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**Access to Work and the Pursuit of Dignified
Lives in Protracted Displacement:**
A Case Study of the EU-Lebanon Compact

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Acknowledgements

The choice of this topic stems from my personal experience of studying and working in Lebanon during 2022–2023. I was astonished by the sense of solidarity and mutual support I witnessed among communities living through prolonged crises and conflict. Although solidarity and hospitality cannot by themselves address the complex realities of displacement, hardship, and the psychological impacts of exile, they provide a starting point for creating inclusive, supportive, and sustainable approaches to these challenges.

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Abstract

As displacement becomes increasingly protracted, humanitarian assistance alone is no longer sufficient to address the needs of refugees, making the pursuit of durable, long-term solutions a central policy challenge. With over 41 million people in need of international protection and conflicts lasting longer than ever before, protracted displacement has become a defining feature of the contemporary refugee context. This dissertation argues that access to work constitutes the most critical condition for enabling refugees to build dignified, self-reliant lives. However, this access is contingent upon enabling factors such as legal residence and education, which remain structurally constrained in many host countries. To explore these dynamics, the dissertation examines the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact. While the Compact aimed to promote resilience and expand economic opportunities for both refugees and host communities, its implementation has been limited, and significant gaps remain between policy ambitions and refugees' lived realities. Through an analysis centred on refugees' perceived needs and barriers, the study demonstrates how restrictive legal frameworks and labour market limitations undermine the potential for self-reliance and long-term integration. Building on these findings, the dissertation critiques existing state-centric approaches to durable solutions and policy coherence for migration and development. It proposes an alternative framework centred on policy coherence for refugee needs, which places refugees' lived experiences, rights, and aspirations at the core of policy design. The study concludes that achieving meaningful resilience and self-sufficiency requires a fundamental reorientation of policy frameworks, including a revision of the EU-Lebanon Compact, to better align with the structural conditions necessary for refugees to access work and build dignified futures.

List of acronyms

EU - European Union

ICESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IOM - International Organisation for Migration

LCRP - Lebanon Crisis Response Plan

MDGs - Millennium Development Goals

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PCD - Policy coherence for development

PCSD - Policy coherence for sustainable development

PICMD - Policy and institutional coherence in migration and development

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN - United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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1. Introduction

“For too many refugees, displacement starts as a lifeline but lasts a lifetime. Humanitarian aid saves lives, but it is not the end point and does not enable refugees to become active agents in control of their futures. We need a paradigm shift that creates a new sense of hope and opportunity for people fleeing war and persecution.”

- Barham Salih, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2026)

In situations of prolonged displacement¹, the ability to work is central to refugees' capacity to build dignified lives as access to employment is both essential for meeting immediate needs but also for fostering resilience, self-reliance, and long-term socio-economic integration (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b; Crawford et al., 2015; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). As displacement becomes increasingly protracted, humanitarian assistance alone proves insufficient, making the transition from aid dependency to livelihood autonomy an important policy challenge.

By the end of 2025, the global population of refugees, asylum seekers, and other people in need of international protection, had reached approximately 41.6 million according to United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2026). In addition, conflicts have become more prolonged and geographically widespread, posing growing challenges for international and humanitarian actors (International Rescue Committee, n.d. a). The average duration of armed conflicts has increasing from four years in the 1970s to approximately nine years in 2021 (International Rescue Committee, n.d. a). This means, that prolonged displacement has become a defining characteristic of today's refugee context, as many refugees remain in host countries for extended periods without clear prospects for return or resettlement (UNHCR, 2026).

Therefore, short-term humanitarian responses become insufficient (UNHCR, 2026). In such circumstances, promoting self-reliance and identifying durable solutions are critical (Crawford et al., 2015). Access to work thus emerges as a foundational condition for enabling this transition. Its realization is closely tied to the broader legal environment, as host countries often impose restrictive conditions on displaced persons and refugees regarding access to the

¹ According to UNHCR, protracted refugee situations are understood as those in which individuals have lived in exile for five years or more without immediate prospects for durable solutions (UNHCR, 2026)

labour market, limiting their ability to earn a living and support themselves (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). Therefore, enabling needs such as legal residence and the right to education are essential criteria for refugees to be able to build dignified lives through access to work.

Lebanon represents a relevant case for examining the challenges of promoting self-reliance and dignified lives in protracted refugee situations. Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the country has hosted the largest refugee population per capita globally (Danish Refugee Council, n.d.). However, the absence of a coherent national refugee policy has contributed to a fragmented response, where informal hosting arrangements, overstretched public services, and unregulated settlements have become defining features of the refugee experience (Janmyr, 2016; Yassin et al., 2015; UNHCR, n.d. a). Over time, Syrian refugees in Lebanon have encountered increasing legal and structural barriers, particularly in accessing legal status and employment (UNHCR, n.d. a). These restrictions have reinforced conditions of long-term precarity and limited opportunities for economic independence, thereby exemplifying the broader challenges identified in protracted displacement contexts in low- and middle-income countries. Lebanon thus illustrates how constraints on access to work can hinder refugees' ability to transition from aid dependency to long-term self-reliance.

Lebanon also provides a context for analysing contemporary international policy responses aimed at addressing such challenges. The EU-Lebanon Compact, introduced in 2016, sought to link financial support and resilience-building of the host country to policy reforms that would enhance refugee inclusion and promote economic opportunities (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016). However, its limited implementation and the persistence of restrictive labour market policies highlight a gap between policy ambitions and realities on the ground. As such, the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon offers insights into both the potential and limitations of current approaches to fostering durable solutions in protracted refugee settings, particularly in relation to the realization of access to work.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation examines access to labour markets as a key pathway toward durable solutions in protracted refugee contexts, where refugees can build dignified lives. It also identifies the need for legal residence and education as necessary conditions for achieving this. The dissertation investigates the case study of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by focussing on their needs in order to be able build dignified and resilient lives and how the EU-Lebanon Compact has corresponded to these needs. The focus will be on refugees' perceived needs and barriers to achieving a dignified life. Furthermore, EU's understanding of resilience

building and policy coherence for migration and development in the context of the EU-Lebanon Compact will be analysed.

Therefore, the dissertation will explore the following research questions:

How coherent is the EU-Lebanon Compact for the needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon? And what does this mean for resilience-building?

1.1 Argument, objective and outline of the dissertation

This dissertation describes the experiences of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as processes marked by prolonged displacement and a state of liminality characterized by restrictive conditions and a lack of opportunity to build a dignified future. The dissertation examines the pursuit of durable solutions for refugees in prolonged refugee situations with particular focus on the right to work as laid out in Chapter 3 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. However, the Refugee Convention does not explicitly define what constitutes durable solutions. Traditionally, three main pathways have been recognised as durable solutions: return to the country of origin, local integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement in a third country (Crawford et al., 2015). These approaches are largely state-centric, as they prioritise resolving displacement as a policy issue for states, often placing less emphasis on the individual's needs, and aspirations of refugees themselves.

This dissertation argues that granting refugees access to legal employment may constitute a viable long-term solution that aligns with the interests of refugees themselves, host states, and the international community. To support this claim, the thesis analyses the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as an example for developing more effective policy approaches. However, it also demonstrates that for initiatives such as the EU-Lebanon Compact to achieve its intended outcomes, particularly in fostering refugee self-sufficiency in protracted displacement contexts, significant revisions to existing frameworks are needed. It is necessary to develop future models that focus on refugees' actual needs and rights rather than on state-centred approaches if we are to achieve resilience for refugees in host communities and sustainable long-term solutions. This means that underlying needs and structural barriers, such as legal residence or education, must also be adequately addressed in order to uphold the right to work.

Building on this critique, the dissertation seeks to develop a model that redefines policy coherence by explicitly addressing the question of *for whom* such coherence is pursued. Existing frameworks of policy coherence for migration and development predominantly serve institutional and state-centric priorities, often privileging concerns such as security, containment, or economic efficiency. In contrast, this dissertation advances a model of policy coherence *for refugee' needs*, positioning them as the central reference point for policy design. This implies that refugees' lived experiences, needs, and aspirations should not only be considered but should actively shape the structure and objectives of prolonged displacement solutions frameworks. Within this approach, refugees are understood as agents capable of contributing to and defining sustainable solutions, rather than as passive recipients of externally designed policies. Moreover, while rights such as access to work are not consistently guaranteed to displaced populations, they can be progressively realized and institutionalized through policy models that contribute to the emergence of new norms. By foregrounding refugees in both practical and normative terms, the proposed model seeks to enable more coherent, inclusive, and ultimately dignified responses to protracted displacement.

The dissertation is structured as follows. The following chapter outlines the methodological choices underpinning the research, including the approach, limitations, and ethical considerations. Chapter 2 examines the existing scholarly literature and establishes the scholarly context for this research. It begins by engaging with the literature on the concept of resilience and the EU's approach to it, before turning to the academic debates on the EU-Lebanon and EU-Jordan Compacts, which are part of EU's broader shift towards resilience-based governance. The chapter situates the study within the academic debates on the Compacts identifying their predominantly state-centric orientation and the limited attention given to refugees in protracted displacement contexts. Chapter 3 explores the concept of policy coherence for development, with particular attention to scholarly debates on the migration–development nexus. Chapter 4 provides a contextual analysis of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, focusing on the country's legal frameworks governing refugees, restrictive residency and work conditions, and broader socioeconomic challenges. Building on this context, chapter 4 then analyses the EU-Lebanon Compact itself, examining its structure, objectives, and limitations. This leads to chapter 5, focussing on refugees' needs to enable them to build dignified lives in protracted refugee contexts. The chapter conceptualises what constitutes a dignified life in protracted displacement, drawing on needs such as access to

work, education, legal status. The empirical analysis together with analysis of secondary literature then brings these strands together by assessing how the EU-Lebanon Compact addresses, or fails to address, key dimensions of refugee well-being, including access to work, inherent challenges for policy coherence and the absence of a refugee-centred approach, while highlighting the interplay between resilience and migration control. Finally, the dissertation concludes by proposing recommendations on how policy frameworks for protracted refugee situations could be improved with a focus on policy coherence for refugee needs.

1.2 Methodology

To address the research questions, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to adequately capture the complexity of refugee experiences and issues related to policy frameworks in this field. The study combines qualitative methods with policy analysis to examine how refugee integration and resilience are framed within existing policy frameworks and how these align with the lived realities and articulated needs of refugees in protracted refugee situations.

The empirical material consists of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted by the author. These are interviews with key informants, including staff members from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working with Syrian refugees, a Syrian refugee, and a PhD researcher specialising in the same thematic field. The interviews provided contextual insights and helped to complement the secondary literature, offering grounded perspectives on refugee experiences and institutional responses within protracted displacement settings. Considering the current situation in Lebanon, all interviewees have been anonymized in this dissertation to ensure their safety and protect their future professional activities. This decision was further informed by the author's familiarity with the country and made in consultation with the supervisor. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and provided with voluntary informed consent forms prior to the interviews. No direct quotations from interviews are included in this dissertation to ensure their anonymity. The following identifiers are used to refer to the interviewees throughout the remainder of the dissertation: Noor and Jad are affiliated with the NGO, Zayd is the Syrian refugee, and Karim is the PhD researcher.

The interviews conducted for this study were based on a semi-structured format, allowing for both consistency across respondents and flexibility to explore individual perspectives in more

depth. The questions were organised thematically, beginning with background-oriented inquiries aimed at understanding the context of the refugee population under study, including their primary needs and challenges. A second set of questions explored broader conceptual and analytical themes, such as the meaning of resilience and dignified lives in regard of refugees, the balance between short-term and long-term integration efforts, and the structural barriers encountered by refugees in relation to access to employment. These questions were designed to capture both practical experiences and normative perspectives. The interviews also included a policy-oriented component, examining perceptions of government responses, the role of different actors including state institutions, NGOs, and international organisations, and the effectiveness of existing frameworks with particular attention given to the EU-Lebanon Compact, with respondents asked about their awareness of and engagement with this policy framework.

Overall, this approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both lived experiences and institutional dynamics, while maintaining the flexibility to adapt questions depending on the expertise and position of each interviewee. A total of four interviews were conducted for this thesis. In addition, the European Commission was contacted with a request for an interview, but they did not respond before the deadline.

It is important to note that the chosen methodology is largely shaped by the constraints encountered in Lebanon doing this research. Since 2 March 2026, the resurgence of hostilities in Lebanon has resulted in civilian casualties, widespread displacement, and increasingly severe humanitarian needs throughout the country. Israeli airstrikes and military activities have affected Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, South Lebanon, and other regions, causing significant damage to housing, healthcare facilities, transportation networks, and essential infrastructure. These developments have further placed pressure on already fragile public services, including healthcare systems, water supply, and electricity provision (International Organization for Migration, 2026). Due to this ongoing conflict and worsened security situation in Lebanon, it was not feasible to conduct fieldwork or carry out in-person interviews with Syrian refugees and NGOs working with refugees in the country. It has also been challenging to conduct online interviews with individuals and NGOs in the area, as they have been preoccupied with emergency response efforts or survival of their own. As a result of these constraints, this study relies primarily on secondary data sources, including existing literature, policy reports, and empirical studies that document refugees' own accounts of their needs and experiences in protracted displacement contexts. Many of these sources are based on interviews with

refugees, thereby providing access to first-hand perspectives despite the absence of direct fieldwork. By drawing on this body of research, the study seeks to incorporate refugee voices indirectly, ensuring that their lived realities remain central to the analysis while acknowledging the limitations on primary data collection.

The analytical framework of the thesis is based on policy coherence for migration and development, with a specific focus on reorienting this concept toward policy coherence for refugees' needs. This framework is used to assess the extent to which policies align across humanitarian, development, and migration domains, and whether they meaningfully reflect the needs and rights of refugees as central actors rather than passive recipients of policy.

The EU-Lebanon Compact serves as the primary case study and is analysed in comparison with the findings derived from both interviews and secondary literature. This comparative approach makes it possible to evaluate how the EU-Lebanon Compact operationalises concepts such as resilience-building and self-reliance, and to identify gaps between policy objectives and lived realities. This way, the dissertation examines the coherence of current policy approaches and develops insights for more refugee- and rights-centred models of long-term solutions.

In this dissertation, Syrian nationals who have fled Syria since 2011 are referred to as “refugees”, even though the Lebanese government officially designates them as “displaced persons”. This choice is grounded in international legal and institutional practice. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, these individuals meet the criteria for refugee status², despite Lebanon not being a signatory to the Convention. This terminology is also consistently used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is reflected in EU policy documents, including the EU-Lebanon Compact. In contrast, the Lebanese government’s refusal to use the term “refugees” represents a deliberate political and legal framing that will be further discussed in chapter 4.2.1. This distinction is reflected in the EU-Lebanon Compact itself, where the term “refugees” is used in the main text, while a footnote clarifies Lebanon’s official position as it states:

² Article 1 defines a refugee as someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

“Nothing in this document holds prejudice to the position of Lebanon to consider the Syrian nationals who have fled from Syria since 2011 as displaced persons” (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 121).

The use of “refugees” in this dissertation therefore reflects prevailing international usage, while recognising that alternative terminology employed by the Lebanese state is politically important and analytically relevant.

Lebanon was selected as the case study even though it is a very complex example. The country represents a particularly challenging context for protracted refugee situations, shaped by a history of repeated conflicts, a confessional power-sharing system that politicises demographic change, a severe and ongoing economic crisis, and structural weaknesses in state capacity. These factors make Lebanon a unique and complex context that differs in important ways from many other refugee-hosting countries. However, Lebanon is also a very relevant and analytically valuable case. As mentioned in the introduction, Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world and thus represents an extreme but critical example of the pressures that large-scale displacement can place on host societies. Moreover, most refugees remain in countries neighbouring their countries of origin and in low- and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2026), making Lebanon representative of a broader global pattern of displacement. The Lebanese case is therefore not an outlier in terms of refugee hosting, but rather an intensified version of dynamics present elsewhere. In addition, Lebanon has long-standing experience with protracted refugee situations, most notably with Palestinian refugees and, more recently, with Syrians. While the Lebanese context is shaped by specific political and historical conditions, all refugee-hosting contexts involve their own particular constraints and complexities. In this sense, Lebanon serves as a case through which broader challenges of refugee integration and policy coherence can be examined.

Ultimately, the selection of Lebanon is grounded in both its empirical significance and its policy relevance. The scale and duration of displacement in the country make the need for sustainable, long-term solutions particularly urgent. Analysing the Lebanese context allows this dissertation to assess existing policy approaches and to explore whether refugee-centred models of integration and resilience can be developed even under constrained conditions.

In addition to its empirical and analytical relevance, the selection of Lebanon as a case study is also informed by the author’s prior experience with the country. Having lived in Lebanon, studied international relations and the role of Lebanon and the broader Middle East in this

context, and worked as a journalist covering Lebanon's developments, the author brings contextual knowledge and familiarity with its socio-political landscape. This background enables a more nuanced understanding of the country's complex dynamics, including its governance structures, public discourse, and the lived realities of both host communities and refugees. It also informs the methodological approach, particularly regarding ethical considerations. Given the ongoing conflict and the fact that Lebanon cannot be characterised as a post-conflict setting, certain topics remain sensitive, and interviewees may be unable or unwilling to address specific issues. Therefore, the interviewees were previously informed that they don't have to answer all questions and there were certain questions they choose not to answer. Awareness of the regional context and the importance of confidentiality have therefore guided the handling of interview data, ensuring that participants are not exposed to potential risks. These precautions were further supported by the supervisor. For these reasons, the full transcripts of the interviews are not included in this dissertation. However, all interviews were recorded, and the author has these recordings in her possession. While this proximity to the chosen case study may introduce certain interpretive perspectives, it also strengthens the analysis by allowing for a more informed and context-sensitive engagement with both primary and secondary sources.

Throughout parts of the writing process for this dissertation, the AI-based translation tool DeepL.com was used to translate sections of the text from the author's native language, Danish, into English. All translated material was carefully reviewed and edited by the author. The author assumes full responsibility for the final content of the text. All core arguments, research, and analysis are entirely the author's own.

2. Literature review

The main objective of this literature review is to map the current literature and research on the EU-Lebanon Compact with a particular focus on the EU's understanding of resilience-building, which formed the basis for the EU-Lebanon Compact. The EU-Jordan Compact will also be the focus of this chapter, as it is comparable to the EU-Lebanon Compact and is more extensively discussed in the literature. However, there are also significant differences between the two compacts and the specific circumstances that applied to the two countries, which are important to understand in terms of their implementation and impact on the lives of Syrian refugees in those countries.

The 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact was a response to the Syrian refugee outflow and was part of a broader shift in EU migration governance toward externalisation and resilience-building in third countries. Together with the EU-Jordan Compact, it represents a policy model that seeks to combine humanitarian assistance with development-oriented solutions, particularly through labour market integration. However, the extent to which these Compacts have sufficiently addressed the needs of displaced Syrians remains highly contested.

A pattern across the literature is its state- and policy-centred focus, with limited attention to how these Compacts have corresponded to the needs and lived experiences of refugees. Furthermore, while the concept of resilience has become central to EU external action, its meaning, implementation, and implications for refugees remain ambiguous and contested (Anholt & Sinatti, 2020; Aleassa, 2025).

As the Compacts have been discussed since their creation in 2016 and the EU's resilience-approach has been widely discussed since EU's 2016 Global Strategy, the literature covers a rich interdisciplinary field grounded in both empirical and theoretical approaches. It spans over EU policy reviews and critical discourse analysis, postcolonial critiques, quantitative research, and qualitative studies involving interviews with representatives, civil society actors and in some cases refugees themselves. In addition to providing an outline of the existing literature and scholarly debate in this field, this chapter will also identify gaps in the research.

This literature review is divided into two main chapters. The first reviews the literature on resilience as a concept in international relations and EU's turn to resilience-building. The second examines scholarship on the EU-Lebanon and EU-Jordan Compacts. The review

highlights a gap in the literature: the lack of micro-level, refugee-centred analysis, which this dissertation seeks to address.

2.1 Resilience and EU external action

2.1.1 Conceptualising resilience

Resilience has emerged as a central but contested concept in international relations and development studies, especially since EU's 2016 Global Strategy where the concept of resilience emerged as a leitmotif in EU's foreign policy (Wagner & Anholt, 2016). Originally rooted in disciplines such as ecology and psychology, it has increasingly been applied to questions of governance, crisis management, and international intervention (Wagner & Anholt, 2020).

At its core, resilience refers to the ability of individuals, communities or systems to withstand, adapt to or recover from shocks or stresses (Tocci, 2019, p. 2). However, as the literature emphasises, this seemingly straightforward definition masks ambiguity over what resilience entails, who may become a subject to negative impact, who is responsible for achieving resilience, and what its political implications are. Hanisch (2016) argues that this ambiguity stems from three key conceptual questions. First, as to where resilience is manifested - is it as recovery from shocks or resistance to them? Second, what types of shocks it addresses - acute crises or long-term structural pressures? And lastly, what constitutes a resilient outcome - is it a return to the status quo or transformation into a new stability? These tensions, he suggests, render resilience a “multifaceted, controversial, and unclear” concept (Hanisch, 2016, p. 3) in policy contexts where it is uncertain whether the aim is to prevent, absorb, or adapt to threats.

This vagueness of the concept is also noted by Bourbeau (2015) who argues that resilience does not constitute a single, coherent concept but rather encompasses a range of analytical approaches, resulting in multiple and sometimes competing interpretations within international relations. He challenges the notion of a single genealogy of resilience, asserting instead that its development should be understood as inclusive, non-linear, and not confined to any specific ideological framework (Bourbeau, 2018). Hanisch (2016) conversely argues that resilience as a concept must be clarified to be relevant in practice.

While some debates on resilience have focused on clarifying its conceptual meaning and role in crisis management, other debates have been focused on whether resilience is a product or

instrument of neoliberal governmentality used to maintain the status quo (Joseph, 2013; Chandler, 2014). Some scholars suggest that the political concept of resilience emerges from neoliberalism and functions as a strategy that allows states to shift or avoid responsibility during crises. Joseph (2013) argues that neoliberalism operates by shaping the conditions in which individuals can exercise freedom, emphasizing self-reliance and personal responsibility. Resilience contributes to this agenda by promoting self-awareness and preparedness and encouraging citizens to take responsibility for their own social and economic well-being rather than relying on the state. According to Joseph (2013), the primary effect of the use of the concept of resilience is to highlight adaptability at the individual or local level, particularly in relation to risk and security. By framing the world as inherently uncertain and beyond full control, resilience fosters active engagement and preparedness (Joseph, 2013). In this way, resilience aligns closely with neoliberal governance as it positions individuals, communities, and the private sector as responsible stakeholders, while the state governs from a distance and encourage certain behaviours (Joseph, 2013).

However, Chandler (2014) argues that resilience builds upon but also transforms neoliberal understandings of complexity. Whereas liberal policies rely on top-down, linear assumptions of causality and neoliberal strategies attempt to manage complexity and “known unknowns” through markets and states, resilience focuses on “unknown unknowns” that only emerge after an event and therefore cannot be predicted. Governance, in this resilience framework, works backward from problems rather than forward from predetermined goals, emphasizing self-reflexivity and responsiveness. Unlike neoliberalism, which treats “complex life” as a limit to be managed, resilience internalizes complexity, critiques attempt to control social processes through market and state levers and instead reframes uncertainty as a space for transformation, offering a postmodern approach to managing unpredictable and emergent challenges (Chandler, 2014).

Joseph (2016) expands his critique of the neoliberal roots of resilience, framing it as a form of governmentality that operates through “failure and denial”. He argues that resilience builds on the repeated failures of interventions and attempts to govern complex systems, using these failures to justify the transfer of responsibility onto the governed. In international contexts, powerful states and organizations present themselves as facilitators rather than problem-solvers, promoting local and individual responsibility for resilience while closely monitoring outcomes. Domestically, this shift manifests as the transfer of responsibility from governments to individuals and communities. Joseph (2016) emphasizes that this form of

governance relies on the neoliberal governance strategy of “responsibilisation” (Joseph, 2016, p. 389), which refers to a form of governance in which responsibility for managing risk is shifted onto individuals or states themselves. Instead of directly addressing structural problems, external actors expect others to become resilient and cope with challenges independently. This effectively transfers the burden and potential failure onto those with the least capacity, without reducing external control (Joseph, 2016). The failure of interventions does then not become a reason to abandon intervention but to reshape it, according to Joseph (2016). While resilience does offer possibilities for human action, these are largely confined to the local level, functioning primarily to reinforce a governing logic that denies the capacity to effect systemic change. Bargués-Pedreny (2020) builds on this critique by highlighting a persistent shortfall in both resilience policy and scholarship, where resilience is consistently framed as something beyond what current practices can achieve. By assuming a perpetual deficit, these strategies reproduce cycles of failure and legitimize further monitoring, control, and neoliberal governance, while simultaneously constraining critique of deeper structural issues. Consequently, resilience risks fostering a sense of permanent inadequacy, where adaptation is treated as both necessary and virtuous, yet substantial outcomes remain limited. This tension underscores the conceptual ambiguity and performative character of resilience, revealing how its rhetorical appeal can mask persistent practical and structural challenges in international governance (Bargués-Pedreny, 2020).

On the other hand, another perspective has emerged that understands resilience as a locally grounded process through which communities respond to adversity. While these perspectives are often treated as competing, some scholars argue that they should instead be seen as complementary, reflecting different but interconnected dimensions of resilience as both a policy tool and a form of self-governance. Korosteleva and Flockhart (2020) seek to move the debate beyond this divide by conceptualising resilience as both a quality of systems and an analytic of governance. They argue that resilience should not be understood as something that can be externally designed or imposed, but as a process that emerges from within local contexts, shaped by the values, needs, and experiences of individuals and communities. In this sense, resilience-thinking shifts the focus of governance away from global, top-down interventions toward inside-out and bottom-up processes that prioritise local ownership and self-governance. Central to their argument is the claim that contemporary governance crises stem from a disconnect between global frameworks and local realities, and that resilience offers a way to bridge this gap by linking system-level outcomes to the everyday practices of

“real people”. By reframing resilience in this way, they position it as a means of rethinking central questions of international relations, including how order is maintained, how the “good life” is pursued, and how more adaptive and sustainable forms of governance can be developed across different levels (Korosteleva and Flockhart, 2020).

The literature reveals that resilience is still a contested concept as it is conceptually ambiguous, encompassing multiple definitions, and theoretically debated, particularly in relation to its links with neoliberal governance. It is ambiguous, as it can be viewed both as a source of empowerment through local participation and as a reinforcement of processes that increase accountability while simultaneously absolving states of responsibility. These tensions are not merely theoretical but carry over into the practical application of resilience in policy, and within the context of the EU.

2.1.2 EU’s turn to resilience

Since the adoption of the EU Global Strategy in 2016, resilience building has become a cornerstone in EU foreign and security policy. Tocci (2019) defines resilience as one of the key elements in “principled pragmatism” which is the overall philosophy of the Global Strategy that seeks to reconcile normative commitments with strategic interests. Tocci describes it as a realistic and pragmatic strategy for the EU that could no longer ignore the increasingly critical situation in the world but instead had to confront the harsh realities in its neighbouring regions³ (Tocci, 2019). In this context, resilience serves several functions. A resilience approach reflects a bridging between traditional policy silos such as development, humanitarian aid, and security. By doing so, resilience enables an integrated approach to complex challenges (Tocci, 2019). Wagner and Anholt (2016) further argues that resilience serves as a middle ground between “over-ambitious liberal peace building and the under-ambitious objective of stability” (Wagner & Anholt, 2019, p. 415).

The 2016 EU Global Strategy opens the door to diverse understandings of resilience and its concrete implications for EU foreign and security policy (Stollenwerk, Börzel & Risse, 2021). Both Tocci (2019), Wagner and Anholt (2019) suggests that this ambiguity was part of its

³ Tocci (2019) refers to rising global tensions such as Russia’s war in Ukraine, terrorism linked to instability in North Africa and the Middle East, and China’s growing assertiveness, that led many in Europe to see international relations as increasingly shaped by power struggles and strategic rivalry, marking a “return of geopolitics” (Tocci, 2019, pp. 4)

appeal in terms of incorporating it into the strategy in the first place, as it allows different actors to interpret and apply the concept in ways that suit their needs and interests.

The adoption of resilience in the 2016 EU Global Strategy marks a broader shift in EU foreign policy from a predominantly normative approach to a more pragmatic one. As Juncos (2019) contends, resilience aligns with a pragmatic turn in global governance, emphasising flexibility and context-specific solutions. Thereby, Juncos argues, the adaption of resilience can reinforce the EU's role as a normative power by privileging persuasion over imposition and by grounding governance in local practices and needs. Emphasising local ownership, partnerships, and capacity-building through a “coaching” approach (Juncos, 2019, p. 14), resilience aligns with more participatory and context-sensitive forms of engagement. At the same time, its inherent ambiguity allows it to be flexibly applied across different contexts and institutional settings, potentially facilitating cooperation among diverse actors involved in EU policymaking and implementation. This lack of conceptual clarity, particularly regarding how resilience should be achieved, what form it should take, and whose resilience is prioritised, can also generate tensions, contributing to coordination problems and institutional competition within EU foreign policy.

This tension is broadly discussed in the literature, showing that the resilience approach is not straightforward and can create a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, resilience calls for bottom-up and locally driven processes. On the other hand, EU interventions often continue to reflect top-down and externally defined priorities (Aleassa, 2025). As a result, resilience may reproduce existing power asymmetries rather than overcoming them. Aleassa (2025) captures this tension by arguing that the EU is “trapped” between its normative and pragmatic approaches. Rather than representing a clear shift, resilience reflects an ongoing struggle to join competing logics within EU foreign policy. She shows this by investigating EU's engagement with Jordan, where EU are caught between a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach. To foster resilience, according to Aleassa, the EU must shift from top-down approaches to instead supporting local ownership and capacity-building. However, EU still prioritises central institutions while neglecting political parties and civil society actors essential for inclusive governance. She further identifies a gap between rhetoric and practice in this case, showing that the EU struggles to align its values with its interests. In this top-down approach resilience risks to operate through disciplinary mechanisms rather than genuine self-governance.

Other works in the literature also examines how resilience has been implemented by the EU in practise which generally leads to a critical conclusion. One key issue concerns the translation of resilience into policy instruments. As Badarin (2020) shows, resilience-building is often shaped by existing financial and institutional frameworks, which are based on stability and security, and is typically used to finance immediate responses to crises, conflicts, and security threats. This “political economy” (Badarin, 2020, p. 79) of resilience influences which interventions are funded and how they are designed. Building on this, Stollenwerk et al. (2021) argue that the EU’s effectiveness in fostering resilience is further constrained by the significant resources, long-term commitment, and contextual sensitivity that a resilience approach requires. Resilience-building is inherently a gradual and resource-intensive process, yet existing EU initiatives often suffer from insufficient funding, limited coherence, and mixed outcomes in practice (Stollenwerk et al., 2021). The authors also highlight that resilience is multidimensional, requiring not only institutional capacity-building but also the promotion of inclusive, legitimate, and trusted governance structures tailored to local contexts. At the same time, the EU’s impact is shaped by external geopolitical dynamics and internal inconsistencies among member states, that risks undermining its role as a coherent resilience actor (Stollenwerk et al., 2021). Overall, this underscores the gap between the EU’s resilience agenda and the practical, political, and structural limitations that hinder its implementation.

Another critique concerns the externalisation of responsibility - a continuation of the criticism regarding responsabilization, as mentioned previously in this chapter. Joseph and Juncos (2019) argue that resilience allows the EU to promote a more integrated and holistic strategy while shifting the burden of implementation onto local actors. This can create a disconnect between ambitious rhetoric and limited practical engagement. Along with Juncos, Joseph reiterates his earlier criticism (Joseph, 2013) of the parallels between the concept of resilience and neoliberalism, as they argue that neoliberal governmentality shapes the EU’s approach to resilience by promoting partnership and stakeholder engagement, while operating at a distance through persuasion rather than coercion. While resilience is presented as a holistic strategy to strengthen local capacities and integrate EU policy, in practice it allows the EU to appear coherent and proactive while placing responsibility on local authorities, masking internal divisions and the EU’s limited capacity for coordinated action. Joseph and Juncos (2019) reach the conclusion that the resilience turn in the EU is as much about projecting an

image of normative authority as it is about addressing practical governance challenges (Joseph & Juncos, 2019).

This criticism of the EU's use of resilience to externalise responsibility is a recurring theme in the literature examining the EU's migration policy. Anholt and Sinatti (2020) even identify this as one of the central elements of EU's approach to resilience and they show the double standard in framing refugees as development opportunities for host states, yet simultaneously as potential threats to Europe's own economy and security. Anholt and Sinatti (2020) argue that resilience-building thereby often reinforces existing inequalities, enabling host states to leverage international aid while vulnerable groups, particularly refugees, remain marginalised. The ambiguity and normative appeal of resilience as a concept make it an effective rhetorical tool, but also limit its transformative potential, allowing political objectives to overshadow substantive improvements in local capacities or security.

Overall, the literature suggests that resilience is best understood as a contested policy framework within EU external action, where its ambiguity allows it to function both as a framework for empowerment and as a mechanism for shifting responsibility onto local actors. Importantly, resilience cannot be reduced to a single meaning or function. It is simultaneously a conceptual framework for understanding change and uncertainty, a policy tool for managing crises and a governance rationality that shapes relations between external actors and local communities. For the EU, resilience offers both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it provides a flexible and integrative approach to complex problems. On the other hand, its ambiguity and contradictions can limit its effectiveness and raise important questions. In particular, the literature highlights the need to critically examine whose resilience is being elevated, for what purposes, and through which mechanisms. These questions are particularly relevant in refugee-hosting contexts such as Lebanon and Jordan, where resilience-building is closely tied to migration governance and the externalization of responsibilities, raising concerns about who truly benefits and whose interests are prioritized in these interventions.

These tensions are directly relevant to the research question, as they shape how the EU-Lebanon Compact conceptualises and addresses resilience-building and the needs of Syrian refugees, and whether its approach to resilience translates into meaningful improvements in their lived conditions. Understanding resilience as both a policy tool and a form of governance thus provides the analytical foundation for assessing the Compact's effectiveness and limitations. Against this backdrop, the following section turns to the literature on the EU-Lebanon and EU-Jordan Compacts.

2.2 The EU-Lebanon and EU-Jordan Compacts

This chapter examines the existing literature on both the EU-Lebanon Compact, and the EU-Jordan Compact to situate the analysis within the broader policy framework of EU responses to the Syrian refugee crisis. As much of the literature addresses these Compacts together, the chapter begins by discussing them in relation to one another, highlighting their shared foundations within a regional strategy that links humanitarian and development objectives through concepts such as resilience and access to labour markets. It then turns to a more detailed examination of the literature on the EU-Lebanon Compact, before analysing the literature on the EU-Jordan Compact as a comparative case as the Jordan Compact it is often used as a benchmark for evaluating the compact model as a whole in the literature. The EU-Jordan Compact embeds access to work more explicitly within a clearer policy framework, thereby providing a useful point of contrast. This comparative perspective helps to illustrate limitations of the EU-Lebanon Compact, including its vaguer formulation of objectives and its less coherent approach to translating resilience into meaningful socio-economic inclusion of refugees.

The EU Compacts with Lebanon and Jordan have been portrayed as “game-changing” (Huang & Ash, 2018) approaches that move beyond traditional humanitarian aid by linking refugee support to development and economic growth. For instance, Huang and Ash (2018) argue that the Compacts represent one of the most promising refugee policy models in decades, particularly through their focus on employment and self-reliance for displaced people. They recognise that there have been disappointing early results of the Compacts, but the shortcomings could be improved by a better understanding of refugees’ needs incorporated in the Compacts.

However, this optimism is tempered by other, more critical academic voices. Bank and Fröhlich (2021) highlight that while the EU-Jordan Compact has been celebrated, its outcomes remain ambiguous. Although aims such as the issuance of 200,000 work permits were formally met, this occurred only after significant delays and did not necessarily translate into meaningful improvements in refugees’ livelihoods (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). In contrast, the EU-Lebanon Compact is characterised as far less successful, lacking concrete implementation mechanisms and clear policy instruments from the outset.

The differences between the two Compacts and the divergence between the intended objectives and the actual results, or lack thereof, underscores the broader debates in the literature: to what extent the Compact model is designed to address refugees' needs versus serving the political, economic, and migration management interests of states and international institutions such as the EU and host states.

2.2.1 The EU-Lebanon Compact: Vagueness and political constraints

The prevailing discussion in the literature on the EU-Lebanon Compact concerns its weaknesses and vagueness. Fakhoury (2020) describes the Compact as a “letter of intent” rather than an actionable policy, emphasising that it lacked concrete mechanisms for implementation and enforcement. This is because the Compact’s rationale did not consider the complex situation in Lebanon and the government’s reluctance to formally recognise Syrians as refugees or integrate them in society (Fakhoury, 2020). Fakhoury further argues that the Compact offered only temporary fixes and failed to adopt a rights-based humanitarian approach focused on lasting legal solutions for the Syrian refugees. Furthermore, Fakhoury (2022) shows that Lebanon actively contested EU migration policy and ensured that the Compact aligned with national priorities, including limiting refugee integration and maintaining control over labour market access. This aligns with the broader discussion in the literature on EU migration policy and refugee cooperation in the Middle East. Tsourapas (2019) conceptualises host states such as Lebanon as “refugee rentier states” that leverage their position to extract financial and political benefits from other state or nonstate actors in exchange for keeping the forcibly displaced population within their borders. Beyond academic relevance, the concept of refugee rent raises ethical concerns, as linking Western aid to refugee management risks encouraging overburdened states to commodify displaced populations. Similarly, Arar (2017) describes a “new grand compromise” in which Global South states will host refugees in exchange for economic support and renegotiating policies to favour state-centric interests, while refugees themselves remain excluded from decision-making processes. This is part of a general criticism of the Compacts’ state-centric character. Together, these perspectives highlight that the EU-Lebanon Compact cannot be understood in isolation from the political economy of refugee hosting. Rather than a purely humanitarian instrument, it is embedded in power relations and strategic bargaining between states (Tsourapas, 2019; Arar, 2017).

2.2.2 The EU-Jordan Compact

While the EU-Jordan Compact is frequently portrayed as a relative success, critical studies challenge this narrative. Two of the most recognized academic voices in the literature on the Jordan Compact is Lenner and Turner (2019), who argue that the EU-Jordan Compact achieved political consensus and institutional support but failed to address structural labour market constraints and refugees' lived realities (Lenner & Turner, 2019). According to them, the EU-Jordan Compact offers an important lesson for new initiatives worldwide as the Compact has shown unlikely to both revive Jordan's economy and provide the Syrian refugees with a dignified, self-sufficient life. Efforts to quickly issue work permits have prioritized quick fixes over sustainable solutions (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Meanwhile, Syrians remain largely disconnected from the humanitarian and policy networks shaping their futures, leaving them with little voice in negotiating and implementing the Compact. As a result, the Syrians have been forced either to reject inadequate opportunities or make the most of limited options (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Similarly, Morris (2020) introduces the concept of "extractivism", arguing that the Compact turns refugees into a source of economic, political and symbolic value for various actors such as states, international organizations and companies. This concept reflects the same criticism as those from Arar (2017) and Tsourapas (2019) where refugees are not beneficiaries but resources within a broader system of value extraction.

However, Moayerian and Stephenson (2021) do not accuse Jordan of agreeing to the Compact to gain "economic rent", but instead criticise the Compact's underlying assumptions, particularly its reliance on neoliberal economic logic. They argue that the focus on market-based solutions overlooked essential preconditions for refugee integration, such as labour rights, legal protections, and access to information. Sustained employment gains in Jordan require deep structural reforms to its political economy beyond what the Compact proposes.

Across these studies, a consistent critique emerges. While the EU-Jordan Compact may have succeeded in meeting formal targets, it has largely failed to provide refugees with dignified and sustainable livelihoods. Much of the literature focuses on the actions and interests of states, while refugees become pawns in a larger game, while their needs are not addressed, as shown by Lenner and Turner (2018). Their research found that the Compact has done little to improve Syrians' actual working conditions. While work permits have reduced the risk of

deportation, they have not led to more secure or dignified employment. Instead, refugees often bear the costs of formalisation (such as fees that should have been paid by their employer) and remain in precarious jobs. This highlights the limits of focusing on the number of work permits alone, underscoring the need to examine refugees' lived experiences and agency, as formal employment on paper does not necessarily translate into meaningful improvements in reality.

Overall, the literature suggests that the EU-Jordan Compact should be understood less as a durable solution to refugee livelihoods and more as a politically suitable framework that prioritises measurable outputs over substantive outcomes. While it has been seen as a success, its limitations reveal a disconnect between political approach and refugees' lived realities.

2.2.3 Missing the refugees: a state-centric focus in the literature

A pattern across the literature on both the Lebanon and Jordan Compacts is a state-centric focus. Most scholars (Fakhoury, 2020; Fakhoury, 2022; Tsourapas, 2019; Arar, 2017; Morris, 2020) analyse the Compacts at the macro-level, focussing on policy design, state interests, international negotiations and power dynamics. Refugees are often treated as passive recipients rather than active agents, paradoxically the same as much of the literature criticises the negotiations and framework of the Compacts for doing (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Even critical studies that highlight shortcomings in implementation tend to evaluate success in terms of policy outputs rather than outcomes for refugees' daily lives. Therefore, some key questions remain underexplored: What do refugees need in protracted displacement to be able to build a dignified life and have agency? And how could this have been better incorporated in the Compacts?

When the literature adopts a refugee-centred perspective, it rarely engages directly with the Compacts. For instance, Trovato et al. (2024) provide a detailed account of Syrian refugees' lived experiences in Lebanon, highlighting insecurity, legal precarity, and limited access to basic services. Their findings show that refugees remain trapped in a state of prolonged displacement, with little improvement in their conditions over time. However, this study does not engage directly with the EU-Lebanon Compact, illustrating a disconnect between refugee-focused research and studies on the Compacts.

Similarly, parts of the literature on Jordan incorporate refugee perspectives, particularly regarding labour conditions and exploitation. However, the analysis often returns to broader theoretical frameworks such as “extractivism” or political economy, rather than centring refugees’ needs as the primary analytical focus. This points to the need for future research to move beyond state-centric analyses and engage more closely with refugees’ everyday experiences, agency, and the structural conditions shaping their access to a dignified life and their ability to gain agency.

While many scholars call for more inclusion of refugees in policy design, few provide concrete insights into what this would mean in practice. This thesis addresses this gap by examining how the EU-Lebanon Compact corresponds to refugees’ needs and what this implies for future policy design.

3. Policy coherence for development

The following chapter engages with the extensive literature on policy coherence for development, which is a theoretical approach for analysing how different policy domains can be aligned to achieve shared objectives. While this body of scholarship provides important insights into the coordination of development and migration policies, it remains largely state-centric and primarily oriented towards institutional priorities rather than the lived realities of refugees. As such, it offers a rich but incomplete foundation for understanding policy coherence in contexts of protracted displacement. Building on this gap, the dissertation will introduce a conceptually distinct approach: policy coherence *for* a dignified life for refugees. The emphasis on “for” signals a shift in analytical focus, positioning refugees, and not states or institutions, as the primary reference point for evaluating coherence. In doing so, the section highlights the limitations of existing frameworks in addressing human rights concerns and establishes the need for a more grounded, refugee-centred understanding of policy coherence.

Policy coherence has emerged as a central concept in development studies and international policy, especially since the 1990’s. Broadly understood, policy coherence refers to the consistency and compatibility of policies across different domains, such that they do not undermine one another but instead contribute to shared objectives. In most general terms, coherence can be defined as the absence of policy effects that contradict intended objectives, either within a single policy field or across multiple policy domains. This distinction reflects both a narrow understanding that is focused on internal consistency within a policy, and a broader understanding that includes interactions across sectors such as trade, migration, and security (Hoebink, 2004).

However, there is no universally agreed definition of policy coherence (Sianes, 2013). But it is still regarded as essential for the effective implementation of global policy agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was endorsed by all United Nations (UN) members at the turn of the century, and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Shawoo et al., 2022, p. 339). Coherent policymaking is seen as a way to manage trade-offs between competing objectives and to promote synergies across policy areas. At the same time, a growing body of critical scholarship question both the feasibility and desirability of full coherence (Hoebink, 2004; Shawoo et al., 2022). Some scholars argue that in pluralistic political systems, competing interests, values, and power relations inevitably

generate tensions between policy goals, making some degree of incoherence unavoidable and in some cases even necessary as a reflection of democratic compromise (Hoebink, 2004). Furthermore, recent contributions emphasise the inherently political nature of policy coherence. Rather than being a purely technical or administrative exercise, coherence is shaped by underlying ideas, institutional arrangements, and competing interests. What counts as “coherent” policy depends on perspective: a policy may appear coherent from a trade perspective while being incoherent from a development perspective (Shawoo et al., 2022). This subjectivity raises questions about whose interests are prioritised and whether coherence may obscure necessary political debates about trade-offs and distributional outcomes.

The concept of policy coherence for development (PCD) gained prominence in response to increasing awareness of the interconnected nature of global challenges. As globalisation intensified interdependencies between countries, it became increasingly clear that aid alone was insufficient to address development challenges. This recognition gave rise to a “beyond aid” agenda, which highlights the importance of embedding development objectives across a wide range of international policy areas rather than treating them as separate from core policymaking (Sianes, 2013). Early discussions stressed that development outcomes are shaped not only by aid policies, but also by non-aid domains such as trade, agriculture, migration, and security. As a result, attention shifted toward aligning these policy areas to avoid contradictions and enhance their collective impact on development. This idea subsequently evolved into policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), which expands the focus further by requiring coherence across all dimensions of sustainable development at both domestic and international levels, rather than concentrating solely on the effects of policies on development in low- and middle-income countries. A widely cited definition by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes PCSD as “an approach and policy tool to integrate the economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development at all stages of domestic and international policy making” (OECD, 2016, p. 83). OECD highlights a transition in PCSD from a traditional donor–recipient model, based on a “do no harm” principle⁴, toward a more collaborative partnership approach involving a broad range of actors

⁴ The “do no harm” principle refers to the obligation of external actors to ensure that their interventions do not inadvertently undermine state capacity or governance processes by for example weakening public institutions, creating dependency, or diverting resources and skilled personnel away from the state and thereby compromising long-term state-building outcomes (OECD, 2009)

across different levels of economic development. This framing places emphasis on sustainable development and shared responsibility.

Within the EU the development and institutionalisation of PCD was formally embedded in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which established the principle that EU policies should take into account their impact on developing countries. This marked the first formal recognition of policy coherence in a multilateral context. The Treaty also introduced the so-called “3C’s” of development policy: coordination, complementarity, and coherence. These principles were intended to ensure that EU development efforts were consistent both internally and with other policy areas. Over time, the EU has developed a range of institutional mechanisms to promote PCD, including impact assessments and inter-service coordination processes (Carbone, 2018, p. 330). Despite these efforts, the EU’s experience illustrates the challenges of achieving policy coherence in practice. Scholars have described PCD in the EU as a “mission impossible,” (Carbone, 2018) highlighting the persistent tensions between development objectives and other policy priorities, such as trade or migration control. Differences in member states’ interests and levels of commitment, as well as the complexity of the EU’s institutional framework, have further hindered progress.

3.1 Conceptualising policy coherence

A substantial body of academic research has focused on the theoretical importance of PCD and the factors that facilitate or obstruct its advancement. A key contribution to the literature has been the development of analytical frameworks to conceptualise different dimensions and ways of evaluating PCD. Early work by Forster and Stokke (1999) identified four dimensions of PCD:

- the alignment of agendas and operational standards among the various agencies and institutions involved in development cooperation within a country, meaning the internal consistency of its development policy;
- the consistency of the different policies a donor country applies toward developing nations;
- the coherence of all policies adopted collectively by donor countries, including those coordinated through supranational institutions, in relation to developing countries;
- the alignment between donor cooperation, whether at the national or supranational level, and the development policies of recipient countries.

These dimensions highlight that coherence operates at multiple levels, from intra-governmental coordination to international policy alignment. Subsequent scholarship has expanded these typologies. Picciotto (2005), for instance, offered a new classification which distinguishes between:

- internal coherence: the alignment of goals, objectives and methods within a single policy or programme implemented by an OECD government to support development;
- intra-country coherence: the alignment among multiple aid and non-aid policies within an OECD government regarding their overall contribution to development;
- inter-country coherence: the alignment of aid and non-aid policies across several OECD countries in regard of their combined impact on development;
- and donor-recipient coherence: the alignment between policies adopted by rich countries collectively and those of poor countries individually or collectively in pursuit of shared development goals (Picciotto, 2005, p. 312).

Similarly, Hoebink (2004) differentiates between internal and external coherence and introduces the idea that coherence can exist in varying degrees rather than as a binary condition as incoherence often will be a given in diverse societies (Hoebink, 2004, p. 187). He conceptualizes “external coherence” as the alignment of goals and activities across policy sectors, emphasizing that policies in one domain should not contradict those in another, particularly development policy. Hoebink (2004) highlights the need to examine inter-bureaucratic relationships, including institutional hierarchies, ideological differences, and underlying power dynamics, that can lead to different types of incoherence (Hoebink, 2004).

Another influential classification distinguishes between horizontal and vertical coherence. Horizontal coherence refers to consistency across different policy sectors, particularly the consistency between aid and non-aid policies in their contribution to development, while vertical coherence concerns alignment across different levels of governance, particularly between the EU and its member states, focusing on the consistency of their respective policies. Additional dimensions include multilateral coherence (between international organisations) and donor-recipient coherence, reflecting the complex, multi-actor nature of contemporary development governance (Carbone, 2008). Policy coherence can also be conceptualised as both a process and an outcome (Di Francesco, 2001). As an outcome, coherence implies either the absence of contradictions between policies or the presence of synergies that enhance overall effectiveness. As a process, it refers to the mechanisms,

institutions, and practices through which coherence is pursued, such as coordination mechanisms, impact assessments, and inter-ministerial collaboration (Sianes, 2013).

The literature on PCD is characterised by several key debates. One central issue concerns feasibility. Some scholars argue that complete policy coherence is neither achievable nor desirable (Sianes, 2013; Hoebink, 2004). Incoherence often arises from structural factors such as conflicting interests, institutional fragmentation, and competing political priorities. These conflicts may be intentional, reflecting deliberate trade-offs, or unintentional, resulting from limited information or coordination failures. As such, incoherence can be seen not only as a policy failure but also as an inherent feature of complex governance systems. Some scholars have raised concerns about the potential downsides of policy coherence, as coherence may suppress legitimate conflicts and obscure trade-offs between competing objectives. Moreover, discourses of coherence can be used strategically to advance particular policy agendas, potentially marginalising alternative perspectives or prioritising certain interests over others (Shawoo et al., 2022).

Finally, a related critique highlights the technocratic bias in much of the PCD literature and practice. Policy coherence has often been framed as a technical issue of coordination and institutional design, overlooking the underlying political dynamics that shape policy choices. Recent research addresses this gap by emphasising the role of ideas, institutions, and interests in shaping coherence (Shawoo et al., 2022). This perspective underscores that policy coherence is deeply embedded in power relations and political struggles, and that efforts to promote coherence may themselves serve ideological or strategic purposes.

In sum, PCD represents both a normative objective and an analytical framework for understanding the interactions between different policy domains. While widely recognised as essential for effective development policy, the concept remains contested, ambiguous, and difficult to operationalise. The literature highlights its multidimensional nature, the inevitability of trade-offs, and the importance of political dynamics in shaping coherence outcomes. These insights are particularly relevant for analysing complex policy frameworks such as the EU-Lebanon Compact, where multiple policy domains, such as development, migration, and security, intersect. Understanding PCD as both a process and a contested political objective provides a critical foundation for assessing how such frameworks respond to the needs of displaced populations and contribute to resilience-building.

3.2 Migration and development

Extensive research shows that migration and development are interconnected with policies in each domain often shaping outcomes in the other. It is the recognition that these policies may run the risk of undermining one another and making it harder to achieve development goals that has created a need for policy and institutional coherence in migration and development (PICMD) (Hong & Knoll, 2016, viii). Building on the OECD's definition on PCD, Hong and Knoll define PICMD as policies for migration and development that seeks to “pursue synergies to advance shared objectives, actively seek to minimize or eliminate negative side effects of policies, [and] prevent policies from detracting from one another or from the achievement of agreed-upon development goals” (ibid, viii).

The relationship between migration and development has been widely debated in the academic and policy literature. It is characterised by the question of whether migration contribute to or undermine development. On one hand, some scholars have an optimistic perspective, emphasising the beneficial contributions of migration to development processes. For instance, Weil (2002) contends that if states engage in efforts to link immigration policy and development, migration can benefit all sides: host countries gain workers and better migration control, origin countries gain remittances and skill circulation, and migrants gain opportunities. The potential benefits depend on ongoing cooperation between countries to manage migration and support shared economic and demographic growth. Adams and Page (2003) similarly argue that international migration has significant importance for poverty reduction, while Agunias and Newland (2012) emphasise the developmental potential of migration through knowledge transfer and investment. These contributions align with institutional approaches promoted by organisations such as the World Bank and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which underpin a discourse that treats migration as a resource that can be leveraged for development if supported by appropriate institutional frameworks.

In contrast, more critical scholars question these assumptions. Delgado Wise et al. (2010) contends that the optimistic perspective ignores root causes for migration, human rights and risks for migrants, and the socioeconomic costs to origin countries, while also lacking solid evidence that remittances produce a net positive impact on development. Moreover, De Haas (2012) argues that migration cannot by itself overcome deeper structural barriers to development and may even reinforce existing inequalities. Therefore, instead of expecting

migrants to drive development, policymakers should focus on improving conditions in origin countries and creating fair migration systems that enable migrants to contribute effectively. These perspectives demonstrate that migration and development are not linearly related, but that their relationship is shaped by broader structural conditions, calling into question simplified policy narratives that present migration as inherently beneficial.

Despite the emphasis on migration as a potential development tool, the literature also points to the parallel trend of increasing securitization of migration governance (Godin et al., 2022; Koff, 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). Securitization is a concept developed by the Copenhagen School that describes how powerful actors such as governments present an issue as an existential threat to justify extraordinary measures. It challenges the idea that security is objective, showing instead that threats are constructed through political discourse (Buzan et al., 1998). Because of the dominance of securitization in migration policies, according to Godin et al. (2022), policy coherence for development and migration has remained largely theoretical (Godin et al., 2022). From the 1990s to early 2000s, migration was framed primarily through a security lens focused on control and restriction, an approach underlined after 9/11. Migration was thus linked to development mainly in terms of addressing root causes to limit flows of migration towards Europe. Although the EU shifted in the mid-2000s to highlight migration's potential developmental benefits, this was largely rhetorical (ibid, p. 7). Lavenex and Kunz (2008) have shown that policies such as EUs Mobility Partnerships with third countries continued to prioritize migration control and lacked development goals, indicating continuity rather than substantive change (Lavenex and Kunz, 2008). This trend persists in the 2016 Migration Partnership Framework, an agreement between the EU and primarily West and North African countries of origin and transit for migrants. This framework emphasizes border control and reducing migration, offering development aid in exchange for cooperation on migration management, while positive developmental effects of migration are largely absent (Godin et al. 2022, p. 8).

According to Koff (2017), migration and development policy in both the EU and the United States are influenced by domestic political pressures, which has contributed to a securitization of these policy objectives. Nyberg-Sørensen (2012) further examines how contemporary policy debates construct and instrumentalize the relationship between migration, development, and security within South-North migration dynamics. She argues that these domains are typically approached through selective nexuses, most prominently migration-development and migration-security, each reflecting shifting geopolitical priorities but

consistently shaped by the interests of governments in the global North. In this framing, development is often reduced to a tool for migration control, aimed at addressing the root causes of migration in the South, while security discourses are mobilized to justify increasingly restrictive border regimes in the North. Nyberg-Sørensen highlights the resulting asymmetry in policymaking, where Southern perspectives are marginalized and policy agendas remain driven by the North. Ultimately, she calls for greater policy coherence grounded in the recognition of mobility as integral to human development, emphasizing the inclusion of migrant experiences, rights, and safety, and questioning the broader consequences of securitization of migration for both development outcomes and global inequality.

As a result of securitization, migration policies can end up contradicting development objectives. While development frameworks emphasize inclusion, poverty reduction, and sustainability, migration policies often focus on containment, prevention, and externalization. This becomes the migration-security-development nexus and raises questions about the extent to which policy approaches can genuinely support development outcomes. These tensions are central to the concept of PCD and its application to migration governance. As the literature suggests, achieving such coherence is inherently challenging in the field of migration.

Considering these challenges, recent scholarship calls for a rethinking of policy coherence in the context of migration and development (Koff, 2017). This involves moving beyond narrow, instrumental approaches and adopting a more holistic understanding of migration as a structural component of development processes. A proposition of this perspective is the need to prioritize normative coherence, as emphasized by Koff (2017). This includes aligning migration policies with principles such as human rights, inclusion, and sustainable development. It also requires broadening the range of actors involved in policymaking, including judicial institutions and transnational networks, which can contribute to norm development and accountability. Koff (2017) suggests that regional human rights courts can strengthen normative coherence in development cooperation by spreading human rights standards into policymaking, despite lacking direct legal authority over development policies. Through soft power, these courts shape the preferences of global actors and promote rights-based norms, thereby reinforcing the transformative potential of development aid in line with the United Nation's 2015 SDGs (Koff, 2017).

Furthermore, the emphasis on controlling migration flows can undermine the very goals that PCD seeks to achieve. Dayton-Johnson and Katseli (2006) conceptualize PCD through the lens of interconnected global “flows”, including aid, migration, trade, and foreign investment.

They argue that development outcomes depend on the complementarity of these flows, suggesting that policies should aim to manage and coordinate them rather than simply control movement across borders. However, they highlight that the benefits of such complementarities are unevenly distributed, with many “developing countries” failing to fully capitalize on these interactions despite receiving aid. This raises policy challenges, including the need to better integrate migration, trade, and development policies, involve migrant-sending countries in decision-making, and address incoherencies through improved coordination, communication, and negotiation among stakeholders (Dayton-Johnson & Katseli, 2006).

The debates outlined above shows that the relationship between migration and development is complex and shaped by political priorities and institutional frameworks. While recent policy approaches frame migration as a tool for development, critical scholarship shows that this framing is often selective and embedded within broader agendas, particularly those related to migration management and containment. The EU-Lebanon Compact exemplifies this, as it seeks to support stabilization and improve the national economy for Lebanon and improve living conditions for Syrian refugees in the country while simultaneously advancing European interests in limiting onward migration. From a policy coherence perspective, this raises questions about whether development policies genuinely address the needs of displaced populations, or whether they are instrumentalized to serve external migration control goals.

This underscores that while existing frameworks of policy coherence offer valuable analytical tools, they remain insufficient for capturing the normative and practical complexities of protracted displacement. Their emphasis on aligning state and institutional objectives often sidelines fundamental human rights considerations and overlooks the everyday realities of refugees. This limitation points to the need for a reconceptualization of policy coherence that is explicitly oriented towards those it is meant to serve. A refugee-centred understanding of policy coherence therefore emerges as a way in bridging this gap, enabling a more grounded and normatively strong approach that places the pursuit of a dignified life at the core of policy design and evaluation.

4. EU-Lebanon Compact and the Syrian refugees

4.1 Contextualising Syrian refugee's situation in Lebanon

This chapter discusses the situation for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, that lead people to flee to neighbouring countries and beyond, and up until today where many Syrian refugees still reside in the respective host countries. To understand the background for and the impact of the EU-Lebanon Compact, it is essential to understand the Syrian refugees' general situation in Lebanon. Therefore, this chapter will discuss areas such as the Lebanese politics concerning the Syrians and their social and economic situation. However, it is not possible to include every aspect of the matter, therefore only the most noteworthy is included in the following chapter.

The Syrian crisis is regarded as one of the largest refugee crises since World War II (Yassin et al. 2015). The outbreak of the conflict in 2011 led to significant flows of refugees moving into neighbouring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. Throughout the Syrian crisis, Lebanon has hosted around 1.5 million Syrian refugees, representing the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide (Danish Refugee Council, n.d.). This has had significant economic and social impacts on Lebanon, which was already struggling with fragile governance systems and limited infrastructure (Yassin et al., 2015). The country has maintained an unclear and inconsistent stance toward Syrians seeking refuge within its borders. At the onset of the crisis, Lebanese authorities offered limited initial response to the influx of refugees, as the situation in Syria was expected to settle quickly (Janmyr, 2016). The government was commended by international organisations for maintaining open borders, which allowed refugees to enter with relative ease. However, closer analysis suggests these policies were not part of a deliberate strategy on Syrian refugees, but rather a reflection of broader political stalemate with paralysed policymaking (Janmyr, 2016, p. 7). Many Syrians were initially hosted by Lebanese families. This hosting dynamic developed organically and was shaped largely by pre-existing Lebanese-Syrian relations such as longstanding familial, economic, and social ties between communities, particularly in border areas (Yassin et al., 2015). But as the crisis intensified and refugee numbers grew, ensuring adequate protection became increasingly challenging, not only for host families but also at the national level. The situation placed pressure on multiple sectors, including security, housing, education, the economy, and social and political systems. In response, the Lebanese government, alongside international organisations such as UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations,

mobilized to address the emergency and proposed various interventions (Yassin et al., 2015). However, the scale and complexity of the crisis, combined with the ongoing needs of refugees and the challenges within the Lebanese context, which will be discussed chapter 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, made it difficult to establish a comprehensive and sustainable long-term strategy (Yassin et al., 2015). NGOs have provided basic assistance and supported access to education, within the limits of available funding and school capacity. In the absence of a clear national policy, municipalities assumed greater authority, particularly in managing refugee settlements. Meanwhile, due to political opposition to formal camps, informal settlements developed in an uncoordinated manner, especially in the North and in Bekaa, to accommodate the growing refugee population (Yassin et al., 2015).

As of mid-2025, Lebanon still hosts around 1.3 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, n.d. a). The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024 led to both voluntary returns from Lebanon to Syria and new inflows to Lebanon, particularly of minority groups fleeing renewed violence. The Syrian refugees continue to encounter obstacles in accessing legal residence, education, essential services and jobs - challenges that are compounded by ongoing socio-economic collapse, political instability, and a fragile security situation (UNHCR, n.b. a).

Before examining the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as the political attitudes that shape and constrain their presence within the country, the following sections will first outline both the confessional structure of Lebanon's political system and the broader context of state fragility and economic crisis, as these complex conditions shape refugee governance in Lebanon. These structural and institutional factors provide an important backdrop for understanding how the country responds to large-scale displacement even though it lies beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore in depth.

4.1.1 Lebanon's confessional system

The socio-economic pressures associated with hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees are not unique to Lebanon, as similar challenges can be observed in other neighbouring countries. However, Lebanon's situation is distinct due to both the scale of displacement it hosts with the highest number of refugees per capita globally and the limitations of its state capacity. But in comparison to other major host countries such as Turkey and Jordan, Lebanon's context is further complicated by its confessional power-sharing system, where questions of sects carry significant political weight. As a result, the presence of refugees is not only a humanitarian or

economic issue but also a political one, closely tied to the country's fragile sectarian balance (Tinas, 2017).

Lebanon's historical sensitivity to demographic change is important for understanding these dynamics, as shifts in population composition directly affect both its political order and security environment. The confessional power-sharing system distributes political authority among religious groups, assigning key positions along sectarian lines: the presidency to a Maronite Christian, the prime ministership to a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of parliament to a Shi'a Muslim (Fakhoury, 2014). This arrangement is intended to preserve stability by maintaining balance among sects, making any demographic transformation a matter of political concern. Within this framework, the large influx of Syrian refugees has become highly politicized. Most of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are Muslim, with around 95 percent of those registered with UNHCR being Sunni (International Crisis Group, 2013). Should a significant portion of this population remain in Lebanon over the long term or even be granted citizenship, it could alter the demographic balance by making the Sunni community the largest single group in the country (Tinas, 2017). This prospect has generated concerns among other sectarian groups, particularly Maronite Christians and Shi'a communities, who perceive such shifts as a potential threat to the existing political balance (Tinas, 2017). Concerns have also been strongly voiced within the broader Christian population, which has long viewed demographic decline as undermining its political position. Reflecting these fears, former President Michel Suleiman characterised the presence of Syrian refugees as posing an existential challenge to Lebanon (Tinas, 2017). At the same time, the Syrian conflict itself is widely interpreted through a sectarian lens within Lebanon, as domestic actors have adopted differing positions on the war. Consequently, public attitudes toward refugees are shaped not only by economic and social considerations but also by sectarian affiliations, perceived security risks, and concerns about their implications for the country's internal political balance (International Crisis Group, 2013).

While the sectarian structure of the Lebanese political system plays an important role in shaping governance dynamics and influence the integration of refugees, this dissertation does not examine these dynamics in depth. Instead, the analysis focuses on Lebanon as a state actor and on the design and implementation of the EU-Lebanon Compact. The sectarian context is therefore acknowledged here as part of the broader context but will not be treated as a central analytical focus moving forward, as the primary aim is to assess policy coherence for refugee needs and the extent to which these frameworks respond to this.

4.1.2 Lebanon as a failed state

Lebanon is widely described as a failed or failing state (Betz, 2021; Azhari & Gebeily, 2022), marked by governmental paralysis, a devastating economic crisis, and the inability to meet citizens' basic needs. Years of entrenched corruption, extreme inflation, and persistent political stalemate have significantly weakened the central government's capacity to function effectively (Rønn, 2023). The crisis is the result of several overlapping challenges. The sectarian power-sharing system (as described in chapter 4.1.1) has led to repeated political deadlock and prolonged periods without functioning leadership, leaving key positions, such as the presidency and central bank leadership, vacant for extended periods (Rønn, 2023). The financial sector has been effectively immobilized since the 2019 banking collapse, causing a sharp currency depreciation and wiping out much of the public's savings. The central bank has struggled to operate, and the country continues to face a profound shortage of liquidity (Rønn, 2023). At the same time, public infrastructure has deteriorated dramatically. Government-provided electricity is limited, compelling residents to depend on costly private generators for power (Azhari & Gebeily, 2022). Furthermore, corruption remains deeply embedded, with the country consistently ranking among the lowest globally and a lack of accountability continue to shield political elites from consequences (L'Orient Today, 2025).

While a comprehensive analysis of Lebanon as a failed or failing state lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is still important to acknowledge as it has implications for the state's response to the Syrian refugees and the EU-Lebanon Compact sought to restore resilience of the Lebanese state and economy. Given that most refugees remain in neighbouring countries, often in protracted displacement situations (UNHCR, 2026), the conditions observed in Lebanon are not exceptional but indicative of broader regional dynamics. Similar pressures are evident in other fragile or failing states such as Ethiopia (UNHCR, n.d. b), Chad (UNHCR, n.d. c), and Iran (UNHCR, n.d. d), where institutional and economic weakness compounds the challenges of hosting large refugee populations. As conflicts across the Middle East and beyond persist, the international community continues to grapple with how to support host states that are themselves under strain. In this regard, continued observation of Lebanon is relevant to extract lessons applicable to other contexts where displacement and state fragility intersect.

4.2 Legal status and political attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon

As shown in chapter 4.1 and 4.1.1, the issue of refugees is a politically contentious topic in Lebanon and their legal framework for refugees is largely non-existent. Although the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners includes six articles related to asylum, these are largely ineffective in practice (Janmyr, 2016). Moreover, the government has repeatedly bypassed other relevant national laws, including aspects of the Constitution, when addressing the presence of Syrian refugees (Janmyr, 2016). Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and, instead, it operates under a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR. This agreement acknowledges that Lebanon is not an asylum state while establishing a basis for cooperation with the international body (Fakhoury, 2017, p. 685). Furthermore, the country's approach to Syrian refugees has been shaped both by three decades of Syrian military presence in Lebanon, the country's historical experience with Palestinian refugees and by the opposing stances of the major political parties regarding the conflict in Syria (Janmyr, 2016). The Lebanese government and citizens view the large and prolonged presence of Syrian refugees as a threat to the country's security as well as its political, economic, and social stability, and has introduced laws and policies that frame them as unwelcome foreigners (Fakhoury, 2017; Janmyr, 2016).

4.2.1 Political attitudes towards Syrian refugees

In 2012, the then caretaker Prime Minister Naguib Miqati introduced a policy of “disassociation” aimed at maintaining Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance amid competing political factions that were unable to reach consensus on the Syrian conflict (TRANSTEC, 2015). A key aspect of this policy was Miqati's formal adoption of the term “displaced persons” instead of “refugees”. In principle, the government rejected refugee integration and defined Lebanon as a state of transit rather than as an asylum country (TRANSTEC, 2015). One reason for this linguistic choice is the association of the term “refugee” with Palestinian populations residing in Lebanon since 1948, whereas “displaced” implies a more temporary condition (Stevens, 2014). The terminology has also been interpreted as a way to avoid legal responsibilities and entitlements typically associated with recognized refugee status (Al-Saadi, 2015).

In October 2014, the Lebanese government took two key steps regarding the Syrian refugees. First, it agreed with the UN on a Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) focused on humanitarian protection, strengthening public services, and supporting Lebanon's overall stability (Yassin et al., 2015). The plan also set out a framework for aligning Lebanon's reception policies with the efforts of international organizations and NGOs. LCRP recognizes the strain on Lebanon's limited capacities and highlights the adverse spillover effects stemming from the Syrian conflict. It also states that international aid has largely focused on Syrians, overlooking vulnerable Lebanese households (UNHCR, 2014). Overall, the LCRP indicates that the Lebanese government favoured crisis management and short-term measures over long-term integration strategies. Second, the government adopted the Policy Paper on Syrian Displacement aimed at reducing refugee numbers, tightening regulation and security measures, and easing pressure on infrastructure. The Policy Paper also outlined stricter enforcement of regulations on displaced persons and foreigners to safeguard Lebanese jobs and the labour market. The two documents identify the return of displaced Syrians as the "preferred durable solution" (UNHCR, 2014, p. 3).

By 2016, dominant political narratives increasingly portrayed the presence of Syrian refugees as a threat to Lebanon's power-sharing system and emphasized the need for their eventual return. While policymakers have emphasized Lebanon's limited capacity and pointed to rising unemployment linked to the large presence of refugees, analysts have criticized the state for neglecting infrastructure and social reforms (Fakhoury, 2017). In this context, nonstate actors such as international organizations and civil society groups have stepped in to compensate for gaps in Lebanon's fragile refugee governance system. Rather than resisting this involvement, the Lebanese state has allowed both international and domestic actors to take on roles related to refugee livelihoods, humanitarian assistance, protection, and empowerment. However, the lack of robust oversight has created fragmented and uncoordinated approaches to refugee management (Fakhoury, 2017).

Lebanon has been dependent on international funding to support refugee relief and protection systems. Contributions from external actors, including the EU have been crucial for the Lebanese state (Fakhoury, 2017). At the same time, this reliance on external funding has created tensions with state authority and efforts to strengthen local capacity. For instance, the international community has often preferred to channel funds through selected partners rather than through government institutions, largely due to concerns over corruption within Lebanon's political system (Fakhoury, 2017). In addition, it also increases local groups'

dependence on international institutions, and it risks undermining the government's authority (Fakhoury, 2017).

4.2.2 Entry and requirements for legal residence

From the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Syrian refugees entering Lebanon with valid identification through official border points received an entry coupon and stamp granting free legal residence for six months, renewable once for another six months. After one year, they were required to renew residency at a cost of \$200 per person annually for those aged 15 and above. Those with irregular entry or overstayed visa risked arrest, prosecution, and deportation, though some could regularize their status by paying a high fee (Janmyr, 2016). These measures have been criticized as unaffordable and inconsistently applied, as renewals could still be denied even when requirements were met (Janmyr, 2016). The system was further complicated by the government's decision that issues regarding Syrian refugees would not be governed by law but by governmental decisions, allowing national law and agreements to be bypassed. From 2013 onwards, entry restrictions were increasingly tightened. The measures aim to deter and prevent Syrian refugees from seeking protection in Lebanon (Janmyr, 2016).

The government also sought to reaffirm Lebanon's sovereign decision-making in response to requests from UNHCR to strengthen refugee protection (Fakhoury, 2017). In 2014, Lebanese officials announced a stricter border policy, declaring that Lebanon was not an asylum country and urging third states to resettle Syrian refugees. By May 2015, following pressure from the Lebanese government, UNHCR suspended refugee registration. Since then, a restrictive visa regime has been implemented. It is based on categories such as tourism, study, medical treatment, short stay, transit, and business, with no provision for displacement due to conflict (Fakhoury, 2017). The system involves complex procedures for residency applications and renewals, and Syrians seeking long-term stay must secure a Lebanese sponsor. These strict and frequently shifting residency procedures have contributed to what Fakhoury (2017) calls "migrant illegality," (Fakhoury, 2017, p. 687) which has given rise to new forms of vulnerability and insecurity for the Syrian refugees. By January 2015, Syrians registered by the UNHCR must also sign a pledge not to work (Fakhoury, 2017), while Syrians not registered with UNHCR must submit a "pledge of responsibility," either through individual sponsorship for a work permit by a Lebanese national or a group sponsorship by a registered

employer hiring multiple Syrians (Yassin et al. 2015). This means that Syrian refugees are effectively compelled to choose between legal employment and access to humanitarian assistance (Kikano et al., 2021). Those who obtain a formal work permit lose their UNHCR registration and, consequently, their eligibility for aid (Kikano et al., 2021).

Organizations assisting the refugees have estimated that the most Syrian refugees will not be able to satisfy the residency requirements as many of them are unable to provide the documentation mandated under the regulations or to pay the fees required (Amnesty International, 2015). According to a report from UNHCR (2022, p. 15) legal residence rates dropped to a record low in 2022, with only 17 percent of Syrian refugees possessing valid residence status.

The study by Haddad et al. (2018) highlights legal status as a central factor shaping the vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, influencing their access to services, employment, mobility, and protection. Irregular status creates a sense of insecurity and underpins multiple forms of marginalisation. Refugees without legal documentation face restricted movement, fear of arrest or deportation, and significant barriers to healthcare, education, and justice systems (Haddad et al., 2018). This often forces them to remain invisible and rely on informal mechanisms for security and dispute resolution (Haddad et al., 2018). At the same time, the inability to register marriages and births reinforces long-term vulnerability, particularly for children who may be excluded from essential services and legal protections. In the labour market, irregular status increases exposure to exploitation, with limited avenues for redress (Haddad et al., 2018).

Although policy changes such as reduced residence fees in 2017 have offered some relief, they remain uneven in their impact as this measure applied only to refugees registered with UNHCR, leaving out an estimated 500,000 Syrians in Lebanon (Haddad et al. 2018, p. 18). The findings further show that legal status intersects with socio-economic inequality as wealthier Syrian refugees are better able to secure legal documentation or bypass restrictions, while poorer Syrian refugees are more frequently targeted by discriminatory practices. Overall, legal status operates as a structural driver of insecurity and inequality among the refugees (Haddad et al., 2018).

4.2.3 Living conditions and the “no-camp” policy

A central aspect of Lebanon’s policies regarding Syrian refugees has been its rejection of formal refugee camps established by humanitarian actors. This “no-camp” policy is largely a result of the country's previous experiences with the long-standing presence of Palestinian refugees (Sanyal, 2017). Lebanese officials frequently invoke this experience to justify restrictive policies toward Syrians, fearing a repetition of past political and security challenges. The protracted Palestinian presence is associated with militarization, civil conflict, and enduring marginalization and it continues to influence public perceptions and policy approaches (Sanyal, 2017). As a result, Lebanon has rejected the establishment of formal camps for Syrian refugees. Instead, Syrians are accommodated through informal arrangements, either in private housing or in informal camps, often on agricultural land (Senyal, 2017). Like many displaced populations, the Syrians were denied the legal right to own or formally rent property (Kikano et al., 2021). Housing arrangements between Syrian refugees and Lebanese landlords are often based on informal or illegal rental agreements, exposing tenants to frequent eviction and exploitative rent levels. The housing is typically in very poor condition. Beyond subdivided apartments and shared rooms, many live in improvised spaces such as backrooms of shops, basements, makeshift mezzanines, or structures added to rooftops. These environments are often overcrowded, unsanitary, and lack adequate light or ventilation (Kikano et al., 2021). A report by UNHCR (2022) supports this and further shows that monthly rent in 2022 had risen to nearly three times its 2021 level. More than half of the Syrian refugee households had fallen behind on rent. Additionally, 58 percent of the households were living in shelters that were overcrowded, failed to meet humanitarian standards, and/or were at risk of collapsing (UNHCR, 2022).

Senyal (2017) describes the Syrian informal settlements as emerging out of a “patron-client relationship” (Senyal, 2017, p. 121), which tend to be less transparent and participatory than formal humanitarian governance structures. This contributes to significant disparities between settlements, with unequal levels of support and services. The policy of not establishing formal camps has produced a fragmented and informal shelter system, creating operational challenges for humanitarian organisations delivering aid and basic services to a large refugee population. In response to growing restrictions and worsening conditions for Syrians, some NGOs have argued that a formal camp-based approach may offer a more effective and organised alternative to the current system (Senyal, 2017).

4.2.4 Work conditions and financial difficulties faced by Syrians in Lebanon

As the majority of the Syrian refugees have not been able to obtain valid residence status, they are also denied rights such as property ownership, official identity documentation, and formal employment (Janmyr, 2016). In addition, the beforementioned sponsorship system through the “pledge of responsibility” concentrates power in the hands of Lebanese employers, making Syrian workers highly dependent on them (Kikano et al. 2021). Even if Syrian refugees manage to obtain a work permit, their access to the labour market is highly restricted. In 2014, the Lebanese Ministry of Labour issued a circular limiting Syrian nationals’ access to employment, effectively confining them to the sectors of construction, agriculture, and cleaning (Yahya et al., 2018). In practice, securing employment outside these sectors remains highly challenging for Syrians, including those holding valid residence permits. Employers are required to demonstrate that no Lebanese worker is available to fill a given position before hiring a refugee, a condition that significantly limits Syrians’ access to broader segments of the labour market (Baroud & Zeidan, 2021).

According to Kikano et al. (2021), due to these restrictions on residence and work permits, many refugees are left with minimal protection from authorities and are highly dependent on employers and landlords. Kikano et al. (2021) argue that refugees experience a paradoxical condition of exclusion and inclusion, whereby they are marginalized institutionally and socially while simultaneously integrated into the local economy. This economic inclusion often occurs under exploitative conditions with low-paid labour and high rental costs, generating benefits for local actors. They suggest that this dynamic raise critical questions about the intent of exclusionary policies, which may function not only to deter refugees but also to sustain their presence in ways that serve the interests of powerful stakeholders (Kikano et al., 2021).

Further research highlights that refugees in Lebanon have developed a range of coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods over prolonged periods of displacement (Fathallah, 2020). Faced with restrictive labour market policies, limited access to formal employment, and precarious legal status, many refugees rely on informal work, self-employment, and small-scale entrepreneurship to secure income. However, these strategies are undermined by challenges, including limited financial resources, lack of legal protection, and the constant risk of business closure due to inconsistent regulatory enforcement (Fathallah, 2020). Despite legal limitations that confine Syrian refugees to specific sectors, many participate in the informal economy, where activities remain largely unregulated and unprotected (Fathallah,

2020). At the same time, fragmented governance structures and varying degrees of enforcement at the municipal level create uneven conditions for refugee-led businesses, with some areas tolerating informal economic activity while others impose stricter controls (Fathallah, 2020).

Furthermore, research by Haddad et al. (2018) identifies access to the labour market and employment as the main source of tensions between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host communities in the areas of Lebanon the study examined. Competition is concentrated in low-skilled sectors, such as cleaning, domestic work, construction, and agriculture, where refugees are perceived to accept lower wages, raising fears of job loss among vulnerable Lebanese workers. While some competition occurs primarily among Syrian, Palestinian and other migrant workers in Beirut, poorer Lebanese communities still feel economically threatened (Haddad et al., 2018). In Bar Elias in the Bekaa Governorate, according to Haddad et al. (2018), tensions around employment are shaped by socio-economic divisions, with some Lebanese expressing resentment toward Syrian refugees who establish businesses, interpreting this as evidence that they are not truly economically vulnerable. Similar sentiments elsewhere in Lebanon have, in some cases, led to hostility, including the forced closure of Syrian-owned businesses and attacks on shops (Haddad et al., 2018). The study emphasizes that tensions stem not only from labour competition but also from broader structural factors. Syrian workers report exploitation and poor conditions, contributing to declining wages overall. However, Lebanese respondents tend to blame refugees rather than employers, masking the role of labour practices and structural causes in driving conflict (Haddad et al., 2018).

Rising prices and the sharp depreciation of the Lebanese lira have significantly increased the economic vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2022). As of 2022, more than two-thirds were unable to afford basic necessities for survival. Without accounting for external aid, nearly 90 percent of Syrian refugee households would lack the financial means to meet even minimal living needs (UNHCR, 2022). Therefore, most must take up debt, which in turn deepens their vulnerability (UNHCR, 2022). As of the same year, 33 percent of the Syrian refugees were working, but they were still unable to cover the expenses for their basic needs, and the majority identified humanitarian assistance as their primary source of income (UNHCR, 2022). Many Syrians have accepted lower wages than Lebanese labourers, and therefore, sectors such as agriculture, construction, and services rely almost entirely on Syrian workers (Kikano et al., 2021). School attendance among children remains low with 53 percent

of those aged 3-17 enrolled in 2021-2022. Economic barriers, especially transport, school costs, and child labour, are the main obstacles (UNHCR, 2022). Youth are particularly at risk according to UNHCR (2022), with 59 percent not in education, employment, or training, and 35 percent having never attended school.

4.3 The EU-Lebanon Compact

The EU has been a main funding actor supporting Lebanon since the influx of Syrian refugees began in 2011, developing a range of regional and bilateral tools to strengthen the country's capacity to host refugees. In response to criticism for focusing too much on only the refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries, EU shifted its approach to benefit both refugees and host communities, embedding its aid within a broader resilience framework. Following the arrival of over one million Syrians in Europe in 2015, the EU intensified collaboration with third countries on migration management (Fakhoury, 2020, p. 7-8). This became part of a broader shift in the international community towards more coordinated and development-oriented approaches in 2016 according to Displacement and Development Study Group (2017). A series of major policy initiatives was introduced, aimed at improving responses to large-scale and protracted refugee situations. Milestones included the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region, which mobilised substantial financial commitments, and the World Humanitarian Summit, which reinforced the need to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development actors through joint planning, multi-year funding, and shared outcomes (Displacement and Development Study Group, 2017). These efforts were further consolidated in the New York Declaration, which emphasised responsibility-sharing and launched the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to enhance coordination among stakeholders (Displacement and Development Study Group, 2017). In this context, the EU introduced partnership frameworks designed to align policies in areas such as development and trade with migration objectives, presenting them as "positive incentives" (European Commission, 2016). These initiatives, known as Compacts, aimed to strengthen host states' capacity to accommodate refugees, enhance local protection systems, and promote refugees' economic self-reliance close to their countries of origin, thereby reducing their dependence on host governments (European Commission, 2016). Furthermore, the Compacts aimed to bring together host governments, donors, and humanitarian and development actors in multi-year, mutually accountable frameworks. The most prominent examples of this are the Jordan and

Lebanon Compacts which were both announced at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London in February 2016. They link financial support and concessional financing to policy reforms, including expanded access to education and labour markets for Syrian refugees in the respective host countries, and they are some of the earliest attempts to operationalise the humanitarian-development nexus at the country level (Displacement and Development Study Group, 2017; Fakhoury 2020a; Lenner & Turner 2018). The two Compacts were brokered between donor states, development institutions such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the governments of Jordan and Lebanon. In the case of Jordan, the Compact aims to generate approximately 200,000 work permits for refugees, leveraging special economic zones and easing trade regulations with the EU. By improving export conditions and attracting both domestic and foreign investment, the initiative seeks to stimulate job creation while supporting broader economic development (Displacement and Development Study Group, 2017). In Lebanon, the Compact allocated funding for the period from 2016 to 2020 for initiatives in employment, governance, security, and counterterrorism, while urging the Lebanese government to ease access to temporary legal residence and work for Syrian refugees (European Commission, 2017). The Compact, embedded within the EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities, emphasise the aim of strengthening the resilience of the Lebanese state and its national economy in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016). Rather than centring the rights of refugees, the framework approaches displacement as a challenge to state stability. It identifies migration and terrorism as the most urgent concerns, with counterterrorism positioned as the foremost priority (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016). The Compact conceptualizes EU-Lebanon cooperation as a framework for short- and medium-term interventions (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 116). While it briefly acknowledges the urgent need to address the situation of refugees and displaced persons, this concern is subordinated to the overarching objective of preserving national stability in Lebanon. The document instead frames the only sustainable long-term solution for refugees and displaced from Syria in Lebanon as being their safe return to Syria (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 117).

A central principle of the EU-Lebanon Compact is that all measures will be implemented in accordance with Lebanese laws and regulations. Economic resilience for Lebanon is prioritized as a prerequisite for any improvements in refugee conditions, including improvement of their economic opportunities (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p.

117). The EU pledges to align its financial and policy interventions with Lebanon's development priorities and to sustain or increase humanitarian assistance. At the same time, Lebanon commits to modest administrative adjustments aimed at facilitating the temporary stay of Syrian refugees. These adjustments focus on streamlining residency regulations rather than fundamentally altering refugees' legal status. Proposed measures include the periodic waiver of residency fees and the simplification of documentation requirements, such as easing the "pledge not to work." However, access to the labour market remains tightly controlled and conditional. Refugees are only permitted to work in specific sectors, where they are not considered to be in direct competition with Lebanese workers, such as agriculture and construction (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 121). Yet, the Compact highlights the migration-development nexus (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 120), aiming to demonstrate tangible development benefits for the Lebanese population, thereby linking migration governance to domestic economic gains.

In addition to the Compact's focus on improving the economy and labour market integration, it also includes several commitments related to education, reflecting an acknowledgment of its role in supporting both refugee and host community resilience and as a means of facilitating access to the labour market (EU-Lebanon Association Council). The EU is positioned as the primary donor to Lebanon's education sector (European Commission, 2017). EU commitments include continued support for school access for young and vulnerable Lebanese and refugees, as well as non-formal education, alongside exploring small and medium-sized enterprise programmes intended to improve employment opportunities. On the Lebanese side, commitments in this regard focus on increasing the capacity of the education system and developing a policy framework for non-formal education (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 124).

However, the Compact remained largely declaratory in nature, outlining mutual commitments and intentions without specifying binding implementation mechanisms or structural reforms (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). Unlike the EU-Jordan Compact, it does not provide for formal job opportunities for refugees, though it encourages their inclusion in the labour market. Its implementation is tied to the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), which prioritizes business development, infrastructure, and job creation for Lebanese citizens, with the expectation that this will indirectly benefit Syrian refugees as well (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016). In practice, however, Syrian refugees face strict limitations on their access to work. Those registered with UNHCR risk losing their refugee status if employed, while

employers who hire them may be subject to fines (Anholt & Sinatti, 2020). Furthermore, the Lebanese government had at the same time of the Compact begun to tighten regulations on refugees and increasingly restrict their rights as discussed in chapter 4.2. Despite this, the Compact initially generated some momentum after its adoption (Fakhoury, 2020). The Lebanese government pledged a number of reforms, including abolishing the \$200 residency renewal fee for Syrian refugees in 2017, permitting Syrian parents to register children born in Lebanon, and simplifying documentation procedures while facilitating access to employment in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and environmental work. In practice these commitments largely failed to materialize (Fakhoury, 2020). One of the more concrete commitments was the promise to generate between 300,000 and 350,000 new jobs in Lebanon, with 60 percent allocated to Syrian refugees. However, this measure was never implemented (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021).

With the adoption of the EU-Lebanon Compact, the Syrian crisis became a central, if not the defining, dimension of EU-Lebanese cooperation, shaping both the scope and direction of their engagement as argued by Bank and Fröhlich (2021). While both parties shared a common interest in preventing the destabilization of Lebanon, their underlying motivations diverged (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). For the EU, the Compact can be interpreted as part of a broader strategy to contain refugee movements by improving conditions for Syrians in Lebanon, thereby discouraging onward migration to Europe (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). Lebanon, in contrast, primarily sought financial and material support to mitigate the severe economic strain caused by the protracted crisis (Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). As a result, the Compact reflects a convergence of interests rooted in stability yet underpinned by different strategic priorities. It ultimately takes the form of a set of loosely formalized, pragmatic policy measures aimed at managing immediate challenges rather than addressing structural or long-term solutions (Seeberg, 2018).

5. Needs to build a dignified life in protracted refugee situations

In this chapter, the needs that refugees have in order to build resilience and dignified lives will be examined. This will make it possible to propose a model based specifically on the needs of refugees in protracted refugee situations. This chapter reviews studies on the needs of refugees in general, as well as those specific to Syrian refugees in the Lebanese context. In addition, empirical data from interviews is used to explore these needs in greater depth within the specific context of Lebanon. First, this chapter defines what constitutes a dignified life for refugees, drawing on interview data to emphasize the centrality of access to stable, legal, and fairly compensated employment. Hereafter, the need for legal status and education and obstacles hereof faced by refugees in host countries will be discussed, before focussing on access to work and its importance for being able to build a dignified life.

This focus reflects findings from both the literature and conducted interviews, which consistently identify access to employment as the central determinant of refugees' ability to lead dignified and self-reliant lives. However, access to the labour market does not exist in isolation. It is contingent upon enabling conditions, notably legal residence and access to education, which underpin the capacity for meaningful labour market participation as will be shown in this chapter. Without secure legal status, refugees face restrictions and insecurity that limit their ability to seek or maintain employment, while access to education is critical for developing the skills necessary to enter and sustain work. As such, this dissertation considers these dimensions not as separate priorities, but as interdependent components that collectively shape refugees' prospects for economic inclusion and a life of dignity.

5.1 Defining a dignified life

Based on the conducted interviews, a dignified life for Syrian refugees in Lebanon emerges as fundamentally tied to the ability to secure, stable, legal, and fairly paid work. Across respondents, the right to work is not understood merely as access to employment, but as access to meaningful, regulated, and sustainable livelihoods that enable autonomy and stability. A central theme is that income security constitutes the baseline of dignity. As highlighted by Jad, a dignified life depends first and foremost on securing an income

generating strategy. Without stable income, refugees remain dependent on aid, unable to meet basic needs, and excluded from long-term life planning. This aligns with the wish as described by Zayd, a Syrian refugee, to be able to economically plan for the future instead of living day by day. Conversely, those who manage to secure income, particularly outside exploitative conditions, are described as having a “good life,” even if not well off. This suggests that dignity is closely tied to access to work to gain economic self-reliance and the ability to provide for oneself and one’s family.

However, the interviews also show that legal barriers significantly undermine the access to labour for refugees. Work permits are consistently described as expensive, difficult to obtain, and restrictive. Even when refugees hold permits, they often face unequal pay and limited opportunities within the Lebanese labour market. This legal precarity forces many into informal or exploitative work arrangements, which directly contradict the notion of dignified labour. The necessity of legal residence and documentation further compounds these challenges, as these are prerequisites for both formal employment and entrepreneurial activity as will be discussed in this chapter and chapter 5.4. In addition, respondents emphasize that decent work, and not just any work, is essential. Decent work includes fair wages, safe conditions, and legal protection. Refugees with work permits still report disparities in wages compared to Lebanese workers and limited upward mobility according to the respondents. This reinforces that the access to work must be understood qualitatively, not only quantitatively.

Another key dimension is the link between work and education. Several interviewees stress that access to education and skill development is important for improving employment prospects. Language barriers, particularly in English, were identified as the main obstacle to accessing remote or international job markets, when it is not possible to work in Lebanon. Programs that enhance skills and connect refugees to global employment opportunities are therefore seen as critical pathways to dignity, especially in a constrained local labour market.

The interviews further highlight the importance of structural and policy-level solutions. Noor emphasizes that sustainable improvements require coordinated agreements between organisations and governments, particularly in regulating labour market access and balancing opportunities between refugees and host communities. This reflects an awareness that refugee dignity cannot be achieved solely at the individual level but depends on broader institutional frameworks that enable fair participation in the economy.

There is a consensus that the right to work is inseparable from other rights, particularly education. Education is viewed by the respondents as both an immediate need and a long-term investment that enables future access to stable employment. Without it, refugees risk being trapped in cycles of low-skilled, insecure labour.

In sum, the interviews suggest that a dignified life for Syrian refugees in Lebanon rests on three interconnected pillars:

- Access to legal and stable employment
- Fair and decent working conditions
- Opportunities for skill development and education

The right to work, therefore, functions as both a practical necessity and a broader mechanism for restoring dignity, stability, and social inclusion.

5.2 Legal status

This chapter will consider how the legal and political positioning of refugees shapes their ability to build a dignified life in prolonged refugee situations. Building on the definition of a dignified life in chapter 5.1 as closely tied to access to work, it shifts the focus to the structural conditions that enable or constrain this access. It examines how legal status, state practices, and political narratives influence refugees' everyday opportunities, security, and autonomy. The chapter highlights how legal precarity is an administrative issue and a central factor shaping refugees' capacity to achieve stability and self-reliance.

Existing research demonstrates that refugees' access to basic rights and resources is not only determined by material conditions, but also by the ways in which states categorize and regulate their presence (Abdo & Jamil, 2020; Trovato et al., 2024; Yassin et al., 2015). In contexts such as Lebanon, refugees often occupy a precarious space in which their stay is tolerated but not formally recognized, exposing them to continuous uncertainty and limited protection as unfolded in chapter 4.2. This process of "illegalization", as argued by Abdo and Jamil (2020), structures everyday life by restricting access to work, services, and social participation, thereby directly influencing refugees' capacity to build resilience and pursue dignified livelihoods. Understanding these structural constraints is therefore necessary for analysing both the needs of refugees and the obstacles they face in attempting to fulfil them. This is further underscored by all the interviews conducted for this dissertation. Every

interviewee mention residence permit and work permit as fundamental to achieving a dignified life.

Abdo and Jamil (2020) argue that individuals without legal status are not isolated from society in everyday life, but their status of “illegality” becomes central primarily in interactions with state authorities, employers or individuals reporting undocumented persons. Moreover, enforcement of migration laws is often inconsistent or selective (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). In some contexts, such as Lebanon, this selective enforcement functions as a mechanism through which the state asserts control without fully formalizing migrants’ legal status (Abdo Jamil, 2020). The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, as shown in the study by Abdo and Jamil (2020), illustrates this dynamic. Although both countries permitted the entry of refugees, neither of the two countries implemented formal legal frameworks to regularize their presence. As a result, refugees remain in a precarious position: their stay is tolerated but not officially authorized, leaving refugees continuously exposed to the risk of deportation. In this sense, their presence is defined less by legal recognition than by the absence of state action to remove them (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). The study conceptualizes this condition as a process of “illegalization,” whereby refugees are systematically positioned as unlawful subjects. The authors argue that research on refugee livelihoods, resilience, and coping strategies must take this process of illegalization into account. It is not merely a legal status but a structural condition that shapes access to rights, resources, and opportunities (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). This means that refugees are often pushed into informal and precarious modes of living, working, and accessing education. Their legal classification can affect them at any moment, limiting their participation in social and economic life compared to citizens or legally recognized migrants (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). Thus, illegalization is not only a legal label but a lived reality that permeates everyday experiences and reinforces systemic exclusion (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). This description of a lived reality in illegalization is shared by Zayd, a Syrian refugee living in Lebanon and one of the interviewees for this dissertation. He lived for several years in Lebanon without being able to obtain a residence permit. Zayd describes a persistent fear that shaped his everyday life, expressing a longing to live without constant anxiety. In particular, encounters with police officers or soldiers evoked a fear of being detained and uncertainty about whether he would see his family again. He also recounts stories of other Syrian refugees who have been deported from Lebanon and returned to Syria. According to Zayd, such accounts contribute to a climate of fear among Syrians without legal residence permits.

The importance of legal classification in being able to obtain other rights for refugees is supported by the findings by Trovato et al. (2024), that shows that legal status strongly shapes refugees' everyday experiences. The study is based on interviews with Syrian refugees conducted in Lebanon. Those without valid residence faced heightened restrictions on mobility, fear of arrest, and limited access to services. Legal insecurity was closely linked to barriers in healthcare, employment, and protection, and contributed to widespread feelings of instability and marginalisation. The participants reported significant economic hardship in Lebanon, particularly due to limited access to employment, high living costs, and inadequate humanitarian assistance. Although some refugees associated residence permits with greater safety, many struggled to obtain them due to high fees and changing regulations (Trovato et al., 2024). Overall, the findings from the study points to fragmented governance, inconsistent humanitarian coverage, and weak institutional coordination in responding to Syrian displacement in Lebanon (Trovato et al., 2024). The study underscores the refugees' need for clearer legal frameworks, improved access to residency and services, and more coherent shelter and livelihood policies that address both urban and rural vulnerabilities (Trovato et al., 2024).

All the interviewees for this dissertation refer to the lack of residence permits for refugees as an important obstacle to building a dignified life. They point to the fact that without a residence permit, refugees cannot get a stable job, start their own business, or have the right to education. In addition, they also fear being deported at any time. Zayd's account illustrates the structural and financial barriers refugees face when attempting to legalise their status in Lebanon as their access to legal residence is not only costly, but also dependent on informal arrangements that undermine both legal clarity and for him personal dignity. As described chapter 4.2.2 and 4.2.4, a key challenge is the requirement to secure a Lebanese sponsor in order to obtain a residence permit. Zayd explains that he was only able to get his residence permit by being registered under the name of a sponsor, and he was formally designated as a farmer even though he has a college degree and admits that he knows nothing about practical work such as farming. Therefore, this classification bore no relation to his actual skills or employment, underscoring how the system compels refugees into fabricated labour categories that align with the government-approved sectors. Prior to obtaining this permit, Zayd lived for several years without legal residence, relying solely on documentation from the UNHCR. However, as he emphasizes, this documentation provides protection rather than legal residence status and is not recognized by Lebanese authorities as conferring access to work.

The financial burden associated with legal status further compounds challenges for refugees. Zayd recounts being required to pay retrospective fees for each year he had resided in the country without valid documentation, amounting to a total of \$3,000. This sum represents a significant economic obstacle, particularly for individuals with limited access to stable income. Even after paying these fees, the benefits of residency remained limited. While it legalized Zayd's presence in the country, it did not grant access to basic rights or services. He reports being unable to perform everyday activities such as registering a phone number or driving a car under his own name. Instead, he remains dependent on Lebanese sponsors or personal connections within institutions to access basic services. Overall, Zayd's experience demonstrates that obtaining a residence permit is not a straightforward pathway to stability. Rather, it is a costly and restrictive process that offers limited practical benefits. These constraints hinder refugees' ability to build a dignified and independent life, despite the formal recognition of their legal presence.

5.3 Education

The human right to education is recognised by UNHCR as a central priority for refugee communities and a fundamental component of building sustainable futures. According to UNHCR in a report by Dryden-Peterson (2011), refugees themselves consistently frame education as “the key to the future” (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 8), associating it with stability and hope. Dryden-Peterson (2011) emphasises that long-term security for refugees is shaped by the knowledge and skills they are able to carry with them across different contexts. In this sense, education is positioned as a central component of durable solutions, enabling refugees to build resilience across economic, social, and political dimensions throughout all phases of displacement, including exile, return, or resettlement. Individuals with access to education are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, secure livelihoods, and regain forms of protection independently (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Education therefore functions both as a long-term investment in future integration and development, and as a bridge between immediate humanitarian assistance and sustainable solutions (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

The right to education is grounded in international legal frameworks that establish it as a basic human right, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989, all of which affirm the right to accessible and non-discriminatory education. For refugees specifically, this right is further articulated in

the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequent UN resolutions addressing education in emergency contexts. Within UNHCR, education has been framed as an “enabling right,” essential for the realisation of other rights and for long-term socio-economic development (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 9). However, significant gaps remain in practice. Access to education for refugees is often limited and uneven, particularly at the secondary level and for girls, highlighting a persistent discrepancy between international commitments and the lived realities of displaced populations (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

Refugee education policy is generally shaped by three main conceptual approaches: humanitarian, human rights, and developmental. The humanitarian approach frames education primarily as an emergency intervention aimed at providing immediate protection and preventing further harm to children, often with limited engagement in long-term institution-building or collaboration with national systems. In contrast, the human rights approach conceptualises education as a fundamental and enabling right that must be guaranteed in all contexts, including crises, and emphasises the importance of quality education that is available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable. The developmental approach, frequently articulated by refugees themselves according to the report by Dryden-Peterson (2011) for UNHCR, views education as a long-term investment in individual livelihoods and broader societal progress, highlighting its role in future stability and economic development. The report argues that greater alignment with the human rights and developmental approaches is essential considering evolving realities in displacement contexts, including the protracted nature of conflicts, the growing number of urban refugees, and the complex role of education in both mitigating and exacerbating conflict. Addressing these challenges requires not only expanding access but also ensuring the quality and relevance of education, as well as strengthening collaboration with national education systems, to support sustainable and durable solutions for refugee populations (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

The importance of the right to education for refugees in supporting a dignified life in the long term is underscored by interviews with staff members at the NGO in Lebanon, which provides educational opportunities for Syrian refugees in the country. Noor highlights both the central importance of education for refugee children and the structural barriers that limit access to it in Lebanon. Drawing on her experience, she points to the lack of legal documentation as the primary obstacle preventing Syrian children from enrolling in public schools. Although educational infrastructure, including afternoon shifts designed for refugee students, formally exists, access is effectively conditional upon registration status and differs between

municipalities and from school to school. In practice, many refugee children are excluded because they lack the required documentation. As a result, what is framed at policy level as a right to education becomes a conditional and unevenly distributed privilege in reality, according to Noor.

She points to issues of social cohesion, including discrimination within host communities, which influences whether schools are willing to accommodate refugee students. Since the decision to open afternoon shifts is often left to individual school administrations, reluctance or prejudice at the local level reduces the opportunities. Even for those who are eligible, practical constraints such as transportation costs create additional obstacles for families with limited financial means.

Despite these challenges, the importance of education for refugee children's life trajectories is evident in the experiences at the NGO, where Noor works. She emphasises that access to education can alter future prospects, particularly for those who remain in Lebanon. Without education, many children are pushed into early labour, often in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture, or into more precarious situations such as street begging. In contrast, even limited educational access, such as literacy and numeracy skills acquired through informal schooling, can open pathways to more stable forms of livelihood, including vocational work in trade or employment in small businesses. In some cases, education has enabled children to disengage from harmful environments, such as gang involvement, and transition into more secure living conditions. This is further supported in other interviews, that stresses the point that long-term stability for refugees depends on securing education for children, as this improves their future employment opportunities and contributes to intergenerational economic stability.

However, the role of informal education remains ambivalent according to Noor. While NGOs provide learning opportunities for children excluded from the formal system, the lack of official certification limits the long-term value of this education. As Noor explains, many families still rely on informal schools, particularly when children risk falling too far behind to re-enter formal education systems later on, either in Lebanon or upon return to Syria.

According to Noor's testimony, the challenges for education for refugees are rooted in policy frameworks. She argues that restrictive regulations regarding documentation and the non-recognition of informal education perpetuate exclusion and undermine the effectiveness of educational provision. Furthermore, according to Noor, limited access to education constrains access to work, leaving many refugees trapped in cycles of precarity. As such, education

emerges not only as a fundamental right but also as a determinant of refugees' ability to build dignified and independent lives.

The points from Noor are consistent with broader research on refugee education in the report by Dryden-Peterson (2011), which identifies structural and policy-related barriers as central challenges to ensuring refugees access to proper education. In particular, the increasing number of refugees living in urban settings requires a shift towards integrating refugee children into national education systems, rather than relying on parallel or temporary solutions (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). At the same time, limited access to post-primary education and the uneven quality of available schooling continue to restrict refugees' long-term prospects. The report emphasises that access alone is insufficient. Education must also be of adequate quality and relevance to support future livelihoods (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Furthermore, effective provision of education for refugees globally is complicated by political dynamics, issues of coordination among key actors, and weak alignment between humanitarian responses and long-term development goals (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). As a result, there remains a significant gap between the formal recognition of education as a fundamental right and its realisation in practice (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). These findings align with the experience from Lebanon as described by Noor. Addressing these challenges, according to the report by Dryden-Peterson (2011), requires stronger collaboration with national institutions, improved monitoring of learning outcomes, and a reconceptualization of education as both an immediate protective measure and a long-term investment in refugees' capacity to achieve sustainable and independent lives (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

5.4 Access to work for refugees

As outlined in the chapters 5.2 and 5.3, both legal status and access to education constitute fundamental conditions shaping refugees' ability to build resilience and establish dignified lives in protracted displacement contexts. Legal status provides the formal recognition necessary to access services and labour market and participate in socio-economic life without constant risk of sanction or exploitation. At the same time, education equips refugees with the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to navigate labour markets and pursue opportunities beyond immediate survival. However, while these elements are essential, they remain enabling conditions rather than ends in themselves as their significance lies in how they facilitate access to employment. The ability to work is central to refugees' capacity to

achieve self-reliance, reduce dependency on humanitarian assistance, and secure long-term stability (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b; Crawford et al., 2015; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018) as will be discussed in the following chapter. This interdependence suggests that access to work occupies a pivotal position among the needs for refugees. It is through work that refugees can translate legal status and educational attainment into tangible improvements in their living conditions and future opportunities. At the same time, the realisation of this need is often constrained by restrictive policies, labour market regulations, and broader socio-economic dynamics within host countries.

This chapter examines the right to work as a central component of refugees' ability to build dignified lives, situating it within both international legal frameworks and the specific political and economic context of Lebanon. It begins by examining the international legal foundations underlying refugees' right to work. The chapter then analyses the importance of the right to work for refugee resilience, while exploring the structural challenges that limit its implementation in practice. It further investigates how restricted access to formal employment confines refugees to informal and precarious labour and considers entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway to economic participation, despite legal and financial barriers. Overall, the chapter argues that while the right to work is essential, its realization is conditioned by broader legal, economic, and political structures that shape refugees' opportunities for self-reliance.

5.4.1 The right to work in international conventions

The right to work is enshrined in several international treaties. 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol establishes refugees' right to work. Chapter 3 in the Convention affirms their right to wage employment, self-employment, and certain professional activities. The legal scholar and one of the architects behind the Convention Louis Henkin noted the fundamental importance of labour rights, asserting that “without the right to work, all other rights were meaningless” (Asylum Access and the Refugee Work Rights Coalition, 2014, p. 11).

However, as Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, refugees in the country are not automatically granted rights to employment under the Refugee Convention (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b). Therefore, the foundation for safeguarding Syrian refugees' right to work lies in wider international human rights

frameworks rather than the 1951 Convention. The right to work is articulated in Article 23 of the UDHR as a universal human right and it is further reinforced in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 6 establishes the right to work and outlines states' responsibility to ensure its realization, while Article 7 further specifies the obligation to guarantee safe and fair working conditions. This is the key international treaty that protects the right to work in binding form to which Lebanon is a signatory (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b). The UN Committee responsible for overseeing the ICESCR has clarified that the right to work extends to all individuals, including non-citizens such as refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and migrant workers, irrespective of their legal status or documentation (United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2009). However, a limitation of the ICESCR lies in Article 2(3), which allows developing countries to decide how far they extend economic rights to non-nationals including refugees. States may also restrict rights based on resource constraints. Nonetheless, states have immediate obligations, applicable to all, including refugees, to take concrete steps toward realizing these rights, avoid interference with them, and ensure they are upheld without discrimination (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b). But even though international human rights standards are applicable, in practice the status of refugees is largely determined by the domestic laws of host countries governing foreign nationals (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b).

5.4.2 Work, sustainability and resilience

There is broad consensus in the literature and the empirical research that access to work is a cornerstone for building a dignified life and resilience for refugees, and that it, once fulfilled, provides access to other human rights (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b; Crawford et al., 2015; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). This underscores the importance of the right to work, not only as a legal entitlement but as a foundational condition for achieving self-reliance and economic independence for refugees.

According to International Rescue Committee (n.d. b), the right to work is a fundamental human right closely tied to human dignity, as it supports both survival and personal development. It is also interconnected with other rights, including health, adequate standard of living, social protection and family life. When refugees are denied legal access to employment, the consequences can be severe: poverty deepens as savings run out,

humanitarian aid falls short, and tensions with host communities may rise. Furthermore, unemployment can have harmful effects on mental health (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b).

Zayd's account underscores the importance of work for refugees in building a dignified life. For him, employment is a necessary condition for stability, and the possibility of planning beyond immediate survival. He describes how, in principle, Lebanon offers economic opportunities, yet access to meaningful work remains heavily restricted for Syrians due to legal constraints on employment and legal status as described in chapter 4.2.2 and 4.2.4. Refugees are limited to a narrow set of low-skilled occupations, regardless of their qualifications. Even when work is available, it is typically poorly paid compared to Lebanese wages, making it difficult to achieve financial independence without taking on multiple jobs. Zayd describes how working under the name of Lebanese sponsors provides a degree of protection but remains precarious and dependent on personal networks. He explains how his opportunities for work and thus his income, does not provide him with a pathway to long-term security but is rather a means of day-to-day survival, highlighting the gap between work in principle and the limited opportunities available in practice. In his view, access to work legally in Lebanon or to start a business is the most important factor in enabling him to build a long-term, decent life for himself and his family.

Along the same lines, Yassin et al. (2015) argue that providing refugees with a clear and rights-based legal status is essential, alongside facilitating access to employment such as participation in public works, as it can strengthen public services, restore refugees' sense of agency, and support local economies. Rather than viewing refugees as labour market competitors, policies should recognise their potential contributions, particularly in sectors like construction and agriculture, and promote opportunities for sustainable livelihoods beyond aid dependency (Yassin et al., 2015, p. 24-27).

Yet, Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016) argue that access to employment alone is insufficient unless structural barriers in host country labour markets are addressed, and unless adequate opportunities for meaningful economic participation exist. While refugee livelihood programming has the potential to enhance self-reliance and improve long-term socioeconomic outcomes, its effectiveness is fundamentally shaped by the broader political, legal, and economic context in which it is implemented (Jacobsen & Fratzke, 2016). The same argument is further emphasised by Abdo and Jamil (2020) in the context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. Their study argues that Syrian refugees' engagement in informal employment

should be understood as a structural consequence of their “illegalization,” rather than as a voluntary coping strategy. Excluded from formal labour markets, refugees are effectively absorbed into pre-existing informal economies in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, where informality already accounts for a significant share of employment (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). As a result, refugees and local informal workers alike are confined to precarious, low-paid work and function as a source of cheap labour within existing power structures. In this context, informality is not an exception but a systemic feature of the political economy, reinforced by state practices that maintain refugees in a legally ambiguous position (Abdo & Jamil, 2020).

This structural perspective is further reflected in the empirical research, which highlights how restrictions on refugees’ access to formal employment are embedded in the broader labour market issues in Lebanon. As noted by Noor, employment opportunities for refugees in the country cannot be understood in isolation from national labour policies aimed at protecting the livelihoods of citizens. Refugees are largely confined to specific sectors and informal work, where lower wage expectations intensify competition with Lebanese workers. Refugees are incorporated into the labour market in ways that both sustain their marginalisation, according to Noor, and contribute to downward pressure on wages within an already fragile economy as Lebanon has been experiencing one of the most severe economic crises in recent history (World Bank, 2023) and the population lives in widespread poverty (European Commission, 2023). This reinforces Noor’s argument that limited access to formal employment is not simply a legal constraint, but part of a broader issue where both refugees and citizens in the host community struggle to make ends meet and find steady work.

5.4.3 Entrepreneurship

A study by Fathallah (2020), based on interviews with Syrian refugee entrepreneurs and stakeholders, shifts the focus from refugees’ access to wage labour to entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway for building sustainable livelihoods for refugees. The findings demonstrate that, in the context of restrictive labour market policies and widespread informality, many refugees turn to small-scale business activities as a strategy for survival, self-reliance, and, in some cases, growth (Fathallah, 2020). However, the study highlights that to transform these strategies into genuinely sustainable and resilient livelihoods, refugees require a set of enabling conditions that are largely absent in the context of Lebanon. Among

these needs are access to financial resources, accessible and renewable legal documentation, and clearer, more consistent regulatory frameworks that reduce the risk of arbitrary business closures (Fathallah, 2020). The constant threat of enforcement, coupled with fragmented and uneven governance across municipalities, forces many entrepreneurs to operate informally, limiting their ability to expand and exposing them to exploitation and insecurity (Fathallah, 2020).

This is further underscored by an interview with Jad for this dissertation, as he emphasized that obtaining legal registration for a startup is challenging, but it is still possible. The NGO he works for therefore offers guidance and mentorship on formal business registration. Although some refugees choose to start businesses without registering them, this is not encouraged. Legal residence is described by Jad as a key prerequisite for formal entrepreneurship, as it is required to register a business. The process becomes easier when refugees have a local Lebanese partner, who can facilitate compliance with administrative procedures. From the interviewee's perspective, entrepreneurship is central to building a resilient and sustainable livelihood. Refugees need to establish reliable income-generating activities to secure stability for themselves and their families, whether in Lebanon or another host country.

In addition, Fathallah (2020) also points out that entrepreneurship is not only a coping mechanism for refugees but also a potential driver of local economic activity. Interviewees in the study emphasised that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs contribute to host communities by renting housing and commercial spaces, purchasing goods from local suppliers, and providing affordable products and services to Lebanese consumers (Fathallah, 2020). In some areas, these activities have stimulated micro-local economies, increasing the circulation of money, particularly in rural and economically marginalised regions. Moreover, refugee-led businesses often generate employment opportunities, both for other Syrian refugees and for Lebanese, thereby extending their economic impact beyond individual households (Fathallah, 2020). Despite these contributions, refugees remain constrained by limited institutional support and legal recognition. Fathallah (2020) argues that despite operating in informal and legally precarious conditions, refugee-led businesses can play an important role in enabling livelihoods and fostering social and economic integration for refugees. Informal entrepreneurship may offer accessible and low-cost entry points for refugees to generate income, particularly in contexts where formal employment and business registration are difficult to obtain. If host communities tolerate or accept these activities, refugee

entrepreneurs may be able to sustain their livelihoods, even without formal recognition. However, Fathallah (2020) also highlights the risks associated with shifting toward stricter regulation and enforcement. Efforts to delegitimise informal refugee businesses may push entrepreneurs toward formalisation, but this outcome is contingent on the feasibility of meeting legal and administrative requirements. If such requirements remain inaccessible due to high costs, bureaucratic barriers, or legal restrictions, refugees may be unable to formalise their businesses. In such cases, increased enforcement is more likely to result in business closures rather than formalisation, ultimately exacerbating refugees' economic vulnerability and undermining their already fragile livelihoods (Fathallah, 2020).

5.5 Recommendations for livelihood initiatives in the literature

Drawing on existing literature, this chapter examines recommendations for livelihood interventions in contexts of protracted displacement, with particular attention to the role of access to work, legal frameworks, and labour market integration. It outlines the limitations of current approaches that prioritise resilience and self-reliance without addressing underlying structural constraints and highlights the importance of rights-based and coherent strategies. The chapter provides a foundation for evaluating whether the EU-Lebanon Compact contribute to meaningful resilience, or if it risks reinforcing the very conditions that undermine refugees' ability to build sustainable and dignified lives. Furthermore, it provides a basis for proposing an alternative model for future policy frameworks in protracted refugee contexts.

Abdo and Jamil (2020) critiques prevailing humanitarian approaches for focusing on resilience and self-reliance while neglecting the structural and political factors that produce refugees' marginalization. Such approaches, according to Abdo and Jamil (2020), risk individualizing responsibility for poverty and overlooking how state policies and international cooperation sustain exclusionary systems. Informality, therefore, extends beyond employment to shape multiple aspects of refugees' everyday lives, including housing, education, and access to services (Abdo & Jamil, 2020) as discussed in chapter 4 and 5. The authors conclude that addressing refugees' conditions requires moving beyond fragmented interventions towards a rights-based approach that confronts underlying power relations and ensures meaningful protection and inclusion (Abdo & Jamil, 2020). Along the same line, Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016) argues that the design and implementation of livelihood

initiatives should be aligned with local labour market realities and should be embedded in long-term development strategies rather than short-term. Such initiatives should also be supported by predictable and coordinated funding mechanisms across humanitarian and development actors (Jacobsen & Fratzke, 2016). Furthermore, according to Jacobsen and Fratzke (2016), interventions should be context-specific rather than standardized, build on refugees' existing skills, capacities, and aspirations, and actively involve both refugees and host communities in programme design to ensure relevance and sustainability. Ultimately, sustainable livelihood outcomes depend on creating enabling environments in which refugees can meaningfully participate in local economies and translate access to work into durable pathways toward dignity and self-reliance (Jacobsen and Fratzke, 2016).

Nevertheless, according to Zetter and Ruaudel (2018), many host states are hesitant to grant refugees the right to work due to concerns about labour market pressures, including job competition, wage suppression, and declining working conditions for its citizens. This is also the case for Lebanon, as discussed in chapter 4. As a result, many countries maintain reservations, and even those that formally allow employment often impose limitations on access to the labour market (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). Zetter and Ruaudel (2018) further shows, that granting the right to work on paper is not enough. It must be supported by effective implementation, compliance, and enforcement to be meaningful. The authors therefore propose several recommendations to strengthen refugees' access to work.

Governments, supported by donors and international actors, should better align refugee policies with national labour market strategies, as these often operate in isolation or even contradiction. Stronger coordination between institutions responsible for migration and those overseeing labour rights can help reduce administrative barriers and improve implementation (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). Employers, trade unions, and business organisations also play a key role in promoting fair access to employment and decent working conditions. Efforts should also focus on raising awareness of labour rights among refugees and strengthening enforcement by authorities, according to Zetter and Ruaudel (2018). Finally, international actors should increase support for policies, funding, and labour market initiatives that enable refugees to access decent and sustainable employment (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018).

The Overseas Development Institute has conducted a set of case studies examining how livelihoods can be developed in situations of protracted displacement, and here, too, access to the labour market is one of the key issues (Crawford et al., 2015). The study identified programming approaches to make initiatives more efficient in making lasting improvement

for refugees in prolonged refugee situations (Crawford et al., 2015). First, integrated programmes that combine vocational training, employment opportunities, and income-generation support are more effective than small-scale or isolated initiatives (Crawford et al., 2015). Fragmented approaches have been criticized for ignoring market demands, overlook refugees' social and psychological barriers, lacking financial expertise, or fail to engage the private sector. More successful examples have combined short-term employment, vocational training, job placement, microenterprise support, and psychosocial assistance (Crawford et al., 2015). This has been further confirmed by other reports showing that technical, vocational and educational training programmes tend to be more effective in contexts where refugees are permitted to work and the economy is relatively stable. In more restrictive settings, however, labour market barriers can limit both the sustainability and overall impact of such training initiatives (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2017). Finally, the study by The Overseas Development Institute emphasises, in line with other findings discussed in this chapter, the importance of broader regional and national development strategies, which advocates long-term, integrated responses supported by political commitment and large-scale infrastructure investment. However, the study also highlights that each context of protracted displacement is inherently complex, meaning there is no universal approach to promoting self-reliance and livelihoods. Different settings require tailored responses that reflect their specific conditions and needs (Crawford et al., 2015).

6. The EU-Lebanon Compact and refugee needs: Implications for resilience and dignified lives

This chapter will discuss the extent to which the EU-Lebanon Compact addresses the actual needs of the Syrian refugees in a protracted displacement context in Lebanon. The discussion will lead to the proposal of a new framework for managing protracted refugee situations in the conclusion (chapter 7), centred on policy coherence for refugee needs. The discussion shows that the EU-Lebanon Compact falls short in aligning its objectives with the lived realities of Syrian refugees, particularly in relation to meaningful access to work. At the same time, approaches such as the EU-Lebanon Compact that prioritise resilience and self-reliance often overlook the structural and political conditions that sustain exclusion, thereby limiting their transformative potential (Abdo & Jamil, 2020).

This chapter will start with a discussion on the EU-Lebanon Compact's approach to refugees' opportunities to enter the labour market and the structural barriers to doing so. Next, the chapter will examine the agreement's understanding of resilience, who it applies to, and the implications thereof. The Compact's lacking focus on the actual needs of refugees in protracted refugee situations and the consequences hereof will be discussed.

6.1 Access to work and limits of the EU-Lebanon Compact

The findings of this dissertation highlight interconnected structural constraints on Syrian refugees' ability to build dignified lives, with access to work as a central condition. Employment enables autonomy, stability, and access to other basic needs (International Rescue Committee, n.d. b; Crawford et al., 2015; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). However, Lebanese policies restrict the access to the labour market, while complex residency regimes prevent most refugees from obtaining documentation needed to work legally (Haddad et al., 2018; Janmyr, 2016). This issue is insufficiently addressed in the EU–Lebanon Compact (Fakhoury, 2020).

The Compact presents itself as a framework aimed at enhancing resilience and supporting both refugees and the host communities through a more development-oriented approach. In principle, its emphasis on livelihoods and economic opportunities (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016) aligns with the recognition that employment is key to reducing dependency on

aid and fostering self-reliance. However, when assessed against the realities of the restrictions described in chapter 4, the Compact falls short of meaningfully addressing the structural barriers that prevent refugees from accessing work (Fakhoury, 2020). While the Compact promotes job creation and economic support initiatives, these measures operate within a system that continues to limit refugees' access to the labour market. As a result, many Syrian refugees have become trapped in prolonged status of "illegality" (Fakhoury, 2020, p. 9), while security forces have increasingly taken action against employers hiring them. The Compact does not truly challenge these structures restricting the refugees access to the labour market as it only states intent to ease restrictions, but only for an unspecified temporary period and without any binding commitments to do so. Efforts to enhance livelihoods have remained confined to short-term or informal opportunities, failing to provide the stability and protection necessary for dignified living. Therefore, as argued by Fakhoury (2020), the EU-Lebanon Compact functions largely as a technical policy instrument and does not address the deeper structural issues that hinder Lebanon from offering durable solutions for Syrian refugees.

Moreover, the Compact specifically states that the only sustainable solution for Syrian refugees is their "safe return" to Syria (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016, p. 117), and the Compact therefore does not provide long-term solutions. This further constrains the possibility of implementing policies that would enable real labour market inclusion and dignified lives for refugees in protracted refugee situations. This is a critical limitation of the Compact. Although it acknowledges the importance of livelihoods, it does not adequately address access to work as a structural and legal issue. Instead, it frames employment in terms of economic projects and external support, rather than as a fundamental right that requires systemic policy change. Thus, the Compact reflects the very shortcomings identified by Zetter and Ruaudel (2018) in frameworks regarding refugee integration, as it fails to ensure alignment between refugee policies and national labour market strategies. Rather than fostering policy coherence across institutions responsible for migration and labour market, the Compact does not include them or impose obligations on them and thereby allows these domains to operate in isolation, limiting effective implementation.

Consequently, the EU-Lebanon Compact has had disappointing outcomes when compared to the otherwise optimistic tone of Huang and Ash (2018), who called the EU-Lebanon and EU-Jordan Compacts "game-changing" due to their focus on employment. Since there was no focus on enforcement mechanisms or the structural barriers preventing refugees from entering

the labour market in Lebanon, the Compact has made no real improvement for refugees in the country.

The effects of restricted access to work extend across all aspects of refugees' lives. Inadequate and unstable income directly affects housing conditions, with many refugees forced into overcrowded and insecure living arrangements (UNHCR, 2022). It also limits access to education and healthcare, as families struggle to cover basic costs and often rely on negative coping strategies such as debt (UNHCR, 2022). The findings therefore suggest that many of the challenges identified, such as poverty, poor living conditions, and limited access to services, are not isolated issues but symptoms of a structural exclusion from formal and secure employment that the Compact failed to sufficiently confront.

Building on this, the role of education within the Compact further illustrates these shortcomings. In the Compact, education is recognised as a complementary component, intended to facilitate access to the labour market for both vulnerable young refugees and Lebanese (EU-Lebanon Association Council, 2016). However, while employment is prioritised as the pathway to self-reliance, insufficient attention is given to the educational and structural conditions that enable access to meaningful and sustainable work.

The findings of this dissertation show that education functions as an enabling right, closely linked to the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. Interviews conducted for this dissertation shows that access to employment depends not only on legal status but also on skills, language proficiency, and recognised qualifications. But barriers such as limited access to formal education, documentation requirements, and the non-recognition of prior learning restrict refugees' opportunities. In this sense, the Compact's support for education remains insufficient, as it is not accompanied by broader reforms underlying structural barriers or supported by implementation mechanisms. Therefore, according to the interviewees, the objectives have not been realised.

This reflects a broader critique of resilience-based approaches by Abdo and Jamil (2020), which in this case emphasise economic participation without adequately addressing the structural constraints that produce exclusion. By promoting education and employment in parallel rather than as part of an integrated rights-based framework that considers the real barriers refugees face, the Compact reduces education to an economic instrument rather than recognising it as a fundamental right that underpins long-term inclusion. Consequently, the lack of alignment between education, labour market policies, and legal residency further

undermines the Compact's capacity to support refugees in achieving stable and dignified lives.

6.2 Resilience and migration control

The EU's adoption of resilience as a guiding framework in its external action, particularly since the 2016 Global Strategy, has been presented as a shift toward more integrated approach to complex challenges (Tocci, 2019). In principle, resilience aims to bridge humanitarian and development approaches, emphasising local ownership, capacity-building, and long-term adaptation to crises (Juncos, 2019; Tocci, 2019). However, as the literature demonstrates, this conceptual shift is marked by significant ambiguity and internal contradictions (Aleassa, 2025; Abdo & Jamil, 2020), and it can be called into question whose resilience is prioritised and for what purpose. This is true for the Compact, since resilience is mentioned in this agreement only in relation to the state of Lebanon its economy. Resilience therefore does not apply to human beings in this regard, and the focus on human rights is thus omitted.

This is in line with the central critique by Wagner and Anholt (2019), that resilience functions as a flexible and politically convenient concept, allowing the EU to reconcile normative commitments with strategic interests. While framed as an empowering and locally driven approach, resilience is often implemented through top-down mechanisms that prioritise state stability and institutional capacity over the needs of affected populations (Aleassa, 2025; Abdo & Jamil, 2020). As Joseph and Juncos (2019) argue, resilience enables the EU to externalise responsibility by shifting the burden of crisis management onto local actors, while maintaining influence through funding and policy frameworks. Similarly, Anholt and Sinatti (2020) highlight how resilience discourse simultaneously frames refugees as development opportunities for host states and as potential threats to European stability, revealing an inherent tension in EU migration governance.

This tension becomes visible in the context of the EU-Lebanon Compact. While the Compact is embedded within a resilience framework and presented as a mechanism to support both host communities and refugees, its underlying logic reflects a predominantly state-centric and migration-management-oriented approach. The emphasis on strengthening the resilience of the Lebanese state and economy illustrates how resilience is operationalised at the level of state and institutions rather than individuals. Refugees, although acknowledged, are not positioned as central agents or beneficiaries within this framework. The Compact

conceptualises displacement as a challenge to national stability rather than a rights-based humanitarian issue. Its prioritisation of security concerns, including migration control and counterterrorism, underscores the extent to which resilience is intertwined with broader geopolitical objectives. Scholars argue that frameworks such as the Compact have functioned to externalize migration control by preventing onward movement towards Europe and encouraging refugees to remain in initial host countries through resilience-based approaches (Fahhoury, 2020; Tsourapas, 2019; Arar, 2017; Anholt & Sinatti, 2020; Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). In this sense, the Compact can be understood as part of a strategy of migration containment, aiming to improve conditions for refugees in Lebanon not as an end in itself, but as a means of discouraging their movement toward Europe. It reflects a broader political economy of refugee governance in which host states leverage their position to secure financial and political support, while maintaining control over refugee populations as argued by Tsourapas (2019). In this context, resilience becomes part of a negotiated arrangement that serves the interests of both the EU and host governments, but not necessarily those of refugees themselves. As Arar (2017) suggests, such arrangements constitute a “grand compromise” in which refugees are effectively excluded from decision-making processes, and their rights are subordinated to state-centric priorities.

The limited impact of the Compact further highlights the gap between rhetoric and practice. Although framed as an innovative and resilience-oriented approach, the EU-Lebanon Compact has been widely criticised for its vagueness and lack of concrete implementation mechanisms (Fakhoury, 2020; Bank & Fröhlich, 2021). This outcome reinforces the critiques by Stollenwerk et al. (2021) that resilience, as operationalised by the EU, often lacks the resources, coherence and long-term commitment necessary to produce meaningful change.

Taken together, this analysis suggests that the EU’s resilience approach, as implemented through the EU-Lebanon Compact, is less concerned with enhancing the resilience of refugees than with stabilising host states and managing migration flows. While the framework incorporates elements of development and self-reliance, these are ultimately instrumentalised in service of broader political objectives. The result is a model that prioritises containment over protection and state resilience over refugee resilience, raising questions about the extent to which resilience can serve as a genuinely transformative approach in refugee contexts.

Bargués-Pedreny’s (2020) critique of the performative character of resilience provides a useful lens through which to interpret the EU-Lebanon Compact. While the Compact adopts the language of resilience to frame its approach to refugee governance, the analysis in this

dissertation has shown that its commitments remain vague and insufficiently aligned with refugees' actual needs. In this context, resilience does not function as a transformative policy framework but as a legitimising discourse that sustains existing governance practices. The emphasis on capacity-building, self-reliance, and economic participation creates an appearance of progressive engagement, yet without addressing the structural barriers that prevent these goals from being realised. As Bargués-Pedreny (2020) suggests, this gap between ambition and implementation reflects a dynamic in which resilience is continually projected as an aspirational objective, thereby normalising limited outcomes and justifying ongoing intervention. In the case of the EU-Lebanon Compact, this performative dimension ultimately reinforces a cycle in which the persistence of the Lebanese state's vulnerability is framed as a need for further resilience-building, rather than prompting more fundamental changes to the legal and socio-economic conditions shaping refugees' lives.

Extending this critique, the limitations of the EU-Lebanon Compact can be further understood through Korosteleva and Flockhart's (2020) reconceptualization of resilience as an emergent, context-specific process rather than a policy tool that can be externally designed and implemented. The findings of this dissertation indicate that the Compact reflects the kind of top-down, externally driven governance approach they caution against, where resilience is promoted through frameworks that insufficiently engage with refugees' lived realities. In prioritising broad objectives such as self-reliance and labour market participation while failing to adequately address structural barriers, the Compact illustrates a disconnect between global policy ambitions and local needs. From this perspective, its shortcomings are not just a matter of weak implementation, but of a deeper misalignment between the design of the framework and the bottom-up processes through which resilience is best generated according to Korosteleva and Flockhart (2020). Their emphasis on "inside-out" resilience therefore reinforces the conclusion that more effective and sustainable responses to protracted displacement require policy frameworks that are grounded in the experiences, needs, and agency of refugees themselves. Consequently, that points to the need for a refugee-centred approach to resilience and policy coherence, in which governance is reoriented away from externally imposed models and towards frameworks that incorporate and respond to the realities of those they are intended to support.

Nevertheless, an important counterargument to critiques of the resilience-oriented and state-centric approach underpinning the EU-Lebanon Compact is grounded in the structural fragility of the Lebanese state itself. As Fakhoury (2022) has shown, Lebanon ensured that the

Compact aligned with their national priorities and limited integration of refugees into the labour market. This prioritization and concern from the Lebanese government regarding Lebanese citizens' access to employment and competition from Syrian refugees is supported by several interviews conducted for this dissertation. Lebanon has faced prolonged political instability, economic collapse, and severe institutional weakness, raising legitimate concerns about its capacity to provide even basic services and economic opportunities for its own citizens (Rønn, 2023). From this perspective, expecting the Lebanese state to ensure comprehensive protection, inclusion, and livelihoods for a large refugee population may appear unrealistic. Instead, prioritising national recovery, institutional rebuilding, and economic stabilisation becomes not only rational but necessary. As the interviewee Karim emphasised, the concept of resilience must be understood in relation to the specific context of Lebanon. In Karim's view, resilience must first be linked to the challenge of building a functioning society before the same society can support resilience and dignified lives for refugees within its territory. Karim argued that the existing (or non-existing) socio-economic and institutional conditions do not provide a foundation in which meaningful coexistence or competition between refugees and citizens can take place. Instead, the priority lies in addressing the structural difficulties that affect the population more broadly, including the inability of many individuals to secure stable livelihoods or meet everyday needs. From this perspective, resilience is less about refugee inclusion per se and more about the broader process of community and state consolidation. This argument was further supported by another interviewee, who said that the Lebanese government must provide jobs for its own citizens first and foremost, but that refugees should be employed in specific sectors or make up a set percentage of the workforce so as not to take jobs away from Lebanese citizens in need.

Seen in this light, the Compact's emphasis on strengthening state resilience and supporting the national economy can be understood as a pragmatic response to these constraints. By focusing on macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, and job creation, primarily targeting Lebanese citizens, the framework aims to prevent further state deterioration, which would ultimately worsen conditions for both host communities and refugees. The logic underpinning this approach is that without a functioning state, there can be no sustainable improvement in refugee protection or well-being. In that sense, the Compact reflects the following argument, which was also put forward by one of the interviewees: First, the state must be stabilized, and then broader social benefits will follow - including for refugees.

However, while this argument highlights important structural realities, it also risks reinforcing a zero-sum framing in which the needs of citizens and refugees are positioned in opposition. Such a framing can overlook the ways in which restrictive refugee policies, particularly limitations on legal status and access to labour markets, may themselves contribute to informality, economic inefficiencies, and social tensions, as shown by Haddad et al. (2018) and International Rescue Committee (n.d. b). Even when acknowledging the severe constraints faced by the Lebanese state, there remains a need to integrate refugee perspectives more explicitly into the notion of policy coherence within policy frameworks regarding prolonged refugee situations. This does not imply disregarding the needs of host communities or the importance of state building but rather recognising that policies aimed at rebuilding the state should not systematically exclude a significant portion of the population residing within it. A more balanced approach would seek to align state-building objectives with measures that profitably can enhance refugees' legal security, access to livelihoods, and social inclusion.

6.3 The lack of a refugee centred approach: Policy coherence for dignified lives for refugees

The perspectives on policy coherence for migration and development from a chapter 3 provide a critical lens through which the EU-Lebanon Compact can be understood. While PICMD emphasizes the need to create synergies between migration and development policies between institutions and to avoid contradictory outcomes (Hong & Knoll, 2016), the literature demonstrates how such coherence is often undermined by the securitization of migration governance and the prioritization of state interests (Godin et al., 2022; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). In this context, the Compact can be seen as an attempt to operationalise policy coherence by aligning development aid, migration management, and state resilience objectives. However, as the literature suggests, coherence is not inherently progressive. Rather, it depends on whose interests are prioritized and which objectives are being aligned (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012; Lavenex & Kunz, 2008). The Compact reflects a form of coherence that is consistent with broader EU external migration policies, where development cooperation is instrumentalised to support migration control and stability (Lavenex & Kunz, 2008). Furthermore, as shown by Fakhoury (2022), Lebanon steered the Compact toward its national priorities, notably constraining refugee integration and preserving strict control over labour market access. This suggests that policy coherence for development and migration, as

operationalised in the Compact, is not politically neutral and reflects priorities and power asymmetries, where migration containment and state interests take precedence. Thus, the Compact reinforces policies that undermine refugees' socio-economic inclusion. In doing so, it generates precisely the kind of contradictory outcomes PICMD aims to prevent, where development goals such as self-reliance and resilience are constrained by restrictive migration governance.

Furthermore, the Compact has been criticized for privileging coordination between the Lebanese government and EU while marginalising other key stakeholders. As noted by Lebanese civil society actors, the development of the Compact involved limited consultation with local NGOs and authorities, despite their central role in responding to the refugee crisis (Haddad et al. 2018, p. 24). At the same time, the shift from earlier rights-based frameworks toward a stronger emphasis on security and migration control raised concerns about potentially undermining human rights considerations (Haddad et al. 2018, p. 24).

As so, there is a gap in terms of coherence for the needs and aspirations of refugees themselves in the EU-Lebanon Compact. Policy coherence, in this regard, does not seek to ensure that refugees are able to build dignified lives in host countries. Instead, refugees are largely positioned as objects within a system designed to manage displacement, rather than as agents with rights, capacities, and long-term needs.

This highlights the need to reconceptualise policy coherence beyond intergovernmental coordination with a focus on development and migration, to include policy coherence with the goal of enabling dignified living conditions. Instead of focusing on the needs of states and institutions in terms of economic and social development and migration control, the focus should be on the inclusion of refugees and consideration of their articulated needs, and through that, a beneficial integration of refugees into society.

A more refugee-centred understanding of policy coherence would require aligning migration, development, and humanitarian policies. This entails moving beyond short-term, containment-oriented strategies toward approaches that support inclusion, secure legal status, and access to decent work. In the absence of such a shift, frameworks like the EU-Lebanon Compact risk reinforcing a form of managed precarity, where refugees are expected to remain in place without being given the necessary conditions to live dignified and autonomous lives.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This dissertation has examined how the 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact corresponds to the needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and what this implies for resilience building. The findings demonstrate that, despite its stated objectives of promoting self-reliance and reducing aid dependency for refugees while supporting resilience and stabilization of Lebanon, the Compact has only limitedly addressed the actual needs of refugees.

The findings in this dissertation shows that the access to legal and secure employment is the core of refugees' ability to build dignified lives. However, the Compact fails to meaningfully engage with the structural barriers that restrict this access, particularly Lebanon's restrictive residence regime, limited labour market inclusion and restrictions toward entrepreneurship. While the Compact promotes livelihoods through economic initiatives, these efforts remain embedded within and constrained by a system that continues to produce informality, insecurity, and exclusion. As a result, employment opportunities generated under the Compact have largely not been materialised.

Moreover, the Compact's approach lacks internal coherence. Although it includes elements related to education and skills development, these are not effectively integrated into a broader strategy between relevant institutions linking legal status, labour market access, and long-term inclusion. Education, which functions as an enabling right to achieve stable work, is treated as a complementary tool rather than as a central component of refugee inclusion. This fragmentation limits the transformative potential of the Compact and undermines its ability to support sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, the agreement does not sufficiently address the need for legal residence, which provides access to the labour market. It merely expresses an intention to ease restrictions on legal residence, but only in the short term and without enforcement mechanisms. These intentions have never been put into practice.

These shortcomings reflect deeper tensions within the EU's resilience framework. Rather than focusing on the resilience of refugees themselves, the Compact primarily prioritises the stability of the Lebanese state and the management of migration flows. In this sense, resilience is operationalised in a state-centric and security-oriented manner, where improving conditions for refugees is partly instrumental to preventing onward migration to Europe. Consequently, refugees are not positioned as rights-bearing agents but as objects of governance within a broader strategy of containment.

This has important implications for resilience building. As implemented through the Compact, resilience does not address the structural conditions that shape refugees' vulnerability, nor does it provide the legal, economic, and social foundations necessary for long-term self-reliance. Instead, it risks reinforcing a form of managed precarity, in which refugees remain in host countries without access to the rights and opportunities required for dignified living.

Extending the contributions of this dissertation, future studies could advance understanding of this topic by examining how complex domestic political structures, such as Lebanon's confessional power-sharing system, shape refugee governance and policy outcomes in greater depth. There is also a need to explore how state fragility and economic crises influence the balance between prioritising national stability and advancing refugee inclusion, particularly in contexts where institutional capacity is severely constrained. Expanding the empirical basis of research through a broader range of interviews and more direct engagement with refugees' lived experiences would strengthen understanding of refugee-centred needs and perspectives. In addition, comparative studies across different host countries could provide valuable insights into how varying political and institutional contexts affect the coherence and effectiveness of policy frameworks, thereby contributing to the development of more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to protracted displacement.

Overall, the findings of this dissertation suggest that the EU-Lebanon Compact has had limited success in responding to the needs of Syrian refugees. Its emphasis on economic support and state stability, combined with weak enforcement mechanisms and a lack of addressing refugees' needs, has constrained its impact.

Therefore, future policy frameworks for protracted refugee situations can be improved by adopting a reconceptualised approach to policy coherence that explicitly centres refugees' needs as the primary reference point for policy design. Rather than prioritising state-centric objectives such as security, containment, or economic efficiency, such frameworks should be oriented towards addressing refugees' lived realities and needs, recognising them as active agents capable of shaping sustainable solutions rather than passive beneficiaries. This dissertation therefore proposes an approach that places policy coherence for refugee needs at its core, grounded in a comprehensive human rights perspective. Within this framework, access to work is understood as foundational, as its realisation enables the fulfilment of rights and supports dignified living. However, given the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights, policy frameworks cannot focus solely on employment. Instead, they must address the broader structural conditions that shape access to work, including legal residence and

education, while supporting the progressive realisation and institutionalisation of rights. By embedding refugees at the centre of both practical policy design and normative development, and by addressing the structural barriers they face, future frameworks can foster more coherent, inclusive, and sustainable responses to prolonged displacement. In accordance with this, this thesis proposes the following framework regarding protracted refugee situations:

1. Centre refugees and their needs as the primary foundation of policy design

Future policy frameworks for protracted refugee situations should begin by placing refugees and their lived realities at the centre of policy design and implementation. Operationalising this shift from a state-centric approach to a needs-based approach requires systematic and meaningful consultation with key stakeholders, particularly refugees themselves. In the case of Lebanon, this includes Syrian refugees, community-based organisations, especially those led by Syrians, as well as international NGOs, private sector actors and local municipalities. Such engagement should aim to identify existing barriers, assess ongoing initiatives, and explore opportunities to strengthen refugee autonomy and self-reliance. It should also incorporate analysis of labour market needs and the potential contributions of refugees within local economies. By grounding policy design in these insights, frameworks can better reflect context-specific realities and uncover underutilised policy options.

Embedding refugees at the centre strengthens policy coherence by aligning migration, development, and humanitarian objectives with the goal of enabling dignified lives while also incorporating various segments of society and institutions. It allows structural constraints, such as limited access to legal status, education, and decent work, to be addressed in an integrated manner across different policy domains and levels of governance. Ultimately, centring refugees is a necessary condition for developing coherent, inclusive, and sustainable policy responses to protracted displacement.

2. Prioritise access to decent work within integrated and rights-based policy frameworks

Future policy frameworks should ensure that access to decent work is not only legally recognised but effectively implemented as a core element of refugee inclusion. This requires enforceable regulations, stronger oversight to prevent exploitation and informality, and better awareness of rights among both refugees and employers.

At the same time, effective implementation requires not only labour inspections and employer compliance, but also accessible and transparent information systems so refugees are aware of

their rights, available jobs, and procedures. Strengthening both institutional coherence and information access is essential to ensure that access to work is applied consistently and meaningfully in practice.

Engagement with private sector actors is also essential to expand sustainable employment opportunities aligned with labour market demand. By combining legal access, enforcement, and multi-actor cooperation, the access to work can be translated into durable economic inclusion.

3. Ensuring inclusive, system-integrated and rights-based education

Future policy frameworks should treat education not only as a humanitarian service, but as a fundamental right and long-term investment in refugees' resilience and socio-economic inclusion. This requires stronger integration of refugee students into national education systems, rather than reliance on parallel or informal structures.

To close the gap between formal rights and lived realities, barriers such as documentation requirements, financial constraints, and local-level discrimination must be systematically addressed. Admissibility rules should be applied consistently, with safeguards to prevent exclusion at the school or municipal level.

At the same time, investment in quality, post-primary education is important, alongside recognition pathways for non-formal learning to prevent long-term exclusion. Education provision should also be aligned with broader livelihood opportunities, given its direct role in shaping future employability and reducing cycles of precarity.

4. Promote integrated and context-specific livelihood programmes

Frameworks should focus on integrated livelihood programmes aligned with national labour markets and embedded in long-term development planning. This requires stronger coordination between migration governance, labour institutions, and development actors, supported by predictable, multi-year funding. Rather than fragmented interventions, livelihood programmes should combine vocational training, job placement, and income-generation support, designed in line with local labour demand and regulatory conditions. At the same time, policies must remain context-specific and participatory, incorporating the skills and aspirations of refugees alongside host community needs.

5. Enable formalisation of entrepreneurship

Future policy frameworks should recognise refugee entrepreneurship as a livelihood strategy and enable pathways for sustainable formalisation. Rather than relying on control and compliance measures, policies should address the underlying structural barriers that keep refugee businesses informal, including restrictive documentation requirements, and complex administrative procedures.

Legal and regulatory frameworks should be harmonised across municipalities to reduce fragmentation and ensure predictable rules for business registration and operation. At the same time, access to legal residency and simplified registration pathways, potentially supported by local partners, should be strengthened to make formalisation realistically achievable.

Finally, accessible information on registration procedures and legal requirements should be systematically provided to refugees to reduce uncertainty and improve compliance.

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Appendix: Consent form

Title of Research Project: The long-term needs for Syrian refugees in Lebanon in a prolonged refugee situation

Description of the study: This research project will examine the extent to which the EU-Lebanon Compact of 2016 has integrated the long-term needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and based on this, the thesis seeks to create a new model grounded in refugees' long-term needs to be able to achieve self-reliance and a dignified life in host countries in a prolonged refugee situation

The University of Luxembourg implements measures to process your personal data securely and in a confidential manner and the researcher responsible for the collection of data (the interview) and transcription of data is bound to maintain confidentiality.

The data collected during the oral interviews (audio-visual recordings of the interviews, the annotations made by the researcher and any other material collected, such as photos and personal documents will be used exclusively for the research project.

Personal data and information mentioned during the interview(s) will only be collected and processed with your prior consent. If you wish to remain anonymous, your data will be used with the use of pseudonyms which means that in scientific publications, only fragments written using pseudonyms will be used. Details that allow for you to be identified, or for the identification of any other people will not be published.

Please also note:

- You have the right to interrupt or close the interview at any time.
- You may withdraw from this study even after you have completed the interview.
- Participation in interviews is free and on a voluntary basis.
- You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.
- You may contact the researcher in charge at any time to learn more about the use and analysis of your data in the research. You have a right to access and rectify your personal data as well as request these to be deleted.

For further details about your right, please refer to the information notice about personal data processing attached to this document.

Contact person for further questions:

Name: Josefine Nygård Hummelmoose

Position: Researcher

Tel: +45 23 46 10 17 Email: josefinenygard.hummelmose@emahumanrights.org

If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the researcher, or with the supervisor for the dissertation:

Name: Harlan Koff

Position: Professor of Social Sciences and Migration Studies in the Department of Geography and Spatial Planning at the University of Luxembourg

Tel: +352 46 66 44 6270 Email: harlan.koff@uni.lu

Please tick the appropriate boxes in the table below, before the start of the interview:

I consent to the collection and use of my personal data in relation to the Research Project.	Yes	No
I consent to the collection and use of my sensitive data in relation to the Research Project, in case I disclose information that qualify as such.	Yes	No
I agree to the personal data I provide being archived on the personal folder of the researcher on the server of the University (interview recording and contact detail).	Yes	No
I consent to my interview being recorded in audio format for the purpose of its transcription.	Yes	No
I consent to be directly quoted for research publications or other dissemination purposes.	Yes	No
I consent to be contacted later in the Research Project to take part in an online event to present the early results of the analysis and be given a possibility to comment on it.	Yes	No

I voluntarily agree to take part in this Research Project.

PARTICIPANT:

Name and/or pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the participant:

RESEARCHER:

I have informed the above-mentioned participant orally and in writing (see Information sheet) about the data processing nature and the potential consequences and risks of the Research Project, and I have given the participant the opportunity to ask any questions. In addition, the participant has received a copy of the information sheet and of this consent form.

Name: Josefine Nygård Hummelmoose

Date: 20th of May, 2026

Signature of the researcher:

