“This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Third World Quarterly on September 28 2019, available online:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503>”

The Politics of Return: Exploring the Future of Syrian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey

Ahmet İçduygu¹, Maissam Nimer²

Abstract

Although the Syrian conflict continues, local and global stakeholders have already begun to consider the return of the six million refugees, especially as neither the option of local integration in the countries of first asylum nor that of resettlement to third countries is seen as a realistic possibility. Elaborating on the return debates in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, we relate the politicisation of this question to the growing acceptance of the option of voluntary and involuntary repatriation in the international refugee regime as well as to policies and public opinion. We argue, based on empirical fieldwork, that any debate about the return of Syrian refugees is problematic, since the conditions of safety, voluntariness and sustainability are not fulfilled. Further, returns should not be left entirely to the individual hosting states and actors in the region but should be carried out in collaboration with representative authorities in Syria and the mediation of international organisations upon full resolution of conflict.

Keywords: Return, Syrian refugees, forced migration, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan

¹ Migration Research Center, Koç University

² Migration Research Center, Koç University and Istanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University

Introduction

Over the last eight years, academic and policy-related debates about the future of around six million Syrian refugees living outside of their country directly refer to the three options formulated by the traditional international refugee regime: local integration in the first country of asylum, third-country resettlement, and voluntary repatriation. In light of the complex interaction between domestic and international politics, it appears that the option of integration in the first countries of asylum or that of resettlement in third countries gain limited currency as viable possibilities. Instead, the idea of return increasingly becomes a politically preferred one and is considered by various players, including governments and international agencies. Despite the fact that the conflict continues in Syria, various observers emphasize an alarming trend advocating for return, even forced or involuntary.¹ In fact, it is claimed that around 172,796 refugees have returned between 2016 and 2019.² Return seems to be voiced frequently in a context of creating ‘safe zones’ in Syria for refugees to return to.

However, in the context of refugee repatriation, there are conditions that need to be fulfilled. While the principle of non-refoulement is the most essential component of refugee protection, the three conditions for viable return are voluntariness, safety, and sustainability.³ Without a peaceful solution for Syria, any debate on the return of Syrian refugees to their homes is, without any doubt, problematic. The tendency observed in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan towards the idea of repatriation of Syrian refugees has not been a linear, straightforward, and one-directional development but has involved considerable variation.

In this essay, we first analyze the conventional approaches to repatriation within the traditional international refugee regime and critically review the changes observed in this regime over the last decades, relating them to the return discourse in the three main host countries of Syrian refugees. Second, we scrutinize the policies and practices of these countries regarding reception, settlement and integration since 2011 and connect them to recent

developments whereby the return question has gradually gained momentum. Third, we study the political and media discourses regarding Syrian refugees and their eventual return, looking at perceptions of governments and host communities. We thus highlight the ways in which the repatriation debate in these countries is associated with the dynamics and mechanisms of the domestic and international political environment around Syrian refugee issues and varies over time. After elaborating on the way in which public discontent has grown and official discourse and practices have evolved concerning the return question, we discuss whether return is a viable option, looking at conditions in Syria, and at the perceptions and experiences of Syrians themselves in each of the neighboring states (Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan). We conclude by stating that politically driven repatriation strategies fail to protect refugee rights and limit the likelihood of successful integration and sustainable return. This paper is based on fieldwork carried out during the first half of 2018. It involves analysis of official discourse related to the question of return, namely review of official documents, newspaper reports, secondary sources, complemented by interviews with government officials, experts and international organization representatives in the three countries.⁴

The Return Question: Changing Paradigms in the International Refugee Regime

The International Refugee Regime (IRR) is the collection of laws and treaties, intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies and funding put in place during the post-World War Two era to provide international protection and assistance to displaced from their country by persecution or war.⁵ Analytically speaking, the traditional IRR articulates three main solutions for refugee situations: voluntary repatriation, local integration in the first country of asylum, and third-country resettlement. It appears that the way in which the international community treats these solutions is context-dependent. However, more strikingly, the formal positions of international organizations and their member states vis-à-vis these three solutions

have been changing and so have their implications for the larger context of the refugee regime in parallel to the paradigm shifts observed in the IRR over the past six decades.⁶ Similarly, we have witnessed a change in the content and context of these options; indeed, over time involuntary repatriation has emerged as a possible solution.⁷

In order to understand the return debates around Syrian refugees in the three main hosting states (Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan), it is imperative to briefly revisit the related literature on these refugee solution options and their changing status through the shifts in the IRR. It is widely accepted that since the Second World War, there have been major paradigm shifts in the refugee regime, which implies changing perceptions of solutions for refugee situations.⁸ Indeed, there have been three main periods in which perceptions on refugee settlement have radically changed. For instance, Chimni⁹ refers to the early period after the War (from 1948 to 1991) as one in which industrialized countries preferred resettlement to repatriation as a solution, even though voluntary repatriation was accepted as the preferred solution. Frelick¹⁰ similarly brought up the same period as one when the international refugee regime benefited from the ‘exilic model’ in the absence of realistic hope of repatriation for refugees in the Cold War period in the case of communist countries. During this period, the IRR largely dealt with providing refugee rights in exile, mostly for those escaping authoritarian regimes and conflict areas, finding solutions outside the country of origin or establishing refugee camps.

With the end of the Cold War, the IRR transformed from an exilic model of response to refugee situations to a source-country model focusing on the causes of refugee flows. It then became unlikely to offer permanent asylum to refugees outside their home countries; instead, they were provided with temporary protection close to the border or a ‘safe zone’ was created inside the country of origin.¹¹ In the words of Chimni, ‘the notion of safe return was introduced into the discourse’, and ‘in the continuum between voluntary and involuntary repatriation the

idea of safe return aspired to occupy the middle ground'.¹² It is assumed that the international community, often under the hegemony of the single superpower of the United States, would be able to intervene to change causes of refugee flows and consequently manage to return displaced people, but the reality in other contexts, such as Afghanistan, has proved otherwise. While voluntary repatriation increasingly came to be promoted as a solution, along with ideas and practices of safe zones¹³, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw another paradigmatic shift in the IRR: a 'security-based exclusionary understanding'¹⁴ began to prevail whereby governments increasingly became against local integration and third-country resettlement. As Chimni argued, in this period: 'the doctrine of imposed return was aired by UNHCR to draw attention to constraints which could compel it to accept the reality of involuntary repatriation'.¹⁵ However, supporting voluntary repatriation may lead to involuntary or forced repatriations as refugees may not ultimately return to their countries of origin due to various reasons.¹⁶ The IRR has thus transformed from a liberal one implementing a selective but integrative policy of access to a full status recognition with complete social rights, permanent settlement, and right to access to citizenship, to one maximizing exclusion on entry and with the perspective of a short stay, and return.¹⁷

The case of Syrian refugee flows also confirms the dominance of exclusionary approaches in the IRR. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, while the countries in the Global North have largely failed to offer a liberal framework for third-country resettlement, Syria's neighboring countries, hosting large numbers of refugees, tend to be reluctant to promote integration. As a result, the idea of repatriation, even involuntary, has emerged. Within the limitations of the conditions surrounding them (namely the IRR), refugees can also act as agents who are able to exercise action¹⁸: individual refugees' agency power can play significant role in their decision-making about their journeys. Further, within this context, different nation

states can either play a more restrictive or a more liberal role with regards to return depending on the socio-political and economic climates.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan: A Historical Synopsis

To understand the recent tendency towards return, it is vital to highlight the larger setting in each of these three national contexts in the region (Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan) in terms of the refugee flows and evolution of settlement policies. Across these countries, the initial response was to allow the flow of refugees by maintaining an open-door policy. In Lebanon and Jordan, the open-door policy came as a natural continuation of the prior bilateral treaties between these countries and Syria permitting reciprocal freedom of movement and work permits. Consequently, the UNHCR figures in 2013 indicated that the number of Syrian refugees in each of these three countries reached over a quarter of a million. In 2018, there were more than 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, nearly one million in Lebanon, and more than a half million in Jordan.

With some exceptions, all three countries adopted a largely non-encampment policy. The Turkish government initially adopted an encampment policy, but as the number of arrivals continued to increase they could not accommodate them further. Currently only six per cent of the refugees are in camps in Turkey. Jordan had initially refused to have camps, but then established six camps hosting nearly one-fifth of refugees. In contrast, Lebanon consistently refused to establish formal camps due to its previous experience with Palestinians.¹⁹ Regarding the legal status of the refugees, neither the Lebanese nor the Jordanian government are signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention; as such, neither recognize refugees' status. Turkey, though a signatory of the 1951 Convention, retains the original geographical focus on Europe

and did not initially give Syrians official refugee status either but later granted them temporary protection.²⁰ In the first years of the conflict, the policies of these three countries asserted the temporariness of the refugees, based on the assumption that the crisis would end in a relatively short period of time and the refugees would return. The approach started to differ between countries as years progressed.

In the early years of the Syrian crisis, Turkey maintained a positive response to the refugee flows from Syria, perceived as a humanitarian issue. An official discourse centering around the notion of ‘guests’ prevailed. In 2013, the foreign minister at the time, Davutoğlu, defined the Syrians as guests and brothers, stressing that closing the doors to them should be ruled out.²¹ In 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Kurtulmuş represented the hosting of refugees as ‘Ansar’.²² In addition, the presence of Syrians was perceived as having a positive effect on future Turkey-Syria relations.²³ The Lebanese government did not formalize a national response to the refugee presence, instead transferring responsibility for the country’s refugees to organizations such as the UNHCR.²⁴ The option of permanent settlement and integration was never viable. Similarly, in Jordan, Minister for International Cooperation and Planning Fakhoury insisted that there would not be a repeat of the level of integration enjoyed by Palestinian refugees²⁵ from 1948.²⁶ However, the government views the refugee population as an opportunity for national development, stressing the economic aspect of the refugee presence.²⁷ As time progressed, the increasing numbers of refugees combined with fears about potential security threats and spill-over of war from ISIS members across the border led to the securitization of borders through tough visa requirements and surveillance mechanisms to block migrants’ access to these three countries with air and ground military equipment. The entry of Syrians was limited to ‘extreme humanitarian cases’.

Though Turkey implemented visa restrictions for Syrians entering the country as of 2015, as a response to the protracted refugee situation, it provided legal grounds for Syrians to be classified as ‘persons under temporary protection’ and gave Syrians more rights than other refugees in the country, including access to a work permit, health services and education.²⁸ This indicates that the Turkish authorities circuitously accepted the likelihood of the long-term settlement of Syrians, in contrast to the two other countries that kept the refugees in an extremely vulnerable situation. It has continuously been developing strategies to integrate refugees especially those with capitals. Since the Turkey-EU deal in 2016, EU-funded initiatives were introduced to facilitate refugee access to education and employment. In addition, it has been offering citizenship status to skilled migrants with economic and cultural capital to retain them.²⁹

Jordan also closed its border, citing an ongoing security threat, and moved from a liberal policy with regard to the employment of Syrians to a strict one.³⁰ However, since 2015, Syrians have again been granted access to the labor market and various measures have been taken to facilitate the issuance of permits,³¹ as a part of the Compact deal of 2016, in return for billions of dollars in grants, loans and preferential trade agreements with the EU.³² In Lebanon, the government took greater control over the presence of Syrians and adopted its first clear policy in 2014 to decrease their number by reducing access to its territory and encouraging return to Syria.³³ In May 2015, the Lebanese government instructed the UNHCR to suspend the registration of Syrian refugees. This was accompanied by further restriction of labor policies³⁴ and a stricter control of informal work at the municipal level. As a result, the percentage of Syrian refugees with residency permits decreased, leaving them in a precarious legal position. In 2017, the government assigned a State Ministry for Refugee Affairs and partially repealed strict registration and labor policies.³⁵ Yet it continued to benefit from humanitarian assistance on account of receiving refugees.

The policies of these three countries in terms of reception, encampment, and integration present a shift from an open-door policy to a stricter political stance. They each developed strategies, in the interplay between domestic and international constraints, weighing out costs and benefits in terms of the presence of refugees. Yet, in all three countries, states and societies began to feel the increasing weight of hosting large numbers of refugees and started to bring up the issue of return in the absence of responsibility sharing from developed countries.

Rising Calls for Return: A Societal and Political Account

In all three countries, there has been a growing discontent within the host communities to various degrees. The public rhetoric gradually worsened, xenophobic tendencies and discrimination are perceived to be on the rise as follows. There has been an increasingly growing sentiment that refugees are a burden on the economy and infrastructure. Citizens of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan feel that they are in competition with Syrian refugees for limited resources and are demanding their welfare rights.³⁶

In Turkey, the solidarity of society toward Syrian refugees slowly faded,³⁷ especially as the government progressively took steps to provide social services, employment rights and citizenship, and the public perceived Syrians as competing for the same resources. These feelings are further exacerbated by the fact that these decisions are often made by state officials without consultation with the public and without giving details on implementation. Another main reason behind the growing discontent is related to domestic politics in the country.³⁸ The current Justice and Development Party (JDP) government has taken a hardline position in favor of Syrians' presence in Turkey. As such, those who oppose the government blame it for the presence of refugees. According to the Syrians Barometer survey,³⁹ the Turkish public is not

sympathetic to the idea of sharing a future with Syrians (82 per cent). The vast majority of Turkish people defended exclusionary options such as ‘they should live in safe zones inside Syria’ (37 per cent), ‘they should be exclusively in the camps’ (28 per cent), or ‘they should all be deported’ (12 per cent). In parallel, several reports have pointed out social tensions and clashes in some neighborhoods. According to the latest ICG report,⁴⁰ incidents of intercommunal violence increased threefold in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. Similarly, host communities developed negative perceptions regarding the extended refugee presence in Lebanon. According to El Gantri and El Mufti,⁴¹ many accuse refugees of endangering their livelihoods and the national economy. In addition, perceptions of Syrians are often attributed to past resentment due to the pre-2005 Syrian presence.⁴² A proportion of 92 per cent agreed that the presence of Syrian refugees is placing strain on Lebanon’s resources, 42 per cent living in vulnerable areas reported knowing someone who lost their job or business to a Syrian, and 49 per cent indicated that relations with Syrian refugees have worsened since 2014.⁴³ For Jordanians, the highly visible presence of many thousands of refugees has raised fears over competition for resources and opportunities,⁴⁴ especially in the northern governorates. Over the years, it appears that public opinion on Syrian refugees has become increasingly critical. However, according to a survey of 1,600 Jordanian citizens,⁴⁵ almost all consider Syrian refugees (‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’) as brothers. Yet, concerns emerged relating to the economy and development followed by social, political and security issues.

There appears to be growing discontent to a varying extent in public opinion in all three countries. We postulate that this might be influencing official discourse and practices. It should be noted that there is a significant body of literature on policy responsiveness suggesting that policy makers tend to respond to the demands of the public, particularly in the field of

immigration and asylum issues, in order to ensure the support of their citizens.⁴⁶ Parallel to the worsening public opinion, and in the absence of options of integration of refugees and of resettlement to third countries, officials in the host countries have brought up the return discourse and suggested concrete mechanisms.

In 2015, as Turkey was hosting nearly 2.5 million refugees and the European countries facing refugee ‘flows’, were trying to protect their borders, the Turkish authorities would highlight the question of ‘responsibility sharing against responsibility shifting’. It is within this context that Turkey’s President Erdogan, visiting EU authorities in Brussels in 2015, demanded support to solve the migration crisis:

Despite the huge refugee influx, which had so far costed Turkey around €8bn, Turkey continues to maintain its open-door policy; but there is a need for European countries to also take responsibility... The migrant crisis could be solved in three easy steps: training and equipping the Syrian opposition, declaring a safe zone along the border in northern Syria where Isis fighters would be cleared, and refugees could be resettled by creating a no-fly zone. ⁴⁷

It thus appears that the question of return of Syrian refugees was already on the agendas of the Turkish authorities at that time. In 2016, after years of an open-door policy and after having introduced integration policies, officials increasingly began to talk about return⁴⁸. This constituted a U-turn that possibly matched Turkey’s changing public opinion, the tensions between native populations and Syrians, the country’s degrading economy and the highly tense election period. It seemed that the government realized that the stay of Syrians in Turkey would have a political and social cost and consequently changed its rhetoric. In parallel, Turkey’s military incursions into northern Syria, which were framed as anti-terror missions, had

implications for return. President Erdoğan repeatedly mentioned the possibility of creating a safe zone in northern Syria and returning the refugees. In February 2018, he said:

*We want our refugee brothers and sisters to return to their land, to their homes. We are not in the position to hide 3.5 million here forever... we'll solve the Afrin incident, we'll solve [Syrian rebel-held] Idlib, and we would like our refugee brothers and sisters to return to their own country.*⁴⁹

Indeed, the previous Euphrates Shield Operation⁵⁰ by Turkey into Syria resulted in the return of a large number of Syrians to the Jarablus region. Similarly, following actions in Afrin, Turkey established refugee camps ahead of a possible influx according to Aksoy, Foreign Ministry spokesperson.⁵¹ He said: *'The Turkish Red Crescent and AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) started preparations to set up camps to host 170,000 people near Idlib and the areas of [the] Euphrates Shield Operation'*.⁵² The return debate thus appears to center on the creation of safe zones. Human Rights Watch highlighted that there had been mass deportations, which were denied by the Directorate General of Migration Management.⁵³ However, it seemed that the return question is always pronounced with a certain degree of caution and remains *rather latent*.

In Lebanon, as political actors continue to ask for support from international donors, all agree that the Syrians will not stay long-term. Foreign Minister Bassil has been calling for the deportation of Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis: *'Lebanon should stop receiving refugees unless for exceptional cases and the Syrians already in Lebanon should be deported'*.⁵⁴ His hostile position towards Syrian refugees aims to reassure his Christian Maronite voters that the presence of a large predominantly Muslim Sunni population of a million refugees was only temporary. Indeed, the demographic balance of Lebanon is a particularly sensitive topic. Over

the years, several propositions and mechanisms with regard to return have emerged. For instance, both Labor Minister Azzi and then-Prime Minister Salam announced plans to send refugees back to Syria over a two-year period. Minister of Social Affairs Bouassi suggested giving incentives to Syrian families to go back. The anti-refugee rhetoric reached its highest point in 2017, following fights with the Nusra Front group in Aarsal. In response, non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah, negotiated the repatriation of Syrian refugees with militant groups, without the direct involvement of the Lebanese government or the United Nations. About 10,000 people returned from Aarsal and Shebaa.⁵⁵ According to Human Rights Watch, many Syrians have returned under indirect pressure, namely harsh conditions, lack of legal residency, restrictions on freedom of movement, and fear of random arrests.⁵⁶ Most recently, Syrian refugees are being forced to tear down their own homes in the face of an aggressive new campaign to pressure refugees into returning home.⁵⁷ Hezbollah and its allies present dialogue and coordination directly with the Syrian government as prerequisites for the return of the refugees.⁵⁸ The Lebanese government (especially the anti-Syrian regime parties) has been unwilling to negotiate with the Syrian government so as not to jeopardize the international community's support. Prime minister, Hariri, instead advocates for mediation from international agencies.⁵⁹ In addition, disagreement appears to be related to the perception of safety. President Aoun considers that: 'There are currently safe zones larger than Lebanon, including agriculture lands, that one can work in'.⁶⁰ He also stated in 2017 at the UN General Assembly that he believes that return should occur as early as possible. However, Hariri, on many occasions, indicated being strongly opposed, questioning the safety of the refugees in Syria and insisted that Lebanon would not force refugees to return but rather called for more international help. However, in 2018, Hariri started expressing his support for efforts that are being exerted to support refugees' return.⁶¹ In addition, all parties in Lebanon have been advocating for de-escalation zones for the repatriation of Syrian refugees with the support of

international organizations. Merhebi, a member of Hariri's Future Movement, Minister of Affairs of the Displaced ⁶² voiced it as follows:

Lebanon supports UN efforts to settle the Syrian crisis and consequently ensure the safe return of refugees to their country... If safe zones are established, we would consider it a good thing because this would reduce the killings in Syria... There will be no forceful repatriation by the Lebanese government, in line with our commitments to international human rights.

Return seems to be the default option, among all parties, and some returns have already taken place; in total, UNHCR reported 172,796 self-organized refugee returns to Syria between 2016 and 2019: 61,000 from Turkey, 39,000 from Lebanon, 36,000 from Jordan and 33,000 from Iraq⁶³, however, the perception of safety and timing of the returns are strongly debated. This has resulted in feuds between the Lebanese government and UNHCR, with the former accusing the latter of standing in the way of voluntary return of Syrians.⁶⁴

The official discourse in Jordan seems the least unfavorable to the influx of refugees. Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Momani states the following: '*Jordan is proud of its track record regarding hosting and helping refugees*'.⁶⁵ Following the car bomb attack in 2016, it was reported that deportations were carried out.⁶⁶ Around 2,300 were deported in 2017.⁶⁷ However, Jordan rejected these claims, as Momani told the local media: 'Jordan is abiding by the international law in this regard... The return of the Syrian refugees is voluntary and in such cases the return is to areas where there is no threat to their lives'.⁶⁸

In addition to deportations, economic difficulties may have also been the cause of some returns. In 2017, similar to the two other neighboring countries, Jordan created safe zones in

southwest Syria to 'soften the flow of refugees into Jordan' and protect Jordanian territory from pro-Iran militias in Syria'.⁶⁹ In February 2018, Prime Minister al-Mulki commented that Jordan had reached its capacity to provide services, spend national resources, and expand social and physical infrastructure to absorb refugees.⁷⁰ However, the situation, as in the case of the two other countries, constitutes an opportunity for bargaining for support from international donors. In this context, the return discourse was never officially brought up. Indeed, the Prime Minister presents the prospect of return to Syria as an unlikely occurrence:

*The prospects of an impending return to Syria ... are still remote. Even if a peaceful solution materializes, it will take years to rebuild Syria and for Syrians to resettle. This means that Jordan will have to continue bearing the mounting costs of the crisis and facing the ever-increasing challenges to the social and economic fabric of the country.*⁷¹

In all cases, it is unclear to what extent returns have been voluntary or forced. In Turkey, the return discourse has been tackled cautiously and linked to safe zones. In Lebanon, return seems the default option among all parties, and some returns have already taken place. However, the safety perceptions and the timing of the returns are strongly debated. The return discourse is the least discussed in Jordan, despite some reports of deportations. Furthermore, in 2018, agreements were reached by the major players (Russia and the US) which 'would see two million Syrian refugees return to their lands and grant safety guarantees'.⁷²

Can Return be a Viable Option? Views from Syria and Syrian Refugees

As the crisis in Syria continues and Europe is guarding its borders and restricting resettlement, neighboring countries are growing wearier of having to shoulder the presence of Syrian refugees in the long-term. The return discourse, as we have demonstrated above, has

increasingly surfaced in host states. To assess its viability, we look at the conditions in Syria and analyze the perceptions about return among Syrians in these three countries.

By examining the situation in Syria, it is difficult to argue that the conditions for safe return are met. In the last eight years, the conflict has caused extensive damage to Syria's physical infrastructure, including the provision of water and electricity, and to its social infrastructure such as schools and healthcare centers. It is estimated that the war has damaged about a third of the housing stock and led to significant economic loss.⁷³ Over half of the country's pre-conflict population has been forcibly displaced. In early 2018, three main factors characterized the situation in Syria. First, ISIS is substantially, but not completely, defeated and some small areas in Syria are still under the control of ISIS. Second, the Assad regime seems to stay in power, and controls the near totality of Syria's territory. Third, despite peace talks, clashes continue between the Assad regime, local opposition groups, and foreign powers. Given this picture, some claim that a de-escalation deal will mark a step towards the final phase of the Syrian civil war.⁷⁴ Many others, however, argue that the country is entering a dangerous and much more volatile phase, characterized by key stakeholders seeking to protect their interests and staking their hold on the ground.⁷⁵ In short, despite some major changes, a peaceful resolution remains elusive. Although there have been instances of repatriations following temporary procurements of security, through arrangements with state or non-state actors or implementation of safe zones, Syria is still at war. In the second half of 2019, Idlib, the last opposition stronghold, was losing ground under the offensive of Syrian government forces backed by Russian airpower and this topic has become an internationally debated hot topic. Despite the fact that Turkey hopes to return Syrian refugees to the northeastern area, which it wants to extend 30 kilometers into Syrian territory, return is being rendered progressively much more difficult, especially for government opposition. In fact, on the contrary, the Idlib offensive

could lead to a fresh wave of refugees and subsequent agreement between Turkey, Iran and Russia on the formation of a committee to draft a new Syrian constitution to normalize the situation in Syria and legitimize the regime⁷⁶, renders the return progressively more difficult, especially for government opposition members.

As such, when we talk of return, we need to consider that the Assad regime claims that there are ‘definitely’ terrorists among the refugees. The mass exile of Syrians is a by-product of a ‘legitimate war’ for Syria to become ‘a homogenous society’.⁷⁷ In addition, it introduced a law (Law No. 10 of 2018) that requires property holders in Syria to formally prove ownership of their private property within a period of 30 days (now extended to one year) or face confiscation.⁷⁸ The fact that many may not be able to return to their own homes or will not be able to get their properties back makes the sustainability of return questionable. More recently, as of May 2018, Assad and his allies have been promoting the idea of return to fuel the perception that the war is ending.⁷⁹ For instance, returnees from Lebanon are to be vetted by Syrian intelligence, in coordination with Lebanon’s General Security intelligence agency and return is to happen to regions under the control of Assad. This position is not shared by all politicians in Lebanon as Hariri and those who oppose Assad insist the UN must oversee returns.

Meanwhile, the perceptions of the Syrian refugees themselves concerning return need to be considered in the context of the aforementioned discourse. Surveys looking at refugee perceptions in each of these three countries indicate that Syrians would like to return as soon as the situation in Syria improves. In a survey conducted by the UNHCR, a proportion of 63 per cent of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries said they would like to ‘one day’ return to Syria.⁸⁰ While survey results should be considered with caution, as results depend on the phrasing of the question, the Syrian Barometer survey⁸¹ does seem to indicate that the majority of interviewed Syrians in Turkey (61 per cent) will return to Syria if the war ends and a good

government is established. Only 16 per cent stated that they would not return to Syria under any circumstances. Similarly, most refugees in Jordan hoped to return to Syria when it was safe to do so.⁸² In addition, many refugees stay in Lebanon despite the hardships in order to stay close to Syria, hoping to return one day.⁸³

Further, the decision to return is not straightforward but varies according to socio-economic status, age, religious affiliation, level of Turkish language and geographical region.⁸⁴ The primary factors that appear to play a determinant role in the decision to return is safety and security.⁸⁵ According to research by Oxfam, most refugees from Syria in Lebanon stated that they cannot go back because it is not safe.⁸⁶ Syrian refugees prioritize a durable solution to the conflict. For that, they would need to receive reliable information on the situation. Furthermore, Syrian refugees reject any proposals that could lead to Syria's fragmentation and have no confidence in safe zones.⁸⁷ There is fear of persecution under Assad's regime and young men fear conscription to the army.⁸⁸ Another main factor that determines return decisions appears to be going back to their own regions; as such, the idea of safe zones in another area of the country is not compatible with their views. Those who are most likely to go back are those whose areas of origin have not been severely affected by the conflict. For others, return would be difficult because of the destruction of their houses⁸⁹ and would require compensation for the loss of property. The 2005 UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees sets the expectation that individuals should be able to return not only to their countries of origin, but to their actual homes.⁹⁰ This becomes even more difficult as Assad introduced Law n.10, which may see the state confiscating the lands of millions of refugees.⁹¹

It thus appears that the notion of a 'voluntary return' of refugees is not fully meaningful at present. In addition, in light of current events, we might expect that if Assad stays in power, the opposition members will not want or be able to return, even less so in the absence of property rights. Finally here, one must recall that the UNHCR has an internationally recognized

key role in a well-functioning repatriation process,⁹² however as emphasized earlier the three conditions for viable return must be fulfilled, in addition, the violence on the ground must end completely, and there needs to be a functioning political authority in Syria. Naturally, external powers who are already heavily involved in the “Syrian crisis” also play a role in this question of return. It is observed that there is a common push by external actors towards normalization of the situation and repatriation, expecting to gain from reconstruction profit, even though the three conditions for viable return are not met. For instance, it is argued that the payback for Russia for its intervention will be through reconstruction profit.⁹³ Turkey also aggressively wishes to take its part in Syrian reconstruction⁹⁴. Some other countries, such as Iran, the US and some Arab and EU countries also want to be part of the reconstruction process to different degrees.

Conclusion

The option of return of Syrian refugees has increasingly emerged in the political discourse in parallel to the relative absence of practices of integration of refugees in host countries and of resettlement to third countries. It is further exacerbated by the politicization of the IRR over time, particularly after experiencing the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe in 2015. Elaborating on the recent return debates, this paper highlights the politicization of the return question in all three neighboring host countries to different degrees, often under the influence of public opinion and international and domestic politics, which lead to the growing acceptance of repatriation as a solution to the global Syrian refugee question. Though returns are occurring and the situation in Syria is progressively portrayed in the media and official discourse as coming close to an end, conditions are still far from acceptable in terms of safety, voluntariness and sustainability. Indeed, Syria is still in a heavy conflict situation, its territories

are under the control of various internal or foreign forces, more than half of its population is displaced, and its internationally recognized government retains a fragile grip on power. Within this context, all three main refugee hosting countries have undertaken initiatives to create ‘safe zones’ either through military interventions in Syria by states and non-state actors or advocated for it with the support of international organizations. While securing borders with conflict zones through ‘safe zones’ may offer minimal security, it cannot offer full protection, or a durable solution to persecution and political exclusion. As noted by Davutoğlu, the main architect of Turkey’s policies towards Syria,⁹⁵ returns to safe zones often mean a temporary arrangement, a type of movement from a refugee situation to internal displacement, which necessitates another settlement program in the post-conflict period. In the meantime, the refugees themselves would want to return only when safety conditions are adequate and only to their original homes. It seems that in the cases where ‘spontaneous’ returns did happen, the question of voluntariness was not clear, as pressure also seem to have been exerted at least indirectly. All three hosting countries are increasingly becoming less open to hosting large numbers of refugees from Syria, as governments try to balance internal and regional politics. At the same time, there are serious political agenda items that derive from long-established cleavages within countries in the region associated with ethnicity, sect and other identity politics. This further complicates the ‘politics of return’.

This issue leaves us with a policy question: can a successful and legitimate repatriation program only be realized in a fully established post-conflict period when the satisfactory conditions of return have been met, or might it be implemented through safe zones before reaching an optimum post-conflict period? Although answering this question is not within the scope of this paper, we argue that the return question has become highly politicized. Therefore, we advocate for the creation of a framework that responds to contextual variations and to changing conditions, without leaving it totally up to individual countries to decide, as decisions

may be driven by public opinion or political agendas. Instead, countries should act in collaboration with international organizations and, most importantly, with the domestic political authority in Syria for the question of property rights to be resolved. Indeed, according to Long,⁹⁶ returns work best when people choose to go back through a gradual process.

The decision on safety and security can thus be considered through a triangulation of actors. Ultimately, the main decisions are taken by the nation states of what happens within their borders. However, for durable solutions, these decisions should be framed within the IRR standards for return (as in the case of the former Yugoslavia, which contributed to it being considered a relatively successful example of return).⁹⁷ Further, the refugee community should be convinced of the viability of return.

In this case, as the Syrian regime is a cause of the conflict and a part of it is still in power, collaboration remains uncertain. The Syrian regime is uneasy with the return of refugees, most of which are considered opposition, and it will be difficult to guarantee their security. One must remember that repatriation is only one of the solutions for the refugees, and there are two other possibilities: integration into the host country and resettlement to a third country. These, too, should be considered by all actors involved. There is the possibility of implementing a 'Comprehensive Plan of Action' (CPA) in the future for these 6 million displaced Syrians that includes some negotiated returns being accepted by the Assad Regime (without disappearances), some local integration, and some third country resettlement, through a UNHCR-led international cooperation, as per previous significant models considered successful such as CIREFCA for Central American refugees and CPA for Indochinese refugees⁹⁸.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) under Grant [116K828] and under Grant [116K448].

Notes

¹ Crisp, “It’s Far Too Early”; Marks, “Pushing Syrian Refugees.”

² UNHCR, “Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions.”

³ Crisp and Long, “Safe and Voluntary.”

⁴ These interviews were carried out in the scope of various projects. The first, funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), focuses on the comparison of three mass refugee flows to Turkey and a second, funded by TUBITAK and Research Council UK, focusing on Syrian youth integration in Turkey. Further interviews were held within the scope of the Experts’ Workshop ‘What does the Global Compact on Refugees mean for the MENA region?’ in February 2018.

⁵ Keely, “The International Refugee Regime(s).”

⁶ Chimni, “From Resettlement”; Chimni, “The Geopolitics”; Frelick, “Paradigm Shifts.”

⁷ Barnett, “UNHCR and Ethics”; Hathaway, “Refugee Solutions.”

⁸ Examples of repatriation namely to Ethiopia (1977-83), Yugoslavia (1996-1998) and Afghanistan (1990-2019) illustrate how the regime has evolved over time.

⁹ Chimni, “From Resettlement”; Chimni, “The Geopolitics.”

¹⁰ Frelick, “Paradigm Shifts.”

¹¹ Chimni, “From Resettlement”; Frelick, “Paradigm Shifts.”

¹² Chimni, “From Resettlement,” 55.

¹³ The first and most important application of safe zones was to protect the Kurds of Northern Iraq in 1991 during the Gulf War.

¹⁴ Frelick, “Paradigm Shifts,” 3.

¹⁵ Chimni, “From Resettlement,” 55.

¹⁶ Duffy Toft, “The Myth.”

¹⁷ Chimni, “From Resettlement”; Frelick, “Paradigm Shifts.”

¹⁸ With the absence of the classical three solutions to refugee situation, large numbers of Syrians, ‘voted with their feet’ by moving on to Europe (through Turkey) as in the summer of 2015.

¹⁹ 450,000 Palestinian refugees have come to Lebanon since 1948, 62 per cent of whom live in 12 camps according to ‘Palestinians in Lebanon’ by Hanafi (2012).

²⁰ İçduygu, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey.”

²¹ MoFA Turkey, “From Rep. of Turkey.”

²² An Islamic religious reference to the early Muslims who hosted the prophet Muhammad when he emigrated from Mecca.

²³ Memisoglu and Ilgit, “Syrian Refugees.”

²⁴ The collaboration was regulated by the terms of a Memoranda of Understanding signed between the UNHCR and Lebanon and Jordan to regulate the main aspects of refugee protection.

²⁵ Jordan is currently home to 2 million Palestinian refugees, more than 337,000 of whom live in the country's 10 official refugee camps and are believed to have greatly contributed to the Jordanian economy according to ‘Palestine refugees: locations and numbers’ in The New Humanitarian published in 2010 updated in 2018.

²⁶ Lenner, “Blasts from the Past.”

²⁷ Betts, Ali, and Memisoglu, “Local Politics.”

²⁸ İçduygu, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey.”

²⁹ Koser Akcapar and Simsek, “Politics of Syrian Refugees.”

³⁰ Barbelet and Wake, “The Lives and Livelihoods.”

³¹ ILO, “Work Permits.”

³² Barbelet, Hagen-Zanker, and Mansour-Ille, “The Jordan Compact.”

³³ Janmyr, “Precarity in Exile.”

³⁴ As of 2016, Syrians are required to sign a pledge not to work and can only sustain their livelihoods through humanitarian assistance provided by the Lebanese government and with support from the international community.

³⁵ Atallah and Mahdi, “Law and Politics.”

³⁶ Abid, Manan, and Rahman, “A Flood of Syrians”; Erdogan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi*.

³⁷ ICG, “Turkey’s Syrian Refugees.”

³⁸ Memisoglu and Ilgit, “Syrian Refugees.”

³⁹ Erdogan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi*.

⁴⁰ ICG, “Turkey’s Syrian Refugees.”

⁴¹ El Gantri and El Mufti, “Not Without Dignity.”

⁴² A presence which started in 1976 during the civil war and ended in 2005 following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri

⁴³ IFIPPIA, “Syrian Refugee Crisis.”

⁴⁴ Carrion, “Syrian Refugees.”

⁴⁵ Athamneh, Momani, and Radaideh, “Jordanians’ Perceptions.”

⁴⁶ Morales, Pilet, and Ruedin, “The Gap.”

⁴⁷ Cendrowicz, “Erdogan Shames EU.”

⁴⁸ Icduygu and Ayasli, “Geri Dönüş Siyaseti: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Dönüş Göçü İhtimali ve Gelecek Senaryoları.”

⁴⁹ Daily Sabah, “Turkish Efforts.”

⁵⁰ A cross-border operation by the Turkish military and Turkey-aligned Syrian opposition groups in the Syrian Civil War, which led to the penetration of Turkish forces into northern Syria.

⁵¹ Hürriyet, “Turkey.”

⁵² Karadeniz, “Turkey.”

⁵³ HRW, “Turkey.”

⁵⁴ Firstpost, “Lebanese Minister.”

⁵⁵ Enders, “Lebanese Foreign Minister.”

⁵⁶ HRW, “Lebanon.”

⁵⁷ McKernan, “Syrian Refugees Forced.”

⁵⁸ Al-Manar, “Sayyed Nasrallah.”

⁵⁹ Reuters, “Lebanon.”

⁶⁰ The Daily Star, “Syria Not Ready.”

⁶¹ Obeid, “Hariri.”

⁶² Kadi, “Lebanon.”

⁶³ UNHCR, “Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions.”

⁶⁴ Hamdan, “Lebanon-UNHCR Feuding.”

⁶⁵ Jordanian Times, “Jordan.”

⁶⁶ Su, “Why Jordan Is Deporting.”

⁶⁷ UNHCR, “Inter-Sector Working Group.”

⁶⁸ Al-Daameh, “Jordan Rejects HRW Accusations.”

⁶⁹ Al-Makahleh, “Case for Safe Zones.”

⁷⁰ Marks, “Pushing Syrian Refugees.”

⁷¹ Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, “10th Meeting.”

⁷² The Daily Star, “Lebanon Must Benefit.”

-
- ⁷³ World Bank, “The Toll of War.”
- ⁷⁴ Kahl, Goldenberg, and Heras, “A Strategy.”
- ⁷⁵ Calamur, “The Many Wars.”
- ⁷⁶ Wilks, “Ankara Summit on Syria.”
- ⁷⁷ Batrawi and Uzelac, “Four Ways.”
- ⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Syria’s New Property Law.”
- ⁷⁹ Alfred, “Dangerous Exit.”
- ⁸⁰ NRC et al, “Dangerous Ground.”
- ⁸¹ Erdogan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi*.
- ⁸² Barbelet and Wake, “The Lives and Livelihoods.”
- ⁸³ El Gantri and El Mufti, “Not Without Dignity.”
- ⁸⁴ Ciplak, Keser, and Erdurmaz, *Suriyeli Siginmacilarin Gelecek Beklentisi*.
- ⁸⁵ El Gantri and El Mufti, “Not Without Dignity.”
- ⁸⁶ Keith and Shawaf, “Still Looking.”
- ⁸⁷ Yahya, Kassir, and El-Hariri, “Unheard Voices.”
- ⁸⁸ Barish, “Return of Refugees.”
- ⁸⁹ Bellamy et al., “The Lives and Livelihoods.”
- ⁹⁰ Anderson, “The UN Principles.”
- ⁹¹ Ibrahim, “Syria: ‘Absentees Law.’”
- ⁹² Chimni, “Meaning of Words”; Zieck, *UNHCR and Voluntary Repatriation*.
- ⁹³ Vohra, “Russia’s Payback Will Be Syria’s Reconstruction Money.”
- ⁹⁴ Aslan, “Turkey’s Reconstruction Model in Syria.”
- ⁹⁵ Interview date: 09.04.2018
- ⁹⁶ Long, “Back.”
- ⁹⁷ Harvey, “Return Dynamics in Bosnia and Croatia.”

⁹⁸ Alexander Betts, “Comprehensive Plans of Action: Insights from CIREFCA and the Indochinese CPA.”

Bibliography

Abid, Raith Zeher, Shakila Abdul Manan, and Zuhair Abdul Amir Abdul Rahman. “‘A Flood of Syrians Has Slowed to a Trickle’: The Use of Metaphors in the Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Online Media News Reports of Host and Non-Host Countries.” *Discourse & Communication* 11, no. 2 (April 2017): 121–40. doi:10.1177/1750481317691857.

Al-Daameh, Mohammed. “Jordan Rejects HRW Accusations of Forced Deportation of Syrians.” News. *Asharq Al-Awsat*, March 10, 2017. <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1041086/jordan-rejects-hrw-accusations-forced-deportation-syrians>.

Alexander Betts. “Comprehensive Plans of Action: Insights from CIREFCA and the Indochinese CPA.” Working Paper. NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH, January 2006.

Alfred, Charlotte. “Dangerous Exit: Who Controls How Syrians in Lebanon Go Home.” *Refugees*, August 8, 2018. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2018/08/08/dangerous-exit-who-controls-how-syrians-in-lebanon-go-home>.

Al-Makahleh, Shehab. “The Case for Safe Zones in Syria.” *Fair Observer*, May 13, 2017. https://www.fairobservers.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/military-intervention-syria-jordan-middle-east-news-analysis-71330/.

-
- Al-Manar. "Sayyed Nasrallah Hails 'Historical' Mosul Victory: Chance to Eradicate ISIL Completely." *Al-Manar TV Lebanon*, July 11, 2017. <https://english.almanar.com.lb/302806>.
- Anderson, M. J. "The UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (The Pinheiro Principles): Suggestions for Improved Applicability." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 304–22. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer005.
- Aslan, Murat. "Turkey's Reconstruction Model in Syria." SETA report, 2019.
- Atallah, Sami, and Dima Mahdi. "Law and Politics of 'Safe Zones' and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon." Policy Paper. Beirut: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, October 2017.
- Athamneh, Abdel Baset, Fawwaz Ayoub Momani, and Yusra S. Radaideh. "Jordanians' Perceptions of the Spillovers of the Syrian Refugee Crisis." Irbid: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migration Studies Center - Yarmouk University, November 2016.
- Barbelet, Veronique, Jessica Hagen-Zanker, and Dina Mansour-Ille. "The Jordan Compact: Lessons Learnt and Implications for Future Refugee Compacts." Briefing papers. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), February 2018. <https://www.odi.org/publications/11045-jordan-compact-lessons-learnt-and-implications-future-refugee-compacts>.
- Barbelet, Veronique, and Caitlin Wake. "The Lives and Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Jordan." Summary Report. UK: Overseas Development Institute (ODI), February 2017. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11344.pdf>.
- Barish, Manhal. "Return of Refugees: Russia Initiates Political Debate between Damascus and Neighboring Countries." *Alquds Newspaper*, April 8, 2018. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=988032>.

Barnett, Michael. "UNHCR and the Ethics of Repatriation," 31–34. Los Angeles, 2000.

<http://www.ciaonet.org/isa>.

Batrawi, Samar, and Ana Uzelac. "Four Ways in Which the Syrian Regime Controls Return." CRU Policy Brief. Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, September 2018.

Bellamy, Catherine, Simone Haysom, Caitlin Wake, and Veronique Barbelet. "The Lives and Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees: A Study of Refugee Perspectives and Their Institutional Environment in Turkey and Jordan." Overseas Development Institute (ODI), February 2017. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58bd75394.html>.

Betts, Alexander, Ali Ali, and Fulya Memisoglu. "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis." UK: Refugee Studies Centre - University of Oxford, November 24, 2017.

Calamur, Krishnadev. "The Many Wars Within Syria's War." *The Atlantic*, February 13, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/syria-conflict/553154/>.

Carrion, Doris. "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Difficult Truths." London: Chatham House, September 2015.

Cendrowicz, Leo. "Erdogan Shames EU with Turkish Stance on Syrian Refugees." News. *The Independent*, October 5, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/president-erdogan-shames-eu-with-turkish-stance-on-syrian-refugee-crisis-a6680846.html>.

Chimni, B. S. "From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 55–73. doi:10.1093/rsq/23.3.55.

———. "The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (January 1, 1998): 350–74. doi:10.1093/jrs/11.4.350-a.

-
- . “The Meaning of Words and the Role of UNHCR in Voluntary Repatriation.” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 442–60. doi:10.1093/ijrl/5.3.442.
- Ciplak, Bilal, Ahmet Keser, and Ali Serdar Erdurmaz. *Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Gelecek Beklentisi*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2017.
- Crisp, Jeff. “It’s Far Too Early to Talk of Return for Syrian Refugees.” *Chatham House*, August 10, 2018. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/31020>.
- Crisp, Jeff, and Katy Long. “Safe and Voluntary Refugee Repatriation: From Principle to Practice.” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 4, no. 3 (2016): 141–47. doi:10.14240/jmhs.v4i3.65.
- Daily Sabah. “Turkish Efforts in Afrin, Idlib Will Allow Syrians to Return Home.” News. *Daily Sabah*, August 2, 2018. <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/02/09/turkish-efforts-in-afrin-idlib-will-allow-syrians-to-return-home>.
- Duffy Toft, Monica. “The Myth of the Borderless World: Refugees and Repatriation Policy.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24, no. 2 (April 2007): 139–57. doi:10.1080/07388940701257549.
- El Gantri, Rim, and Karim El Mufti. “Not Without Dignity Views of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon on Displacement, Conditions of Return, and Coexistence.” Research Report. UK: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2017.
- Enders, David. “Lebanese Foreign Minister Battles UNHCR over Refugee Policy on Return.” *The National*, June 11, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/lebanese-foreign-minister-battles-unhcr-over-refugee-policy-on-return-1.739062>.
- Erdogan, Murat. *Suriyeliler Barometresi: Suriyelilerle Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi*. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018.

-
- Firstpost. "Lebanese Minister Calls for Deporting Syrian Refugees." *Firstpost*, September 28, 2013. <http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/lebanese-minister-calls-for-deporting-syrian-refugees-1139137.html>.
- Frelick, Bill. "Paradigm Shifts in the International Response to Refugees." In *Fear of Persecution: Global Human Rights, International Law, and Human Well-Being*, edited by James White and Anthony Marsella. Lexington Books, 2007.
- Hamdan, Hanan. "Lebanon-UNHCR Feuding over Syrian Refugees." *Al-Monitor*, July 6, 2018. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/lebanon-syrian-displaced-voluntary-return-unhcr.html>.
- Harvey, Joanna. "Return Dynamics in Bosnia and Croatia: A Comparative Analysis." *International Migration* 44, no. 3 (2006): 89–144. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2006.00373.x.
- Hathaway, James C. "Refugee Solutions, or Solutions to Refugeehood?" *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2007). <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/21378>.
- HRW. "Lebanon: Refugees in Border Zone at Risk." *Human Rights Watch*, September 20, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/20/lebanon-refugees-border-zone-risk>.
- . "Turkey: Mass Deportations of Syrians." *Human Rights Watch*, March 22, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/22/turkey-mass-deportations-syrians>.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). "Syria's New Property Law." *Human Rights Watch*, May 29, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/29/qa-syrias-new-property-law>.
- Hürriyet. "Turkey to Establish Refugee Camps in Nine Regions of Idlib Ahead of Possible Afrin Influx." *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 6, 2018. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-establish-refugee-camps-in-nine-regions-of-idlib-ahead-of-possible-afrin-influx-128297>.

-
- Ibrahim, Arwa. "Syria: 'Absentees Law' Could See Millions of Refugees Lose Lands | Syria News | Al Jazeera." News. *Al Jazeera*, July 4, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/syria-absentees-law-millions-refugees-lose-lands-180407073139495.html>.
- İçduygu, Ahmet. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey. The Long Road Ahead." Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, April 2015.
- Icduygu, Ahmet, and Enes Ayasli. "Geri Dönüş Siyaseti: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Dönüş Göçü İhtimali ve Gelecek Senaryoları." Mirekoc Working Paper. Istanbul, April 2019.
- ICG. "Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions." Europe Report. Brussels: ICG, January 29, 2018. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions>.
- IFIPPIA. "Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: Fatigue in Numbers." Issam Fares Institute Public Policy and International Affairs, April 2018.
- ILO. "Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Towards Formalising the Work of Syrian Refugees." Beirut: International Labour Organization Regional Office for Arab States, 2017.
- Janmyr, Maja. "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 58–78. doi:10.1093/rsq/hdw016.
- Jordanian Times. "Jordan Says World's Failure to Deal with Refugee Plight Has Led to Current Crisis." *Jordan Times*, September 5, 2015. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-says-world%E2%80%99s-failure-deal-refugee-plight-has-led-current-crisis>.

-
- Kadi, Samar. "Lebanon Seeking a Long-Delayed Syrian Refugee Policy." *Arab Weekly*, March 12, 2017. <https://thearabweekly.com/lebanon-seeking-long-delayed-syrian-refugee-policy>.
- Kahl, Colin H., Ilan Goldenberg, and Nicholas A. Heras. "A Strategy for Ending the Syrian Civil War." Middle East Security Program. Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 7, 2017. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/a-strategy-for-ending-the-syrian-civil-war>.
- Karadeniz, Tulay. "Turkey to Set up Camps for 170,000 People near Syria's Idlib:..." *Reuters*, March 7, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-settlementen/turkey-to-set-up-camps-for-170000-people-near-syrias-idlib-sources-idUSKCN1GI0ST>.
- Keely, Charles B. "The International Refugee Regime(s): The End of the Cold War Matters." *The International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 303–14.
- Keith, Amy, and Nour Shawaf. "Still Looking for Safety: Voices of Refugees from Syria on Solutions for the Present and Future," June 20, 2017.
- Koser Akcapar, Sebnem, and Dogus Simsek. "The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship." *Social Inclusion* 6, no. 1 (March 29, 2018): 176. doi:10.17645/si.v6i1.1323.
- Lenner, K. "Blasts from the Past: Policy Legacies and Memories in the Making of the Jordanian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis." EUI Working Paper. MWP Red Number Series, 2016.
- Long, Katy. "Back to Where You Once Belonged - A Historical Review of UNHCR Policy and Practice on Refugee Repatriation." Policy Development and Evaluation Service. UNHCR, September 2013.

-
- Marks, Jesse. "Pushing Syrian Refugees to Return." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 1, 2018. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/75684>.
- McKernan, Bethan. "Syrian Refugees Forced to Destroy Their Own Homes in Lebanon." *The Guardian*, June 30, 2019, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/30/syrian-refugees-forced-destroy-own-homes-lebanon>.
- Memisoglu, Fulya, and Asli Ilgit. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Multifaceted Challenges, Diverse Players and Ambiguous Policies." *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 317–38. doi:10.1080/13629395.2016.1189479.
- Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. "10th Meeting of the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis Remarks of H.E. Prime Minister, Dr. Hani Al-Mulki," 2018.
- MoFA Turkey. "From Rep. of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs." *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, July 9, 2013. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-we-will-stand-by-the-syrian-people-until-they-live-with-honor-in-all-around-syria.en.mfa>.
- Morales, Laura, Jean-Benoit Pilet, and Didier Ruedin. "The Gap between Public Preferences and Policies on Immigration: A Comparative Examination of the Effect of Politicisation on Policy Congruence." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 9 (July 29, 2015): 1495–1516. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2015.1021598.
- NRC et al. "Dangerous Ground - Syria's Refugees Face an Uncertain Future | NRC." Jordan: Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, CARE, Action Against Hunger USA, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, February 2018. <https://www.nrc.no/dangerous-ground---syrias-refugees-face-an-uncertain-future>.

-
- Obeid, Ghinwa. "Hariri Set to Meet Russian Delegation to Discuss Refugees Return." *The Daily Star*, July 25, 2018. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jul-25/457814-hariri-set-to-meet-russian-delegation-to-discuss-refugees-return.ashx>.
- Reuters. "Lebanon Will Coordinate Refugee Returns to Syria Only with U.N.: PM..." *Reuters*, July 14, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-syria/lebanon-will-coordinate-refugee-returns-to-syria-only-with-u-n-pm-hariri-idUSKBN19Z1M4>.
- Su, Alice. "Why Jordan Is Deporting Syrian Refugees." *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/jordan-syrian-refugees-deportation/543057/>.
- The Daily Star. "Lebanon Must Benefit from Proposed US-Russia Deal to Return Refugees," July 22, 2018. http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jul-22/457435-lebanon-must-benefit-from-proposed-us-russia-deal-to-return-refugees-geagea.ashx?utm_source=Magnet&utm_medium=Recommended%20Articles%20widget&utm_campaign=Magnet%20tools.
- . "Syria Not Ready for Return of Refugees: German President," January 30, 2018. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jan-30/436042-syria-not-ready-for-return-of-refugees-german-president.ashx>.
- UNHCR. "Inter-Sector Working Group, Jordan: Protection Sector Quarterly Report (July 2017 – September 2017)." UN High Commissioner for Refugees, September 30, 2017. <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/inter-sector-working-group-jordan-protection-sector-quarterly-report-july-2017>.
- . "Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions," June 13, 2019. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions.

-
- Vohra, Anchal. "Russia's Payback Will Be Syria's Reconstruction Money." *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/05/russias-payback-will-be-syrias-reconstruction-money/>.
- Wilks, Andrew. "Ankara Summit on Syria: 'A Win for Moscow and al-Assad.'" *Al Jazeera*, September 17, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/ankara-summit-syria-win-moscow-assad-190917051916123.html>.
- World Bank. "The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria." World Bank, July 10, 2017.
- Yahya, Maha, Jean Kassir, and Khalil El-Hariri. "Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home." *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 16, 2018. <https://carnegie-mec.org/2018/04/16/unheard-voices-what-syrian-refugees-need-to-return-home-pub-76050>.
- Zieck, Marjoleine. *UNHCR and Voluntary Repatriation of Refugees: A Legal Analysis*. Brill Nijhoff, 1997. <https://brill.com/view/title/10387>.