

# Refuge from Syria: Policy Recommendations<sup>1</sup>

- Noting that: the **Syrian Humanitarian Crisis is now entering its fifth year**;
- Noting that: Syrians are fleeing from armed conflict and terrorism in their state, **violence which is being conducted by their own government, by Iranian, Russian and Allied Coalition state actors as well as armed non-state actors**; they are often the targets of violence and are not the 'violent extremists' of Europe who are largely home-grown;
- Noting that: **approximately 11 million people – about 50% of the population of Syria – are now displaced and dispossessed both internally to Syria and outside its national borders**;
- Recognising that: **of the \$4.320 billion pledged** by the international community to assist in the delivery of emergency and development aid to countries hosting Syrians in the Middle East Region, **only 58% has been received** (\$2.485 billion);
- Recognising that: the current EU policy of **containment of refugees from Syria in the neighbouring Middle Eastern countries is unsustainable** due to lack of funding and lack of coordination between local and international NGOs;
- Recognising that: the aid that is reaching the region is mainly directed to refugees in camps, whereas **the majority of refugees from Syria live in informal settlements or urban contexts**, many fearing eviction by national state actors;
- Recognising that: **Syria's historical role as a 'state of refuge' for millions of Muslims, Christians and Jews** from the closing decades of the Ottoman Empire to 2010 has created broad social, cultural and economic networks in the region;
- Recognising that: the hospitality of the countries surrounding Syria is being overwhelmed; for example, **in Lebanon nearly one in every three people is seeking refuge from Syria** (it is as though 20 million Syrians were in the UK seeking asylum);
- Recognising that: Syrians will continue to flee to safety – **when safety cannot be achieved in neighbouring countries they will find routes to Europe**, both legal and clandestine which contribute to financing criminal trafficking networks;
- Recognising that: **the movement of refugees into Europe is going to continue and to accelerate despite measures by national governments** to build barriers, fences and other deterrents – people will find alternative ways to reach Europe if they cannot survive with dignity in the region;
- Recognising that: movement to Europe is generally of the **well-educated middle class from Syria** (as well as from Gulf countries where many Syrians are losing their jobs); with skills recognition and professional re-qualification they **can be an effective temporary workforce in Europe**;

<sup>1</sup> The workshop 'Refuge from Syria' was held at the Refugee Studies Centre on 9 December 2015. Full details are available at [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/refuge-from-syria](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/refuge-from-syria)

- Recognising that: **public health concerns in Europe are going to grow** – health surveillance sites (sentinel sites) need to be set up before epidemics and pandemics spread across Europe with these large-scale refugee movements;
- Recognising that: **Syrian children born in the regional hosting countries and elsewhere have no birth certificates**, meaning their futures are blighted as they join the ranks of **stateless** people, contributing to long-term instability and suffering;
- Recognising that: **formal and non-formal education through scholarship and apprenticeship schemes needs to be developed** for Syrian youth in host countries and internationally while taking account of incomplete and missing educational documentation;
- Recognising that: **barriers in access to education** (including higher education) in regional hosting countries due to high cost and perceived risks **contributes to the attraction of Europe** as a destination for building viable futures;

## We the undersigned recommend that:

- **Better mechanisms for livelihood development and employment opportunities** are needed for survival in dignity among both the vulnerable host communities and the refugee community;
- **Better implementation of ideas and practices with regard to humanitarian assistance** is required, in light of the current massive counter-terrorism legislation which also translates into lack of sympathy for Syrians;
- **Concerted effort is required at the local, national and regional level to keep refugee youth in formal schooling** with full and appropriate education curriculum. Until such a time as these institutions can be set up, informal, non-formal and technical education programmes need to be developed and implemented;
- **'Spaces' for young refugees are needed, especially female youth**, to allow them to develop recreational activity including cultural activities, for example, traditional 'storytelling' and theatre;
- Greater effort needs to be made to **create more effective linkages with local municipalities, local NGOs, national and international IGOs**; local staff should be given precedence in hiring whenever possible;
- There needs to be **greater encouragement for UNHCR and UNRWA to work together to assist Palestinian refugees from Syria** who have been displaced by the current crisis (as was agreed during the Iraqi refugee crisis a decade earlier);
- **Alternative solutions to protection are needed in countries that have not signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol**;
- **A 'Comprehensive Plan of Action' offering Syrians temporary protection or resettlement** is needed, as has been implemented before for refugees from Bosnia in the 1990s and for the Vietnamese Boat People in the 1980s.

## Signatories:

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Cover photo: Syrian refugee girl preparing to return to school in Lebanon. © UNHCR/Nisreen Jaafar

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