



Resolution 2224 (2018)¹
Provisional version

The humanitarian situation of refugees in the countries neighbouring Syria

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its earlier work on the humanitarian situation of refugees in Syria, its neighbouring countries and the whole region, and in particular to [Resolution 2107 \(2016\)](#) on a stronger European response to the Syrian refugee crisis and [Resolution 1971 \(2014\)](#) “Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance?”.
2. Furthermore, it refers to its earlier work concerning the human rights of refugees and general principles underlying the management of mass population displacement that is fully relevant and applicable to the situation in Syria’s neighbouring countries and surrounding region, and in particular: [Resolution 2164 \(2017\)](#) on possible ways to improve the funding of emergency refugee situations; [Resolution 2109 \(2016\)](#) on the situation of refugees and migrants under the EU–Turkey Agreement of 18 March 2016; [Resolution 2089 \(2016\)](#) on organised crime and migrants; [Resolution 2099 \(2016\)](#) on the need to eradicate statelessness of children; and [Resolution 2136 \(2016\)](#) on harmonising the protection of unaccompanied minors in Europe.
3. The region is currently both the source and recipient of the largest numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons globally, and Syria’s neighbours are among the countries with both the highest refugee-to-population ratio and absolute numbers of refugees. As at 1 June 2018, there were over 3.6 million registered refugees in Turkey, 2.7 million in Jordan, 1.8 million in Lebanon and 267 000 in Iraq.
4. The entire region had been subject to mass forced population movements for many years as a result of armed conflicts including the civil war in Lebanon, the Gulf wars and the war in Yemen. These movements took place in the context of the long-term displacement of third and fourth generation Palestinian refugees. While Syria and Yemen are currently at the core of the large-scale displacements, there is significant protracted displacement from other countries, particularly from Iraq.
5. The outbreak of military hostilities in Syria in 2011 and the ensuing influx of refugees overstretched reception capacities and put enormous strain on the economies, social services and populations of the neighbouring countries. Over 5.3 million Syrian refugees out of the 11 million in total who had fled the country are currently registered in one of the neighbouring countries.
6. Confronted with a humanitarian tragedy of this scale, the neighbouring countries have not always been able, despite international assistance, to provide refugees with adequate material reception conditions. To their credit, it should be underlined that they left their borders open for Syrian refugees during the peak arrivals. Regrettably, at present the borders remain closed except for critical medical cases and there have been reported returns of refugees on an involuntary basis.
7. The legal framework governing refugee issues in Syria’s neighbouring countries is far from satisfactory. In particular, all of these countries should ratify as a priority the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees without exemption clauses and its 1967 Protocol, and introduce, if they have not already done so, adequate legislation regulating services offered to refugees, including access to health care, education and work governed by the principle of non-discrimination.

1. *Assembly debate* on 26 June 2018 (21st Sitting) (see [Doc. 14569](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Mr Manlio Di Stefano). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 June 2018 (21st Sitting).



8. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between 75% and 90% of Syrian refugees in the region live below the poverty line. More than 2.5 million require continuous food assistance. 43% of Syrian refugee children were out of school as of June 2017. These figures should, however, be considered in the context of the economic situation of the countries concerned as well as of the living conditions of the local population.
9. With a view to sustaining the efforts of the neighbouring countries, which are continuously confronted with a refugee influx, greater financial support from the international community is indispensable. The comprehensive approach adopted by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan under the aegis of the United Nations that addresses the needs of the host communities in Syria's neighbouring countries, including refugees and the local population, is to be highly commended as responding to the challenges faced by the region.
10. There is a clear need to enhance the use of and take advantage of new technologies, including "EyePay" and a blockchain-based form of digital identity, in order to make significant financial savings and make the whole assistance process more transparent and accountable.
11. While improvement of the reception capacities of the countries across the region remains the main objective, the creation of legal pathways for resettlement, including humanitarian visas, academic scholarships, private sponsorship and labour mobility schemes, should become another priority. Furthermore, external processing of asylum applications constitutes an opportunity to improve the situation and should be seriously considered.
12. The Assembly therefore calls on the governments of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon to:
 - 12.1. enhance their legal framework for governing refugee issues, in particular, to ratify the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and introduce specific legislation with regard to asylum procedures governed by the principle of non-discrimination and guaranteeing fundamental freedoms;
 - 12.2. adopt and implement comprehensive domestic legislation regulating benefits offered to refugees and asylum seekers, in particular with regard to health care, education and employment;
 - 12.3. ensure a legal basis for the priority treatment of unaccompanied refugee minors and other vulnerable groups of refugees;
 - 12.4. further, adopt and implement comprehensive policies including but not limited to ease of access and staff training, in order to ensure appropriate assistance is consistently provided to all unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups of refugees, in particular women and girls;
 - 12.5. follow UNHCR recommendations with regard to stateless people;
 - 12.6. maintain an open-door policy for refugees and create appropriate reception centres at border areas with Syria to provide temporary legal protection for refugees;
 - 12.7. ensure that all returns are conducted on a voluntary basis with due respect for security and dignity;
 - 12.8. enhance mutual co-operation with the UNHCR with a view to the better management of refugee flows and the facilitation of distribution of appropriate services to refugees and asylum seekers.
13. The Assembly calls on the Government of Turkey to:
 - 13.1. abolish the geographical limitations restricting the scope of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees;
 - 13.2. return to an open-door policy for refugees and refrain from carrying out forced returns;
 - 13.3. ensure that the implementation of the EU–Turkey statement of March 2016 is carried out with full respect for the human rights of irregular migrants and refugees;
 - 13.4. meet the specific needs of unaccompanied minors and all vulnerable groups of refugees, especially women and girls.
14. Furthermore, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:
 - 14.1. step up financial contributions to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan drawn up under the auspices of the United Nations, in order to satisfy funding requirements;

14.2. step up responsibility sharing by substantially increasing the resettlement and other forms of legal admission of refugees from the region to their countries;

14.3. use all available diplomatic means to encourage fairer responsibility sharing with non-European Union countries, in particular those involved in the Middle East process such as the United States, the Russian Federation and the Gulf States.

15. The Assembly is of the opinion that all integration and social inclusion initiatives targeting refugees in the region should be supported and encouraged. The Intercultural cities programme sponsored by the Council of Europe is a good example to follow.

16. Furthermore, the Council of Europe Development Bank could be instrumental in funding integration projects for refugees in the region, as already recommended by the Assembly in its [Resolution 1971 \(2014\)](#).

17. The Assembly calls on its member States to reply positively to the pledge of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for increased contributions to its budget in order to compensate for the significant funding cuts on the part of the United States.

18. The Assembly points out that enhancing the capacity of Syria's neighbouring countries to cope with the consequences of forced displacements in the region would create more favourable conditions for refugees to return to their countries once the situation allows it. It would furthermore reduce the risk of their undertaking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean and falling prey to smugglers and traffickers and endangering their lives.