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Original Article

Climate change and refugee communities in Jordan: Critical reflections on neoliberal resilience-building

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Abstract

This article advances resilience theory by examining climate change responses and refugee experiences, and the perspectives of national, international, and refugee stakeholders in Jordan. Addressing climate change is crucial for all communities, particularly vulnerable groups like refugees and displaced persons, yet there are significant gaps in our understanding of how policies are made and implemented, and the performative roles refugees play. Thus, this paper: (1) analyses how different national and international stakeholders view policymaking that relates to refugees and their climate change adaptation and resilience-building needs in Jordan; (2) explores how refugees understand and experience climate change, and how they relate to policymaking and/or policy implementation processes; and (3) considers the extent to which the global tendency towards neoliberal resilience-building in refugee communities takes place in Jordan. We find that the Jordanian government considers refugees when formulating climate change responses. Conversely, international stakeholders adopt a nuanced, neoliberal approach aimed at fostering self-sufficient, resilient refugee agents who can adapt to climate change independently of state and international support. Finally, refugees residing in Jordan experience climate change through heightened vulnerability, insecurity, and exclusion from national response decision-making processes. We conclude that in the case of Jordan, it is ineffectual to adopt the neoliberal ethos underpinning 'resilient' refugees, and we call for further critique of the neoliberal resilience framework. Ultimately, we advocate for a post-neoliberal resilience model that recognizes the need for inclusion and integration between stakeholders at different levels to effectively address the climate change challenges faced by refugee communities.

Keywords: Jordan; refugees; climate change; adaptation; resilience-building.

1. Introduction[1]

Climate change is manifest at the global level, and no part of the world is free from at least some of its adverse effects. Yet, it is developing states that are paying the highest price due to their embedded socioeconomic and political problems that aggravate their exposure to climate risks. There has been an increase in the number of studies of the politics of climate change in developing states (see Poberezhskaya and Danilova 2021); however, there is still much that we do not know about climate change experiences, and the nature of mitigation

and adaptation initiatives. The Middle East, in particular, has been understudied in this regard (see Weinthal et al., 2015; Feitelson and Tubi 2017). For example, at the time of writing, there are only four academic studies dedicated to Jordan's climate change mitigation and adaptation policies (Al-Zu'bi 2016; El-Anis and Poberezhskaya 2025; Poberezhskaya and El-Anis 2024; Abu-Allaban and Hamasha 2025). This omission is problematic as responding to climate change is increasingly important to all communities across the region and beyond, and especially those communities that are most vulnerable, for example, refugees and displaced persons (see Sowers 2019). This article focuses on refugees affected by climate change after their initial displacement, yet it acknowledges that climate stresses in origin countries can drive the underlying causes of conflict and displacement that encourage people to flee (see Kälin 2010).

A key challenge for aiding vulnerable communities in their responses to climate change is that policymaking (including that related to climate) in developing states, like Jordan, tends to be highly centralized, serving government interests and objectives without sufficiently including the full range of stakeholders. This phenomenon is not unique to Jordan, of course, and marginalized and vulnerable communities around the world (especially those residing in authoritarian states) are often left out of policymaking and knowledge sharing practices (see Glasius et al., 2020; Harley and Hobbs 2020). This results in low levels of adaptability and resilience to climate change's adverse effects and undermines the overall wellbeing and security of refugees (see Ramcilovic-Suominen et al., 2021). On the other hand, an inclusive climate change-related policy process can both contribute to national adaptive capacities and promote welfare in refugee and other vulnerable communities by ensuring that varied experiences are considered and solutions are informed by local knowledge, and tailored to the needs of communities on the ground (Dolšak and Prakash 2018).

Jordan presents us with a compelling case for advancing theoretical understandings of climate resilience and refugee communities due to the intersection of environmental vulnerability, geopolitical positioning, and institutional adaptability experienced by the kingdom. As a small, resource-poor state in a politically volatile region, Jordan has developed governance mechanisms that balance domestic pressures with international cooperation (see Ryan 2018). Furthermore, Jordan's engagement with climate-related policies offers valuable insights into how small, developing states can navigate resilience by engaging with strategic policy innovation. In short, examining the case of refugees and climate change in Jordan enables us to refine resilience theory by incorporating the dynamics of insecurity, development, political stability, external aid dependency, and regional politics.

In this paper we: (1) analyse how different national and international stakeholders view policymaking that relates to refugees and their climate change adaptation and resilience-building needs in Jordan; (2) explore how refugees understand and experience climate change, and how they relate to policymaking and/or policy implementation processes; and (3) consider the extent to which the global tendency towards neoliberal resilience-building in refugee communities takes place in Jordan. We contribute to resilience theory by testing the argument that, in the case of Jordan, applying a neoliberal logic to hosting refugees and ensuring their climate change resilience is not evident. Instead, the practice of commodifying refugees and climate change to attract external financial, political and technical support—what can be called eco-humanitarian rentierism (see Tsourapas and El-Anis 2025)—is the norm for the Jordanian government. At the same time, international actors (e.g. the UN Development Programme [UNDP], and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]) engage in practices that neoliberalize resilience-building, and refugees are presented with few options but to engage with these international actors, thus corralling them into a neoliberal framework. This dichotomy in the interests and practices of different stakeholders at the local, national and

international levels demonstrates the friction within the neoliberal resilience-building framework.

2. Situating climate change, refugees, and resilience

Debates on the relationship between climate change and displacement are well versed, and a significant body of academic literature on climate refugees exists (see Hartmann 2010; Methmann and Oels 2015; White 2019). The correlation between worsening environmental conditions due to climate change and forced migration has long been established, and there has been significant development in international governance and law-making to respond to this phenomenon (Behrman and Kent 2022). Studies have considered the impact of refugees on host communities, their economies, and environments (Verme and Schuettler 2021). In the case of Jordan, for example, scholars have explored different facets of the impact of hosting refugees on Jordan's education system (Assaad et al., 2023), healthcare system (Lupieri 2020), labour market (Fallah et al., 2019; Sahin Mencutek and Nashwan 2021; Almasri 2024a; Lenner and Turner 2024), security and governance (Kumaraswamy and Singh 2017; Beaujouan and Rasheed 2020), freshwater resources (Al Wreikat and Al Kharabsheh 2020; Hussein et al., 2020), and civil society and the non-governmental sector (Ghreiz et al., 2020). Some works have also reflected on the socio-political complexity of the types of refugees that are displaced to Jordan, problematizing not only how their place of origin affects their status and economic well-being but also their socio-demographic characteristics as well as where they end up residing in Jordan (see Turner 2023).

At the same time, academic literature on climate change's effects on people already displaced due to conflict and other non-environment related issues is rather limited (Ashour et al., 2023). Nonetheless, important debates in this area are emerging, perhaps the most critical of which has come to focus on one key aspect of refugee experiences: resilience and resilience-building. This debate reflects the development of refugee resilience-building policy and practice pursued by state, inter-governmental, and non-state actors since the 1990s. Understanding '[h]ow resilience is conceptualized is central to resilience building interventions' (Bottrell 2009: 321) and therefore studies of resilience in different contexts have proliferated. Here, resilience denotes a condition in which refugees can 'absorb and deal with difficult situations and crises' (Krause and Schmidt 2020: 23), a condition where refugees can in the medium- to long-term rely largely on themselves and less on support from national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations (IOs). The UNHCR EXCOM (2017: 3) regards resilience as 'the ability of individuals, households, communities, national institutions and systems to prevent, absorb and recover from shocks, while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, and the attainment of human rights'. But contemporary resilience discourse, policy, and practice have a deeper meaning than this. Refugees have been rhetorically shifted away from merely being 'vulnerable' and have come to be seen as 'actors' with 'agency' (Krause and Schmidt 2020). This shift can be seen as empowering by placing the agency of refugees at the centre with resiliency defined as 'the capacity to positively or successfully adapt to external problems or threats. The resilient subject […] is never conceived as passive or as lacking agency' (Chandler 2012: 217). Through this prism, resilience is understood as a positive value (Brassett et al., 2013) where a social system (e.g. a society) can adapt to shocks/disturbances that undermine welfare and security (see Comfort et al., 2010). The rise of resilience (in both policy and practice, and academic discussions) is 'symptomatic' of the broader transition from liberalism to neoliberalism in the post-Cold War era (Brassett et al., 2013).

The neoliberalization of refugees through resilience discourse is prevalent in many contexts. In their study of refugee camp management, Ilcan and Rygiel (2015: 342), for

example, found that 'refugee and displaced populations are reimagined as resilient and reassembled as neoliberal subjects through their active engagement in camp life and its management'. This reflects both the longevity of displacement in many contexts (many Syrian refugees, for example, have been displaced to Jordan, Lebanon, Türkiye, and elsewhere for over a decade) and the inability of national governments to foot the bill for hosting refugees in the era of austerity (in the case of Jordan, the government has long sought financial aid from external donors to help it cope with hosting large refugee populations[2]—a form of rentierism through which refugees are commodified [see Tsourapas 2019; Almasri 2024b]). At the same time, when climate change is considered, there is some value in seeing resilience as synonymous with accepting and adapting to, rather than resisting, conditions of suffering/difficulty (Chandler 2012) as we cannot resist and reverse climate change, we can only seek to mitigate and adapt to it.

While resilience and resilience-building appear to be established concepts in both (neoliberal) theory and practice, it is necessary to broaden how resilience as a concept can be understood, and how resilience-building is manifest (or not) in practice. We suggest here that there are tensions between the neoliberal ethos of resilience on the one hand, and resilience narratives and performance on the other. As Anderson (2015) notes in his thought-provoking contribution to a special issue of *Politics* that asked: 'what kind of thing is resilience?', if we move beyond analysis of government representations and themes, and include the views and experiences of refugees, we may find that:

> The 'resilient subject' is more than a liberal 'self-securing' subject. The 'resilient subject' is, among other things: a subject who is encouraged to make preparations; a subject who is to be protected by the state (specifically emergency services); a subject who is a member, or may become a member, of different kinds of community; and a subject who accepts state help in order to return to a pre-emergency normality. (Anderson 2015: 61)

This may fit the context of refugees in Jordan and climate change resilience more appropriately and offer new insights into a post- (or at least critical) neoliberal resilience. Here, we argue that the 'state' can alternate between adopting and performing neoliberal resilience and adopting and performing responsibility at different times.

We need to investigate the phenomenon of refugee resilience further, and one way of doing so is to consider climate change resilience in refugee communities in Jordan. Is there such a rhetorical shift from 'vulnerable' to 'actor' in this case? And, as Krause and Schmidt (2020) argue, does this result in the disempowerment of refugees and the empowerment of the national and international actors generating these views? Consideration of who defines resilience and who can wield it as a diagnostic of power are important. Gatter (2025), for example, demonstrates that power dynamics are at play between aid agencies and refugees residing in a 'securitized' refugee camp in Jordan where evidence suggests refugees resist the resilience narratives imposed on them. At the same time, what if refugees in Jordan are merely 'actors-to-be' (Miller 2014) who are excluded from policymaking processes, and therefore do not have the capacity to inform their own supposed resilience-building? As Brassett et al. (2013: 225) note in their introduction to an earlier special issue in *Politics* that set out a research agenda for resilience, we need to consider '[w]ho benefits, and what and/or whom is excluded' from contemporary resilience approaches and policymaking.

3. Methodology

This study applies thematic analysis to official Jordanian and international documentation related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to interviews with policy makers and activists, and representatives of NGOs and international NGOs (INGOs), and Syrian refugees in Jordan living outside refugee camps to explore how the Jordanian government

and international actors approach climate change resilience-building for refugees, and how refugees themselves understand and experience climate change-related challenges.[3] Our initial research design aims to incorporate the perspectives of refugees living in both formal camp settings and urban environments outside of camps, thereby capturing a diverse range of experiences. However, obtaining official permission to conduct interviews within the Za'atari and Azraq Refugee Camps was not granted. As a result, most participant recruitment focused on urban refugees who were accessed through the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) and snowball sampling. Despite this adjustment limiting the ability to conduct comparisons between the two contexts, it nonetheless provided essential insights into the realities of urban settlement. We also address the experiences of refugees from camp perspectives using the UNHCR Vulnerability Assessment Framework (UNHCR 2024).

Following data collection, a thematic analysis process was employed which entailed identifying, analysing, and interpreting meaningful patterns or 'themes' in qualitative data. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022), this requires: (1) reading through the data; (2) coding the data; (3) developing themes; (4) refining and defining themes; and (5) representing the analysis. This iterative process integrates both deductive and inductive approaches strengthening the rigour and depth of qualitative research (Fletcher 2017). We conducted a comprehensive review of the Jordanian government's climate change mitigation and adaptation documentation to understand the existing policy and legal frameworks and how marginalized communities are accounted for/considered therein. All necessary data are available online via official government websites or websites of projects curated by IOs. See Table 1 in the Appendix for the list of documents analysed for this project.

We also conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with: refugees living in Amman, Mafraq and Irbid; Jordanian scientists, policy makers and activists; and representatives of NGOs and INGOs working in the fields of climate change and refugee support in the kingdom. Interviewees were recruited through links with the following institutions and organizations: the Ministry of Environment; the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC); the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Water and Irrigation; USAID; the GGGI; the Royal Scientific Society; the UNDP; the Jordan Environment Society; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. These interviews were used to collect data on how Jordanian and international stakeholders consider refugees in Jordan in their responses to climate change, and how refugees experience and understand climate change in Jordan, and what they need (and what they have received) to build resilience to its adverse effects. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person in Jordan during fieldwork from July to September 2024 and lasted approximately 30–60 min. All interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and translated into English before they were analysed.

4. Analysis

Jordan is a good case for testing the accuracy of neoliberal resilience-building theory as it experiences intense climate change vulnerabilities and hosts a large number of refugees comprising forty-three nationalities, including from Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan (UNHCR 2025). The kingdom is the world's fourth most freshwater scarce country, having only around sixty-five cubic metres of renewable freshwater per capita annually (the UN regards the absolute water scarcity line as 500 cubic metres per capita annually) (Hussein 2019). It also hosts one of the highest number of refugees relative to overall population in the world, with around 675,000 refugees registered with UNHCR (of which 91 per cent are Syrian refugees [UNHCR 2025]), and 2.39 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA [UNRWA 2025a], although Palestinian residents received Jordanian citizenship following the 1954 amendment to Jordan's nationality law, and thus are not

structured in the same manner as Syrian refugees [UNRWA 2025b]), and potentially several hundred thousand more unregistered refugees. The total refugee population equates to around 10 per cent of the overall population. Combined with Jordan's underdeveloped economy, the result is exceptional national vulnerability to climate change and limited adaptive capacity. The most concerning effects of climate change in Jordan include: increased freshwater scarcity; desertification and the loss of arable land; and the spread of pests and diseases to areas not previously affected (Alrusheidat et al., 2016). Climate change is also impacting Jordan's fragile political and social situation, as communities increasingly compete over declining levels of freshwater and disappearing arable land. This is concerning, especially when we consider that Jordan has historically been regarded as an island of stability in a turbulent neighbourhood and has acted as a political stabilizer in Middle Eastern affairs. Hence, the way Jordan responds to climate change not only affects its own national security, but also regional and international stability (El-Anis and Poberezhskaya 2025).

As has been demonstrated elsewhere (see Bose 2024), refugees are often disproportionately vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change due to their limited access to essential resources (especially potable water and food), infrastructure (including adequate shelter), and political representation, which constrains their ability to adapt to environmental stressors. For example, in Jordan, climate-induced water scarcity and extreme temperatures exacerbate the precarity of refugees living in camps like Za'atari as well as those residing in urban centres, where environmental degradation intersects with socio-political marginalization. Overall, low agency in terms of incomes, and restrictions on the ability to work, travel, and relocate (e.g. Syrian refugees require permits for these activities) limit refugees' adaptation and resilience-building capacities. Responding to climate change and staving off the worst of its political, economic and social effects can only truly work if all stakeholders are involved, and this includes those most vulnerable to climate change, including refugees.

4.1 Official Jordanian themes on climate change and refugees

A number of themes are evident in the official Jordanian discourse related to climate change, refugees, and strategic planning. Most importantly, perhaps, is the notion of inclusion. Here, the discourse overtly encourages consideration of refugees alongside citizens in climate change adaptation plans. Refugees are seen not just as a burden (although this is also a key theme in the national documentation, see below) but as worthy of being looked after and as part of the broader fabric of the Jordanian state. Their problems matter, not only for the refugees themselves, but for host communities and the country as a whole. Refugees are presented as being worthy of consideration in the same way as Jordanian citizens and others residing in the kingdom. The official policy discourse highlights the need to support refugees residing in the kingdom as they respond to climate change. Several strategies and measures are constant throughout a significant proportion of the official documentation analysed. Importantly, these policies are not designed for refugee responses to climate change in isolation, but instead they are integrated into broader national climate change adaptation and resilience-building frameworks. For example, the National Climate Change Policy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (NCCP): 2022–2050 (MoEnv 2022a) highlights that climate change adaptation must be mainstreamed across all sectors, including those affecting refugee communities. With regards to water management, the NCCP highlights the importance of promoting the use of treated wastewater (especially in agriculture), developing more efficient irrigation systems, and water-saving technologies in urban settings (MoEnv 2022a). As refugees are embedded in society across Jordan, working in agriculture and other sectors, and living in urban settlements including Amman, Zarqa, Irbid and Mafraq, these policies directly relate to their experiences and climate change resilience. Jordan's Fourth National Communication to the UNFCCC (MoEnv 2022b) also

emphasizes the importance of responding to climate change on behalf of both citizens and refugees, stressing the need 'to build resilience related to energy, urban planning, construction, public spaces' in order to promote the welfare of all in the face of a deteriorating climate.

With regards to infrastructure development, the NCCP focuses on ways to develop climate-resilient infrastructure in both refugee camps and urban areas where refugees reside. In particular, the policy highlights the need to enhance drainage systems to deal with periods of intense precipitation (e.g. to manage flash floods more effectively) and constructing shelters/dwellings that allow residents to withstand extreme weather conditions (e.g. extreme heat and cold) (MoEnv 2022b). The policy also addresses the need to strengthen healthcare services to help people (refugees and citizens alike) to deal with climate-related health risks. Of particular concern are heat-related illnesses, and respiratory and waterborne diseases—the latter two are particularly problematic for refugees residing in the Za'atari and Azraq Refugee Camps and those living in poorer neighbourhoods of major cities which have degraded infrastructure (MoEnv 2022b). Furthermore, the NCCP suggests that refugee communities should be engaged in the planning and implementation of at least some climate-adaptation initiatives. This is encouraging as it would ensure that their specific vulnerabilities are understood, and their needs considered (MoEnv 2022b). This recommendation overlaps with the National Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy 2019–2022 (GoJ 2019: 33) which states that response strategies 'must be based on a common understanding of the exposure and vulnerability of different population groups (including refugees), and the exposure and vulnerability of the Jordanian economy to climate and disaster risks'.

Likewise, the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NAP) published in 2021 by the Ministry of Environment provides a roadmap for implementing adaptation strategies, many of which also have direct implications for refugee communities in Jordan. The starting point for the NAP is to build institutional and community capacity at the local level to enhance all residents' (refugees included) resilience to climate change. Emphasis is placed on climate change awareness campaigns, training programmes, and the development of community-based adaptation initiatives (MoEnv 2021a). Although the agricultural sector in Jordan only contributes between 2 per cent and 5 per cent to GDP and employs a small workforce, its importance lies in offering opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable communities (especially refugees). Here, the NAP is clear on the need to promote climate-resilient agricultural practices, including the use of drought-resistant crops, improved and more efficient irrigation techniques, and other sustainable farming practices (MoEnv 2021a). In terms of broader policymaking in the kingdom, the NAP aims to promote the integration of climate change adaptation into both local and national development plans. This means that refugees are considered and their needs integrated into broader policy frameworks. Furthermore, this should offer more social protection to refugees (and others) as they cope with the economic impacts of climate change (e.g. loss of livelihoods, increased costs for food, water and utilities, and healthcare costs). The NAP indicates that this could include financial assistance (although the sources of funds are not specified), livelihood support, and improved social services (MoEnv 2021a). In a similar manner, Jordan's Way to Sustainable Development (GoJ 2017: 28) provides 'an integrated development framework for Jordan that outlines the need and interventions for Jordanians and […] refugees'.

In the first updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2021 (MoEnv 2021b), Jordan addressed refugee populations through a dual lens. First, as a contextual reality shaping the country's socioeconomic landscape, and second, as part of the broader 'vulnerable social groups' framework, alongside women, children, persons with disabilities, and the unemployed. The NDC explicitly links rising unemployment among Jordanian youth and refugees to climate vulnerabilities, while positioning green job creation as a

strategic priority to advance climate adaptation, alleviate unemployment pressures, and strengthen socioeconomic resilience. Likewise, Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision for 2023–2025 (EMV) (GoJ 2023) explicitly incorporates refugee populations into its macroeconomic analysis, framing their presence as a structural and enduring demographic phenomenon rather than a transient or short-term challenge. This reflects the recognition of the long-term socioeconomic implications of hosting refugees that necessitates adaptive long-term economic planning. Similarly, the Climate Investment Mobilization Plan (MoEnv 2022c), which builds upon the EMV, accounts for refugee-induced demand pressures in critical sectors, particularly energy and transportation. Within this framework, two of the ten proposed large-scale investment projects addressed contextual challenges posed by increased demand for services resulting from refugee influxes, illustrating the policy linkage between increased demand and climate-resilient infrastructure development.

On the other side, the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), Jordan's primary policy framework addressing the Syrian refugee crisis since 2013 and managed by MoPIC, underwent a notable evolution in its engagement with climate change. While initial iterations overlooked climate considerations (UN 2013; UN 2014; MoPIC 2015), the 2016–2022 plans introduced climate adaptation as a strategic priority, particularly through developing refugees' capacity in climate-smart agriculture (MoPIC 2015, 2018, 2020). This reflects a recognition of refugee livelihoods (many refugees work in agriculture) and Jordan's resource scarcity challenges, aiming to improve food security via sustainable productivity gains. The 2024–2025 JRP Requirements (MoPIC 2024, 2025) mark a dual shift: (1) in addressing a list of priority interventions responding not only to refugees but also host communities; and (2) in cross-sectoral climate mainstreaming. This integration expands beyond adaptation to incorporate mitigation measures (e.g. energy efficiency, renewable energy, and waste recycling) alongside resilience-building interventions. Notably, the framework now integrates with priorities spanning education (including climate awareness), WASH (water efficiency), and agriculture (smart irrigation).

At the same time, refugees are sometimes overtly presented as a burden on Jordan. Their presence in the kingdom is seen as placing significant pressure on natural resources (especially freshwater), services (especially healthcare and education), infrastructure (especially housing and transportation), and the economy as a whole. A senior official at the Ministry of Environment, for example, summarized a common concern amongst many 'with the population increase and all the refugees that we have in Jordan, we barely have enough [water] to go now' (Interview 24, 3 October 2024). The Green Growth National Action Plan, 2021–2025 for the Water Sector (MoEnv 2021c) notes the increased hardship faced by citizens, and competition between host communities and refugees for resources, which is seen as threatening social cohesion. Likewise, the National Green Growth Plan for Jordan (MoEnv and GGGI 2017) bluntly states 'the refugee crisis has significantly exacerbated [the] existing water security issue' (MoEnv and GGGI 2017: 20) and the 'influx of refugees into Jordan is placing an undeniable immediate strain on the economy through the burden of integrating such a consistently high volume of people into society' (MoEnv and GGGI 2017: 79). Additionally, policy language in the NCCP 2022–2050, NDC, NAP, and similar documents often targets Syrian refugees as the primary 'refugee rentier subject' (Almasri 2024b), rather than acknowledging that a significant proportion of refugees are from other nationalities (e.g. Palestinian). This language stems from agreements like the Jordan Compact which was explicitly negotiated in response to Syrian displacement. Consequently, the benefits of refugee-related rentierism and the design of resilience programmes are intended for (and remain disproportionately focused on) Syrian refugees, leaving other groups unaddressed. Though regardless of their origins, the overall narrative is quite unapologetic in its conclusions: refugees are making the negative effects of climate change even worse.

Yet this theme, while seemingly negative or hostile to refugees, serves a more constructive purpose. Rather than falling in-line behind the neoliberal narratives of creating resilient refugees who no longer need to be looked after by the state, the documentation first highlights the challenges refugees face and the burden they place on Jordan but then goes on to stress that the government (and society) will continue to support these vulnerable communities. The welfare and security of refugees is seen as important for these communities themselves, but also for Jordan as a whole. Here, the emphasis on a climate change-refugee nexus is clear, but it also reflects the broader official theme of fraternity with displaced peoples from neighbouring countries. This is exemplified in the Climate Refugee Nexus Initiative launched by King Abdullah at COP27: 'The UN has recognised that global refugees and their hosts are among the most vulnerable to climate change. To address this crisis, Jordan has put forward a Climate/Refugee Nexus Initiative. It will prioritise support for host countries that bear the brunt of climate change. Join us in endorsing this initiative' (Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein 2022).

4.2 International actors' themes on climate change and refugees in Jordan

In addition to official Jordanian stakeholders, international actors also play a major role in responding to climate change in Jordan. Indeed, as has been discussed elsewhere (see El-Anis and Poberezhskaya 2025) collaboration between the Jordanian government and IOs, foreign governments, and national and international NGOs is essential and deep-rooted. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the positions of non-Jordanian actors involved in refugee resilience-building. The UNHCR and UNDP have both developed strategies to support refugees (especially Syrian refugees since 2012), including in adapting to climate change. For example, the UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework (UNHCR 2024) uses an index to identify the extent to which refugees are vulnerable to weather events associated with climate change, including extreme heatwaves and storms. Given Jordan's extreme water scarcity, the UNHCR and UNDP recognize the challenges that refugees (and others) face in accessing sufficient clean water and sanitation services (Hall 2022). Both have advocated for the development of sustainable water systems, including for example, the use of off-grid solar-powered water technologies. The UNDP's 'Scaling Up Innovation in Water Management for Climate Security in Northern Jordan' project launched in 2021 aimed to improve water management in places with significant refugee numbers (e.g. Mafraq and Jerash) (UNDP 2021). Central to this initiative are innovative water security solutions that enhance local capacities. There are reflections of the neoliberal view of resilience here, but while this complements Jordanian initiatives to promote water management, it also contradicts the government's interest in maintaining external support for hosting refugees.

The UNHCR also advocates for the improvement of health services available to refugee communities in Jordan, especially with regards to water-borne diseases and heat-related illnesses (which are expected to worsen because of climate change). In terms of building resilience, the UNHCR calls for training healthcare workers on climate-related challenges that will affect vulnerable communities. The UNDP also emphasizes capacity building to allow local institutions and communities to adapt to climate change more effectively. Here, training courses, awareness campaigns, and community-based initiatives are seen as essential to building resilience. As with the official Jordanian position, the UNDP and international aid agencies similarly call for integrating various local and national stakeholders (including refugees) into climate change adaptation policymaking. The argument here is that ensuring the needs of refugees, as with all communities in Jordan, would lead to more cohesive and effective responses to climate change that are well-financed, and advance overall resilience in the kingdom (UNDP and UNHCR 2014). A senior USAID representative succinctly highlighted the need for comprehensive planning due to the nexus between the climate change response needs of Jordan and the pressures that arise from hosting refugees: 'Jordan's plans and infrastructure have been overwhelmed [due to the] waves of refugees'

(Interview 32, 8 July 2024). Of course, the UNHCR and UNDP also acknowledge the impact of hosting Syrian refugees on host communities and argue that addressing the needs of both communities will most effectively ensure climate change resilience for all (UNDP and UNHCR 2014).

4.3 Refugee understandings and experiences of climate change and resilience

Overall, the themes of threat, vulnerability, inclusion, and support have been consistent in official Jordanian discourse on refugees and climate change for more than a decade. This fact runs counter to the argument that there is a global trend of neoliberalizing refugees to create resilient agents that do not need continuous official support. However, while official discourse presents an intentional public image—one which serves a clear purpose, for example, securing external financial support to host refugees (i.e. refugee rentierism)—it does not necessarily reflect the experiences of refugees on the ground. To ascertain whether the intention to support refugees in Jordan as they adapt to climate change is manifest in practice, we now consider the experiences of refugees.

The UNHCR's (2024a,b) socioeconomic surveys of refugees living in two refugee camps (Za'atari and Azraq) in Jordan and in host communities (randomly sampled from all Jordanian governorates) offer an important insight into how climate change affects refugees across different settings. The findings highlight the first theme related to refugees' understanding and experiences of climate change: that it is a threat to which they are vulnerable and which undermines their security. The surveys show that around 40 per cent of refugees in camps demonstrate substantial climate vulnerability, including 12 per cent that 'are highly vulnerable and are in a state of emergency' (UNHCR 2024a: 48). Interestingly, refugees living in camps show higher levels of climate vulnerability than those in host communities (where 39 per cent experience climate change vulnerability, with 8 per cent falling into the 'stress' category [UNHCR 2024b]). This is largely because the 'precarious conditions of their shelters facilitate leakages and flooding' (UNHCR 2024a). These low levels of climate adaptability are explained by both the lack of financial resources and limited climate change awareness. For example, refugees in camps have very little resources to deal with 'shock and damages to their shelters' and 84 per cent of respondents reported that they will not even be able to deal with fifteen Jordanian Dinars (JD) worth of damage (while 95 per cent would struggle with thirty JD worth of damage) (UNHCR 2024a). Refugees from host communities showed somewhat similar results, with 89 per cent of respondents unable to deal with thirty JD worth of damage to their dwellings and almost all (98 per cent) unable to pay 100 JD for repairs (UNHCR 2024b).

Both UN surveys highlight the problems with access to water: while a majority of the respondents never have problems accessing water to drink (60 per cent of refugees living in camps and 54 per cent of those living in host communities), a quarter of the respondents (24 per cent of refugees from camps and 23 per cent of refugees from host communities) often or very often struggle to access water to drink (UNHCR 2024a,b). Interviews with refugees based in host communities support this data by offering interesting insights. While the worsening of dire water scarcity in Jordan presents a huge problem for the whole population, a factor that sometimes gets overlooked is that refugees have an additional level of vulnerability—the lack of experience of living in extremely arid conditions. A majority of the interviewed refugees expressed a sense of 'shock' when they entered Jordan with regards to how limited water resources are in the kingdom: 'it was shocking [for us] because we were kids and […] used to use a lot of water' (Interview 6, 29 August 2024); 'issues with accessing water were intense for the first 5–6 years' (Interview 7, 29 August 2024).

Additionally, the UNHCR surveys demonstrated that around one-third of respondents had no knowledge of climate change and that low levels of adaptive capacity strongly

correlate with the lower levels of education among the surveyed refugees living in camps. Interestingly, the survey involving refugees living in host communities showed:

> For refugees in host communities, labour-market participation appears crucial, as for them, holding a work permit is found to be associated with a reduction in their climate-related vulnerability, 67 per cent of refugee families with a member holding a work permit were at a low vulnerability level compared to 59 per cent of those without a work permit. (UNHCR 2024b)

The interviews conducted for this study offer more 'illustrations' to this generalized data. For example, when talking about their engagement (or lack thereof) with the climate change topic, all interviewed refugees mentioned their struggles with employability which, besides the immediate effect on their economic insecurity, also translates into a limited sense of national identity and belonging: 'Syrians are like fixed in their places with no advancements, in a way that we cannot practice our citizenship' (Interview 11, 27 August 24): 'after eleven years here […] I feel like my home is Mafraq. And like I feel now that I'm an adult of this country. It's only that there is […] a missing thing, so I don't get like a complete service from everything because I'm still a refugee' (Interview 12, 27 August 24); 'there are no opportunities in the normal market [for me], this [is like a] fingerprint of being a refugee' (Interview 18, 24 August 2024).

At the same time, all interviewees demonstrated strong engagement with IOs and NGOs, but knowledge of existing governmental initiatives or policies related to climate change adaptation/resilience was minimal: 'As a refugee my government is NGOs, not the government itself' (Interview 11, 27 August 2024); '[I] do not have much interest in knowing who deals with it in the government. [I] prefer to know more [those] who deal with it from organizations and NGOs because they are willing to listen and sit and talk to you about it. The government [is] really busy, they will tell you all later, all later' (Interview 15, 27 August 24). Refugees with high levels of climate awareness all noted that they received training through IOs in the form of seminars and initiatives which have (in their subjective view) increased their levels of climate resilience and elevated their employability chances. Furthermore, IOs lean towards climate change-themed training and initiatives that seem to act as a pull for engaged refugees who pick environment-related projects knowing that this is more likely to secure some kind of employment with the IOs and NGOs (Interview 18, 24 August 2024).

5. Discussion

There is much to question given the shift in neoliberal ethos towards resilience-building. As Anderson (2015: 63) notes '[r]esilience is, consequently, treated as both a new way of governing insecurity in an age of catastrophe and symptomatic of a transition to neoliberalism/neoliberalization'. Two processes are at play here: firstly, the responsibility for the resilience of the 'neoliberal subject' is removed from the state (and by extension intergovernmental organizations) and assigned to those who are vulnerable and in need of 'securing' themselves. And secondly, responsibility for addressing threats and challenges faced by non-Western (or developing) societies is removed from more affluent states (Chandler 2012). In effect, this neoliberal form of governmentality (Dean 2012), reinforced by the resilience discourse and rhetoric of both national governments and IOs (including the UNHCR and UNDP), serves to pass the responsibility (and the cost, financial and otherwise) of securing refugees onto the refugees themselves. A resilient refugee is one who does not need help from the state or international community, and thus, a resilient refugee is a 'good' refugee. Welsh (2014) notes that this form of resiliency discourse can create subjects who are disciplined into believing they must secure their own well-being and must not

rely on the state. Yet, the first theme identified in our analysis of Jordanian policy is that refugees are considered in climate change responses, and the challenges and threats they face are taken into account—and the documentation is clear that they must be considered if the kingdom is to respond to climate change effectively. The second theme identified—that refugees are a significant burden on Jordan's economy and society—should not be misconstrued as the Jordanian authorities adopting the neoliberal resilience-building framework and trying to offload the responsibility of supporting refugees. Instead, the government's emphasis on the burden of hosting refugees is used to commodify the latter to attract external support for Jordanian efforts to support them.

While the body of official Jordanian climate change-related policies is growing, is well established and considers the needs of a significant range of actors, there are limitations with regards to coordination between actors at the local and national levels. Consideration and engagement with refugees and other vulnerable communities in national policymaking, for example, has not been particularly effective. The NCCP 2022–2050 and NAP do refer to refugees, and they acknowledge the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination (e.g. between government agencies, NGOs and international partners). Indeed, refugees tend to be considered in the impacts of climate change on Jordanian society in general. This makes some sense given the embedded nature of refugees in Jordan with most living in major urban centres amongst the local population. But there are important distinctions between the experiences, understandings and needs of different communities in Jordan, especially with regards to responding to climate change and building 'resilience'. An important finding is that the official Jordanian documentation largely considers refugees as one segment of the population and does not often differentiate between those living in camps and those residing in host communities. As a result, the official position on refugees is anchored by the intention to look after them, but in practice the paternalistic role applies in a varied manner with the Jordanian state (working closely with IOs) having a greater role in meeting the welfare needs of refugees in camps, at least in principle. For refugees residing in host communities the role of the Jordanian state is far less overt with the welfare needs of these refugee communities being met largely by NGOs, the private sector and their own communal support networks. There is, therefore, a disconnect between the official Jordanian position that stresses the state's important role in hosting refugees (collectively) on the one hand, and the lived experiences of different refugee communities on the other.

The broader conceptualization of 'inclusion' in the neoliberalization of refugees and refugee-hosting is complex, especially as it pertains to decision-making. As Ilcan and Rygiel (2015: 342) note '[c]ommunity building […] involves different actors working together to partner and coordinate under the decision making of lead agencies in humanitarian emergency assistance'. Yet in the case of Jordan, there is limited evidence that refugee communities are directly engaged in policymaking related to securing their well-being, building their capabilities, and adapting to climate change. There are mechanisms by which refugee communities can be engaged in dialogue with Jordanian decision-makers but this is largely one way (from the state to the refugees) and does not constitute policymaking. There is clear hesitation to open policymaking to the broader influence of refugees (and other communities). This reflects the historical tendency towards the centralization of decision-making in Jordanian politics (Barari 2015) and demonstrates that climate change is not exceptional. Rather it is treated in the same way as other challenges the government faces: that is, with guarded policymaking. Indeed, two other themes identified through our analysis are firstly, that refugees are in practice excluded from policymaking related to climate change responses, and secondly, they do not engage with (or rely on) the Jordanian government as much as they do NGOs and INGOs. Therefore, neoliberal resilience-building may be emerging on the ground. Although, this is likely 'by default' rather than by design (at least on the part of the Jordanian government) given the limited resources of the Jordanian state and the neoliberal ethos of the INGOs operating in the refugee landscape in Jordan.

Importantly, if refugees are excluded from policymaking, are they prevented from building resilience? Do they fit the model of the neoliberal self-reliant subject? Krause and Schmidt's (2020) work on meaning-making in refugee resilience-building is important to reflect on here. They (Krause and Schmidt 2020: 30) argue that 'the issue at hand concerns meanings that are developed in policies: refugees are being portrayed in certain ways for humanitarian reasons with insufficient regard to their realities'. This correlates directly with studies on both refugee rentierism and an emergent 'climate change rentierism' in Jordan (see Kelberer 2017; Poberezhskaya and El-Anis 2024; Tsourapas and El-Anis 2025) which find that refugees are commodified and narrated in a manner that highlights vulnerabilities and the need for external support.

6. Conclusions

As we demonstrate in this article, there is a dichotomy in the ways different stakeholders at the local, national and international levels consider climate change adaptation and resilience-building in refugee communities in Jordan. The Jordanian government conceptualizes refugees as part of the broader population and considers them as such when developing responses to climate change. International stakeholders profess a more nuanced and neoliberal ethos where the end goal is to build resilient refugee agents that must eventually support themselves and adapt to climate change without relying on state apparatus. At the same time, however, there is some overlap in the national and international actors approaches to refugees in Jordan, and this inadvertently serves to conceptualize refugees as 'actors-to-be' who are excluded from policymaking processes and thus do not have the capacity to inform their own resilience-building. Refugees themselves understand and experience climate change through their vulnerability to its adverse effects and the insecurity that this leads to.

The case of climate change responses, refugees, and resilience in Jordan is telling in that several stakeholders (chief among them the Jordanian government) have commodified refugees in order to secure rents in the form of external financial, technical and political support—an observation likely to be made for other cases with similar parameters. This represents a critical or post-neoliberal resilience framework where it is counter-intuitive to create 'good' and resilient refugees in the neoliberal mould who do not need to be supported by the state. The Jordanian state does not fully embrace the neoliberal model of self-reliant refugees. Instead, governmental actors maintain focus on refugees' vulnerability as a strategic asset to secure international support. Furthermore, there does not seem to be a rhetorical shift from 'vulnerable' to 'resilient' actor in the case of refugees in Jordan. Refugees are vulnerable, insecure and experience climate change's adverse effects, and they remain presented in this way at the national and international levels by the key stakeholders. This reinforces their disempowerment and the empowerment of the national and international actors generating these views. At the same time, the exclusion of refugees from decision-making contradicts the notion of agency that is central to neoliberal resilience. Overall, this is highly problematic given the temporality of the issues and processes at hand. Climate change is a long-term problem that will not be managed/resolved for generations. Likewise, refugees and their descendants displaced to Jordan, whether from Iraq, Syria or elsewhere, are in large measure not likely to return to their countries of origin in the near future—many are part of the fabric of the Jordanian economy, polity and society, and must also be seen as part of the kingdom's response to climate change. This challenges the short-termism and individualism inherent in neoliberal understandings of resilience.

In sum, by using the case of refugees and climate change in Jordan, this paper offers a critique of the dominant neoliberal resilience paradigm by showing that it serves the interests of national and international stakeholders more than those of refugees. At the same time, it obscures structural inequalities and long-term vulnerabilities hindering refugees'

empowerment in a more meaningful way. We therefore call for a reframing of resilience that is inclusive, long-term, and structurally aware, one that moves beyond neoliberal assumptions.

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Supplementary data

Supplementary data is available at *MIGRAT Journal* online.

Conflict of interest statement

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This project received a favourable ethical opinion by Nottingham Trent University's Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (1748951).

Notes

1. Institutional ethical approval: this project received a favourable ethical opinion by Nottingham Trent University's Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (1748951).
2. Note, Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Jordan has signed a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR to manage Asylum Seeker Certificate applicants, registration and so on, but this does not commit Jordan to take direct responsibility for those who can be termed 'refugees'.
3. We would like to thank the Global Green Growth Institute Jordan team for facilitating access to respondents from the refugee community through their project titled 'Creating Sustainable Green Jobs for Refugees and Host Communities Through the Green Economy in Jordan'.

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Interview 18. Refugee living in Amman. Held in person in Amman, Jordan on 24/08/2024.
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