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Focus:

The regional refugee crisis in the Middle East: causes, current challenges and perspectives

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Name, Company, Address, Phone, Fax, E-Mail:
Dear readers of the ORIENT,

At present, Europe – and particularly Germany – is facing the greatest challenge of this century, so far confronted with a massive influx of refugees and migrants from the war-torn countries of the Near and Middle East. The ongoing civil war in Syria, the continuing bombing of all opposition-held territories by Assad forces and Russia as well as the intensified fight against IS are increasing the number of refugees ever further. It is the greatest refugee crisis in modern times, with more than four million Syrians fleeing their country as well as millions of internally displaced persons. More than a million are on the move from Iraq, and in Afghanistan the decreasing security is also leading to a massive refugee stream.

The refugee crisis has put many other states in the region under enormous pressure: Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan host large numbers. The UNHCR lacks the necessary funds to provide them with decent shelter, while the GCC countries are highly reluctant to provide financial assistance and help. The significant pressures on Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey demand a quick reaction and assistance, which is probably more urgent than bombing IS in Syria and Iraq. Only a political solution of the Syrian Civil War will stop this immense outflow of people.

This issue of ORIENT will deal with the manifold aspects of this continuing crisis. Dr. Luigi Achilli will focus on the situation of Syrian refugees and their decision to leave the region based on their experiences in Jordan. Following this, Dr. Rabih Shibli will shed light on the situation in Lebanon before Dr. Mona Christophersen, Maysa Ayoub and Dr. Kılıç Buğra Kanat deal with the same in Jordan, Egypt and Turkey respectively. Lastly, Dr. Omer Karasapan engages with the current situation of women in these developments and Prof. AKM Ahsan Ullah engages with the patterns of forced migration in the region.

I hope that the current issue of ORIENT will provide you with valuable insights and a variety of perspectives on the migration crisis in the region.

I wish all readers a more peaceful year 2016!

Dr. Gunter Mulack
Director of the German Orient-Institute
Luigi Achilli

Back to Syria? Conflicting patterns of mobility among Syrian refugees in Jordan

Over the past two years, Jordan has adopted harsher policies towards refugees by periodically closing its borders and limiting access to employment opportunities as well as health and educational facilities. Against the backdrop of their deteriorating situation in Jordan, large numbers of Syrian refugees have expressed a desire to leave this host country. Many of them see migration as a way of escaping their hardships in Jordan. However, even when the leaving is not in doubt, the destination is. By focusing on Syrian refugees living in Jordan, this article will look at the consequences of their protracted displacement. What will be argued here is that the refugees' decision to travel cannot be reduced to a mere self-interest or cost–benefit analysis. Seeking refuge has to be understood as the outcome of a complex process of decision making motivated by a range of factors, not least the refugees' affective relationship with their country.

Luigi Achilli is a research associate in the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute. His research and writing focus on everyday forms of political engagement and disengagement, nationalism, the Palestinian issue, refugees and refugee camps, irregular migration and smuggling networks, and the politics of space. His last research project has culminated with the publication of a book about the significance of the “ordinary” in the process of political self-fashioning in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, “Palestinian Refugees and Identity: Nationalism, Politics and the Everyday” (I.B. Tauris, 2015).

Rabih Shibli

Syrian refugees in Lebanon

This article aims to examine the complex power dynamics that impact Syrian refugees during their protracted stay in Lebanon. Covert and overt regional and international agendas, deep-seated local anxieties and weak governance, and an apocalyptic civil war, have placed millions of refugees on ‘shifting sands’. Following four and a half years of turmoil, feeble political ententes and ‘supernatural’ ambitions depict the bloody landscape of a fragmenting Levant. In wake of the centennial, Sykes-Picot lines are looming as moribund and aggravate venomous rivalries that are heaping coal on the sectarian strife. Within this context, relief operations represent band-aids for critical wounds that are only getting deeper by the day. In order to efficiently support refugees undergoing dire conditions in unfolding madness, it is imperative to envisage practical, contextual, and efficient operations that go beyond simplistic and ornate overtures, calling to the reconfiguration of relief mechanisms.

Rabih Shibli is the director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service at the American University of Beirut, and the founder and director of Beit Bil Jnoub (House In The South). His latest research and projects focus on the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Lebanon.

Mona Christophersen

Jordan and the Syrian refugees

Jordan has shown remarkable hospitality towards the refugees and extraordinary resilience in a troubled region. The majority of refugees live outside camps in host communities with considerable challenges related to employment, education and livelihoods. International funding is insufficient to cover the refugees’ most basic needs. After years of hardship many refugees are losing hope for the future and in increasing numbers they return to Syria. Will their next stop be Europe?
**Mona Christophersen** is a senior adviser to the International Peace Institute in New York and a researcher at the Fafo Foundation in Oslo. Her areas of work include Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, doing field research on refugee livelihoods and coping strategies among Palestinian as well as Syrian refugees. From 2011 she also conducted research on protest movements and elections in Jordan. Previously she has worked at the Lebanon field office of UNRWA and at the UN headquarters in NY. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work and an MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Oslo.

**Maysa Ayoub**
The situation of Syrian refugees in Egypt
The article is largely based on a statistical study conducted by the author on Syrians in Egypt in 2013. The statistical study entitled “Syrian Refugees in Egypt: the challenges of a politically changing environment’ traces the situation of Syrian refugees since their arrival in 2011 until August 2013. Building on that study, this article highlights the changes since August 2013 to present, the implications of the continuation of the crisis, and the perspectives for improving the situation.

**Maysa Ayoub** is Research and Outreach Manager of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) at the American University, Cairo. With a background in political sociology, her research interests include migration policies, integration, and livelihoods of minorities as well as diasporas, and transnationalism. She has conducted research and published on the livelihood of different refugee groups in Egypt. Ayoub is a PhD candidate in the Euro-Mediterranean studies programme at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University. She has an MA in Sociology and a Graduate Diploma in Migration and Refugee Studies, both from AUC. Prior to joining AUC, she worked with local and international research institutions as well as non-governmental organisations.

**Kılıç Buğra Kanat**
Turkey’s Syrian refugees
The civil war in Syria has gravely impacted Turkey – currently it alone hosts more than two million refugees from Syria. A great majority of these refugees live around the cities along the Turkish-Syrian border. With no end in sight, Turkey, as the country that hosts more refugees than any other state in the world, has reached a significant threshold in its ability to unilaterally deal with and sustain its response to the situation. In order to deal with the three different dimensions of the refugee crisis, a multilayered approach needs to be established by a global coalition of countries.

**Kılıç Buğra Kanat** is the Research Director at the SETA Foundation USA, Washington DC. He is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Penn State University, Erie, and received his PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University. Kanat’s writings have appeared in in numerous prestigious journals and he is the author of “A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama’s Syria Policy”.

**Omer Karasapan**
Syria’s displaced women and girls
There are now some 60 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world. The last time the number exceeded 50 million was during World War II. Roughly half of this population –
divided into 19 million refugees and 41 million internally displaced people (IDPs) – are female. Children under 17 constitute over 50% of the displaced. This the highest number ever recorded and the numbers continue to rise. Women, already facing multiple inequalities, confront significantly greater risks in displacement – especially discrimination at various levels, grinding harassment, and often sexual and gender based violence. Host and transit countries need to be aware of these needs and try and provide for the safety and special services required, especially for the most vulnerable, i.e. unaccompanied women and children, female headed families, and pregnant, disabled, and older women. This is a growing crisis which needs urgent investment and focus. This short note looks in particular at issues around female-headed families, child brides, gender and education for refugees and the challenges women and girls face as they travel to and through Europe.

**Omer Karasapan** is the Knowledge Coordinator at the World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa region. His career at the World Bank spans more than 25 years including positions as Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, and later as a Knowledge Coordinator in a number of World Bank units, focusing on developing and contributing to numerous knowledge products. He has blogged at the World Bank since 2012 and at Brookings’ Future Development blog since 2015.

**AKM Ahsan Ullah**

Refugee mobility: causes and perspective in the Middle East

The lack of prospect for stability in the Middle East that has been plaguing the region has undoubtedly created unprecedented humanitarian crises resulting in millions of people being uprooted from their own homeland. Refugee breakouts took place in the Middle East in different point of times in history. Colonial occupations, pervasive poverty, political violence and repression as well as ethnic violence have been the primary factors responsible for this instability that led to fragile political transition in the region. This paper tries to shed light on the most pressing issue that the world currently is witnessing e.g. refugee and Syrian conflict. Half of the 23 million population of Syria have been forced from their homes, with four million becoming refugees in other countries. The 4th year of Syrian conflict, a protracted crisis, has shaped a new pattern of refugee flows.

**AKM Ahsan Ullah** is Associate Professor of Geography, Environment and Development Studies and Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), the University of Brunei Darussalam. Dr. Ullah has extensively contributed to refereed journals. He contributed chapters to numerous books, and published 17 books on migration, refugee and development studies. In his last 20 years of career, Dr. Ullah taught and researched in leading of Universities in Africa, North America, Europe and Asia.
Luigi Achilli

Back to Syria?
Conflicting patterns of mobility among Syrian refugees in Jordan

I. Introduction

“Syria has become the great tragedy of this century”, says former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), António Guterres: “a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history.”¹ Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, it is estimated that around 12 million people have fled their homes. A bleak scenario seems to be playing out against the backdrop of a Europe crumbling under the sheer weight of mounting waves of refugees. Dramatic photos of refugees en route circulate in the media and fuel fears in Europe, aptly manipulated by political parties, that EU member states will be soon overrun by this blur of humanity. All this has produced political heat across Europe. Many political leaders and a compliant media cry out for the need to stop the Syrian exodus. However, all these accounts seem to overlook the fact that fewer than 700,000 Syrians declared asylum in the European Union from the beginning of the crisis to October 2015.² On the other hand, according to the UNHCR, over 7.5 million are internally displaced (IDPs) and almost 4.5 million have fled seeking refuge in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan.³ Nonetheless, the full glare of the media spotlight seems to remain focused on the European case. The supposedly epic proportion of the Syrian flow to Europe distracts from the growing number of those refugees who have little if no intention of going to Europe.

Although the number of refugees coming to Europe has risen dramatically over the last year, the depiction of Syrian refugees as a mass of people waiting to seize the best opportunity to leave their country and go to Europe is problematic. Not only must we seriously entertain the possibility that many Syrian refugees in Europe may perceive their stay only as a temporary strategy pending their return to Syria. A considerable number of refugees living in Syria’s immediate neighbours – Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan – actually returned to their war-ravaged country rather than facing an unknown future in any of the EU member states. In Jordan, for example, the number of new arrivals now seems to be lower than those voluntarily returning to Syria. Most importantly, the majority of refugees in the country are today considering a prompt return to their homeland as an option if the protraction of the Syrian crisis further limits their income earning and employment opportunities.⁴ By focusing on Syrian refugees living in Jordan,⁵ this article will look at the consequences of the protracted displacement of refugees in Jordan. What will be argued here is that the refugees’ decision to travel cannot be reduced to a mere self-interest or cost–benefit analysis. Seeking refuge has to be understood as the outcome of a complex process of decision making motivated by a range of factors, not least the refugees’ affective relationship with their country.

¹ UNHCR, *Two million Syrians are refugees*, 2015.
⁵ This article is based on the author’s field research in Jordan. Research for this paper was carried out from May 2012 and December 2014, and complemented by return trips in October and November 2015. The collection of data has mainly relied on individual/key informants’ interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews of refugees, aid personnel, scholars and other relevant stakeholders were based on a schedule of questions covering key thematic areas of interest e.g. migration flows, push and pull factors, protection issues, international land national laws etc.
II. Syrian Refugees in Jordan

At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the large influx of refugees to Jordan was generally accompanied by demonstrations of solidarity, hospitality and tolerance from the host society towards the newcomers. Family ties as well as linguistic and cultural relations between Syrian refugees and the members of Jordanian host communities have facilitated the reception of Syrians in the Kingdom of Jordan. However, the protracted nature of the crisis is now affecting the relationship between the two communities. As of November 2015, over 633,000 Syrians have registered with the UNHCR in Jordan. The massive numbers of refugees over almost five years has had a serious impact on the already meagre Jordanian national resources. All this has meant that Jordanians, who at first welcomed refugees, have become hostile: those who were originally ḏuyūf (guests) are now ḥāji'īn (refugees). The belief that refugees are thriving on scarce local resources is common amongst increasingly resentful host communities. There is also the widespread belief among less advantaged Jordanians that Syrian refugees thrive thanks to a lavishly generous international community that is fulfilling the needs of the latter while leaving the former stranded and without resources.

According to the Jordanian Economic and Social Council, the Syrian crisis has cost the country USD 1.2 billion, and the financial burden is expected to rise to USD 4.2 billion by 2016. Jordan’s international trade has been gravely affected by the loss of one of the principal points of access to regional trade through Syria. A recent study reveals that the Syrian crisis has had a particularly negative impact on Jordanian structural vulnerabilities. The available services within the hosting communities have grown thinner, raising serious concerns over the availability of already limited resources: the chronic lack of safe drinkable water, for instance. The influx of refugees has also increased the demand on schools, sanitation, housing, food and energy to an intolerable extent. In particular, the arrival of Syrian refugees seems to have had a negative impact on Jordan’s housing sector. Rent prices have tripled or even quadrupled in border zones and other areas of high refugee density. As the majority of Syrians do not live in camps, this rise can be explained by the sharp increase in demand for housing and by the refugees’ capacity to afford higher prices by sharing housing with others to bring down costs.

The protracted nature of the crisis is now aggravating the relationship between the two communities. It should be noted, however, that Syrian refugees are blamed for a variety of issues that have always plagued Jordan’s dysfunctional infrastructure and stagnant economic market. The job market constitutes another point of friction. Work permits are not being issued to Syrians, principally due to prohibitive costs and administrative obstacles. Non-Jordanians with legal residency and a valid passport can obtain a work permit only if the prospective employer pays a fee and shows that the job requires experience or skills not to be found among the Jordanian population. Nonetheless, a recent UNHCR survey reports that only 1% of visited refugee households had a member with a work permit in Jordan. Despite the official restrictions on

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6 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2015.
7 Al-Kilani, A duty and a burden on Jordan, 2015.
8 REACH, Evaluating the Effect of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Stability and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities, 2015. It should be noticed that while rents continue to increase for both Jordanians and Syrians, the former tend to pay higher sums than Jordanian households. According to CARE International, “Shelter is reported as the single most pressing need. The average rental expenditure is JOD 166. Syrian households on average pay JOD 193 for rent, indicating a 28% increase from the baseline data for urban areas outside of Amman. Jordanians report lower monthly rental expenditure (JOD 107).” CARE, Lives Unseen, 2015, 8.
9 UNHCR, Living in the Shadow, 2015, 28.
working, many refugees work informally. Jordanians often perceive Syrians as competitors for jobs, yet a recent report published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) shows not only that unemployment rates are not correlated with the areas with large influxes of Syrian refugees, but also that Syrian refugees are mainly working in jobs in the informal sector that are commonly performed by non-Jordanian migrant workers, such as Egyptians – e.g. in agriculture, construction, food service and retail.10

III. A Protracted Emergency

As a result of this prolonged crisis, the situation has radically worsened for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The Government of Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which relates to the status of refugees, or its 1967 Protocol. The country deals with refugees within certain margins of discretion. The large majority of refugees interviewed lamented the systematic restriction of their movement following the recent approval of a number of regulations by the host country. Ever since the second half of 2014, the Jordanian authorities have progressively restrained Syrian refugees’ freedom of movement in urban areas. Refugees used to be able to register with the UNHCR no matter the status of their documentation. Since 14 July 2014, the government has instructed the UNHCR to stop issuing Asylum Seeker Certificates (ASCs) to Syrian refugees that have left the camps without proper “bail out” documentation. The ASC is indispensable for obtaining the Ministry of Interior (MoI) Service Card, which grants refugees access to public healthcare and education services in host communities. The new policy has consequently affected many Syrian households. Furthermore, the cards need to be renewed on a yearly basis. The cost of renewing a MOI card is JOD 50 for each member, which makes it extremely expensive for large households. Refugees without a valid MoI card have to pay a fine; according to interviewees, the authorities deport those refugees who have not paid the fine within three months to either Syria or the refugee camps.

The majority of my interviewees also lamented the great challenges that they have to face to access basic services. For example, public hospitals – subsidised by the UN – were open to Syrian refugees for over three years after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. However, free healthcare provided to Syrians overburdened the country’s capacity to maintain the service. Since July 2014, primary health care services are available to all registered Syrians at subsidised prices only upon the presentation of a health certificate. The certificate, however, is costly and covers only a limited range of health issues. As Mohammed – a refugee in his mid-thirties – explained, “if my daughter would need to go through surgical operation as happened three years ago [she has a heart issue], we would not be able to do anything for her as now we have to pay for this type of intervention. This is why I want to go to Europe; I simply cannot afford to stay in Jordan any longer”. Furthermore, restrictions on freedom of movement have further infringed upon these services. In Jordan, valid residence permits are indispensable for obtaining access to public healthcare services in host communities. A recent NRC study in Jordan reports how the lack of proper health coverage is one of the greatest challenges faced by refugees with limited legal status.11

Overall, vulnerability is increasing, and refugees have often to resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive. Refugee families have coped with the status quo by liquidating the few assets that they were able to bring along with them, relying on hu-

11 NRC, In search of a home, 2015.
manitarian assistance and working, mostly illegally. However, these work and humani-
tarian “opportunities” decreased steadily in 2014 and almost disappeared towards the end of 2014. An ILO study reports, for ex-
ample, that close to half of the Syrian refugees’ families have one working child.12 A previous UNWOMEN assessment reveals that 47% of paid employment in refugee households came from children.13 Syrian families have also been readyer to turn to early marriage, common in some parts of the Syrian community prior the war in order to ensure a better economic position and a safer space for their daughters.14 Furthermore, the requirement to pledge not to work and the limitations on obtaining working per-
mits render Syrians dependent on humanitarian assistance or debt. Syrians have heavily relied on humanitarian aid from the UNHCR and other NGOs. However, funding shortfalls have negatively affected humanitarian aid inflow for the past two years. In Jordan, as of September 2015, over half of urban refugees who had been receiving some food aid from the World Food Pro-
gramme (WFP) lost their benefits.15 The remaining half received only JOD 10 (USD 14) instead of the planned JOD 20 (USD 28) due to the ongoing funding crisis. Interviewed refugees in Jordan identified the im-
minent suspension of WFP assistance in urban areas as the deadline for their stay in the country.

IV. The Choice of Leaving

Against the backdrop of their deteriorating situation in Jordan, large numbers of Syrian refugees have expressed a desire to leave this host country. Many of them describe mi-
gration as a way of escaping their hardships in Jordan. However, even when the leaving is not in doubt, the destination is. While many wish to embark on journey to Europe, others consider the return to Syria their only option.

Socio-economic disparities amongst Syrian refugees certainly played a role in the deci-
sion to leave.16 This may sound surprising. In popular and journalistic accounts all over the world, Syrian refugees are generally repre-
sented as a sea of humanity, an undistin-
guishable mass of individuals related to each other by a common condition of extreme destitution and poverty. Yet, while a shared sense of misery is an important aspect of the ways in which refugees imagine their condi-
tion in Jordan, this should not conceal the im-
portant forms of differentiation that are also part of the Syrian community. A closer scrutiny, indeed, reveals the existence of a geographical and socio-economic fragmen-
tation within the composition of the refugee population. If this fragmentation has largely influ-
enced Syrians’ patterns of accommodation in Jordan,17 it is partly affecting the preferred destination today of refugees that want to leave the country.

12 ILO, Rapid Assessment on Child Labor in the Urban Informal Sector in Three Governorates of Jordan, 2015. Also, note that many studies have shown how child labour amongst Syrian refugees is a widespread phenomenon, which is not perceived by local communities as being inherently negative. See, for example, Un Ponte Per, Comprehensive Assessment on Syrian Refugees Residing in the Community in Northern Jordan, 2012.
14 Note that Syrian refugees have also developed some positive coping strategies. One example is the relevance of community support as one of the main sources of income for many households. Care, Syrian Refugees in urban Jordan report, 2012.
15 The World Food Programme (WFP) has recently reinstated food assistance until January 2016 to those refugees who have been without since September 2015. See Jordan Times, WFP to reinstate food aid to 229,000 Syrian, 2015.
16 For a comparative study of current displacement trends to the EU amongst Syrian refugees living in the Middle East, see REACH, Migration trends & patterns of Syrian asylum seekers travelling to the European Union, 2015.
Refugees living in Amman were generally keen to embark on an irregular journey to Europe. These were mostly medium-high skilled workers from Syrian urban areas. They believed they had the sufficient cultural capital for that: a westernised style of life and some fluency in English. Many of their relatives and friends were already living in Europe – generally in Sweden and Germany. Mahmood and his wife represent the category well. They are from a well-off neighbourhood of Damascus, are in their thirties and have two children. Mahmood was an engineer in Syria; his wife, Suhad, owned and worked in a pharmacist near their house. They left Syria in 2013 after a mortar shell hit and destroyed both their house and pharmacy. They headed towards Jordan. Jordanian authorities intercepted Mahmood and his family at the border, and took them to the Za’atari Camp. They spent only three hours there, for registration, and left soon after to Amman, where Suhad’s brother had moved a year earlier. “It is impossible to find a decent job in Jordan”, Mahmood claimed, and continued: “the Jordanian government asked me to provide proper documentation as an engineer but these are not available since in Syria these papers got lost during the war. […] We filed a request for resettlement with the UNHCR when we moved to Jordan – our daughter is very sick – but we never heard back from them. I cannot wait anymore. Next week I will leave for Europe and I will ask for family reunification. My wife would like me to go to Sweden where her brother just moved. But I think I will go to Germany; my friends told me that life there is very good”.

Syrian refugees coming from rural areas generally showed a quite different attitude. Many were farmers and farm-workers from around Daraa with no or very little knowledge of English; the majority of them lived in Za’a’tari Camp or in Irbid and the villages nearby. The refugees’ decision to leave for Europe cannot be understood without an appropriate recognition of the complex demands of earning a living in a precarious economic context. Yet socio-economic status affects the decision to leave in a complex manner. It was not only a lack of means that set Syrians on a journey to Europe; these refugees may have been poorer than their counterparts in Amman, but they had still something left in Syria – their lands, on which they could have survived if they had returned. Furthermore, many refugees interviewed often argued that they did not want to go to Europe because they would never be able to integrate into a culture so different from theirs. As a Syrian man in his late sixties put it: “I felt lost when I first fled Syria to come to Jordan. I don’t want to feel lost twice”. He was living in a small village near the border with Syria. The man argued that there was no future in Jordan. He considered returning to Syria, where life was cheaper and where he owned a house. He excluded categorically the possibility of moving to Europe: he was too old and too different – he claimed – to get used to Europe. Furthermore, he did not want his daughters to live what he referred to as the immoral lifestyle of European countries. Like him, many other refugees faced forms of intense emotional distress generated not by a forced immobility but, on the contrary, by the very capacity to move.

The desire to move raises considerable concerns centred on the notions of community, family and parenting – leaving is rarely, if ever, an easy decision. A closer scrutiny of the refugees’ trajectories sheds light on their ambiguous relationship with the affective and political space of their homeland. While the refugees certainly desired to leave their host countries, they were not simply free-roaming individuals seeking to escape as soon as possible in order to pursue better economic conditions in Europe. The case of Umm Omar is poignant. This woman came to Amman, Jor-

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18 Ibid.
dan, with her youngest son after the militias of Syria’s dictator Bashar al-Assad supposedly killed her three older sons. Umm Omar called them shuhādā’ (martyrs): “they are martyrs of the revolution”, the woman claimed: “they fought against Bashar and died for ḥurrīya (freedom)”. She said this while flipping through the pictures on her mobile: some showing her children carrying machine guns, others portraying them laid out in their coffins just before burial. She told us how she had no doubt about returning to Syria: “I am not leaving [for Europe]. Where do you want me to go?! I am too old to leave. But even if I were younger, I would never do that: I would never leave my country. I am ashamed of all these shābāb (young men) who leave for Europe. They should stay in Syria and fight for freedom, as my children did”. Her short comment enclosed a complex set of assumptions where gender, age and political allegiance are intertwined and ultimately affect the choice of destination.

V. Conclusion

The Syrian refugees’ personal accounts and life stories shed light on the variety of ways in which refugees negotiate the demands of mobility at a time of great socio-economic and political uncertainty. Over the past two years, Jordan has adopted harsher polices towards refugees by periodically closing its borders and limiting access to employment opportunities as well as to health and educational facilities. In the meantime, international donors are running out of funds and humanitarian agencies – such as the WFP, for instance – have dramatically decreased their assistance to Syrians, pushing them to find better living conditions elsewhere. Against this backdrop, many refugees perceived departure to be the only solution to their predicament. The choice of the destination was made according to various criteria. Not all of them wanted to go to Europe; many showed a determination to return to Syria – despite the evident risks that a journey to their war-ravaged country would entail. My interviewees concurred that the journey to Europe was expensive and dangerous, and that the majority feared cultural estrangement once there, be their final destination Sweden, Germany or any other European country. They saw these problems in the media, heard about them from those who made it to Europe and extrapolated from those who vanished on the journey. However, while danger, costs and cultural estrangement held some back, they did not prevent many others from leaving or wishing to leave. What ultimately determined the decision whether to return to Syria or embark on a long journey to Europe were a number of interrelated factors generally linked to the socio-economic status, age and social network of the refugee-migrant. However, other factors also emerged into the picture, such as ideology, expectations and political considerations, amongst others. Patterns of refugee mobility challenge the notion that the choice of destination is made on the basis of a mere self-interest or cost–benefit analysis. By contrast, they show how the Syrian refugees’ trajectories depend on complex frameworks of self and subjectivity.

Reference list


All internet sources were accessed and verified on December 9, 2015.
Rabih Shibli

Syrian refugees in Lebanon
A protracted stay on mired grounds

I. In the Eye of Crisis

The breakout of protests and civil war in Syria in March 2011 has forced nearly half of the population to become internally displaced (7.6 million) or to seek refuge outside their country (4.1 million).1 The number of Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR by December 4, 2015 in the bordering countries stands at 2,181,293 million in Turkey, 1,075 million in Lebanon, and 632,762 thousands in Jordan.2 The bearing capacities in neighbouring courtiers have reached a zenith, and refugees are seeking safety further afield. Accordingly, the next largest numbers of refugees are hosted in the EU, with 428,000 asylum seekers by August 2015.3 On 7 June 2013 the United Nations called for the largest financing appeal in its history (USD 5 billion) to deliver humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees affected by a conflict described by Antonio Guterrres, the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as “the most dangerous crisis since the end of the cold war”.4 As the cold war again heats up in the Syrian skies, stirred by the US Air Force’s F-16s and the Russian Sukhois, the financial appeal continues to grow. In 2014 the international community was requested to provide USD 6.5 billion,5 and by 2015 the number had increased to USD 8.4 billion.6

The advent of international and regional coalitions, one led by the United States and another by Russia,7 to fight the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Islamic extremists is being compared to the war on al-Qaeda, which started in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks and is still dragging on. The geography of Syria has become a battlefield for venomous regional rivalries and international opposing poles to settle scores, with no ‘practical’ political ceiling for resolutions looming in the near future despite of the Syria Peace Talks in Vienna.8 The refugee crisis is expected to be prolonged as “millions escape an apocalyptic civil war,”9 where scorched earth and transfer of demographics represent the general tactics.

Lebanon is currently hosting the largest concentration of refugees per capita worldwide. The UNHCR’s figures of registered refugees mark 1.445 million in January 2015,10 and if the United Nations Relief and Works Agency’s (UNRWA) numbers of Palestinian refugees are to be added to the formula, then close to half of Lebanon’s population is comprised of

1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Syrian Arab Republic.
2 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response.
3 European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, ECHO Factsheet - Syria Crisis, 2015.
5 UNHCR, Syria Emergency.
7 The French President Francois Hollande has been trying to build an international coalition to fight ISIS on a response to the Paris attacks that killed 130 people. However, the shooting down of the Russian Sukhoi by Turkish F-16 fighter jets, and the NATO’s chief assertion of his readiness to support Turkey, have hampered the rise of the envisioned alliance.
8 Members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) convened in Vienna on October 30, 2015 to discuss a peace process for Syria in the absence of the Syrian government and the Syrian oppositions. Deep rifts and conflicting interests among participants, yielded a nebulous statement regarding “Syria’s unity, independence, territorial integrity and secular character”.
9 Saloepk, Fleeing Terror, Finding Refuge Millions of Syrians escape an apocalyptic civil war, creating a historic crisis, 2015.
10 UNHCR, 2015 UNHCR country operations profile - Lebanon.
refugees. Local political stakeholders have not reached a consensus regarding the formal establishment of collective camps due to fears of naturalisation anxieties linked to the Palestinian crisis, and to security threats linked to Islamic extremists. Accordingly, refugees are dispersed among 1,700 localities of the country’s 10,450 square kilometres, and they are mostly taking shelter in unfinished structures, informal tented settlements, and underground depots with very limited access to basic services. Around 53 percent (510,000) of the Syrian refugee population are school aged out of which, 200,000 (age groups between 3 and 14) will be accommodated in public schools in 2015 with the support of USD 94 million through UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Bank to the Lebanese Ministry of Education.\footnote{European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, \textit{ECHO Factsheet- Lebanon: Syria Crisis}, 2015.}

Besides the daily challenges facing refugee students and causing increasing dropouts, job opportunities are scarce for Syrian graduates. According to the Lebanese Ministry of Labor, Syrian refugees are only allowed to work in agriculture, hygiene, and construction sectors;\footnote{A World at School, \textit{Reaching all Children with Education in Lebanon}, 2015.} menial jobs that do not require professional skills. A UNHCR report entitled \textit{Stories From Syrian Refugees} states that “the vast majority of refugees are dependent on aid.”\footnote{Challenges are attributed, and not limited to, prejudice and discrimination, security threats, and language barriers in the Lebanese curriculum.} Household heads are losing their traditional role as breadwinner (refugees “feel they cannot meet society’s expectations of them as men”\footnote{The Daily Star, \textit{Ministry limits over 60 jobs to Lebanese}, 2014.}) and are venting out their anxieties among their respective communities and families. Due to shortage in financial means, “refugees face overwhelming economic barriers in paying for primary health services”,\footnote{UNHCR, \textit{Stories from Syrian Refugees}.} although UNHCR covers 75 percent of the health care cost.

Lebanese society has been radically divided in response to the ongoing war in Syria and the influx of refugees. In an attempt to neutralise tensions, Lebanon’s first official stance was announced by former Prime Minister Najeeb Mikati on 11 April 2012 calling for a general policy of “dissociation”.\footnote{El-Masri, Harvey and Garwood, \textit{Shifting Sands}, 2013.} This centrist position was further affirmed by President Michelle Suleiman and the “Baabda Declaration”, which advocated “keeping Lebanon away from regional and international conflicts and sparing it the negative repercussions of regional tensions and crises.”\footnote{Weatherbee, \textit{Impact of the refugee crisis on Lebanon’s health sector}, 2015.} Both positions were rendered ineffective due to the significant participation of Lebanese fighters, mainly Hezbollah, in the Syrian war, and the repetitive terrorist bombings by Islamic extremist groups on Lebanese civilian targets. Mikati and his cabinet resigned in March 2013 and it took Prime Minister Tamam Salam almost a year to announce a new council of ministers in February 2014. Both cabinets maintained an open-borders strategy allowing refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war to enter Lebanon with few restrictions. However, this policy has changed as of January 2015, where strict measures have been enforced on all Syrians entering Lebanon,\footnote{Salem, \textit{Can Lebanon survive the Syrian Crisis?}, 2012.} and the numbers of entries almost froze due to a new ‘de-facto’ closed-borders strategy.

Unlike the national response plans that were prepared by the Jordanian and Turkish authorities, the Lebanese government has not produced a road map that assigns well-
defined roles and responsibilities for tackling the refugee crisis. Accordingly, the UNHCR took a leading role to fill the gap, and the responsibilities of the agency grew exponentially towards sectors far beyond the remit of the organisation. In addition to the role of the ‘liberal funding’ which is being operationalised via UN agencies and International NGOs, Islamic faith-based organisations constitute the backbone of relief efforts. On the local level, mayors of the host communities are dealing with the crisis with improvisation. While certain localities host more refugees than their own local residents, others ban them from staying within their geographic jurisdictions. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2015-2016 was developed mainly in response to donors’ stern criticism regarding the UNHCR’s inflated role and the Lebanese Government’s meager engagement in crisis management. The plan proposes USD 2.14 billion to “1) provide direct humanitarian assistance to 2.2 million highly vulnerable individuals with acute needs, primarily de-facto Syrian refugees and 2) invest in services, economies and institutions reaching up to 2.9 million people in the poorest locations.”21 However, central authorities have not been able to institutionalise the plan due to weak governance, which is reflected in incompetence at handling pressing challenges facing the public, including providing basic services such as trash removal. A lack of governmental transparency has fuelled a growing feeling of resentment among citizens, represented most clearly by the “You Stink”22 civil movement whose name was derived in response to piles of garbage accumulating in the streets of Beirut, and to widespread corruption in state institutions. Political analysts have been divided in regards to the ‘authenticity’ of the street demonstrations that were able to rally thousands of supporters on 29 August 2015 under anti-corruption banners. While some fully support the genuine backgrounds of the organisers, others claim that “Lebanese issues are larger than Lebanon, and that the radical solutions lie in the Saudi-Iranian relationships”.23

II. A State of Contained Paralysis

The roots of the government’s current paralysis can in part be traced back to the Taif Agreement, a covenant which has shaped Lebanon’s political system since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990. The agreement was reached in Saudi Arabia in 1989, under the supervision of Syria, and had the blessing of the United States. It introduced key modifications to the 1943 National Pact, which materialised by incorporating the “Troika”25 model into the governance system. The unwritten clauses of the agreement allowed for Syrian troops to maintain an active presence all over the Lebanese geography, except for the South Governorate. Following the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon’s Security Belt26 in May 2000, voices for a Syrian Army pullout from Lebanon culminated in the UN Security Council resolution 1559, which was adopted on 2 September 2004 and called “upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon” and “for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.”27 Five months later, on 14 February 2005, Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated and Lebanon was split into two radical coalitions: one called ‘March 8th” with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah as its backbone, and the other one ‘March 21 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Lebanon Crisis Response plan 2015-2016, 2014.
22 Cf. the movement’s homepage: http://www.youstink.org/?page_id=33.
25 The Troika is a power sharing model between the Maronite-Christian President, Sunni-Muslim Prime Minister, and the Shia-Muslim Speaker of the Parliament.
26 The belt was established in 1985 by the Israeli Army who supported a Lebanese proxy militia namely, South Lebanon Army (SLA) to govern the occupied region.
Syrian refugees in Lebanon

14th with the Saudi-backed Future Party as its backbone. In the following three years, Lebanon witnessed intense political congestion, which erupted on 7 May 2008 in armed conflicts between supporters of the two groups in the urban streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Two weeks later the opposing parties met in Qatar, and on 21 May 2008 the Doha Agreement set the roadmap for (a) naming Michael Suleiman as President, (b) forming a national unity government headed by the leader of Future Party Sa’ad Al-Hariri, and (c) holding parliamentary elections. The Doha Agreement was a precursor to the deteriorating effects of the Taif, and an implicit admission by Lebanon’s guardians, namely Syria and Saudi Arabia, of changes in the rules of the game. The Doha proceedings pacified the simmering political arena for a short period. However, distrust between the rival groups resurfaced when the March 8th bloc pulled out from the cabinet and paved the way for Sa’ad Al-Hariri’s government to collapse in early 2011.

During the period of Prime Minister Najeeb Mikati’s government (June 2011 – May 2013), that was heavily influenced by Hezbollah, and which coincided with the uprising in Syria, Lebanon witnessed a phase of political instability and security unrest. In addition to frequent cross-border skirmishes and tit-for-tat kidnappings in the Beqaa region, Mikati’s term was tainted with a series of suicide bombings, the battle of Sidon between the Lebanese Army and Ahmad Al-Aseer Salafist movement, and sectarian attacks in Tripoli between Alawites of Jabal Mohsen and Sunnis of Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhoods. To avoid the bloody abyss, Mikati announced the “resignation of the cabinet in the hope it will open the way for a solution to the major political blocs to take responsibility and come together to bring Lebanon out of the unknown.” On 25 May 2013, two months following Mikati’s resignation, Secretary-General of Hezbollah Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah announced the large-scale involvement of his fighters in the Syrian War, and appealed for “those who want to support the opposition groups and those who want to support the regime to go fight their battles in Syria and to spare Lebanon.” Sayyed Nasrallah’s political stance reflected a deal reached between the March 8th and March 14th blocs to form a national unity government with Tammam Salam as a Prime Minister. Representatives of the core constituents of the two blocs, namely Hezbollah and the Future Party, have been meeting on a biweekly basis since December 2014 under the patronage of the Speaker of the House Nabih Berri, who issued a statement in the tenth session of dialogue urging both parties to “adhere to the positions of Iran and Saudi Arabia, who despite their differences, are engaged in calm rhetoric.” Accordingly, internal security incidents were significantly reduced. However, political rifts widened among the two blocs due to radical differences on almost every issue facing the country and the region.

Although the bloody spillover of the Syrian war into Lebanon has been subsequently contained, the functioning of state institutions has been affected. Weaknesses in the structural governance body are epitomised by the vacancy in the presidency since May 2014, the postponing of parliamentary elections twice since May 2013, and “an unproductive

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29 Fadel, After government collapse, Hezbollah works to get more power in Lebanon, 2011.
30 The first attack occurred on October 19, 2012 which was followed by 5 attacks in the year of 2013, and 11 attacks in the year of 2014. The death toll of these terrorist attacks is 95 and the number of injured above 1000.
32 Siddiq, Troops deployed to Tripoli after Syrian groups clash: 15 killed, 2012.
33 Al Akhbar, Lebanon’s president accepts Mikati’s resignation, 2013.
34 Voltaire Network, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s speech on Syria, 2013.
36 Dakroub, Derbas: Cabinet has reached a dead end, 2015.
A National Dialogue Committee held among key constituents of the confessional political system has been meeting on an ad-hoc basis to mitigate tensions that lead to dysfunctional state institutions. From discussing the “setup of an international tribunal to trial the killers of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri,” to tackling “Hezbollah’s arms and the proliferation of weapons in the country as a whole,” to “reaching a deal on the election of a president,” the National Dialogue signals another transition from the Taif accord. Its conceptual framework is a state of contained paralysis: avoiding the collapse and awaiting the uncertainty.

III. An Armed Belt

Between al-Qasr (a Lebanese border village located on the outskirts of Hermel district) and al-Qusayr (a Syrian border town located on the outskirts of Homs), 23 villages and 12 farms of Lebanese-origin citizens are located on the Syrian side of the border line, with a majority of Shiites who are offshoots of clans in the Hermel governorate. In October 2012 Hezbollah announced its engagement in the Syrian turmoil to protect the Lebanese border and the citizens living in al-Qusayr villages, a pretext which soon changed to the ‘Sacred Defense’ when Hezbollah deployed armed groups to defend the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in Damascus.

The Labbayki Ya Zanab (We are at your Service Oh Zaynab) war chant has been reverberating among Hezbollah’s fighters, whose overarching mission has been defined by Sayyed Nasrallah as protecting the “back of resistance.” Reports indicate Hezbollah’s participation in most of the Syrian Army’s battlefields. In May 2015 Hezbollah launched the Qalamoun operation to liberate the rugged Syrian range, which extends along Anti-Lebanon mountains, from Islamic extremists. In July 2015 Hezbollah besieged the town of Zabadani, the last stronghold for Syrian rebels in Qalamoun, and is now close to announcing its downfall and securing the strategic Damascus-Homs highway.

This highway stretches from Syria’s southern to northern borders. It connects the cities of Daraa’, Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, and overlaps with the railway route of the Middle Eastern mandates of 1939. Departing from Aleppo towards the Persian Gulf, the mandates’ railway passed through the cities of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. The same route presented growing strategic importance after the subsequent toppling of Ba’ath regime in Iraq and the rise of the “Axis of Deterrence and Resistance” of Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut. Following the downfall of Mosul in June 2014, ISIS was able to breach the geographic continuity of the Axis due to its control over wide swathes of land between Baghdad and Aleppo. The Syrian army and its supporters have not been able to reclaim the territory conquered by ISIS and accordingly failed to secure geographic connectivity with the ‘Axis’. Having realised the gravity of events, the Syrian regime has resorted to ensuring supremacy over the geography dubbed as the “useful Syria”. The boundaries of this geography include a part of Syria that extends from the Daraa’-Aleppo axis towards the Mediterranean Sea, a belt...
that includes most of the country’s minorities. Sectarian militias and vigilante groups have been replacing the Syrian army’s absence from areas that are predominantly inhabited by ‘like-minded’ guilds. The might of each group is determined by the number of their ‘loyalists’ who are eligible to carry arms and fight, and to each minority’s connections to arms’ dealers. Although the different militias do not share common agendas, they all meet under the slogan of existential threat and the imperative to rebuff the takfiris\(^{48}\) surge. Differences are mainly attributed to the alliances of every group in relation to the regime and the foreign players. This explains the behaviour of the Kurds (People’s Protection Units/YPG, and the Kurdistan Workers Party/PKK), the National Defence Forces (NDF), and the Druze: The YPG and PKK enjoy full authority and raise their flags in the three selfruled Kurdish cantons that stretch along the Turkish borders – Cizire, Ifrin, and Kobane.\(^{49}\) They coordinate with the Syrian army when interests intersect,\(^{50}\) and fight ISIS backed with US airstrikes.\(^{51}\) Due to the Kurds’ intrinsic separatist aspirations, Turkey has been putting their militias in the crosshairs.\(^{52}\) The backbone of the NDF comprises Alawites\(^ {54}\) in the coastal areas and Homs governorate, and Christians in Wadi el-nasara (valley of Christians).\(^ {55}\) In addition to the NDF, there is a wide array of replicas, such as the Baath Battalions, The Jerusalem Brigade, The Syrian Resistance, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. The Druze are the fourth largest minority group in Syria after the Alawites, Kurds, and Christians, and they are mainly concentrated in Suwayda province on the Southern borders adjoining the Golan Heights.\(^ {56}\) While a small group of the Suwayda Druze supports the regime and another is allied with the rebels, the “isolationist majority demands neutrality in conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, and does not probably mind autonomy.”\(^ {57}\)

Minorities in Lebanon and along the ‘Syrian Belt’ are closing ranks where ISIS and the Nusra Front are being portrayed as menace to their existence. War chants are reverberating among belligerents, who are linking their deeds to nationalism, eschatology, messianism, and esoteric beliefs. The minorities’ coalition is augmenting under the banner of the ‘existential war’, which has almost diluted the fragile borderline between Lebanon and Syria and is yielding a new political geography, which looms as a confederal Minorities Belt.

**IV. Enhancing the de facto**

The major constituents of the Sykes-Picot agreement that drew the political geography for the Middle East in 1916 have been rendered as moribund. However, the alternative model(s) in the region, such as the Caliphate (Islamic State) or the Taqiyya\(^ {58}\) coalition, do not present better prospects. The swapping of land and demographics through the applica-

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\(^{48}\) _takfir_ is the accusation of apostasy, a word derived from _kafir_ (a disbeliever). _Takfiris_ (al-takfiriyeen as pronounced in Arabic) are referred to as the Islamic extremist groups who commit atrocities to instill fear in the hearts and minds of ‘apostates’.


\(^{50}\) Bulos, *Kurdish fighters to flush Isil from Key town in Syria*, 2015.

\(^{51}\) Lund, *Who are the Pro-Assad Militias?,* 2015.

\(^{52}\) Global Security, *Syria- National Defence Forces (NDF).*

\(^{53}\) Ibid.


\(^{58}\) _Taqiyya_ is the dissimulation or concealment of practices of religious minorities.
tion of the scorched earth strategy and forced displacement is integral to the ongoing upheaval. This process has yielded the reconfiguration of the Iraq-Syria borders and the elasticity of the Syria-Lebanon frontier. The unfolding events indicate a protracted struggle in which outcomes are vague and amorphous. In the absence of sophisticated international diplomacy, humanitarian funding has served as a band-aid for the bleeding nations, and the military coalitions have been heaping coal on the fire. An in-depth understanding of the root causes of the predicaments in the Middle East is an imperative prerequisite in order to dry up the roots of extremism and formulate new political geographies that can thrive under the tenets of a contextualised version of liberal democracy. Geneva and Vienna ‘peace talks’ have indicated the ‘significant differences’ that exist among the international and regional powers regarding the fate of Syria, and a growing appetite for more engagement in the worsening conflict. An upsurge in armament might produce a momentary upturn on specific fronts, yet it will be most conducive to a maelstrom on others. Accordingly, the near future will not bring an end to the death toll; neither will the refugees be able to return safely to their respective homelands.

The latest Lebanon Crisis Response Plan that was prepared by UN agencies in coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs implies that the ‘de-facto’ refugees’ stay in Lebanon is a protracted one, and places emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable host communities through a ‘Stabilization Roadmap’. However, the complex local power structure and the existing grassroots dynamics are poorly laid out in the report, which suggests a flow of funding through central authorities. This hypothesis has proven to be inefficient for the past four and a half years, and has yielded a general feeling of dissatisfaction among refugees and host communities. The enhancement of conditions for both groups can only be achieved by means of ‘Reconfiguring Relief Mechanisms’ which are based on locating and empowering local decentralised authorities.

The current administrative structure of Lebanon’s decentralized body is based on (a) 8 regional governments (Mohafazat), (b) 26 district jurisdictions (Aqdiya), and (c) 985 municipalities (Baladiyat) / 42 unions of municipalities. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MIOM) oversees the three levels of authority among which the Mohafazat represent the most suitable venue to lead the enhanced relief operations based on the following reasons:

1 International relief agencies already operate in a decentralized mode (Bekaa, Tripoli, Akkar, the South, Beirut and Mount Lebanon) which is closest in geographic distribution to that of the Mohafazat. This system enables agencies to target municipalities within their areas of operations, and to promptly coordinate with their respective central offices.

2 Muhafiz (Governor) is a grade-one civil servant appointed by the cabinet to implement “policies established by the central government and the coordina-

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59 Evans and Wyke, *Major powers still have ‘significant differences’ in opinion over future of Assad after eight hours of talks to end Syria civil war in Vienna*, 2015.
61 Lebanon is not a State part to the 1951 Convention concerning the status of refugees and has not signed the 1967 Protocol. Local Lebanese authorities use “persons displaced from Syria” or “persons registered as refugees by UNHCR” when referring to Syrian refugees. De-facto term was reached as a compromise of terminologies between GoL and the UN.
63 The 8 regional governments are: Nabatiyeh, South, the Beqaa, Baalbek-Hermel, Akkar, the North, Mount Lebanon, and Beirut.
tion among central government offices and officials within the Muḥafāzā.\textsuperscript{64} This profile highlights the significant role of the Muḥafīz/Muḥafāzat as junctions between national policies and local needs.

Article 47 of decree 116 of 1959 states that a council of Muḥafāzā should be an advisory body “presided by the Muḥafīz and composed of all qaimacams in the Muḥafāzā, the official in charge of finance in the Muḥafāzā, and two representatives from each qāda appointed by a decree from the Council of Ministers.”\textsuperscript{65}

No changes will occur in the structural organization that defines relations between the four levels of authority – namely the central government, regional governments, district jurisdictions, and municipalities/unions of municipalities. The suggested intervention will target the councils of Muḥafāzat, which will need to be simultaneously revitalized in the eight regional governorates to ensure balanced operations. Council of Muḥafāzat will chair coordination meetings with donors and relief agencies, and will allocate defined tasks to supportive units to implement relief projects in partnership with the municipalities that host refugees. Due to their extensive knowledge in the field of relief and crisis management, UN agencies will have a significant role in the establishment of the units and in building personnel capacities. The enabling of a decentralized mechanism is imperative in order to assimilate seismic repercussions on Lebanon’s fragile socio-political and economic landscape, and to ensure a humane temporary stay for refugees on mired grounds.

Reference list


\textsuperscript{64} Harb and Atallah, Decentralization and Infrastructure Service Delivery in Lebanon, 2003, 7.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.


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All internet sources were accessed and verified on December 9, 2015.
The current numbers are retrieved from the UNHCR Syrian Refugee Regional Response http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.

For example: The Jordan Times, Refugee crisis poses challenge to stability, national resilience, 2015;
Homoud, In Jordan, we understand a refugee crisis, 2015.


According to UNRWA: http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan.

UNHCR, Jordan Overview, June 2014.

I. Background

Five years ago, Syria was a relatively stable middle-income country in a turbulent region. Since 2011, the country has been torn apart by civil war; half of the almost 23 million population is internally displaced and more than four million Syrians are registered as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighbouring countries. Of these about 630,000 are registered in Jordan, although the Jordanian government frequently claims that 1.4 million Syrians are in the kingdom and constitute 21 percent of their total population. The latter numbers are contested; some Syrians were work-migrants in Jordan already before the conflict and have later brought families to safety in Jordan and some refugees have not registered with the UNHCR, particularly among more well off refugees and among refugees fearing their name will be revealed to Syrian authorities if they register. Yet Jordan has some vested interest in exaggerating the numbers and thereby hoping to release more international funds for the emergency. Some evidence of exaggerated numbers was found when Fafo did a survey of Iraqi refugees in Jordan in 2007, yet Jordan has shown remarkable hospitality towards the refugees as well as extraordinary resilience during the largest refugee crisis in modern history.

Jordan’s population of 6.5 million includes two million Palestinian refugees and 30,000 registered Iraqi refugees. The Palestinian refugees are rather integrated and the Jordanian economy would probably suffer should they leave abruptly. Nevertheless, water and resource deficiencies challenge the development of a robust economy. The combination of increasing state debt, an unbalanced state budget, high rates of subsidies and a swelling, inefficient and over-employed public sector already characterised the Jordanian economy before the current refugee challenge.

From 2010 to 2012, Jordan saw its version of the “Arab Spring”, with frequent street protests demanding political and economic reform. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, where protesters united around one common goal – to oust a despotic leader – the position of the Jordanian king remained undisputed. Protesters called for reform rather than revolution. Moreover, the protest groups were fragmented and held disparate views and expectations for reforms, making it difficult to develop a common political agenda. These divergent currents followed Jordan’s main political fault lines, mainly between Jordanians of Palestinian origin and the more tribally organised East Bank populations. Neo-liberal economic reforms had undermined the traditional social contract in which the tribes would exchange their loyalty to the Hashemite king in return for state services and employment opportunities. These reforms were threatening historic privileges and had particularly limited local leaders’ ability to provide jobs for tribal youth. The Jordanians of Palestinian origin, on the other hand, seek political, electoral and constitutional reforms that can increase their status, influence and parliamentary par-
ticipation. While all Palestinian refugees were granted Jordanian citizenship after the annexation of the West Bank in 1950, a system of green and yellow ID cards was introduced for “Palestinians” in 1980. When Jordan disengaged from the West Bank in 1988, green-card holders living in the West Bank lost their citizenship and many yellow-card holders living in Jordan were somewhat arbitrarily stripped of their national ID numbers. Such procedures added to an existing sense of second-class citizenship among many Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and led to their focus on the distribution of power to gain more influence over politics.6

Most Jordanians know that reforms are urgent for a rentier economy based on few natural resources and thus considerable budgetary restrictions, but nonetheless the government continues to offer generous subsidies on fuel, energy and other basic commodities. An attempt to remove some subsidies at the end of 2010 had to be revoked after the protests began in 2011. In addition, Jordan is under pressure from several external factors. The Syrian crisis had a particularly strong and immediate political impact. No one in Jordan wanted to risk the instability spreading to Jordan. It curbed the Jordanian public’s desire for change and made them crave stability ahead of democracy.

Furthermore, pressure from Saudi Arabia, one of Jordan’s most important benefactors, restricts any Jordanian democratic development, fearing democracy in Jordan (or elsewhere in the region) will have “negative” spill-over effects in Saudi Arabia. This is in contrast to the US and the EU, likewise important donors, who instead pressure the regime to respect democratic freedoms and human rights. Some observers claim that Jordan thus could end up as an ideological battleground for foreign powers donating to its hard-pressed economy, hoping to influence its politics in one direction or the other. However, all external actors officially express the importance that Jordan should remain a stable island in an unpredictable Middle East.

II. Impact

This fragile country has opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of Syrians seeking refuge. Although Jordan has established refugee camps and is assisted to a considerable extent by international donors, funding has never been enough to cover the refugees’ basic living costs. The majority live outside camps in host communities, mainly in the northern governorates of Mafraq and Irbid and around the capital Amman. Without adequate humanitarian support to sustain them, the refugees put pressure on several sectors in the host communities. Firstly there is increased demand on public services such as healthcare, education, water, electricity and waste disposal. Second, demand for accommodation is driving up rents, affecting both refugees and poorer locals. Refugees are often willing or able to pay higher rent both because they might consider housing arrangements as temporary and because they are willing to share overcrowded facilities to pool resources.

The Fafo Foundation was involved in a study of social, economic and fiscal burdens on the country in 2013 for the World Bank.7 At that time, a review of budget data did not reveal substantive change in service performance, although impacts at local levels were obvious. One explanation for the finding was that the study came too early, particularly before the peak of Syrian displacement in 2013. Another explanation is that service institutions have a built-in surplus capacity before they become overwhelmed and additional institutional capacity is required. The refugee influx has,

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however, impacted the macroeconomic and development trajectories. Regional trading patterns and the transportation sector in particular have been disrupted by the Syrian conflict, whereas the tourist sector, for example, has flourished as travellers shift their destinations away from Syria and Lebanon (and recently Egypt).\textsuperscript{8} The middle class and the wealthy have undoubtedly benefited from the increased production and consumption the refugee influx has generated. Despite negative impacts as described above, the cost-benefit effect of the Syrian refugees in Jordan is contested,\textsuperscript{9} and some economic growth has been seen in 2015.\textsuperscript{10}

The refugee influx has generated a surge in labour supply, particularly because aid allowances alone cannot sustain the refugees. During my last research trip to Jordan in May 2015, refugees reported that their allowances were steadily cut or retracted altogether as fewer were eligible for assistance due to chronic underfunding of the emergency response. A 2015 UNHCR survey found an alarming number of Syrian refugees living under the absolute poverty line.\textsuperscript{11} Although Jordan has put restrictions on the refugees’ right to work, competition for jobs prevails in the informal sector.

A study by Fafo and the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that although unemployment rates in Jordan had increased in 2014, there was little evidence of Syrians taking jobs from Jordanians. On the contrary, refugees mainly find jobs in the growing aid economy\textsuperscript{12} or in sectors primarily employing migrant workers from Egypt and Sudan.\textsuperscript{13} Refugees with access to aid and food vouchers are often seen to be favoured over locals without access to aid because they accept lower wages. Pre-existing vulnerabilities among the local populations prior to the crisis have been accentuated and have disproportionally negatively impacted the poorest segments in society.

The Jordan Response Plan\textsuperscript{14} (addressing the impact of the Syrian refugees) was developed in 2015 by the Jordanian Ministry of Planning in cooperation with various UN agencies to replace the initial emergency plans to mitigate the refugees’ pressure on Jordan’s economy and development. It has a humanitarian chapter for the refugees and a resilience chapter designed to ease the burden on host communities, also aiming to reduce tensions between refugees and local Jordanians over scarce resources. The response plan allocates between 30 and 50 percent of donor funds to development programmes for Jordan and could be a way for Jordan to benefit from the crisis. However, in October 2015 the USD 2.99 billion plan had only received 35 percent of its funding.\textsuperscript{15}

III. Seeking a dignified life

With minimal aid, the refugees need alternative income. For most this means finding a job in the informal sector, usually without an official contract and work permit. The Fafo/ILO study found that 52 percent of male Syrians are participating in the Jordanian labour force, but only ten percent have work permits.\textsuperscript{16} Most of the young men I met in Amman found work a necessity, yet lack of job security instilled fear and anxiety. Many refugees felt that Jordanian labour unions implemented in-

\textsuperscript{8} Ajluni and Kawar, \textit{The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the labour market in Jordan}, 2014.
\textsuperscript{10} Schenker, \textit{Jordan’s Economy Surprises}, 2015.
\textsuperscript{11} UNHCR, \textit{UNHCR warns of bleaker future for refugees as conflict enters its 5th year}, 2015.
\textsuperscript{12} Stave and Hillesund, \textit{Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market}, 2015.
\textsuperscript{14} Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis: http://www.jrpsc.org/.
\textsuperscript{15} The Jordan Times, \textit{Refugee crisis poses challenge to stability, national resilience}, 2015
\textsuperscript{16} Labor force participation among male Syrian refugees varied across regions with highest participation in Amman at 67 percent. Stave and Hillesund, \textit{Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market}, 2015, 45.
Inspections at workplaces to prevent Syrian refugees working without formal permits. Osama,\textsuperscript{17} for instance, found a job when he came to Jordan. After ten days he asked for his salary, but without a work permit his employer refused to give him money. Angered by the exploitation he decided not to work in Jordan again. However, establishing a family compelled him to find a new job. This time the Labour Union found him working without a permit. He was forced to sign a document and warned not to work illegally in Jordan again. If caught a second time, Osama believes he will be deported back to Syria, a risk he cannot afford. The Fako/ILO study reports similar inspections by the Ministry of Labour, but states that no Syrian to date has been deported.\textsuperscript{18} One of my informants, however, claimed that this had happened to her friend.\textsuperscript{19}

Although Jordan has generously opened public schools for Syrian students and established double shifts to enhance capacity, Syrian students find few offers beyond primary education. Aid organisations working in this field expressed a need for more skill-training and vocational programmes, but were faced with restrictions from the Jordanian government. Quoting one expert: “They do not want the Syrians to get trained so they can get work afterwards. They are afraid of competition with domestic youth”.\textsuperscript{20}

Most of the international organisations could only offer opportunities to youths in the camps, where they find some leeway to combine life skills programmes with semi-professional learning. None of the education organisations were able to implement such training in host communities and pointed to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a focal point for livelihood development. However, Jordanian policy dictates the UNDP can implement such programmes for Jordanians only.

Most of the young males I met in Jordan had dropped out of school and started to work before graduation in Syria. A typical pattern was starting as an informal apprentice trained in a skill by a relative or family friend. Mohammad\textsuperscript{21} left school at the age of 12 to work with a family friend, who trained him in a craft. According to his mother, he was only eight when he started this training. Likewise, Osama\textsuperscript{22} dropped out of school and was trained in a skill by his brother. In Syria, informal training could provide jobs with a decent income. In Jordan, the jobs available do not always bring sufficient income, not to mention saving for the young men’s most important investment: marriage.

Despite the high costs associated with marriage, most of the refugees I met that were 20 years or older had married and established families. Syrians traditionally marry younger than Jordanians and perhaps more so in the current unpredictable reality. It can be seen as a way for young men (and women) to stay safe, shifting concerns towards finding work and building a family. Yet they had concerns about the insecurity and risks associated with the illegal nature of their work.

Exploitation sometimes had severe health implications. Ali\textsuperscript{23} had a nervous breakdown when the money he earned from his work was stolen. Now he was in need of extended medical treatment, preferably hospitalisation, which his family could not afford. Instead his wife had to manage self-treatment at home. These young men lacked opportunities to improve their situation in Jordan, something the Jordanian authorities probably do not support anyway, fearing the Syrian refugees will stay

\textsuperscript{17} Interview in Amman May 1, 2015. All names in this report are pseudonyms.
\textsuperscript{18} Stave and Hillesund, \textit{Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market}, 2015, 64.
\textsuperscript{19} Interview in Amman April 30, 2015.
\textsuperscript{20} Interview with education expert, Amman April 2015.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview in Amman January 15, 2015.
\textsuperscript{22} See footnote 16.
\textsuperscript{23} Interview in Amman April 30, 2015.
like the Palestinians. All the young men and women I met had fading hopes that Jordan could or would provide security and the economic foundation they needed to live a decent life in the years to come. Most had already been refugees for several years. As a result, many were looking for opportunities beyond Jordan, mostly to be accepted in the UN resettlement programmes in Europe or North America.

In July 2015, the World Food Programme (WFP), which was delivering food aid to four million Syrian refugees, had to cut rations from USD 28 to USD 14 per person per month for the most vulnerable in Jordan. The rest saw cuts from USD 14 to USD 7 a month.24 The alternative for these refugees has been either to move to a camp where they will keep the USD 28 ration, return to Syria or move to a third country, preferably the US or a European one, as final destination. Among the refugees I met, transfer to a camp was the last option. The camps are not considered safe and provide limited work opportunities. For Ali’s wife, a life in the camp was her biggest fear, creeping ever closer after her husband got ill.25 As mentioned above, I saw frequent discussion of the last option, yet being selected as a UN quota refugee is unrealistic for all of refugees due to the small number accepted by the UN. What remains is to return to Syria to pick up a shattered life, or to move through Turkey to join the thousands marching towards Europe.

In autumn 2015, the UNHCR has registered a steady increase of refugees returning to Syria from Jordan. Before they go, they are counselled on the conditions they will meet in Syria, before they register for a bus departing from the Zaatari camp in northern Jordan. In July 2015, an average of 66 refugees were returning each day, which doubled to 129 daily in August, or about 4,000 in total. September saw a peak of 340 refugees returning in a single day, increasing the average to 300.26 The surge coincided with dramatic WFP cuts in food vouchers to the refugees. Combining this with spent savings and building debts, more refugees seem to be opting for return rather than continued destitution and futureless exile.

Some observers claim that the lack of assistance in Syria’s neighbouring countries is fuelling the refugee flows to Europe. When this thesis was raised, the WFP spokeswoman dismissed it and said that most of the refugees in Jordan were too poor and could not even afford the bus ride to the border.27 Instead, the fast travelling news about the difficulties the Syrian refugees were facing in the region has compelled new refugees to head for Europe. 30 percent of the refugees leaving Jordan said in exit interviews that they planned to travel on to Europe through Turkey, as this route is regarded as safer than through conflict-ravaged Sinai to Libya and the precarious crossing of the Mediterranean. Although many refugees have been returning to Syria to reunite with family and property, some go back to sell property to finance continued travels, inspired by well-organised trafficking organisations announcing their service online.

IV. Conclusion

Into the fifth year of the Syrian crisis, the sad reality is that the international community has not been up to facing the largest refugee challenge in modern history. Funding has not been sufficient to cover the refugees’ most basic needs, not to speak of giving them hope for a better future. The chances for a political solution to the conflict are slim despite recent meetings in Vi-

25 Interview in Amman April 30, 2015.
27 Jones and Shaheen, Destitute Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon may return to warzone, 2015.
enna. Combined with the level of destruction inside Syria, it is not likely that the majority of refugees will return home any time soon – if ever.

While desperation and hopelessness drive hundreds of refugees daily to defy security risks and the limited health and education resources still functioning in Syria in the hope of reuniting with family, many more will seek other coping strategies. Given a sick family member that cannot get treatment in Jordan or a child without access to education, the choice is hard, but not impossible. This failure to provide dignity and hope for the future is what has set many refugees on the move north.

The war in Syria has seen a stalemate between the government forces and different opposition groups for years. From September 2015 onward, the extended Russian military engagement to support the al-Assad regime created a new dynamic in the international discussions held in Vienna to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict. A possible ceasefire might hopefully start a political process to end the conflict. Yet it will take time to see changes on the ground. The situation may even get worse before it gets better, with more refugees trying to leave the country. Currently, both Jordan and Lebanon are monitoring their borders strictly, and the border with Iraq is more or less controlled by Daesh (the so-called Islamic State), the group claiming a Muslim caliphate in parts of Syria and Iraq. That leaves Turkey as the most realistic destination at the moment. While it is already hosting more than two million Syrian refugees, it has also facilitated migration of refugees towards Europe. The European Union has reached an agreement with Turkey that includes a generous aid package meant to stop this migration. Yet aid packages to Jordan fail to fill the funding gaps and it is time to ask what this means for Jordan’s stability. Jordan’s dilemma is that giving the refugees some rights such as those for the Palestinians 65 years ago will have intolerable political consequences. The response plan shows Jordan’s efforts to alleviate discontent among Jordanians. Yet stability remains a main concern. With decreased aid for the refugees and few alternatives for them to survive other than illegal work, desperation might turn refugees into radicals. The same goes for Jordanians that perceive a decreased quality of services and competition for jobs. It is estimated that 2,500 Jordanians have gone to Syria to participate in Jihad, with many joining Daesh or Al-Qaida-affiliated groups.28

It is time to remind the signatories of the UN convention on the rights of refugees that granting asylum for large numbers of refugees may place undue burdens on certain countries, which cannot be achieved without international cooperation. The convention thus underpins the obligations of all countries towards supporting any international or national effort to address the humanitarian, economic, political and social implications of refugees. Countries that have signed this convention have the obligation to take all measures necessary to share the burden. For the largest humanitarian crisis in modern history, this has yet to happen. Failure to respond can have dramatic consequences not only for Syria and the region, but also for Europe, in the unforeseeable future.

Reference list


All internet sources were accessed and verified on December 9, 2015.
I. Introduction

The Syrian crisis has displaced an estimated figure of 9 million people; over three million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and 6.5 million are internally displaced within Syria. The majority of Syrian refugees have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Egypt, not a bordering country, has received far less. Nevertheless, it is important to study their situation in Egypt, a country that has been undergoing political transition since 2011, exacerbating its already fragile economic situation. The information provided in this article is largely based on a statistical study conducted by the author in 2013. The study, entitled “Syrian Refugees in Egypt: the challenges of a politically changing environment”, traces the situation of Syrian refugees since their arrival in 2011 until August 2013. Building on that study, this article highlights the changes from August 2013 to the present, the implications of the continuation of the crisis, and the perspectives for improving the situation.

II. Numbers and arrival patterns

Egypt, in comparison to the countries in the region that share borders with Syria, has received the lowest number of Syrian refugees. According to the statistics of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of registered Syrians at the UNHCR is 132,375. However, this number does not reflect the actual number of Syrians in Egypt, which is probably much higher. The long history of migration between Egypt and Syria produced a well-integrated community of Syrians in Egypt. It was the existence of such community that encouraged Syrians fleeing the conflict that started in 2011 to come to Egypt, where they had families, businesses and/or some personal networks. Syrians fleeing the conflict started to arrive in Egypt at the end of 2011, and the rate of their arrival reached its peak in April 2013. The rate stabilised from April to June 2013 and then fell dramatically as of August 2013 with the imposition of visa restrictions by the Egyptian government. From January 2011 to May 2013, the registration rate of Syrians at the UNHCR was very low. Before June 2013, Syrians did not feel the need to register with the UNHCR. The lack of visa requirements, the ease with which residency permits were issued, the welcoming reception by Egyptians, the stigma associated with refugee status and the fear of its implications were among the factors behind the reluctance of many Syrians to register with the UNHCR. It should be noted that those arriving early were well-to-do economically, many among them easily obtaining resident permits by investing in Egypt and initiating a business. With the continuation and escalation of the conflict in Syria, less wealthy Syrians started to arrive in Egypt as well. According to a recent UNHCR socio-economic assessment, a large number of Syrian refugees in Egypt are classified as ‘severely vulnerable’. With the political changes in Egypt in 2013 and the imposition of visa restrictions on Syrians, their arrival to Egypt was halted and the registration rate of those already residing in the country increased as they felt in need of UNHCR protection.

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1 The information in this article is based on an earlier study conducted by the author on Syrians in Egypt in 2013.
2 UNHCR, Fact sheet, 2015
3 Rollins, The Socio-economic of the Diaspora: UNHCR documents reveal that majority of Syrians in Egypt are suffering, 2015.
III. Living arrangements

Egypt does not have a policy of encampment, except for the refugee camp that was set up along the Libyan border area near Salloum. At the onset of the Libyan revolution in 2011, the UNHCR established a temporary camp on the border of Egypt and Libya to host the influx of Libyans, third country nationals and African refugees fleeing Libya.4 As such, apart from this temporary camp, all refugees in Egypt are self-settled. Syrians, unlike other groups of refugees concentrated in Cairo, are scattered around the whole country. According to UNHCR statistics, 63% of registered Syrian refugees live in Greater Cairo (which includes Cairo, Giza and Qalyubia), 18% in Alexandria, 8% in Damietta and 10% in a number of other governorates.5 Despite the fact that they are dispersed across a number of governorates, they tend to cluster themselves around specific communities in each governorate. For example, in Cairo and Giza they are concentrated in the satellite cities of 6th October and Al Rehab.6

The payment of rent depends on the level of income and the area of residency. In the survey of Syrian refugees in 2013, the highest reported rent was 2,500 L.E. (300 EUR) and the average was between 700-1000 L.E (85-120 EUR). In poorer areas, rent tends to be lower. The most vulnerable Syrians are found in four areas of Greater Cairo: Masaken Othman, which is a poor suburban area developed to accommodate relocated Egyptians from other areas; Obour, which is a suburban poor new town; and Faisal and Omraneya, which are two informal settlements.7

Most Syrians arrived in Egypt in a nuclear family. A number of households are found to be headed by women, a situation that was uncommon in 2011 and is attributed to the increased number of male irregular movement to Europe, leaving their families behind in Egypt in the hope of reuniting after they succeed in reaching a new destination. Youth and younger adults make up the bulk of the Syrian family. According to the 2013 survey, 46% of Syrians in Egypt are under the age of 18.

IV. Employment

Refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt are treated as foreigners. This means they are allowed to work only if they can find an employer to sponsor them and issue a work permit. A work permit is contingent upon the fact that other Egyptians cannot fill the position. As such, only a small, educated elite with specialised skills can in practice obtain formal employment. Such restrictions by the Egyptian government, however, must be seen in relation to the already high unemployment rates in Egypt and the need to protect the domestic labour market. As such, almost all refugees resort to the informal sector for work. However, the majority of Egyptians also work in the informal sector, and the participation of refugees in this sector increases their vulnerability and exposes them to possible abuse and exploitation. Moreover, informal work — with its poor working conditions, maltreatment by employers and co-workers, low salaries and lack of secure employment — pushes refugees to change their work frequently, creating further instability.8

Work is the main source of income for many Syrian families residing in Egypt. 45.5% of the 1,700 individuals surveyed reported work as their only source of income. The rest either depended on a combination of work, financial aid and/or withdrawing from savings to sustain their livelihoods. A very small percentage

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4 Ayoub, Jacobsen and Johnson, Remittances to transit countries: The impact on Sudanese refugee livelihoods in Cairo, 2012.
5 UNHCR, Inter-agency operational update: Egypt, 2015.
7 Ibid.
8 Ayoub, Jacobsen and Johnson, Remittances to transit countries: The impact on Sudanese refugee livelihoods in Cairo, 2012.
depended on money transfers from outside Egypt as their only source of income. Young men between the age of 18 and 39 were found to be the most able to find work, as work opportunities seemed to decline with age. When they first arrived, Syrians were able to carve out a niche in the Egyptian economy because of their reputation as experienced entrepreneurs and workers in the food industry. The well-to-do among them were able to start their own businesses and provide opportunities to other Syrians. Many others worked in Egyptian-owned businesses, as they were perceived as experienced and hard workers. However, tensions emerged when Syrian refugees came in larger numbers and their Egyptian counterparts began to perceive that they were preferred for job opportunities in the food industry. Their situation worsened after 30 June 2013, when they became allegedly associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. As such, their ability to find work has lessened as compared to when they first arrived. An alarming finding in the survey was the significant engagement of children under the age of 18 in work in the informal sector.

V. Access to services

Refugees escaping war, violence or individual persecution usually arrive in their host countries in a weak physical and mental condition due to the horrors experienced in the country of origin as well as during the dangerous and stressful trip they undertake to reach their destination. Research on various groups of refugees in Egypt highlights their suffering from various stress-related ailments, like chronic depression. Syrian refugees with young children highlighted the traumatisation of their children, a problem that is largely left ignored as they indicated that they do not seek any kind of medical help or advice. Developing a livelihood does not only necessitate acquiring the needed skills and knowledge to make a living but also the physical and mental capability to perform the needed job. Access to both health and education is greatly restricted in Egypt despite the fact that refugees are entitled to both.

Refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt are entitled to access public health services and enrol their children in primary public schools despite the reservations placed on the 1951 convention. This is due to a number of reasons. First of all, a number of ministerial decrees have been issued in recent years allowing refugees to access public health care and primary education. Secondly, according to Egyptian law, any student funded by the UNHCR is entitled to enrolment in Egyptian schools. Thirdly, some nationalities (Sudanese, Libyan and Jordanian) have access to public education regardless of residency status because of bilateral agreements with Egypt.9 Last but not least, refugees’ rights to access services (like education and health) must be seen in the broader context of Egypt’s obligations under the universal human rights system.10 Moreover, with regard to Syrians, former president Mohamed Morsi openly announced that they had been granted full access to public services, such as free health care and education.

Actual access, however, is restricted because of the poor infrastructure of public services and overcrowdedness.11 With regard to access to education, there are additional problems, including the different Arabic dialects, loss of previous school certificates to determine grades, and the long process of providing proof of residency and letters from the UNHCR.12

In August 2014, the Egyptian Ministry of Education (MOE) indicated that it is hosting nearly

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9 Ibid.
11 Ayoub, Jacobsen and Johnson, Remittances to transit countries: The impact on Sudanese refugee livelihoods in Cairo, 2012.
35,000 Syrian refugees through its public schools, exempting them of tuition fees and costing the government a total of approximately USD 23 million. With regard to public universities, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) announced in October 2014 that it has spent up to USD 57.5 million on the education of 9,535 undergraduate and 1,377 post-graduate Syrian students. These numbers, however, should be treated cautiously because research on Syrian refugees highlights a high percentage of dropouts from schools. As such, the numbers do not reflect actual access to education. Although the government has exempted Syrian refugees from the tuition for primary schools, the poor quality of education pushes families to resort to private tutoring. Syrian families are unable to cover such costs, which leads children to either fail or more often leave school. Likewise, the numbers do not reflect actual access to higher education. Some Syrian students reported that they were asked to pay enrolment fees for entry into their university’s final exams, highlighting the discrepancy between policies and actual implementation. The situation is even more difficult for girls as subject to sexual harassment and the incorrect perception that Syrian girls are available for *sutra* marriage (in which Arab Muslim men marry Syrian girls to “protect” them from difficult living conditions) were also mentioned among the reasons that prevent families from sending girls to seek educational or work opportunities.

**VI. Protection issues**

Research with Syrian refugees highlighted an initial welcoming reception by Egyptians and cited that as the prime reason for choosing Egypt rather than going to other neighbouring countries that are geographically closer to Syria. However, two years later many Syrians reported a sharp change in Egyptian attitudes towards them, which was attributed to three main reasons: the increase in the numbers of Syrian refugees, their extended duration of stay in Egypt, and the developments in the Egyptian political scene that tarnished Syrian refugees’ image through accusations of involvement in domestic Egyptian politics. Syrian refugees began to face problems in Egypt after a speech by former president Mohamed Morsi in which he expressed full support for the Free Syrian Army and announced the closure of the Syrian Embassy in Egypt. He called on Egyptians to join the Syrians in their fight against the Assad regime. Their situation worsened after 30 June 2013. A few Syrians reportedly participated in an extended sit-in organised by the Muslim Brotherhood in protest against the political changes of 3 July 2013.

The participation of those few Syrian refugees was highlighted in different Egyptian media channels, which led to the spread of anti-Syrian sentiment and the emergence of a hostile attitude toward Syrians. Some Egyptian TV presenters accused Syrian refugees of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and interfering in Egypt’s internal politics. Strong nationalistic sentiments were nurtured by the media after 30 June 2013, where the distinctiveness of the Egyptian identity was emphasised and its Arab, African and Muslim elements were downplayed. National security and the need to preserve territorial integrity were repeatedly invoked to fuel Egyptian nationalism. Conspiracy theories about attempts to undermine Egypt’s national interest multiplied. Turmoil and instability in several other Arab countries were used as evidence of this conspiracy. In the official discourse, a strong state and a solid army were needed as bulwarks against the reproduction of such turmoil and instability in Egypt. This discourse portrayed the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood as bent on undermining Egypt’s national interests. Therefore, the association created between Syrian refugees and the Brotherhood affected their security and threatened their protection in Egypt.

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13 **3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-2016: Egypt.**
During July and August 2013, Syrians were exposed to arbitrary arrests for allegedly supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, unknowingly breaking the curfew that was imposed right after 30 June and/or because of missing residence permits. 145 Syrians were arbitrarily arrested between July and December 2013, and the duration of the arrests sometimes exceeded two months. Arbitrary arrests for the above reasons have decreased since March 2014. However, the detention of Syrians for attempting to enter Egypt without visa or depart irregularly continues.

The irregular migration of Egyptians to Europe through the Egypt-Libya-Italy route has been a growing phenomenon since the 1990s. In recent years, Egypt has also become a transit country on a route increasingly used by Arabs, Africans and Asians to get to Europe. However, the irregular migration of Syrians from Egypt to Europe only started after July 2013 and is a direct consequence of the growing difficulty of living in Egypt. According to figures from the UNHCR, between the months of January and September 2013, about 6,000 Syrian refugees reached Italy irregularly, with the majority arriving from Egypt. UNHCR records indicate that Egyptian security forces have detained over 1,500 refugees from Syria during the period mentioned above, including 400 Palestinians and 250 children, as they tried to irregularly migrate to Europe. They were detained until the General Intelligence Directorate offered a clearance permit to re-enter Egypt. According to the UNHCR, most Syrians detained by Egyptian authorities in their attempts to migrate to Europe are allowed to re-enter Egypt. A small percentage of people whose situation could not be cleared was sent to the transit country from which they originally came, such as Jordan or Lebanon.

Syrians constituted the vast majority of refugees attempting to leave Egypt irregularly to Europe from July 2013 to October 2014. However, the number decreased in 2015: According to the UNHCR, 533 Syrians among a total of 3,612 refugees and migrants were arrested during their attempt to depart from Egypt irregularly by sea. As such, Syrians are now the third top nationality attempting to reach Europe by sea from Egypt, after Sudanese and Somalis, in comparison to 2014 where Syrians were the majority of those departing. The decrease in the number of Syrians does not indicate an improvement in their livelihoods in Egypt but rather is a reflection of the reduced number of arrivals to Egypt. Syrian refugees, whether registered with the UNHCR or not, are generally released from detention upon UNHCR intervention.

However, this has not been the case with regard to those attempting to enter Egypt without authorisation. On 1 November 2014, the Egyptian border control guards arrested a group of refugees including Syrians who left Turkey by boat on 23 October 2014 aiming to reach Europe before being left stranded in Alexandria by the smugglers following a dispute. The Public Prosecutor ordered their release on 5 November 2014 but Egypt's homeland security authority issued orders for their deportation, which constitutes a direct breach of Egyptian law. They were not deported but rather kept in detention in a police station in Alexandria. In February 2015, they started a hunger strike protesting their ongoing detention without charges. According to reports from human rights organisations, they were still detained in April 2015. As of November 2015 (a year after their arrest) no sources have been found to confirm their release or the continuation of their detention.

15 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-2016: Egypt
VII. Further implications of the refugee situation and outlook

The continuation of the crisis is particularly affecting refugee children, who constitute half of the number of Syrian refugees in Egypt. According to the UNHCR’s Syria regional refugee response, the bulk of those coming to Egypt continue to be young. Of those currently registered with the UNHCR, 43.3% are under the age of 18. Research in Egypt highlights problems of actual access to education, a high rate of dropouts out from school and a high rate of engagement in the informal labour market, which exposes them to possible exploitation. Moreover, it is estimated that a third of Syrian children in Egypt have been exposed to traumatic events in Syria – an issue that is left unresolved in Egypt due to lack of access to psychosocial health services.18 The difficulty of accessing education and health has also been indicated in other countries of the region that are hosting Syrian refugee children as well as in Syria, a situation that is placing an entire generation at the risk of being lost.19

Until a political solution is reached to end the Syrian civil war, three initiatives should be pursued. The first is increasing the resilience of the host countries by linking development and humanitarian initiatives. The second is urging Western countries to increase the number of slots available for resettlement and to improve the resettlement process. And the third is calling for the involvement of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

An attempt to pursue the first initiative is already underway following the adoption of the 3RP (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan) in September 2014. The 3RP responds to the Syrian crisis and its impact on the region by combining humanitarian and development capacities and resources to assist the Syrian refugees and the communities hosting them. It brings together UN agencies, regional governments, and humanitarian and aid agencies. However, a year after the launch of the 3RP, the international community is still falling short in meeting the needs of refugees from Syria and the countries hosting them.20 In Egypt, UNICEF’s attempts fell short in their targets for child protection and education. For example, while UNICEF’s target for education from January to December 2014 was to enrol 25,000 children in formal education, only 8,013 children were enrolled. Likewise, the target of providing psychosocial support to 24,500 children was not met, as only 5,745 received access.21 The reasons for not achieving the targets need to be understood in order to eradicate the barriers impeding the implementation of the targets.

The countries of the region are hosting 95% of the total number of Syrian refugees, 10% of them identified by the UNHCR as in need of resettlement. By contrast, only 2.6% have been resettled or are currently in the process of resettlement to countries outside of the region. The bulk has been absorbed by Germany and Sweden, accounting for 47% of Syrian asylum applications in the EU between April 2011 and July 2015. It is estimated that the rest of the EU countries have absorbed around only 0.2% of the Syrians refugees hosted in countries of the region.22 Similarly, the United States has admitted just over 2,200 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.23 As such, a lot could and should be done by Western countries and other high-income countries like Russia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, who have not offered any resettlement places to

Syrians so far. Unfortunately, there is a growing fear that the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 November 2015 will have a negative impact on the already low rate of resettlement as media reports are linking the recent attacks with the possibility of terrorists being among refugees entering Europe.

The members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are major donors to refugees in Syria and in neighbouring countries. They have continued to attract Syrian workers, and in limited cases have facilitated family reunions and eased residency measures for Syrian residents who entered before 2011 and could not return. However, they have been completely silent in response to the influx of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Attempts should be made to understand the reasons behind such silence and to adopt measures to encourage them to start accepting refugees for resettlement.

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25 Patrick, Why Syrian Refugee Passport found at Paris Attack Scene must be treated with caution, 2015.


All internet sources were accessed and verified on December 9, 2015.
I. Introduction

When the first demonstrations started in Syria against the repressive policies of the government, no one expected that they would result in the emergence of the major humanitarian disaster the world faces today. Within a short period of time, the Syrian regime resorted to the use of force against peaceful demonstrators. As a result of this decision and the conflict that ensued, a massive number of Syrian people have lost their lives or been displaced. The increasing militarisation of the conflict resulted in a major civil war where gross atrocities have been committed, mostly by the Syrian regime. The situation in Syria eventually led to the emergence of a failed state and the presence of terrorist organisations. Today, with the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the territories of Syria, the conflict has become a major concern for international security. An international coalition has been formed in order to fight against ISIS, although it has yielded only dubious outcomes in terms of destroying ISIS so far.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the conflict in Syria has produced the largest humanitarian challenge of the 21st century. In addition to more than 250,000 reported deaths in the civil war and many more wounded, as identified by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are 13.5 million people still in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 4.2 million Syrians have fled the country and an additional 6.5 million remain internally displaced within Syria. With no end to the conflict in sight, these numbers continue to increase and the challenges continue to compound. The countries neighbouring Syria have been those most directly impacted by the flow of refugees. Turkey alone currently hosts more than two million refugees from Syria. A great majority of these refugees live around the cities along the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkey has done an exemplary job in hosting these refugees and has received praise for its efforts by the international community. Last summer, during his visit to the refugee camps established to host the Syrian refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, praised the efforts by the Turkish government and civil society organisations to handle the refugee crisis generated by the Syrian conflict. He stated that “You [Turkey] have managed well a very difficult period during which there was both complicated situation on the other side of the border [in Syria] and intensive arrivals here….You have carried out important aids with your fraternal emotions and sympathy”. The same type of praise has also been given from the EU in recent months. The President of European Parliament, Martin Schulz, said during his recent visit to several refugee camps: “I am quite impressed by what Turkey did. we can see the great work carried out here with our own eyes. We see an urban life in here where everything functions regularly, all needs are met and infrastructure is established”.

However, despite this praises, Turkey and other countries neighbouring Syria have been mostly left alone in the handling of this major international humanitarian catastrophe. The amount of humanitarian assistance provided to care for Syrian refugees has been less than sufficient and Turkey’s “open door” for accepting refugees without preconditions or restrictions has not been supported by most Western countries. The most critical turning point in this refugee crisis has been the recent overflow of refugees from Turkey to Europe.

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1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Syria: Key Figures*.
2 Middle East Monitor, *UN Refugee Chief Praises Turkish Efforts Toward Syrians*, 2015.
Turkey’s Syrian refugees

In the midst of this crisis in Europe lies the heart of debates surrounding Turkey and its Syrian refugees. As the refugee crisis in Europe grows, there is increasing reference to Turkey’s role in the handling of this crisis. Although some have criticised Turkey for its lax border control policies, blaming them for paving the way for the huge number of refugees flowing into Europe, others have asserted that the burden Turkey has handled for the last four years of the crisis must be shared by European countries. According to the Directorate General of Migration Management of Turkey, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has reached two million. More than 259,000 of these refugees live in camps organised and managed by the Disaster Management Authority of Turkey (AFAD). For the remaining 1.7 million refugees, Turkey has been providing, with the assistance of some international relief organisations, medical and nutritional assistance. Most of these refugees live either in the border cities between Turkey and Syria or in Turkey’s more metropolitan cities, including Istanbul, Ankara and Adana. In ten cities in Turkey these refugees now constitute an important proportion of the population. Furthermore, in some border cities, such as Kilis, the number of refugees has surpassed the number of local people.

Despite the immense effort put into the refugee crisis by the Turkish government, its aid and disaster management authorities and the civil society organisations in the country, the challenge that the Syrian refugees pose to Turkey has already passed the boundaries of what is sustainable for Turkey. There are serious short- and long-term challenges ahead for these Syrian refugees. Furthermore, there is a high risk of the emergence of a new wave of refugees from Syria as a result of Russian air forces and Syrian regime forces

and the corresponding increase in the number of casualties taking place during this dangerous journey. The most notorious symbol of refugees’ struggles to reach Europe emerged in a picture of the body of a drowned toddler on a beach in Turkey, which shocked the world. Since then, the refugee issue has become not only an issue of humanitarian assistance but also a foreign policy and domestic politics issue for both the European Union and its member states. An extensive debate has been launched in different parts of the world about how the EU should deal with this significant crisis. This debate has generated major discussion on the capabilities and performance of the EU and also created an internal discussion within the EU member states and institutions about multiculturalism and xenophobia on the continent. The reaction of some European countries to the refugee flow shocked not only other European countries but also world public opinion. This new wave of refugees has demonstrated that although refugee assistance has been on the agenda of many countries surrounding Syria for almost five years, the European countries are not prepared to handle this scale of crisis.

As stated by Jan Techau, the director of Carnegie Europe, “From immigration to integration policies, from border control to the fight against organised crime, from humanitarian aid to internal solidarity and burden sharing, from trade policy to development cooperation, from military interventions to the European Neighbourhood Policy—Europe has failed so consistently and so comprehensively that fixing the multilayered issue is one of the most complicated and convoluted tasks Europeans have ever had to face collectively. Europeans have been oblivious to the scope of their failure, so they are equally overwhelmed by the size of the crisis this failure has created.”

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5 Read more at: http://ceip.org/1HAD03L.
7 Hürriyet, 10 ilde Suriyeli Mülteci Sayısı Yerel Nüfusla Yarışıyor, 2015.
striking the mostly Turkoman populated regions of the country. There are three simultaneous challenges that the Turkish authorities face in their dealings with this refugee crisis. In the remaining part of this essay these three challenges will be examined.

II. Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Since April 2011, Turkey has allowed Syrian refugees into the country based on the government’s self-declared open door policy. While the Turkish government’s initial response was based on short-term emergency planning with the goal of providing shelter and food for the refugees, Turkey has since adjusted to the changing conditions on the ground, as the conflict prolonged and turned into a long-term protracted affair. Refugees come to Turkey from different regions of Syria, live in different parts of Turkey and have significant challenges despite the efforts of the Turkish government and civil society. Since the outbreak of conflict in Syria the impact of these refugees and their needs and requirements have also changed dramatically. In line with the transforming nature of refugee affairs, Turkey changed its immigration policy, and in 2014 the parliament passed a comprehensive and progressive asylum and refugee bill. Most of the Syrian refugees currently have temporary protection status and as of today the flow of refugees to Turkey is still going strong. The most immediate challenge Turkey is facing with regards to the refugees is going through a learning process in dealing with these new populations while also being exposed to further influx.

There are significant challenges that the refugees pose to the Turkish economic, political and social structure. First of all, there is an increasing cost to integrating refugees today, which has become completely unsustainable for a country that has already spent more than USD 7 billion in four years. This situation has been outlined in numerous reports and studies on refugees in Turkey. For instance, an International Crisis Group report questioned possible limits for the “open door policy” of Turkey, while a Brookings report stated that “Turkey’s resources and public patience are wearing thin.” The EU’s attempt to support Turkey and share the burden in the Syrian refugee crisis may be insufficient as its pledge of EUR 3 billion may not adequately supplement Turkey given the possible new wave of refugees predicted to flood the country. This is especially true considering the recent economic slowdown in Turkey. The continued cost of refugees will likely result in serious complications in budget allocations in the country.

A second challenge facing Turkey is its long border with Syria. The continuing conflict in Syria has rendered it difficult for security forces to control the very long border between the two countries. During the heyday of relations between Turkey and Syria, the Turkish government removed most of the minefields and security barriers between the two countries. Since the beginning of the crisis, the constant flow of refugees from Syria through various border crossings as well as through other areas along the border have made it extremely difficult for security forces to adopt strict security measures. For instance, during the height of the Kobani crisis in 2014, in a very short period of time around 180,000 refugees entered Turkey. With the growing influence of ISIS on the other side of the border, Turkey began to adopt stricter measures to control the entrance of the refugees and

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10 For an overview of Turkey’s refugee policy, see İçduygu, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*, 2015.
passage of individuals. There are several projects underway, including an integrated border control system that includes not only the erection of a wall on the border but also the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, mobile border control vehicles, barbed wires and increasing numbers of troops.\textsuperscript{14} Despite all of these precautions, its length and the lack of geographical barriers make it difficult for Turkish authorities to control the border. Recently, there have been calls by the US for Turkey to seal its Syrian border with military troops. It has been reported that such a move would necessitate an additional 30,000 Turkish soldiers along the border.\textsuperscript{15} This would equate to one soldier every three metres along the 98 kilometre line, which would be hard to adopt.\textsuperscript{16}

The more than two million Syrian refugees in Turkey live either in camps or in one of the country’s major metropolitan areas. Refugee camps in Turkey are established by the Disaster Management Authority of Turkey (AFAD), which is the institution responsible for coordinating humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees. Although it was initially established for dealing with natural disasters, most specifically with earthquakes, in a very short period of time the agency recalibrated its structure in order to handle the refugee crisis.\textsuperscript{17} The responsibility of this organisation for dealing with Syrian refugees demonstrates that it was initially thought that Syria was in the midst of a short-term crisis. At the beginning the Syrian refugees were indeed thought to be temporary visitors, just as was the case when Kurds from Northern Iraq flowed into Turkey following the Gulf War and Saddam Hussein’s attack on northern Iraq. However, the crisis extended and expanded in a very short period of time. With strong financial and political backing from the government, AFAD was able to, in a very short period of time, establish an extensive organisation in cities receiving refugees along the Turkish-Syrian border. The camps that were established and run by AFAD become among the most successful ones in the world.\textsuperscript{18}

There are currently 25 camps located in 10 different cities in Turkey, hosting more than 260,000 refugees. These camps provide social and cultural services, and refugees have access to health, education (pre-school, school and adult), religious and social services. Camp residents actively benefit from these services and, in some instances, take an active role in organising and running them. The management of these camps is taken care of by local government employees and civil servants. In particular, AFAD is extensively using the civil servants working for the state to provide educational services in the camps. The security of these camps is mostly provided by the gendarmerie.

The most significant challenges in Turkey’s refugee camps were uncovered during the establishment of their working operations. Since initially camp establishment was considered an emergency measure, both the refugees and camp managers did not think that it would be necessary to establish a functioning system of long-term management for the camps. However, this line of thinking was changed by the prolongation of the conflict in Syria and increasing number of refugees. Despite cultural affinity and linguistic advantages, Turkish authorities in the camps had a difficult time fully communicating with the refugee population at the beginning of this refugee flow. The dietary particularities, the traditional differences and the establishment of rules and norms in the camps have taken a significant amount of time to develop. With the emergence of community leaders in the camps better communication and coordination systems have been established. Today, despite challenges, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Hasan, \textit{Suriye sınırına 2 milyarlık proje}, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Entous, Lubold and Nissenbaum, \textit{U.S. Urges Turkey to Seal Border}, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Zeyrek, \textit{Türkiye’den ABD’ye ’sınır’ tepkisi: 3 metreye bir asker mi dikelim}, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Kanat and Ustun, \textit{Turkey’s Syrian Refugees: Toward Integration}, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{18} McClelland, \textit{How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp}, 2014.
\end{itemize}
camps are considered to be one of the best run and managed operations for assisting Syrian refugees.

The most challenging issue for Turkey in handing Syrian refugees is the non-camp refugees, who are mostly dispersed to the main metropolitan areas and city centres on the Turkish-Syrian border. Almost 90 percent of refugees in Turkey are not living in state-run refugee camps. Some of these refugees preferred not to live in the camps due to family ties or financial independence. However, a great amount of the “urban refugees” are in the cities either as a result of tight camp capacities or as a result of their desire to move on to another country. These urban refugees have urgent housing problems and some of them are living in very crowded apartments or unsafe residences. The increasing demand for housing, especially in cities adjacent to Syria in the south of Turkey, has generated major housing shortages and increases in rent prices. This reality has impacted the local population and their ability to access affordable housing while simultaneously generating increasingly difficult living conditions for the refugees. As the number of refugees is constantly growing, housing will continue to be a significant problem that authorities must tackle.

Similar problems exist of a lack of capacity in other public services for refugees. For instance, despite the government supplying free healthcare for the Syrian refugees, the clinic, hospital and medical personnel capacity are not sufficient to provide adequate services. Just like in the case of housing, this situation makes it difficult for the local people to benefit from these public services and also generates a challenging situation for the Syrian refugees. Refugees both in Turkey and in other parts of Europe continue to face difficulties in terms of language barriers to health services. The absence of a sufficient number of translators and bilingual medical professionals afflict refugees in need of medical assistance. Again, the same capacity problem can be observed regarding the education of school age children. It is estimated that in the autumn of 2015 there were 600,000 school age refugee children. However, both due to the capacity of the schools and the educators, less than 20 percent of these children attend school at present. The education institutions and facilities of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey are not sufficient to handle such a high number of refugee children in the south-eastern cities of Turkey. In terms of housing, education and healthcare all of these new demands are stretching thin already limited resources that the people in these regions have. Despite the attempts of NGOs in the region to help the state cover the needs of the refugee population, in recent months it has become obvious that it will be impossible for Turkey to meet the demands and needs of the refugee population without a comprehensive international programme to share the burden. In fact, even the monetary assistance that has been promised recently may not be enough to run the social services, rehabilitation programs and social integration projects needed by refugees in Turkey. In the meantime, the Turkish government also needs to take several steps to facilitate the integration process of these individuals. The most important step is to provide working permits and Turkish language education, which are vital for refugees.

III. The Flow of Refugees from Syria to European Countries

A second significant challenge facing Turkey is that hosted Syrian refugees have begun to look to migrate into Europe. There are various different reasons for this recent second flow. First of all, despite billions of dollars being spent to support refugees in Turkey, the situation is unsustainable, making it difficult to manage the crisis. As a result, many refugees

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in Turkey and elsewhere in the region live in difficult circumstances, leading them to look for alternative locations to survive. Also, refugees who migrated to Europe previously or have successfully reached Europe since the beginning of this crisis have served as promoters of Europe as a desirable end location, leading refugees in the countries surrounding Syria to also want to migrate to these countries in order to have better life.

This flow did not start recently. It has been a few years since the waters of the Mediterranean Sea began to host tragedies for the refugees trying to reach one of the European countries with a coast line on the Mediterranean Sea from countries such as Libya. Thousands of refugees have lost their lives during this dangerous journey. However, there has not been a comprehensive action plan to handle this crisis and to change the circumstances of these refugees. In recent months the number of refugees trying to migrate to Europe has rapidly increased. Turkey is located at the centre of one of the passageways utilised in this outflow. The pathway to Europe has become increasingly recognisable to refugees, while human smuggling through the Aegean Sea has become another major pathway other than the Mediterranean Sea. With the death of Aylan Kurdi, a toddler whose drowned body was found on the shores of Aegean Sea, and the acceleration of this flow of refugees landing on European borders, the international community has become more sensitive to this issue.

This situation is creating a major challenge for Turkey, as now there are refugees from a diverse set of sources passing through Turkey in route to Europe. These refugees are putting their lives at risk by trying to survive on the streets in search for a vessel or a human smuggler that might move them deeper into Europe. Smugglers are using makeshift boats and dangerous vessels, many of which drown in the waters of Aegean Sea. Some vessels in distress, as shown in a video footage showing Greek navy personnel attacking one such ship, are being left unattended in the middle of the sea, where their occupants drown. Those whose lives are in danger as a result of these actions of the navies of other states are also picked up by the Turkish coastguard.21

Previously, Human Rights Watch raised concerns about similar problems generated by the Greek Navy in the Aegean Sea. The organisation stated that “Armed masked men have been disabling boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers in the Aegean Sea and pushing them back to Turkish waters.”22 It is also worth mentioning that attempts by refugees to reach Europe from Turkey also generated their own international criminal network. It is hard for Turkey to fight illegal smuggling networks alone, as they continue to gain money and power. An international coalition needs to combat human smuggling and groups that organise and benefit from desperate migrants. Most importantly, the crackdown on this human smuggling networks needs to take place in the source countries with the cooperation of international community.

IV. The Risk of a New Wave of Refugees

The flow of refugees from Syria to Turkey began during the very first days of the uprising in Syria. After the egregious, disproportional use of force by the Syrian regime against demonstrators, citizens of Syria began fleeing to the Turkish border. The first refugee camp established during this period was Yayladag camp in the south-eastern Turkish city of Hatay.23 The flow of refugees into Turkey has been constant, and escalated in correspondence with the intensification of violence within Syria. Regime attacks on major city centres, such as Homs, Hama and Aleppo, and later ISIS attacks on other major residential areas, such as

21 Corcoran, Sick game of pass the parcel, 2015.
Kobani and Sinjar in Iraq, all increased refugee flows. One of the attacks with the most dramatic impact on refugee flows was the ISIS attack in Kobani. As mentioned above, within just a few days, more than 180,000 people, mostly Kurds, had fled the city and entered Turkey through the Mursitpinar border gate.\(^{24}\) A spike in refugees occurred again during and following the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)’s annexation of the city of Telabyad, which resulted in thousands of refugees piling up to the Akcakale border gate.\(^{25}\) In this instance thousands of Turkmens and Arabs fled to Turkey. These massive flows of people in short periods of time continue to generate significant challenges for the Turkish authorities. We observed another very vivid example of this situation during the Russian airmistrikes on the Turkmen Dagi region, which is mostly inhabited by Turkmen. The attacks on the residential areas under the control of the opposition launched a flow of the people to Turkish border. Although the Turkish disaster management authorities have started their preparations for further possibilities, the aforementioned risks will continue to exist. Such attacks may launch another major flow of refugees.

Despite the efforts of organisations such as AFAD, sometimes the humanitarian assistance to these new refugees have failed to fulfil basic requirements. This puts both refugees and refugee-receiving states in a difficult situation. The massive and uncontrolled flow of people into Turkey has also generated security problems — for instance, in the sudden flow of people fleeing Telabyad, refugees from one ethnic group are trying to escape persecution by those of another. This generates the risk of exporting ethnic tensions from Syria into Turkey. Finally, a sudden and urgent flow of people makes it difficult for Turkish authorities to be able to register and control refugees.

In the absence of a solution to the problem in Syria, we will continue to witness these massive flows of refugees into Turkey. In the short term, the ability to handle the crisis may become increasingly unsustainable for the Turkish authorities. In the event of continued Russian airmistrikes on population centres we may see a similar wave of refugee avalanches at the Syrian-Turkish border. In fact, the refugee crisis of the Syrian conflict might reach another peak in terms of its size and extent if the international community will not take necessary precautions.

V. Conclusion

The refugee crisis in Turkey is reaching a new level with the intensification of the civil war in Syria and complications that have emerged from the rise of ISIS and the intervention of Russia in the Syrian civil war. Moreover, the refugee problem itself has reached a new dimension and acquired multiple layers. First of all, there are the Syrian refugees who have been arriving in Turkey since April 2011 and whose numbers have passed two million according to official statistics. Ten percent of these people reside in Turkish refugee camps, while the remaining majority are urban refugees spread across different cities around Turkey. Due to the capacity of these cities, there are important challenges that the authorities are facing in terms of providing public services and housing for these refugees. A second group of refugees is using Turkey as a transfer route to reach to European countries. An even more complicated part of this picture is that these refugees are not only coming from Syria, but from a diverse set of countries, also including Iraq and Afghanistan. These refugees often become the prey of human smugglers and illicit networks functioning to move migrants to countries in the West with little thought for the lives they put in danger. A third and final layer of the refugee issue is

\(^{24}\) Butler and Holmes, *Turkey says Syria town about to fall as Islamic State advances*, 2014.

related to the potential newcomers. Due to the attacks by the Russian air force and the coinciding empowerment of regime forces, there is the possibility that a new wave of refugees from major population centres in Syria will look towards Turkey. Turkey may need to engage in a new set of preparations to handle the flow of these potential refugees.

Turkey, as the country that hosts more refugees than any other state in the world, has reached a significant threshold in its ability to unilaterally deal with and sustain its response to the situation. The increasing complexity of the refugee situation and the increasing demands and needs of the refugees make it necessary to develop a comprehensive strategy to integrate the refugees into social, economic and cultural life in Turkey as well as to provide a legal framework and reforms to social policies. However, these steps cannot be taken without the support of the international community. The recent attempt by the EU to assist the refugees in Turkey seems a good step but is still insufficient to control and manage the crisis.

In order to deal with the three different dimensions of the refugee crisis, a multilayered approach needs to be established by a global coalition of countries. To stop the flow of more refugees to Turkey, these countries need to work on a solution of the Syrian crisis. To handle the refugee flow to Europe, European countries need to first join in burden sharing with the current refugee-receiving countries both in terms of monetary assistance and also in accepting refugees to their countries. Additionally, steps need to be taken to establish a safe zone within Syria and crackdown on illicit networks in the source countries. Finally, to help the refugees in Turkey, the international community needs to further increase its financial support and assistance to those refugees.

VI. Timeline of Refugees in Turkey

March 2011
Syrian crisis begins with peaceful protests that spread nationwide in April.

May 2011
First camps for refugees opened in Turkey

June 2011
The military siege of Jisr al-Shughour in the north-western part of Syria sparks a major flow of refugees into Turkey. Shelling and fighting causes thousands to cross the border.

July 2011
15,000 Syrians take shelter in tent cities set up in the Hatay Province near the border with Syria. 5,000 return to Syria at the end of the month as conditions somewhat stabilise (UNHCR).

August 2011
Turkey erects Altinozu (Boynuyogun) refugee camp in Hatay

September 2011
Turkey formally cuts ties with Assad regime.

November 2011
By the end of November more than 16,000 Syrians have fled to Turkey and by the end of the year Turkey will have spent up to USD 15 million to set up six camps, 5 for refugees and 1 for military defectors (Apaydin camp). Turkish officials insist to the media that Syrians are “guests” and not “refugees.”

December 2011
UNHCR and partners launch first Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt. The plan is valued at USD 1 billion. The total number of Syrian refugees registered is approximately 9,000.

26 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fact Sheet: Timeline and Figures.
27 Stack, For Refugees from Syria, a Visit with No Expiration Date, 2011.
March 2012
There are 15,000 registered refugees in Hatay Province, with possibly thousands more unregistered and residing in other provinces. Turkish officials begin constructing additional tent cities in southern provinces of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa.30

April 2012
Fighting worsens in Aleppo and Idlib province in advance of April 12th UN ceasefire: Over 2,500 swell across Turkish-Syrian border in one day, the highest ever recorded. Rebels and refugees claim that Syrian forces plant mines near the Turkish border in an attempt to block the flow of refugees and supplies for insurgents. By the end of April, the total number of refugees is an estimated 23,000.

July 2012
Intense warfare in Aleppo causes up to 200,000 additional refugees to flee, with thousands crossing over to Turkey. In response, Greece beefs up border guards in case of an influx of Syrian refugees. By the end of July the approximate number of registered refugees has reached 49,000.31 Turkey announces “red-line” of 100,000 refugees that Turkey would accept; with numbers rising above this, talk in Turkey began of pushing for a “buffer zone” in northern Syria (Brookings).

September 2012
UNHCR reports that more than 11,000 Syrians flee into Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon in a 24-hour period on September 11th-12th. Between eight and nine thousand of these refugees enter Turkey.32 An estimated 120,000 registered Syrian refugees are now sheltered in Turkish camps. Tens of thousands of unregistered Syrians are also living in Turkish border towns and villages.33

December 2012
The UNHCR and its partners appeal to international donors for USD 1 billion to support refugees fleeing Syria to Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt.34 More than half a million Syrian refugees have fled their homeland by year’s end, UNHCR says. 170,000 of these are now residing as registered refugees in Turkey.

March 2013
The UNHCR announces that the number of Syrians either registered as refugees or being assisted as such has reached the one million mark, with an additional 4.25 million internally displaced within Syria.35 Turkey alone hosts over a quarter (260,000) of Syria’s refugees. By this point, Turkey has spent over USD 600 million setting up 17 refugee camps, with more under construction.36

April 2013
Turkey overhauls its asylum and reception system to meet international and European Union standards, most notably with the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Implementing these reforms has limited Turkish authorities’ capacity to manage the Syrian refugee crisis. Instead, management of the crisis is left in the hands of national organisations working on the ground, in camps, without larger strategic and policy guidance. However, it has provided Turkey with a modern, efficient and fair system for the management of these refugees with an emphasis on integration. The law does not limit migration to people of “Turkish descent and culture” and replaces the 1994 Regulations on Asylum.37

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30 İçduygu, Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2015.
32 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 11,000 Syrians have fled in the past 24 hours: UN, 2012.
33 Reuters, 11,000 Syrians fled in past 24 hours, says UN., 2012.
35 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Number of Syrian refugees reaches 1 million mark,2013.
Turkey’s Syrian refugees

**June 2013**
UN humanitarian agencies call for USD 4.4 billion in aid for displaced Syrians. USD 3 billion is injected into the Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees in surrounding countries.38 The number of registered refugees in Turkey surpasses 400,000.39

**September 2013**
UNHCR and government ministers from Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq meet in Geneva and pledge joint action to seek greater international help for host countries struggling to cope with the Syrian refugee crisis. At this point, well over half a million Syrian refugees are sheltered in Turkey.40

**October 2013**
Turkey builds a two-metre wall in the district of Nusaybin, site of frequent clashes between rebels, Kurds and Arab tribes. Protests break out during the wall’s construction.41 There are now 21 operational refugee camps in Turkey, hosting an estimated 200,000 refugees.42

**November 2013**
A German NGO claims that Greek armed forces are conducting operations around the Turkish border to repel Syrian refugees. The report, called „Pushed Back,” details what it calls „systematic” operations by special operations forces on land and sea.43

In response to a spike in Syrian asylum seekers, Bulgaria begins construction of a 30-km fence along its border with Turkey.

**April 2014**
UNHCR releases report on refugees in Turkey putting the total number of registered Syrian refugees at 735,865. Of this number, only 29.9 percent are living within refugee camps. Registration of non-camp Syrian refugees through mobile registration centres continues to yield positive results, owing to the rapid increase in the non-camp figures. Out of the 12 mobile registration units deployed in the field, 9 were fully operational by the end of April.

The General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM) officially commences operations in what will eventually transform the entire residential permit application process for foreigners living in Turkey.

**June 2014**
As ISIS captures Mosul, 240-250,000 Iraqi refugees, mostly Kurds, enter Turkey (Brookings).

**August 2014**
Turkey now has 25 refugee camps, hosting a quarter of the 800,000 registered refugees residing in the country.44

**September 2014**
ISIS fighters begin attacking Kurdish villages along the Syrian-Turkey border, sparking fears of a massive refugee influx. A UN official states that this could be the „greatest yet” refugee flow since the start of the Syrian civil war. More than 130,000 Syrian Kurds flee in late September. At the end of the month, this great influx brings Turkey’s total Syrian refugee population to approximately 870,000.45

**October 2014**
The Turkish border city of Suruc doubles in population as almost 400,000 Kurds flee across the border from the besieged city of Kobani and surrounding villages. Syrian

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38 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fact Sheet: Timeline and Figures.
40 Pamuk and Coskun, Turkey builds wall on Syrian border to stem illegal migration , 2013.
41 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fact Sheet: Timeline and Figures.
44 Kirisci and Ferris, Not Likely to Go Home, 2015.
refugees in Turkey approach the one million mark.46

Turkey adopts a new Temporary Protection (TP) regulation to create an effective, legally established system that provides Syrian refugees with satisfactory protection and humanitarian assistance.

December 2014
A report (released in February 2015) by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of Turkey (AFAD) stated that by the end of 2014 four out of five Syrian refugees are being housed in cities rather than camps. This is a drastic change from the beginning of the refugee crisis when almost all Syrian refugees were housed in camps.47

January 2015
Over 1.5 million Syrian refugees are now registered in Turkey.48

February 2015
The cost of providing both camp-based services and assistance to urban refugees reaches more than USD 5 billion, of which the international community covered some 3 percent.49

March 2015
The United Nations estimates that the Syrian refugee population in Turkey has exceeded 1.7 million. Notably, this is triple the estimated figures of December 2013.50

June 2015
Clashes erupt between ISIS and PYD/Syrian Arab allied forces in the Syrian border town of Tel Abyad, prompting some 25,000 people to flee to Turkey under chaotic circumstances (Brookings). The total number of refugees registered reaches 1.8 million.

September 2015
Pictures of three-year-old Aylan al-Kurdi, drowned in his Syrian family’s attempt to reach Greece from Turkey, provoke a wave of public sympathy for refugees.

October 2015
Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel visits Istanbul in an attempt to strengthen Turkish ties with the European Union in return for stemming the continent’s refugee crisis.

November 2015
The number of registered refugees in Turkey is 2.181 million.

On November 29th, Turkey and the EU strike a deal that the Turkish prime minister calls a “new beginning”. Turkey promises to help stem the flow of migrants to Europe in return for financial support, visas and renewed talks on joining the EU. A key element is the EUR 3 billion (USD 3.2 billion) in EU aid for the Syrians now in Turkey.51

51 Emmot, *Declaring ‘New Beginning,’ EU and Turkey Seal Migrant Deal*, 2015.
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Turkey’s Syrian refugees


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Omer Karasapan
Syria’s displaced women and girls

I. Introduction

There are now some 60 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world. The last time the number exceeded 50 million was during World War II. Roughly half of this population – divided into 19 million refugees and 41 million internally displaced people (IDPs) – are female. Children under 17 constitute over 50% of the displaced. This the highest number ever recorded and the numbers continue to rise. The UN’s former High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres has stated that “we are witnessing (…) an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before”.

Women, already facing multiple inequalities, face significantly greater risks in displacement – especially discrimination, grinding harassment, and often sexual and gender-based violence. Host and transit countries need to be aware of these perils and try and provide for the safety and special services required, especially for the most vulnerable, i.e. unaccompanied women and children, female-headed families, and pregnant, disabled, and older women. However, many countries are overwhelmed with the sheer numbers they face, unable to adequately respond despite the efforts of local and international humanitarian agencies. This is a growing crisis which needs urgent investment and focus. According to Jane Sloan, Vice President of Programs at the Global Fund for Women, “we are at a crossroads (…) women’s needs are acute, and the longer the situation persists, the more their fundamental human rights are threatened”.

While this article largely focuses on Syrian refugees and the internally displaced, those who have remained behind or have been unable to leave also face incredibly difficult circumstances as the war drags into its fifth year and violence escalates. A 2014 report by Human Rights Watch notes that “women in Syria have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, physically abused, harassed and tortured during Syria’s conflict by government forces, pro-government militias, and armed groups opposed to the government”. The horrors visited on women and girls by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which range from sharp restrictions on their rights to free movement, work and education to slavery and brutal killings needs little recounting. Needless to say, life in ISIS occupied areas and large cities like Mosul and Raqqa remains a daily visitation of sharp discrimination and injustices against women, while a whole generation of children is being indoctrinated to follow these brutal practices.

However, it is also worth noting that the war has forced many Syrian women to move beyond more traditional roles and take an active role in trying to preserve the lives of their families. As Liesl Gerntholtz, women’s rights director at Human Rights Watch underlines: “Women have not been spared any aspect of the brutality of the Syrian conflict, but they are not merely passive victims (…) Women are taking on increasing responsibilities – whether

1 UNHCR, Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase, 2015.
2 Ibid.
3 Tenuta, Amid the Hard Lessons of War, Refugee Women Learn Their Rights, 2015.
5 For more information on the issues of women’s rights and the situation in Syria, please cf. https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights and https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria, respectively.
6 Cobiella, Tachibana and Adams, Yazidi Women Tell of Rape and Enslavement at Hands of ISIS, 2015.
by choice or due to circumstance – and they should not have to pay with intimidation, arrest, abuse, or even torture”.

II. The Syrian Tragedy

The single largest source of forced displacements in the world remains Syria, with over 4 million refugees and around 8 million IDPs. A further 124,000 Syrians were displaced from their homes in Aleppo and Idlib in October 2015 as the Syrian army, with Russian and Iranian support, went on the offensive. Currently, Turkey is estimated to host some 2.2 million registered Syrian refugees, with over a million hosted in Lebanon and 630,000 in Jordan – yet actual numbers are higher. According to the UN, women and children under 17 constitute 77% of Syrian refugees, who account for 21% of all refugees and 28% of all IDPs in the world. The trauma of being a refugee cuts across gender, ethnic and sectarian lines, but women tend to fare worse when it comes to many outcomes. Some of these challenges are outlined below.

III. Syria’s Female-Headed Families

Today, with winter fast approaching, the situation for Syrian refugees in neighbouring host countries is deteriorating as funding runs low. Hundreds of thousands have had aid sharply curtailed in Lebanon and Jordan. The World Food Programme (WFP) states that 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan are living below the poverty line, as are well over half of those in Lebanon. Food insecurity afflicts 85% and 79% of these refugees respectively, with much higher vulnerability for female-headed families. In Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, one in four families – or approximately 145,000 – are female headed, with tens of thousands or more such families in Turkey. A 2014 UNHCR report echoes the WFP in stressing the vulnerability of these families: “Life in exile for these women has meant becoming the main breadwinner and caregiver, fending for themselves and their families, away from their communities and traditional sources of support. For most, the burden is overwhelming, and many are entirely dependent on outside assistance”. These households tend to have greater debt, less food, more children at work and be subject to greater degrees of violence, sexual or otherwise.

These families are also less likely to be aware of their rights and the resources available to them. Registration is critical for refugee populations since it opens the door to some form of assistance. However, an estimated 70% of babies born to Syrians in Lebanon are unregistered. Since only fathers can confer citizenship in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, an absent father will preclude registration. Statelessness becomes a real issue here, and a long-term problem. Chris Nash, director of the European Network on Statelessness, describes the stateless as “legal ghosts, exposed to human rights abuses and with no recourse to justice”. Without legal documents, these individuals are denied basic health and education services, with sharp restrictions on their rights and freedom of movement. They also become easy prey for trafficking or recruitment by criminals and militias and are at the mercy of corrupt officials. Do also note that while Syrian authorities have made get-

7 Anadolu Agency, UN says 123,000 people newly displaced in Syria, 2015.
8 Data provided by the UNHCR: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224.
9 Data provided by the UNHCR: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122.
13 UNHCR, 145,000 Syrian refugee women fight for survival as they head families alone, 2014.
14 UNHCR, Women Alone, 2014.
16 Gentleman, UN refugee agency launches global campaign to end statelessness, 2014.
17 Karasapan, The state of statelessness in the Middle East, 2015.
ting passports easier, female-headed households are unlikely to avail themselves of this service as easily as other families given their greater wariness of authorities as well as issues around child safety and care for single parents, for example.

IV. The Tragedy of Child Brides

The vulnerability of young women and girls in displacement has also led to massive increases in child marriages. With fears of sexual violence, many families quickly marry off their daughters for protection or fearing for the girl’s “honour”. Many families also need the dowry payments. According to Isadora Quay, a Gender in Emergencies Specialist from CARE: “We’ve seen a massive increase in child marriage in Syria and Iraq and (...) as far afield as Egypt”. Marriages of children under 18 trebled among refugees in Jordan in 2014. Women refugees in Turkey also raise this issue as one of their most serious challenges. According to the UN, among rural Syrian families where marriage before 18 was common, now girls as young as 13 and 14 are being married, often to much older men. In 2011, 12% of brides in registered marriages by Syrian refugees were under the age of 18 – roughly the same ratio as in Syria. By 2013 it had risen to as high as 25%, while the number Syrian boys registered as married was much lower, suggesting that the girls are being married to older men.

Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of more than 550 civil society organisations, states that “child brides are often disempowered, dependent on their husbands and deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and safety. Neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, child brides are at greater risk of experiencing dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth, becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and suffering domestic violence. With little access to education and economic opportunities, they and their families are more likely to live in poverty”.

They are also likely to be deprived of their legal rights as citizens or refugees. In Syria the minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls, while it is 18 in Turkey and Jordan – though in the latter a waiver is rare but possible. Marriages of girls under 18 are therefore essentially illegal in both countries. Also, many girls end up as second or third wives. In Turkey, where the practice of polygamy is illegal and had practically disappeared, it is now resurfacing, which means that all these “marriages” are illegal, as can be the ‘urf or traditional marriages in Jordan and Lebanon, leaving the women with little legal protection. Even where a proper religious marriage ceremony is performed, marriage certification requires valid documents, which are not always available from the religious authorities performing these ceremonies, whether in Syria or in the host countries.

This has serious implications for the children of these marriages. Jordan, Lebanon and Syria require legal marriage certificates prior to registering a baby, along with a birth notification from a hospital, doctor or midwife. Aside from the issue of the illegality of marriages with underage girls, women often give birth at home or in emergency situations where formal birth notifications are not avail-

18 Timms, Child brides: Number of Syrian refugee girls forced into marriage has tripled since conflict began, 2015.
19 ALNAP, Findings from the Inter - Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Za’atari Refugee Camp, 2013.
23 Evin, Syrian refugees sold as ‘co-wives’ in Turkey, 2014.
able.\textsuperscript{24} As noted earlier, these challenges mean that statelessness also looms as a significant danger for the children of these marriages.

\textbf{V. Women and Girls: The Education Challenge}

The impact on these girls of the growing phenomenon of early marriages can be devastating.\textsuperscript{25} Beyond the issue of health problems for mothers and babies, greater risk of violence within families, and the psychological impact of leaving one’s family, school and community at an early age, there is the issue of education. Leaving school is also linked to being trapped in a life of poverty.\textsuperscript{26} Especially in refugee or IDP situations, this has the potential to become a self-perpetuating cycle as the children of such marriages are at greater risk than others. We also know that if children are out of school, they are vulnerable and more at risk of entering the labour market or early marriage.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed UNICEF promotes programmes which keep girls in formal schooling for longer periods while promoting education as a compatible goal alongside marriage, but its reach is limited given the numbers involved.\textsuperscript{28}

This lack of access to education does not just impact on the child brides, however. Women and girls who have been displaced tend to fare worse than their male counterparts in accessing education at all levels. For example, there are estimated to be around 50,000 Syrian university students in Jordan and Lebanon but less than 10\% of eligible Syrian students are enrolled in either country and the overwhelming majority are men – women, once the majority in Syrian universities, are now a small minority.\textsuperscript{29} Schooling continues to be a challenge at other levels as well and preference is often given to boys to attend school.\textsuperscript{30} Turkey poses a linguistic challenge that is not easy to overcome, though some 40,000 refugee children are in Turkish public schools and another 200,000 in Temporary Education Centres (TECs) which teach in Arabic.\textsuperscript{31} This still leaves nearly 400,000 out of school. There is a government commitment to doubling the number this year and reaching all children thereafter but there are challenges, especially for girls. The fact that education in Turkey is mixed while it is segregated by sex in Syria is another hurdle for some families. This is also a challenge for Syrians in Lebanon. Older girls and young women face particular challenges in accessing secondary education given the lack of compatibility across curriculums and the often daunting process of securing the needed documentation. In 2014 the UNHCR recorded 91\% of adolescent refugee girls in Lebanon aged 15-19 as being out of school.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{VI. The Trek to Europe}

The current large movement of refugees, over 876,000 arriving on European shores since the beginning of the year, poses risks for all refugees but especially for young girls and women, who need additional protection and appropriate services and shelter. It is worth noting that 52\% of refugees arriving in Europe are now women and children, compared with 27\% in June 2015.\textsuperscript{33} Commenting on this unexpected dramatic rise in numbers, UNICEF
spokesperson Sarah Crowe says that “we can only assume that this is a sense of the desperation that families are going through. When you take your whole family with you it means you don’t have schools for your children, you don’t have proper shelter, you have no sense of what lies ahead.”

Sheltering or incarceration with large numbers of men and sharing facilities challenges women and children, and at times they are preyed upon. Most at risk are unaccompanied women and children, who are falling prey to organised crime groups intent not only on trafficking for sexual purposes but also for slave labour.34 The growing number of children and women separated during the trek through Europe exacerbates this tragedy, with the UNHCR receiving reports of children engaging in survival sex.35

With winter coming and neighbouring and European nations struggling to cope, it isn’t easy to focus host and transit countries on this issue. Yet providing women with livelihood support, safe shelters for them and their children, health care, family reunification support, protection from grinding harassment, and making police and other professionals available to deal with criminal activities and their victims are imperative. The UNHCR sees Syrian women as the glue that holds a broken society together.36 Any support to them will greatly facilitate the emergence of stable, adaptive communities – whether back at home, in Europe, or elsewhere.

VII. Conclusion

This year at the November 2015 G20 summit in Turkey, a newly created engagement group, the W(omen) 20,37 did raise the issue of displaced women and children, noting that women and children were paying the highest price in the continuing tragedy and calling for a concerted effort on this issue by bringing governments, businesses, civil society and the media together to work towards greater aid and resources. Since neither of these individual actors can solve the issue raised by displacement on their own, the scale of the issue and its impact require a concerted joint effort. One reason the world needs to get this “right” is that there is a coming tide, but not a tsunami since there is still some time to take action on the much larger numbers expected to be displaced because of climate change. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) notes that since 2008 an average of 26.4 million people a year have fled their homes due to environmental disasters.38 In the same period, the numbers displaced as a result of conflict stands at an annual average of 6.2 million.39 The UNHCR predicts higher numbers in the years to come. The IDMC also notes that the likelihood of displacement due to climate disaster is 60% higher today than four decades ago. As the Paris Climate Change Conference debates how to deal with displacement, it is important that they too keep in mind the particular vulnerabilities as well as the indispensable contributions of women and girls to building sound and resilient communities.

34 Sherwood, Unaccompanied young refugees in Europe ‘at risk from criminal gangs’, 2015.
35 UNHCR, UNHCR concerned at reports of sexual violence against refugee women and children, 2015.
36 Sherwood, Syria’s female refugees facing poverty, harassment and isolation, 2014.
37 For further information cf. http://w20turkey.org/about-w20/.
39 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Leaving no one behind: Internal displacement and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, 2015.
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I. Introduction

Today there are about 59.5 million refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people in the world,\(^1\) of which Syria provides the largest contingent, followed by Colombia and Iraq. While there is a myriad of factors that push people out of their own country, currently civil wars are playing a vital role in generating refugees. At present, there are around 14 ongoing larger conflicts: eight in Africa (Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Burundi), three in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq and Yemen), three in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Pakistan) and one in Europe (Ukraine). Overall, by 2014 the Middle East has the highest number of refugees in the world (17.2 million), settled especially in Turkey (1.6 million, or 223 per 10,000 inhabitants) and Lebanon.\(^2\)

Over the last two years, conflict and persecution have forced an average of 42,500 people per day to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere, either within the borders of their country or beyond.\(^3\) At this moment, as we talk about the Middle East, the most pressing issue that appears in front of us is of refugees and conflicts in Syria. Half of the 23 million population of Syria have been forced from their homes, with four million becoming refugees in other countries. Millions of people are fleeing conflict in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine, as well as persecution in areas of Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, creating the highest level of displacement since World War II.\(^4\)

Refugee outbreaks have taken place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at different points of time in history. A number of factors have contributed to the creation of refugee flows in the region. Colonial occupations, pervasive poverty, political violence and repression, and ethnic violence are generally listed among the primary reasons for the creation of such refugee flows, although a counter-argument here is that poverty elsewhere does not seem to generate refugees in these numbers. Since 2011, the countries of the Arab Uprisings have generated a growing number of refugees.\(^5\) However, the protracted Syrian crisis has shaped a new pattern of refugee flows.

Countries with ‘controversial’ leaderships, such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, have faced the domino effect of uprisings. Following Tunisia, the governments of Egypt and Libya were overthrown. Although the magnitude of the revolutions was considerable, they did not escalate into civil war like they did in Libya and Syria. In Syria, specifically, fierce fighting between protesters and the government is ongoing and has resulted in miserable living conditions for Syrians in general as well as an ever-increasing number of refugees.

The Arab Uprisings resulted in massive movements of refugees and displaced people across the MENA region. In some places, it led to the eruption of xenophobic attacks against non-nationals; most visible was the case of sub-Saharan Africans in Libya. It has therefore become clear from the onset that

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\(^1\) UNHCR, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2015, 27.


\(^3\) UNHCR, *World at War*, 2014, 2.


the Arab Uprisings have had a direct impact on issues of migration, asylum and protection. More than two million people are believed to have been forced to leave their homes across the MENA region. Asylum seeking claims have risen by around 20 percent as an outcome of the events. Many Tunisians have sought refuge in neighbouring states, while at the same time Tunisia itself became a recipient country for refugees and asylum seekers from Libya when sentiments against the regime of long-serving ruler Muammar Al-Gaddafi erupted. By the end of August 2012, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) rose to around 80,000 in Tunisia; in Yemen, this stood at about 500,000 people as a result of internal conflict. Yemen also hosts around 230,000 refugees, mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. As of June 2013, an estimated 1,588,286 people have left Syria, mostly for Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, and around 2.5 million people have been displaced within Syria itself. Likewise, in Libya the anti-Gaddafi protests degenerated into a civil war in which over one million individuals fled across the borders to neighbouring countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Niger and Chad. Egypt and Tunisia accepted around 630,000 of the refugees, both Libyan nationals and foreign migrant workers.

II. The Perspective of Refugee Creation

In many countries in the Middle East in the past, popular aspirations for change led to violent political movements that eventually caused millions to be displaced. The bread riots that occurred in Egypt in 1977, the Massacre of Hama in 1982 and the Algerian Civil War in 1991 are just a few examples that demonstrate tentative feelings of change (and democratisation) in the region. However, the robustness of the military apparatus and the division between secular and religious groups help to explain the previous lack of democracy in the region. The current situation in Syria is no different from what happened in the past.

Talking about the issue of refugees in the Middle East, however, for a long time meant talking about Palestinian refugees. In this paper, I preclude Palestinian refugees deliberately, owing to the fact that the currency and urgency of refugees generated in Syria has surpassed many other important sources of refugee movement. There were similar demands and mobilisations in many countries of the region, at which citizens and protesters chanted the same slogans. Nevertheless, the experiences of each country have been distinct. For instance, in some countries the military defected from the regime, like in Tunisia and Egypt, while in Libya, Yemen and Syria the military has stayed loyal to the president. Some uprisings seemed to be domestic affairs while others quickly led to foreign intervention, such as the intervention of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia, in Bahrain and that of NATO in Libya. Some wealthy states have responded with increased spending on job creation and benefits for their citizens while some other wealthy countries, such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, have observed events silently. Citizens of these states are generally satisfied with their governments. The situation was different in Bahrain, where the Shia majority of the population demanded political reforms, about which Saudi Arabia became very concerned because of the fear of Iranian influence among Shia in the Arab Gulf states.

8 Ibid.
10 Hamilton, Africans Say Libyan Troops Try to Make them Fight, 2011.
11 Ibid, Regional Overview, 2011.
12 Ibid.
Morocco and Jordan tried to quell the situation by initiating constitutional reforms.

The unrest in the region has caused displacement to varying degrees – not only of citizens, but also of migrants and refugees being hosted in these countries. In Egypt, Islamic parties took the lead in the parliamentary elections held between November 2011 and February 2012. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces announced that it would hand over power following the Presidential elections held in May and June 2013, yet the regime ‘struck back’.

In Syria, peaceful protests swept across the country in March 2011 only to be responded to by the Syrian government with brutal crackdowns. The government did make some concessions, such as the lifting of the emergency laws in April 2011, yet this attempt to calm down the situation faded with ongoing violence and fatal state responses against civilian protesters. A formal UN Resolution against the regime failed due to the veto by Russia and China. The bloodshed has never ended. Demonstrations against governments elsewhere in the region have been seen as a domino effect of Tunisia. Protests have occurred in Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel and the Palestinian Territories of varying scales and durations. These political changes have brought two new dynamics to the refugee issue: one is the change from being host country to becoming an origin country of refugees, and the other is the new challenge presented by the existing refugees from other countries. Tunisians attempted to flee to Europe via boats, mainly to the Italian island of Lampedusa both during and after the uprising. Months after the fall of Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the majority of people arriving on the island from North Africa were Tunisians. They ended up on overcrowded Italian shores.

In Libya, the final overthrow of Al-Gaddafi was preceded by a brutal battle. In February 2011, political violence erupted across the country after the government violently suppressed demonstrations against the Libyan leader. This was followed by months of intense fighting between government and opposition forces as well as the involvement of international forces. The Libyan economy has been heavily dependent on migrant workers. As violence broke out in Libya, Tripoli literally became empty of foreigners. Border zones became crowded with anxious people fleeing conflict. At the onset of the conflict, some 20 percent of the approximately 6.5 million people living in Libya were from sub-Saharan Africa, most of them being migrant workers and refugees. They came from various countries, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. These sub-Saharan Africans faced harsh discrimination when it came to light that Gaddafi employed sub-Saharan African mercenaries to crush the protests. Between 1.2-1.5 million Egyptians were also estimated to have been in the country at the outbreak of the conflict, mostly as migrant workers.

Many fled Libya trying to cross the Mediterranean. Some of those had initially fled from Libya to Tunisia but returned back to Libya due to the frustrating conditions in the Tunisian camps before starting the journey to Europe. At least 1,500 people have drowned during these attempts. Most Libyans crossed the borders only temporarily to purchase gasoline and other goods or to bring family members to a secure location. By the end of August 2011, when the Gaddafi regime

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was toppled, out of the 247,167 Libyans who had crossed into Egypt, only 4,500 remained there.\textsuperscript{17}

About half a million people fled to Egypt through the Salloum border. These included Libyans as well as foreigners who resided in Libya. The International Organisation for Migration, in cooperation with border authorities, reported that by January 2012 only 263,554 people had crossed the Libyan-Egyptian border, of which 173,873 were Egyptians and 89,681 were foreigners. Most of those in the latter group fled on their own without asking for assistance. This comprised mainly people from Middle Eastern countries and Sudan. They were not required to wait for visa processing at the border.\textsuperscript{18}

An estimated 43 percent of the total number of refugees fleeing Libya crossed the Western Libyan border from Tripoli and other Libyan cities that are located close to the Tunisian border. Consequently, Tunisia received the most refugees from Libya. Camps were set up along the border. According to Egyptian authorities, almost 63,000 Egyptians made their way to Tunisia between 28 February 2011 and 3 March 2011.\textsuperscript{19} Over 235,000 people had fled from Libya to Tunisia through the main border points of Ras Adjir and Dehiba by April 2011. By January 2012, approximately 137,000 Tunisians and 208,489 other foreigners had arrived in the country. The flows to Tunisia decreased by two thirds in June with an average of 1,795 people arriving per day.\textsuperscript{20}

III. The ‘Burden’ and Direction: The Case of Italy

People fleeing through the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, Spain or Malta are not small in number.\textsuperscript{21} The journey has been dangerous and at least 1,500 are believed to have died between 2011 and 2012 during the attempted cross-over, and one boat which departed Libya drifted for two weeks on the sea. Only nine out of its 72 passengers survived.

European countries have continued to play a vital role in the movement of refugees since the Arab Uprisings.\textsuperscript{22} The vast majority of those refugees went to southern Europe to seek refuge, particularly to Italy, Malta\textsuperscript{23} and Turkey. Italy has been one of the most reachable states for the incoming migrants from Tunisia, Libya and even Egypt seeking a safer place after the Arab Uprisings.\textsuperscript{24} For example, about 57,000 migrants turned up on Lampedusa Island as a result, and the Italian detention centre there was allowed to overfill, triggering protests and clashes between authorities, detainees and locals angry that the influx had scared off tourists.\textsuperscript{25}

Italy has not been prepared for such a huge number of migrants, and it has caused a conflict between international human rights standards in theory and the implementation of these principles in reality. Italy, as a signatory state to several human rights conventions, is obliged to receive refugees into its territory. This right is preserved in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights\textsuperscript{26} and in the EU Council Directive on

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Sanz, \textit{Socio-economic Profile of Egyptian Migrants Returning from Libya due to Crisis: Sample Analysis}, 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Pennington and Kristele, \textit{Libya: Protect Vulnerable Minorities and Assist Civilians Harmed}, 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Agharzam and Tishler, \textit{Migrants Caught in Crisis: The IOM Experience in Libya}, 2012.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Wheeler, \textit{Waves Upon Waves: Arab Spring Refugees Cross the Mediterranean}, 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Nebahay, \textit{Arab Spring Helps Push Asylum Claims up 20 percent in the West}, 2012.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Diamantopoulos, \textit{The Arab Spring and Its Consequences on the Euro-Mediterranean Migration Flows}, 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Wheeler, \textit{Waves Upon Waves: Arab Spring Refugees Cross the Mediterranean}, 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Article 14: (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from
the Temporary Protection of Displaced Persons, which requires that “asylum-seekers forming part of a large influx of migrants must be admitted to the country to which they first seek refuge. If that first country cannot admit asylum-seekers on a permanent basis, it must at least provide temporary protection”. Additionally, refugees cannot be expelled from Italy according to the UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which guarantees the principles of non-refoulement and thereby “prohibits the expulsion or return of refugees against their will to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened”. Furthermore, Italy is party to the Dublin agreement, which requires it to process each refugee’s application for asylum. These steps have not been met easily with the current migration movement from the neighbouring Arab Uprisings countries since these North African countries have witnessed the fleeing of different groups with different backgrounds all with unique immigration purposes.

European states have not responded to the refugees that have resulted from the Arab Uprisings equally. For example, Italy and Greece have accused the United Kingdom and its northern European neighbours of not sharing the responsibility for a crisis in migration that has left them struggling to cope. Furthermore, both Italy and Greece have sought a suspension to their commitment to the EU Dublin system since that system compounds their burden. In order to escape from their responsibility, European states allege that such refugees are illegal immigrants and not asylum seekers, which then allows them to refuse their entrance to Europe.

Italy has initiated a policy to lessen this volume of migrants in coordination with the EU Border Protection Agency, which has resulted in a clear violation of international refugee laws. There have been incidents where Italian authorities have blocked boats carrying migrants from entering Italian ports and failed to provide aid. Distinguishing between illegal immigrants and refugees is necessary for the protection of the country; however, failing to follow this policy of distinguishing leads to a violation of international refugees laws regarding “the admission of, and the prohibition on the expulsion of, asylum seekers”. Such cases have ultimately been dodged by politicians framing the people fleeing Libya and Tunisia as illegal immigrants rather than refugees seeking asylum. An example of the reluctance of Italy to tackle the situation positively is clear in the recent agreement between Italy and Libya’s National Transitional Council to exchange information on illegal immigrants and the arrangement for their repatriation. Despite the mounting pressure of refugees, Italy is bound by EU law to deal with the matter on its own.

As the situation on the little island of Lampedusa became unsustainable, Italy decided to give an estimated 25,000 Tunisian refugees a humanitarian visa that allowed them unlimited travel throughout Europe. Other EU member states, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, fear that this humanitarian visa may cause them increased illegal immigration and affect many social, medical and housing programmes. The reaction of other EU member states, such as Belgium, Denmark and Austria, was to resume border acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) Available at: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

28 Ibid.
29 Grant and Domokos, UK Failing to Share Burden of Migration Crisis, 2011.
33 McPhun, The Arab Spring’s Refugee Crisis, 2011.
checkpoints. The only EU member that supported Italy’s decision was Malta for the simple reason that it has to face the same refugee crisis. Italy and Malta pushed for the implementation of the EU directive 2001/55/EC, which was drafted after the Kosovo War. This directive would allow refugees to stay in any EU member state other than the country of first entry in order to temporarily provide shelter for refugees for a maximum period of one year.34

Without support from the international community, refugee-hosting countries can no longer provide for this vulnerable population. This development, coupled with renewed violence inside Syria, has forced millions of Syrians to seek refuge elsewhere, including Europe. Yet, as the number of refugees has surged, it has also become harder for them to travel to Europe legally. European countries have restricted visas once available to refugees and few offer humanitarian visas, which allow those in need of international protection to access a third country in order to apply for asylum. European countries have the legal tools to bring in refugees safely and legally, but they use these tools infrequently and ineffectively.

IV. Conclusions

The main reason for the dramatic acceleration in displacement in 2015 has been the continuing conflict in Syria, which has made the Middle East simultaneously the largest producer and host of forcibly displaced people in the world. Four and a half years of violence have uprooted an estimated 7.6 million people within the country, and driven more than four million people across Syria’s borders and into neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. These countries can no longer cope with the strain of hosting such large numbers of refugees. Turkey, which has taken in more than two million Syrians since the beginning of the conflict, has become the largest refugee-hosting country in the world. It has put the annual cost of hosting Syrian refugees at USD 4.5 billion at least. In Lebanon, Syrians constitute between a quarter and a third of the population; the World Bank estimates that Lebanon’s basic infrastructure will need investment of up to USD 2.5 billion just to be restored to pre-crisis levels. Iraq, already suffering from massive internal displacement, is hosting approximately a quarter of a million people. And Jordan, one of the most water-starved nations on the planet, hosts more than 630,000 registered refugees.

Refugees resulting from the Arab Uprisings are not isolated problems; on the contrary, it is a regional and worldwide problem. People seeking democracy and human rights should be respected and valued especially if these are the principles that govern the whole world and Western states in particular. This support can be achieved through providing a humane and civilised arena for people fleeing from their states, not through escaping from the responsibility and seeking the suspension of their international legal obligation towards those refugees.

The image of a 3-year-old drowned boy, Aylan Kurdi, lying face down on a beach had a huge symbolic effect on all refugee-receiving countries. It has affected them more than the many greater tragedies in war-torn city centres in Syria and elsewhere over last few years. Therefore, the refugee crisis not only demands an urgent solution but also raises fundamental questions about the nature of politics and leadership in the Arab and Muslim world. Western Europe habitually avoids any connection of the crisis with religion or racial identity, but others are less coy. Senior officials in Eastern Europe have openly declared their opposition to taking in Muslim refugees.

Before the current international refugee apparatus was established, protection of refugees was recognised as a primary ob-

34 Squires, Refugees Head for Europe from Tunisia and Libya, 2011.
objective. In 1946, in the aftermath of the Second World War, which resulted in the world’s largest crisis of refugees and displaced persons ever seen so far, the then newly established International Refugee Organisation (IRO)’s mandate was to engage in, among other tasks, “the care and assistance; the legal and political protection…of persons who are the concern of the Organization…”. Provision 1 of the statute of the IRO’s follow-up, the UNHCR, was to “assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute”. For a refugee population to fall within the mandate of the UNHCR, the population has to have, or have had, a well-founded fear of persecution. Today however, the protection mandate of the UNHCR covers not only those who fall within the 1951 Convention definition but provides protection services to millions of refugees who fall within much broader categories,35 though Palestinian refugees do not fall under the protective mandate of the UNHCR. The claim here is that the 1951 Convention does not apply to those who are at present receiving from specific organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the UNHCR protection and assistance.36

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All internet sources were accessed and verified on December 16, 2015.
When a wave of popular unrest grasped the Middle Eastern and North African countries in 2011, leading to regime change in some of the affected states, even the countries that managed to maintain some degree of stability had to accept that the region’s political landscape was undergoing fundamental change. Four years later, it is uncertain what exactly this change will bring about, but the so-called Arab Spring is still perceived as the key moment altering recent geopolitics in the Middle East. While a lack of democratic progress characterises most countries throughout the region, the debate about redefining a state’s social contract, ideology and regional hegemony has instead brought about much chaos and violence.

The unpredictability that resulted from this process might now be one of the region’s most striking features. And this feature is indeed not only an obstacle to a stable balance of power among regional players, but also to the international community and its respective interests. It is specifically this latter aspect that the two books discussed here, Robert Mason’s *The International Politics of the Arab Spring* and Richard Youngs’ *Europe in the New Middle East*, take as a vantage point for their observations on how the Arab Spring changed foreign policy in the Middle East.

Robert Mason begins his discussion by placing the Arab Spring within the context of social science and political science research, predominantly led by the question as to why academia was unable to predict the Arab Spring, or as Martin Beck puts it in a later chapter “why did social science overestimate the stability of pre-Arab Spring regimes?” (p. 11). The book’s attempt at answering this question is structured around eight chapters, discussing the US’, the EU’s, and the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries’ policies towards the region before and after the Arab Spring. In so doing, Mason takes an interesting approach by not searching for the internal causes of the Arab Spring, but in contrast looking at the behaviour of the international community and the respective impact of external actors on the region’s trajectory before and after 2011.

Beginning with the United States’ declared shift towards a non-imposition policy in the Middle East under the Obama administration, Mason argues that “the necessary context and political cover for interventionism” that had previously served as a justification for George W. Bush’s *War on Terror* had vanished (p. 37).

Mason elaborates on this point by outlining President Obama’s delicate quest for geopolitical equilibrium among the main regional actors by supporting enhanced multilateralism. Together with Timo Behr’s chapter on the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – arguing
that although the ENP’s revision after 2011 has often been criticised as being too modest, it actually aimed too high (p. 75) – the book delivers an analytical overview of how the two most prominent external actors in the Middle East were unable to either preserve a certain degree of stability or fully live up to the people’s aspiration for human rights and democracy.

Much literature on the post-2011 Middle East rightly focuses on the prospect or failure of democracy based on the internal dimension of social change. Mason’s contribution to understanding the repercussions of the Arab Spring is to show how the international community’s reluctance and inability to develop a coherent policy towards the region has contributed to the emergence of a power vacuum in which a diverse set of state and non-state actors now compete for influence.

The way in which the Arab Spring has changed the behaviour of external actors in the region is further assessed by Richard Youngs in his book on Europe’s Middle East policy in the context of the Arab Spring. Solely focusing on how the EU, specifically through its Neighbourhood Policy, attempted to adjust its approach towards the region, Youngs delivers a valuable, in-depth analysis of the EU’s response to the Arab Spring. Taking stock of the uneasy mix of risk and opportunity that the Arab Spring posed to policy makers in Brussels and the national capitals, the book thoroughly outlines both the EU’s achievements and limitations in its post-2011 foreign policy towards the region. Highlighting the “multifaceted ways in which support was provided” (p. 60). Youngs argues that the EU eventually stopped being an obstacle to reform and that its influence was “not replaced by other international actors quite as much as might have been expected” (p. 222).

Both Youngs’ and Mason’s assessments thus provide a critical view on how the Arab Spring’s demand for dignity and self-determination has created a situation in which external actors are increasingly weary of imposing their interest on the region, but in which the self-governance of local actors has simultaneously become progressively more difficult and contested.

On this note, Mason’s book provides a particularly interesting observation. In its assessment of China’s, Russia’s and the Latin American countries’ response to the Arab Spring, it becomes clear that the events which were supposed to lift an entire region out of heteronomy have served specifically those external actors mentioned above in steering the discourse on democracy and foreign intervention in favour of their very own interests and their ambition to become, or preserve, their respective places as relevant international players.

With regard to the current unpredictability and uncertainty that seem to be sweeping politics in the Middle East, both books can help in understanding the wider implications that the Arab Spring has had in shaping the region’s foreign affairs, as well as its global significance. Acknowledging the fact that in a globalised era regional conflicts tend to have an increasingly global impact, both books deliver thoughtful insights into the current state of regional politics by perceiving the Arab Spring from an international relations perspective. At a time when Middle Eastern affairs appear to be increasingly complex and interwoven, both contributions explain very well how external actors are significantly entangled in what one might easily perceive as regional developments.

Lucas Rasche
Wahhabism was and still is one of the most prominent issues sparking the interest of scholars of Islamic Middle East Studies, of social activists, journalists and bloggers. A number of books, articles, and papers have been published, from Hamid Algar’s *Wahhabsim: A Critical Essay* to David Commin’s *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. These authors deal with the extreme Islamic movement that has arisen in the central “Najd” region of the Arabien Peninsula. In accordance with its principles, this current aims to eliminate false religious and non-religious practices and ideas. The most recent study of the movement is *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power In Saudi Arabia* by Nabil Mouline – a work that some regard as the first in-depth study to employ a multidisciplinary approach combining history, sociology and Islamic studies. In addition to Nabil Mouline’s study, Stéphane Lacroix wrote *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, in which he focused on the political sociology of Islamist movements in the Kingdom.

This review, however, will discuss Simon Ross Valentine’s recent book *Force and Fanaticism. Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond*. A freelance British lecturer and researcher into Islam and comparative religious studies, Valentine has taught at Leeds University and Brodford University. According to the preface, the author seeks to provide in-depth study of Wahhabism, including his own experience and impressions as well as what he describes as a cultural and intellectual odyssey. His work should for one be insightful for academics working in the field of Islamic Studies, yet with its style and the use of a detailed glossary it also seeks to reach a wider audience. The author splits the book into twelve chapters, starting with a definition of Wahhabism before introducing Mohamed Ibn Abdulwahab, the co-founder of the movement. He continues by providing some historical facts related to the growth of Wahhabism and its main beliefs and doctrine, linking these to the stages of the development of modern day Saudi Arabia. Valentine continues with a chapter on the influence of Wahhabism on the Saudi legal system before turning his attention to the export of this ‘ideology’.

However, *Force and Fanaticism* does not provide new ideas or findings. In fact, the sense of storytelling and the number of repetitions make the book appear superficial. In his analysis of Wahhabism he does not move beyond facts and events when dealing with extremism or the relationship between the Saudi monarchy and the Wahhabi clerics: he does not embed this in its historical and political context. Several times the author also refers to what he calls the ‘Islamic mainstream’ when contrasting Wahhabism. Valentine hence assumes that Muslims around the world follow a common current, and ignores all other differences even inside Sunni Islam. “The majority of mainstream Sunni and Shia Muslims worldwide would strongly disagree with the interpretation of Wahhabism. Rather than see Wahhabism as a reform movement, many Muslims would reject it in the strongest terms as Firqa, a new faction, a ‘vile sect’” (16). He also quotes some mainstream Islamic scholars arguing that “Wahabis have seriously distorted fundamental teachings of Islam” (16). Yet he does not provide an adequate definition of mainstream Islam, allowing the image to form of a monolithic Islam from Morocco to Indonesia that opposes Wah-
habism – an observation that demonstrates the lack of a solid research methodology.

Ambition and reality, it seems, are detached in this work since it neither offers new insights nor is it appealing to academic readers. Rather, it can serve as a travel log or personal account providing first-hand experience.

Mai Abdulwahab

Veit Veltzke
Unter Wüstensöhnen


In der exakten Beschreibung dieser Kampfhandlungen sowie der Schilderung des Lebens und Überlebens der Expeditionsteilnehmer wird deutlich, wie die Begegnung mit fremden Kulturen und religiösen Vorstellungen das Schicksal und die politische Einstellung des Leiters Fritz Klein und so mancher seiner Gefährten grundlegend änderten. Die Orienterfahrungen riefen nachhaltige Denkprozesse...


Dem aufmerksamen Leser wird deutlich, dass es sich bei diesem Buch nicht nur um die Hubung eines wertvollen historischen Schatzes handelt, welcher die Erkenntnisse über die Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges an der europäischen Peripherie in wesentlichen Punkten erweitert, sondern darüber hinaus ist es der literarischen und wissenschaftlichen Geschicklichkeit des Verfassers zu verdanken, dass der Leser nicht nur eine spannende historische Lektüre genießen kann, sondern zudem zu den Ursprüngen aktueller Themen geführt wird. So zu denen des Beginns des Kampfes um die Erdölreserven, um die Ursprünge des „Heiligen Krieges“, zu den Wurzeln der mannigfachen Konflikte auf der arabischen Halbinsel und im Iran sowie zu der Frage nach einem deutschen Militäreinsatz im orientalischen Raum.

Nicht zuletzt deshalb ist das Buch nicht nur Orient-, Militär-, Islam- und Entdeckungshistorikern zu empfehlen, sondern auch Politikern und Politikwissenschaftlern.

Ulrich van der Heyden

*Muslim Institutions of Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa* seeks to enrich the public debate on Muslim education in Africa by offering new insight into the evolving encounter between the diversity of local Islamic knowledge and the politics of transnational trends of Muslim education. Contributors include scholars in the field of Islamic education and administrators in Muslim institutions. Using theoretical studies, case studies of these institutions, and analyzing issues of intellectual viability and graduate visibility in these institutions this volume will serve students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.


To date little research has been devoted to uncovering the conditions for peace, and the factors that contribute to stabilizing the state of peace. This volume assesses the factors that contribute to regional pacification, the incentives that motivate states in establishing peaceful relations, and most importantly, how regions become peaceful. It discusses the conditions under which various types of ‘peace’ might emerge on a regional level and the factors most likely to determine the outcome. The book takes an innovative approach through a systematic comparison of two regions that are particularly prominent and important for the subject of regional pacification: Europe and the Middle East. While many believe that the European case is the indispensable model for peacemaking, others believe that these two regions are too different for Europe to be a useful framework for the Middle East. This volume occupies a middle ground between these two extreme positions. It argues that while a mindless copying of European models will not lead to peace in the Middle East, important insights can be gained from the most successful case of regional peacemaking to date. This work will be of much interest to students of regional security, peacemaking, conflict management, Middle East politics, European security and IR in general.


At a time of regional turmoil and political reform, the topic of democracy promotion has never been more pertinent. We are witnessing the emergence of popular movements that are challenging authoritarian governments long supported by the US. Tracing the contours of the ongoing transition in US policy in the Middle East, this book critically deconstructs the strategy of democracy promotion on both a theoretical and empirical level. By formulating and applying an analytical framework derived from a Gramscian approach, Markakis seeks to propose a re-evaluation of what US foreign policy in the Middle East truly constitutes, critiquing both the ideological foundations of the strategy as well as the implementation. This book will provide a solid foundation for the analysis of US policy and in particular the strategy of democracy promotion at this time of momentous transition across the region.

Schmitz, Sabine and Tuba Isik (eds.): Muslimische Identitäten in Europa. Dispositive im gesellschaftlichen Wandel, transcript, August 2015, 430 pp., ISBN 978-3-83762561-5:

In vielen Teilen Europas sind Muslime heute

The Arab uprisings of 2011 have sparked much scholarly discussion with regards to democratisation, the resilience of authoritarian rule, mobilisation patterns, and the relationship between secularism and Islam, all under the assumption that politics has changed for good in North Africa and the Middle East. While acknowledging the post-2011 transformations taking place in the region, this book brings to the forefront an understudied, yet crucial, aspect related to the uprisings, namely the interplay between continuity and change.

Perthes, Volker: Das Ende des Nahen Ostens, wie wir ihn kennen, Suhrkamp, August 2015, 144pp., ISBN 978-3-51-807442-8:

The subject of Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East and indeed in the West attracts much academic and media attention. Nowhere is this more the case than in Egypt, which has the largest Christian community in the Middle East, estimated at 6-10 per cent of the national population. Henrik Lindberg Hansen analyzes this relationship, offering an examination of the nature and role of religious dialogue in Egyptian society and politics. Analysing the three main religious organizations and institutions in Egypt (namely the Azhar University, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Coptic Orthodox Church) as well as a range of smaller dialogue initiatives (such as those of CEOSS, the Anglican and Catholic Churches and youth organisations), Hansen argues that religious dialogue involves a close examination of societal relations, and
how these are understood and approached. The books includes analysis of the occasions of violence against and dialogue initiatives involving Christian communities in 2011 and the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in 2013, and thus provides a wide-ranging exploration of the importance of religion in Egyptian society and everyday encounters with a religious other. The book is consequently vital for practitioners as well as researchers dealing with religious minorities in the Middle East and interfaith dialogue in a wider context.


Throughout the turbulent history of the Levant the ‘Alawis — a secretive, resilient and ancient Muslim sect — have aroused suspicion and animosity, including accusations of religious heresy. More recently they have been tarred with the brush of political separatism and complicity in the excesses of the Assad regime, claims that have gained greater traction since the onset of the Syrian uprising and subsequent devastating civil war. The contributors to this book provide a complex and nuanced reading of Syria’s ‘Alawi communities — from loyalist gangs (Shabiha) to outspoken critics of the regime. Drawing upon wide-ranging research that examines the historic, political and social dynamics of the ‘Alawi and the Syrian state, the current tensions are scrutinised and fresh insights offered. Among the themes addressed are religious practice, social identities, and relations to the Ba’ath party, the Syrian state and the military apparatus. The analysis also extends to Lebanon with a focus on the embattled ‘Alawi community of Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli and state relations with Hizbollah amid the current crisis.


In this book, Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon account for how human rights — generally conceived as a counter-hegemonic instrument for righting historical injustices — are being deployed to further subjugate the weak and legitimize domination. Using Israel/Palestine as its main case study, The Human Right to Dominate describes the establishment of settler NGOs that appropriate human rights to dispossess indigenous Palestinians and military think-tanks that rationalize lethal violence by invoking human rights. The book underscores the increasing convergences between human rights NGOs, security agencies, settler organizations, and extreme right nationalists, showing how political actors of different stripes champion the dissemination of human rights and mirror each other’s political strategies.


Analysis of both official and opposition Saudi divine politics is often monolithic, conjuring images of conservatism, radicalism, misogyny and resistance to democracy. In her new book Madawi Al-Rasheed challenges this stereotype as she examines a long tradition of engaging with modernism that gathered momentum with the Arab uprisings and incurred the wrath of both the Saudi regime and its Wahhabi supporters. With this nascent modernism, constructions of new divine politics, anchored in a rigorous reinterpretation of foundational Islamic texts and civil society activism, are emerging in a context where an authoritarian state prefers its advocates to remain muted. Based on a plethora of
texts written by ulama and intellectuals, interviews with important modernist interlocutors, and analysis of online sources, mainly new social media activism, Madawi Al-Rasheed debunks several academic and ideological myths about a country struggling to free itself from the straitjacket of predetermined analysis and misguided understandings of divine politics. She also challenges much of the scholarly received wisdom on Islamism in general, blurring the boundaries between secular and religious politics.

Güney, Aylin and Ali Tekin (eds.): The Europeanization of Turkish Public Policies, Routledge, October 2015, 210 pp., ISBN 978-1-13884009-6:

Turkey’s candidacy for membership of the European Union has had mixed effects on its public policies. The initial degree of cohesion between EU and Turkish national policies, practices and institutions has varied by the policy field in question, leading to a complex amalgam of fit and misfit between the two actors. Their interaction in different policy areas has had direct influence both on Turkey’s accession to the EU and its own national reform process. With accession negotiations stalled and Turkey’s relationship with the EU increasingly tenuous, it is vital to take stock of the extent to which Turkey and the EU are aligned in key policy areas.


The eruption of the anti-Assad revolution in Syria has had many unintended consequences, among which is the opportunity it offered Sunni jihadists to establish a foothold in the heart of the Middle East. That Syria’s ongoing civil war is so brutal and protracted has only compounded the situation, as have developments in Iraq and Lebanon. Ranging across the battlefields and international borders have been dozens of jihadi Islamist fighting groups, some of which coalesced into significant factions such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State. This book assesses and explains the emergence since 2011 of Sunni jihadist organisations in Syria’s fledgling insurgency, charts their evolution and situates them within the global Islamist project. Unprecedented numbers of foreign fighters have joined such groups, who will almost certainly continue to host them. External factors are scrutinised, including the strategic and tactical lessons learned from other jihadist conflict zones and the complex interplay between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and how it has influenced the jihadist sphere in Syria. Tensions between and conflict within such groups also feature in this indispensable volume.

Momani, Bessma: Arab Dawn: Arab Youth and the Demographic Dividend they Will Bring, University of Toronto Press, October 2015, 176 pp., ISBN 978-1-44262856-4:

Change is on its way in the Middle East, argues Bessma Momani, and its cause is demographic. Today, one in five Arabs is between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. Young, optimistic, and increasingly cosmopolitan, their generation will shape the region’s future. Drawing on interviews, surveys, and other research conducted with young people in fifteen countries across the Arab world, Momani describes the passion for entrepreneurship, reform, and equality among Arab youth. With insightful political analysis based on the latest statistics and first-hand accounts, Arab Dawn is an invigorating study of the Arab world and the transformative power of youth.
Aarts, Paul and Carolien Roelants: Saudi Arabia. A Kingdom in Peril, Hurst Publishers, October 2015, 288 pp., ISBN 978-1-84-904465-3: The Saudi royal family has survived the events of the Arab Spring intact and unscathed. Any major upheavals were ostensibly averted with the help of oil revenues, while the Kingdom’s influential clerics conveniently declared all forms of protest to be against Islam. Saudi dollars bent events to the Kingdom’s will in the Arab world—particularly in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, but also in Egypt and Lebanon, Saudi cash has had a profound impact. Does this mean that all is well in Saudi Arabia itself, which has an extremely youthful population ruled by a gerontocracy? Problems endemic in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria—youth unemployment, corruption and repression—are also evident in the Kingdom and while young Saudis may not yet be taking to the streets, on Twitter and Facebook their discontent is manifest. Saudi Arabia remains the dominant player in the Gulf, and the fall of the House of Saud would have explosive repercussions on the GCC while the knock-on effect worldwide would be immeasurable. Saudi Arabia is the only oil exporter capable of acting as a ‘swing producer’, a fact of which this book reminds us. Aarts and Roelants have drawn a compelling picture of a Middle East power which, while not presently endangered, may soon deviate from the trajectory established by the House of Saud.

Akcali, Emel: Neoliberal Governmentality and the Future of the State in the Middle East and North Africa, Palgrave Macmillan, November 2015, 248 pp., ISBN 978-1-13-754692-0: Through an analysis of diverse regional case studies, this edited volume aims to shed light on the ways in which neoliberal governmentalties have developed and functioned in various Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. By scrutinizing whether or not resistance and a genuine revolutionary transformation in this important region have been futile, the authors seek to offer an outlook on the future of the state and society in the MENA. Furthermore, this volume aims to consider the ways in which global neoliberal discourses of democracy, modernity, emancipation, liberty, secularism, individual rights, and liberalism translate on the ground in the region.

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Conferences

Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany and Europe - Analysing the Problem and Creating Counter Strategies

Date: 14-16 January 2016
Location: Osnabrück, Germany
Organisation: University of Osnabrück

A growing number of mosque attacks as well as weekly anti-Muslim demonstrations in Dresden and other German cities are signs of rising anti-Muslim attitudes within large parts of the German population. This conference about anti-Muslim racism will analyze and counter these detrimental developments.

For further information see http://www.islamische-theologie.uni-osnabrueck.de/fileadmin/documents/public/Tagung_-_Antimuslimischer_Rassismus_Stand_-_Flyer.pdf

Migration Crisis? What Crisis? Why Crisis? Thinking, Framing, and Theorizing Mass Mobility in a Globalized Age

Date: 31 March-1 April 2016
Location: Rochester, NY, USA
Organisation: Rochester Institute of Technology

The conference will examine the nature of the "crisis" and the response to refugee movements in the oceans north of Australia as well as the Mediterranean and Balkan overland routes into the European Union.

For further information see http://www.rit.edu/cla/conable/call-papers

Migrants: Communities, Borders, Memories, Conflicts

Date: 17-19 March 2016
Location: Catania, Italy
Organisation: University of Catania

The 2016 SeSaMO conference puts the spotlight on migration meant as a general phenomenon that has affected Muslim-majority societies across history and can be approached from different disciplinary perspectives. Scholars are invited to present panels and papers dealing with the conference theme from different perspectives. Interdisciplinary proposals are welcome as well as proposals focusing on distinct areas of interest in the field of Middle Eastern studies. With the aim of encouraging scientific interaction with the international scholarly community, the conference will host keynote speakers who will lecture on topics of interest for the Society and who will have the opportunity to listen to paper presentations. Working languages will be Italian, English and French.

For further information see http://www.sesamoitalia.it/
Academia and Social Justice
Date: 11-13 March 2016
Location: Beirut, Lebanon
Organisation: Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship / Arab Studies Institute, American University of Beirut

This conference aims to query aspects of this relationship between academia and social justice in the Arab region and internationally. What are the debates and paradigms that define this engagement given the trends towards market-place economics, corporatization, and political orthodoxy?

For further information see https://gallery.mailchimp.com/2706fba83081d638f41bab041/files/AI_ASI_2016_Call_4_Papers_E.pdf

How Do We See Each Other? The Abrahamic Religions and Interreligious Relations in the Past and Present
Date: 10-11 March 2016
Location: 10-11 March 2016
Organisation: University of Navarra

This conference will consider interdisciplinary perspectives of how the Abrahamic religions perceive and relate to one another today, and how they have perceived and related to each other in the past.

For further information see https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/88404/how-do-we-see-each-other-abrahamic-religions-and-interreligious

Symposium
The Politics of Dress and Identity in Eastern Mediterranean Societies, Past and Present
Date: 24-26 March 2016
Location: Amsterdam
Organisation: Allard Pierson Museum

This symposium explores the interplay between dress and identity in the broader Mediterranean basin, with a special focus on Muslim societies and interconnected cultures, in both the past and present. It aims to bring together anthropologists, sociologists, historians, art historians, archaeologists, and scholars of other disciplines working on this subject.

For further information see http://humweb.ucsc.edu/mediterraneanseminar/news/index.php?id=521
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