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A stronger European response to the Syrian refugee crisis

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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Summary

There are now some 640 000 Syrians registered as refugees in Jordan and a similar number are unregistered; around 1 070 000 registered Syrian refugees and some 400 000 others in Lebanon; and 2 620 000 Syrian refugees in Turkey. None of these countries recognises Syrians as refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, although they are in principle protected from *refoulement*, and there have been problems of access to protection in all three. Syrian refugees face problems of housing, food shortages, lack of work permits (in Jordan and Lebanon), poverty and debt, and inadequate access to health care and education; women and children are at risk of particular forms of abuse. Palestinian refugees from Syria have been especially badly affected. The host societies are also under extreme social, political and economic strain. It is unlikely that a mass return of Syrian refugees will be possible even in the medium term.

The European response to the crisis must be based on certain clear principles. Welcoming recent international initiatives, the Parliamentary Assembly should call on European States, the European Union and the wider international community to do more, including through humanitarian pathways for admission of refugees, prioritising the most vulnerable and facilitating family reunification, if current efforts prove inadequate. It should also call for a generous response to UNRWA's emergency appeal.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4143 of 26 June 2015.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Syrian refugee crisis is a consequence of the ongoing war in Syria, which started in 2011. Refugees began fleeing Syria from early in the conflict. By early March 2016, the total number of registered Syrian refugees was over 4 800 000, added to around 6.6 million internally displaced persons. The mounting complexity of the conflict, coupled with the increasing military involvement of external actors, has made the prospects for peace ever more remote. This makes it equally unlikely that conditions within Syria will allow for a mass return of refugees in the short or even medium term.

2. Jordan now hosts some 640 000 registered Syrian refugees, with a similar number of Syrians resident but not registered as refugees. The country's current total population is around 7.5 to 8 million. Some 18% of the refugees live in camps, the rest are "urban" refugees. The refugee camps – notably Za'atari and Azraq – are well-equipped, supplied and orderly, although the food situation is critical – women in particular are often undernourished – and medical care is insufficient. Around 1 070 000 registered Syrian refugees are in Lebanon, a drop of 115 000 from the peak of April 2015, but to which should be added some 400 000 other Syrians, mostly unregistered refugees. Lebanon has a population of 5 850 000: Syrian refugees make up around one quarter of the population. There are no official refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon: Syrian refugees live in urban accommodation or in one of the 1 900 informal settlements spread across the country. There are now 2 715 789 Syrian refugees in Turkey: this makes Turkey the country with the largest refugee population in the world. Around 10% of Syrian refugees in Turkey live in the 26 camps in the south of the country.

3. Neither Jordan nor Lebanon is Party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and so do not extend legal protection to refugees in full accordance with international standards, although both remain bound by the customary international law prohibition on *refoulement*. Turkey has ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol but applies a geographical limitation that excludes Syrian refugees. Under Turkey's 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection, however, Syrian refugees can benefit from "temporary protection", analogous to that under the 1951 Convention, including protection against *refoulement*.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that there are problems of access to protection in all three countries. A group of over 20 000 Syrian refugees has been blocked by the Jordanian authorities in the desert at the border with Syria, many for several months. In Lebanon, many refugees have been unable to renew their residence status since January 2015, and in May 2015, the Lebanese Government instructed the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to suspend registration of new arrivals. Turkish policy appears to have changed in recent weeks: thousands of refugees fleeing the intensified fighting around Aleppo have reportedly been denied entry into Turkey, with 110 000 now stuck in camps on the Syrian side of the border.

5. All three countries are under extreme social, political and economic strain. From the refugees' perspective, problems include uncertain legal status and protection (especially in Jordan and Lebanon), lack of decent, affordable housing, food shortages, lack of work permits (in Jordan and Lebanon, and until recently in Turkey) leading to irregular employment and exploitation, poverty and debt, inadequate access to health care, inadequate access to education and recourse to negative coping strategies such as child labour, early marriage and prostitution. From the host communities' perspective, problems include housing shortages and rent increases, increased food prices, competition in the labour market and reduced wages (especially in informal employment), pressure on municipal services and infrastructure, environmental degradation, and huge budgetary burdens that have increased public debt and undermined economic growth. From the perspective of both refugees and host communities, the current situation is untenable.

6. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that many Syrian refugees, faced with inadequate protection and lack of prospects for themselves and their children and with little chance of being able to return home, are turning to western Europe, attracted by its reputation for respecting human rights and the rule of law and its far greater prosperity

7. The Assembly believes that the European response to the Syrian refugee crisis must be based on the following principles:

- 7.1. those fleeing the conflict in Syria are entitled to international protection;
- 7.2. that protection is usually, but not always, best provided in countries close to home;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 March 2016.

- 7.3. these neighbouring countries cannot provide that protection without extensive external support, which must be tailored to their particular circumstances;
- 7.4. that support must include sufficient financial assistance as well as technical measures including privileged access to export markets;
- 7.5. it must be accompanied by humanitarian pathways for admission of substantial numbers of Syrian refugees, including by resettlement, that prioritise the most vulnerable and avoid the need for them to take dangerous, irregular routes to seek protection in Europe;
- 7.6. in particular, cases of family reunification should be given priority; the issuing of visas for family members with either children or parents in European countries should be quick and procedurally streamlined.

8. The Assembly therefore welcomes the progress made under recent initiatives, notably the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region of 4 February 2016, the financial aid promised to Turkey and the commitment to improve the situation of Syrian refugees in the European Union-Turkey Joint Action Plan of 15 October 2015 and the High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees. The international community, including European States and the European Union, must be prepared to do more if their current efforts prove inadequate. Furthermore, European Union support for Syrian refugees in Turkey must not be made conditional on a reduction in the number of people – far from all of whom are Syrian refugees – crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to the Greek islands. It must also be ensured that financial aid is invested as intended, in order to meet the needs of refugees both in urban areas and in camps.

9. The Assembly emphasises that the Syrian refugee crisis is the responsibility not only of neighbouring States and of Europe but also of the international community as a whole. It calls on other States, including in the Middle East region, to take a similar approach based on providing not only financial aid, as many pledged to do at the London Conference, but also humanitarian pathways for admission of Syrian refugees as such.

10. Palestinian refugees, especially those formerly living in Syria, have been particularly badly affected by the conflict and the fact that many of them are stateless adds to the obstacles they face. At the same time, the fact that they are almost exclusively supported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has left them somewhat outside the reach of much of the international aid intended for Syrian refugees. The Assembly therefore calls on the European States and the European Union to respond generously to UNRWA's Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2016.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Annette Groth, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The Syrian refugee crisis is a consequence of the ongoing war in Syria. This conflict has its origins in the popular demonstrations of March 2011 against the government of Bashar al-Assad. The government's violent response and external actors' military and financial aid to opposition groups caused a rapid escalation into armed conflict. Regional powers including Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia interfered in the conflict as it spread and intensified, becoming a "proxy war" between outside powers. The conflict has also taken on a seemingly sectarian nature, with various Islamist forces fighting against the Assad government, most prominent amongst them the terrorist Sunni group "IS" and the al-Nusra Front, and Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed Shi'ite groups fighting alongside government forces. International powers, including the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Russia, are also involved in varying ways. According to the United Nations, by the summer of 2015, more than 250 000 people had been killed and 1.2 million injured; others estimate that up to 500 000 people have been killed. The growing complexity of the conflict, coupled with the increasing military involvement of external actors, has made the prospects for peace ever more remote, as shown by the failure of successive rounds of UN-sponsored peace initiatives.

2. Refugees began fleeing Syria early on in the conflict, although initially in relatively small numbers. At the end of 2011, there were still under 9 000 registered Syrian refugees (although there were undoubtedly many more outside the country on different bases). By the end of 2012, there were almost 500 000. The most dramatic increase came the following year, by the end of which there were over 2 300 000. The exodus continued during 2014, reaching a total of over 3 700 000 by year's end. Although the rate of departures decreased during mid-2015, renewed fighting from September onwards contributed to a further 400 000 people leaving Syria in the following months. By early March 2016, the total number of registered Syrian refugees was over 4 800 000.

3. A detailed analysis of the various displacements from different regions of Syria towards its neighbouring States over the five-year course of the conflict is beyond the scope of the present report.³ Even today, more people (around 6.6 million) are internally displaced within Syria than have fled the country. Most of those who have left Syria had previously been displaced within the country, usually several times. Throughout the conflict, refugees have returned to Syria from neighbouring countries, either because developments within Syria have permitted it or because conditions in the country of refuge became unsustainable. Overall, more and more people have been displaced over time and a growing proportion of these have sought refuge in other countries. International protection has become the only viable alternative for an ever greater number. At the same time, it seems ever more unlikely that conditions within Syria will allow for a mass return of refugees within the short or even medium term.

4. Furthermore, those fleeing Syria increasingly look further afield for sustainable protection. A survey by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of Syrian refugees passing through Greece during 2015 found that 55% of those interviewed had either not resided in a third country or had spent less than three months there before crossing to Europe. The main reasons for leaving the country of first asylum/transit were lack of suitable, non-exploitative employment opportunities, financial needs, security and protection concerns, the search for better opportunities for their children and the hope of educational opportunities. Similarly, research by the Danish Refugee Council amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey found that conditions in those countries, along with the apparently interminable nature of the Syrian conflict, were the main drivers of onward movement, with Europe being attractive due to expectations of access to labour markets, education, medical care and material support. For those with the means and physical capacity to undertake the journey, the hazardous and uncertain route to Europe is increasingly seen as preferable to the prospect of prolonged residence in a country of first asylum. If European Union policy towards Syrian refugees is based on the assumption that the protection needs of most of them can be met outside Europe, these considerations must be addressed.

5. The present report has been prepared as follow-up to the June 2015 visit by the ad hoc committee of the Bureau of the Assembly to Istanbul and the camps for Syrian refugees in Kilis and Gaziantep in Turkey.⁴ The Assembly has also adopted a number of resolutions relating to Syrian refugees, including [Resolution](#)

3. For further information, see for example UNHCR's Syria Regional Refugee Response website (data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php) and the World Bank/UNHCR report, "The Welfare of Syrian Refugees" (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23228>).

4. A detailed report on this visit was presented to the Assembly at its autumn 2015 part-session: see "Ad hoc committee on large scale arrivals of refugees to Turkey: Progress report", [Doc. 13813](#) Addendum III, 22 June 2015.

1878 (2012) on the situation on Syria, which urged Council of Europe member States to respond positively to UN agencies' appeals relating to humanitarian aid to refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and to those affected within Syria; Resolution 1902 (2012) on the European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, which invited the international community to show solidarity with the Syrian victims of the conflict and with neighbouring States taking the brunt of refugees; Resolution 1940 (2013) on the situation in the Middle East, which called for an increase in financial assistance to Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon in order to meet the needs of Syrian refugees; Resolution 1971 (2014) "Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance", which noted that the refugee situation in neighbouring countries was steadily worsening and called on States to show generosity and solidarity; Resolution 2025 (2014) "Resettlement of refugees: promoting greater solidarity", which included specific recommendations on the situation of Syrian refugees; Resolution 2047 (2015) on the humanitarian consequences of the actions of the terrorist group known as "Islamic State", which reiterated the Assembly's appeal to States to show solidarity and a sense of responsibility; and Resolution 2073 (2015) "Countries of transit: meeting new migration and asylum challenges", which, whilst not explicitly mentioning Syrian refugees, did address the situation in Turkey, examined in some detail in the underlying report.

6. The present report will concentrate on the situation in countries of first asylum neighbouring Syria, in particular Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. It will also address an often overlooked aspect of the Syrian refugee crisis, namely the specific and especially difficult situation of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria (known as "PRS") to Jordan and Lebanon. The report will examine the social, economic and political impact of the refugee influx on the countries concerned and the response of the national authorities. It will also look at the assistance provided by the international community and the role of international agencies, notably the UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), with particular attention to the recent London Conference and the European Union-Turkey Joint Action Plan. I will then conclude by reflecting upon future strategy and the action that Europe should take.

2. The situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries of first asylum

2.1. Jordan

7. Jordan now hosts some 640 000 registered Syrian refugees, with a similar number of Syrians resident in the country but not registered as refugees. Its current total population is between 7.5 and 8 million. Jordan is not party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and so does not extend legal protection to refugees in full accordance with international standards, although it remains bound by the customary international law prohibition on *refoulement*. This is also reflected in Jordan's memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR, which gives the latter the right to conduct refugee status determination and requires it to provide for their protection. Domestic law does not give formal residency rights to UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees, and it has been reported that the authorities often avoid officially recognising refugees as such under relevant domestic legal provisions.

8. Just over half of the registered refugees are minors (aged under 18); just over half are female. Some 18% of them live in refugee camps, the rest are "urban" refugees. By far the largest camp population is in Za'atari (80 000), followed by Azraq (31 000), which I visited, and the Emirati Jordanian camp (6 000). A residential block on the outskirts of the Cyber City industrial park close to the border with Syria, which I also visited, has been set aside for a group of around 260 PRS. Of the registered urban refugees, the great majority live in northern Jordan: some 178 000 in the Amman governorate, 141 000 in Irbid, 77 000 in Mafraq and 50 000 in Zarqa.

9. The main camps – Za'atari and Azraq – are well equipped, well supplied and orderly, with many international staff of the main international agencies present on site. Neither camp is over-populated: indeed, the population of Za'atari has fallen from a peak of over 200 000 in April 2013 and Azraq remains more than half-empty. Azraq in particular is very isolated – literally surrounded by desert – and, intended as a place where newly arrived refugees are accommodated, offers little attraction even as a medium-term solution. Most essential needs – housing, basic medical care and education, although not direct electricity or water supplies to each household – are met, although in many cases food aid and medical care are insufficient. There are very few meaningful activities available to adults other than a small, newly opened market at which camp residents (and Jordanian locals) can sell small items such as food, clothes, toys and electrical items purchased outside the camp. Adults see few, if any, prospects for the future.

10. The Cyber City site presents a very specific situation: the unofficial explanation for its peculiar location and character is that the Jordanian authorities suspect some of its PRS residents of having connections to Palestine Liberation Organisation fighters in the “Black September” civil war in 1970-71. In any event, conditions at Cyber City are particularly grim, with facilities limited in scope and of relatively poor quality. I was reassured to hear that potentially many of the residents may be resettled, especially to Canada, and urge the Jordanian authorities and responsible international agencies to step up their efforts to find a solution to this unacceptable situation.

11. The situation of the 525 000 urban refugees is in many ways even more difficult than that of the refugees in camps. Housing is a particular problem, with a serious deficit in supply causing a 14% increase in average rental prices between January 2013 and June 2015 and tensions between Jordanian and Syrian communities. Over 55% of refugees’ expenditure goes on accommodation, even though more than half of Syrian refugee families share accommodation with at least one other family. More than 20% of Syrian refugee families do not have a rental contract, which is a prerequisite for receiving a “service card” from the Ministry of the Interior, needed to access public health and education services. Public health care is no longer free for Syrian refugees: I met several who had been seriously injured by fighting in Syria but were now unable, despite assistance, to meet the costs of essential treatments. Last September, the WFP stopped providing food aid to 229 000 urban Syrian refugees in Jordan because of insufficient funding. There is only very limited access to formal employment: many work irregularly, outside the protection of labour regulations and vulnerable to low pay and other forms of exploitation. Those who do work without permits risk detention, fines and, potentially, deportation to Syria. Despite the Jordanian authorities’ efforts, including introduction of “double-shift” schooling, more than one third of Syrian refugee children do not attend school, with between 11% and 33% being ineligible due to admission regulations. Some attend non-formal schools instead, where they may be at risk of radicalisation. Many girls scheduled to attend the “second (afternoon) shift” are not sent to school, as their families are afraid to have them return home after sunset. Furthermore, as households’ savings and positive coping mechanisms are exhausted, children are increasingly being taken out of school and sent to work in various manual and/or menial jobs, or even to beg, since the authorities are perceived as being more lenient towards children working irregularly. In May 2015, 14% of interviewed Syrian refugee families relied on their children’s wages to pay the rent. There are also widespread reports of families resorting to under-age marriage of daughters, including “temporary” marriages that amount to little more than sanctioned prostitution, and of more blatant forms of prostitution and trafficking. Despite, or perhaps because of, increasing recourse to such negative coping mechanisms, two thirds of urban refugees have taken on high levels of debt. Over 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the national poverty line; by the UNHCR’s standards, which set the level at which cash assistance is given, 69% are in poverty.

12. Also of acute concern is a group of over 20 000 Syrian refugees blocked by the Jordanian authorities at the border with Syria in the far north-east of the country. Many of them have been waiting to enter Jordan for several months. The Jordanian authorities admit only a few dozen each day, citing security concerns based on the fact that the refugees originated from “IS”-controlled areas. The previously uninhabited crossing points at Hadalat and Rubkan, where the refugees are now living in makeshift tents, are in a desert region some 150 km from the nearest town, which complicates and greatly increases the expense of delivering essential humanitarian aid. The Jordanian authorities should accelerate their security vetting and seek to bring a swift end to this awful situation.

13. The presence of so many urban refugees has put enormous strain on Jordan’s infrastructure and services, including water supplies (Jordan already had one of the lowest levels of water resource availability per capita in the world) and sanitation, solid waste disposal, health services and education, as well as affecting the environment and labour and housing markets. Meeting these challenges is all the more difficult as the Jordanian economy faces significant difficulties on account of the conflict in Syria, an important trading partner, including the disruption of overland trade routes to Iraq and the Gulf and via Turkey to Europe, and greatly reduced revenue from tourism. Despite successfully completing an International Monetary Fund emergency programme in November, gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2015 was around 2.5%, one third of the level of 2010, and public debt had increased to 90% of GDP, after having fallen over the previous decade. Unemployment increased from 11.4% in the first half of 2014 to 12.5% in the same period of 2015. This may be due at least in part to displacement of Jordanian workers by Syrians, although the latter are mostly employed in the agriculture and construction sectors that are traditionally unattractive to Jordanians and whose labour force was previously provided by migrant workers; since the influx of Syrian refugees, the Jordanian authorities no longer grant visas to foreign workers. It has, however, been reported that the presence of so many Syrian refugees working irregularly has depressed wages for unskilled labour in the informal economy.

14. The people of Jordan have shown remarkable generosity in welcoming Syrian refugees – despite previously having hosted large-scale waves of refugees from Palestine and Iraq – but the country’s social and economic capacity to continue providing for so many desperate people is clearly reaching its limits. The Jordanian Government has prepared a Response Plan 2016-2018 (JRP2016-18), intended to continue the “evolution of the response from a mainly refugee approach to a resilience-based comprehensive framework that bridges the divide between short-term humanitarian, and longer-term developmental responses”. A key theme of the Jordanian Government’s approach is to ensure balance in the support given to Syrian refugees and that made available to host communities and the wider society and economy. The Plan contains costed response strategies for the education, energy, environment, health, justice, livelihoods and food security, local governance and municipal services, social protection, shelter, transport and “WASH” (water, sanitation and hygiene) sectors, amounting to a total of almost US\$2.5 billion for “refugee interventions” and over US\$2.3 billion for “resilience strengthening”. In its “Jordan Compact” presented to the “Supporting Syria and the Region Conference” in London, the Jordanian Government also explained its intention to “[turn] the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity that attracts new investments and opens up the EU market with simplified rules of origin, creating jobs for Jordanians and Syrian refugees whilst supporting the post-conflict Syrian economy”.

2.2. Lebanon

15. There are now around 1 070 000 registered Syrian refugees in the country, a drop of 115 000 from the peak of April 2015, but to which should be added some 400 000 other Syrians, mostly unregistered refugees. Lebanon has a population of 5 850 000. In total, Syrian refugees amount to around a quarter of the population. Like Jordan, Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and relies on the UNHCR to register refugees; it does not extend legal protection to refugees in full accordance with international standards, although it remains bound by the customary international law prohibition on *refoulement*. In May 2015, the Lebanese Government instructed the UNHCR to suspend registration of new arrivals: the Minister for Social Affairs, Rashid Derbas, explained that Lebanon could no longer absorb such a high number of refugees. In order to renew their annual residence permits, refugees must pay US\$200, and provide proof of settled residence (certified lease or deed), a notarised pledge not to work and proof of their financial means. Many, if not most, Syrian refugees are unable to fulfil these requirements. Their resulting irregular status creates a constant fear of arrest, detention and abuse for being undocumented, and a sense of acute insecurity. It is easy to understand how this may give rise to a desire to seek more sustainable protection elsewhere.

16. Slightly more than half of the registered refugees are under 18 and slightly more than half are female: the gender disparity is particularly pronounced in the 18 to 59 age group, which suggests that many working-age men have either not registered, returned to Syria or sought refuge elsewhere (which may have future family reunification implications), and is reflected in the fact that one fifth of households are headed by women. Some 261 000 live in the northern coastal region, 312 000 in and around Beirut, 125 000 in the southern coastal region and 372 000 in the Bekaa valley, separated by mountains from the Beirut coastal plain and in winter, often cut off by bad weather. There are no official refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon, apparently because of the authorities’ fear that permanent camps will develop, like those for Palestinian refugees. Syrian refugees live in urban accommodation or one of the 1 900 informal settlements spread across the country.

17. There was a housing crisis in Lebanon even before the mass arrival of Syrian refugees, which has of course only made it worse. Syrian refugees pay as much as US\$200 per month, 90% of their income, often to live in substandard property such as garages, sheds and unfinished buildings. Some must pay rent to farmers for the corners of fields where they have erected tents. Those living in tents in the Bekaa valley, which lies at an average altitude of 1 000 m, have to contend with sub-zero temperatures and snow during winter; at least four died in a January 2015 snowstorm. Two thirds of Syrian refugees are behind with rental payments and 20% have been threatened with eviction; in 2015, 18 000 were evicted from their homes. The UNHCR reported in August 2015 that 70% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were living below the national poverty line. 89% of Syrian refugee households are in debt, at an average of US\$842 per household. Syrian refugees have difficulty accessing public health care, for which they must pay. Poverty and debt mean that refugees also have difficulty affording sufficient food, due also to the fact that on account of insufficient funding, the WFP in July 2015 halved the value of its monthly food aid to US\$13.50, although the level has since partially recovered to US\$21.60. Refugees whom I met at a store equipped to receive payment via WFP e-cards complained that this amount was sufficient only for the first two weeks in the month, after which their diet became extremely restricted.

18. Of 370 000 school-age Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, 180 000 do not go to school, and some 40 000 are in “non-formal” education (outside the Lebanese education system). It is hoped that this year, 200 000 Syrian children will be able to attend public schools for free, with international agencies and donors covering the annual fee of US\$60 (also for Lebanese children from impoverished families). The Lebanese authorities also intend to close down “non-formal” schools, whose curricula are unsupervised and qualifications uncertified, and which may be responsible for radicalisation of refugee children. As in Jordan, the effect of poverty, debt, lack of work permits and the threat of arrest, detention and potential deportation for adults working irregularly, failure of positive coping mechanisms and, at least until recently, difficulties in accessing education is that children are often sent to work from a young age, exposing them to abuse and exploitation and damaging their life prospects by depriving them of education. There are also widespread reports of child marriage, which violates the rights of the girl child – and of prostitution, including under the guise of “temporary marriages”.

19. The Lebanese economy has suffered since the outbreak of war in Syria. Government sources told me that in 2010, the economy grew by 8% but by the end of 2015, there was zero or even negative growth (although the World Bank continues to report growth of around 2.5% per annum), despite the estimated 1.3% positive growth effect of aid and aid-related expenditure. The budget deficit has risen to 9% of GDP per annum, with total public debt standing at 138% of GDP, 16 points ahead of the level projected without the crisis. The reasons are similar to those in Jordan, including the loss of Syria as an export market, especially for agricultural produce, and decreased tourist revenue. The agricultural and construction sectors had relied on Syrian labour for the past 30 years: around 300 000 Syrians came to Lebanon each year as seasonal migrant labour; when the conflict forced them to flee Syria, they brought their families with them to Lebanon and stayed. The fact that there are now a far greater number of Syrian refugees, many of whom have no choice but to work irregularly (it has been reported that 90% of Syrian refugees in work have no formal employment contract), has added to the negative impact on Lebanese labour markets and wages: between 2012 and 2014, the unemployment rate doubled to over 20% (30% for young people). To illustrate the strain placed on resources and public services: since 2011, demand for water has increased by 28% and municipal spending on waste disposal by 40%.

20. Lebanon has some advantages in responding to the refugee crisis, notably adequate water resources, its strong agricultural and finance sectors and a diaspora of at least 12 million that sent remittances worth €9 billion in 2014, equivalent to 18% of GDP. Politically, however, it is a much more fragile State, with a weak central government and far greater potential for inter-communal and sectarian conflict. One need only recall the 1975-1990 civil war, the ensuing Israeli and Syrian occupations and intermittent conflicts over the past decade to imagine how precarious the domestic situation is and how easily it could be disrupted, with potentially disastrous consequences. The November 2015 “IS” suicide bombings in Bourj el-Barajneh, which killed around 40 people and were apparently planned and committed by a group of mainly Syrians, followed by the reported revenge attack on a mastermind figure by Syrian and Hezbollah agents, illustrate how things could quickly deteriorate.

21. Despite this delicate situation, the people of Lebanon have shown exceptional hospitality towards Syrian refugees, perhaps on account of their own experience of the suffering caused by civil war. However, as time has passed and numbers and pressures have grown, tensions have increased. This is especially evident in the evolution of border policy from one of “open doors” in the early years of the Syrian conflict, to a restrictive policy, denying access to Syrians from non-bordering regions and promoting returns and the establishment of camps in “safe” areas of Syria, in June 2014, to effective closure of the border to Syrian refugees and the introduction of onerous registration requirements in January 2015. These measures have been accompanied by public statements calling for a reduction in the number of Syrian refugees, a view that I heard expressed in my meeting with Lebanese parliamentarians. When compared to the vitriolic, xenophobic rhetoric of many European politicians faced with relatively insignificant refugee challenges, however, it is difficult to be critical of the Lebanese position: the country’s generosity is reaching its limits.

22. The government has prepared a “Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16” (LCRP2015-16). This recognises that “Lebanon’s government and communities continue to face critical tests of stability. At the same time, the most vulnerable Lebanese, displaced Syrians, and Palestinian refugees are reaching the end of their coping capacities”. The Lebanese response is based on a three-fold strategy: ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for the most vulnerable, both Syrian refugees and impoverished Lebanese; strengthen national capacity to ensure access to and quality of basic public services; and reinforcing Lebanon’s economic, social, institutional and environmental stability. Like the JRP2016-18 (see above), the LCRP2015-16 takes a costed, sectorial approach, with \$2.48 billion funding required in total for 2016.

2.3. Turkey

23. There are now 2 715 789 Syrian refugees in Turkey, whose population in 2015 was 78 741 000: this makes Turkey the country with the largest refugee population in the world, although in terms of refugees per capita it is far surpassed by Jordan and especially Lebanon. Around 10% of Syrian refugees in Turkey live in the 26 camps in the south of the country. Many non-camp refugees also live in the south of the country, particularly in Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Hatay and Kilis, where in some urban centres they outnumber the local population. A further concentration, reportedly as large as 366 000, lives in Istanbul. Turkey has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol but applies a geographical limitation restricting refugee status to persons fleeing persecution in a European country, which excludes Syrian refugees. Under the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), however, Syrian refugees can benefit from “temporary protection”, analogous to that under the 1951 Refugee Convention, including protection against *refoulement* (although there is a growing number of reports that Turkey is engaging in “push-backs” of Syrian refugees at its Syrian border). Turkey conducts its own registration procedure with technical assistance from the UNHCR. Turkish policy appears to have changed in recent weeks as thousands of refugees fleeing the intensified fighting around Aleppo have reportedly been denied entry to Turkish territory, with 110 000 now stuck in camps on the Syrian side of the border, an increase of 58 000 in two weeks.

24. Conditions in Turkey’s Syrian refugee camps are generally seen as exceeding international standards: each family has its own tent, there are medical facilities, schools (offering the Syrian curriculum) attended by 90% of school-age children, supermarkets where refugees may buy food using e-cards administered by the WFP, and a “market” with small businesses run by Syrian refugees. However, climatic conditions in the camps can be extreme, with temperatures ranging from -10°C in winter to over 40°C in summer. These conditions remain vulnerable to funding, however, as shown in February 2015, when a US\$71 million shortfall forced the WFP to stop providing aid in nine camps, leaving 66 000 refugees without food aid.

25. Despite Turkey’s size, the fact that non-camp Syrian refugees are concentrated in a few regions has inevitably placed great strain on the housing market, increasing rental prices by 60% to 70% in provinces along the border. As in Jordan and Lebanon, many refugees are forced to live in substandard accommodation (only 25% of respondents in one survey had access to heating and 35%, easy access to toilets and showers) and/ or to share overcrowded lodgings with other families (32% of dwellings, of an average size of 2.1 rooms, housed more than one family). It has been reported that Turkish landlords have become reluctant to rent to Syrian refugees; at the same time, some Turks consider that landlords prefer Syrian refugees as tenants as they are prepared to accept overcrowded conditions. Health care for non-camp Syrian refugees is theoretically free of charge and has been generally well administered in co-operation with WHO and other international agencies, with broadly satisfactory outcomes, despite, for example, a 30% to 40% increase in hospitals’ patient loads. There have also been some problems, such as the refusal in March 2015 of 5 000 Istanbul pharmacists to provide medicines to Syrian refugees on account of the government failing to reimburse them.

26. In 2014-15, only 25% of school-age Syrian refugee children living outside the camps attended **school**; in Syria before the war, 99% had attended primary school and 82% secondary school. Some have lost over four years of schooling; others who arrived in Turkey before reaching school age have never been to school. Although the Turkish authorities have made efforts to improve access to education outside the camps, including by opening schools at weekends, lifting formal residency requirements and accrediting “temporary education centres” that teach an approved Arabic-language curriculum, the future prospects of a generation of Syrian refugee children are being undermined. Many are in informal employment, notably in agriculture and garment-making, or resort to begging, and are at risk of exploitation and other forms of abuse. Child marriage is also an increasingly common negative coping mechanism (in 2014, the Turkish authorities reported that 14% of Syrian girls between 15 and 18 years of age were married; as most ceremonies would be religious rather than civil, it is likely that the true figure is higher), as is prostitution, including in the form of “temporary marriages”.

27. Turkey estimates to have spent over €7 billion supporting Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis. Initially, it met all related expenses itself, but since 2012 it has also called for and received international aid, although in relatively modest amounts. Annual economic growth stood at 9.2% in 2010 but by 2012 had fallen to 2.2%. This was partly due to disruption of trade with Syria, estimated to have cost US\$6 billion between 2011 and 2014, and a drop in tourism revenue of US\$1.6 billion over the same period; although other factors such as the European Union’s financial crisis and a 25% increase in defence expenditure between 2010 and 2014 will also have had significant effects. Recent reports suggest, however, that the economic activity of Syrian refugees and the government’s expenditure on supporting them has boosted the economy, with higher than expected growth rates of 4% in 2015 leading the government to raise its expectations for 2016 from 4% to 4.5%. The 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection in principle

permitted Syrian refugees to work, but the necessary secondary legislation was not adopted until January 2016. As a result, six months after receiving identity cards, refugees may apply for permits that allow them to work only in the province where they are registered but which allow them to do any type of work; employers may hire up to 10% of their workforce from amongst Syrian refugees, with no limit in the agricultural sector. In the meantime, large numbers of Syrian refugees had been working irregularly, and many undoubtedly continue to do so, often in exploitative conditions. This has had a displacement effect on Turkish workers, especially women and the less educated, in the informal sector, including agriculture, construction and garment-making; at the same time, however, it has increased opportunities for some categories of Turkish workers, notably less educated men, in an expanded formal sector. There is nevertheless a perception amongst Turks that Syrian refugees “take our jobs”. The presence of large numbers of non-camp Syrian refugees especially in the southern provinces has placed great strain on municipal services, notably management of solid waste and waste water, and infrastructure.

28. There are a number of so-called “pre-removal detention centres” in Turkey in which refugees, including unaccompanied minors, are detained. The situation in these “centres” is such that a human rights organisation wrote to the EU Delegation requesting that it visit one of them. When the EU delegation visited the “centre”, they found only refugees who arrived the day before, all previous detainees having been transferred to an unknown location. On 11 February, a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) issued a press release criticising the situation in these “centres” and requesting access, which has so far been denied; only the Red Crescent has access. At the beginning of March, when I was in Turkey with a delegation of the Human Rights Committee of the German Parliament, we were denied access to the “pre-removal detention centre” in Izmir.

2.4. Palestinian refugees formerly living in Syria

29. As noted above, Palestinian refugees, especially those formerly living in Syria, have been particularly badly affected by the conflict. Families displaced from Syria have been made refugees for the second or even third time, and the wider consequences of the refugee crisis in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon have had an impact on Palestinian refugee communities already living there. At the same time, the fact that they are almost exclusively supported by UNRWA (and not by the UNHCR, in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Statute of the High Commissioner) has left them somewhat outside the reach of much of the international aid intended for Syrian refugees. Even more inexcusably, because most are technically stateless, they are often not recognised as Syrian refugees when arriving in Europe, even if they hold UNRWA documents and their families had been living in Syria for generations. Furthermore, the funding requirements of operations to support Syrian refugees may have had an impact on the provision of services to Palestinian refugees by UNRWA, which faced a severe financial crisis in 2015 that would have led to postponement of the opening of the UNRWA school year had it not been for last-minute donations from Gulf States.

30. UNRWA has launched a “Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2016”. The Appeal calls for a total of almost US\$410 million in funding for 2016, including US\$63 million for Lebanon, now hosting 42 000 PRS (with 450 000 Palestinian refugees in total), and US\$17 million for Jordan, which hosts 18 000 PRS (2 097 000 Palestinian refugees in total). Palestinian refugees from Syria are amongst the most vulnerable of the already vulnerable population of Syrian refugees, and without this funding their acute protection needs in Jordan and Lebanon cannot be met.

3. The European response

3.1. Strategic aims

31. The primary goal of the international community must be to secure peace in Syria and establish conditions allowing the safe return of refugees. This is also what the refugees themselves want most. Since peace is unlikely in at least the short term and safe return for the majority difficult even in the medium term, however, international protection will remain a necessity. This should be provided as close to home as possible: not because Syrian refugees are not Europe’s problem, or because the presence of Syrian refugees is a danger for European countries (neither of which is true); but because it will facilitate future return and in the meantime allows refugees to maintain ties with their homes and contact with family members still in Syria. It is also true that many Syrian refugees feel more at ease in societies similar to their own; and that it is more cost-effective to provide humanitarian aid to refugees in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey than it is in western Europe. Setting aside the baseless fears and xenophobia of those who consider Syrian refugees to be a threat, therefore, it is good policy to support the countries neighbouring Syria that are already bearing

the real burden of the refugee crisis. Reducing “irregular migration” and the number of asylum applications in Europe may be a consequence of this policy being effective, but should not be considered as the primary aim: we must put the refugees first. If the refugees’ needs cannot be met in the neighbouring countries, due to the fact that these have reached the limits of their absorption capacity, it is imperative also to put in place solutions outside the region.

32. The above studies of the situations in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey show that all three countries are under extreme social, political and economic strain. Whilst there are differences between the situations in each, there are also many common elements. From the refugees’ perspective, these include uncertain legal status and protection (especially in Jordan and Lebanon), lack of decent, affordable housing, food shortages, lack of work permits leading to irregular employment and exploitation, poverty and debt, inadequate access to healthcare, inadequate access to education, and recourse to negative coping strategies such as child labour, early marriage and prostitution. From the host communities’ perspective, the common elements include housing shortages and rent increases, increased food prices, competition in the labour market and reduced wages (especially in informal employment), pressure on municipal services and infrastructure, environmental degradation, and huge budgetary burdens that have increased public debt and undermined economic growth; overall, the impact has been felt most by the least well off, who often live alongside non-camp refugees in the same neighbourhoods. From the perspective of both, the current situation is untenable. The differences, however, are also important and must not be overlooked: they include Jordan’s relative isolation from easy export opportunities and lack of obvious comparative advantages, and Lebanon’s socio-political fragility.

33. To a large extent, many of these problems can be alleviated by money. Money alone may not be sufficient, but it is certainly a necessary precondition for the countries concerned to provide sustainable protection to most of the enormous numbers of refugees they host, whilst protecting their own societies against the resulting stresses and strains. Even if this is achieved, however, it does not relieve the international community of the obligation to provide protection primarily to those most vulnerable refugees whose particular needs cannot otherwise be met. Resettlement programmes for such people, and for sufficient numbers of others to relieve some of the burden on countries of first asylum, are an essential part of any future strategy. But if the international community does not do enough to support countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, refugees will be forced to seek protection elsewhere, and instead of orderly resettlement prioritising the most vulnerable, the chaotic, indiscriminate flow of desperate refugees through Greece and the western Balkans will continue – to Europe’s everlasting shame. Closing borders or restricting admission to just a limited number of refugees – as is now happening on a daily basis – is in no way an appropriate solution to any of the underlying causes of the crisis; never mind the fact that the Greek government and people cannot cope with the consequences of a situation which evolved due to the failures of the international community.

3.2. The London Conference

34. The London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region of 4 February 2016 had three objectives: to raise significantly increased funding to meet both immediate needs and mid-term humanitarian, resilience and development financial commitments (up to 2020); to address longer-term needs by identifying ways to strengthen resilience by creating economic opportunities and jobs and providing education opportunities; and to maintain pressure on parties to the conflict to protect civilians affected by it, and to ensure that the international community is well prepared to support a co-ordinated stabilisation effort once conditions allow. Noting that only 56% of the 2015 UN-co-ordinated inter-agency appeals had been funded, the Conference generated pledges from States of over US\$11 billion: US\$5.9 billion for 2016 and a further US\$5.4 billion for 2017-20. Multilateral banks and other donors announced around US\$40 billion in loans, of which some (including US\$200 million from the World Bank for Lebanon and Jordan) would be on concessional terms. The Final Declaration welcomed host countries’ commitment to allow refugees access to labour markets and offered support in areas such as access to external markets, concessional financing and external support for job creation, estimating that up to 1.1 million jobs could be created. It also recognised the specific needs of Palestinian refugees, including presumably additional but unspecified funding for UNRWA.

35. Whilst these results are certainly impressive and the close involvement of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in the London Conference a reassuring sign that their particular needs were taken into account, the Final Declaration itself is not a concrete result. Experience shows that funding pledges are often not fulfilled. Furthermore, the funding may not be sufficient: the US\$5.9 billion promised for 2016 is intended to cover a wide range of activities, whereas the UN-led Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) alone calls for exactly that amount of funding only for Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The expected eventual outcome is also dependent on a number of assumptions that may or may not be realistic, including the capacity of the host countries’ economies to exploit new export markets and generate high levels of new employment.

Nevertheless, the London Conference has certainly raised the international community's awareness of the enormous challenges facing countries that neighbour Syria and host large Syrian refugee populations, and reflects a recognition that the situation requires a co-ordinated international response. It is absolutely crucial that funding pledges are honoured in full, but also that the international community, and especially European States and the European Union, do not conclude that their responsibilities have been fully discharged simply by promising money.

36. That said, it must be recalled that the Syrian refugee crisis is the responsibility not only of neighbouring States and of Europe, but of the international community as a whole. Other States, including in the Middle East region, should also take a similar approach based on providing not only financial aid, as many pledged to do at the London Conference, but also humanitarian pathways for admission of Syrian refugees as such.

3.3. The EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan

37. On 15 October, the European Union and Turkey agreed a Joint Action Plan to address the refugee crisis, and on 29 November they agreed to activate it. The Joint Action Plan seeks to address the crisis by addressing root causes of the massive influx of Syrians; supporting Syrian refugees and their host communities in Turkey; and strengthening co-operation to prevent "irregular migration". The European Union stated its intention to mobilise in a sustained manner substantial and concrete new funds, appropriate to the emerging needs, to support Turkey's efforts to meet the challenge of the Syrian refugee influx. On the basis of a comprehensive jointly-conducted needs assessment, priority should be given to humanitarian assistance, legal, administrative and psychological support, community centres, self-sufficiency and economic participation, social exclusion, access to education and infrastructure and services. For its part, Turkey made commitments including full implementation of the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection, ensuring access to education and health services and meeting the protection needs of vulnerable people.

38. Unfortunately, the agreement on implementation of the Joint Action Plan was followed by a period of unseemly squabbling within the European Union over funding, which was not resolved until early February, when agreement was reached on where the €3 billion would come from (€1 billion from the EU budget and the rest from member States). In the meantime, the European Commission produced a First Implementation Report covering the period 30 November to 16 December. Whilst mainly addressing measures against "irregular migration", the report also noted that the Turkish Government's "Reform Action Group" had decided to adopt a series of measures, including, for example, secondary legislation under the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection on work permits for Syrian refugees. The report also noted that the EU regional Trust Fund for Syria had adopted new financial decisions with a budget of up to €150 million for actions in Turkey. The emphasis on border control and "irregular migration" was echoed by European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans when visiting Turkey on 11 January 2016. It is important that EU support for Syrian refugees in Turkey does not become conditional on a reduction in the number of persons – far from all of whom are Syrian refugees – crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to the Greek islands.

39. A second Implementation report published on 10 February 2016 similarly gave priority to "irregular migration". It also noted the adoption of, amongst other things, the secondary legislation on work permits. For its part, the second report noted that the European Union had created a "Facility for Refugees in Turkey" to administer the €3 billion fund, along with a mechanism to co-ordinate the efforts of the European Union and its member States in supporting Turkey's efforts to host Syrian refugees. The Facility "will deliver assistance as soon as possible", with foreseen priorities including humanitarian assistance, socio-economic support (education and training), access to the labour market, health care and social inclusion, and municipal infrastructures. A first needs assessment has been announced, to identify projects to be funded by the Facility. The report mentions that since the beginning of the crisis, the European Union had already provided €365 million in direct support to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey. A further special meeting of the EU heads of State or government with Turkey took place on 7 March 2016 in Brussels, with implementation of the Joint Action Plan a priority issue on the agenda.

3.4. High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees

40. On 30 March, the UNHCR will host in Geneva a "High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees". The aim of this event is twofold: to create or expand humanitarian pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, specifically those with "compelling needs", such as resettlement/humanitarian admission, private sponsorship, humanitarian visas and emergency evacuation; and to facilitate access to additional pathways for admission such as admission of relatives (beyond existing

family reunification grounds), academic scholarships and apprenticeships, and labour mobility schemes, or by relaxing or removing legal barriers or administrative requirements for admission. The aim is to secure such pathways for at least 10% of the Syrian refugee population over the next three years.

41. I very much hope that this initiative is met with the same enthusiasm as the London Conference. Both approaches are necessary if the international community is to respond effectively to the Syrian refugee crisis: money alone will not be enough to ensure adequate protection of the refugees and the resilience of their host communities.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

42. The Syrian conflict, which rapidly spiralled out of control and for which many other countries bear at least some responsibility, has generated perhaps the most severe refugee crisis the world has seen since the Second World War. Syria's neighbouring countries, whether implicated or not, are bearing the brunt of this challenge and Europe has so far failed to do enough to live up to its moral and legal responsibilities.

43. The European response must be based on certain clear principles: those fleeing the conflict in Syria are entitled to international protection; that protection is usually, but not always, best provided in countries close to home; those countries cannot provide that protection without extensive external support, which must be tailored to their particular circumstances; that support must include sufficient financial assistance, as well as technical measures including privileged access to export markets; and it must be accompanied by humanitarian pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, including by resettlement, that prioritise the most vulnerable and avoid the need to take dangerous, irregular routes to seeking protection in Europe. In particular, cases of family reunification should be given priority; the issuing of visas for family members with either children or parents in European countries should be quick and procedurally streamlined. Several figures, including in German Visa Departments, have proposed that visa requirements be lifted for family members, who should instead be issued with entry permits following confirmation of their identity. As only 3% of applicants from Turkey are refused visas, the cumbersome visa procedure should be omitted for all applicants.

44. International organisations, especially the United Nations and its subsidiary organs, should employ greater proportions of local staff and also refugees, following the example of UNRWA, instead of recruiting large numbers of international staff who are disproportionately expensive. For the refugees concerned, this could also open new perspectives. Beyond that, the refugees' needs could in many cases be much better met by staff speaking their language and having the same background.

45. Initiatives such as the London Conference, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan and the Geneva meeting must be given equal importance and considered as forming the basis of a package of internationally co-ordinated measures. Most importantly, the international community, including European States and the European Union, must be prepared to do more by resettlement and family reunification if their current efforts prove insufficient.