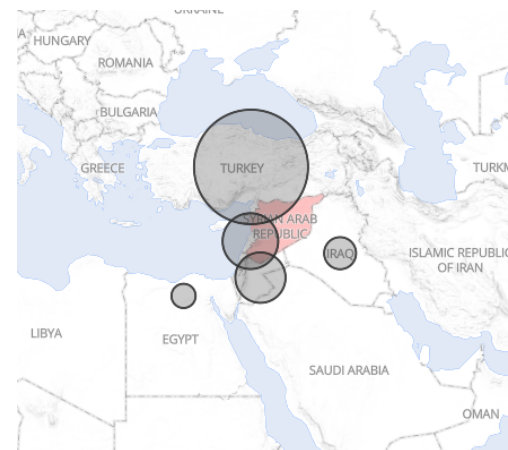


Refugee Crises: Syria

Since 2011, 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. 5.5 million refugees live in neighbouring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, but many are strewn across the globe. Germany for example, hosts 850,000 Syrian refugees.¹ These figures are all the more harrowing, when one considers that 47% of the Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries are under 18 years old.² This crisis and its implications are profound, and hence, should be understood and treated correspondingly.



Circles represent the number of Refugees housed by the neighbouring countries: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

Causes

The primary cause of the Refugee crisis is the Civil War which began in 2011. It began as a government crackdown on public demonstrations, which subsequently escalated to a point where the regime stoked sectarian tensions to divide opposition. The government can largely be seen as pro-Shia, and hence has attacked the Sunni and Kurd populations in the country, which explains the large numbers of Sunni Muslims among the refugee population.³ These ethnic conflicts are worsened by the activities of Jihadists and ISIS in the country.⁴ Currently, various ethnic groups, as well as Jihadists and ISIS, control different parts of Syria:



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International involvement has contributed to the conflict and hence, the ensuing refugee crisis. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar provided arms, cash and preachers to the Sunnis in Syria during the rising tensions with the Assad regime. Likewise, Iranian backed militias control border areas to Iraq and Lebanon. These have been targeted by Israeli airstrikes.⁶ Turkey has launched offensives against the Kurds, for fear that Syrian Kurds will encourage the separatist Kurdish movement in Turkey.

¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>

² <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>

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⁴ <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/06/28/how-a-victorious-bashar-al-assad-is-changing-syria>

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⁵ <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/03/13/ten-years-of-war-have-broken-syria-into-pieces>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

American, British and French officers are overseeing the Kurdish-led force in North-East Syria.⁷ France and Britain agreed to send further forces to Syria in 2019 in aid of US troop withdrawals.⁸ There are thus many stakeholders at play in this conflict which helps explain the longevity and destruction caused by it – together, that has heightened the need for many Syrians to flee their country.

Natural disasters have likewise exacerbated the living conditions in Syria. The country was adversely affected by Cholera and Covid-19.⁹ In addition, The Turkey-Syria earthquakes in February 2023 displaced 150,000 households across Syria due to the destruction of buildings and homes. The earthquake also struck areas of Turkey where there were already many vulnerable Syrian refugees.¹⁰

Consequences:

Whilst most Syrian refugees are not living in refugee camps, 70% of Syrian refugees are living in poverty.¹¹ It is extremely difficult for them to source sufficient food and pay for essential services. In Turkey and Jordan, refugee mobility is limited and work opportunities are scarce.¹² In Lebanon, many refugees have few legal opportunities to earn money and they struggle to afford residency fees, rent, utilities and food.¹³ Refugee children have been especially damaged by the conflict with more than a third of them not having access to education.¹⁴ Likewise, they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and child labour when they do live in camps.¹⁵ Whilst refugee support may have been more extensive in European host countries, refugees have still faced discrimination from and tensions with host communities.

For Syria, the loss of so many citizens has been devastating. The economy has shrunk massively and swathes of the educated class have fled.¹⁶ This threatens the survival of Syria. If it were to overcome the current military and political challenges, reconstruction and rebuilding would still be extremely difficult.

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<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/06/28/how-a-victorious-bashar-al-assad-is-changing-syria>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/09/uk-and-france-to-send-further-forces-to-syria-in-aid-of-us-withdrawal>

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<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts#:~:text=War%20in%20Syria%20has%20created,need%20emergency%20aid%20in%202023>

¹⁰ <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>

¹¹ Ibid.

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<https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/03/02/syrian-earthquake-survivors-in-turkey-have-nowhere-to-go> ; <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/03/economic-burden-or-opportunity-how-syrian-refugees.html>

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<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts#:~:text=War%20in%20Syria%20has%20created,need%20emergency%20aid%20in%202023>.

¹⁴ <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>

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<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts#:~:text=War%20in%20Syria%20has%20created,need%20emergency%20aid%20in%202023>.

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<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/06/28/how-a-victorious-bashar-al-assad-is-changing-syria>

For host countries, the presence of refugees has strained education, health and other basic services.¹⁷ This is accentuated in countries such as Lebanon whose population is now constituted of 1/5 refugees.¹⁸ For Western countries, the arrival of refugees has sometimes divided populations, hardened identities and led to radical government responses. It is thus critical that social and economic integration and support is provided to refugees in all countries.

Current Action

As expected, **UNHCR** is providing major support to the refugees. This includes emergency cash assistance, covid containment, harmonization initiatives and emergency responses to the earthquakes.¹⁹ **UNICEF** is also working at reaching children in settlements and host communities with education, water, sanitation, and protection and nutrition services.²⁰

Charities and **NGOs** are catering to the symptoms of the crisis: their support ranges from healthcare, to food, to psychosocial support. They are being careful to support government led initiatives in countries such as Turkey and Lebanon who are more resistant to UN interference.²¹ For example, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is overseeing support for Syrians affected by both the war and earthquakes. The British Red Cross work in Aleppo is specifically based around direct cash payments.²²

Host countries are also providing varying levels of support to refugees.

Forced to Flee's Call to Action:

- Calls upon host countries to extend rights and opportunities granted to refugees
- Encourages citizens and businesses to donate to those organisations supporting the refugees
- Affirms the need for active harmonization efforts between groups within Syria, so as to create an environment for the peaceful rebuilding of the country

Sustainable Development Goals:



¹⁷ <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/03/economic-burden-or-opportunity-how-syrian-refugees.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23813975>

¹⁹ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4454>

²⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrian-refugees>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23813975>

²² <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/international/syria>



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All accessed on 18/03/2023