Refuge from Syria: Policy Recommendations

- 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;

1 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
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