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The EU's effectiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean migration quandary: challenges to building societal resilience

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ABSTRACT

Under what conditions does the EU contribute to the prevention of governance breakdown and violent conflict in areas of limited statehood and contested orders by fostering societal resilience? This study seeks answers to this question by examining the EU's effectiveness in fostering societal resilience in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey while they have coped with risks emerging from cross-border mobility, mass influx, and prolonged stays of the forcibly displaced due to the Syrian crisis since 2011. The study argues that the EU has been constrained in building societal resilience. The findings suggest that the EU's effectiveness is limited by context-specific social, political, and economic risks in host countries; divergence among policy actors' often contradictory preferences; and the impact of the EU's policies in outsourcing management of forced displacement. The study concludes that the EU needs to link the implementation of its short-term pragmatic programmes that primarily enable state resilience in crisis contexts with its long-term liberal vision for fostering high level societal resilience with democratic principles and institutions.

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KEYWORDS Eastern Mediterranean; forced migration; migration governance; European Union; resilience

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been working on assuming the role of a global actor propagating ideas and practices of democracy promotion and economic prosperity for decades. Within the framework of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) fostering resilience became the pivotal instrument in the pursuit of effective global action. Yet the EU has not been immune to the challenges of being an external actor aiming to influence national policies and politics in complex crisis situations. Due to the consequent limits to its capabilities as an external actor, the EU displayed varying degrees of effectiveness in building resilience dependent on the nature and severity of the crisis surrounding the affected countries and societies. Among the regions the EU is involved in the Eastern Mediterranean is identified more with conflict than cohesion,[1] and as including many areas of limited statehood, where the

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state is unable to set and enforce rules, and contested orders, in which contestation in different spheres is driven by lack of consensus and compromise.[2] Countries in this region are highly susceptible to governance breakdown and violent conflict when they are exposed to global and diffuse risks, including massive cross-border mobility. Hence, these countries stand out as pertinent test cases for understanding and explaining the conditions for EU's effectiveness in fostering resilience for mitigating risks and preventing governance breakdown.

The outbreak of conflict and ensuing forced displacement have been ever existing risks in the Eastern Mediterranean region. By the end of 2019, 79.5 million persons were forcibly displaced worldwide, the highest number of refugees originated from Syria who have fled to neighbouring countries in millions.[3] In the absence of adequate resources, massive refugee flows may exacerbate the economic, political and social vulnerabilities already existing in a country.[4] The risks generated by mass influx of displaced persons to a country followed by continuous inflow and prolonged stays due to protracted conflict may contribute to a "cascading tipping point"[5] at which governance breakdown and violent conflict may emerge in host countries.[6] To avoid this, fostering "societal resilience" in host countries is a promising strategy. Societal resilience refers to the "adaptive capacity of societies, communities and individuals to deal with opportunities and risks in a peaceful manner".[7] and is constructed around social trust, legitimacy of governance institutions, and appropriate design of these institutions. The interaction between the nature and severity of risks and the level of societal resilience determines the likelihood of governance breakdown and violent conflict.

The EU's external policies mainly consist of financial and diplomatic instruments through which it builds cooperation with third countries.[8] The EU had been pursuing financial and technical programmes for building resilience in Syria since 2007 with the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) through facilitating trade and investment alongside reforms in healthcare, education and local development.[9] However, the EU has not been effective in preventing the outbreak of violent conflict in this country and the ensuing outflow of refugees. Forcibly displaced Syrians fled predominantly to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as of 2011. In response, the EU shifted its main focus to supporting resilience in these countries to fend off the mass influx induced risks that could lead to governance breakdown and spill over of conflict while continuing to assist the population affected by the crisis in Syria. To date, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon have been subject to mass influx induced risks with areas of limited statehood and contested orders, however, have not experienced major governance breakdown or violent conflict. Using this episode, this study seeks answers to the question: Under what conditions does the EU contribute to the prevention of governance breakdown and violent conflict in areas of limited statehood and contested orders by fostering societal resilience? This study claims that, in the context of the mass influx Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have medium level of societal resilience,[10] and the EU's performance as an enabler of societal resilience is constrained. Three factors are decisive in this regard: context-specific social, political, and economic risks in host countries; divergence among policy actors' preferences in both the EU and host countries; and the impact of the EU's long-standing policies in outsourcing management of forced displacement, which inhibits policy adaptability.

Studies on identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for explaining the effectiveness of EU's external governance,[11] suggest three variables as constraining its capacity: capabilities as a "normative power",[12] perceived legitimacy of EU rules,[13] and EU bargaining power.[14] First, the EU aims to perform as a global actor

through emphasizing principles such as the rule of law, human rights and liberal economies in an international context of realpolitik operating mostly with "hard power" policy instruments,[15] which seriously limits its capacity to ensure compliance by other countries. In response, scholars propose the EU to adapt new foreign policy strategies that expand its normative influence ("soft power") and economic strength ("sharp power").[16] Second, unless all stakeholders perceive the EU as a legitimate external actor for cooperation, the EU's effectiveness in transforming national policies will remain limited and short-lived.[17] Third, the EU's capacity to transform domestic policies and institutions depends on its capacity to construct, negotiate and facilitate collaboration among state and non-state actors at all levels. Therefore, the EU's effectiveness in fostering long-term resilience is challenged by constraints experienced by all international actors steering "externally driven reforms"[18] to transform domestic politics and in ensuring "local ownership" for sustainability. In addition to all these factors, in the Eastern Mediterranean forced migration context, the refugee hosting countries constitute "faltering democracies." In order to ensure adequate international protection for refugees and promote societal resilience in the host countries, the EU supports provision of public services and social assistance, however, does not attach any stringent conditions for compliance with liberal norms such as human rights, rule of law and good governance in these countries during implementation. Moreover, the EU invests heavily in border controls to the extent of neglecting the human rights of the forcibly displaced during their attempts to migrate into the EU. Such inherent contradictions in EU's external policies diminish the EU's capacity to negotiate implementation of programmes in accordance with liberal norms and values, and jeopradize the perceived legitimacy of EU's rules by host countries. Despite all these setbacks, the findings of this study suggests that the EU has been able to foster medium level societal resilience against mass influx induced risks, however, has not been able to instill long-term societal resilience.

The study fills a theoretical gap in the literature on understanding and explaining the processes by which risks may or may not turn into threats through the involvement of external actors, in this case the EU, in two ways. First, most studies characterize the role of external actors, in preventing governance breakdown or violent conflict as either effective or deficient.[19] This study proposes a nuanced approach which accounts for the constraints on an actor's effectiveness in mitigating risks, including the nature and severity of the risk, the context of action, the other actors involved, and the limits of its own policy tools. Second, the impacts of cross-border mobility on receiving countries are often categorized as either beneficial or harmful.[20] The analysis also shows that there are conditions in which even the highest-risk cross-border mobility – i.e. that which is hard to manage due to a protracted conflict which displaces millions of people – may not necessarily lead to definite governance breakdown and/or trigger violent conflict in host countries. The observations warn EU against the consequences of stalling the improvement of the design and implementation of resilience building policies pursued in refugee hosting societies. The failure to do so is likely to further fuel anti-immigrant sentiment within the EU due to fears of having more asylum seekers. Such discord around how the EU aims to eliminate the causes of refugee flows is likely to weaken the resolve for supporting costly resilience building strategies in the long run and endanger the foundations of the whole global strategy.

The paper begins by delineating the context within which cross-border mobility, inflow and stay of forcibly displaced constitute risks that could trigger a "cascading tipping point". The next section examines the consequences of actors' contradictory

policy preferences and expectations about outcomes for both the EU and the hosting countries. The following discussion elaborates on the repercussions of EU's routine approach to externalization of migration management for the trajectory of resilience building strategies. It concludes with a discussion of the findings.

Context-specific risks in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey

In Turkey, the number of Syrians under temporary protection (SuTP) increased from 2,503,549 to 3,605,152 between 2015 and 2020, equivalent to about 4% of the national population.[21] In Jordan, while the number of Syrian refugees was 622,672 in January of 2015, it reached 658,756 in 2020 (about 16% of national population). Only in Lebanon was there a decrease in numbers from 1,146,911 in 2015 to 884,266 in 2020 (about 12% of national population)[22] as a result of the Lebanese governments' efforts to return Syrians to their country of origin.[23] In all three countries, there has been a gradual shift from a humanitarian to a more restrictive approach from 2011 to 2020. Turkey, for example, initially implemented an emergency response strategy with an open borders policy, a temporary protection plan, and accommodation of the forcibly displaced Syrians in temporary accommodation centres (a.k.a. camps). With the Temporary Protection Regulation of 2014, Turkey allowed refugees to access universal healthcare, public schools, and the labour market. As of 2016, this policy was transformed towards seeking durable solutions and pursuing social cohesion for the forcibly displaced during their stay though with a policy expectation of their eventual return to Syria. Turkey gradually introduced limits on border crossings from Syria in the post 2018 period.[24] Jordan started receiving refugees with open borders, and due to a rapid influx in 2012 they opened the Zaatari Camp while most refugees preferred to stay in the cities.[25] Until 2014 refugees had access to all public services such as medical care and education, which were restricted afterwards, the borders were closed by June 2016, and most refugees were sent to camps in 2017. There were limits on social support payments by 2018.[26] Lebanon began to host refugees from 2011 onwards with a rapid increase between 2012 and 2013, and there were debates about the accurate number of refugees due to many remaining unregistered. By 2015, Lebanon began restricting the influx of refugees by introducing visas and preventing UNHCR from registering newcomers. They also promoted return and stopped re-entry of those who left for Syria. Lebanon began to restrict labour market access of Syrian refugees as early as 2014, and they had to pay for medical care, and access to schools remained consistently limited.[27] By 2018, Jordan and Lebanon continued with policies of hosting the forcibly displaced in safe zones within the country. Turkey has closed most of its camps, and currently 98% of SuTP live in urban settings mostly close to the Syrian border.[28] Jordan pursued durable solutions for increasing access to livelihood such as through the introduction of Special Economic Zones[29] while Lebanon has consistently circumscribed labour force participation. On the whole, hosting forcibly displaced Syrians has put pressures on the economy and unemployment rate in all countries.[30] In 2020, many reports highlight an alarming strain on public resources and the need for external support for national and local institutions to maintain adequate provision of services and social cohesion in all three countries.[31] While there has been no major governance breakdown or violent conflict to date, these countries continue to experience areas of limited statehood and contested orders while coping with the risk of hosting forcibly displaced Syrians.

In the Eastern Mediterranean region, the ongoing political tensions between some countries have challenged democratization processes and negatively influenced countries' economic performance.[32] The significant declines in the economic growth and the surges in unemployment rates in a context of crony capitalism and state capture,[33] have prevented the emergence of inclusive, transparent, and accountable institutions in the countries of the region. The EU attempted to respond to the political developments strategically by increasing funds, revising bilateral agreements to meet the political challenges, and proposing "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" based on principles of democracy and inclusive economic growth.[34] The EU intends to stimulate the economies of these countries and strengthen their institutional capacity through various cooperation agreements and programmes, such as: the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA); the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis; the EU External Investment Plan; and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). In the post-2011 period, the EU provided financial assistance to enhance the institutional capacity of these countries to deliver public services, including the initial cash injections. These policies, however, do not appear to be able to reverse the deteriorating economic situation or the "democratic regression".[35]

In all three countries, the increasing pressures on public resources affect their governance performance negatively.[36] As an indication of faltering state legitimacy, in 2018, trust in government was, additionally, reported at a little above 50% in Turkey,[37] at 38% in Jordan, and at just 19% in Lebanon.[38] State legitimacy scores, where a higher score denotes lower legitimacy, ranged from 5.7 to 6.1 for Jordan, 7 to 7.4 for Lebanon and 5.9 to 7.5 for Turkey between 2011 and 2020.[39] All three countries differ in the adequacy of the design of institutions for emergency preparedness and response during mass influx. As the Syrian crisis unfolded, Lebanon was suffering from a governmental crisis[40] that impeded its immediate humanitarian assistance programme for the arriving forcibly displaced people. Turkey and Jordan have relatively stable political systems, although Turkey transitioned from a parliamentary to an executive presidency system in 2018. In 2011, all three countries had sketchy policies for governing forced migration and international protection. Jordan charged the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation to manage the arrival of Syrian refugees, and began with a plan to coordinate international aid. However, by 2015, the limits of the state's capacity to deliver services such as healthcare, education and shelter for the forcibly displaced became evident.[41] In Turkey, the Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) implemented a rapid emergency response in 2011 with a large scale humanitarian effort largely funded by Turkish state resources. In 2013, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) was established within the Ministry of Interior, and began to coordinate all programmes of international, local, and national actors in forced migration governance.[42] In all three countries, the EU had to pursue its programmes and policies within variable policy settings with shifting state and non-state actor policy networks, limited consistency of commitment to intra-regional collaboration, and different institutional capacities with significantly diverse needs.

Lack of pluralistic and inclusive institutions increase the likelihood of governance breakdown.[43] Social trust in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan remain fairly low,[44] and threat perceptions between local communities and the forcibly displaced Syrians have increased over time. In Lebanon, studies found a high level of support among

locals for discriminatory policies and practices towards Syrians, increasing the risk of intercommunity violence.[45] Syrians also reported hostility and discrimination by the local communities in Jordan,[46] and local communities express resentment over the presence of Syrians.[47] In Turkey, Syrians are perceived as a threat to public order.[48] In all three countries, research suggests that hostility towards Syrians increased due to the perceptions that refugees receive social assistance while vulnerable groups in local communities were being neglected.[49] This is an example of how the EU's existing social assistance programming and implementation in humanitarian settings may impede long-term societal resilience in host countries by affecting local communities' trust in the perceived fairness of EU actions towards vulnerable local versus displaced groups.

While the EU has been effective in fostering resilience by diminishing the magnifying effect of context-specific risks in all three countries through supporting state resilience with financial and technical support, it has fallen short of establishing long-term and sustainable societal resilience. All three countries followed through with EU's proposed policies for enhancing humanitarian assistance short of durable solutions, and Turkey introduced partial social cohesion processes. However, the EU has not been able to diffuse democratic norms and values or contribute to the building of inclusive institutions during the partnership for forced migration governance with these countries. Such a setback is mainly due to the "external-internal duality of EU resilience thinking",[50] which securitizes context-specific risks and hence blocks prospects for self-governance and empowerment of local agency.[51] Moreover, implementation of international protection responsibilities remains at the sovereign discretion of states which further impedes the extent to which an external actor, in this case the EU, may influence the operating principles of domestic institutions.

Diverging policy preferences: out of many, not one

EU's foreign policy has lacked coherence since its inception.[52] Policy actors in the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean differ significantly over key forced migration governance themes, including: how to cooperate towards solutions for improving the conditions in host societies for the forcibly displaced (incentive structures and cooperation mechanisms); which objectives to pursue (humanitarian assistance, social cohesion); which policy solutions to advocate and advance (settlement in camps, cities, safe zones), and; the duration of the cooperation. The dissonance among policy actors' approaches means the EU's involvement is often derailed, and prospects for continuous collaboration among states and non-state actors in the region are challenged.

In autumn 2015, EU member states differed significantly in their responses to the arrival of those fleeing conflict leading to severe collective anxiety over security concerns in Europe.[53] Austria advocated for an anti-immigration policy with more restrictive EU border management, Poland refused to accept refugees under the EU relocation scheme, and Hungary stigmatized the arriving refugees as "Muslim invaders",[54] while Germany led a humanitarian policy of welcoming refugees.[55] During their efforts to stop irregular migration, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania committed human rights violations during push-backs in the Aegean and by hosting refugees in sub-standard reception centres;[56] practices which Greenhill has termed "uncoordinated individual state defections from collective arrangements".[57] Accordingly, the EU

appeared less credible in terms of balancing human rights and security concerns while engaging in migration governance in the region. This led refugee-hosting countries to question both the legitimacy of EU rules and the fitness for purpose of the institutional design that the EU was proposing. Turkey gained "valuable bargaining leverage over the EU" and concessions in institutional design, which has curtailed the rights of the forcibly displaced.[58]

Host countries also diverge in their policy preferences to cope with cross-border mobility, mass influx, and prolonged stays of the forcibly displaced. In 2014, Turkey introduced a Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) and committed to applying the principle of no return without any prospect of long-term integration or refugee status in Turkey. Turkey relied mostly on its own public resources for hosting the forcibly displaced and delivering protection as well as education, healthcare, and access to livelihoods until 2015. Through financial and technical support, the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement established the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT) mechanism. This coordination programme facilitates the design and implementation of policies for inclusion of Syrian children in public schools, expansion of health care services through targeted interventions such as Migrant Health Centres, and integration of SuTP to working life.[59] Lebanon and Jordan, however, refrained from implementing any international protection policies including a prospect for integration. Lebanon hosted the forcibly displaced in settlements leading to marginalization and precluding any prospects for social cohesion. Jordan established settlement areas close to the Southern Syria border, and by 2018 the country declared that it was in dire need of investment in social services and infrastructure to be able continue hosting refugees,[60] which also forestalled debate on increasing social cohesion. QUDRA 1 and QUDRA 2 are examples of programmes aiming to promote societal resilience for the forcibly displaced and local communities in all three countries by promoting social cohesion with substantial funding by the EU. These programmes focus on "education and protection, employment and income generation; local governmental institutions and civil society organizations".[61] However, there is no clear sign that these programmes result in the establishment of sustainable and inclusive institutions to maintain the accomplishments of these programmes towards effective governance in the host countries.

One of the most prominent policy instruments for regional cooperation for forced migration governance in the region is the 3RP (Refugee Resilience and Response Plan), established in 2015 to facilitate collaboration and coordination among international organizations, states, and non-state actors in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq. The EU was a major external actor contributing to its institutional inception and has acted as a significant donor ever since.[62] The 3RP aims to instil a "comprehensive approach to forced displacement"[63] which includes "promoting access to national systems" and "supporting national ownership".[64] There was a surge in regional policy initiatives to support societal resilience through regional cooperation.[65] However, similar to other initiatives, these regional practices could only generate medium level societal resilience in host countries.[66]

While increasing humanitarian assistance targeted the implementation of durable solutions such as generating sustainable means of livelihood and promoting social cohesion, host communities continued to express discontent about the prolonged stays of the forcibly displaced. In all host countries, public disapproval towards the forcibly displaced has increased. In Jordan, research shows that more than 70% of local people consider refugees as negatively affecting housing, the economy, services,

crime, terrorism, and education.[67] In Lebanon, reports on growing hostility towards refugees raised alarm bells about increasing harassment and discrimination.[68] In Turkey, 2019 data indicates that the Turkish public identifies forcibly displaced Syrians in their country as a "burden" on the system and expects them to be "causing problems in the future".[69] Observing the increasing pressure on public resources accompanied by public discontent, policy actors in host countries shifted towards restricting the cross border mobility of the forcibly displaced and began to propose and/or implement return policy alternatives.[70] Turkey proposed establishing a safe-zone in northern Syria in order to relocate Syrian refugees into this area, which the US, Russia, Iran, and Syria opposed and Lebanon supported.[71] In December 2019, as a result of escalating conflict in Syria's Idlib province concerned about a new wave of refugees, Turkey declared that the country "will not carry such a refugee burden on its own".[72] When 33 Turkish soldiers died as a result of the air strike by Assad regime forces in February 2020, in addition to conducting ground and air strikes in Syria, Turkey opened its Western land and sea borders and announced it would no longer block refugees attempting passage to Europe via this route.[73] Thereupon, large numbers of refugees moved towards border areas with Greece and Bulgaria, who responded by deploying tear gas and physical force against those attempting to cross.[74] Overall, the EU has to navigate the complex web of member states' and host countries' divergent policy preferences and strategies in order to build long-term societal resilience, which seems to have been curtailed to date mainly due to the difficulties in securing a consensus around international protection policies and their outcomes.

Outsourcing forced displacement management: one size fits none?

Studies characterize EU's foreign policy instruments as "external projection of internal solutions"[75] or an "our size fits all"[76] approach, towards the Mediterranean in particular. Since 2011, the EU has revised the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility by combining foreign policy, migration policy, and development initiatives to strengthen existing relationships with non-EU countries.[77] The EU formalizes its policy interaction with third countries by signing bilateral agreements such as the 2013 Readmission Agreement between the EU and Turkey, the 2015 Joint Action Plan, the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, and the EU-Jordan and EU-Lebanon Compacts.[78] The collaboration focuses on the governance of legal, irregular, and short-term migration,[79] and includes training, monitoring, mentoring, and consulting to transfer know-how to strengthen community resilience. Implementation of policies through collaborative mechanisms among international organizations, state and non-state actors presents the EU as a partner in promoting participatory institutions rather than a full scale actor pursuing external intervention.[80] In parallel, however, the EU invests heavily in border control; for example, borders with Africa, the Balkans, and Turkey are now monitored through a complex socio-technological system to enhance security capacity and control irregular migration flows, including drone projects.[81]

Complementary to the regular programmed bilateral cooperation,[82] with the Compacts, the EU has allocated a substantial budget for enabling the forcibly displaced in Lebanon and Jordan to receive high-quality education and find sufficient employment opportunities to become self-sufficient in these countries. The EU has also launched an assistance package to support refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon

via the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis; to enable vulnerable populations in Lebanon to have better access to health services, and to both create a more inclusive national social protection system and enhance employment opportunities in Jordan to strengthen the self-reliance of refugees.[83] The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation (ECHO) has also been active since 2012 to support societal resilience by requiring NGOs and local governments to cooperate in administering the funds and implementing the programmes. Through ECHO-funded projects, the EU has supported municipal authorities in all three countries which are the most contested sites of resource constraints such as water, housing, education as well as law and order.[84] Yet despite the EU's efforts to build societal resilience and promote social cohesion through facilitating access to the labour market for the forcibly displaced and reducing the burden on public services, both Jordan and Lebanon have become more restrictive towards admitting new arrivals, their populations have become more hostile, and policies of return have been preferred to social cohesion initiatives.

In the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, the FRiT mechanism included financial assistance to Turkey to keep the forcibly displaced within the country and aimed to ensure compliance through the incentive of a visa liberalization roadmap for Turkey.[85] Through the FRiT, SuTP have received humanitarian, educational, socio-economic, and health support. Despite the EU's extensive financial, technical, and institutional support for facilitating social cohesion in Turkey, there is decreasing support among the Turkish public for the prolonged stays of forcibly displaced Syrians, and 44.8% of local people would prefer that Syrians stay in the safe zones, an increase from 37.4% in 2017. Data on public opinion also reports less trust towards the strategic and psychological benefits of EU-Turkey relations. For instance, 9.4% of people in Turkey had a great deal of confidence in the EU up to 2014, but this dropped 4.6% by 2020.[86] Despite the relentless pursuit of collaborative governance in the region and implementation of comprehensive policies covering education, health care, and working life to advance social cohesion, the social distance between local people and SuTP has increased.[87] To date, EU's efforts are far from establishing participatory institutions at the local level, and laying down the foundation for long-term societal resilience.

Furthermore, tensions between the EU and Turkey over migration management remain particularly alarming on the theme of protecting the rights of the forcibly displaced. At the outset, the EU accomplished its immediate policy objective of controlling irregular migration towards the EU. The number of Syrian first-time asylum applicants to the EU-27 fell from 80,000 to 74,400, while the proportion of Syrians in the EU-27 total decreased from 14.6% to 12.1% between 2018 and 2019.[88] Turkey, similarly, has fended off the risk of governance breakdown in service provision posed by the scale of the mass influx and prolonged stays through the extensive humanitarian assistance provided by the EU. Since 2016, however, the EU and Turkey have experienced standoffs on cross-border mobility of the forcibly displaced, which have eclipsed the accomplishments of the institutional design for social cohesion put in place through the FRiT mechanism. Headlines have focused on the confrontational aspects of managing irregular migration, such as the increase in the number border guards in Greece in 2016,[89] Greece fortifying land borders in 2018,[90] or the strains on Greece's asylum system in 2019.[91] In February 2020, as a reaction to Turkey's decision to relax its border controls, Greek authorities used force to stop 35,000

Syrians from crossing their borders[92] and suspended asylum applications. The EU called for an emergency meeting, declaring Greece to be Europe's shield in the migration crisis,[93] creating an impression in Turkish public opinion that the EU was ready to forsake the rights and dignity of the forcibly displaced in international protection. The 2016 EU-Turkey Statement has coincided with a period of "democratic rollback"[94] in Turkey. For example, between 2016 and 2020, there has been consistent pressure on non-state actors with increasingly restricted freedom of expression and association,[95] and this has limited efforts to containment of immediate risks by putting in place the institutional design necessary to promote societal resilience in the long-term. The 2016 EU-Lebanon Compact, for example, overemphasizes funding temporary practices in partnership with state elites without seeking good governance through partnering with societal actors, building capacity for a rights-based approach, and holding states in the host country "accountable" for pursuing bottom-up democracy promotion.[96]

The EU's efforts to promote regional cooperation in migration and asylum revolve around economic and security concerns emphasizing policies of border control and stopping irregular flows towards the EU. Declaring this policy objective as an external actor by itself does not undermine the EU's resilience-building role while helping refugee-hosting countries, but it does occasionally challenge perceptions of its cooperation strategies, incentive structures, and the institutional design it proposes for building societal resilience. First, the EU seems to overlook faltering state legitimacy and trust as well as increasing public discontent towards refugees. Second, the EU contributes to the construction of provisional institutions which may or may not be identified as having adequate institutional design to both respond to local needs for capacity development and cope with the long-term and comprehensive effects of the prolonged stay of the forcibly displaced. Thus, to act as a builder of societal resilience, the EU needs to increase its legitimacy and promote social trust among local populations by including national and local stakeholders in planning resilience strategies and policies and balance a multi-stakeholder humanitarian and development perspective.

Conclusion

The persistence of areas of limited statehood and contested orders in the Eastern Mediterranean increases the likelihood of any risk triggering a "cascading tipping point" into governance breakdown and violent conflict at any time. External actors participating in mitigating risks and building societal resilience in this region are highly likely to find themselves with inadequate policy instruments and enforcement capacity. This makes it difficult (but not impossible) for external actors, and the EU in particular, to play a resilience-building role. The EU needs to engage in a delicate balancing act between its own policy principles, preferences and strategies and existing instruments and the context-specific needs of domestic actors in refugee hosting countries.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, the context-specific risks stem mainly from a legacy of state-centric governance and historical hostilities in the region which have made it difficult to avert existing risks by establishing even minimal preconditions for regional cooperation in managing cross-border mobility. On the one hand, the deep historical and sociological roots of the disputes within the region seem to require greater involvement of external actors to cope with existing risks and approaching tipping points.

On the other hand, when external actors are unable to eradicate the root causes of displacement or mitigate domestic risk factors such as rising unemployment, shrinking economies, limited resources for delivery of services, and discrimination towards the forcibly displaced, host societies may view context-specific risks as inevitable and any external interventions as obsolete.

In the region, the EU pursues policies of inclusion of non-state actors in migration governance, financial support for delivery of public services, and consistent collaboration among all stakeholders in host communities. However, its effectiveness in promoting local ownership of these resilience-building policies is diminished by a double bind. On one hand, host countries prioritize the implementation of their national policy strategies and view the EU as just a supporting external actor while coping with the risks originating from mass influx. On the other, in times of acute crisis such as December 2019, EU member states react based on national policy preferences. Such disunity in the EU over a course of action towards refugees compromises the EU's international outlook as a legitimate external actor aiming to build societal resilience since the refugee hosting countries perceive the institutional design that the EU proposes as not benefiting the refugees or host countries at all. The EU's capacity and perception as a builder of resilience suffered another blow when its enthusiasm for the proposed institutional design for social cohesion based on inclusiveness and access to resources in host countries began to be received as another policy strategy to outsource forced migration management. Despite the major financial investments and innovative design of collaborative policy implementation represented in the Lebanon and Jordan Compacts and the FRiT, the EU's efforts have suffered from lack of local ownership. The EU's external migration policy instruments for building the resilience are increasingly perceived as building the EU's resilience rather than that of host countries and their societies. This perception reduces the EU's effectiveness as an external actor in the short run, and places the EU's role in enabling societal resilience in host countries at risk in the long run.

Forcibly displaced Syrians are among the most vulnerable of world refugee populations in the COVID 19 context with no end date in sight for the crisis in Syria. Consequently, the EU is highly likely to remain as a significant external actor in supporting the refugee hosting countries in the region while they cope with the strains on their resources and tensions in their societies. By identifying the constraints on the EU's capacity to build resilience in forced migration contexts, this study points out two main lessons for the EU to become a more effective external actor. First, the EU needs to address the severity of context-specific risks accurately and mobilize its resources with a long-term strategy. While doing so, it needs to build robust local partnerships with non-state actors to reach out to the communities effectively and maintain them through a cohesive plan. Second, the EU needs to reinforce its normative power role in promoting democratic principles while remaining practical in attending to immediate humanitarian exigencies in refugee receiving countries. In a world of complex crisis and heightened uncertainty, the EU cannot afford to remain incremental in its interventions and modest in its policy strategies if it aims to remain a strong global actor in forced migration governance. This will be possible when the EU synthesizes the implementation of its short-term pragmatic programmes that primarily enable state resilience in crisis contexts with its long-term liberal vision for fostering high level societal resilience founded upon democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law.

Notes

1. Bornstein, "Eastern Mediterranean Regional Dynamics."
2. This article uses the key concepts and definitions guiding this special issue. Please see the introduction to this special issue for a broader discussion of the conceptual framework.
3. See https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/
4. Lischer, "The Global Refugee Crisis."
5. See " . . . ." by XYZ in this special issue.
6. On the definition and categorization of such "tipping points" at which risks become threats to resilience, and of which "uncontrolled migration" is potentially both a "one-time" and a "cascading" type, see author XYZ in this special issue.
7. See introduction to this special issue.
8. Vimont, "Upgraded EU Foreign Policy."
9. See https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/syria_en
10. See intorduction to this special issue for further discussion on the concept of medium level of societal resilience.
11. Lavenex and Schimmelfenning, "EU Rules."
12. Manners, "Normative Power Europe."
13. Barbé et al., "Drawing the Neighbours Closer."
14. Youngs, "Democracy Promotion."
15. Tocci et al., "Normative Foreign Policy Actor."
16. Abels et al., "Enhancing Europe's Global Power"
17. Krasner and Risse, "External Actors."
18. See https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/195366_en.html.
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