The scale of refugee movements from Syria has been both rapid and massive. A full year after the first disturbances in Syria, the number of registered Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries was just over 26,000.¹ Nearly four years later, as of end-December 2015, this total was just under 4.6 million.² None of the host governments expected the displacement either to reach such a scale or to last this long.

The initial displacement occurred against the optimistic background of the early days of the Arab Spring and thus under the assumption that any displacement caused by popular uprisings in Syria would be of a very temporary nature. Many in the region (and outside the region as well) initially believed the Syrian regime would be replaced by a reformist one, mirroring the transition that had just taken place in Tunisia and Egypt. Instead, the situation in Syria escalated into a civil war. Indiscriminate government attacks on and repression of civilians forced more and more people to
become either internally displaced or flee into neighboring countries. Since the summer of 2014, additional displacement has resulted from the brutal treatment of civilians by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and from fighting between ISIS and other opposition groups. The Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war in support of the Syrian government since September 2015 has led to further displacement and to prospects that the situation could get even worse.

The registered refugee populations in Lebanon and Jordan have by and large remained stable at around 630,000 since early 2014 in Jordan and around 1.1 million since late 2014 in Lebanon, the results of hardening border policies in both countries (see figure 2-1). In the case of Turkey, the number of refugees has continued to increase, reaching 2.5 million as of the end of December 2015. The escalation of violence in and around Aleppo, partly resulting from Russian intervention but also engendered by pro-regime factions, is expected to precipitate the displacement of up to another 3 million people toward Turkey. In the meantime,
the actual number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey increased by almost half a million between early October and late December—and that in spite of the movement of Syrians leaving Turkey for Europe. Approximately 245,000 and 117,000 registered Syrian refugees are in Iraq and Egypt, respectively, together with another estimated 28,000 refugees in North African countries. The majority of the refugees live outside camps in these five host countries. Most of the refugees are Sunni, but minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Roma, and Yazidis have also joined their ranks.

As noted in the previous chapter, with the exception of Turkey the other host countries are not signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees. This means that Syrian refugees do not have the possibility of receiving a full-fledged refugee status, and instead are considered “guests”—an ill-defined status offering no legal protection. In effect, the situation is not very different in Turkey, as Turkey maintains a “geographical limitation” that limits the application of the Geneva Convention to those asylum-seekers who have become refugees as a result of “events occurring in Europe.” This means that Turkey neither grants refugee status to Syrians nor allows them the possibility of remaining in the country for the long term. Resettlement and voluntary repatriation are seen as the only durable solutions. Instead of being recognized as refugees with rights, Syrians are granted “temporary protection” in Turkey.

The role and status of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) vary across these host countries. UNHCR has been involved in the registration of refugees—a critical process in terms of ensuring protection and access to basic services, including education, health, food, and social support. In Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR
has also been the lead international agency in ensuring basic humanitarian assistance for the refugees and managing the camps. All of these countries have extended generous support to the refugees, but none has allowed the refugees to work legally, dramatically limiting their ability to gain access to legal livelihoods and improve their living conditions.

In the meantime, there is now a general consensus that many, possibly most, Syrian refugees will remain in neighboring countries for the foreseeable future. This raises a host of questions, especially for Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—the three countries that have received 90 percent of the refugees registered in Syria’s neighborhood. What has been the economic, social, and political impact on these three countries of the refugee crisis? How has the international response evolved? How can the cooperation between these three countries and the international community in addressing the needs of refugees be improved? Are there lessons to be learned? These questions are the focus of this chapter.

**THE GROWING REFUGEE CRISIS**

In addition to the significant increase in numbers, there are three striking differences between the refugee situation today and that of only a few years ago. Firstly, the ethnic and religious background of the refugees has become much more diverse, especially in the case of Turkey. Originally, the refugees were overwhelmingly Arab Sunni Syrians with a smaller number of Turcomans and Alawites. Today, they have been joined by Kurds from northern Syria as well as Yazidis and Christians from Iraq. Some 40,000 to 50,000 Iraqis fled to Turkey following the capture of Mosul and its environs by ISIS in June 2014; later, the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdish regional government as well as the U.S. air-
strikes were able to push back against the ISIS onslaught. By the time the situation stabilized, however, the number had increased to about 240,000–250,000. The Turkish government and various municipalities constructed camps to house some of the refugees, while most settled into villages and towns in southeastern Turkey inhabited by their coreligionists or ethnic brethren. Another mass exodus occurred in October 2014, when around 170,000 Syrians, most of them Kurds, fled the fighting between the Democratic Union Party (PYD, from the Kurdish, Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat) and ISIS in Kobane. Some of these refugees have since returned, although some still live in one large government camp and smaller municipal camps, while others remain dispersed throughout Turkey’s Suruç region, across the border from Kobane.

In June 2015 clashes erupted between ISIS and the PYD forces along with their Syrian Arab allies—this time for the control of the Syrian border town of Tel Abyad. About 25,000 Arabs, Kurds, and Turcomans fled into Turkey under chaotic circumstances. Most of the refugees who escaped into Lebanon and Jordan were Sunni Arabs from the central and southern parts of Syria; some were Christians. In the fall of 2015 Russian military intervention aggravated the situation. Then in November 2015, just days before the downing of a Russian fighter plane by Turkey, there were reports of Turcomans being displaced to the Turkish-Syrian border where a makeshift camp was set up for them. Subsequent Russian operations in the area became even more forceful, undermining humanitarian assistance efforts and causing additional displacement. The very real possibility of increased confrontations between various Syrian opposition groups and ISIS, as well as Russia, in areas close to Turkey risks aggravating the displacement crisis. One Turk-
ish report estimated that another “3 to 5 million Syrians are expected to leave their country.”

Secondly, the political response of countries receiving Syrian refugees has also dramatically changed, particularly for Jordan and Turkey. The governments there received the first waves of refugees with open arms. This was partly driven by the fact that the refugee numbers initially were limited, and both governments believed the regime in Damascus would soon collapse and the refugees could return home quickly. They thus instituted an “open door policy” and began to set up camps for the refugees. Jordan invited UNHCR to manage the camps and co-register the refugees. In Turkey, camps were set up and run by the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency, while the government formally extended temporary protection to the refugees in October 2011, stating that it would manage the situation without international assistance.

However, much sooner than expected, both Ankara’s and Amman’s hopes that the refugees would be able to return to a reformed Syria were dashed. Instead, Turkey became increasingly embroiled in efforts to overthrow the Assad regime through active support for the opposition, including radical Islamic groups. Furthermore, as the cost of maintaining Syrian refugees rapidly increased, Turkey sought greater international support and persistently called for the establishment of a “safe haven” for refugees inside Syria, though with little success on either count. Jordan, unlike Turkey, did not completely rupture its relations with the Syrian regime and eventually succeeded in creating a kind of informal safe zone that enabled some refugees to return to southern Syria. Jordan was also able both to mobilize more international assistance for refugees and to limit the flow of refugees into its territory. Although the Jorda-
nian government continues to identify its policy as “open doors,” human rights and international nongovernmental organization officials note that it is not really the case in practice.\textsuperscript{16} Turkey’s track record in this regard has also been questioned, with cases of \textit{refoulement} (expelling refugees back into dangerous situations), forced returns, and other violations of the government’s “open door” policy being frequently reported.\textsuperscript{17} These practices have reportedly increased since the deal reached between the European Union and Turkey in November to stem the flow of Syrian refugees (discussed further below).\textsuperscript{18}

The case of Lebanon is somewhat different. The long-standing governmental deadlock engendered by the failure to elect a new president and sensitivity over delicate sectarian balances, especially between the Sunni and Shia communities in Lebanon, have shaped the government’s response to the Syrian crisis. The near-paralysis of the government initially resulted in “semi-laissez faire” policy, enabling refugees to enter the country unhindered. Lebanon’s previous experiences with Palestinians and the lessons drawn from the long civil war between 1975 and 1990 led the government to prohibit the establishment of refugee camps.\textsuperscript{19} Instead, hundreds of small makeshift settlements have sprung up to house those refugees who have been unable to find better shelter. Furthermore, the fragile sectarian situation and the fact that Hezbollah, the leading Shia Lebanese political actor, has been actively supporting the regime in Syria have strained Lebanon’s capacity to receive large numbers of primarily Sunni refugees. Alarmed by the reality that by early 2015 the number of Syrian refugees surpassed one-fourth of Lebanon’s own population, the government put in place a visa requirement for Syrians to enter Lebanon and then stopped registering any further refugees.\textsuperscript{20} In effect,
this led to the abandonment of Lebanon’s open-door policy. At the same time, the precipitous decrease in humanitarian aid, coupled with administrative measures that made the renewal of residency permits more difficult and expensive, has led some Syrians to leave Lebanon. Meanwhile, those who remain behind are trapped in a vicious cycle of insecurity.

The third factor is that the worsening refugee crisis has deepened the social, economic, and political problems of the host countries. The massive growth in the number of refugees outside camps and the lack of adequate assistance policies toward them have aggravated a range of social problems. Refugees experience problems of adaptation especially in urban settings (where most are living) in terms of access to shelter and basic services such as education and health care. An added problem in the case of Turkey is the language barrier that complicates the refugees’ ability to cope with the challenges of day-to-day survival.

Now that the initially generous welcome has worn thin, public opinion toward refugees is becoming increasingly negative. The sight of Syrians begging in the streets is causing particular resentment among local people, especially in cities in western Turkey. There have also been reports of occasional violence between refugees and locals. In turn, this reinforces a growing public perception that associates Syrian refugees with criminality. A public opinion poll conducted in Turkey in October 2014 revealed that more than 62 percent of those surveyed supported the idea that Syrian refugees were implicated in criminality and were responsible for the uptick in the number of crimes committed. As early as 2013, a poll in Lebanon found that 52 percent of respondents believed Syrian refugees posed a threat to national security and stability, and more than 90 percent said the Syrian conflict had a negative impact on the Lebanese
government’s capacity to protect Lebanese citizens. These concerns persist, and a survey in June 2015 noted that almost half of those surveyed fear for their personal safety because of the refugees. Similar complaints also have been made in Jordan. Yet these attitudes represent a stark contrast with local authorities’ and security officials’ observations in all three countries: in reality, criminality is surprisingly low, and Syrian community leaders are very effective in preventing crime and defusing tensions between refugees and locals.

The presence of large numbers of refugees, especially in urban centers, generates competition for public services with local residents. The cost of providing these services to a growing number of refugees, together with the costs of the camps in Jordan and Turkey, fuels the resentment of local communities. In the case of Turkey, this is heightened by the fact that the government continues to allocate funds from its own budget to pay for dealing with the refugees. This practice hits a particular nerve among the locals, who feel that it undermines their own access to, for instance, health services, while health personnel are occupied to an overwhelming degree with the refugees. Not surprisingly, 71 percent of the Turkish public told pollsters that Syrian refugees have cost the economy dearly, and 60 percent objected to their taxes being spent on the refugees. Similar observations can also be made for education, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, where both governments have opened their schools to Syrian refugee children. In Lebanon, there are now more Syrian children in public schools than Lebanese children, in part reflecting the dominance of the private educational system unaffordable for the refugees. Jordan has scheduled teaching staff in double-shifts to accommodate the new students and handle overcrowded classrooms. On the other
hand, cost considerations and public opinion have led the Jordanian government to scale down substantially the refugees’ access to public health services.

**The Economic Impact of the Refugees**

The urban refugees present very visible economic problems. One striking case in point is the increase in prices in general, but especially in the real estate market—which gives rise to additional complaints among local residents. Furthermore, many refugees are employed informally and often are prepared to work for lower wages than locals. In Turkey, 69 percent of the public in the regions close to Syria believe that refugees are taking away their jobs. A similar survey finding is also reported in Lebanon. This feeling also is widely shared in Jordan. The fact that refugees neither pay taxes nor make contributions to social security expenses creates additional distortions in the economy. This situation not only makes Syrian refugees vulnerable to exploitation but also generates resentment, especially from local unskilled workers looking for employment in the informal sector. The reluctance of governments to open the labor market to refugees or to support livelihoods for them appears to further aggravate the situation, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, where subsistence assistance to refugees has been substantially curtailed.

In spite of these negative consequences, the refugee crisis has also led to an increase in economic activity and added more positions for skilled laborers in host countries. The growth in the number of national and international non-governmental organizations and specialized agencies aiding Syrian refugees has created opportunities for employment in the host countries and set the conditions for economic
growth through their demand for local goods and services. Regional cities such as Amman, Beirut, Gaziantep, Kilis, and others have become visible hubs of humanitarian activity. Furthermore, the three neighboring countries have become important suppliers of humanitarian and other goods being sent into Syria. For example, the Turkish provinces sharing a border with Syria saw their exports to Syria rise by more than 200 percent from 2011 to 2014, while the overall increase for Turkey’s exports to Syria in general was only 11 percent. As much as Jordan and Lebanon have seen their exports to Syria fluctuate, they have nevertheless continued to be important suppliers of fresh and processed food, household goods, and construction materials. Additionally, greater economic activity has been spurred by small and larger businesses, often in the form of restaurants but also factories set up by Syrians who were able to bring their capital to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. For example, according to a study by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, the number of companies established in Turkey with Syrian shareholders increased to 1,256 in 2014 from just 30 such companies in 2010. Including the “informal” Syrian business establishments increased the 2014 figure to more than 10,000. One Jordanian economist remarked that refugees increased demand “by using their wages to rent apartments, buying goods and services, putting factories and retailers to work.” Similar observations can be made for Lebanon.

However, there is also a downside to this picture. Syrian refugees have become a source of cheap labor willing to work in positions that local workers are reluctant to take up. Without legal employment, as one Turkish academic in Gaziantep noted, the educated and middle-class Syrian refugees are reduced to cheap labor.
ate livelihoods is forcing refugee families to resort to “negative coping mechanisms.” There is a serious problem of child labor across the three host countries, as children are less likely to be arrested for working illegally than are adult men and women. In Jordan and Lebanon, the case is aggravated by a desire to circumvent the risk of detention and deportation for illegal employment.⁴³ Similarly, families are allowing and encouraging underage girls to marry early, even submitting their daughters to polygamous marriages.⁴⁴ This presents a legal problem in Turkey, where marriage under the age of eighteen and polygamy are both prohibited by law. There are growing concerns among women and human rights advocates that the spread of this practice risks undermining the effectiveness of the law, especially at a time when a recent constitutional court ruling in Turkey has decriminalized religious weddings without civil marriage.⁴⁵ Some women who are desperate to feed their families now resort to prostitution—yet another example of the negative social impact the presence of Syrian refugees is having on host societies. A Joint Agency Briefing Paper prepared by a group of international nongovernmental organizations said this picture has become the norm for refugees, adding: “More and more refugees are being pushed to make desperate choices. Children are forced to leave school and work illegally, girls are forced into marriage before their time, and many have little option but to risk their lives on dangerous boat journeys in the hope of reaching Europe, or even to return to Syria.”⁴⁶

Political Consequences

The continued influx of large numbers of refugees has also had political consequences. As noted above, public reaction toward refugees has shifted from a generous welcome to
calls for their departure. These calls, however, are not uniform and are influenced by ethnic and religious affinities. In Turkey, for example, religiously conservative Turks and Turkish citizens of Arab descent, often members of the governing Justice and Development Party constituency, have consistently supported the government’s openness to receiving the bulk of the refugees, provided that they are Sunni Arabs. Secular Turks, Alevi, and Kurds, by contrast, fear the prospect of welcoming large numbers of Sunni Arabs, as they may change the demographics of local society and politics. Interestingly, since the influx of refugees from Kobane, Kurdish views on Syrian refugees have become more aligned with those of ruling party supporters.

Yet, at the same time, the reluctance of the Turkish government to assist the Kurds in their resistance to the onslaught of ISIS in Kobane in the fall of 2014 and an initial hesitation to allow Kurdish refugees to enter Turkey deeply scarred Kurds’ trust in the Turkish government. The situation continued to worsen in the run-up to the national elections in Turkey in June 2015, as the Kurdish People’s Democratic Party campaigned against the government. Subsequently, tensions between the Kurds and the Turkish government were exacerbated by the deaths of more than 30 people in July 2015 in a bombing in the Turkish town of Suruç across from Kobane, followed by a similar bombing in Ankara in October that killed more than 100 people and that was orchestrated by ISIS-affiliated suicide bombers. The cycle of violence that followed these events killed hundreds of civilians, Kurdish militants, and security forces—and continues to pose a threat to the stability of Turkey. Turkey’s Kurdish-populated Southeast increasingly looks like Iraq and Syria. It is very difficult to understand this sudden escalation without appreciating the impact that the siege of
Kobane and the arrival of Kurdish refugees from Kobane have had on Turkish domestic politics.\textsuperscript{51}

In Lebanon, the political impact of Syrian refugees has been a particularly acute concern. Not surprisingly, the arrival of refugees that eventually constituted a fourth of the population—in a country where demographic balances among the Sunni, Shia, and Christians have always been at the center of politics—has produced negative ramifications.\textsuperscript{52} This has been further complicated because most refugees are Sunni and have fled Syria as a result of government attacks on their communities. One leading player in Lebanese politics, Hezbollah, is actually an overt ally of the Syrian regime, and its foot soldiers have directly fought in support of the regime and against Syrian opposition groups.\textsuperscript{53} In turn, Syrian rebels, including radical Islamic groups, have even attacked Hezbollah positions along the Syrian-Lebanese border.\textsuperscript{54} These developments created a very tense situation in certain parts of Lebanon such as the Bekaa Valley where many Syrian refugees have settled. Clearly, the civil war in Syria has directly affected Lebanon’s domestic politics—to the extent that it has run the risk of reigniting a civil war.\textsuperscript{55} More recently the November 2015 suicide bombings in Beirut, for which ISIS claimed responsibility, demonstrated Lebanon’s vulnerability to violence in the region.\textsuperscript{56}

Lebanon has a long and torturous relationship with Syria, which historically had difficulties in accepting Lebanon’s existence as a separate and independent state. Syria was deeply involved in the Lebanese civil war, and for years afterward many people considered Lebanon to be under Syria’s occupation.\textsuperscript{57} This occupation came to an abrupt end after the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri, a former prime minister. Even after Syria’s withdrawal, the close relationship between the two countries did not end, and many Syrians continued to live
and work in Lebanon, some of whom actually became refugees *sur place* after the eruption of the Syrian conflict.\(^{58}\) The refugees and Syria’s particular legacy in Lebanon fuel fears of a repetition of the situation when the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and subsequent developments launched the protracted journey toward the Lebanese civil war.\(^{59}\)

This legacy of Palestinian refugees also plays a role in shaping Jordan’s concerns regarding the impact of Syrian refugees. The arrival of more than half a million Syrian refugees evoked, in the minds of the public and the leadership, the memories of the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and again in 1967. These memories include a violent uprising in 1971, when radical Palestinian groups rebelled against the Hashemite kingdom.\(^{60}\) This experience left a deep imprint on Jordanian sense of national identity and national security, highlighting the importance of maintaining the delicate balance between “East Bankers” and Jordanians of Palestinian descent. More than 2 million Palestinians are still registered in the refugee camps across Jordan; the arrival and the continuing presence of more than half a million Syrian refugees therefore creates a politically sensitive situation for a country of only 6.7 million. Furthermore, somewhat like in Turkey, one’s political affiliation does play a role in determining attitudes toward the Syrian refugees. Trends indicate that sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, compared with the more nationalist and secular Jordanians, are more likely to support the welcoming approach.

**MANAGING THE REFUGEE INFLUX**

Often overlooked is modern Turkey’s long history as a country of asylum and immigration. Between the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and roughly the end
of the Cold War, it received more than 1.5 million immigrants from the Balkans.\textsuperscript{61} Turkey also served as a country of asylum for individuals fleeing the Soviet bloc during the Cold War years. There were also mass influxes of refugees from Bulgaria and Iraq in 1989 and 1991. Since then, Turkey has received numerous applications from the nationals of a wide array of Asian and African countries, and it was listed by the UNHCR as the fourth largest recipient of individual asylum-seekers in 2014.\textsuperscript{62}

As discussed earlier, unlike Jordan and Lebanon, Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, but it grants “full” refugee status only to asylum-seekers who have fled “events occurring in Europe.”\textsuperscript{63} Other asylum-seekers are granted the right to remain in Turkey only until their resettlement can be arranged. This practice was incorporated into the Law on Foreigners and International Protection adopted in April 2013.\textsuperscript{64} As of May 2015 Turkey was host to 230,000 non-Syrian individual asylum-seekers, mostly Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, and Somalis.\textsuperscript{65}

There are certainly similarities (as mentioned above) in how each of these countries has received and managed the refugee crisis. However, as the crisis persisted, each country developed its own unique approach. Jordan worked much more closely with the international community and pushed harder for international burden sharing; but as the crisis wore on, the government cut back on the benefits for refugees, public opinion soured, and national resources became strained. Unlike Jordan, Lebanon, as a function of its paralyzed state and weak government, introduced a kind of “semi laissez faire” approach that has left refugees either to survive on their own resources or from those offered by the international community. Like its Jordanian counterpart, the Lebanese government has energetically denied refugees
the possibility of legal employment and since 2014 has also introduced restrictions on new arrivals and imposed new fees and procedures for renewing residency permits. Turkey, on the other hand, followed a distinctive approach. Initially it turned away international assistance and tried to manage the crisis on its own. As Turkey’s plans failed to create a safe-zone in Syria, where would-be refugees could live instead of entering Turkey, the Turkish leadership developed an uneasy relationship with the international community. This relationship oscillated between pragmatism and harsh criticism. In the meantime, the government continued to extend assistance, but, like Jordan and Lebanon, it, until recently, did not allow the refugees to take up jobs legally (although more and more refugees reportedly worked in the informal sector).

Initially Jordan set up the Zaatari camp, south of its border with Syria, for the refugees, with a peak population in March 2013 of more than 150,000. This camp then became Jordan’s third largest city and was subsequently followed with the construction of additional camps. Simultaneously, Jordan engaged the cooperation of the UNHCR as well as other international agencies, allowing them to manage the day-to-day affairs of the camp. However, as the numbers continued to increase and the conflict in Syria escalated, the expectation of a quick return was replaced by growing concerns about the political implications of permanent camps. As discussed in detail above, past experience with Palestinian refugees accentuated these concerns. Jordan very quickly instituted, together with UNHCR, a registration process for urban refugees and made registration a requirement for access to such public services as health and education. Jordan also welcomed a long list of international agencies to help support the needs of refugees in
coordination with the Ministry of Planning and the Hashemite Charity Organization.

The size of the refugee population and the protracted nature of the conflict in Syria have put dramatic strains on Jordan’s financial and limited natural resources, including water. The government has virulently complained about inadequate burden sharing on the part of the international community and pushed for greater funding to support the refugees. The point was made starkly by King Abdullah II during his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2015 at the height of the European refugee crisis. This concern for greater economic support is not surprising. According to some, hosting refugees who make up more than 10 percent of the population in a relatively small and resource-poor country even runs the risk of transforming Jordan from a “middle income” to a “low income” country. Furthermore, the mounting economic cost of hosting the refugees has created tension between the Jordanian government and international agencies, as the sides disagree over the actual number of refugees under the government’s care. While the UNHCR put the number of Syrian refugees at around 630,000 in October 2015, the government insisted that the actual figure was more like 1.4 million. The government was not quite transparent about how it arrived at this figure, which appeared to include Syrians who were already in the country before the crisis erupted. Furthermore, motivated by sensitivity toward public opinion, the government demanded that a greater share of international assistance be directed toward local communities. This was starkly reflected in the Jordan Resilience Plan, whose focus was primarily on programs for local communities rather than the refugees.
Budgetary concerns coupled with domestic political considerations also led the government to cut off health subsidies for refugees and deny refugees access to the local labor market. These developments coincided with a drastic scaling down of support from the World Food Program, leaving an increasing number of the refugees in particularly vulnerable situations. Inability to maintain a livelihood and the utterly desperate situation that many Syrian refugees found themselves in pushed an increasing number of Syrians to return to Syria and/or to travel from Jordan on to Europe. These returns were also prompted by the relative calm in southern regions of Syria that border Jordan. In October 2015 the returns to Syria were estimated to be around 140 a day. However, among human rights and some international agency circles there were concerns that these returns might not have been voluntary and therefore not in line with international law. This concern was aggravated by a government practice that made it increasingly difficult for Syrians to enter Jordan and benefit from what was fast becoming a “not-so-open-door policy.”

Lebanon, largely because of the Palestinian experience, decided right from the beginning not to set up refugee camps. Instead, refugees were initially sheltered in available housing and accommodation centers but subsequently were left to fend for themselves. As a result, a large proportion of the more than 1.1 million refugees had to build their own makeshift shelters (referred to as “informal tented settlements”) while some managed to rent accommodations, usually of very poor quality. One of the few measures the Lebanese government introduced, beyond following strictly their registration, was to allow Syrian refugee children access to schools. Actually, more than half of the students regis-
tered in Lebanese schools as of mid-2015 were Syrian children. Refugees had to rely on their own means for meeting their health needs or to seek access to services provided by international agencies and their nongovernmental partners responsible for implementation. The government worked closely with the World Food Program to make a food cash program available for refugees. However, lack of funds led to a severe curtailment of the program in 2015. This was aggravated by the government’s longstanding decision not to allow refugees to work legally. In an effort to maintain their livelihoods, many resorted to negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and prostitution—increasing the pressure on refugees to return to Syria or to leave Lebanon for other destinations.

To Europe via Turkey

The decision to end Lebanon’s “open door” policy in late 2014 and the introduction of major and costly administrative measures increasingly complicated the possibility for Syrian refugees to stay in Lebanon. National security considerations and especially the role of Hezbollah in Lebanon’s executive circles and its support for the Assad regime suggested that this trend was not likely to change in the near future. It was therefore not surprising that some refugees felt obliged to return to the precarious circumstances prevailing in Syria, and those who could not afford to take such risks attempted to make it to Europe.

Turkey began to receive its first refugees from Syria as early as April 2011, and like Jordan and Lebanon adopted an “open door” policy. In the initial stages of the crisis, refugees were mostly housed in schools, sports halls, unused ware-
houses, and factories. As the numbers continued to increase, the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency was given the task of constructing purpose-built camps for refugees while the government formally extended “temporary protection” to Syrian refugees in October 2011. In less than two years more than twenty camps had been set up, housing about 200,000 refugees. Soon it became evident that the agency could not go on constructing camps, as more and more refugees arrived and preferred to live in urban settings. The government made provisional arrangements to ensure access to health services, but it was not until October 2014 that the government adopted what it called a Temporary Protection Circular to define temporary protection, instituted registration of the refugees, and established coordination between different agencies to provide better services for urban refugees. The disaster agency remained responsible for establishing and running refugee camps as well as ensuring emergency assistance for new arrivals, while the Directorate General for Migration Management took over the task of registration and overall coordination. As of late December 2015 almost 2.5 million refugees were registered, with more than a quarter of a million of them living in twenty-five refugee camps, including five camps set up specifically to house Christians, Kurds, and Yazidis. Another 200,000 to 250,000 refugees had failed to register for a variety of reasons, and some commentators believe that many of the Syrian refugees that fled to Europe were among them.

Managing the presence of more than 2.5 million refugees has not been an easy task—even for a country with significant administrative and economic capacity. This was complicated by an initial reluctance by the government to seek international assistance. Turkey chose not to be included in
the first Syrian Regional Response Plan of the UN and preferred not to cooperate with the UNHCR beyond ensuring supplies of tents for camps and overseeing voluntary return. However, as the burden of refugees dramatically increased, the Turkish government started to coordinate more with international agencies such as the International Organization on Migration, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Program, and the World Health Organization.\textsuperscript{81} After initial resistance by the government, a range of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also established themselves in Turkey. They worked with a growing number of Turkish and Syrian NGOs to respond to the needs of urban refugees by supporting activities that ranged from teaching language courses, including Turkish, to running courses to help women acquire vocational skills and psycho-social support programs.\textsuperscript{82} Unlike Lebanon and Jordan, Turkey never put into place a comprehensive food cash support program for urban refugees beyond modest and limited programs offered by some NGOs.\textsuperscript{83}

As much as Turkey’s hosting of Syrian refugees received wide-ranging praise (including from the authors), Turkey’s management of the presence of Syrian refugees has not been without difficulties.\textsuperscript{84} One immediate problem had to do with access to the services promised under the Temporary Protection Circular. Amnesty International and others reported that Syrian refugees on occasion were denied entry into Turkey, especially in the case of Palestinian refugees from Syria. There also were allegations of violation of non-refoulement, one of the central pillars of the Temporary Protection Circular, as well as reports of forced relocation of urban refugees into refugee camps.\textsuperscript{85} These cases appear to have increased since Turkey reached a deal with the EU in November 2015 to stem the flow of Syrian refugees.\textsuperscript{86}
Furthermore, heads of some international nongovernmental organizations continued to complain about encountering difficulties in registering their organizations with the government and that the process of registration was very vague and ambiguous. There also were complaints, especially from Syrian NGOs, that local government officials frequently fined them for employing personnel without work permits. Simultaneously, NGO staff as well as local government officials complained about a flood of small NGOs, often with no more than an office and a door bell, seeking to benefit from the situation for personal gain. Difficulties of coordination and especially duplication of tasks were also raised as challenges that required attention to better manage the needs of urban refugees.

THE LONG RUN AND BURDEN SHARING

Given the extensive destruction in Syria and the absence of prospects for an immediate political solution to the conflict, there is a broad-based recognition in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey that Syrian refugees are not likely to be able to return home for a long time. However, the issue of the refugees’ long-term status is unclear. In these three host countries the refugees are generally referred to as “guests” and left in a gray zone in terms of their rights and the level of protection they can enjoy in the long run. None of the traditional “durable solutions”—in the form of voluntary return, integration into host societies, or resettlement—has been available to them. In the meantime, the Syrian conflict is entering its sixth year and many of the refugees have been away from their homes for years. Some of the urban refugees in neighboring countries are slowly but surely integrating themselves into local communities. Babies are being born; marriages with
local people are occurring; some of the refugees are building new lives even if their future in all three countries remains legally precarious and economically vulnerable. In effect, some Syrian refugees in Turkish urban settings are no longer refugees waiting for the war to end, but immigrants ready to write a new chapter in their lives. At the same time, many also hope to move on to Europe. Just about half a million of them made their way to the European Union during the course of 2015 in search of a better and more secure future. The journeys to Europe for Syrians and other nationalities have been fraught with difficulties as refugees have had to resort to the services of unscrupulous smugglers, and more than 3,770 deaths have occurred as a result of accidents in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.

The refugees face a wide range of challenges in the long run. Once again, there are both similarities and differences across Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. One common challenge is how to cope with tension associated with the refugees’ long-term presence in host countries. The publics of all three countries resist the notion that refugees may have to become a permanent part of their host communities; the idea of their eventually becoming citizens is unacceptable. In Jordan and Lebanon, integration presents a problem particularly because of the countries’ small populations and limited national resources. In the case of Turkey, however, the challenge is more of a cultural one. First of all, Turkey has never before received and integrated Arab refugees or immigrants. Furthermore, the presence of Arab refugees in some parts of the country is a source of resentment toward the current government and is seen as part of an effort to Islamize the country.

Nevertheless, in Turkey, in spite of the absence of a com-
prehensive governmental policy toward integration, signs of a piecemeal policy have emerged with respect to education and employment. Employment is seen as an important avenue to informal integration but also inclusion in local communities. As Syrian refugees have seen their savings disappear, they have been forced, as mentioned earlier, to find illegal employment in various sectors of the economy ranging from agriculture to the construction sector and the textiles industry. The number of Syrians illegally employed in Turkey in 2015 was put at around 300,000, while the number of actual work permits issued for Syrians was a mere 3,900. Many Syrian entrepreneurs brought their businesses to Turkey and provided employment to both refugees and locals. However, being able to work legally in the country will be critical for the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. As one Syrian refugee starkly captured it, employment, like education, is a security issue. He noted “how refugees who are left jobless and without means of survival can become the devil. They can turn into [pro-Assad militants] or join the likes of Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. Providing them with employment allows them to reintegrate into society and gives them hope for a better life.”

In principle, the Temporary Protection Circular gives registered refugees the right to seek legal employment in Turkey. Before the general elections in June 2015, the government had prepared legislation to open parts of the national economy to formal employment for Syrian refugees. This was a huge step forward for supporting the incorporation of the Syrian refugees into Turkish society in a more constructive manner. This step also was encouraged by representatives of local business associations in the provinces close to the Syrian border, who argued that there was a shortage of
labor in the region. The proposed legislation addressed the problem of “negative coping strategies” that leave Syrian refugees vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. It enabled Syrian skilled workers, such as orthodontists, engineers, teachers, and nurses, to contribute to the Turkish economy and society.\textsuperscript{96} The legislation was stalled for much of 2015 because of the country’s two parliamentary elections, but it was revived, and finally adopted, after the governing party won a decisive victory in the November elections.\textsuperscript{97}

A recent report supported by the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations drew attention to the need to recognize that Syrians are not about to return and that “the matter at hand has come to a phase that demands transition from emergency support policies to those of integration.”\textsuperscript{98} The report, based on interviews with leading business representatives, highlights the demand for a comprehensive strategy to integrate Syrian refugees with particular emphasis on the need for education and regulating their access to employment.

Instead, the frustrating deadlock over legal access to labor markets during 2015 pushed refugees into moving toward European Union countries. Granting formal access to the labor market would also help considerably to reduce the current level of expense that the government incurs for the upkeep of the refugees. Most important, it would help empower the refugees in camps and get them out of the passive state of existence—the result of their dependency on government and international handouts.
The Jordanian government strictly prohibits the employment of Syrian refugees and penalizes violators by deporting them. Furthermore, the government does not allow any vocational projects or training programs to equip refugees with marketable skills. Nevertheless, refugees do work illegally and often take up positions that local workers do not fill. At the same time, the government is also concerned that better-trained and skilled Syrian refugees displace local Jordanians from jobs. A study conducted by the International Labor Organization in 2014 noted that the level of unemployment among Jordanians had increased from 14 percent to 22 percent since the arrival of refugees from Syria. The study also estimated that half of the Syrian men living outside camps were informally employed. Yet, at the same time, a prominent Jordanian economist also noted that “only 4 percent of Jordanians compete for low-skilled jobs that refugees would be employed in.” These are menial jobs traditionally filled by foreign workers, most from Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen.

The government is caught between conflicting priorities. On the one hand it needs to be sensitive to public opinion in a country that experiences high unemployment. Yet at the same time, similar to its Turkish counterpart, it faces another dilemma: frustrated and unemployed young refugees risk becoming a security challenge. Employment, however, may prolong the stay of refugees and increase the likelihood of their integration in a Jordan that is already sensitive about the demographic balance in the country.

Despite these conflicting concerns, the cutbacks in subsidies for health services and food clearly need to be addressed. This has led the Jordanian government to enlist the
help of the UN in opening some sectors of the Jordanian economy to refugee labor with the proviso that the arrangement should create new jobs rather than displace Jordanian workers. The government, as of early 2016, continued to explore the idea of opening the construction, domestic work, agriculture, and textiles sectors to employment while supporting Jordan’s industrialization efforts as part of a “holistic approach” to managing the refugee crisis. The competing considerations clearly capture the difficulties that accompany policymaking for the long term.

Additional Challenges in Lebanon

The situation in Lebanon is similar to the one in Jordan, with the exception that the ratio of Syrian refugees to the local population is much higher. This in itself creates additional challenges. Otherwise, as in Jordan, economic and employment-related considerations are critical to the refugees’ long-term presence in Lebanon. In this respect, one challenge is the generally held belief that Syrian refugees are forcing wages down, causing greater unemployment, and increasing the number of Lebanese living below the poverty line. Yet, in the economic realm the inflow of humanitarian aid amounting to roughly $800 million has been calculated to have had significant positive multiplier effect on the Lebanese economy. Even so, this effect needs to be balanced against the decline of income from tourism, trade, and investments resulting from the crisis in Syria. An International Labor Organization study in 2014 noted that nearly one-half of the working-age Syrian refugees were economically active in Lebanon and were “engaged in agriculture or in personal and domestic services and, on a smaller scale, in construction. These jobs provide little income and
no security or protection, reflecting refugees’ low skill capacities.” In the meantime, however, Lebanese authorities have become much stricter about employment prospects for Syrian refugees as well as their stay in the country. Concerns about the likely political impact on Lebanon of such a sizeable Syrian refugee community are driving these measures. One commentator described the presence of the large refugee population as creating “a social and political ticking bomb, particularly in relation to the identity and existence of the Lebanese entity.” Therefore, the combination of economic and political considerations makes the prospects of improving the inclusion of Syrian refugees into mainstream Lebanese society an even greater challenge than in Jordan and Turkey.

Education also is critical for ensuring better inclusion of Syrian refugees into local communities. The fact that Syria shares a common language with Lebanon and Jordan makes the process of inclusion much easier than in Turkey. Syrian refugees in Turkey, unless they are Turcoman, face the added challenge of having to operate in a completely different linguistic environment, not to mention the complications of deciphering different scripts in everyday life. Jordan and Lebanon opened their national education system to the refugee children. Even so, Syrians in Lebanon face a challenge because the language of instruction is usually in French or English, with Arabic being taught in parallel. Nonetheless, both countries introduced double shifts at schools to accommodate the children.

The experience of Turkey has been much more complicated and problematic. The need to provide education was recognized at a relatively early stage. Initially, however, a rather fragmented and poorly coordinated policy on education emerged based on the premise that the refugees were
in Turkey temporarily. Refugee children in camps acquired early access to schooling based on a modified Syrian curriculum in Arabic accompanied by language classes in Turkish. In urban settings, the government permitted children whose parents had residence permits to access Turkish schools while Syrian-run schools, called Temporary Education Centers, emerged but had little governmental supervision. Concerns increased about the content and quality of the education, especially with respect to religious teaching. These concerns finally led the Ministry of Education to implement a much-needed policy to bring all informal Syrian schools under its supervision. At the same time, in June 2015 the ministry was preparing its own schools in the border areas to accommodate Syrian children into second shifts and follow a curriculum to the ones in refugee camps. Furthermore, parents who are registered under the Temporary Protection Circular now have the option of sending their children to Turkish schools as well.

In all three countries the greatest challenge is that only a fraction of the school-age children actually access or attend school regularly; for instance, only a third of the 621,000 school-age Syrian refugee children are in school in Turkey. The situation is not much better in Lebanon and Jordan. Economic difficulties, and the “negative coping mechanisms” they have adopted for livelihood, keep children from attending schools regularly. Yet a Turkish education official acknowledged: “Whether the refugees stay or return to Syria, we simply cannot afford to allow for a lost generation,” adding that “without a chance of education, they risk falling victim to radical and terrorist groups.” This need to avoid a “lost generation” should be emphasized, since most Syrian children inside Syria are not in school, and the country’s future may well depend on the education received
by Syrian children outside the country. In this regard, there is closer cooperation with UNICEF in the three countries to develop and fund programs to reach a larger number of Syrian refugees. There is also broad recognition that education is critical to any prospects for integration into host societies. However, it is difficult to see how this situation can be improved unless Syrian refugees also are given access to livelihood opportunities so they can afford to send their children to school rather than rely on the income they can seek out in the streets or through child labor. Similarly, host countries will need considerable support to meet the costs associated with infrastructure and capacity building.

In the long run, ensuring the integration of the refugees would be a “win-win” for all involved: Syria, especially after the war is brought to an end; the three host countries; and the international community. Host countries will need to recognize that integration does not necessarily mean that refugees will never return to their native lands. Instead, access to education and livelihood opportunities is much more likely to provide the basis of “sustainable return” when the day comes than if the refugees remain completely dependent on handouts and are forced into a state of passivity.115

However, it would be unfair to expect miracles from the host countries if left to their own devices. These countries are actually providing the international community with a “public good.” Protection of refugees is considered to be an international responsibility, one that demands burden-sharing. As discussed in the introduction of this book, so far burden sharing in the form of refugee resettlement from the host countries and funding to meet the needs of refugees has been disappointing. The UN, in its Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for 2015–16, has recognized that local communities hosting refugees also deserve assistance, and it
budgeted for projects to increase the resilience of these communities. This is a very positive step; however, it is disappointing that UN budgets remain seriously underfunded. It is paramount that the international community finds better ways to share the cost of projects with the host countries and also contribute global expertise in addressing the challenges of providing education and employment opportunities for Syrian refugees.

Burden sharing is also critical in terms of legitimizing the expenses of the government in the eyes of the host countries’ publics, and it demonstrates that caring for the refugees is an international responsibility and that these countries are not alone. However, in turn the host governments, when presenting the expenditure that they have made for the Syrian refugees, would earn the trust of the international community if they acknowledged that funds do come from abroad—even if not at the desired level. These funds help meet at least some of the needs of the refugees, provide jobs for local nationals, and contribute to the local economy. International agencies and nongovernmental organizations often use these funds to buy local products, pay local taxes on them, and pay the salaries of local employees. Yet, hosting more than 4.5 million refugees has indeed called for great sacrifices from host countries. Measuring that sacrifice is of course difficult and complicated, if not outright impossible, even for economic costs alone.

It is clear that whatever the actual cost for Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, the financial assistance from the international community has fallen well short of what is needed. Ankara puts the direct cost of caring for the refugees at $7.6 to $8 billion, Amman at $4.5 billion by 2016, and Beirut at more than $4 billion so far.156 On the other hand, a World Bank assessment put the overall cost of the Syrian crisis at
$35 billion through mid-2014 without including the actual cost of caring for the refugees.\textsuperscript{117} As noted in the introductory chapter, the Syrian crisis has received a disproportionate percentage of global humanitarian funds. Even so, the $15 billion that the international community has committed or spent in the form of assistance since the beginning of the crisis falls well short of meeting the needs of the Syrian displaced and refugees.\textsuperscript{118}

The European refugee crisis, discussed below, has drawn attention to the plight of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and accentuated the need for greater recognition of the burden carried by these countries. This has led to several positive developments. The European Union and the United States have agreed to increase their funding for programs to address the needs of Syrian refugees in the region. After long and arduous negotiations late in November 2015 the EU and Turkey formally adopted an “Action Plan” that will make more than 3 billion euros available for supporting Syrian refugees in Turkey.\textsuperscript{119} Total funding for UN budgets for Syria has edged up from less than one-fourth in mid-summer to a little over half by the end of 2015.\textsuperscript{120} Britain has also taken the lead to call for a major “Syrian Donors Conference” in February 2016.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, the Group of 20 Leaders’ Communique adopted at the summit in Antalya, Turkey, in mid-November 2015 included a paragraph calling on the leaders “to continue further strengthening our support for all efforts to provide protection and assistance and to find durable solutions for the unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in various parts of the world” including Syria.\textsuperscript{122} There were also calls emphasizing that protecting and assisting the refugees was a global responsibility that should be distributed more equally. However, it will be critical to translate these devel-
opments into actual projects to benefit both Syrian refugees as well as their host communities.

Similarly, the international community has not been particularly generous with respect to resettlement. In spite of numerous appeals by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres to the EU and the United States to offer more resettlement places available, only about 125,000 spots were available as of December 2015. That number represented less than 3 percent of all Syrian refugees. It was the arrival by September 2015 of more than half a million Syrian refugees and others by sea that forced the EU to respond. In September the EU decided to resettle 160,000 refugees among EU member countries but did not make places available for taking refugees directly from the major refugee-hosting countries. Britain, which had accepted fewer than 5,000 Syrian refugees since 2011, promised to admit 20,000 more refugees in the next five years from countries neighboring Syria. France also announced that it would make its 24,000 quota available in the next two years for resettling Syrian refugees from the neighboring countries. The Action Plan adopted between the EU and Turkey referred vaguely to making places available for resettlement of Syrian refugees from the countries of the region. Time will tell whether a subsequent EU “voluntary admissions” program to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey will work. However, the fact that as of early 2016 only 272 refugees were relocated from Greece and Italy on the basis of the deal reached among EU members was not very promising for the future of this “voluntary” scheme.

The EU-Turkey Action Plan was intended to provide much more support for host countries and for Turkey in particular. The plan promised to share the cost of the refugees’ upkeep, access to public services, and their participation in
local economies. In return, Turkey was expected to prevent the smuggling into the EU of Syrian refugees and other migrants. EU leaders, ranging from German chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Commission vice president Frans Timmermans and the European commissioner Johannes Hahn, stressed the importance of cooperating with Turkey to stem the flow of refugees into Europe and promised the prospect of introducing visa-free travel for Turkish nationals as well as revitalizing negotiations for Turkey’s long-delayed accession into EU membership. However, the plan also received considerable criticism for being focused primarily on addressing the interests of the EU and Turkey rather than the welfare of Syrian refugees. Critics also noted that it was based on a transactional “we pay, you keep the refugees” logic, with little regard for ethical and value issues. Amnesty International was particularly critical of the plan; its report noted in detail that denying the refugees the possibility to seek protection in Europe would fall short of forging a durable solution to the crisis.

The European refugee crisis is still evolving. By the end of 2015, the number of arrivals had reached more than one million (see figure 2-2). More than one-half of these refugees are Syrians, some of whom came directly from Syria via Turkey and some of whom left the countries hosting Syrian refugees. In any event, many experts now recognize that lack of adequate international solidarity in sharing the burden of managing the Syrian refugees was a major and compelling reason why Syrians began to flee to Europe in massive numbers. In that respect, it is significant that the refugees who were interviewed on why they decided to attempt to get to Europe cited the desire to ensure the education of their children and the lack of access to labor markets. These happen to be two areas with which the hosting
countries neighboring Syria have struggled the most and have failed to make significant progress. Substantive and effective international assistance might have produced a different result. Furthermore, the absence of any prospects for a legal path for moving on to third countries encouraged many Syrians to resort to human smugglers. It is not surprising that many struggled for years in neighboring countries, lost hope about the future, and finally resorted to a form of “self-resettling” themselves to Europe.

Managing a mass influx of refugees in such a short period of time and then integrating those who have been recognized as refugees will be a mammoth task. Germany has been at the forefront in receiving the bulk of the refugees, and German chancellor Angela Merkel has received wide international praise—but also much domestic criticism—for her stand. However, the fact that some of the perpetrators of the November 2015 attacks in Paris appear to have entered Europe through Greece has further complicated the man-

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**Figure 2-2. Irregular Migrant and Refugee Arrivals into Europe by Sea, by Country of Origin, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>533,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>228,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>97,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>43,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>185,064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 1,088,616

agement of the refugee crisis. There already have been calls that measures introduced to ensure public security across Europe should not work to the detriment of refugees and that borders should definitely not be closed. Such measures would undermine the prospects of future resettlement from host countries and make the situation even more precarious for refugees in flight. At the same time, there are also worries that the pressure to cope with the crisis could risk the unraveling of the EU itself, while others have been critical of the EU’s selfishness and failure to live up to its values.  

Security concerns subsequent to the Paris attacks and the December 2015 attack in San Bernardino, California, have destroyed the good will that emerged in the United States in support of receiving Syrian refugees, which had been the initial response to a widely published photograph of the body of a little boy on a Turkish beach in September 2015. The reaction to San Bernardino was swift, with a large group of governors announcing their opposition to the resettlement of any Syrian refugees in their states. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill calling for even more onerous security restrictions on Syrian refugees. This rhetoric is particularly disappointing because it came at a time when the U.S. administration had just committed itself to admitting 10,000 Syrian refugees before the end of October 2016, as well as expanding the annual general resettlement quota from 70,000 to 100,000 in the coming years. These steps were particularly welcomed by advocates, because previously the United States had been slow in admitting Syrian refugees and was facing criticism from refugee advocacy groups. Fewer than 2,200 Syrians have been resettled in the United States since the war’s outbreak in 2011.

The absence of effective burden sharing had played an important role in Turkey’s call for safe zones in Syria—an
issue discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Turkey has pushed the idea on numerous occasions since 2012, when the number of Syrian refugees first crossed the 100,000 “red line” once declared by the government. The Turkish government has frequently sought support for safe zones from the United States and the EU. In July 2015, upon signing an agreement with the United States to coordinate its military effort against ISIS, Turkey advocated the establishment of such a zone within the so-called ISIS-free area north of Aleppo, stretching about sixty miles along the Syrian-Turkish border. Due to Washington’s continued resistance, however, this safe zone was never realized. The idea was subsequently revived by the president of Turkey during the November 2015 G-20 summit but did not receive much support from U.S. president Barack Obama. Nor was the idea embraced by the EU, which was itself struggling with unprecedented refugee arrivals. Because of European reluctance, the creation of a safe zone was dropped from the agenda of the EU-Turkey summit of late November. In any event, the Turkish downing of a Russian fighter plane in late November 2015 brought the prospects of a safe zone to an end. Russia’s introduction of powerful ballistic missiles into Syria has ironically created a de facto no-fly zone in reverse. The Turkish idea of a safe zone in Syria across from the Turkish border may well be dead for the foreseeable future.

We turn now to an examination of some of the challenges posed by those displaced—and trapped—inside Syrian borders.