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The impact of Gender-based violence and gender norms on child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon: limited legal status and lack of education[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and identify root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) in forced migration as contributor to child marriage among Syrian refugee in Lebanon. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and its concept of *habitus*, I argue that refugees' *habitus* in Lebanon can be altered when the new field represented by the host society changes, the paper seeks to investigate entrenched gender norms and gender inequality that affect Syrian refugee women and girls in some aspects of their daily life in Lebanon. From this perspective, the paper examines existing social and gender norms that intertwined with factors such as lack of education and insecurity (limited legal status), which exposes refugees to the risk of arrest and detention, it also hampers their access to basic services like education and other social services, thus contributing to increase rates of child marriage among Syrian refugee in Lebanon. This paper is in the first phase of ongoing research, empirical data are not yet available, it will rely on an extensive literature review.

JEL: K38, J71
Keywords: Child marriage, Displacement, Gender-based violence, Syrian refugee, Lebanon

1. Introduction

Syria remains an enormous humanitarian and displacement crisis. More than 6.9 million people have fled their homes inside the country, and over 6.5 million remain outside Syria, of whom 5.7 million are refugees in the region, still being hosted by neighbouring countries. Today, 14.6 million people in Syria rely on aid, more than 90 percent of Syrians live in poverty. Gender- based violence (GBV) and risks to children are on the rise, nearly one in two Syrian children are out of school and vulnerable to child labour, early and forced marriages, trafficking and recruitment by armed actors (UNHCR, 2022a). Lebanon remains the country hosting the largest number of refugees per capita. The Government of Lebanon estimates that the

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country hosts 1.5 million Syrians who have fled the conflict in Syria, including 831,053 refugees registered with UNHCR (2022b). The Syrian crisis has had economic and social impact on Lebanon, a country with an already fragile governance system (Yassin et al., 2015). Lebanon is facing an unprecedented multi-layered political, economic, and public health crisis. Individuals and families are falling deeper into poverty due to currency depreciation, high inflation, rising food prices and loss of income (3RP, 2022)[2]. This has led to a climate of hostility towards refugees whom Lebanese nationals view as competition for jobs and social services. Echoing these views, the Lebanese government has instituted policies limiting refugee access to work opportunities and other forms of social support (Habib et al., 2019). Since their resettlement in Lebanon, Syrian refugees have faced many challenges, such as poor living conditions, tensions with the host community, and reduced access to essential services like health, education, and legal services, especially marriage and birth registrations (Murtada & Melnikas, 2022). Many of Syrian refugee children face risks related to poverty, food insecurity and lack of access to healthcare, girls are also vulnerable to additional gendered risks including child marriage (Roupetz et al., 2020). According to the 2022 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, one in five adolescent girls aged 15-19 were married at the time of survey. Among married girls, 68 percent did not attend school on any day during the scholastic year 2022, the highest rate of child marriage found in Beirut at 36 percent (VASyR, 2022). Despite expanded international attention and growing evidence on child marriage, less evidence exists about factors affecting child marriage in forced migration such as lack of education and limited legal status. Undoubtedly, (GBV) and gender norms continue to be important determinants but a more in-depth understanding is needed of how such determinants contribute to child marriage in forced displacement. Lebanon is not party to the 1951 convention on refugees and does not employ a legal definition of refugee nor a legal framework that regulates their presence and status (Dionigi, 2016). Although it is bound by the customary law principle of *non-refoulment* and by the obligations of the human rights treaties which it has signed and which are incorporated into its Constitution (NRC, 2015; Frangieh, 2015; Janmyr, 2016). As of May, 2015, as per Government of Lebanon instructions, UNHCR suspended new registration for refugees (Dionigi, 2016; Nassar et al., 2019), which according to government estimates, has led to nearly 500,000 people living in Lebanon without the necessary paperwork to access UN provided services (UN WOMEN, 2018). The Lebanese state policy prohibited organized camps and adopted regulations with regard to registration, residence, and work drive refugees into informality and even illegality, disengaged from management of the refugee influx. This responsibility was tacitly transferred to the municipality (Nassar et al., 2019). Refugees thus settled informally in different types of houses and shelters (Sanyal, 2017). By the end of 2014, the national government closed official border crossing points with Syria. Simultaneously, the Council of Ministers approved a 'Policy Paper on Syrian Refugee Displacement', the paper included a new set of regulations preventing Syrians from entering Lebanese territory and tightened restrictions on residency and work permits for Syrians already in the country (Kikano et al, 2021). These regulations, which went into effect on 5 January 2015, delineate two

[2] Regional Strategic Overview. 2022.

'categories' of Syrian refugees: those registered with UNHCR and those with a Lebanese national 'sponsor' (Janmyr, 2016). The former signed a pledge not to work in order to receive a residency permit. The latter must have their subsistence guaranteed by their sponsor. For both categories, the annual renewal of the residence permits for persons over 15 years of age costs $200 (Lenner & Schmelter, 2016). The new regulations have led to around 70-80 percent of Syrian refugees being left without legal residency permits. The lack of legal status for the overwhelming majority of Syrians has significantly increased their socio-economic vulnerability and put their safety at risk (Favir, 2016; Lenner & Schmelter, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2016a). As documented in the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) report, the assessment confirms the consequences of having limited legal status including: lack of freedom of movement; lack of access to basic services; lack of access to livelihoods; and difficulties with the host community (NRC, 2015). The lack of valid residency permits opened the door to practices such as temporary arrests at checkpoints, arbitrary detentions, and the imposition of curfews for Syrian refugees in certain municipalities (UNHCR, 2015; AUB, 2020; Favier, 2016). A 2021 UN assessment (VASyR, 2021) found that Lebanon hosts 660,000 school age Syrian refugee children, but 30 percent – 200,000- have never been to school, and 58 percent of children out of school were not enrolled in school in recent years. NCR's research identified a number of structural barriers to school enrolment, which children and parents cannot address themselves. These include financial constraints, class capacity and real and perceived administrative obstacles (NCR, 2020). A systematic review of the literature will carry out to gather evidence from articles related to gender inequality and (GBV) among Syrian refugees in Lebanon in order to analyse the effect of the overlapping socio-economic vulnerabilities in terms of legal status and lack of education and their contribution in increased rates of child marriage during forced displacement. The paper draws on Bourdieu' s theory of practice and its concept of *habitus*. I argue that refugees' *habitus* as an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experience (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) can be altered when new field changes. This paper also draws on the reports of humanitarian organisations, press releases and grey literature from a range of non-governmental organization (NGO) and human rights organisations. In the following paragraphs, I first analyse drivers and consequences of child marriage. Next, I examine gender base-violence and symbolic violence in displacement context and gender norms and its impact on child marriage. Subsequently, the paper analyses insecurity factor in terms of lack of legal status, followed by analysing lack of education in terms of gender parity among refugees and their association with child marriage. The purpose of this paper is to investigate on restrictive policies and regulation in host country and how they intertwined with gender based-violence and existing gender norms thus contributing to increase child marriage practice. I argue that an understanding of these factors is important to generate recommendations on how to mitigate the drivers and consequences of child marriage practices based on findings, rather than seeing this practice as extension of Syrian culture.

2. Drivers and consequences of child marriage

As a result of the difficulties associated with displacement, child marriage has been identified as a coping strategy among Syrian refugee. Studies in Lebanon have highlighted financial hardship, insecurity and disruption of educational opportunities as a key driver of early marriage among Syrian refugees (Bartels et al., 2018, 2020; Roupetz, 2020; VASyR, 2021; Mourtada et al., 2017; NCR, 2015). Another driver of early marriage is concern about girls' safety from gender-based violence and protection of their honour in the unfamiliar contexts of host countries (Murtada et al., 2017; Bartels et al., 2018, 2020; UNICEF, 2018), led some families to marry their daughters early as a way to secure their futures financially and to protect them from sexual violence (Bakhache et al., 2017). This transfers the responsibility of women's upkeep both financially and in terms of *Sharaf (*honour*)* to their husbands (Fincham, 2022). Furthermore, Sexual exploitation, forces prostitution and, "survival sex" have also been described as a negative coping strategy for some Syrian women and girls who have no other means to raise the funds needed to cover living expenses in Lebanon (Roupetz et al., 2020; Bartels et al., 2018; Mourtada et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2016b). Additional gendered risks have been documented for displaced Syrian girls including harassment and Gender-based violence most commonly reported by girls while travelling to and from school (Bartels et al., 2020; Roupetz et al., 2020). In addition, Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, facing institutionalized multi-systemic violence, is often lost in a reductive analysis of women in war and gender-based violence, (Yasmine & Moughalian, 2016). Recent reports and academic literature have raised concern over increased rate of child marriage within displacement (Bakhache et al., 2017; Yasmine et al., 2016; Gausman et al., 2020; Roupetz et al., 2020; El Arab et al., 2019; Bartels et al., 2018; Mourtada, 2017; El Nakib et al., 2022; UNFPA, 2017; Spencer & Care International, 2015). At least 1 in 3 Syrian refugee girls are married often as household coping mechanism, which increase girls' risk for marital rape, domestic violence, severe health complications in child birth, school drop-outs, and prostitution (UN Women, 2019). OHCHR and women's human rights and gender equality defines child marriage as a human rights violation and a harmful practice, and any formal or informal union where one or both parties is below the age of 18 (OHCHR, 2022). Is rooted in gender inequality, discriminatory institutions and gender and social norms, and a lack of opportunities for adolescent girls and their families (UNFPA, 2020). Beyond being a violation of girl's human rights, child marriage is one of the most pervasive and earliest forms of gender-based violence including physical and emotional abuse by husbands and other family members, as well as marital rape and sexual coercion (UNICEF, 2018; Roupetz et al., 2020; Bartels et al., 2020). Although child marriage occurred in some areas within Syria prior to the war (Bakhache et al., 2017), with 13.3 percent of girls under the age of 18 reportedly married in 2006 (UNICEF DATA-child marriage), forced displacement appears to have increased its prevalence: a recent study found that, in Lebanon, 18 percent of Syrian refugee adolescent girls (15-18 years of age) were married. Another survey found that the rate of child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon was 23 percent (Mourtada, 2017).

3. Theoretical framing

The paper adopts a sociological lens to consider the security and education situation Syrians face in Lebanon. In attempting to conceptualise the situation of refugees I have drawn on the work of Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977: 80) and its concept of '*habitus*' as 'the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions'. In this sense Bourdieu refers to the social, political and cultural fields where agents operate and accumulate economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital, the latter being presented by subjects and institutions as a way of giving them approval (Refai et al., 2018). *Habitus* as a system derives primarily from our social background and upbringing so that according to Bourdieu not only is the body in the social world, but the social world is also in the body. *Habitus* is permeable and is continually being restructured by the individual's engagement with the social world (Morrice, 2013).

… it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experience, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133).

This is how pre-and post-migratory experience shape and mark Syrian refugees' *habitus*, for Bourdieu the complete past that has produced the person continues to have an effect in the present. Most criticisms of *habitus* invoke structuralism or determinism; some of Bourdieu's texts provide more space for agency than others. As McNay (2001, p. 146) asserts, 'there has been an increasing emphasis in Bourdieu's more recent work on moments of disalignment and tension between *habitus* and field, which may give rise to social change' (Reay, 2004), for example, migration can also lead to changes in relations of power and gender relations with families and couples, and in some cases to increasing incidences of domestic violence (Freedman, 2016). Some authors have asserted that Bourdieu admitted the possibility of *habitus* alteration, for example, these studies showed empirically the possibility of *habitus* alteration (Reay, 2004; Barrett et al., 2012; Horvat et al., 2011). However, Bourdieu argues that when individuals encounter a new and unfamiliar field, *habitus* is recreated or at least transformed to meet the conditions under which the dominant social structures operate (Bourdieu, 1990). This is the case when Syrian refugees are trying to adapt to a new country and new environment with different requirements and expectations (Karam et al., 2017). Bourdieu's theory of practice enables the analysis of the encounter between refugees and host society institutions and scrutinising the dynamics of the interaction. Bourdieu (1977, 1986) outlines the ways social fields and capital intertwined to shape the positions of individuals in different social fields, and describes three basic forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural (Abdelhady & Al Ariss, 2022). Economic capital refers to material and financial property (Schuman, 2001), for example, Syrian refugees in Lebanon face a range of challenges such as loss of employment and economic opportunities which result in financial hardship (Bartels et al., 2018). The increased stress of not earning adequate income to cover the family's living expenses, can lead to negative health consequences, while also contributing to an ongoing cycle of poverty (Roupetz et al., 2020). As for cultural capital refers to level of education (Schuman, 2001), for Syrian refugees the limited access to the labour market and to education, the precarity of their status,

have induced them to live in precarious conditions (Lenner et al., 2016), for example, public school in Lebanon are struggling to meet the very different needs of Syrian, overall, education levels remain low for Syrian refugees, because of shortage of schools and qualified teachers, and a lack of resources and facilities (Mahfouz et al., 2020). Thus, with reduce girls' access to education which limits their future literacy skills and earning potential, many families in these settings turn to child marriage (Bartels et al., 2020). As for social capital to social prestige and good connections (Schuman, 2001), given that Syrian refugees have been living in informal tented settlements in Lebanon since 2011, their needs extend beyond daily necessities like food and shelter. On the other hand, social capital has been linked to the exclusion of outsiders, restriction on individual freedoms, and undermining group cohesion (Habib et al., 2020), thus forced displacement deprives refugees of access to meaningful jobs and habitation and psychosocial resources such as social support from friends. On the community level, refugees lose access to larger social structures in their homelands, causing a loss of access to community social capital (Villalonga-Olives et al., 2022). This breakdown of social capital is a sign of extreme vulnerability. The loss of this kind of capital increases the likelihood of refugees resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as begging, prostitution or returning under unsafe conditions (Uzelac et al., 2018). Finally, symbolic capital in this study consists of honour and prestige (Cerny, 2020), due to concerns around girls' safety, security, and protecting their honour, including protecting them from potential rape, some Syrian parents believes that the best available means to protect their children especially girls, is to enter them into a child marriage arrangement (Najjarnejad et al., 2022). For Bourdieu, capital is useful only to the extent it is recognised and appreciated within a specific field. In this regard, Bourdieu draws attention to the relational aspect of capital, that its value is dependent on the specific field. Following Bourdieu's argumentation, it is understandable that the value of the capital the refugees possess changes as they move across nation-states and social fields. Importantly, the theory allows for an understanding of the ways refugees re-evaluate their position in a given field and find ways to create new capital in the new field (Abdelhady & Al Ariss, 2022). In order to offer a theoretical interpretation of gender as a social institution or structure, I build on Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). Connell indicates that masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting (Connell, 2005). Studies show that may of the men, who are in the dominant position of the gender order, experience forced migration as a kind of masculinity crisis that shakes their dominant masculinity ideals, and thus they develop much more patriarchal and sexist reflexes in the face of this crisis (Carpar et al., 2021). Bourdieu in his essay on male domination, draws attention to symbolic violence, which "constitutes the essential aspect of male domination" ("La domination masculine 1998"). The concept of symbolic violence is the acting out of a worldview and social order anchored deeply in the *habitus* of both dominants and dominated. Thus, lies in the fact that the oppressed in this case women must identify themselves as inferior by incorporating the prevailing order. Domination also means that the dominated adopt the "prevailing opinion," the world view developed by the dominant, and along with it, a self-

image shaped by the dominant (Krais, 2006). Symbolic violence refers to the ideologies, words, nonverbal behaviours or communications that express stereotypes, hegemonies and create humiliation or stigma. It draws from other social institutions (e.g., the family, religion, education, economic and political institutions) and is therefore often constructed and named as normal and natural (Montesanti et al., 2015). In my study I would consider the institutionalised violence that Syrian refugee women face in Lebanon as a symbolic violence.

4. Gender-based violence, displacement and symbolic violence

The term gender-based violence is connected with a range of evolving discourses that are not merely descriptive, but interpretive and political. Gender-based violence is an ostensibly gender-neutral term that could refer to men, women or non-binary people (Buiten and Naidoo, 2020). Gender-based violence is a global health, human rights, and protection issue, which can increase during emergencies. Is deeply entrenched in gender inequality, (GBV) is often reinforced by patriarchal norms, discriminatory laws, and socio-cultural norms that undermine women's rights. (GBV) takes many forms in humanitarian settings, intimate partner violence (IPV) is often the most reported form of gender based-violence (Raftery et al., 2022), also forced and child marriage are widely recognized as a form of gender based-violence (Roupetz et al., 2020). Drawing on sociological theories of gender, can help to communicate more effectively and specifically how gender operates at multiple levels to produce and sustain violence, beyond broad or obscure claims about gender. Sociological accounts of gender have evolved significantly in the past few decades. By the late 1980s and 1990s, theorists such as Connell (1987) and Risman (1998) made a significant mark on the field by urging sociologist to think of gender beyond the level of personal identity and interactions, to look at it as a social *structure or institution* that organises social relations and the distribution of resources (Buiten and Naidoo, 2020). Gender as a social institution organizes social life in hierarchical, mutually exclusive categories, which maintains subordinate positions, whether material or ideological, among people within families, households or communities (Montesanti et al., 2015). As is known, discussions on migration and gender in social sciences have started to develop with the contributions of women's studies, especially since the 1970s. Forced migration, which inherently and usually occurs in an unexpected manner, results in dramatic changes in the daily lives of all actors. As a result, it is seen that the men and masculinities may be more affected by the forced migration than other types of migration (Carpar et al., 2021). Connell (2001) wrote that there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. Different cultures and different periods of history construct masculinity differently (Connell, 2001). Many men take with them the masculine roles and patterns they have learned throughout their life (Carpar et al., 2021). In Syrian society patriarchal norms and customs are common, which signifies men typically are the main breadwinners, protectors of the family, and dominate the political, social, and economic spheres in the Syrian society (Yalim & Critelli, 2023). Migration is one of the dynamics that directly affect the

identity relations (Carpar et al., 2021), as the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in extremely poor and increasingly crowded conditions with extended family members, shifts in gender roles within the family are apparent with men who are bound to the camps or homes due to fear of deportation as a result of illegal entry to Lebanon. Meanwhile, frustrated husbands, who due to various reasons cannot assume their gender roles as primary breadwinners, further interfere with women's mobility. Such shifts in gender roles are associated with an increase in IPV and hyper-masculinity (Yasmine et al., 2016). The form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting is called "hegemonic masculinity." "Hegemonic" signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership. It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women (Connell, 2001). Masculinity is understood in this paper as being socially and culturally constructed. Huizinga and colleagues (2021) argued that masculinities are differentiated by age, social class, race and religion (Yalim et al., 2023; Huizinga et al., 2021). Recent work of masculinities highlights how gender identities of migrants are intertwined with unemployment, and how gendered status were lost in the event of migration (Huizinga et al., 2021). Within the Syrian context in Lebanon, the contradictions between men's lived experience as refugees and narratives of 'appropriate' Syrian masculinity (men as 'protectors' and 'provider') mean that men's ability to be appropriately gendered as 'masculine' has been seriously undermined (Fincham, 2022), which may lead them to experiencing their masculinity negatively and can manifest itself as IPV (Yalim & Critelli, 2023). In forced migrants many refugees are not provided with humanitarian support and are excluded from the social welfare system, services and formal work (Hourani et al., 2021). Displaced Syrian families in Lebanon are confronted with burdensome governmental policies and regulations. For example, Syrians are only permitted to work in agriculture, construction and environment (Roupetz et al., 2020). Syrian refugee in Lebanon faces symbolic and structural violence (Hourani et al., 2022) in forms of restrictive policies such as limited legal status, lack of employment opportunities and lack of financial support all of which place forced migrants at an increased risk of poverty and destitution (Habib et al., 2019), with many parents genuinely feeling that child marriage will secure their daughters' future (Bartels et al., 2018). In hosting countries refugee women can gain responsibilities that they did not have in their country of origin, such as providing financially for their families. At the same time, men can lose their traditional status due to economic, social and political limitations, and legal restrictions (Hourani et al., 2021). In Lebanon many refugee women and girls no longer have access to the resources and services they used to have in Syria before the conflict began, which enabled them to fulfil their traditional gender role (El Masri, 2013), this may lead employed women to be overwhelmed by continued pressures of domestic obligations and cultural demands from their families and community (Yalim & Critelli, 2023). These changed relations can contribute to violent acts against women as men attempt to reassert their prior status as 'head 'of the household (Hourani et al., 2021). Furthermore, Syrian refugee women in Lebanon are subject to institutionalized multi systemic violence as a result of discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. They are criticized by healthcare providers for the number of children they have and for the unintended and intended conceptions that took place on Lebanese land. A case in point of institutionalized violence against Syrian refugee in Lebanon, is the practise of Lebanese media which depicts Syrian refugee women as "stealing the men" or

being "cheap wives" for accepting lower dowry, leading to further harassment, shaming, and bullying of refugees from the host community (Yasmine et al., 2016).

5. Gender norms and child marriage

The phenomenon of child marriage indirectly affects women's subordination[3]. In this regard, religion and social norms have a role in perpetuating child marriage, reproducing subordination, and symbolic violence against women (Fatimatus Zahro' Jihan Fitri et al., 2022; Kohno et al., 2020). Studies found that among Syrian refugees in Lebanon there was a strong belief that child marriage would bring social protection to the girls and lead to the preservation of a girl's honour in a conflict setting (Kohno et al., 2020). In the Middle East context, honour often carries gendered connotations, emphasising the need for women in particular to adhere to particular gender norms. Gender norms define 'acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society'. They are 'produced and reproduced through social interaction' (Lokot, 2021). Syrian female honour is aligned with that of the family as well as the nation, and women become the embodiment of ideals such as tradition, culture and honour. Within the context of traditional Syrian culture, (heterosexual) marriage is considered a compulsory right of passage through which women's sexual activity and sexual reproduction are regulated (Fincham, 2022). In Islam, based on religious doctrines, it is taught that when a person gets married, he/she indeed perfects half of his/her religion. This suggests that, regardless of their age, marriage is perceived as promoting human spiritual maturity in this religion. Also, patriarchal ideology influences the decision of child marriage (Kohno et al., 2020). Patriarchal family culture valued the family above the person, women subordinate to men, juniors to seniors. Gender and age hierarchy inherited within and outside family relationships (Joseph, 2005). Within Syrian culture, decisions are taken communally with reference to both patriarchal and age relations (i.e., males and elders having more authority within the family). It is within this context that the family exerts tremendous influence over young women's behaviours and movements (Fincham, 2022).

6. The consequences of limited legal status for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and its impact on child marriage

[3] Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) where child marriage includes any "marriage in which at least one of the parties is a child" - a person below the age of 18. It also "refers to marriages involving a person aged below 18 in countries where the age of majority is attained earlier or upon marriage". Early marriage can also refer to marriages where "both spouses are 18 or older but other factors make them unready to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development, or a lack of information regarding the person's life options". Furthermore, "any marriage which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties and/or where one or both of the parties is/are unable to end or leave the marriage, including as a result of duress or intense social or family pressure", also falls within the definition of CEFM. World Health Organization, (2016). Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries.

The legal status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in light of 2015 policy leaves many refugees in a deeply precarious legal position (Janmyr, 2016). Legal and political exclusion of refugees are intrinsically tied to one another as they have a causal relationship. Political tensions are usually channelled through legal instruments in order to enact laws that limit the refugees' rights and differentiate them from other groups (Yassin et al., 2015). The refugee issue is highly politicised in Lebanon, and the Government stance towards Syrian refugees can be explained on the one hand by Lebanon's previous refugee experience with Palestinians, and, on the other, by the major antagonistic political parties' conflicting attitudes towards the conflict in Syria. The diverging approach to refugees was particularly evident in the recurrent debate on the establishment of refugee camps (Janmyr, 2016). As a result of this 'no camp' policy, Syrians are forced to either live in private rented accommodation in towns and cities throughout the country, or in informal settlements built on private, often agricultural land (Sanyal, 2017; VASyR, 2021) they live in conditions below humanitarian standards with over half (57%) of Syrian refugee families living in overcrowded shelters (VASyR, 2021). The lack of legal protection or status has created a deeply marginalising situation for Syrian refugees (Sanyal, 2017). This loss of legal status puts refugees at risk of arrest and detention, it restricting their movement due to fear of arrest, it also makes them vulnerable to labour and sexual exploitation by employers, without the ability to turn to authorities for protection, women are exposes to risk of sexual harassment and exploitation, due to their limited legal status, they rarely report this harassment to the police or other authorities for fear of being arrested (Human Rights Watch, 2016b; Aranki et al., 2014; NCR, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). The NCR field assessment (2013, 2014), focused on the situation of Syrian refugees with limited legal status conducted in locations feature sizeable populations of refugees from Syria, found key challenges linked to their legal status, in particular: restrictions on their freedom of movement including fear of mistreatment or arrest at official checkpoints, fear of kidnapping and fear of violent attack by armed groups or member of the host community, another challenges linked to legal status was access to healthcare services due to fear of crossing checkpoints (NCR, 2013, 2014; Yassin et al., 2015). Restricted movement has serious consequences for refugees' physical and mental wellbeing, including access to essential services, preventing family reunification, and hindering the search for livelihood opportunities (NCR, 2014). In addition, coping mechanisms adopted by refugees to deal with their situation of limited legal status exposes them to new risks and increases their vulnerability included, going into debt, risking returning to Syria, obtaining false documents in order to maintain legal stay (NCR, 2014). In addition, they rely on children to contribute to household income, as children favoured by employers because they are cheap labour instead of parents who have no freedom of movement, while women increasing their movements men who were more likely to be arrested decrease their movements, this exposes women to risks of sexual harassment and exploitation (NCR, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2016a). Seven percent of women reported arranging marriages for their underage children as a mechanism for coping their inability to meet the basic needs of the household (NCR, 2014). With few employment opportunities, lower wages for Syrian employees, and discriminatory higher costs of

living, many families rely on their children working to help meet the family's financial needs (Bartels et al., 2020). Female Syrian refugees make up more than half of the total caseload of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, over half of those displaced are under the age of 18 (UN Women, 2018; UNICEF, 2017). 86 percent of refugee women have UNHCR registration, and 11 percent have a residency permit, and 79 percent of refugee women reported economic insecurity as a primary concern. Only 1 percent have jobs, the majority of whom live in female headed households (UN Women, 2018). Residency restrictions also increase the risk of Syrian children recently born in Lebanon becoming stateless due to the fact that their parents cannot register their births in the country if they do not have legal status (Human Rights Watch, 2016a) are also unable to complete important administrative processes to obtain civil documentation such as registering marriages (VASyR, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2016a; Bartels et al., 2018; Mourtada et al., 2017; Janmyr, 2016; NCR, 2013, 2014, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). Furthermore, the absence of a state policy to regulate the presence of refugees permitted the emergence of many Lebanese municipalities as authoritative local bodies (Yassin et al., 2015). One of the clearest examples of this municipality autonomy is the curfews imposed on Syrian refugees, restricting freedom of movement (Janmyr, 2016). In the qualitative interviews conducted by Un Women in Lebanon, Syrian women reported that their status as secondary citizens in Lebanon, along with un-renewed papers, seriously restricted their movement (UN Women, 2018), the process of obtaining valid documentation was expensive, most of the families were not able to renew it because of their economic insecurity. Not having the proper paperwork prohibited many from being able to pass security checkpoints, which often limited participants' ability to work, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Bartels et al., 2018, 2020). Some women said their husband's fear for their safety was also a factor, as was lack of access to public space (UN Women, 2018). Women faced additional security threats in their communities and in some cases have been perceived as having lower earning potential, and thus women were less likely to be employed. In 2021, 94 percent of the Syrian refugee households faced challenges when accessing food and had to employ coping mechanisms to manage their food shortages. More than half (54%) of female-headed households borrowed food or relied on help from friends or relatives significantly more than male-headed ones (38%). A study conducted by UN Agencies, found that approximately one fifth (20%) of females aged 15-19 were married at the time of the survey. This was true for less than 1% of males in the same age category (VASyR, 2021). Research on child marriage and economic insecurity, report that perceived discriminatory practices and policies prevented Syrians in Lebanon from being able to obtain the necessary legal documents that would allow them to have safe freedom of movement, to work legally, to register their children in school, and this further contributed to their poverty, this situation is significant in terms of child marriage since impoverished parents sometimes feel they are unable to provide for their daughters and therefore turn to child marriage as a way of securing their daughters' economic future (Bartels et al., 2018, 2020). To illustrate gender issues among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, in terms of legal residency we follow the gender analysis conducted by UN Women, in partnership with UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP (VASyR, 2021). I found that rates of legal residency for women were 4 percentage points lower than for men, which means women with legal residency declined from 18% in 2020 to 14% in 2021 and that men with legal residency declined from 23%

to 19%. On the other hand, men (42%) more often had legal residency in the form of sponsorship than women (17%), (VASyR, 2021). This is in part underpinned by socio-economic conditions prioritising male residency, and women being one- third less likely to know the procedures (UN Women, 2019).

7. Lack of education and its impact on child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Education is not only a human right, but also a powerful tool for women's empowerment and a strategic development investment (Mc-Cleary-Sills et al., 2015). Previous studies have shown that higher levels of education negatively affect attitudes towards child marriage (UNICEF, 2017). At the same time, child marriage may also prevent women from completing their education. For example, a study on child marriage amongst Syrian refugee population in *Bekka* found that, of girls not enrolled in school for the 2015-2016 school year, marriage or engagement was the cause in 20 percent of cases, also, the study shown that higher levels of education negatively affect attitudes towards child marriage. Thus, increased education may delay marriage by changing both girls' and adults' attitudes towards child marriage (UNICEF, 2017). Lebanon hosts 660,000 school age Syrian refugee children (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The 2021, UN assessment results show that 30 percent of school-aged refugee children (ages 6-17) have never been to school, while only 11 percent of youth (aged 15 to 24 years) were enrolled in education (UNHCR, 2021). Furthermore, many Syrian children cannot attend public schools, in many cases due to a complex range of factors, including financial hardship their families cannot afford transportation cost, education fees and materials (Human Rights Watch, 2021; VASyR, 2021; UN Women, 2021; Yassin et al., 2015), another challenge they face is the incapacity of local higher education institutions to absorb such large numbers of refugees (Fincham, 2022). Furthermore, school is refusing to let Syrian children to take mandatory examination if they do not have legal residency in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch, 2021), which is required at age 15 but which only 20 percent of Syrian refugees have legal residency, the requirement of legal residency has become a critical obstacle that prevents student from their right to education (Human Rights Watch, 2022), According to UN Agencies' gender analysis in terms of education found that older Syrian boys and girls were not being sent to school for different reasons. One third (33%) of boys aged 15-18 were not attending school due to work compared to 9% of girls in the same age range, and this rose significantly to 57% of young men aged 19-24 not attending due to work compared to 5% of young women. On the other hand, around half (46%) of young women were not attending school because they were married (VASyR, 2021; UNICEF, 2017). Data indicate that Syrian children in Lebanon show alarmingly low rates of school enrolment, in addition, insecurity and poverty contribute to girl's vulnerability to early marriage. One of the consequences of limited legal status for Syrian refugees in Lebanon was identified by NCR field assessment, that found some refugee parents with limited legal status reported that they were hiding, minimising movements and sometimes unable to find jobs, which has consequences on their children, including

their access to education through enrolment al school, primarily because they cannot afford the transportation, afraid to cross checkpoints, parents with limited work opportunities often children will join the labour market to raise the family income (NCR, 2013). Also, gender barriers prevent girls from attending and competing schools, including child marriage (Mc-Cleary-Sills et al, 2015). Families make decisions about their daughters' marriages within the context of social norms, displacement, financial constraints, and lack of economic opportunities. Around 50 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children (UNHCR, 2013). The majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are above the age of secondary education, only a small fraction of refugees is currently enrolled in higher education (Fincham, 2022) 13 percent of adolescents and youth (aged 14 to 24) were attending school in 2021 (VASyR, 2021). Among the youth, costs were still reported as a prominent reason for not attending school, however, the two main reasons were either due to marriage or due to work to support their family financially. Moreover, seven out of 10 youth were not in education, employment, or training, with boys (78%) reporting a higher rate than girls (54%). The gender parity indices show that the proportion of girls enrolled in schools was slightly higher compared to boys at the primary level (1.13) and lower secondary level (1.14), with a larger proportion for higher secondary level (1.30), (VASyR, 2021).

Conclusion

My findings show that forced migration impacted gender dynamics in many ways, it brought about social transformation and has changed the way that families view gender relations. Child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon is associated with poverty and gender inequality, is indirectly affects women's subordination, in this regards many factors contribute to child marriage including financial hardships, concern about girls' safety from (GBV), harassment and sexual violence. By examining (GBV) and its impact on child marriage from multiple levels, my results illustrate two key factors that is likely to increase the practice of child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, first issue is symbolic and structural violence in forms of restrictive policies and regulations in the host country such as limited legal status that prevented Syrian refugees from being able to obtain the required legal documents, lack of employment, disruption of educational opportunities, and restricted movement for Syrian girls which limits their educational opportunities and contributes to parents option to marry off their daughters. The other issue has close links with socio-cultural and religious aspects as well as existing social and gender norms. For instance, Syrian refugees believe that child marriage would bring social and sexual protection to the girls and preserve girl's honour in displacement. The theory of practice and its concept of *habitus* has been the framework on which the paper has been conducted. By employing Bourdieu's concept of *habitus as* it shaped by family through socialization, social groups and institutionalised states, we found that Syrian refugees are encountering a new and unfamiliar field which consist of structural barriers in terms of polices and regulation of host society, as *habitus* is not eternal, refugees try to replace old-structured dispositions with new ones, trying to adopt to their new field through responding to social vulnerability that interact with existing

Syrian refugees' socio-cultural norms such as tradition, culture which concern about preservation of girls honour in displacement, consequently contributing to increased rates of child marriage. I predict, that a change in policies of hosting country in terms of legal status and education, we can hope to unravel the dynamics of continuity and change in the *habitus* of refugees, in order to decrease child marriage practice among Syrian refugees. These hypotheses will guide field research that will be structured in the coming months.

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