

The impact of armed conflicts and forced migration on labour markets: systematic literature review and future research agenda

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The impact of armed conflicts and forced migration on labour markets: systematic literature review and future research agenda

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how forced migration resulting from armed conflicts influences regional development, highlighting the double-edged impact it has on labor markets. This study, based on an interdisciplinary systematic literature review of 70 rigorously-selected peer-reviewed publications over the last 10 years (2013-2023), confronts the findings of studies on migration, armed conflicts and labour markets to shed a light on the economic and social impact of forced migration on host countries, home countries and the migrants themselves. The selected sample of papers highlights the different ways in which forced migration resulting from 25 different armed conflicts affected labor markets. Four main thematic clusters emerge from the literature: the socio-economic impact of armed conflicts on labour markets, the professional development of forced migrants in host countries, the impact of armed conflicts on the labour force of home countries and the social and psychological aspects of forced migration. By bringing together insights from economics, social studies and international relations, the authors make policy recommendations on the combination of factors that allow for a smooth integration of forced migrants into host labour markets.

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Armed conflicts; forced migration; labour markets; systematic literature review

Introduction

Over the past few decades, forced migration has grown into a multifaceted global challenge (Olivieri et al. 2022). Forced migration or forced displacement can be defined as a conflict or disaster-induced movement of population within a country or between countries (Verme and Schuettler 2021). The notion of forced migration includes both refugees (people who have left their country) and internally displaced people (who have left their home but not their country) as a result of armed conflicts, persecution or disaster. It has been opposed to economic migration which is more predictable, consists of more skilled workers and people with savings and networks in host countries which facilitate

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their integration (Ceriani and Verme 2018). Forced migration may result from a wide spectrum of events including armed conflicts, civil unrest, protracted wars, natural disasters, environmental crises, chemical or nuclear events, famines (European Commission Forced Migration 2023). Forced migration has grown from a humanitarian concern to a global disruptive phenomenon which affects home countries, transit countries and host countries (Ben-Yehuda and Goldstein 2020). This study concentrates on forced migration resulting from armed conflicts, considering the careers of forced migrants, the impact of their arrival on the labour force of host countries and the implications of their departure for home countries. Armed conflicts are military confrontations 'between the armed forces of states (international armed conflicts) or between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state (non-international armed conflicts)' (Vité 2009). The term 'armed conflict' is conceptually wider than 'war' and differs from it in international law in that armed conflicts do not require a formal declaration of hostilities from the government of a state (Dinstein 2021).

Armed conflicts have a disruptive effect on labor markets in both home and host countries due to displacement, destruction, and shifting labor dynamics. The impact is most often studied through the prism of forced migration, which can simultaneously challenge and transform economic structures. In conflict-affected regions, violence and instability have a number of consequences including internal and cross-border displacement, eroding infrastructure, reducing employment opportunities, and contributing to labor informality and gendered participation shifts (Loewenthal and Miaari 2020; Menon and Van der Meulen Rodgers 2015; Shemyakina 2015). In host countries, the influx of forced migrants can lead to short-term pressures on labor markets, welfare systems, and public services, particularly in areas with increased economic vulnerability (Borjas and Monras 2017; Maystadt et al. 2019). However, over the long term, migration can promote human capital development and stimulate productivity and innovation, particularly when migrants are skilled and integration frameworks are in place (Fassio, Montobbio, and Venturini 2019; Gagliardi 2015). The degree of disruption and potential for positive transformation is conditioned by conflict severity, state capacity, geography, and proximity to global economic hubs (Echevarria-Coco and Gardeazabal 2021; Sanch-Maritan and Vedrine 2019).

Previous research has examined the repercussions of forced migration on labour markets, generally focusing on particular regions or sectors (e.g. Acosta 2020; Brell, Dustmann, and Preston 2020; Fernández, Ibáñez, and Peña 2014; Kondylis 2010; Shemyakina 2015). These studies have highlighted the varied socio-economic implications of forced displacement, examining the career trajectories of migrants as well as their linguistic assimilation and societal integration (Annan et al. 2011; Borjas and Monras 2017; Hassel, Steen Knudsen, and Wagner 2016; Ichino and Winter-Ebmer 2004). However, the current literature presents a significant research gap: few studies offer a cross-regional perspective on conflict-induced forced migration or an interdisciplinary approach to how migration impacts labour markets, particularly over the long term. Among the issues that warrant further investigation are how policy measures in host countries can be improved to cope with migration flows but also gain some benefits from them, the ethical responsibility of both host and home countries when dealing with vulnerable populations and the extent to which lessons from one conflict-induced migration crisis are transposable to other countries.

In this context, our paper has three main research objectives: the first is to identify recurring tendencies, and disparities, in how conflict-induced forced migration affects the dynamics of labour markets across different contexts, the second is to highlight how host country policies and conflict dynamics influence the integration of migrants, and the third is to propose areas for future research and policy recommendations to better manage the labour implications of forced migration. In order to identify how social, economic and political factors can influence the ways in which forced migration resulting from armed conflicts impacts labour markets, we carried out a systematic literature review covering articles published between 2013 and 2023, drawing insights from 70 carefully selected and peer-reviewed publications. Thus, this study aims to synthesize the existing literature as regards both host and home countries.

The remainder of this paper presents our methodology (Section 2) and the main findings of our literature review, highlighting predominant research themes (Section 3). Section 4 offers a discussion of key insights and plots the trajectory for future research. Section 5 wraps up the study, shedding light on policy implications and acknowledging its limitations.

Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology, which aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on how forced migration affects labor markets. This method offers the most reliable means of systematically collecting and analysing large volumes of publications over a specific period (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Denyer, Tranfield, and Van Aken 2008; Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003). This design was developed using recent theoretical and methodological studies on how to carry out a systematic literature review in the fields of business and management (Linnenluecke, Marrone, and Singh 2020; Paul and Criado 2020; Snyder 2019).

We conducted the systematic literature review using the *Web of Science* database where we searched for combinations of keywords related to conflicts and the labour markets research domain, such as ‘conflicts’ AND ‘impact OR effect’ AND ‘labour market’. The initial search yielded 33,912 publications. We targeted English-language publications in academic journals published within the last 10 years, which limited the search to 18,408 articles. The next step was to select relevant research areas, wherein we considered publications in business economics, international relations, geography, social issues, etc. This further limited the search to 5,220 articles. After applying the final available selection criteria – research domains, we then narrowed down our selection to those published in the social sciences, science technology, arts/humanities and technology, which resulted in a further reduction of publications to 842 articles (Figure 1).

In order to ensure that our sample consisted of high-quality publications and was unbiased, we applied additional inclusion criteria based on the ranking and reputation of academic journals. Therefore, when choosing whether to include a publication in the final literature review sample, we consulted the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) international journal ranking, a reliable and trusted benchmark of journals that meet international academic standards (Paul and Benito 2017). If a journal did not appear on the list, we applied the impact-factor criteria, requiring a minimum impact-factor of 1.0. This approach has been widely used in prior systematic literature reviews (e.g. Buliga,

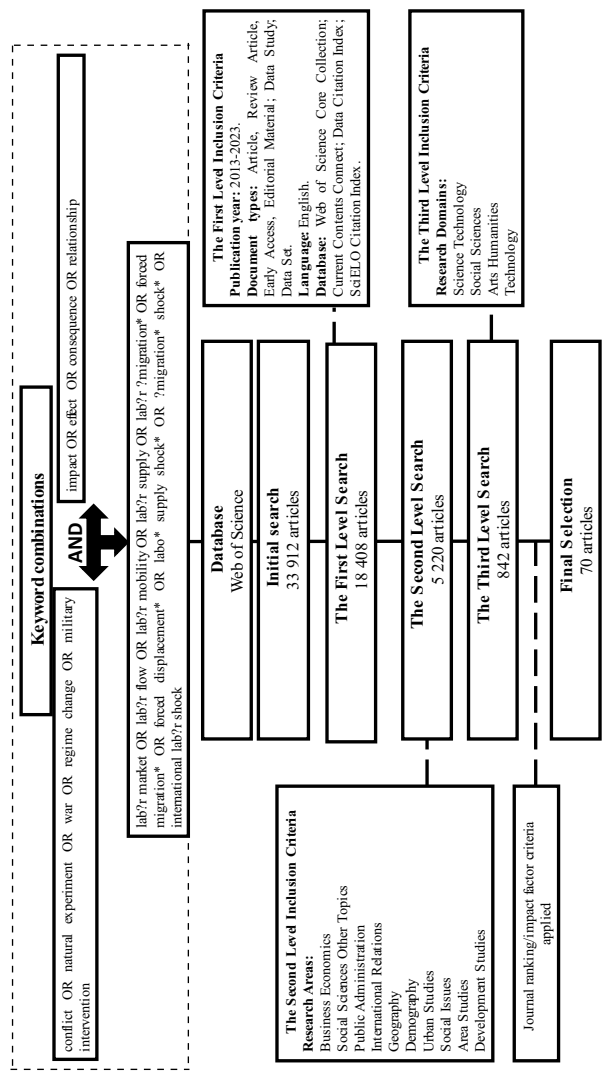


Figure 1. Web of science research design. Source: Authors

Table 1. Journals included in the literature review.

Journal Title	No of papers selected	ABS ranking/ IF
Defence and Peace Economics	6	ABS 2*
Journal of Conflict Resolution	6	ABS 3*
Journal of Development Economics	6	ABS 3*
Journal of Development Studies	5	ABS 3*
Labour Economics	5	ABS 3*
Journal of Refugee Studies	4	ABS 4*
Journal of Comparative Economics	3	ABS 3*
Journal of Economic Geography	3	ABS 4*
Journal of Economic History	3	ABS 3*
Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	3	ABS 1*
World Development	2	ABS 3*
Economic Journal	2	ABS 4*
European Economic Review	2	ABS 3*
Journal of The European Economic Association	2	ABS 4*
Oxford Review of Economic Policy	2	ABS 2*
American Economic Review	1	ABS 4*
Annual Review of Resource Economics	1	ABS2*
Applied Economics	1	ABS 2*
Demographic Research	1	IF 2.00
Economics of Education Review	1	ABS 2*
Explorations in Economic History	1	ABS 3*
International Migration	1	IF 2.02
Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization	1	IF 2.00
Journal of Peace Research	1	IF 3.71
Journal of Population Economics	1	ABS 3*
Journal of Urban Economics	1	ABS 3*
Migration Studies	1	IF 2.77
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America	1	IF 12.77
Review of Economics and Statistics	1	ABS 4*
Sustainability	1	IF 3.88
Third World Quarterly	1	ABS 2*
Total:31	Total:70	

Scheiner, and Voigt 2016; Keupp and Gassmann 2009; Khlystova, Kalyuzhnova, and Belitski 2022; Paul and Rosado-Serrano 2019). The journals included in the literature review, as well as their CABS ranking and impact-factor are presented in Table 1.

Finally, we selected for our sample only papers published between 2013 to 2023. This timeframe was chosen for several reasons. First, this decade witnessed a significant number of forced migration events, including the escalation of the Syrian Civil War, the Venezuelan crisis, and the Ukrainian crisis (Bluszcz and Valente 2022; Fakh, Kassab, and Lizzaik 2024; Gonchar et al. 2024; Pina 2024). All these events increased research interest in migration and in policy responses to this phenomenon. Second, the selection of 2013 as a start date has allowed the systematic literature review to reflect specific post-conflict economic dynamics that have influenced migration policies and labour market structures in developed as well as developing countries. Third, this timeframe allows for the inclusion of the most recent methodological and empirical developments, especially as research on forced migration and labour market integration has become more interdisciplinary and data-driven over the last 10 years (Fakh and Ibrahim 2016; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2013, 2015; Shimizutani and Yamada 2024). This focus on the past decade makes it possible to provide policy-relevant insights that reflect current challenges, and contexts.

Two researchers worked on the data cleaning process, reviewing the pre-final sample of 842 publications by analysing their titles, abstracts and keywords. Drawing on the approach of Linnenluecke, Marrone, and Singh (2020), the research team looked at the context of how the keywords were used in order to avoid 'false positives'. After the papers for the sample were selected, the researchers reviewed the publications to ensure the inclusion criteria was properly observed. At this stage, no discrepancies were detected. The final stage of the data cleaning process involved reviewing the reference lists of papers in the sample to make sure that no relevant articles or contributions were overlooked (Denyer, Tranfield, and Van Aken 2008). Once the data cleaning process was completed, the final literature review sample consisted of 70 peer-reviewed articles from 32 different academic journals.

Results

In order to understand the main themes within the literature review sample, we performed a keyword analysis on the 70 papers selected. This method facilitates the analysis of extensive literature and helps to further explore the key characteristics of the topic analysed (Linnenluecke, Marrone, and Singh 2020). For example, co-word analysis can shed more light on established research sub-streams and emerging topics in the literature, revealing their thematic relationship (Donthu et al. 2021; Khlystova, Kalyuzhnova, and Belitski 2022; Verma and Gustafsson 2020).

We used VOSviewer software to create a network visualisation of keywords from the sample. This imaging tool helped not only to identify but also to illustrate some of the most common thematic clusters that appear in the literature. The visualisation (Figure 2) highlights how the selected studies address the forced migration – labour market nexus through several key conceptual lenses, including *labour and employment* (blue and green clusters), *education and career development* (yellow cluster), *gender-related issues* (pink, red and purple clusters), and *broader discussions on refugees and migration* (brown cluster). It is important to note that VOSviewer was used as a supplementary analytical tool and did not serve as the primary basis for our results. While it helped us to visualise and confirm the thematic structure emerging from our in-depth qualitative review, the identification of themes was primarily grounded in a detailed reading and coding of the full texts. The software-assisted clustering provided an additional layer of insight by visually mapping the frequency and co-occurrence of key terms throughout the literature. This approach enriched, but did not determine, our thematic categorisation. By combining qualitative synthesis with visual mapping, we attempted to balance rigour with accessibility, while acknowledging the inherent complexity and the multidimensional nature of forced migration and labour market dynamics.

The majority of papers that were reviewed were empirical and explored the impact of conflicts on labour markets. The selected papers consider different geographical scales ranging from *intra-country studies* to *cross-national studies*.

The intra-country studies (37%) examined the impact of conflicts on domestic labour markets and patterns of internal migration where an armed conflict took place within the same country, for instance, Algeria, Bosnia, Colombia, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Myanmar, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, Ukraine and Vietnam.

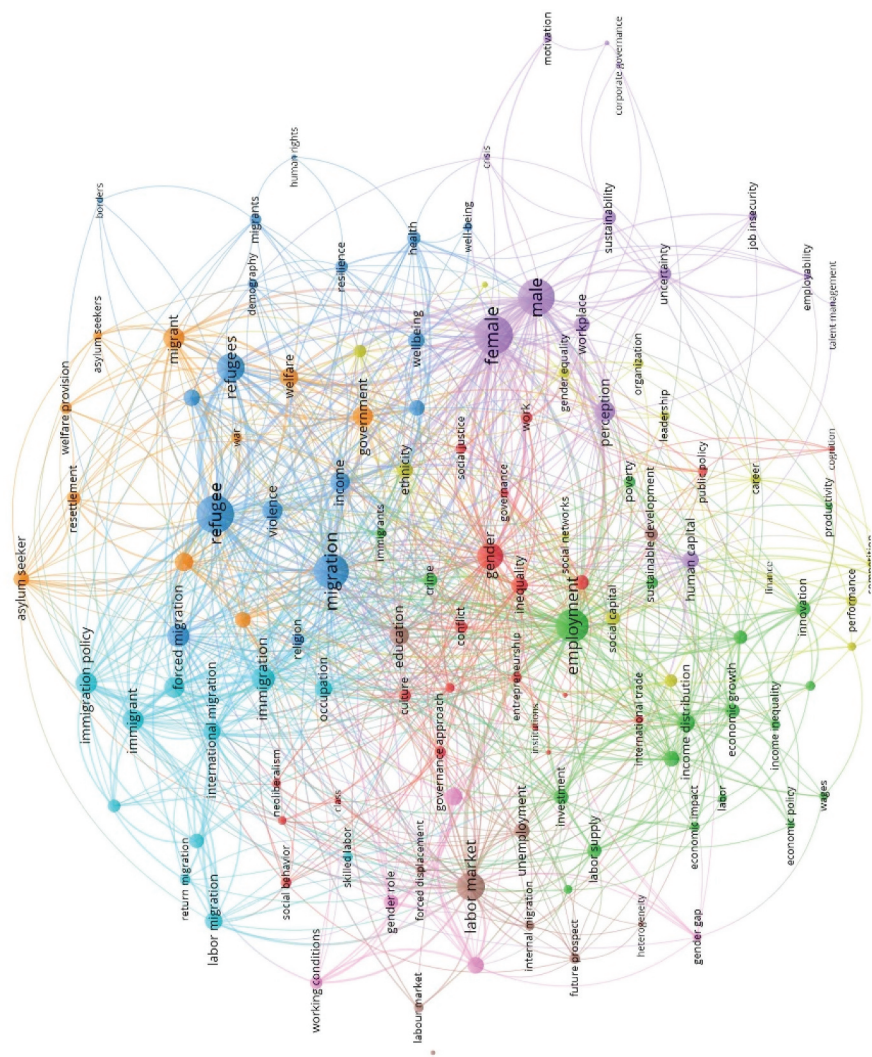


Figure 2. The visualization of conflicts-labour market search. Source: Authors

The cross-national studies (52%) explored the impact of armed conflicts on third countries or regions, for example, Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Poland, Tanzania, Turkey, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, U.S.A., Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Scandinavia.

11% of the sample were *conceptual papers* exploring the regional dynamics of armed conflicts and their impact on forced migration (e.g. Becker et al. 2020; Braithwaite, Salehyan, and Savun 2019; Verme and Schuettler 2021). Among the conflicts examined, the Syrian Civil War (2011-present) was the most frequently studied, appearing in 16% of the sample and often analysed for its consequences on third countries. Other conflicts discussed in the literature include the Abkhaz – Georgian conflict (1989-present), the Algerian War (1954-1962), the Boko Haram Insurgency (2009-present), the Bosnian War (1992-1995), the Revival process in Bulgaria (1984-1989), the Burundian civil war (1993-2005), the Cold War (1945-1991), the Colombian conflict (1964-present), the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), the Egyptian revolution (2011), the Georgian – Ossetian conflict (1989-present), the Israeli – Palestinian conflict (1948-present: the Blockade of the Gaza Strip, the mobility restriction in the West Bank, the Second Intifada (2000-2005), the Kachin conflict, Myanmar (2011-present), the Kenyan election violence (2017), the Lebanon War (2016), the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency in Uganda (1987-present), the Nepalese Civil War (1996-2006), the Rwandan Civil War (1990-1994), sanctions against Iran (2012-present), Sri Lanka Civil War (1983-2009), the Tajikistani Civil War (1992-1997), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Ukrainian War (2014-present), the War in Darfur, Sudan (2003-2020), World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945).

A summary of our analysis is presented in Table 2, which outlines the main thematic clusters, the number of papers analysed in each category, and associated findings.

Structural disruptions and sectoral impacts

Studies devoted to the socio-economic impact of conflicts on labour markets have for main focus how inhabitants of restricted areas are affected by restrictions to workforce mobility, such as border shutdowns, economic isolation, physical barriers, disparities in obtaining identification cards and job permissions (e.g. Adnan 2015, 2022; Cali and Miaari 2018). These studies found that border shutdowns lead to labour shortages in certain economic sectors in restricted areas. Moreover, the unforeseen decline in mobility during the early stages of workers' careers has negative consequences for their future development and personal income (Edo 2020; Torosyan, Pignatti, and Obrizan 2018; Tur-Sinai and Romanov 2018).

Many recent studies expressed concern about the repercussions of politically driven conflicts and trade barriers on labour markets in countries geographically close to such conflicts (Adnan 2022; Aksu, Erzan, and Kirdar 2022; Araci, Demirci, and Kirdar 2022; Aydemir and Kirdar 2017; Fakihi and Ibrahim 2016; Gomes et al. 2023). The recent study conducted by Kelishomi and Nistico (2022) investigated the negative impact of economic sanctions on employment in the most affected sectors, such as manufacturing, and import-dependent sectors. The authors found that the implementation of sanctions results in a considerable decrease in employment growth in the manufacturing sector.

Forced migration also has a significant impact on labour markets particularly in agriculture, construction, and the housing sector (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2013; Tsuda

Table 2. The distribution of reviewed papers among clusters with the studied regions and the key findings.

Cluster	No of Papers	Methodology mostly used	Countries/Regions of Research	Key Findings
The socio-economic impact of forced migration on labour markets	34	Quantitative	Algeria, Colombia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, U.S.A.	1. Restrictions and barriers on labour mobility have a negative effect on employment and wages in restricted areas. 2. Forced migration has negative effects on the employment and wages of local low-skilled workers, women and young people, especially in the informal sector. 3. Economic sanctions have a negative effect on employment in the import-dependent sectors of countries subject to sanctions.
The impact of armed conflicts on professional development and career labour force	8	Quantitative	Austria, Bosnia, Croatia, Palestine, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tajikistan	1. Armed conflicts have a negative impact on youth education. 2. Armed conflicts negatively affect academic achievements and career development of the labour force. 3. Language skills are important for forced migrants' employability and integration into labour markets in a host country.
The impact of armed conflicts on diversity and inclusion of labour force	12	Quantitative	Algeria, Colombia, Egypt, Germany, Nepal, U.S.A., Tajikistan, Palestine; Scandinavia	1. Conflicts have more negative effects on people in informal and private sectors and affect them first, especially female labour force. 2. The female labour force has higher opportunities for employment during and after conflicts 3. Female participation in labour markets during conflicts positively affects the next generation of young women's careers.
Other emerging impacts	11	Quantitative	Colombia, Germany, Kenya, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Turkey, Vietnam, Ukraine; Europe	1. Recent studies have investigated the social aspects of the decision-making process of forced labour flows in host countries and their labour markets 2. Attitudes of host countries' communities towards forced migrants play a significant role in their participation and integration in the labour market.

2022). A number of developing countries experienced internal conflicts that resulted in the displacement of people and had effects on their economy (Becker and Ferrara 2019; Tsuda 2022). Some studies found that the arrival of refugees had advantages and drawbacks for farming households (e.g. Alix-Garcia, Bartlett, and Saah 2013; Dower and Markevich 2018; Sarvimäki, Uusitalo, and Jäntti 2022). Several studies emphasized that the impact of refugee flows on the housing sector (Elster, Zussman, and Zussman 2017; Roza and Sviatschi 2021). For instance, Balkan and Tumen (2016), George and Adelaja (2022) and Maystadt et al. (2019) argued that the arrival of forced migrants can lead to a decrease in consumer prices and disruptions in demand and supply within the receiving areas, where both goods and services can experience comparable price reductions. Moreover, the consequences of forced displacement are complicated for affected households, particularly as they face notable declines in their consumption levels compared to non-displaced households (Fiala 2015).

Several studies investigated the entrepreneurial opportunities of forced migrants (Bozzoli, Brück, and Wald 2013; Calderón-Mejía and Ibáñez 2016). The literature review reveals that forced migrants are more likely to compete in the job market with low-skilled local workers than with any other category of employees. For example, S. Braun and Mahmoud (2014) examined how the arrival of displaced people reduces employment opportunities for those local residents who can be professionally replaced by migrants, typically those with comparable levels of skills, knowledge, language, social and cultural features. S. T. Braun et al. (2021) pointed out that the sudden increase in population had a lasting impact on job markets in specific areas.

Labor market competition and integration outcomes

Increased labor market competition linked to conflict-induced forced migration is a significant challenge. Several researchers, including Verme and Schuettler (2021), Stillman et al. (2022) and Hyll and Schneider (2018), have analysed the ways in which internal forced migration impacts the income levels and behavior of local urban residents. Their findings reveal that an influx of forced migrants is frequently linked to a decrease in the wages of low-skilled locals, and this particularly in the informal sector. Fallah, Krafft, and Wahba (2019) argued that the native population residing in regions with a significant number of forced migrants did not experience adverse effects in the job market compared to natives who had less exposure to the arrivals. Interestingly, internally displaced persons with a lower income than wealthy local groups tend to view more unfavorably foreigners, particularly those from low-income states.

A number of studies highlight, however, the positive and dual effects of forced migration. Powell, Clark, and Nowrasteh (2017) and Suzuki (2019) found that an influx of foreign workforce can bolster the labour market of a host country and enhance its economic development, while the outflows of educated and skilled population from a country affected by an armed conflict can have an adverse impact on its economic growth.

The literature on forced migration and labour markets reveals different trends and impacts on host countries, with in some cases contradictory results. Some studies show that forced migrants can have a positive or neutral effect on host countries, especially in countries with flexible labour markets. For instance, Akgündüz, Van Den Berg, and Hassink

(2018) and Altındağ, Bakış, and Rozo (2020) found that the arrival of forced migrants increased the number of new businesses and supported informal economic activities without seriously harming jobs for local workers. However, other researchers such as Borjas and Monras (2017) noted a number of significant challenges faced by countries hosting forced migrants, including a reduction in wages and job opportunities for low-skilled local workers, especially in areas with rigid labour markets. Moreover, the level of development of host regions also determines the ease with which migrants can professionally integrate. A study by Araci, Demirci, and Kirdar (2022) showed that in Turkey, the repercussions of forced migration were much worse for under-developed areas. Aydemir and Kirdar (2017) noted that the consequences are worse yet if the skills of forced migrants do not match the skills needed in the local economy. In contrast, studies from Jordan and Lebanon such as Fakihi and Ibrahim (2016) and Fallah, Krafft, and Wahba (2019) showed different results depending on the work sector, the legal status of refugees, and gender. Some sectors were able to take in more forced migrants, while others experienced more strain.

Human capital, education, and career paths

This cluster of papers examines the effects of conflicts on the professional development and career outcomes of the labour force (Efendic, Kovac, and Shapiro 2022; Kecmanovic 2013; Saad and Fallah 2020). The main research topic in this cluster was the impact of armed conflicts on the long-term education and training of young professionals as well as their educational and career choices (e.g. Becker et al. 2020; Di Maio and Nandi 2013; Shimizutani and Yamada, 2022; Saad and Fallah 2020). Several studies examined how flows of forced migrants affected employment and educational opportunities, focusing on low-skilled, less-educated and junior local workers (Aksu, Erzan, and Kirdar 2022; Fakihi and Ibrahim 2016; Gomes et al. 2023).

This research stream also suggests that there is a negative pattern in academic achievements and in the career development of workers living in zones affected by armed conflicts. For example, Efendic, Kovac, and Shapiro (2022) concluded that forced migrants have higher academic achievements and higher long-term income levels compared to those who remained in home countries during an armed conflict. The authors also show that forced migrants often have the opportunity to pursue their education and improve their employment prospects when in host countries, which leads after their return home, to an improvement in their revenue levels. Ludolph (2023) also supported the idea that obtaining an educational degree abroad helped improve the employment opportunities of forced migrants in the labour market. Finally, Auer (2018) emphasized the importance of language skills for the integration of forced migrants, showing that language proficiency improved their employability.

Gender, vulnerability, and inclusion dynamics

This cluster considers the effects of armed conflicts on the diversity of the labour force of home countries, highlighting the changing role of women in various job settings (El-Mallakh, Maurel, and Speciale 2018; Loewenthal and Miaari 2020; Menon and Van der Meulen Rodgers 2015; Rose 2018; Shatnawi and Fishback 2018;

Shemyakina 2015). Recent studies conducted by El-Mallakh, Maurel, and Speciale (2018) and Loewenthal and Miaari (2020) investigated the increase in female labour force participation following armed conflicts. For instance, Menon and Van der Meulen Rodgers (2015) argued that an increase in the participation of women in employment often results from the displacement of men and the 'added worker effect'. Interestingly, Shemyakina (2015) found that increased female employment opportunities during and after conflicts can have lasting positive effects on the career prospects of the next generation of young women. Furthermore, Rose (2018) and Shatnawi and Fishback (2018) concluded that during wars, the female workforce can grow significantly due to industrial mobilisation, as with the massive employment of women in the United States in World War II where women were employed for the first time in jobs such as building aircraft, assembling ammunition and working in government services.

However, when conflicts escalate, this can significantly reduce women's participation in the labor market. Such situations widen the gender gap on labour markets and can bring about an unemployment crisis, especially in economic sectors with a higher percentage of female workforce (e.g. tourism, services, administrative positions) (Berrebi and Ostwald 2016; Loewenthal and Miaari 2020). One of the topics within this research stream is the study of income differences between male and female workforce and of policy-making initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion (Lippmann, Georgieff, and Senik 2020). There is an ongoing discussion in the literature regarding the impact of forced migration and conflicts on women's income and employment participation, debating what might be conducive to sustaining the gender equality trend. Indeed, recent studies suggest that women are particularly vulnerable members of the workforce, especially in developing countries, due to different perceptions of safety and protection (Narriman Guémar 2019, Hamelink and Güngör 2022). The violence of the Algerian Civil War known as the 'Black Decade' resulted in a higher proportion of women among high-skilled forced migrants (Narriman Guémar 2019). While the negative effects diminish over time, they continue to affect low-skilled local women, indicating that this specific group is especially affected by the arrival of forced migrants (Gimenez-Nadal, Molina, and Silva-Quintero 2019; Morales 2018).

Social and psychological aspects of forced migration

Our literature review identified other emerging impacts of forced migration on labour markets, with research focusing on social and psychological aspects of their integration. This research particularly investigates the ethics, cultural diversity and acceptance of forced labour flows by host countries (Böhm et al. 2018; Schaeffer and Bukenya 2014). S. T. Braun and Dwenger (2020) contributed to this research by analysing the socio-economic integration and political assimilation of forced migrants and the ways in which they influence the social and economic conditions host country labor markets. Several studies focused on the ethnic diversity of labour flows, through a regional perspective (e.g. Oztig 2021; Steele and Abdelaaty 2019). Refugee inflows can spark identity-based anxieties, as both citizens and leaders worry about potential shifts in a region's demographic and cultural landscape. Furthermore, Böhm et al. (2018) noted that the willingness of local residents to assist forced migrants in labour market

integration is substantially influenced by the associated personal costs. The researchers found that locals are less likely to help refugees if it entails personal sacrifices.

A new trend in the literature has established that the decision-making process of forced migrants, particularly when selecting a country for relocation, is primarily influenced by the following factors: the economic climate, job opportunities, work environment, language familiarity, presence of diasporas, and geographical closeness, as highlighted by Conte and Migali (2019) and Mykhnenko, Delahaye, and Mehdi (2022). Ruhe (2021) also showed that the way violence is perceived by individuals can influence their choice of a host country. Also, the decision of when to leave a conflict zone depends on the prevalence of real and perceived security concerns. Some migrants decide to move only when they are directly and materially affected by a conflict. Others move when the first threats appear and the psychological context starts to worsen. Additionally, the selection of a host country by internationally displaced individuals is affected by the political orientation of potential receiving areas. For instance, congenial political viewpoints may become a primary consideration when selecting a host region.

Host countries can act selectively, taking into account their security policies and strategic socio-economic interests as well as the professional background of forced migrants. Recently, the priority given to the voluntary repatriation of refugees has increased, as compared to their integration and relocation. This shift has occurred primarily due to the unwillingness of receiving countries, particularly developed economies, to host a sizable population of forced migrants, out of concerns over possible adverse socio-economic and security outcomes. AlShwawra (2021) explored different scenarios of forced migrants' integration into labour markets. If forced migrants are unable to integrate into the host country's labour market, they may either return voluntarily to their country of origin with protection guarantees, or relocate to a third country. Conversely, successful integration enables them to secure employment and remain in the host country. Finally, Hall (2018) conducted a study focusing on the social aspects of migration. The study concluded that effective integration into host communities and labour markets weakens the support of migrants for conflict-inducing beliefs. After having successfully integrated and when living in conditions of economic and social stability, migrants acquire a new and more complex sense of identity. Interestingly, in countries that have welcoming policies towards forced migrants, the foreigners often adopt progressive attitudes and contribute positively, upon their return home, to promoting peace and tolerance.

Discussion and future research agenda

In our research, we have explored how armed conflicts and forced migration define labour markets outcomes. Our analysis shows the dual role of forced migration in regional development, revealing both opportunities and challenges. Building on papers in our sample (Akgündüz, Van Den Berg, and Hassink 2018; Altındağ, Bakış, and Roza 2020; Maystadt and Duranton 2019; Tumen 2016), we identified the conditions under which forced migration can improve local human capital and promote socio-economic development, yielding policy recommendations for host regions.

Migration, particularly when it involves skilled individuals, can serve as a catalyst for regional development, by increasing productivity, wages, labour resources, and

inclusivity (Bosetti, Cattaneo, and Verdolini 2015; Gagliardi 2015; Jensen 2014; Sinoi 2021). Our study contributes to this discourse by emphasizing the crucial role of skilled labour in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in host nations (Bettin et al. 2019; Fassio, Montobbio, and Venturini 2019; Gagliardi 2015; Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle 2010). Skilled migration, our review suggests, can bolster the labour market's long-term outcomes. However, the host region's economic development level is an important factor as regards migrant integration outcomes, with economically robust regions acting as resilient hubs, boosting business productivity and innovation through the inclusion of skilled migrants and the implementation of integration-centric policies. This can be accomplished by developing fresh business ideas, promoting knowledge spillovers, attracting expertise and investment, and ultimately boosting regional economic performance (Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle 2010; Miguelez and Temgoua 2020; Niebuhr 2010).

Migration caused by conflicts, both internal displacement and refugees entering from conflict zones, does indeed constitute a humanitarian crisis with short-term risks like violence, environmental degradation, and the spread of disease, and long-term impacts on commerce, infrastructure, and labour markets (Maystadt et al. 2019). The capacity of host regions to absorb these impacts depends mostly on their level of socio-economic development (Araci, Demirci, and Kirdar 2022; Pholphirul and Rukumnuaykit 2016). Although low-skilled migrants can present significant challenges to underdeveloped regions, developed areas may mitigate the negative effects, with possible upward mobility trends for the local workforce.

The literature currently bifurcates into refugee studies and internal displacement without adequately considering both. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) often receive less global attention and protection compared to refugees (Ho 2018). In situations with limited global support, community-based organizations become pivotal in assisting IDPs. Future research should explore the relocation dynamics of low-skilled migrants to developed regions without adversely impacting locals. The educational and cultural backgrounds of migrants must be considered, as well as national and regional policies. Since the integration process has legal, economic and social dimensions, facilitating the entry of migrants into local job markets is crucial (AlShwawra 2021).

Several studies have shown how host countries' policies, economic conditions and social integration programmes impact the ways in which forced migration affects labour markets. For instance, Altındağ, Bakış, and Rozo (2020) demonstrated that in Turkey, the government's open-border policy and flexible labour regulations allowed many refugees to enter the informal job market without any legal restrictions, and this helped reduce the negative effects on local employment. In contrast, Fakihi, Kassab, and Lizzaik (2024) found that in Lebanon, where legal opportunities for refugees were limited, competition in low-skilled jobs increased, especially among women and young workers, leading to suboptimal labour market outcomes. On the other hand, Fallah, Krafft, and Wahba (2019) reported that in Jordan, areas with better economic infrastructure, which benefited from international aid and employment programmes, experienced fewer negative impacts, suggesting that integration efforts could help mitigate labour market difficulties. Additionally, business resilience in conflict-affected economies contributes to productivity gains despite labour market disruptions (Gonchar et al. 2024). Historical evidence from post-WWII Germany demonstrates that regions that invested in housing, education and

training for displaced migrants saw more positive long-term effects such as higher productivity and improved human capital (Becker et al. 2020).

Migration has a significant influence on international trade, with notable advantages for host countries. Future research could further investigate how host countries can benefit from receiving forced migrants by facilitating the sustainable development of strategic economic sectors for their economy, such as international trade, services, manufacturing, etc (Parsons and Vézina 2018; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2013). Increases in trade between host countries and migrants' countries of origin are one of several understudied topics (Parsons and Vézina 2018). We argue that such cross-countries cooperation can be a strategic source of long-term economic advantages for host countries, particularly in terms of trade and services development.

Economic sanctions, commonly imposed during conflicts, have consequences for third-party countries, affecting their strategic economic sectors (Kelishomi and Nisticò 2022; Peterson 2021). Further research could investigate how such countries could reduce the potential negative impact on their economies through investments in labour, skills, services and import-dependent industries. Conflicts also cause a significant depletion of high-skilled labour. It is therefore important to investigate the mechanisms of attracting back local talent and facilitating the inflow of new human capital. Similarly, strategies for the reintegration of returned migrants could help to mitigate long-term skill shortages in post-conflict settings (Efendic, Kovac, and Shapiro 2022).

The spillover effects of armed conflicts – such as rising transport costs and trade disruption – warrant further investigation, particularly in neighbouring economies (Feldman and Sadeh 2018; Qureshi 2013). Governments also face fiscal pressures due to increased social spending and infrastructure demands triggered by mass migration (Fakih and Ibrahim 2016). Further research should focus on studying the effects of forced migration on labour markets by sectoral specialization (e.g. oil and gas, creative industries, hospitality) (Fakih and Ibrahim 2016) as well as the role of self-employment (Gimenez-Nadal, Molina, and Silva-Quintero 2019; Shimizutani and Yamada 2024). This may be particularly relevant when assessing the effectiveness of past policies on labour markets, integration, and social issues (George and Adelaja 2022; Maystadt et al. 2019; Torosyan, Pignatti, and Obrizan 2018; Verme and Schuettler 2021). There is also a need for more cross-country comparative analyses of single conflicts, as well as studies linking forced migration to environmental challenges such as climate change (Becker and Ferrara 2019; Echevarria-Coco and Gardezabal 2021).

Researchers should further investigate the role of employment duration, re-employment possibilities (Auer 2018), local attitudes towards migrants (Böhm et al. 2018) while considering economic and cultural aspects (S. T. Braun and Dwenger 2020). A better understanding of these dynamics will help governments develop targeted integration policies.

Further research is also needed to understand the complex dynamics of how the intensity and nature of conflicts affect labour market outcomes (Ben-Yehuda and Goldstein 2020; Conte and Migali 2019). The majority of the research in this domain has focused on the Middle East, the Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa and Colombia (e.g. Aksu, Erzan, and Kırdar 2022; Bozzoli, Brück, and Wald 2013; Ludolph 2023; Tsuda 2022). There is a need for studies examining Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Caucasus (Verme and Schuettler 2021). Studies on the Afghan conflict, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and

the Ukrainian war could help better understand the role of local economic development in mitigating conflict-related shocks. Additionally, future research could also look at how one specific conflict can affect labour markets of countries with different levels of economic development.

Further research could look into the dynamics of professional integration of forced migrants in more detail in order to have a deeper understanding of how labour market challenges in host countries are amplified by the influx of forced migrants (Tsuda 2022), particularly of those who are employed in low-skilled jobs (Ludolph 2023). Moreover, future research should also explore the impact of international aid and humanitarian support programs on the labour market environment, since these programs, aimed at addressing the needs of forced migrants, can significantly contribute to generating job opportunities for local populations, thus mitigating the negative effects of forced migration (Fallah, Krafft, and Wahba 2019; Rozo and Sviatschi 2021).

Future studies could be carried out to examine the impact of mobility restrictions on labour markets, utilising firm level data to understand to what extent a decrease in a firm's income and labour demand might ease the issues arising from these restrictions (Cali and Miaari 2018). Finally, as studies in our sample were mostly conducted by using quantitative methods, future research on the impact of conflicts on labour markets could be carried out with more qualitative methods to have a deeper understanding of how and why forced the workforce and labour markets are affected by conflicts. Ethical considerations, especially regarding data collection with forced migrants, must be a priority in future research (Müller-Funk 2021).

Conclusions, policy implications and limitations of the study

This research project had for main goal to develop a comprehensive analysis of the existing studies on how armed conflicts and forced migration impact labour markets. We carried out a systematic analysis of papers published between 2013 and 2023 and reviewed 70 papers. Our analysis demonstrated that conflicts have heterogeneous effects on labour markets and social capital in different countries and regions. Studies within our review encompassed over 25 distinct armed conflicts. A common finding across the literature is that forced migration affects vulnerable populations in host countries, particularly people who are low-skilled, female, or young, because of the shifts that occur in the labour market. Additionally, our examination reveals that forced migration may present challenges to food security in host areas. Assessing food insecurity levels in regions neighbouring conflict zones or susceptible to immigration flows should be a priority. This can help to enhance resilience and protect populations at risk.

This comprehensive literature review reveals that government bodies and policy-makers should streamline the employment process for forced migrants to ensure their swift and seamless integration into the local economy and community. Given the extensive societal implications of immigration, understanding the varied reactions of local residents to incoming forced migrants requires taking into account economic and social factors. Consequently, it is imperative to develop forward-thinking policies that support vulnerable segments of the local population, including women, the young, and informal workers, to address societal challenges and overcome divisive views regarding forced migrants.

Inadequate management of forced migration may signal broader sustainability issues within a society (Morales-Muñoz et al. 2020). Migration is frequently driven by a number of interdependent factors including armed conflicts, environmental degradation, and food insecurity. Food insecurity is the strongest catalyst for displacement. Understanding these interrelated drivers helps to design responsive migration policies and to strengthen fragile labour markets, all the while promoting sustainable development.

Additionally, the quality of a host country's education system has a strong impact on the long-term social and economic integration of immigrants. Investments made to support refugees upon arrival and to integrate young people in the educational system can enhance their future employability.

Some practical policy measures could be adopted by the international community and host countries, before, during and after the start of conflict-induced migration flows. First of all, reinforcing the role of the UN's International Organisation for Migration by securing additional funding for its conflict-prevention and early detection programs can help reduce the number of migrants but also allow them to migrate before they are psychologically affected by the trauma of war. Warning people about a rapidly deteriorating situation allows them to prepare psychologically and professionally for a move away from their home town or country. Timely migration improves the chances of successful integration into labour markets abroad, with migrants being able to select the country of destination, start learning a language and apply for legal documentation to ensure their qualifications are recognised abroad. Additionally, when a conflict breaks out, neighbouring countries should launch cooperation mechanisms to determine the number and vulnerability of the immigrants heading to and through their countries. Adequate identification and processing of migrants fleeing conflict zones helps to reinforce public trust in migrants and identify individuals presenting a terrorist threat. A centralised international management of migrant flows can help to improve the 'fit' between specific migrants and the destination country, further facilitating their integration.

After a conflict has started and the inflow of migrants has begun, government-initiated and community-based initiatives should be implemented to ensure job opportunities are created for forced migrants and that they are informed about them. Initiatives can include tax-rebates for businesses that practice inclusive hiring. Inviting forced migrants to work alongside other vulnerable populations at equal pay can foster mutual help and positive communication, thus reducing the social stigma linked to being a foreign worker. Creating educational programs for forced migrants to acquire new skills while working in apprentice-type jobs can increase the public acceptance of migrants as well as their self-esteem. Complex solutions including childcare should be devised for women to reintegrate the workforce in similar proportions to men.

When the conflict has ended, repatriation programs should be made available by host countries to migrants who want to go home and support the democratic transition and reconstruction of their home countries. 'Friendship' programs should be developed to ensure ties are not severed with these individuals who can help promote good relations between their home and host countries, stimulating economic growth on both sides. Forced migration presents many, so far largely untapped, opportunities for host countries.

Our study presents a number of limitations. The review only included peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2013 and 2023. The decision to limit the research to journals listed in the Academic Journal Guide 2021 (ABS) or those with an

impact factor of at least 1.0 was linked to the need to ensure the reliability of findings. It may however have introduced a selection bias by possibly excluding relevant studies in other languages, grey literature (e.g. NGO reports, policy briefs), or high-quality publications outside our chosen parameters.

Another natural limitation is linked to the scope of the study. Our focus on migration resulting from armed conflicts led to the exclusion of studies on displacement linked to other causes, such as environmental disasters, public health crises, or economic hardship, even though they do impact labour markets. The filtering process that we used, based on keywords, subject domains, and journal quality, helped exclude irrelevant papers, but some relevant publications may also have been omitted. Future reviews could widen the scope of the selected literature by broadening the inclusion criteria and including non-English databases. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe our review provides a robust and representative overview of the recent academic discourse on forced migration and labour markets, particularly within the context of armed conflict.

The study lays the groundwork for future research in this domain, providing a structured basis for analyzing conflict-driven migration. The constraints of our research design, while narrowing our focus, have enabled us to delve deeply into the selected subject matter, offering an understanding upon which subsequent studies can build. As migration flows continue to rise in response to conflict and instability, further interdisciplinary and inclusive research will be essential to inform policy and promote equitable labour market outcomes worldwide.

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