



Syria's Humanitarian Crisis: A Call for Regional and International Responses

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Syrian conflict has resulted in the largest humanitarian crisis of our time.

As of December 2014, there were more than 3.3 million Syrians listed as “registered refugees” or “persons of concern” by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹ In addition, some 12 million people are internally displaced, with another 5 million in besieged, hard-to-access areas. These figures mean that 18 million Syrians—nearly three-quarters of Syria’s population of 22 million—are in need of urgent assistance by the international community. Another 200,000 Syrians are dead because of the war.

The Syrian crisis is distinctive for its size and complexity, to be sure, but it also occurs in a context of regional and international uncertainty about how to help those who have lost their homes and livelihoods as Syria’s internal conflict continues, while finding ways to mitigate the impact the crisis is having on neighboring states. As we look to 2015, it is likely that new military interventions to fight the “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria will only mean *more* refugees. This poses tremendous challenges for the Arab region. Syria’s neighbors are hosting the vast majority of the 3.3 million refugees and other “persons of concern,” with the heaviest burden falling on Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and, to a lesser extent, Iraq. As we mark the conflict’s fourth winter, funding shortfalls increasingly threaten essential support programs, making an already dire situation unimaginably worse.

Further compounding the situation is a duality of understanding on the part of the international community: on one hand, the situation is a regional issue, something the Arab states (as well as Iran and Turkey) should work out on their own; on the other hand, the sheer numbers of refugees—not to mention military and political interventions by the United States, Russia, Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, to name a few—makes it a global issue. These factors raise questions about the very nature of humanitarian assistance for protracted refugee situations—Syria’s and those that, unfortunately, are certain to come in the future.

So, where does this leave the refugees and the internally displaced people who are trying desperately to survive the bitter Levantine winter? Where does it leave the millions of children and youths who need not just shoes, schooling, and sustenance, but also support to grow into emotionally healthy, productive adults?

Syria’s Humanitarian Crisis: A Policy Discussion

On October 31, 2014, the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies (BCARS) hosted a workshop for scholars, policy analysts, and program implementers to discuss the impacts of Syria’s refugee crisis on the region and the international community. We asked ourselves: “What can we learn from the refugees, those providing aid, and those providing funds, to help ameliorate the situation, now and into the future?” Our goal was to share evidence, understandings, and insights related to research and work on the ground; assess what is working and what may need to change; and suggest a set of recommendations for government decision-makers, donors, program

¹ UNHCR, “Syrian Refugee Regional Response,” <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (accessed Dec. 19, 2014). See also http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54.

implementers, and researchers to consider as they create and update policy, design and implement programs, and conduct the research in which policy and programs are grounded. In other words, we sought to understand how and where the international community could be doing more—and working differently—to respond to this growing crisis.

A thoughtful and experienced group of participants shared new research and on-the-ground expertise implementing humanitarian assistance programs and government-funded projects in Syria and neighboring countries. Presentations by renowned anthropologist Julie Peteet, BCARS scholar Vicky Kelberer of Boston University, and keynote speaker Susan Akram, also of Boston University, grounded the group in the facts, figures, and human factors. Rami Khouri, BCARS senior scholar from the American University of Beirut, offered a “Top 10” list of policy implications, based on his analysis of Lebanon’s response. Curtis Rhodes, founder and international director of Questscope, shared lessons from his organization’s work with young refugees inside Jordan’s Za’atari camp. Many other BCARS scholars and development practitioners offered insights and experiences; the names of all who participated and the full workshop program appear at the end of this report.

What follows is a summary of the discussions, highlighting the origins, status, and likely policy challenges of the crisis. This report is an attempt to document the themes that emerged, offer ideas on how the region and the international community could replicate successes—and there *are* successes to report—and come to consensus around policies that could enable the host countries and the refugees to bear up under this protracted situation. We begin by summarizing the key aspects of the crisis for Syrian refugees, focusing on Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and, to a lesser extent, Iraq. We then offer a set of themes that complicate the provision of humanitarian assistance and longer-term development aid for refugees and other “persons of concern,” followed by a summary of lessons and examples of promising models for the delivery of assistance. We close with a set of recommendations and questions for further study, which are summarized below.

Summary of Recommendations from the Workshop

As we release this report, the plight of Syrians worsens. On December 1, 2014, the World Food Programme announced that it would have to stop providing food vouchers to hundreds of thousands of refugees, because funds that had supported the program since 2011 were finally exhausted.² Although the program was restarted a week later, the incident underscores the international community’s haphazard response to the crisis, and the potentially disastrous consequences it could have for those most vulnerable. It is clearly time for a reinvigorated response, and more than time for the global community to imagine new directions to assist the refugees and the communities that are offering them shelter. With that in mind, we offer policymakers and practitioners four main recommendations from our discussions.



“Preparing for winter in Lebanon’s Bekaa valley” // DFID
<https://flic.kr/p/i2pVb7> // Creative Commons license CC BY 2.0

² Sam Jones, “1.7m Syrian refugees face food crisis as UN funds dry up,” December 1, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/01/syrian-refugees-food-crisis-un-world-programme>.

- **Recommendation #1. Develop a regional and international vision for immediate humanitarian aid *and* long-term development assistance.** Complex crises demand new and complex ways of thinking in order to explore workable interventions and credible responses; they further demand that policymakers look beyond the short term. The BCARS workshop participants agree that although there is an urgent need for funds to provide Syria’s refugees with today’s survival needs, such solutions will remain short-term in nature unless there is a regionally and internationally cohesive response that creates a long-term vision for development. This is particularly the case because many regional and global actors are actively contributing to the warfare and diplomatic blockages that generate refugee flows. Until the wider community acknowledges a shared responsibility to support and strengthen UNHCR’s Regional Response Plan,³ we risk perpetuating and worsening a failing status quo. A crucial subtask in this recommendation is a coordinated approach to addressing the needs and clarifying the status of the twice-refugeed Palestinians who have fled Syria. Finally and fundamentally, shared responsibility for the conflict requires a regionally and internationally coordinated effort to put an end to the conflict that fuels the Syrian crisis.
- **Recommendation #2. Involve refugees in active participation and decision-making.** Donor calls for funding often highlight the “faces of the crisis,” showing the families, men and women, youth, and children whose lives hang in the balance. Although this strategy can encourage donations and funding, the rhetoric around humanitarian assistance too often conceptualizes the refugee as a passive recipient of the generosity of others. Programs that emerge from this understanding place refugees in a position of being acted *upon*. They become “projects,” not people who can and should have a role in how programs look or how to run them. This type of thinking must change, and there are a number of models—including some that are summarized in this report—that demonstrate how recognizing human agency and ability contributes to more successful and potentially more sustainable programs.
- **Recommendation #3: Mitigate the burden on host communities.** The international community must acknowledge the burden and provide for more equitable sharing of resources to reduce the strain on the countries and communities who are hosting the greatest numbers of refugees. Programs that enable refugees to make visible contributions to themselves and to the overall well-being of their host communities are one option for generating positive interactions and associations that may reduce tension (for example, a program that brings solar power or clean water to refugees can be extended to include a surrounding community that lacks infrastructure). Underlying this recommendation is the need to reduce the sheer numbers of refugees in a few countries; the United States and the European Union in particular need to accept more Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. Although Western governments have committed to collectively resettling an estimated 100,000 refugees in 2015 (a mere 3 percent of the total refugee population), this is not nearly enough to meaningfully ease the strain placed on neighboring countries.⁴
- **Recommendation #4. Fund “smaller actions” that show promise.** Acknowledging the need for a longer-term vision and programs that integrate and empower refugees to help define the way forward also means testing promising interventions on a smaller scale. Numerous

³ See <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>.

⁴ Nick Cumming-Bruce, “More Nations Pledge to U.N. to Resettle Syrian Refugees,” December 9, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/10/world/middleeast/united-nations-wins-government-pledges-for-resettling-syrian-refugees.html>.

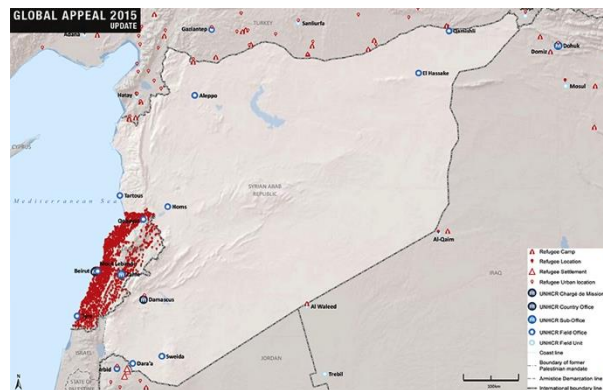
organizations are modeling and piloting programs that offer refugees and displaced Syrians (as well as vulnerable populations in host communities) promising ideas for the use of technology, community-based infrastructure development, mental health counseling, and youth mentorship programs, to name a few examples. Testing ideas on a smaller scale enables direct links with the individuals and communities who can and should have a voice in the design and adaptation of refugee-focused interventions. Moreover, a pilot or community-based program can test a “big” idea at relatively low cost, while generating immediate benefits for those who need them and offering direct evidence of value to the decision-makers and funding agencies that design the larger programs that can take successful ideas to scale.

Our audience for this report encompasses policymakers and practitioners: regional governments and coalitions; humanitarian assistance agencies such as UNHCR and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA); human development agencies; international humanitarian assistance organizations; and grassroots organizations working in the camps and communities refugees and other displaced people must now call home. We also expect to add to the work of academics whose endeavors are embedded in the Arab region, and deepen the types of questions that are being asked about this refugee crisis and its implications for the Arab region and the world.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF SYRIA'S REFUGEE CRISIS

Although the past century has been punctuated by mass displacements throughout the world, a range of circumstances have made the Middle East a major site of human displacement. By 2007, four years before the current crisis began, the region was generating more than 40 percent of the world's refugees.⁵

Even in this context, the Syrian crisis is distinctive for a number of reasons, not least of which is its implications for how refugees and “persons of concern” have been defined by the international community and how protocols and agreements are understood and enacted in a protracted crisis that is affecting *millions* of refugees and host communities and straining cross-border relations. First, the speed with which massive numbers of people are being displaced is unprecedented: More than 3.3 million⁶ Syrians have fled since 2011. The result is a remapping of the region that, though observable, does not tell us how things will look in the years to come.



UNHCR map shows location of registered Syrian refugees. Source: www.unhcr.org/images/operationsMaps/country-syr.jpg.

A second defining feature of this crisis is its urban component. Eighty percent of refugees are in towns and cities, not in official refugee camps. This poses tremendous challenges to the delivery of aid: How is the population identified, and how can aid organizations understand and meet their needs in a non-camp framework? The influx of refugees to towns and cities also changes the face of the places where refugees settle: Beirut, Lebanon, is being radically transformed by its Syrian refugees, as is Amman, Jordan, a city that was already transformed by waves of refugees throughout the 20th century.⁷

Jordan has also established two of the region's largest camps for Syrian refugees, which more than 100,000 Syrian men, women, and children now call “home.” The camps' existence is telling; despite broad acknowledgment of the urban nature of the crisis, camps remain a primary device for delivering assistance to refugees. Camps are also means of “containing” refugees in spaces that are defined by governments and aid agencies: built on grids, with high walls that divide those in the camps from the citizens of the host country and keep them separate. From the inside, camp residents often feel like “prisoners” or, at best, like disempowered non-citizens. From the outside, camp residents may seem to receive “better” services than host community residents. As funds and experts flow in to provide food, clothing, and health services and build water, sanitation, and electricity infrastructure in the camp, surrounding communities often feel marginalized.

⁵ Julie Peteet, “Unsettling the Categories of Refugees,” *Middle East Report 244 – “Displaced.”* Middle East Research and Information Project, Fall 2007. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer244/unsettling-categories-displacement>.

⁶ UNHCR, “Syrian Refugee Regional Response,” <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁷ Sarah A. Tobin, “The History of Amman,” in *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Amman, Jordan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), forthcoming.

The Syrian crisis also arises in a time of changing approaches to refugee aid. Worldwide, the major assistance and development agencies are looking at “public-private partnerships” and “resilience” strategies.⁸ Meanwhile, technology enables unprecedented levels of connection, not only in giving refugees the ability to stay in touch with those they left behind and with refugees in other countries, but also in creating a near-constant stream of visuals from the camps. Technology also enables a different kind of assistance through cash cards and e-vouchers, raising questions about surveillance and complicating the provision of aid to those outside the camps.

Several legal and policy documents have guided international approaches to refugee assistance for decades. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol,⁹ and the 1969 OAU Convention defined who is a refugee and established the rights of refugees and the legal obligations of states. As crises occur, multilateral treaties and other agreements govern country and regional responses. Although these provide essential frameworks for assistance, the protracted character of this crisis requires new thinking, new definitions, and actionable new policies. Syria has lost an estimated 35 to 50 years of human development due to the civil war; repatriation or resettlement of several million people will be a difficult and protracted process.

But the conflict inside Syria continues, and military intervention in the region by the United States and Iran¹⁰ (among others) to combat the “Islamic State” will create more refugees. Although many host-country policies prefer repatriation to “integration” of refugees, the ongoing conflict may preclude that option for some time. And even if the refugees can eventually return, the landscape of their homes has changed dramatically. More durable solutions are needed to ensure a coordinated regional and international response that can meet immediate needs for assistance while preparing to support the human development needs of refugees and the displaced for decades to come.

Syrian Refugee Crisis: Key Facts & Figures

- **3.3 million** refugees and **8 million** internally displaced.
- **80% live outside formal camps**; in urban areas, refugees face persecution from host communities.
- Roughly **54% of refugees are children** under the age of 18.
- **4 in 5 Syrian refugee children are not in school**; those who are may not be receiving an effective education due a variety of factors.
- Only **4% (123,000)** of refugees have been admitted to Europe, and only a few hundred have been admitted to the United States and Canada.
- **Palestinians** who have fled Syria face additional barriers to assistance due to questions of formal status and host-country policies that predate the current crisis, as well as policies developed in response to the crisis.
- Despite the international community’s efforts, particularly UNHCR Regional Response Plan, **regional policies remain uncoordinated** and host-country policies toward refugees vary widely.
- Funding lags far behind the need. **Only 67% of UNHCR’s \$4.2 billion Regional Response Plan 6 has been fulfilled.**

⁸ Denis Sullivan and Sarah Tobin, “Security and Resilience among Syrian Refugees in Jordan,” Middle East Research and Information Project, October 14, 2014. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero101414>.

⁹ UNHCR, “The Legislation that Underpins Our Work,” <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>.

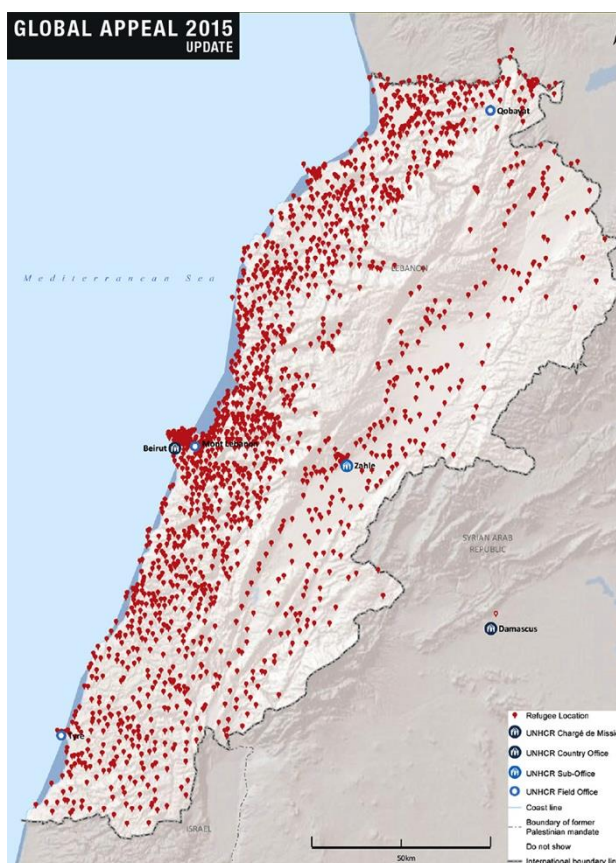
¹⁰ Tim Arango and Thomas Erdbrink, “U.S. and Iran Both Attack ISIS, but Try Not to Look Like Allies,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/world/middleeast/iran-airstrikes-hit-islamic-state-in-iraq.html>.

BELEAGUERED HOST COUNTRIES

This report focuses on Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, which are hosting the greatest number of refugees and offer examples of policy approaches and humanitarian assistance concerns related to relief and development in the countries hosting refugees from Syria. However, it is crucial to remember that Syria's other neighbor, Iraq, is under intense and increasing pressure from more than a decade of conflict. From a humanitarian assistance standpoint, new U.S. and other military interventions to combat the "Islamic State" are likely only to complicate the displacement situation, increasing the number of refugees and internally displaced people.¹¹

In Lebanon, one in four people is a refugee from Syria. The sheer numbers of refugees—now fully one-quarter of the Lebanese population—has inspired a reversal of the government's initial "open-door" policy. The closure of official crossings has reduced the influx of refugees, but that does little to help the country's already beleaguered host communities. Moreover, the government has no official policy in place to give refugees formal status. Aid to refugees is further complicated by the fact that Lebanon has not established camps for refugees from Syria. This means that refugees are scattered across the country, but because camps are the traditional structures through which aid is delivered, their welfare is a grave concern.

Nearly all of the refugees live side-by-side with the poorest Lebanese. Although the dynamics have yet to be fully examined, tensions are obvious: Host communities, already stretched for jobs, resources, and development assistance, feel increasingly marginalized. There is increasing violence against Syrians in urban areas. Many see the presence of refugees as a threat on multiple levels, from economics to religion. Beyond its initial support to allow refugees to enter the country, Lebanon's central government has not set a clear policy. Focused on internal political struggles, it is letting UNHCR and the UNRWA take the lead in determining the course of assistance. In April 2014 Lebanon closed its borders to Palestinians from Syria, and in January 2015 the Lebanese government announced that it would begin implementing new visa restrictions on Syrians, allowing refugees to enter only under "very limited" and "exceptional" cases.¹²



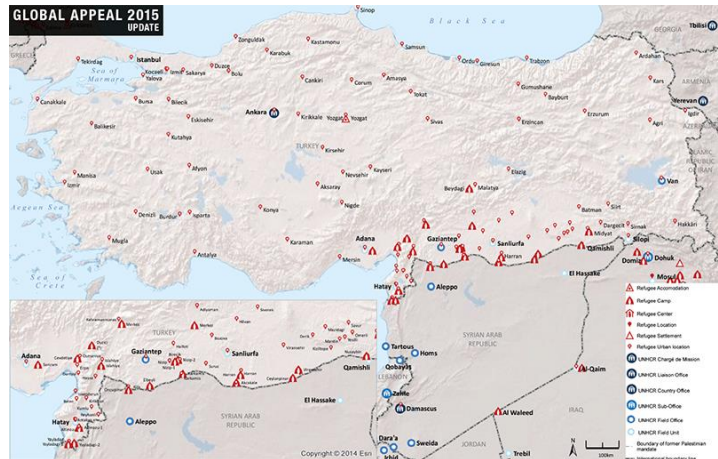
Lebanon is inundated with refugees. Image source: UNHCR (Dec. 5, 2014) www.unhcr.org/images/operationsMaps/country-lbn-400.jpg

¹¹ Syrian refugees are a relatively small portion of the displacement picture in Iraq, where 1.8 million people are internally displaced.

¹² "The plight of Syrian refugees deepens in Lebanon and abroad," January 8, 2015, *The Middle East Monitor*, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/16238-the-plight-of-syrian-refugees-deepens-in-lebanon-and-abroad>.

Given the protracted nature of this crisis, which many believe will go on for at least a decade, development assistance needs to shift to longer-term thinking that considers the host community context and looks closely at ways to mitigate economic vulnerabilities (unemployment, poverty, rent prices, tourism decline), social tensions, and other factors plaguing the country as it tries to deal with more than 1 million Syrians within its borders.

Turkey is now host to some 1.6 million Syrian refugees. Initially refusing any international aid in support of the refugees streaming into the country, Turkey was relatively better equipped than other host countries to support refugees. Now, its preparedness is also its misfortune. Initial success in accepting, registering, and providing aid to Syria's refugees meant the international community paid comparatively little attention—at least until the “Islamic State” began encroaching.¹³ Turkey estimates it has spent some \$4.5 billion of its own money on refugee assistance, a figure that matches the entirety of EU spending on the crisis.



Refugees in Turkey. Image source: UNHCR (Dec. 5, 2014) www.unhcr.org/images/operationsMaps/country-tur-400.jpg

As in Lebanon, many refugees have settled in urban areas, dispersed among the Turkish population. The Turkish government provides widespread services—and does not distinguish between Syrians and Palestinians, unlike the other host countries—but the language barrier keeps many refugees from knowing their rights of access to health care and other services. Growing resentment by host communities is an ongoing concern, particularly around ethnic and religious differences, and there is evidence of increasing sexual and gender-based violence against and among refugees. Sheer numbers of refugees are increasing the tensions dramatically: In the city of Kilis, near the border with Syria, refugees now outnumber the local residents. All of this strains both sides: One survey found that 86 percent of Turkish respondents wanted to stop accepting refugees, and 30 percent wanted Syrian refugees sent back across the border.¹⁴

Turkey offers a policy example that could be a model for addressing this crisis and those to come, including its Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which was implemented in mid-2014. The law reflects Turkish policymakers' efforts to re-evaluate migration systems, and creates a new agency that will ensure interagency coordination. The Migration Policy Institute called the policy “a significant step toward managing both legal and irregular migration to Turkey, including humanitarian migration.”¹⁵ This important development is a possible step toward transforming the legal framework to incorporate longer-term, development-based approaches to the crisis.

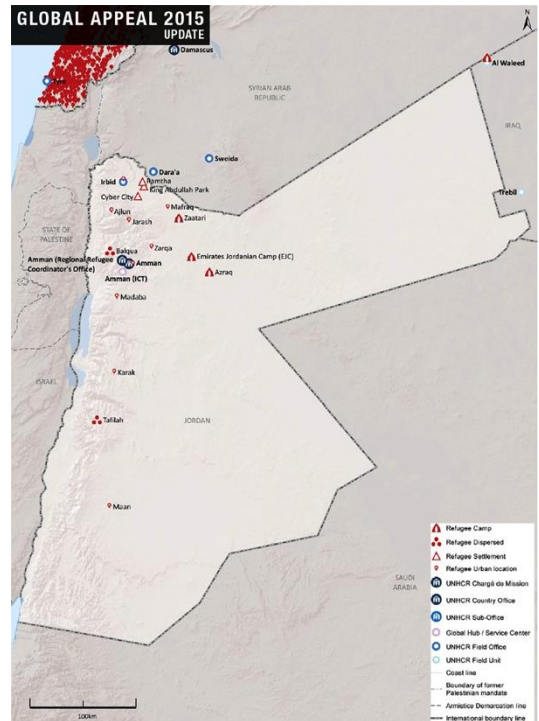
¹³ Karam Shoulmali and Anne Barnard, “Refugees Flood Turkish Border as Islamic State Steps Up Attacks on Syrian Kurds,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/29/world/middleeast/refugees-flood-turkish-border-as-isis-steps-up-attacks-on-syrian-kurds.html>.

¹⁴ Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, “Reaction Mounting Against Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” <http://www.edam.org.tr/Media/Files/1152/EdamSurvey2014.1.pdf>.

¹⁵ Rebecca Kilbert, “Turkey’s Evolving Migration Identity,” Migration Policy Institute, July 24, 2014, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkeys-evolving-migration-identity>.

Jordan is host to more than 620,000 registered Syrian refugees (10 percent of the population); the government says there are 1.3 million Syrians in Jordan. In October 2014, Jordan effectively closed its borders to new refugees. In 2013, there were 10,000 refugees entering Jordan each week; this slowed to fewer than 50 per week in late 2014. The country's strategy toward refugees is one of "containment": Za'atari is the world's third-largest refugee camp, and refugees must register with the UNHCR to receive assistance, but cannot do so outside the camp structures. Inside the camp, security is a major concern, especially sexual and gender-based violence, prostitution, sexual assault, and early marriage.

Fewer than 20 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan reside in camps; as in Lebanon and Turkey, many have settled in urban areas, living alongside the poorest Jordanians and competing for limited assistance resources. Palestinian refugees face particular challenges. Jordan was hosting 2 million Palestinian refugees before the crisis began, but its new policy of not allowing new Palestinians to enter collides with Syria's policy of not allowing Palestinians to return. In short, they have nowhere to go.



Refugees in Jordan. Image source: UNHCR (Dec. 5, 2014) www.unhcr.org/images/operationsMaps/country-jor.jpg

Jordan is already a major recipient of development assistance, particularly U.S. assistance, much of which goes toward "capacity building" and water infrastructure. As international donors and aid organizations redirect their focus to humanitarian assistance to refugees in the camps, however, Jordanian communities are feeling marginalized. Meanwhile, the refugee influx is putting a strain on resources, and gross domestic product appears to be slowing. As in Lebanon and Turkey, Jordanians who once opened their borders to the refugees now want to shut them completely. Models for assisting refugees would do well to take into account the development needs of economically poor and marginalized Jordanians, who lack many of the same resources as the refugees.

"Stateless & Status-Less"¹⁶: Palestinian Refugees from Syria

- **508,000 Palestinians** lived in refugee camps in Syria before the crisis began.
- **More than 73,000 have fled** to neighboring countries, Gaza, Europe, and Southeast Asia; many have lost legal status.
- **Lebanon and Jordan have closed their borders** to new Palestinian entrants, resulting in illegal border crossings; **Egypt has banned UNHCR from registering Palestinians.**
- In contrast, **Turkey does not distinguish between Syrians and Palestinians** in providing refugee assistance; however, this could change if the current government does not stay in power.
- Palestinians have **no international protection agency**; therefore, they have no way to gain formal refugee status under international conventions on refugee assistance.

¹⁶ Maisam al-Ahmed coined this term during the October workshop.

CLOSING THE GAPS: THEMES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR PROTRACTED REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

For those outside of a crisis, the idea of being driven to flee home to escape famine, natural disaster, or human violence is difficult to absorb. How much more difficult, then, to contemplate what it means to be displaced, to be an asylum seeker, to be a refugee? But there is a necessary next step, with dramatic implications for policy and programming. We must understand, and then reach for solutions that see refugees as *partners*. This process requires us to wrestle with a number of issues that complicate current notions of how aid is delivered to refugees.

This section considers some of the themes and questions that complicate or support the provision of assistance in a protracted refugee crisis, using findings from field-based research, pilot programs, and organizations working directly with the people who are affected by Syria's refugee crisis. By no means is this a comprehensive listing of the issues; however, these are some of the most important areas for focus as governments and international agencies consider how to deliver aid to Syrians.

Questions of Safety: Acknowledging Gaps in Protections for Children and Women

Gaps in social protections are a particularly damaging element of this crisis. As the country profiles in the previous section indicate, sexual and gender-based violence are an increasing concern. The research of Kathleen Hamill and Susan Bartells of Harvard University's FXB Center for Health & Human Rights examines child protection concerns specifically. Their team undertook a detailed child protection assessment in Lebanon—where half of all Syrian refugees are children—to understand the risks facing families and children, identify ways to decrease vulnerability to those risks, and advocate for policies and programs to promote the rights of children. Their observations and interviews with refugees reveal a number of issues for consideration.¹⁷ For example, families cannot access refugee services until they are registered, and wait times for registration can hinder access to basic health services and even food and water. This, along with crowded conditions—especially in tented settlements—increases children's risk of exposure to communicable and infectious diseases, while interfering with their psychological well-being. Security measures designed to constrain refugee movements can also limit access to education and other social services.

Although some parents (as well as NGOs and UN agencies) are finding ways to create child-friendly spaces even under these conditions, the social isolation of refugee-hood is taking a toll, with dire consequences for the most vulnerable. Many children and adults are developing negative coping mechanisms that exacerbate the situation. Child labor (as families must choose between doing without basic needs or sending their children to work), early marriage (which often ends education for girls), and reports of human trafficking are all occurring, but the international response does not always focus on these factors as it struggles to provide food, shelter, and winter clothing.

Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, is an increasing reality. Syrian women in Jordan's refugee camps report that their husbands are under immense stress, and more than 40 percent of women in the camps do not leave home because they fear harassment and

¹⁷ Susan Bartells and Kathleen Hamill, "Running Out of Time: Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon," *FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University*, January 2014, <http://fxb.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2014/01/FXB-Center-Syrian-Refugees-in-Lebanon-Released-01-13-14.pdf>.

violence. Meanwhile, lack of trust in providers and cultural stigma are likely keeping many from reporting their experiences. And although sexual and gender-based violence does not affect only women and girls, men and boys are even less likely to report it. Jordan's Family Protection Services has implemented an interagency response to sexual and gender-based violence inside and outside of camp settings, including safe centers, clinical care, counseling for survivors, and training for providers. The host countries are taking steps to address specific issues (in 2011 Lebanon passed an anti-trafficking law, and Jordan has a national sub-working group on sexual and gender-based violence), coordinated international action is needed to address the longer-term psychosocial implications of the crisis and fund programs that enable refugees and their children to cope and recover.

Questions of Technology: Acknowledging the Need for Connection

Dana Janbek of Lasell College and Melissa Wall from California State University–Northridge have examined how communication technology relates to Syrian refugees' ability to cope and find that the cellphone is an essential tool in Za'atari refugee camp and in urban areas in Jordan. No longer a "luxury," cellphones are a lifeline for receiving and sharing information with those left behind, sending money to and from Jordan, and comparing news about changing conditions back home and in the camp. In an environment of multilayered formal and informal security and surveillance,¹⁸ refugees use coded messages and self-censoring in their communications with friends and family. Even so, many have told Dr. Janbek that they trust only their phones. The cellphone is one of the few things over which refugees feel they can exert some measure of control: It contributes to social cohesion and offers a form of agency for those who have experienced the extreme loss of control that refugee-hood brings.

Other kinds of communication technology show promise as means of connecting those living and working in the camps with support beyond basic survival needs. As Hussam Jefee-Bahloul of Yale School of Medicine says, "We can do a lot from here"; in other words, technology expands the base of refugee support to those who cannot (for security or other reasons) be physically present in refugee camps or settlements. Dr. Jefee-Bahloul and his colleagues are piloting "telemedicine" approaches¹⁹ that use Skype to train volunteer health workers in "psychological first aid"²⁰ and asynchronous email communication to connect Syrians who treat refugees with a global network of psychiatry specialists. They call the latter approach the **Syrian TelePsychiatric Network**. The pilot is a promising mechanism for connecting isolated field workers and field-based clinicians with training, information, and expertise that can help them offer more complete services to refugees. More than that, the network is an example of the type of approach that could generate shared responsibility for supporting Syria's refugees—in the Middle East and beyond.

Questions of Empathy: Achieving Mutually Beneficial Development

Although rhetoric around displacements tends to consider refugee-hood as a temporary situation, the average stay in a refugee camp lasts twelve years.²¹ Acknowledging this fact requires a different

¹⁸ Sullivan and Tobin, "Security and Resilience among Syrian Refugees in Jordan," <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero101414>.

¹⁹ Hussam Jefee-Bahloul, "Sustainability by technology," *The Lancet Global Health Blog*, October 3, 2014, <http://globalhealth.thelancet.com/2014/10/03/sustainability-technology>.

²⁰ For a description, see http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/.

²¹ Reihaneh Mozaffari, presentation, October 31, 2014. See also Mac McClelland, "How To Build a Perfect Refugee Camp," *New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html>.

kind of thinking: The camp (and indeed, any other refugee settlement) becomes a semi-permanent structure that is established within or alongside a community; the fates of both communities are intertwined. The case of Mafraq in Jordan offers a salient example. Mafraq is the community closest to Za’atari refugee camp. What many humanitarian workers in Za’atari may not realize is that residents of Mafraq lack access to sustainable water, electricity, and waste management infrastructure; the area was already under environmental strain before the camp added 100,000 refugees to the local population. In other words, the community suffers many of the same lacks that refugees do, but limited resources are, perhaps understandably, directed toward the immediate crisis.

To provide infrastructure or assistance to the camp without providing concurrent support to surrounding communities exacerbates tensions between the refugees and their hosts, who wonder why they do not have the same level of support for their own development. Empathy for the refugees’ plight will not last long in such circumstances. Given the likelihood that the camp will be there for years to come, directing development assistance only toward the camp is a shortsighted view that one coalition is attempting to correct. A new organization, Innovation & Planning Agency, is hoping to test new models that will change the conversation about refugees—to spark development-based thinking that will help host communities and host governments to see refugees as assets, not burdens. The hope is to extend some benefits of humanitarian assistance outside the camp—addressing the entirety of an issue. For example, a project to bring solar power into Za’atari camp could share its surplus electricity with the people of Mafraq, even acknowledging the camp/the refugees as the source.

Such ideas are a first step, but they require coordinating bodies that can assess needs, direct funding flows, and build capacity and awareness to bring them to fruition. This is all easier said than done, but one crucial need is to help policymakers acknowledge the longevity of the camps, so that development efforts begin to take medium- to long-term thinking in their approaches to managing not only funds but also relationships between refugees and their “hosts.” And at the level of scale, regional and international coordination will be required to test and adapt ideas outside of the localities where they offer the first promise.

Questions of Agency: Acknowledging the Refugee’s Role in Decision-Making

To be a refugee is to suffer great loss, of nearly everything one possesses. This loss is embodied in traditional approaches to humanitarian assistance, in which programs are designed by distant actors and then *delivered to refugees*. The passive construction, “aid is delivered,” lies at the heart of this model. Without necessarily setting out to do so, the model places the refugee in the position of being acted upon, of being a “project,” rather than a person who has the ability to guide the direction of his or her life. In a crisis such as this, the refugee has already been stripped of much of what life once meant: Forced from home, family, friends, and livelihoods, refugees are asked to relinquish decision-making power—to let the aid agency act upon them—in order to receive assistance. In general terms, the refugee is seen as a burden, not an asset.

Such loss of agency has deep ramifications for how refugees are seen and how they see themselves. For example, many Syrian adult refugees are well-educated, successful people who have lost not just their homes, but also the sense of self that comes from working in a chosen career and being able to provide for themselves and their families. But a variety of factors driving host-country policies do not allow many Syrian (or Palestinian) refugees to work, inside or outside the camps. The Jordanian government, focused on questions of security and capacity, has not yet permitted meaningful Syrian

involvement in delivering their own support programs. As one example, those who teach Syrian refugee children are required to be Jordanians, despite the large number of qualified Syrian teachers living in the camps. Meanwhile, children are losing out on years of primary and secondary education, both inside and outside the camps.

Several programs are supporting refugees to reclaim their sense of self, but a sustainable shift in thinking across the region will require collaborative approaches that bring Syrians into the decision-making process for program design and see them as essential partners and actors in carrying out those programs. Such a shift means viewing the refugee not as a “recipient” but as a partner, or even a client. In simple terms, this means bringing Syrians into the entire process of program design, delivery, and evaluation. Two programs offer examples of how this kind of “client-centered” thinking can be integrated to aid Syrian refugees—and those who have remained in Syria.

The international nonprofit organization Questscope offers a promising model for collaboration. Led by Dr. Curtis Rhodes, Questscope links individuals, communities, local and national organizations, and policymakers to design programs jointly. In Jordan, Questscope has worked with the Ministry of Education to create non-formal education alternatives for Jordanians and Syrians. In Za’atari refugee camp, the organization works with and through Syrian young adult mentors who volunteer their time to help at-risk youth gain life skills. Questscope case managers (all of whom are Syrian) link the mentors with local partners to enhance their work. Through the program, young people learn to make positive choices and be productive members of their communities.²²

Client-centered thinking is not limited to the nonprofit sector or to the refugee situation. The USAID-funded Essential Services-North project, implemented by Chemonics International, piloted activities to restore “economically essential water infrastructure in agricultural communities,” rebuilding water pumps and installing solar-powered pumps to restore irrigation. The solar project enabled farmers in the northern Syrian village of Bdama to irrigate 120 orchards, resulting in the first harvest since 2012.²³ The goal was not “development” per se; the project was designed to document lessons from a “complex conflict environment.” Project managers believe that an important factor is sharing responsibility (and subsequent benefits) and ensuring that Syrians lead the process. The project’s Syrian staff worked with local authorities (the Local Councils) to identify needs and carry out the rehabilitation projects using locally available materials. Cross-border coordination was also important: Some unavailable materials came from the Turkish supply chain, underlining the possibility that regional coordination structures might, eventually, speed the pace of restoration.

Of course, humanitarian and development assistance in a protracted refugee crisis cannot afford to change only a few people’s lives at a time. Enabling refugees to recover their sense of agency in the crisis requires, as Dr. Rhodes has said, “changing the reality *around* that person.” To do that requires a close look at regional and international policy and accountability structures for refugee assistance.

Questions of Accountability: Acknowledging the Crisis as a Shared Responsibility

The Syrian crisis raises urgent questions about international responsibilities for refugee protection. The traditional response assumes each crisis will be temporary and confined to a relatively small

²² Questscope, “2013/14 Annual Report,” http://questscope.org/sites/default/files/documents/QS-2014AR%20FINAL_0.pdf. See also <http://questscope.org/our-work/mentoring>.

²³ Chemonics International Inc., “Essential Services-North Final Report: Lessons Learned and Recommendations,” U.S. Agency for International Development, 2014, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K6Q5.pdf.

area. Given the protracted and regional nature of this crisis, however, traditional models and frameworks are proving insufficient. Funding shortfalls and uncoordinated responses at the regional level are revealing tensions between humanitarian agencies' ability to provide short-term relief and the international community's ability to construct durable solutions for the longer term.

Susan Akram of Boston University recently led a fieldwork study that mapped the interplay of domestic, regional, and international laws and policies for refugee protections in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt to identify mechanisms that would relieve pressure on the current host countries by requiring other states to offer resettlement options. The resulting report makes

“an urgent call for a global Comprehensive Plan of Action (‘CPA’) that builds on UNHCR’s recommendations for solidarity with the countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region by offering resettlement, humanitarian, and other forms of admission for the refugees ... with over three million refugees from Syria outside their home territory, resettlement can only be a partial solution—restricted as it is to only the most exceptional opportunities for the most vulnerable individuals. Countries outside the current host region must begin considering much more open policies ... [The study] sets out a framework for how states in and outside the Middle East region can implement genuine responsibility sharing toward the refugee population through existing laws and policies, integrating Syrian and non-Syrian refugees through the short-term and longer-term admissions.”²⁴

The Comprehensive Plan of Action, as outlined in the study, would:

- (1) extend humanitarian admission/temporary protection, resettlement, and alternative legal routes for refugees to enter the European Union;
- (2) fill the U.S. resettlement quota for the Middle East for 2014 and expand it for 2015, speed processing of security background checks, and expand Temporary Protected Status for Syrians, while accelerating the resettlement of non-Syrian refugee populations;
- (3) increase Canada’s resettlement quotas for Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees, including government-sponsored slots, and overcome processing delays and barriers to private sponsorship of refugees;
- (4) open resettlement spaces for refugees from Syria and develop platforms for temporary protection and resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Latin America; and
- (5) maintain open borders in the Middle East, ensure non-*refoulement*²⁵ for Palestinians, implement a temporary protection regime for Palestinians and Syrian refugees, and formalize refugee legislation in the host countries.

As in all of the above examples, the focus of such a policy shift would be to reorient responses *toward the refugees as prime movers in creating, carrying out, and evaluating programs*. That shift toward transparent and inclusive development is fundamental to the overarching policy recommendations in the final section of this report.

²⁴ Susan M. Akram, et al., “Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing” Boston University School of Law, 2014, <http://www.bu.edu/law/central/id/programs/clinics/international-human-rights/documents/FINAL.FullReport.pdf>.

²⁵ According to UNHCR, “In no case may an alien be deported or returned to a country regardless of whether or not it is his country of origin, if in that country his right to life or personal freedom is in danger of being violated because of his race, nationality, religion, social status or political opinions.” See <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68ccd10.html>.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PROGRAMMING, AND FURTHER STUDY

“Humanitarian aid and development cooperation need to come closer. During a protracted crisis, we cannot limit support to humanitarian aid ... This is something that we all know is essential, but we do not really know how.”

—Martin Dahinden, Swiss ambassador to the United States and former director-general of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation²⁶

On December 18, 2014, the United Nations announced it needed \$8.4 billion for projected expenses in 2015 to help nearly 18 million victims of the Syrian conflict. This “18 million victims” is a new number, derived from the following:

- the current number of registered refugees and “persons of concern”: 3.3 million
- others who have fled Syria but are not officially registered with UNHCR: at least 1 million
- the number of Syrians who are internally displaced: more than 12 million
- vulnerable communities in host countries: more than 1 million

The other stark figure is “more than 200,000”— that is the number of Syrians killed in the last four years of fighting in Syria. This number climbs daily.

Existing policy frameworks are not sufficient to ensure continued support to the immense numbers of refugees and “persons of concern” resulting from the Syrian conflict. International efforts must *continue* providing assistance to several million refugees, and find ways to reduce the burden on host communities. Development-oriented thinking may be required to address the economic and humanitarian and security issues that accompany this protracted refugee situation.

Although there is no one-size solution, policymakers have begun to consider the longer-term implications of a region with **millions of refugees who may never be able to return home**. To that end, we offer four overarching recommendations for policy, programming, and further study.

Recommendation #1: Develop a Regional and International Vision for Immediate Humanitarian Aid *and* Long-Term Development Assistance

Complex crises require complex thinking that deepens the conversation so that policymakers can look beyond the short term. The participants who came together on October 31, 2014, agree that although there is an urgent need for funds to provide Syria’s refugees with today’s survival needs, such solutions will remain short-term in nature unless there is a regionally and internationally cohesive response that seeks a longer-term vision for development. Until the wider community

²⁶ The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, “An Interview with Ambassador Martin Dahinden,” *The Fletcher School, Tufts University*, October 1, 2014, <http://www.fletcherforum.org/2014/10/01/dahinden/>.

acknowledges a shared responsibility in the form of clear regional response plans (likely modeled on Turkey’s promising approach), we risk maintaining a status quo that is not working.

Current approaches work within a paradigm of containment—keeping the crisis within the region. However, the sheer scale of the crisis, not to mention the fact that the international community is already involved on several levels, makes this unfeasible. Governments outside the Middle East, particularly the United States and the countries of the European Union, must honor their commitments under current frameworks and provide status and protections for refugees from Syria outside the region. A **Global Comprehensive Plan of Action** is urgently needed,²⁷ building on UNHCR’s recommendations for solidarity with the current host countries and including a regional Temporary Protection Plan with basic rights afforded uniformly in each country. Turkey’s Temporary Protection Plan offers a model that could be adapted at a regional level, and assistance could come from aid funding that is already flowing into the region.

A crucial subtask in this recommendation is a coordinated approach to addressing the needs and clarifying the status of Palestinians who have fled Syria. A separate Temporary Protection Plan for the Palestinians could be coupled with three- to five-year statuses in Latin American states that have already paved the way for this kind of program for Palestinians after the Iraq war.

Finally, countries must recognize the backlogs of non-Syrian refugees. A paradigm of shared responsibility must incorporate expedited resettlement and expanded refugee slots for the Eritrean, Iraqi, Somali, and other refugees who are awaiting status. Other refugees should not have to pay for the Syrian crisis; there are ways to provide protection for both groups under existing laws.

Recommendation #2: Involve Refugees in Active Participation and Decision-Making

Donor calls for funding often highlight the “faces of the crisis,” showing the families, men, women, youths, and children whose lives hang in the balance, and policymakers must take care to link their work to the people it affects. Because the rhetoric around humanitarian assistance conceptualizes the refugee as a passive recipient of the generosity of others, resulting programs risk placing refugees in a position of being “projects,” not people who can and should have a role in how programs look or how they are run. This type of thinking must change, but to do so requires the conviction that refugees are *assets* to the assistance and recovery process who must actively participate in the programs that shape their futures. How can assistance agencies and host communities begin to see refugees as assets rather than drains on resources?

There are a number of models—including some that are summarized in this report—that demonstrate how such a shift can contribute to more successful and potentially more sustainable programs. Rather than programs *acting upon* refugees, policymakers and programmers must incorporate refugees into the discussion at the earliest stages. Approaches such as Questscope’s mentorship program place Syrians at the center of the action, recognizing that their experiences and understandings are crucial to defining their needs and designing responsive programs. More than that, their active involvement is essential for any hope of sustained progress. Aid agencies must begin designing *programs that cannot succeed without the refugees*. Involving refugees in implementation and evaluation can also offer “early warnings” when a program is off course.

²⁷ Susan M. Akram, et al., “Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing,” Boston University School of Law, 2014, <http://www.bu.edu/law/central/id/programs/clinics/international-human-rights/documents/FINALFullReport.pdf>.

Recommendation #3: Mitigate the Burden on Host Communities

The refugee crisis is changing not only the policy environment, but also the physical landscape. The frailty and vulnerability of social and material infrastructure in many Arab countries has been greatly exacerbated by the refugee situation. The stress on water and power infrastructure and sanitation and environmental systems creates the potential for longer-term issues of disease and pollution, not to mention social tensions, as refugees settle in some of the region's poorest communities. There is an urgent need to support host communities in a variety of ways.

This call for action is likely impossible without a policy framework that acknowledges the burden and provides for more equitable sharing of resources to reduce the strain on the countries that are hosting the greatest numbers of refugees. Programs that enable refugees to make visible contributions to the well-being of their host communities may go a long way toward reducing tensions. For example, solar power or clean water infrastructure for refugee camps can and should be extended to benefit the surrounding communities. Addressing infrastructure needs in surrounding areas may be costly, but it will be essential in the longer term, especially as host communities come to understand that many refugee settlements are permanent or semi-permanent parts of their world.

Underlying this recommendation is the need to reduce the sheer numbers of refugees in a few countries; the United States and the European Union in particular must review their approaches to accepting Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. In the current host countries, meanwhile, there is a need to understand and differentiate refugee and host community experiences. What helps incentivize communities to take in new refugees? How can hosts and refugee voices alike be heard and incorporated into governmental responses? How can those living in poverty feel supported by their governments and by the international development community as they are asked to take on refugees in increasing numbers? These are complex questions that will require further study, particularly through perception studies to understand host community/refugee dynamics.

Recommendation #4: Fund “Smaller” Actions that Show Promise

Acknowledging the need for a longer-term vision and programs that integrate and empower refugees to define the way forward also means looking at smaller-scale interventions. At a basic level, small details (even curtains, heaters, and the like) can help a refugee family make a tent into more of a home and feel that they are making decisions about space, even if they cannot address their larger situation. Aid agencies would do well to ask refugees what kinds of small actions might help them regain a sense of dignity.

At the program level, numerous organizations are modeling and piloting programs that are helping refugees and displaced Syrians (and service providers). These include promising ideas for the use of technology, community-based infrastructure development and rehabilitation, mental health counseling, and youth mentorship that have been described in this report.

Testing ideas on a smaller scale is a proven method of sparking creative thinking about a problem, as the multitude of technology start-ups have shown in recent years. A pilot project or community-based program can test a “big” idea at relatively low cost while generating immediate benefits for those who need them and offering direct evidence of value to the decision-makers and funding agencies that design large programs that can take successful ideas to scale. Grassroots focus also

offers a direct link with the individuals and communities who can and should have a voice in the design and adaptation of interventions that will affect their lives. However, such programs require a greater flexibility at the level of funding. Organizations such as UNHCR would do well to consider ways to incorporate “start-up” and “scale-up” funding into their refugee assistance mechanisms, in partnership with international and host-country governments.



Our audience for this report encompasses policymakers and practitioners; regional governments and coalitions; humanitarian assistance agencies such as UNHCR and UNRWA; human development agencies; international humanitarian assistance organizations; and grassroots organizations working in the camps and communities refugees and other displaced people must now call home. We also expect to add to the work of academics whose endeavors are embedded in the Arab region, and deepen the types of questions that are being asked about this refugee crisis and its implications for the Arab region and the world.

Our ultimate hope is that this report will put pressure on all of the governments involved to put a stop to the conflict that fuels the humanitarian crisis.

For more information or to contact one of the contributors to this study, please visit www.northeastern.edu/bcars, or email d.sullivan@neu.edu.

SYRIA'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS: A POLICY DISCUSSION: WORKSHOP PROGRAM – OCTOBER 31, 2014

Welcome by Denis Sullivan, BCARS Director & Workshop Facilitator

Julie Peteet (University of Louisville): “The Distinctiveness of the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis”

SYRIA'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Vicky Kelberer (BCARS, Boston University): “Overview of the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis”

Rami Khouri (BCARS, American University of Beirut): “Lebanon & the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis”

Cigdem Benam (BCARS, Boston University): “Turkey & the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis”

Maisam Al-Ahmed (BCARS, Northeastern University): “Status of Palestinians Refugees from Syria”

COMPLICATIONS TO AID

Rima Rassi (BCARS, American University of Beirut) & Bethany Saul (BCARS, Boston University):
“From an Emergency Refugee Assistance Model to Development-Based Assistance in
Lebanon & Jordan”

Sarah A. Tobin (BCARS, Northeastern University): “Early Marriage in Za’atari: Beyond Alarmism”

Taghreed Abu Sarhan (UNFPA): “Inter-Agency Responses to Sexual & Gender-Based Violence in
Jordan”

Kathleen Hamill (FXB Center for Health & Human Rights, Harvard University): “Child Protection
Issues Facing Syrian Refugees”

MOVING FORWARD, INNOVATIONS IN AID PROVISION

Curtis Rhodes (Questscope): “Reality Counts: Agency Aid, Government Aid & Refugee Agency”

Dana Janbek (Lasell College): “A Survey of Communication Habits of Syrian Refugees in Jordan”

Reihaneh Mozaffari (Innovation & Planning Agency, IPA): “Innovative Engagement of Global
Resources – Za’atari Refugee Camp”

Jordann Sullivan (Chemonics International Inc.): “Sustainable Development Amidst Crisis: Lessons
Learned from the USAID Essential Services – North Pilot Project in Syria”

Hussam Jefee-Bahloul (Yale University School of Medicine): “Mental Health Services for Syrian
Refugees in Turkey & the Role of Technology”

KEYNOTE: LEGAL BARRIERS TO RELIEF

Susan Akram (Boston University), Editor of *Still Waiting for Tomorrow*

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