Syria’s war was not caused by the international community but rather was the product of deep-seated political and economic factors endemic to the region and specific actions taken by the Bashar al-Assad regime and various insurgent groups. While the war has been abetted by international actors who have supplied arms and fighters to all sides of the conflict, it is important to underscore that the roots of the conflict are mostly internal. Similarly, the displacement of one-half of Syria’s population was not caused by the international community.

But as the war and the resulting displacement pose a threat to international peace and security—the very kind of threat that systems of global governance are intended to address—we look now at what Syrian displacement tells us about the present international order. This chapter begins with a synthesis of central themes emerging from this study, followed by recommendations for moving forward. In par-
ticular we argue that the time is right to develop what we call a New Global Approach for Syria.

**IMPLICATIONS OF SYRIAN DISPLACEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

The Syrian conflict and resulting displacement are clear signs that the present international system for preventing and resolving conflicts has been deeply challenged. The United Nations was created to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” and the Security Council in particular was given the responsibility of ensuring global peace and security.1 The “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, launched with such optimism a decade ago, has utterly failed in the case of Syria. Of course, there have been other cases where the UN has successfully intervened to prevent and resolve conflicts, such as in Côte d’Ivoire, Chad, and Mali, and in cases such as South Sudan where UN peacekeeping operations have demonstrated flexibility in protecting civilians in new ways.

But robust action to halt the violence in Syria has not occurred, due to the lack of consensus among major powers about the way forward. The UN Security Council has issued resolutions calling for an end to the conflict, for the protection of civilians, and for an end to sieges of entire communities, but these resolutions have had little or no impact on the conflict on the ground. The adoption of a roadmap for peace in Syria in December 2015, calling for UN-led negotiations on a political transition and for an immediate cease-fire, offered a glimmer of hope for the way forward.2 The political obstacles to the implementation of this long-delayed proposal are manifold.

It may be that the Syrian conflict has become too com-
plex, the political interests too diverse, and the proliferation of actors too great for the UN to be able to take effective action to prevent chaos. These factors suggest that the international community should tackle the much-discussed need for Security Council reform. We do not have the expertise to propose such changes, and there are many proposals by much more knowledgeable groups about what is needed. But we can say on the basis of this study that the present international system for preventing the war and resolving the underlying conflict that has displaced so many has—for five years—failed in Syria.

In spite of growing attention to the role of regional organizations, Syrian displacement is also a clear indictment of the failure of regional bodies to prevent and resolve crises. While both the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation suspended Syria’s membership in 2011 and 2012, respectively, neither has played a significant role in addressing the conflict. The Arab League, which played an important role in supporting the use of military force in Libya (from which it later backtracked), has been almost completely absent on the Syria conflict. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation has failed to bring about a unified position on the Syrian crisis among its members. The principal actions of both the Arab League and the Islamic organization have been to call on the UN Security Council to take action. In failing to rise above specific political interests, regional actors in the Middle East have not provided an alternative conflict resolution strategy for Syria. Thus far, they also have failed to offer a coherent regional approach to the refugee situation, even though some of their members are the most directly impacted by the crisis.

The European Union has been active on Syria, but its actions also have failed to bring about either an end to the
conflict or even a coordinated approach to the refugee crisis. EU engagement in support of UN-led efforts to bring about a political solution has been more robust than those of either the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, but in the end, the EU has adopted the same approach: calling on the UN to resolve the conflict. This seems to indicate that the role of regional organizations is limited in conflict resolution; the tools available to them are simply inadequate to bring an end to Syria’s civil war.

However, the lack of European solidarity in responding to the initial Mediterranean migration crisis in 2013–14 and to the much larger mass influx by sea and land in 2015 raises fundamental questions about the future of European integration. Rather than rising to the challenge of creating a stronger union through a common approach to the crisis, the policies adopted can best be described as a “beggar thy neighbor” approach. The impact on European unity of the refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere—coupled with the aftermath of the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris—could be profound, threatening the tremendous progress made to enable free movement across European borders, including the Schengen agreement. The imposition of border controls within Europe, on more than a temporary basis, could have long-term consequences in ways that call into question the very principles of European unity.

The solution to the crisis of Syrian refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) is political. It has long been a mantra in the humanitarian community that “there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian crises.” The solutions have to be political, in which different groups in a society somehow find a way to settle their differences. This is particularly apparent in Syria. Former secretary of state
Madeleine Albright rightly noted that the crisis in Syria “is not only a humanitarian emergency, but also a political emergency. It is a series of political failures that have led to the grave situation that we find today.” No matter how much money is mobilized for humanitarian aid, or how many humanitarian workers are deployed, or how many refugees are resettled, Syria’s humanitarian crisis will persist until the conflict is resolved and possibly beyond it, too.

Displacement—whether cross-border or internally—always has political consequences. But the refugee/security nexus has catapulted to global attention in the case of Syrian refugees, particularly after the Paris attacks. Even before then there was a perception in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon that crime was increasing because of the presence of Syrian refugees, although there was little, if any, hard evidence for that conclusion. Since the November 2015 Paris attacks, the association of Syrian refugees with terrorism has taken on a particularly ugly tone, especially in the United States. A paradigm shift in understanding the relationship between refugees and security is urgently needed, based on solid empirical evidence and an acknowledgement of the security risks that may result from protracted displacement. As displacement drags on, and if solutions do not emerge, it is possible, in the words of one expert, that refugees “will become involved in political violence and be susceptible to militant recruitment. . . . protracted situations result in reduced expectations for the future, increasing feelings of hopelessness, and desperation among refugees/displaced persons.” Hence, mobilizing the political will to ensure decent protection for the refugees and respond to their needs, including offering them the possibility to rebuild their lives and take control of their futures, will be critical.

Thus far, resettlement of Syrian refugees has played a
very minor role in the response to the massive Syrian displacement crisis. Resettlement, unlike asylum, is based on a process of identifying, selecting, vetting, and supporting refugees from countries of first refuge to third countries outside the region. As a system developed in the aftermath of World War II and particularly during the Cold War era, resettlement has become a tool for protecting refugees who face risks where they are and for finding solutions for particularly vulnerable refugees. It is also a bureaucratic, slow, and expensive process, costing an average of some $15,000 per resettled refugee. And yet, resettlement is a strong example of a truly durable solution. Resettled refugees do very well, and they contribute to their host countries. This is particularly the case in the United States, which has a long tradition of refugee resettlement and which played a leadership role in developing the global resettlement system.

In the present political context, it will require considerable political leadership and effort both in the EU and the United States to advocate for and implement a policy of resettling Syrian refugees. Yet, without a robust resettlement program, it will be difficult to strengthen the principle of burden sharing, which is in urgent need of reaffirmation, along with the very values that the transatlantic community is supposed to represent.

Responding to displacement inside Syria is a far more complex and politically treacherous endeavor than responding to more than 4.5 million refugees in many different countries. The international community has provided massive support for assistance inside Syria, and many dedicated local and international staff have risked their lives to deliver relief. In spite of these efforts, assistance to displaced people still inside Syria—as well as to those who are trapped in their communities—is insufficient. It took years for the UN
Security Council to adopt decisions enabling international agencies to be able to provide some assistance across borders and in areas not controlled by the Syrian government. The relatively “soft law” on aiding IDPs has been as ineffective as the more formal “hard law” on the protection of civilians in combat zones. The disregard of these laws by state actors has been exacerbated by the practices of non-state actors that often have deliberately used civilians as shields or targets. In other situations of internal displacement, working to build capacity and political will of the government is the obvious approach, but this does not seem to be possible in Syria.

As discussed in chapter 3, the notions of “safe areas,” “no-fly zones,” and “humanitarian corridors” are frequently brought up as means to protect both IDPs and civilians generally inside Syria. These proposals need to be approached very carefully. “Safe havens” have also been advocated as areas that could eventually evolve into mini-states constituting the basis of a confederal Syria. They could also play a role if a completely different constellation of states emerges in the aftermath of the conflict—consisting of ethnically and religious homogenous stand-alone stages, including one “Sunnistan.” But as of now, there is a striking lack of political consensus on whether and how such safe zones might function.

**The Interrelationship Between Solutions to the Conflict and Displacement**

Any solution to the Syrian conflict must take displacement into account. If Assad remains in power, the possibilities of large-scale refugee returns are limited. It is hard to overestimate the bitterness and alienation felt by many refugees at the suffering caused by the Assad regime. Studies show
that peace processes that fail to take into account the desires of the displaced populations are not sustainable. The Security Council in its resolutions has a tendency to mention displacement only in terms of returns of refugees. This is both simplistic and inadequate. In the case of Syrian refugees, it is unlikely that most will return home in the foreseeable future, but if and when they do return, they will need robust support to reintegrate into their home communities. Alternative solutions—such as local integration and resettlement—should be considered in any peace agreement.

Offering opportunities to refugees to develop their own livelihoods would not just benefit the economies of host communities but also improve the capacity of refugees to return home when the possibility emerges. The World Bank, in a 2015 report on Syrian refugees in Turkey, advocated taking a more developmental approach to supplement the humanitarian response and argued that “experience shows that when refugees are supported in becoming socially and economically self-reliant, and given freedom of movement and protection, they are more likely to contribute to their host country. They are also more likely to be able to undertake a successful return process.” Supporting the “integration” of refugees into their host communities especially through access to livelihood opportunities does not necessarily mean fewer returns.

Any solution to the Syrian conflict needs to provide sufficient funds for the physical reconstruction of the country. This will be a daunting task. As a former Syrian official noted, “if or when the war ends, any government will find itself ruling over a pile of rubble.” The cost of rebuilding some 2.1 million homes, one-half the country’s hospitals, and more than 7,000 schools destroyed in Syria is put at more than $300 billion by this official, who also said: “I don’t know who
will fund this.” As much as it may seem unrealistic at this point, the international community needs to start thinking about a Middle East Recovery Plan, somewhat reminiscent of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. If the Vienna process and the UN roadmap for peace in Syria do indeed take hold and progress is made toward a political solution in Syria, this idea of a “recovery plan” that also addresses the return of refugees and IDPs is essential. Such an initiative could grow out of a comprehensive regional approach to the Syrian refugee crisis as discussed later here.

Any solution to the Syrian conflict also must provide an accounting for the crimes committed. Transitional justice mechanisms are painfully slow and rarely address displacement. This must change in any post-conflict plan for Syria. Whether criminal prosecutions through the International Criminal Court, or truth commissions, or justice-sensitive security sector reform—use of these transitional justice mechanisms could play a central role in determining whether the displaced can return and whether a post-conflict Syria will be stable and secure.

There is a very real danger that a quick fix (though even quick fixes seem distant at the time of this writing) will contain the seeds of the next conflict. If there are large-scale retributions, if the rule of law cannot be ensured, if those responsible for dropping barrel bombs remain in power, then further conflict and displacement are likely.

To cite again the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic:

Government forces have committed gross violations of human rights and the war crimes of murder, torture, rape, sexual violence and targeting civilians. Government forces disregarded the special protec-
Anti-Government armed groups have committed the war crimes of murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking and attacking protected objects. The litany of abuses listed here captures only part of the trauma experienced by Syrian civilians, as the world stands witness.  

Syrian displacement is inextricably linked with these larger questions of accountability and governance processes. But displacement also raises specific challenges to how the world responds to major humanitarian emergencies. In this regard, we offer reflections from two very different perspectives: bottom up and top down. The top-down approach is more comfortable for those working on either the national or international level as well as for academics; somehow it is easier to figure out the elements of a grand plan for refugees (and we present some of these ideas below) than to enter the messy world of trying to understand how refugees and IDPs support themselves without international assistance. Nonetheless, we suggest that understanding the bottom-up approach may in fact turn out to be the best hope for refugees and IDPs.

RECOGNIZING REFUGEES AS ACTORS

While refugees and IDPs are usually depicted in Western media only as the victims of conflict, they are survivors. Displacement is, first and foremost, a protection strategy. While national authorities and international agencies have a responsibility to protect and assist them, the fact is that most are surviving not because of international aid but by their own means. And it is likely that most will find their own solu-
tions without international support; certainly that has been the case in the resolution of most displacement situations. As with the case of Syrian refugees today, local integration was rejected by all the governments hosting Iraqi refugees in the mid-2000s. And yet, Dawn Chatty and Nisrine Mansour found that while integration wasn’t possible, local “accommodation” is taking place where Iraqis are blending in with their host communities (including through intermarriage with locals), and few are deported. 21 Similarly, Katy Long found that mobility is an effective protection strategy for refugees; in fact, large numbers of Central American refugees in the 1990s found their solutions through migration rather than through formal international schemes.22

These findings suggest two implications for international actors. First, they should be more humble in considering the effects of their actions. Second, more concerted and sustained international efforts are needed to help refugees and IDPs to survive and to find their own solutions. Refugees in neighboring countries are running out of resources, and their coping strategies are under tremendous strain. For many, savings have been depleted and cuts in international assistance mean that minimum basic needs are not being met. The fact that so many Syrians have made the painful decision to move further away from Syria and to make risky journeys to Europe is a sign that their resilience is wearing thin. International humanitarian agencies are simply unable to meet the assistance needs of the refugees, and they often cannot protect refugees and displaced persons even in areas where they are working.23

In the case of refugees living in neighboring host countries, the single biggest change that would allow them to prosper would be having the right to legal employment and access to livelihoods. The governments of the region have
legitimate reasons for not wanting refugees to work, including concerns about domestic unemployment and potential political backlash. But if the refugees are to remain in these countries for at least some period of time, their ability to work would both reduce their burden on the finances of host countries and their dependence on international assistance. Having jobs would allow them the dignity that comes with self-sufficiency, as well as enable them to contribute to the economy of host communities. The question then becomes: How can the international community support the host governments in such a way that they see a benefit in allowing refugees access to employment?

This is a tough issue that flies in the face of the current “incentive structure” in which host governments receive international funds for care and maintenance of refugees. There is a need for a new incentive structure for incorporating refugees into local labor markets and enabling them to access a livelihood. It is encouraging that this idea was incorporated into the G-20 leaders’ November 2015 communiqué in the form of a call for “efforts to ensure that refugees can access . . . livelihood opportunities.”24 If the incentive structure were changed so that host governments realized a direct benefit from allowing refugees to work (with appropriate safeguards for those unable to work), this would have an enormous effect on refugees’ ability both to survive in the current climate and to move toward solutions. Such a change would not have to happen either immediately or across the board. For example, there may be ways of gradually opening up the labor market to refugees by starting with specific sectors, such as allowing Syrian school teachers to be paid for teaching Syrian refugee children.

The issue of livelihoods is also tied closely to education. Too many Syrian refugee children are out of school because
they need to work to support their families. It is widely recognized that they are not in school and are at risk of becoming a “lost generation” with consequent implications for security. Livelihoods and education need to be approached in a holistic fashion and, beyond security considerations, their impact on economic growth needs to be well understood. While ensuring access to education to all refugee children will require additional funds, other steps need to be taken, including supporting efforts by universities in host countries to admit Syrian refugees and finding ways to certify refugee students’ academic records when documents are missing. Discussions of refugee education usually focus on primary schools, but opportunities for providing university and vocational training for older students could well be key to Syria’s near-term future.

Providing education and livelihood opportunities to refugees has significant financial, social, and political consequences for the governments hosting Syrian refugees. These consequences need to be taken seriously by the international community.

It is important to underscore that the burden of protecting and assisting refugees has largely fallen on the shoulders of major host countries—primarily Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. As this study has detailed, the governments of these three countries have been on the front line of responding to refugees. While this study has been critical of some aspects of their response, they have done amazing work with inadequate international support. The international refugee system, created in the aftermath of World War II, was built on the premise that responsibility for refugees is an international responsibility, not just the responsibility of the governments of the countries to which refugees happened to arrive. The implicit “deal” was that if a government kept
its borders open and allowed refugees to arrive, the international community would play its part. In the case of Syria, international donors have provided an unprecedented influx of funds—far more per capita than for refugees displaced by other conflicts that are not in the media spotlight. Still, the support has not been enough: not enough to provide lives of dignity for the refugees, and not enough to reassure the host governments. In other situations (notably Southeast Asia), the resettlement of refugees relieved sufficient pressure on host governments to allow them to continue offering asylum to refugees in their countries. But resettlement opportunities for Syrians have been limited. International agencies and humanitarian actors have had to do their best with very limited and constantly diminishing funds.

Appeals by host governments and the UN system for more assistance received scant attention—until large numbers of Syrians began to arrive in Europe. Public empathy and solidarity with Syrian refugees and the accompanying positive climate in support of resettlement and assistance, however, was cut short by the Paris attacks. The resettlement issue very quickly became securitized, and in a disappointing but unsurprising manner many politicians in the United States as well as in Europe adopted xenophobic rhetoric toward Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, the governments of Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the United States, among others, continued to adhere to their commitment to receive refugees in spite of the unfavorable domestic context. But even if the number of resettlement places was to increase significantly, there are limits to resettlement, particularly if funding for increased resettlement of Syrian refugees comes at the expense of financial support for refugees in the region. In addition, the majority of the refugees likely will want to return to their homes once a settlement can be reached in
Syria and rebuild their country, even though prospects for return will decrease with time. Large-scale resettlement could undermine these efforts and could deprive post-conflict Syria of the human capital that will be needed for the mammoth task of reconstruction. Instead, the strategic use of resettlement is needed, in which a robust and viable resettlement program gives priority to vulnerable cases and supports solutions for refugees.

In the meantime, borders are closing to Syrian refugees. Host countries are experiencing fatigue resulting in part from inadequate burden sharing. Host country officials do not miss a chance to criticize the double standards of others, especially EU countries, in calling on them to keep maintain their borders open to Syrian refugees while closing their own borders. An unfortunate situation has developed in terms of Turkey’s open door policy since a deal was reached between the EU and Turkey to stem the flow of Syrian and other refugees and migrants. Turkey has indeed stepped up its efforts to halt human smuggling of Syrian refugees across the Aegean Sea and has stopped an increasing number of boats while constructing a wall on part of the Syrian border. Yet, at the same time, human rights organizations have reported that Syrian refugees are being detained and even forcefully returned to Syria. Both the EU and Turkey have the obligation to make sure that Syrians fleeing war and destruction continue to enjoy protection and that European interests in halting migratory pressures and Turkish desires for closer EU relations do not undermine refugee protection.

There are many challenges in responding to Syrian displacement: strengthening resilience and supporting refugees and IDPs to find their own solutions; ensuring protection and security for both refugees and for host communities
Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişci alike; addressing the concerns of host governments and helping them provide livelihood and education opportunities for refugees; mobilizing not only more international assistance but more long-term development aid, even as the war continues; ensuring that efforts to respond to humanitarian needs contribute to a solution to the war and do not make things worse; and recognizing the importance of addressing displacement in whatever political solution is eventually negotiated to end the conflict. None of these challenges can be satisfactorily addressed on its own. Rather, what is needed is a new international approach to Syrian refugees and IDPs: a new agreement that in essence represents a new kind of international “bargain” for refugee response. We call this a “New Global Approach for Syria.”

This New Global Approach for Syria would provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to finding solutions for the 4-plus million Syrian refugees and to developing sound alternatives to responding to the more difficult issue of supporting solutions for Syria’s 6.5 million IDPs. The New Global Approach for Syria could serve as a model for other large-scale displacement situations.

RECASTING THE DEAL: A NEW GLOBAL APPROACH FOR SYRIA

Syria is the most complex and massive humanitarian emergency facing the world today. The human suffering is enormous and visible. The threats to global peace and security are obvious. World leaders must summon the political will to come up with solutions in a context where solutions are not obvious. The challenge is a global one, facing countries in different parts of the world and multilateral institutions. If ever the world community could come together in new ways to tackle a major humanitarian crisis, Syria would be
the case. And if a new “grand experiment” on Syrian dis-
placement were to succeed, it might offer new possibilities
for joint action in other humanitarian crises.

Negotiating a New Global Approach for Syria for Syrian
refugees would be a complex undertaking in which:

■ Middle East regional organizations would be chal-
lenged to be more assertive and more successful than they
have been in the past. They would have to take risks in
working together and put aside major political differences
to focus on humanitarian needs and the common regional
good. In light of recent intraregional conflicts, this is a tall
order. But it also is an opportunity for Middle Eastern orga-
nizations to develop a stronger impetus and adopt a more
effective role. By demonstrating their ability to work to-
gether for a common humanitarian cause, this may serve
as a confidence-building measure, leading to cooperation in
other areas.

■ International humanitarian and development actors
finally would have to emerge from their silos and work
together in a more coherent way. This, too, is a tall order,
and yet there are signs from both operational humanitar-
ian agencies and from development actors of a new willing-
ness to work together. Humanitarian agencies can’t handle
the burdens alone, particularly as displacement drags on for
years. If they were to step back from being in the driver’s seat
in protracted situations—and if development actors stepped
up to the longer-term challenge—they could concentrate
on improving their emergency response. Multilateral de-
velopment banks, which traditionally have kept humani-
tarian issues at arm’s length, and which are threatened by
new competitors, need a new mission. They have expertise
in working with failed and fragile states. What better case
to address than the needs of one-half of Syria’s population?
If they can build on their expertise and contribute funds, skills, and human resources to finding solutions for Syria’s displaced population, they can have the opportunity to demonstrate their continued relevance by helping resolve the most pressing crisis facing the world today.

- Host governments would have to take the political and economic risks of opening up their labor markets to refugees and making difficult decisions to give refugees a more secure legal status than they presently have. The trade-off for taking these risks would be increased security at home and more stable financial assistance not only in support of their refugee programs but also for their own development goals.

- Donor governments—and not just the traditional roster of mostly Western governments—would have to recommit to the principle that the protection of refugees is indeed an international responsibility and then take concrete actions to demonstrate their solidarity with host countries on the front line. Western governments would have to be more open to leadership and ideas coming from emerging donor countries such as China and Turkey; this is a necessary trade-off for those countries’ commitment to participate in international burden sharing.

- Governments outside of the region would need to consider new commitments for resettlement, and new thinking will be needed on reshaping resettlement to meet the needs of future refugee emergencies.

- International nongovernmental organizations, which have played positive and constructive roles by supporting both refugees and IDPs, would be challenged to consider new ways of working with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and diaspora groups that offer unique resources for aiding Syria’s displaced but often are not at the table in coordination mechanisms. The Syrian crisis offers
an opportunity to find more creative ways of overcoming the divide between international and national actors. Such a synergy would be especially useful for a comprehensive needs assessment exercise that would be critical to the New Global Approach for Syria.

None of these actors is likely to be able to take the political risks associated with these actions alone. But if all of them were to indicate a willingness to make painful choices, there is a chance that a new bargain can be struck. And while all of these actions are politically painful, they all have the potential of providing long-term payoffs. Most of all they offer the possibility of addressing the serious threat to international peace and security that the Syrian refugee situation now poses. And if this “grand experiment” works for Syria, it can serve as a precedent for common action on other burning humanitarian issues. The UN has organized a full agenda of high-level meetings in 2016 where momentum could be built around this area, including the World Humanitarian Summit and the High-Level Plenary organized by the UN secretary general on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants in September 2016. Both of these global meetings, as well as other Syria-specific initiatives, will search for new ways of responding to Syrian refugees and other population movements.

Not Starting from Scratch

There are precedents for regional efforts to resolve protracted refugee/IDP situations. In particular, two successful examples stand out: the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees between 1988 and 1996, and the International Conference on Central American Refugees between 1987 and 1994. The Indochina plan was adopted
in 1989 as hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees were seeking to escape by land and sea; neighboring countries, overwhelmed by the influx, were closing borders and deporting refugees. The plan, in essence, represented a new “bargain” in which large numbers of people were resettled in third countries, some refugees remained in their host countries, and some were returned to Vietnam. The Central America conference brought together governments, international actors, and civil society groups to find solutions for both refugees and IDPs in a highly charged political environment. Among other things, it represented a particularly positive experience of collaboration between development and humanitarian actors. Neither of these was an easy process, and both required substantial international commitments of time, money, and national buy-in. But by and large, the participants resolved the large displacement crises of their times through different mechanisms.

There already is a somewhat similar pattern of international meetings on Syria, mostly to mobilize funding.\textsuperscript{30} Regional efforts have been much more limited, however, and as noted above, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in particular has failed to adopt a proactive role in responding to the refugee challenge. According to the UNHCR “Mid-Year Trends 2015” report, six Muslim countries are among both the top ten refugee-sending countries as well as the top refugee-receiving countries.\textsuperscript{31} With the exception of Eritrea, all of these countries are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The overwhelming majority of the Syrian refugees are from member countries, and the seat of the organization is in Saudi Arabia, which is a leading donor to the Syrian humanitarian cause. Yet, strikingly, so far that organization has failed to coordinate the efforts of its membership in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis.
In the earlier stages of the Syrian displacement crisis there was an initial effort to coordinate efforts among the major Syrian refugee–receiving countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey together with UNHCR. The so called “Ministerial Meeting of Syria Bordering Countries” held three rounds of meetings in September 2013 and then in January and May 2014 to draw attention to the situation of Syrian refugees and coordinate calls for international burden sharing. However, these meetings subsequently appear to have been discontinued. Ideally, countries bordering Syria together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation should play a central role in the New Global Approach for Syria.

Other initiatives indicate a movement by disparate actors in different forums in the same direction. The UN’s Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan embodies both a robust regional approach and a commitment to supporting resilience and increased engagement by development actors. The World Bank has adopted a New Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa, which includes as central pillars increasing the resilience of host societies to deal with refugees and IDPs and creating the conditions for long-term recovery. We have already referred to the G-20 communique in November 2015. The Solutions Alliance represents a new type of partnership between affected governments and development and humanitarian actors to find solutions for displacement. Numerous international nongovernmental organizations have worked on the idea of achieving better interaction between relief and developmental assistance.

This seems to be a time when many initiatives are bubbling up and different actors are reaching the same conclusion that a fundamentally new approach is needed for dealing with refugee and migration influxes. While the
Syrian situation is certainly not the only case in need of such a fresh start, it is unique in the scale of displacement, the global impact, and the apparent existence of strong political will to do things differently. If ever there was a time ripe for new and innovative action, that time is now.

What Would a New Global Approach for Syria Do?

A New Global Approach for Syria could build on the experiences of the Indochina and Central America initiatives in the 1990s by tying together a commitment to maintaining open borders to refugees in the region, increased support for resilience among refugees, development of ways to support eventual solutions for refugees, the strategic use of resettlement, and increased support for host governments—particularly in opening up livelihood opportunities to refugees. All of these are difficult and costly undertakings, but if taken collectively could be more politically palatable than if undertaken individually.

Elements of the New Global Approach for Syria

The New Global Approach for Syria could include at least six essential elements:

- Reaffirming international responsibility for refugees;
- Supporting common legal and policy approaches to Syrian refugees in the region;
- Retooling elements of resettlement policy to meet the needs;
- Engaging development actors more smoothly;
- Providing a forum for developing responses to IDPs; and
- Preparing for future recovery and reconstruction
To begin with, our suggested approach should recommit to the principle that the protection of refugees is indeed an international responsibility. However, this responsibility will need to be a truly global one and not shouldered just by traditional donor countries, most of them in the West. Emerging powers, especially Brazil, China, India, and others, will need to extend support, too. In that sense the recent G-20 summit decision to include in the communiqué a commitment to help with refugee issues around the world was a good step in the right direction. It will be important that China, as the host of the next G-20 summit, keeps this issue on the agenda and pursues efforts toward its implementation. This could also be an occasion to strengthen the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR Executive Committee decisions, especially those pertaining to mass influx situations.

A New Global Approach for Syria should provide countries in the region hosting Syrian refugees with the space to develop common legal and policy approaches to those refugees. Ideally, the host governments would ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and put refugee determination procedures in place. However, since under current circumstances this seems politically impossible and in any event would be a long-term process, the countries could at least agree on common legal approaches to forms of temporary protection, perhaps modeled on Turkey’s policies. This is where a regional deal resembling the one between Turkey and the EU could provide the capacity-building means for the host countries. A regional forum could provide the opportunity to develop regional standards for treatment of refugees.35

Resettlement needs to be reaffirmed as a core component of refugee protection and assistance. As noted above, resettlement has played a very small role thus far in providing
solutions to Syrian refugees, and it needs to be strengthened, reinvigorated, and developed into an important strategic tool as part of the New Global Approach for Syria. This will require significant rethinking—not only by UNHCR and the traditional resettlement countries but also by countries that have not yet played a role in resettling refugees.

More countries should be encouraged to offer resettlement slots, and they should be recognized for doing so. Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau’s decision to reverse the previous government’s more restrictive policy and instead take an initial 25,000 Syrian refugees was a commendable development. The decision by Australia to receive 12,000 Syrian refugees is also a positive development. However, a much greater effort will be needed to respond to the scale of the crisis. It will be important to find ways of encouraging a wider range of countries to join the ranks of traditional resettlement countries. As of mid-December 2015, out of the thirty countries that made 125,600 places available to the UNHCR for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, only Argentina, Brazil, Belarus, and Uruguay were from outside the list of traditional resettlement countries: the United States, EU, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Other countries—for example in Latin America, Asia, and the Persian Gulf—should be encouraged to do their part in receiving Syrian refugees for resettlement. In particular, countries such as Iran and Russia could begin to accept Syrian refugees for resettlement. Armenia, for example, has opened its doors to Syrian refugees of Armenian descent but could be encouraged and supported to receive Yazidi refugees, even if in modest numbers given the small size of the country and the economic difficulties it faces. Finally, wealthy Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, have not been particularly forthcoming in receiving Syrian refugees. They have
Indeed contributed generous funds for humanitarian assistance and also host expatriate Syrian communities, but they have been reluctant to receive Syrian refugees, so far. The New Global Approach for Syria might borrow a page from the climate change negotiations and suggest that countries unwilling to resettle refugees provide more generous financial contributions for countries on the front line.

More thought is needed about more robust and creative ways of increased engagement of the private sector, with consideration given to family and community sponsorship opportunities. There are clear disadvantages to having some refugees funded privately while others are funded by a government, but perhaps it is time to take another look at alternative ways of funding resettlement. Could more be done, for example, to strengthen diaspora networks and bring them into the international system? Perhaps they can be considered as potential developmental actors for the reconstruction of their home country when the day comes. Finally, could resettlement to third countries be used for those displaced inside Syria? As noted throughout this report, solutions for IDPs are much more difficult than for refugees. And while countries such as the United States have used in-country processing before, there have been major problems with at least some of these programs (such as in the cases of Haiti and Central America). But in other cases, such as the Orderly Departure Program for Vietnamese in the 1980s, resettlement has saved lives.

The New Global Approach for Syria should provide a new relationship between humanitarian and development actors. Refugees need more opportunities to access education and livelihoods. This means appreciating their economic contributions, and it will require host governments to make difficult decisions to allow them to access employ-
ment opportunities. However, it also will be critical that the international community shift gears from an emphasis on short-term humanitarian assistance to long-term development goals. Such a shift has never been done in the midst of ongoing conflict, but there are signs that this may be possible as evidenced by the UN’s Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan strategy, the World Bank’s new plan for the Middle East and North Africa, and many other initiatives.

It also is important that traditional developmental agencies, led by the World Bank, revise their procedures and make middle-income countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey eligible for grants and other support programs. Increasing coordination between these agencies and humanitarian relief agencies will also be critical. These ideas—especially to increase refugees’ and their host communities’ resilience, and to encourage cooperation with a wider range of stakeholders—have indeed been central to the World Bank’s new Middle East and North Africa strategy. This in turn could constitute a step in the direction of a Middle East Recovery Plan, a sort of Marshall Plan discussed earlier in this chapter, toward the reconstruction of the region. As one World Bank official explained, it is important to build resilience to communities affected by mass population movements “by supporting the displaced as well as host communities and preparing recovery and reconstruction wherever and whenever peace emerges. This harks back to our immediate post–World War II mission, when we were first established as the IBRD—the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.” Furthermore, going beyond just relief assistance and moving into the developmental aspect of the challenges ahead would also fall in line with the World Bank’s recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals.
Indeed, there are a few encouraging signs that development actors, such as the World Bank, are taking steps to play a role in both protracted displacement situations and in supporting solutions for displacement. However, this needs to be robustly supported by political leaders and by the donor community. International agencies beyond UNHCR, the World Food Program, the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and UNICEF will need to become more active, especially the World Bank Group and agencies such as Islamic Development Bank, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, and the China-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank. The New Global Approach for Syria should make the engagement of both humanitarian and development actors central.

The New Global Approach for Syria should also offer a forum for creative thinking on solutions for internally displaced people. As this study has shown, internal displacement is directly related to refugee movements; when people cannot find protection within the borders of their own country, they move elsewhere. Protection, assistance, and solutions for IDPs are much more difficult and more controversial than for refugees, and the way forward is much less clear. First and foremost, greater diplomatic efforts should go into strengthening the implementation of earlier UN Security Council resolutions, especially on provision of assistance in rebel-controlled areas. Second, perhaps there are opportunities for engaging the Syrian government around protection of people in besieged areas or in negotiating access. These options should be tried. The “Whole of Syria” approach adopted by the UN in late 2014 offers some important precedents for this. Third, as discussed in chapter 3, challenges and difficulties are associated with “no-fly” and “safe” zones. But these options require further discussion.
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and the elaboration of alternative models for how they can be implemented.

The engagement of different kinds of actors—from experts in peacekeeping to diaspora groups to Gulf charities—may enable more realistic assessments of their possibilities to protect civilians. The New Global Approach for Syria could set up multi-stakeholder working groups that could look at the feasibility of safe zones, no-fly areas, humanitarian corridors, and humanitarian cease-fires. It might be that, as certain parts of Syria achieve relative calm, the idea of extending humanitarian corridors from less secure areas could be considered. In the present political context, there are no good options for responding to IDPs inside Syria or, indeed, to those who are trapped and unable to move. But the New Global Approach for Syria could offer a new space for developing such options and a better forum for coordinating cross-border operations.

The New Global Approach for Syria can include an essential component of preparing the recovery by laying the groundwork for longer-term reconstruction and recovery efforts. Much of this will depend on the political negotiations and the “shape” of a postwar Syria, with the distinct possibility that the contours of the present nation-state of Syria may not remain. But efforts are already under way to think about the transition. These efforts, and many others, could be brought together under the New Global Approach for Syria. Doing so might ensure that humanitarian and development efforts are tailored in such a way to support eventual recovery.

Bringing an end to the conflict in Syria and developing a long-term recovery strategy are clearly the most desired solutions for displacement. Although this ideal appears a distant possibility, it is likely that the eventual shape of postwar
Syria will be determined largely by the patterns of displacement that already have occurred. In this vein, proposals to create safe zones, local cease-fires, and permanent restructuring of the country usually build on the demographic reshaping that has resulted from displacement. A federal or confederal structure may well be the eventual political solution. Some analysts are making the point that it is unlikely Syria will even exist as a nation-state in five years.45

*Getting to a New Global Approach for Syria*

What would a new “Grand Bargain for Syrian Refugees” look like? It would bring together the governments of refugee-hosting countries, the UN and other intergovernmental agencies, regional bodies, international nongovernmental organizations and local civil society actors, and donor governments to consider and adopt a new system of burden sharing. This system potentially would include commitments to keep the borders open to Syrian refugees and to more fairly share the costs of assisting and protecting refugees, along with an agreement to allow Syrian refugees to access education and livelihoods, including through legal employment opportunities.

The process could be jointly organized by the UN secretary general and the president of the World Bank and could culminate in a global meeting in March 2017. That meeting would be intended to ratify the New Global Approach for Syria, which had been worked out through a consultative process with stakeholders over a six-to-twelve-month period. This is a short period of time for international actors to act. But now is not a time for business as usual. The needs are urgent, and with the strong political support of the world’s leaders, such a bargain could indeed be pulled off.
We suggest that the UN secretary general and the president of the World Bank announce the initiative at the General Assembly in September 2016 and ask for commitments from stakeholders to actively engage in it. At the same time, the two conveners should announce a list of “expectations,” to which relevant stakeholders should respond within a month. For example, one expectation could be that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation would take the lead in organizing a meeting of host-country governments to consider common approaches to the legal status of refugees in their countries and to come up with ways to prevent statelessness among Syrian refugees. Another “expectation” could be for the EU to come up with an implementable “relocation” policy for Syrian refugees arriving in EU countries. Still another could be to ask the UN Development Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization to compile a list of feasible livelihood projects that could be carried out now in Syria, or to ask UNHCR to put together a concrete proposal to support resettlement of Syrian refugees in countries that have not traditionally resettled refugees.

At the same time as the conveners are launching the New Global Approach for Syria and announcing specific expectations, they should take two additional actions. First, they should commission two definitive studies. One study would cover the positive and negative economic impacts of refugees in host countries; perhaps it could be carried out by a consortium of academic institutions in the region coordinated by the World Bank. The study would also discuss the possibilities in which the creation of livelihood opportunities would connect with an eventual rebuilding program for Syria. A second study should examine the security implications of Syrian refugees; perhaps it could be carried out in association with relevant police associations in the Middle
East, Europe, and elsewhere under the coordination of a respected research institution, perhaps the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Other studies may also be needed.

In addition to commissioning studies, the conveners should issue a call to NGOs and civil society organizations, including Muslim charities, to make their contribution to this New Global Approach for Syria. For example, they could solicit the input of refugees and diaspora groups in coming up with less risky paths for Syrians traveling outside the region or in researching coping methods of refugees and identifying measures that could mitigate negative coping behavior, such as early marriage and transactional sex. The possibility of organizing inclusive civil society meetings in the regions, perhaps under the auspices of local universities or NGO platforms, should be considered. There are particular advantages to asking respected groups that are perceived as neutral to play such facilitating roles. The conveners could also set up a website where these contributions could be posted and where collaboration could be sought. Groups of all types—for example, the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees; the Red Cross movement; and universities and defense departments—should be encouraged to participate in the process of coming up with a new Grand Bargain for Syrian Refugees.

THE SYRIAN DISPLACEMENT CRISIS AND
THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

The international humanitarian system is under serious strain and, as a whole, is overstretched. António Guterres, who just stepped down as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, noted: “If you look at those displaced by conflict per
day, in 2010 it was 11,000; last year there were 42,000. This means a dramatic increase in need, from shelter to water and sanitation, food, medical assistance, education.” He went on to remark: “The global humanitarian community is not broken—as a whole they are more effective than ever before. But we are financially broke.”46 However, we think that solutions to the problem must involve more than just a simple infusion of funds and that there is a need for more fundamental change to fix the system. With the world’s attention now focused on refugees and the Syrian humanitarian crisis generally, this is a perhaps once-in-an-era opportunity to discuss—and implement—bold change to the humanitarian system.

Some of the reflections and consultations in the lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit offer good proposals for change; for example, the crucial need for more engagement of local civil society actors since local and national humanitarian actors received only 0.2 percent of the overall direct global humanitarian response in 2013.47 However, these proposals do not go far enough. Bigger issues that need to be addressed include reforming the current Western-led humanitarian system to make sure scarce funds better serve the needy and looking for ways to better integrate the emerging humanitarian actors and donors into a reformed system.48 Mobilizing collective action on Syria and harnessing the creative energy could well serve as an impetus for more radical change in the international humanitarian system.

The scale of Syrian displacement, the difficulties of accessing people in need inside Syria, and the likelihood that Syrians will be displaced for years are now driving efforts to find political solutions to the conflict. There are risks that this pressure will lead to political agreements that do not
offer sufficient protection to those who have been displaced. There also are risks that, given the situation in the neighboring countries and in Europe, refugees will be encouraged or even forced to return home before it is safe for them to do so. Furthermore, as Syrian displacement becomes protracted there is an additional risk that the world’s attention will diminish and the crisis will be relegated to situation reports by humanitarian agencies that are read mainly by other humanitarian agencies.

But there is also an opportunity to use this horrific human tragedy to introduce needed fundamental changes to our systems of global governance and humanitarian response. It is an opportunity to bring order out of chaos and, it is hoped, ensure that the victims of the world’s next civil conflict will be treated better than the people of Syria have been.