). Most of these Syrian refugees live outside of camps, mainly in Amman and northern governorates (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). Nowadays, after over 12 years of the brutal crisis in Syria, the situation is still complex and unpredictable, and the conflict is ongoing in numerous places.

Following the Arab Spring uprisings in the late 2010s, gunfire occurred in Syria in March 2011, ushering in a brutal civil war. Protests against the Al-Assad regime demanded an end to his authoritarian practices. The Syrian government used violence to suppress such acts, which led to the expansion of opposition, causing an extraordinary civil war (Yacoubian, 2021).

The cultural and linguistic similarities, along with the tribal connections and family ties between Syrians and Jordanians, have made it easier for Syrian refugees to integrate into Jordanian society, and the Jordanian military has kept itself from incursions into Syrian territory. Jordan first took a welcoming approach to Syrian refugees (2011-2013), but after the terrorist activities in Syria, including the horrifying execution of the Jordanian pilot Muath Al Kasasbeh by ISIS, Jordan closed its two official entry points with Syria once they came under the control of the armed opposition: the Daraa border crossing in October 2013 and the Nassib border crossing in April 2015 (Fallah et al., 2021).

Moreover, the Jordan Response Plan (JRP) has been continuously implemented to respond for Syrian refugees' needs since 2015, reflecting Jordan's exemplary situation as a host country. JRP is a nationally owned and led plan of the Jordanian government, which started in 2015 as a bridge between resilience and needed services for Syrian refugees. It urges better support, for both Syrian refugees and the host community, in education, environment, health, livelihoods, shelter, and transportation (Francis, 2015). Other JRPs were followed, including the JRP 2020-2022 (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan/Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, n.d. -a) and its COVID-related update, the JRP 2021 (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan/Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation., n.d. -b).

2.1.1 Political Impact

Kirui & Mwaruvie (2012), Salehya (2008) and Gleditsch (2006) suggest that the influx of refugees evokes a strained political relationship between receiving and sending countries. The inflow of refugees shapes several types of conflicts within receiving states. The arrival of refugees contributes to various conflicts within host countries, such as tensions with the host government as refugees often organize groups to oppose their home country or government. Additionally, conflicts arise between refugees and host communities due to the competitive relationship between refugees and locals, particularly when refugees receive superior (and free) services compared to citizens. In addition, civil wars in neighboring countries extend the tension to receiving countries, especially when camps are close to the borders of two countries. However, Jordan's experience with Palestinian

and Iraqi refugees has a key role in building Jordan's Syrian refugee policy.

Jordan's policy focuses on forming alliances with a diverse range of players while avoiding escalating hostilities with both neighboring and far-flung countries. For instance, despite the fact that much of the international community continues to isolate Syria, Jordan has established trading relations with it. Even though the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, a policy of the United States that diplomatic and coercive economic means should be utilized to compel the government of Bashar Al-Assad to halt its murderous attacks on the Syrian people and to support a transition to a government in Syria that respects the rule of law, human rights, and peaceful co-existence with its neighbors (Madouni & Derradji, 2020), restricts business with Syria, the Jordanian-Syrian Free Zone was reopened in December 2021 (The Jordan Times, 2021).

According to Weiner (1992), the impact of refugee presence varies according to three factors: First, the legitimate nature of the existing system, as the political background of host countries has a significant impact on the settlement of refugees. Second, the degree to which ethnic groups are utilized in political activity, because utilizing refugees as ethnic tools may escalate conflicts in host nations. And finally, the host countries' leaders' tactics to sustain power, as while conflict creates refugees, refugees themselves may also cause conflict.

It is asserted that poverty, unemployment, and a poor quality of life make refugees and internally displaced people more likely to join radical and terrorist groups (Haider, 2014). Criminal threats continue to jeopardize Jordan's security, and the Jordanian government continues to address all border violations and other crimes such as smuggling and drug trafficking. However, since Jordan's environment as a host country was supportive and protective toward Syrian refugees, refugees helped in preventing and minimizing terrorist acts.

2.1.2 *Economic Impact*

In general, the negative and positive economic impact of refugees in host countries is still controversial. Salehyan (2008) argues that civil conflicts in neighboring states result in adverse repercussions. In the case of Syrian refugees in Jordan, the economic burden is intensified due to the poor conditions, and refugees competing with the citizens for public services, job opportunities, and natural resources. Additionally, the probability of health problems increases due to sanitation problems and infectious diseases among refugees.

Jordan and Syria's economic relationship is mutual, and due to the Syrian civil war, Jordan's economic growth and infrastructure has been affected, causing an imbalance of resources. Its fragile economy makes Jordan more vulnerable to the impact of an extreme influx of refugees (Luck, 2016). Additionally, Jordan lost its main financial trade route and transportation networks, which resulted in finding more expensive alternatives thus affecting the local prices. In order to lessen the negative impact of such a phenomenon, Jordanian citizens were forced to pay additional taxes. The Central Bank of Jordan (2016) said that there was a 42% increase in taxes after the Syrian crisis. On the one hand, the effect of the Syrian conflict on the region raised investors' fears and doubts; however, on the other hand, Syrian refugees who are investors and owners of economic activities moved their capitals to Jordan (Luck, 2016). Consequently, Jordan's foreign investment has been harmed less than other economic tiers.

Employment-wise, most Jordanians perceive that Syrian refugees have increased the unemployment rate and have deteriorated working conditions (ACAPS, 2016). Since 2016, Jordan has provided limited worker rights to Syrian refugees in five sectors, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, food and beverage services, as well as wholesale and retail trade (Barbelet et al., 2018). Syrians were not officially allowed to work until 2016, when the European Union (EU) and Jordan, as an annex to EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities, signed the EU-Jordan Compact (Almasri 2021), which includes humanitarian relief and macro-financial support, as well as trade concessions from the EU (European Commission, 2019). Refugees interested in working outside of camps have to obtain work permits, but such permits are not required in the Al Za'atari and Azraq camps.

As for education, Jordan has opened 98 additional double-shifted schools to alleviate pressures on classroom size (IMPACT, 2014). Furthermore, there are vocational training possibilities available within the Al Za'atri and Azraq refugee camps, which are primarily administered by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and UNICEF through four training centers. However, Syrian families encounter a number of challenges in enrolling and keeping all of their children in school. Distance to school, availability of seats in a school, financial and economic barriers, missed education, and so on are examples of social, economic, and educational impediments.

Jordan's network of health-care centers was also affected by the inflow of Syrian refugees. These facilities are experiencing overcrowding and a shortage of medicines and immunizations. Jordan's whole healthcare system is under pressure, financially and in terms of service capacity (Alshoubaki & Harris, 2018). In Jordan, Syrian refugees registered with the UN can receive free medical care for acute and infectious diseases from a variety of nonprofits operating in the camps. However, unregistered Syrian refugees must pay for medical care and supplies. Outside the camps, refugees in Jordan can receive healthcare like the non-insured Jordanian in hospitals and medical facilities run by the Ministry of Health, and UNHCR is ramping up refugee use of public health services.

The Jordanian housing market was also negatively affected by the Syrian influx, resulting in a surge in rental prices. As it became inevitable that the influx would only grow, the UNHCR and Jordan's government rushed to open the Al Za'atari refugee camp in July 2012. By August, the town's population had grown rapidly. Al Za'atari has now developed into one of the region's most densely populated areas, with 80,000 inhabitants, previously 120,000 (Carlisle, 2022). It is Jordan's fourth-largest 'city' and was once considered the second-largest camp in the world, and now is considered the world's fourth-largest refugee camp (World Food Program USA, 2023). To ease pressure on Al Za'atari camp, Azraq camp was opened in 2014 to become a home for 38,063 Syrian refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021a). Many international partners, governmental partners, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working together to coordinate services inside the camps.

2.1.3 Social Impact

There is a potential effect on the social and cultural structure of the host communities resulting from hosting refugees who might have different values, traditions, or social norms (Fajth et al., 2019). In parallel, host communities may have some social barriers such as racism which definitely creates social tension between the host communities and

refugees. However, as in the case of Syrian refugees, sociocultural tension is diminished when refugees and host communities share the same culture, religion, and language because they are homogeneous, and the opportunity for social integration is high (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007). Despite this, strained social relationships between citizens and refugees may occur from the competition surrounding the offered services, limited job opportunities, housing, public services, and inequalities among them. The population pressure created by Syrian refugees' existence entails demographic changes accompanied by unhealthy social practices such as child labor, violation of law, and underage marriage.

2.1.4 Legal Situation

Under the direction of Jordan's government and based on the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding, UNHCR manages the refugee response in a joint effort involving donors, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, community-based groups, refugees, and host communities. "Currently eight sectors provide support within the Jordan refugee response" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021b). Few extensive studies have been undertaken in Jordan to provide a full knowledge of the key drivers of host community tensions. The multi-sectoral REACH assessment intended to identify where tensions have emerged in northern Jordan as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, and how they could be alleviated through social cohesion and resilience programs, in order to close this information gap (UNICEF, UNHCR, & British Embassy Amman, 2014).

On 13 January 2013, the government established a department for Syrian refugee camps affairs which was later modified and renamed "Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013). This directorate is responsible for coordinating refugee aid initiatives between the Jordanian government and foreign and local NGOs and organizations, as well as donor support. In February 2016, at an international donor conference in London, the international community agreed to increase external support for public and private sector job creation. Donors agreed to fund job-creation initiatives and to urge municipalities and communities in their own countries to collaborate more closely with authorities and communities in refugee-hosting nations. As a result, Jordan established a vision for mutual obligations and responsibilities with the international community, as well as the creation of 200,000 work possibilities in Jordan for Syrian nationals (European Parliament, 2017).

In the case of Syria, all refugees in Jordan must have a valid Ministry of Interior (MOI) card from the area in which they are residing. A valid MOI card is required to use government services, particularly those related to health and education. In addition, refugees must have a UNHCR asylum seeker certificate in order to receive many of the services and support offered by humanitarian organizations. It is worth noting that the Jordanian government decided to make it easier for Syrian investors to come to Jordan by allowing the Jordan Investment Board to grant them ID cards (JIB), as the Syrian investments help improve the Jordanian economy (ILO, 2015).

2.2 Palestine

Following the events of 1948, when the international community recognized Israel as an independent state, the Palestinian diaspora began, as many Palestinians fled to neighboring countries. Jordan hosts various Palestinian refugee groups, mainly due to the phenomenon of the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank and disengagement from it in

1988 (Al Hussein, 2013).

Palestine was assigned and promised to be a home for Jews through the Belfour Declaration in 1917. Jews started to settle in Palestine from all over the world, and their presence was intensified after World War II. The UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 1947, which gave the proposed Jewish state 56 percent of Palestine's area, including most of the Arab land, was the driving force behind the involuntary displacement of the Palestinian populations. Both wars, 1948 and 1967, resulted in large numbers of refugees. UNRWA has defined a Palestine refugee as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 War." (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, n.d. -d). This definition excludes those displaced by any other conflict, including the Six Day war in 1967, who are unable to receive UNRWA assistance because they do not match UNRWA's definition of a refugee.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan received waves of Palestinian refugees, and thirteen refugee camps were established to accommodate the influx of refugees. The DPA (Department of Palestinian Affairs) recognizes and considers all of them, although UNRWA recognizes just ten of them (Tawil, 2009).

2.2.1 *Political Impact*

Jordan's political legitimacy is based on the foundations of east Jordanian identity. The prospect of Jordan becoming an alternate country for Palestinians has loomed big in Jordan's political psychology since its inception.

After Israel seized control of the West Bank in 1967, Palestinian fighters known as 'al-fedayeen' relocated to Jordan and intensified attacks on Israel and Israeli-occupied territory, and Jordan found itself forced to deal with the PLO inside its territory. Supported by the joint victory of the 'Alkaramah battle' against Israel, the PLO strength in Jordan grew, and their political interference in internal issues increased, causing tension and clashes with the Jordanian government, which later led to a war (Aruri, 1985). After a short period of the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan, led by King Hussein, Jordan launched a plan for a federative relationship between the east and the west banks. According to the plan, an independent Palestinian area in the West Bank, which would include Arab Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and an autonomous Jordanian region in the East Bank were to create a federation (Nevo & Pappé, 1994). Jordan and the West Bank's administrative separation was announced in a royal speech in 1988 (Brand, 1995). As a result, 1.5 million Palestinians who held Jordanian passports became citizens of Palestine.

2.2.2 *Economic Impact*

Palestinian citizenship has had a significant impact on all resources, services, and infrastructure since it gave each Palestinian the same political and civil rights as Jordanians. Some claim that Palestinian refugees were awarded citizenship in order to better contribute to the country's development (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

As Palestinian refugees make up a significant part of Jordan's population (Chen, 2009), they hence are a vital piece of the country's economic structure in terms of products and services output. Palestinian refugees, who were mostly aid beneficiaries with no connection to the local labor market when they arrived in the aftermath of the 1948 and

1967 wars, are now deeply integrated into Jordanian working life. Palestinian refugees who were not awarded Jordanian citizenship were given a temporary passport upon arrival, which is renewed at the decision of the government. Such groups, and a huge number of refugees in general, lack access to reliable employment opportunities.

Regarding education, The Ministry of Education was responsible for creating a curriculum system for both government schools and UNRWA schools, which were established in December 1949 to meet the needs of Palestinian refugees throughout the country (Jaber, 2023). Palestinian refugees both inside and outside of camps are allowed to attend government schools, UNRWA's schools, or private ones once they can demonstrate that they are living in a camp. However, they are treated as foreigners and must pay their tuition in foreign currency; therefore, the majority find it challenging to enroll at Jordanian universities.

The gap between inside-camp refugees and outside-camp refugees in relation to education is quite noticeable. This can be linked to the economic situation of families inside and outside of camps. While most of the families try to finish their basic schooling level, the attainment of post-secondary level education differs from one place to another. Nowadays, after 74 years of Palestinian presence in Jordan, there are about 169 schools run by UNRWA (UNRWA, n.d. -b). Palestinian refugees can also be enrolled in all other government schools and the private ones just like any Jordanian.

Jordan is well-known in the Arab world for its medical clinics, and medical tourism has become a popular attraction for the country. Healthcare for Palestinian refugees is provided by UNRWA in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Health, whereas Palestinian refugees who have obtained Jordanian nationality have the same rights as Jordanians, including healthcare. One common form of insurance for Palestinian outside-camp refugees is the Civil Insurance Program (CIP). University insurance, Royal Medical Services, and private health insurance are other forms of insurance in which Palestinian refugees are enrolled. The use of healthcare services varies between inside-camps refugees and outside-camps refugees. Inside-camp refugees tend to use available UNRWA's services and clinics because they can easily access such clinics, as well as the affordability of such services. Whereas outside-camps refugees are more likely to head for government clinics or private hospitals in case of emergency, depending on the type of insurance they have and financial abilities (Tiltneš & Zhang, 2013).

Palestinian refugees in Jordan reside inside camps as well as in Jordanian cities and towns. When the Palestinian influx started in Jordan, their shelters used to be tents inside camps. Later on, the UNRWA and the DPA started to build more suitable shelters to meet refugees' needs. Nowadays, most Palestinian refugees are outside camps like other Jordanian citizens who live in apartments or own their dwellings. The housing inside camps is described to be small and low standard, with environmental and economic challenges causing the rent prices to be lower than outside the camps (Tiltneš & Zang, 2013). Conversely, housing outside of camps can be described to be diverse, with lower challenges and higher rents. In terms of ownership, the only people who lack ownership rights are those who have temporary passports. They must seek a ministerial council for permission and include a local Jordanian partner in any property they own (El-Abed, 2009). As for camps, there are three unauthorized Palestinian camps in Jordan in addition to the 10 UNRWA-managed or 'official' camps: Madaba, Prince Hassan (Nasser), and Sukhneh.

2.2.3 Social Impact

Refugees from Palestine who fled to Jordan have found ease with socially integrating and being part of the society, as they share the same language and similar societal norms. For example, Palestinian refugees outside-camp are not fundamentally distinct from Jordanians in their marriage traditions. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Palestinians had faced some challenges with integrating in the society due mainly to some political reasons. For example, they faced some discrimination in the recruitment and rewards strategies (Al Hussein & Bocco, 2009). However, the majority of Palestinians in Jordan are now fully integrated. They represent a cross-section of Jordanian society in terms of socioeconomic status. Palestinian refugees with Jordanian citizenship, in particular, enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as Jordanians. Despite integrating into society, earning employment and property, and comprising the majority of Jordan's middle class, Palestinians have maintained their Palestinian identity and their claim to one day return to their homeland (Brand, 1995).

2.2.4 Legal Situation

UNRWA, established in 1949, had the opportunity to identify who can be considered a displaced person (refugee). The need to limit UNRWA aid recipients led to the creation of the definition.

“UNHCR’s mandate covers Palestinians who are refugees within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which could include Palestine refugees as defined by UNRWA. UNHCR normally takes up the case of Palestinian refugees only when they are outside UNRWA’s area of operations” (UNRWA, 2007).

UNRWA was responsible for the social development of refugees after the Jordanian government took over the physical part of the improvement process in the refugee camps. It tried various social betterment ideas to promote the mental health, awareness, and self-esteem of the inhabitants in order to evoke decision-making skills, as well as create independent people who are able to deal with their environmental challenges.

After the west and east banks were united and the Kingdom’s laws were unified, Palestinian refugees were considered Jordanian citizens. The 1954 law conditions identified Jordanian citizen as

“[a]ny person who, not being Jewish, possessed Palestinian nationality before 15 May 1948 and was a regular resident in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan between 20 December 1949 and 16 February 1954” (The Kingdom of Jordan, 1954).

Therefore, many Palestinians hold the Jordanian nationality on this basis. Palestinians who came to Jordan after 1954 were not granted citizenship, such as refugees in the Gaza Camp.

Initially, Jordan did not record the number of Palestinians who were displaced in 1967 since they merely migrated from the West Bank to the East Bank of Jordan. But when the Jordanian Ministry of Occupied Territories of Displaced Persons requested for registration in the 1970s, 240,000 displaced people responded. The majority of them were registered with UNRWA, meaning they had been displaced twice (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2001). Jordanian citizenship is held by 96% of Palestinian refugees living outside the camps (Tiltne & Zhang, 2013). Moreover, almost all non-citizens have a Jordanian temporary passport, with no national number, to ease their movement and their socio-

economic status. Palestinian refugees who came to Jordan after 1967 from Gaza were not given citizenship due to political reasons between Jordan, Egypt, and Israel.

3 Methodology

This study used a systematic literature review to collect data, which is going to describe a series of past events to understand the present and anticipate the future. This method consists of many steps, such as formulating the idea, developing a research question, clarifying the validity and reliability of the data, developing an outline, and, finally, collecting the data. The data collected throughout this approach depends on the data synthesis: accept or reject data and reconcile conflicting evidence to produce an issue paper.

In this study, a systematic literature review is used to analyze the situation based on major contextual factors (political, economic, social, and legal), providing supportive information concerning the impact of Palestinian and Syrian refugees on Jordan. The goal of a systematic literature review is to provide a knowledge base, which will assist in directing the study and conducting a research gap analysis.

3.1 Search Strategy

Systematic reviews of refugee studies and refugee reports are utilized to assemble the scientific evidence and integrate the analytical facts to assess the impact of Syrian and Palestinian refugees on Jordan's hosting communities. Major databases such as the UNHCR portal, ProQuest, the United Nations refugee agency's database, the Jordan MOPIC database, the Central Bank of Jordan database, and official news agencies are employed.

3.2 Framework

A Systems Thinking Approach aims to discover the behaviors of a complex system (a whole society). It examines the system's components and the relationship between such components at all levels (Carey et al., 2015). In this study, the aim of using such an analytical framework is to enable and help Jordanian policymakers in assembling information from previous studies and past experiences, comparing Jordan's situation when hosting Palestinians and Syrians to anticipate Jordan's ability of coping with any possible crisis in the region.

This analytical framework was developed based on the following steps (Alshoubaki, & Harris, 2018):

- *Step one:* Develop a framework based on the contextual factors that influence the overall impact of a receiving state's acceptance of refugees. To build the analytical framework, political, economic, social and legal aspects were analyzed.
- *Step two:* Identify the design of the framework considering a Systems Thinking Approach. A systematic review will be used to provide a comprehensive summary of existing literature on the topic, while including gray literature will be used to help capture additional sources that may not be found in traditional databases (Newman & Gough, 2020). The literature was diverse, including articles, humanitarian agency studies, governmental reports, and official news regarding Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

- *Step three:* Analyze, synthesize and compare the content of all literature reviews. The analysis process entails the dividing of the components of a complex phenomenon to facilitate understanding, while the synthesis process is the combination of all the components of a phenomenon to shape a comprehensible form of a case that is subject to a study (Ritchey, 1991). A comparison between past events, and their breakdown leads to an analysis of Jordan's current situation and future possibilities.
- *Step four:* Form conclusions from the collected and analyzed data to provide a comprehensive image and reference through giving recommendations to be taken into account in case of any similar events in the future.

4 Discussion

4.1 Comparison

The impact of refugee groups on host communities has always been an issue, which might lead to serious complications. One specific example of the impact of Syrian refugees on Jordanian host communities is the strain on the country's healthcare system. Jordan's healthcare infrastructure has struggled to accommodate the increased demand for medical services due to the influx of refugees. Hospitals and clinics, especially those located in close proximity to refugee camps, have faced challenges in providing timely and adequate healthcare to both Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees. This strain has resulted in longer waiting times for medical appointments, overcrowded facilities, and shortages of essential medical supplies and personnel. The majority of previous studies focus on refugees' situations in the host countries without highlighting the political, economic, social, and legal impacts occurring in the host community. Due to its geographical location, Jordan was the first refuge for Palestinians in 1948 and was a source of survival for Syrians in 2011. In parallel, Jordan's stability is a top priority; therefore, the government's abilities to help refugees is refrained to multiple economic political factors.

The time difference between the Palestinian and Syrian crises affects the whole hosting process. Each period of time has its own background, challenges, and possibilities based on certain factors such as the status of the economy, political stability, and international support. From one side, the Syrian crisis's political implications on Jordan were fewer than those of the Palestinian case. Therefore, Jordan's strategy toward other refugee groups extrapolated from its approach with the Palestinian refugee crisis. The Syrian crisis experienced external interference from other countries and militias on the Syrian-Jordanian borders, which required a political and military response, especially after the terrorist attacks. However, Jordan has kept itself away from any incursion into Syrian territory (Francis, 2015). In contrast, the Palestinian-Israeli issue occurred shortly after the Kingdom's independence. At that time, Jordan had no experience dealing with refugees, and many internal political threats occurred. As mentioned previously, the PLO tried to interfere in the internal affairs, imposing a state within a state and causing a real conflict, which resulted in the expulsion of the PLO along with the death of many Palestinians (Tristram, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, after long periods of displacement, refugees will seek ways to be engaged in the political life. The difference between Syrian refugees and Palestinian in this case is due to their legal status and documentation. Since King Hussein aimed to integrate Palestinian Jordanians into the Jordanian state structure, the majority of Palestinians

obtained nationality and ID numbers, allowing them to take part in political life (Al Hussein, 2013). On the other hand, Syrian refugees in Jordan are not allowed to participate in any matter of politics. Jordan has welcomed Syrian refugees without having the obligation to do so, as it did not sign the 1951 Convention or any refugee-related convention. Therefore, the possibility of Syrian refugees becoming part of the Jordanian fabric is difficult due to various reasons, primarily political and economic ones.

In terms of political status and relations, and due to its supportive and protective environment toward refugees, Jordan remains a stable country despite the surrounding violent events and conflicts in the region, looking to refugees as an opportunity for the Kingdom's development. However, Jordan's economy and infrastructure was deeply injured by hosting large influxes of refugees. The high demands for public services and infrastructure resulting from the refugee influxes have put a spoke in the Jordanian development wheel. As a result, labor markets have become more competitive and tensions between refugees and their host communities have escalated (Alshoubaki & Harris, 2018).

It is vital to understand the development of the international community and the impact of media to see the underlying differences between the Syrian and Palestinian refugees' journeys inside Jordan. Back in the 1950s, the UN organizations were few, and international community involvement was limited compared to the current situation. The Palestinian case was mainly adopted by the UNRWA, with the help of the UNHCR outside UNRWA's area of operations. At that time, the role of the press was limited, there were no social media campaigns, and there was an absence of CBOs and NGOs.

The Syrian crisis, taking place 63 years after the Palestinian one, would certainly experience great differences in terms of media press, as well as international support impacts. For instance, UNHCR co-chairs eight different UN agencies and INGOs, providing support for Syrian refugees in various sectors. Such agencies collaborate with NGOs and CBOs to reach more refugees and vulnerable groups. Additionally, as a result of Jordan's previous experiences hosting refugees, the development of refugee response plans, and assessment frameworks to help targeting refugees' needs was easier. Furthermore, the media press development helped in promoting refugee voices and revealing the real image of human rights violations, which assisted in raising funds and sympathy toward refugees worldwide (McCann et al., 2023).

Over time, the circumstances have shifted for Syrian and Palestinian refugees as a result of reduced funding, which stems from political tensions and the emergence of additional crises globally. This decrease affects refugees' situation in Jordan, the citizens of the host country, as well as communities' infrastructure intensively for many reasons. Jordan's limited resources and poor economic situation comes at the forefront of these reasons. Jordan suffers from water scarcity, which is considered to be a life threat for all its inhabitants, due to the rapid growth of its population (Francis, 2015). Moreover, refugees' different perceptions of water use overwhelmed the already drained water resource, causing the threat to become a more pressing. Jordan's geographic location has also affected its situation; sharing borders with both Palestine and Syria intensified the security threats and affected the Jordanian import-export trade. The historical relationship between Jordan and Palestine comes from the religious value of Jerusalem, as well as the agricultural trading between them. Some Palestinians used to work in Jordan and go back to their homes at the end of the day and vice versa. On the other hand, Syria was a main

trade route between Jordan and Europe, whereas Jordan was its link with the Gulf in return. These relationships reflect how deep the existence of refugees affects the Jordanian community and economy (Francis, 2015).

When comparing the economic impact of Palestinian and Syrian refugees on Jordan, it is essential to understand and analyze each group's documentation and legal status first. Such analysis will help in understanding each group's rights, obligations, access to services, and the impact they can impose on the Jordanian economic structure. As categorized below, Palestinians entering Jordan on several programs, the unification of the two banks in 1950 as well as the Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank in 1988, affected the legal status they obtained. Table 1 below clarifies the status of Jordanians, Palestinian-Jordanians, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, and Syrian refugees.

As shown in the mentioned Table 1 below, the differences are not confined between Syrian and Palestinian refugees, they even occur between the different groups of Palestinian refugees. It can be noticed that the political involvement of Palestinians who obtained the Jordanian passport with ID number is the same as non-refugee Jordanians, whereas Syrian refugees have no access to political participation. Therefore, it is normal for Palestinian refugees to have a greater impact on the political level than that of Syrian refugees. However, due to political and security reasons, some Palestinian refugee groups do not have such access, such as those residing in the West Bank and those who came from Gaza.

The employment impact of Palestinian and Syrian refugees varies according to several factors. In 1948, the Jordanian economic infrastructure was in the establishment phase, and the employment sectors were mainly agricultural, having work collaborations with Palestinians. When Palestinian refugees came to Jordan, many of them had already built connections with the labor market through trades, others sought for any possible opportunity because there were no official legal restrictions for work opportunities at that time. On the other hand, Syrian refugees entered Jordan shortly after the global financial crisis 2008. The economic infrastructure and sectors were in the recovery phase, suffering from many challenges. The Syrian refugees' existence made the scenario much harder and put the Jordanian government in a precarious situation with high demands for basic life needs and high unemployment rates, thus overstretching the resources (Francis, 2015).

While the majority of Palestinian refugees were granted full employment rights, Jordan maintained restrictions to the employment access of Syrian refugees in order to prevent escalating tensions between citizens and refugee groups. Eventually, the Syrian crisis became protracted, and the refugees' needs for employment appeared to be more pressing, causing more challenges for the Jordanian government. Yet, Jordan's burdened economy needed external international support to embed such a group into the labor market through various programs. The employment impact of Syrian refugees is visible through the increased rates of unemployment from 12.9% in 2011 to 16.85% in 2019 (O'Neill, 2024). This increase cannot be solely attributed to the presence of Syrian refugees in Jordan. While it's true that the influx of refugees has added pressure to the labor market, there are various other contributing factors to consider. These include the overall increase in population, regional conflicts impacting economic stability, and potential decreases in funding or investment in job creation initiatives. Additionally, Syrian

refugees often have limited access to formal employment opportunities and may engage in informal or low-skilled labor that may not be captured in official unemployment statistics. Therefore, while the presence of Syrian refugees may contribute to shifts in the labor market dynamics, it is essential to consider the broader context and multiple factors influencing unemployment rates in Jordan.

Table 1. Status of Non-refugee Jordanians, Palestinian-Jordanians, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and Syrian Refugees

	Non-Refugee Jordanians	Jordanian- Palestinians			Palestinians of Gaza	Syrian Refugees
		Refugees of 1948	Refugees of 1967			
Residence	Permanent residency in Jordan	Permanent residency in Jordan	Permanent residency in Jordan	Permanent residency in the West Bank	Permanent residency in Jordan	Residency in Jordan under conditions for investor card holder / Mol card holders
Passport	Five-year passport with national ID number	Five-year passport with national ID number	Five-year passport with national ID number	Five-year passport without national ID number	Two-year temporary passport	No Jordanian passport, Mol cards
Card of Crossing	-	-	Yellow Card / family reunification	Green Card	Blue Card in case of family reunification	-
Political Rights	Full access	Full access	Full access	No access	No access	No access
Employment	Full access	Full access	Full access	Need a work permit	Need a work permit	Limited work permits within specific fields
Education	Public services	Public and UNRWA services	Public and UNRWA services	University education payment in foreign fees	University education payment in foreign fees	Public and UNHCR services (for Mol card holder and UNHCR asylum seeker certificate)
Healthcare	Public services	Public and UNRWA services	Public and UNRWA services	As uninsured Jordanian	UNRWA services	As uninsured Jordanian and UNHCR services (for Mol card holder and UNHCR asylum seeker certificate)
Ownership	Freedom of ownership	Freedom of ownership	Freedom of ownership	Ownership with the approval of a ministerial council under partnership conditions	Ownership with the approval of a ministerial council under partnership conditions	Under conditions for investor card holder

Taking into consideration the Jordanian economic background and the limited resources, the deficit Jordan faces is reflected through their absolute necessity for international support. This can be clearly viewed through having the UNRWA as an essential body supporting all the needs of Palestinian refugees, as well as the UNHCR and other INGOs providing services for Syrian refugees. Education, shelters, healthcare, and all other complementary services are provided for both refugee groups as a result of a joint effort between the Jordanian governmental bodies and the international support organizations.

4.2 Neglected Population Group

Despite all the efforts by Jordan and the international community, there is a neglected group which is considered to be stateless with minimal access to their rights and even their basic needs. This group has suffered from conflicts and wars twice: once when they were forced to leave their home (Palestine) and settle in a neighboring country (Syria), and the second time when they were forced to leave Syria after the civil war in 2011, seeking refuge away from death. In Jordan, the border has been closed to Palestinians from Syria. The difficulties Palestinians confront when attempting to leave Syria enhance their vulnerability in the Syrian crisis.

Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) are one of the most vulnerable populations in the Syrian conflict. As it was claimed that their camps were hiding 'terrorists', they were attacked and blasted, causing many of them to be internally displaced or seek safety in surrounding countries (Al-Khatib, 2021). In early 2013, Jordan's government began a policy of blocking entrance to Palestinians escaping the Syrian conflict. This prevented the flow of Palestinian refugees from Syria into Jordan, aggravating the extreme vulnerability of Palestinians seeking asylum in Syria, as well as those who made it into Jordan (Medical Aid for Palestinians, 2016).

Non-admission and refoulement rates for Palestinian refugees from Syria have been extraordinarily high, suggesting an explicitly political dimension to Jordan's refugee policy (Abu Moghli, et al., 2015). The Syrian crisis has wreaked havoc on the Palestinian community in Syria, which now faces new challenges in post-conflict Syria in terms of reintegrating back into society. The number of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria registering with UNRWA in Jordan is projected to approach 20,000 by the end of 2014 (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, n.d. -a). Through the emergency response, UNRWA provides them with relief and social and protection services. They also access UNRWA education and health services, overwhelming the existing capacities of the agency as the numbers grow.

The PLO and Jordan's leadership have a long history of animosity, but there are other reasons at play in Jordan's systemic marginalization against PRS (Kassim, 1997). To begin with, Jordanian authorities are unwilling to open its borders to more PRS or grant them any rights, fearing that they may choose to stay in Jordan rather than return to Syria. Jordan has long been concerned about being utilized as a Palestinian alternative homeland. The protection situation for PRS in Jordan is worse than it is for other Palestinian refugees. This is related to the practice of refoulement and the very restrictive state policies they encounter, which raises the question of whether they should have a specialized protection system.

4.3 Right to Return

Normally, the host community's situation plays a crucial role in enforcing refugees to think of returning. In Jordan, due to the limited natural resources. The economic implications cause social tensions or political involvement, and that economic deterioration can have an indirect influence on the ecology and natural resources, potentially causing social instability.

Since the Jaber/Nassib border crossing reopened in mid-October of 2018, around 20,000 Syrian refugees have returned to Syria, with around 14,000 returning in 2019. (Turnbull, 2019). Furthermore, 25,000 refugees chose voluntary repatriation in the first eight months of 2021. The number of refugees returning to Syria is likely to remain stable. According to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2023) return intention poll, conducted in May 2023, 40% of Syrians aspire to return one day, while just a tiny percentage intend to return within the next twelve months (1.1 percent). While many Syrian refugees in Jordan prefer not to return to Syria because of the threat of conscription for Syrian men, as well as the lack of opportunities and services, those who have returned have done so mostly for family reasons or just to see their homeland. In short, although Syrian refugees have many reasons to be back home, the journey is still perilous.

However, this is not the case for Palestinian refugees. According to own observation, the majority of them became Jordanian citizens a long time ago; others are integrated in the society but wish to return home one day, and Palestinians in diaspora all over the world always express their right to go back, to self-determination, to Palestinian nationality, and to civil and religious rights. Palestinians' sense of belonging to Palestine has not been diminished by the fact that they hold Jordanian passports. The Right of Return is at the core of the political instability of the area, particularly in Jordan, the nation with the most registered refugees. Israel has denied Palestinians the right to return to their homes and lands since their expulsion in 1948; therefore, even if they may desire to improve their social and economic situations by integrating and flourishing elsewhere, they sometimes do not want to be misunderstood as having consented to plans that attempt to erase their identity and belonging with the justification that they have found alternate homes.

5 Conclusion

Jordan's current situation and capacity can be seen through its experiences. All political, economic, social, and legal dimensions play a crucial role in evaluating the situation. The discussion has shown the importance of understanding the legal situation of each group as it plays a key role in refugees' integration process, rights, obligations, and accessibility to services. In other words, refugees' legal situation affects the political, economic, and social dimensions of the host country since the legal status determines the level of involvement and local integration in the different sectors in the host country.

The massive influx of refugees has put tremendous strain on Jordan's economy, which has pushed the Jordanian government to amend labor laws to tackle such issues. Moreover, the existence of such groups led to the high demand for various public services, such as education, shelter, and healthcare. Jordan's economic situation was deeply affected by both influxes in different ways. While Palestinian refugees mainly had full access to services and had a positive impact on the labor market at that time helping Jordan's economic growth, this was not the case for Syrians in 2011, except for those who

invested in their capitals.

When comparing Palestinian and Syrian refugees' status and their impact on Jordan, differences arise. From one side, the period in which each crisis took place, the political reasons behind each crisis, the international community and media role, the host's abilities and capacities, the political situation in the region, the legal situation, and so the possibility of return for each group are different. However, some similarities are apparent, such as the high demand for public services, including shelter, healthcare, education, and camps. Additionally, Syrian and Palestinian people share similar religions, social ties, and language with Jordanians, which was reflected throughout their integration process. It can be noticed that Jordan has maintained open channels of communication with all involved parties in both Palestinian and Syrian cases. Jordan's government seems to be a key player in the peace process, placing its security and stability above all other issues.

The historical precedent of Palestinian refugees in Jordan played a significant role in local perceptions of Syrian-Jordanian ties. As these elements combined under rising socio-economic strain and political uncertainty, relationships between Syrians and Jordanians in all areas indicated an alarming tendency to take the form of a negative slide toward escalating conflict due to such factors. However, Syrians and Jordanians, with the help of the government and various organizations, managed to overcome the negative cycle and reframe refugee-host community relations toward social cohesiveness. From another side, Palestinian refugees, after 74 years of displacement, have found their way to being part of the Jordanian social fabric. However, the presence of refugees in Jordanian host communities highlights the potential social ramifications of refugees to society, even if they share essential cultural principles. The strain on the population, differences in origin, and diversity in customs are too much for the host communities to handle.

Jordan is considered a role-model country in hosting refugees despite its vulnerable resources and abilities. It maintains peace and stability within its borders regardless of the external instabilities and risks. However, Jordan needs constant support and commitment from the international community for its efforts not to be futile and to improve – if possible – its services for both local and refugee communities, along with monitoring these efforts to make sure that it is on the right track. Otherwise, Jordan will be forced to marginalize either refugees or its citizens in an effort to prioritize its obligations to the different communities on its land.

Jordan has long viewed refugee influxes as possibilities for the country's growth. This dynamic must be recognized by the international community, which must emphasize the integration of national development aid and humanitarian aid in its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which will benefit both host communities and refugees. If the international assistance includes capacity-building programs, the ability of Jordanian municipal actors to provide services to its citizens and Syrian refugees will be improved (Francis, 2015). International donors and humanitarian implementers must provide targeted aid that can strengthen local systems of governance in Jordan.

Some more general recommendations can be derived from the findings of this comparative study and summarized for policy makers, researchers and the international community:

1. Policy Makers:

- Develop comprehensive policies that address the legal status and integration process of refugees, considering their rights, obligations, and access to services.
- Foster open and transparent channels of communication with all involved parties, including international organizations and the local community, to effectively manage refugee crises and promote peace and stability.

2. Researchers:

- Conduct further research to understand the socio-economic and political factors influencing refugee-host community relations and identify strategies for fostering social cohesiveness.
- Explore the long-term impacts of refugee influxes on host communities, including potential social ramifications and challenges related to cultural differences.
- Explore the sense of belonging and identity crisis that refugees in host countries might face.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs aimed at supporting refugees and host communities and identify areas for improvement.

3. International Community:

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of international assistance to ensure that it is effectively meeting the needs of both host communities and refugees, and adjust strategies as needed.

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