



**DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES TO FORCED DISPLACEMENT
FROM SYRIA IN LEBANON, JORDAN AND IRAQ**

POLICY BRIEF

Authored by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Aydan Greatrick and Estella Carpi, with Amal Shaiah Istanbouli

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Refugees seek safety and to build secure and dignified lives for themselves and their families. Securing rights, legal protections, pathways to residency, access to services, employment and education are all important to refugees and their families; and to wider policy and development objectives, including around the promotion of Human Rights, Refugee Rights and Labour Rights.

The assumptions that refugees will undertake onward migration, that refugees' presence leads to social tensions, and that they have significant negative impacts on host economies are not consistent with the available evidence. When embedded into policy and interventions, these assumptions can undermine rather than uphold the promotion of rights and protection, as they imply that refugees are to blame for the challenges that are being addressed. Working with media and governments to raise awareness of refugees' rights and to challenge discriminatory rhetoric is important to uphold people's rights and support the development of positive social relations between different people affected by, and responding to, displacement.

Refugees can and do make significant contributions to local communities and are motivated to build dignified and safe lives for themselves and their children, including through access to education, employment, and protection. However, refugees' aspirations and capabilities are often undermined by structural factors, including poor access to rights and residency, and the negative impacts of different governmental policies, media narratives and unequal access to foreign assistance. These structural factors are also exacerbated by changing socio-economic and political contexts in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq which may be worsening for both refugees and host communities, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long-term, integrated programming offers effective ways of promoting positive social relations and dynamics (what is often referred to as social cohesion), and refugees' meaningful participation in local communities. Combining initiatives and policies, rather than developing and implementing isolated short-term projects and programmes, may have more sustainable effects which support people's rights and needs, and enable safe and sustainable forms of *de facto* integration and local participation.

Recognising refugees' diverse motivations, aspirations and experiences, including the exclusions they face, requires a situational approach that is attentive to intersecting identities and power structures. Contextual, situational, and long-term interventions are effective at recognising and addressing pre-existing structural, social and historical factors that shape refugees' aspirations and capabilities, refugee-host community perceptions, and barriers to economic participation.



Front cover photo:
Al-Bazerkan Market in Old Tripoli, Lebanon.
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REFUGEES' ONWARD MIGRATION DECISIONS

Refugees from Syria and their families face severe restrictions on their ability to build and maintain dignified and meaningful lives, leading many to believe they have no future in host countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. High aspirations for onward migration reflect refugees' frustrations with the situations they are in, and the fear and insecurity they face due to discrimination, social exclusion, and precariousness. However, despite many refugees' aspirations to leave, very few have the capacity or capabilities to undertake onward migration, and they face multiple barriers to their mobility that means they become 'stuck' in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. With over 90% of all refugees remaining within their regions of origin, primarily in neighbouring countries, only a minority of refugees actually engage in onward migration beyond their country of first asylum or their region of origin. Understanding that the majority of refugees remain in neighbouring countries is important for policy to address people's needs and uphold rights.

Factors influencing refugees' decisions to stay in their first country of asylum include: pathways to rights and protections, access to services and the viability of return. Refugees have to believe that they can build a secure and dignified future for themselves and their families in the host country in order to want to stay.

Factors shaping aspirations and decisions to leave include a lack of access to rights and protection, insecure livelihoods, low markers of social cohesion, and perceptions that European countries offer better long-term reception, rights, and opportunities. However, whilst aspirations for onward migration remain high, onward migration is often impossible for refugees, who must 'make do' with staying in situations of protracted insecurity and precarity.

Education, employment, and protection are all relevant factors in shaping refugees' onward migration decisions, yet the relative significance of different factors is difficult to predict, will change over time, and will be determined by refugees' perceptions of their current and future situation. Likewise, the influence of foreign assistance on migration decision making is difficult to assess based on available evidence. However, rights and residency form the bedrock around which refugees believe that sustainable and secure futures can be built. Where education or employment are seen to lead to this, then the relevance of these factors in shaping decisions to stay appears to increase.

Aspirations and capabilities: Decisions to leave are informed by refugees' aspirations and capabilities. Refugees' aspirations for onward migration can be wide-ranging, from a wish to an idea to an intention or concrete plan. Onward migration capabilities include economic resources, language skills, and social networks. These, more than aspirations, determine the means of mobility.

Information: European governments have sought to influence refugees' decisions to stay through migrant information campaigns. However, "broadcast" information (including media, state-level policy announcements, migrant information campaigns and other 'macro' messaging) is less trusted by refugees, who rather trust and rely on "narrowcast" information shared between personal networks. European funded migrant information campaigns can also have unintended consequences, leading refugees to mistrust information provided by European states more broadly.

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Summary of factors that influence onward migration decisions:	
Decisions to stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and supportive social ties in host countries. • Increased access to high-quality education in host countries. • Perceptions that qualifications will lead to employment and a secure legal status. • Availability of safe educational opportunities. • Employment opportunities that are dignified, legal and which lead to rights. • Availability of work opportunities for wider social groups, including families. • Protection gaps (i.e. limited pathways to resettlement).
Decisions to leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to rights, protection, educational and employment opportunities. • Insecure livelihoods and the high cost of living. • Barriers to integration that prevent long-term planning. • The presence of family members and transnational ties in other countries. • Perceptions of Europe as offering better long-term reception to refugees. • Exclusion from education provision. • Family separation. • Lack of access to long-term employment and secure livelihoods. • Perceptions that European job opportunities lead to legal status and residency. • Gaps in protection that lead to a lack of access to services and safety.
Capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to sufficient economic resources. • Access to trusted information. • Access to safe and secure onward migration routes. • Access to social ties and networks, including family members living in Europe.
Foreign Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts focused on mitigating social tensions can help foster conditions to stay. • Inclusive, sustainable social protection systems optimise integration. • Programmes that address sustainable livelihoods promote economic security. • Exclusion from foreign assistance may indirectly increase aspirations to leave. • Shortfalls in aid, especially where refugees are dependent on foreign assistance.

UNDERSTANDING AND PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION

The nature of refugee-host relations has increasingly been examined through the lens of ‘social cohesion’. In spite of its popularity amongst policy-makers and practitioners, social cohesion is a contested concept which remains largely undefined and is difficult to measure. Social

cohesion literature, policies and programmes have overwhelmingly focused on documenting host perceptions of refugees and host assumptions relating to the ‘impact’ of refugees on hosts. However, the assumption that the presence of refugees leads to negative impacts on members of host communities is not consistent with the evidence.

Factors which enable or restrict safe forms of social interaction and participation in local communities include the nature and objectives of national and municipal policies, discourses, and actions; residing within spaces which may facilitate or prevent people’s freedom of movement and social interaction; the nature of local-level dynamics; and inter-personal and inter-communal relationships in local communities.

Local participation takes place across diverse communities which each have their own complex historical, political, and socio-economic dynamics. The nature of social interactions and the capacity for refugees to participate in local communities varies according to settlement policies and types, including across closed or open camps, or in the context of cohabitation in towns, cities, and rural areas. Participation and the nature of interactions can be highly dependent on local level dynamics and will vary within different host countries, as evidenced by the Refugee Hosts project.

Refugees’ experiences and outcomes relating to participation and ‘social cohesion’ vary significantly based on demographic characteristics. Addressing exclusions facing refugees because of their gender, age, nationality, religion, ethnicity, dis/ability status, gender identity and sexual orientation should move beyond an essentialist approach i.e. focusing on a single, fixed category such as ‘refugee women’, toward a ‘situational approach’, which accounts for the particular factors that lead to specific people being able or unable to safely participate in particular situations.

Defining social cohesion: There is an absence of appropriate methodologies, indicators and evaluations of programmes and policies relating to ‘social cohesion’. Individual projects which aim to promote social cohesion may therefore be ineffective in the absence of more comprehensive, integrated approaches. Combining a range of initiatives, policies and programmes is necessary to promote meaningful participation that is sensitive and sustainable to diverse local and structural barriers. These interventions include the development of high-quality integrated service provision for refugees and hosts; initiatives to support and maintain positive interpersonal interactions; in conjunction with awareness-raising and media campaigns which combat xenophobia and discrimination against refugees. These should be long-term commitments rather than isolated, short-term projects and programmes.

Factors that enable meaningful social cohesion and participation include:

- Access to legal rights: positive de jure and de facto rights and regulatory frameworks.
- A welcoming political and media discourse, policy and practice.
- Access to the labour market, safe and dignified forms of employment, fair income.
- Inclusive settlement policies, safe and dignified housing, and safe spaces for interaction.
- Access to education.
- Positive markers of ‘Social Cohesion’ (including):
 - Positive nature and degree of social interactions between refugees and hosts.
 - Positive host perceptions of refugees and the presumed ‘impacts’ of refugees.
 - Positive refugee perceptions of hosts.
 - Positive host and refugee perceptions of diverse institutions.
 - Positive perceptions of belonging to and being safe in host community and country.
 - Safety and stability.
- Experiences and outcomes related to integration and participation will vary depending on refugees’ intersecting identity markers (real and imputed) and demographic identifiers.

Recommendations arising in the literature:

- More nuanced and contextually specific approaches to understanding the relationship between social cohesion and displacement are needed, noting that social cohesion is poorly defined.
- Develop integrated area-based responses that redress pre-existing structural inequalities, such as policies and programmes to address poverty and resource scarcity amongst residents (refugees and hosts alike).
- Strengthen national- and municipal-level capacity to deliver public goods and services to all residents.
- Enhance access, affordability, and quality of housing for all residents.
- Increase the quality of interactions, perceptions and attitudes between refugees and hosts.
- Address the reality and/or hosts' perceptions that job competition has increased following refugees' arrival.
- Enhance livelihoods opportunities for all residents (refugees and hosts alike).
- Mitigate against host members' perceptions that resources and support are being unfairly and unequally distributed by municipal, national, and international actors.
- Support local systems to resolve disputes and reduce tensions.
- Work with the media to challenge xenophobic rhetoric that blames and scapegoat's refugees.

REFUGEES' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN HOST COUNTRIES

The presence of refugees from Syria has often been assumed to have a significant adverse effect on economic and social development in receiving countries. However, the most significant economic impacts arise from laws, policies, and actions implemented by governments and international actors. Exclusionary responses to the presence of refugees that scapegoat refugees undermine economic participation more so than the presence of refugees *per se*.

Refugees' abilities to participate in local economies, and the outcomes of such participation, vary according to demographics and the national and local context. When defining successful and failed participation, policymakers should consider:

1. the broader human rights framework, including the importance of eliminating people's reliance on negative coping mechanisms when joining local markets; and
2. the design and coordination of programmes (e.g., the degree and impact of standardisation, compartmentalisation, or local contextualisation), and what the assessment model is.

Factors of successful participation	Factors of failed participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad-hoc programmes, intersectoral policies and cooperation between public, private and civil society. • Refugee entrepreneurship. • Cash-Based Initiatives (CBIs) that end negative coping mechanisms. • Refugee entrepreneurship. • Legal and financial frameworks that support participation and empowerment. • Investment in refugee education and skilled labour supported by labour rights protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compartmentalisation of programmes which fail to build linkages between refugees, livelihood strategies, security and the job market. • Lack of labour rights. • Flawed implementation of policy changes (i.e., poor work conditions via the Jordan Compact).



An alleyway in the Turkish town of Ayvalik, overlooking the Aegean Sea.
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ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

This Policy Brief is part of a series that synthesises findings from a longer report on Development Approaches to Forced Displacement from Syria in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, based on a state-of-the-art desk-based literature review of over 260 sources published between 2016-2021.

The **Full Report** is available here: www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/dafdfullreport

A **Summary Report** is available here: www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/dafdsmary

Other Policy Briefs related to this study are also available:

- **Policy Brief** on Refugees' Onward Migration Decision Making in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Available here: www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/dafdombriefing
- **Policy Brief** on Refugees' Participation in Local Communities and Social Cohesion in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Available here: www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/dafdsbriefing



A Syrian man from the city of Daraa gently holds his wife's ring in Jordan. Displaced and separated from his family by the conflict in Syria, he was informed by phone that his wife had died in childbirth. He was unable to bury his wife, and is unable to return to Syria to meet his child. "The ring is a part of me."

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