

Beyond the right to work

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Summary

Beyond the Right to Work: Labour Market Engagement of Protracted Refugees Through a Social Exclusion Lens

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Over 75 percent of all refugees globally find themselves in a protracted situation, i.e., being displaced for a period of five years or more, without any prospect for durable solutions. This places refugees at risk of long-term adverse effects in terms of economic, social and political dimensions. Furthermore, it fails to recognise that refugees are actors in and of themselves enacting on their own agency as many find their way to the local labour market to ensure a certain level of well-being. While this awareness has been picked up in recent policy debates such as the Global Compact for Refugees, adopted in 2018, that argues for the need of social, cultural, and economic inclusion of refugees as an alternative pathway to the durable solutions, a clear understanding on what economic inclusion entails is still lacking. Too often the focus is on providing the right to work for refugees.

Though the right to work determines their access to the formal labour market, this is compounded by the notion that engagement of refugees in the labour market – whether formal or informal – should not be seen as an objective in itself. Instead, there is a need to critically assess to what extent and under what conditions refugees engage in the labour market differently from the host community, and which role policies have in shaping this engagement. Incorporating a social exclusion framework, this dissertation seeks to better understand the role of refugee-related policies pertaining to status, camp and right to work in shaping the labour market engagement of protracted refugees. Furthermore, the study is able to recognise the heterogeneity of refugees as a social exclusion lens allows for capturing both between and within group differences. *Chapter 2* thus sets out the theoretical framework underpinning this dissertation.

Next, the concept of labour market inclusion of refugees in this dissertation is explored within the context of Jordan. The country has a long history of refugee influxes. Both Syrian and Palestinian refugees are the largest groups of refugees in Jordan which reside both in and outside camps. The study thus captures different stages of displacement as well as investigates how camp or non-camp residency relates back to labour market outcomes. On the one hand, it unfolds the between group differences, both the difference between refugees and the host community as well as the difference between Syrian and Palestinian refugees. On the other hand, the study critically assesses within group differences for the respective refugee groups.

Chapter 3 therefore studies the interconnection between refugees, citizenship, encampment, and the right to work from a socio-legal perspective. This chapter highlights the challenge of taking a purely human rights-based approach to the right to work. The rights for refugees are not set in stone but are reflective of the political discourse. This concerns both the framing of

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rights as well as to what extent they are upheld. It highlights how refugee management, in terms of encampment and citizenship/status, is reflective of political interest. There is, as such, a trade-off between human rights and state interest.

This is then further explored in the empirical chapters (*Chapters 4, 5, and 6*). *Chapter 4* sets out to understand how the fault lines of self-identity, camp-residency and citizenship shape non-inclusionary labour market practices for Palestinian refugees using the FAFO 2011/2012 Comprehensive Household Survey. Thus, it seeks to better understand the within-group differences from an econometric perspective. The analysis highlights that while citizenship influences to what extent Palestinians are able to participate and are included in the labour market, the labour market conditions are further aggravated by former camp policies.

Chapter 5 analyses the 2016 Jordan National Child Labour Survey studying the between-group differences for Syrian refugees and Palestinian-Palestinian refugees, respectively through the fault lines of nationality and camp-residency prior to the Jordan Compact. The study is indicative of the short-term effects of displacement, placing Syrians in a worse-off position, though at the same it is cognisant of the long-term implications of the continued state of temporariness that protracted refugees face. In addition, it recognises that residing in a camp in itself places someone in a worst-off position. Simultaneously, the analysis is suggestive of the notion of a camp economy that recognises that the camp functions as a market in itself.

This is followed by *Chapter 6* that further explores under what conditions different refugee groups are able to participate in the labour market, based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with Syrian and Palestinian refugees in and outside camps during the Summer of 2018. This analysis further unravels the particularities of how refugee-related policies shape the access of refugees to and their engagement in the labour market. In addition to capturing the immediate effect of policies, it also sheds light on the unintended spill-overs from recent efforts such as the Jordan Compact, adopted in March 2016, that included a focus on the labour market participation of Syrian refugees.

Chapter 7 next reflects on the positionality as a researcher and recognises that the research field is not a static environment but is in constant motion. It urges care against research fatigue and warrants a critical look at who is included and who is excluded. This is followed by *Chapter 8* which concludes the dissertation, discusses areas for future research and provides policy recommendations.