From Humanitarian Aid to Resilience-Oriented Development: Jordan's Post-2010 Refugee Governance and Its Migration Diplomacy with the EU

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Abstract:
Since the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, refugee policy in the Middle East has undergone a significant transformation. Currently, assistance efforts by the United Nations, the European Union countries, and other organizations focus on enhancing the "resilience" of host communities. Jordan is a traditional refugee host country that faces political and social challenges. The substantial influx of refugees into Jordan has jeopardized border security, contributed to inflation, strained social infrastructure, and exacerbated unemployment. To address these challenges, Jordan has engaged in "migration diplomacy" since the 2010s, trying to secure financial assistance from the international community. One of its greatest successes is the EU-Jordan Compact, which has utilized the refugee situation as a political resource for securing national interests. The EU has also provided significant funding for development projects in Jordan with the aim of building resilience. Thus, the refugee support framework in the Mediterranean region, including Jordan, is deeply linked to the EU's political objectives. This article examines the transformation of refugee governance in the Mediterranean region by analyzing the EU-Jordan relationship. It argues that as the EU outsources refugee management to Mediterranean countries, humanitarian refugee governance has been absorbed into the context of development aid, as traditionally practiced in EU-Jordan relations.

Keywords: *Syrian refugee crisis, refugee governance, EU-Jordan relations, resilience*

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. At its peak, the number of Syrian refugees exceeded 6.8 million,[1] and if refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are included, over half of the Syrian population were forced to flee the country and endure prolonged displacement. Even over a decade after the onset of the war, many Syrian refugees

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1 The figure is based on UNHCR statistics <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>.

continue to live in poverty under unstable legal conditions in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. While repatriations to Syria have increased since the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024,[2] a fundamental resolution to the refugee crisis is expected to take many years.

Furthermore, their presence continues to deal a significant blow to local communities in host countries. Middle Eastern nations have long faced water scarcity issues; however, the sharp increase in population due to Syrian refugees has exacerbated this problem. Various social infrastructures are under strain, including disruptions in schools providing education to Syrian children and soaring rents. In rural areas of Turkey and Lebanon, Syrians have flooded into sparsely populated villages, drastically altering the local ethnic, religious, and sectarian composition (Cagaptay 2014). Furthermore, in recent years, anti-refugee sentiment among residents of host societies, exhausted by the prolonged refugee crisis, has become increasingly visible, leading to demonstrations and other protests (Uras 2022; Hall and Todman 2024).

Moreover, the refugee crisis has shaken the entire international refugee regime. Beyond Europe, which faced the "European refugee crisis" around 2015, the dispersal of Syrian refugees has extended from Africa to North and South America. This geographic expansion underscored that the Syrian refugee crisis is not merely a localized issue in the Middle East but a global challenge. Between 2014 and 2016, political leaders across Europe were forced to change their policies on refugee acceptance (Rea et al. 2019).

Particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the nature of refugee governance has undergone significant transformations as countries have been forced to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. As the interests of Europe (i.e., keep refugees within Syria's neighboring countries) clashed with those of the neighboring countries (i.e., secure international aid in exchange for accepting refugees), the international refugee regime shifted in the 2010s from a humanitarian-centered approach to one that integrates humanitarian aid and development, with "resilience-building" for both refugees and host societies as the key concept. Jordan, the subject of this paper, is one of the countries most significantly affected by this paradigm shift.

This paper examines how the logic of Jordan's refugee governance has transformed after the refugee crisis, focusing on building resilience in the host society. Since the Syrian refugee crisis, the term "resilience" has become an internationally used keyword in refugee assistance and is also a key concept in analyzing Jordan's refugee policy. Furthermore, the large-scale displacement of Syrian refugees has not only affected Jordan but has also fundamentally altered the norms of refugee assistance in the Mediterranean region. In particular, the EU has focused on strengthening cooperative relationships with countries in the Mediterranean region from a security perspective, exerting significant influence over Mediterranean migration management. Consequently, Jordan's refugee policy must be positioned as part of the EU-led refugee governance framework in this region. Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the recent dynamics of the refugee system in the Eastern Mediterranean region with a focus on the relationship between Jordan and the EU.

2. Literature Review

Since the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe),[3] the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been a traditional refugee-hosting country. Consequently, the history of nation-building in Jordan is closely intertwined with refugee acceptance, and the refugee population within the country remains a factor that cannot be

2 As of December 2025, approximately 780,000 Syrian refugees had returned (AJLabs 2025).

3 This refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians that took place following Israel's establishment between 1947 and 1948.

ignored in politics. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Jordan hosted approximately 670,000 Syrian refugees at its peak,[4] making it the third-largest host country for Syrians after Turkey and Lebanon. Although there are numerous studies on Jordan's refugee policies, the Jordanian case is often treated as a regional issue in the Middle East, and there have been insufficient attempts to position Jordan within a broader international migration network. Jordan relies heavily on international aid for its national finances, and further examination is required to understand how it uses the refugee situation as a resource to extract diplomatic benefits.

(1) The Discussion of Migration Diplomacy

In recent years, the concept of "migration diplomacy" has been proposed as a framework for analyzing the refugee policies of Middle Eastern host countries (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019; Norman 2020; Tsourapas 2021; Fine 2025). Tsourapas, a Middle Eastern political scientist, points out that international migration has traditionally been discussed as a result of the pursuit of economic interests within domestic and international economic systems, while the role of sovereign states has been overlooked (Tsourapas 2021, 4). This analytical concept instead focuses on actions by sovereign states, such as utilizing the influx of migrants into their own country to pursue other national interests or employing diplomatic means to achieve migration-related goals. In particular, the large influx of refugees has been viewed as a strategic political resource in Middle Eastern countries (Tsourapas 2021, 8). In this regard, recent years have seen a growing debate on states that view refugees as financial assets and refers to states that leverage aid on their behalf as "refugee rentier states" (cf. Tsourapas 2019). "Migration diplomacy" is therefore a useful concept for analyzing both sides of the relationship: not only the impact of international migration on foreign policy, but also the impact of foreign policy on migration and refugee policy, by focusing on the strategic use of migration to secure other benefits.

Furthermore, when discussing refugee governance in Jordan, it is necessary to consider the external migration policy of the EU, given its proximity across the Mediterranean Sea. It has provided substantial funding to Jordan and has played a leading role in shaping the international refugee regime for Syrian refugees. In recent years, research on EU external migration policy has actively sought to shift away from traditional Eurocentric analysis. For example, Vaagland (2023) discusses the impact of refugee host countries' diplomatic strategies on donor states from the perspective of the EU-Jordan relationship. This perspective addresses a dimension largely overlooked in conventional discussions of "migration diplomacy." As Vaagland points out, it is crucial to analyze not only the situation within Jordan but also the negotiation process within the EU-Jordan policy-making process to clarify the strategies employed by both sides in migration diplomacy (Vaagland 2023, 3098). However, existing literature has focused on the negotiation process between actors, with little attention paid to the actual changes that it produces. This paper aims to shed light on the transformation of refugee governance in Eastern Mediterranean countries in the 2010s by linking the EU-Jordan relationship to the international refugee regime.

(2) The Concept of Resilience

Alongside migration diplomacy, "resilience" is a key concept when examining Jordan's refugee

4 The figure is based on UNHCR statistics <https://data.unhcr.org/>.

governance. As mentioned above, the term "resilience" has become increasingly prevalent when discussing refugee regimes following the Syrian refugee crisis. "Resilience" originated as a concept in ecology and signifies a system's capacity to anticipate, absorb, and recover from external shocks (Omata 2023). It has been applied in the social sciences as a group's ability to regain its physical or mental stability, or as the capacity and process by which a group responds to and recovers from external pressures/crises (Fingerle and Wink 2020; Wünsche and Fischer 2020; Omata 2023). Even in the context of forced displacement, research examining individual refugee resilience using psychological approaches emerged as early as the 1970s (Fingerle and Wink 2020).

However, the term has recently begun to be used in the field of refugee policy, where it functions as a "buzzword" that evokes positive connotations among those involved (Omata 2023). As a result, resilience-based investments have expanded, and reducing the strain on host societies while strengthening their capacity to cope with refugee crises has become a central objective of refugee governance. Numerous aid projects deployed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011 have elevated the concept of "resilience" to a core position in refugee policy (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015).

According to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2017), resilience is defined as "the ability of individuals, households, communities, national institutions, and systems to prevent, absorb, and recover from shocks while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace, security, and the attainment of human rights." UNHCR argues that promoting self-reliance and resilience among refugees will enable them to sustain their lives in their home countries even after returning home (UNHCR 2017).

Meanwhile, in Jordan, while there is no clear definition of the term as used by the UNHCR, the core conceptualization of resilience lies in "capacity development," and the development of both refugees and their host communities has been positioned as a complement to humanitarian assistance (Host Community Support Platform 2013; MoPIC 2015). In other words, in Jordan's refugee governance, resilience is a policy concept that implies a commitment to sustainable development as a means to that end in addition to its original meaning of the capabilities and processes required to respond to external pressures/crises.

While the idea of integrating development into refugee assistance is not new (Omata 2023), the resilience approach has become increasingly central to refugee governance since the 2010s. The resilience approach offers an appealing narrative: it not only supports the economic self-reliance of refugees, but also strengthens the capacity of host societies strained by large-scale refugee inflows, presenting a purportedly win–win solution for both refugees and host countries. By employing these two concepts, this paper demonstrates that the development of the resilience approach in Jordan has further strengthened its development orientation within the context of the Jordanian government's migration diplomacy, thereby transforming the nature of its refugee governance.

3. The Syrian Crisis as an Exception in Jordan's Refugee Governance

Refugee governance has emerged as a key framework for addressing contemporary global challenges. The 1951 Refugee Convention was established after World War II to protect refugees from Europe, and its subsequent 1967 Protocol broadened the definition of refugees. Accordingly, the modern international refugee regime has emerged as a global set of norms and decision-making procedures aimed at protecting diverse categories of forcibly displaced people. Refugee governance within the framework of the international refugee regime is the result of political bargaining among states, organizations

such as the United Nations and the EU, NGOs, and private organizations. This encompasses a series of measures, practices, laws, regulations, and institutions. These are not necessarily hard policies; they can also be informal and soft in nature (Cardwell and Dickson 2023).

However, this international refugee regime has been criticized for being overly Eurocentric (Betts and Collier 2017). The Middle East, the focus of this paper, faced multiple large-scale refugee crises, including Palestinian, Iraqi, and Afghan refugees, even before the Syrian refugee crisis. Despite being a central arena for refugee hosting, it was placed outside the framework of the international refugee regime (Fakhoury and Chatty 2025, 2). This exclusion can be attributed to two reasons. First, most Middle Eastern countries have not ratified the Refugee Convention because of their political stances on the Palestinian issue. Second, compared to the EU, the Arab League—the principal regional organization in the Middle East—has limited institutional capacity. Despite ongoing refugee crises in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sub-Saharan Africa, the region lacks a comprehensive refugee policy. Consequently, the Middle East has been viewed as an outsider or a spoiler to the international refugee regime, rather than as a central actor in shaping international refugee norms (Fakhoury and Chatty 2025).

Amid a lack of comprehensive coordination in the Middle East region regarding refugee governance, countries in the region have addressed the refugee crisis through cooperation with international organizations and other nations. For example, Jordan has delegated much of its administrative framework, including refugee registration and assistance, to United Nations agencies. Like many other Middle Eastern countries, Jordan has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Refugee Protocol and therefore bears no formal obligation under international law to provide asylum to refugees within its borders. Many refugees residing in Jordan have traditionally been considered "guests." Jordan's domestic law, the "Residence and Foreigners' Affairs Law, 1973 (Qānūn al-Iqāma wa Shu'ūn al-Ajānib li Sana 1973)," stipulates that political asylum seekers may register their status at police stations within Jordan. Although Jordan has not ratified the Refugee Convention, it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR. Under this agreement, refugees in Jordan, excluding Palestinian refugees, are subject to UNHCR jurisdiction. Thus, people can obtain registered refugee status and access various benefits.

Thus, refugee assistance in Jordan has traditionally been provided through cooperation between the Jordanian government and international organizations. Consequently, from the early stages of the Syrian refugee crisis, Jordan has emphasized the need for support from the international community. The Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched the Host Community Support Platform to investigate the impact of the Syrian refugee influx on Jordanian society. The platform reported that the massive influx has strained public service provision in Jordan, including education, health, and water and sanitation; particularly between 2010 and 2013, rents rose by 16.0% and food prices by 13.0% (Host Community Support Platform 2013). Furthermore, in January 2013, Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh stated that the Jordanian government had called for urgent support from international donors to help it deal with an "unprecedented" number of Syrian refugees (Al Jazeera 2013). Thus, appealing to the international community regarding the severe strain on Jordan's social infrastructure can be regarded as a fundamental strategy of its migration diplomacy.

In particular, the Jordanian government tends to emphasize the large number of Syrian refugees in the country to raise international awareness of the burden it bears (Tsourapas 2019; Beaujouan and Rasheed 2020; Lenner 2020). While Jordan does not grant refugee status under the Refugee Convention to Syrian nationals, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) issues ID cards (commonly known as

"MoI cards")[5] for them that are used as identification documents within Jordan. This represents an exceptional measure compared to the treatment of Iraqi refugees who have entered Jordan since 2003. The Jordanian government has stated that this is intended to help "Syrian brothers (al-Ikhwa al-Sūrīyūn)".[6]

There are two primary reasons for adopting these special measures for Syrian refugees. The first concerns national security. The massive influx of refugees has been seen worldwide as a threat to national sovereignty and a challenge to national values. This trend was particularly pronounced in Europe, forcing the EU to strengthen border security, with Jordan being no exception in this regard. In addition to accepting refugees, Jordan has worked diligently to strengthen its cooperation with other Arab countries and the EU to prevent extremism and terrorism. Furthermore, it has agreed on security cooperation with Middle Eastern countries to combat human trafficking and prevent the smuggling of narcotics and psychotropic substances from Syria.[7] Second, the Jordanian government aimed to make refugees visible while avoiding settlement. It reflected on its past treatment of Iraqi refugees as "guests" rather than "refugees," which made it impossible to accurately determine the number of Iraqis and highlight the seriousness of its refugee problem to the international community (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2020, 50). Learning from this experience, Jordan has consistently treated Syrian refugees as UNHCR-registered "refugees," managing them through camps to track their population and repeatedly highlighting the burden their presence places on the host country. Regarding population statistics, while UNHCR figures for 2021 put the number of Syrian refugees accepted by Jordan at approximately 670,000, the Jordanian government estimates the number to be around 1.3 million (MoPIC 2020). Lenner (2020) points out that the Jordanian government, in an attempt to emphasize the scale of the refugee crisis, includes Syrian nationals residing in the country in its figures regardless of their registration status.

These special measures for Syrian refugees have been justified through rhetoric emphasizing the nobility of the Hashemite dynasty and Arab-Islamic traditions, including references to "guests" and "Syrian brothers." Such phrases are also frequently used in statements by senior government officials to highlight Jordan's contributions to the refugee crisis. For example, while inspecting the Mrajeeb Al Fhood refugee camp in April 2017, former Interior Minister Ghaleb Zu'bi emphasized "the national, humanitarian, and moral role that Jordan plays toward Syrian refugees, starting from receiving them at the borders and sheltering them in camps to securing all the services they need, whether educational, health, security, and others, based on the established national principles on which the Kingdom operates" grounded in "the customs, traditions, and values of the Jordanian people who share all the elements of life with their brothers from the refugees, whether they are Syrians or others who sought refuge in the Kingdom" (MoI 2017a).

Similarly, during a meeting with UNHCR Representative in Jordan on World Refugee Day 2019, former Minister of Interior Salama Hammam stated: "(Jordan) has witnessed successive waves of refugees, which it has borne with all their economic, social, and security consequences, based on our Hashemite Arab principles and values, which the Hashemites have always affirmed by standing with

5 This card, which started being issued in 2014, is one of the ways to recognize the legal status of refugees in Jordan, along with the refugee application certificate. However, the MoI Card does not guarantee Syrian refugees' citizenship, right to work, or property ownership; it is solely an identification document. In 2018, the MoI conducted a re-registration of Syrian refugees residing outside refugee camps and issued new cards to them.

6 See Jordanian MoI website <https://moi.gov.jo/Ar/Pages/بطاقة_الخدمة_الخاصة_بالجالية_السورية>.

7 For example, in April 2021, Jordan and Qatar agreed on a MoU of Security Cooperation as brotherly nations, and in August 2023, Jordan and Iraq did the same (AlSharif 2021; Jordan Times 2023).

all those who seek help and seek security and safety" (MoI 2019). Furthermore, in a statement marking World Humanitarian Day in August 2021, Minister of Interior Al-Farrayeh cited a well-known Islamic Hadith, noting that while helping the world's needy is a duty for many, Jordan is grounded in the firm belief that "None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself" (MoI 2021b).

As described above, speeches by senior government officials have repeatedly emphasized Jordan's national mission, the generosity of the Hashemite monarchy, and Arab-Islamic brotherhood as justifications for refugee acceptance. Simultaneously, Jordan has highlighted its contribution to the refugee crisis and demanded burden sharing by the international community. It has been pointed out that these statements, along with practices such as using the camps to exaggerate the scale of the Syrian refugee crisis and appeal to the international community, have contributed to the Jordanian government securing aid from the international community (Tsourapas 2019).

4. Humanitarian-Development Nexus Approach in Jordan after 2011

As noted in the prior section, by emphasizing the severity of the Syrian refugee crisis at the domestic level, Jordan has sought to elicit support from the international community, having actually succeeded in securing substantial international aid (Tsourapas 2019). For example, according to OCHA,[8] a total of 934.6 million dollars in funding was provided to Jordan in 2015, with donors including United Nations agencies (e.g., UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF), foreign governments (e.g., the EU, the United States of America, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates), and NGOs (e.g., the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates and Mercy Corps). This success can be attributed to the introduction of the policy concept of "resilience" from the early stages of the refugee crisis, which has fostered a strong international awareness of the need to support not only refugees but also host societies.

(1) The Role of the Concept of Resilience in Refugee Governance in Jordan

Starting around 2013, "resilience" began to be incorporated into Jordan's refugee assistance plans as a key concept for integrating the idea of sustainable development in host communities into the framework of emergency humanitarian aid. The Host Community Support Platform (2013) states that "it is critical that the ongoing humanitarian response be rapidly complemented by a more sustainable and development-oriented response." Based on the findings of this report, the Jordanian government launched the National Resilience Plan (NRP) to declare its commitment to the development of the host community, strengthening of their livelihoods and the educational system, securing energy resources, and enhancing the resilience of local governments to cope with the shock of refugee inflows (Host Community Support Platform 2013). In parallel, in 2013, when the influx of Syrian refugees peaked, the Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG) was established under the leadership of the UNDP, and the term resilience was widely adopted in Jordanian policy discourse (Mencutek and Nashwan 2023, 101). The R-UNDG fostered cooperation between humanitarian and development actors and established a joint response framework among Syria's neighboring countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt), proposing a new approach to integrating humanitarian and development assistance (Mencutek and Nashwan 2023, 101). Furthermore, in December of the same year, the

8 See OCHA data <https://fts.unocha.org/>.

Jordan Response Plan (JRP) was announced as a guideline for Jordan's Syrian refugee policy, based on cooperation between the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the United Nations. The plan not only included emergency assistance for Syrian refugees but also emphasized expanding employment opportunities and strengthening the capacity of local communities.

UNHCR's experience in Jordan also contributed to the development of a refugee assistance scheme centered on "resilience building." In 2012, UNHCR launched the Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP) and led protection and support efforts for Syrian refugees. However, the RRP primarily focused on humanitarian assistance, with only sporadic references to building the resilience of refugees and host communities (Anholt and Sinatti 2020). Resilience building was not recognized as a core component of UNHCR's assistance in the Middle East until the RRP was replaced by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in 2015, which added a dedicated section on "resilience." At the same time, the 3RP broadened UNHCR's interpretation of its role, shifting the emphasis from short-term refugee protection to a longer-term approach linking humanitarian and development assistance.

The EU-Jordan Compact, signed in 2016, is a prime example of the refugee regime's paradigm shift. This agreement was signed between Jordan and the EU at the London Pledging Summit hosted by the United Kingdom, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, and the United Nations, following the Mobility Partnership concluded between the EU and Jordan in 2014. The Compact's main objectives were (1) promoting refugee integration into the labor market, (2) financing the Jordanian economy, and (3) securing trade benefits from the EU (European Commission 2016; European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016a). In exchange for financial assistance from European countries, Jordan pledged to integrate 200,000 Syrian refugees into the domestic labor market and create employment opportunities for them. After the Compact was signed, the Jordanian government announced that it would waive work permit fees for Syrian refugees and integrate them into existing special economic zones (primarily in manufacturing). In return, the EU pledged a minimum of EUR 747 million in funding and promised duty-free access to the European market for Jordanian companies employing a certain percentage of Syrian refugees (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016a).

This arrangement indicates that Jordan successfully formulated concrete integration policies for Syrian refugees and secured substantial financial assistance from the EU.[9] This outcome exemplifies "refugee rent-seeking," as identified by Tsourapas (2019). In other words, Jordan strategically leveraged the presence of refugees in its migration diplomacy with the EU to advance national interests through foreign policy.

(2) The Migration Diplomacy in the EU-Jordan Relationship

The question here is why Jordan's migration diplomacy has been so effective in its dealings with the EU. To answer this, we must examine the historical context in which Jordan's immigration and refugee policies have become deeply intertwined with the EU's external objectives. Historically, Jordan's refugee policy has been closely intertwined with the EU's external goals. Migration cooperation between Jordan and the EU has traditionally been implemented within the framework of the European Neighbourhood

9 A similar agreement was signed between the EU and Lebanon, but the Lebanon Compact did not attract as much support as Jordan as it did not include creating employment opportunities for refugees. As a result, despite accepting fewer Syrian refugees than Lebanon, Jordan received substantial funding from the international community to cover the cost of hosting refugees and promote development aid.

Policy (ENP). The ENP is part of the EU's foreign policy toward non-EU regions and establishes a framework for broad political, economic, and social partnerships. It initially aimed to prevent security threats from entering the EU by extending its "common values"[10] and "common interests" to non-EU countries, while simultaneously promoting the stability and prosperity of these countries through financial support (Commission of the European Communities 2004). This approach reflected concerns about the security implications of new borders between expanding EU member states and non-member countries, including illegal immigration and smuggling. Refugee crises originating in the Middle East have consistently spilled over into Europe, leading to a close connection between Jordan's refugee governance and the EU's external security policy.

The ENP was launched in 2004 and categorizes its 16 partner countries into Eastern and Southern neighborhoods (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2015). The Eastern Neighborhood primarily refers to countries located in the eastern part of Europe, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The Southern Neighborhood, on the other hand, includes the Mediterranean countries of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. Southern ENP countries are subject to "Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements," which cover trade in goods.

Among the numerous policies implemented under the ENP, migration policy has been a key component since its inception. In response to illegal immigration, particularly within the Mediterranean region, the "Global Approach to Migration (GAM)" was presented in 2005. The Arab Spring, which began in late 2010 and continued through 2011, further elevated the prominence of the migration policy within the ENP. Simultaneously, the need for an integrated EU-level policy approach to address the North-South divide in immigration and refugee acceptance among member states became apparent. In 2011, the concept of "mobility" was incorporated into ENP policy, and the GAM was revised to "Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM)" under EU leadership. Additionally, under the GAMM framework, the "Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM)" was established as a bilateral cooperative initiative with third countries. It aims to promote regular migration, safeguard migrant rights, and enhance international protection for refugees. In August 2011, the European Commission proposed "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean." This emphasized the need for the EU to support the political and economic reforms demanded by the Arab Spring in Middle Eastern countries (Aleassa 2025). This initiative can be interpreted as part of a broader reassessment of the ENP in response to political changes in the Middle East (Aleassa 2025).

In this context, changes in EU-Jordan relations represent a typical example of the transformation of refugee governance in the Mediterranean region in the 2010s. Prior to 2011, the EU-Jordan ENP focused solely on improving the working and living conditions of Jordanian migrants and did not focus on Jordan's social situation, although it had already hosted a large number of refugees. However, following the Arab Spring, the EU's involvement in the refugee issue in Jordan deepened in conjunction with its foreign and security policies. During this period, the EU's external security policy sought to deepen broader political, economic, social, and security engagement with the Southern Neighborhood. As part of the "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity" proposal, the EU pursued a "long-term framework based on political dialogue and operational cooperation" and sought to improve security relations with partner countries (European Commission 2011). As calls for enhanced "dialogue

10 This includes democratic and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development.

on mobility and security" with Southern Mediterranean countries intensified, the EU accelerated the development of partnerships with ENP partners, culminating in the conclusion of a Mobility Partnership (MP) with Jordan in 2014.

At that time, the EU was particularly concerned not only about Syrian refugees but also about the influx of ISIS fighters. This led to the refugee crisis being viewed as a serious security issue by both the Middle East and the EU. From a security perspective, strengthening relations with Middle Eastern countries was crucial for the EU, and Jordan was particularly recognized as a key partner with "advanced status" among ENP countries (Council of the European Union 2014). Concomitantly, the Jordanian government sought to leverage the refugee situation to secure financial and political support from the EU. It was in this context that Jordan's "migration diplomacy" towards the EU became increasingly visible.

Around this period, the EU-Jordan relationship initially advanced from a security perspective and subsequently shifted its focus toward Jordan's domestic development policies. The 2015 revision of the EU-Jordan Partnership Agreement (ENP) marked a major shift from its original objectives of promoting democracy and sharing EU values among member states to a stronger emphasis on security policy and building regional resilience (Aleassa 2025). This did not mean abandoning shared EU values; rather, it recognized building "resilience" as an important step in expanding EU norms (Aleassa 2025). The revision of the ENP also led to the adoption of the EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities, a new framework for defining bilateral relations. The objectives of this agreement included: (1) strengthening cooperation on regional stability and security, including counterterrorism; (2) promoting economic stability, sustainable and knowledge-based growth, quality education, and job creation; and (3) strengthening democratic governance, the rule of law, and human rights (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016b). Through this process, the EU aimed to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Middle Eastern countries, with particular emphasis on relations with Jordan and Lebanon. This series of EU strategies represented a major shift towards integrating previously fragmented extraterritorial migration policies implemented in individual countries, and migration policy within the ENP framework became increasingly linked to development.

The introduction of the concept of resilience within the ENP framework coincided with the period when resilience, as a policy idea, began to occupy a central role in refugee governance. It is hence possible to point out that the conclusion of the EU-Jordan Compact, which brought significant benefits to Jordan, was underpinned by a convergence of interests: the paradigm shift in the international refugee assistance system toward linking humanitarian aid and development, and the ENP's objective of promoting social stability in partner countries from the perspective of external security.

(3) From Aid to Development

More importantly, the EU-Jordan Compact has not only become a successful example of Jordan's refugee rent-seeking, but also served as a turning point, marking a shift in the focus of financial assistance from the EU and the international community from humanitarian aid to development. Since the conclusion of the Jordan Compact, international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the EU have been actively involved in refugee assistance in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and other countries. One notable example is the EUTF Syria-Madad. Established in December 2014,[11] it implemented 129

11 It officially ended in 2021, but projects continued until June 2025.

projects in sectors such as education, livelihoods, health, and sanitation, disbursing a total of EUR 2.38 billion to support Syrian refugees. After Madad's termination, EU financing for the Syrian refugee crisis was taken over by the Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). Following the signing of the EU-Jordan Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership in 2025, NDICI committed EUR 3 billion in financing for the period from 2025 to 2027 (MoPIC 2025). Of this, EUR 640 million was allocated as non-repayable funding (MoPIC 2025).

However, this series of refugee-related initiatives has been criticized for presenting a superficially win-win model of migration and refugee governance, while, in practice, prioritizing the interests of the EU and its partner states (Cardwell and Dickson 2023, 3133). Although the Jordan Compact and Madad appear to provide aid to Jordan, they can be understood as mechanisms for the informal outsourcing of refugee management by the EU. Migration arrangements within the ENP, which initially focused on readmission agreements, were replaced by the outsourcing of refugee management to Jordan as part of the EU's crisis management policy. This also positioned the Middle East as a "buffer zone" for refugee containment. Cardwell and Dickson (2023) characterize this EU strategy as "formal informality." "Formal informality" refers to governance arrangements that resemble established legal tools (such as regulations, directives, and international agreements), while lacking procedural transparency and formal legal classification (Cardwell and Dickson 2023, 3122). This form of consensus-based refugee governance has become increasingly characteristic of migration governance in the Mediterranean region (Cardwell and Dickson 2023, 3126), aligning with what Lavenex (2018) describes as an "organized hypocrisy."

It is also clear that Jordan's goal was not simply to support refugees' self-reliance. This is because the benefits of the Compact, implemented through collaboration between the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Labor, were limited to Syrian refugees and Jordanian nationals; migrants and refugees of other nationalities, such as Iraqis, Sudanese, and Yemenis, were excluded from this scheme. Regarding this selection of beneficiaries, Almasri (2024) argues that Syrians and vulnerable Jordanians were placed in the government's "mainstream response" framework, while other refugees were relegated to the "alternative response." In practice, NGOs providing refugee support in Jordan were required to register with the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis (JORISS) system. To register and receive funding from the Jordanian government, they could only target Syrians. In other words, the government rendered Syrians visible as a resource for attracting international aid, while keeping other refugee populations relatively invisible within its society.

It can be said that today's approach to the humanitarian-development nexus has evolved not by treating the two as equally valuable, but by integrating humanitarian assistance into development. The Jordan Compact became a cornerstone in replacing humanitarian aid for refugees with development assistance.

As mentioned above, the concept of linking domestic development assistance with humanitarian aid has gained momentum since the EU-Jordan Compact. For example, in a workshop co-hosted by the EU and Jordan's Ministry of Interior in October 2017, Samir Mubaydin, former Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior, stated, "The Jordanian government is interested in linking migration and development" (MoI 2017b). While this statement was intended to emphasize collaboration between institutions to support Jordanian migrants and those living abroad, Jordan has since not only strengthened cooperation with the EU on migration management but has also received various forms of development aid.

One such initiative is the promotion of decentralization in Jordan. EUROMED Migration V (EMM5), implemented from 2020 to 2023, was launched to strengthen the consistency and effectiveness

of migration management in Europe and the Mediterranean region by enhancing its operational scope and resilience. A cooperation agreement was signed between Jordan's Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Local Administration, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the EU, and the UNDP, providing EUR 5 million in funding to strengthen local governance in Jordan (MoI 2021a). Furthermore, to improve the performance of Jordan's public sector, the EU provided digital tools to support local governance and development. At the signing of EMM5, Interior Minister Mazin Al-Farrayeh stated, "The program is based on the principle that development cooperation should be centered around the citizen" (MoI 2021a).

The policy idea of strengthening local autonomy is not new in Jordan. Even before the Syrian refugee crisis, decentralization projects were promoted at the initiative of King Abdullah II, with the EU providing support within the framework of the ENP. Prior to the Jordan Compact, the EU-Jordan Action Plan signed in 2013 included the objective of pursuing "political, administrative and financial decentralization fostering citizen participation in the local decision-making process and strengthening public accountability and transparency" (European External Action Service 2013). These decentralization reforms have been framed as consistent with the EU's emphasis on democratization.

The promotion of strengthened local governance in the context of Syrian refugee support stems from the EU's recognition that local governments, which provide direct assistance to refugees, are essential actors in building resilience in Jordanian society. While local governments have historically demonstrated proactive responses to Syrian refugees, often motivated by tribal and religious solidarity, insufficient coordination with the central government and international organizations has been a challenge (Ali 2023). Jordan has a centralized political structure headed by the monarchy, with powerful institutions such as the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Finance. Within this structure, refugee governance involves multiple domestic ministries, resulting in a multilayered structure (Ali 2023). Consequently, multiple government agencies, including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Islamic Courts, and local governments, each play roles in refugee governance, contributing to a lack of policy coherence (Ali 2023). In response, the EU has promoted efforts to integrate national and developmental policies, emphasizing that resilience-building is the responsibility of local governments (Aleassa 2025, 6).

For example, in February 2020, a special training program titled "Fundamentals of Local Administration and Development," funded by the European Union, was conducted in Jordan (MoI 2020). This program was implemented by the UNDP and the Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO) in cooperation with Jordan's Ministry of Interior as part of a decentralization project led by King Abdullah II. The program aimed to enhance the capabilities of Jordanian civil servants and targeted officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of International Cooperation, the Ministry of Planning, and local governments who were involved in political and economic reforms. It provided participants with master's degrees in collaboration with European universities. Sandrine Petroni, Governance and Decentralization Attaché at the EU Delegation to Jordan, stated that decentralization constituted a pathway toward sustainable and comprehensive economic and social development in Jordan (MoI 2020). In other words, aid for Syrian refugees in Jordan was retroactively absorbed into the development assistance that had traditionally been provided as part of the EU's policy toward Jordan following the emergence of a new aid framework focused on building resilience—much like the decentralization reforms.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian government has increasingly emphasized the burden of hosting refugees and begun to openly express its clear opposition to the settlement of Syrian refugees in Jordan. In

February 2024, Interior Minister Al-Farrayeh stated in a meeting with the camp council, “Jordan has never been and will never be a place for settling Syrian refugees” (MoI 2024a). This is likely due to the increasing number of Syrian refugee births; it is estimated that over 215,000 second-generation Syrian refugee children have been born in Jordan, and the government is concerned that their identity is shifting from Syrian to Jordanian (MoI 2024a). In July 2024, he further emphasized that “the priority of the Jordanian government is its own people, not refugees,” and that “the rightful home of refugees is their homeland” (MoI 2024b). In the speech, he linked the increased pressure on Jordan’s economy caused by foreign workers, not just refugees, to the need for responsibility sharing within international society and emphasized the importance of border control.

While the Jordanian government has shifted away from its tolerant rhetoric toward Syrian refugees, development aid arrangements between Jordan and the EU have accelerated. In other words, as humanitarian-based refugee governance became linked to development policy in the 2010s, the latter gained more weight, and refugee governance was incorporated into development policy frameworks.

Such discourse from the Jordanian government suggests an intention to downplay its responsibility for humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants, viewing them as a means of appealing to the international community. It also shows that development assistance agreements between Jordan and the EU are progressing rapidly. As a result, in the 2010s, humanitarian refugee governance became intertwined with development policy, leading to an increased emphasis on the latter and a transformation where refugee governance was absorbed into traditional development policy.

5. Conclusion

The Syrian refugee crisis has brought about a major transformation in international refugee governance. The new refugee governance of the 2010s, which can be described as the “resilience paradigm,” has shifted toward integrating traditional humanitarian assistance with development projects for host societies. Within this framework, enhancing the resilience of host countries, donors, and refugees has become a central policy objective. Jordan’s refugee policy, in particular, adopted the concept of “resilience” early on. Alongside EU and UNHCR refugee policies, it played a role in explicitly linking humanitarian aid and host country social development, using “resilience” as a conceptual bridge.

Jordan is a traditional refugee-hosting country and has established itself as a “good neighbor” for the EU. In particular, the ENP, which has functioned as the cornerstone of EU-Jordan cooperation, formed the basis for the EU’s support framework for Jordan in responding to the refugee crisis since 2011. Consequently, development assistance, such as decentralization reforms implemented under the previous ENP framework, was incorporated into refugee support within the “resilience paradigm.” This signifies that refugee governance has been positioned as an extension of the ENP framework, through which Jordan has collaborated with the EU.

However, this new approach has several limitations. First, by relegating refugee support to the context of development aid, Syrian refugees, who should be protected under international law, have been treated on the same level as socially vulnerable Jordanians and instrumentalized as a “political tool” for enhancing Jordan’s migration diplomacy. The limitations of the “resilience” framework are evident in the restricted outcomes of the 2016 Jordan Compact and Jordan’s persistently high unemployment rate. While refugee economic self-reliance has been promoted as a noble cause, the resulting governance practices have often failed to deliver meaningful improvements in refugees’ livelihoods.

Furthermore, in relation to the EU, this “resilience paradigm” has failed to break away from the

traditional donor-dependent model of the international refugee regime. From a security perspective, the EU informally outsources refugee governance to the Middle East to manage "undesirable migrants (irregular migrants and refugees)." Meanwhile, Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries remain dependent on the EU's financial aid, which has created a dominant structure where refugee governance and social development are vulnerable to being swayed by the EU's agenda, and it is questionable whether this approach is truly contributing to the building of Jordan's fundamental resilience.

In conclusion, the paradigm shift in the international refugee regime linking humanitarian aid with development is leading to the formation of a new framework of refugee management in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including Jordan, spearheaded by donors such as the EU. It has also led to the formation of a new EU-led "governance space" for refugees across the Mediterranean. The global resilience-based approach deployed is being utilized as a strategic resource for intergovernmental migration diplomacy and has been replaced by development aid under the guise of refugee assistance; however, it remains uncertain whether it has significantly strengthened the resilience of most refugee stakeholders. Further examination and consideration are required to assess the extent to which the structure of refugee governance aligns with the original purpose of protecting refugees' human rights.

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