

Syrian Spillover

National Tensions, Domestic Responses, & International Options

Ellen Lust
April 2015



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PROJECT
ON MIDDLE EAST
DEMOCRACY

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Cover image: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry views the Mrajeab al-Fhood camp for Syrian refugees as he flies back to Amman, Jordan, from visiting the nearby Za'atri refugee camp on July 18, 2013. (State Department photo/ Public Domain)

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About the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

The Project on Middle East Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining how genuine democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process. Through research, dialogue, and advocacy, we aim to strengthen the constituency for U.S. policies that peacefully support democratic reform in the Middle East.

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Executive Summary

The Syrian conflict has resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with 220,000 casualties, more than 7.6 million internally displaced persons, and about 3.8 million refugees. The refugee crisis places extraordinary pressures on Syria's neighbors. Host communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt face increasing tensions over scarce resources as well as between the local and refugee populations. This report examines the Syrian refugee crisis and the challenges it poses to host countries and especially municipal administrations, which often lack both the resources and capacity to address the crisis effectively.

The nature of Syrians fleeing their home country changed over time and varies across space. The first wave of refugees were either active supporters of the uprisings, while those fleeing later were worse off and therefore often forced to settle close to the border. Refugees are not distributed evenly across the region; Lebanon and Jordan are affected particularly severely. High numbers of refugees strain local services, including electricity, water systems, solid waste management, health services, and education. The refugee crisis has caused rent and food prices to rise, while depressing wages for low and medium-skilled workers.

The refugee crisis spurs social and political tensions. Local residents often see refugee communities as disproportionately benefitting from humanitarian aid, while the presence of the refugees makes their own lives more difficult. Refugees can also alter the sectarian or ethnic balance and thus exacerbate pre-existing factional power roles, which may have especially severe consequences in Lebanon.

Host communities have addressed the refugee crisis by trying to limit the impact of refugees, on the one hand, while attempting to adapt to changing circumstances, on the other. They have imposed border restrictions and established measures such as curfews, restrictions on owning businesses and property, and limits on movement in the country. Slowly, however, host communities realize that measures aimed exclusively at restricting the livelihoods of Syrian refugees will not succeed. Host communities have also sought to mobilize local resources and proposed institutional reforms to strengthen state performance and expand local powers.

The international community has also become increasingly aware that the crisis calls for strengthening governance mechanisms. Despite enormous sums that have been poured into alleviating the Syrian crisis, international response plans have fallen short of targets. Moreover, resources are allocated unevenly. Only the most seriously affected communities are being served, and education, the training of health workers, and the provision of basic needs are particularly underfinanced. Moreover, international donors lack coordination, thus hampering the implementation of projects.

The crisis requires steadfast engagement from the international community. The community should maintain commitments for humanitarian aid, assisting both host communities and refugees living inside and outside of camps. International actors should also help to foster communities' abilities to mobilize resources. This can be accomplished, in part, by placing a premium on enhancing communities' ability to undertake projects independently. Strengthening institutions that foster accountability and good governance can also help create resilient communities that can respond to the crisis—and potentially leave Syria's neighbors with stronger institutions and more effective governance than before the crisis. At the same time, the international community should put pressure on Syria's neighbors to maintain open borders and treat refugees with dignity, while opening their own borders to resettling refugees, thus alleviating pressures on Syria's neighbors. Finally, the international community should work fervently to end the bloody civil war. Ultimately, the Syrian refugee crisis will end only when the tragic violence inside the country comes to an end.

Introduction

The effects of the Syrian conflict—over 220,000 lives lost, the destruction of schools, hospitals, and infrastructure—are felt far beyond the boundaries of the war-torn country. On January 7, 2015, Syria overtook Afghanistan as the country with the most registered refugees, the majority having fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. This places extraordinary pressures on Syria's neighbors.

Increasing demand for scarce resources in these countries has been fostering tensions between host populations and refugees. But addressing these problems is extraordinarily challenging for both domestic and international actors. They are unable to address fully the social and economic problems, and yet more challenges continue to emerge. Meanwhile, municipalities are on the front lines, often lacking both resources and capacity. More than ever, they need to develop capacities, and national and international actors recognize the importance of doing so.

The refugee crisis challenges governance systems, but it also provides an opportunity for reform. This report examines the Syrian refugee crises, the dissolution of normalcy in host countries, and the possibilities for reform. It begins with a brief review of the expansion of Syrian refugees into neighboring countries. Section two studies the economic impact of the crisis, while section three examines the social and political tensions that result. Sections four and five consider how domestic and international communities have responded respectively. The report concludes by discussing how the international community can engage to ease suffering while fostering lasting improvements to governance.

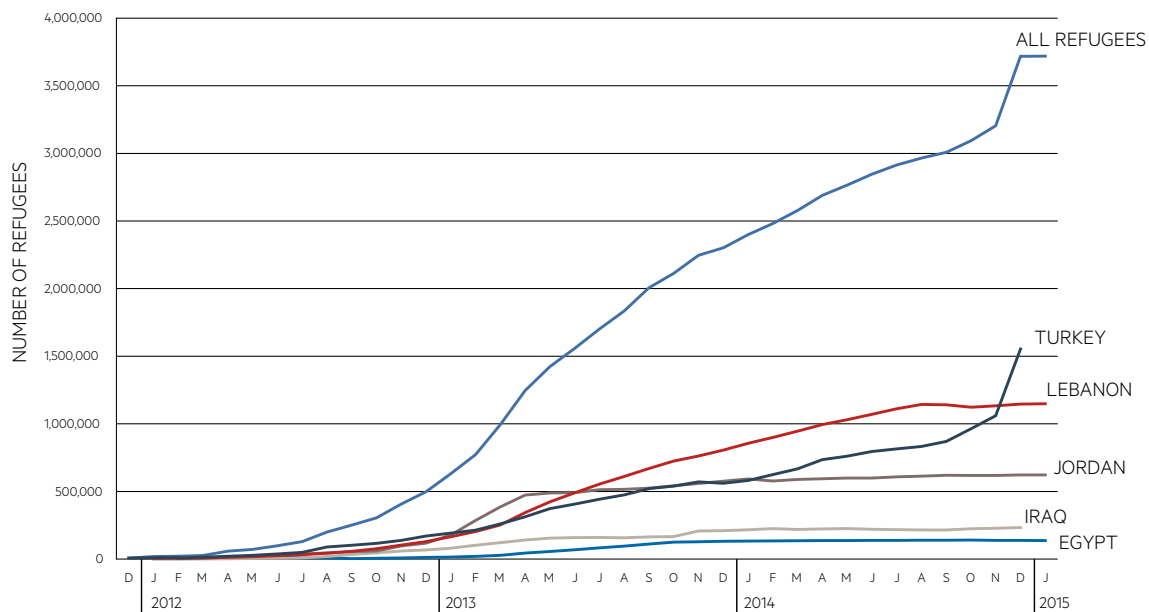
The Refugee Crisis Expands

The refugee crisis has changed significantly over time. Those fleeing in the early stages of the crisis often reported leaving because they were actively involved in the uprising, had their names on the “black list,” and were escaping torture or imprisonment.¹ Others left because they had the means to escape the crisis, or they had family living across the border who could help them resettle. Given that large families and tribes had often spanned across the borders of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, social ties and proximity both contributed to higher settlements of refugees in border areas rather than in more distant areas.² The existence of such ties eased social tensions, as friends and relatives welcomed their Syrian guests. Other early refugees settled in costly cities—such as Istanbul, Beirut, or Cairo—or passed through neighboring countries as a means to live abroad, often in Europe or the United States.

In general, early refugees were more likely to be politically engaged and better off than those who followed. Syrian refugees, both activists and others, often continued traveling between border towns. When bombings would start, those living near the Syrian border fled across it to safety, returning once the violence abated. Others collected food, medicine, and other supplies from neighboring countries to bring back to their community, either as supplies to provide or as goods to sell.

The nature of refugees changed as the crisis continued. By the end of 2012, fighting had escalated, and many Syrians were left without shelter, heat, food, and water. The number of refugees skyrocketed (Figure 1),³ and often those who were coming were much worse off than those who had come earlier.

FIGURE 1—NUMBER OF REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES OVER TIME



1. Özden, Senay, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” Migration Policy Center, 2013, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicy-centre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf>.

2. Syrians explicitly state that, when possible, they settled in those areas where they know friends, relatives, or business partners. See, for example on Jordan: Olwan, Mohamed, and Shiyab, Ahmed, “Forced Migration of Syrians to Jordan: An Exploratory Study,” Migration Policy Centre, 2012, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/23502/MPC-RR-2012-06.pdf?sequence=1>.

3. Source: UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal,” last modified February 10, 2015, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

Usually, they had lost their houses and belongings and came from poorer communities within Syria. With little means to support themselves if they left home, these refugees had remained in Syria during the first stages of the uprising. As the situation became unbearable, however, they were forced to leave. Often, they arrived in their host country with few resources and with less established social networks.⁴

Most of these late-stage refugees could not afford to travel to, or live in, costly cities. Rather, they settled along the Syrian border, often in smaller towns or camps. By the end of 2014, of the total registered refugees from Syria, 38.7 percent lived in camps in Iraq, 22.1 percent did so in Jordan, and 13.75 percent lived in camps in Turkey.⁵ While there are no official refugee camps in Lebanon, there were about 1,435 informal tented sites in Lebanon—852 of them in Beqaa Valley alone—housing approximately 55 percent of Lebanon’s refugee population.⁶ Even as camps expanded, the majority of refugees across the region moved into heavily populated areas under the jurisdiction of local governments. Their arrival had an immense impact on local host communities.

4. Regarding Jordan, see: Host Communities, “The Influx to Jordan,” accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.hostcommunities-jo.org/focus-area/host-communities/the-influx-of-syrian-refugees-to-jordan/>.

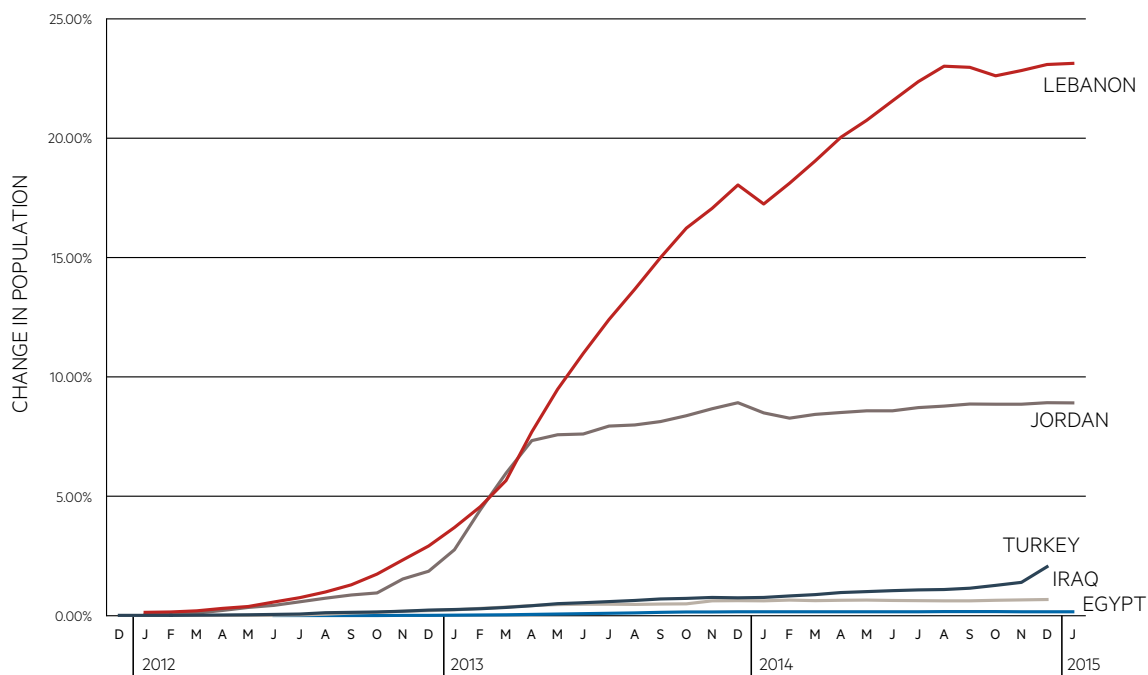
5. UNHCR, “Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan: Home Visit Data Findings, 2013,” 2013. and UNCHR. “Syrian Refugees: Inter-Agency Regional Update, 9 December 2014.” <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7705>. See also: Letsch, Constanze, “Amnesty report reveals desperate plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey: government-run camps full to bursting and those outside camps battling to survive as tension rises among local population,” *The Guardian*, November 20, 2014, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/20/amnesty-report-desperate-plight-syrian-refugees-turkey>.

6. UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” and Pizzi, Michael, “In Syria’s war refugees, Lebanon sees echoes of Palestinian crisis,” *Al Jazeera America*, January 6, 2015, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/6/lebanon-syria-refugees.html>.

Economic Impacts

The influx of Syrians puts pressures on the infrastructure and services of communities. However, it is important to understand that these pressures do not weigh equally on host countries, nor are these burdens distributed equally within them. As shown in Figure 2,⁷ the influx of refugees has resulted in a nearly 25 percent increase of the total population in Lebanon. In Jordan, refugees comprise nearly 10 percent of the total population. Indeed, Lebanon and Jordan currently rank as first and second in the world, respectively, with regard to the percentage of the total population comprised of refugees.⁸ The strains are extraordinary. In contrast, although the numbers of refugees in Egypt, Turkey and Iraq are significant, they comprise a much smaller proportion of the population overall. In each case, there is also a great variation in the size of refugee populations in different parts of the country. Large numbers of refugees are located in border areas; indeed, in Lebanon the number of Syrian refugees far outpaces the numbers of Lebanese in some areas.

FIGURE 2—PERCENT INCREASE IN HOST COUNTRY POPULATION DUE TO REFUGEE INFLUX



This overpopulation strains local services. Electricity and water systems are stretched beyond capacity, leading to frequent outages and shortages.⁹ Solid waste management in many areas is incapable of keeping up with the increased population. Garbage collection is one of the few services

7. Data source: UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response.”

8. UNHCR, “Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan and 2015-2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan,” Berlin, December 14, 2014. Available at <http://www.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2014/12/18/building-resilience-amongst-refugee-and-host-community-populations-alike-launch-of-the-regional-refugee-and-resilience-plan-in-berlin.html> (retrieved February 17, 2015).

9. For instance, a recent report by the state electricity company *Electricité du Liban* (EDL) claims that state electricity supply by the EDL covers less than two-thirds of a 24-hour day. Production costs of electricity are the highest in the world, and emergency break-downs are frequent. See Aziz, Jean. “Lebanon’s continued electricity cuts portend disaster.” *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/lebanon-electricity-supply-debt-disaster.html#>.

under the purview of municipalities, which lack the financial resources, personnel, and equipment to collect the additional waste produced by the expanding population.¹⁰ Waste management becomes a marker of degradation—the visibility of waste build-up allows communities to target it as a source of complaint against local government; leads people to engage in illegal dumping and burning of waste; and contributes to water, soil, and air pollution. Over time, poor waste management provides an environment ripe for the spread of diseases such as diarrhea, skin diseases, and hepatitis.¹¹

Health conditions are a particular concern for three reasons. First, as mentioned above, deteriorating waste management may make disease more prevalent. Second, many fear that the influx of unvaccinated Syrian children will expose communities to disease. Polio vaccination coverage in Syria has fallen during the crisis from 90 percent before 2011 to just 52 percent in March 2014, putting more Syrian children at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. Fearing exposure to disease, some Jordanian parents have gone so far as to prohibit their children from attending school.¹² Finally, public health services are stretched at the very time that disease prevalence may be on the rise. In the Turkish town of Kilis, for instance, the health infrastructure designed for 89,000 Turkish citizens is now forced to serve an additional 75,000 Syrian refugees.¹³ So too, in Lebanon, refugees place new burdens on the health system. In December 2012, when there were only approximately 130,000 Syrian refugees in country (about 12 percent of the total in 2014),¹⁴ they already accounted for 40 percent of primary healthcare clinic visits.

Similar pressures are felt in education. Most adult Syrian refugees have low levels of education: of those in Lebanon, nearly one-third have never attended school, and another 40 percent have only a primary education. As such, parents are ill-prepared to help their children succeed in school. School-aged children have often had disrupted education inside Syria, and those who have attended school often find the curriculum in the host country to be dramatically different from what they are accustomed to in Syria. In Lebanon, where much of the curriculum is in English and French, Syrian children who have been schooled primarily in Arabic face additional obstacles.¹⁵ Many school-aged refugees suffer from the trauma of relocation. Given the myriad of problems, it is not entirely surprising that only 31 percent of school-aged Syrian refugees in Lebanon were enrolled in education in 2013, and many of these children appear to be held back at the primary level.¹⁶

Even with low enrollments, demand for schooling is high. Refugee populations are disproportionately young; in Lebanon, more than half of refugees are below 24 years in age, and in Jordan, nearly half

10. In Lebanon, the presence of refugees has led to an increase in the volume of solid waste by an estimated 30 to 40 percent (see International Labour Organization, “Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile,” accessed 25 January 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wcms_240134.pdf). In the Jordanian governorates of Mafraq and Irbid, refugees are producing an additional 60 tons of waste per day, leading to a total volume to be collected of 150 tons, which exceeds current collection capacity. See: Host Communities, “Municipal Services: Solid Waste,” accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.hostcommunities-jo.org/focus-area/solid-waste-management/>.

11. International Labour Organization, “Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile,” Accessed January 25, 2015. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_240134.pdf

12. World Health Organization, “Mass global action needed to protect children against polio in Syria, Iraq and the region,” accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.emro.who.int/fr/polio/polio-news/mass-global-action-needed-to-protect-children-against-polio-in-syria-iraq-and-region.html>.

13. UNHCR, “Solidarity and Burden-Sharing: Background papers for the High Level Segment,” accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/525fe3e59.pdf>.

14. Thibos, Cameron, “One million Syrians in Lebanon: A milestone quickly passed,” Migration Policy Center 2014, accessed January 25, 2015, http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/31696/MPC_THIBOS_2014_.pdf?sequence=1.

15. International Labour Organization, “Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile.”

16. *Ibid.*

of refugees are less than 18 years old.¹⁷ As refugees flood across the border, they seek placement in schools, both in host communities and in refugee camps. By December 2014, there were more than 90,000 registered refugee children enrolled in Lebanese schools and 120,000 refugee children in Jordanian schools.¹⁸

In addition to the pressures on public services, the refugee crisis has spurred economic problems. The costs of rent, food, and other basic goods have risen considerably.¹⁹ The problems are particularly notable in areas with high refugee populations; for example, in some areas of Beirut, rents have increased by as much as 400 percent.²⁰ At the same time, the influx of new labor has depressed wages, particularly for low- and medium-skilled workers. In Lebanon, for instance, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN reported that some areas of Lebanon had seen up to a 60 percent decrease in the wage rate for day labor.²¹ Similarly, in Jordan, specifically in the Mafraq and Irbid governorates, where the majority of Syrian refugees reside, Syrians have been willing to work for between five to six Jordanian dinars (JD) for unskilled labor and eight to ten JD for skilled labor, compared to the previously existing wages of JD 8-10 and 15-20 JD, respectively. This affects not only Jordanians, but also Egyptian and Bangladeshi workers.²² Many Syrian refugees are also successfully opening small businesses, often seen as providing superior service at lower prices, undercutting local business communities.²³

Economic downturn, driven particularly by a decline in tourism since the Arab uprisings, exacerbates the economic stress caused by the refugee crisis. Revolutions and protests in Egypt and Turkey, coupled with the violence in Syria and elsewhere, discourage travel to the Levant. Both Western and Arab travelers have chosen other destinations for tourism, and a number of countries (including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar) have issued travel restrictions on their nationals wishing to travel to the area.²⁴ Tourism in Lebanon, for instance, decreased 17 percent over the period 2011-2012.²⁵ In countries where tourism accounts for a large percentage of revenue (e.g., seven percent of the GDP in Tunisia and 5.6 percent in Egypt²⁶), such a drop is significant.

17. *Ibid.*, and Pedram, Shiva, "Syrian Refugee Crisis Threatens Stability in the Middle East," Center for American Progress, August 12, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2014/08/12/95595/syrian-refugee-crisis-threatens-stability-in-the-middle-east/>.

18. On Lebanon, see: Government of Lebanon, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, 2015-16," December 15, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/2015-2016_Lebanon_CRP_EN.pdf. On Jordan, see: Government of Jordan, "Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis," December 17, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP_percent2BFinal_percent2BDraft_percent2B2014.12.17.pdf. See also: REACH, "Education and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees," accessed January 28, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/education-and-tensions-jordanian-communities-hosting-syrian-refugees-thematic>.

19. Thibos, "One million Syrians in Lebanon"; International Labour Organization, "Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile"; Kawakibi, Salam, "The Syrian crisis and its repercussions: internally displaced persons and refugees," Migration Policy Centre, 2013, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-03.pdf>.

20. International Labour Organization, "Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile."

21. *Ibid.*

22. Host Communities, "Employment," accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.hostcommunities-jo.org/focus-area/employment/>.

23. International Labour Organization, "Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile."

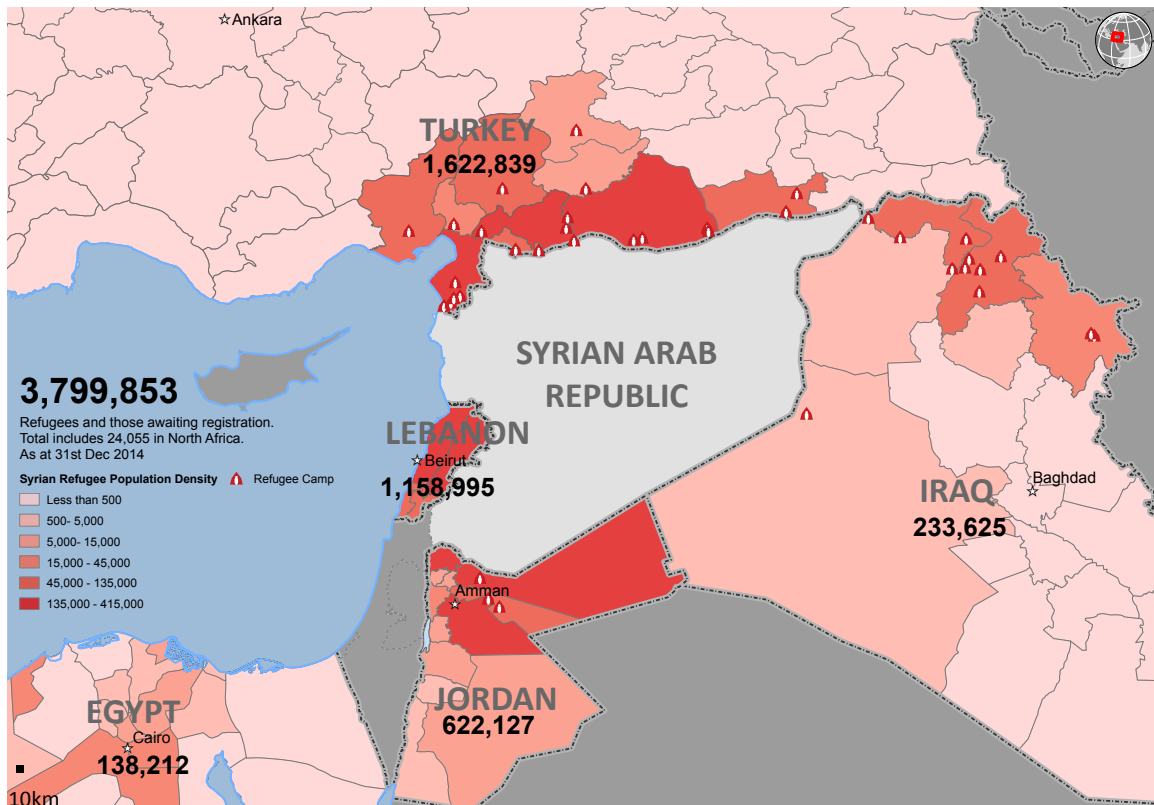
24. Wehbe, Mouhamed, "The Gulf Boycotts Lebanon," *Alakhbar English*, September 26, 2012, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12648>; AP, "UAE issues travel warning for Lebanon," AP The Big Story, June 22, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/uae-issues-travel-warning-lebanon>.

25. International Labour Organization, "Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile."

26. The direct contributions for Tunisia were 7.3 percent, and the total was 15.2 percent of GDP. The direct contributions for Egypt were 5.6 percent, and the total was 12.6 percent. See: World Travel and Tourism Council, "Travel & Tourism: Economic Impact 2014," accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.wttc.org/focus/research-for-action/economic-impact-analysis/country-reports/>. See also UNWTO, "UNWTO Supporting Tourism Recovery in Tunisia," accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www2.unwto.org/press-release/2011-04-27/unwto-supporting-tourism-recovery-tunisia>.

The result, overall, has been increased economic hardship and widespread poverty, as indicated in Figure 3.²⁷ In Lebanon, the incidence of poverty in the areas with the highest numbers of refugees has reached nearly double the national average: 53 percent in the North, 42 percent in the South, and 30 percent in the Beqaa valley, compared to the 28 percent national average.²⁸ The areas in which refugees settled had long comprised the bulk of Lebanon’s impoverished population, but the situation has become worse.²⁹ As Figure 3 below shows, need is widespread in the other neighboring countries as well.

FIGURE 3—POPULATIONS IN NEED AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES³⁰



27. UNHCR, “Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan,” December 18, 2014, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7908>

28. International Labour Organization, “Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile.”

29. Seventy-eight percent of the Lebanese living in the North, the Beqaa, and Mount Lebanon lived below the poverty line prior to the crisis (around 987,000 people). The same regions account for 85 percent of registered Syrian refugees currently in the country. Thibos, “One million Syrians in Lebanon.”

30. UNHCR, “2014 Syria Regional Response Plan. Annual Report,” accessed April 3, 2015, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8491>.

Social and Political Impacts

These economic problems spur social and political tensions. Deteriorating conditions strain relations between refugees and host communities who often blame the presence of refugees for the problems they face. Refugees and dislocated social and political spheres also create new winners and losers, thus destabilizing existing power relations. More significantly, refugees alter the sectarian or ethnic balance in a host community, exacerbating pre-existing factional power roles.

Frustration with refugees is prevalent across host countries. In cities with large Syrian refugee populations, from Turkey to Jordan, host communities blame Syrians for failures—falling wages, rising prices, garbage on the streets, and clogged traffic.³¹ For instance, studies conducted by REACH in Jordan clearly document that majorities of both Syrians and Jordanians see housing, education, and health as sources of rising tensions between the communities.³² The problems are made worse by the fact that local residents—many themselves economically deprived—see refugee communities as disproportionately benefitting from humanitarian aid while the presence of these refugees makes their own lives more difficult.³³ In truth, access to such aid varies tremendously, and many refugees live in abject conditions.³⁴ But this does not lessen frustrations. As one Jordanian mayor explained, even guests can overstay their welcome, and in 2015, the host communities' patience with Syrian refugees is wearing thin.

Moreover, refugees have dramatically altered the social and demographic balance within host populations. To understand this imbalance, two factors must be kept in mind. First, although the crisis has negative effects on the economy, not all are equally impacted. Nationals in host communities experience far more significant costs than those living in other areas of the country; small- and medium-businesses and lower skilled workers suffer more than large businesses or skilled workers, who can in fact benefit from decreased wages. So, too, can landlords enjoy higher rents, while renters suffer from the same. The result is a shift in the relative power of different social groups, disrupting pre-existing communal balances. Second, the Syrian conflict has not affected all Syrians equally, and thus the refugee population neither represents the Syrian population as a whole, nor does it fit easily within the demographic makeup of the host communities. Arab Sunnis

31. See: Letsch, "Amnesty report reveals desperate plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey."

32. A study by REACH in Jordan found that 64 percent of surveyed Jordanians and 56 percent of Syrians perceived access to health care as a source of tension. Overcrowded healthcare centers are most often named as a key driver for tensions (named by 60 percent of Jordanians and 39 percent of Syrians). Sixty-six percent of Syrians—but only 57 percent of Jordanians—reported adequate health care access, and 26 percent of Jordanians—compared to 21 percent of Syrians—claim that uneven access is a cause of tensions. (See: REACH, "Access to Health Care and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees," June 2014, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/access-health-care-and-tensions-jordanian-communities-hosting-syrian-refugees-thematic>). Another survey conducted by REACH in Jordan finds that 83 percent of Jordanians and 77 percent of Syrians cite access to housing as a cause of tension in host communities. Forty-four percent of Jordanians and Syrians rate housing challenges as urgent. More Jordanians (62 percent) than Syrians (51 percent), and more men (63 percent) than women (56 percent) perceive access to housing as inadequate. However, most Jordanians (66 percent) perceive the lack of housing as the main cause of tension, while Syrians (51 percent) name high costs. (See REACH, "Housing and Tensions"). Education is a third cause of community tension (named by 53 percent of respondents) due to the fact that Syrians and Jordanians converge in schools. This may lead to increased competition and clashes between values and beliefs.

33. This has led to controversies, for instance, over the cash transfer program in Lebanon. More generally, donor communities are keenly aware of these complaints.

34. For instance, according to the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), only 15 percent of refugees outside of camps receive humanitarian aid. Moreover, an Amnesty International report estimates that 1.38 million Syrians live outside the government-run refugee camps, often in abject poverty and without access to education, housing, healthcare and other basic services. Many live in abject poverty. See Amnesty International, "Struggling to Survive: Refugees From Syria in Turkey," 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR44/017/2014/en/be0d18a5-dd22-463c-a6e4-4362e62a5459/eur440172014en.pdf>.

make up the majority of Syrian refugees in the MENA region both because the majority of Syrians are Sunni Arabs and because Sunnis appear to be fleeing to neighboring countries at a higher rate than their minority counterparts. Indeed, according to the UNHCR, as of April 2014, less than one percent of each minority community (e.g. Christians, Alawite, Ismaili, Mandaeen, and Yezidis) was registered refugees.³⁵

The spike in the Sunni Arab population is particularly destabilizing in Lebanon. There, sectarian divisions were at the heart of the civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990, and the Taif Agreement of 1990 and the Syrian intervention through 2005 reinforced these divisions. The influx of Syrian Sunnis threatens the Christian population; if they exit in the face of the deteriorating economic and security situation, their position may become only more precarious.³⁶ It also particularly raises tensions between the Shiite and Sunni communities, given the support that Hizbullah (the leading Shiite party) has given to the Assad regime and the tendency for Sunni refugees to hail from opposition forces. This has encouraged Shia opposition to Hizbullah to step up criticism within the organization and has also pushed Hizbullah to reach out to Iraqi Shia for support. Finally, the crisis appears to have provided entry points for Al-Qaeda and Salafi forces to strengthen their presence in the country. The result is warring factions and the outbreak of violence, particularly in the North of Lebanon. This has led many to see the country as being in the midst of an existential crisis. Certainly, it may very well be on the cusp of civil war.³⁷

35. There are several reasons advanced to explain the imbalance. Christians and Alawites are more likely to relocate domestically, moving to their home areas or areas held by the regime, which do not suffer from bombings. Second, Christians and Alawites who flee the country are less likely to register with the UNHCR for fear of being associated with Assad's regime. Third, some minority refugees pretend to be Sunni Muslims when fleeing Syria. (See: Jasser, M. Zuhdi, "Sectarian Conflict in Syria," accessed February 2, 2015, http://cco.dodlive.mil/files/2014/01/Syrias_Sectarian_Conflict.pdf.)

36. Rainey, Venetia, "Lebanon's refugee influx alarms Christians," Al Jazeera, May 11, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/lebanon-refugee-influx-alarms-christians-201441913659149837.html>.

37. Inbari, Pinhas, "Demographic Upheaval: How the Syrian War is Reshaping the Region," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, June 17, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://jcpa.org/article/syrian-war-is-reshaping-the-region/#sthash.Y50oEGs5.dpuf>.

Host Responses: Limiting Change or Adapting to Circumstance?

Syria's neighbors have addressed the refugee crisis both by trying to limit the impact of refugees and by attempting to adapt to changing circumstances. They have attempted to minimize the impact of refugees by limiting the number of them entering the country and establishing measures such as curfews, restrictions on owning businesses, and limits on movement in the country. They have also increasingly sought to find ways to adapt to changing circumstances through concerted efforts to mobilize local resources, even stepping up plans to institute reforms aimed at strengthening state performance and expanding local powers.

As hopes for the return of refugees diminished, populations rose, and local economies worsened, governments sought to stem the flood of refugees.³⁸ Border closures first came in mid-2013, when the Sisi government began restricting the entry of refugees following the ouster of President Morsi. That closure was as political as it was economic—the Sisi government claimed that refugees were mobilizing in support of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁹ More stringent entry requirements were put in place for Syrians coming to Egypt, and dozens of Syrians were deported or turned back at the border.⁴⁰ Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq have also placed restrictions on refugees, closing their borders, off and on, in response to economic problems and political pressures.⁴¹

The restrictions have been most notable in Lebanon, however, where until very recently 3,000-4,000 Syrians came across the border on a daily basis. The Lebanese government announced plans for stepping up restrictions in summer 2014, when the government announced that they would bar entry to Syrians who lived in “safe” parts of Syria, who had fled to Lebanon but returned to Syria, and who came from Syrian territories far from the Lebanese border.⁴² By 2015, the Interior Minister explained, “There’s no capacity anymore to host more displaced,”⁴³ and announced a visa system that restricted Syrians’ ability to enter the country.⁴⁴ Due to the crisis, Lebanon reversed long-standing

38. For an overview and timeline, see <http://newirin.irinnews.org/syrian-refugees-restrictions-timeline/> (accessed January 28, 2015).

39. Karam, Zeina and Mroue, Bassem, “Egypt puts travel restrictions on Syrians,” AP, July 8, 2013, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://big-story.ap.org/article/syria-official-says-forces-take-rebel-area-homs>. See also: *Asharq Al-Awsat*, “Egypt imposes new visa and security restrictions on Syrians,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, July 10, 2013, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/07/article55309221>; Pizzi, Michael and al-Masri, Abdulrahman, “Morsi’s fall spurs anti-Syrian xenophobia in Egypt,” *Syria: direct*, July 25, 2013, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://syriadirect.org/main/30-reports/675-morsi-s-fall-spurs-anti-syrian-xenophobia-in-egypt>; Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions: The Plight of Those Fleeing Syria to Jordan,” 2013, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE16/003/2013/en/c29bdf87-a4e5-40ff-b65b-df88005298b5/mde160032013en.pdf>.

40. Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.”

41. It is important to note that opposition fighters allegedly travel between refugee camps and Syria, reportedly going to camps for family visits, rest, and recreation. See: Osman Bahadır Dinçer, Vittoria Federici, Elizabeth Ferris, Sema Karaca, Kemal Kirici, and Elif Özmenek Çarmikli, “Turkey and Syrian Refugees: The Limits of Hospitality,” Brookings, 2013, accessed February 2, 2015, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/11/18_percent20syria_percent20turkey_percent20refugees/turkey_percent20and_percent20syrian_percent20refugees_the_percent20limits_percent20of_percent20hospitality_percent20\(2014\).pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/11/18_percent20syria_percent20turkey_percent20refugees/turkey_percent20and_percent20syrian_percent20refugees_the_percent20limits_percent20of_percent20hospitality_percent20(2014).pdf). According to Amnesty International (“Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions”), Jordan closed its borders after May 20, 2013, leading to clashes in the border areas and a substantial decline in the number of refugees entering the country. For example, the UNHCR’s regional coordinator for refugees in Jordan stated on May 21, 2013 that “it is extraordinary that all of a sudden from receiving two thousand refugees a day, the number has dropped to close to zero.” Turkey has been blocking thousands of people fleeing Syria from entering the country since mid-2012. Individuals without a passport or an urgent medical need were especially likely to be refused entry into the country.

42. Human Rights First, “Lebanon Imposes Restrictions on Syrian Refugees,” June 10, 2014, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/lebanon-imposes-restrictions-syrian-refugees>.

43. BBC, “Syria conflict: Lebanon refugee curb prompts UN concern,” BBC, January 5, 2015, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30685174>.

44. Naylor, Hugh and Haidamous, Suzan, “Syrian refugees become less welcome in Lebanon, as new entry rules take effect,” *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2015, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-refugees-become-less-welcome-in-lebanon-as-new-entry-rules-take-effect/2015/01/05/7e412f59-b357-4af4-95a4-5edf3df7af06_story.html.

policies that allowed Syrians to travel back and forth across the border freely. Consequently, Syrians who have received only short-term permits are required to return to Damascus to obtain documents necessary to extend their stay.

Palestinian refugees who have long lived in Syria are subject to strict limitations when they try to flee. Jordan denied Palestinians entry as early as 2012, making this an official policy in January 2013.⁴⁵ This violates the principles of international refugee law, which prohibit the return of refugees to conflict where their lives are in danger.⁴⁶ Even those who were allowed to enter are often arbitrarily detained and kept in Cyber City Refugee Camp, a single, six-story building. Palestinians are confined to live in and around Cyber City under circumstances that “amount to detention.”⁴⁷ From early August 2013, for instance, the Lebanese government had required Palestinians living in Syria to obtain an exit permit from central authorities. Obtaining the permit required travel to Damascus (often a difficult journey) and put Palestinians at risk of detention.⁴⁸ Even in Turkey, where Palestinian refugees are not historically associated with domestic tensions, Palestinians from Syria reportedly face greater entry restrictions.⁴⁹

While border restrictions only partially alleviate the problems facing host countries, they do worse by placing those fleeing Syria at risk. The return to war-torn areas inside Syria creates clear dangers. So, too, does taking the chance to cross the border illegally at unofficial crossings. For instance, an Amnesty International report noted that border areas are often mined, and refugees have been killed or injured while attempting to cross.⁵⁰ Restricted entry also puts those fleeing Syria at risk of ill treatment. Indeed, at least 17 refugees were killed, and others severely beaten by Turkish border guards.⁵¹

Host governments have also stepped up restrictions on refugees inside their countries in their attempt to alleviate the political and economic pressures. For instance, in Turkey and Lebanon, refugees are not formally granted refugee status, but rather are referred to as “guests.” Officially labeling them in this way allows them temporary protection but does not grant them international rights as refugees. In Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) that once granted residency permits to refugees—enabling refugees to work and allowing freedom of movement and access to basic services—has now suspended such permits, instead encouraging refugees to transfer into camps.⁵² In Jordan, the program once known as “bail out,” which allowed refugees to reside outside of the camps if they have a Jordanian sponsor,⁵³ was interrupted in January 2015, leaving thousands of Syrians stranded in transfer facilities.⁵⁴ Syrian refugees also suffer more localized restrictions on movement—in Lebanon, for instance, more than 45 municipalities placed curfews on refugees,

45. Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.”

46. Human Rights Watch, “Not Welcome; Jordan’s Treatment of Palestinians Escaping Syria,” 2014, accessed April 3, 2015, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/jordan0814_ForUpload_0.pdf

47. Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.” See also: Santos, Ricardo, “Palestinian refugees from Syria in Jordan: An Overview,” BADIL, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.badil.org/al-majdal/item/2088-art5#_ftn11; and Luck, Taylor, “Syrian protest refugee camp move as authorities tighten movement restrictions,” *Jordan Times*, accessed February 11, 2015, <http://jordantimes.com/article/syrians-protest-refugee-camp-move-as-authorities-tighten-movement-restrictions>.

48. Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.”

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. Amnesty International, “Struggling to Survive.”

52. UNDP, “Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-16: Iraq, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.iq.undp.org/content/dam/iraq/docs/cpr/UNDP-IQ_3RP_percent20Plan_percent2018Dec_EN.pdf; and Sammonds, Neil, “Life getting harder for Syrian refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan,” *Livewire Amnesty International*, January 3, 2014, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://livewire.amnesty.org/2014/01/03/life-getting-harder-for-syrian-refugees-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>; Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.”

53. Amnesty International, “Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions.”

54. Luck, “Syrian protest refugee camp move.”

many (but not all) following the August 2014 fighting in Arsal between Lebanese soldiers and extremist groups operating from within Syria.⁵⁵ It is not surprising that nearly three-fourths of Lebanese refugees surveyed named freedom of movement as the main challenge they face, with the vast majority feeling that they cannot move beyond their immediate surroundings.⁵⁶

Host governments also try to protect their labor markets, imposing barriers on refugees seeking employment. In certain areas, restrictions on residency permits, as recently instituted in Iraq, lead to restricted access to employment opportunities.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, as in Turkey and Egypt, Syrians can apply for a work permit, but it is an extremely lengthy and expensive process. Moreover, an employer hoping to hire a Syrian must demonstrate that no national can do the job. Similar conditions are found in Lebanon, where Syrians had difficulties obtaining work permits even before the Syrian civil war,⁵⁸ and in Jordan, where Syrians not only are required to obtain work permits but also must work outside of a government-published list of Jordanian-specific professions.⁵⁹ As a result, like many nationals,⁶⁰ many Syrians tend to work illegally or in the informal economy, without benefits or protection from exploitative employers.⁶¹

Governments also restrict Syrians' ability to own property and establish enterprises in an attempt to protect national businesses and counter complaints of unfair competition.⁶² In Jordan, for example, Syrians are required to have a Jordanian business partner if they are to invest in a property or establish a business—a requirement, incidentally, that was not imposed on Iraqis during the Iraqi refugee crisis. The same is true in Egypt.⁶³ In Lebanon, Syrians are advised to find a Lebanese

55. Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: At Least 45 Local Curfews Imposed on Syrian Refugees: Some Appear to Be Retaliation for August Clashes, Executions," Human Rights Watch, October 3, 2014, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/03/lebanon-least-45-local-curfews-imposed-syrian-refugees>; and ACAPS, "Regional Analysis Syria," April 4, 2014, accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.acaps.org/img/reports/p-140404-ras-part-ii---final.pdf>.

56. Norwegian Refugee Council, "The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: NRC Lebanon Field Assessment. Part Two: North, Bekaa, South," March 2014, accessed January 24, 2015, https://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9177958.pdf.

57. UNHCR, "Economic Survey of Syrian Refugees," accessed January 25, 2015, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=5547>.

58. See: International Labour Organization, "Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment Profile." Although Egypt does not object to the protection of refugees' rights to employment (Articles 17 and 18 of the Refugee Convention), refugees cannot obtain Egyptian work permits easily. According to Article 11 of Ministerial Resolution 390 (1982), employers have to prove a shortage in the national labor force before a work permit is issued. See: Sadek, George, "Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq," Library of Congress, December 2013, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugees/legal-status-refugees.php>. See also: SNAP, "Legal status of individuals fleeing Syria," June 2013, accessed February 2, 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/legal_status_of_individuals_fleeing_syria.pdf.

59. A list of professions and industries published by the Jordanian Ministry of Labor states that non-nationals are excluded from working in medical, engineering, administrative, accounting and clerical professions; telephone and warehouse employment; sales; education; hairdressing; decorating; fuel sales; electrical and mechanical occupations; and as guards; drivers; and construction workers (Sadek, "Legal Status of Refugees").

60. While it is already hard for Egyptians to find formal employment (reportedly, 80 percent of all private employment in the country is in the informal sector), there are even more obstacles for refugees to find formal employment. Treated as foreigners, they must first obtain work permits, and their potential employers must prove a shortage in the domestic labor market and pay fees in order to sponsor their employment. These administrative hurdles reduce the likelihood for refugees to find formal employment. See Ayoub, Maysa, and Khallaf, Shaden, "Syrian Refugees in Egypt: Challenges of a Politically Changing Environment," Cairo Studies on Migration and Refugees Paper No. 7, September 2014, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/Documents/Final_Syrian_percent20refugees.pdf.

61. SNAP, "Legal status of individuals fleeing Syria."

62. There are concerns and complaints about unfair competition between Syrians and Turks in the region: Reportedly, employers have to pay only a two percent social security contribution for Syrians, while regular contributions for Turkish employees amount to 32.5 percent. Some Syrian shop owners avoid the payment of taxes by not properly registering their businesses (Source: Albayrak, Aydin, "Offering Syrians work permits increase locals' anger toward refugees," *Today's Zaman*, August 12, 2014, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.todayzaman.com/interviews_offering-syrians-work-permits-increase-locals-anger-toward-refugees_355286.html).

63. According to legislation, non-Egyptians cannot completely own a small business in Egypt, though they can own a portion of a business (See El-Behary, Hend and Sanchez, Luis, "Syrian Refugees: No work, no home," *Daily News Egypt*, May 19, 2013, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/05/19/syrian-refuges-no-work-no-home/>).

partner to smooth the process of establishing a business.⁶⁴ Similar stories are heard in Turkey,⁶⁵ although Turkey has been noted as leading the way in guaranteeing Syrians access to their labor market.⁶⁶

Limited access to residency, economic opportunities, and services creates problems for refugees and, in the long run, the host communities as well. Women and girls are particularly impacted by government restrictions. By restricting movement, limiting opportunities, and failing to establish social safety nets, governments undermine women's abilities to cope with stress and often create more worry in the process.⁶⁷ Moreover, Syrian refugee newborns increasingly remain unregistered, which can create a class of stateless children without access to education, health, and other services. Indeed, a UNHCR survey found that 70 percent of Syrian children born in Lebanon do not have a birth certificate, and there is reason to believe this situation is repeated across the region.⁶⁸

Host communities, increasingly aware that Syrian refugees are unlikely to return home soon, have in some cases innovated to mobilize local resources to address the rising problems. In Jordan, for instance, one municipality created a voucher program for low-income families that allowed them to receive food at a local grocery store in return for separating waste for recycling and reducing their needs to one trash pick-up per week. Another municipality introduced a deposit on potato chip bags in order to encourage consumers to pick up litter, with deposits that are not retrieved used to help fund waste collection. A third mayor organized fruit and vegetable vendors by renting stalls in an area that became the market place and using the proceeds to pay for keeping the area clean.⁶⁹

This search for institutional solutions is significant but not surprising. It is by now clear that simply attempting to stem the tide of refugees—or restricting their livelihoods in the hope that their presence will not disrupt the lives of citizens—simply will not succeed. Reform, not restriction, is needed today. Moreover, crises such as those facing Syria's neighbors today often put citizens, policymakers, and elites in a domain of losses where they are more likely to take risks.⁷⁰ This fosters new alliances between unlikely actors and opens up possibilities of reform.⁷¹

The crisis creates new pressures for institutional reform at the national level as well, particularly regarding decentralization. Decentralization, as well as reform in education, health and other services, have long been debated, but to little effect. In general, the Arab world houses some of the

64. Shamas, Soha, "Lebanon: Unlicensed Syrian Businesses Target of Ministry Plan," *Alakhbar English*, November 7, 2013, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/17542>.

65. Dinçer et al., "Turkey and Syrian Refugees."

66. UNHCR, "Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan."

67. UN Women, "We just keep silent: Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," April 2014, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://uniraq.org/images/documents/We%20Just%20Keep%20Silent%20final%20English.pdf>.

68. UNHCR, "Born in exile, Syrian children face threat of statelessness," November 4, 2014. Accessed April 3, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/54589fb16.html>.

69. Experiences shared in meetings with mayors, October and December 2014.

70. According to Prospect Theory (Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," *Econometrica* 47(2): 263-291; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Choices, Values, and Frames," *American Psychologist* 39(4, 1984): 341-350), political agents evaluate all changes in relation to a reference point. If the change leads to an outcome better than the reference point, people are risk-averse, whereas they are risk-seeking if the new outcome is worse than the reference point. One can easily argue that the Syrian refugee crisis puts political decision makers into a status that is worse than the reference point. In this "domain of losses" they are willing to pursue risky reforms.

71. This expectation is supported by scholarship examining crises and reform, more generally. Keeler, John T.S., "Opening the Window for Reform: Mandates, Crises, and Extraordinary Policy-Making," *Comparative Political Studies* 25 (4, 1993): 433-86. Hunter, Janet, "Institutional change in Meiji Japan: Image and Reality," In *Institutional change in Japan*, edited by Magnus Blomström and Summer La Croix (New York: Routledge, 2006): 45-70. Weyland, Kurt, *The Politics of Market Reform in Fragile Democracies: Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). Skocpol, Theda, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For additional discussion on the refugee crisis and possibilities of reform, see :Brixi, Hana, Lust, Ellen, and Woolcock, Michael, et al, *Trust, Voice and Incentives: Learning from Local Successes in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank, forthcoming).

most centralized regimes in the world, and local actors are weak. The provision of social services such as education and health are controlled by central ministries, and decisions regarding staffing, budgetary allocations, and other operational issues are made at the central or district levels.⁷² Local governments are often appointed and have limited responsibilities—and even more limited resources. Lebanon, for instance, has more than 1,100 municipalities, but the majority of them lack the human and fiscal resources to perform their functions.⁷³

With municipalities at the forefront of the crisis, resources strapped, and the need for immediate success heightened, once-reticent central elites appear to be more willing to consider fundamental reforms. In Jordan, the government is preparing to implement new laws on municipalities and decentralization that will strengthen local governance and place service provision under governors who—for the first time ever—will be elected. In Lebanon, a draft law for decentralization, unveiled in April 2014, is now being debated seriously. Both laws can be criticized for not going far enough or for containing vague provisions; nevertheless, they could be important steps toward strengthening accountability.⁷⁴

72. Brixi, Hana, Lust, Ellen, and Woolcock, Michael, et al, *Trust, Voice and Incentives: Learning from Local Successes in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank, forthcoming), Chapter 7.

73. Seventy percent of the municipalities have a registered population under 4,000. Four hundred have only one employee and 87 percent have fewer than six employees. Three-quarters of municipalities report lacking resources to hire employees. (Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, “Decentralization Facts and Figures,” available at <http://www.lcps-decentralization.com/facts.aspx?id=2&lang=2>.) Moreover, municipalities lack the ability to raise necessary funds and are, in many cases, disadvantaged by fiscal formulas that unevenly distribute resources and often lag seriously behind in disbursements. (Sami Atallah, Raneem Baassiri, and Jana Harb, “Municipal finance must be reformed to address Lebanon’s socio-economic crisis,” Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, July 1, 2014 available at <http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1404724341-policy.pdf>.)

74. “Lebanon’s Decentralization Draft Law Anchors Political Accountability at the Core of Development” <http://localdemocracy.net/2014/08/11/lebanons-decentralization-draft-law-anchors-political-accountability-at-the-core-of-development/>; and Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development – RASAD, “Analyzing the Expected Democratic Impact of the Governing Legal Framework for Local Administration in Jordan, 2014,” August 2014, available at <http://www.hayatcenter.org/uploads/2015/02/20150209162323en.pdf>.

International Responses: Toward Resiliency

Like Syria's neighbors, the international community has also grown increasingly aware that the crisis calls for strengthening governance mechanisms. Enormous sums have been poured into alleviating the Syrian crisis, including more than three billion USD from the U.S. alone by 2015,⁷⁵ with much of that supporting humanitarian assistance. Donors also began to implement projects aimed at mobilizing community resources and strengthening institutions, recognizing the importance of creating resilient communities and better governance mechanisms. They have been much more reticent, however, to open their own borders.

The scale of destruction and dislocation requires that humanitarian assistance be a key component of the aid. The difficult circumstances of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries are documented above, and Syrians who have remained within the country face dire circumstances as well: three-quarters of Syrians living inside the country now live below the poverty line, with 54 percent living in extreme poverty.⁷⁶ In 2014 alone, millions received food, clothing, shelter, education, and other assistance.

Nevertheless, the UNHCR reports assistance has fallen short of targets. The 2014 Regional Response Plan, which coordinates support from UN and non-UN partners, was only 54 percent funded by December 2014. Moreover, donors nearly met targets in food assistance, agricultural livelihood support, but in other important areas, such as education, training health workers, and providing basic needs, they fell far short.⁷⁷ This has left communities with unmet needs and frustrations toward the donor community, whom they often see as renegeing on their promises. As discussed above, where donors are seen as privileging refugees over the host community, support has also escalated social tensions.

Given the magnitude of the crisis, local human and material resources must also be mobilized. The UNHCR, Mercy Corps, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), and others implement programs aimed at mobilizing local communities to determine their needs, develop solutions, and plan implementation. The UNDP-Lebanon and Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs are currently spearheading one of the most ambitious of these projects, the Maps of Risks and Resources. The project, which is now being introduced in Jordan as well, brings together public officials and community leaders to map community problems and needs, combines them with precise location data, and provides a geographic information system (GIS)-coded map of risks and resources.⁷⁸ This is then used to determine community priorities and plan solutions.

75. USAID, "Humanitarian Funding to Syria: Humanitarian Response to FY 2012-2015," accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>.

76. UNHCR, "Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan," p. 2.

77. Specifically, 77 percent of the targeted 2,605,000 received in-kind, cash, or voucher assistance for food; 95 percent of the 33,000 children received supplements through school feeding programs, and 93 percent of the 80,000 targeted are actually receiving agricultural livelihoods support. Fifty-seven percent of 636,000 children targeted are enrolled in formal primary or secondary school, and 65 percent in non-formal, informal, or life skills education; 34 percent of 792,000 targeted received school supplies. With regard to health, 79 percent of 3,717,000 targeted received primary health care services; but only 29 percent of the targeted 11,000 health care workers were trained. Basic needs—47 percent with core relief items to meet basic needs (of 1,770,000), 45 percent of 2,394,000 given seasonal relief items. Seventy-six percent (of 540,000 targeted) in camps given shelter but only 41 percent (of 1,115,000) in community provided assistance, which included legal support and rehabilitation, as well as cash assistance. Seventy-one percent (of 1,900,000) provided clean water, while 59 percent sanitation (of 953,000). Finally, livelihood the most stifled – only eight percent of 111,000 targeted given participation in employment assistance and income generation, and only 18 percent received vocational training, literacy or life skills (177,000). See: UNHCR, "Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan," p. 6.

78. See: UNDP, "UNDP holds training workshop on developing "Maps of Risks and Resources" for municipalities," December 28, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2014/12/28/undp-holds-a-training-workshop-on-developing-maps-of-risks-and-resources-for-municipalities->

Such projects can be extremely effective. When Syrian refugees are mobilized alongside the host community, the energy and skills of the refugee community can be harnessed, and all sides can feel empowered. This can relieve pressure on the domestic and international community. These projects can also help to reduce social tensions by bringing members of the host community and refugees to work together, although unfortunately, too often these same social tensions lead host communities to exclude refugees. Finally, they can become positive success stories that inspire replication and further innovation in other communities.

Yet, even these projects cannot fully alleviate the problems, particularly as long as their implementation relies on the donor community. Even with a large number of donors engaged in such efforts, only the most seriously affected communities are currently being served. Strong donor coordination can alleviate this problem to some extent, eliminating duplicate efforts and distributing resources and energies, but it is unlikely—if not impossible—for donor-driven projects to mobilize enough local resources to address the mounting demands.

The donor community recognizes that the crisis calls for institutional reforms as well. The United Nations' 2015-2016 Regional Refugee Response rightly calls for strengthening communities and institutions. The Maps of Risks and Resources described above can be understood to be part of such initiatives—but so too are projects that are seemingly detached from the Syrian refugee crisis. Programs aimed at supporting decentralization, reform in service sectors, and other institutional reforms can aid those affected by the Syrian refugee crisis, although they do so indirectly and over time.

Policy Recommendations

Syria's neighbors have addressed the refugee crisis both by trying to limit the impact of refugees and by attempting to adapt to changing circumstances. They have attempted to minimize the impact of refugees by limiting the number entering the country and establishing measures such as curfews, restrictions on owning businesses, or limits on movement in the country. They have also increasingly sought to find ways to adapt to changing circumstances through concerted efforts to mobilize local resources, even stepping up plans to institute reforms aimed at strengthening state performance and expanding local powers. Like Syria's neighbors, the international community has also become increasingly aware that the crisis calls for strengthening governance mechanisms. These moves should be encouraged and further expanded.

- 1. Maintain commitments for humanitarian aid.** The international community must continue to maintain its commitments for humanitarian assistance, even as the crisis continues and fatigue sets in. Failing to maintain commitments not only puts lives at stake, but also heightens hostility toward the West and potentially fuels radical movements.
- 2. Assist host communities and refugees living outside of camps.** The donor community has rightly recognized the importance of addressing the needs of all of those affected by the crisis, host and refugee communities alike. It must continue aiding communities as a whole, using aid to help reduce social tensions and to help communities identify problems, mobilize resources, and devise solutions. They should emphasize programs that engage host and refugee communities in joint efforts, in order to reduce social tensions between the two communities.
- 3. Put a premium on communities' ability to undertake projects independently.** This is a difficult task but also an important one. Aid workers should avoid over-programming. They should provide guidance and resources but also allow local communities to drive implementation, potentially make mistakes, and strengthen their capacities.
- 4. Redouble efforts to help strengthen institutions.** Donor communities should work with national governments to institute reforms that strengthen institutional effectiveness and accountability. Doing so not only helps to address the current crisis, but can potentially leave Syria's neighbors with stronger institutions and more effective governance than before the crisis. Programs aimed at decentralization, building capacity for voice and accountability, and strengthening bureaucratic capacity underpinning service delivery, security, and responsibilities should be emphasized, even in a time of need.
- 5. Work with governments in host countries to enhance the ability of Syrian refugees to access employment and public services.** U.S. officials should engage with counterparts of host governments to offer technical assistance and advice on legal reforms needed to reduce Syrian refugees' impediments to public services, with particular focus on obtaining work permits and business licenses.
- 6. Put pressure on Syria's neighbors to maintain open borders and treat refugees with dignity.** The international community should draw attention to violations of international law and human rights that put Syrian lives in jeopardy. This requires in part that the international community follow through on commitments of support, thereby increasing its leverage.

- 7. Open their own borders to reduce tensions.** Members of the international community must also help alleviate tensions inside neighboring countries by allowing Syrians to resettle in the West. As of December 2014, the U.S. had accepted only 300 of the 3.2 million refugees from Syria's four-year conflict. The U.S. must be willing to open its own borders to alleviate tensions in Lebanon, Jordan, and other neighboring countries.

