

## The Reformulation of the Refugee Crisis: Syrian Children at Risk

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*The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of any official institution or agency.*

### Abstract

This article discusses the Syrian refugee crisis as of April, 2016, paying particular attention to the refugee children at risk. The number of registered Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries has increased by more than a million just within the last year, bringing the total number to 4.8 million. In a region already hosting millions of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, the scale of the Syrian crisis is placing a huge additional strain. Accordingly, the number of Syrians arriving in Europe seeking international protection is on the rise as well. With this regard, this article proposes to put children refugees as a priority, and develop strategies to accelerate their integration into host communities. A lack of policy that addresses the needs of child refugees; a lack of integration; growing public anger; and internalised despair has the risk of refugee radicalisation and this could ultimately result in losing a generation.

**Keywords:** Refugee, Syria, Middle East, Europe, Children

## Mülteci Krizinin Yeniden Formüle Edilmesi: Risk Altındaki Suriyeli Çocuklar

### Özet

Bu makale, Nisan 2016 itibariyle Suriyeli mülteci krizini, özellikle çocuk mülteciler ekseninde yoğunlaşarak tartışmaktadır. Suriye'nin komşu ülkelerindeki kayıtlı mülteci sayısı, sadece geçtiğimiz yıl bir milyonluk bir artış göstererek, toplamda 4,8 milyona ulaşmıştır. Suriyeli mülteciler, sayısı milyonları aşan Filistinli ve Iraklı mültecilere yıllardır ev sahipliği yapan Orta Doğu ülkelerinin sosyal, siyasi ve ekonomik yapısı üzerinde bir baskı oluşturmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, uluslararası yardım talebiyle Avrupa'ya ulaşan Suriyeli mülteci sayısında da ciddi bir artış gözlenmektedir. Tüm bu gelişmeleri göz önünde bulundurarak, bu makale çocuk mültecileri hedef alan politikaların öncelik taşıması gerektiğine ve çocukların sığındıkları toplumlara uyum sürecinin hızlandırılmasının önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Çocuk mültecileri göz ardı eden politikaların başarısız bir entegrasyona, toplumda artan bir öfkeye; içselleştirilmiş umutsuzluğa neden olabileceği ve tüm bunların sonucu olarak taşıdığı radikalleşme riski ile bir neslin kaybına neden olabileceğini savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:**Mülteci, Suriye, Orta Doğu, Avrupa, Çocuklar

6-year-old Gulistan knows the difference between closing eyes and sleeping, and she prefers to close her eyes even if it only means pretending, because pretending keeps her away from the nightmares. She misses the pillow she had in her house in Syria. On the other hand, Tamam is scared of her pillow as her pillow brings back the memories of the

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air raids on her hometown that usually took place at night. Her pillow is the source of danger for her, and she cries every night at bedtime.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the story of 3-year-old Aylan, whose dead body was found on the shore of Turkey when trying to reach Greece, is just one among millions of children inside Syria and across the region witnessing their past and future disappears.

The image of a 3-year-old Syrian boy lying on the beach was so powerful that it has even altered how most people perceive the whole refugee situation. The image of the Syrian kid provoked reactions across the world, and for the first time in the Syrian crisis turned the attention from concerns over security, religion, politics, economics to humanitarian action. A call for action from the public was powerful enough to force politicians to make a striking u-turn towards their refugee policy. It may be hard for some people to comprehend what is happening in Syria; however, there is nothing hard to understand about how children need safety; to live and sleep peacefully.

Nevertheless, more cynically the real question remains whether or not the image was powerful enough to create a permanent change. Unfortunately, the answer is no. On September 2015, Angela Merkel opened Germany's borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees mostly from Syria, allowing them to go to Germany. These refugees had been previously detained in Hungary. Nevertheless, the flow of refugees has not been managed successfully as the European Union has not worked together, which has left some European countries such as Germany and Sweden to cope alone with the crisis. In addition, shortly after the German chancellor's open door policy for people fleeing war in Syria, we have been told more and more different refugee stories that have been used to alter public opinion. Sexual harassment, increasing crime rates in host nations, economically motivated migrants presenting themselves as refugees fleeing from war in Syria were the main highlights among those stories that were successful enough to make the public quickly forget about the little Syrian boy, and many others who share the same destiny as him. Once again, refugees were unwelcome.

There have been several attempts by the international community to resolve the issue including broader and deeper commitment to funding UN humanitarian appeals; expanded resettlement and other legal channels for humanitarian admissions; facilitating refugee inclusion; provision of cash assistance, and social services to refugee families, as well as counselling and other support mechanisms that are made available to refugees. Of those attempts, funding the neighbouring countries hosting the refugees remains as the most common one. Nevertheless, financial initiatives are not enough to address the crisis. As the cross border and spill-over impacts of the conflict have reached far beyond the neighbouring states, there is an urgent need for international community to develop more comprehensive mechanisms to prevent the destabilisation of social cohesion. The discussion on open border policies; the rhetoric on no Plan B; the EU-Turkey dilemma; the NATO monitoring in the Aegean Sea; the host countries in the Middle East altogether do not see the very essence of the challenge. The main plight here, however, lies in the prospect of policies addressing the refugees. Few of the political discussions involve a sustainable feasible political strategy aimed at offering a solution to the "refugee crisis".

With this in mind, we propose to approach the situation from a "children crisis" perspective that tends to make people think more about the humanitarian ramifications. This article presents a statistical overview of the Syrian refugee crisis with a specific focus on children, before arguing that the lack of integration; the lack of policy addressing

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<sup>1</sup>Bergfeldt, Carina, Wiman, Erik and Weigl, Kerstin "Where the Children Sleeps", Magnus Wennman Photo Project, 2015, <http://darbarnensover.aftonbladet.se/chapter/english-version/>, (22.03.2016).

education; the growing public anger; the risk of refugee radicalisation; and in the end losing a generation will create consequences that take many more years to overcome. Although it is generally believed that refugees will go back to their home countries once the conflict is over, history suggests that this will take longer than initially anticipated. Consequently, there is an urgent need for a Plan B, which offers a sustainable long term approach that specifically addresses Syrian children. Consequently, multi-level assistance, not only addressing the basic needs of children, but also offering a comprehensive psychosocial support is essential because some stories are never meant for children.

### **Tackling the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Development and Protection Challenges**

The term refugee has become almost synonymous with Syria in recent times. Before proceeding, it is essential to define the term refugee with an aim to clarify possible confusions especially with regards to mistakenly interchangeable usage of refugee, asylum seeker and migrant. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons defines refugee as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."<sup>2</sup> Refugees are individuals who flee for safety. Accordingly, an asylum seeker refers to someone awaiting a decision on their application for refugee status under the relevant international and national legal structures. On the other hand, despite no universally agreed definition, the term migrant is used for a person who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate.<sup>3</sup>

These distinctions are necessary because refugees and migrants are not the same and this indeed matters. Using these terms interchangeably is arguably a way to undermine the status of refugees. Refugees do not choose to move but they are in a way forced to move in order to survive due to a threat of persecution or death. Migrants, however, choose, and have other reasons to move including a prospect for a better life, family reunification and education. This distinction matters, particularly with regards to recognised legal principles. Refugees are defined and protected in international law, whereas national immigration laws define the nature of migration processes. Subsequently, countries bear specific responsibilities towards those seeking asylum on their sovereign territories. Conflation of these terms can have severe outcomes on the security of refugees. Although it is also paramount to emphasise the importance of the human rights of migrants, obscuring the two terms diverts attention from the specific legal protections refugees need, and can sabotage public support for refugees.<sup>4</sup>

In light of these definitions, there are nearly 19.5 million refugees in the world, of which almost a quarter are Syrian with 4.8 million. Of those, 2.1 million Syrians registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and 2.7 million in Turkey. In addition, there are more than 28,000 Syrian refugees registered in North Africa.<sup>5</sup> The number of registered Syrian

<sup>2</sup> Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees- Text of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>, (22.03.2016).

<sup>3</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Glossary on Migration, International Migration Law Series No. 25, 2011 <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>, (22.03.2016).

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Adrian Refugee or Migrant: Which is Right? United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) viewpoint, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/55df0e556.html>, (22.03.2016).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR "Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase", 18 June 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>, (27.03.2016).

refugees in these neighbouring countries has increased by more than a million just within the last year, bringing the total number to 4.8 million. This increase signals to us that the conflict has accelerated dramatically over the last 12 months, and many more refugees are on the door to come. Besides, this number does not include the thousands of asylum seekers. For instance, in 2014, there were 137,887 asylum applications in Europe, and that was just below 900,000 between April 2011 and December 2015.<sup>6</sup> Despite the increasing trend in the number of Syrians arriving in Europe seeking international protection, it remains comparatively low considering the number of refugees residing within the region. The main destinations remain the neighbouring countries.<sup>7</sup> It is also essential to remark that all available statistics are sourced from official figures, and therefore it is highly likely that these numbers are more substantial than what is reported.

Accordingly, accommodating refugees has become a pressing issue in host countries after the civil war turned into a regional crisis. On average in 2014, 3,300 refugees arrived in neighbouring countries every day.<sup>8</sup> In a region already hosting millions of Palestinians and Iraqi refugees, the scale of the Syrian crisis is placing a huge additional strain on the neighbouring countries.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, the international humanitarian response has been tasked to alleviate the severe negative social, economic and human developmental impacts of the refugee influx on the host countries of the region. In January 2016, the UN agencies appealed for almost \$8 billion in funding to help Syrians affected by the conflict.<sup>10</sup> This request is known to be its largest appeal in history to meet the ongoing humanitarian needs inside and outside of Syria. Along with the international community, individual states such as the United States provide humanitarian assistance including medical care, water, food, shelter and non-food items. Moreover, psychosocial rehabilitation of refugees as well as the prevention of gender based violence is other focus areas of the international assistance provided. Nevertheless, despite the international efforts including the UN and the individual governments to generate and increase contributions, funding and support remain vastly inadequate.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the indicated international community efforts, the degree of protection by the international community at large has been very limited in comparison to that provided by the neighbouring countries to Syria. In addition to currently hosting the vast majority of the refugees, these states implement a crisis response plan aiming at an integrated stabilisation strategy. More specifically, Lebanon provides material and legal assistance to the most vulnerable among Syrian refugees. In close coordination with the ministries, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan aims to strengthen the national and local capacity as well as the accessibility of public services. Moreover, the plan introduces rapid impact job creation

<sup>6</sup>Eurostat “Asylum Quarterly Report” (2016) [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report), (27.03.2016).

<sup>7</sup> 3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016-2017 UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, via:<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>8</sup>Zetter, Roger and Ruaudel, Heloise “Development and Protection Challenges Of the Syrian Refugee Crisis” University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> UNDP New Centre “UN agencies warn humanitarian needs growing in Syria and region: nearly US\$8 billion urgently needed in 2016”, 12 January 2016, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/01/12/un-agencies-warn-humanitarian-needs-growing-in-syria-and-region-nearly-us-8-billion-urgently-needed-in-2016.html>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>11</sup>Margesson, Rhoda and Chesser, Susan G. “Syria: Overview of the Humanitarian Response”, 30 May 2014, Congressional Research Service, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43119.pdf>, (27.03.2016).

opportunities, and seeks to complement international assistance in the country.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Jordan has several targeted interventions addressing short-term people-centred needs as well as medium to long-term institutional developments. The Jordanian Response Plan includes specific sector strategies with an aim to prevent a long-term deterioration in the society. For instance, the education sector strategy seeks to ensure sustained quality educational services for all refugee children, while energy sector response strategy aims to fulfil the additional power demand in line with the refugees' needs.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, hosting the largest numbers of refugees in the world puts an additional strain on Turkey. Not only to address the immediate humanitarian needs of refugees, but also to cope with the challenges posed by the crisis, Turkey has established an asylum framework providing Syrian refugees with access to health care and education, and with further plans for enabling them to gain access to the labour market.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, taking the efforts of individual states into account, the international community's response remains rather limited. Funding the countries hosting the refugees is not enough because socio-economic implications on the host communities cannot be addressed only through financial initiatives. Cross border effects of the conflict have already been a big disturbance in neighbouring states. Destabilisation of social cohesion and distortion of trade and economic patterns have already caused a great deal of issues.<sup>15</sup>

More specifically, in terms of micro-economic impacts of the refugee influx on the neighbouring countries, substantial spikes in unemployment, depressed wage rates and limited employment opportunities are widespread. In addition, the fiscal stress impacted upon economic production while impoverishing a very substantial proportion of households. As these households are mainly low income, the tension is increasing in society blaming refugees for stealing their jobs and limited socio-economic opportunities.<sup>16</sup> For instance, prior to the refugee crisis, almost a quarter of the Lebanese population lived below the poverty line of \$4 per day, and the refugee influx was estimated to push an additional 170,000 Lebanese nationals into poverty.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to micro-economic impacts, macro-economic implications include large losses in terms of economic performance, cuts in growth, increasing unemployment and deepening national deficits. The refugee crisis has also had a serious effect on public services including health and education sectors as well as water supplies and power.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, the World Bank estimated that the refugee crisis impacted upon Lebanon's economic growth reducing it by 2.9% per annum from a predicted growth rate of 4.4 % in

<sup>12</sup>UNHCR Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016.

<sup>13</sup>Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2015-2016.

<sup>14</sup>Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016 -2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Zetter, Roger and Ruaudel, Héloïse "Development and Protection Challenges of the Syrian Refugee Crisis", September 2014, <http://www.fmreview.org/syria/zetter-ruaudel%20.html#sthash.mJ7A5aIW.dpuf>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>17</sup> "Lebanon, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict", World Bank Report No. 81098-LB, September 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/WB-EconomicSocialImpact-Leb> - See more at: <http://www.fmreview.org/syria/zetter-ruaudel%20.html#sthash.mJ7A5aIW.dpuf>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>18</sup>Zetter, Roger and Ruaudel, Héloïse "Development and Protection Challenges of the Syrian Refugee Crisis", September 2014, <http://www.fmreview.org/syria/zetter-ruaudel%20.html#sthash.mJ7A5aIW.dpuf>, (27.03.2016).

2012-14.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the Jordanian Economic and Social Council asserted that the cost per Syrian refugee to Amman is more than \$3,500 a year.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, after more than five years of war, neighbouring states, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, are about to collapse under the weight of refugees. Lebanon's economy has taken a \$7.5 billion hit due to the refugee crisis, and the country's unemployment rate is expected to double after the refugee influxes. This is not unique to Lebanon since Jordan has been experiencing the same overwhelming impacts of the crisis.<sup>21</sup> In addition to economic, energy and natural resource pressures of large Syrian refugee populations, a fragile security and political environment is weighing heavily on neighbouring countries, and further complicating the already complex political dynamics of the region.<sup>22</sup>

The early waves of Syrian refugee influx were met with empathy and aid from the international community; however, this is no longer enough. More needs to be done to assist Syria's neighbours. The support of the international community is out of proportion with the needs. Since the spill-over effects of the war have reached far beyond neighbouring states, there is an urgent need for international community to revise the way it thinks about developing more comprehensive response mechanism.<sup>23</sup> In addition to encouraging the neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to those fleeing the conflict in Syria, it is essential to share the burden.

Accordingly, most European states are in a more stable and economically able position than their Middle Eastern counterparts. Yet the European Union has been paralysed by the discussion over collective interest versus individual preferences of member states. Meanwhile, Germany is the exception that has demonstrated the courage and capacity to try to absorb a sizable group of Syrian refugees.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Germany's open-arms policy towards those people in need of sanctuary has not been warmly welcomed by the European counterparts of Germany. To the contrary, the open border policies of the Chancellor were considered to be naïve not only by Central European countries, but also by Germany's closer partners such as France. Berlin's persistence that Europe can and should absorb more refugees arguably caused more harm than its expected benefits. Merkel's insistence on no Plan B paved the way for the refugee crisis to escalate within the EU. Terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 as well as the mass sexual assaults on women in Cologne on New Year's Eve provoked a collective contentious perspective toward Merkel's way of handling the refugee crisis across the Union. Even though EU leaders urged citizens not to confuse refugees with terrorists, most of whom were EU citizens, the Paris attacks triggered the threat that terrorists could hide among

<sup>19</sup>Zetter, Roger "Reframing Displacement Crises as Development Opportunities" Displacement Solutions Initiative (DSI) Roundtable, Copenhagen, 2-3 April 2014 [www.endingdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Concept-note.pdf](http://www.endingdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Concept-note.pdf), (27.03.2016).

<sup>20</sup>Al-Kilani, Saleh "A Duty and a Burden on Jordan" Forced Migration Review, September 2014, 47, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1561632668?pq-origsite=summon&>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>21</sup>Sprusansky, Dale "Tackling Syria's Humanitarian Crisis" Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 2014, pp. 51-54, <http://www.wrmea.org/2014-may/human-rights-tackling-syrias-humanitarian-crisis.html>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>22</sup>Margesson, Rhoda and Chesser, Susan G. "Syria: Overview of the Humanitarian Response".

<sup>23</sup>Sprusansky, Dale "Tackling Syria's Humanitarian Crisis".

<sup>24</sup>Laipson, Ellen "Gulf States' Inaction Heightens Europe's Migrant Crisis" World Politics Review, 1 September 2015, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/16584/gulf-states-inaction-heightens-europe-s-migrant-crisis>, (30.03.2016).

migrants.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the Paris attacks have led some East European nations including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and some right-wing politicians to call for tighter border controls. Many of those linking the refugee crisis and the attacks were already sceptical of accepting refugees in the first place. However, after the attacks, they have explicitly called for the Schengen border region to limit migrant movements putting the EU's resettlement program, designed to spread 160,000 migrants around European countries, at risk.<sup>26</sup>

The deepening split between Berlin and other European member states has worsened the attempts to achieve a common European approach for the refugee crisis. Instead, the contradiction between Merkel's pro-refugee policy and Europe's refusal to absorb the majority of refugees has forced the EU to resolve the problem through other means. Of these, the negotiation with Turkey is one of the most crucial as well as the most controversial. The EU deal with Turkey aims to keep open the Turkish-Syrian border to refugee influx while closing its borders to the EU. The readmission of irregular refugees to Turkey is another part of the agreement. In this regard, the EU and Turkey agreed to resettle one Syrian from Turkey for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey after arriving irregularly, which is also known as the 1:1 mechanism.<sup>27</sup> Although this 1:1 mechanism seems to aim at the prevention of dangerous irregular migrant flows across the Aegean Sea by encouraging legal resettlement process, it remains contentious concerning the obscure relocation and resettlement procedures. Intriguingly, EU-Turkey agreement appears to be the "best" possible option for the EU to address the worst humanitarian crisis of the last decade. It seems there will be no refugee crisis if the refugees are not in the EU.

In addition to the EU-Turkish agreement, Greece, Turkey and Germany have asked for NATO support to monitor the Aegean Sea in order to fight against the irregular border crossings. However, the monitoring of the sea will likely not resolve the "crisis", either. The approach should be more comprehensive than merely monitoring. EU financial assistance for Turkey's compliance with EU wishes and the involvement of NATO in the refugee crisis will do little to achieve a long lasting positive impact on the issue. Broadly speaking, these crisis resolution methods appear to do little to address the challenges presented by this crisis, but instead are arguably creating new problems.

### **Statistical Outlook: What the Numbers Tell Us**

Significantly, the UNHCR<sup>28</sup> estimates that 13.5 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, 4.8 million Syrians are refugees, and 6.5 million are displaced within Syria, and only about 9% of those registered Syrian refugees have been living in camps. This is important because it highlights the living conditions of the refugees. The Syrians who are not living in camps receive little to no financial support from the host states. For instance, almost 86% of refugees outside camps in Jordan live below the poverty line of US \$ 3.2 per day. A similar situation exists in Lebanon since 55% of

<sup>25</sup> Martin, Philip L. "Viewpoint: Europe's migration crisis: an American perspective" Migration Letters, 13(2), pp.311 <http://www.tplondon.com/journal/index.php/ml/article/viewFile/614/460>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>26</sup> Time Magazine "The Paris Attacks Have Put Europe's Refugee Crisis Under Renewed Scrutiny" 16 November, 2015 <http://time.com/4114009/paris-attacks-migrant-crisis-refugees-eu/>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>27</sup> European Commission - Press release "Relocation and Resettlement: EU Member States must act to sustain current management of flows" 18 May 2016 [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-1763\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-1763_en.htm), (30.03.2016).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

refugees live in substandard houses.<sup>29</sup> Unsurprisingly, harsh living conditions and the need to provide for themselves and for their families are highly likely to result in an increase in undocumented employment as well as in child labour.

Concerning the demographic breakdown of Syrian refugees, it is estimated that gender division is almost equal with 49.3% males and 50.7% females.<sup>30</sup> Unlike what is mostly believed, the majority of Syrian refugees are not men crossing the border to look for better jobs in Europe. What is even more crucial concerning the demographic make-up is actually the age composition. Approximately half of the refugee population with 2.4 million are under the age of 18, and of those 40% are under the age of 12.<sup>31</sup> This implies that there is an urgent need to act responsibly in the host countries to provide children with protection and assistance. In addition to 2.4 million registered refugee children and children awaiting registration outside Syria, there are around 6 million children affected within Syria.<sup>32</sup> These children are arguably the potential refugees, whose situation is not any better than the ones outside of Syria. More specifically, children on the move face several difficulties including sickness and in some cases death; trafficking; separation from parents; extortion by smugglers; exploitation and abuse.<sup>33</sup> Even after they successfully cross the borders, there are several other barriers preventing their integration into the host nations. Fractured family structures; physical and mental scars; insecurity; the need to work; educational obstacles; and discrimination<sup>34</sup> are some of the most challenging problems children face.

Principally, limited possibilities force children seeking international protection to make use of irregular routes as a means to reach the EU, which leaves them with a wide range of safety risks. According to IOM<sup>35</sup>, 30% of the victims of these dangerous journeys across the Aegean were from children trying to reach Europe. Many people on the move are found wet and cold after their arrival; some children suffer from hypothermia and risk developing pneumonia.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the safety risks for children travelling to and through Europe, there have been several other challenges children had to face along the route. Being separated from parents is one of the most prolific issues faced by these children. The risk of separation is likely to happen not only on their way to Europe, but also during their early journey to neighbouring countries. Smugglers do not care about keeping families together as they preferably think about pushing as many people as possible into a boat, and sail it when it is full regardless of who are in and out. In this respect, unaccompanied children are by far the most vulnerable group among refugees, and are likely to face with more severe challenges

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR Press Release “Total number of Syrian refugees exceeds four million for first time”, 9 July 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/559d67d46.html>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>30</sup> 3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016-2017 UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, via:<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>31</sup> Sirin, Selcuk R. and Sirin-Rogers, Lauren “The Educational and Mental Needs of Syrian Refugee Children” Migration Policy Institute 2015.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF “Syrian Arab Republic”, 13 January 2016, <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/syria.html>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>33</sup> Verheul, Rhea and Fagerholm, Karin “Safety and Fundamental Rights At Stake For Children On the Move”, The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), 2016.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR “The Future of Syria”, 2016, <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>35</sup> IOM and UNICEF Data Brief: Migration of Children to Europe, 30 November 2015, [http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/IOM-UNICEF-Data-Brief-Refugee-and-Migrant-Crisis-in-Europe-30.11.15.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/IOM-UNICEF-Data-Brief-Refugee-and-Migrant-Crisis-in-Europe-30.11.15.pdf), (30.03.2016).

<sup>36</sup> Verheul, Rhea and Fagerholm, Karin “Safety and Fundamental Rights At Stake For Children On the Move” The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), 2016.

after they successfully enter into the host countries.<sup>37</sup> Save the Children estimates 26,000 unaccompanied children entered Europe in 2015, and according to the EU's criminal intelligence agency –Europol-<sup>38</sup>, at least 10,000 of them have gone missing after arriving in Europe. What is even more frightening is the disturbing crossover between smugglers and human trafficking gangs. The nexus between gangs helping smuggle refugees and the gangs using refugees for sex and slavery is unmistakable. In other words, the risk of becoming the victim of sexual exploitation is unfortunately highly likely for young refugees. Indeed, officials are concerned that many unaccompanied missing child refugees might have falling into the hands of organised trafficking syndicates.

Furthermore, the provision of basic needs and services in destination countries is another critical issue. Most refugees encounter with problems in access to shelter, protection, food and other basic services such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene and education. In this regard, it is essential to emphasise the importance of physical and mental health of young refugees. Regardless of their age, Syrian children have gone through severe physical pain due to war including sniper fire, rockets and missiles. Some may have got away from severe physical injuries; almost none is able to avoid the psychological and mental impact of the war. According to interviews carried out by UNHCR officials<sup>39</sup>, based on what the parents indicated, trouble sleeping, horrifying flashbacks, constant crying, bed-wetting and even speech problems are noted as visible impacts of the war on those children.

From an educational standpoint, the statistics do not provide us with a brighter picture, which is highly likely to result in an under-educated generation, if not a lost generation. Despite the lack of official data on the registry rate of refugee children in schools in the host nations, interviews and focus group discussions shed light on the situation that Syrian children are likely not to continue their education. In Lebanon, a study<sup>40</sup> conducted by the United Nations and its sister agencies found out that 80% refugee children were not enrolled in schools. The situation is similar in Jordan. In line with official Jordanian Ministry of Education figures<sup>41</sup>, 83,232 Syrian children were enrolled in formal education. Statistically speaking, 56% of the refugee children were not in school when the data was collected in 2013. More strikingly, the number of refugees in Jordan has almost doubled since 2013.<sup>42</sup> Contrariwise, it is highly likely that the percentage of Syrian refugee children who are not in school is on the rise as the numbers of refugees are growing in the respective host countries. In 2014, of the 1.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, it is predicted that 576,000 school-aged children require access to schooling. According to UNICEF, at the end of the 2013-2014 school year, some 65,000 children were enrolled in formal education programmes in camps, and 45,000 children were attending in temporary education centres in communities, with a further 7,500 participating in the national education system. Despite the increase in the enrolment rates compared to

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Euronews “10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol”, 31 January 2016, <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/31/10000-refugee-children-are-missing-says-europol/>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR “The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis”, November 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/529c3b4d4.pdf>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>40</sup>Karlstrom, Kerstin and Hamoudi, Nathalie “Lebanon: RRP5 Update- Education” MEHE, UNGCR, UNICEF, 2014.

<sup>41</sup>International Labour Organisation (ILO) “Report of the rapid assessment on Child Labour in the Urban Informal Sector in three governorates of Jordan (Amman, Mafraq and Irbid)”, 2014.

<sup>42</sup>3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016-2017 UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, via:<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#>, (27.03.2016).

previous years, 70% of school-aged children are estimated to be still out of school.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, similarly to Jordan and Lebanon, refugees in Turkey have steadily increased since 2014 with many children not having access to education.

Even if refugee children continue their education, some other barriers exist preventing their possible integration. Of these, linguistic barriers; hidden constraints; the capacity of schools; the quality of education; discrimination and segregation remain vital. Language restricts integration. Evidence suggests that language support provided by the host governments both for the refugee students and the teachers to provide Syrian refugees with multilingual education has been limited. Even if local language courses exist, they are generally not sufficient enough to provide the course beneficiaries with adequate tools and the required skills to make full use of mainstream education. In order to bypass the language barrier, there has been some effort made such as in the case of Turkey in which temporary education centres also known as TECs are operated in public school buildings. TECs function on a modified Syrian curriculum with the language of instruction in Arabic. Nevertheless, there are not enough of these centres to meet the demands of the refugee population<sup>44</sup>. Despite being a serious educational option, it is not a long-term solution.

The education of refugee children is an essential tool that increases the probability of long term integration with the local populace. In this regard, child labour is another crucial issue due to its direct correlation with school attendance. Some children need to quit school to support their families. For instance, 47% of respondents in Jordan (186 polled households)<sup>45</sup> indicated that children are responsible either partly or entirely for their family's income. Sadly, the situation is predicted to be even worse in reality. Child labour has reached critical levels as it is estimated that at least one in ten Syrian refugee children in the Middle East region is engaged in child labour.<sup>46</sup> Since child labour is not legal in the host nations, it is hard to keep track of the problem. Families and employers tend to hide the situation due to the fear of ramifications that might result in disqualification of families for financial assistance provided by the international organisations. Despite the difficulties in identification of working refugee children, it is not difficult to penetrate the child protection problems attached to child labour.

Over the last 12 months the number of registered Syrian refugees in the Republic of Turkey, the Lebanese Republic, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Iraq, and the Arab Republic of Egypt has increased by more than 1 million.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the number of Syrians arriving in Europe seeking international protection is on the rise, equal to 579.184 between April 2011 and December 2015<sup>48</sup>. According to Eurostat<sup>49</sup>, the number of first time asylum applicants has increased by more than 130% in the fourth quarter of 2015 when compared with the same quarter in 2014 and remained unchanged in

<sup>43</sup>3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis 2015-16 Turkey.

<sup>44</sup>World Bank Group- Social, Urban, Rural & Resilience "Turkey's Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Road Ahead", December 2015, <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23548/Turkey0s0respo0s0and0the0road0ahead.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>45</sup> UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment "Gender Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage", July 2013, p.35.

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF "No Lost Generation" (publication pending).

<sup>47</sup> 3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016-2017 UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, via: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#>, (27.03.2016).

<sup>48</sup> UNHCR "Europe: Syrian Asylum Applications From April 2011 to December 2015" <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10282>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>49</sup> Eurostat "Asylum Quarterly Report", 2016, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report), (27.03.2016).

comparison to the third quarter of 2015. This increase is mainly due to Syrian asylum seekers. Despite this increase, the number is particularly low when compared to countries bordering Syria. However, as indicated, this implies that fighting has intensified in almost all Syrian governorates, and this could likely compel many more people from Syria. As a result, what the numbers really tell us is that although it is presented as if all the refugees are men looking for jobs in Europe, the truth is they are not. Almost half of them are children in need, and until the conflict is over, there will be more and more influxes of people; and it is essential to provide a longer term multi-level assistance to overcome the challenge.

The hope of returning home is shrinking since the conflict accelerates, which puts refugees in a precarious situation. Besides, negative coping practices including but not limited to child labour, begging, child marriages, undocumented employment are on the rise. Competition for employment, housing, infrastructure services in already vulnerable host states is making the situation even more complicated for the host communities. Ensuring support for the increasing number of refugees has become even harder.<sup>50</sup> From the stance of strategic impact, it is essential to formulate a sustainable policy that not only respects and supports the rights of those admitted, but also ensures that these rights are protected. The governments may be caught unprepared by the growing refugee influx. It does not, however, necessarily mean that it is not possible to achieve a balance between humanitarian responsibility, the weight of public opinion and economic burden. Merkel said there was no ‘Plan B’ for her aim of reducing the flow of migrants through cooperation with Turkey, efforts she said could unravel were Germany to cap the number of refugees it accepts. Merkel can sustain her stance in relation to the refugee influx; however, there is an urgent need to admit that it is time for a Plan B, which is a more sustainable and long-term approach targeting refugee integration in the host communities.

Whether it is in Lebanon, Turkey or Europe, there is a need for a permanent solution within the very near future for how to integrate Syrians into the host countries.<sup>51</sup> The main challenges for humanitarian actors involved in the Syrian refugee crisis are to stabilise the precarious economic situation; push for a transition from assistance to development; and promote economic development strategies. Accordingly, formulating better targeted long term interventions could diminish the potential for negative effects of the crisis. In order to develop better targeted strategies, there should be a number of areas that are prioritised.<sup>52</sup> With this respect, we propose to put children refugees as a priority, and further develop targeted strategies to accelerate their integration into host countries.

### **Plan B: More Sustainable Long Term Approach**

“When the Palestinians came in 1948, we thought they would stay for a couple of weeks” said Antonie Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the United States. Despite the evident historical hindsight, politicians, however, keep repeating the same mistake. There has only been short-term thinking in host countries concerning the incoming refugees, which has blinded them from the long-term benefits of absorbing these refugees into their communities. In this regard, it would be advisable to adopt a long-term policy response addressing specifically to the child refugees. Children are the basis of sustainability. They will transmit what they have learnt and what they have experienced to the next generations.

<sup>50</sup>UNHCR “More Than Four Million Syrians Have Now Fled War and Persecution”, 9 July 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/print/559d648a9.html>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>51</sup>Sprusansky, Dale “Tackling Syria’s Humanitarian Crisis”.

<sup>52</sup>Zetter, Roger and Ruauadel, Héloïse ”Development and Protection Challenges of the Syrian Refugee Crisis”.

A lack of policy that addresses the needs of child refugees; a lack of integration; growing public anger; and internalised despair has the risk of refugee radicalisation and this could ultimately result in losing a generation. Contrariwise, health and counselling services; targeted and inclusive education schemes; and integration mechanisms are the basic steps for our proposed Plan B approach.

Initially, these are the children who have been affected by the war physically and psychologically. There needs to be a comprehensive mechanism supporting refugee children. Accordingly, protecting physical health of children is not enough. As is indicated by the numbers, the majority of these refugee children undergo psychological trauma. The first step should be the provision of a safe haven; however, it needs to be complemented by psychological counselling services to ensure that refugee children can overcome the negative impacts of the war. To address this issue the UNHCR and UNICEF launched a joint initiative<sup>53</sup> that aims to strengthen the protection for the growing numbers of children and others with specific needs arriving in Europe. Accordingly, the UNHCR together with its sister agency put child and family protection support hubs also known as “Blue Dots” into operation. Although the overall objective of these initiatives is no different than what has been suggested, it is essential to note that they are not nearly comprehensive enough to support the incoming refugee children. More specifically, the international humanitarian response should also take into account the many unaccompanied and separated children. The identification of this group, and providing them with targeted protection mechanisms should be a priority. With this respect, targeted counselling and follow-up services for children; psychological support in schools; more specialised support provision; and recreational activities should be the preliminary steps of host communities in welcoming refugees. In addition to physical and mental health, the education of refugee children should be at the centre of the response mechanisms being developed. Refugee children need education as education helps generations to learn; to develop; to absorb the values of respect and tolerance, which is why education should be prioritised to ensure that these children do not take up arms and become radicalised.<sup>54</sup>

Short-term measures implemented by the host governments including increasing class sizes; offering informal educational support; providing additional tutoring programmes are essential. Nevertheless, more needs to be done than these stopgap measures.<sup>55</sup> For instance, the Palestinian refugee crisis has already been continuing for several decades, and more than a half million Palestinian children still attend separate UN refugee schools.<sup>56</sup> Even though initially a separate system was required for Palestinian children to guarantee that they received an education, their inclusion into mainstream education systems has not been yet accomplished. The failure to integrate refugee children into mainstream education brings several disadvantages in the long term including unequal economic and social opportunities. Similar to the Palestinian case, Syrian children are at the same risk. More than half of Syrian refugees are enrolled in non-mainstream schools.

<sup>53</sup> UNHCR “UNHCR, UNICEF Launch Plan To Protect Refugee Women and Children”, 26 February 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/56d05ec76.html>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>54</sup> Al-haj, Mustafa “How One Syrian Group Is Helping Kids Get Back To School”, Al-Monitor, 2 February 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/syria-schools-destruction-civil-society-initiatives.html#ixzz48RTKQ7v3> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/syria-schools-destruction-civil-society-initiatives.html#ixzz41jpWfuXX>, (09.04.2016).

<sup>55</sup> Culbertson, Shelly and Constant, Louay “Battered by War, Syrian Refugee Kids Need to Be Taught” RAND Corporation, 15 January 2016, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2016/01/battered-by-war-syrian-refugee-kids-need-to-be-taught.html>, (09.04.2016).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

There has been a visible difference, which has the potential to exacerbate over the long run between the native population and the refugees if not being addressed.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, these short-term measures should not be taken for granted by the host communities.

With this regard, the management of the education of refugee children needs to take the protracted nature of the problem into consideration. The application of stopgap measures alone is not enough to address the educational challenge. The long term policy response should include a plan to expand educational access to out-of-school children as well as investing in additional infrastructural development. The international community could leverage its knowledge and resources to enable host communities to manage the crisis in the long term.<sup>58</sup> This crisis of education will impact upon the stability and economy not only of the host communities, but also of the Middle East region itself for at least a generation. As a result, interim measures should be complimented by long-term policies with the degree of foresight required to overcome what is an overwhelming educational challenge. Expanding a safe and inclusive learning environment; recruiting and training more teachers; further developing the quality of education; and encouraging the development of technical and vocational skills for youths could bring more refugee children back to learning while protecting those at risk of dropping out.<sup>59</sup>

Linked to education, the proposed Plan B puts emphasis on integration. The feelings of isolation and insecurity that have become a part of everyday life for young Syrians need to change urgently.<sup>60</sup> Tensions within and between refugee and host communities are likely to heighten these fears. This could in turn endanger the wellbeing of children. The refugee influx undoubtedly has had crucial impacts on the host societies including the destabilisation of local economies, the pressure on infrastructure and social services, and therefore could result in more polarisations in society. In this regard, a poll conducted in Lebanon in May 2013 with 900 Lebanese adults<sup>61</sup> confirms that refugees are not welcome in the host nations since 54% of the respondents stated that Lebanon should not receive more Syrian refugees. Similarly, according to the survey carried out in Jordan with 1,800 Jordanians in July 2013<sup>62</sup>, 73% of the respondents were opposed to continued refugee admittance. What is more alarming is that these host countries accepted many more refugees after the polls despite lack of public support. Accordingly, this might result in an increasingly hostile attitude towards incoming refugees.

In this respect, against the increasing tension within the host societies as well as the backdrop of fear and insecurity, education is a foremost way to overcome these challenges. Organised educational and recreational activities are one of the best ways for children to interact and extend the horizons of refugee children that can mitigate the effects of war, and thus should be the integral part of the education policies.

## Conclusion

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR “The Future of Syria”, 2016, <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/>, (30.03.2016).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> No Lost Generation “Usd\$1.4 Billion Needed To Get Every Syrian Child Back In School, Say Aid Agencies” 2 February 2016, <http://nolostgeneration.org/post/138538710232/usd-14-billion-needed-to-get-every-syrian-child>, (09.04.2016).

<sup>60</sup> UNHCR “The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis”, November 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/529c3b4d4.pdf>, (02.04.2016).

<sup>61</sup> National Opinion Poll conducted 15-21 May 2013 undertaken by Fafo Independent Research Foundation in cooperation with Information International, <http://bit.ly/1/dclay>, (09.04.2016).

<sup>62</sup> The Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan “Current Issues in Jordan”, July 2013, Survey of 1,800 Jordanian nationals led by Dr. Walid Alkhatib.

As is highlighted several times, 4.8 million people flee to neighbouring countries and beyond; and there are 13.5 million people inside Syria that need humanitarian assistance; and half are children.<sup>63</sup> This is not simply a statistic. These are the Syrian people whose lives, hopes and futures are in danger. Unlike the stories, numbers may not provide us with the personal insights; however, the numbers certainly tell us more than the personal stories. One can eliminate the publication of results or the public declaration of these numbers; however, one cannot delete the truth concealed in the numbers.

The dislocation of the Syrian people first and foremost, is a humanitarian catastrophe with important ramifications across many countries in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. This movement does not only influence the lives of those Syrians, but also directly impacts upon the lives of the members of host societies.<sup>64</sup> Closing the borders will not eliminate the problem as opening the borders alone will not resolve it. Neither natural, nor man-made barriers used by actors will be enough to avoid the “unwanted” guests. As is manifested, it is an alarming situation, and it is time to share the burden; to provide these people with a safe haven; to formulate sustainable policies; to integrate; to provide education and health services. These people will stay longer than expected whether we want them to or not. Consequently, it is the time to open the minds, not the borders alone; and to formulate long term policies because these are children no different to any David in Britain, any Selin in Turkey, or any Lorenzo in Italy except they are Syrians. As Nelson Mandela remarked, “there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children”.

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<sup>63</sup> European Commission “Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection: Syria Crisis Echo Factsheet” March 2016, [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf), (11.04.2016).

<sup>64</sup> Aiyar, Shekhar; Barkbu, Bergljot; Batini, Nicoletta; Berger, Helge; Detragiache, Enrica; Dizioli, Allan; Ebeke, Christian; Lin, Huidan; Kaltani, Linda; Sosa, Sebastian; Spilimbergo, Antonio and Topalova, Petia “The Refugee Surge in Europe: Economic Challenges” International Monetary Fund, January 2016, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1602.pdf>, (11.04.2016).

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