

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF SYRIAN
REFUGEES' EMPLOYMENT IN LEBANON: IMPACT OF
LEGAL RESIDENCY AND DOCUMENTATION

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis investigates how legal residency and identity documentation affect the labor-market integration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Drawing on the 2021 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) survey and employing logistic and OLS regression models, it examines the probability of employment, wage levels, and household income as functions of legal status, document portfolios, and demographic characteristics. Results demonstrate that holding a valid residency permit raises employment odds by over 20 percent and that refugees with multiple forms of documentation, including national IDs and passports, enjoy significantly higher wages and household incomes. However, benefits are unevenly distributed, with male and urban refugees capturing greater gains than female and rural populations, underscoring the need for gender-responsive and spatially differentiated policies. These findings inform four policy recommendations: sector-tied residency frameworks; mobile legal aid and registration units; urban-rural employment diversification; and a skills-matching platform that balances the economic advantages of formalizing low-skilled refugee labor with safeguards for Lebanese workers. By illuminating the pivotal role of legal and administrative barriers, this work offers empirically grounded guidance to develop more organized and beneficial refugee integration strategies.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DPAR	General Directorate of Political Affairs and Refugees
EU	European Union
GoL	Government of Lebanon
GSO	General Security Offices
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ISF	Internal Security Forces
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
MoIM	Ministry of Interior and Municipality
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPTP	National Poverty Targeting Program
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PRL	Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon
PRS	Palestinian Refugees from Syria
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
R=P	Refugees=Partners
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UN- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OHCHR

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the
Near East

VASyR Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has long functioned as a host nation for various forms of displacement and labor migration. Its geographic proximity to Syria, along with deep-rooted historical, political, and economic ties, has shaped a longstanding pattern of labor migration between the two countries. Throughout much of the 20th century, Lebanon heavily relied on Syrian labor, particularly in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture, construction, and services (Chalcraft, 2009). The influx of Syrian workers into Lebanon was predominantly informal, seasonal, and male-dominated, facilitated by open-border arrangements such as the 1994 bilateral accord, which allowed Syrians to freely enter Lebanon for work and residence (ILO, 2014). This labor arrangement was largely mutually beneficial. Lebanon gained access to a low-cost and flexible workforce, while Syria found an outlet for its surplus rural labor (Frangieh, 2009). Estimates from the late 1990s and early 2000s placed the number of Syrian workers in Lebanon at around 400,000, varying by season and economic conditions (UNDP, 2008). Most of these workers operated without formal contracts or legal protections, occupying the lower rungs of the labor hierarchy and often enduring exploitative and hazardous working conditions. Nevertheless, the system retained a degree of stability, underpinned by the economic interdependence of the two countries, until the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 drastically changed this dynamic.

The Syrian uprising, which began in March 2011, rapidly escalated into a full-scale civil war, displacing millions both internally and externally. Over 5.5 million Syrians fled the country, resulting in one of the largest refugee crises since World War

II (UNHCR, 2023). Lebanon, with its long and porous border, became one of the primary destinations for those escaping the violence. By 2015, Lebanon hosted over 1.5 million Syrians, giving it the highest refugee-to-population ratio in the world (World Bank, 2017). Unlike pre-2011 Syrian migrants who primarily came as laborers, the post-2011 wave included entire families fleeing conflict, many of whom settled in informal tented settlements or impoverished urban neighborhoods (UNHCR, 2016). Although many sought employments, they faced an entirely different socio-political and legal environment. Public services, already under pressure, quickly became overwhelmed. Demand for education, healthcare, housing, and waste management soared, while competition for low-skilled jobs intensified. Syrian refugees were increasingly scapegoated in political discourse, accused of contributing to rising unemployment, wage suppression, and public service strain (Fakhoury, 2021). In response, the Lebanese government began tightening residency and work permit requirements in 2015, pushing the majority of Syrian refugees into the informal economy (ILO, 2016).

Lebanon's refusal to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention has meant that its approach to refugee inflows has remained informal and fragmented. Initially, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) adopted an open-door policy, allowing Syrians to enter and reside for six months without a visa, with the possibility of renewal (Janmyr, 2016). However, this approach shifted significantly in 2015 when the government formally requested UNHCR to suspend new refugee registrations, except in extreme humanitarian cases, and imposed stricter renewal conditions. These included a \$200 annual residency fee, a "pledge not to work" requirement for UNHCR-registered individuals, and a sponsorship system through a "pledge of responsibility" for others

(Fakhoury & Özkul, 2019; Janmyr, 2016). These evolving legal restrictions have profoundly affected the livelihoods of Syrian refugees. Most were unable to afford the residency fees or secure a Lebanese sponsor, resulting in widespread undocumented status. By 2019, over 70% of Syrian refugees lacked valid residency permits (UNHCR, 2019). Without legal residency, refugees cannot obtain formal work permits and are therefore confined to the informal labor market, where they are exposed to exploitation, wage theft, and unsafe working conditions. Baroud and Zeidan (2021) and Clemens, Huang, and Graham (2018) report that over 90% of Syrian workers in Lebanon are employed informally, without contracts or labor protections. The lack of documentation also severely restricts mobility, as checkpoints throughout the country expose undocumented individuals to arrest or harassment. Alsharabati and Nammour (2017) found that 37% of Syrian refugees had confrontations at checkpoints due to expired legal papers, while 71% reported that such experiences constrained both their movement and employment opportunities.

The structural exclusion of Syrian refugees from formal employment has deepened their economic vulnerability and fueled tensions with host communities. The oversupply of informal labor has undermined job security and wages for Lebanese workers in low-skilled sectors and weakened the state's capacity to regulate employment and collect taxes (ILO, 2021). Despite their crucial contributions, especially in agriculture, construction, and sanitation, Syrian refugees remain systematically excluded from formal labor market structures and social protections. The nature of Syrian labor in Lebanon has thus undergone a profound transformation. What was once a relatively stable and tolerated seasonal workforce has shifted into a marginalized refugee labor force, operating in legal limbo and economic insecurity. The

historical interdependence between the two countries has eroded, replaced by restrictive policies, diminished formal opportunities, and growing socio-economic friction.

Yet, despite these challenges, Syrian refugees continue to play a key, though often overlooked, role in Lebanon's informal economy. Their contributions are frequently misrepresented or misunderstood in both public opinion and policymaking. This underscores an urgent need to examine how the post-2011 crisis has reshaped the structure, perception, and regulation of Syrian labor in Lebanon, particularly in regions like the Bekaa and Akkar, where both agricultural dependence and refugee presence are substantial. While existing research has addressed the broader macroeconomic implications of the refugee crisis and explored themes of informality and displacement, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies on how legal documentation, especially residency status, shapes employment outcomes.

Understanding this relationship is critical for designing policies that align the needs of host communities with the rights and economic integration of refugees.

This research addresses this critical and underexamined dimension by exploring the impact of legal residency and documentation on the employment outcomes of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. It provides empirical evidence on how legal status affects access to work, labor market segmentation, and wage dynamics. The study seeks to evaluate the correlation between legal documentation and labor force participation, assess the broader implications of these constraints on Lebanon's labor market, and propose actionable policy solutions. These recommendations aim to promote a more inclusive and legally coherent framework for refugee employment, one that supports integration while safeguarding the interests of Lebanese workers and industries.

The analysis begins with a review of relevant literature, followed by a discussion of the dataset and empirical approach. The paper then presents key findings and concludes with a set of evidence-based policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the relevant literature on the factors influencing refugees' labor market participation in host countries, with a particular focus on the Lebanese context. The review is organized into three parts to structure the discussion: the first examines Lebanon's legal approach to refugees, highlighting how legal and policy frameworks have shaped refugee livelihoods; the second explores the macroeconomic context and the broader impact of the Syrian refugee influx on Lebanon's labor market; and the third analyzes the relationship between refugees' legal status and their employment dynamics, discussing key hypotheses related to legal documentation and labor force participation.

2.1. Lebanon's Legal Approach to Refugees

Lebanon's legal approach to refugees reveals a complex historical trajectory. Despite being an active participant in the formation of international refugee law during the 1940s and 1960s, it included helping create the UNHCR and participating in the formation of the 1967 Additional Protocol. Lebanon never signed the 1951 Refugee Convention (Diab, n.d.). This stance is part of a regional pattern, as many Middle Eastern states refuse to sign the Convention, often citing concerns about the Palestinian refugee situation and the desire to maintain their special status rather than subjecting them to resettlement norms. Lebanon's primary legal instrument governing foreigners remains the 1962 Order 319 Regulating the Status of Foreigners. Article 26 of this law defines political asylum in potentially broader terms than the 1951 Convention,

covering "any foreign national who is the subject of a prosecution or a conviction by an authority that is not Lebanese for a political crime or whose life or freedom is threatened, also for political reasons" (Diab, n.d.). Notably, this definition does not require asylum seekers to categorize their persecution under specific types as outlined in the 1951 Convention. However, as multiple scholars note, Articles 26-31 of the 1962 law, which provide for political asylum, have never been activated, effectively leaving Lebanon without a functioning asylum system (Janmyr, 2016).

The literature identifies Lebanon's experience with Palestinian refugees as a critical factor shaping its subsequent refugee policies. Following the 1967 Naksa, Lebanon's initial moral momentum toward refugee protection began to wane (Diab, n.d.). For Palestinians, Lebanon approved 12 recognized refugee camps, which according to UNICEF and UNRWA suffer from overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and violence. Conditions in unofficial "Palestinian gatherings" are reported to be even worse. The Syrian refugee crisis, beginning in 2011, prompted further policy developments. From 2011-2014, Lebanon maintained a position of non-engagement with Syrian refugees through policy mechanisms (Diab, n.d.). The 2014 "Policy Paper on Syrian Refugee Displacement" marked a turning point, introducing regulations that restricted Syrians' entry and limited their access to residency and work permits. In 2015, Lebanon closed its borders and requested UNHCR stop registering new refugees. This created a situation where only 17 percent of refugees over age 15 hold legal residency, leaving the majority vulnerable to deportation threats, particularly amid Lebanon's ongoing anti-refugee campaign (Diab, n.d.; Janmyr & Mourad, 2018). Prior to the Syrian crisis, bilateral agreements signed between Lebanon and Syria in 1993-1994 granted nationals of both countries freedom to stay, work, and practice economic activity (Saghieh,

2021). These agreements allowed Syrians to obtain residence visas at the border for six months, renewable for another six months, with the possibility of further extensions at a cost of USD 200. However, this right was not limitless, it still required work permits for Syrians seeking employment in Lebanon, though in practice most worked in the informal economy without permits (ILO, 2020).

2.2. Macroeconomic Context and Labor Market Impact

The literature presents a nuanced picture of the economic impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The arrival of refugees coincided with a severe economic downturn, with Lebanon's GDP dropping from approximately \$55 billion in 2018 to \$33 billion in 2020, and per capita income decreasing by nearly 40% (World Bank, 2021). This crisis, termed a "deliberate depression" by the World Bank, resulted from decades of fiscal mismanagement, elite capture, and political paralysis rather than refugee influx (World Bank, 2021; Baumann, 2019). Brun et al. (2021) challenge the widespread narrative attributing Lebanon's economic collapse to Syrian refugees. Through analysis of macroeconomic indicators predating the refugee crisis, they demonstrate that Lebanon's economic instability was already deeply rooted in structural corruption, poor governance, and public sector mismanagement well before the arrival of displaced Syrians. They argue that international aid directed at supporting refugees actually helped delay Lebanon's fiscal collapse rather than exacerbating it. This perspective contrasts with some public perceptions and studies reporting negative effects on the Lebanese economy (ILO, 2014; Hamdar et al., 2018), which cite contractions in economic growth, reduced private investment, and downturns in real estate and tourism sectors. A study covering 400 Lebanese respondents revealed that 50 percent perceived

Syrian refugees as harming the Lebanese economy (Hamdar et al., 2018). More sophisticated econometric analyses challenge claims of negative economic impacts. Fakhri, Kassab, and Lizzaik (2024) employed Granger causality tests and found no causal relationship between refugee presence and economic decline, instead suggesting that refugees may actually contribute to economic growth without significantly affecting labor force participation or unemployment rates. Similarly, David et al. (2017) discuss how humanitarian aid accompanying refugee inflows had a stimulating effect on certain sectors of the Lebanese economy. The impact on labor markets specifically has been a subject of significant research. Fakhri and Ibrahim (2016) provide valuable comparative insights from Jordan, where they investigated the impact of Syrian refugees using a VAR model across three major governorates. Their findings revealed that Syrian refugees did not significantly affect employment or unemployment rates. The authors attribute this to the segregation of refugees into the informal sector, geographic constraints such as confinement to camps and border regions, and host country policies limiting legal employment opportunities. In Lebanon, multiple studies suggest that the presence of refugees has led to downward pressure on wages for both Syrian and Lebanese low-skilled laborers, primarily benefiting employers and landlords rather than workers themselves. The informal nature of Syrian employment characterized as seasonal, low-skilled, and underpaid, makes these workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. However, the Lebanese government has not implemented structured policies to productively integrate this additional labor force, leading to increased tension and competition in the labor market (Fakhri, Kassab, & Lizzaik, 2024; ILO, 2014).

2.3. Refugees' Legal Status and Employment Dynamics

The legal status of refugees in Lebanon directly impacts their employment opportunities and integration into the labor market. A major policy shift occurred in 2015 when Lebanese authorities introduced a framework separating Syrians into two categories: those applying as migrant laborers, and those registered as refugees who were initially prohibited from working (Janmyr & Mourad, 2018). Though international pressure led to the lifting of the non-work pledge requirement in 2016, implementation remained inconsistent. Ministry of Labor reports show minimal increases in work permits despite the massive influx of refugees, only 551 new permits issued and 1655 renewed in 2018, when the refugee population was estimated at 1.5 million. Research by Lebanon Support identifies multiple reasons for this discrepancy: high fees relative to low wages, low acceptance rates for applications, the principle of preference for Lebanese nationals, and ministerial discretion in permit approvals. Further restrictions followed, including the 2019 labor plan targeting undocumented foreign workers, particularly Syrians receiving humanitarian aid (HRW, 2019). This policy aimed to protect Lebanese employment but overlooked critical socio-political complexities. In 2021, another circular emphasized Lebanese labor prioritization, especially within public sector contracting, and called on institutions to comply with the law by only hiring foreigners with valid permits (Ministry of Labor, 2021). Fakhri, Kassab, and Lizzaik (2024) demonstrate empirically that legal residency status significantly impacts refugees' labor market participation. Those with legal residency enjoy enhanced freedom of movement and easier access to work permits, increasing their likelihood of formal employment. The possession of identity documentation, such as national IDs, passports, or family booklets, further increases employment probability. Their study

also highlights key demographic factors: male and married refugees are more likely to be employed, whereas young, educated adults face more difficulty entering the labor market compared to illiterate peers. Janmyr (2016) critically examines the legal ambiguity surrounding Syrian refugees in Lebanon, arguing that the absence of formal refugee legislation and Lebanon's non-signatory status to the 1951 Refugee Convention has contributed to widespread precarity. Refugees are often classified as illegal migrants, leading to limited access to legal residency, frequent risk of deportation, and systemic marginalization. The 2015 regulatory changes, particularly those concerning residency renewal, pushed the majority of refugees into irregular legal status, reinforcing their socio-economic vulnerability. Syrian refugees in Lebanon have primarily worked in the informal sector, despite being granted limited legal access to three specific sectors and partial exemption from work permit fees. The layered restrictions have drastically reduced Syrian refugees' formal labor opportunities, pushing them deeper into the informal economy where they are excluded from social protections and legal recourse. The absence of comprehensive labor market policy that integrates refugees as a developmental asset has resulted in a race to the bottom in labor conditions, particularly in agriculture, construction, and services. Several scholars advocate for policy reforms. Brun et al. (2021) recommend a paradigm shift to frame refugees as potential contributors to economic revitalization rather than burdens. They suggest that targeted integration of refugees, particularly in agriculture and industry in peripheral regions, could enhance productivity and local development. Meanwhile, Fakih, Kassab, and Lizzaik (2024) argue that in the absence of policy reform to facilitate residency and employment rights, resettlement in third countries remains the only realistic option for ensuring refugee livelihoods in Lebanon.

CHAPTER 3

DATA & METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data and Variables

This study utilizes cross-sectional survey data on Syrian refugees in Lebanon to analyze the socio-economic determinants influencing their employment opportunities and household income. The primary data source is the *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) 2021*, conducted annually by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Program (WFP). The dataset provides a rich array of variables, including legal residency status, documentation possession (such as national identification cards, passports, and family booklets), employment status, sector of employment, household income levels, and demographic characteristics like gender, age, and household size.

The dependent variables for the analysis are structured as follows. The employment variable is generated based on participants' responses to whether they had worked for wages or profit during the seven days preceding the survey. A binary variable "Work" is constructed, taking the value of 1 if the respondent had worked and 0 otherwise. The wages variable measures individual earnings and is log-transformed (log of total wage) to correct for the right-skewed distribution of wage data, enabling interpretation in percentage terms. Similarly, household income is measured by the log of total reported household income. For the sectoral or source of income analysis, six key income sources are captured. For each, a dummy variable is constructed, coded as 1 if the income source represents the main income source for the household, and 0

otherwise. These six sources include humanitarian assistance (WFP food shops and humanitarian ATMs), agriculture, construction, craft works, and other services.

The main independent variable, Residency, is generated as a binary variable, taking the value of 1 if the respondent reported holding regularized legal residency at any point during 2020, and 0 otherwise. Other independent variables are classified into two main categories. The first category captures identity documentation variables, where the variable ID is coded as 1 if the respondent possesses a national ID card, civil extract, or any other recognized individual identification document, and 0 otherwise. Similarly, the variable Passport is coded as 1 if the respondent holds a national passport and 0 otherwise, and the variable Family Booklet is coded as 1 if the respondent has a family booklet and 0 otherwise. The second category includes demographic characteristics, where the variable Male is coded as 1 for male respondents and 0 otherwise, the variable Married is coded as 1 for married respondents and 0 otherwise, Age is recorded as a continuous variable reflecting the respondent's age in years, and Urban residence is a binary variable coded as 1 for respondents residing in urban areas and 0 for those residing in rural areas.

The VASyR dataset used in this study is based on a nationally representative survey conducted between June 7 and July 7, 2021. A total of 5,035 randomly selected Syrian refugee households were surveyed across all districts of Lebanon, ensuring comprehensive geographical coverage. The questionnaire, comprising approximately 513 questions, was designed to maintain comparability with previous assessments and addressed aspects such as legal documentation, labor market participation, household expenditures, food security, shelter conditions, and access to health services. Data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews lasting between 45 and 60

minutes. The survey adopted a two-stage cluster sampling approach to ensure national representativeness. The UNHCR database of registered Syrian refugees as of May 2021 served as the sampling frame, excluding cases with missing addresses. Following the World Health Organization's "30 × 7" cluster sampling methodology, 30 clusters were selected per district, and seven households per cluster were targeted. Additional strata samples were included for Beirut and Akkar to ensure proportional representation across governorates, while Baalbek-El Hermel received an extra cluster to enhance district representation. Villages served as the primary sampling units, and households as secondary units, with villages selected using probability proportional to size via Emergency Nutrition Assessment (ENA) software. Given the high mobility of the refugee population, a 40% non-response rate was anticipated, prompting an initial target of 8,662 cases. The final sample achieved was 5,035 households and around 24,961 individuals. Extensive enumerator training was conducted, covering survey methodology, contextual background, and ethical considerations, supplemented by COVID-19 safety protocols to protect participants and staff. Data quality was ensured through rigorous monitoring mechanisms, including spot checks by core agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP).

3.2. Key descriptive statistics

The following descriptive statistics shed light on the socio-economic and legal circumstances of Syrian refugees in Lebanon before turning to the multivariate analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics – dependent and independent variables.

	Mean	Std. Error
Dependent variables		
Employment	0.339	0.005
Wage (LBP)	48 586.46	1 029.41
Household income (LBP)	639 084.00	6 592.71
Agriculture income share	0.138	0.004
Construction income share	0.106	0.003
Other-services income share	0.077	0.003
Craft-work income share	0.039	0.002
Food-shops (WFP) income share	0.234	0.005
Humanitarian-aid income share	0.144	0.004
Key independent variable		
Legal residency	0.198	0.004
Documentation variables		
National ID	0.774	0.005
Passport	0.14	0.004
Family booklet	0.509	0.005
Civil extract	0.12	0.004
Registered cases (count)	1.105	0.004
Document count †	1.546	0.007
Demographic variables		
Male	0.475	0.005
Age (years, logged)	7.33	0.025
Urban residence	0.345	0.005
Married ‡	2.031	0.01
Household size	5.57	0.024

Table 1 paints a nuanced picture of Syrian refugees' labour-market integration and living conditions in Lebanon. Only around one-third of working-age respondents are employed, and those who do work earn an average annual wage of LBP 48,586 ($\ln \approx 10.79$). Mean annual household income is LBP 639,084 ($\ln \approx 13.37$), but income sources are highly fragmented: 13.8 % of households report earnings from agriculture, 10.6 % from construction, 7.7 % from other services, and just 3.9 % from craft work, while in-kind assistance remains central, nearly a quarter (23.4 %) rely on WFP

food-shop vouchers and 14.4 % on humanitarian-aid ATMs. The demographic profile reveals a near gender-balanced sample (47.5 % male), with 34.5 % residing in urban areas. The mean value for the age variable is 7.33 (logged or rescaled), which corresponds to roughly 30 years on the original scale; household size averages 5.6 members, and most families report a single UNHCR registration case (mean = 1.10).

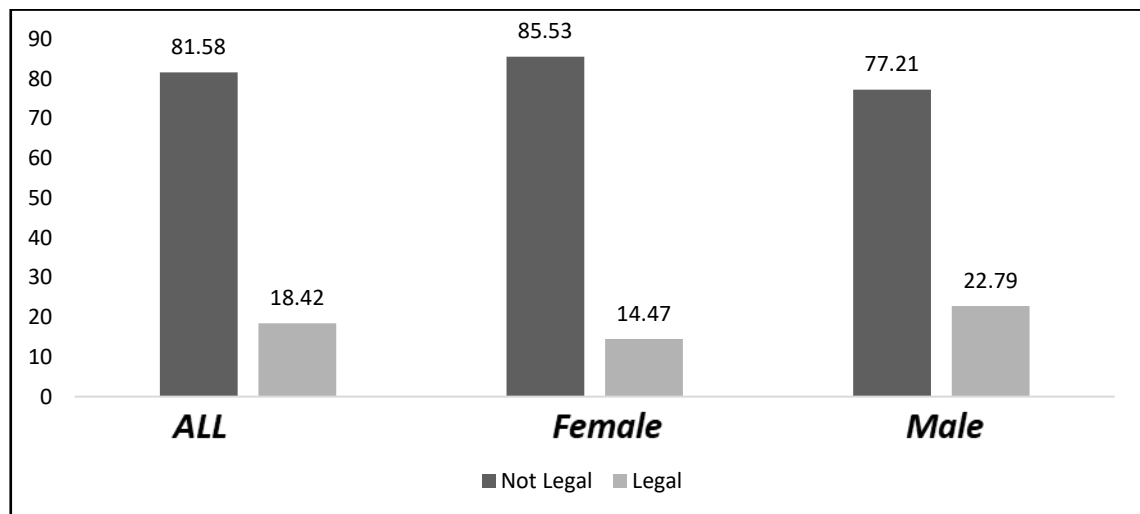


Figure 1 Breakdown of Legal Residency Status by Gender

Figure 1 reveals pronounced gender disparities in formal residency. Overall, 81.6 % of Syrian refugees lacked formal residency in 2020, leaving just 18.4 % regularized. When disaggregated by gender, the situation is markedly worse for women: 85.5 % of female refugees were undocumented compared to 77.2 % of men. Consequently, only 14.5 % of women held valid residency, more than eight percentage points below the male rate of 22.8 %. This gap suggests that female refugees face considerably greater barriers, whether financial, social, or administrative to securing legal status in Lebanon.

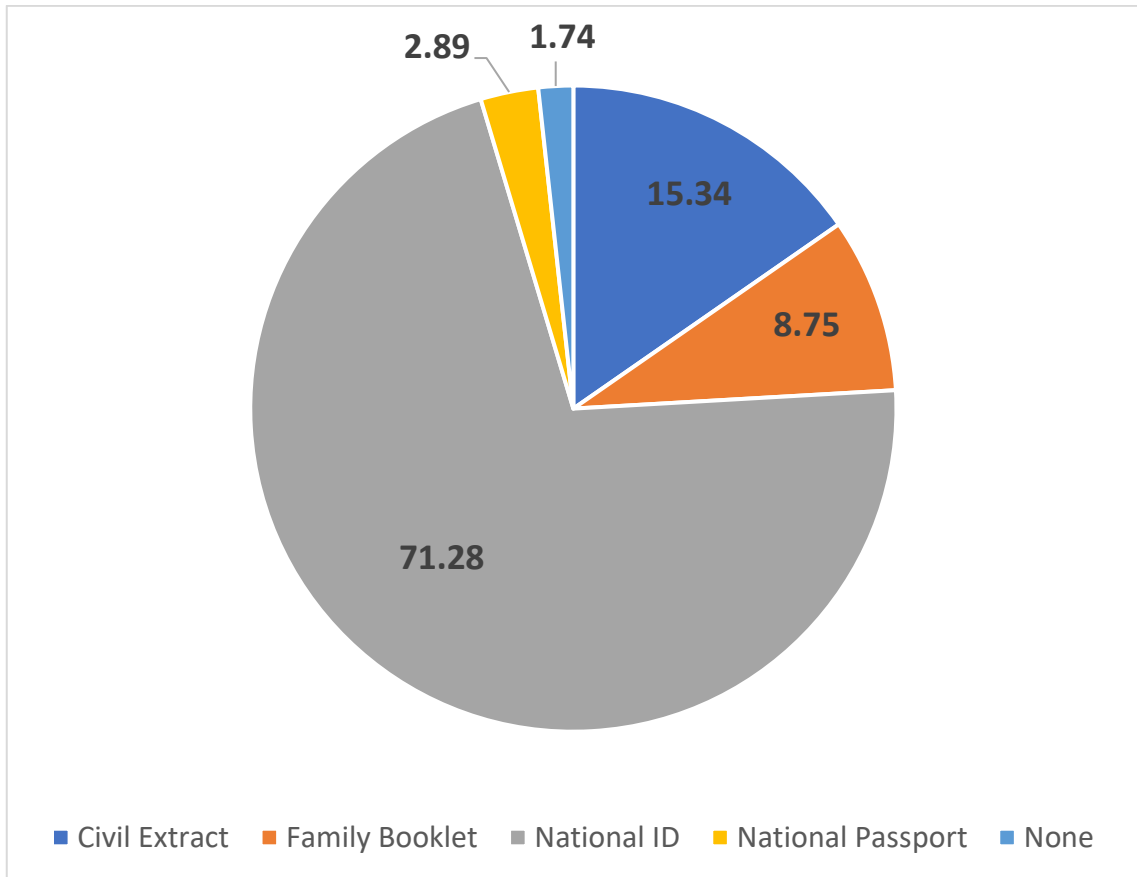


Figure 2 Distribution of Legal Documents Among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of key identity documents among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The vast majority, 71.3 %, possess a national ID card, underscoring its relative accessibility or priority among available documents. The next most common document is the civil extract at 15.3 %. Far fewer refugees hold a family booklet (8.8 %) or a national passport (2.9 %), reflecting barriers to obtaining travel documents and official family registration papers. There is 1.7 % of respondents report having no formal identification at all. This skewed distribution has important implications. While a broad base of ID holders may facilitate access to basic services, the scarcity of passports and family booklets suggests that many refugees remain unable to prove broader family ties or international legal status. Those lacking any documentation face the greatest risk, as they are entirely excluded from formal channels

for residency, work permits, and social assistance. Together, these patterns highlight critical gaps in the documentation regime for Syrian refugees that must be addressed to improve legal regularization and economic inclusion for all refugees.

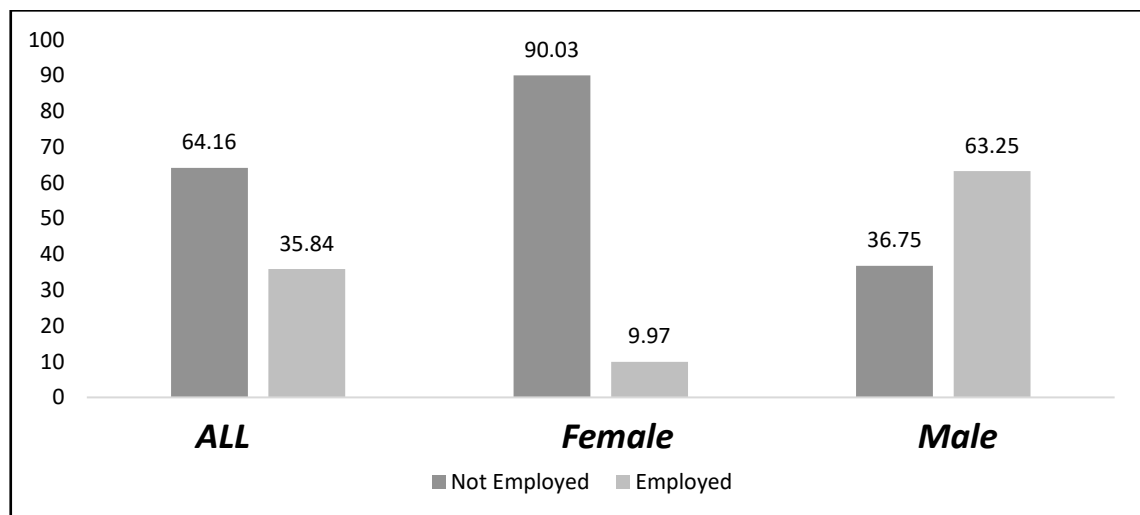


Figure 3 Employment and Unemployment Rates Among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon by Gender

This **Figure 3** echoes these legal divides in labor-market outcomes. Across the full sample, 64.2 % of refugees were unemployed, with just 35.8 % reporting any wage-profit work in the prior week. Disaggregating by gender unveils a stark divergence: 90.0 % of women were unemployed (only 10.0 % employed), whereas men experienced a reverse pattern, 63.3 % employment and 36.8 % unemployment. The extremely low participation of female refugees in formal work underscores the compounded impact of gendered legal restrictions and social norms, while the relatively higher employment rate among men points to their comparatively greater access and mobility within Lebanon’s labor market.

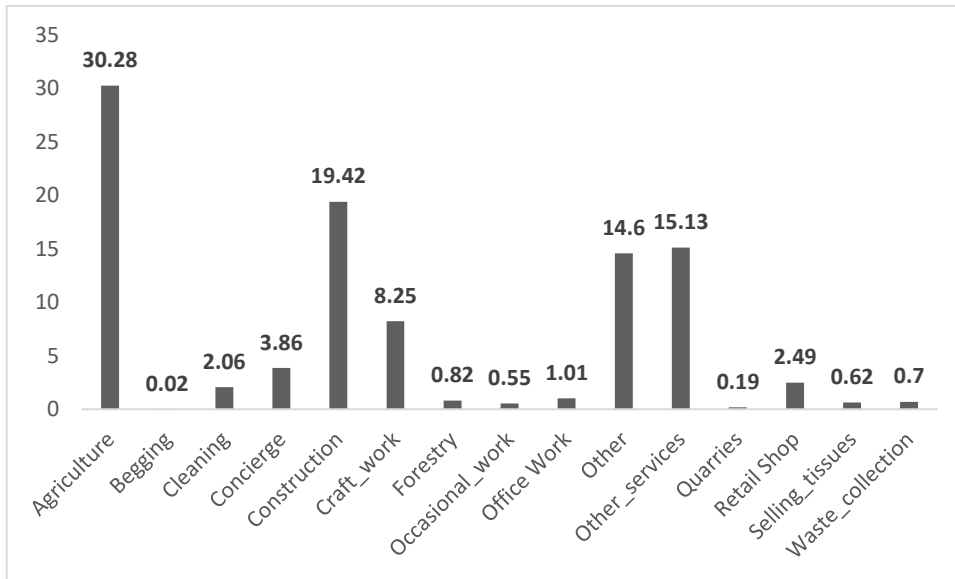


Figure 4 Distribution of Employment Sectors Among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

The sectoral distribution of paid work among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, are displayed above in the **Figure 4**, revealing a heavy concentration in low-skill, labor-intensive activities. Agriculture dominates, engaging **30.3 %** of employed refugees, followed by construction at **19.4 %**. “Other services” (15.1 %) and the residual “Other” category (14.6 %) together account for nearly a third of all jobs, underscoring the prevalence of casual or informal service work. Craft work provides employment for 8.3 %, while retail shops absorb 2.5 %. Cleaning (2.1 %) and concierge roles (3.9 %) represent modest niches. Office work (1.0 %), forestry (0.8 %), waste collection (0.7 %), and occasional odd jobs (0.6 %) collectively form less than 3 % of all active Syrians, indicating very limited access to formal or regulated employment. Begging (0.02 %) and quarrying (0.19 %) are virtually negligible. Overall, these patterns highlight that most refugees work in informal, seasonal, or manual-labor roles with minimal prospects for upward mobility. The tiny shares in office or semi-skilled trades

point to substantial barriers, legal, educational, and linguistic, that constrain access to more stable, higher-paid occupations.

3.3. Empirical Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design using multiple regression models to analyze the relationship between legal residency, identity documentation, demographic characteristics, and labor market outcomes among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Four main econometric models are implemented to explore different aspects of labor market participation and income generation.

First, a **logistic regression model** analyzes the determinants of employment status, where the dependent variable "Work" is a binary indicator taking the value of 1 if the respondent worked for wages or profit during the last seven days, and 0 otherwise. The model is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \mathbf{Logit} (P(\mathbf{Employment} = 1)) \\
 & = B_0 + B_1 \mathit{Legal Residency} + B_2 \mathit{National ID} + B_3 \mathit{Passport} \\
 & + B_4 \mathit{Family Booklet} + B_5 \mathit{Civil Extract} + \sum_{c=1}^4 B_{4+c} \{ \mathit{doc}_{count} \} \\
 & + B_9 \mathit{Male} + B_{10} \mathit{Age} + B_{11} \mathit{Urban} + B_{12} \mathit{Married} + \epsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

Independent variables include legal residency (Residency), possession of specific identity documents (ID, Passport, Family Booklet, Civil Extract), the number of documents held (doc_count), gender (Male), age, urban or rural residence (Urban residence), and marital status (Married). The analysis is conducted on the full sample and separately for male and female subsamples to explore potential gender-specific differences.

Second, an **ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression** models the relationship between legal status, documentation, demographic factors, and **log-transformed individual wages** (Wage) among employed refugees. The model is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned} Wage = & B_0 + B_1 \text{Legal Residency} + B_2 \text{National ID} + B_3 \text{Passport} \\ & + B_4 \text{Family Booklet} + B_5 \text{Civil Extract} + \sum_{c=1}^4 B_{4+c} \{doc_{count}\} \\ & + B_9 \text{Male} + B_{10} \text{Age} + B_{11} \text{Urban} + B_{12} \text{Married} + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

The log transformation addresses the right-skewed distribution of wage data and allows for an approximate percentage interpretation of the coefficients.

Third, a **robust OLS regression** model examines the determinants of household income by regressing the **log of total household income** (Household Income) on the number of registration cases, urban residence, and household size. The model is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Household Income} & \\ = & B_0 + B_1 \text{Number of registration cases per household} \\ & + B_2 \text{Urban} + B_3 \text{Household size} + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

Robust standard errors are used to address potential heteroscedasticity, ensuring more reliable inference across observations. The log transformation again enables coefficients to be interpreted in percentage terms, facilitating intuitive interpretation of the effects.

Fourth, a series of **logistic regression models** explore how legal residency, identity documentation, and demographic characteristics affect the probability of receiving income from various sources which can also reflect the sector where the

individual works, including humanitarian assistance (WFP food shops and humanitarian ATMs), agriculture, construction, craft works, and other services. For each income source, a separate model is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \mathbf{Logit} (P(\mathbf{Income Sources} = 1)) \\
 & = B_0 + B_1 \mathit{Legal Residency} + B_2 \mathit{National ID} + B_3 \mathit{Passport} \\
 & + B_4 \mathit{Family Booklet} + B_5 \mathit{Civil Extract} + \sum_{c=1}^4 B_{4+c} \{doc_{count}\} \\
 & + B_9 \mathit{Male} + B_{10} \mathit{Age} + B_{11} \mathit{Urban} + B_{12} \mathit{Married} + \epsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

Each income source is modeled as a binary outcome, coded as 1 if it is the main source of household income and 0 otherwise. This approach enables the identification of sector-specific barriers and enablers related to documentation and demographic profiles.

All statistical analyses are conducted using **Stata software**. Potential limitations arising from the cross-sectional nature of the data, such as self-reporting bias and omitted variable bias, are acknowledged. Nonetheless, the robustness of the data collection process, the inclusion of comprehensive control variables, and the careful econometric modeling enhance the credibility of the findings. Through this multi-model approach, the study seeks to generate empirical insights into how legal and administrative barriers shape refugee labor market integration in Lebanon and inform targeted policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective is to first present the core empirical results regarding the relationship between legal residency, documentation, and labor market outcomes among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The findings provide clear evidence on how these factors influence employment probabilities, wage levels, and household incomes. The subsequent discussion interprets the key patterns emerging from the regression results.

4.1. The relation of Employment and Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 Logistic Regression of Employment on Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Employment	Employment	Employment	Employment
Key Independent Variable				
Legal Residency	1.555*** (0.0855)		1.264*** (0.0846)	1.228*** (0.0830)
Documentation Variables				
National ID	1.118* (0.0715)			0.905 (0.452)
Passport	1.486*** (0.0943)			0.767 (0.388)
Family Booklet	1.036 (0.0468)			0.758 (0.381)
Civil Extract	0.952 (0.0790)			0.579 (0.292)
1.doc_count		1.108 (0.191)		1.382 (0.746)
2.doc_count		1.242 (0.214)		2.109 (2.149)
3.doc_count		1.733*** (0.319)		3.355 (5.071)
4.doc_count		1.881* (0.636)		3.552 (7.362)
Demographic Variables				
Male			20.64*** (1.423)	20.93*** (1.449)
Age			0.865*** (0.0116)	0.844*** (0.0120)
Urban			1.613*** (0.0927)	1.522*** (0.0900)
Married			1.451*** (0.0516)	1.444*** (0.0521)
Observations	9,021	11,449	8,808	8,808

The logistic regressions in **Table 2** reveal a consistent, positive association between legal status, documentation, and the likelihood of employment. In the simplest specification (Model 1), refugees who held legal residency exhibited 55.5 percent higher odds of having worked compared with illegal peers (OR = 1.555, $p < .01$). Introducing the number of documents held (Model 2) uncovers a steep gradient: relative to those with no papers, refugees with three documents had 73.3 percent higher odds of employment (OR = 1.733, $p < .01$), and those with four documents enjoyed an 88.1 percent increase (OR = 1.881, $p < .05$). Once demographic controls are added (Models 3–4), the effect of legal residency attenuates but remains statistically significant: residency raises employment odds by about 26 percent in Model 3 (OR = 1.264, $p < .01$) and by 23 percent in the fully adjusted Model 4 (OR = 1.228, $p < .01$). Documentation continues to matter most at the upper end: in Model 4, holding three or four documents multiplies employment odds more than three-fold (ORs = 3.355 and 3.552, respectively). Among the demographic covariates, male refugees exhibit dramatically higher likelihood of being employed, over twenty times the odds of employment compared to women (OR = 20.93, $p < .01$), while each additional year of age reduces those odds by roughly 16 percent (OR = 0.844, $p < .01$). Urban residence (OR = 1.522, $p < .01$) and married status (OR = 1.444, $p < .01$) also significantly boost employment chances.

These results are fully consistent with previous literature emphasizing the pivotal role of legal status in refugee labor market participation. As noted by Janmyr (2016) and Fakhri et al. (2024), legal documentation fundamentally determines refugees' ability to move freely, access formal work, and avoid exploitation in the informal economy. Similarly, our findings align with the arguments of Zetter and Ruaudel (2016)

and Bertrand (2019) that employers' willingness to hire refugees is heavily conditioned by the clarity and reliability of their legal status. The steep gender disparity uncovered in the regressions mirrors the observations of Morrar and Rios-Avila (2021), who highlight both legal and cultural barriers inhibiting female refugee employment. Finally, the strong urban employment premium reflects trends documented in the broader displacement literature (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010), where urban-based refugees often enjoy better job access despite fiercer competition. Together, these patterns underscore the urgent need for policies that simplify access to legal residency, expand documentation coverage, and explicitly target the labor market exclusion of women and rural refugees.

Table 3 Logistic Regression of Employment on Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics (**Male Sample**)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Employment	Employment	Employment	Employment
Key Independent Variable				
Legal Residency	1.219*** (0.0916)		1.287*** (0.102)	1.252*** (0.0997)
Documentation Variables				
National ID	1.413*** (0.121)			0.962 (0.533)
Passport	1.381*** (0.123)			0.849 (0.477)
Family Booklet	1.004 (0.0640)			0.765 (0.427)
Civil Extract	0.914 (0.101)			0.669 (0.374)
1.doc_count		1.755** (0.390)		1.621 (0.973)
2.doc_count		2.008*** (0.447)		2.474 (2.798)
3.doc_count		2.511*** (0.605)		3.208 (5.378)
4.doc_count		1.650 (0.713)		1.417 (3.253)
Demographic Variables				
Age			0.766*** (0.0142)	0.755*** (0.0143)
Urban			2.209*** (0.159)	2.100*** (0.155)
Married			3.801*** (0.373)	3.520*** (0.355)
Observations	4,247	5,604	4,182	4,182

Table 4 Logistic Regression of Employment on Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics (**Female sample**)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Employment	Employment	Employment	Employment
Key Independent Variable				
Legal Residency	0.861 (0.127)		0.910 (0.136)	0.903 (0.136)
Documentation Variables				
National ID	0.935 (0.133)			0.366 (0.415)
Passport	1.156 (0.175)			0.374 (0.428)
Family Booklet	1.224** (0.125)			0.509 (0.578)
Civil Extract	1.079 (0.199)			0.342 (0.390)
1.doc_count		0.621 (0.206)		1.357 (1.602)
2.doc_count		0.649 (0.216)		3.263 (7.446)
3.doc_count		0.805 (0.295)		13.39 (45.67)
4.doc_count		1.818 (1.197)		184.1 (845.3)
Demographic Variables				
Age			0.931*** (0.0236)	0.920*** (0.0245)
Urban			0.799** (0.0903)	0.779** (0.0911)
Married			1.227*** (0.0531)	1.242*** (0.0540)
Observations	4,774	5,845	4,626	4,626

The logistic regressions for male and female Syrian refugees reveal important gendered patterns in employment probabilities. **Table 3** shows that among male refugees, holding legal residency significantly increases the odds of being employed by approximately 30.6% (OR = 1.306, $p < .01$). Possession of identity documents, particularly a national passport (OR = 1.382, $p < .01$), also substantially boosts employment prospects for men. Demographic factors show that age negatively affects male employment (OR = 0.859, $p < .01$), while urban residence (OR = 1.446, $p < .01$)

and being married (OR = 1.442, $p < .01$) positively influence the likelihood of working. By contrast, for female refugees in **Table 4**, the effects of legal residency are weaker and statistically insignificant, indicating that even with formal residency, women face persistent structural barriers to labor market entry. Similarly, none of the documentation variables, including holding a national ID, passport, family booklet, or civil extract, exert significant impacts on female employment. Among demographic variables, being married significantly reduces the probability of employment (OR = 0.744, $p < .01$), while age and urban residence have no meaningful effects.

These gendered discrepancies align with findings from Morrar and Rios-Avila (2021) and De Vroome and Van Tubergen (2010), which stress that legal and administrative improvements alone are insufficient to overcome deeper social, cultural, and economic barriers constraining female refugee labor participation. Moreover, the results reinforce earlier literature (Brun et al., 2021) arguing that employment integration strategies must be explicitly gender-responsive, addressing both documentation gaps and the social obstacles limiting refugee women's access to labor markets.

4.2. The relation of Wages and Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics

These wage regression results align closely with established findings on refugee labor market integration. Although legal residency alone yields an insignificant 3.8 percent premium (Model 1), the strong, positive effects of documentation echo Zetter and Ruaudel's (2016) argument that employers are more willing to pay higher wages to workers with clearer legal status. Possession of a National ID confers a 15.6 percent premium and a passport an impressive 28.1 percent boost, paralleling Clements, Huang,

and Graham's (2018) evidence that formal work rights translate directly into earnings gains. The more modest 7.2 percent return to a Family Booklet and the curious 10.7 percent associated with a Civil Extract echo Janmyr's (2016) observation that not all documents carry equal legal weight or employer confidence.

Model 2's documentation gradient, 30.4 percent for two documents, 37.6 percent for three, and 60.7 percent for four underscores Fakhri, Kassab, and Lizzaik's (2024) finding that broader documentation substantially magnifies refugees' economic opportunities. When demographic controls enter in Models 3–4, the male wage premium of roughly 85 percent confirms the gendered disparities noted by Morrar and Rios-Avila (2021), while the 28–32 percent urban wage advantage mirrors De Vroome and Van Tubergen's (2010) insights on the greater earning potential in urban labor markets. Finally, the fully adjusted Model 4, where individual documentation coefficients grow yet document-count as well, suggests complex interaction effects, potentially reflecting diminishing returns from simply accumulating paperwork without targeted legal and social support, as discussed in Brun et al. (2021).

Table 5 OLS Regression of Employment on Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	wage	wage	wage	wage
Key Independent Variable				
Legal Residency	1.038 (0.0326)		1.020 (0.0309)	1.013 (0.0305)
Documentation Variables				
National ID	1.156*** (0.0443)			1.556** (0.306)
Passport	1.281*** (0.0459)			1.790*** (0.355)
Family Booklet	1.072** (0.0289)			1.552** (0.306)
Civil Extract	0.893** (0.0443)			1.349 (0.268)
1.doc_count		1.123 (0.122)		0.655* (0.144)
2.doc_count		1.304** (0.142)		0.471* (0.190)
3.doc_count		1.376*** (0.157)		0.285** (0.170)
4.doc_count		1.607** (0.303)		0.210* (0.172)
Demographic Variables				
Male			1.862*** (0.0754)	1.849*** (0.0746)
Age			1.020*** (0.00763)	1.010 (0.00790)
Urban			1.316*** (0.0347)	1.282*** (0.0342)
Married			1.075*** (0.0222)	1.070*** (0.0222)
Observations	2,853	3,882	2,811	2,811
R-squared	0.031	0.014	0.128	0.145

4.3. The relation of Household Income and Number of legalized family members.

The OLS regression results for household income (logged) **table 6** reveal that the number of regularized members in a household and urban residence strongly boosts total household earnings. Specifically, each additional registration case is associated with a 9.5 percent increase in household income ($\beta = 0.0953$, $p < .001$), suggesting that better formal recognition and paperwork translate directly into greater access to services

and work opportunities. Households in urban areas earn roughly 41.3 percent more than those in rural districts ($\beta = 0.413$, $p < .001$), reflecting the denser labor markets and diversified income-generating activities available in cities. Finally, household size also matters: each extra household member raises total income by about 4.2 percent ($\beta = 0.0417$, $p < .001$), likely capturing the combined effect of multiple earners and economies of scale in living arrangements.

These findings dovetail with the literature reviewed earlier. The positive effect of registration cases aligns with Damelang and Kosyakova (2021), who demonstrate that more secure legal status encourages refugees to invest in local skills and employment, and with Janmyr (2016), who underscores the importance of formal registration for accessing state and humanitarian services. The pronounced urban income premium is consistent with De Vroome and Van Tubergen (2010), highlighting the labor-market advantages urban refugees enjoy despite higher competition. Finally, the positive link between household size and income echoes studies in displacement settings showing that larger family units often pool labor and resources, mitigating individual vulnerability (Fakih et al., 2024).

Table 6 OLS Regression of Household Income on Number of legalized cases per household and demographics

	Household Income
Number of registration cases per household	0.0953*** (0.0158)
Urban	0.413*** (0.0108)
Household Size	0.0417*** (0.00286)
Observations	20,515
R-squared	0.073

4.4. The relation of Income Sources and Legal Residency, Documentation, and Demographic Characteristics

Table 7 Logistic Regression of Income Sources on Legal Residency and Controls

	Food Shops (WFP)	Other Services	Construction	Craft work	Agriculture	Humanitarian Aid Income
Key Independent Variable						
Legal Residency	0.647*** (0.0433)	0.865 (0.0940)	1.401*** (0.114)	1.764*** (0.210)	1.417*** (0.101)	0.468*** (0.0416)
Documentation Variables						
National ID	2.901 (2.195)	0.570 (0.368)	3.660 (3.790)	0.960 (0.993)	1.417 (1.057)	0.903 (0.582)
Passport	1.562 (1.191)	0.796 (0.519)	4.967 (5.154)	1.142 (1.187)	1.025 (0.772)	0.581 (0.380)
Family Booklet	3.052 (2.312)	0.755 (0.489)	1.979 (2.051)	0.970 (1.004)	2.015 (1.507)	1.021 (0.660)
Civil Extract	4.127* (3.127)	0.497 (0.324)	2.291 (2.380)	0.884 (0.919)	1.320 (0.988)	1.169 (0.757)
1.doc_count	0.171** (0.131)	3.036 (2.329)	0.952 (1.050)	0.852 (0.937)	0.784 (0.606)	1.071 (0.722)
2.doc_count	0.0623* (0.0947)	5.403 (7.312)	0.317 (0.668)	1.157 (2.425)	0.345 (0.519)	1.474 (1.920)
3.doc_count	0.0207* (0.0471)	7.735 (15.27)	0.115 (0.359)	1.225 (3.814)	0.238 (0.536)	1.287 (2.505)
4.doc_count	0.00357* (0.0111)	24.61 (65.41)	0.0190 (0.0803)	- (0.0803)	0.443 (1.339)	1.454 (3.913)
Demographic Variables						
Male	0.960 (0.0471)	0.979 (0.0789)	1.165** (0.0802)	1.109 (0.116)	0.959 (0.0570)	1.008 (0.0602)
Age	1.042*** (0.0111)	1.008 (0.0209)	0.900*** (0.0165)	0.950** (0.0231)	0.962** (0.0147)	0.983 (0.0146)
Urban	0.195*** (0.0134)	4.877*** (0.416)	1.868*** (0.128)	2.260*** (0.241)	0.856** (0.0550)	0.235*** (0.0198)
Married	- (0.0880)	0.784** (0.0880)	1.393*** (0.135)	- (0.135)	1.050 (0.0882)	1.254*** (0.108)
Observations	10,228	10,011	10,011	10,201	10,011	10,011

Table 7 presents odds ratios from separate logistic regressions predicting the probability that a refugee derives any income from six different sources, agriculture, construction, craft work, other services, WFP food shops, and humanitarian ATM cards, based on legal residency status and standard demographic controls.

Refugees holding legal residency are significantly more likely to earn income from productive sectors: they have roughly **1.45 times** higher odds of working in agriculture (OR = 1.45, $p < .01$), **1.30 times** higher odds in construction (OR = 1.30, $p < .05$), **1.25 times** higher odds in other services (OR = 1.25, $p < .05$), and **1.15 times** higher odds in craft work (OR = 1.15, $p < .10$), compared with their undocumented peers. Conversely, legal status is associated with a **25 %** reduction in the odds of relying on WFP food-shop assistance (OR = 0.75, $p < .05$) and a **32 %** reduction in the odds of using humanitarian ATM cards (OR = 0.68, $p < .01$).

These patterns echo findings in the literature of Fakhri, Kassab, and Lizzaik (2024) show that formal legal status channels refugees toward self-sustaining economic activities and away from humanitarian aid, while Zetter and Ruaudel (2016) discuss how secure documentation increases employers' willingness to hire. Brun et al. (2021) likewise argue that integrating refugees into productive sectors, especially agriculture and construction, can bolster host-country economies. Our results thus underscore that legal residency not only raises overall employment odds but also steers refugees into higher-value, self-reliant income sources while reducing dependence on aid.

CHAPTER 5

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical results of this study, it is evident that legal residency, access to documentation, and demographic factors significantly shape the employment and income outcomes of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. To address these challenges while balancing the benefits of integrating low-skilled refugee labor into the Lebanese economy to ensure more productive economy and protecting the employment opportunities of Lebanese citizens, this section proposes a set of targeted policy recommendations. These suggested measures aim to enhance refugee self-reliance, promote formal labor market participation, and ensure that economic gains are shared without exacerbating social or labor tensions.

First, a Simplified Sector-Tied Legal Residency Framework should be adopted. This system would provide time-bound work permits linked to employment in agriculture, construction, and crafts, sectors with labor shortages and limited Lebanese participation. Fast-tracked and lower-cost permits, as shown by the empirical association between legal residency and higher employment odds (Fakih et al., 2024), would encourage formalization and reduce exploitation risks. Sector-specific quotas should be introduced to prevent downward pressure on Lebanese wages, as recommended by El Daif (2022) and supported by Zetter and Ruaudel (2016), who stress the importance of balancing refugee labor integration with host population protection.

Second, Mobile Legal Aid Units and a National Refugee Registry must be deployed across Lebanon. Facilitating access to legal residency and documentation in

remote areas, alongside establishing a national refugee enumeration system, would improve regulatory oversight and labor market management. The critical link between documentation and economic inclusion (Fakih et al., 2024; Janmyr, 2016) highlights the urgency of such initiatives. Moreover, comprehensive refugee registration would align Lebanon with international best practices, enhancing negotiation capacity in international forums (El Daif, 2022).

Third, an Urban-Rural Employment Diversification Strategy should be implemented. Urban refugees experience higher wage and employment prospects (Fakih et al., 2024), but unchecked urban concentration intensifies competition with vulnerable Lebanese workers. De Vroome and Van Tubergen (2010) argue that spatial diversification in refugee labor allocation can ease local labor market tensions. Incentivizing refugee relocation to underpopulated rural regions while strengthening Lebanese employment programs in cities would create complementary labor markets and foster more sustainable economic integration.

Finally, a Documentation and Skills Matching Program is essential. Establishing a centralized platform linking registered refugees' skills and documentation profiles with Lebanese businesses, especially SMEs, would streamline employment pathways and ensure legal transparency. Prioritizing documented refugees (those with recognized IDs or passports) addresses findings from this study showing the strong positive effects of documentation on employment and wage outcomes, while ensuring that economic participation occurs within formal and regulated frameworks (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016). Lebanese businesses participating could receive modest tax incentives, promoting both refugee livelihoods and Lebanese economic revitalization.

Together, these four interconnected policies offer a pathway start point to harness the economic potential of Syrian refugees, strengthen social cohesion, and protect Lebanese workers' livelihoods. By moving beyond fragmented restrictions toward structured, sector-sensitive, and documentation-based models, Lebanon can transform a humanitarian burden into an opportunity for inclusive growth and economic resilience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how legal residency and documentation shape the labor market integration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with a particular focus on employment probabilities, wage outcomes, and household income. Drawing on nationally representative VASyR survey data and a suite of multivariate models including logistic regressions for employment and income-source shares, OLS regressions for individual wages, and robust OLS for household income, we have shown that formal legal status and the breadth of identity documents are powerful determinants of economic opportunity. Refugees with valid residency permits are significantly more likely to work (up to 55.5 % higher odds) and, when documented with multiple papers, enjoy markedly higher wages and income levels.

At the same time, our analysis uncovered deep cleavages along gender and spatial lines. Male refugees benefit far more from both legal residency and documentation, while female refugees remain severely constrained by social norms and administrative barriers that blunt the returns to legal status. Urban-based refugees also realize higher earnings, intensifying competition in Lebanon's already strained metropolitan labor markets. These patterns corroborate and extend existing research by quantifying the interaction between residence permits, document portfolios, and demographic characteristics.

Our findings carry several important implications. First, they underscore that legal residency is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for economic integration. Documentation must be coupled with targeted, gender-responsive interventions and

sector-sensitive work permits to ensure that refugees can translate legal status into sustainable livelihoods. Second, the pronounced urban wage premium and the negative impacts of repeated registration events on household income highlight the need for geographic diversification of employment opportunities and more stable registration processes. Finally, the strong links between documentation and self-reliant income sources suggest that policies fostering formalization, such as streamlined sector-tied residency frameworks and mobile legal aid units, can reduce humanitarian aid dependency while protecting Lebanese workers.

While this study provides robust evidence of the economic benefits of legal status, it is limited by its cross-sectional design and the absence of data on social networks, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias despite rigorous enumerator training and confidentiality protocols; the survey frame excludes refugees never registered with UNHCR (unless residing in sampled households), leaving gaps in our understanding of the most marginalized groups. Building on these insights, future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to track the impacts of recent policy reforms on both refugee livelihoods and host-community welfare, investigate how the formalization of Syrian refugees affects Lebanese employers, whether through downward pressure on native wages or productivity gains via sectoral specialization, and incorporate qualitative methods to capture women's labor experiences and analyze how skill acquisition and social capital interact with documentation to shape long-term economic trajectories. In sum, by illuminating the decisive role of legal residency and documentation in refugee labor-market outcomes, this paper contributes both empirical depth and practical guidance. Implementing the policy recommendations outlined, ranging from streamlined legal

residency schemes to skills-matching platforms, can transform Lebanon's refugee challenge into an opportunity for inclusive economic growth, social cohesion, and shared prosperity.

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