

## Book Review

**Juline Beaujoun and Amjed Rasheed (2020). *Syrian Crisis, Syrian Refugees: Voices from Jordan and Lebanon*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 163 pages (hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-35015-4**

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This edited volume by Juline Beaujoun and Amjed Rasheed, former Durham University researchers, provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on Lebanon and Jordan from social, cultural, and economic perspectives. Comprising 11 chapters, each authored by different experts, the book underscores the critical challenges and responses of these two countries to the refugee influx, revealing a complex political landscape aimed at delegitimizing the Syrian regime. The book can be divided into two main themes. The first theme, comprising chapters 3, 5, 7, and 9, uncovers the discourses on Jordan's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, while chapters 4, 6, 8, and 10 in the second theme tackle the reaction of Lebanon towards the same issue. Our reviews are structured based on these two themes which can be seen as follows.

Chapters 1 and 2 set the stage by detailing the Syrian conflict, marked by a myriad of actors and interests, leading to the most severe refugee crisis since World War II. Neither Jordan nor Lebanon is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines refugees and establishes their rights. This omission is significant, as it influences the framework for refugee protection in both countries. The risk of human rights abuses, brutal dictatorship, conscription, and the challenges of integration suggest that many Syrians will remain in Jordan and Lebanon indefinitely.

Jordan, a small desert country with limited natural resources, has faced considerable strain due to the Syrian refugee influx. Chapter 3 highlights the additional burdens placed on its infrastructure and public services. The country's inadequate capacity to fund services, particularly in education and healthcare, is exacerbated by the high proportion of women, children, and young people among the refugees. The strain on these essential services illustrates the broader economic and social impact on Jordanian society. Initially adopting an open border policy, Jordan's refugee framework—rooted in the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR—proved insufficient. Chapter 5 outlines the development of more comprehensive plans, such as the National Resilience Plan, the JRPSC, and the Jordan Response Plans. These initiatives aim to invest in local institutions, create opportunities for refugees, and implement sustainable solutions. However, corruption and lack of coordination between different objectives continue to impede their effectiveness. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of how these plans have evolved in response to the protracted nature of the crisis.

Chapter 7 discusses Jordanian perceptions of the refugee crisis, noting decreased local support as Jordanians feel displaced in the labour market by Syrians willing to work for lower wages. This economic tension is a significant issue, as it affects not only job opportunities but also wages and working conditions for local Jordanians. Despite these economic tensions, significant hostilities are absent, with many Syrians having family ties in Jordan and feeling integrated enough to envision a long-term future there. The chapter delves into the complexities of these social dynamics and the potential for Syrian skills and labour to benefit the Jordanian economy in the long run. NGOs play a critical role in Jordan, filling gaps left by the government. However, as Chapter 9 explains, their focus on immediate emergency response limits their capacity to provide long-term solutions. Donor fatigue and competition for funding further undermine their effectiveness. The chapter highlights specific examples of NGO initiatives and the challenges they face in ensuring equitable distribution of aid and services.

Chapter 4 outlines Lebanon's history with refugees, portraying a similar strain on governmental services. Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance has been disrupted by the influx, yet no robust integration mechanisms have been established. Initially denying its role as a refuge, Lebanon prevented refugee

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camps and largely ignored the crisis for the first six months. The absence of obligation under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the non-registration of many refugees with the UNHCR complicate the situation further. The chapter provides a nuanced view of Lebanon's political and social landscape, explaining how historical precedents have influenced current policies.

Lebanon's refugee policy, described in Chapter 6, shows an initial willingness to host refugees without formally recognizing them, leading to security concerns and eventual border closures. Chapter 8 highlights the significant impact on Lebanese communities, with demographic shifts in deprived and sectarian areas raising fears of crime and terrorism. Economic tensions and the strain on public services persist, exacerbated by pre-existing inequalities and corruption. The chapters together offer a detailed account of how public perceptions and governmental policies have evolved in response to the crisis, affecting both refugees and local populations.

Similar to Jordan, Chapter 10 discusses the role of NGOs in Lebanon. Local and national NGOs struggle to coordinate with international counterparts, and dependence on donor funding limits their ability to provide consistent aid. This lack of harmonization hampers effective support for refugees. The chapter provides case studies of NGO activities, illustrating the successes and failures of various initiatives.

Chapter 11 concludes that both Jordan and Lebanon have experienced a parallel shift in policy as the conflict extended beyond initial expectations, leading to border closures and stricter refugee regulations. Despite calls for regional support, a lack of leadership from bodies like the Arab League leaves these countries reliant on external aid, primarily from the EU. The authors argue for more effective frameworks to address the refugee crisis, expanded public services, and sustainable integration solutions. Enhanced coordination between local and international NGOs is essential for harmonized and effective responses. The chapter synthesizes the key findings from the book and proposes actionable recommendations for policymakers and international organizations.

Overall, 'Syrian Crisis, Syrian Refugees: Voices from Jordan and Lebanon' offers a critical and detailed examination of the multifaceted impacts and responses to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and Lebanon. It emphasizes the need for sustainable and coordinated efforts to manage this ongoing humanitarian challenge, providing valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and humanitarian practitioners.