

Comparison of Mass Refugee Governance Patterns in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan

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Introduction

After 2011 Turkey became the top refugee hosting country worldwide, while Lebanon became the top country in refugee-citizenship ratio. Jordan is just following, at the second place, after the Lebanon for refugee-citizenship ratio

Table 1: Comparison of Refugee Hosting in Numbers

	Number of registered Syrian refugees	Ratio to total Syrian refugees	Syrian refugee ratio to country's population	Number of refugees relative to national population (worldwide ranking)	Country's place at the global refugee numbers ranking
Turkey	3,303,113*	63 %	2,4 % (81,188,088)***	3****	1 st
Lebanon	1,001,051**	19 %	16,4% (6,086,600) ***	1	3 rd
Jordan	654,582**	12 %	14,9 % (9,778,286) ***	2	6 th
Total	5,225,475**	%94	-		

*As of November 2017. Source: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik

** As of September 2017, source: 3RP 2017 Progress Report, www.3RPSyriaCrisis.org

*** As of September 2017, Population estimates are retrieved from [Worldometers' RTS algorithm](http://Worldometers.com), which processes data collected from the United Nations Population

Division. <http://www.worldometers.info/population/asia/western-asia/>. Accessed 17.11.2017.

****As of 2018, UNHCR Global Report

POLICY VARIATION IN BORDER CONTROLS, RECEPTION-PROTECTION AND INTEGRATION

Border controls: Regulations and implementations in border control field have shown variations across three countries and cross time. In responding to the arrivals of Syrian refugees to their borders, all three countries had first adopted open door policies, meaning that they allowed the entry of Syrians without documents (visa, passport, IDs) regardless of their crossing through official or non-official border points. Lebanon and Jordan had been discriminative against the crossing of Palestinians (who are stateless and Syrian was their country of first asylum) due to their bitter historical memories.

All three countries gradually shifted from the initial open door policy to close door policy. During the transition period, Turkey used ad-hoc openings and closures of border gates, while Jordan used very limited daily quotas claiming that it tried to keep entries at ‘manageable’ levels. Until reaching critical juncture, Turkey and Lebanon tolerated circular migration in and out of the country, while Jordan was strict about it. When Syrians left to the country for any reason, they are not able to enter back Jordan. At the end, all of them fully prohibited border crossings except for humanitarian cases and business reasons. Compared to Turkey and Jordan, Lebanon has less strict on entries, because of not being capable of controlling the border by state security forces and the intense involvement of some Lebanese groups such as Hezbollah to the Syrian war across the border.

With regards to exit, none of these countries has put control on Syrians returning to Syria or their further traveling to any other destination country until mid-2015. Returns are common in the Jordanian case; in Lebanon it is rare, but threat of deportation has been on the rise. While Jordan and Lebanon do not control border crossings intended to exit, Turkey started to control exits towards European shores after the 2015 deal with the EU.

Reception and protection: Variations across countries are also observable in this policy field.

In Turkey, Syrians were first registered by the camps authorities, Migration Directorate of Ministry of Interior and governorates.

In Jordan, from the very beginning to 2015, there was overlapping dual registration process which was carried out by both the Ministry of Interior and the UNHCR for Syrian asylum seekers who wants to access services, assistance and residence permit, but the Jordanian government ordered the UNHCR to stop issuing registration cards in 2015. In Lebanon, only the UNHCR was responsible for registration. But the Lebanese government has suspended the UNHCR's registration of newly arrived refugees since 2015.

There have been disparities about the exact numbers of Syrians due to the problems about the lack of registration. Also, the pre-war, liberal visa policy between Syria and all these countries that enabled Syrians' entry without any registration for a long time led to the uncertainty and inconsistencies in the actual numbers of Syrians in these countries.

In terms of the legal status of refugees, all three countries have some similarities and differences. None of them granted refugee status to Syrians. Jordan and Lebanon are not parties to the Refugee Convention, as they reject to be seen as countries of asylum. The refugee category (with the exception of Palestinians who are recognized as refugees in the state where they have their permanent residency) does not exist as such. So, their national regimes that defines refugeeness differ from international refugee regime does. Neither of these countries define Syrians as legal refugees, international refugee regime see them as refugees. They officially called Syrians guest, persons registered as refugees by UNHCR and de facto refugees. Additionally, in Lebanon, Syrians are treated as foreigners, labourers, guests, displaced, while in Jordan, they are also treated as temporary or uninvited guests

(Chatty 2017; Janmyr and Mourad 2018). Not one of these labels has legal recognition or permanent protection in practice.

Turkey is the signatory of the Refugee Convention, but maintains geographical limitation, implying that only asylum seekers from countries of the Council of Europe are recognized as refugees. Turkey has treated Syrians as guests in the political discourse. Legally, Syrians are given the status of “those under temporary protection” since 2014. So, neither Turkey nor Lebanon and Jordan granted formal refugee status to Syrians, leaving them in limbo in terms of legal status.

Nevertheless, all three countries are not out of the sphere of influence of the international refugee regime. As said, Turkey is a signatory of the Refugee Convention. Lebanon and Jordan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR that mirrors main principles of protection laid in the Refugee Convention. Differently, the MoU (s) do envision neither local integration of refugees nor any working rights (Chatelard 2016, 22).

Measures taken during the stay of refugees in these three states may work as control mechanisms, particularly the state involvement in settlement and mobility of refugees. Each country displayed a relatively different stance in these policy fields. Turkey established camps for the most vulnerable groups and generally supported self-settlement. It adopted a flexible (but controllable) approach by making residence permits tied to a certain province. Similar to Turkey, Jordan had both encampment and self-settlement options. After first to two years, it mainly preferred the settling of refugees in camps, thus self-settlement (or leaving the camps) is made conditional upon the finding Jordanian sponsors and became more restrictive in the course of time. Lebanon has pursued a ‘no camp’ policy in which Lebanese government neither established camps nor allowed international actors to do it (Chatty 2017, 37).

Refugees mainly live in urban areas or informal settlements. In all countries, most refugees were first clustered in the regions of the countries' bordering Syria, they have gradually moved to large industrial cities where more informal jobs are available. At the end, the policies of three resulted in the same consequences of having huge urban refugee population.

Integration: Access of refugees to sustainable livelihood opportunities and integration into the formal labor market is a huge concern for all host countries as it can encourage the permanent settlement of refugees and lead communal tensions because of increasing competition for scarce job opportunities in these countries suffering from high unemployment rates.

It was fact that Syrians have been working in the informal market intensively under precarious conditions. For all countries, granting work permits came into the agenda in negotiating with donors. Turkey granted the right in early February 2016, while Jordan granted in March 2016 after negotiation with donors in the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference in February 2016. Lebanon also waived the “pledge not to work” requirement to Syrians. To prevent possible public repercussions, Jordan has put limitations on sectors in which Syrians may work, Lebanon has limited work permits in certain sectors where they will not directly compete with Lebanese such as agriculture, construction and other labour-intensive sectors. Moreover, Jordan gets the promise from the EU that would grant a financial aid for creation of jobs for refugees. Turkey has adopted a quota system in which only 1 out of 10 workers can be Syrian in a given workplace. All facilitate business creation by Syrians. The working permit has not been received the expected attention by refugee employees and employers.

Three governments have more welcoming and flexible attitudes towards Syrians directing capital to the country, proving the refugee selectivity despite of general restrictive

policies. Refugees' socio-economic differences lead to differences in the protection and integration fields. Refugees with greater resources have been able to carve their path to wealth and comfort, while others are left to little protection from impoverishment or exploitation in the unregulated labor market and declining humanitarian aid.

The protracted stays of Syrians and competition for resources have sparked tensions as well as discrimination targeting Syrians. They have been accused for wide range of issues that were in fact in place before their arrivals such as high unemployment, housing shortage, inflation, stress on public infrastructure (water-waste collection), overcrowd in hospitals, schools, rise in criminality, and social problems. To respond communal tensions, national security forces take several measures that often disfavor Syrians to appease local citizens.

The forced relocation of Syrians by the security authorities is a widespread practice in all three countries. In Turkey, state authorities tend to relocate Syrians to another province when Turkish citizens and Syrians confronted for crime related issue in a given province. In Jordan and Lebanon, relocation has been happening on unclear security grounds. Jordan expels them to camps, while Lebanon does not offer new residence. Many municipalities in Lebanon use illegal curfews. These also work as deterring mechanism by impeding freedom of movement and working of Syrians.

Integration in general, granting citizenship in particular is the greatest challenge in refugee hosting countries. Turkey has started to voice the issue since 2016, by giving signals of the government's positive approach, but sharply return from this idea in 2018. While there is no international pressure over Jordan on this field, Lebanon encounters the pressure of the UN. Both Jordan and Lebanon view the issue as taboo and they object demands.

So, three countries show policy similarities and differences in responding the mass refugee flow from Syria. Their policies also make shifts in the course of time due to the several reasons.